Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 37 | Issue 2 Article 6

6-2022

Teaching with the Genius in Mind: Enacting Literacy as a Civil Right

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Recommended Citation
Glupker, Katie; Gower, Pam; and Knight, Angela (2022) "Teaching with the Genius in Mind: Enacting Literacy as a Civil Right," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 37: Iss. 2, Article 6.
Available at: https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.2332

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors wish to thank Elisabeth Spinner, Emily Sommer, Naitnaphit C. Limlamai, Anna J. Roseboro, Lynne Lesky, Kim Stein, Rick Kreinbring, and Shelley Esman, along with Cathy Fleischer, Kris Gedeon, Kristin Smith, Alaina Feliks, Jessica De Young Kander, Eileen Olech, Ellen Daniel, Beth Shaum, and Kristi Gatchel, and the person who suggested that the three of us “write the next article” during the October 2021 MCTE presentation about the book club.

This article is available in Language Arts Journal of Michigan: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm/vol37/iss2/6

Teaching with the Genius in Mind: Enacting Literacy as a Civil Right

KATIE GLUPKER, PAM GOWER, AND ANGELA KNIGHT

Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy (Muhammad, 2020), is a groundbreaking book that invites educators to learn from the Black literary societies of the 19th century and shares how and why we should emulate those societies with our 21st-century students. We read the book during a summer professional book club through MCTE (Michigan Council of Teachers of English). The book offers readers a culturally and historically responsive framework (HRL framework) to hold in front of our curricula and our teaching. We learned through reading and discussing Muhammad's ideas that culturally and historically responsive literacy is a way to engage our students in building their own literacy skills through a framework that recognizes the genius of the students in our rooms as well as the identities of the people in our communities and societies.

For more on how this book club formed and functioned, please see "From Critical Self Reflection to Cultivating Equitable Literacy Classrooms: Educators Creating PD as They Move Forward with Hope" by Elisabeth Spinner and others in Volume 37, Issue 1 of this journal. The authors of this article presented at the MCTE Fall Conference. We were invited to join the presentation to share how we had enacted the pursuits in our teaching to that point.

In this collaborative article, we (three white female educators, teaching in different parts of Michigan) share ways that we have incorporated the HRL framework across all grade bands in ways that are age- and subject-appropriate, from drawings to independent choice reading to questioning history lessons to research inquiries. When we consider how literacy is taught and assessed and whose literacies count, we have each started incorporating the HRL framework in our teaching contexts to enact literacy as a civil right while cultivating the genius inside each student.

In the book, Muhammad talks about the genius that lives inside every child. She writes specifically about the "exalted literary legacy" of 19th-century Black literary societies: "History from Black communities tells us that educators don't need to empower youth or give them brilliance or genius. Instead, the power and genius is already within them" (2020, p. 13). We pushed one another to model literary societies which addressed current issues; we designed learning experiences that cultivated the individual and collective genius within our language arts, writing, and civics classrooms.

By careful and intentional implementation of the pursuits of identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy in our various contexts, we have created spaces to nurture genius in our students and ourselves. We recognize that students come to our classrooms already possessing genius, so with humility and joy, we continue the work of growing their literacy and brilliance. We wrote this article to show what it is like to begin implementing the HRL framework—which we expect to become a mainstay of ELA teaching practice in the coming years—and how it has changed our teaching and thinking. In each section, teachers share what we each learned from reading *Cultivating Genius,* how we tried to implement the HRL framework in our classes, and what we will try next.

Muhammad's Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy

Muhammad's popular and critically acclaimed book has received attention from other experts in the field of ELA and culturally responsive education. *Cultivating Genius* is based on the pursuits of identity, skills, intellect, and criticality. Bettina Love, author of *We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, explained in the forward to Muhammad's book that these pursuits are "a way to see literacy through a framework that does not run from our current political times and embraces both the diversity of learning and the diversity of our children, all while doing the work of connecting children to who they are," (2020, p. 6). We learned in undergrad education courses to help students see the connections between our instruction and their lives. Crucially, Muhammad has taken this connection work further by arguing that identity and criticality must be pursued as urgently as skills and intellect.

Muhammad's work is so important because knowledge and testable skills are not enough for full participation in a democratic society. She argues that students and teachers need to be and can be excellent. This means understanding why the world is the way it is, having confidence in our capacity to name and interrogate injustice, and being able to flexibly "read" our world.

Identity. Muhammad (2020) defines identity as "composed of notions of who we are, who others say we are (in both positive and negative ways) and whom we desire to be" (2020, p. 67). She includes "racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, kinship, academic/intellectual, environmental, personal/individual, sexual and community identities" and advocates that "[Y]outh need opportunities in school to explore multiple facets of selfhood, but also to learn about the identities of others who may differ" (p. 67).

Skills. Muhammad says skills are "central to the ways in which we do school today and typically define achievement standards" (p. 85). Throughout the book, Muhammad contextualizes her framework: "Historically, writing was the ultimate intellectual and literary skill because it entailed the act of reading something, thinking about the content, considering new ideas to set to paper, and then communicating those words to the intended audience" (p. 83).

Intellect. Muhammad clarifies the difference between skills and intellect by challenging teachers to go beyond skills to incorporate intellectualism: "Intellect includes what we want students to become smarter about, but also creates a space for students to apply their learning in authentic ways connected to the world" (2020, p. 104). Students need to learn, but they also need time and space in school to contemplate ways in which they could apply these skills outside of school.

Criticality. Criticality "helps students assume responsibility for the ways in which they process information—to avoid being passive consumers of knowledge and information. Criticality helps students read the world with a critical eye, refusing to accept unexamined information as factual or true" (Muhammad 2020, p. 122). Criticality also asks students to examine and question power structures in preparation to "become future adults who will work toward humanization and not perpetuate oppressions" (Muhammad 2020, p. 132).

Joy. When Muhammad speaks now about her book, she includes a fifth pursuit, joy, for the purpose of "teaching students about the beauty and truth in humanity" (2021). She added this after the publication of the book, and we learned about it through webinars and videos. In an interview with Instruction Partners, Muhammad explains, "I made joy more formally a pursuit for schools today because I noticed that [the literary] societies were always centered in joy and were intentional about receiving joy amid our nation's harshest realities. Those five pursuits for learning serve as a guidebook for what we need to do and how we need to structure and frame all education today, for K–12, higher education, and adult education" (2020).

Pursuits at the Elementary Level (Angela)

After learning about Muhammad's work through both the MCTE book club and a webinar series she conducted for teachers in the county, I sought ways to implement the pursuits in my work with Bright Futures, an after-school and summer program. I can't speak to the racial identities of these students because I don't work with them directly. I create literacy kits: packets that correspond to a book. Students receive their own copy of the book, the packet, and a corresponding activity that incorporate relevant STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) activities, as well as social-emotional skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, responsibility, empathy, initiative, and emotion management. Integrating the HRF framework into these literacy kits supports students' intellectual and social-emotional development.

Muhammad's pursuits apply to both fiction and nonfiction texts. For example, in *Dinosaur Lady: The Daring Discoveries of Mary Anning, the First Paleontologist* by Linda Skeers, opens with a scene of Mary Anning on the beach. In the 3rd-5th grade packet, I incorporated the framework with the following:

Identity: Draw a picture and write about what you like to do at the beach.

Skills: Mary Anning learned to read and write at Sunday School, and then she borrowed books to learn more about the bones and fossils that she found. Draw a picture and write about a time that you learned a little bit about something, and then you learned more about it on your own.

Intellect: Mary Anning was helping scientists and geologists around the world learn more about dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures. Draw or write about how you have used your knowledge to help other people learn more about something you know.

Criticality: How long did it take The Royal Society of London to name Mary Anning as one of the ten most influential British women of science? Why do you think Mary

Anning didn't get credit for her discovery when she found the dinosaur fossils? How many years passed between Mary Anning's discovery of the Ichthyosaurus and the year that Sir Richard Owen coined the term dinosaur? How are these two events related? Why do you think so many years passed between these two events?

When teachers incorporate criticality, "the capacity to read, write, and think in ways of understanding power, privilege, social justice and oppression, particularly for populations who have been historically marginalized in the world," (Muhammad 2020, p. 120), we acknowledge and define types of injustices so that we can model and teach students how to work towards social justice in our classrooms and in the world. The concept is a challenge to include at the elementary level, and it is the pursuit that I still struggle to apply in my teaching, but power structures are not a secret to young children. Children's literacies are not made up of only their comprehension skills; rather, they are defined by their reading of the world.

In my attempt to integrate criticality with these students, I read *All Because You Matte*r by Tami Charles and illustrated by Bryan Collier. After a first reading, I dismissed the book because I struggled to apply STEAM or the HRL. In a webinar with Muhammad, she taught me ways the pursuits apply to this text. While discussing skills and intellect, she used the scientific definition of the word *matter*; I included text and images to teach students about solids, liquids, gasses, and molecules. Examples of the HRL framework in this K-2 packet include:

Identity: Draw a self-portrait. What do you look like when you're proud of yourself?

Intellect: What does it mean to matter? What matters to you? Who matters to you? Draw their pictures.

Criticality: What do you do when someone makes you feel like you don't matter?

Joy: What are four things that you love about yourself? Why do these things make you smile?

The literacy kits were originally designed so that kids could learn while schools were closed during the pandemic; I am in the process of redesigning the packets so that the Bright Futures staff can use them with book clubs: student literary societies. These packets can be shared with anyone. I continue to read books with the Bright Futures students in mind, considering ways to encourage students to develop their literacy, social-emotional skills, and strategies. I also think about how the HRL can be incorporated, especially criticality. Not all books lend themselves to a discussion of criticality, and I am still learning how it applies to different situations and contexts. It's a lot to think about while reading a book, but the kids deserve no less.

Pursuits at the Middle School Level (Pam)

Exploring Muhammad's work on the pursuit of intellectualism in classrooms, encouraged me to examine how my independent reading curriculum supports literary societies that encourage community building and excitement about reading. Muhammad says, "Books mattered. In literary societies, literature and reading various texts were at the heart of all their pursuits and literacy learning goals. They read diverse literature to enrich their minds and also to cultivate their identities, skills, intellect, and criticality" (2020, p. 137). This idea, along with reading Muhammad's examples of unit plans, helped me to discover elements I could add to build stronger engagement around reading.

I combine my silent reading each day with mindfulness in order to build my students' intellect. Muhammad says that "educators need to move beyond the teaching of skills alone and teach new ideas in ways that enlarge their mental powers in the disciplines" (2020, p, 104). She goes on to say that intellectualism for students means "developing their mental culture" and that it's about "emotional intelligence and self- and social awareness" (2020, p. 105). At the beginning of the school year, I invite students to sense a physical connection with the space they are in. They practice sitting with a straight spine and a relaxed body, so that they can breathe freely to begin their reading practice. I engage students in activities to settle their bodies. I end each reading session with a chime. As Thich Nhat Nahn (2017) explains, this "inviting of the bell" helps everyone in the room and has specific benefits to the person ringing it, so students also take turns ringing the bell. Both students and teacher can yawn, stretch, let out sounds, and pause before the next part of the class begins, which invites relief in the mind, body, and spirit. This practice helps my students and me build our intellect. It prepares us to be open to listening to others' ideas by awakening our senses and calming our minds. In this state, we can embrace the empathy we need to listen to others because we have taken the time to ease our minds and bodies. Bringing mindfulness practices into the classroom is a great way to help students build their emotional intelligence along with their skills.

Muhammad (2020) also explains that the cultivation of genius is not something that teachers give students. Rather, students already possess genius, and so a teacher's job is to create a learning environment that supports students in recognizing their own genius. She goes on to point out "to teach geniuses, however, charges teachers to cultivate their own genius that lies within them" (p. 14). I demonstrate this in a way that was inspired by Penny Kittle (2013), who has guided me to provide evidence of my rich reading life every day by displaying the books I've read, am reading, and plan to read. So many wonderful teachers use displays like this to model for students that reading is an endless pursuit that is not completed at the finish of a unit or comprehension quiz.

Another practice that so many teachers already do is to talk about books regularly, both in passing with students and during formal book talks. Book talks have been routine in my classroom for many years now, but I've added video clips of the authors talking about how their books came to be and their own reading lives beginning back when they were my students' age. Students are able to see that reading is both historical and contemporary and that authors are creating videos as texts along with the books they are writing. Seeing authors that look like them, speak like them, and struggle and achieve like them encourages my students to see that reading (and even authoring) books can be a part of their identity, too.

As a teacher in Michigan, I am aware of the skills outlined by state standards that students can practice through guided reading. Since teachers are required to make space in their curriculum for students to practice and demonstrate these skills, it seems logical to use texts that teachers know well or have at least read themselves. It can feel risky for English teachers to replace whole-class texts with choice reading because students will be reading texts that teachers may not have read but learning about literary societies helped me to understand why my students were engaged and joyful about independent reading. Having choices in what students read along with not being required to complete an assessment task after reading the book is inherent to building intellectualism. Instead, students completed open-ended weekly reading check-ins where they wrote to the prompt, "What are you currently thinking about while you are reading?" Additionally, students shared their thinking in whole-class discussions and students added books to their "To Read" lists as they learned about books from their peers. Real reading teaches students so much about their own and others' identities because they are focused on personal connections, history, and conflicts that are in their books that also exist in society. Reading for pleasure activates the curiosity and creativity that students need to participate as citizens in their community. Reading leads to more reading, and that is the most important goal I have for my students. The life-long readers that leave my classroom will continue to change and grow as they read and to change and grow the world around them.

There are many ways to assess students' intellect and skill-building, two of Muhammad's pursuits that can be used to promote historically responsive literacy, even when students are reading independently. My students have presented multimedia book talks to demonstrate speaking and technology skills. They continue to respond weekly to their reading through check-ins based on skills like summarizing, evaluating, or connecting, or more precise notebook entries with things like annotations, characterization charts, and plot maps. Still, I find that inviting students to write Book Letters or Quarterly Reading Reflections, as Penny Kittle (2013) calls them, to their teachers to reflect on their reading lives is the best way to move students from skill-building to intellect-building because the Book Letters require students to self-reflect, set goals, and celebrate themselves. Book Letters make space for students to explore their own intellectualism around reading because students make a list of their books from most challenging to least challenging in order for them to reflect on both what challenges them as a reader and whether or not they are challenging themselves as readers.

Book Letters are also an avenue for students to explore criticality, another pursuit that Muhammad (2020) includes for developing historically responsive literacy. Book Letters invite students to write about the injustice of the past and present and how that affects them and the people in their community since so many of the books students read contain these issues. Teachers can prompt students to write about injustice in their Book Letters with a question like, "What is an example of a book you read during this marking period where a character or group is being treated unfairly?" If a student read *Clean Getaway* by Nic Stone, they could describe the way Scoob's grandparents were treated during segregation in the American South. If a student read *A Wish in the Dark* by Christina Soontornvant, they could discuss the injustice of Pong automatically becoming a prisoner because his mother birthed him in prison. If a student reads *Show Me a Sign* by Ann Clare LeZotte, they could discuss their reaction to a scientist capturing Mary, the deaf main character, with the intention of treating her like a specimen in experiments to discover what has caused her deafness. Each of these questions urges students to examine power structures of the past and present.

Other books that include issues like the abuse of power, inequity, and the silencing of diverse voices are *New Kid* by Jerry Craft, *The Best at It* by Maulik Pancholy, *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *The 57 Bus* by Dashka Slater, *My Fate*

According to the Butterfly by Gail D. Villanueva, *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, and so many more. Reading books and writing Book Letters centered around injustice will fuel other class assignments like research projects, argumentative writing, and other multimedia texts that can inspire students to be activists and make real change in the world. Teachers can require students to look back at their Book Letters to find topics for other projects.

Next year, I plan to begin with this end in mind, for students to use their independent reading, weekly check-ins, and book letters as brainstorming for a final activism project. Students could build skills and intellect through writing about their reading and sharing in large and small groups. They could explore their own and others' identities with these questions in mind: How do societies decide who is in power, and how can power create injustice? How do characters and real people fight against injustice? What is the role of joy in celebrating culture and humanity?

As a white teacher of middle school students with diverse racial identities, my role is to provide students with opportunities to explore criticality, so that students question the way things are and know that they have the power to disrupt the systems of oppression. Ultimately, this is what Muhammad wants for our students, classrooms that are literary societies where students' identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy are supported by their teacher.

Pursuits at the High School Level (Katie)

In 2020, I taught through the pandemic, the presidential election, the murder of George Floyd (and others), and a kernel of an idea took shape in my imagination. What would happen if I taught Civics? Students in my racially diverse school take Government before they graduate, but will they get better at having hard conversations about difficult topics such as politics, race, and identity? Will they specifically learn about polarization and how it affects them? Civics appealed to me because of its focus on participation and the dispositions needed for life in a democratic society. The events of 2020 had already found their way into my classroom: students and I regularly talked through what was happening in the world and what we could do to help ourselves move forward. The discipline of English Language Arts has long been a home for this kind of engagement, and teachers have powerful civic tools to share, such as journalism, first-person narrative, argumentative writing, and poetry. I wanted to do even more. I believed that in a Civics class, I could help students enact and practice democracy directly. After teaching secondary English Language Arts for 15 years, I requested to switch to Civics for the 2021-22 school year, and my request was approved.

During the summer MCTE book club, I designed my first Civics unit with the HRL framework in mind because it offered me the tools for the kind of Civics I wanted to teach: I wanted to help students situate themselves in civic society as valuable participants (identity), learn how to get involved in civic behaviors (skills), get smarter about the issues that matter to them (intellect), interrogate the beliefs and messages that are part of our everyday lives (criticality), and celebrate their own attempts to participate and engage (joy).

The unit I designed was a collaboration with my Environmental Science colleague, and in it, students would learn about pollution in Lake Erie and how Toledo citizens took action to protect their water. I was curious about what students knew about civic participation, besides voting. At ages 14-15, they see elections as too far away, and according to the Democratic Knowledge Project at Harvard University, most young people don't consider it essential to live in a democracy. However, my high school students do care about issues such as protecting the environment and racial justice. I asked them how confident they felt in their ability to do something about these concerns. While they care a lot, their confidence (and knowledge) is low. In the unit, students would read a case study about toxic algae blooms in Lake Erie to build their intellect, and I was ready to help them navigate a rigorous nonfiction text. We could practice literacy skills such as locating specific details in the text that support the author's argument. But I was stumped on identity. I couldn't figure out how Lake Erie is part of our identity.

Our school in Ann Arbor is roughly an hour away from Lake Erie. So it's close enough to visit, but not a major part of most students' lives. Muhammad writes that identity is important because "students, and arguably adults, are always looking for themselves in spaces and places" (2020, p. 69). Since we don't spend a lot of time at Lake Erie, it is hard to find ourselves there. When I shared my difficulty with the summer book club participants, they suggested that I ask students to think about their own drinking water. Where does it come from? How do we know it's safe? And...what does it taste like? The "Tap Water Taste Test" was born.

I received an annual water quality report in the mail from my local township, but I was pretty sure that students wouldn't know much about their own tap water. This is a civic literacy issue because all students have the right to understand the basic structure and functions of their local government. So I showed them links to their city and township water departments. Based on where they live, students could figure out the source of their tap water. Students then brought their tap water in clean bottles, and on a warm September day, under a huge outdoor tent, we all safely sampled water from municipal wells, private wells, the Detroit River, the Huron River, and even Lake Erie.

I drank the Lake Erie water, but most students were too nervous to taste it. We had just read a case study that told the story of how in the summer of 2014, toxic algae blooms in Lake Erie contaminated the Toledo area's drinking water for days. In the era of the Flint water crisis and the ongoing water crisis in Benton Harbor, the government's responsibility to deliver safe drinking water is a literacy aspect I hadn't considered when I was an English educator. And when students consider what the state of Ohio *should do* to protect all residents in the metro Toledo area, especially those who are most vulnerable, they are pursuing Criticality. The Toledo water crisis was resolved within days, but this is not what happened in Flint or Benton Harbor, cities with large African American populations. Students need to be able to access criticality to puzzle about why these inequities persist. Muhammad says that criticality gives students a way to "see, name, and interrogate the world not only to make sense of injustice but also to work toward social transformation" (2020, p. 120). This is the kind of Civics I want to be teaching.

A couple of weeks later, we took a field trip to Lake Erie. Students completed water quality testing, learned about bird migration, and heard a brief lecture about the Wyandot (Wyandotte) tribe, who settled along the shores of Lake Erie in southeastern Michigan. A staff member talked about agriculture, canoe building, sociology, and inter-tribe relations.

This is all fine, but I realized that none of us had learned about the Wyandot before, and I started to use my own criticality to ask why this had happened. The Lake Erie case study we'd read together in class gave a brief mention of the Treaty of Greenville (1795), which opened up certain Ohio lands for white settlers. This is important because the whole time my students and I were learning about the ecological tragedies that had been happening to Lake Erie and the Maumee River watershed, there was another story going on involving stolen land, broken treaties, and forced displacement of indigenous people. The question I had been asking about how the government should protect its people got a lot more complicated. We didn't have enough knowledge (intellect) about the Wyandot to ask the right kinds of questions about what had happened to them and why (criticality).

We can do better as teachers, and we must. It is not students' fault when their education fails to name oppression, contextualize it accurately, and give them skills to build a just society for everyone. Civics education must do this as a non-negotiable priority. It is important for students to know that as their teacher, I am on my own journey to increase my excellence by un-learning harmful misinformation and making up for missing information. This work is difficult and humbling. Likewise, my students will face uncertainty and pushback and failure and joy and sometimes triumph when they persevere as civic participants. They can do it, though, because of the genius that lives inside of them. Muhammad defines "genius" as "the brilliance, intellect, ability, cleverness, and artistry that have been flowing through their minds and spirits across the generations" (2020, p. 13).

So I told Civics students upfront that they are all geniuses. They pushed back against this norm for weeks. "How can we all be geniuses? You're watering it down," they complained. "Look," I said, "I could have told you all secretly—privately—that *you're a genius*. But then what? You would have felt proud and special until you started figuring out that everyone got the same message." I explained that it's essential for me to speak about everyone's genius so that we get used to seeing one another as brilliant, creative, clever, artistic, and full of possibility. It helps us beat back stereotypes about who is smart and who is not.

Many educators have heard about studies in which teachers are tricked into believing that a regular- or low-performing group of students is actually the gifted and high-IQ cohort (Spiegel 2012). Students in those studies fulfill teachers' expectations of them— students show their genius when their teachers expect them to do so. That's why, I told my Civics students, the "you're a genius" norm is so important: it frames my perceptions just as much as (hopefully) it frames the way they view themselves and one another.

During this school year, I have learned more about both the overlaps and the unique domains of Civics and ELA. Although implementing the HRL framework wasn't a motivator for my decision to switch disciplines, the learning I gained from Muhammad's book and my summer MCTE group helped me plan my entire first year of Civics teaching. HRL helped me conceptualize and plan the kind of Civics I wanted to do but didn't have language for: a course focused on how young people can situate themselves as meaningful participants in a not-yet-equal democracy that needs their problem-solving and creative brilliance. Because I was already making a big shift, I was willing to plan with the HRL framework in mind. However, HRL is relevant and needed in all subject areas and all age groups, which is part of what we are trying to show in this article.

What made the framework work so well for me in my first attempt was the insistence that identity, criticality, and joy are pursuits with the same importance and urgency as intellect and skills. It seems obvious to me now that this is a natural fit for Civics, and I'm thinking about how HRL applies to ELA classrooms as well. I have learned that what I thought of as "critical thinking" is not the same as "criticality." True criticality, I'm learning, creates challenge and cognitive dissonance because it demands that we name and interrogate our beliefs about how some things will never change. Civic heroes show us otherwise and show us what it means to be a genius.

When I talk to students about how people who are geniuses persist and don't expect to know everything easily or immediately, I am also talking to myself. My first attempt at the HRL framework was valuable even though it was far from complete.

Pursuits in First-Year College Writing and Research (Angela)

When I finished reading *Cultivating Genius,* I was teaching a first-year writing course called College Writing and Research. To meet the course outcomes, I offered two book choices for each of the three units that I chose: fiction, novel-in-verse, and nonfiction. I had chosen texts that were based on my perceptions of the racial diversity of the students on campus, based on what I saw in the semester and a half before March 2020. The students in this class were online, via Zoom with cameras off; students chose when or if to self-identify, to let us know whether the books were mirrors or windows for them (Bishop).

The culminating project for the course is a research project. During the reading units, students could choose a research topic based on something, *anything*, they read that they were curious about. In order for the students to derive joy from this project, and in the hopes that students would personally connect to their topics, they needed choice. While there were many moments of laughter and joy during the text discussions, the essence of each text was social justice. This complicated asking students to find joy in their research.

Students also benefit from scaffolding, in this case, a way to work through a research project in manageable sections. The HRL made sense to me as a way to offer a framework for their research project. My hope was that the framework would help students both focus and organize their project in a way that also encouraged them to make choices about what and how to research as well as how to organize their writing.

In the Identity section, students wrote about their personal connection to and interest in their topics. I combined Skills and Intellect, the two pursuits that are often difficult to separate, in the research section: what was their question and what did they learn about their topics? Students explained the impact on society, whether it was a past or current issue, and if there were any local implications.

Students were asked to also consider the trajectory of their topic over time, how it has changed, and what changes still need to be made. Through my discussion with the other authors of this article, I've learned that this is part of Criticality, but at the time, I included it in the Research section. In the Criticality section, I asked questions about the role that power, anti-oppression, and/or equity played in students' topics, and how had their reading of class texts and their research affected their thinking about power, equity, anti-oppression in the text, in society, and in the world.

All six of our texts included real-world social justice issues: addiction, adoption, strict Catholic parents, divorce, immigration and documentation, Islamophobia, materialism, multilingual families, multicultural and mixed-religion families, racism, sexual assault, technology-developed versus technology-developing countries, and white supremacy. Students did not shy away from the difficult topics when they chose their research projects, so I did not ask about joy within the context of their research. While reading *Stamped from the Beginning* (2020) by Jason Reynolds with Ibram X. Kendi, one of the nonfiction choices, students were introduced to aspects of history that were not covered in their K-12 curriculum, so one student chose to research how the photographs taken during the 1960s affected the Civil Rights Movement.

Other topics included Imam Ali Ibn Abu Taleb, child neglect as a result of divorce, an increase in hatred toward Asian-Americans, how a parent's drug use affected their children, scientific racism, challenges faced by people crossing the United States border, and developmental trauma. Two students who read *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to Hunger Games* chose to apply Dr. Thomas's dark fantastic cycle of spectacle, hesitation, violence, haunting, and emancipation, to Black characters in *A Game of Thrones* and *True Blood* miniseries, respectively.

To add purpose to their research projects, students created a presentation to share their learning with their classmates. For a short period of time, the presentations emulated the literary societies in which people shared ideas about their reading. Students gave each other feedback after the presentations via Jamboard. During future student presentations, I will incorporate discussion time after each presentation to better emulate the literary societies.

As I revise the text list, syllabus, and assignments for another semester of this class, I look forward to the opportunity to better implement the framework: first, to make students aware of Dr. Bishop's mirrors and windows to invite students to share their identities as they read the books, to share my own mirrors and windows in my rationale of the texts chosen, and second, to share the history of the Black literary societies to provide historical context for the reason I am using Dr. Muhammad's framework because "[K]nowing the oppressive history of the U.S. means that cultivating intellect also entails the importance of restoring what has been taken from our African American people—thereby benefiting all people" (2020, p. 103). One of the motivators for writing this article together at the beginning of our HRL learning journey was to emphasize that HRL is for all students, not just Black and Brown students. We hope that teachers reading our work are intrigued by the ways that teaching Criticality benefits all students, including (and maybe especially) white students.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In order to truly make everybody's genius be recognized and their literacy count in our classrooms, we search for ways that students can show us their identities and build joy. We are English teachers because we love reading and writing. We take responsibility for helping our students find this same joy. We also take responsibility for promoting the literacy that is necessary for a democratic society.

We have learned much through this book, our teaching, and writing this article that helps us better define, apply, and enact the pursuits in our teaching, but we still have more to learn. The pursuit of criticality in all of our classes was the most challenging of the HRL framework, but that's why it is incredibly important to study Muhammad's work in book clubs and other PLCs. Writing this article with other teachers invited us to learn from each other. By hearing each other's stories, we celebrated successes and worked through the challenges.

To continue the literacy tradition that started over two hundred years ago, we need to invite students and our colleagues in all disciplines to be a part of a literary society of readers, writers, and debaters about today's issues and challenges. To create a better, more just society, "students need spaces to name and critique injustice and ultimately have the agency to build a better world for all" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 120). As we co-create literary learning spaces with our students, we empower them to work towards a more just society.

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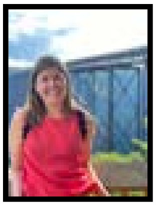

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