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# Using Literature to Support Second Graders' Critical Literacy of Civil Rights

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Using Literature to Support Second Graders' Critical Literacy of Civil Rights

By

Nicole M. Leo  
May 2012

A thesis submitted to the  
Department of Education and Human Development of the  
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Using Literature to Support Second Graders' Critical Literacy of Civil Rights

by

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## Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Background .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	2
Rationale .....	3
Definitions.....	5
Study Approach .....	5
Summary .....	6
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	8
Introduction.....	8
Critical Literacy .....	8
Conflict Resolution.....	11
Children’s Literature .....	13
Summary .....	14
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedure .....	16
Introduction.....	16
School .....	16
Classroom .....	18
Participants.....	20
Data Collection Instruments .....	21
Procedures.....	23
Data Analysis .....	25
Summary .....	25
Chapter Four: Results .....	27
Introduction.....	27
Children’s Literature Perspectives.....	27
Student Interpretation of Perspectives .....	33
Children’s Literature and Critical Literacy.....	37
Summary .....	46
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations .....	48
Introduction.....	48
Recommendations for Students .....	48
Recommendations for My Teaching.....	49
Recommendations for Literacy Educators.....	50
Summary .....	52
References.....	53
Appendix A.....	55
Appendix B .....	56
Appendix C .....	57
Appendix D.....	58
Appendix E .....	60
Appendix F.....	62
Appendix G.....	64

## List of Figures

Figure 4.1: Student Survey Story Cover.....	28
Figure 4.2: Student Survey Illustration.....	29
Figure 4.3: Student Survey Reading Passage .....	30
Figure 4.4: Kim Response Form Question 1 .....	34
Figure 4.5: Kim Response Form Question 2 .....	34
Figure 4.6: Kim Response Form Question 3 .....	35
Figure 4.7: Matt Response Form Question 1 .....	36
Figure 4.8: Matt Most Important Part Response Form.....	37
Figure 4.9: Matt Most Important Part Response Form Caption .....	37
Figure 4.11: Observational Field Notes Lesson 1 .....	40
Figure 4.12: Student Discussion Ideas.....	41
Figure 4.13: Observational Field Notes Lesson 2.....	43
Figure 4.14: Student Discussion Ideas Lesson 2 .....	44
Figure 4.15: Student Response Good Law .....	45
Figure 4.16: Student Response Bad Law.....	45

## **List of Tables**

Table 3.1: Data Collection Procedures .....	23
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## **Abstract**

This study was designed to explore the use of children's literature to engage second grade students in critical literacy. I drew on multiple domains examining the use of children's literature in students' critical literacy development. I used data to analyze the kinds of perspectives children's literature provides, how students interpret different perspectives to solve their conflicts, and in what ways children's literature helps second graders act on issues that are important to them. The duration of the study was five weeks. An inquiry style of research was used. Data was collected through the use of field note observation forms, student surveys, and student response forms. After analyzing data, it is clear that specific, quality, literature has a strong impact on second grade students' critical literacy development. Children's literature provides unique perspectives that students may be unaware of otherwise. After initial orientation, students are able to contextualize and generalize new findings into their own lives. Children's literature also helps second graders take action on important issues by providing opportunity to discuss the conflicts that arise in their daily lives and the ways in which they react to those conflicts. The discussion allows students to use their peers as a sounding board for acceptable and unacceptable actions during a conflict. Children's literature helps second graders act on issues that are important to them by unlocking their critical thinking skills. After having thought critically about a topic provided by quality literature, students will be able to transfer their deep-thinking skills to other aspects of life.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Background**

Traditional education emphasizes a hidden passivity in the curriculum. Many students are taught only what they need to know to pass the next benchmark. Students are made to believe that classroom learning is typical of “real-world” learning. Many times, teachers teach the curricula given to them by administrators and the students are the “product” of those teachings.

An effect of this is that a majority of students are unable to think critically about issues. Students, starting at the pre-school level and up, are accustomed to sitting and receiving instruction from teachers. When faced with a social problem within the classroom, students are at a loss for how to solve it. Many students fail when it comes to resolving conflicts and expressing their opinions peacefully. They have not acquired the skills that are necessary to negotiate these solutions. Students have not had the experience of looking at a situation from multiple angles.

In the current educational policy that emphasizes mandated curricula and standardized testing, students’ lives are often overlooked during teaching. The matters that concern them are not included in the classroom. Students feel that their opinions are not valuable and that they are in a position of powerlessness. Many students are unaware of the power of language as a tool for effective communication and change.

Teachers need to rethink traditional educational methods to help students in the changing world. Students must acquire tools in the classroom that are useful outside of the classroom as well. Students’ lives are complicated. As a teacher, it is

my responsibility to make my students aware of the complexities of real-world communication and to help them to find their effective voices.

Literature is a way to break away from educational norms. Literature offers different opinions and allows students to think critically about the subject in a hypothetical situation. Students can use the parallels they make between literature and their own lives to help them solve their own problems. Literature also provides a nonthreatening way for students to question current practices and to develop a keen sense of the issues surrounding power in society.

Critical literacy is about guiding students in the classroom to act on issues that are of concern to them. Possible types of actions may include researching an issue in order to discuss it, writing letters, and meeting with individuals. Ultimately, students will transfer their critical literacy to other aspects of their lives. Barbara Comber, a regarded teacher-researcher in the field, states “critical literacies include practicing the use of language in powerful ways to get things done in the world, to enhance everyday life in schools and communities, and to question practices of privilege and injustice” (Comber, 2001, p. 1). Students will use their critical literacy in this increasingly complex world. This study will use critical literacy in the classroom. Ultimately, students will transfer these skills to other aspects of their lives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to use children’s literature to engage second grade students in critical literacy. Students will learn the language of critical literacy and will question and challenge texts. The literature will lead students to a deeper

understanding of which issues are important to them and how to take action on those issues. Second grade students often have a difficult time communicating with their peers in the school world. Critical literacy helps to create a strong classroom community through effective communication. As students unpack issues in the texts together, they rely on each other for new perspectives and ideas. Students learn what the benefits of being part of a community are. In completing this study, I aim to discover how the use of children's literature supports second graders critical literacy development about civil rights. For this examination, I will explore the following questions:

- What kinds of perspectives does children's literature provide?
- How do students interpret different perspectives to solve their conflicts?
- In what ways does children's literature help second graders act on issues that are important to them?

### **Rationale**

It is important for second grade students to learn how to understand the viewpoints of others. As the world becomes more diverse, it is critical that students recognize and value multiple perspectives. The classroom learning community is strengthened by the use of critical literacy because students are intimately involved with multiple perspectives. This involvement fosters an open, honest, and productive environment where students speak with each other about "important work" and communicate their ideas effectively.

This study will affect second grade students in that they will become better

communicators. The students will understand the value of a strong classroom community and the benefits of tackling important issues together. Students' motivation to read and write will increase during the critical literacy unit due to the fact that we will be discussing issues of significance to them. Students will have a personal stake in the topic and become acutely involved and proactive.

I have experienced success with this civil rights unit in the past. In February 2010, I began a two-week unit on civil rights with my class of second grade students. We started by discussing civil rights and what the term meant from their perspective. Some students were aware of the acts of the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Other students had never heard the term. Through group discussions, we developed charts of our ideas.

We read literature about the famous people of the civil rights movement. As we discussed Martin Luther King, Jr., Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks, the students personally connected with these figures. The students drew pictures of what inequality looked like and drew their own solutions to the problems. The pictures were proudly displayed in our hallway. The students became passionate about the subject and concluded the unit by seeking out their own literature on Martin Luther King, Jr., among other figures, to read in their free time.

We also discussed what the term civil rights meant in a broader context. We determined the ways that civil rights are evident in our own lives and uncovered the importance of upholding these ideals. Students connected with the fact that all citizens of a country should have political and social freedom ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)).

The literature of critical literacy supports young children's engaging with and understanding differences in opinions. The selected literature will introduce students to new positions, which will broaden their horizons and help them to understand a diverse world full of different ideologies and interests of different social groups.

This study will benefit other early childhood educators because it will demonstrate how a group of second grade students with limited exposure to critical issues developed a deeper understanding of those issues and learned to communicate effectively. Other early childhood educators will draw on the types of questions I ask my students and the supportive feedback that I give them. Educators may reference this study to enforce the fact that even children with limited exposure to the outside world can develop useful critical literacies.

### **Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, I have decided that the following language will be the most useful in guiding the ideology of the study:

- *Critical literacy* is practicing the use of language in powerful ways to get things done in the world, to enhance everyday life in schools and communities, and to question practices of privilege and injustice (Comber, 2001).
- *Civil rights* are defined as the rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)).

### **Study Approach**

The study will be a qualitative study that explores the experiences of second grade students learning about civil rights. I will use multiple data collection methods

for the exploration. The study will begin with a three-question survey as a pre-assessment to determine students' critical understanding of the topic of civil rights. The teacher will record student answers.

The unit will begin after the pre-assessment has been completed. The literature unit will take place over two weeks and will use four pieces of children's literature that support critical literacy. The texts support critical literacy because they involve students in the subject and allow them to think critically about the impact of the themes on their own lives.

Each piece of literature will be introduced to the students and there will be a discussion surrounding the main themes of the literature. The students will draw pictures of their interpretation of the theme. The teacher will keep an observational field notes throughout the two-week period.

At the end of the two-week period, the teacher will give the students a three-question survey to determine how students' critical understandings have changed. The methodology of the study adopts principles of ethnography in data collection and analysis. The study will provide an emic perspective of the students' critical understandings of civil rights.

### **Summary**

Teachers are responsible for helping students develop the tools they need to navigate this world. Through a critical literacy unit on civil rights, students in the classroom will be guided to act on issues that are of concern to them. Critical literacy is using language in significant ways to accomplish goals, and to empower students to

take action on issues that are important to them (Comber, 2001). This qualitative study will involve students in the subject and allow them to think critically about the impact of the themes of literature on their own lives. This study will provide an insider's view of the critical literacy development in a second grade classroom.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I will provide the conceptual framework for the study. The conceptual framework is divided into three sections: critical literacy, conflict resolution, and social issues in children's literature. This section will present theoretical and primary research in the three main areas.

### **Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy can be defined in different ways. Some researchers define critical literacy as empowering students to take action on issues that are important to them using their own cultural funds of knowledge (Vasquez, 2003). Other researchers define critical literacy as using literacy to promote social justice (Comber, 2001). Lewison, Seely Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) studied teacher's efforts of including critical literacy into their school curriculum. They determined that critical literacy can be broken into four, interrelated components: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action (Lewison, Seely Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). This is a comprehensive definition of critical literacy.

These four dimensions can be further broken down into more concrete sub-categories. Disrupting the commonplace occurs in the classroom by critiquing texts and asking questions such as "How I am being classified or labeled by this text?" This allows students to view literature with a critical eye and to recognize areas of weakness in a text.

Lewison, et al. (2002) conclude that in order to interrogate multiple viewpoints, we must “imagine standing in the shoes of others—to understand experience and text from our own perspectives and the viewpoints of others and to consider these various perspectives concurrently” (p. 383). This aspect of critical literacy is most evident in the classroom. In my classroom, students are often confronted with literature that offers an alternative perspective of an issue. Through this unit on critical literacy and civil rights, we will work on considering our own perspectives and alternative perspectives simultaneously.

Critical literacy must focus on sociopolitical issues. These issues are often ignored in a typical school curriculum. A critical literacy curriculum uses speaking, reading, and writing to help students negotiate conflict in the school world. Students are taught how to communicate efficiently and therefore are more capable of problem solving in the classroom. Sociopolitical issues include issues of cultural citizenship and politics. These issues should be addressed in school because they teach students how to deal with real-world issues and how to take action on the issues that matter to them.

Taking action is a characteristic piece of a critical literacy curriculum. In order to take action, students must be able to self-reflect on their own impact in the world in order to change it. Students must also use language to enhance everyday life and question practices of privilege and injustice (Comber, 2001). Taking action also involves challenging social walls and barriers by encouraging diversity when possible.

There are numerous benefits to implement a critical literacy curriculum in the classroom. Barbara Comber defines critical literacy as the opportunity to use language in powerful ways to get things done in the world (Comber, 2001). Students often have no idea of the capabilities that they have acquired through learning to read and write in school. Critical literacy allows students to re-examine their own resources and to use them in powerful ways.

Critical literacy is often implemented using the aforementioned framework. The framework is used to guide teachers and students in developing critical questions and to take action on their questions. There is no accepted, pre-packaged curriculum to use in the implementation of critical literacy in the classroom. Therefore, critical literacy may look different in every classroom.

Vivian Vasquez (2003), an elementary school teacher and prominent researcher in the field, describes what critical literacy looked like in a third-grade public school classroom in the Midwestern U.S. The teacher used a six-step model for implementing critical literacy study using a social issues picture book. Vasquez describes the process as “lingering with a book” (p. 37). The sessions include a read aloud, picture walk, small-group conversations, whole-group meeting, choosing an illustration, and journal writing. During the picture walk, students complete a response sheet asking questions like “What is important to remember about this book?” and “What questions do you have?” During the notebook writing, students revisit the response sheet and expand upon their initial ideas of the topic.

Penny Silvers, Mary Shorey, and Linda Crafton (2010) conducted a study of

25 six and seven year old children within the classroom context engaging in a critical literacy study. The first grade students were interested in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and how it affected people's lives. The first grade teacher set up a time for the students to engage in critical conversation about the topic and to look at images from newspapers and magazines. The teacher posited critical questions to the students and encouraged them to share their opinions. Students drew pictures of their understanding of the situation and labeled the pictures with captions. As the students became immersed in the subject, they desired to share their findings with others. The students conducted their own research using information from the news, television programs, magazine pictures and Internet websites. The students' participation in the inquiry evolved as they involved their parents and community in the research.

The students documented their learning on a visual audit trail or learning wall. The wall contained the students' drawings and captions about the issue, copies of significant illustrations from books and photos, and newspaper clippings about the issue. The wall contained student-authored reports and personal reflections about the social issue. The students bonded through their commitment to an "important issue" and remained a tight-knit bunch throughout the year. The students learned to communicate and share their ideas with one another and understood the value of a community. The group became a "critical community of practice in the classroom" (Silvers, Shorey & Crafton, 2010, p. 402).

### **Conflict Resolution**

Critical literacy may encourage stronger conflict resolution skills in students

by focusing on socio-political issues and fostering effective communication. Second grade students have difficulty communicating their thoughts and feelings to each other in the classroom. These situations result in many conflicts, which seem to be resolved only when the teacher becomes involved to “sort it out”. Vasquez (2003), through her work on critical literacy, observed; “Students relied on teachers to mediate conflicts but often found them to be unfair, ineffective, or unresponsive” (p. 51). Students need to learn the necessary skills to negotiate conflicts effectively. Critical literacy will help students to recognize conflict when it is present and to address it in an efficient way.

Through the unit on critical literacy, the students will form a community in which they will learn to voice their opinions and feelings effectively and respectfully. The students will become better communicators and therefore, better problem solvers through the unit on critical literacy. Miller and Pedro (2006) state: “A respectful classroom environment decreases the fear of the unknown and unexplored. Children in such a classroom are encouraged to get to know each other and about others, share ideas, explore new content and carry this out with the feeling of safety and appreciation” (p. 296). In order to reach this goal of a permeated, respect-filled classroom, we must teach our students to recognize tolerance and practice conflict resolution.

Harris and Walton (2008) state; “a critical discursive skill involved in negotiating non-violent resolutions to conflict is the ability to create narrative accounts of conflict-threatening situations” (p. 288). This lends support to the idea of

journaling after reading and discussing a critical literacy book with a conflict resolution theme. Harris and Walton claim that in order for students to become successful members of society, they must be able to narrate what is happening in the world around them. Students must be able to recognize and repeat the ways in which they are able to resolve various conflicts. Journaling is a form of self-regulating behavior. The narration the students will do when journaling also allows them to reflect on their own actions and the implications of those actions.

Wan (2008) states the importance of literature as a way to celebrate culture: “To face and meet the challenge and demand of enhancing teachers' and students' awareness of diversity, we need to develop programs with multicultural components. Literature is the essence of communication” (p. 141). Throughout the study, I will read a book aloud to my class that closely aligns with critical literacy ideas. We will be able to share and relate to each other through this literature.

### **Children’s Literature**

Children’s literature is the tool that I will use in my research to bring up topics of social issues. The literature will be selected based on the fact that the books allow students to become involved in the topic. Botelho and Rudman (2009), researchers of children’s literature, claim that human history and literature are intimately connected. They state; “The examination of this history demonstrates that literacy practices are social practices; that is, they are linked to human activity and interaction, to something we want to accomplish socially and politically” (p. 37). Literature provides a path for change in the school-world and beyond. Literature will provide a forum in

which we will discuss social issues as a class. By using literature as the foundation of our critical literacy study, we will “create spaces for understanding how language works to construct people, for using language to critique the word and the world, and for changing social practices that advantage some people over others” (Vasquez, 2003, p. 70).

Botelho and Rudman (2009) state; “Children’s literature contains experiences that are different from children’s everyday worlds. It offers a window into society and creates a space where children can meet people across lines of social difference (e.g., cultural, class, language, sexuality, age, ability, and geography), providing vantage points from which readers can view multiple lives” (p.17). The use of children’s literature in a critical literacy curriculum is imperative. The literature allows students to question, critique, and reconsider their own “social worlds, spaces, and places” (Vasquez, 2003, p. 71).

Through class discussion and literature critique, students will learn the power of literature in everyday life. An astute kindergarten student in Vivian Vasquez’s class stated at the end of the critical literacy unit “books are not just words, right?” (p. 70). This sentiment displays the power of literature to be used in many different ways, as it is evident even to a five year old.

## **Summary**

Critical literacy can be defined in many ways. Lewison, Seely Flint & Van Sluys developed a useful and comprehensive definition of critical literacy (2002).

They determined that critical literacy can be broken into four, interrelated components: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action. In the second grade classroom, we will use children's literature to foster an open, communicative environment. This unit will help students to resolve conflict peacefully. The students will be encouraged to act on issues that are important to them to and to develop a strong sense of community.

## **Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will describe the contexts and methods for data collection for the study. I will also describe the school, student population and the curriculum used at the school where the study is taking place. The physical layout of the classroom and the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade daily schedule will be discussed. I will also describe the demographic information of the students of the classroom and provide a detailed description of the focal student and his role in the classroom community. The purpose of the study is to discover how the use of children's literature supports second graders' critical literacy development through a civil rights unit. In the following section, I introduce the contextual information and data collection methods and procedures.

### **School**

Educate the Individual of Western New York (ETI) is a private, Orthodox-Jewish, elementary school. The school is a secluded wing of Catholic High School in western New York and consists of 80 students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The faculty consists of seven general studies teachers and five Judaic studies teachers. The ETI mission statement is as follows:

Educate the Individual of Western New York (ETI) is committed to providing a Torah education for all Jewish children. A seamless fusion of curricula has been developed to educate the whole

child. ETI teaches a superior, scholastic curriculum that meets and exceeds New York State Education Department standards.

The intellectual and moral development of every student is maximized in a warm, nurturing learning environment. Each student is viewed as an individual, having multiple capacities, interests and intelligences. Thus, our educational philosophy reflects the wisdom of Proverbs: Chanoch l'naar al pi darko (educate each child according to his nature).

All of the students live in a tight-knit, Jewish community in western New York. The students are bused to the school by way of the city school district busing. The students have an intense day of studying, learning Judaic studies for half of the day and general studies for half of the day. Judaic studies include learning Torah and Hebrew among other things. General studies include English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies curricula. The school day hours are from 8:20 AM to 3:45 PM, Monday through Thursday, and from 8:20 AM to 1:30 PM, Friday. The reason for the early release on Friday is to allow time for the students and their families to prepare for the weekly Shabbos (Sabbath) observances, which start on Friday at sundown and end Saturday at sundown.

Classes are co-educational in kindergarten through fourth grade before becoming gender separated starting in fifth grade. The culture of the school is one that encourages education and learning Torah above everything else. The school and religion are extremely conservative. The female teachers must cover their knees

(wearing only skirts) and elbows at all times. The students wear light and navy blue uniforms.

### **Classroom**

The second grade classroom is decorated with English and Hebrew posters, books, and materials. It is a vibrant room with 12 desks and a teacher's desk. The desks are arranged in a U-shape facing the whiteboard. The teacher's desk is to the side of the U-shaped desk arrangement. In the back of the room there is a small, half-circle table and 6 chairs. There is a library corner with baskets of books organized by fiction/non-fiction, science, social studies, math books, and author baskets. There are three armchairs for students to sit and read in. Student work decorates the three bulletin boards and walls.

The general studies curriculum includes English Language Arts (ELA), Math, Science, and Social Studies programs. The students focus on general studies from 12:30 PM to 3:45 PM, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. On Wednesday, the students have computer lab time from 3:00 PM to 3:45 PM. On Friday, the students have general studies from 12:30-1:30 and then have a 1:30 PM dismissal time.

The second grade ELA block is daily from 12:30 PM to 2:00 PM. From 12:30 PM to 1:00 PM, the students work on their daily journals. The students copy the date from the white board, and copy a journal prompt that they complete on their own and then illustrate it. After doing these things, some students are offered the opportunity to share their work with their classmates. At 1:00 PM, the students participate in

daily Wilson Foundations lessons. These lessons take anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes and are phonics-based. The goal of the Wilson Foundations program is to teach phonics rules to second graders and to give them a strong phonetic background. ETI uses Wilson Foundations in grades Kindergarten through Second. The lessons include drills in the sound-letter and sound-parts of words, writing current words, reviewing old words and patterns, and coloring the sounds and matching pictures in a workbook.

Around 1:15 PM (depending on the length of the Wilson Foundations lesson), the students work on literacy centers while the teacher pulls two guided reading groups of 4 students to work at the back table. The guided reading books are available only at the K and L levels (Fountas and Pinnell). Right now, one group is on level K and one group is on level L. The students talk with the teacher about the book, and read independently. The teacher asks the students to whisper-read while one student at a time reads aloud to the teacher. At the end of the session, the teacher introduces a strategy or concept such as “re-reading”, demonstrates it, and has the students try it. The students are assessed weekly in the principles they have been taught from the Wilson Foundations programs for the week and in reading through the use of running records. Guided reading and centers run until 2:00 PM, when the students go outside for a 15-minute recess.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class consists of 12 students in total. There are 5 boys and 7 girls. All 12 students live in the same Orthodox-Jewish community in western New York. The students are well acquainted with each other, and often spend time at one another’s homes. One of the students is new to ETI this year. Most of the class has

been together since kindergarten. They are a tight-knit bunch that often work and play together like brothers and sisters.

### **Participants**

The focal child is named Matt. Matt is 7.2 years of age. He is average in height and build and appears healthy. Matt does not have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan, and does not receive any outside services. Matt comes from an Orthodox-Jewish family. Matt is respectful and attentive in the classroom. He is eager to learn and enjoys sharing his perspective with the teacher and his peers. He has been attending ETI for 2.2 years. Matt gets along well with the other students in the class and works well in small groups and independently.

The second focal student is named Kim. Kim is 7.5 years of age. She is a happy, healthy student. Kim does not have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan, and does not receive any outside services this academic year. Kim immigrated to the United States from Israel one year ago. Kim's first language is Hebrew. English is Kim's second language. Kim received one-on-one tutoring in reading and writing during the first grade academic year. At the end of the first grade year, Kim took the first grade Terra Nova test and tested at grade level in all academic areas. Kim is eager to participate in class conversations and puts a strong effort into her schoolwork. Kim often goes above the required work and is very involved in her own learning.

The teacher is 25 years old and received a B.S.Ed. from SUNY Geneseo with a major in Special Education and a minor in Spanish. She is dually certified by New

York State to teach Students with Disabilities (1-6) and Elementary Education (1-6). The teacher is a white female and has taught at ETI for 2.5 years. The teacher has taught 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and Physical Education classes at ETI. For the 2011-2012 school year, the teacher is teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> grade general studies, grades 3 and 4 girls' physical education, and grades 6 and 7 girls' physical education classes.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Several data collection techniques and multiple data domains will be used in order to explore the impact of children's literature on students' critical literacies. I will gather parental consent for the students to be involved in the study. Parental permission for all students in the class will be secured through a Statement of Informed Consent for parents (see Appendices C and D). Locking the field notes in a filing cabinet drawer in the teacher's desk will protect the confidentiality of the participants. After the conclusion of the study, the teacher will destroy the data collected throughout the study.

I will use two student surveys in this study (see Appendix A). One survey will be given before the unit and one survey will be given after the unit. Depending on the selected literature, the survey will ask three different questions of the student in order to assess his/her critical literacy skills. The survey will allow me to determine if students feel that literature provides varying perspectives, how students interpret selected literature, and whether or not students feel that literature affects their own behavior in the school-world. I will read these three questions to each student

individually and will record their answers. The survey will take approximately five minutes per child to complete.

I will use a field note observation form to record my observations and interpretations during the critical literacy lessons (see Appendix B). I will use the field note observation form two times weekly, during each of the critical literacy lessons. The field notes will provide information on the lesson procedures and the students' reactions to the lessons. The field notes will also provide an interpretation of the elements of the lessons and the students' behaviors during the lesson. The field notes will determine how students interpret selected literature and the effect of the literature on students' critical literacies.

I will use student writing and drawing samples to illustrate students' critical understandings of important issues. I will also use classroom images to illustrate the environment in which the class discussions and work will take place. I will block out all student names in order to retain confidentiality of the students.

## Procedures

### *Timeline for Procedures for Data Collection*

The following table exhibits the procedures for which I will follow to complete the study. The table is an accurate depiction of the work that will be done in the classroom throughout the study (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Data Collection Procedures

<i>Week</i>	<i>Activities</i>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Distribute parental consent forms</li><li>•Collect parental consent forms</li></ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Administer student surveys and record answers</li></ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Read a children’s book with a civil rights theme</li><li>•Discuss the issue as a class: record some class conversation</li><li>•Record ideas on chart paper</li><li>•Take photos of student work</li><li>•Take photos of classroom</li><li>•Use the Field Note Observation Form to record phases/interpretations of lesson (2 times per week)</li></ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Read a children’s book with a civil rights theme</li><li>•Discuss the issue as a class: record some class conversation</li><li>•Record ideas on chart paper</li><li>•Take photos of student work</li><li>•Take photos of classroom</li><li>•Use the Field Note Observation Form to record phases/interpretations of lesson (2 times per week)</li></ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Read a children’s book with a civil rights theme</li><li>•Discuss the issue as a class</li><li>•Record ideas on chart paper</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Take photos of student work</li> <li>•Take photos of classroom</li> <li>•Use the Field Note Observation Form to record phases/interpretations of lesson (2 times per week)</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Administer student surveys and record answers</li> <li>•Analyze data</li> </ul>

In week one of the study, I will administer and collect parental consent forms. In week two, I will administer student surveys by reading a short passage followed by three questions to each student individually. I will record each of the students' answers. The questions seek to answer how critically students think about the text meaning and the author. For example, one question is "What type of person would like to read this story?" The answers to these questions will serve as baseline data.

In weeks three, four and five, I will read a children's book with a civil rights theme. We will discuss the issue as a class. We will record our ideas using graphic organizers and lists on chart paper. I will take photos of these graphic organizer and lists.

Each time we do a lesson on civil rights, I will use the field note observation form to record the phases and interpretations of the lessons. I will use the field note observation form two times weekly. In week five, I will read the same passage and ask students the same questions that I asked them in week two. I will record each student's answers individually.

## **Data Analysis**

Triangulation increases the reliability and validity of the study. I will draw on multiple domains examining the use of children's literature in students' critical literacy development. I will analyze the student surveys, student response sheets, and field notes to draw findings and conclusions.

I will analyze the student surveys by coding them for trends in opinions and ideology. The survey will allow me to determine if students feel that literature provides varying perspectives, how students interpret selected literature, and whether or not students feel that literature affects their own behavior in the school-world. The trends will be determined after the surveys have been completed.

Student response forms and field notes will serve to provide information on the lessons and the students' reactions to the lessons. The field notes will provide detailed procedures for the lessons and the students' behaviors during the lessons. The field notes will determine how students interpret selected literature and the effect of the literature on students' critical thinking.

The analytical framework that I draw on to answer my questions include perspectives of children's literature, students' interpretation of literature, and the influence of children's literature on students' social actions.

## **Summary**

The purpose of the study is to discover how the use of children's literature supports second graders' critical literacy development through a civil rights unit. The study will take place in a second grade classroom of a private elementary school in

western New York. Data will be collected through the use of field note observation forms, student surveys, audio-recorded class discussion, and student journal responses. The data will be coded for significant trends. Through this study, I will explore the multiple perspectives of children's literature, students' interpretation of literature, and the influence of children's literature on students' social actions.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to research the following questions:

- What kinds of perspectives does children’s literature provide?
- How do students interpret different perspectives to solve their conflicts?
- In what ways does children’s literature help second graders act on issues that are important to them?

I drew on multiple domains examining the use of children’s literature in students’ critical literacy development. I analyzed the student surveys, student response forms, and field notes to draw findings and conclusions. In the following section, I will provide responses to the study questions. I triangulated my data to increase the reliability and validity of the study. In the following section, I introduce findings to the research questions that I have posed for the current study.

*What kinds of perspectives does children’s literature provide?*

Student surveys were given before and after the literature unit. The same survey was given before and after the literature unit. I read a passage (see Figure 4.3) of *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles to each of the students. I asked them to answer a three-question survey and I recorded their answers. I analyzed the student surveys by coding them for trends in opinions and ideology. The surveys ask the following three questions referring to *The Story of Ruby Bridges*:

1. What do you notice about the front cover?
2. Read passage and ask: What is this text about? How do we know?
3. Who would be most likely to read and/or view this text and why?

Figure 4.1: Student Survey Story Cover

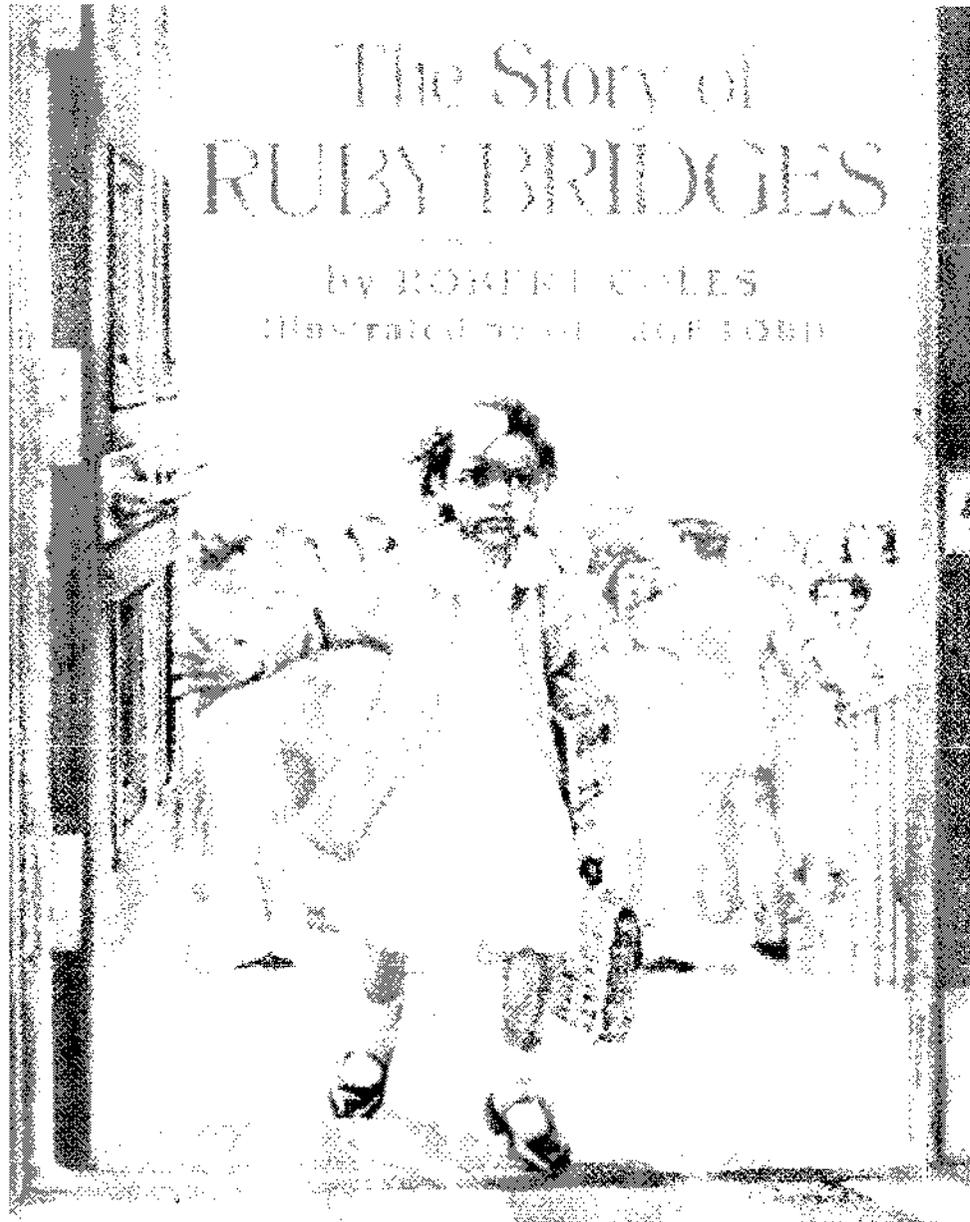


Figure 4.2: Student Survey Illustration





The student surveys provided insight into what kinds of perspectives children's literature provides. During the initial survey, students were not used to answering higher-level questions about topics such as civil rights. The students responded somewhat superficially. The students were unfamiliar with the topic and somewhat uncomfortable about it as evidenced by abnormally evasive behavior and joking. By the end of the unit, students responded to critical questions in more meaningful ways and were more comfortable discussing topics of great importance, such as civil rights, differences between people, and ways to solve personal conflicts.

After analyzing Kim's student surveys, I found that her ideas about the importance of the topic of civil rights had changed since the beginning of the study. After asking Kim question number one, during the first student survey she stated that the girl on the cover (Ruby Bridges) looks like she is going somewhere, perhaps on vacation. After asking Kim question number one, during the final student survey, Kim answered, "people are screaming at her (Ruby) and are kind of angry". This shows a deeper progression of thought. At the first viewing of the cover, Kim thought that the illustration was portraying a girl going on vacation, a light-hearted topic typical of a children's book. At the final viewing of the cover, Kim was able to notice the looks on people's faces and to determine the emotions that they were feeling (angry). Kim paid attention to a deeper meaning at the final viewing of the cover of the book.

Kim answered question number three the same way in both surveys. The question asks "Who would be most likely to read and/or view this text and why?"

Kim responded “everybody-because everybody can learn important things from it”. This shows the high value that Kim placed on this civil rights story that remained consistent throughout the unit.

Matt also displayed both changing and consistent ideas about the importance of the topic of civil rights after analyzing the student surveys. After asking question one during the first survey, Matt answered that “it looks like the story might be about how the people think African American people aren’t people” and “the people in the crowd look like they’re kicking her out because she is not white” and “the people are angry”. After asking Matt question number one during the final survey he stated that “Ruby is going to school and the white people are angry about it”. This shows how perceptive Matt was at the beginning of the unit and at the end of the unit. Matt was particularly keen to recognize the emotions of the people in the illustration and to infer the cause of those emotions.

Matt’s answer to the second survey question stayed the same and changed. Matt answered that the text was about how white people would not send their children to school with African American children. Matt said that he figured this out from the cover and the one passage of text that I read to him. Matt answered this way during both survey questionings. During the final survey questioning, Matt also answered “the text was about an African American girl who prayed everyday that people would have the knowledge to know that they were all equal”. Matt realized the importance of equality by the end of the unit. Matt, coming from a religious background, connected with the fact that Ruby prayed for other people instead of addressing the

conflict with violence. Matt's critical literacy skills strengthened as the unit progressed as evidenced by his deep moral connection with the religious aspect of the text. The books used in the civil rights unit provided unique perspectives unfamiliar to the students before the unit. Once the students became oriented to the new perspectives, they were able to contextualize and generalize their new findings into their own lives.

*How do students interpret different perspectives to solve their conflicts?*

The student response forms evidenced different interpretations of the themes of the literature and ways that they may incorporate the themes into their own lives. Student response forms also served to provide information on the lessons and the students' reactions to the lessons. The students responded in either drawing or writing format and were asked to explain their work to the teacher. The students completed the response forms after reading the book and discussing it as a class.

Kim showed growth in critical thinking through her writing and drawing responses. After reading *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, the students completed their first response form. Kim responded, "People should read it (Ruby Bridges) because they can learn very important stuff" as seen in Figure 4.4. This written statement shows that Kim recognizes the importance of the topic, but may not quite grasp the full meaning of the story. This idea is further proved when Kim asks "Why did people scream at Ruby? Only because of the skin?" on her response form as seen in Figure 4.5. Kim understands that the topic involves conflict and is

meaningful, but she does not understand the complete meaning of the story at this point in the study.

Figure 4.4: Kim Response Form Question 1

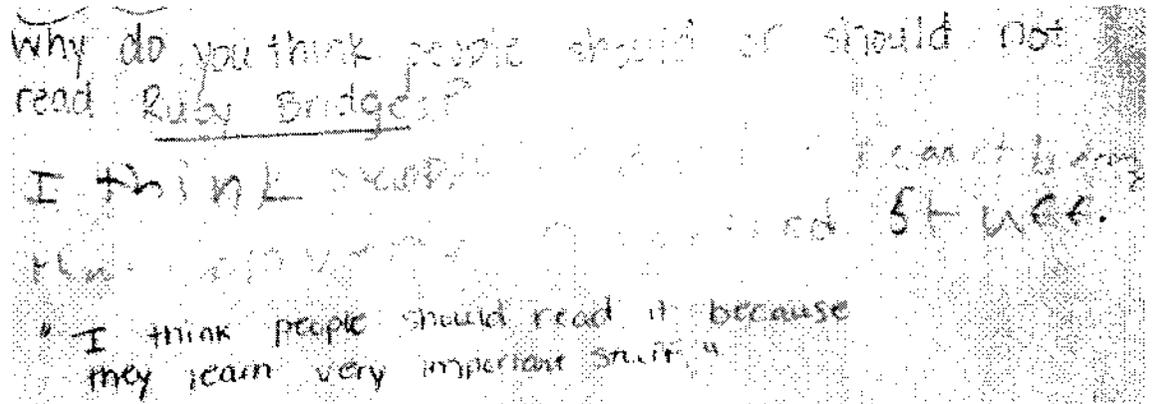
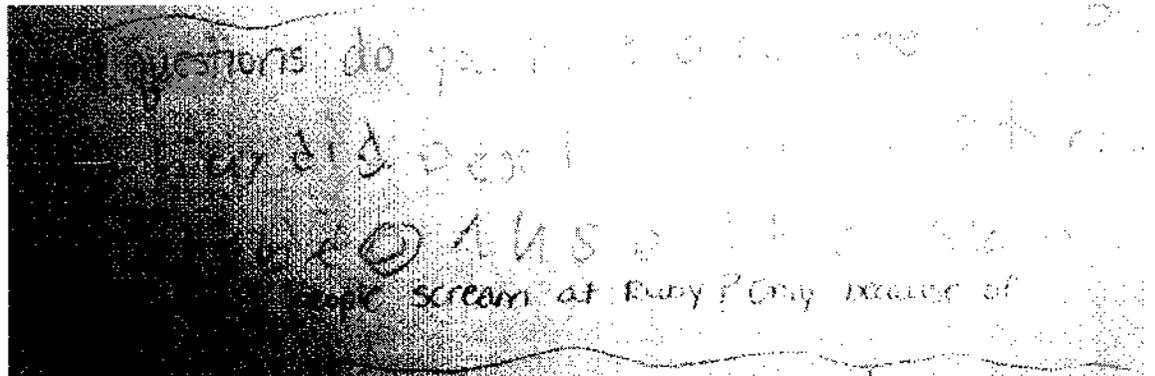


Figure 4.5: Kim Response Form Question 2



The final task on the Ruby Bridges response sheet was to draw or write about one or two topics from the students' own lives that connect with the story. Kim wrote, "People were trying to kill her and some people want to kill the Jewish people" as seen in Figure 4.6. Kim, growing up in an extremely religious environment, always has her faith on the forefront of her mind. Right away, Kim connected with the persecution and prejudice that Ruby faced. Kim, having moved to the United States

only two years ago, knows what it feels like to be the outsider. Kim critically understood civil rights after reading the first book of the unit.

Figure 4.6: Kim Response Form Question 3



Matt also showed growth in his critical literacy skills throughout the unit.

After reading *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, Matt responded, “People should read it so that they know the color of your skin is not important” as seen in Figure 4.7. This shows Matt’s deep understanding of equality. After reading *Young Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Matt responded that the most important part of story was when a policeman treated Martin Luther King, Junior’s father disrespectfully. Matt drew a picture of the scene and wrote, “this should not happen” and “ the world should be fair!” (see Figures 4.8 and 4.9). Matt took one of the most poignant pieces of the story to heart. He understood the subtle message of disrespect in the policeman’s actions. Matt tried to reconcile the fact that the world is sometimes unfair. He did this with his illustration and captions.

Figure 4.7: Matt Response Form Question 1



Figure 4.8: Matt Most Important Part Response Form

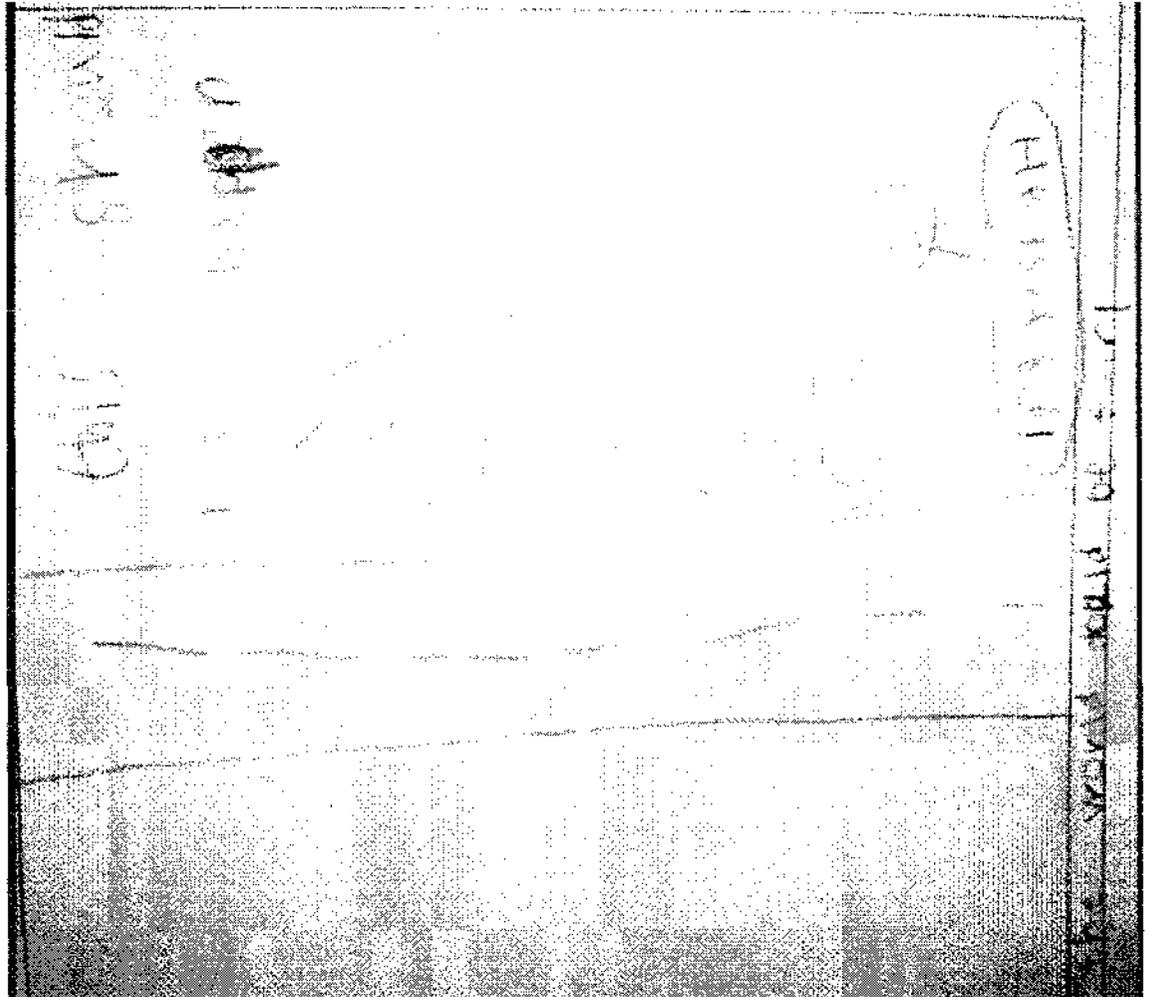
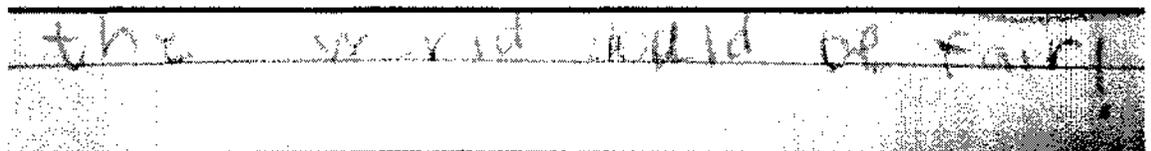


Figure 4.9: Matt Most Important Part Response Form Caption



*In what ways does children's literature help second graders act on issues that are important to them?*

Field notes served to provide information on the lessons and the students' reactions to the lessons. The field notes (see Figure 4.11) provided detailed

procedures for the lessons and the students' behaviors during the lessons. The field notes determined how students interpreted selected literature and the effect of the literature on students' critical thinking and actions.

The class literature discussions increased in complexity as the unit progressed. During the reading of the first selection, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, the class seemed to ask more questions to clarify and gain a firm understanding of the topic. For example, there is a scene in *The Story of Ruby Bridges* in which the crowd is screaming at Ruby. The text itself does not mention this, but the illustration clearly conveys it. Some students asked the question "Why are people screaming at Ruby?" As a class, we came to the decision that it was "because of the skin". We recorded these questions and possible answers on chart paper throughout the reading of the story. The students immediately empathized with Ruby and asked questions to gain a basic understanding of the conflict and the civil rights movement.

In phase three of this lesson, Kim made the connection that people were trying to hurt/kill Ruby just like some people want to hurt/kill the Jewish people. She drew an illustration and explained it to me orally. By the end of lesson number one, students were already connecting deeply with the characters of the civil rights movement.

During the class discussion, we recorded some ways that people can handle conflicts such as the one Ruby is facing in the story (as seen in Figure 4.12). I asked the students to think about a time when they felt they were treated unfairly and how they handled it. One student offered the idea that people sometimes play games in an

unfair way. We decided that there are many ways to handle the situation but that two productive ways would be to either ignore it or to ask the person to change their behavior in a polite way. Another student said that it is important to always “remain calm” during a conflict. An interesting discussion point occurred when a student stated that one type of conflict is when people say things that are not true. The class discussed and decided that the best way to handle it would be to “stick up for yourself” by stating the truth or to “ignore it”. The literature provided students with a forum for discussing the conflicts that arise in their daily lives and the ways in which they react to those conflicts. The forum allowed students to use their peers as a sounding board for acceptable and unacceptable actions during a conflict.



Figure 4.12: Student Discussion Ideas

The Story of Ruby  
Bridges by Robert Coles

(connected to)

- \* people didn't have the name
- \* shouting it out
- \* Sometimes people don't
- you be used to it
- be used to it
- \* not for
- \* Sometimes
- aren't to
- to speak up
- write it

We used the book *Young Martin Luther King, Jr.* for the second literature lesson as seen in the field notes on the lesson (see Figure 4.13). This lesson served to further student understanding of the civil rights movement and to forge new connections with the figures of the movement. The literature also served to address the issue of fairness. During the book introduction the class discussed Ruby Bridges and her connection to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. About two-thirds of the class had heard the name “Martin Luther King, Jr.” before.

In phase two of the lesson we stopped to clarify certain parts, summarize, and turn and talk to a neighbor (see Figure 4.14). Focal student Matt asked, “Why was it such a big deal?” referring to the animosity between black and white people. The students stated “That time was unfair because people didn’t care about people who were different”. The students also discussed the idea that people can learn new things from other people if they are different. The students generalized their new findings into the larger world by writing and drawing and example their interpretations of a good law and a bad law. Most students stated that a good law was fair to all types of people (see Figure 4.15) and that a bad law was unfair (see Figure 4.16). When probed further, students stated that a fair law helps all people and an unfair law might help some people but not all people.

Figure 4.13: Observational Field Notes Lesson Two

Date: 2/28/12  
 Teacher Name: LEO  
 Observer: LEO  
 School:  
 Time start: Time Stop: 12:45 PM - 1:15 PM  
 Subject: Critical Literacy  
 Class (eg. multiroom, inclusive class, individualized)  
 Grade Level: 2  
 Location: Western New York  
 Class Layout: all on carpet teacher seated at front, small groups  
 Group Configurations: 31 22 23  
 Grouping strategies:  
 Instruction materials:  
 Young Martin Luther King Jr. speech (see attached notes sheet)

Classroom Discourse: Focal Child Observation

Class Activities & Discourse	Focal Child's Participation
<p>Phase 1: Read aloud to the class about the importance of voting rights in the U.S. and the rights of citizens.</p>	
<p>Phase 2: Read me out to the class and discuss shipping to class, community parts/summary of him and talk to a neighbor.</p>	
<p>Phase 3: Complete response sheets in groups.</p>	<p>Writes and draws a picture showing an example of a good law as a fire law and a bad law being one that does not help others.</p>

Figure 4.14: Student Discussion Ideas Lesson Two

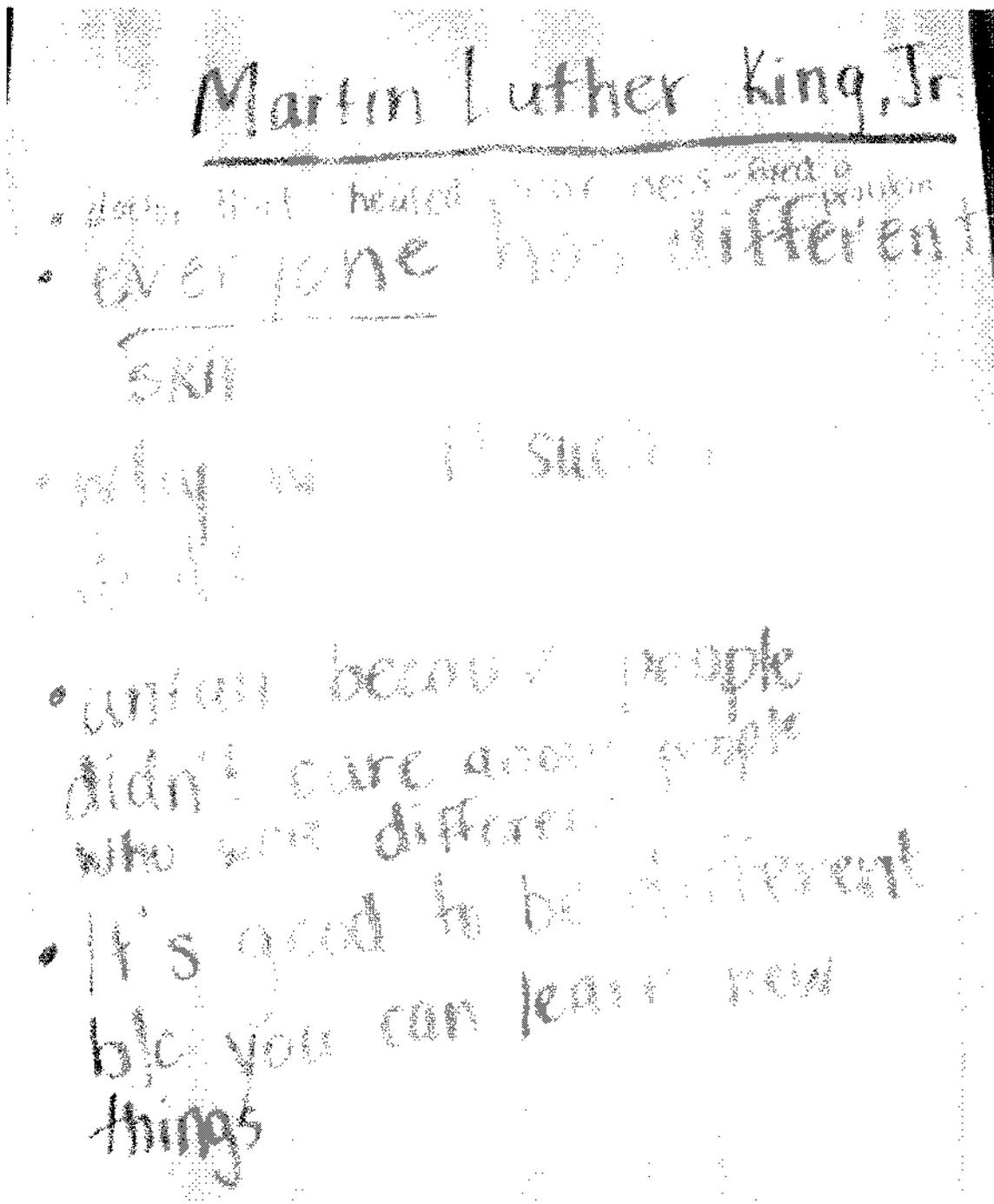


Figure 4.15: Student Response Good Law

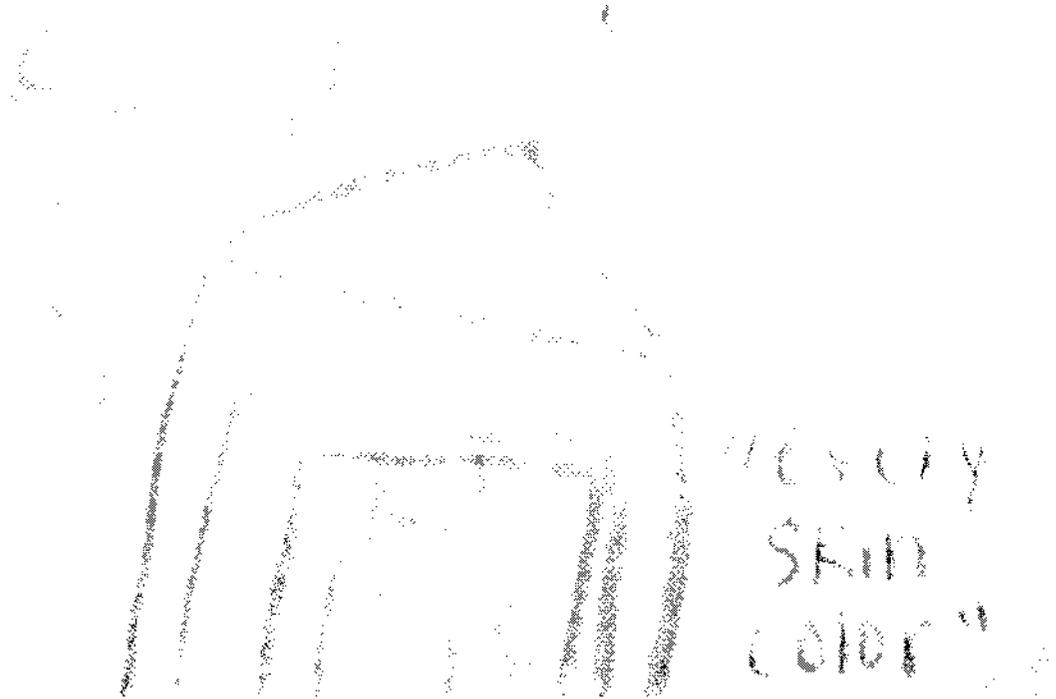


Figure 4.16: Student Response Bad Law



Throughout the unit, students developed ways of interpreting and contextualizing their new knowledge. At one point, during a reading of *My Brother Martin* by Christine King Farris, Matt announced that what we call people should not

matter and that we can call people black, white, purple and that it does not change who they are. Matt decided that a more appropriate name for white people would be peach people and from then on, all students needed to say peach people when talking about white people. This vignette tells us that students create language when necessary to help them understand new information. Matt was exploring the meaning of labels and language when he came up with the idea for “peach people”. The literature discussion that we were having allowed Matt to unlock a treasure trove of critical thinking. After having thought critically about such a topic, Matt will be able to transfer these deep-thinking skills to other aspects of his life.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to research what kinds of perspectives children’s literature provides, how students interpret different perspectives to solve their conflicts, and in what ways children’s literature helps second graders act on issues that are important to them. I drew on multiple domains examining the use of children’s literature in students’ critical literacy development. After analyzing student surveys, response forms, and field notes, it is clear that selected literature has a strong impact on second grade students’ critical literacy development. Children’s literature provides unique perspectives that may be unfamiliar to students in their everyday lives. Once students become oriented to new perspectives, they are able to contextualize and generalize new findings into their own lives. Children’s literature also helps second graders act on issues that important to them by providing them with a forum for discussing the conflicts that arise in their daily lives and they ways in

which they react to those conflicts. The forum allows students to use their peers as a sounding board for acceptable and unacceptable actions during a conflict. Finally, children's literature helps second graders act on issues that are important to them by unlocking their critical thinking skills. After having thought critically about a topic provided by quality literature, students will be able to transfer their deep-thinking skills to other aspects of life.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

After the analysis of the pre-unit and the post-unit data, I have observed and interpreted some notable changes. When teaching critical literacy lessons using selected literature, students demonstrated an increase in critical thinking. The students became more aware of other perspectives, and discussed important issues in an open and supportive environment. The group discussion of selected literature provided new perspectives and a forum for students to discuss them critically. This study is conducted in a second grade classroom for a short time as a case study, but it offers valuable lessons for literacy education. In the following section I present recommendations for students taking on a critical perspective, recommendations for my own teaching of critical literacy, and recommendations for other literacy professionals engaging in the process of critical literacy.

### **Recommendations for Students**

As a student, it is important to be aware of your own educational needs. Being critically literate helps one to address times when your needs may or may not be met. Being critically literate means being aware of the responsibility you have over your own actions. To become more critically literate, you can read books with more critical themes (saving the rainforest, civil rights, advertising and marketing, etc.) and you can choose to take action on the ones you feel are necessary.

There are many ways to take action on issues. You could write letters to people asking them to support your cause. You could form meetings and seminars to

discuss the issue from varying perspectives. You could become a problem-solver and try to find the root cause of the issue. To be critically literate means to use your knowledge to change something.

### **Recommendations For My Teaching**

Since concluding my research, I have decided to continue incorporating critical literacy into my curriculum. I feel that teachers are responsible for helping students develop the tools they need to navigate this world. Through the critical literacy unit on civil rights, students in the classroom were guided to act on issues that were important to them. The students also became careful users and even creators of language. The empowerment they felt and the language they used became useful tools in their repertoire of skills. They learned how to make language work for them and support their causes.

The critical literacy unit provided varying perspectives for the students through the use of children's literature. These perspectives may not be found in the typical children's book, so it is important for the teacher to provide access to these different viewpoints. The critical literacy unit also provided a forum for students to discuss issues that were important to them. We used literature as a springboard for discussion and the students quickly learned how to discuss their views with their peers. The forum helped students to communicate with each other effectively.

## Recommendations for Literacy Educators

As stated above, it is important that teachers provide access to varying perspectives and high-quality literature. Harste (2000) suggests teachers consider the following when choosing books for critical literacy:

- explore differences rather than make them invisible
- enrich understandings of history and life by giving voice to those traditionally silenced or marginalized
- show how people can begin to take action on important social issues
- explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people as "others"
- don't provide "happily ever after" endings for complex social problems

(p. 507)

Each book should meet one or more of these criteria to be used as a critical literacy resource. It can be somewhat overwhelming to develop critical literacy lessons initially. The subject can seem vague and overwhelmingly large. It is important to have a list of critical questions that you can ask students to prompt discussion during a reading. The following questions are examples of critical questions and can be modified to fit the nature of the book.

- Why did the author choose to \_\_\_\_\_ in this book?
- What does this text mean to me?
- Is this text providing a balanced point of view?
- Should we look at some other sources as well?

- Whose voice is being heard through this text?
- Whose voice is being left out?
- Do you agree with what is written here?
- Who would be most likely to read this text and why?
- Are there any actions you wish to take after reading this text?

The following a list of suggested books for teaching critical literacy adapted from Vivian Vasquez's book *Getting beyond "I like the book": Creating space for critical literacy in k-6 classrooms* (2008):

- Bartoletti, S. (1999). *Kids on Strike!* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Breckler, R. (1996). *Sweet Dried Apples: A Vietnamese Wartime Childhood*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brumbeau, J. (2000). *The Quilt Maker's Gift*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cronin, D. (2000). *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Dash, J. (1996). *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Women's Factory Strike of 1909*. New York: Scholastic.
- Fradin, D., & Fradin, J. (2001). *Ida B. Wells: Mother of the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Clarion Books.
- Hansen, J. (1998). *Women of Hope: African Americans Who Made a Difference*. New York: Scholastic Press.
- Kaplan, W. (1998). *One More Border: The True Story of One Family's Escape From War-Torn Europe*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.

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### **Summary**

Critical literacy has a necessary spot in today's classroom. Vasquez (2008) states, "When curriculum is negotiated using the social worlds of children, learning is sustained and generative" (p. 138). Students' lives have a place in our curriculum and when teachers value that idea, learning is effective. Critical literacy is complex and flexible. It is the job of the teacher to make sure that they are "providing children opportunities to connect their current understandings with issues that arise in their everyday lives or that of their peers" (Vasquez, 2008, p. 138). As a teacher, it is my responsibility to make my students aware of the complexities of real-world communication and to help them to find their effective voices.

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Appendix A: Student Survey

*To Be Given Before and After the Literature Unit (the same survey)*



(read passage and show the picture)

1. What do you notice about the front cover?
2. Read passage and ask: What is this text about? How do we know?
3. Who would be most likely to read and/or view this text and why?

Appendix B: Field Note Observation Form

**Date:**

**Teacher Name:**

**Observer:**

**School:**

**Time start: Time Stop:**

**Subject:**

**Class (e.g., mainstream, inclusive class):**

**Grade Level:**

**Location:**

**Class Layout:**

**Group Configurations:**

**Grouping strategies:**

**Instruction materials:**

<b>Classroom Discourse/ Focal Child Observation</b>	
<b>Class Activities &amp; Discourse</b>	<b>Focal Child's Participation</b>
Phase 1:	
Phase 2:	
Phase 3:	

## Appendix C: Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

As some of you may know, I am pursuing my master's degree in education from SUNY Brockport. I am still your child's second grade teacher. I am working part-time on my master's degree. I am currently developing my thesis on how the use of children's literature supports second graders critical literacy development about civil rights. I am investigating the types of perspectives children's literature provides, how students interpret different perspectives to help solve their conflicts, and how children's literature helps second graders act on issues that are important to them.

As part of my study, I would like to give each student a three-question survey to determine their critical understandings of the topic of civil rights. I will record the students' answers. I would like to conduct a short literature unit using pieces of children's literature that support critical literacy. The texts support critical literacy because they involve students in the subject and allow them to think critically about the impact of the themes on their own lives.

Each piece of literature will be introduced to the students and there will be a discussion surrounding the main themes of the literature. The students will draw pictures of their interpretation of the theme. I will keep observational field notes throughout the two-week period.

At the end of the two-week period, I will give the students the same three-question survey to determine how students' critical understandings have changed.

I will not ask for student names, or professionals within the school. In my study, I will not disclose the name or location of the school, professionals, or student names.

I am attaching the Parent/Guardian Statement of Informed Consent to be signed by you if you agree to have your child participate in the study. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to call or email me. Thank you.

<u>Primary researcher</u>	<u>Faculty Advisor</u>
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<a href="mailto:nicoleleo@gmail.com">nicoleleo@gmail.com</a>	<a href="mailto:dshin@brockport.edu">dshin@brockport.edu</a>

## Appendix D: Statement of Informed Consent/Parental Consent

This form describes a research study being conducted about second graders' critical literacy of civil rights. The purpose of this research is to understand students' critical literacy development. I am the second grade teacher at Derech HaTorah of Rochester and am conducting this research for my Masters in Education from The College at Brockport, SUNY. Information collected in this study may possibly benefit teachers and allow them to better prepare young people to become critical readers and writers.

The class will be studying civil rights in the coming weeks. Students will complete an initial survey about her/his knowledge of civil rights. The class will read several books about civil rights and engage in discussion about topics in the literature. The students will also draw pictures to express their understanding of civil rights. At the conclusion of the civil rights unit, students will retake the civil-rights survey. If you agree to have your child participate in this study, data from her/his involvement in the civil rights unit will be used in my research. I will observe the students during discussion and keep field notes documenting the impact of critical literacy. Two students will be selected as the focus of the study. These students will remain anonymous to the rest of the class. I will use pseudonyms for each student in my research.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Being in it or refusing to be in it will not affect your child's grades or class standing. S/he is free to change her/his mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My child's participation is voluntary and s/he has the right to refuse to answer any questions. S/he will have a chance to discuss any questions s/he has about the study with the researcher after completing the survey.
2. My child's confidentiality is guaranteed. There will be no way to connect my child to the written survey or field notes. If any publication results from this research, s/he would not be identified by name. Results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that neither the participants nor their schools can be identified. Participation will have no effect on grades status.
3. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.
4. My child's participation involves responding to a survey of 3 questions and answering those questions verbally. It is estimated that it will take 3 minutes to complete the survey.

5. Group conversations about the literature will be observed. The purpose of this is to allow the researcher to take field notes on the students' involvement in the discussions. No individual students will be identified. It is estimated that the discussion sessions will last 10 minutes.
6. Approximately 13 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a research project by the primary researcher.
7. Surveys, field notes, consent forms, and other data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Only the primary investigator will have access to the surveys, field notes, consent forms and other data. Surveys, field notes, consent forms, and other data will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been accepted and approved.

You are being asked whether or not you will permit your child to participate in this study. If you wish to give permission to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. Your child can refuse to participate even if you have given permission for her/him to participate.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this project. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child's participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.

If you have any questions you may contact:

<u>Primary researcher</u>	<u>Faculty Advisor</u>
Nicole M. Leo	Dr. Dong-shin Shin
Graduate Student	Education and Human Development
The College at Brockport, SUNY	The College at Brockport, SUNY
315-573-5551	585-395-5007
nicolemleo@gmail.com	dshin@brockport.edu

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent /Date

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Statement of Assent

I am Miss Leo, your teacher and a student at SUNY Brockport. I am studying how students read and understand books and language. I would like to find out what all of you do when you read books and think about certain topics. You may see me writing in my notebook or looking at what you are doing when you are reading and writing. Also, we will have some class conversations on the rug about certain topics. If you want to participate, I will take notes during these conversations so that I can go back later and read them. I will focus on two students when I review the notes.

The class will be studying civil rights in the coming weeks. We will complete an initial survey about your knowledge of civil rights. The class will read several books about civil rights and engage in discussion about topics in the literature. The class will also draw pictures to express their understanding of civil rights. At the conclusion of the civil rights unit, the class will retake the civil-rights survey. If you agree to participate in this study, data from your involvement in the civil rights unit will be used in my research. I will observe the class during discussion and keep field notes documenting the impact of critical literacy. Two students will be selected as the focus of the study. These students will remain anonymous to the rest of the class. I will use pseudonyms for each student in my research.

If you decide to let me find out about the way you read and write about certain topics, I will not write down your name or let anyone else know who you are. When I write about my study, I will only say what you and your classmates did during reading and writing about the topics. If you do not want to participate in the study, you will still participate in the civil rights unit, but I will not take any notes about your participation.

Your parent or guardian has given permission for you to take part in this study, but it is up to you to decide if you would like to. If you would like to take part in my study, but change your mind later on, you can tell me that you have changed your mind. It is okay to change your mind at any time.

If it is okay with you for me to find out about how you read and write about certain topics, you can write your name on the first line below. Under your name you can write today's date, which is \_\_\_\_\_. It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you want to participate, you can sign this sheet to state that. If you do not want to participate, then you do not sign this sheet.

Thank you very much,

Miss Leo

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F: Letter to Principal

October 20, 2011

Mr. X, Principal  
Z Elementary School  
Somewhere City Schools

Dear Principal X,

As you know, I am a graduate student at SUNY Brockport. I am currently developing my thesis on how the use of children's literature supports second graders critical literacy development about civil rights. I am investigating the types of perspectives children's literature provides, how students interpret different perspectives to help solve their conflicts, and how children's literature helps second graders act on issues that are important to them.

As part of my study, I would like to give each student a three-question survey to determine their critical understandings of the topic of civil rights. I will record the students' answers. I would like to conduct a short literature unit using pieces of children's literature that support critical literacy. The texts support critical literacy because they involve students in the subject and allow them to think critically about the impact of the themes on their own lives.

Each piece of literature will be introduced to the students and there will be a discussion surrounding the main themes of the literature. The discussions may be recorded. The students will draw pictures of their interpretation of the theme. I will keep observational field notes throughout the two-week period.

At the end of the two-week period, the teacher will give the students a three-question survey to determine how students' critical understandings have changed.

I will not ask for student names, or professionals within the school. In my study, I will not disclose the name or location of the school, professionals, or student names.

In order to comply with SUNY Brockport Institutional Review Board, I must submit a letter from you, on your school's letterhead, stating your approval of this study. I must also submit informed consent forms from the parents/guardians of my students.

Please contact me at [nicolemleo@gmail.com](mailto:nicolemleo@gmail.com) or (315) 573-5551, if you have any questions regarding my study. If you approve of my study, please return a signed letter of approval to me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicole Leo  
Graduate Student SUNY Brockport  
Brockport  
Second Grade Teacher

Dr. Dong-Shin Shin  
Thesis Advisor at SUNY

Appendix G: Permission Letter from School

To: Institutional Review Board  
The College at Brockport, SUNY

I have read and approve the research study entitled, " \_\_\_\_\_ "  
By Nicole Leo and give consent for the study to be conducted at or through Derech  
HaTorah of Rochester.

The institution may add any other appropriate requirements, so long as information  
regarding the study is shared with staff of the agency after the completion of the  
study, so long as parental permission is obtained, etc.

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Signature/ Date

Title: \_\_\_\_\_