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**I Want Them to Read Again:
Stories and Moral Imagination in the Middle Grades Language Arts
Classroom**

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Abstract. Without question, I believe that those who desire to teach and subsequently become educators do so because they look at students and find hope, recognize humanity. As a teacher for these last 13 years, the most foundational questions (*What is education? Why do I teach? Who do I teach? How do I teach?*) seem lost in wider conversations about education. This is due, in part, to the guiding educational philosophies that determine our society’s motivations for valuing education. In this project, I look at the potential literature affords to engage adolescents in thinking about ethics. In chapter one, I argue why this remains an important task in the public sphere. Next, I discuss the state of current educational rationales and literature standards for middle school Language Arts classrooms. Through this research, I discovered the term “moral imagination,” an idea present in many professional schools but notably absent in Kindergarten through undergraduate educational settings. In the second chapter, I discuss moral imagination using scholarly historical and psychological perspectives. I then argue for the unique opportunity the middle grades classroom provides to encourage this type of imagining. In the third chapter, I explore how teachers might encourage thinking about morality through reading actual books, cover to cover, page by page. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I provide close readings of three widely-used middle school texts: Jacqueline Woodson’s *brown girl dreaming*, Mildred Taylor’s *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*. My purpose in this short analysis is to demonstrate motifs that arise when students read books that cultivate imaginative ways to understand complicated stories and characters. I encourage teachers to risk assigning books that help young people stretch their moral muscles, so to speak, and learn to engage questions that cut to the core of what it means to be human.

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Acknowledgements

Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation. In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathise with humans whose experiences we have never shared.

...

Unlike any other creature on this planet, humans can learn and understand, without having experienced. They can think themselves into other people's places.

(J.K. Rowling)

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Introduction / First Things

To me, the heart of this project is as apparent as it is absent. It is as revolutionary as it is fundamental. It is as surprising as it is commonplace. This project is borne from my experience in education, my profession for these last 13 years. Though the daughter of a teacher, my eventual career choice surprised even me, having never considered the classroom because it truly did not occur to me. I woke up one summer after participating in a Children's Literature course to fulfill a World Literature requirement. Fast forward a few months to a conversation with a math teacher, of all things, and I can now point directly to *Holes*, *Tuck Everlasting*, *The Chamber of Secrets*, *Hatchet* and *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* as the catalysts that ultimately convinced me exactly where my vocational home should be.

In my career, the greatest continual surprise has been the absence of a particular conversation in the world of education, and yet it is absolutely there. It is there, but it feels nameless because I have never heard it named. Without question, I believe that those who desire to teach and subsequently become educators do so because they look at students and find hope, recognize humanity. I believe that teachers understand, on some level, that their profession is sacred. In my 13 years, I have yet to meet a teacher for whom her responsibility toward our youngest citizens was completely lost on her. No, I am convinced that the professional commitment of every colleague I have known is rooted in something nearly too noble for words. At the same time, I have found that the most fundamental questions about education are also the silent ones, and I will not believe that it is because they are unimportant or do not exist. Whether the questions, *What is education? Why do I teach? Who do I teach? How do I teach?* are forgotten or pushed aside (I think it is the latter), these foundational "first things" do not enter a moment of conversation in teacher's lounges, hallways after school, professional development workshops, or one of the regular, countless meetings. Is it any surprise that our beginning teachers are increasingly likely to leave the profession within their first five years? We attribute the high

turnover to the stresses of the job – of which there are indeed many – but I often wonder if new teachers sense so great an ideological distance between their initial commitments in their Schools of Education to the everyday realities of working in schools. I have considered, often, what might be the effects of taking regular time to put ourselves back in the way of remembering why we chose to teach in the first place.

I have yet to attend a staff meeting on literature’s invitations, but have spent countless hours looking at student data. I have yet to attend a workshop centered around supporting students in their adolescent ways of seeing the world, but I have been to many workshops on learning styles and math curriculum. I have yet to attend a professional conference themed around questions such as: *What is education? Why do I teach?* Yet, I have attended several colloquiums covering the range of mindfulness, technology, and cultural competence. Finally, I have yet to hear most of my colleagues describe *why* they continue, day after day, to work with students, to look at data, to teach math, to attend professional development, to learn new and evolving technologies. But they persist, and I will not attribute that persistence to building retirement or sacrificing pay and status in order to grade papers on weekends or to answer parent emails while cooking a toddler’s dinner. Where are these conversations, so foundational to my profession, occurring? Perhaps it is time for our educational discourse to return to those first things.

Education has a reputation for its pendulum swings, for trends and buzzwords that inform one year to the next in the same way certain songs and foods take you back to your college dorm or the short summer stint when you worked in Santa Fe. I can look back to the relatively recent past and talk at length about research studies and curricular trends that, at the time, were the most pressing ideas on the table. However, the ideas that have never changed are that we, as educators and as a society, find education important, that we teach and interact with young people, and that there are unequivocal methods for guiding these young human beings along their educational journeys to engage in the

deepest parts of the human experience. My wish in beginning this program, in researching this project topic, is to find language to begin asking those questions. I want to give myself and my colleagues permission to turn momentarily from the crowding urgencies of our classrooms in order to entertain the ideas of these questions: *What is education? Why do I teach? Who do I teach? How do I teach?* In what often feels like resistance against the commodification of education, the following conversation represents my effort to name a felt absence in our field and to search for language and methods that support, with hope, this alternative conversation.

Like many new teachers, my career began with its share of challenges. My first experiences included distant administrators, burned-out colleagues, mid-year curricular changes, frustrated parents, and students denied access to resources. By the end of my second year in the classroom, I planned to give education one last chance. It seemed, at the time, nearly impossible to resist efforts counter to my pre-service hopes that prioritized, always, the personhood of the student. In my third year, a supportive mentor and committed colleagues encouraged a renewed resolve to remain in education. I have not looked back since.

Still, I recall a moment in my career when I experienced the wide ideological disparity in a literal and visceral way. In 2010, I began my sixth year of teaching and my first year in a North Carolina public elementary school. Our first meeting on the first day of staff in-service comprised a general review of the employee handbook. During this annual routine, school leadership guides teachers through important highlights and amendments to the manual. As teachers, we were to read the handbook in its entirety and submit a signed statement promising we had read the book's contents within the first days of school. That year, in the section about classroom Language Arts instruction, I read bold text stating: "Do not teach novels." Novels and "book studies" were considered a waste of time better spent teaching strategies through short snippets of text in publisher-peddled books contrived for specific reading skills instruction. My years in that school, while rich and fulfilling in other ways, centered

around daily 90 to 120-minute “literacy blocks,” the highest prioritized time of the day dedicated to strategy practice focused on objectives such as determining meanings of words, identifying main ideas, and using context clues to make an inference. District and school administration charged teachers with the task of teaching all learners to read, but my students had little experience reading for anything beyond information.

I rebelled, in my own way, against the philosophy of the literacy block a few minutes each day after lunch. Once students returned from the cafeteria, I read a novel aloud to them for a few minutes, an eventual handful of stories over the course of the year. If teachers were to teach reading, I believed our students needed experiences that taught them that books meant infinitely more than strategies and information. At a foundational level, I hoped those few minutes provided some sense that novels tell important stories, introduce compelling characters, and describe unfamiliar experiences. If my students learned anything in my classroom, I hoped that they would *want to read again*. Further, I felt responsible for giving my classes such an experience. Having entered the teaching profession with the sense that education was more about students as people and less about job training for the future, novels, I found, provided one of the best avenues for engaging my students as young human beings.

Recently, activist and educator Jonathon Kozol recommended immediate prioritization of developing critical consciousness and collective responsibility among students in schools. In the current climate of polarizing views, homogeneous educational settings, and the diminishing appearance of history and humanities in the classrooms, Kozol’s recommendation is timely. At the root of this educational trend, however, are guiding philosophies with practical implications for teachers and students. Some are problematic, but there is a hopeful opportunity embedded in the Language Arts classroom through the process of engaging ethics through literature. This opportunity supposes the presence of moral imagination, a historical and cognitive conception of imagining in which a person conceives of other possibilities even in spite of moral norms. Further, middle school students are

particularly suited to the task of thinking about moral ideas, due in part to the characteristics of today's adolescent, but also rising from great texts that depict moral ideas that matter. Through this project, I name one conversation and one place to begin.

Chapter One: Educational Narratives

Following the contentious 2016 presidential election, educator and civil rights activist Jonathan Kozol held an interview with the news organization Mother Jones regarding the election, displays of bigotry, and resulting implications for education (Rizga). A bestselling author, Kozol's books argue that the lack of integrated schools and the homogeneous nature of our educational settings have resulted in fewer opportunities to learn "mutual understanding and collective responsibility." In the post-election interview, Kozol spoke at length on the last few decades' decline in the amount of time students spend in school engaging with history and the humanities. He proposed that the virtual elimination of social studies "eclipses our memory" of atrocities committed as a result of extreme prejudice. Kozol also suggested that fiction and poetry in particular "refine the souls of human beings." Through literature, people "open [their] hearts to compassion," experience a "profound sense of vulnerability," and begin to identify and empathize with others who are unlike themselves. Having noticed the decline in valuing literature over the course of my career, this project represents my contribution to the conversation. History and the humanities grow increasingly obsolete in classrooms, and yet I – like Kozol – believe they are the subjects most capable of countering singular perspectives. Has the limited presence of these subjects in schools narrowed "our sense of civic decency, collective responsibility, and moral generosity"? I contend that the diminishing support for history and great books in public classrooms contributes to societal difficulties such as the heightened tensions and prejudice between groups of people in the United States. Kozol has an idea to address this, to "fight back," so to speak. He suggests immediately prioritizing "development of critical consciousness," or empowering our youngest citizens "to ask discerning questions and to feel that it's okay to challenge evils and injustices they perceive." This is a lofty ambition, but not at all unattainable. In fact, it is embedded in our curricular system, apparent and available if teachers will notice the potential the humanities hold for this opportunity.

Proposal: Ethics + Literature

Perhaps it is fair to ask whether, while noble, the charge to inhabit a “critical consciousness” and to “challenge evils and injustices” has a place in public educational instruction, given that this charge has a clear, moral component. There is tension in acknowledging any educational role in nurturing “moral generosity.” Robert Probst, a Georgia State Professor of English Education warns in his article, “Literature as Invitation,” that one must be cognizant that public education is an institution “free from the constraints of public and corporate dogma” (11). He points out, however, that many people recognize ideas exist that are “despicable, inhumane, and corrupt.” If that is the case, I argue, there are also ideas that are honorable, courageous, and ethical. Any educator in the United States who believes education can challenge “evils and injustices” must attend to this tension. What is the responsibility of addressing ethics or some other moral dimension beyond the scope of curricular standards? Probst gives no answer, though he believes students should be encouraged to “reflect upon and examine the visions of human possibilities they are offered...so that they may learn to assess the implications of the beliefs they hold and of the values that shape their choices.” Indeed, because there exists in America separation between the state and moral prescriptions, educators, by law, must attend to this separation while upholding responsibility for providing students the “opportunity to consider other options.” Probst’s suggestion implies that if students can name that which is ugly, they must also have the opportunity to consider other options informed by values, visions, and reflection.

Although David Carr resides in a country that endorses an official church, the University of Edinburgh professor directly addresses the tension inherent in “educational cultivation of moral virtue, feeling, and emotion” while simultaneously acknowledging necessary limitations for any prescriptive sort of moral curriculum (137). As a result, his discussion is useful for the American educator. In his article, “On the Contribution of Literature and the Arts to the Educational Cultivation of Moral Virtue, Feeling, and Emotion,” Carr argues that the process of making an ethical choice is undergirded by both

intellectual and emotional components. Suggesting human beings rely on both to make choices, Carr criticizes the attempt of the many schools worldwide that have instituted forms of “so-called ‘character education,’” viewing this as a trend that places moral choice solely in the domain of a cognitive developmental tradition (139) and “behaviour training” (144). In other words, “character education” implicitly relies on reason and will alone, lacking consideration for the role of feelings and emotion. Often, Carr presumes, character education is a tool by which schools teach students to behave – to think and act – but not to also feel. Engaging reason without emotion stunts a student’s capacity to entertain a moral choice. Carr’s argument acknowledges that people generally rely on both head and heart to make decisions of value. Rather than condoning a theorist or framework dependent on the cognitive domain, Carr insists that educators engage in a conversation that engages both head and heart.

In light of such a conversation, Carr argues that the best reconciliation between the cognitive and affective domains reflects an Aristotelian view of virtue. This is the notion of a particular “ordering” of emotions, thought, and actions (140). As a result, virtue ethics includes a conscious, cognitive approach that considers and accounts for emotions. In this view, the mind and emotions work together toward ethical choice and action. This view, then, encompasses some “absolutes” like murder and lying, certain behaviors deemed “despicable, inhumane, and corrupt.” On the other hand, because there are an enormous number of moral beliefs that are not “absolute,” these require conscious consideration of possible approaches. For instance, there are usually multiple moral and right choices in a given situation. Also, attitudes and beliefs can change. A conception may shift, for example, from some early formation of prejudice to tolerance and acceptance. Further, different social constituencies justify different approaches to the same choice: as an example, various religious groups have conflicting perceptions of “moral behavior.” As a result, if the ethical domain is so vast and if ethical choice is informed by both the head and the heart, then Probst’s invitation to “consider other options” does have a place in the public classroom. While educational policy in the United States will not – and should not –

reflect a theory prescribing absolutes, teachers can in good conscience support the Aristotelian virtue ethic, one which disregards “must” in terms of moral choice while still recognizing the place of emotion in making an ethical decision.

Instead of policy, Carr turns to literature and the humanities in the same way that Kozol observes the decline in classroom time spent on those things. As Kozol believes literature refines the human soul, Carr suggests the humanities offer the richest sources of “human truth or meaning,” holding universal understanding beyond the context of a particular time or culture (146). Carr points out that the canon of great literature does not promote clear-cut moral principles, but rather “calls our established normative or evaluative assumptions into question” (148). Essentially, simply because great literature inheres wider human truth and meaning, educational policy can both avoid prescriptive notions of moral education while simultaneously allowing literature to include “exploration and cultivation of those ‘thick’ identity constitutive values and virtues” (145). Literature, in terms of the Aristotelian virtue ethic, gives students an education of the heart as well as the head. It should be noted that not all literature can provide such an education. Indeed, if there is “great” literature, there are also texts that do not support this process. Christopher Michaelson, a scholar in literature and business ethics, reminds us that appropriate texts – those “worthy of serious attention” – are “not just a quaint search for lowbrow moral fables or a vain pursuit of highbrow” modes of literary works (359). Instead, “worthy” texts are those that “imitate life, thereby expanding our vision beyond” narrow experience. In a general sense, for the purposes of this paper, a book is “great” because it provides wider truth and meaning as it questions “our established normative.” Great literature includes texts that connect universal ideas to situations outside the reader’s lived experience.

In *Love’s Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum describes “worthy” literature a little more specifically. She reminds us that in the Greek world, art was considered to be a “practical, aesthetic interest in a practical interest—an interest in the good life and in communal self-understanding” (*Love’s Knowledge*:

Essays on Philosophy and Literature 16). Engagement with art promoted both understanding life while also learning to live better in community with others. Nussbaum finds that the best literature allows readers to connect “with our deepest practical searching” for the good life and the good community. She holds that the complexity of literature has provided the best criticism in ethics due to the complicated nature of story and its ability to “cast doubt on reductive theories” (22). Like Carr, Nussbaum reminds us that good literature challenges our normative inclinations; it does not prescribe “oughts” and “thou shalt nots.” The process of looking at ethics through literature allows readers to synthesize the oldest and newer ethical conceptions as we understand and refine our own.

Our own experience is vital to this process. The events and ideas from our real lives which delight, confuse, bother, challenge, and affirm become part of the lens through which we experience literature. Those same events, as we happen upon them, include “obstacles” like “jealousy” and “personal interest” that fracture us, coming “between us and the loving perception of each particular” (162). Is it possible to clearly engage complexities in real life situations without these added pressures? When we read, we bring questions we are already asking, “searching for images of what we might do and be, and holding these up against images we derive from our knowledge of other conceptions” in texts or other art forms (29). Nussbaum, like Carr, shares the Aristotelian virtue ethic by her belief that “moral communication” employs both emotions in the affective domain and imagination in the cognitive one (153). The novel is the ideal space to make such reflection. Although people read using imagination, human experiences and questions allow us to engage dilemmas most “lucidly” through literature. Conversely, our own real-life hurdles require significant effort to “correct vision” due in part to potential “blindness and stupidity” that prevents us from looking most clearly at certain experiences (162). Ultimately, Nussbaum tells us that, in the process of text interactions, readers may inhabit “moral perception.” By engaging in a text, people have the opportunity to “refine” both conceptions and imagination in order to better understand “our human capabilities to see and feel and judge; an ability

to miss less, to be responsible for more” (164). From confusion and distracted vision, literature clarifies; great books invite readers to see, to assume critical consciousness.

Iris Murdoch, in her book *The Sovereignty of Good*, believes that because human beings are fundamentally inward-focused, “beauty” may be an antidote to such conceit (64). Beauty encourages a person to turn his affections outward, resulting in a kind of “self-forgetfulness” as he learns to appreciate nature, art, and literature. This state of “self-forgetfulness” allows a person to engage in a text with Nussbaum’s “lucidity,” or reading without those hurdles that prevent clear vision. Murdoch owes that, “art transcends selfish and obsessive limitations of personality and can enlarge the sensibility of its consumer” (87). As I engage literature, Murdoch argues that my reading experience provides an additional layer of clarity – giving “a clear sense to many ideas which seem more puzzling when we meet with them elsewhere” (88). This kind of clarity allows me to distance myself in order to understand more objectively that while literature is outside of me, it “pierces the veil and gives sense to the notion of a reality which lies beyond.” According to one conception shared by Nussbaum and Murdoch, the reader’s imagination and reflection are informed through lucid vision in the presence of literature, the place of some of the most clearly “articulated” ideas about “wider human truth and meaning.”

Current Educational Ideologies

If critical consciousness development begins with intentional literary interactions, educators must honestly assess guiding educational ideologies currently affecting and propelling American schools and consider more closely the way literature looks in today’s classrooms. Jonathan Kozol speaks to this, too. He criticizes another result of our segregated, homogeneous schools: the obsession and focus on the “latest, data-based, research-driven, miracle solution to create high-scoring, happy, apartheid schools in America” (Kozol, “The Details of Life”). In his 2000 article, “The Details of Life,” Kozol describes educational trends against the backdrop of a familiar neighborhood in the South Bronx. As a

leader in education and activism, he contrasts his experiences with South Bronx children and contemporary educational thought and leadership. While his young friends take time to prepare a funeral for a cat, Kozol critiques business imagery used to characterize children and schools. His experiences have put him in rooms with leaders whose comments about public school funding contain language like “bottom line concerns with ‘discipline,’ and ‘rigor’ and ‘job preparation’ and ‘high standards,’ language that is connected to what is now known as ‘high stakes testing.’” Consider the disparity in ideas related to meeting a child’s needs. In one image, a pastor helps neighborhood children bury their cat. In the other, children must fit within a “business-minded ethos, proven to be economically utilitarian and justifiable in cost-effective terms.” Ultimately, Kozol characterizes those in places of educational power using structured, “managerial,” “impersonal and technocratic” vocabulary enhanced by educational buzzwords: “‘performance-referenced,’ ‘outcome-oriented,’ ‘competency-centered,’ ‘competition,’ ‘delivery of product,’ and, of course, high standards and exams.” There is enormous distance between the decision makers’ perceptions and real children who make the time to hold a funeral for a cat.

What is absent from Kozol’s conversations with these leaders? Ideas acknowledging the immeasurable, untested humanity of children such as inner health, and the well-being of “complicated, unpredictable and interesting little people” are nowhere to be heard. Finally, Kozol underscores that all of these ideas define children as “investments.” Money spent on programs serving children must prove “useful” in building what will one day remove any label of “burden to society.” In this story, children’s educational experience becomes nothing more than a “‘necessary prologue’ to utilitarian adulthood.” Hopefully, a future exists for children when they will have experiences absent of “utilitarian considerations” *including the knowledge* that their existence is “not contaminated by economic uses that a nation does or does not have” for them. Perhaps this begins when students hear and recognize that they are people whose existence matters for that reason more than any other.

The educational business ethos Kozol observed in 2000 is reminiscent of Neil Postman's education critique in his 1995 book, *The End of Education*. In the book, Postman names the trajectory Kozol describes, this notion of counting children as investments. Postman discusses two deeply rooted problems in education: an "engineering" problem and a "metaphysical" one (3). The engineering problem is the "hyper focus" on methodology while the metaphysical problem deals with the reason – not motivation – for "being in a classroom, for listening to a teacher, for taking an examination, for doing homework, for putting up with school even if you are not motivated" (4). Postman contends that stakeholders in the educational process – parents, students, teachers, administrators – find their reason within the structure of some narrative.

These narratives – which Postman sometimes refers to as "gods" – function in order to "give point to our labors, exalt our history, elucidate the present, and give direction to our future" (7). Additionally, these "gods" may be deeply maligned and, for that reason, Postman suggests the following criteria for determining whether a narrative "serves." A robust narrative must support personal identities, community life, a basis for moral conduct, and explanations of "unknowable things." Postman believes that education may be both the cause of and the antidote to a broken system, and its ability to rehabilitate depends absolutely on the existence of shared narratives and the exclusion of narratives that lead to "alienation and divisiveness" (17). As one may suspect, the business ethos Kozol observed fits quite cohesively into one of Postman's flawed narratives.

Kozol's business imagery is replete in two of Postman's "gods that fail." He calls these narratives the god of Economic Utility and the god of Consumership. The Economic Utility narrative is rooted in the notion that "the purpose of school is to prepare children for competent entry into the economic life" (27). This narrative holds that students' identities are "first and foremost economic creatures," their "sense of worth and purpose is to be found in [their] capacity to secure material benefits." The Economic Utility narrative means that its community – and success within it – is assured by a

“stimulating and bountiful job” (28). Its moral basis, its “good and evil” so to speak, assumes that “goodness inheres in productivity, efficiency, and organization; evil in inefficiency and sloth.” In the event these pitfalls seem cloudy, Postman suggests that Economic Utility is far too “limited to be useful, and, in any case, so diminishes the world that it mocks one’s humanity. At the very least, it diminishes the idea of what a good learner is” (31). In Kozol’s interactions with educational leaders, there appears little recognition of something human in these young “investments.” To those leaders, students seem something almost inhuman: a tool with a narrow set of skills for a narrow vision of the world.

It is worth mentioning Postman’s “god of Consumerism,” a narrative that complements the low-hanging fruit of Economic Utility. Consumerism finishes the story. In it, the students are allowed – encouraged – to ask: “If I get a good job, then what?” (33). The moral basis for Consumerism takes the student’s sense of worth and says that one who is productive and useful enjoys the ability to buy things. Evil inheres in those who do not have the means to display their “usefulness” through the acquisition of stuff, the stuff being symbols of one’s productivity, usefulness, and resulting “happy life” (35-36). In this story, the South Bronx children might fail to outgrow their “burden on society” status, and the Consumerism narrative is there to remind them, daily, that they lose twice. First, they had nothing to offer and, now, they get nothing to enjoy.

As bleak as this sounds, Postman, like Kozol, does not believe that all is lost. At the conclusion of his critique, Postman suggests that people who teach children and teens *can* find narratives that serve, that reclaim the humanity of students and allow them to find personal identity, community life, moral bases, and explanations of unknowable things. Albert J. Raboteau, too, in “Re-enchanting the World: Education, Wisdom, and Imagination,” deems that recovering wisdom is possible and that, while schooling is replete with “engineering” and “metaphysical” problems, there yet lies within education the ability to “re-enchant” the world, to meet learners on a more hopeful path that will allow them to “reclaim” wisdom (395). Raboteau believes that the “enchanting” sort of wisdom – ancient and modern

– resides in the form of story. This project is borne from hope in this possibility.

Current Literature Standards

What is the opportunity for literature in a society whose educational narratives seem eerily similar to Postman’s god of Economic Utility? It is important first to understand the current curricular expectations of teachers. By the early 2000s, most states utilized standards and goals for student learning as well as definitions of “proficiency” (“Development Process”). State boards of education determined standards; state tests measured goal achievement. In 2008, three organizations published a manifesto regarding the need for nationwide standards that equip students with “necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive.” By 2009, 49 governors committed to the process of writing the Common Core standards in Math and Language Arts. By 2010, the drafting process began by first finalizing “College and Career Readiness Standards,” or what students needed to know and be able to do by high school graduation. From there, the writers created 12th grade standards, followed by 11th grade standards to lead toward the senior year, and so on, “backmapping” student learning from 12th grade down to Kindergarten. Between 2011 and 2013, 45 states adopted and implemented these standards. Today, in 2017, 42 states utilize the standards to design their curriculum. At its best, the standards delineate the ultimate goal for education in the United States: globally competitive students, college and career readiness, and a “nesting” structure of standards implementation in which Kindergarten serves the ultimate aim and end just as 4th grade does, and 7th grade, and 11th grade.

Consider then, the narrative at play in those standards specific to literature. According to corestandards.org, the “why” of the English Language Arts (ELA) standards document reads, “The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy represent the next generation of K-12 standards designed to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life by the time they graduate from high school” (“English Language Arts Standards> Reading: Literature > Grade 11-12”). If a

6th grade student successfully, consistently meets standards written with a view toward the “end game” of college or career, she is considered “good.” As a result, excepting a tiny sliver of space in the standards, our educational narrative implies that students’ worth, their 13 years of education serve the “god” of holding a job. While our society is dependent upon professional goods and services, there are so many other facets of the human experience that transcend one’s place in the economy.

Consider this, from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Website: “The English Language Arts Standards are based on research and evidence that describe the competencies necessary for all students to become *college and career ready by the end of high school, outlining a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the 21st Century* (italics mine)” (“English Language Arts”). I want to consider the phrase, “a literate person in the 21st century?” In light of Carr, Nussbaum, and Murdoch’s ideal that literature serves unlike no other medium, to describe Language Arts merely as a technique for success seems a category error. Or in a generous view, this leaves everything open to interpretation. What does it mean to be literate? Literacy is not, we understand, equal to real, human communication. Consider the child yet unable to read that can convey his will, emotions, and joys without the ability to read a manual or understand signage. What does one assume to represent the 21st century? If the standards are another “philosophy,” does its ideal hold that human beings have the capacity for much more than is reducible to a job description?

In North Carolina, curricular decisions are put into the hands of local districts. One district places value on the opportunity and priority for reading together (“Read Aloud and Shared Reading”). In that county, students in Kindergarten through 5th grade participate in daily “Read Aloud” or “Shared Reading.” While this idea seems promising, implementing shared reading during the “literacy block” is dedicated “to *expose* students to grade level complex text” (italics mine). The eventual purpose for this activity is that “literature and informational texts are *utilized to focus on a specific strategy or skill.*” Finally, shared reading and “read alouds” teach “students [to] ‘read like a detective’ *to find answers* to

text-based questions.” While this aim is intended for Kindergarten through 5th grade, the same school system promotes a one-page bulleted list that builds upon and enumerates “daily,” “weekly,” and “monthly” expectations of Middle School English students and teachers (“Rcss Middle School Framework for Literacy”). According to this plan, teachers should incorporate daily reading instruction through mini-lessons that teach “comprehension strategies for literature and non-fiction text.” Teachers are also required to provide weekly opportunities for students to reflect through writing or speaking. Finally, according to Randolph County’s Curriculum website, students should “regularly” take tests and use texts to inform research. Such minimal direction regarding literature teaching practices requires a look at the Common Core Standards for Grades 5 through 8 (the “Middle Grades”).

The Common Core English Language Arts (CCELA) standards include one component of “Literature Standards” subdivided into four sub-standards known as “Key Ideas and Details,” “Craft and Structure,” “Range of Reading and Level of Complexity,” and “Integration of Knowledge and Ideas” (“English Language Arts Standards > Reading: Literature > Grade 11-12”). In a nutshell, “Key Ideas and Details,” refers to quoting from text, determining a theme, and comparing and contrasting. By 8th grade, students should additionally be able to cite specific parts texts to support their analyses. The “Craft and Structure” standard encompasses instruction related to literary form, including meanings of words, literary devices, and the contributions of each to a text. “Range of Reading and Text Complexity” simply refers to a variety of genres that students should be able to read “independently and proficiently.” Texts considered sufficiently “complex” must meet three measures: qualitative complexity, quantitative complexity, and “reader and task” complexity. Qualitative complexity refers to “levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands.” Quantitative complexity encompasses “readability measures and other scores of text complexity.” “Reader and task” complexity acknowledges variables such as the student’s knowledge and the purpose of assigned tasks.

It would seem that the fourth sub-standard would offer the most appropriate space for engaging a student reader in such a way that “refines the soul.” As it is, ELA Literature standards so far comprise a technical study of literature plus a firm suggestion that students read a variety of “complex” books. Therefore, a standard named “Integration of Knowledge and Ideas” sounds like one that may promote thinking about texts below the surface, engaging a piece of literature where it meets human experience. In actuality, the standard refers primarily to interaction with visual elements such as graphic novels and multimedia presentations of fiction and poetry. There is some allusion to deeper things when the standard asks students to compare and contrast stories in light of how they approach similar “themes and topics.” However, it appears that this standard, like the other Literature standards, offers little more than an invitation to “do things” with books: to name, identify, and analyze text.

With so many standards connected to literary features in books, at what point does a student have the opportunity to read for what the author intended to provide? Did Mildred Taylor, in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, hope her readers would primarily engage in technical interactions with the book, subjugating the character Cassie Logan to an analysis of Taylor’s prose and voice? Did Lois Lowry employ irony in *The Giver* to reinforce her readers’ understanding of the literary device? Certainly classroom tasks support a student’s deepest understanding of a novel. Form analysis and working with literary devices allow students to more fully engage in the author’s intended message. But at what point – if any – does the teacher have permission to turn from form and device in order to really know Cassie and Jonas?

If such technical “hyper focus” in classrooms is difficult to envision, indeed there exist concrete manifestations of methodological obsession. In his article, “Why Literature Matters,” Tim Gillespie, a high school English teacher in Oregon, wrote an article more than 20 years ago wondering exactly what purpose literature and writing must serve in the context of the developing educational narratives of the mid-1990s. He found himself amidst colleagues questioning the “purpose” of literature. The

“pragmatists,” argued that “no one *needs* literature to be a productive worker, competitive in the global economy” (16). Still, Gillespie wanted to remind them of the novel’s contribution to “imagination and empathy.” He witnessed this literary contribution truncated when he judged a fiction writing competition whose applicants represented the most exceptional high school students in his state. While the young writers employed brilliant “technique” and “writerly craft,” he was dismayed at the inability of such talented writers to “make a generous effort to get to know [their characters] well.” Ultimately, he wished the students’ imaginations and empathy were “as refined as their technical skills” (19). This is but one snapshot of a potential product of pragmatist-driven education, but the implications are profound. If it is true that we write what we know, then the most “successful” students from the “best classrooms” in this anecdote did not have the opportunity to connect with the characters of their literature in a way that promoted imagination and empathy.

In “Voices Carry: A Content Analysis of *Voices from the Middle*,” four authors analyzed the 15 year “dialogue” of the journal for Middle School English Teachers (Wilson). This journal represents English Education scholarship for Middle School teachers under the National Council of Teachers of English. The authors describe gradual emphasis on the tension between a “social constructivist worldview” of education, in which students learn through social interactions, and the “post-positivist” view based on “narrow” school curricula focused on skills teaching and standardized testing. Even among English Educational scholarship, conversation has evolved to people versus method. Further, my own comprehensive search through *Voices* reveals only one article written outside the scope of this “either/or” paradigm: “authentic learning, good teaching practices, and...mandated standards” (15). In “Literature as Invitation,” author Robert Probst discusses opportunities for students to encounter ethical decision making through literature. Though these ideas are absent in larger English education conversations, they are actually part of many professional programs. In recognizing recent efforts to discuss ethics through literature at the highest levels of education, perhaps Middle Schools, too, might

provide similar opportunities for allowing great texts to support developing critical consciousness and collective responsibility. Within the narrow educational narrative, miniscule space in the standards, virtual omission from middle school professional development and scholarship, educators must take a look at this missing, vital piece.

Chapter Two: Moral Imagination

Although public education does not explicitly subscribe to an intersection of literature and ethics, let it be known that this conversation is present in college and career education, that “endpoint” toward which developers created the Common Core Standards. Within the last 20 years, many schools of law, business, and medicine have begun to value and supplement their technical curriculum with an “ethics education” (Young and Annisette 94). For example, in 2002, following nationwide corporate scandals, accounting legislation obligated professions to “enhance truthfulness,” and business schools responded by incorporating and prioritizing ethics classes. Most commonly, professional schools have interpreted this obligation as an opportunity for students to engage models and systematic approaches to theoretical ethical decision making (95). The idea of an ethical model appears to be some attempt toward combining ethics and technical skill in order to make students “proficient” ethical decision makers. However, a few innovative courses have emerged and the findings are significant.

First, in the mid-1990s, Mark Weisberg and Jacalyn Duffin began to facilitate ethics-through-literature courses at Queens University (Canada) for law, nursing and medical students. In the course, students read, reflected on, and discussed stories about professional ethics, culture, and professional education (249). The course incorporated texts that provided complex conceptions of law and medical professionals, clients, and patients. The professors noticed some key outcomes. First, they perceived camaraderie created between classmates regardless of their professional programs; law and medical students would not have otherwise participated in a common course (256). Secondly, the authors recognized a benefit of addressing ethics within story. They write: “approaching ethics as crystallized dilemmas enforces a conception of ethics that emphasizes individual choices and leaves out interpersonal relationships.” In Weisberg and Duffin’s course, however, students discussed ethics within the dynamic context of narratives, a context that highlights interpersonal relationships. The authors found that literature helped students “clarify and sometimes even change their own thoughts and

feelings” surrounding particular moral matters (255). Perhaps students’ connections and opportunities to view ethics through literary contexts encouraged new possibilities in the landscape of ethics education.

In 2009, Joni J. Young and Marcia Annisette of the University of New Mexico and York University explored a similar perspective regarding stories and ethics education. Rather than relying on stories specifically related to professional situations, they instead recommended for their accounting and ethics courses general literature and stories written by authors like Flannery O’Connor, John Updike, and Charles Dickens (95). Like Weisberg and Duffin, they refute the idea of teaching ethics as singular, “crystallized dilemmas” with no interpersonal or intrapersonal elements to consider. They reject the notion of using models in ethics education, on the basis that such a method assumes the learner’s values (102). Young and Annisette instead assert that ethics education begins with stories that offer opportunities to enhance one’s imagination, discernment, expand the horizon of experience, and allow the person to vicariously confront conflict, choices, and emotions. The authors assert that such an approach places the student in the position of self-reflection, asking continually, “Who am I becoming?” and “What does it mean for me to live well?” (100). From such reflection, the student may then consider a range of options for a choice in front of her.

In their research, Young and Annisette found that literature promotes ethical inquiry because of its connection to the imagination. Imagination makes us “aware of the constructions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress,” encouraging readers to envision alternatives (101). The authors state that the novel has a critical role in ethical construction as readers imagine possible “modes of living” beyond the constraints of one’s daily life (102). Essentially, literary scenarios and imagination provide readers with possible alternatives to decisions. Through the effort of engaging literature, one interacts, too, with complex conceptions of life and subsequently, with ethics. In *The Liberal Imagination*, Lionel Trilling says, “I spoke of the novel as an especially useful agent of the moral imagination, as the literary form

which most directly reveals to us the complexity, the difficulty, and the interest of life in society and best instructs us in our human variety and contradiction” (Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 45). Indeed, literature incorporated for this purpose continues to appear in professional school ethics education but it is completely absent in the years prior to undergraduate studies. As an example, a search of the Duke University Library website for peer-reviewed journal articles with the terms “moral imagination” and those professional disciplines (law, business, medicine) yielded 347 articles published in the last three years. A search conducted with the same parameters in the discipline of “education” with the filter “children and youth” (in order to prevent inclusion of professional education) yielded 22 articles alone, only 12 of which had, anywhere within the article, a term alluding to the middle grades. Imagination – and the novel – are key components in engaging ethics with students. If teachers are to meaningfully incorporate ethics in their classrooms prior to a student’s 13th year of schooling (or later), understanding the opportunity for processing ideas related to morality is an appropriate place to begin.

Moral Imagination as a Historical Concept

Perhaps it is helpful to consider two conceptions of the term, “moral imagination,” this phrase that has gained some traction and presence in scholarly conversation. The first includes a historical perspective of moral imagination and the second, a cognitive approach to understanding it. In his anthology, *Moral Imagination Essays*, Yale Professor David Bromwich traces the term’s historical meaning. Since the 17th century, the term “morals,” denotes a “realm of duties and obligations, of compulsory and optional approvals and regrets, the rewards and sanctions properly affixed to human action” (3). This includes the idea that morals are acquired by socialization and offer humans choices to act in ways acceptable within a given societal standard. The term “imagination...applies to things or people as they are not now, or are not yet, or are not any more, or to a state of the world as it never could have been but is interesting to reflect on.” According to these definitions, morality is concerned

with what is real while imagination connotes things that are “probable.” The sense that these two ideas are “closely allied” is at first paradoxical. Until the middle of the 19th century, the imagination was regarded, à la Shakespeare, as “an airy nothing” (5). Imagination, in that sense, meant daydreams and silly, hopeless fancying. Since the mid-1800s, however, pairing “morals” and “imagination” infiltrates a variety of arenas, arising most commonly during “movements of social reform and political resistance in the twentieth century” (5). In other words, imagination became something representing more substance, an imaginative motif that undergirded a shift in the moral sense during times of social and political upheaval.

Edmund Burke is the first writer to join the term “moral imagination” and does so in his book, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (5). Burke was an 18th century Irish statesman, author, orator, political theorist, philosopher, member of parliament, and fierce opponent of the French Revolution (*The Intellectual Life* 2). Bromwich notes that Burke’s first usage of the term appears in a passage in which he reflects on a shift in certain values during the French Revolution. Burke suggests that the “moral imagination” is the process by which one acts “rightly” by selecting “from a pre-existing array of approved habits” (7). In this instance of the word, Burke’s usage sounds like a definition of prudence, requiring little more than knowing and doing rightly. However, Bromwich points out that Burke’s subsequent “elaboration” of such an imagination helps us understand that to imagine morally includes the idea that moral imagination must be acted upon to be realized, that there is some action that must follow the imagined thought. This suggests something other than a mere “objective right” in making an ethical decision. Instead, Bromwich notes that the “sense is orthodox, but the stance is critical, dramatic, inquisitive, disturbed” (8). There is a stance *following* knowing the “orthodox” view that invites further consideration.

To illustrate this point in literature, Bromwich uses Wordsworth’s controversial poem, “The Idiot Boy.” In it, Wordsworth attends not to the feelings of the “aberrant” boy, but to the “portrayal of a

mother's cares, as deeply as such feelings can be imagined" (10). Thus, rather than pity for Johnny, that "reliable sentiment anyone may be supposed to have on such an occasion," moral imagination is the "stance" from which the reader asks, "What can I feel about [the boy]?" rather than "What *ought* I to feel about about him?" (11). This usage is nuanced; it is "disturbed," as one attends to more than pity, as one identifies with the boy's mother. Bromwich argues that here, the "axis of imagining has shifted...from a rehearsed response of pity to a sense of Johnny's actual dignity" (10). The "rehearsed response of pity" is the orthodox response and "a sense of Johnny's actual dignity" is the critical stance. In this first usage of the term, Bromwich believes that Burke used "moral imagination" as a "socialized forbearance toward neighbors and their fortunes, no questions asked" (16). This represents an idea of understanding some customary response, then assuming a questioning posture in which one wonders, "What else might I see?"

Moral imagination, as a historical term, shifts in Burke's later writings when he begins to openly oppose the British East India Company for having injured the people of India through their "partnership" by his recognition that "the cries are lost over the thousands of miles of ocean that separate England from the subcontinent it governs by proxy" (15). In his writings, Burke comes to defend the Indians not because he has seen their suffering, but because he has owned that the suffering has been caused by his own country. In Bromwich's words, Burke "identifies himself with the transgressions of Britain" and thus says that "the motive for sympathetic action" is preceded by recognition of a person's dignity. Bromwich is careful to clarify that such an attitude is *not* "weak imagining" that assumes someone "needs" one's intervention. Put another way, weak imagining views myself as a "moral actor," thinking of others as "moral objects" deserving my sympathy (16). In this shift from Burke's first usage, the term suggests not just a critical stance, but an insistence of dignity based upon my own personal ethical code.

Bromwich articulates a helpful caveat in his exploration of Burke's moral imagination as it manifests in "weak imagining," or the type of imagining which is behind complacency and thinking

oneself a moral agent in the plight of another's injustice. Bromwich argues that we "abridge our knowledge of suffering" through a "habit" of "willful imperceptiveness" and "self-censorship" (21). That process is both "benign-seeming" and "coercive" and essentially aims to change our narratives in a way that brings "uniformity" and leaves us "comfortable and free of doubts" (22). In other words, when I allow myself to habitually censor whatever element might leave me "uncomfortable," I display dependence on "weak imagining." To illustrate the effects of weak imagining, Bromwich references Virginia Woolf's Sir William Bradshaw from *Mrs. Dalloway* (19). Through one of Bradshaw's soliloquies, the character enumerates "Proportion," the desire to "bring uniformity" to one's circle of power, and "Conversion," the idea of "loving to impress, to impose." These "gods" are like "a well-adapted priest of power and unconscious privilege—or perhaps one should say, of a privilege whose cost and reward is unconsciousness." In this sense, unconsciousness is the lack of moral imagination. There is, in "unconscious privilege," an inability to see those things that might be otherwise. J.K. Rowling alludes to the same idea. She says:

Choosing to live in narrow spaces leads to a form of mental agoraphobia, and that brings its own terrors. I think the willfully unimaginative see more monsters. They are often more afraid. What is more, those who choose not to empathise enable real monsters. For without ever committing an act of outright evil ourselves, we collude with it, through our own apathy. (Rowling)

Finally, Bromwich's historical depiction of moral imagination involves two components, one being "justice to a stranger...a more profound work of conscience than justice to a friend" (26). The second component includes the notion that the "authority" of moral imagination "calls on me to act in accord with my own constitution." In this conception of moral imagining, I view myself not as a moral agent or judge, but as someone who acts as though my interactions are responses borne out of my duties towards myself. This sort of authority recognizes that when I see the sufferer, I disregard the temptation to "justify any improvement" that may represent an "act of assimilation or conquest" in

order to assuage my own guilt for their suffering. Moral imagining does not regard myself as a “doer.” Rather, moral imagination is “a source of resistance to the most elusive of vices, self-deception. And the place to look for self-deception...is in the texture of human conduct, in our manners or habits of self-regard” (36). The place of moral imagination lies within the manifestation of my self-regard. Bromwich’s conception of moral imagination begins when I ask, “Who shall I become?” and “What ought I to feel?” and responds through a code of ethics that assumes, always, dignity of my neighbor.

Moral Imagination as a Cognitive Function

The second conception of moral imagination may be considered in terms of its psychological components based on two recent studies that place thinking about moral ideas within neuroscience and cognitive psychology research. In 2014, Thomas W. Osmer and Ariana Salazar-Newton of Princeton Theological Seminary wrote “The Practice of Reading and the Formation of the Moral Imagination.” In their article, they frame a way to understand how people think about morality based on its place as a cognitive function (55). In a nutshell, the authors suggest a psychological “location” for ways that people process ideas related to morality within a broader sense of the imagination. Summarizing Osmer and Salazar-Newton, the imagination comprises three forms: the primary imagination, the secondary imagination, and the tertiary imagination. Primary imagination includes the role of the imagination in “ordinary knowing,” or acquiring cultural patterns based primarily on pattern formation and recognition (55). This process of “distilling” experiences results in several forms including prototypes, metaphors, schemas, scripts, categories, and other “templates” that allow a person to identify patterns of new experiences on an ongoing basis (56). This imagination also changes as I accept new patterns. For example, children’s capacities to think undergo enormous change and growth from infancy through adolescence (55). The secondary imagination is a “source of social transformation” (57). This form of the imagination allows one to perceive insufficiencies or problems with something in the present and

subsequently proceeds to “imagine things otherwise.” This component supports identity change, innovation, and allows me to see some problem in an alternative fashion. Finally, the tertiary imagination is the source that allows us to create stories to interpret the world or make meaning of the human experience (57). This description is helpful for “locating” the process of thinking about ideas related to morality.

Osmer and Salazar-Newton argue that moral imagination is a “special instance” of the primary imagination that fundamentally necessitates the process of developing patterns for a person’s sense of ethics within the context of social relationships (58). As a special instance of the primary imagination, experiences of justice and care are “distilled” into patterns which support the growth of a person’s moral sense. The authors next argue that literature allows a person to “acquire” patterns that ultimately form and inform the primary imagination as one observes characters and events in a story. Michael J. Pardales of The University of Michigan would likely concur with Osmer and Salazar-Newton’s conception of the moral imagination as a special instance of the primary imagination. In his 2002 article that predated the latter work by 12 years, Pardales argues that moral imagination is informed by prototypes, metaphors, narratives, and moral perception, ideas derived “from a set of exemplars” (422). Our “prototype of any moral concept” is a sort of “average” of experiences (428). Imagination, Pardales asserts, arises from multiple exposures to moral practices. Further, human beings often use concrete experiences to understand more abstract ones, a “fundamentally metaphorical” way of conceiving abstract ideas (429). As an example, consider the tendency to apply an accounting metaphor to mutuality in a relationship through phrases like “I owe you one” or “you have enriched my life.” Through this mode of conceptualizing moral imagination, Osmer, Salazar-Newton, and Pardales agree that processing notions of morality is formed by pattern recognition, by distilling ideas derived from memorable experiences.

Pardales additionally claims that moral imagination is rooted in my propensity to apply narrative

structure to various events (430). How often do I superimpose story elements on the events in my life in order to make sense of them? As I examine my life, I am often likely to construct a narrative, providing me the ability to “criticize [my] present situation, explore avenues of possible action, and transform...identity in the process.” In this process, I view myself and those around me as characters. I assign beginnings, middles, and endings. I project particular settings. I find patterns, causes, and effects. I examine past choices and use these factors to determine pathways for future decisions. This process also allows me to revise my prototypes and metaphors. Through his exploration in cognitive science and psychology, Pardales’s study supports the idea that moral imagination is a special instance of the primary imagination.

While moral imagination is often a special function of the primary imagination, the secondary imagination provides an additional opportunity to profoundly inform moral imagination. Recall that secondary imagination is that which allows one to perceive insufficiencies or problems with something in the present and subsequently proceeds to “imagine things otherwise.” What’s more, according to Osmer and Salazar-Newton, this is specific to the process of reading literature. The authors suppose that “some literature invites readers to imagine the lacks and terrors of the present, [those things] which sometimes are legitimated by conventional morality. It invites readers to imagine things differently, engaging their capacities of creative discovery” (60). The authors assert that “some literature” may “enlarge the moral imagination or even subvert the morality of everyday life.” In this conception, literature introduces moral themes in narrative form, inviting readers to “reflect on moral experience and to imagine their world differently” (60). In such a view, through another particular instance of moral imagination, literature gives readers a chance to imagine the world other than it is. It is significant that thinking about morality within the secondary imagination is predominantly linked to interaction with great texts.

Literature serves as a catalyst for expanding one’s imagination and offering the opportunity to

shift moral observations from the primary imagination (recognizing patterns) to the secondary imagination (recognizing new possibilities). Literature, in this regard, supports moral perception. Pardales defines moral perception as the act of framing a situation by identifying “ethically salient features” (430). Moral perception may not be a psychological component that informs ethical decision-making, but it does influence a person’s capacity to recognize important ethical features in a complex situation. Moral perception, like the secondary imagination, also demonstrates how I consider a situation and then imagine other possibilities.

Pardales’s study asserts that a “cultivated” moral imagination is one which has a “greater store of and more complex prototypes and metaphors, a richer sense of narrative and a heightened sense of moral perception” (432). Conversely, an “uncultivated moral imagination will have few resources and yield a process of moral judgment that is based on less information. The resulting judgments are likely to be significantly less informed” (435). Perhaps we may consider that components of moral imagination lay on a sort of spectrum. Pardales supports the idea of a moral “range” by claiming that “an uncultivated moral imagination will probably have impoverished prototypes and metaphors, a weaker sense of narrative and dull moral perception.” Moral perception allows me, as I read, to “bear witness to various particular circumstances,” exposing me to more than I might face in my experience alone. To this end, Pardales, like Nussbaum and Murdoch, believes that interaction with literature allows us to operate at the “stronger” end of the spectrum. Literature, Pardales reminds readers, “adds” to experiences by providing situations I would not otherwise confront. From this view, deep engagement with literature increases my base of complex prototypes, teaches me new metaphors, and involves me in the narratives of others. Literature, according to Pardales, too, holds a particularly significant role in nurturing moral imagination.

Moral Imagination and Literature

If moral imagination allows me to envision new possibilities and if literature might inform this process at a deep level, there are resulting significant implications for education. Pardales even questions how literature is taught, stating that “quizzing students on the plot and characters will not be sufficient” for prompting deep thought about the text (435). Instead, Pardales suggests that teachers of literature facilitate discussion and response that allows students to exercise moral imagination based on the question: “how should one live?” Interaction with literature promotes, among other things, the specific benefit of engaging students in ethical inquiry.

Osmer and Salazar-Newton, in their article, summarize several claims made by philosophers, literary critics, educators, and authors regarding the “formative impact of literature on the moral imagination.” These claims range from: “literature offers understanding” to “literature enlarges human experience” (60-61). They also assert that “literature cultivates empathy and sympathy through character identification and narrative engagement” (61). One of their statements suggests, as Pardales did, that “literature offers...material on which readers can draw to form their prototypes of persons who embody goodness, evil, and the ambiguities of the moral life” (62). These claims help conceptualize the myriad benefits available to the reader accessing her ability to think about morality.

Additionally, Osmer and Salazar-Newton make two claims particularly applicable to educators considering the place for literature and moral imagination within her classroom. The first claim says that “literature introduces larger thematic patterns...in narrative form. While typically internalized at an unconscious level, these themes may provide the occasion for moral reflection, *especially when literature is discussed with others* (italics mine)” (63). Literature introduces moral themes internalized unconsciously unless I, as a reader, have the opportunity to *discuss* my responses. Robert Probst points out that educational classrooms are the only opportunity most people have to read books with others (14). Combine this with Osmer and Salazar-Newton’s claim that “deep reading” is a practice endangered because it is a solitary activity (53). Additionally, it is endangered because “schools now require less

reading of the classics and more business prose,” an accusation that is no exaggeration (52). The diminishing presence of “classics” in favor of “business prose” is based on the implementation of the Common Core Standards in which one-third of the “literacy shifts” promote “building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction,” a marked movement away from literature, its prototypes, metaphors, and narratives (Partners). Reading fiction and discussing it with others is an essential link between literature and moral imagination.

Osmer and Salazar-Newton’s second claim applicable to the Language Arts educator says that “literature may subvert the taken-for-granted reality of readers’ everyday lives...by inviting readers to imagine things otherwise” (64). In short, literary discussion leads to forward movement, interaction from the place of the secondary imagination, the kind of moral imagination Bromwich suggests in Edmund Burke’s defining the critical stance against unconsciousness toward justice. This, remember, says that literature may challenge the legitimized unethical behavior within a society, supporting the conception that certain literature can expand ways that people think about moral ideas within the secondary imagination by inviting readers to imagine things differently than they are. These two claims combine the potentiality this paper will explore in its third and fourth chapters, implementing literature into a curriculum that invites moral imagination as well as close readings of texts that support this practice.

As Osmer and Salazar-Newton assert, there are novels – certain novels, they say – that promote exercising the secondary imagination. Interacting with literature can move me, as a reader, from recognizing certain moral patterns in literature to assuming a Bromwichian critical stance. This is where moral imagination and Osmer and Salazar-Newton merge. The critical stance, “imagining things otherwise,” has an incredibly close connection to certain kinds of literature. We use this process most effectively through literary interactions occurring within social settings like classrooms, guided by conversation that considers multiple perspectives and analyses. The unique situation of a classroom

affords the kind of text interaction that most deeply encourages students to begin to process moral ideas, to develop critical consciousness. For teachers, supporting this practice is profoundly formative in view of the personhood of our students. It is also embedded in what we already do if we are willing to see the potentiality of our classroom text and task selections. Such a process begins with common language and a willingness to look for those pedagogical tools that most encourage adolescent students to think about morality.

Chapter Three: Inviting Books in the Classroom

Osmer and Salazar-Newton's final two claims regarding the connection between literature and moral imagination are tremendously significant for educators. The authors show that particular literature supports the secondary imagination, this process by which I may observe a situation in the present and then "imagine things otherwise." They also assert that this ability is largely dependent upon literary interactions within a communal setting. I agree. Engaging texts with others can produce newly imagined perspectives. Classrooms present one of the best spaces to do this.

I wish to add to these dynamics of imagination and literature studies the characteristics of a middle school student in the U.S. in 2017. As a teacher, I understand the traits generally attributed to this transitional period. It is important to recognize that adolescents are often looking ahead to the future, placing trust in others, acting courageously, and exercising empathy. Adolescents are optimistic. They eagerly anticipate what is ahead of them, events in the immediate future – like a pep rally – and the eventual future, such as perceived perks of adulthood. Middle schoolers care deeply and have an awareness of those around them that causes them to think about what others think about. This is particularly true for those with whom they share a relationship or view as a trusted source. Adolescents exhibit loyalty. They are bold in their speech and in their actions. In certain arenas, they are willing to experiment without hesitation, vacillating in the space of seconds between childlike exploration and profoundly mature observations. I can give countless examples of students moving rapidly from silly to serious and back to silly. Late elementary aged students, developmentally, possess the capability to perceive beyond their personal space. As a 5th grade teacher, it is a special experience to watch this happen. Through their growing empathies, I see my students generously bestow the benefit of the doubt. They often assign dignity without needing to completely understand a person or her situation, something difficult for many adults I know who are accustomed to their habitual patterns related to thinking about others.

Adolescents are quite empathetic. I remember a student whom I will call Alicia. Alicia moved to the area shortly before the end of the previous school year and I began teaching at her school the following August. Alicia, I learned, moved often. Understandably, she had some difficulty forming new friendships and academics were a great struggle for her. I had a feeling she had missed a lot of school in her childhood, and she moved away a few months into the school year without any notice. One day she was at school and the next, she had withdrawn. I never saw her again. Still, I remember Alicia was an insightful and perceptive writer and so the following event really comes as no surprise. She was emotionally in tune with others, regardless of the fact that her classmates were not particularly close to her. They were friendly, but it was a small community and she had not lived in it as long as everyone else.

One day, Alicia asked to go to our spirit shop. Because the spirit shop could tempt students to skip out on important things like learning and instruction, I made a policy that my students had to show me that they had some amount of money to spend in order to leave class to go. The spirit shop was no 5th Avenue, but I remember having to hide my surprise when Alicia held out a handful of change. I could sense she was a little embarrassed and I doubted the shop sold anything she could buy with a few cents, but I wasn't about to refuse her. At the end of the day, I found an eraser on my desk. Alicia had purchased for me an eraser in the shape of a million-dollar bill. I don't remember how I found out this was how she had chosen to spend her money, but I do remember that I had been looking for an eraser during a small group lesson earlier that week. Moments like that one, together with the characteristics I witness frequently in this marvelous stage, suggest that adolescence is an appropriate time to invite students to process ideas related to morality, to ways of being and living among other human beings.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle makes the following observation about adolescents: "They would always rather do noble deeds than useful ones: their lives are regulated more by moral feeling than by reasoning; and whereas reasoning leads us to choose what is useful, moral goodness leads us to choose

what is noble" (101). Certainly, intellect and emotion work together in making an ethical choice, but I think the distinction here is important. Middle schoolers live in a world guided by emotion to a degree that is often emphasized over the intellectual. My students make really thoughtful observations, but their emotions are a key component in decision making as they transition to adulthood. Because of the emotional aspect of their identity formation, thinking about morality in the classroom is not only historically important, it is personally significant for my students as young human beings. The middle schooler's emotional bent makes this stage a timely period for conversation that prompts and promotes moral imagination. With such an understanding as a basis, it is imperative that middle school teachers wishing for their students to think about morality might know how this can look in the classroom.

As I recognize the potential for middle school classrooms to facilitate such experiences, recall Young and Annisette, who acknowledge one potent limitation to their accounting and ethics courses: time and timing. With the accounting student's "over-crowded technical curriculum," the authors concede the difficulty for business schools to make time for novels in such a specialized field of study (107). The authors grant that graduate school is also quite late in one's education to first consider ethics in a classroom. Why not begin, then, when it resonates so well with the age of the student and, for that matter, happens many years prior to professional education? Let the middle schooler, alongside a classroom of peers and a caring teacher, confront ethical ideas in their literature studies. Provide them with opportunities to imagine morally.

Robert Probst, in his *Voices from the Middle* article, "Literature as an Invitation," writes about literature and its connection to moral spaces. His article specifically addresses this relationship in the context of middle grades classrooms. Probst identifies six "invitations" literature creates for the reader, a progression interpreted for this paper as successive opportunities available to students while interacting with great texts. In his discussion, Probst also offers some pragmatic, pedagogical tools for highlighting these invitations in Language Arts classrooms, drawing on his own teaching experiences

with students reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In summary, Probst says that students are first invited to speak, to react or respond either aloud or on paper (8). Secondly, students use their reactions as a guide for dialogue and connection with other readers (10). Third, students are invited into the process of intellectual inquiry, the opportunity to examine the author's intent and reasons for "doing something" with text (11). Fourth, students are invited further into self-reflection as they begin telling their own stories. He says "literature evokes literature"; there is a connection between reading and the writing process (13). Fifth, Probst suggests that literature invites students "to participate in a society and the culture" (14). Sixth and ultimately, Probst asserts that literature invites students into a process of self-definition. Through these invitations, Probst gives that reading literature provides something deeply human and meaningful, something infinitely more than demonstrating technical proficiency in reading and writing. Below, I address Probst's six invitations by giving an interpretation of each definition, why the invitation supports moral imagination, and how a teacher might implement each one into her classroom.

Literature as an Invitation to Speak

Probst says that literature invites students to "speak" or to respond (8). Perhaps the most straightforward of the invitations, speaking is the easiest to define and to find already occurring in classrooms everywhere. As an example, this is the only invitation that correlates to a component supported by the set of middle school standards that currently exist for the Randolph County School System in North Carolina, and, I imagine, many other schools nationwide. Recall that on a weekly basis, teachers are to provide opportunities for students to reflect through writing or speaking. Give students a text, provide a chance to respond to what they read. While the idea is basic, this invitation amounts to committing time and space for students to react after reading. In Weisberg and Duffin's course on ethics and story, one key component included student journaling, documented responses to the various texts. When the authors studied the journals over a period of time, they noted that the students' ideas

“developed and changed...embedded in continuing narratives.” Further, Weisberg and Duffin said that the journals worked “against the normal academic impulse to distill, to synthesize, to reduce, to perfect.” The authors committed time in their course to allowing students to respond and process new ideas in a dynamic manner. At a pedagogical level, responding to text and subsequent discussion became fundamental to developing ethical narratives among the cohort of Weisberg and Duffin’s students.

In addition to the role of journaling in the ethics course, the simple act of response leads to myriad opportunities according to one idea known as “readers’ response theory” (Collins, 4). According to this theory, “a reader’s interaction with the text stimulates change in the reader and enables that person to go beyond his or her experience.” Carol Jones Collins, a veteran middle school librarian, writes “Finding the Way,” an article supporting her claim that a reader’s encounter with literature is akin to a “meeting of the minds” that happens when the reader, as a person, encounters the text as an experience. Through reading, the reader “explores” his identity, “exposes untapped emotions,” and acquires a perspective formerly unavailable. Literary response is not only a tool for deepening understanding, it is a catalyst for broader appreciation of what texts may offer. This is critical to moral imagination. Through simple response tasks while reading, students engage in a dynamic interplay of reflection, emotion, and new vision. New vision relates directly to processing ideas about ethics. As students read and understand text, exposure to books promotes patterns for moral thought within the primary imagination. As they engage mind and heart, students entertain new visions of the world, unfamiliar experiences, and potentiality for change.

Many teachers include in their classrooms opportunities for responding to literature. As a teacher, I would assume response is a technique educators implement into their instruction without even thinking about it. After thirteen years in the classroom, every teacher with whom I’ve worked or observed naturally and regularly assigns response tasks: journal entries, digital platform reflections,

sticky note comments on passages, end-of-class “exit tickets,” and so forth. For whichever task teachers choose, perhaps the most important attribute of this invitation is that it is free-association and open-ended. An open response allows students to record first thoughts and impressions without added pressure to gather articulate expressions or synthesize an entire mental conversation.

Middle school English teachers Mary E. Styslinger et al studied the reciprocal nature of response, talk, and reflection on texts read in middle grades Language Arts classes. In their article, “The Chicken and the Egg: Inviting Response and Talk through Socratic Circles,” Styslinger et al acknowledge customary response tasks for students and suggest a few additional, easy-to-implement strategies. One task utilizes a simple text-marking system wherein students write check marks, question marks, and exclamation points into the margins of the book (39). This is a purposely simple exercise and one all levels of readers may do while reading any selection. Because students use symbols, they are not required to fully understand a passage in order to mark it. Students do not yet have to articulate why a text strikes them, only where any “ah-ha!” occurs. Students return to reason it out later, in other assignments. Another of Styslinger’s suggestions invites students to write one question and one comment about the assigned excerpt, a bare bones reflection, if you will (39). Through this streamlined prompt, students can quickly synthesize first reactions to the text in just a couple of minutes. Then, as students are ready to gather for discussion, they might spend 10 minutes comparing their marking system notes or bare bones reflections to compose a few sentences in preparation for the next invitation, dialogue.

Literature as an Invitation to Dialogue

When someone finishes a book or movie that captures the emotion and imagination, who does not immediately hope to find someone with whom to talk about it? Probst’s second invitation says that after students respond to the text, their responses guide them to dialogue with fellow readers (10). Individual reactions propel people into conversation with others about the text. This is significant:

after initial response, reading naturally becomes a communal activity. Remember, too, that Osmer and Salazar-Newton note that readers absorb moral information subconsciously, *unless those readers share the text with others*. When a person gathers with a group of other people around a text, the experience provides a completely new set of possibilities.

Dialogue around literature is a conversation. Probst says that dialogue might begin as simply as asking students to pretend they just viewed a film at the theater and are sitting around talking about it (11). Dialogue, then, is founded on and driven by student responses to the text rather than guided by a teacher toward some particular understanding. Probst points out that open-ended conversation holds a “vitality” that structured facilitation is incapable of providing. Students and teacher may wonder, “How did we get here?” as the topics ebb and flow. Through open conversation, students reveal their initial reactions to the text, what experiences he brought to the novel, what emotions she felt as she read a passage. Through the revelatory nature of open dialogue, conversation potentially magnifies those issues students find most important to discuss. At its best, unstructured talk lends itself to the “great ongoing conversation” about the things that matter most to a group of readers (11). In those moments, students might recognize that the ideas most important to them also mattered to the author and to each other.

Carol Jones Collins asserts that the reader’s response theory eventually gives way to a “social construction” theory. This notion, based on various research she cites, claims that people are continually involved in “construction and reconstruction” of the self which is “created” through interactions with others (5). In this view, all methods of personal growth arise from social interactions and meaning making. Collins further argues that one’s moral sense arises from the combination of responding to literature and conversing with others about it. Not only does a reader deepen her understanding by shifting into dialogue, she is that much abler to lift from the text ideas centered

around ethics, virtue, and morality. Perhaps as one classmate offers a new perspective, other readers move from subconscious to conscious awareness of some ethical dimension specific to the text.

Dialogue is clearly a critical step for students thinking about ethical ideas. According to Osmer and Salazar-Newton, participants in their study identified several moral motifs present in the *Harry Potter* series (69). However, the respondents were unable to articulate the details of these themes. Several of them even acknowledged regret at their lack of opportunity to process the books with others as they completed the series. Dialogue, no matter how unstructured, supports a reader's understanding of a text. In the case of promoting ethical reflection, dialogue is necessary. Styslinger et al drew similar connections between moral imagination and classroom dialogue (which they call "talk"). After analyzing conversation transcripts, strong correlations existed between student understanding, comprehension, and talking about the text (42). Further, the dynamic nature of interacting with the text in a group highlighted opportunities for "new visions of possibility." One student said that talking allowed her, as a reader, to "understand [the classroom community], understand the literature, and create [her] own perspective." The community has an integral role in developing deeper understandings but also new perspectives. What's more, these new "visions of possibility" may launch that second imagination, a departure from what is commonly acceptable practice, a "critical stance" considered toward an "orthodox sense." It is also important to note the high rate of participation Styslinger et al observed in their research. When a group of students engaged in classroom dialogue, 99% of the middle schoolers participated, a much higher percentage than the number of students engaged in many other reflective tasks (44). If discussion is critical to understanding, directly supports students thinking about moral ideas, and additionally ensures a high level of participation, teachers should incorporate dialogue as frequently and consistently as possible.

A teacher wanting her students to dialogue might ask: What if no one will talk? Generally speaking, the nature of such open-ended conversation and rapport built between teacher and students

alleviates discomfort in those golden moments of silence. Sure, those moments will occur as students think and process texts together. Still, Probst offers some suggestions. In one scenario, he recommends allowing the students to pass notes (10). Beginning with an open-ended question, students literally pass notes, either randomly or among an assigned group of students. Each person takes the time to respond to the previous commenter, somewhat like a pencil-paper “comments thread” on a blog. In fact, if multiple students simultaneously start a note-passing “thread,” after just a few minutes, every student would contribute to multiple conversations. In following up with students afterward, common themes, new revelations, or striking questions might naturally generate additional discussion. Also, passing notes allows students to “listen” because they are not required to listen while also thinking of a response to follow. Another small group dialogue option includes giving students a poster of a short passage from the novel. The students can gather to read it with the single requirement of writing about that section directly on the poster. The activity may at first begin quietly, but eventually, students will begin reading each other’s notes and talking about their reactions.

A third option, based on my personal experience with adolescents, is to utilize a class blog or digital platform like SeeSaw. SeeSaw, a digital portfolio application, is a simplified blogging tool that allows students at every grade level to demonstrate and “post” a variety of artifacts, from typed notes to videos to annotated pictures. Once a post is added to the “class feed,” a teacher can elect to have students comment on each other’s posts. At first, I ask my students to comment on x number of posts or to comment on posts belonging to individuals sitting at one table. I also find it helpful to talk with students about how to comment on a post, how to answer questions specifically, not generally, and how to use etiquette appropriate to the media. On SeeSaw, I approve all comments, so my students have some awareness that each interaction is read and considered. I find that this small measure of accountability heightens the level of thoughtfulness in this quick process. After receiving and viewing comments on SeeSaw, I follow up with students by asking very generally, “What did you notice? What

did you learn? What surprised you?" The conversation, though unguided, prompts dialogue among my students that supports their processing together and aloud.

Literature as an Invitation to Intellectual Inquiry

Probst's third invitation marks the students' shift from group discussion in the form of dialogue into a type of conversation that encourages intellectual inquiry (11). Talk does not remain as open-ended in this invitation and instead affords middle schoolers the space to "reflect upon and examine visions of human possibilities that they are offered, with the assistance of other students and teachers, so that they may learn to assess the implications of the beliefs they hold and of the values that shape their choices" (11-12). At this point, students begin examining motive and intent in a text, an opportunity for students to intentionally assume a critical lens as they look over the text in larger parts or as a whole. As a result, it is with this third invitation that teachers can naturally raise questions that ask students to consider ethical implications.

At this juncture, because student conversation evolves from free dialogue to something resembling more structure, the teacher's understanding of and role in facilitating more intense close reading becomes paramount to this invitation. Although I will offer more suggestions in a moment, in the spirit of fully understanding this third invitation, Probst suggests that intellectual inquiry in conversation begins when teachers "lay ideas on the table" (11).

Though Probst does not reference her directly, Charlotte Mason, an early 20th century educator in Britain's Lake District, spoke at length to young teachers about the "presentation of ideas" (vii). A summary of her philosophy is useful for helping today's teacher understand this element of intellectual inquiry, in particular because Mason's ideas were informed by a clear educational narrative she promoted among teachers in training. Mason supported a specific philosophy of education she articulated often, one which she hoped would shift teachers away from the ideals of industrialization to something that viewed education as a process of teaching young persons (ix). In fact, her first

philosophical tenet held that children are “born persons,” and by underscoring this perspective, Mason asked future teachers to reject any notion of a utility narrative, any idea that viewed children as “investments.” Mason believed her view of children “as persons” required the “presentation of living ideas” rather than filling them as “mere sacs” with facts and skills (xxx). Because children are “born persons,” they are born with the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional capacities of persons (20). Ideas, then, are thoughts and concepts that engage mind, spirit, and heart. These ideas are what Mason called “living ideas” because they “nourish” the mind, “a spiritual organism” with an “appetite” for knowledge. Ultimately, Mason believed that teachers ought to put their students “in the way of a generous curriculum,” one that comprises wide and varied ideas appealing to both intellectual and emotional capacities (xxix). Probst does not mention Mason’s “living ideas,” but he does imply that the thinking about morality is central in intellectual inquiry. If that thinking, which invokes the heart and mind, is “put in the way” of Mason’s “living ideas” – the stuff both heart and mind will respond to – it is appropriate to suggest that intellectual inquiry is dependent upon living ideas.

In his description of the invitation, Probst leaves an opening for thinking about moral ideas although he doesn’t specifically name it. He gives that readers should analyze values and beliefs in intellectual inquiry. In this process, students naturally articulate perceived and upheld ethical ideals as they begin to generate an agreement on actions and notions that are “despicable, inhumane, and corrupt” (11). As students recognize inhumane practices, they simultaneously identify actions they consider noble, dignified, and integrous, whether or not they know to state this explicitly. Because intellectual inquiry encourages the practice of identifying guiding values, this invitation lends itself easily to providing students time to think about moral ideas, a process they will continue in subsequent invitations. In defining, agreeing, and disagreeing on ideas both despicable and noble, students assume critical stances and potentially imagine challenges to societal standards.

Once a teacher recognizes how ideas support intellectual inquiry and the way that informed conversation encourages critical re-consideration, Probst suggests a number of ways to facilitate discussion that encourages students to think about morality. Teachers might begin by asking students questions about their personal feelings, beliefs, and values, some inquiry that leads to an iteration of an “I feel” response (12). As students begin to articulate beliefs about themselves, teachers can prompt students to explain why. As readers begin to identify those processes and the powers that inform motives and beliefs, they may contemplate a new perspective. Styslinger et al corroborate these suggestions with the results of their study. The authors find that text-based class discussions are most effective when both personal questions and text-based questions arise (43). Teachers can encourage both intellectual and personal engagement by selecting passages that spark emotional responses, allowing students to discuss both textual and affective connections.

In addition to the tips Probst and Styslinger et al provide, as a Duke University Graduate Liberal Studies student, I’ve observed discussions facilitated in a manner that promotes intellectual inquiry. Over the course of my graduate career, professors from a range of fields have demonstrated various pedagogical tools that bring students together around texts. While ability levels and book selections contrast with those usually found in middle school classrooms, I have learned to apply some of the facilitation principles successfully with my adolescent students. Dr. Debby Gold, my “Aging and Death in Literature and Film” professor, utilized simple but effective methods for encouraging conversation that scrutinized ideas like ethical choice and motive. One method Professor Gold used that I have found to be quite accessible for my students begins by asking them to select their favorite character and describe the reason behind their choice. As students contribute their favorites, I compile a list and new perspectives emerge. Common reactions include, at the surface, surprise at the array of responses, initial incredulity that not every reader chose the same character. Often, conversation shifts to deeper levels of analysis: “Why do you think the author chose Jonas to release the memories? What

was the major turning point in Jackie's life?" Students change their minds or adjust their perceptions of characters. Following this discussion, I repeat the process with least favorite characters. In this version, my students focus on tensions and conflict in the plot, among characters, and in the author's personal contexts.

Professor Gold introduced me to another activity that challenges my middle school students to think intellectually about our texts. In it, my students collaborate to build a list of the novel's characters followed by the charge to form a consensus and attach a single adjective describing each person in the list. Certainly, this type of discussion rejects right/wrong answers, and as students debate around appropriate adjectives, they often respond with observations such as: "Did you really think Cassie was conniving when she hit Lillian Jean? I thought Lillian Jean deserved it! Cassie wasn't conniving, she was clever! 'Conniving' is too negative." Different interpretations of events and character traits emerge in this type of talk, leading groups of students to wonder why an author created a conniving event for a mostly clever character. After my students build their character and adjective lists, I ask them to agree on a second adjective and we conclude the activity with questions such as: "Who was most important to the story? Who was least important? Who was necessary? Unnecessary?" Through this exercise, students debate, take sides, change sides, make allusions, identify central messages, reflect on authors' lives, all stemming from a simple list of adjectives. At the middle school level, I recommend providing students with lists of adjectives to begin their deliberations. Both of Professor Gold's pedagogical methods are applicable to most fiction and memoir texts. Having tried these methods with 11 year olds, I attest that both lend themselves to engaging a wide range of ages in deep and meaningful conversations originating in simple, approachable tasks.

In addition to Professor Gold's facilitation activities, I also use close reading with my students, another method I learned as a Graduate Liberal Studies student. Dr. Amy Laura Hall, who taught the course, "Sin and Redemption in North American Literature," utilizes close reading to guide discussion

that moves readers toward thinking deeply about texts. In her courses, I composed short close reading papers based on one word of a novel. As a teacher, I have found this exercise meaningful for middle school students as well as colleagues in professional development workshops. I begin by asking the participants to choose, at most, one sentence (or phrase or word) for a portion of text, beginning with a chapter or two of the book. I ask them, initially, to work in pairs. After students select the word(s) that are, to them, the most important, surprising, unknown, or evoke some other strong response, I invite them to share their selected phrases as we collect them on a chart. Though we begin with a structure in which everyone adds to the list, my students inevitably begin drawing connections between the chosen words: "A lot of those words have to do with Frightful, Sam's falcon. This is a big deal because she is his new companion. Maybe she will be important in the novel after this chapter." Students learn to understand allusions, analyze word choice, and note literary patterns as they create the list and observe collected responses. Both Professor Gold's and Professor Hall's methods are accessible among readers of all ages and importantly, each method is conducive to encouraging students to think critically about beliefs and values. There is an intentionality inherent in intellectual inquiry that allows readers to lift from the novel's pages those text features that charge them to assume a critical stance in their examinations of the story.

Literature as Invitation to Tell One's Own Story

Once students engage in intellectual inquiry, they may build upon their reflections by telling their own stories (13). "Literature evokes literature," Probst reminds us, and there exist multiple connections between reading literature and writing. He is fairly general about practical application in the classroom; however, this invitation is a bit of an obvious one. It is a widely accepted assumption that, beginning at the earliest ages, a person's writing reflects words and ideas expressed in familiar stories and books. Consider that Probst may be alluding to something deeper. Inviting students to "tell

their own stories” can be both academic and personal. On one hand, many teachers follow novel studies with analytical or persuasive essay assignments. In this context, to be sure, reading texts shapes the academic essay. Consider, too, more personal forms of writing. Whether creative fiction, poetry, or memoir, written words are informed by those ideas that have previously entertained a reader, consciously or not.

Certainly, intellectual discussion informs academic writing. When Styslinger et al studied response and talk among their middle school students, they followed the discussion with a written assignment in which students reflected on *both* the text and class discussions. The authors compared student thinking evident in dialogue and the post-discussion written reflections. Unsurprisingly, Styslinger et al observed that the student’s writing indicated a greater number and “deeper connections” to the text than those made aloud in conversations (41). Additionally, their writing reflected a personal approach to the text as the students included comments they had not shared aloud in the discussions. Providing students with the opportunity to write after intellectual conversation enhances understanding of the text as readers take the time to synthesize the experiences of reading and conversation.

When Probst suggests that literature invites the written story, he also recognizes potential for texts to influence other, narrative types of writing. In fact, Probst believes that as readers identify with a story, they are compelled to offer their own (13). Probst even recounts instances when fiction allowed writers to make sense of events. In one example, Probst references the popular children’s novelist Katherine Paterson who wrote the tragic and entirely fictional book, *Bridge to Terabithia*, in order to make sense of a personal tragedy (14). Probst doesn’t offer practical suggestions for launching fiction writing assignments following novel studies in the classroom, and as a teacher, I wonder whether this is because fiction writing can vary so widely from text to text and student to student. However, teachers might consider giving their students a choice between an academic essay and a fictional response. Or,

teachers might assign both types in the course of studying one text or may alternate between the two throughout the year. Either way, emphasizing the connection between meaning making and fiction writing provides students more time to process literary ideas related to morality.

Finally, the connection between reading and writing requires a moment to consider the weighty implications inherent in text selection. If literature informs writing, the books and ideas presented to students must be assigned out of great thought and intentionality. It is essential that teachers are mindful of the ways in which literature is internalized and perpetuates story and meaning. In her poignant TEDTalk, writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discusses “The Danger of a Single Story.” She begins her talk by connecting the earliest books she read with the earliest stories she told and wrote. She reveals:

I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: all my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.

She attributes her writing to the influence of the books she read, reminding her audience how “vulnerable and impressionable we are in the face of a story.” Further, reading only one type of story yielded “unintended consequences” that taught her there was only one story to be told, only one worth telling, and to resist writing from her actual experiences. These consequences utterly refute the possibility of Probst’s invitations and therefore, literature only provides this fourth invitation if teachers select varied stories for their students.

To me, the effects of text selection on writing is the juncture at which thinking about ethical ideas enters this invitation. After Adichie describes her experiences hearing “the single story of poverty” or “the single story of the African,” she asserts that the primary effect of a single story robs people of

dignity and promotes pity. It is reading beyond single stories, interacting with many stories, that allows readers to acquaint vast and varied characters through lenses of humanity and self-worth. After reading multiple perspectives and thereby avoiding single stories, students subvert their initial pity as they discover new viewpoints. Put another way, the danger of a single story results in a weak imagining, unconsciousness, an uncritical view toward the orthodox sense. Remembering that literature evokes literature, teachers must recognize and defend their monumental responsibility to recommend the most thoughtful possible selection of stories to tell, share, read, discuss, and write about.

Literature as Invitation to Participate in a Society and the Culture

Probst's final two invitations are for the future student, opportunities for those middle schoolers who have had numerous occasions to engage a great and wide variety of books. He states, in fact, that this "is what the conversation, the storytelling, the intellectual inquiry add up to." Because these last two invitations issue ideals for a student's "someday," it is nearly impossible to offer practical strategies for teachers. Though I will share some suggestions that encourage these ways of thinking, the remainder of this chapter is an invitation for the *teacher*, asking educators to consider what the first four invitations ultimately promote.

In the first of these ultimate invitations, Probst states that students are called "to participate in a society and the culture...to become human, to share knowledgeably in the continuing effort to make sense out of our experience" (14-15). As students grow accustomed to making meaning through literary interactions, they are compelled by sense-making and reflection to look around them, to notice people, their stories, and human experiences. Adolescents recognize and react to those universal "questions raised by writers." She may, Probst hopes, desire to "trade...perceptions, tell...stories, reveal and consider...values and beliefs, argue and assess ...reasoning, and ultimately come to...reconciliation with the world and the people in it" (14). For the young reader who connects with characters like *brown girl*

dreaming's Jacqueline, Cassie Taylor, or Jonas in *The Giver*, he forms prototypes and may be that much more equipped to “share knowledgeably in the continuing effort” to “become human.”

If it is possible to disregard my bias as a middle grades teacher, one less familiar with this age group should note how engaging literature for future involvement translates to a middle school student. According to their physical, emotional, and cognitive development, adolescents themselves are in an optimal place to consider “things that matter” (Wolk, 46). Through avenues such as loyalty in relationships, the tendency to feel deeply, and the ability to perceive situations increasingly less connected personally to themselves, middle schoolers are ready to process important ideas that have before felt unimportant. They are beginning, for the first time in their lives, to “engage with complex and sophisticated ideas,” they are “awakening...new intellectual powers” and “they are hungry to explore the world and study ideas that really matter” (46). As they understand more complexities of the world around them, they often want to think more globally about the ideas and events that affect human beings. Adolescents “relish” the struggle of moral dilemmas: “it connects to their heightened awareness of life, their fierce energy to let their voices be heard, and their passion to fix a deeply broken world” (49). Having until this moment most frequently regarded the rules of the world as clear and straightforward, most adolescents are captivated by spaces that give them permission to realize it just isn't so.

Steven Wolk, an education professor at Northeastern Illinois University, suggests three mental shifts teachers can make to encourage them to acknowledge how Language Arts classrooms support participation in society and culture (46). His first shift encourages the teacher to select texts that support discourse on “things that matter” (46). Adichie's discussion on stories and Mason's philosophy of living ideas connect directly to this point. Wolk's second suggestion is to trust students. A teacher who wants to encourage participation in this type of dialogue ought to show her students that she is confident in their abilities by her willingness to put engaging, varied, and even difficult texts in front of

them. Teachers who choose these kinds of books convey an implicit sense of trust in her students' abilities to understand "important, controversial, and complex topics," demonstrating belief that adolescents are well suited and capable of handling these ideas with care (46-47). In my experience, adolescents who sense that I am willing to hand over "big questions" respond with enthusiasm, openness, and willing participation. Finally, Wolk recommends choosing books that ask questions. Books that raise questions "about the world, about life, about the human condition, about ourselves" and generally provide "no single correct answer" lend themselves to important ideas that matter most to adolescent readers (47). In my experience, students receive books that matter with enthusiasm. Probst believes that interaction around those texts invites transformation and supports the "someday" student in ways that may transcend the immediate experience of the classroom.

Literature as Invitation to Self-Definition

Finally, Probst supposes that literature invites students into self-definition, to "thoughtfully and reflectively decide who she will be, what he will become, and what sort of world we will all have in the future" (15). Though he calls it "self-definition," I argue that one of the most positive versions of self-definition, perhaps even the ideal version, is a strong moral imagination.

First, self-definition may be called "self-making," a term I find to be a more salient. Self-definition connotes some ultimate, achievable aim while self-making instead implies a process continually undertaken to make oneself. In his essay, "Paging the Self: Privacies of Reading," essayist and literary critic Sven Birkerts connects reading to this very process (87). He asserts that reading provides "above all an agency" of bettering the self for upcoming life situations and phases. To support this thesis, Birkerts describes literature's role in self-making at various stages: how the beginning reader informs a future self, the adolescent reader, and so on, all the way through adult readers. Birkerts believes that adolescent reading encompasses a particularly formative time for self-making. This specific stage includes a fundamental shift. It is during this "biological and psychological free-fire zone

[that] the profoundest existential questions are not only posed, but lived. Who am I? Why am I doing what I'm doing? What *should* I do? What will happen to me?" Then, these questions meet the "problem" of the future, as adolescents look into their personal "someday," often for the first times in their lives. With this sense of their futurity, Birkerts wonders if novels become "the site for testing transformations," that adolescence is the ideal "laboratory for studying the *ideal* impact of reading on that [self] formation." As middle school readers meet and acquaint characters, they may desire to be them and as a result, "form" archetypes that guide their own values and behavior. Birkerts suggests, then, that reading points the adolescent "toward significance and resolution...living toward meaning, or at least living in the light of the possible" (91). If young readers project and claim ideals, their prototypes invite reflection based on "some larger momentum toward meaning." If this is self-making, the belief that our students can see themselves in the future, can form visions that promote "larger momentum toward meaning," it is reasonable to assume that such is the essence of Probst's final, ultimate invitation. Probst believes that literature affords students the chance to "thoughtfully and reflectively decide" who they will become (15).

Who will she be? Who will he become? What sort of world will we have in the future? I hope that, regardless of the various paths my students take as human beings in this world, their process of making meaning is rooted in a strong moral imagination. I hope they are accustomed to posing questions and respond by naturally assuming critical stances toward orthodox realities. In his essay, "The Moral Imagination," 20th century critic and author Russell Kirk defined moral imagination as a "power exercised in poetry and art" in which one engages "that power of ethical perception which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and momentary events." Subsequently, this capacity allows one to envision the most "right order in the soul and right order in the commonwealth." Put another way, strong moral imagination allows me to live with integrity as a person ("right order in the soul") and to live in community well ("in the commonwealth"). Upon deliberately ordering emotion and

intellect, upon imagining the most fulfilling conditions to experience life as a human, social being, she who reads widely may develop habits of thinking and imagining that supports living into the best version of herself.

In 2008, J.K. Rowling gave the commencement address at Harvard University titled, “The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination” (Rowling). At one point, she says:

Many prefer not to exercise their imaginations at all. They choose to remain comfortably within the bounds of their own experience, never troubling to wonder how it would feel to have been born other than they are. They can refuse to hear screams or to peer inside cages; they can close their minds and hearts to any suffering that does not touch them personally; they can refuse to know. (Rowling)

One might define this as an illustration of weak imagining, define “willingly unimaginative” as “unconscious.” Ed Mooney, however, a contributor to the *Zeteo Interdisciplinary Journal*, reads Rowling’s excerpt “backwards,” drawing attention to the *virtues* of exercising imagination (Mooney). Flipped around and read in the positive, Mooney’s virtuous imagination “moves out” beyond narrow experience, “troubles to wonder how it would feel to have been born other than one is,” “bothers to hear” and willingly “peers inside cages.” She “opens [her] mind and heart to suffering” and “comes to know through imagining more.” Viewed in this direction, processing moral situations in a manner informed by these “virtues” is one manifestation of a strong moral imagination.

The last of Probst’s invitations carry profound implications. Interacting with literature at the middle school level is almost singularly particular to the experience of the Language Arts classroom. At the specific juncture of interacting with a text while in community, readers are able to engage an “investigation of the big issues” and inform the thought processes that will one day build families, communities, and societies (15). Further, through the process of self-making, literature may propel readers to action, to participation “in the cultural life of humankind,” to “create [themselves].” When

there is need to “escape the narrow confines of our instincts or upbringing, to see various ways of feeling and thinking about life,” human beings, through reading, see and make themselves. Or, as readers have the opportunity to envision more than their lived experience allows, they may assume a larger capacity to imagine. Literature promotes opportunities inherently conducive to imagining morally, expanding one’s vision of possibility in the presence of a value, a dilemma, or an ethical complexity. If professional schools desire to increase ethical thinking among its students, listen to those like Young and Annisette who name the limitations of waiting to provide this at the *end* of “college and career ready.” Middle school literature has an integral role in providing this possibility for our students.

Chapter Four: Three Middle Grades Texts

As middle schoolers read, respond, and discuss great books, they have the opportunity to process ideas related to morality, to envision possibilities beyond societal norms. Below, I consider this process as it manifests among my middle schoolers. In one form, middle grades texts promote moral imagining at the level of thinking and re-consideration, a practice connected to Bromwich's first elaboration of moral imagination. In the second manifestation, one related to Bromwich's second description of the term, the reader experiences a character's development and subsequent action rising from a sense of commitment. In the former, the adolescent encounters an alternative way of seeing the world. The second option shifts focus toward the reader's future self. Perceiving a character's personal constitution invites a reader to acknowledge some moral responsibility potentially applicable to her own code of ethical principles.

There exists precedent for both modes of thinking about morality in addition to my own classroom observations. In one instance, Martha Nussbaum describes a type of re-consideration after teaching Richard Wright's *Native Son* to a group of white students (93). As this text portrays "a Black man tormented by inequity and hatred," Nussbaum's students, through reading it, acquired a "knowledge of their ignorance." This acknowledgment presented students a perspective formerly unavailable to them, providing them with the opportunity to reexamine their personal constructs. As the students interacted critically with *Native Son*, they recognized and identified injustice. Upon participating with her students in discourse related to the novel, Nussbaum concluded that other, similar exposure "broadens our experience and may heighten our ability" to perceive and grow sensitive toward various issues of social justice.

In the second form of applying ethics through literary experience, novels may examine characters' moral responses from within a personal code, thereby inviting me to build upon my own principles. In her essay, "Artistic and Moral Imagination in *The Hundred Dresses*," Claudia Mills defines

the precise moment in the novella when the character, Maddie, commits to reject future opportunities to be “cowardly complicit” (174). Maddie admits fault in standing silently by a bully, vowing to speak up in future similar interactions. At that point in the plot, “Maddie crafts a moral rule for herself and a firm resolution to abide by it” (169). She chooses to act from this new principle going forward, and I, as the reader, note this amendment to her ethical code. As I observe similar other moments in which characters make moral commitments, I may also wish to revise my personal constitution.

For this final chapter, I highlight three texts frequently taught in the middle grades including: *brown girl dreaming*, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and *The Giver*. While these books lend themselves to different ranges within adolescence, all of them are used in middle school Language Arts classrooms at any grade level, 5th through 8th grades. Through close readings, I underscore at least one opportunity for readers to engage their moral imaginations, whether by re-considering some moral idea or to experience a character’s conviction to uphold some ethical standard. For these readings, I focus primarily on themes of memory, storytelling, and weak imagining. As I discuss middle school texts commonly found on curricular reading lists, I hope my fellow teachers will note how books already embedded in middle level courses invite students to think about morality and ethics.

Jacqueline Woodson’s *brown girl dreaming*

Jacqueline Woodson’s 2014 memoir, *brown girl dreaming*, recounts in free verse the story of her 1960s childhood split between South Carolina and New York, her growing awareness of the Civil Rights Movement, and the way she found her voice through writing despite her learning difficulties (Woodson). The book won several awards, including the Coretta Scott King Award for Peace, Non-Violent Social Change, and Brotherhood, the National Book Award, and was a 2015 Newbery Honor Book. Woodson says that she began writing when her mother passed away (“Jacqueline Woodson on Growing up, Coming out, and Saying Hi to Strangers”). She characterizes the experience as her “wake-

up call that the people I love, and the people who know my story, and the people who know my history are not always going to be here.” Jackie – sometimes calling herself Jacqueline – remembers her history through the process of retelling it with her sister and brothers. She began to record these stories as a way of making sure “some kind of record” survives (Dean). Jackie’s memoir depicts her journey in remembering and eventually reclaiming memories and truth through her growing desire to use letters to “form words, words gathering meaning, becoming thoughts outside my head, becoming sentences written by Jacqueline Amanda Woodson” (156). Ultimately, Jackie’s poetry provides her the ability to make sense of what she remembers and what she believes is true.

Near the beginning of her memoir, Jacqueline strains to remember:

how to listen #1

somewhere in my brain

each laugh, tear, and lullaby

becomes *memory* (20)

This poem near the beginning of the memoir, “how to listen #1,” names memory as something hazy and elusive. Jackie believes that a memory must live “somewhere,” must hold a particular place in time, but – for her – that place still exists beyond her grasp. Jackie’s conflicted desire for certainty begins the day of her birth in three different accounts of the time she was born. In a poem titled, “other people’s memories,” Jackie’s mother, father, and grandmother remember her birth occurring in the morning, afternoon, and night time (17). Over the course of the memoir, readers observe that the slippery nature of memory arises from Jackie’s unsuccessful attempt to claim something that is *not hers*. The birth stories are not her memory, and until she later owns what is hers and what isn’t, memory remains outside of her.

Just as she desires to find memory, Jackie also hopes to know “truth.” Her memories become clearer as she starts to tell stories, whether or not they are true. In fact, early in her life, Jackie wonders

why some stories come out as “lies.” For instance, she creates narratives to explain her father’s absence to her friends and, in some ways, to herself. Some people in Jackie’s life – her mother and grandmother – value structure, value fact, demand truth. Still others – Jacqueline’s Uncle Robert and grandfather, “Daddy” – value her stories, praise her creativity. Chastised for her stories on one hand, praised for them on the other, Jackie doesn’t know, at first, what to do with her words.

Keep making up stories, my uncle says.

You’re lying, my mother says.

Maybe the truth is somewhere in between all that I’m told and memory. (176)

At another point, Jackie talks about her grandmother’s frequent suspicion directed toward their neighbors. Jackie writes from the voice of her grandmother:

Someday, you’ll come to know

when someone is telling the truth

and when they’re just making up stories. (115)

Ironically, “truth” and “stories” do not remain discrete categories for Jacqueline. At this point, however, Jackie starts to believe that it is possible to find “truth.” Though still ambivalent, this poem represents new understanding for Jackie, the idea that knowing “truth” may happen “someday,” just as she expects to find memory “somewhere.” Jackie has yet to claim either herself, she sees herself as a recipient of “all that I’m told” by others, but there remains a sense that memory and truth grow clearer. As a result, Jackie’s desire to *obtain* memory and truth moves toward the hope that she will, one day, “come to know.”

Jackie also struggles to make sense of words, to “catch words” that she hopes to obtain, “to hold.” As she finds memory and truth tricky, so are reading and writing:

I want to catch words one day. I want to hold them

then blow gently,
watch them float
right out of my hands. (169)

Jacqueline consistently describes things she wants to “hold”: memories, truth, words. Eventually, striving to *obtain* gives way to poetry, Jackie’s catalyst for remembering, her avenue for exploring what is true. From her poem, “reading,”:

But I don’t want to read faster or older or
any way else that might
make the story disappear too quickly from where
it’s settling
inside my brain,
slowly becoming
a part of me.
A story I will remember
long after I’ve read it for the second, third,
tenth, hundredth time. (226)

From “somewhere” and “someday,” to “becoming,” and finally, “part of me.” Jackie’s early “somewhere” and “someday” become “part of [her]” as she listens and writes. The “somewhere” and “someday” becomes “me.” Memory, truth, and poetry become *hers*.

brown girl dreaming raises so many questions for a middle school student. What is memory? How might we define it? Is it history? A story? What is truth? Why is it elusive? Does truth matter? Is truth structured and factual, as it is for Jackie’s grandmother? Is it inventive and created, like Uncle Robert’s version of truth? Who tells the stories that endure? Who listens to stories and appreciates them? *brown girl dreaming* allows the reader acknowledge that Jackie rejects compartmentalized

definitions of history and truth. Instead, by the end of her memoir, Jackie concludes that *her* history is the reconciliation of once seemingly divergent parts. Regardless of the tensions and conflicts her memories represent, Jacqueline claims them together:

“what i believe”

I believe in God and evolution.

I believe in the Bible and the Qur’an.

I believe in Christmas and the New World.

I believe that there is good in each of us
no matter who we are or what we believe in.

I believe in the words of my grandfather.

I believe in the city and the South

the past and the present.

I believe in Black people and White people coming
together.

I believe in nonviolence and “Power to the People.”

I believe in my little brother’s pale skin and my own
dark brown.

I believe in my sister’s brilliance and the too-easy
books I love to read.

I believe in my mother on a bus and Black people
refusing to ride.

I believe in good friends and good food.

I believe in johnny pumps and jump ropes,

Malcolm and Martin, Buckeyes and Birmingham,
Writing and listening, bad words and good words –
I believe in Brooklyn!

I believe in one day and someday and this
perfect moment called *Now*. (317-8)

Jackie reconciles memory and truth through her writing, using the inviting word, “and.” The word “and” allows Jackie to unify once hazy ideas. Ideas so difficult to “catch” – memory, truth, and words – become the avenues through which she finds herself. Within Jackie’s ability to inhabit either world, she imagines herself a part of both of them and both form her story.

When there are many worlds
you can choose the one
you walk into each day.

You can imagine yourself brilliant as your sister,
slower moving, quiet and thoughtful as your older brother
or filled up with the hiccupping joy and laughter
of the baby in the family.

You can imagine yourself, a mother now, climbing
onto a bus at nightfall, turning
to wave good-bye to your children, watching
the world of South Carolina disappear behind you.

When there are many worlds, love can wrap itself
around you, say, *Don't cry. Say, You are as good as anyone.*
Say, Keep remembering me. And you know, even as the
world explodes
around you—that you are loved...

Each day a new world
opens itself up to you. And all the worlds you are—
Ohio and Greenville
Woodson and Irby
Gunnar's child and Jack's daughter
Jehovah's Witness and nonbeliever
listener and writer
Jackie and Jacqueline —

gather into one world

called You

where You decide

what each world
and each story
and each ending

will finally be. (319-320)

Jacqueline's reconciliations allow her to "imagine," to *choose*, and her choice to "walk into" many worlds makes her *Jackie*. In hoping to obtain memory and truth, Jackie finds clarity, not in "catching" them, but in owning her unique ability to "*decide* what each world and each story and each ending will finally be (italics mine)." Rather than obtaining, Jackie's freedom is *deciding*.

brown girl dreaming invites adolescents to "imagine otherwise" through the opportunity to acknowledge the elusiveness of "truth" and the relationship between memory and history. In experiencing Jackie's journey to make sense of her story, she teaches me to associate "memory" and "truth" with something that looks a little less obtainable while also, perhaps, permitting me to welcome "and." This is a new view that asks me to re-consider "memory" and "history." Perhaps, in *brown girl dreaming*, the "orthodox sense" of history is fact told as a narrative of causes and effects. To be sure, I am continually exposed to histories presented and framed in this way, as stories. Whether the history of a place, a person, or a group of people, I am accustomed to viewing their history as a representation of characters, a setting, and a beginning, middle, and end. However, *brown girl dreaming* allows me to don a critical lens through which the past encompasses much more than one linear story. I can then acknowledge that history is not a "compressed past," a "singular interpretation" which "denies historical alternatives...complexities of motivation or causation" but as something dynamic and interpreted (Rosenstone 1174). In this spirit, Jackie's memories of her childhood challenges the perception of memory as one's singular story of facts. Instead, Jackie's "world" grows from listening to others and imagining for herself.

Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Mildred Taylor wrote *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in 1976. Taylor's Newbery winning classic is

one of the most widely-read novels in Language Arts classrooms. The title appears on the Common Core list of text exemplars, and until recently, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was on the text set list for the General Certificate of Secondary Education in the United Kingdom (Hardstaff). According to one children's literature scholar, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* remains one of the most universally known adolescent texts in her academic field. Similar to Jacqueline Woodson, who is a vocal admirer of *Roll of Thunder*, Mildred Taylor's work grew out of storytelling and her personal commitment to make sense of her southern roots and northern upbringing ("Mildred D. Taylor").

In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, protagonist Cassie Taylor tells the story of living as a 10-year-old Black girl in Mississippi during the Great Depression. It is 1933, and this text depicts various ways that white southerners responded to the perceived threat of new opportunities for Black people, such as those who earned an education, like Cassie's mother, and those who became landowners, like the Logan family. Readers confront the injustices of Cassie's childhood as they consider the various responses of white people, ranging from violence to indifference. Cassie narrates the story, a perspective that portrays childlike naiveté, anger, and incredulousness over the course of 1933. At one poignant moment in the story, the Logan family's disgruntled neighbor, Harlan Granger, appears unannounced in Mrs. Logan's classroom along with other members of the school board:

Mama seemed startled to see the men, but when Mr. Granger said, "Been hearing 'bout your teaching, Mary, so as members of the school board we thought we'd come by and learn something," she merely nodded and went on with her lesson. Mr. Wellevor left the room, returning shortly with three folding chairs for the visitors; he himself remained standing.

Mama was in the middle of history and I knew that was bad. I could tell Stacey knew it too; he sat tense near the back of the room, his lips very tight, his eyes on the men. But Mama did not flinch; she always started her history class the first thing in the

morning when the students were most alert, and I knew that the hour was not yet up. To make matters worse, her lesson for the day was slavery. She spoke on the cruelty of it; of the rich economic cycle it generated as slaves produced the raw products for the factories of the North and Europe; how the country profited and grew from the free labor of a people still not free.

Before she had finished, Mr. Granger picked up a student's book, flipped it open to the pasted-over front cover, and pursed his lips.

"Thought these books belonged to the county," he said, interrupting her. Mama glanced over at him, but did not reply. Mr. Granger turned the pages, stopped, and read something. "I don't see all them things you're teaching in here."

"That's because they're not in there," Mama said.

"Well, if it ain't in here, then you got no right teaching it. This book's approved by the Board of Education and you're expected to teach what's in it."

"I can't do that."

"And why not?"

Mama, her back straight and her eyes fixed on the men, answered, "Because all that's in that book isn't true." (139-140)

In the subsequent paragraphs, Mr. Granger berates Mrs. Logan for thinking herself "some kind of smart...to know more than the fellow who wrote that book" (140). She loses her job and the family's sudden lack of income jeopardizes the Logan family and their precious land.

Storytelling is a theme in the book, both in its influence on the actual writing of the work as well as the storytelling embedded in its narrative. The text itself is a product of telling stories. In her foreword, Mildred Taylor begins with the sentence, "My father was a master storyteller" (vii). She then shares that her novels are based on her father's oral histories about their ancestors' lives in the

South. It was from her father she learned “a history not then written in books.” Taylor attributes her father’s love for stories to her eventual love for writing. It is no surprise, then, that *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* contains multiple instances of storytelling among its characters. As Mildred Taylor’s father shared family stories, so Cassie listens to Big Ma’s oral histories of the Logan family. Stories find their way into several other major and minor plot points including: T.J.’s penchant for fibbing, books donated to Great Faith Elementary School, novels gifted to the children at Christmas, and the time T.J. peruses W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Negro* to cover his “cheat notes” just prior to scapegoating Stacey and fracturing their friendship.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry invites students to consider ethical ideas within its theme of storytelling, more particularly, *silenced* storytelling. In the excerpt above, book publishers and the county’s Board of Education – two institutions responsible for curriculum, the latter of which should be most concerned with the county’s children and their education – endeavor to obliterate a certain story. Historical “truth” in Depression Era Mississippi, students learn, is one marketed by those in power as a means of continued oppression. The history books and school board are not the only means of enforcing silence; Mrs. Logan’s colleagues accept that they should tolerate injustice, an acceptance manifested as the victims yield unquestioningly to the most powerful voices. Miss Crocker, a fellow teacher, remains continually suspicious toward Mrs. Logan, often attempting to justify her decisions to uphold the school board’s unjust practices. Through direct enforcement of a single story as well as leveraging power to impose actual belief in that story, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* asks middle schoolers to consider various ways storytelling may be silenced.

Indeed, *Roll of Thunder* demonstrates the connection between stories and power. History is selected and shared by a particular voice and students may recognize that stories come from *someone*. They might contemplate: how do we determine “validity” related to a historical event? How can we most fully understand events from the unobservable past? Can we name limitations to our perspective?

How do those in power silence history and stories? Why is this important to them? Such discussion may lead students to consider, in addition to that of the Logan family, other dominant and silenced stories, other cultural narratives selected and perpetuated. Recalling Adichie's lecture, how does the dominant culture promote a single story? Are listeners able to tell another story as Mrs. Logan does, or, like Miss Crocker, do they succumb to it, and why do they feel that they have to? Perhaps, students may note, one of the scariest ramifications of silenced story is through the resulting educations received by both dominant and marginalized cultures. What, I wonder, do the story-choosers, the story-tellers, and the story-hearers internalize?

Finally, in this passage, note that Mrs. Logan quite intentionally acts from her personal code of ethics as she teaches a silenced story anyway, unsurprised that it comes at great cost to her and her family. Further, she is ardently committed to the subject of history, always teaching it first thing in the morning, "when the students are still alert." History, this text teaches, takes precedence over all other content areas. In light of this moment in *Roll of Thunder*, recall Kozol's critique, his dismay at history's diminishing presence in our schools. For the teacher contemplating discussion around themes of silenced story, I encourage her to recognize that, even in Language Arts classrooms, books can support informed commitments to history and social studies.

Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

In the 1993 Newbery Award-winning dystopian novel, *The Giver*, Lois Lowry creates a community in which pain, difference, emotion, and memory have been removed to create "Sameness." As an author, Lowry is committed to telling stories that explore the importance of human connection ("Biography"). This is noticeable even among the variety of genres Lowry's works represent, from her other Newbery Award-winning book, the historical fiction *Number the Stars*, to *A Summer to Die*, the fictionalized account of Lowry's sister's early death. Lowry's range of texts poses big questions

set in widely varying contexts and plots.

In *The Giver*, protagonist Jonas, his “family unit,” and their “community” live and work in a highly ordered, predictable setting. Each December, the community observes a series of ceremonies for their society’s children. This begins as 50 “newchildren” are named and placed with family units whose applications have been approved for them to receive their first or second child (11). Each successive year, that group of children earns items and celebrates stages and contributions to their community. The December ceremonies include unique recognitions for every group of 50 children in the community. For example, at the Ceremony of Fours, children are given a jacket that buttons in the back “to learn interdependence” (40). At the Ceremony of the Nines, the children receive bicycles to mark independence and new responsibility (44). A group of Elders leads the community and performs, among others, the important task of observing before ultimately assigning children to a particular adult role within the community. The Chief Elder reveals those assignments at the final ceremony, the Ceremony of the Twelves. Upon each child’s “promotion,” the Chief Elder thanks the child for their childhood, marking the twelve-year old’s entrance into adulthood. *The Giver* begins as Jonas anticipates his Ceremony of the Twelves, unsure what he might be assigned to do. His Ceremony starts with the Chief Elder’s speech:

“This is the time,” she began, looking directly at them, “when we acknowledge difference. You Elevens have spent all your years till now learning to fit in, to standardize your behavior, to curb any impulse that might set you apart from the group.

“But today we honor your differences. They have determined your futures.” (51)

As it happens, Jonas is not “assigned,” but “selected” to be the next “Receiver of Memory.” In their community, the Receiver is the sole person responsible for holding the memories of all history until such a time that the Elders desire “wisdom” to help them make some decision. The Receiver is not allowed to disclose history, books, emotions, or any other ideas that disrupt “sameness.” As the Receiver-in-

Training, Jonas absorbs the memories of the previous Receiver, who now calls himself “The Giver.” In the course of his training, The Giver endows Jonas with memories comprising first experiences of concepts like color, pleasure, snow, sunshine, and love. Eventually, Jonas receives devastating ideas like pain, sunburn, grief, loss, war, and death. Jonas eventually equates “sameness” with ultimate “emptiness.” Jonas’s experience as the Receiver-in-Training marks a journey from oblivion to enlightenment. At first, he is innocuous to the ills of Sameness. Jonas justifies the idea, then begins to struggle with it, and eventually rejects Sameness, accepting the world as we know it while renouncing the one prescribed for and lived by everyone else in the community.

At the beginning of the novel, during his first days of “training,” Jonas supports the community’s standardized functioning; he knows no other option. Over time, he begins to notice more frequently new concepts he is learning through his time with The Giver, ideas such as “color” and “sunshine.” His “groupmates” and “family unit” are unable to see either of these. Jonas finally starts to question the community’s rejection of these ideas.

The Giver shrugged. “Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back. We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with differences.” He thought for a moment. “We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others.” (95)

Jonas first responds using his community’s logic, justifying their value for Sameness. He is not conflicted by the opposing views; he attempts to make space for both.

“But now that I can see colors, at least sometimes, I was thinking: what if we could hold up things that were bright red or bright yellow and [Baby Gabriel] could choose? Instead of Sameness.”

“He might make wrong choices.”

“Oh.” Jonas was silent for a minute. “Oh, I see what you mean. It wouldn’t matter for a newchild’s toy. But later it does matter, doesn’t it? We don’t dare to let people make choices of their own.”

“Not safe?” The Giver suggested.

“Definitely not safe,” Jonas said with certainty. “What if they were allowed to choose their own mate? And chose wrong?”

“Or what if,” he went on, almost laughing at the absurdity, “they chose their own jobs?”

“Frightening, isn’t it?” The Giver said.

Jonas chuckled. “Very frightening. I can’t even imagine it. We really have to protect people from wrong choices.”

“It’s safer.”

“Yes,” Jonas agreed. “Much safer.”

But when the conversation turned to other things, Jonas was left, still, with a feeling of frustration that he didn’t understand.

He found that he was often angry, now: irrationally angry at his groupmates, that they were satisfied with their lives which had none of the vibrance his own was taking on. And he was angry at himself, that he could not change that for them.” (98)

In this passage, as Jonas considers a baby’s future as it relates to choice, he begins to experience – also for the first time – an internal struggle. Prior to his irrational anger, Jonas sees himself as an agent. He confirms absurdity at the notion of change, assuming he necessarily must provide protection for community members. He gives a cursory nod to imagination, unable to “imagine” his community enjoying *choice*. At this point in the story, Jonas has no imagination. He cannot yet conceive of any alternative way of living; he has no ability to imagine otherwise. This realization is an ironic one; indeed,

it is apparent that the community fundamentally opposes imagination. Within their mode of operations, there can be no choice, no vision, no knowledge. There can only be control. Eventually, Jonas starts to recognize the community's values: safety over choice, painlessness over relationships, contentment over understanding and knowledge. Though the end of this excerpt signals Jonas's ultimate dilemma – irrational anger toward the community's ignorant contentment juxtaposed against the “vibrance his [life] was taking on” – he feels powerless to do anything about it. Eventually, Jonas brings this juxtaposition into his “dwelling” and among his “family unit.” Following a moment after The Giver shares with Jonas the memory of an extended family sharing Christmas together:

Jonas blurted out what he was feeling. “I was thinking that...well, I can see that it wasn't a very practical way to live, with the Old right there in the same place, where maybe they wouldn't be well taken care of, the way they are now, and that we have a better-arranged way of doing things. But anyway, I was thinking, I mean feeling, actually, that it was kind of nice, then. And that I wish we could be that way, and that you could be my grandparent. The family in the memory seemed a little more—” He faltered, not able to find the word he wanted.

“A little more complete,” The Giver suggested.

Jonas nodded. “I liked the feeling of love,” he confessed. He glanced nervously at the speaker on the wall, reassuring himself that no one was listening. “I wish we still had that,” he whispered. “Of course,” he added quickly, “I do understand that it wouldn't work very well. And that it's much better to be organized the way we are now. I can see that it was a dangerous way to live.”

“What do you mean?”

Jonas hesitated. He wasn't certain, really, what he had meant. He could feel that there was risk involved, though he wasn't sure how. “Well,” he said finally, grasping for

an explanation, “they had fire right there in that room. There was a fire burning in the fireplace. And there were candles on a table, I can certainly see why those things were outlawed.

“Still,” he said slowly to himself, “I did like the light they made. And the warmth.”

“Father? Mother?” Jonas asked tentatively after the evening meal. “I have a question I want to ask you.”

“What is it, Jonas?” his father asked.

He made himself say the words, though he felt flushed with embarrassment. He had rehearsed them in his mind all the way home from the Annex.

“Do you love me?”

There was an awkward silence for a moment. Then Father gave a little chuckle.

“Jonas. You, of all people. Precision of language, please!”

“What do you mean?” Jonas asked. Amusement was not at all what he had anticipated.

“Your father means that you used a very generalized word, so meaningless that it’s become almost obsolete,” his mother explained carefully.

Jonas stared at them. Meaningless? He had never before felt anything as meaningful as the memory.

“And of course our community can’t function smoothly if people don’t use precise language. You could ask, ‘Do you enjoy me?’ The answer is ‘Yes,’” his mother said.

“Or,” his father suggested. “‘Do you take pride in my accomplishments?’ And the answer is wholeheartedly ‘Yes.’”

“Do you understand why it’s inappropriate to use a word like ‘love’?” Mother asked.

(125-126)

Through this heart wrenching passage, Jonas begins, at last, to turn away from the community's ideals. After receiving the memory of Christmas and love, Jonas determines, initially, to justify elimination of these concepts. He names fire and candles as "risks," he wonders whether love and family outweigh certain "dangers." However, Jonas also acknowledges the alternative values associated with the dangers: warmth, light, completeness. He experiences powerful rejection when he reveals some of his struggle to those closest to him. His mother and father insist he use "appropriate" words rather than "obsolete" ones. However, that which is "appropriate" in the community is ultimately limited and Jonas finally recognizes that insistence on "precise language" is deeply problematic: this standard imposes a horrific form of oppression. Requiring "precise language" undermines meaning and intent, relegating Jonas and his family to the most limited and narrow human experience possible. Through this realization, Jonas begins to see clearly the inhumane aspects of the community's way of life.

Interestingly, Osmer and Salazar-Newton specifically address dystopian fiction like *The Giver*. Recall their final, profound claim in "The Practice of Reading and the Formation of the Moral Imagination." The authors assert that literature may "subvert the taken-for-granted reality of readers' everyday lives. It does so by inviting readers to imagine things otherwise" (63). The authors' elaboration includes the suggestion that utopian and dystopian literature are particularly suited to this possibility. They summarize Tom Moylan's assertion that dystopian fiction manifests "this ability to register the impact of an unseen and unexamined social system...the dystopian text opens in the midst of a social 'elsewhere' that appears to be far worse than any in the 'real' world" (64). Eventually, the protagonist begins to "recognize the situation for what it really is" and the reader is able to experience the character's growing consciousness in attempting to reconcile the dystopian world around her. In other words, reading texts like *The Giver* provides the added bonus of examining a society whose extreme, distorted values clearly illustrate an inhumane ethic in the midst of a highly "believable"

literary world. As Jonas “grows in consciousness,” readers may consider the manner by which values shape human experience.

The Giver is read frequently in middle grades Language Arts classrooms and undoubtedly invites reflection on values and contemporary societal norms. I think it additionally provides the opportunity to think about morality in two unique ways: weak imagining and the representation of acquiring a moral imagination. As readers experience Jonas’s maturing consciousness, the character of The Giver provides contrasting weak imagining. He represents cynicism and unconsciousness. He demonstrates pity and asserts his belief that he is unequipped to act on his criticisms of the community’s operations. The Giver portrays a limited moral sense whereby he repeatedly assumes the role of moral agent, viewing his position as a burden bearer, unable to share knowledge he alone has carried. Consider his name, “The Giver.” He renames himself based on his perception that he is in control, however tormented, and must uphold safety, perpetuating Sameness. The Giver also acknowledges his inherent honor among members of the community, but never opts to confront the system. Eventually, The Giver chooses to work with Jonas to “let the memories loose” and to “free” the community, but this involvement comes at Jonas’s suggestion. The Giver volunteers to remain behind to help the community deal with the chaos. He knows he has power, and sees his role as sacrificial, benevolent. However, he never sees humanity in the people of the community, at least not to the extent that he offers to uphold it. This is especially frustrating as readers see that The Giver is the most equipped and able to comprehend it. The Giver’s role, then, is tainted by his belief that without guidance, members of the community might “assimilate” Jonas’s memories. The Giver, like those he criticizes, has assimilated. In fact, his assimilation may be worse because he is not ignorant. He holds knowledge, but it has never prompted response. The Giver, too, rejects discomfort, thereby refusing to acknowledge the values of memory, human connection, and understanding. The Giver embodies weak imagination, a version of moral unconsciousness.

At the same time, Jonas's character provides a very specific example of moral imagination. From the Ceremony when he is selected as the next Receiver, the Chief Elder tells the community that he has "the Capacity to See Beyond," although she is clear that they are unable to know what this means (63). As Jonas begins to recognize the system around him, he starts to see beyond, he begins to *imagine otherwise*. Through his growing awareness, Jonas assumes an increasingly critical perspective and ultimately acts on his new understanding. The end of *The Giver* depicts Jonas and Baby Gabriel riding away from the community to "Elsewhere," releasing memories back to the community as he runs, consciously, toward an unknown future (180). His rescuing – or perhaps, kidnapping? – Baby Gabriel in order to start life anew displays an action arising from a code Jonas developed over the course of the novel. Jonas demonstrates the greatest change in the book. From mere "Capacity" to imagine to one which prompts response, Jonas symbolizes consciousness.

The three texts above: *brown girl dreaming*, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and *The Giver* represent great middle school texts that provide adolescent readers opportunities to process ideas related to ethics and moral consciousness. *brown girl dreaming* invites students to re-consider memory and truth. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, middle schoolers may recognize and discuss the relationship between power and history. Students also experience Mrs. Logan's conviction in action as she subverts attempts to silence history. *The Giver* provides both an example of weak imagining and a conception of unconsciousness giving way to strong moral imagination. It is my hope that teachers familiar and unfamiliar with these books see in each the invitation great books provide to our students to imagine otherwise.

Conclusion / *Tuck Everlasting*

I am fortunate, right now, to teach in a school that allows me to share novels with my students during our Language Arts class. Even so, I still like to read aloud to them a few minutes each day. My book selections change from year to year, but there is one I read to them annually, usually in the spring, and usually when everyone is tired and aggravated. Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* never fails to invite a really special experience with my students. I was introduced to this short, lovely book when I was in the Children's Literature course that prompted me, months later, to become an Education Major during my undergraduate days. I remember my professor mentioning to us that *Tuck Everlasting* was named the "most influential book of the 20th century." I'm not sure whether that is true, or if I'd even agree with that assessment, but I find the little book so compelling and I love to read it with my classes.

"Life's got to be lived, no matter how long or how short,' she said calmly" (54). *Tuck Everlasting* is about a girl, Winnie, who learns about life and death through the lives of a family, four people who do not age and cannot die. The Tuck family, Winnie learns, convenes every ten years near Treegap, where they accidentally discovered a fountain of youth on Winnie's ancestors' property. Winnie escapes her boring, subservient existence in her family home, meets the Tucks, and they bond through a kidnapping, a murder, and a prison escape. The book explores each character's relationship with immortality. Jesse and Miles represent the ignorance of youth and the bitterness of a disenchanting life. Mae and "Tuck" (the father) are lonely and weary, and they treat Winnie with more affection and love than she has known in her "touch-me-not" cottage (7).

Wrapped around the story is some of the most beautiful, lilting prose I have read. Babbitt's text is full of imagery and symbolism, much of which my students miss or, at least, they do not identify. The Tuck family's dialect feels old-fashioned to my students and the plot is unveiled through a long telling of just a few hours. It is not fast paced, and does not "hook" them in the first chapter. And this is okay. As my students listen to the first pages, I sense their initial indifference, followed by their confusion, and

around the fourth or fifth chapter, intrigue gives way to entrancement as each of them learns, through Winnie, to adore these characters. One my students, today, said, *Tuck Everlasting* “was so good, it felt like it needed to be real.”

At the climax of the book, Winnie helps the Tucks avert a crisis threatening exposure and publicity of their immortality, which they agree cannot be exploited or publicly revealed. Just as they leave Treegap, Jesse presents a vial of the water to Winnie and asks her to consider drinking it when she is older, so that they can marry and spend their forever youthfulness seeing the world. At the end of the book, Winnie pours Jesse’s water onto a parched toad and, in passing, reminds him – and the reader – that she can go to the spring any time she chooses to drink the water that will keep her young forever. This is the final event in the closing chapter of the story.

Today, I read this chapter to my students and, as I do every year when we arrive at this point, I asked them to answer two questions in a short, written reflection: *Do they predict Winnie will drink the water? Would they drink the water if they could?* My students spent a very quiet and diligent few minutes writing, I collected their responses, and we gathered back together to read the epilogue. The epilogue is one of my favorite final chapters in any novel I have ever read. It opens as Ma and Tuck enter Treegap during what is clearly many decades later. After a walk through the town, Tuck finds a cemetery and a tombstone with an epitaph revealing that Winnie never drank the water (138). She lived a long, full life, and then she died. In one of the most powerful literary images I know, Tuck stands over Winnie’s grave, deeply moved, and utters aloud, “good girl.” As we finished the book today, just as I anticipated, the weight of the book’s ending was palpable, as much for the students in their first reading as it was for me in my 8th or 9th or 10th.

What is always remarkable to me – in addition to the experience of sharing this story together, of sharing those final pages with each new group of students – is reading through their responses to those two questions: *Will Winnie drink the water? Would you?* Today, as always, *most* of my students

provided the same answers, despite the fact that they responded without discussion. Of the 17 students present today, all but three predicted that Winnie would drink the water, find Jesse, and the two would live happily ever after. Then, just as I anticipated, 12 of the students admitted that, given the chance to escape death, they *would not* take it. They gave a variety of reasons: not wanting to outlive everyone they know, loneliness, boredom, hoping to experience the range of life's events, reasons related to God and heaven, and a few profoundly perceptive thoughts: "just because you can't die doesn't mean you don't feel pain" and "I think that it is normal to die. It is not that pleasant to talk about, I will admit, but everyone except for the Tucks die [sic]. I would want to live a good life."

So why this disparity? While the book communicates pretty clearly that life is a cycle, a gift, a responsibility, and that immortality represents something "stuck" and empty, my students choose the opposite option for Winnie as for themselves. I have a theory. As far as Winnie is concerned, they overwhelmingly expect her to drink the water. I wonder if this is founded in some conditioning – through certain stories like fairy tales – that teaches them that living forever is a "happy ending." No one wants to think about death, let alone choose it! But for my students, *as people*, they say "no," they reject for themselves the perceived fairy tale ending they would give the beloved Winnie. Then, as I asked after reading today, my students acknowledge their surprise that Winnie chose exactly what we all deeply hoped she would choose.

This disparity, to me, is what it looks like for my students to engage their moral imaginations. As together we consider the idea of life and living without death, my students – thanks to Natalie Babbitt – reflect on one "orthodox sense" of immortality. In *Tuck Everlasting*, the man in the yellow suit represents this sense, having spent his life studying the properties of the water, then searching for and chasing after the Tuck Family. As my students consider this, I watch as they ultimately reject it, having imagined, for a few pages, "everlasting" as *something otherwise*. Natalie Babbitt has invited them to consider life without death. In fact, one of my students said that she wonders if the inevitability of

death allows us to more intentionally live in light of recognizing that “we really don’t have forever.” Just before my students left today, I asked them to think about a particular question over the weekend. It was this: *We do not know what Winnie’s life was like between the end of the last chapter and the epilogue, Winnie as a young girl and Tuck’s graveside “good girl” 70 years later. What do you imagine – during those years – Winnie considered as she lived her life?* I have never asked this question before and I am not sure how my students might respond. I will find out on Monday.

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