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Engendering Empathy for Immigrants in Middle Grade Readers Through Culturally Relevant Young Adult Literature

Amy J. Cattapan

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ENGENDERING EMPATHY FOR IMMIGRANTS IN MIDDLE GRADE READERS
THROUGH CULTURALLY RELEVANT YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

AMY J. CATTAPAN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2020

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uncovered the ways through which culturally relevant young adult literature (YAL) engenders empathy for immigrants in middle grade readers. Empathy was displayed through both affective and cognitive responses and resulted in mirror and window moments (Bishop, 1990) as well as crystallizing experiences. Their empathetic responses led students to apply critical literacy skills to issues related to stereotypes, racism, discrimination, and immigration policies.

I conducted a qualitative case study to examine the ways in which reading and discussing YAL about immigrants created empathy in eighth graders in a culturally and linguistically diverse middle school and in what ways it promoted their critical thinking about immigration. I conducted classroom observations, document analysis of student assignments, and student interviews. With a critical literacy lens, I coded the data to discover the reasons behind the students' empathetic responses.

The study revealed that students' strongest empathetic responses came when they related to the experiences of the characters. While past studies on culturally relevant YAL focused on areas of relevance described by Ebe (as cited in Hickey & Hopenwasser, 2013), these students responded more to experiences they could relate to, such as dealing with siblings, bullies, or losing a family member. Another new finding of this study adds to Bishop's (1990) work on mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Participants in this study saw themselves or their immigrant parents reflected in the book, but the books also

expanded their understanding of what they already knew. The books acted like prismatic crystals, both reflecting and refracting their experiences. Furthermore, just as a crystal is defined as a solid with a particular atom structure, it was also the internal structure of these novels (i.e. the way the authors wrote) that clarified the students' understanding and created crystallizing experiences for them.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“The historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like.”

-E.L. Doctorow, 2006 (as cited in Grossman, 2006, para. 6)

Introduction

During the 2007-2008 school year, I was one of two eighth grade reading and language arts teachers at my public middle school in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city. One of our units was a cross-curricular unit on immigration taught in conjunction with the social studies teacher. At that time, I taught reading and language arts in a double-period block so that I saw the students for 80 minutes, during which we would cover both the reading and the writing tasks related to this unit. The unit focused on the major immigration period in the United States in the early 1900s (known as the Great Immigration) that had millions of people (including my own grandparents and great grandparents) entering through Ellis Island. The chosen novel for the reading class component of this unit was *Letters from Rifka*, a tale about a young Russian Jewish girl immigrating to the United States at this same time (Hesse, 1992). The book had been part of the reading curriculum for at least ten years prior to my arrival at the school and was likely adopted following its publication in the early- to mid-1990s.

At that time, the school population included a large number of Jewish families, which made up about 50% of the total population of this suburban town (Holli & D'alroy,

1995). Therefore, a good number of the students could imagine that the main character Rifka might have been their own grandmother or great-grandmother. However, the population at the school has changed considerably over the last twenty years. In 2019, we had immigrant families from countries such as Romania, Croatia, Afghanistan, India, the Philippines, Pakistan, China, Vietnam, and Korea, as well as from Central and South American countries, such as Guatemala, Ecuador, and Mexico. According to the school's 2018 state report card, the student population was 50.9% white and 49.1% non-White. The largest non-White demographic group was Asian (37%), followed by Hispanic (6%), two or more races (3.3%), black (2.6%), and Pacific Islander or American Indian (0.6%). For the 2019-2020 school year, the home language survey results showed 41 different languages spoken in the homes of the middle school students. After English (listed as the home language of 141 families), the most frequent languages were Urdu (45), Spanish (36), Assyrian (31), Romanian (28), Arabic (24), Vietnamese (22), and Tagalog (10).

Since ELA was a double-period block in 2007-2008, I could only teach about half of the eighth-grade students. In other words, I taught about 65 of the approximately 140 students. A second ELA teacher on the eighth-grade team taught most of the remaining students, with another teaching one class of eighth graders who qualified for the advanced/gifted level. One day during the Immigration Unit, my partner ELA teacher made a remark about how many of our students were immigrants themselves and that their immigration experiences (or that of their parents) were vastly different from that of the European immigrants who entered through Ellis Island one hundred years earlier. She

made a comment to the effect that it seemed a bit ironic that we were *teaching* immigrants about immigration.

At the same time, I was working on a master's degree in language arts instruction, which included a class on multicultural children's literature that focused on introducing into the classroom books that depict the diversity within the community (Fleming, 2016). Eager to add more multicultural literature to my classroom, I asked for three new sets of novels so that I could create a literature circles project with different groups reading different immigration stories. Some students read *Letters from Rifka*, but others read *Crossing the Wire* (a Mexican immigrant story by Will Hobbs, 2007), *Dragon's Gate* (a Chinese immigration novel by Laurence Yep, 1995), or *Ashes from Roses* (an Irish immigration novel by M.J. Auch, 2002). Even at the time, I knew it was not the best diversity in literature (if I had had more time, I would have sought out a Middle Eastern immigration story as well), but I thought it was better to have at least some cultural diversity instead of none.

The next year, I taught the advanced/gifted level students at all three grade levels (sixth, seventh, and eighth) since the previous teacher had just retired. A few years later, I was moved to teaching only sixth grade reading and language arts (at both the advanced/gifted and regular levels), and the teachers who took over the eighth-grade position after me dropped any of the multicultural novels I had brought in and went back to using only *Letters from Rifka* (Hesse, 1992) for the regular reading classes and *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair (2001) for the advanced/gifted class. The latter title was neither YAL nor culturally relevant for the student population at this school.

In 2017, Mrs. Carlson (pseudonym) was hired to be the new eighth-grade reading teacher. Due to my interest in bringing culturally relevant texts into the classroom and the district's policy that teachers must share what they learn from their graduate studies with their colleagues, I shared with Mrs. Carlson what I was learning about culturally relevant texts and their role within the reading curriculum. She seemed eager to learn more and to read a couple of the assignments I had completed regarding novel selections in reading classes. Like every ELA teacher, Mrs. Carlson faced the challenging decision-making process of choosing new novels for her classroom. With these ideas in mind, I examined how a reading teacher used culturally relevant YA novels to engender empathy for immigrants in middle grade readers.

Problem Statement

Premised by my own experience as a middle school ELA teacher in a diversifying community, this study involved two problems facing ELA teachers. The first problem was that of continued prejudice against immigrants in the United States – both in our society in general and within schools. The second problem was how teachers might incorporate culturally relevant YAL into the classroom (often breaking from the canon) and how those choices might lead to discussing matters of social justice, such as the treatment of immigrants. In this section, I examine the relevant issues regarding immigrants and literature selection.

Immigration Issues

The United States has been a country of immigrants since its beginning (Timberlake & Williams, 2012). Despite it being the bedrock of our country, prejudice

against immigrants, especially particular ethnic and religious groups of immigrants at particular times, has persisted. As a result, immigration reform is a topic that is often discussed. Daily news programs, online journalism, and even our social media feeds are filled with stories about what should or should not be done for (or to) the immigrants at and within our borders.

History of Prejudice Against Immigrants in the United States

The United States is a nation of immigrants (Brown, 2010; Graff, 2010; Maples & Groenke, 2009; Murray & Marx, 2013; Sembiente, Baxley, & Cavallaro, 2018; Timberlake & Williams, 2012). In 2014, the United States had 5.4 million American Indians and Alaskan Natives (US Census Bureau, 2018). This included those of more than one race. This put the total of Native Americans at only about 2 percent of the total population. That means about 98% of the nation's population was either immigrants or descendants of immigrants. They may be many generations removed from their immigrant ancestors, but their heritage is still tied back to a country outside of the land that is now called the United States.

Because of this immigrant history, the United States has had a complex history with different groups of immigrants coming for different reasons (Brown, 2010; Maples & Groenke, 2009). No matter what their reason for immigrating, immigrants throughout the generations have often suffered from the negative stereotypes that have persisted against them (Brown, 2010; Gay, 2018; Graff, 2010; Maples & Groenke, 2009; Murray & Marx, 2013; Sembiente, Baxley, & Cavallaro, 2018). In fact, the prejudice one sees against immigrants today is not much different from the past, with the prime target

usually being the newest ethnic or cultural group to enter the country in large numbers (Brown, 2010). The first major wave of immigration to the United States after the Revolutionary War brought immigrants mostly from the United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavia, and Ireland (Brown, 2010). The second wave, known as the Great Immigration, brought Italians, Poles, Jews, and Eastern Europeans, whose darker skin and different religious affiliations caused suspicion among the earlier immigrants (Brown, 2010). While these southern and eastern Europeans entered through Ellis Island, Chinese immigrants who entered through the West and Mexicans who came through the South encountered even more discrimination (Brown, 2010).

Current Perception of Immigrants Within the United States

Even with such a long history of immigrants coming into our country, prejudice against them persists. This is particularly true for immigrants who are undocumented. In fact, concern over undocumented immigrants has been growing as indicated by a 2001 poll that revealed only 28% of U.S. residents expressing concern over undocumented immigrants while a 2007 poll indicated 45% of residents being concerned (Murray & Marx, 2012). About 80% of the U.S. undocumented immigrants are of Hispanic origin (Lopez, Morin, & Taylor, 2010). A 2010 survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center revealed that Latinos are not in agreement about whether these undocumented immigrants should be deported or not. Only 13% say they should be deported, while 28% says they should not be punished at all, and 53% say they should pay a fine but not be deported (Lopez et al., 2010). In other words, there is little agreement about how undocumented immigrants should be treated.

How the Media Contributes to Perceptions. The media adds to negative perceptions by portraying immigrants as a collective ethnic group instead of as individuals (Christoph, 2012). Journalists, especially those in television, tend to favor news that sensationalizes topics (Christoph, 2012). This leads to incomplete or biased news stories that paint immigrants in a negative light. Furthermore, less than 10% of U.S. journalists covering the immigration issue are of Latin American origin, which may account for part of the bias against immigrants from those regions in the news (Benson, 2016). The marginalization of diverse voices within the media only perpetuates the showcasing of anti-immigrant sentiments in the news.

The words that reporters use make a difference as well. For example, someone fleeing one country for another might be called either an *immigrant* or a *refugee*. In contrast to international outlets, U.S. newspapers use the term *immigrant* for someone who would otherwise be seen as a *refugee* (Hoewe, 2018). The Associated Press (AP) defines immigrants as individuals moving “from place to place for temporary work or economic advantage” whereas refugees are defined as “a person who is forced to leave his or her home or country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster” (Associated Press as cited in Hoewe, 2018, p. 487). When U.S. journalists misuse terms, people fleeing dangerous or deadly situations are framed as making choices to move for reasons not life-threatening. Further, news stories erroneously using the term immigrant to describe those fleeing from wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan were more likely to mention terrorists and terrorism, thus making negative connotations between refugees and terrorists (Hoewe, 2018). To further complicate matters, some reporters use the term

illegal immigrant, which has a pejorative tone, while others use the term *unauthorized immigrant* or *undocumented immigrant*, which have a less negative connotation (Timberlake & Williams, 2012).

Prejudice Against Immigrants in Schools Since 9/11. Many educators have documented how prejudices against immigrants have played out in schools in the years since 9/11 (Gay, 2018; Graff, 2013; Maples & Groenke, 2009; Miranda, 2017; Murray & Marx, 2013). Graff (2013) interviewed students in grades 3-8 regarding their opinions on immigrants and found that student opinions mirrored that of the community at large; namely, they believed that immigrants are the root of society's problems and they wanted a monolingual society. JoEllen Groenke (Maples & Groenke, 2009) discovered that her students made stereotypical negative comments toward recent immigrants in her Tennessee school. One student referred to another student as a "wetback" and a "Mexican" (p. 28). When the student retorted that he was from Brazil and an American, the student repeated a comment from his parents that "if Mexicans are here illegally they shouldn't be here because they are not Americans" (p. 28). These kinds of racist comments demonstrate how young students can be easily influenced and confused by racist comments they hear from parents.

How long a student's family has been in the U.S. can also affect the amount of prejudicial attitudes he or she displays. For example, when Murray and Marx (2012) looked at attitudes towards undocumented immigrants, documented immigrants, and refugees, they also examined how those attitudes varied based on a participant's own generational status. Generational status refers to how many generations back one traces

his ancestry in order to find a non-native born family member. The study revealed that “as generational status increased, participants become more prejudiced toward refugees” (p. 337). In other words, the longer that the family has lived in the U.S. generationally, the greater the chance the student will be prejudiced against refugees.

Impact of Recent Immigration Policies on Students. Recent laws and policies within the United States have contributed even further to negative attitudes toward immigrants (Miranda, 2017; Rogers, Franke, Yun, Ishimoto, Diera, Geller, Berryman, & Brenes, 2017). Rogers et al. (2017) conducted a survey of 1,535 teachers from U.S. public high schools to determine the concerns students had over policies implemented by the recently elected Donald Trump. The survey focused on the teachers’ perceptions of student experiences from January-May 2017. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 35 social studies and English teachers in July and August 2017. The survey results revealed that 58% of the teachers reported their students being concerned over the deportation of undocumented immigrants. Jeff Seuss, a social studies teacher from Nebraska, stated that his students were in “survival mode” since they felt that “at any time they could be possibly picked up by the police and deported to a country they didn’t even grow up in” (Rogers et al., 2017, p. 8). Nicole Morris, a social studies teacher in Utah, overheard students talking about what they would do if their undocumented parents were deported. They wondered if they would stay in the United States at all, and if they did, how they would survive. The survey also revealed that 27.7% of the teachers heard more derogatory remarks being made about other groups during class discussions, and 51.4% reported that more students experienced anxiety and high stress than in previous

years. Jordan Smith, a social studies teacher from North Carolina, said that local news reports regarding Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents picking up undocumented parents while dropping off students at school had dramatically increased the anxiety level of his students.

Changing Demographics Within the United States in Recent Years

As stated earlier, the United States is a country of immigrants, and that immigrant population continues to grow. In 2017, the U.S. reached a record high of 44.4 million immigrants living within the country (Radford & Noe-Bustamente, 2019). That made immigrants 13.6% of the U.S. population. This is a sharp increase from 1960 when 9.7 million immigrants made up 5.4% of the total population (Radford & Noe-Bustamente, 2019). According to the Pew Research Center, the number of immigrants living in the U.S. is expected to double by 2065 (Radford & Noe-Bustamente, 2019).

In addition to increasing in overall numbers, the cultural background of these immigrants is shifting as well. This shift began in 1965 after the Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed (Radford & Noe-Bustamente, 2019). In 1960, 84% of immigrants in the U.S. were born in Europe or Canada, 6% came from Mexico, 3.8% came from South and East Asia, and 3.5% came from other Latin American countries. However, in 2017, only 13.2% of immigrants living in the U.S. came from Europe or Canada. Meanwhile, 27.4% came from South and East Asia, 25.3% came from Mexico, and 25.1% came from other Latin American countries. In addition to all these immigrant groups increasing, 12% of the U.S. population is now comprised of the U.S.-born children of immigrants (Radford & Noe-Bustamente, 2019). Other recent polls state that

between 20-23% of children in U.S. schools are either immigrants or children of recent immigrants (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011; Graff, 2010; Sembiente, Baxley, & Cavallaro, 2018). As of 2014, White children became the minority in U.S. schools (Krogstad & Fry, 2014).

These changing demographics need to be reflected in the literature used in the classroom, with teachers choosing books representing more than the European cultures of White students. In urban and urban-like suburban schools where the number of immigrant students is on the rise, there is a need for texts that reflect the diversifying population (Fleming, Catapano, Thompson, & Carrillo, 2016). Illinois, the state where this study takes place, is one of six U.S. states that hold the majority of the undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Pew Center Research, 2019). In 2016, Illinois had approximately 400,000 undocumented immigrants (Pew Center Research, 2019). If U.S. educators such as myself are going to include novels that reflect our student populations, then the literature we choose in our classrooms must reflect the diversity of the students within them.

Literature Selection Issues

Every year middle school ELA teachers across the country make decisions about what books their students will read. Often these decisions are based on what has been read in the past and the experiences of the teacher (Hays, 2017; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). The result is that the same books ends up being read year after year, so that the classics that have been part of the canon for decades continue to be read while young adult literature (YAL) struggles to find its place in the curriculum.

The Canon vs. Young Adult Literature

In the world of education, the term YAL is a relatively new one (Buehler, 2016; Hayn, Kaplan, & Nolen, 2011; Klems, 2017; Santoli & Wagner, 2004; Strickland, 2015). It first appeared in the 1970s with key authors such as Lois Duncan, Robert Cormier, and Judy Blume (Strickland, 2015). Since then, those in the publishing industry have struggled to define exactly what it is. Generally, YAL is seen as literature in which there is a teenaged protagonist who has a coming-of-age experience but not necessarily a storybook happy ending (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016). Buehler (2016) acknowledges the difficulty in pinpointing how the term YAL is to be applied. Is it a literary form? Is it a sales category or marketing division to help booksellers and librarians know how to shelve them? Can these books be both “engaging and accessible” yet “lengthy and difficult” (Buehler, 2016, p. 27)?

To make matters worse, confusion often exists between the terms *young adult* and *middle grade* when it comes to literature. Teachers, parents, and academics tend to blur the lines between them; however, the publishing industry draws clear distinctions (Klems, 2017). Middle grade literature is aimed at ages 8-12, with a protagonist around 10-13 years old. The story is often told in third person, runs 30,000-50,000 words, and focuses on their immediate world, especially relationships with friends and family (Klems, 2017). In contrast, YAL is often told in first person, is aimed at ages 13-18, and runs 50,000-75,000 words. The main character is usually a teen, and the topics tend to be more mature with a focus on how the protagonist fits into the larger world beyond family and friends.

Part of the confusion with the distinction between these two terms is that both books are likely to be read by middle school students, depending on their age, maturity level, and interests. In this study, the term YAL encompasses young adult and upper middle grade books since the books discussed in this study cover both age categories, a variety of word lengths, and varying degrees of maturity when it comes to handling tough topics. Hays (2017) used the term YAL to refer to books for ages 12-20 in which an adolescent character must deal with adult issues. For the purpose of my study, I use the term YAL in the same spirit to mean books that might be read by middle schoolers and teenagers in which the main character is a teen or preteen who deals with complex issues.

Long before YAL became a part of the publishing world, the literature included in the reading classroom included texts that might be defined as *classics*, or the *canon*. Santoli and Wagner (2004) defined the term classic literature as “novels that have been traditionally used in English language arts classrooms because of a belief in their timelessness, such as *Great Expectations*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and similar works” (p. 66). Historically, the decision makers who selected these texts were White men, such as when Harvard president Dr. Charles Eliot chaired the Committee of Ten and suggested a list of classics like those he had read as a boy (Monnin, 2013).

Other definitions of classics exist that might provide some implied reasons for why reading teachers should include YAL in the classroom. For example, Gallo (2001) offers a bit of a tongue-in-cheek definition when he states that one of his former college students defined a classic as a book that “requires a teacher to figure out a glimmer of what it says” (p. 33). This definition says a great deal about how students view classics.

Clearly, they can be hard to understand if they require a teacher's assistance to understand even a "glimmer" of it. Young readers might find classics challenging for many reasons. First, they simply might not be able to relate to the adult character, the setting, or the context of the story in a way that makes the story understandable (Gallo, 2001; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012; White, 2000). Second, classics often do not have the exciting beginnings, or hooks, that contemporary YAL has, and thus students might want to put the book down within the first chapter (Gallo, 2001). Third, classic novels tend to get bogged down with "dull, lengthy descriptions" that may pull a young reader's attention away from the plot (Gallo, 2001, p. 36). Finally, classics tend to have more complex plots, lengthier sentences, and older vocabulary words that are not readily familiar to young readers.

At the time YAL hit the publishing world and libraries, changes were happening in American education (Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). During the 1970s and 1980s, education experts questioned old behavioral theories; they moved from focusing on simple decoding strategies to "authentic" experiences with "real literature" (Raphael & McMahon, 1994, p. 102). For example, there was a push to incorporate literature-based reading instruction in a form similar to book clubs, which led to teachers using literature circles. In this sense, the theorists were making use of social constructivist ideas, which focus on learning as a social process (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). In these literature circles, readers can learn by interacting with the text and one another.

Also during this time, educators expressed a renewed interest in reader-response theory, which may have led to the introduction of YAL in classrooms (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). Reader-response theory came from Louise Rosenblatt's (1938) *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem* in which she outlined her Literary Transaction Theory. Rosenblatt believed that every reader brings his or her own set of background experiences to the reading of a text, and these experiences have an impact on how the reader interprets the text (Allen, 1988; Cain, 2015; Lewis, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1938). If a reader's experiences change, then her interpretation of a text might change as well. In other words, there is a transaction that occurs when the reader is engaged with a text.

Rosenblatt also introduced her ideas about the difference between efferent and aesthetic reading (Allen, 1988; Cain, 2015; Flynn, 2007; Lewis, 2000; Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016). Efferent reading means reading in order to derive information from the reading (Cain, 2015). It is more about reading for information than reading for an emotional experience (Miller, 2000). In contrast, an aesthetic reading entails "the experience of the reading, the feelings and images that flow with the words" (Cain, 2015, p. 68). An aesthetic reading is tied to the personal, emotional experience of the reader (Miller, 2000). It is less about gathering facts and more about what is happening in the moment that the reader is engaging in the text. That is not to say that one reads one text purely for efferent reasons and a different text for aesthetic reasons. Instead, the efferent and aesthetic stances reside on a continuum (Lewis, 2000). In fact, Rosenblatt (1994) suggested that teachers should teach students to read for both reasons. A reader can take information away from a text while simultaneously enjoying the experience of reading it.

When a renewed interest in reader-response theory developed toward the end of the twentieth century, teachers began to see value in students reading novels that they actually had a connection with and reaction to. For some students, reading YAL helped “unlock doors of resistance to reading and resistance to learning” (Karr & Julian, 1999, p. 39) because they were able to make connections with those books. Bishop (2007) echoes this idea: “For literature to be meaningful, there must be a relationship between the readers and the characters in the books and stories they read” (p. 27). In other words, YAL (books with teens as the main characters) appeared on the literary scene at a time that teachers were searching for books that their students would create meaningful engagement for them.

Young Adult Literature for Critical Literacy. Critical literacy is the concept of using the written word to examine our world within its current historical position in such a way as to critique and analyze it for the purpose of some greater good. (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Bishop, 2014; Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015). In the classroom, the purpose of critical literacy is to help students analyze the texts that they read in order to think critically about the world around them (Bean & Moni, 2003; Christensen, 2000; Cummins, 2013; Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis, 2015; Wolk, 2009). Furthermore, when YAL is read through a critical lens, students can learn to recognize the beliefs that the author brings to the text as well as the beliefs that they bring as readers (Cummins, 2013). Students can do this by reflecting on their own beliefs before, during, and after reading the text, using reading journals or logs to facilitate reflective thinking. In addition to recognizing their own ideologies, students should seek to identify the ideologies of the

authors. What might the authors be trying to say about the power structures within society? The purpose of critical literacy is to “help students use words as a passage into interrogating society” (Christensen, 2000, p. vii) with the end goal of having students “understand why things are fair or unfair and how to change them” (Christensen, 2000, p. 1). In other words, they can learn the power of words to disrupt the status quo and bring about positive change in the world.

Contemporary YAL is well-suited to tackling tough subjects through a critical literacy perspective (Christensen, 2000; Cummins, 2013; Hays, 2017; Vogt, Yuen Pun, Fernandez, Grubman, & Stacey, 2016; Wolk, 2009). In its postmodern form, YAL encourages young people to challenge the status quo and to work to bring about changes to society (Vogt et al., 2016). When teachers read YAL with their students, there is a “high potential for in-depth analysis that moves beyond relatability” (Hays, 2017, p. 14). In other words, it is important for students to read works that they find relevant, but this should mean more than just that the book is something they find to be relatable. The students should also be thinking deeply about how they can bring change to the world. Since most YA novels have teenage characters who successfully bring about change, the teens who read these books begin to understand that they are not as powerless as they often feel and can effect change in the social system if they want to do so (Cummins, 2013). When young readers see teens their own age changing their communities, they feel empowered to do the same.

Critical literacy can help educators examine how they might create a sociopolitical consciousness within their students (Christensen, 2009; Ladson-Billings,

2014). Ladson-Billings (2014) defines a sociopolitical consciousness as the “ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (p. 75). To do this, ELA teachers must look for books in which the protagonists don’t accept the roles society has set out for them (Christenson, 2009). For example, the YA novel *Hunger Games* could be used to examine power structures and political rules (Burke, 2013). Using a critical lens, students might recognize that the powerful elite in this dystopian series had little knowledge about how those in other districts lived and their sense of privilege that led to unfair distribution of wealth. Topics like race, class, gender, and solidarity are often not discussed in schools, but reading books that bring up these topics helps students realize where injustices lie and how to change them (Christensen, 2009). With a critical literacy approach combined with YAL, teachers and students can begin to question how immigrants are viewed, depicted, and treated.

Culturally Relevant Young Adult Literature. Before the term culturally relevant literature was coined, the term multicultural literature came into use. The origin of multicultural literature can be traced back to the civil rights and women’s movements (Graff, 2010). It is not hard to imagine how movements aimed at bringing equality and power to groups that had been marginalized could also engender a desire for literature that represents all groups, not just those in power. The term *multicultural literature* is often defined as books that depict the diversity within the community (Fleming et al., 2016). It includes novels, nonfiction books, poetry, and picture books that depict our pluralistic society.

Its purpose is closely aligned with the movements in which it got its start. When it comes to children's and YAL, "Multicultural children's literature shares multicultural education's purposes and raises related debates regarding intersections of power, race, and culture" (Ching, 2005, p. 129). In other words, multicultural children's literature could be used to begin discussions about the same topics that spurred on the women's and civil rights movements, as well as other related topics. Teachers might use multicultural literature with their students to "show numerous ways to respond to and resolve conflicts" (Bean, Valerio, & Senior, 1999, p. 33). Reading multicultural YAL can help students learn to respect others, work for greater social equality, and develop greater understanding for different cultures (Ching, 2005; Norton, 2005; Sanders, Foyil, & Graff, 2010). In an era when it feels like our culture is constantly pulling us into an "us" versus "them" mentality, multicultural YAL can help teens see the similarities and shared values that they have with others to help bridge the cultural divides that may exist between them (Norton, 2005). "The best books break down barriers . . . they extend that phrase 'like me' to include what we thought was foreign and strange" (Hazel Rochman as cited in Norton, 2005, p. 1). As the multicultural literature movement garnered momentum, the term *culturally relevant literature* came into play.

The term *culturally relevant literature* is closely tied to multicultural literature, but is a bit more recent in origin. It stems from Ladson-Billings's (1995) work calling for culturally relevant pedagogy. The term *culturally relevant literature* has been used to refer to "books in which students can find themselves, their families, and their communities reflected and valued" (Fleming et al., 2016, p. 6). In other words, the

emphasis here is not just on depicting a pluralistic society but rather readers being able to recognize aspects of their own lives within the lives of the characters in the stories. These aspects of cultural relevance are numerous and varied. In fact Ann E. Ebe (as cited in Hickey & Hopenwasser, 2013) has listed seven aspects of cultural relevance: “(a) ethnicity of characters, (b) familiarity of setting, (c) relevance of time period depicted, (d) age of main characters, (e) gender of main characters, (f) exposure to the particular genre, and (g) relationship to the reader’s schema” (p. 105). These seven points of relevance might expand what people think of when they first consider the word *culture*, but the more of these points of relevance that exist between a reader and the text, the more the reader can relate to the text.

YAL for and About Immigrants

Incorporating culturally relevant YAL on immigration issues into the classroom can have a number of positive benefits (Brown, 2010; Christensen, 2000; Cummins, 2013; Hays, 2017). First, as stated above, concern over immigration often involves undocumented immigrants; for some readers, including teachers, these fictional immigrants may be the only undocumented migrants they ever get a chance to “know” (Cummins, 2013). Reading about them may give them a chance to encounter people they have only seen portrayed negatively on the news or via social media. YAL can combat these stereotypical messages young readers may get about undocumented immigrants. These books “individuate undocumented migrants and use their perspectives to humanize a political issue” (Cummins, 2013, p. 58). The media might provide brief, overarching simplifications of immigration issues while portraying all immigrants with a broad stroke.

YAL allows the reader to step into the life of one immigrant and see the issue from his or her perspective.

Second, they can learn about the history of immigration policies more in depth. For example, they might learn how gender, race, and class have affected immigration policies (Christensen, 2000). In the book *Echo* (Ryan, 2015), the reader sees how Hitler's Nazi party forced the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Germany. In *Refugee* (Gratz, 2017), the reader learns through Josef's story how some Jewish refugees who fled to Cuba were suddenly turned away at the island's ports even though other ships had been allowed to disembark. It appeared as though Cuba had had its fill of Jewish refugees. These are aspects of anti-Semitism that might be overlooked in the typical curriculum unit on the Holocaust. With books like these, teachers can use YAL to fill in the gaps that might occur in students' history classes.

One of the challenges of incorporating culturally relevant literature on immigration in the classroom is to find quality YAL that authentically and accurately depicts the immigrant experience, especially the diverse experiences of all cultural groups (Graff, 2010; Fleming et al., 2016). Books such as *Letters from Rifka* (Hesse, 1999) and *Ashes from Roses* (Auch, 2002) depict two different immigrants (one a Russian Jew, the other an Irish Catholic) who entered the U.S. through Ellis Island. Using only novels like these contributes to a "whitewashing" of history, in which there is no discussion of how certain ethnic groups were denied entrance to the United States (Graff, 2010, p. 107). For example, the stories of Asian immigrants are significantly underrepresented in literature (Fleming et al., 2016). If only certain ethnic groups are depicted within the published

literature, teachers need to go out of their way to find those stories that will create both mirror and window experiences for their students (Bishop, 1990).

Furthermore, even if an ethnic group is depicted, it does not necessitate that the culture is represented accurately within the story (Bean et al., 1999; Ching, 2005). When an author who is not a member of a particular ethnic group attempts to write a novel about that ethnic group, he or she may not have all the information necessary to depict the culture accurately. Even if the author is a member of that ethnic group, she might draw from her own personal experiences, which may not be reflective of the rest of the cultural group. For example, in the book *Heartbeat, Drumbeat* (Hernandez, 1992), a Navajo mentor named Isadora is burned as if she were a chief, but she's not (Bean et al., 1999, p. 36). The author clearly thought someone who is not a chief could be burned that way, but as Bean et al. (1999), points out, others within the culture have said that would never happen to someone who was not the chief. Readers might believe this is a part of the Navajo culture because that is the way it is depicted in the book. In Gary Paulsen's *The Tortilla Factory* (1995), he "elevates European Americans and subordinates ethnic communities" while presenting a romanticized view of agricultural and factory labor that "erases hardship" (Ching, 2005, p. 131). Every author will bring his own personal experiences and biases to the writing of a story, and this means that readers need to think critically about how a culture is being represented and whether or not that representation is accurate.

The Current Study

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which a teacher's decision to incorporate culturally relevant YA novels into her reading classroom challenged students' perceptions of immigrants. Specifically, I examined the ways in which culturally relevant YAL may be used to engender empathy for immigrants in middle grade readers. Further, this study explored how this empathy might lead students to engage in critical literacy in such a way that it caused them to rethink stereotypes about immigrants and how immigrants are treated in the United States.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to examine how culturally relevant YAL on immigration impacted middle grade readers, using classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. Based on a cross-curricular unit at a particular school, a case study design (Meriam, 1998) was appropriate to understand how the literature aspect fit into the unit as a whole. The goal was to explore how students created meaning about immigrants after reading fictionalized accounts of immigrants. The participants were eighth graders reading a YA novel with immigrant characters during a cross-curricular unit that focused on the Great Immigration period in U.S. history.

For this study, I looked at the reading component of this cross-curricular unit on immigration. The social studies component continued to focus on the Great Immigration period in U.S. history during which millions of European immigrants entered through Ellis Island. The ELA components were separated into two separate classes instead of an

80-minute block. The writing teacher covered the major writing assignment of the unit.

The reading teacher covered reading the immigration-themed novel with them.

Research Questions

Since the focus of this study was on the use of YAL, two research questions focused on how YAL might engender empathy for immigrants in middle grade readers and cause them to think critically about how immigrants are viewed and treated. The research questions were as follows:

1. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL about immigrants create empathy for immigrants among eighth graders in a culturally and linguistically diverse middle school?
2. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL promote students' critical thinking about immigration?
 - a. How does classroom use of particular novels disrupt and challenge stereotypes about immigrants?
 - b. How does classroom use of particular novels impact the way students believe immigrants should be treated?

With this study, I hoped to understand the ways in which students engage with the novels and reflect on what they have read and how those novels might cause them to question prejudices and stereotypes.

Definition of Key Terms

Throughout this study, five key terms were used that deserve clarification.

Definitions of the key terms used throughout my dissertation are as follows:

- *Critical Literacy*—a theoretical framework and approach to literacy that focuses on analyzing texts so as to question the world around you as well as the status quo and the text itself (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Bishop, 2014; Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015).
- *Culturally Relevant Literature*—literature in which the readers see themselves and their communities reflected and valued (Fleming et al., 2016)
- *Empathy*—the cognitive and affective responses of understanding the feelings of another person so as to understand the motives behind a person’s actions and emotions (Bullough, 2019; Hoffman, 2000; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Rantala, Manninen, & van den Berg, 2016).
- *Generational status*—the number of generations one’s family has lived in that country. For example, a first-generation resident would be the person who emigrated from another country. A second-generation resident would be the son or daughter of the immigrant.
- *Immigrant*—a person who moves from one country to another. For this study, the term immigrant will include those who are both documented and undocumented and those who are seeking asylum as a refugee.
- *Young Adult Literature (YAL)*—literature aimed at middle school and high school students in which the (usually) teenaged main character must deal with complex

issues and challenges. Within the context of this study, the term YAL will also incorporate upper middle grade novels that might be read by both teens and preteens.

Significance of the Study

This study is important for educators who are faced with an ever-changing and increasingly diverse student body. Some teachers are noticing negative relationships between native-born and immigrant students (Graff, 2010; Maples & Groenke, 2009; Murray & Marx, 2013). Adults and students alike are often bombarded with negative portrayals of immigrants through the media, and yet teachers are charged with the task of making sure every student in their classroom succeeds. If teachers are going to help their students be successful, they need to make sure every student feels valued and capable of success. YAL can be an effective way of introducing difficult, often politically charged, topics into the classroom while recognizing the value of having a diverse student population.

This study contributed to the research that has already occurred. While there have been numerous articles written that advocate for the use of culturally relevant YAL, few studies have been completed that examine its impact on students (Rosado, Amaro-Jiménez, & Kieffer, 2015). Researchers such as Bercaw and Collins (2007), Heineke (2014), and Hopkins and Heineke (2017) have studied the impact of reading culturally relevant children's and YA texts on teachers and teacher candidates, but there have been few studies on how students in middle school and secondary schools have responded to culturally relevant texts (Glazier & Seo, 2005; Scieurba, 2014; Hickman & Verden, 2009;

Verden, 2012). Rarely, does this research touch on YAL on immigration. Also, there have been studies on how fiction might engender empathy, but again none of it has focused on empathy for immigrants (Fjällström & Kokkola, 2014; Vogt et al., 2016). Studies on using a critical literacy approach with culturally relevant texts have focused on teacher education (Shanahan & Dallacqua, 2018), high school classrooms (Locke & Cleary, 2011), read-alouds with elementary students (Evans, 2010), or pre-reading activities leading up to the reading of a culturally relevant YAL (Maples & Groenke, 2009). This study brought an experimental approach into the discussion to see how critical literacy could be used with culturally relevant young adult novels in order to determine how they might impact a middle school reader's ability to empathize with immigrants in such a way that stereotypical views and treatments of immigrants might be brought into question.

My Story

I cannot deny that this study has great personal significance for me, one that has only grown over the last 13 years. At the time I was an eighth-grade teacher responsible for the reading portion of the Immigration Unit at my school, I was also considering pursuing my doctorate. However, one of my professors from the master's program cautioned me and a classmate to hold off on starting our doctoral programs until we had found a research topic we loved so much that we could stand reading and writing about it night and day for years.

With that advice in mind, I decided to hold off a bit on my doctoral studies. In the meantime, I had plenty to keep me busy as the new position teaching gifted classes

required me to pursue classes in gifted education, eventually leading to full certification in gifted instruction. In between my master's and post-master's classes, I decided to give writing children's literature another try. Prior to the master's degree, I had taken a class on writing for children and young adults and had even submitted stories and articles to children's magazines. After years of trying, I had nonfiction articles and short stories accepted for publication in children's magazines such as *Hopscotch for Girls*, *Highlights*, and *Pockets*.

After I finished more of my master's degree and the classes in gifted education, I decided to take a break from my studies for a bit and try writing a novel again. I had already made two attempts at novel manuscripts, but neither of them had found publishers. Eventually, I wrote two more novel manuscripts, and in 2014 I had my first YA novel accepted for publication. A year later, the same publisher accepted a middle grade novel. As I began to see the impact my YA novel had on readers, I decided it was time to pursue that doctoral degree. After all, I figured I had finally found a topic I could stand researching: young adult literature. I knew from my work as an author that I loved talking about YAL, and I wanted to study how someone's life could be positively affected by the right book.

With this general idea for a research topic in mind, I began my doctoral studies at Loyola University Chicago in the fall of 2015 just after my middle grade novel had been accepted for publication. During the first semester, I began researching my topic. In the foundational course on curriculum and instruction, I traced the development of literature within the reading classroom, starting with the Committee of Ten making

recommendations for books that have been a part of the canon ever since, and following the changes through to the introduction of YAL in the latter half of the twentieth century.

During that same first semester, I also took a class on multicultural education. This is where I first started studying Paolo Freire and critical pedagogy. I had already taken a class on multicultural literature during my master's program, but this is where I first heard the term *culturally relevant literature*. For my final project in that class, I researched how YAL might engender empathy for those who are marginalized. While my instructor at the time tried to encourage me to focus my studies on one ethnic group (for example, how African Americans are portrayed in YAL), I could not figure out how to choose just one ethnic group to study. The middle school where I teach is so culturally and linguistically diverse that I almost felt like it would be a betrayal to all of the other groups if I focused on just one ethnic group among them.

The following summer I took my first elective as well as my first research methods course. My first elective was on teaching English language learners (ELLs) in the classroom and was conducted at Loyola University's John Felice Rome Center in Italy during the second half of the summer and involved visiting three refugee assistance sites while we were there. Most of the required reading focused on immigrant students and how teachers can assist them linguistically, academically, and socially in the classroom. Because it was a condensed two-week course, we were encouraged to do all the readings for the course during the first half of the summer, which was when I was also taking my first research methods course. The research course required us to write a preliminary version of a dissertation research proposal with a short introduction, brief

review of literature, and a proposed methodology. Since I was reading articles and books on teaching immigrant students at the same time that I was trying to decide on a topic for my miniature dissertation proposal, it hit me that I could combine what I was learning about immigrant students with what I had previously done with YAL. This would fit perfectly for me since my student population included immigrants and children of immigrants. Furthermore, it meant I could finally return to that question I had had ever since I had taught eighth grade all those years earlier: What YA books might be the best fit for the immigration unit at my school? How could my school choose novels that would best benefit the needs of the students while also reflecting the cultural and linguistic diversity at the school?

After writing that initial practice proposal for the research methods class, I traveled to Rome for the elective on teaching ELLs. During the course, we visited three sites in Rome that assisted immigrants and refugees. The first was Centro Astalli, the Jesuit Refugee Services Center, where we saw firsthand the facilities that the Jesuits have for helping refugees in Rome. They have language courses (to help refugees learn to communicate in Italian so that they can get jobs), provide showering, food, and post office services (since many have no homes), and have medical and legal services. The second was Refugee ScART, a nonprofit group started by a Roman woman with a Ph.D. in the Italian Renaissance. She saw the African refugees in the streets of Rome and decided she needed to help them. Refugee ScART engages refugees in creating beautiful and useful works of art by picking up trash on the streets of Rome and recycling the material (often plastics) into goods they can sell. The refugees keep 100% of the profits.

The third site was the *Comunita di Sant'Egidio*, a Christian community that began in Rome after the Second Vatican Council. The Community focuses on prayer, the poor, and peace. Because of its commitment to the poor and peace (and bolstered by their strong prayer life), the Community has been dedicated to assisting immigrants and refugees in Italy since the 1970s, including finding humanitarian visas to make migration to Italy possible for those who might not otherwise be able to enter the country. After visiting these three sites, I was further committed to making the story of immigrants part of my dissertation process. In the United States, we tend to think that immigration is an issue that is peculiar to the United States, but this is a myopic view. My studies in Italy in the summer of 2016 (as well as follow-up studies in Rome in 2017 and 2019) only strengthened my understanding that caring for migrants is a global issue.

As my doctoral work at Loyola University Chicago progressed, my interest in the use of YAL in the classroom to address immigration as a social justice issue increased. While the United States and its schools struggle to find socially just ways to handle immigration, especially in light of our current political climate in which there is much debate about whether or not a wall should be built between the U.S. and Mexico and how migrants who enter should be treated (Miranda, 2017), my research interest has focused on how YAL might engender empathy for immigrants and cause middle grade readers to think critically about how immigrants are viewed and treated.

Delimitations

I conducted a qualitative study at a public middle school in a culturally and linguistically diverse suburb of major Midwestern metropolitan city. The eighth grade

ELA teacher, Mrs. Carlson, taught five periods of regular reading and two periods of advanced reading. Only those eighth grade students in periods 8 and 9 were interviewed for this study since those were my planning periods and I wanted to interview only those students whom I could also observe in class. The eighth period class was one of her regular reading classes, and the ninth period class was one of her advanced reading classes. I collected three types of data: document analysis from the written assignments of the students as well as a pre-reading reflection they completed, classroom observations, and student interviews held at the end of the unit.

Summary and Organization of the Dissertation

The research aimed to discover in what ways YAL can be used to engender empathy for immigrants in middle grade readers. The study explored these ways through a critical literacy lens to see how students might begin to question assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices about immigrants and how they are treated after reading a novel.

The purpose of this chapter was to give an overview of the context, to identify the two key issues within the problem statement, to state the method and research questions this study focused on, and to explain the significance of this study within the current related fields of study. Chapter II provides in-depth discussions on the use of critical literacy as a theoretical framework and a review of the literature on the three key concepts within this study: (a) how readers respond to culturally relevant texts, (b) how fiction can engender empathy, and (c) how culturally relevant texts can be used to engage in critical literacy. Chapter III details the research design used, as well as the rationale for

its use and the data collection and data analysis methods used. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study, and Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings as well as further implications for areas of future study.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes an examination of critical literacy as a theoretical framework for this study and a review of the relevant literature. The opening section on the theoretical framework includes a definition of critical literacy, including how it can be applied to research in reading instruction. Following the discussion of the theoretical framework is a review of the literature related to the three conceptual areas that guided my research: (a) how readers respond to culturally relevant YAL, (b) how fiction can engender empathy, and (c) how culturally relevant texts can be used for critical literacy.

Critical Literacy as a Theoretical Framework

For this study, I used critical literacy as a theoretical framework to examine how incorporating YA novels about immigration within a reading classroom might engender empathy for immigrants in eighth graders in such a way that the students could critically analyze stereotypes about immigrants. Because this growth in empathy caused the students to question the way immigrants were treated or portrayed, a critical literacy framework helped examine whether or not the students read the novel critically enough to change their beliefs.

Definition of Critical Literacy

The term *literacy* can be defined as the reading and writing of text, and the word *critical* comes from the Greek word *kriticos*, which relates to the ability to judge or argue

(Luke, 2012). When these two terms are combined, we have a theoretical approach that helps researchers and educators see how reading and writing can involve a sort of evaluating, arguing, and judging of various forms of text (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Bishop, 2014; Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015). Luke (2012) defines critical literacy as the “use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (p. 5). Another way to think of this approach within a classroom setting is to say that the purpose of critical literacy is to help students analyze the texts that they read to think critically about the world around them and how writers use language for their own purposes.

Anderson and Irvine (1993) had a similar way of defining critical literacy. For them, critical literacy is about “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (p. 82). This definition includes writing as part of critical literacy. It also adds in the importance of history and power relations. Bishop (2014) pulled these ideas together by stating that critical literacy “uses texts and print skills in ways that enable students to examine the politics of daily life within contemporary society with a view to understanding what it means to locate and actively seek out contradictions within modes of life, theories, and substantive intellectual positions” (p. 55). What is common across these three definitions is the concept of using the written word to examine our world as it is situated within its current historical position and to do so with an eye toward critiquing and analyzing for the purpose of some greater good.

Key Theorists and Concepts

Maxine Greene (as cited in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) states, “If we are to associate it [critical literacy] with any one individual thinker, it is clearly with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire” (p. ix). When Paulo Freire (1970) wrote his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he advocated for a “dialogical approach to literacy based on principles of reciprocal exchange” (Luke, 2012, p. 5). Critical literacy is grounded in Freire’s idea of critical pedagogy (Bishop, 2014). He talked of developing a critical consciousness (as opposed to a naïve consciousness). This critical consciousness was described as “the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them” (as cited in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 28). This related directly to my research as I studied how YAL can disrupt preconceived ideas students might have about immigrants and how to solve the immigration problems our nation currently faces. Furthermore, Freire (1970) believed that for the critical reader “the important thing is the continuing humanization of people” (as cited in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 42). This again directly related to my study as the only way to break down stereotypes is to humanize the people being generalized.

Freire and Macedo’s (1987) work on literacy and critical pedagogy placed an emphasis on understanding the political and economic contexts in which texts are situated and created. In fact, literacy itself is a “social and political practice rather than a set of neutral, psychological skills” (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000, p. 46). In other words, readers do not read texts within a vacuum. There are social implications when we read because we often discuss what we read with others or we may change how we interact with others

based on what we read. Critical discussions on literacy may lead us to discuss topics related to local or global conditions (Maples & Groenke, 2009). For example, reading about the challenges faced by modern-day immigrants may change the way we view them and interact with them. This was at the heart of my study and why I chose a critical literacy approach.

Another important contributor whose ideas may have influenced the shaping of critical literacy was Derrida who, during the late 1970s, used a poststructuralist lens to critique the literary canon and argue that any given text may not have one definitive interpretation (Luke, 2012). This critiquing of the literary canon continues to be part of the critical literacy perspective today (Behrman, 2006) as researchers advocate for the reading of YAL to engage students in difficult teen problems and societal issues that might not be addressed at all within the canon (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gallo, 2001; Santoli & Wagner, 2004; White, 2000).

Despite Freire being the foundational theorist for critical literacy, Bishop (2014) points to Lankshear and McLaren's (1993) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern* for a seminal text. In their book, the authors focus on the idea that literacy is more than just reading and writing, and that critical literacy looks at the "social construction of reading, writing, and text production within political contexts" (Bishop, 2014, p. 53). Historically, critical readings focused only on recognizing author bias or multiple possible interpretations. What was missing was that critical reading of texts could have social and cultural purposes (Luke, 2012; Wolk, 2009). In other words, critical readings might help students develop that critical consciousness that Freire

discussed (Ladson-Billings as cited in Fleming et al., 2016). The idea of using a critical literacy approach to develop a critical consciousness means that “students who engage in critical literacy not only develop higher levels of analysis and interpretation but move beyond to think and act in new ways for the betterment of their own lives and the lives of others in society” (Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015, p. 10). Critical literacy should cause readers to question why and how certain groups are privileged while other groups are marginalized or excluded within mainstream narratives. Again, this was central to my study as it sought to examine how YAL may cause middle grade readers to question how immigrants are marginalized.

Applying Critical Literacy to Research in Reading Instruction

The concept and implications of critical literacy as an approach to research in reading instruction is a complicated one. It is a “theory with implications for practice rather than a distinctive instructional methodology” (Behrman, 2006, p. 490). In other words, critical literacy is not a series of steps that a teacher uses in the classroom. It is not a particular method for teaching reading, such as phonics or whole language. Instead, it is a theoretical lens through which a teacher might make decisions about which pieces of literature to include in the classroom and how discussions about those books with students may play out in the classroom. Therefore, one implication of this is that it is probably best used in action research with direct in-classroom usage. It would fit well if the researcher used a more pragmatic approach as Dewey had suggested. Dewey suggested that the teachers themselves should be the “investigators” (Dewey, 1929, as cited in Biesta & Burbules, 2003). This is one of the reasons this framework works well

for my study, which took place within an eighth grade reading classroom. The eighth grade teacher could use the findings of this study to determine if the chosen novels helped the students think about immigration from a critical standpoint.

Key Elements of Critical Literacy

Once critical literacy is accepted as an approach that is more pragmatic in nature, there is still a difficulty in using it because critical literacy offers no definitive instructional methodology (Behrman, 2006; Bishop, 2014; Maples & Groenke, 2009). Furthermore, there is no single model for critical literacy; instead, it has practical implications in the classroom. These implications have three key elements (described below); educators and educational researchers can use these key elements to see how reading a text can impact a student. For my study, I looked at how these key elements of critical literacy might provide a lens through which to examine how YAL may engender empathy for immigrants in young readers.

First Key Element of Critical Literacy. The first key element of critical literacy is that it involves “questioning our everyday assumptions and what seems ‘normal’” (Maples & Groenke, 2009, p. 28). Students are shaped by the world around them. They develop certain ideas about what is normal and what is not, but critical literacy requires them to question all of that.

For instance, it may be considered “normal” to view all undocumented immigrants as criminals who deserve to be deported. However, a critical reading of an immigration novel may cause the reader to question that idea. For example, in the YA novel *Ask Me No Questions* (Budhos, 2007), the readers meet Nadira, a fourteen-year-old

girl whose family comes to the United States on tourist visas. They hope to win the “Diversity Lottery” so that they can stay (p. 7). However, year after year, they stay past the visa expiration date as her father works hard at a variety of jobs. The family lives on the hope that one day they would “get the paperwork right,” but then 9/11 happens, the Patriot Act is put into effect, and the family tries fleeing to Canada (p. 8). They had sold everything they had to come to the United States, so there is nothing for the family back in Bangladesh. Other than staying past their expired visas, the family has been living a virtuous, crime-free life in the United States. In fact, Nadira’s older sister seems to be the ideal American student. She is up for class valedictorian, but without the proper papers, she cannot apply for college scholarships. By using a critical literacy approach with these novels, a teacher can help students question what is often assumed about immigrants being hardened criminals. In other words, critical literacy can be used to break down stereotypes.

Second Key Element of Critical Literacy. Second, critical literacy involves investigating “the power structures involved in ideological constructs of people through lenses of and intersections between race, class and gender” (Graff, 2010, p. 110). In other words, it requires the reader to think about how the dominant society may hold power over immigrants and how it may even use this power to shape how we view others, whether it be by race, class, gender, language, or religion. This purpose of questioning power and privilege is often seen as a key element of critical literacy (Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015).

As an example, a critical reading of Pam Muñoz Ryan's (2015) novel *Echo* highlights how the government can affect how people view those of another race and how the dominant culture can hold power over them. *Echo* tells the story of three characters who find an unusual harmonica around the time of World War II. The third character is Ivy, whose family moves to Orange County, California, in order to watch over a farm that is owned by the Yamamotos, a Japanese American family who has been forced into an internment camp. As Ivy's family settles in and begins to take care of the farm, neighbors paint racial slurs on the doors of the Yamamotos' boarded-up house. One neighbor insists on inspecting the inside of the house because he believes the Yamamotos must be spies, even though their son Kenny is currently fighting in the U.S. Army. Clearly, the internment required by the government (a power structure) is impacting how this neighbor views the Yamamotos. Meanwhile, Ivy is facing her own discrimination at school, another power structure. Despite the fact that her family has lived in the United States over one hundred years and Ivy speaks perfect English, she is sent to a separate school from her white friend Susan. Instead of attending Lincoln Main, she is sent to "Lincoln Annex, the Americanization school," where the teacher recognizes she speaks English well, but only proceeds to suggest she help out younger students in the third grade instead of giving her an appropriate fifth grade education (p. 445). Both Ivy's experience and that of the Yamamotos are ripe with details for students to apply their critical literacy skills as they examine how power structures are at play here. This relates to my study since it looks at how students view the treatment of immigrants by the power structures within the United States.

Third Key Element of Critical Literacy. Third, critical literacy demands looking at a text through multiple perspectives (Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis, 2015). Some immigration novels, such as *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman (1997), are extremely effective at this as they include multiple perspectives within one text. Through this novel, young readers can discover how different people can see the same concept of immigration through a different lens. This ability to hold different perspectives at the same time is crucial if students are going to care about social justice issues (Maples & Groenke, 2009). The reader must reflect on other people's perspectives and even rethink his own. In the words of Fjällström & Kokkola (2015), we must "sample the feelings of another" (p. 397). Only by looking at the topic of immigration through different perspectives can we develop enough empathy to be moved to social action.

Another YA novel that offers multiple perspectives is that of *Return to Sender* by Julia Alvarez (2010). Each chapter has two parts. The first part is written in present tense from the third person limited perspective of twelve-year-old Tyler, whose family has been farming the same land in Vermont for generations. However, after Tyler's father is injured in a tractor accident, the family is unsure if they can keep the farm going. As the story opens, Tyler learns that his father has hired three Mexican workers, one of whom is father to three daughters. The other part of each chapter is written from the perspective of the eldest of those three daughters. Her name is Mari, and each of her entries is written in the form of a letter, usually to her mother who returned to Mexico when Mari's grandmother was dying but who has now been missing for months. From Tyler's perspective, we see him struggling to understand why his patriotic family has broken the

law in order to hire these three undocumented workers, and from Mari's perspective, we see what it is like to live in constant fear of being deported. These two different perspectives allow the reader to compare points of view on a topic (an important Common Core State Standard), which also happens to be an important part of critical literacy.

That being said, researchers (Bishop, 2014; Blackburn and Clark, 2007; Comber & Nixon, 1999) have argued that perhaps one implication of critical literacy is that it should be used outside the confines of the classroom. Beck (2005) studied the use of critical literacy inside an all-male prison and came to the conclusion that critical literacy, which involves questioning hierarchy and power, might not be useful in a setting where silence is encouraged. Blackburn and Clark (2007) stated that critical literacy, if it is truly going to get young people involved in social activism, must be moved outside the classroom, where it cannot be regulated by the school's interests. Comber and Nixon (1999) claimed that most literary practices used within classroom settings only worked to preserve the dominant culture so critical literacy could not be effective. According to at least these researchers, the very nature of critical literacy to call for a questioning into hegemonic tendencies makes it incompatible in classrooms.

Why Critical Literacy Is Important

ELA teachers have curricular goals and standards to meet, with the end goal being to prepare active citizens who work for the good of society (Hays, 2017; Miller, 2014; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015; Wolk, 2009). To pursue this goal, ELA teachers cannot settle for students who will "blow through books without thinking very deeply about the

story or text” (Buehler, 2016, p. 14). They need to encourage active reading with a critical eye. If students are charged with reading YAL critically, their identities may shift and that may prompt empathy and social action (Bean & Moni, 2003; Noddings, 2012; Wolk, 2009; Wormeli, 2014). Without the teacher guiding them through the “right” interpretation of a literary text, students can begin to feel empowered to make their own opinions. To put it another way, reading YAL with a critical lens can be a “catalyst for personal change” (Alsup as cited in Hays, 2017, p. 18). The critical approach to reading opens the doorway to a personal change within readers that may lead to an outward change in their behavior. The goal of this study is to see if reading YAL increases empathy (a personal change) that might lead to changing prejudicial views and unjust treatments of immigrants (an outward change).

Literature Review

A review of the literature revealed empirical studies that focused on one or more of the following areas: (a) how readers respond to culturally relevant YAL, (b) how fiction can engender empathy, and (c) how culturally relevant texts can be used for critical literacy. This review of the literature examines studies in these three conceptual areas and discusses how the gap in literature lies within the overlap of these concepts.

How Readers Respond to Culturally Relevant YAL

In the field of culturally relevant literature, readers’ responses to culturally relevant YAL are usually described by referring to Rudine Sims Bishop’s (1990) seminal piece on mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Bishop’s work demonstrated not only the importance of culturally relevant children’s literature, but the three different ways in

which readers interact with culturally relevant texts (Zygmunt, Clark, Tancock, Mucherah, & Clausen, 2015). One possible experience a reader may have is a *mirror* experience. In this reading of a text, the students see their own lives reflected in books (Heineke, 2014). It is as if the text is holding a mirror up to the students so that they can see themselves reflected in the literature.

A *window* experience allows the reader to peer into another culture (Bishop, 1990). It is a “‘window of opportunity’ for authors, teachers, and students to contemplate what is and what can be regarding racially and culturally diverse attitudes and actions” (Gay, 2018, p. 161). This can have a positive impact on students’ reading experiences. For example, Karr and Julian (1999) used culturally relevant YAL in their middle school classrooms. After reading just one book about a culture different from their own, students wanted to read more YAL about other cultures. It is part of an ELA teacher’s “tremendous responsibility” to select “texts that speak to their students’ cultural heritage and broaden their respect and appreciation of heritages of diverse groups” (Stallworth et al., 2006, p. 478). A book that provides a window experience for students allows them to learn about cultures or groups different from their own, thus expanding their appreciation and respect for others.

The third kind of experience described by Bishop (1990) is a *sliding glass door* experience. In this type of situation, the reader steps into the “unique realities” of another’s experience (Heineke, 2014, p. 128). For example, the novel *Return to Sender* (Alvarez, 2010) allows the reader to step into the worlds of two different characters because the viewpoint shifts between them. Some chapters are told from the perspective

of a Caucasian boy living on a family farm in Vermont. The others are told from the perspective of a Mexican daughter of an undocumented migrant worker who comes to live on the farm. Students might find one of those experiences to be a “mirror” for them while the other is a “window,” or both of them may provide “sliding glass door” experiences if neither character is particularly culturally relevant to them.

Even if a student has had prior experience with a particular culture, he or she may still learn more from reading a text that portrays that culture. “Although the individual reader may have experience with the issue, seeing how other families experience the same issue, or how other people cope with the issue can expand the individual’s understanding of the issue” (Hays, 2017, p. 58). For example, a student who is an undocumented immigrant may relate to the character of Mari in *Return to Sender*; however, since not all undocumented immigrants have the same experience, he may still learn from reading about Mari’s particular experience. Students are not the only ones who may have these kinds of experiences with culturally relevant YAL. A teacher who was a legal visitor to the United States and read a YA novel on immigration was surprised to learn that undocumented immigrants had experiences similar to her own (Graff, 2013, p. 117). In other words, even though age can be one aspect of cultural relevance, it is certainly not the only one and a lack of similar ages does not prevent a mirror experience from occurring.

Student Responses

While articles have espoused the use of culturally relevant texts, few empirical studies exist within the realms of YAL and middle school classrooms (Hayn et al., 2011).

In fact, a few of the recent studies on the impact of reading culturally relevant YAL actually look at how teachers and teacher candidates (not middle school students) have had mirror, window, and sliding glass door experiences with these texts (Bercaw & Collins, 2007; Heineke, 2014; Hopkins & Heineke, 2017). Nonetheless, a few relevant empirical studies involving students were found. For this portion of the literature review, the scope of the literature search was confined by the following parameters: (a) empirical studies, (b) studies involving culturally relevant children's and YAL, (c) studies focused on middle school students, and (d) studies within the past ten years.

Sciurba (2014) studied an all-boys academy with mostly African American students. Her goal was to find why African American boys found some books to be more relevant than others (Sciurba, 2014). After interviewing 13 students, she shared the findings of her interviews with two African-American seventh grade boys. Her findings revealed that boys related more to a Walter Dean Myers novel (with an African-American male teen as the main character) than *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* since the Myers novel offered both ethnic and generational relevance. Boys in that study also noted that they related to Harry Potter (in which the main characters are neither African nor American), which suggest that generational importance may be as important as ethnic or national relevance (Sciurba, 2014; Hickey & Hopenwasser, 2013). In other words, students might connect to characters of other ethnicities based on other points of relevance. Furthermore, Sciurba (2014) found that students demonstrated two kinds of mirror experiences. In the first type of mirror experience, they saw relevance when they could see themselves in the literature. In the second type of mirror experience, they saw

relevance when they could apply some meaning or lesson from the book that they considered “important” (p. 314). While this study examined what causes a YAL text to be relevant, my research built on this as it focused on how this relevance might cause a middle grade student to feel empathy.

Hickman and Verden (2009) conducted a study of six urban middle school students who had emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and read culturally relevant literature. After reading these texts aloud with the students on a daily basis, the students engaged in individual reflective journal writing and groups discussions. The findings of the study revealed that the “students became willing to discuss personal issues and events via the characters and the texts” because they were reading stories about characters who were “just like” them, allowing them the opportunity to discuss problem-solving issues they could relate to without having to focus on their own lives (p. 9).

In a related article, Verden (2012) shared her findings from a similar study. This time her study took place in a middle school classroom with eight students ranging from sixth to eighth grade with a variety of behavioral and academic strengths and weaknesses. As a teacher researcher, Verden interviewed Omar, an eighth-grade boy identified as having EBD. He opened up about his own problems after reading Anne Schraff’s (2002) *Lost and Found*. In that novel, the father leaves the family. Omar could relate to this, and in a journal entry, he shared that he felt responsible for his parents’ separation because he had been the one to tell his dad that his mother had had another man over to the house. “As a result of the literature read aloud, Omar was given the opportunity to express his feelings and then process them” (Verden, 2012, p. 624). Omar had been in this classroom

for students with behavioral challenges for three years, but had never opened up about this guilt he carried with him until after reading this text that was culturally relevant to him. In both of Verden's studies, the findings revealed that students could connections between their own lives and the characters in the books because of how relevant the characters' stories were to their own lives.

While these authors focus on how cultural relevance allows students to open up about their problems more and use those stories to find possible solutions to their own problems, I take the research further to add *how* cultural relevance might open up students to talk about global issues that have implications in their classroom and beyond. In other words, these previous studies had an inward focus in that the researchers examined how middle grade students made self-to-text connections with texts as mirrors. My research looked at how both mirror and window experiences might cause a student to make not only self-to-text connections but also text-to-world connections so as to connect the novel they read with the immigration issues facing the United States today.

How Fiction Can Engender Empathy

Our reading classrooms need literature that can create both mirror and window experiences for our students (Bishop, 1990). However, good YAL can do more than just help students see themselves in the books they read or learn more about other cultures. It can also lead to having empathy for people living in different times, speaking different languages, or engaging in other cultural practices. This empathy might also lead a student to change his or her mind about important social justice topics.

Empathy Within the Classroom

Three studies looked at how and why empathy should be a part of the curriculum (Bullough, 2019; Hazler, 2017; Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2018). First of all, “empathy can foster cooperation and citizenship” (Lee et al., 2018, p. 509). It contributes to human solidarity because it allows people to see the commonalities we all have (Bullough, 2019). It can also decrease biases and prejudices. As Hazler (2017) points out: “One only has to observe the nightly news to witness how many of the world’s citizens cannot disentangle themselves from their own beliefs and needs to acknowledge and respect the beliefs and needs of others” (p. 25). In other words, empathy teaches us to step outside our own belief systems to see the world through other perspectives.

With regard to immigration, empathy can teach U.S.-born residents to understand the perspectives and experiences of immigrants. Understanding the emotional hardships of a person is the first step in recognizing the need to help that person (Noddings; 2012; Thomas-Brown, 2010). “Empathy is a logical antecedent of helping behavior” (Thomas-Brown, 2010) or to put it in the words of Noddings (2012): “the condition—the expressed need—of the other moves us” (p. 773). In other words, if we want our students to fight injustices against immigrants, then we first need to teach them to be empathetic to the immigrant experience. Using a reading curriculum that makes use of YAL as a way of creating empathy for those who may be marginalized is a goal expressed by numerous educators (Christian, 2000; Cummins, 2013; Wolk, 2009). A goal for readers of YAL about undocumented migrants should be “empathetic outreach” (Cummins, 2013, p. 61). Students need “a curriculum that encourages them to empathize with others”

(Christiansen, 2000, 2). Teachers should consider forming classroom communities in which students must learn to see from another's perspective to understand how pain, struggle, and joy can cut across cultural and social lines.

Connection Between Fiction and Empathy

Numerous studies have shown that reading fiction has strong ties to empathy (Hays, 2017; Hazler, 2007; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Mar, Hrish, delaPaz, & Peterson, 2005; McCreary & Marchant, 2017; Wormeli, 2014). However, most of these have been studies that have dealt with students over the age of 18 and the reading of literature that is not YAL. For this portion of the literature review, the scope of the literature search was confined by the following parameters: (a) empirical studies, (b) studies involving YAL, (c) studies focused on students in grades 5-10, and (d) studies within the past ten years.

Vezzali, Stathi, and Giovannini (2012) conducted a study to see if reading books with multicultural topics improves student attitudes toward immigrants. The participants were ninety-six Italian secondary school students whose mean age was 12.81 years. The students were randomly assigned into three groups: one group read a text with intercultural themes for their summer reading, the second group read a book that did not have intercultural themes, and the third group was not advised to read any book over the summer. One week into the next school year, the students completed a questionnaire about their attitudes toward immigrants. Findings revealed that students who read a book with intercultural themes expressed less negative intergroup stereotypes, had more positive intergroup attitudes, and were more interested in engaging in future activities with those outside their cultural group than the students in the two control groups. While

this study had similarities to my research interests, there was no evidence of critical literacy being employed. Furthermore, the study took place in an Italian secondary school instead of a U.S. middle school and involved only quantitative data. My study employed qualitative research to understand the *how* and the *why* behind this kind of improved attitude and reduction in stereotypes about immigrants.

Three years after Vezzali et al.'s (2012) study, Vezzali, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza, and Trifiletti (2015) conducted similar research. This time, they had three studies on how reading Harry Potter affected participants' attitudes toward three different marginalized groups (immigrants, homosexuals, and refugees). The studies also looked at their different age groups (fifth graders, high school students, and university students). The goal of all three studies was to see if reading the Harry Potter novels improved attitudes toward stigmatized groups. The first study came closest to mine and involved thirty-four Italian fifth grade students. They were first given a questionnaire to determine their attitudes toward immigrants. The students were then divided into two groups. One group met repeatedly with the researcher to read selections from Harry Potter that concerned the issue of prejudice. The other group (the control group) also met with the researcher to read selections from Harry Potter, but those passages did not address the issue of prejudice. After six weeks of meeting once a week with the researcher, the students were given another questionnaire to determine their attitudes toward immigrants. Findings revealed a positive correlation between students reading the passages related to prejudice improving their attitudes toward immigrants. This quantitative study related to my research because it involved YAL and prejudice towards immigrants. However, it did

not involve middle grade readers or culturally relevant texts with immigrant characters. Furthermore, my research advanced this topic by adding qualitative data to explain why this change in attitude and empathy occurred.

The cultural relevance of a text can also aid in engendering empathy. Hickman and Verden (2009) provided an example in their study when discussing how a sixth-grade boy reading a culturally relevant text (*A Matter of Trust*, Schraff, 2002) developed empathy for a character in a book. In the student journal, he wrote:

To me it's easy to forgive someone when they're mean to me because they [sic] just doing it to get attention. I know this for a fact because I used to do it to get some attention, so why wouldn't I forgive them? They probably aren't getting any attention or love. I kind of do feel sorry for those kids but then again why don't they take their anger out on a punching bag? (Derek, Personal Journal Entry, October 4, 2004, as cited in Hickman & Verden, 2009, p. 11)

Since Derek was able to relate to the character, he was able to feel sorry for him and understand why he might be responding the way that he does. My study advanced this research by applying this phenomenon to culturally relevant texts involving immigrants.

Junker and Jacquemin (2017) conducted a study with 42 high school sophomores who read literature and responded to writing prompts over the course of two semesters. Six texts were used each semester for a total of 12 texts. The texts included some YAL, including Sherman Alexi's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), as well as adult books such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2004) and Jeanette Walls's *The Glass Castle* (2017). Their findings stated that text selection was an important factor in

increasing empathy. Their results point to several textual attributes of fiction that lend themselves to increasing empathy in readers. First of all, the use of a first-person narrator was likely to engender empathy in the reader. Another aspect is that conflict within the story that produces negative affective situations for the character can lead to empathy. In fact, Junker and Jacquemin (2017) note that “experiencing negative affective situations and . . . watching characters experience hardship makes readers especially likely to be able to identify across categories of difference” (p. 80). In other words, watching a character struggle through a difficult situation causes the reader to become empathetic. Another textual attribute teachers should take into consideration is textual difficulty. They found that texts that were harder to comprehend meant that readers had “little analytical power left over for emotional and cognitive complexities” (p. 85). This particular finding furthers a discussion point from the introduction; namely, that if a teacher wants to discuss complex topics, YAL is probably a better choice than adult literature. The easier it is for students to relate to the literature, the easier they will understand it, and that leads to a better chance of developing empathy. While this study included the connection between empathy and YAL, the addition of adult texts confused the issue. My study furthered this research by looking at texts that are more likely to be relevant to students, thereby increasing the likelihood of engendering empathy.

Aspects of YAL that Make it Proficient at Engendering Empathy

YAL in particular has certain aspects that engender empathy (Buehler, 2016; Maples & Groenke, 2009; Vogt et al., 2016). First, YAL often encourages the reader to question the status quo and to create positive changes in the world (Vogt et al., 2016).

YAL asks young readers to question their place in the world and to challenge what might be seen as typical or expected behavior. They do this in a way that is easily accessible to young readers. The characters in the book use contemporary language that is easy for the readers to understand and have realistic flaws to which the readers can relate. At the same time, the novels also include complex themes and characters (Buehler, 2016). They have the “ability to incorporate greater complexities into the representation of issues like class, poverty, and disability” (Vogt et al., 2016, p. 42). The reader is able to develop such a deep connection with the main character as he or she faces obstacles that the reader is moved beyond just sympathy to actual empathy for the protagonist (Vogt et al., 2016). Furthermore, the importance of fitting in is a crucial part of the preteen and teenage years, and since fitting in is often a key part of the immigrant’s experience as well, YAL with immigration stories is prime reading material for young minds that often face similar challenges.

An excellent example of this is the novel *Amina’s Voice* (Kahn, 2017) in which sixth grader Amina tries to fit in among the students at her middle school. Her best friend Soojin seems to be changing. She hangs out with someone who used to taunt both Soojin and Amina. Furthermore, Soojin thinks about changing her name to sound more “American” after becoming a United States citizen. Amina struggles with understanding her friend while also facing an uncle from Pakistan who may not be too happy with how “Americanized” Amina’s family has become. This story is about finding voice and identity, both as an immigrant in a new culture and as a middle-school student.

Another reason YA novels can be so effective at combatting stereotypical messages about immigrants is that they bring the reader into that individual character's story (Cummins, 2013; Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010). In the media, the immigrant experience is often depicted as being homogenous—as if every immigrant has the same experience and the same goal: complete assimilation (Cummins, 2013). However, YAL allows students to see that not every immigrant's experience is the same (Cummins, 2013). When Joellen Maples incorporated contemporary immigration novels into her middle school classroom in Tennessee, students could “stand in the shoes of others” (Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010, p. 32). This allowed her students, whom she had witnessed previously making stereotypical and negative remarks to her newly immigrated students, to rethink their previous assumptions. They realized that immigrants face discrimination and hatred and that each one had their own unique experience.

By including different YA books or by using a literature circle method, teachers can lead students to read a variety of immigration stories and see that not all immigrants have the exact same experience. For example, the novel *Ask Me No Questions* (Budhos, 2007) showed how the character Nadira was unable to gain resident status in the United States, but still lived a relatively peaceful life as a Muslim in the United States by flying under the radar, even after the 9/11 attacks. However, in *Shooting Kabul* (Senzai, 2010), we meet Fadi, a boy whose family flees Afghanistan and seeks asylum in America in the months leading up to the 9/11 attacks. Unlike Nadira, he is able to remain legally. However, he endures bullying after the 9/11 attacks simply for being Muslim. By reading

those two novels together, students could critically analyze the two different experiences of the main characters who are both Muslim and both seeking legal residency.

If there is not enough time to compare multiple books during the school year, a teacher may turn to the new novel *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017) in order to give students the opportunity to see how not all immigrant stories are exactly the same and yet there can still be similarities across them. This popular work of YAL bounces the reader back and forth between three different stories. All of the main characters are refugees, as the title suggests, but they come from different countries and different time periods. Josef is a Jewish boy whose father is captured and then released by the Nazis in 1930s Germany. When the Nazis release his father, it is under the stipulation that the entire family must leave the country. Isabel is an eleven-year-old girl living in Cuba in the 1990s. When Fidel Castro temporarily allows any Cubans the right to leave the country right after her father is wanted by the police for protesting in the streets, she and her family board a neighbor's newly made boat and head over the dangerous sea to Miami. On the other side of the world in 2015, Mahmoud has been avoiding war and bullies in his hometown of Aleppo, Syria, for too long. When bombs destroy his family's apartment, they begin a long trek across Europe hoping to find a country that will take them in.

Gratz's *Refugee* allows the reader to compare and contrast the stories of three different families who are seeking asylum. The stories certainly share some similarities. All three of the refugees end up in dangerous water crossings for at least part of their journey. All three of them face potential death and/or imprisonment if they stay in their native land. All of them are seeking a life away from war and chaos in their home

country. However, each story is unique. While they all travel with at least two other family members, those family members may or may not be helpful. They each encounter varying degrees of helpfulness or hurt from strangers along the way. Because the families represent three different religious backgrounds (Jewish, Catholic [or as much as one could be under Fidel Castro], and Muslim), readers can see how not only various ethnic groups but also various religious groups have been victimized throughout the world.

A final reason why YA novels can be so successful is that they are often written in first person (Cummins, 2013; Vogt et al., 2016). This creates a personal relationship between the reader and the protagonist. Furthermore, it allows the reader to become immersed in the immigrant's situation (Cummins, 2013). As Vogt et al. (2016) point out, first person narrators allow readers to "better understand the impact that such forms of self-imposed social exclusion have on the protagonist, which essentially establishes a point of empathy" (pp. 39-40). The first-person narrator allows for an intimate relationship that paves the way for understanding the immigrant experience through the eyes of a teenaged narrator. Junker and Jacquemin (2017) note that "textual attributes that facilitate identification, such as the use of first-person narration, are likely to play a role in fostering empathy" (p. 80). Novels such as *Ask Me No Question* (Budhos, 2007), *Amina's Voice* (Kahn, 2017), *Return to Sender* (Alvarez, 2010), *Crossing the Wire* (Hobbs, 2006), and *Inside Out & Back Again* (Lai, 2011) all make use of a first person narrator to help the reader step into the shoes of the immigrant character.

How Culturally Relevant Literature Can Be Used for Critical Literacy

One of the benefits of adding diverse literature to the reading curriculum is that it can help students and teachers to discuss challenging issues that students face today. This tackling of tough subjects is exactly what educators need to do (Cummins, 2013; Graff, 2013; Stallworth et al., 2006), but it requires a critical literacy perspective. Educators must prepare students to be productive members of society and that means preparing students to tackle real world issues by being part of a democratic society. If teachers use YAL to “examine traditionally assumed values by means of individualistic critical thought,” then they are taking a critical literacy perspective, and that might help to raise “the kinds of informed citizens capable of maintaining a democratic form of government” (Elliot, 2008, p 289). If educators see one of their objectives as being the raising up of active participants within a democracy, then they must teach them to deal with the same tough issues that adults face within that democracy. For this portion of the literature review, the scope of the literature search was confined by the following parameters: (a) empirical studies, (b) studies using a critical literacy framework, (c) studies focused on culturally relevant texts, and (d) studies within the past ten years.

Graff (2010) created a graduate seminar for teachers on the construction of immigrants in multicultural children’s literature. Then through a series of interviews, personal response journals, class activities, and field notes, Graff examined how teachers thought and spoke about immigrants throughout the course and in interviews one year later. She purposely employed a critical literacy approach in order to see if the teachers would begin to question their original assumptions regarding immigrants. Her findings

reveal that multicultural literature can disrupt beliefs people have about immigrants. She describes the disruption as follows:

Teachers transitioned from considering immigration to be a homogenous entity to be studied in school and on the news to understanding immigration as an often tumultuous process involving diverse people whose identities are often constructed from them by the dominant culture. (p. 126)

While this study examined the change in perspectives teachers have about immigrants, my study examined the change in perspectives students might have regarding immigrants.

Evans (2010) used a critical literacy framework to study the use of multicultural picture books as a tool for changing how fourth-grade students viewed others. These picture books were read aloud to the fourth graders and then discussed as a group. Evans used recorded discussions and written journal entries to examine how students' attitudes changed over eight months with three major findings reported. First, students became more aware of the "values, beliefs, and social practices of cultures other than their own," which led to an increase in empathy toward others (p. 97). Second, reading and discussing the picture books led to an increase in appreciation for their own cultures as well as the similarities that cultures share. Third, the students showed an increased understanding of biases and prejudices. The researcher's use of critical literacy helped to form my own interview questions. For example, based on the student responses shared in the article, it is clear that the researcher asked the students to explain *why* the author wrote this book. This has a direct correlation with the critical literacy framework, which includes questioning author's own biases. Student responses to this can also reveal their

own attitudes toward what they feel is the message of the book. While this research provided some helpful qualitative data on the use of critical literacy and culturally relevant texts, it did not focus on middle grade students, YAL, or the topic of immigrants. My study built on this one by looking at a particular topic and genre of YAL that might be used to engage critical literacy skills with students.

Shanahan and Dallacqua (2018) examined how YAL can be paired with a critical literacy perspective to help teacher candidates consider how they might use them (both YAL and critical literacy) in their future careers. In this study, the researchers developed a design experiment methodology, in which one of the two researchers also served as the course instructor. The two researchers worked together to develop an Introduction to Adolescent Literature course so that it included the central tenets of critical literacy. Almost all of the twenty-five participating students reported that using a critical literacy approach changed the way they read the literature, including the YA novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007). Of particular interest to my study was a comment made by Michael, one of the middle school teacher candidates who stated that critical literacy “seems like a study of stereotypes” (p. 50). While this study looked at how teachers and teacher candidates might consider using critical literacy approaches when reading YAL with their students, my research focused on how students might question stereotypes about immigrants when probed to think deeply about how YAL portrays them.

Countering Stereotypes

To become empathetic, one must often learn to see past common stereotypes. Timberlake and Williams (2012) conducted a study to determine what are the common stereotypes of U.S. immigrants. Their study used a split-ballot design to reveal the stereotypes held about immigrants from four global regions: Asia, Europe, Middle East, and Latin America. Participants only answered questions regarding one of the four global regions, which was randomly assigned to them. For each question, participants were asked to rank immigrants on a scale from 1-7 on five different traits. For example, participants who were randomly selected to answer questions about Asian immigrants were asked, “In general, where would you rate [Asian immigrants] on this scale, where 1 meant RICH, and 7 mean POOR?” (Timberlake & Williams, 2012, p. 877). The other four traits related to intelligence, nonviolence, self-supporting, and fitting in.

The results showed the most negative stereotypes were held against Latin American immigrants. For the wealth question, Latin American immigrants were rated very low (over 1.0 below the neutral point), while the other three regional groups were all rated close to the neutral point. For the trait of fitting in, the European immigrants were the only ones rated positively. Latin American and Middle Eastern were rated the lowest while Asian immigrants received a nearly neutral rating. Latin American and Middle Eastern immigrants received a neutral rating on the nonviolent/violent scale while European and Asian immigrants received nearly identical positive ratings toward the trait of nonviolence. For the trait of being self-supporting, only Latin American immigrants received a negative score; the other three groups received positive ratings with Asian

immigrants receiving the highest. For the intelligence rating, Latin Americans received a neutral score while the others received positive ratings, with Asian immigrants once again receiving the highest score.

In their conclusion, Timberlake and Williams (2012) stated that because their study took place in Ohio where there are very few immigrants, especially those from Latin America, their findings suggest that these negative stereotypes have been caused by political rhetoric and the actions of various anti-immigration groups. In particular, they mentioned that “most convincingly in our view, stereotypes of Latin American immigrants were strongly associated with assessments of the problem of unauthorized immigrants” (p. 887).

Reyna, Dobria, and Wetherell (2013) also conducted a study that revealed common stereotypes held regarding immigrants from the same four global regions as Timberlake and Williams’s (2012) study. Reyna et al.’s study included responses from 414 undergraduates at a major Midwestern city. The study revealed that the participants often had both positive and negative attitudes toward each group. For example, Latin American immigrants were seen as untrustworthy, poor, likely to commit a crime, and likely to take their jobs, but at the same time they were seen as warmer than other immigrant groups and family-oriented. Furthermore, they were seen as exploited and victimized. Middle Eastern immigrants were seen as fanatical, dangerous, and a threat to what the participants felt is the American way of life, but they were also seen as smarter and better educated than some other immigrant groups. Asian immigrants were seen as

smart, hardworking, and successful but less warm than other groups. European immigrants were seen as competent, but within that group, Poles were seen as stubborn.

In her study of eleven YA novels depicting undocumented Mexican immigrants, Cummins (2012) argued that YA novels could be used to counter some of these stereotypes. For example, undocumented immigrants are often viewed as criminals. However, YAL can help break that stereotype. Referring to novels like *Crossing the Wire* (Hobbs, 2007), Cummins explained, “Countering the stereotype that undocumented immigrants frequently commit crimes because their entire existence in the United States is illegal, the border crossing youth in the novels think carefully any time they break the law” (p. 69). Stories like this help us see how the only “crime” some immigrants commit is how they enter or how long they remain in the country. By using a critical literacy approach with these novels, a teacher can help students question the stereotypes and common assumptions that are made about immigrants.

Current Study

My research contributed to the field by fulfilling gaps in the studies above. For example, studies on culturally relevant YAL have often focused on how mirroring experiences can occur when culturally relevant texts are used, but they have rarely examined the effect of window experiences, especially when it comes to how immigrants are viewed. Sciarba (2014), Hickman and Verden (2009), and Verden (2012) all focused on how reading culturally relevant YAL helped students in U.S. schools see themselves in the texts they read. There was no discussion of critical literacy or immigrants, and

rarely was there discussion on developing empathy for others through window experiences.

Studies on empathy and fiction have rarely focused on culturally relevant YAL used in middle grade classrooms, especially not in U.S. classrooms and or by using a critical literacy lens. Vezzali et al. (2012) and Vezzali et al. (2015) came closest to my research interests in that their studies looked at how students' attitudes toward immigrants might be improved by reading books. However, neither of these studies were tested in U.S. schools nor employed qualitative measures to explain the reasoning behind the phenomenon. Furthermore, neither of the Italian studies used a critical literacy framework.

Finally, studies on critical literacy have not often looked at immigration as a subject matter worthy of examination, especially not with YAL. Graff (2010) and Shanahan and Dallacqua (2018) both looked at teacher reactions to reading culturally relevant YAL instead of student reactions. Evans (2010) did look at students' ability to engage in critical literacy with culturally relevant YAL; however, it did not address immigration as a topic.

The table below shows whether or not the studies in the literature review addressed each of the related topics and the theoretical framework that were at the heart of my study.

Table 1

Related Topics and Theoretical Framework

Studies Grouped By Key Concepts Labeled in Literature Review	Culturally Relevant YAL	Empathy	U.S. Schools	Student as Participants	Immigration	Critical Literacy
How Readers Respond to Culturally Relevant YAL						
Sciurba, 2014	X		X	X		
Verden & Hickman, 2009	X	X	X	X		
Verden, 2012	X		X	X		
How Fiction Can Engender Empathy						
Vezzali et al., 2012		X		X	X	
Vezzali et al., 2015		X		X	X	
Junker & Jacquemin, 2017		X	X	X		
How Culturally Relevant Texts Can Be Used for Critical Literacy						
Graff, 2010	X	X	X		X	X
Evans, 2010		X	X	X		X
Shanahan & Dallacqua, 2018	X		X			X
My study	X	X	X	X	X	X

Therefore, my study filled gaps in the literature by examining the intersection of the above concepts by studying how reading culturally relevant texts on immigration can cause students to empathize with immigrants and to think critically about how immigrants are portrayed and treated. Furthermore, it expanded on the studies closest to it, which happened to take place in Italian schools. Vezzali et al. (2012) and Vezzali et al. (2015) both offered quantitative data to demonstrate that reading can lead to empathy for immigrants. However, without any qualitative data there is no explanation for *why* this is

happening. Since empathy and the breaking down of stereotypes is so closely tied to our emotions, my qualitative approach furthered the cause for reading culturally relevant YAL to engender empathy for immigrants by explaining how middle school students could engage in critical literacy to discuss a topic of utmost importance at the present time in U.S. history.

Conclusion

While YAL has been gaining some ground in reading classrooms, some teachers are still drawn to reading the same novels over and over again. Furthermore, the novels used in our schools need to reflect the diversity of our student population so that students can see themselves mirrored in some of the books they read but can also have “window” experiences allowing them to peek into other cultures with other books, especially groups or cultures that may have been marginalized (Bishop, 1990). One marginalized group that is worthy of attention in our classrooms and our literature is immigrants. While there has been research on the ways immigrants have been depicted in YAL and studies on how teachers and teacher candidates have reacted to reading YAL on immigration, a review of the literature reveals a gap in the studies with regard to how students themselves are reacting to these novels. Furthermore, there have been studies on fiction as a tool for increasing empathy, but these often have not focused on YAL and/or on immigration. There is certainly room for more research on how YA novels can be used to engender empathy and to critique the status quo of certain social justice topics through a critical literacy lens.

The next chapter explains the research design. This includes why a qualitative, case study design approach was used to answer my research questions. The methods used for collecting and analyzing the data are also described.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

The approach for this study was a qualitative method that incorporated classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. This study used a case study design since I studied one particular unit at a particular school (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This chapter details the case study design approach and methods used in this research. In this chapter, I describe the reasons for choosing a case study design, as well as the context, population, and methods employed. The chapter is organized as follows: (a) rationale for qualitative research, (b) research questions, (c) research method, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) researcher role.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2008, p. 4). In this study, the social or human problem at hand was the treatment of immigrants within the United States. The goal was to explore how students create meaning about immigrants after reading fictionalized accounts of immigrants in a middle school language arts classroom. While qualitative research has been gaining ground in the last thirty years, it has not been the dominant method in the history of educational research (Seidman, 2019). However, I chose to conduct qualitative research to get at the “lived experience” of the participants (Seidman, 2019, p. 18) to understand what students experience while reading

these novels and how they made meaning from those experiences. This research took place in the classroom setting to put students at ease (Creswell, 2008).

Research Questions

For this study, I wrote two research questions to determine in what ways YAL might be used in the classroom to engender empathy for immigrants in middle grade readers and how a critical literacy approach might challenge the views students have on issues of immigration, particularly with respect to stereotypes about immigrants and how immigrants are treated. The research questions, and the corresponding probes, were as follows:

1. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL about immigrants create empathy for immigrants among eighth graders in a culturally and linguistically diverse middle school?
2. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL promote students' critical thinking about immigration?
 - a. How does classroom use of particular novels disrupt and challenge stereotypes about immigrants?
 - b. How does classroom use of particular novels impact the way students believe immigrants should be treated?

Research Method

This research used a case study design. The participants were eighth grade students taking part in a cross-curricular unit on immigration that involved three of their core subject areas: reading, language arts, and social studies.

Case Study Design

This study was framed with the critical literacy framework (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Bishop, 2014; Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015) with the belief that middle grade students could use YAL to look critically at a social justice topic such as the fair treatment of immigrants (Bean & Moni, 2003; Christensen, 2000; Cummins, 2013; Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis, 2015; Wolk, 2009;). The case study examined how YAL was used within one public middle school as part of a cross-curricular unit on immigration that involved the content areas of social studies, reading, and language arts. This qualified as a case study because it examined “a local phenomenon, situated in a relatively specific, well-defined social context” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 26). The immigration unit at this middle school is a specific unit that is well-defined from the rest of the curriculum in all three content areas (social studies, language arts, and reading).

Furthermore, a case study approach was appropriate because the research studied the use of value and power within the reading curriculum choices. Flyvberg (2001) “argued for the use of case study to address matters of value, power, and local detail, as these are pertinent to policy decision making” (as cited in Erickson, 2013, p 110). While this study might not affect policy decisions at a district or state level, it can certainly affect decision making at the school level, in which teachers must decide which literature to include in their reading curriculum. Hopefully, this case study can be made generalizable to other ELA teachers who must choose literature for an immigration unit or other similar units that discuss social justice topics. Furthermore, I chose a case study because I wanted answers to *how* and *why* questions set in a contemporary, real-life

context (Schwandt, 2015). My research questions began with the words *in what ways*, which is a variation of *how* and *why* questions, and my object of study was an event that has happened multiple times at this school.

For a methodological approach, I looked to Merriam's (1998) definition and description of a qualitative case study: "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. xiii). The bounded phenomenon was the reading component of a cross-curricular immigration unit at a particular school. The "intensive, holistic description and analysis" part indicated that I needed to be able to describe in detail how these YA novels impacted the students. I also followed Merriam's (1998) guideline to do extensive research in a case study by employing three methods of data collection: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Multiple data sources used in conjunction with discourse analysis further improved validity (Gee, 2014).

Sample Selection

The sample selection was a two-tier process, which is common in qualitative case studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The first tier involved site selection. The site selection was purposeful as I needed a school with a unit on immigration that included reading YA novels with immigrant characters. The second tier was participant selection (described below), during which I intended to use both convenience and purposeful sampling.

The target population of this study was eighth grade students at Greenwood Middle School (pseudonym). The eighth grade had approximately 140 total students. Less than twenty of them were labeled as "gifted" and were taught by a separate teacher.

A few of them were labeled as “special education” and were also taught by a separate teacher. The remaining 120 students were divided among seven sections of eighth grade reading and taught by Mrs. Carlson (pseudonym). Two of those sections were advanced reading classes; the rest were considered regular eighth grade reading classes.

The following table provides a summary of the demographics of the two class periods used in this study and exemplifies the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population. Period 8 was a regular reading class, while period 9 was one of the advanced reading classes.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

	Number of Languages Spoken			Generational Status			
	Monolingual	Bilingual	Multilingual	First	Second	Third	Fourth+
Period 8	5	7	1	0	10	2	1
Period 9	6	6	2	2	8	2	2

As noted in chapter I, I used the term *first generation* for immigrants in this study. Two students self-identified as immigrants in period 9 (the advanced reading class). A total of 18 students self-identified as the children of immigrants (10 in eighth period and 8 in ninth period). The remaining seven students identified as third generation or beyond. In both class periods, over half identified as bilingual or multilingual.

The following table lists the languages the students identified as ones that they speak fluently or have a minimal understanding of (i.e. have studied or speak at least a little off). For example, some students are sent to a separate language school in the

afternoons or on the weekends. Some understand a small amount of a particular language because that is the language of their grandparents. Spanish is the foreign language studied in grades 7 and 8 at this school. Only a small number of students do not take Spanish.

Table 3

Languages Spoken by Students

	Period 8		Period 9	
	Spoken Fluently	Minimal Understanding	Spoken Fluently	Minimal Understanding
English	13		14	
Spanish	2	10		14
Romanian	2		1	
Assyrian	2			
Urdu	1			
Russian	1	1		
Bosnian	1			
Vietnamese	1		1	
Hebrew		1		
Arabic		2		
Turkish		2		
Azerbaijani		1		
German		1		3
Korean		1		
Malayalam		1		
Bengali				1
Albanian			1	
French			1	
Greek			2	
Lithuanian			1	
Serbian			1	
Latin				1
Italian				1
Polish				1

Rationale for This School

I chose this school because it had a diverse population of students and included a cross-curricular immigration unit that involves reading YAL. It was also easy for me to

access since I already taught at a different grade level at this school and was familiar with the history of the immigration unit since I had taught it twelve years earlier.

Diverse Population of Students. Greenwood Middle School is a public school situated in a suburb of a major metropolitan area with a diverse population in terms of ethnicities, socio-economic classes, and languages spoken. At the time of this study, the school had approximately 450 students in grades 6-8. According to the school district's state report card, the student population was 50.9% white and 49.1% minority. The largest minority group was Asian (37%), followed by Hispanic (6%), two or more races (3.3%), black (2.6%), and Pacific Islander or American Indian (0.6%). While the state report card stated that only 18% of the students were labeled ELLs, over half of the students in this study identified as bilingual or multilingual. About 50% of the students classified as White were first or second generation Eastern European immigrants.

History of Cross-Curricular Immigration Unit. The Immigration Unit has been a staple of the eighth-grade curriculum at Greenwood Middle School for over two decades. As a cross-curricular unit, the students discussed immigration in social studies, reading, and language arts. In the social studies class, the students studied immigration as a historical topic (not a contemporary reality) with a focus on the peak years of immigration through Ellis Island in the early 1900s.

In the reading class, students read a novel that involved an immigrant character. From the 1990s through February 2019, this novel had been *Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse (1992). In this easy-to-read novel, a Jewish family flees Russia after their family is

threatened when the son leaves the army. The story is told through the daughter Rifka who writes letters back to a cousin as they try to journey to America.

For the 2019-2020 school year, the reading teacher decided to use a literature circle approach so that a greater variety of novels could be used that might be more culturally relevant to the population of Greenwood Middle School. The novels used were *Letters from Rifka* (retained for its ease of reading and relevance to the remaining Jewish families in the district), *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman (a contemporary novel with thirteen chapters, each told by a different character, most of whom are immigrants), *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (a historical novel in verse about Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s), and *Shooting Kabul* (a contemporary story of an Afghan family fleeing the Taliban just prior to 9/11). In 2018, I had shared with the reading teacher an annotated bibliography listing nine YA books regarding immigrants and refugees that I had created during my doctoral studies. Two of the novels she chose (*Inside Out & Back Again* and *Shooting Kabul*) were on that list. *Seedfolks* was chosen by the teacher because she wanted a book with a lower Lexile level for some of her students. The use of four different novels also allowed students the opportunity to compare and contrast immigrant stories across cultures and generations.

Rationale for This Teacher and Students

This teacher was chosen because she was the only eighth grade reading teacher at the school, other than the teacher who taught the gifted level and the special education teacher. I chose the period 8 and 9 classes because those were the only times during the day when I would be free to observe their classes and interview the students. In other

words, this tier of the selection process involved convenience sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Period 8 was a regular reading class, and period 9 was an advanced reading class.

How Students Were Selected for Interviews. I had planned to select students from within the period 8 and 9 classes through purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Since I wanted to examine mirror and window experiences (Bishop, 1990), my initial plan was to choose eight students (two for each book) who could provide contrasting perspectives. I hoped to get one student who could provide a mirror experience because he or she was either first or second generation and/or matched the cultural identity of the main character and then chose a student who could provide a window experience by being third or fourth generation or not matching the cultural identity of the main character. Unfortunately, both of these class periods were small (fifteen students or fewer), and I had little time to encourage them to return the consent and assent forms. In the end, only nine students returned the necessary paperwork to participate, so my plans for purposeful sampling had to be altered. Instead of trying to decide which one of the nine students not to include in the study, I decided to interview all nine of them. An overview of the participants is listed in the table below.

Table 4

Participants

Pseudonym	Novel Read	Cultural Background	Generational Status	Language(s) Spoken
Avani	<i>Letters from Rifka</i>	Bosnian	2	English and Bosnian
Daniella	<i>Inside Out & Back Again</i>	Assyrian, Lebanese, and Iraqi	2	Assyrian and English
Trang	<i>Inside Out & Back Again</i>	Vietnamese	1	Vietnamese and English
Sal	<i>Inside Out & Back Again</i>	Mostly Mexican	2	Spanish and English
Isaiah	<i>Shooting Kabul</i>	Mostly Indian	3	English
Maria	<i>Shooting Kabul</i>	Romanian and “1/2 American” (student’s words)	2	English
Sasha	<i>Shooting Kabul</i>	Albanian	2	Albanian and English
Hubert	<i>Shooting Kabul</i>	Assyrian	2	English
Bosha	<i>Shooting Kabul</i>	Polish	2	English (limited Polish)

As can be seen in the table above, none of the students who read *Seedfolks* were included in this study because none of them returned consent forms. The chances of having a participant from that literature circle were slim from the start. Since the teacher had purchased those copies only for students who would benefit from a lower Lexile level, she did not include it in her period 9 advanced reading class. Therefore, of the two periods included in this study, there was only one literature circle with four students reading *Seedfolks*, and none of those four returned the consent forms. Also, *Letters from Rifka* (another fairly low Lexile level book) was only read by one literature circle group

in the advanced class and one literature circle group in the period 8 class. Of the six students (all girls) reading *Letters from Rifka* in those two periods, only one returned a consent form. There were a total of six students reading *Inside Out and Back Again* in the two classes periods. Two (out of four) from the advanced class and one (out of two) from the regular class returned consent forms. In contrast, there were a total of fourteen students reading *Shooting Kabul*, two literature circle groups in each of the class periods. Therefore, I had a higher number of students who read that novel returning consent forms, probably due to the fact that there were simply more students reading that book.

Despite the difficulty in getting consent and assent forms returned, there was still a good amount of variety in the participants. One (Trang) was an immigrant who arrived in America when she was about ten or eleven years old (She could not remember her exact age when questioned during the interview). One (Isaiah) was third generation (with a grandfather from India), and the remaining six were all children of immigrants. All but one of the second generation students (Maria, whose dad was from Romania but mom was born in the United States) had two parents who were immigrants.

Furthermore, as can be noted above, there was no duplication in cultural backgrounds of students. Each of the students claimed a different cultural background from the others. In terms of languages spoken, five were bilingual, three were monolingual, and one was mostly monolingual (English) but could understand some spoken Polish. Despite the convenience sampling I was defaulted into, the participants in the study reflected a diversity in keeping with the overall diversity of the student population at this school.

Data Collection

I chose a qualitative over a quantitative case study design because of the nature of the research questions. Instead of researching whether or not reading YAL *can* engender empathy (as studied by Mar et al., 2009; Mar et al., 2005; Vezzali et al., 2012; Vezzali et al., 2015), I sought to examine in what ways, or how, YAL can engender empathy by trying to fetter out the lived experiences of the students as they read and discussed the books. In order to triangulate the data, I used all three of the common data collection methods for qualitative research in an educational setting: classroom observations, document analysis, and interviews.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations allowed observations of students discussing the books in their literature circles. I was an “observer as participant” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 144), meaning that my actions were known to the participants but any interaction I had with them was secondary to my role as an observer. As I observed, I took notes using a two-column observational protocol (Creswell, p. 2008). On the left column I took descriptive notes, including a description of the classroom setting, portraits of the student participants, emotional reactions of the students to the discussion, and snippets of dialogue that stood out. I particularly looked for students who seemed the most engaged and animated in their discussion. On the right column, I made reflective notes. These were my personal thoughts and reactions to what I observed. I also noted questions I had in this column, especially things I thought I might want to ask about during the post-

reading interviews at the end of the unit. The observation protocol also included basic demographic information about the observation such as time, place, and date.

Observation allowed me to observe the students' experience from my own point of view (Seidman, 2019, p. 17). In other words, I could see the students' reactions to the books, but I was still seeing their experience from my perspective. In order to see their experiences from their point of view, follow-up interviews were needed. Another purpose of the observations was to provide me with specific examples of discussions, behaviors, or emotions I witnessed that could be used as a reference point for the follow-up interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Document Analysis

Through the document analysis, I aimed to find what the students wrote in response to the YAL. The document analysis included two parts. The first was a pre-reading reflection that I asked the reading teacher to pass out at the beginning of the unit. I had hoped she might use it as a springboard for conversation to get the students talking about immigration before reading the novels, but she simply handed them out, collected them, and returned them to me. I analyzed these by coding them in the same manner as the interview transcripts (see below) and also looking for anything I might want to follow up with during the interviews.

The other part of the document analysis included the written assignments the students completed as part of their literature circles assignments. The reading teacher made each group create a portfolio out of construction paper on the first day of the unit. Students wrote the title of their books, drew an image to represent their book, and listed

their names on the cover. Each day the students were assigned 3-5 tasks to complete. Each of these tasks was written on loose-leaf paper and inserted into the portfolios, which were kept in bins assigned to each class period. For the document analysis, I read over the written assignments prior to interviewing the students. In that way, I could ask the students to further explain or clarify points they had brought up. To analyze the documents, I used the “Document Analysis Protocol” included in the Appendix. This protocol included questions that focused on finding answers to the two research questions; therefore, the questions centered on finding evidence that the students had increased empathy for immigrants and/or could engage in critical literacy while reading.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the students were completed at the end of the unit. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These happened at the end of Immigration Day (the culminating activity for this unit) and utilized the “Post-Reading Interview Protocol” (see Appendix). Students were interviewed individually, and the interviews were recorded using Voice Memo on my laptop. The purpose of the interviews was to yield direct quotations from the students about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and understanding of the content (Patton, 2015). During the interviews, I encouraged the students to delve deeper into their explanations for their reactions to the novels.

To ensure as smooth an interview process as possible, I followed the guidelines of Brinkman and Kvale (2015). First, I kept in mind that the importance of the first few minutes in making the interviewee feel like he or she could talk freely. Therefore, I spent a minute or two catching up with the students as individuals in order to reestablish the

positive rapport we had had when I was their classroom teacher two years earlier. One of the students was a new transfer, so I tried to make sure she felt comfortable talking to me before we began. Second, I used an open-ended introductory question to get them talking about their experience in general. Their answers to follow-up questions were encouraged with further probing questions or affirmative responses, such as “Hmm” or “Yes.”

Piloting the Interview Protocol

In the previous spring, I had piloted the interview protocol. I met with each of the three students in the pilot study individually for approximately ten minutes during their class’s weekly trip to the library to check out books so that they did not miss any instructional time. I audio-recorded the interviews using Quicktime on my laptop.

For transcription, I created a spreadsheet that listed my original questions from the interview protocol at the top of the page. Then in the first column on the left, I transcribed the exact wording I used during the interview for that question with student #1 and then student #1’s response. In the next two columns, I repeated the process with the questions and answers for student #2, and then finally did the same for student #3. In this way, I saw not only the similarities and differences in the student responses, but also how I changed the question as the interviews progressed and whether or not my change in wording seemed to make any difference. To revise my interview protocol, I looked back over the parts where I seemed to get better responses to see if I had asked the question differently for that student(s).

For the next step, I printed out the transcription pages to engage in discourse analysis (Gee, 2014). I wanted to immerse myself in the transcriptions so as to understand

the situated meanings students had created and engaged in during the unit. For this process, I reread my original research questions and highlighted words or phrases that I thought might help answer those questions. Once the highlighting was complete, I reread only the highlighted parts while keeping an extra sheet of paper beside me. As I read the highlighted text, I jotted down words or themes that seemed to repeat. I tried to group them as I wrote them so that I would have them listed by research question.

During the analysis, I discovered that I needed to confirm students had indeed become empathetic to immigrants. Thus, I decided it would be helpful to interview the students prior to reading the novel so that I could get their thoughts on immigrants before the unit began. In the pilot, I had only interviewed the students after reading the book. I also noticed a gap between students having empathy for immigrants of the past versus current immigrants. During last year's pilot study, all of the students read *Letters from Rifka*. Thus, I encouraged the reading teacher to try a literature circle approach that would allow some students to read contemporary immigration stories while others read historical immigration stories so that the students could compare and contrast the immigrants' challenges and experiences.

Data Analysis

As a qualitative study, the data analysis was rather recursive, with findings from some of the early document analysis and classroom observations often refining and improving the data collection and analysis for the next phase (Creswell, 2008). Furthermore, I used Gee's (2014) idea of contrastive analysis to compare and contrast

how *mirror* and *window* experiences (Bishop, 2014) gave rise to different situated meanings for students as they read the books and engaged in discussions.

Method for Coding and Analysis

The first step in the data analysis was completing the classroom observations. For this, I used the “Classroom Observation Protocol” noted in the appendix. I highlighted any notes that stood out as important or indicated any change in feelings (empathetic responses) or critical literacy (challenging stereotypes or preconceived ideas about the treatment of immigrants).

Next, I completed the document analysis. During this phase, I examined the documents that the students had completed as assignments during the immigration unit. I analyzed these documents using the document analysis form created for this study, which included questions about evidence for empathy and critical literacy with regard to immigration issues. Specifically, I looked for points I might want the participant to clarify or expand upon during a private interview. After analyzing the documents, I used those findings to refine my post-reading interview protocols by adding, subtracting, and revising questions as necessary. This allowed me to plan my final data collection sessions (the post-reading interviews) according to what I had learned in the previous observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Finally, I analyzed data collected during the interviews. Using steps recommended by Creswell (2008), I first organized and prepared the interview data by transcribing the audio recordings. Next, I read over all the interview transcriptions to get a general feel for the conversation and to reflect on their meaning. Then I coded the

interview transcriptions based on common themes. As each new theme emerged, I noted it on a pad of paper beside my laptop. These themes, or categories, were determined inductively through the interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Once these codes were established, I typed them into a formal coding scheme that grouped the codes based on which research question they answered. In other words, I decided whether the themes related more directly to empathy or critical thinking.

Table 5 lists the coding scheme for the first research question. These related to the third key element of critical literacy as described in chapter II. In other words, I examined how students used multiple perspectives to examine a text or issue to arrive at an empathetic response.

Research Question #1: In what ways does reading and discussing YAL about immigrants create empathy for immigrants among eighth graders in a culturally and linguistically diverse middle school?

Table 5

Coding Scheme for Research Question #1

Perspectives	Empathy
Mirror Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural similarities • Experience-related similarities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Bullying • Language 	Affective Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear and Concern • Sadness • Happiness
Window Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical differences • Experience-related differences 	Cognitive Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding • Recognition • Using Imagination
Crystallizing Experiences	

Table 6 lists the coding scheme for the second question. These related to the first and second key elements of critical literacy as described in chapter II. The first key element involves questioning everyday assumptions and what is considered typical or appropriate. The second key element involves investigating power structures with regard to how people are treated.

Research Question #2: In what ways does reading and discussing YAL promote students' critical thinking about immigration reform?

Table 6

Coding Scheme for Research Question #2

Stereotypes	Treatment of Immigrants
Questioning Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypes • Personal beliefs 	Person-to-Person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism • Discrimination
	Policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary policies • Historical policies

Triangulation of Data

In order to improve internal validity, the data collection included methods triangulation (Creswell, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation increases the credibility or internal validity of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Triangulating data means to seek verification of a finding through one method of data collection by using another method of data collection. The three methods used to triangulate data in this study were document analysis, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews. In order to triangulate the data, I looked for ways that the findings

within the documents were either observed in the classroom discussions or clarified and expanded upon during the interviews.

Researcher Role

Two aspects of my role as the researcher in this study require some attention. First, I taught ELA at this school. For the previous seven years, I had taught solely at the sixth-grade level so that most of the eighth-grade students I interviewed either had me as a teacher or knew me from passing me in the sixth-grade hallway. A couple of the students had moved into the district after sixth grade, so they did not know me before I introduced myself to the class before the unit began. I believe knowing most of the students in advance worked in my favor as I already had a good rapport with the students. They knew me as an adult they could trust and with whom they could openly discuss books and their ideas about those books. At the same time, I was not their current teacher, so they did not need to worry that anything they said to me would affect their grade.

As a former eighth-grade teacher who taught this unit, I had my beliefs about how the unit should be taught. My first belief was that culturally relevant literature is an important component in the reading classroom. This had been stressed throughout my master's program and my doctoral program. Thus, I began providing the current eighth-grade reading teacher with alternative immigration novels a year and a half before my research began. My second belief was that a topic like immigration should be addressed in the classroom as a current social justice topic, not just a historical event from the past. Thus, I encouraged the reading teacher to have the literature circle groups share what

they read in their novels with the rest of the class so that they could compare the historical and contemporary immigration stories.

The second positionality I held was as a YAL and middle grade author myself. As an author who writes novels for teens and tweens, I certainly want to believe that they are valuable contributions to the literary world and could serve useful purposes in the classroom. Indeed, I have had teachers who have used my books tell me what a wonderful addition they have been to their curriculum. However, the books chosen for this unit were ones I did not write, nor were any of them written by any of my YAL author friends. Nonetheless, as a YA author who was active within the publishing community and a member of professional writing groups such as the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators, I was well positioned to know what kind of YAL books to suggest to the reading teacher that would fit the theme of the unit and appeal to eighth graders.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

As described in Chapter I, my study examined the ways in which YAL can be used to engender empathy for immigrants in middle-grade readers. The study used a critical literacy lens to see how students who read immigration novels questioned assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices about immigrants. In this chapter, I answer my research questions:

1. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL about immigrants create empathy for immigrants among eighth graders in a culturally and linguistically diverse middle school?
2. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL promote students' critical thinking about immigration?
 - a. How does classroom use of particular novels disrupt and challenge stereotypes about immigrants?
 - b. How does classroom use of particular novels impact the way students believe immigrants should be treated?

With this study, I hoped to understand the ways in which students engaged with the novels and reflected on what they read and how those novels caused them to question prejudices and stereotypes.

As described in Chapter II, I used critical literacy as a framework to guide my analysis. In other words, I examined how students used the written word to examine our world within its historical context for the purpose of critiquing and analyzing it for some greater good (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Bishop, 2014; Luke, 2012). Specifically, I wanted to see how students used the written words within YAL to examine, critique, and analyze the experiences of immigrants within the United States.

Participant Profiles

In this section, I share profiles of the nine participants. I organized the profiles based on the book read, then by class period, and then by literature circle group.

***Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse**

Letters from Rifka (Hesse, 1992) tells the story of a young Jewish girl named Rifka whose family flees Russia in 1919 to avoid war and persecution. During her journey, she uses an old book of poetry to write letters to her cousin Tovah, who remains in Russia. With this diary-style format, the book uses first-person narration to bring the reader into Rifka's challenges. When Rifka develops ringworm, she remains in Europe as the rest of her family forges on. She faces numerous challenges throughout the story, including illnesses, a dangerous sea voyage, and being held at Ellis Island before being reunited with her family. One student who read *Letters from Rifka* returned consent and assent forms.

Avani, Period 8

Avani, a 13-year-old, eighth-grade girl, identified her ethnicity as Bosnian. While she had originally stated that she spoke both Bosnian and English, she admitted during

the interview that at home it was more likely for her parents to speak Bosnian to her and for her to respond in English. While in her twenties, her mom immigrated to the United States with Avani's grandmother. Her dad immigrated alone as a young man. Avani participated actively with two female group members and showed great enthusiasm and emotion during our interview despite admitting that the interview made her nervous. She did not find the book to be interesting in the beginning. However, it became more interesting to her when she realized Rifka was a strong girl who would not stop at anything to get what she wanted.

***Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai**

Inside Out & Back Again (Lai, 2017), a novel told in verse, details one year in the life of ten-year-old Hà, a Vietnamese girl whose father has been missing since shortly after her birth. The year is 1975, and Hà has become used to hearing the sounds of war near her home in Saigon. When her mother decides it is time for the family (which includes Hà's three older brothers) to flee their home, they join their uncle on a navy ship that is headed out to sea. Hà leaves behind her beloved papaya tree, her friends, and most of her belongings. After weeks on the ship, they are finally rescued by an American ship but must then wait in Florida for a family to sponsor them. Eventually, they are sponsored and moved to Alabama, where Hà finds that peacetime in Alabama may be worse than wartime in Saigon. She endures a great deal of bullying while trying to learn English and adapt to her new school and community. Three participants in this study read *Inside Out & Back Again*. Daniella worked with one other girl in her period 8 class. Trang and Sal worked together in a group with two other boys in their period 9 class.

Daniella, Period 8

Daniella, a 14-year-old eighth grade girl, identified herself as mostly Assyrian, but also Lebanese and Iraqi. She identified both Assyrian and English as her home languages. Her mom emigrated from Assyria, and her dad moved from Lebanon to Greece to the United States. Daniella worked with one other girl to read *Inside Out & Back Again*. During our interview, Daniella admitted that this was her second time reading the book. The teacher had assigned the books so that I do not believe the teacher knew Daniella had already read the book. In my classroom observations, I witnessed Daniella and her literature circles partner often working independently on their assignments. They interacted only when they needed to clarify their assignments. Daniella, a rather soft-spoken girl in class, easily opened up to talk about the book when we had our one-on-one interview.

Trang, Period 9

Trang, a 14-year-old girl, identified as Vietnamese. The only immigrant in the sample, Trang emigrated from Vietnam about 3 or 4 years earlier when she was about 10 or 11. She spoke both English and Vietnamese, with Vietnamese being the main language in the home. Trang read *Inside Out & Back Again* in a group with three boys, including Sal (below). The teacher had originally assigned Trang to *Shooting Kabul*; however, on the first day that the literature circles met, the three boys in the group kept turning to Trang to ask her how to pronounce the Vietnamese words in the book and what they meant. Trang asked to switch groups. During our interview, I asked Trang about the switch, and she said she wanted to read *Inside Out & Back Again* “because I think it

might be related to me somehow so I wanted to read the book.” (Trang, Interview, February 14, 2020). Her classmate Sasha (see below) had originally been in the *Inside Out & Back Again* group with the three boys and offered to switch places with Trang since she had already read *Inside Out & Back Again* but had not read *Shooting Kabul*. In my classroom observations, I continued to witness Trang helping her classmates to understand the Vietnamese words and culture portrayed in the book.

Sal, Period 9

Sal, a fourteen-year-old boy, identified himself as “mostly Mexican” (Sal, Interview, February 14, 2020). He spoke English and Spanish, with Spanish being the primary language in the home. Both of his parents were immigrants. Sal worked with Trang and two other boys in a group. In my classroom observations, Sal was rather soft spoken in large-group settings, but in small-group discussions, he quickly spoke up about the hardships faced by immigrants. For example, while one of his group members was working on a timeline project, that group member stated that “nothing” happened after the main character Hà started school, but Sal piped in that she was bullied. The group member retorted that the bullying wasn’t that important to the story, but Sal insisted that it was. When asked about that interaction in the interview, Sal responded:

It's [the bullying] still an event that was important because it's still Hà's experience. And so, how she feels about moving to America, how she felt, we got to read through that, and bullying was like a big part [of] when she moved. [It's] how she got to understand the society, and how people treat people. (Sal, Interview, February 14, 2020)

***Shooting Kabul* by N. H. Senzai**

In *Shooting Kabul* (Senzai, 2010), twelve-year-old Fadi and his family flee the Taliban in Afghanistan in the summer of 2001. While trying to sneak out of the country, Fadi holds the hand of his younger sister Mariam. The family waits for a truck to take them across the border to Pakistan. When it arrives, other families come out of hiding and swarm the truck. Mariam gets lost in the crowd just as Fadi is pulled up onto the truck. With the Taliban on its tail, the truck flees to Pakistan. Once they are in Pakistan, it is impossible for the family to go back without losing their chance for asylum. After being granted asylum in the United States, Fadi's father makes arrangements for contacts back in Pakistan to search for Mariam. However, Fadi feels terribly guilty, as he believes it was his fault Mariam slipped from his fingers during the escape. He enters a photography contest with a grand prize of a trip to India. He hopes that if he can get to India, he can sneak back into Afghanistan to save his sister. Several groups read *Shooting Kabul*. In period 8, Hubert worked with one other boy in a small group. In period 9, two groups read *Shooting Kabul*. Isaiah and Maria worked in a group with two more students, and Sasha and Bosha worked in a different group with two more boys.

Hubert, Period 8

Hubert, a thirteen-year-old boy, identified himself as Assyrian. Both of his parents emigrated from Iran. Hubert identified only English as his home language. Hubert had one other male classmate in his group. The two boys got along well and asked each other questions if they did not understand a part in the book or the guidelines of an assignment. They joked around quietly with each other from time to time but came quickly back to

their work. If the noise level in the room got too loud, the boys asked to work out in the hallway.

Isaiah, Period 9

Isaiah, a thirteen-year-old boy, identified himself as “mostly Indian” (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020). He claimed English as his only language. He identified as third generation, with his grandfather having emigrated from India. Isaiah and Maria worked in the same literature circle group with one other boy and one other girl. A rather out-spoken boy, Isaiah spoke up in both his small group and larger class discussions. Isaiah stated that he really enjoyed reading the book because of its theme, which he identified as “regret” since the main character Fadi “was super regretful about losing Mariam” (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020).

Maria, Period 9

Maria, a fourteen-year-old girl, identified herself as half Romanian and “half American” (Maria, Interview, February 14, 2020). She listed English as her only home language but identified as second generation because her father had emigrated from Romania. Her mother’s family had been in the United States so long that she could not name the ethnic backgrounds of ancestors from that side of the family. Maria worked in the group with Isaiah (above). She had moved to the district the previous year, so that she was not one of my former students. Despite our not having met previously, she spoke easily and enthusiastically with me. She was an avid reader who valued literature. Without any prompting from me or her teacher, she brought up the idea of standing in a character’s shoes in class discussions, in her written classwork, and in our interview.

Sasha, Period 9

Sasha, a thirteen-year-old girl, identified herself as Albanian. She spoke both English and Albanian, with the latter being used more at home. Both of her parents were immigrants. Sasha read *Shooting Kabul* in the same literature circle as Bosha (below). Originally, she had been placed in the *Inside Out & Back Again* group but switched places with Trang since Trang wanted to read that book and Sasha had already read it. Despite being the only girl in her literature circle group, she confidently voiced her opinions about how the work in her group should be completed. For example, on the first day, one boy read on the back cover that 9/11 would be part of the plot, so he suggested that they draw a picture of the Twin Towers burning on the cover of their portfolio. Sasha quickly and forcefully interjected that she did not feel that would be appropriate and suggested some new ideas for the cover image.

Bosha, Period 9

Bosha, a thirteen-year-old boy, identified himself as Polish. He identified his home language as English but told me he also understood some spoken Polish at home. Both of his parents emigrated from Poland. He eagerly shared his opinions, not just with me during our interview, but also with his classmates during their discussions. He liked to joke around and was in the same literature circle group as Sasha (see above) who sometimes had to remind him to stay on task.

Discoveries

In this section, I share some of the discoveries made during this research. I begin with the discoveries related to empathy: (a) through affective responses, (b) through

cognitive responses, and (c) through perspective. I then address the discoveries related to critical literacy: (a) addressing stereotypes, (b) racism and discrimination, and (c) immigration policies.

Empathy

In introductory chapters, I defined empathy as the cognitive and affective responses of understanding the feelings of another person so as to understand the motives behind a person's actions and emotions (Bullough, 2019; Hoffman, 2000; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Rantala et al., 2016). I also connected empathy and cultural relevance, indicating that mirror, window, and sliding glass door experiences with literature can impact the development of empathy (Bishop, 1980). In analyzing the data, I looked for ways in which students responded both cognitively and affectively to the plight of the immigrants in the novels. I discovered that students, particularly second-generation immigrants, had a cross between mirror and window experiences that reminded me of a prism, with its abilities to both reflect and refract light. However, further reflection and research led me to rename this effect as a crystallizing experience. In this section, I examine how (a) empathy was present through affective responses, (b) empathy was present through cognitive responses, and (c) window, mirror, and crystallizing experiences promoted empathy.

Empathy through Affective Responses

Students responded to characters' experiences through a variety of emotions. The three most prevalent emotions expressed were sadness, happiness, and a sense of fear or concern for characters' well-being.

Sadness. Six of the nine students specifically mentioned feeling sad for characters. Two of these responses related to experiences that could happen to immigrants and non-immigrants alike. Sal reported feeling sad when Hà learned that her father had died (Sal, Interview, February 14, 2020). Bosha reported that “the only sad part” of *Shooting Kabul* was “when Fadi lost his sister and when Fadi lost the photo taking contest” (Bosha, Interview, February 14, 2020). Losing a family member (either through death, such as Hà losing her dad, or leaving a family member behind, such as Fadi leaving his sister behind) were experiences to which students related and did not seem to be intrinsically tied to the experience of immigrating.

The other four students who reported feeling sad mentioned aspects of the story more intricately tied to the experience of immigrating. Daniella offered a long explanation of how classmates bullied Hà for her looks, especially in comparison to the other girls in her American school who had wavy and curly hair. They also teased her for how she did not understand what they said because of language differences (Daniella, Interview, February 14, 2020). Hubert, like Bosha, had mentioned Fadi’s sister Mariam being left behind: “I kind of felt sad and bad that Mariam had to stay there. [Fadi and his family] were just helpless and the passengers would like drag them back onto the truck” (Hubert, Interview, February 14, 2020). Unlike Bosha’s general statement that Fadi had “lost his sister,” Hubert tied his sadness to the moment when Fadi’s family tried to escape the Taliban on a truck in the middle of the night and Fadi was helpless to get his sister back on the truck with them.

Maria's and Avani's sadness stemmed from injustices in the way immigrant characters were treated. When speaking of how Rifka from *Letters from Rifka* was forced to stay in Europe after being diagnosed with ringworm, Avani explained that she "was kind of sad when [Rifka] had to live one year in Poland because she did not deserve that. She deserves a life in America" (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020). Her reaction indicated that she felt Rifka was worthy of life as an American and that a disease should not be a reason to keep someone from entering a country. Maria's sadness also tied to the immigrant experience. During our interview, she explained how she felt about Fadi, as a Middle Eastern immigrant, being bullied in his American school after 9/11:

When I was reading it, I got to the one part where the two boys in the book attacked Fadi outside of school and started punching him. And that made me really sad because I knew that these kids were hearing stuff from their parents . . . about what had happened during 9/11, and [these bullies] developed from their parents' opinions their own sort of like political views. (Maria, February 14, 2020)

Maria made a connection between the historical facts from that time and one immigrant's experience with discrimination and racism. Furthermore, she indicated that this made her feel "really sad," which demonstrates a deep level of empathy for the character as well as an understanding of where this feeling emanated.

Happiness. Happiness was not an affective response I had initially expected from the students. However, upon examination, their reported times of feeling happy indicated empathy for immigrant characters. The four times students expressed feeling happy came

when characters overcame challenges. Isaiah stated that he “felt really good” for Fadi when he learned about the photo shoot competition because it meant Fadi might win a trip back to India, which would get him closer to Pakistan and his sister (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020). Bosha stated that he was happy when he read the part where Fadi’s sister was found (Isaiah, February 14, 2020). If Isaiah and Bosha had not previously been concerned or worried about Fadi losing his sister, they would not have experienced any happiness or good feeling about seeing Fadi succeed.

In a similar fashion, Avani and Sal felt happy when their characters made progress in their immigrant journeys. In his written assignments and during our interview, Sal discussed the challenges Hà had speaking English after immigrating to America. “I kind of felt, I guess happy when Hà was able to express her feelings with Miss Washington” (Sal, Interview February 14, 2020). His use of the phrases “kind of” and “I guess” hinted at a reluctance to admit he was happy for someone who struggled so much. At the same time, he wanted her to have these kinds of positive experiences where she could use her new language the way she wanted to. While discussing *Letters from Rifka*, Avani tied together both feelings of fear and happiness:

I was very scared when [Rifka] said her head was itching, but she didn't want to check if she had ringworm again. I was like, if she doesn't get into America, I don't know how it would feel so I was really scared for her, but when I read the last few pages . . . she got into America, and then she started her hair sort of growing back, I was so happy for her and I just cannot stop smiling.” (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020)

Avani smiled as she explained this last scene to me. She had reached a position of rooting for the main character, and her happiness stemmed from Rifka succeeding, at long last, to enter America.

Concern. The remaining affective responses related to areas of concern for immigrants. Students used words like stressed, anxious, and scared to relate these emotional experiences they had while reading. The experience of being bullied was a common area of concern reported by the participants. “When [*Inside Out & Back Again*] got to the bullying part, I felt really bad for [Hà] because they would call her ‘Buddha, Buddha’” (Daniella, Interview, February 14, 2020). Here Daniella referred to an incident in which classmates bullied Hà for her ethnicity. Earlier in an assignment, Daniella had pointed out that the “most stressful thing Hà has gone through so far is being bullied. She was being bullied for looking different. They called her names and chased her home” (Daniella, Respond Activity, February 12, 2020). Likewise, Sal, who read the same book in a different class period, expressed concern over the bullying Hà experienced:

I was thinking bullying was also a big, I guess you could say a bit smaller, but still an event that was important because it’s still Ha’s experience . . . she had an opinion about moving to America . . . and also bullying that was like a big part when she moved as she got to understand society and how people treat people at that time. (Sal, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Both of these students showed concern for the bullying Hà experienced. Given that bullying had been a common topic my coworkers and I combated and discussed with

students at this school, this was not terribly surprising. However, what is of note here is that both of these students recognized the bullying was related to Hà being an immigrant.

Stress was an emotion mentioned by both Isaiah and Daniella. As noted above, Daniella found the bullying to be the most stressful thing her character had faced. Isaiah mentioned stress in conjunction with anxiety. When asked if he had had any strong emotional reactions to any part of the book, Isaiah explained that he was

Anxious, especially during the part where Fadi lost Mariam. I was kind of stressed, like sad, because that was like the main point of the book . . . we watch[ed] it playing out . . . him losing Marian and then they just being gone from each other. (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Of all the students who experienced emotional reactions, Isaiah's responses tied to general topics, such as losing a sibling, and the least likely to be tied to an experience directly related to immigration. As the only third-generation immigrant in the sample, Isaiah was the farthest removed from the experience of immigration, making his inability to relate with the immigrant character more understandable. He had fewer points of cultural relevance that tied directly to the experience of immigrating so when he did find relevance, it was often to an experience that anyone his age might have had, such as feeling regret over not taking better care of a sibling.

The final emotion related to concern expressed by any student was that of fear. When reaching toward the climatic moment in *Letters from Rifka*, Avani reported that she felt

very scared when she said her head was itching, but she didn't want to check if she had ringworm again. I was like, if she doesn't get into America, I don't know how it would feel so I was really scared for her. (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020)

At this point, Avani had empathized with the main character to the point that she experienced the same emotion as the character in that moment: fear over whether or not, after over a year of waiting, she could get into America.

Empathy through Cognitive Responses

As noted in Chapter I, the term empathy does not refer to emotional responses alone. It also includes cognitive responses (Bullough, 2019; Hoffman, 2000; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017). The cognitive aspect of empathy involves understanding and growing in knowledge about a person's situation and the choices an individual makes. In this section, I report on the students' (a) new understandings about immigrants, (b) recognitions of previously held beliefs, and (c) use of their imaginations to stand in the shoes of an immigrant character.

New Understandings About Immigrants. For Hubert, reading *Shooting Kabul* taught him one new thing about immigrants he had never considered before: perhaps not all immigrants are happy about their decision to immigrate after they have made the move.

I thought being an immigrant was like . . . you completely made a decision on whether you're going to America or not, and you're happy with that decision . . . but with *Shooting Kabul* and the movie that we're watching, I kind of know that

people are homesick and they want to stay in their country, but for better opportunities they stay in America. (Hubert, Interview, February 14, 2020)

The movie Hubert referred to was one they watched at the end of their Immigration Day experience. *Amreeka* (Dabis, 2009) told the story of a contemporary Middle Eastern family moving to America. Through the book and the movie (both works of fiction), Hubert realized that even though people sometimes left their home countries and moved to America for better opportunities, they still loved their home countries and experienced homesickness or regret.

Isaiah also came to a new understanding about immigration after reading *Shooting Kabul*. Prior to this, he had “only read about people that like kind of succeed and it’s easy for them.” He then went out to explain the “really risky plan” that Fadi’s family had to get tickets and sneak onto a truck in the middle of the night to escape over the border to Pakistan (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020). Reading this novel prompted his understanding of the dangers of immigration, which was in contrast to the other things he had read about immigration that made it look easy.

Bosha’s experience with *Shooting Kabul* also prompted new understandings. He felt this unit was important because “some people might only hear from one thing or another that immigration is this or that, and they might not know about the full struggles . . . a lot of people don’t know the full struggles of immigrating, like myself, I did not know” (Bosha, Interview, February 14, 2020). While he did not detail these struggles, he expressed an understanding that immigration was more challenging than he had previously understood it to be.

For Sasha, reading *Shooting Kabul* gave her a new understanding about her own life. “Everything’s like given to me . . . the only problem or things I have to worry about is just school” (Sasha, Interview, February 14, 2020). For her, reading this immigration novel helped her to understand that she did not have to fight for the right to be a U.S. citizen. She did not have to worry about leaving behind an oppressive government to start life anew or whether or not she would be accepted in a new country.

Recognition of Previously Held Beliefs. While students like Hubert, Isaiah, Boshia, and Sasha came to new understandings, other students had experiences that might be better classified as recognitions; in other words, they were literally *re* (a Latin prefix meaning “again”) *cognizing* (a Latin stem meaning “to learn” or “to know”) what they had already known or suspected. For example, Avani had noted that “getting cured of diseases” was a common struggle for immigrants before she read *Letters from Rifka* (Avani, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). When she read and discussed the book, she often commented on Rifka having ringworm. Before reading *Inside Out & Back Again*, Sal knew that “The trip to America will be difficult. They will face Ellis Island and discrimination” (Sal, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). Although Hà, the main character in *Inside Out & Back Again*, did not face Ellis Island, Sal did recognize moments when she faced discrimination, such as the bullying she endured at school. Before the unit began, Maria had noted that immigrants face “separation from families” (Maria, Pre-Reading Reflection), which she saw happen with Fadi and his sister in *Shooting Kabul*.

Because of seeing immigrants struggle as they had expected, these three students had difficulty explaining how the books changed their understanding during the Post-Reading Interviews. When asked whether or not reading the book had changed their views of immigrants, Sal and Maria (who had both expressed great degrees of empathy for the characters throughout their classwork, groups discussions, and interviews) stated that reading the books did not really change their feelings but did provide “more information.” Of his experience with *Inside Out & Back Again*, Sal told me, “I guess I just learned more information but it didn’t really change my attitude” (Sal, Interview, February 14, 2020). Maria expressed herself in similar words. When asked if reading *Shooting Kabul* changed the way she looked at immigrants, she responded, “Um . . . not exactly, but it did give me more information. So it kind of, I guess, confirmed what I already thought was true” (Maria, Interview, February 14, 2020). Avani also used the term “information” when describing to me why she could not put the book down: “When I was reading the book, I really, really did not want to stop reading. It was just so much information that I didn’t want to miss out” (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020). While their vague responses puzzled me at first (none of them could elaborate on what “more information” really meant), the pieces of the puzzle fell together when I considered the kinds of mirror and window experiences the students had (see below).

Although Maria recognized some of her own previously held ideas about immigrants reflected in the novel, she still felt it could change someone else’s perspective on immigrants:

“I think it would kind of change their perspective. I should hope it would because that’s what good literature is supposed to do, right? Kind of change your view on something. And, yeah, some people can be very stuck on their ideas, but I think it just takes informing somebody to kind of change your viewpoint.” (Maria, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Here Maria summed up the importance of good literature and how it can change lives. She expressed her belief that good stories can provide the kind of information necessary to change someone’s viewpoint.

Using Imagination to Stand in the Shoes of an Immigrant. In Chapter II, I noted that when Joellen Maples incorporated contemporary immigration novels into her middle school classroom in Tennessee, her students could “stand in the shoes of others” (Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010, p. 32). This allowed her students, whom she had witnessed previously making stereotypical and negative remarks to her immigrant students, to rethink their previous assumptions. Thus, I explored in what ways these three novels might make students stand in the shoes of the immigrant character.

The findings showed that, in both interviews or writing assignments, students used their imaginations to consider what they might do if they had been placed in similar situations. Often these moments related to how students imagined they would deal with family situations. For the students reading *Shooting Kabul*, this led them to wonder how they might react if they had been in Fadi’s shoes and lost a sibling they had been put in charge of: “It made me think of what I might do if that had happened to me if I was in Fadi’s shoes. You know, losing my little brother for example” (Maria, Interview,

February 14, 2020). For Daniella, reading *Inside Out & Back Again* had her imagining a different sort of family situation. In that story, a character “sacrifices her doll to make her brother happy and at peace” (Daniella, Problem Solving Assignment, February 4, 2020). Daniella reflected on this by saying, “I would have done something like comfort [my brother], but then tell him nothing can bring it back, let it go. I learned that you sometimes have to sacrifice something of your own to make your family happy” (Daniella, Problem Solving Assignment, February 4, 2020). In these cases, dealing with family problems was an aspect of cultural relevance that caused students to put themselves in the place of the immigrant character to imagine what they might have done in similar situations. While these students were not immigrants themselves, dealing with family problems was a common enough problem to help them make a connection between themselves and the character to the point of becoming empathetic for what the character had to do.

Not all instances of standing in the shoes of an immigrant were related to family problems, however. Sometimes a basic common human experience, such as bullying, discrimination, or fearing others in power positions, was enough to cause the students to imagine how they would respond if they had been the character. For example, Avani had seen stories about immigrants on the news and seen videos of immigrants being told to “go back to your country” (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020). Then she reflected on this unit as a whole:

I’m getting more information on the past too and how people would treat [immigrants] and give them bad looks or say bad things to them. I don’t know too

much about that, but . . . if someone was saying that to me, I'd be really sad and not know what to do.” (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020)

While she may claim not to know too much about the discrimination against immigrants, she could already imagine herself being discriminated against.

In a similar vein, Sasha imagined how she might react in the face of a terrorist group. Early on in her reading of *Shooting Kabul*, Sasha reflected on Fadi's father's decision to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban comes to him and wants him to join them:

The Taliban is such a bad group I would be scared to say ‘no’ to them, but at the same time I wouldn't want to say ‘yes’ to them. I feel like if I could do what Habib [Fadi's father] did, I would.” (Sasha, Problem Solving Assignment, February 4, 2020)

Sasha imagined herself having to make a tough decision, which caused her to empathize with the main character's father.

Both in the interviews and in the writing assignments, students demonstrated how their ability to imagine themselves in the same situation as the characters helped them to develop empathy for immigrants.

Empathy through Perspective

In Chapter II, I described Bishop's (1990) theory on how students can have mirror and window experiences when reading culturally relevant young adult literature. In reviewing the written assignments and interview transcripts, I noted a new variation on these experiences, mostly due to the fact that seven of the nine participants were the children of immigrants. For them, reading these texts created a hybrid between mirror

and window experiences, which I refer to as a crystallizing experience. In this section, I highlight their (a) mirror experiences, (b) window experiences, and (c) crystallizing experiences.

Mirror Experiences. Despite the many ways to see oneself in text (Ebe as cited in Hickey & Hopenwasser, 2013), only one student connected primarily to the ethnicity of characters. As a Vietnamese immigrant, Trang made references to her culture being reflected in *Inside Out & Back Again*. When asked if she connected to the main character, she responded, “I guess the culture, that we have the same cultures” (Trang, Interview, February 14, 2020). She also made references to speaking the same language: “I think that language barrier is a common struggle for most immigrants. As someone who experienced that, it was quite hard for me to fit in and start to understand how everything works” (Trang, Pre-reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). She also brought up speaking the same language as Hà when explaining how the other students kept asking her to pronounce words for them. In my classroom observations, I saw this continue as her peers asked her about certain Vietnamese words and foods mentioned in the story. At one point, a classmate used his iPad to look up a flowering tree mentioned in the book and showed Trang a picture to confirm that he had found the right one. Clearly, Trang had numerous mirror experiences with this book because she recognized her own ethnic culture (including food and language) represented in the book.

However, most of the mirror experiences the students reported did not fit into any of the categories Ebe provided. Rather, they fit into a broader category of related experiences. These students were not immigrants themselves and often read books with

characters that had different ethnicities. Nonetheless, they found points of connection with the main characters because they still had faced similar situations. For example, Sal noted on an assignment:

I can connect with the main character because I too have transferred schools and had to change my main language. Hà also had to go to a new school and focus only on English. This is important because Hà is getting used to the American society. (Sal, Connections Assignment, February 10, 2020)

This is different from Trang's connecting with Hà because the two of them speak Vietnamese. Sal's first language was Spanish. What he found relevant was the experience of starting at a new school where he would be forced to make English his primary language—at least during the school day. Sal reiterated this point during our interview when I asked what connections he made with Hà or any other character in *Inside Out & Back Again*:

I guess [I related] more to the experience to like going to a new school and how it is a bit difficult . . . I didn't really struggle with making friends, but it was more of the language difference. (Sal, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Although he spoke a different language than Hà, Sal saw his own experience of switching to English as the primary language at school reflected in the experiences of Hà at her new school.

Both Trang and Daniella related to Hà's experience of having difficulty fitting in and facing bullying. Daniella explained it this way: "I kind of connected how she got made fun of . . . almost everyone's got made fun of in their life, and . . . sometimes it's a

joke, everyone will laugh, but sometimes it goes too far” (Daniella, Interview, February 14, 2020). For Daniella, getting made fun of is a universal experience that might cause any reader to feel that Hà’s experience is relevant to his or her own. Trang expressed a similar sentiment:

In school, she [Hà] got bullied and how she feels like she doesn’t fit in, I think sometimes I can relate to that when I was new to here . . . I didn’t get bullied, but I didn’t really fit in . . . sometimes [people] say I’m not smart enough.” (Trang, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Even though Trang explained that she hadn’t been bullied as outwardly as Hà was in the book, she could still relate to the experience of being made to feel like she was not good enough to belong.

A third culturally relevant experience for some of the students was having siblings. When asked if she could relate to Fadi in *Shooting Kabul*, Maria responded:

Well, definitely not escaping a country because I’ve never done that, but . . . the bond that we have with our siblings. Fadi’s relationship with Mariam kind of reminded me of mine with my brother; he can irritate me sometimes, but I know that I would pretty much do anything for him. (Maria, Interview, February 14, 2020)

This similar experience of relating to the main character because of a sibling bond was echoed in Daniella’s previous comment about doing anything to comfort a family member and Isaiah’s repeated comments about Fadi feeling guilty over losing his sister being at the core of *Shooting Kabul*.

Interestingly, none of the students made connections to the main characters based on Ebe's other points of culture relevance; that is, no one mentioned familiar settings, time periods, age of main characters, gender of main characters, or having read this genre previously. With the exception of Trang, an immigrant from the same country as her main character, all of them found relevance with their main character based on being in similar situations.

Window Experiences. As noted previously, window experiences occur when the reader sees into a new culture or experience through the reading of the text. For most students, they seemed surprised most by the historical differences in immigration stories. Since they had studied the Great Immigration Period in social studies, students compared their own experiences or the experiences of their parents or their main characters with what immigration was like for immigrants over a hundred years ago. As an immigrant herself, Trang noted the challenge her family faced in getting the right documents to immigrate. Her family first applied for those documents before her birth, and they did not end up immigrating until she was about ten years old. In contrast to Hà's experience (who was brought relatively quickly into the U.S. after fleeing Vietnam), Trang's experience was "really different. I did like wait for a long time" (Trang, Interview, February 14, 2020). For Trang, reading this book gave her a window into what moving to the United States from Vietnam during the Vietnamese War was like and how different it was from her own experience moving from Vietnam to the United States.

Two students had window experiences that let them peer into the lives of refugees. Daniella noted how Hà's story in *Inside Out & Back Again* showed her how

different a Vietnamese War refugee's experience was from the immigrant experience she was studying in social studies: "She [Hà] came through like a rescue ship or boat. So it was different than her going to Ellis Island, because she didn't mention going to Ellis Island" (Daniella, Interview, February 14, 2020). Isaiah had a similar window experience with *Shooting Kabul*: "Fadi and his family had to run away from terrorists, the Taliban. When they're trying to get into America, they said in the book, there were human traffickers so they moved humans to places" (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020). Isaiah's and Daniella's comments demonstrated the students' abilities to see through their characters that refugees in the last fifty years have had different experiences from what they studied with regard to immigrants in the Great Immigration Period.

After completing my research, I reflected on why I might not have found as many window experiences as I had originally expected. Several possibilities exist. First, it might simply have been due to my limited time to conduct the interviews. Perhaps if I had had more time to delve deeper into the students' experiences, I might have found more window experiences. Second, it might have been due to the questions I used during interviewing. I had asked if reading the book had changed their perspective on immigrants or if anything surprised them. It might have been beneficial to have assumed they had been learned something new and asked a more pointed question, such as "What did you learn about this character's culture or immigration experience that you did not know beforehand?" Thirdly, since the school was very culturally and linguistically diverse, the students already had a great deal of exposure to a variety of cultures so the books might not have provided as much of a window into another culture for them as it

would have for students from a less culturally diverse school. Finally, since eight of the nine participants were first or second generation, they were already familiar with some of the challenges of immigrating through their own or their parents' experiences.

Crystallizing Experiences. In looking over my research notes, I noticed a phenomenon that I had not seen or read about while completing my literature review. Since seven of the nine participants were the children of immigrants, they had an experience with the novels (and really even the unit as a whole) that combined facets of mirror and window experiences. In other words, they saw their parents' experiences reflected in the characters in the novels—almost a secondhand mirror experience. In other words, it was as if, in the mirror, they saw their parents standing behind them. At the same time, the novels provided a window experience through which they could peer deeper into the experience of an immigrant and perhaps even understand their own parents' experiences better.

Hubert, the son of two Assyrian immigrants, explained that reading *Shooting Kabul* changed the way he looked at immigrants like his parents because he had previously thought that all immigrants were completely happy with the decision to immigrate after they had done so, but that this book made him realize that sometimes they were not happy and that they were homesick (Hubert, Interview, February 14, 2020). Sasha, the daughter of two Albanian immigrants, said that the book “helped me remember how I should be thankful that I didn't have go through any of [the immigration process], and that I am an American citizen” (Sasha, Interview, February 14, 2020). She immediately connected that to her own family members' experiences:

I do have a lot of my aunts who wanted to come here just so they could have their kid born an American citizen and then go back to Albania because they couldn't afford living here, like they were literally going to leave and just have their kid here and then take them back so their daughters and their sons could be born American citizens. (Sasha, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Sasha recalled information she already knew about family members' desires to have their children be American citizens so that if their children wanted to live here later, they would not have to endure the challenging process of getting the correct documentation. Through reading *Shooting Kabul*, she came to understand why immigrating is challenging and why her aunts went through all this trouble to have their children born here.

Maria, the daughter of a Romanian immigrant father, compared what she had learned about contemporary immigration through *Shooting Kabul* to what she learned about historical immigration in her social studies class:

Let me see if I can formulate what's going on in my head right now, but um . . . my dad's family immigrated to the U.S., in the sense that back when my dad was living in Romania, it was a country that was closed off from the rest of the world and nobody could go in or out, and my dad's cousin and his parents left the country when his cousin was younger, so they left illegally, and my dad and his parents stayed because they didn't want to risk leaving and getting caught. And then my dad came here when he was 18, which was when the country opened up legally, and he went to college here and his parents came with him for a little

while, then went back to Romania, and it took my dad many years to get citizenship here . . . maybe I was 10 or 11 . . . I say it's [the process of becoming a citizen] just as difficult as back then. I wouldn't exactly know because I've never tried to get citizenship, but judging from what my dad did to get citizenship here, I think it's still very hard." (Maria, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Maria processed what she knew about her own family in light of what she had read in *Shooting Kabul* and learned in social studies. Like Fadi in the novel, her father came from a country that people tried to leave but had difficulties doing so legally.

Sal, the son of two Mexican immigrants, also saw a connection between his parents' experience and that of the character Hà in *Inside Out & Back Again*. When asked if reading this book made him look at immigrants or even his own parents differently, he had a mixed reaction. At first, he said, "Um, yeah, in a sense." Then he went on to explain that his parents had told him "their whole experience" and "their struggles," and that he could relate their struggles to Hà's, but that it didn't really change his attitude about his parents—he "just learned more information" (Sal, Interview, February 14, 2020). While he may not have changed his feelings (to be fair, his comments and reactions in class showed him to be empathetic toward immigrants from the beginning), he saw a fuller picture of the immigrant experience through the reading of the novel.

Bosha, the son of two Polish immigrants, felt that reading a novel about a Middle Eastern immigrant changed the way he looked at his own parents. Both of his parents had shared their own immigration stories with him. His mother had told him about her

experience coming to the United States at age eighteen. However, his father's story reminded him more of Fadi:

My dad, he came here with his mom at 12 years old, sort of similar [to] Fadi's age. That gave me, especially like more empathy because I knew it would have been hard, but I never knew it would be so hard. I never knew how big the language barrier might be, how hard it would be to feel completely different, like a whole complete different lifestyle. (Bosha, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Bosha's experience demonstrated the prism concept perfectly. On the one hand, Bosha experienced a secondhand mirror experience because his father had been about the same age as Fadi when he immigrated. However, it also provided him with that expanded view and deeper understanding because it allowed him to see the challenges with language barriers and lifestyle changes that he had not come to understand through hearing his own parents' stories.

Avani, the daughter of two Bosnian immigrants, had likewise heard her parents' immigration stories but confessed that reading *Letters from Rifka* brought her greater understanding of what her parents had experienced:

When my mom told me the story of her coming here, she only got into detail a bit. She just said she was actually in college in England and then she had to come back for my uncle and my grandma, and she went to America, and she told me a little bit [about] how she came here with like nothing, so I was like, 'Oh, that must have been really hard,' but when I read the story, I really kind of pictured what my mom had to go through. I was like, 'Wow, that's terrible,' you know?

I'm probably going to ask my mom a little more about it because it's really interesting. (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020)

This response from Avani demonstrated the progression of thought that occurred for the second-generation students. Before reading these novels, they knew information about their parents' immigration. While reading, they connected what they knew about their parents with what characters experienced. At the same time that they had this secondhand mirror experience, reading the fictionalized account of a character brought them a window experience in which they received "more information" (as Sal and Maria described it) and the ability to "picture it" (as Avani described it) so that they could empathize more deeply with the immigrants. Avani even felt driven to learn more about immigration in general and her parents' experiences specifically.

At first, this dual mirror-window experience reminded me of a prism, specifically a triangular, or optical, prism. With a triangular prism, light can hit the glass surfaces in two possible ways. If the light hits it straight on, all of the light is reflected straight back, and the prism acts as mirror. However, if the light hits the surface at an angle, the light is refracted (instead of reflected) and a rainbow appears. The beam of white light that entered the prism leaves it at varying wavelengths, and the white light expands out into a full rainbow of colors.

The more I contemplated this image, the more it suited the experiences of all the participants. All of them had at least some moments of mirroring. As an immigrant from the same country as her main character, Trang had plenty of ethnic relevance reflected back to her. The second- and third-generation students had mirror experiences when they

saw similar experiences of trying to fit in, caring for family members, or dealing with bullying. At the same time, they all came to a greater understanding of what it meant to be an immigrant or a refugee. Through the novels, they saw vibrant pictures of what it means to be an immigrant, just like someone sees all the colors of the rainbow when white light is refracted. In that sense, the book took what they already knew about immigration and refracted it for them in a way that brought them an expanded understanding.

I thought I had stumbled upon a brand-new term by calling this a prism experience; however, then I was informed that my fellow children's book author Uma Krishnaswami (2019) had used the term a year earlier in her article "Why Stop at Windows and Mirrors?: Children's Book Prisms." As she described it, "A prism can slow and bend the light that passes through it, splitting that light into its component colors. It can refract light in as many directions as the prism's shape and surface planes allow" (Krishnaswami, 2019). The prism metaphor had come to her mind when she, an immigrant herself, was working on a middle grade historical novel about internment camps during World War II. Simultaneous to her work on this novel, detention camps were being set up for asylum-seekers in the United States. She realized that stories can help us understand not only the past, but they can also shed new light on contemporary realities.

For the purposes of my research questions, the next question, of course, was *how*. How did fictionalized accounts of immigrants create this broader spectrum of understanding for the students? With the limited amount of time I had for research and

the limited capacity of eighth graders to be metacognitive in their responses, I relied on my research notes to find an answer. Pulling together what I knew about the connection between empathy and affective responses, I was drawn to the students' responses to the figurative language assignment. The students had to find an example of figurative language in the novel, copy it down, explain what type of figurative language it was, and describe how it added to their understanding of the novel. As I perused students' answers, I found that the examples of figurative language related to emotional responses the students had toward characters. Hubert quoted this line from *Shooting Kabul*, "The Taliban is oppressing everyone with a version of Islam that they've cooked up," and then responded that the author used this "to show that the characters are scared and need to be freed from Afghanistan" (Hubert, Figurative Language Assignment, February 3, 2020). Hubert recognized that figurative language could be used to encourage readers to empathize with the fear of Fadi's family.

In *Letters from Rifka*, Avani picked out the phrase, "my heart knocking against my ribs," and reflected: "It is personification. It means she's lonely and scared. The author uses it to emphasis (sic) her emotion and bring attention to the reader. It helps us understand how she is feeling in that situation" (Avani, Figurative Language Assignment, February 3, 2020). Again, the student recognized how the author used figurative language to depict emotions, which are directly tied to empathy. Bosha examined imagery in *Shooting Kabul*:

The figurative language used is imagery and is as follows: 'She hadn't spoken a word during the white-knuckled six-hour ride from their home in the capital city

of Kabul.’ The author likely used this figurative language to show how the 6-hour ride may have been excruciating. Having white knuckles would likely mean no blood circulation through that area, which is definitely NOT pleasant. The figurative language adds to the understanding by letting the reader know how the travels the family have to make are NOT at all pleasant.” (Bosah, Figurative Language Assignment, February 3, 2020)

Bosha’s response on the use of imagery to convey emotions got me thinking about the ways in which authors use sensory details to make stories more vivid so that readers can see, smell, hear, taste, and feel the same experiences as the character. These sensory details have been useful for young readers who might not have the life experiences to help them fill-in-the-blanks on their own if they simply read factual accounts, such as those used in history texts.

Avani described her need for figurative language and sensory details when she explained how reading the novel differed from studying immigration in social studies.

When you’re studying the history, you get like an overall information. You don’t really get the feelings of the people that were going through it. You can have, like, yes they went on the boat, they went to Ellis Island, they got checked through, but . . . when you’re reading a book about the person, like, what they’re thinking, you really get a sense of what would happen and what actually happened. You can really feel and imagine what’s happening . . . when I was reading in history class, I couldn’t really picture it. When I was reading the book, I really, really did not

want to stop reading. It was just so much information that I didn't want to miss out. (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020)

While interviewing students, their vague descriptions of “picturing it” and getting “more information” frustrated me. However, when I connected their descriptions of the figurative language to their explanations of connecting novels to their own parents in reflective and refractive ways, I saw how they as readers really needed the full rainbow of experience that a novel provides. Different from the factual descriptions of immigration provided in their social studies class, students needed sensory experiences from novels to bring the immigration into color. The authors of these YA novels used a whole toolbox of literary devices (e.g. sensory details, figurative language, first-person narrator or third-person narrators with deep point of view) to give readers the sights, sounds, and emotions of the immigrant experience.

With this understanding that it was the very make-up of the book that created these profound reading experiences, I dove back into researching prisms to see if I could carry the metaphor a step further. While I tried to explain my research with a friend, I mentioned the prism idea, and she responded back, “You mean, like a crystal?” With that idea in mind, I returned to my research and discovered something I had not known about crystals. A crystal is “any solid material in which the component atoms are arranged in a definite pattern and whose surface regularity reflects its internal symmetry” (Manan, 2020). In other words, the determining factor in classifying something as a crystal is tied to its internal structure. Just as the atoms in a crystal must be arranged in a particular way in order to make it a crystal, so must the words in a novel must be arranged in a certain

way in order to evoke empathy in the reader. Crystals then become prismatic when their surfaces create opportunities for both reflection and refraction. In other words, these books functioned as prismatic crystals. They were able to create both mirror and window experiences that took the students' understanding to a deeper, full level because of the way the words inside them had been arranged.

To take this metaphor one step further, these books provided crystallizing experiences for the readers. When used as a verb, the word *crystallize* has multiple means. It can mean (), but it can also mean () (Merriam-Webster, 1993). This latter definition refers to how our thoughts are shaped. These books made clear for the students something they had had a basic understanding of prior to reading the novels. The fiction they read helped to crystallize their understanding. Thus, the crystallizing metaphor works on two levels: 1) to explain how the way authors write their books impacts the ability of the reader to empathize with the character, and 2) the books can reflect and refract the readers' world in ways that help them clarify their thoughts and understandings.

Critical Literacy

In Chapter II, I explained my use of critical literacy as a framework to see how students used the written words within YAL to examine, critique, and analyze the experiences of immigrants within the United States. Specifically, I used the three key elements of critical literacy to guide my research questions for this section, which examines how students tackled with questions and concerns related to (a) stereotypes, (b) racism and discrimination, and (c) historical and contemporary immigration policies.

Addressing Stereotypes

In the Pre-Reading Reflection activity, students named stereotypes that people commonly held regarding immigrants. However, they were not specific as to which stereotypes were held against which ethnic groups, as demonstrated by Sasha's vague response: "Each place has their own stereotype" (Sasha, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). Hubert was the only participant who named a stereotype of a more favorable nature; he wrote that one common stereotype is that Asians are smart (Hubert, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). Ironically, Trang, an Asian immigrant in the Advanced Reading class, listed the opposite as a common stereotype. On her Pre-Reading Reflection, she listed "not smart" as a stereotype people have about immigrants (Trang, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020).

All the others identified stereotypes that were unfavorable. Isaiah wrote that immigrants are seen as "looking for work, poor. Maybe some are beggars" (Isaiah, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). Daniella pointed out that immigrants from the Middle East are often seen as terrorists and included, "My grandma went to Israel and was held for a more harder inspection to see if she was a terrorist from Iraq" (Daniella, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). Maria came up with a list:

Less educated. Won't be able to communicate (no English). Will only have very basic English skills. Poor, very little money. [The stereotypes] can depend on the country [they are from]. (These stereotypes are not always true . . . but people tend to buy into them very often). (Maria, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020)

After reading *Shooting Kabul*, Isaiah questioned the stereotype he had written about earlier regarding all immigrants needing to get jobs. When asked if reading this novel might affect the stereotypes people held, he responded,

I think it would affect them because . . . it shows what people have to go through to get to America. Like, they're in America, they probably have to get a job now.

That might be true, but it's also probably true because they've just moved from a country and everything's new to them." (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020)

He grew in understanding that the need to find a new job would be true for anyone who made a major move whether within a country or to another country.

Bosha also felt that reading *Shooting Kabul* might challenge stereotypes. In his Pre-Reading Reflection, he had made only general remarks about intelligence and intentions being matters related to possible stereotypes people might hold against immigrants without mentioning any specific countries. However, in the Post-Reading Interview, he specifically brought up immigrants from Afghanistan. Regarding how people might view immigrants from Afghanistan, Bosha said, "Those people would think, 'Oh the intentions of anyone coming from Afghanistan will be to just make everything worse'" (Bosha, Interview, February 14, 2020). His reading of a novel about immigrants from Afghanistan focused his attention on that particular ethnic group. He continued by talking about another stereotype: "Some people are saying that they only want to come to steal jobs" (Bosha, Interview, February 14, 2020). So while he made only a vague reference to people believing immigrants had certain "intentions" for immigrating *before* reading the novel, he fleshed out that idea and specifically mentioned

immigrants from Afghanistan and stealing jobs *after* reading the novel. Reading a novel helped Bosha take what he already knew (that some people believed immigrants come for negative intentions) and refracted that by showing the negative attitudes toward a specific ethnic group and one specific negative intention some people applied to that group.

Racism and Discrimination

In the Pre-Reading Reflection, only two of the students brought up discrimination or racism as a struggle they expected to see depicted during their immigration unit. Sal predicted that the immigrants “will face Ellis Island and discrimination. This is because it is the first thing they go through and there are many people who dislike immigrants” (Sal, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). Further on in the Pre-Reading Reflection, he discussed whether or not immigrants are treated better now than they were a hundred years ago: “I don’t think [the treatment of immigrants has] changed that much because people still are discriminated through stereotypes” (Sal, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). Isaiah, the other student who mentioned discrimination and racism prior to reading the novel, gave this list of common struggles on his pre-reading reflection: “discrimination, prejudice, racism, violence” (Isaiah, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020).

Although only two participants had brought up racism or discrimination prior to reading the novel, six participants brought up discrimination based on ethnicity during the interview, a sign that the novels had made them more aware of this as a difficulty immigrants faced. Maria said, “Certain groups of people have a harder time than others,” and when pushed to clarify, she stated that she meant groups based on “ethnicity,

religion, something like that” (Maria, Interview, February 14, 2020). Sasha believed “there are a lot of people that would rather have welcoming arms to some European family rather than some other cultural family” (Sasha, Interview, February 14, 2020).

Bosha echoed that sentiment:

Let’s say I can take an example: Greece. Those people from Greece would be treated better if they immigrate to America . . . compared to people coming from somewhere like Afghanistan where there’s a lot of trouble right now, a lot of discrimination.” (Bosha, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Hubert also mentioned people from the Middle East being called terrorists, but “if you’re from like England or France, people will just not make fun of you because they don’t think anything bad about those countries” (Hubert, Interview, February 14, 2020).

Finally, Isaiah repeated his thoughts on immigrants being discriminated against, but added a comparison between how a French person and a Muslim person would be treated, and Diana provided the example of her grandma being presumed to be a terrorist when she visited Israel. Given the depth of explanation regarding discrimination, especially against different ethnic groups, the book and their studies encouraged the participants to see discrimination as a real struggle for immigrants, especially those from non-European countries.

Immigration Policies

Finally, I probed how these novels impacted students’ abilities to think critically about immigration policies and the ways immigrants are (and have been) treated. This final section of the chapter harks back to an idea I had in my first class at Loyola, which

was on multicultural education. My final paper for that class examined the emotional impact reading YAL could have on a culturally diverse classroom. In my presentation to the class, I halfheartedly joked that I should have called my paper “Getting Past the Warm Fuzzies” because I really wanted to move beyond just recognizing how YAL could produce empathy to see if it could be pushed more toward a social justice movement. Could it be used to put “empathy into action”? While that question lies beyond the scope of this study, I did examine how students might be pushed to think critically about immigration as a social justice topic.

Avani, who read the historical novel *Letters from Rifka*, stated that she believed our immigration policies in the United States went easier on immigrants in the past than today. She described the Ellis Island immigration experience: “It was just a bunch of questions, a checkup, and yes, you would sometimes get sent back, but it was, I think, a little bit easier [than immigrating today]” (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020). Avani said she didn’t watch the news much, but when she did, she heard a lot of talk about immigration that had not affected her much in the past:

Before, when I used to hear [about immigration issues], I wouldn’t really question what they’re going through . . . now I’m like, “Oh, this is what’s happening!” So now I want to know more about this, so I watch a little more, I get a little more articles . . . because it’s more interesting now to me . . . I try to figure out more details . . . I realize this is what’s going on . . . I really want to know more about it . . . and I can compare and contrast, and you know, really think about. (Avani, Interview, February 13, 2020)

Avani was being pulled to “really think about” the issue of how immigrants are treated. A topic she had previously brushed off when she heard it mentioned on the news became a topic she wanted to learn more about. Her desire to learn more and to compare and contrast the information she was obtaining demonstrated her critical literacy skills.

For Trang, whose Vietnamese parents spent about ten years getting the right documents to come to the United States, proper documentation for immigrants remained the primary area of concern for her. She mentioned people not being treated well because of expired documents at the beginning of the unit (Trang, Pre-Reading Reflection, January 30, 2020). At the end of the unit, she spoke with me again about the challenges of proper documentation. This time, she mentioned it in the light of the social studies teacher’s discussions on DACA and Dreamers:

They went here when they were little, and then they study here, and the only language they know is like English and stuff. And so, if the document gets expired and they have to be sent back, [it] be like really difficult for them since they don’t really know anything but our country. (Trang, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Her own parents’ long struggle with getting proper documentation caused her to pay particular attention to that detail in social studies class.

Isaiah and Daniella also brought up DACA and Dreamers during their interviews, but their understandings were rather limited. Isaiah explained:

There was a Newsela article that we were supposed to read called “DACA, and the Dreamers,” and I think it was about . . . if I remember correctly, it was like

about how Trump is denying immigration to a lot of people, and they just have to wait a super long time because it's often filled up. I didn't really read it too in-depth. (Isaiah, Interview, February 14, 2020)

Daniella also had a limited understanding of our contemporary immigration issues related to the group known as Dreamers. She stated that “they don't have paperwork” and “they don't have parents” and that “people don't want them to arrive” (Daniella, Interview, February 14, 2020). Neither of these students had a thorough understanding of our contemporary immigration issues, but they were at least aware of the fact that there are people facing challenges with immigration right now in the United States and that immigration policies are still impacting how people arrive and become citizens today.

Conclusion

In this study, students demonstrated empathy through affective and cognitive responses. Their affective responses indicated that they connected to moments when their character was sad or happy, but they also showed that they felt concern for the immigrant character's struggles. Often, these moments of empathy were tied to culturally relevant experiences that the students could understand, such as being bullied or being stressed over a situation that is hard for them to control. The cognitive responses showed that students came to new understandings regarding how immigrants feel about moving or the struggles they face after moving. They also recognized some of their previously held beliefs about the struggles of immigrants portrayed in these books and could stand in the shoes of these characters and wonder how they might respond in a similar situation.

Empathy was also developed through their moments of mirror, window, and crystallizing experiences. However, the mirror experiences were not related to the commonly held ideas about what makes up cultural relevance, but rather to experiential relevance. In addition to some mirror experiences, the students also described a few window experiences, particularly those related to refugees. However, the most common experience seemed to be that of a crystallizing experience, in which students saw their lives (or those of their immigrant family members) reflected at the same time that they also had the immigrant experience refracted for them in a way that provided them with a fuller, clearer picture of and a broader understanding of the struggles of immigrants.

As for encouraging critical thinking regarding immigrants, students did consider issues of stereotyping, racism, and discrimination while discussing these novels. The novels made them consider how documentation requirements for immigrants have changed over the years and how these new laws have made entering and remaining in the United States a harder challenge for today's immigrants. At the same time, several of the students recognized that they do not know enough about the current laws, and one student expressed interest in learning more about them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I reflect on the findings of this study with regard to critical literacy and reading instruction. The chapter begins with a summary of the study and then examines the major findings and their significance within the current literature. Finally, I share the implications this study has on further research. The chapter is organized in four sections: (a) Summary of the Study, (b) Significant Findings Related to the Literature, (c) Implications and Recommendations, and (d) Conclusions.

Summary of the Study

In the previous chapters, I presented my research on using culturally relevant young adult literature to engender empathy for immigrants in middle grade readers. The questions that guided my research were as follows:

1. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL about immigrants create empathy for immigrants among eighth graders in a culturally and linguistically diverse middle school?
2. In what ways does reading and discussing YAL promote students' critical thinking about immigration?
 - a. How does classroom use of particular novels disrupt and challenge stereotypes about immigrants?

- b. How does classroom use of particular novels impact the way students believe immigrants should be treated?

With critical literacy as a framework, I studied how students developed deeper empathy for immigrants through the reading and discussion of young adult novels as part of a cross-curricular unit on immigration. The following section provides a review of the major findings presented in Chapter IV through the lens of a critical literacy framework.

Major Findings Through a Critical Literacy Lens

As described in Chapter II, my study used a critical literacy lens (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Behrman, 2006; Bishop, 2014; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) to examine how YAL may engender empathy for immigrants in middle-grade readers. I described three key elements of critical literacy that provided a framework for examining the data.

The first key element of critical literacy is that it involves “questioning our everyday assumptions and what seems ‘normal’” (Maples & Groenke, 2009, p. 28). Stereotypes identify assumptions that people make about other groups. For example, students assumed that all immigrants would be happy with their decision to immigrate after they moved. Reading novels that depict immigrants who regret their move or struggle with knowing whether they made the right decision helped students question that assumption. By providing for alternative narratives, teachers can assist their students in taking a critical approach to their reading. The students can see that their assumptions about a group of people might not be true for everyone within that group. In other words,

reading teachers can use fiction as a springboard for disrupting assumptions students might have.

The second key element of critical literacy involves investigating “the power structures involved in ideological constructs of people through lenses of and intersections between race, class and gender” (Graff, 2010, p. 110). In terms of my study, I examined how students considered the power that the dominant society and the government held over immigrants. This use of questioning power and privilege is often seen as a key element of critical literacy (Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015). In my study, students brought up current immigration policy issues as an important facet of what they had learned and realized that immigration policies are complicated and controversial. On a broader level, teachers can use YAL to help students examine matters of power and privilege. By reading and discussing fictionalized accounts of how those in power mistreat those in marginalized positions, students see how race, class, gender, and language can be used to construct negative depictions of marginalized groups. They can also see how those negative depictions lead to discrimination and racism, such as when students reading *Shooting Kabul* noted how characters bullied Fadi for being Muslim after 9/11 based on what they had heard from their parents or seen on the news.

The third key element of critical literacy looks at a text through multiple perspectives (Luke, 2012; Papola-Ellis, 2015). As noted in Chapter II, novels such as *Seedfolks* (Fleischman, 1997) and *Return to Sender* (Alvararez, 2010) provide multiple perspectives within the text itself. This ability to hold different perspectives at the same time is crucial if students are going to care about social justice issues (Maples &

Groenke, 2009). When a novel with multiple perspectives is not available, teachers have other options available to bring in multiple perspectives. For example, teachers can make use of multiple texts, if time allows. Students could read one novel and then a short story or two from a different perspective. Teachers could also add movies to the set of texts being used. For example, the social studies teacher in this cross-curricular unit used the movie *Amreeka* (Dabis, 2009) so that students who read historical novels had a contemporary perspective as well, which one of the students commented on during his interview (Hubert, Interview, February 14, 2020). Finally, teachers can make use of literature circles so that students read and discuss different books within their small groups and periodically join in whole-class discussions so that they can hear from the perspectives offered by the other texts.

Significant Findings Related to the Literature

As discussed in Chapter I, the treatment of immigrants in the United States has persisted as a matter of social justice. Despite decades upon decades of waves of immigrants, those venturing to start a new life in America have been met with stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. The student participants in this study demonstrated the importance of this issue as a classroom topic, not only through their discussion of the YAL they read but also through the sharing of their own and their families' immigration stories. This study added to the current body of literature in all three topics discussed in Chapter II: (a) how readers respond to culturally relevant YAL, (b) how fiction can engender empathy, and (c) how culturally relevant literature can be used for critical literacy.

How Readers Respond to Culturally Relevant YAL

Past studies on culturally relevant YAL have focused on how mirroring experiences can occur when culturally relevant texts are used, but they have not examined how mirror and window experiences might impact how immigrants are viewed. Stallworth et al. (2006) emphasized the importance of teachers selecting “texts that speak to their students’ cultural heritage and broaden their respect and appreciation of heritages of diverse groups” (p. 478). Scirba (2014) noted how African American boys found cultural relevance within the Harry Potter texts, even though those stories take place in another country and the main characters are not of African descent. Verden’s studies (2009, 2012) focused on how students opened up about their own emotions after reading culturally relevant texts. However, none of these studies pushed the topic of cultural relevance far enough. This appreciation of cultures and recognition of similar situations between characters’ lives and readers’ lives can be taken a step further by examining how YAL can move beyond just an appreciation for others to how a reader can be moved to feel empathetic toward someone who is different. My study built on these initial ideas by examining how text-to-self connections led students to become more empathetic toward immigrants. By seeing situations they recognized (e.g. dealing with siblings, trying to fit in, and avoiding bullying), the eighth graders in my study grew in empathy for the immigrant characters.

How Fiction Can Engender Empathy

Studies on empathy and fiction have rarely focused on culturally relevant YAL used in middle-grade classrooms, especially not in U.S. classrooms or by using a critical

literacy lens. However, empathy is an important quality to foster as it contributes to human solidarity because it allows us to see the commonalities we have with people around the world (Bullough, 2019). Studies such as Vezzali et al. (2012) and Vezzali et al. (2015) looked at how students' attitudes toward immigrants might be improved by reading books. However, their studies did not involve critical literacy, middle school students, or qualitative data. My research confirmed Vezzali et al.'s (2015) study that students can grow in empathy for immigrants by reading YAL; however, my study expanded upon that by using qualitative measures to find out how cultural relevance (particularly in the form of experiential relevance) created crystallizing experiences in order to foster deeper levels of empathy for the readers. My study also revealed the role that figurative language and imagery through sensory details plays in creating a bigger picture for the students to broaden their understanding of the struggles of immigrants.

Junker and Jacquemin's (2017) study with 42 high school sophomores pointed to textual attributes of fiction that might increase empathy in readers. They included the use of a first-person narrator and the nature of conflict within the story, particularly when a character must face a challenging situation. Junker and Jacquemin (2017) noted that "experiencing negative affective situations and . . . watching characters experience hardship makes readers especially likely to be able to identify across categories of difference" (p. 80). My study confirmed this and narrowed it down to hardships related specifically to the experiences of immigrants. Furthermore, Junker and Jacquemin's (2017) study involved some adult texts, which lessened the probability of cultural relevance for the teen readers. My study furthered this research by looking at texts that

are more likely to be relevant to students, which increased the level of empathy they could achieve. Also, my study added the impact made by figurative language and imagery while Junker and Jacquemin focused on text complexity and first-person narrators as factors in cultural relevance.

Previous literature also examined how YAL can combat stereotypes that students might have about immigrants (Cummins, 2013; Groenke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010). My study confirmed that students are aware of some stereotypes about immigrants but could only get more specific about those stereotypes after reading the assigned book. For example, they mentioned being poor, needing jobs, or being perceived as people with ill intentions. However, they only specifically mentioned terrorists, Middle Eastern immigrants, or Muslims after reading the novels.

How Culturally Relevant Literature Can Be Used for Critical Literacy

Previous studies have shown that adding diverse literature to the reading curriculum can help students and teachers discuss challenging issues (Cummins, 2013; Graff, 2013; Stallworth et al., 2006). Studies on critical literacy have not often looked at immigration as a subject matter worthy of examination, especially not with YAL. Graff (2010) and Shanahan and Dallacqua (2018) both looked at teacher reactions to reading culturally relevant YAL instead of student reactions. Graff's (2010) study revealed that teachers who read YAL on immigration learned to see immigrants as a heterogeneous entity, not as a homogenous group as they had prior to reading the novels. My study showed that this also holds true for middle school readers who read YAL on immigration with a critical lens, as demonstrated by participants such as Isaiah and Hubert questioning

what they had previously believed about all immigrants being successful and content with their moves. Shanahan and Dallacqua (2018) looked at how teachers and teacher candidates might use YAL and critical literacy in the classroom. My study built on this by examining how this actually plays out in the classroom.

Furthermore, Evans (2010) looked at fourth graders' ability to increase their levels of empathy, their appreciation of different cultures, and their understanding of prejudice; however, her study focused on picture books and did not specifically target prejudice against immigrants. My study used YAL and focused on thinking critically about the treatment of immigrants.

Finally, a review of the literature revealed two studies related to stereotypes of immigrants (Reyna et al., 2013; Timberlake & Williams, 2012). Both studies examined stereotypes as they relate to immigrants from large geographic locations, such as Latin American immigrants, Middle Eastern immigrants, Asian immigrants, and European immigrants. Reyna et al. (2013) found that Middle Eastern immigrants are often seen as dangerous or a threat to a community and Asians are often seen as smart. Participants in my study confirmed these two stereotypes during my interviews with them.

Timber and Williams (2012) concluded that Latin American immigrants are the group with the most negative stereotypes. Despite that, only one student in my study mentioned negative stereotypes against Latin American immigrants. However, this lack of including Latin American immigrants was not surprising, in light of the selection of novels used. Neither of the Latin American immigrant novels I had suggested was used in the classroom. Reluctance to use Latin American immigrant stories (whether on the part

of the reading teacher who first selects the novels or the administrators who either approve or disapprove the reading teacher's choices) confirms the strong discrimination and prejudice held against this group as found by Timberlake and Williams (2012). Also, without a Latin American novel in the mix, none of the students brought up prejudice against Latin Americans. They did, however, bring up prejudice against Middle Eastern immigrants because that is what the majority of them read about. This indicates that students will think critically about what they read, but might not expand that critical thinking to other ethnic groups not represented within the books they read. In other words, the choices teachers make regarding reading materials really make a difference in what their students think critically about.

In summary, this study added significantly to the current literature. In the area of students responding to culturally relevant YAL, it demonstrated how middle-grade readers can be moved beyond recognizing themselves in the literature to growing in empathy for immigrants through the reading and discussing of fiction. While past studies used quantitative measures to show a correlation between fiction and empathy, my study used qualitative measures to uncover the crystallizing experiences that moved readers to deep levels of empathy through the authors' use of figurative language, imagery, and sensory details. While past studies examined how teachers and teacher candidates considered how they might use critical literacy to address challenging issues, my study demonstrated how this played out in an actual classroom with middle-grade readers. Finally, my study built on previous work on negative stereotypes of immigrants by illuminating the challenges of addressing discrimination against a particular ethnic group

(in this case Latin Americans) when texts about that ethnic group are excluded from the classroom.

Implications and Recommendations

The insights from this study provide implications and recommendations for classroom reading teachers, as well as social studies and other content-area teachers. Any educator who seeks to help students think critically about a matter of social justice, such as the fair treatment of immigrants, might benefit from the findings of this study.

Reading Teachers

While reading teachers may hold reservations about using young adult literature in the classroom and still hold tight to the canon (Gilton, 2007; Irwin & Moeller, 2010; Monin, 2013), this study provides confirmation that YAL deserves a place in the contemporary reading classroom. The findings of this study demonstrate students' ability to discuss a current topic, such as immigration policies and the treatment of immigrants, through their discussion of YA novels. Furthermore, it raises their curiosity to learn more about a topic they might have heard on the news, but now want to pay attention to and learn more about. YA novels broaden understandings of topics and expand readers' minds to challenge previous beliefs or assumptions.

This study also serves as a reminder that the selection of particular YA novels has a major impact on what students think about and discuss, as evidenced by their ability to name specific discrimination and prejudicial stereotypes toward Middle Eastern immigrants after reading a novel about Middle Eastern immigrants and their lack of discussion about discrimination against Latin American immigrants when no Latin

American stories were included. Reading teachers need to consider carefully what topics their literature will address and consider if they are purposely avoiding certain topics by avoiding certain literature.

Finally, reading teachers should consider how the projects and assessments (both formal and informal) they assign might lead to work that engages students in critical literacy. While the teacher had 25 total assignments given during the unit, only a handful of them showed evidence of critical literacy skills. For example, the Respond Activity called for critical literacy skills because it pressed students to explain *why* a character felt a certain way and how those feelings might have been caused by the effects of stereotyping or by power structures exhorting their dominance over the immigrants. Reading teachers can make use of these deeper level *why* questions to engage students in critical literacy skills.

The Problem Solving and Connections Assignment often caused the students to consider what they would have done if they had been in the same shoes as the main character. This led to greater empathy for the character as well as opening the opportunity for window, mirror, and crystallizing experiences to occur. Reading teachers can craft similar assignments that require students to consider in what ways their response to a situation would be similar to or different from characters' responses.

The Figurative Language Assignment led to deeper thoughts about the characters and their emotions than I originally anticipated. The key part of that assignment was the final question: How does it add to your understanding? That question forced students to think about why an author would choose to use figurative language. My study revealed

that students chose figurative language that expressed how the character felt, and their analysis of that figurative language showed that they were aware that the author was trying to get them to experience the same emotion as the main character. All reading teachers can use a common figurative language assignment to engage students in critical literacy by asking why the author chose that type of figurative language and how it adds to understanding.

Social Studies and Other Content-Area Teachers

While this study did not specifically examine the social studies or the language arts lessons included in this cross-curricular unit, it still provides useful implications for social studies and other content-area teachers who are involved in cross-curricular units or wish to engage students in thinking critically about social justice matters in their classrooms. Students reported getting “more information” from the novels they read than from their social studies class. Whether it’s because of the first-person narrators, the figurative language, the imagery, or the sensory details, well-written novels sweep students into the world of the immigrant character so that they can picture and feel the experience in a way that they cannot after reading a nonfiction text that does not incorporate the same level of storytelling. Thus, social studies teachers may want to consider using historical fiction in their classrooms or partnering with the reading teachers to create cross-curricular units such as this one.

Another implication for content-area teachers is the importance of addressing contemporary social justice content within the context of the curriculum. These eighth-grade students had only a limited exposure to the contemporary challenges of

immigration, despite having immigrant parents and grandparents as well as classmates who were immigrants themselves. As educators, we can bring important topics like immigration into our curricula in order to help our students think critically about topics that are directly affecting their lives. Educators must consider how they can use fiction to discuss other important social justice matters in the classroom. This means taking the time to read a wide variety of YAL so that teachers know what is available and the variety of topics covered in contemporary YAL. This also means deliberately choosing titles that address topics that require critical literacy skills. Finally, it means that educators must create and implement assignments that guide students through the three key aspects of critical literacy: questioning assumptions, investigating power imbalances, and viewing topics through multiple perspectives.

Conclusions

My research with eighth-grade students in a cross-curricular unit on immigration revealed that reading fictionalized accounts of immigrants helped these middle-grade readers to obtain a clearer picture of the challenges and discrimination faced by immigrants, which led to deeper levels of cognitive and affective empathy. The use of literary techniques such as figurative language, sensory details, and imagery helped the students to become immersed in the immigrant character's world so that they could better empathize with the character and begin to question common assumptions and stereotypes to the extent that several of them expressed a desire to dig deeper into this social justice topic. In this final section, I address (a) limitations of the study and recommendations for further research, (b) concluding remarks, and (c) personal reflections.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As a single case study, this research has its limitations, particularly within the area of transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that the findings from one specific case may be transferable to another “if the inquirer provides sufficient detail about the circumstances of the situation or case that was studied so that the readers can engage in reasonable but modest speculation about whether findings are applicable to other cases with similar circumstances” (as cited in Schwandt, 2015, p. 129). In other words, teachers involved in immigration units at other schools might learn ideas from this study that they want to incorporate into their units or they might be inspired to use more culturally relevant YAL in their classrooms. However, how any of those scenarios would play out could not be predicted by the findings of this one case study.

This suggests many possibilities for future research. Future studies could involve other novels. As mentioned above, most of the students in this study read a novel about Middle Eastern immigrants, a population that had seen a recent increase in the student body at the school. As a result, students mentioned discrimination against Middle Eastern immigrants in particular during the interviews. Studies that broadened the ethnic groups depicted in the novels could confirm and expand on the findings of this study.

The scope could also be broadened to involve multiple sites. Within a multi-site research project, schools with more homogenous student populations could be included. Because the site in my study had a very diverse population, students indicated an awareness of prejudice and discrimination in their Pre-Reading Reflections. A study

conducted in multiple sites in a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural) could examine how student diversity (or lack thereof) within a school setting might impact the results.

Future research could also expand the scope by examining how novels that address other social justice topics might increase empathy. For example, a teacher might develop a literature circles unit that addresses the matter of civil rights. This is another social justice topic that requires a great deal of empathy on the part of students. A future study could examine how students' attitudes, beliefs, and levels of empathy (both cognitive and affective) change, grow, or deepen after reading novels related to civil rights, racism, gender inequality, or other social justice issues.

Finally, longitudinal studies could examine how reading novels that require empathizing with the main character affect students long term. For this reason, future studies could address the questions: How does fiction read during school impact students' decisions to get involved in social justice matters as they mature? How might it impact the way in which they build relationships with people who are of another culture, religion, or ethnicity? In other words, in what ways, might reading fiction lead to empathy-in-action?

Concluding Remarks

I began this dissertation with a quote from E.L. Doctorow that I had found while working on the proposal for this project: "The historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like" (as cited in Grossman, 2006, para. 6). When a friend shared that quote on Facebook, I felt instinctively that this was key to my study. In the eighth grade social studies class, the historian (social studies teacher) shared the

factual information about the Great Immigration period in U.S. history. However, the novelists who wrote *Shooting Kabul*, *Inside Out & Back Again*, and *Letters from Rifka* could show the students what it *felt* like to be an immigrant. Those feelings led to both cognitive and affective displays of empathy. Purely factual descriptions of immigration are not enough to develop deep levels of empathy. Even having immigrant parents share their own immigration stories did not create the same levels of empathy. It required the artistic abilities of the authors to give the students the “more information” they needed so they could see the bigger picture. Parents who tell their own immigration stories may not have the narrative skills to make their child smell, taste, feel, hear, and see the experience as if a movie played before them. However, that is precisely what good literature can do. It can create that movie-like experience that draws the reader in so that he or she is fully immersed in the experience of that character to the point that the reader begins to question what he or she would do if faced with the same circumstances.

As detailed in Chapter IV, Maria summed it up when she explained that the goal of good literature was to “change your view on something” (Maria, Interview, February 14, 2020). Even in eighth grade, Maria understood the impact good literature could have. Good fiction can change our perspective. Even fictionalized accounts can make us see the facts of a situation in a whole new light. Reading teachers can use this knowledge to defend their use of YAL in the classroom.

Personal Reflections

I wrote the final chapters of this dissertation during the stay-at-home orders of the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020. This quarantine reminded us of our shared humanity

because we had to stay at home in order to protect others, particularly those most vulnerable to this disease. Without a vaccine or a cure, the only way to slow the spread and save lives was to recognize that we were in this together. This sense of a shared humanity is exactly what good novels can do, too. They can remind us that immigrants aren't just the numbers we see reported on the news. They are people's mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters. We need to recognize our shared humanity in order to respond humanely to the needs of others.

Another phenomenon occurred while writing these final chapters that further solidified my findings. While everyone sought shows to binge watch during quarantine, I was drawn to binge watch a new TV show on Jesus and his disciples called *The Chosen*. Although the first season of the show had been released during 2019, the show's number of viewings skyrocketed during the quarantine. All over social media, people praised this show for helping them to understand Jesus better. As I contemplated why this was happening, I realized that it related to my research findings. The evangelists who wrote the four Gospels were interested in recording history. They were not authors trained in the craft of writing, nor did they really need to flesh out in vivid sensory details what life was like in the Middle East 2,000 years ago. Their readers already knew! In other words, they were more like the historians who just tell you what happened. Thus, the Gospels can read a bit like dry history at times. However, when a modern-day filmmaker comes along and presents the stories in such a way that the contemporary viewer can now smell the stinky fish on Simon Peter when he returns home from a day of fishing and see the dirt on Jesus's clothes, the story suddenly becomes more relatable. In previous Christian

films, Jesus is often depicted as more of an abstraction; his divine nature is brought to the forefront while his human nature is minimized. However, *The Chosen*, with its scenes of Jesus laughing, brushing his teeth, and dancing at a wedding, reminds viewers that Jesus was a real human being (even viewers who do not recognize His divinity cannot deny the historical evidence that a human named Jesus walked the earth 2,000 years ago). That is why people are connecting with this show so much—because Jesus and his disciples have suddenly become culturally relevant again, precisely because they are depicted as having normal human experiences.

The same thing occurred with the YAL in my study. The immigrants were no longer abstractions. They were “real” human beings, with normal human experiences, like caring for siblings and wanting to fit in. While there is much I can take away from this study, the resounding echo in my heart will be the importance of recognizing our shared humanity. It is only when we see each other as individuals, unique and beautiful in our own right, and yet united through our humanity that we might live out the Jesuit principle of *cura personalis*—caring for the whole person.

APPENDIX A
PRE-READING REFLECTION

Name _____ Period _____
Immigration Unit – Pre-reading Reflection

1. What do you think this immigration unit will be like?

2. What do you think are some common struggles of immigrants? What are the challenges they face? How do you know?

3. On a scale from 1-10, how well do you think immigrants are treated on our country? (1 is very poorly, 10 is very well)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Please explain why you circled the number above.

5. How do you think the treatment of immigrants in this country has changed over the years? (Do you think they are treated better or worse now than they were 100 years ago? Why do you think that?)

6. What do you think are some stereotypes that people in the United States have about immigrants? Do those stereotypes depend on what country they are from?

APPENDIX B
CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Classroom Observation Protocol**Date of Observation:****Location of Observation:****Class Period:**

Descriptive Notes (description of the classroom setting, portraits of the student participants, emotional reactions of the students, and snippets of dialogue)	Reflective Notes (my personal responses to what I observed)

APPENDIX C
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Document Analysis Protocol

Name and/or Description of Document:

Categorization:

Formal assessment (test, quiz) Project
 Formative assessment (worksheet, study guide) Supplemental
 readings
 Other:

Empathy Connections:

- Does the document show evidence that the reader felt sorry for the immigrant character?
- Does the document show evidence that the reader understood why the immigrant had to make the difficult choice to immigrate?
- Does the document show evidence that the reader was able to “stand in the shoes” of the immigrant character?

Critical Literacy Evidence:

- Does the document show evidence of encouraging the students to think critically about the experience of immigrants while reading the novels and any supplementary reading materials?
- Did they make connections between historical immigrant experiences and current immigrant experiences?
- Does the document show that any assumptions, stereotypes, or misconceptions of immigrants were discussed?
- Is there any evidence that this was more than “just a story” to be analyzed for its plot structure and characterization?

APPENDIX D
POST-READING INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Post-Reading Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Home language(s):

Generational status:

Age:

Date of Interview:

Interviewer: Amy J. Cattapan

Interview Protocol:

1. What was your overall impression of the novel you read for this unit?
2. Tell me about some of the different emotions you experienced while reading this book. In what ways did you connect with the book?
3. What connection were you able to make between the Great Immigration period that you studied in social studies and the character in your novel?
 - a. Do you think it's easy to become a citizen of the U.S. nowadays? Is it easier or harder now than it used to be?
4. In what ways has reading this book either changed or confirmed your feelings toward immigrants?
5. Before you read the book, I asked you about stereotypes you think people have about immigrants. Do you think reading this book would help change someone's mind about those stereotypes?
6. Before reading this book, I also asked you whether or not you think immigrants are treated fairly in this country. Tell me about how your feelings have either changed or stayed the same.

APPENDIX E
CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Engendering Empathy for Immigrants in Middle Grade Readers Through Culturally Relevant Young Adult Literature

Researcher: Amy J. Cattapan

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Amy Heineke

Introduction:

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Ms. Amy J. Cattapan for the purpose of completing a dissertation in curriculum and instruction in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. This dissertation is under the supervision of Dr. Amy Heineke.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine how young adult literature is used as part of a cross-curricular unit on immigration at a middle school with a culturally and linguistically diverse student body.

Procedures:

If you agree to let your child take part in this study, they will be asked to do the following:

- Participate normally in reading class and in any activities the reading teacher has planned for this unit, including completing a pre-reading survey at the start of the unit. The researcher will have access to completed homework and class assignments that are assigned during this unit.
- Participate in a 15-minute interview during the school day at the end of the unit. Please be advised that the interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcription. The interview will take place during independent reading or library book check out time so that students will not miss any direct instruction.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. If necessary, Mrs. Roeder, our school social worker, is available to talk with your child.

Although there are no direct benefits for taking part in this study, the results of this study may help reading teachers decide how best to use young adult novels within the context of the immigration unit.

Confidentiality:

The interview will be recorded digitally but will be deleted after the research is complete. Information collected during this project will be used for the purpose of completing my dissertation in my doctoral program. Pseudonyms will be used for all students, the classroom teacher, and the school.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish your child to be involved in the study, there is no negative consequence for not participating. Even if you give your child permission to participate, your child will be free to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. *Participation in this study will not in any way affect your child's grade in class.*

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Ms. Amy J. Cattapan at acattapan@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor Dr. Amy Heineke at aheineke@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature on this page indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and give permission for your child to participate in the project. If you do NOT want to give permission, **do not send this form back.**

Student Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX F
ASSENT FORM

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Engendering Empathy for Immigrants in Middle Grade Readers Through Culturally Relevant Young Adult Literature

Researcher: Amy J. Cattapan

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Amy J. Heineke

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Ms. Amy J. Cattapan for the purpose of completing a dissertation in curriculum and instruction in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. This dissertation is under the supervision of Dr. Amy J. Heineke.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine how young adult literature is used as part of a cross-curricular unit on immigration at a middle school with a culturally and linguistically diverse student body.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate normally in reading class and in any activities the reading teacher has planned for this unit, including completing a pre-reading survey at the start of the unit. The researcher will have access to completed homework and class assignments that are assigned during this unit.
- Participate in a 15-minute interview during the school day at the end of the unit. Please be advised that the interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcription. The interview will take place during independent reading or library book check out time so that you will not miss any direct instruction.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. If necessary, Mrs. Roeder, our school social worker, is available to talk with you.

Although there are no direct benefits for taking part in this study, the results of this study may help reading teachers decide how best to use young adult novels within the context of the immigration unit.

Confidentiality:

The interview will be recorded digitally but will be deleted after the transcription is completed. Information collected during this project will be used for the purpose of completing my dissertation in my doctoral program. Pseudonyms will be used for all students, the classroom teacher, and the school.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish to be involved in the study, there is no negative consequence for not participating. Even if your parent gives permission for you to participate, you are free to not participate at all. If you do decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. ***Participation in this study will not in any way affect your grade in class.***

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me at acattapan@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor Dr. Amy Heineke at aheineke@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Assent:

Your signature on this page indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in the project. If you do NOT want to give permission, **do not send this form back.**

Student Name (Printed) _____

Student Signature _____ Date _____

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VITA

Amy J. Cattapan was born in Evanston, Illinois, and grew up in the north and northwest suburbs of Chicago. She graduated from Marquette University in 1996 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education, Secondary, with magna cum laude honors. She began her career as a public high school teacher but switched to teaching at the middle school level after one year. She spent the next ten years teaching at three different Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Chicago before switching to a public middle school in the suburbs of Chicago where she has taught for thirteen years.

Shortly after switching to the public middle school, Ms. Cattapan finished her Master's Degree in Language Arts Instruction, Secondary, at Northeastern Illinois University. After completing advanced coursework in gifted education, Ms. Cattapan worked on writing young adult and middle grade novels, two of which have been published and won awards. Around the same time her second novel was accepted for publication, Ms. Cattapan began her doctoral studies at Loyola University Chicago with a desire to study the use of young adult novels within the classroom.

Ms. Cattapan continues to teach middle school reading and language arts while also writing and speaking at schools and conferences across the country. Her next book will be a nonfiction book for Catholic school teachers on combatting teacher burnout through Gospel reflections and will be released in 2021 from Ave Maria Press.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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