

THE EFFECTS OF LITERATURE CIRCLES ON THE READING ACHIEVEMENT  
OF COLLEGE READING STUDENTS

by

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I dedicate this research to Jeff and Cameron, co-owners of my heart.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of literature circles on the reading achievement of college reading students using a mixed method approach. A literature circle is defined in this study as students who form a group, read a novel, and meet on a regular basis to discuss what they have read. The researcher-developed intervention included three activities: collaborative oral re-tell, short written response to a prompt, and open discussion. The study employed an experimental design in order to examine the effectiveness of the intervention (literature circles); in addition, the sociocultural context of the college reading classes (and students) is described in detail. Grounded theory was employed to analyze reading attitude, reading motivation, response to participation in a literature circle, and textual engagement. Thirty-eight college students in required reading courses participated in the five-week study. Students were randomly assigned to either the treatment (participation in literature circle) or control (independent reading) condition. Students were able to choose from four pre-selected high-interest young adult novels. At the conclusion of the series of literature circle meetings (or upon completion of reading the novel independently, for control group participants), comprehension was measured using three measures: an oral re-tell of the novel, a twenty question researcher-developed open-ended book-specific assessment, and a twenty question assessment on a two-part high school level passage from the Qualitative Reading Inventory (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). Textual engagement was measured by coding and counting responses to a semi-structured interview. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed a significant main effect for group assignment, meaning that—when all four measures were

combined into a linear function—the students assigned to literature circles outperformed the control group students. Given the significance of the overall test, the univariate main effects were examined. Significant univariate main effects were obtained for the researcher developed test and textual engagement. Qualitative analysis revealed that literature circles improve reading comprehension, depth of textual engagement, and provides an opportunity for discourse, collaboration, and social interaction for its participants. These findings suggest that literature circles lead to both improved comprehension and deeper textual engagement for college reading students.

*Keywords:* literature circles/book club/literature discussion, reading comprehension, textual engagement, reader response, post-secondary/college/university, developmental studies, mixed method; experimental design; grounded theory

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

*“With book reports, I just think too much about it. I can’t think of what to say, but when we talk about it [in literature circles] and hear other people’s stories, it helps me bring out mine.”*

### The Context

#### “Really? That counts?”

When I meet with a group of literature circle participants for the first time, I give a short talk in which I list “all the things you can and should do” in a literature circle (see Methodology for a complete list). Some of the things that I list might seem painfully obvious to someone already entrenched in mainstream academia: asking questions to clarify meaning, relating personally to the text, agreeing or disagreeing, and making connections with other texts are only a few examples. After my first semester as a reading instructor and literature circle facilitator at a public university in central Tennessee (henceforth referred to as “Central State University,” or CSU), I experienced first-hand that even the most basic ways of connecting with books were, for various reasons, beyond the reach of the literature circle participants. This is not to say that the participants were incapable of asking, connecting, disagreeing, and discussing. On the contrary, the developmental reading students at CSU are particularly adept at these skills—listening to them talk in the hallway before class is proof positive. For the purposes of this study, the term *developmental reading* is defined as the reading coursework which CSU requires for students whose placement tests indicate a below twelfth grade reading equivalent. These students are given full, unconditional admission

to CSU, but they are required to complete the reading skills enhancement course before they are allowed to register for more advanced reading-intensive courses. *Developmental reading students* are the students enrolled in these courses.

*What happens when these students walk into the classroom, then?* The answer is at the same time both simple and frustratingly complicated. Somewhere along the way, these students have been made to feel that their “ways of taking from” a text (Heath, 1982) are not given credence by the educational system. In other words, their inventories of skills and knowledge are not valued by the discourse of power (Foucault, 1972). When I tell literature circle participants that it is not only “okay” but actually very good to make a connection between the book and their own lives, students’ responses range from confusion to disbelief. “Really? That *counts*?”

The “funds of knowledge” brought from home and community into the development reading classroom by diverse students are not deficits, but instead, valuable resources from which students and teachers alike could and should benefit (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). While it is important for educators to honor the knowledge and experiences of their students, it is even more important for students to honor their *own* knowledge and experiences. Just because some educators and administrators have shifted towards a more student-centered ideology that values identity and prior knowledge, students might not necessarily be able to “unlearn” what years and years of transmission-based teaching has hard-wired in their academic identities. Unfortunately, many students have been shut out and thus “shut down” by the educational process, especially those whose ways of learning and of demonstrating knowledge are not privileged by those in power (Delpit, 1995; Moll et al., 1992).

The typical classroom model—teacher pouring knowledge into the empty minds of students—is referred to as the “banking” or “transmission ideology” (Freire, 1970). The transmission ideology allows the dominant group/ideology to maintain power. According to Freire’s description of transmission-based teaching, students are informed, and exploration is not encouraged. Students are not allowed to construct their own knowledge; they are kept from truly participating in the learning process. When students are not engaged learning, they (understandably) detach from the experience. This approach to education perpetuates the stereotypes of ethnic minority students (Heath, 2000). In a classroom that embraces transmission ideology, the prior knowledge and experiences of students are not valued unless they happen to be a part of the dominant way of thinking. Students who are not part of this dominant knowledge base are left to flounder.

Through previous exploratory inquiries, I observed that, as a result of the failings of the transmission model of teaching, some of the most common, taken-for-granted teaching methods fall short of engaging developmental reading students. For example, the concept of modeling comprehension strategies for students (think-aloud, for example) is a widely accepted instructional method. The National Reading Panel recommends multiple strategy instruction for reading comprehension (NICHD, 2000). From my own experiences as an instructor of college developmental reading and literature circle facilitator for that student population, modeling only works when the students feel empowered to adopt the strategy being modeled. In other words, some students (often the ones who end up in developmental reading courses) have been indoctrinated with the

implicit assumption that any and all independent thinking is the job of the teacher, *not* the student.

After striving to model strategies week after week during my first round of literature circles, I was not observing any changes in my students. As a result, I developed a semi-scripted set of talking points for the literature circle facilitator to read aloud to students at the first meeting. When I told students that it was not only okay but actually *preferable* for them to talk about their own lives, the news, or another book/class at CSU, many of them told me that they never knew that kind of thing was “allowed.” By bringing these issues to the foreground and listening to the student response, I learned that many students self-censor in class and small group discussion, for fear of speaking “incorrectly.” In other words, “I can’t say it ‘right,’ so I’m going to play it safe and not say anything at all.”

### **Reading Research**

Over the last 15 years, reading research has explored teaching effectiveness (intervention studies), cognitive processing, and sociocultural practices. Thanks to advances in cognitive psychology, reading researchers have begun to provide an account of what happens in the mind during the act of reading and comprehending. Once comprehension was identified as the target construct, educators and reading researchers questioned the lack of comprehension instruction taking place in the classroom (Kamil, Pearson, Birr Moje, & Afflerbach, 2011).

The increasing amount of federal support for reading research has certainly generated a multitude of studies on comprehension and its various sub-skills, but the “reading wars” of the 1990s prevented scholars from providing a truly comprehensive

review of reading research. The authors of the most recent volume of the *Handbook of Reading Research* document their past efforts to include qualitative/whole language perspectives: the Volume Two chapter on linguistically diverse readers, the Volume Three emphasis on globalization and non-Western perspectives, and the Volume Three methodology chapter on English Learners (Kamil et al., 2011). The fourth and most recent volume of the *HBRR* indicates a shift towards a mixed method approach to reading research—a shift from “what works” to “what works for whom, and when” (xviii). My goal is to answer the latter, more nuanced question—with regards to literature circles and post-secondary reading students—by means of a mixed method inquiry. The dynamic and ever-changing nature of the act of making meaning with a text requires a qualitative component to contextualize the independent variable isolation accomplished with an experimental design.

### **Comprehension: K-12 and Beyond**

Based on the 2011 Nation’s Report Card (NCES), 33% of fourth graders and 24% of eighth graders did not score at or above “basic” on the NAEP, a national standardized reading assessment. Ethnic minorities and English Learners are disproportionately represented in this low-achieving group, so it should come as no surprise that almost three times as many minority students enroll in college developmental reading courses than whites. Of those who are placed in developmental reading classes, only 7% earn a two-year degree, and only 14% earn a four-year degree (Adelman, 2004). These statistics raise some important concerns. Are these courses serving the best interests of the students forced to take them? If we are to provide access to higher education, then we also must provide the tools for success in higher education. Otherwise, it is unethical to admit

students to universities, place them into required remedial courses, and charge them tuition for these courses.

Developmental reading at the college level has not been found to be as effective as other developmental courses, such as math and even English composition (Flippo & Caverly, 2009). While K-12 reading instruction (K-3 in particular) has been subjected to increased accountability measures and unified standards, post-secondary education remains unregulated for the most part (Stahl & Boylan, 2003). There is no consensus for how or what to teach college reading students (Paulson, 2006). This begs an important question: *What takes place in college developmental reading classes?* The answer to this question is another much needed line of inquiry. I can only share what I have experienced as a reading instructor and literature circle facilitator CSU, and until more data are collected on the curricula of developmental reading courses at other universities, I cannot generalize my findings beyond my own academic community.

### **Pilot Inquiry – Fall 2010**

During the fall 2010 semester, students in READ 3000 (Teaching Reading in Secondary School) facilitated literature circles for the READ 1000 (Developmental Reading) students. The READ 3000 students were taught about literature circle strategies at the beginning of the semester; then, they were sent into the READ 1000 classes as literature circle facilitators. While this collaboration between English education majors and the developmental reading program was an important step in the right direction, there were many opportunities to improve upon this work—from planning to execution, on to evaluation, assessment, and analysis.

The only data collected during this project were responses to an evaluation form (see Appendix A). While I was not involved in the fall 2010 literature circles or the creation of the evaluation form, I was asked to review and analyze the resulting data. Word frequency word clouds generated by *wordle.com* reflect the responses to the three self-evaluation questions selected from the evaluation form (Appendix B). These word clouds can be understood as an informal, simplistic content analysis of the students' written responses.

Overall, students enjoyed participating in the literature circles. Strong connections were made between “talking” and “understanding.” By and large, students felt less pressure as literature circle participants than they did in their one-on-one book reports. Several students noted in response to the “pressure” question that literature circles created a “good” kind of pressure as compared to the book reports. One possible explanation is that the “good” pressure to which these students are referring comes from the knowledge that they are going to be relied on by their fellow literature circle participants, while the pressure experienced in a book report stems from the fear of judgment from the instructor, and ultimately, failure of the assignment/course.

### **Pilot Inquiry – Spring 2011**

In the spring 2011 semester at CSU, I facilitated eight literature circles in the READ 1000 classes. I chose to focus on African American students and conduct an ethnography and discourse analysis, with a secondary focus on my own teacher/facilitator talk.

## **Description of Study**

I facilitated a total of eight literature circles—four sections at a time for two rounds of four weeks each. Groups consisted of 4-6 students, plus a facilitator. Since the average READ 1000 class has at least 20 students, only about half of each section was able to participate in a literature circle this semester. The recruitment method was simple: the literature circle facilitator gave a short talk about the book, how literature circles were different than book reports, and what was expected of literature circle participants. The students were asked to raise their hands if they were interested in participating. Since this inquiry focused on African American language ideologies, one group from each round was selected for analysis, based on group membership. Coincidentally, both groups selected the same book: *The Pact*, written by Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt. The book tells the story of how these three young African American men made a pact in middle/high school to become doctors. The chapters of the book each feature one of the three protagonists as first-person narrator. After the initial meeting, each subsequent meeting was audio-recorded. Decisions regarding the format and strategies used in Round 1 were informed by a literature review and discussions with both the READ 1000 director and READ 3000 instructor. Decisions regarding the format and strategies used in Round 2 were informed by the results of Round 1.

## **Research Questions (Pilot Inquiry)**

The primary research questions for the pilot inquiry were as follows:

1. How can literature circles help us learn more about how sociocultural identity impacts post-secondary reading comprehension?

2. How does the role of the facilitator impact the quality of literature circle discussions?

Secondary questions included the following:

3. Do literature circles provide something valuable to non-mainstream college students?
4. Do African American language ideologies offer something valuable to literature circles?
5. Do literature circles and African American language ideologies offer something valuable to college developmental reading courses?

### **Results/Discussion**

Analysis of the literature circle discussions supported my initial hypotheses that 1) the literature circle format has something valuable to offer to students who come to college with a non-mainstream language ideology, 2) African American language ideologies have something valuable to offer to the literature circle, and 3) both have something valuable to offer to the developmental reading class. Furthermore, I was able to learn much about how the sociocultural identity of literature circle participants impacted comprehension; in other words, I observed how context and collaboration affect the making of meaning through interaction with a text.

Analysis of my own “facilitator-talk” led to a greater understanding of how deeply the transmission-based ideology is embedded into the educational system. After analyzing and making appropriate shifts in my role and my voice as a literature circle facilitator, I found that the resulting shift in student talk was immediate and overwhelmingly for the better. With these students, the facilitator-as-modeler-of-

language was not particularly effective. While these pilot data cannot be generalized to the broader population of African American college reading students, the results can be used to inform teaching practice. Furthermore, the results of the pilot project led directly to the development of this study.

Efforts to tell the students how to read or how to annotate their books with post-it notes were ineffective. On the other hand, the free-writing exercises were received very well. The students particularly enjoyed writing about and discussing “moral debates,” and once I was able to convince them that it was permissible and appropriate to personally relate to the book, they enjoyed drawing parallels to their own lives.

One of the most important findings of this inquiry has to do with the grip that transmission-based pedagogy has on all our minds, whether we are students or teachers. As a literature circle facilitator for adults, I must remember that I am working with a group of people who have spent many years being indoctrinated by the system of schooling. It is not enough to decide that I will not wield my authoritative power in the literature circle. First of all, the power wielded by teachers often takes place below the threshold of conscious awareness. Furthermore, short of explicitly legitimizing the students’ own voice/languages/ dialects (in the form of the previously mentioned “talking points”), the students will vigilantly maintain the power imbalance that they were accustomed to, without any cue from the instructor.

However, with a relatable book and a facilitator who turns over the power to the group, college reading students have the opportunity to flourish as literature circle participants—in my pilot inquiries, I observed overlapping and latching talk,

repetitive/rhythmic speech, choral speech, and spirited moral debates. These rhetorical moves enhanced the literature circles for all participants.

### **Purpose Statement**

The richness and depth of data I collected through my 2010 and 2011 pilot inquiries, combined with my desire to legitimize the presence of literature circles in classes like READ 1000, led to the current mixed method project. A literature circle provides a collaborative social context for learning, so it comes as no surprise that the conversation about literature circles to date has been a qualitative one by and large. The few quantitative studies on literature circles lack the theoretical grounding and sociocultural perspective offered by the qualitative studies.

More specifically, the qualitative body of research on literature circles highlights the depth of discourse that takes place when students come together to discuss a text. Literature circle participants are encouraged to share background knowledge and experiences and make connections with both the text and fellow participants. There is every reason to expect that participation in a literature circle could lead to gains in reading comprehension, yet there is a dearth of experimental or quasi-experimental design research on the topic.

In a situation such as READ 1000, where so much is at stake for the students, it is crucial that every minute of reading instruction that takes place in the classroom is productive. On a common sense level, one can sympathize with a developmental reading instructor who is hesitant to give up class time for “talking about books” when that time could be spent doing drills in workbooks that more closely resemble the standardized test items these students will need to have success with in order to exit the class. Therefore,

this inquiry seeks to show that the collaborative nature and depth of discussion in literature circles can equip nontraditional students with skills that will help them not only with standardized tests, but also with the rest of their journey as college students and beyond, as lifelong readers and critical thinkers.

My goal as a researcher and a developer of a new intervention is to “bridge the gap” between the sociocultural approach to literature circles and the more structured interventions, such as Transactional Strategies, Dialogic Reading, and Reciprocal Teaching (see Chapter II). It is my argument that students in developmental college reading classes have a unique need for meaningful interaction with a high-interest novel, unencumbered by acronyms, role specifications, and other types of tasks which will cause already disenfranchised college students to disengage. The literature circle experience must address the affective issues faced by college reading students at least as much as it addresses reading comprehension skill development.

In the language arts/English world, literature circles offer an alternative to the traditional instruction of a text, in which an entire classroom reads a novel and takes notes as the teacher shares his/her interpretation. While some discussion of the text might take place, students look to the teacher for the “right answers” with regard to the “true meaning” of the text. In the world of reading instruction, literature circles offer an opportunity for small groups of peers to read and discuss a meaningful, high-interest book. It seems obvious that struggling college readers should have an opportunity to interact meaningfully with a book, but in order to best understand the phenomenon, describe the context, and demonstrate a causal relationship between literature circles and

reading achievement, I have decided to analyze literature circles through both the quantitative and qualitative lenses.

### **Research Questions**

1. Compared to independent reading, to what extent does participation in a supplemental literature circle improve reading comprehension for college students in a developmental reading course? My hypothesis was that literature circle participation would have a positive impact on comprehension, as measured by the four selected measures. The hypothesis was tested using multivariate analysis of variance.
2. Compared to independent reading, how does participation in a supplemental literature circle impact the quantity and quality of textual connections made by college students in a developmental reading course? My hypothesis was that literature circle participants would articulate more discrete textual connections than the control group participants. For the qualitative portion, I did not formulate a hypothesis, since that is not methodologically appropriate for grounded theory analysis.

## CHAPTER II: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Theoretical Perspectives

As with almost any modern inquiry into educational practices, a theoretical and philosophical debt is owed to Dewey (1902). Particularly in the case of literature circle research, Dewey's theories ring true. Education is a social, interactive process, and the school should be a vehicle for social reform. Students should be empowered to take part in the learning process. The goal of education should not be hinged on a pre-determined set of skills, but instead 1) self-realization and 2) the ability to use academic skills to make the world a better place. In *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), Dewey argues that content must be presented in a way that allows the student to make connections between the new information and prior experiences, which deepens the connections with material taught in school.

Freire takes Dewey's argument a step farther in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), in which he looks at education through a Marxist lens. He labels the traditional pedagogy originally identified by Dewey as the "banking model" because it treats students like empty piggy banks, waiting to be filled with knowledge. Like Dewey, Freire argues for learners to co-create knowledge. The act of learning is necessarily social and political.

If Dewey and Freire view learning as an act of democratic empowerment, then Vygotsky views learning as an act of social interaction. He describes the process of guided participation, during which creative thinkers interact with a knowledgeable person. Vygotsky gives accounts of guided participation in cultures around the world and

suggests its use as a model for classroom instruction (1978). Indeed, the theoretical underpinnings of literature circles mirror Vygotsky's original conception of guided participation and the zone of proximal development. Through guided participation, our social and cultural practices become internalized and determine the way we think and learn. The supportive yet minimalist role of the literature circle in this study utilizes the zone of proximal development in order to bolster the participants' confidence and independence as meaning-makers.

Perhaps no other theorist is better suited to rationalize the implementation of literature circles than Bakhtin (1981), for his view is that thought, language, and thus texts, exist in dialogue. In other words, language is a social phenomenon that exists as it is used by people to address one another. When the language is used to create a text, it retains its dialogic identity and function. Taken to a theoretical extreme, texts carry out "conversations" with each other. In other words, intertextuality is ever present, which is why "other books" earned a spot on the Star Connections graphic organizer (see Appendix D). Every word that has been spoken or written exists in response to things that have been said and in anticipation of things that will be said in response. We do not speak, write, or live in a cultural vacuum; thus, texts are incapable of neutrality. Every word is bound to the context in which it exists: this is the cornerstone of sociocultural theory.

Bakhtin's theory of polyglossia—the hybridity of language—supports the argument that the concept of a "standard English" or "correct English" is a social construct. There is no "pure" language, which is something to be celebrated. Every text is a chorus of different registers, language use, dialect, and borrowed vocabulary—

Bakhtin's heteroglossia (1981). According to these principles, literature circles could and should be a place for language hybridity, contact, and meaning-making.

The emergence of literature circles and book clubs in school settings over the last thirty years is just one of the many manifestations of the philosophical shift from a banking, or transmission, model of learning to one where education is social and dialogic. Literature circle proponents draw on many theories that inform educational philosophy, the nature of the reader/text, how we gain knowledge (epistemology), and sociocultural context. One such theory is *transactional theory* (Rosenblatt, 1969). The act of reading involves a transaction between the reader and the text; this transaction produces meaning, which is said to exist within that reader-text interaction (as opposed to fixed, innate within the text). Each reader brings individual background knowledge, beliefs, and context to the reading event. As a result, any given text has as many different meanings as there are readers. Rosenblatt's work led directly to reader-response theory, in which the reader, an active agent, completes the meaning of a text through engagement and interpretation (Fish, 1967).

Heath (1982) suggests that the ways in which people "take from books" (i.e., engage with a text) is informed by culture, and that there is a mainstream "way of taking" that is rewarded in the classroom. Students who exist outside this mainstream are less likely to succeed in school. While they are interacting with texts as much and as meaningfully as their mainstream counterparts, their approach is not recognized as valid, and thus, it is not rewarded. Heath studied the language ideologies of "the other" and how they stand in contrast with transmission ideology (1989). Students outside of the "mainstream" learning and communication patterns have talents from which the entire

classroom could benefit, such as community interaction and the oral interpretation of written materials in a social context. Much can be learned from non-mainstream language ideologies (both oral and written), and literature circle discussions could be facilitated in a manner that welcomes simultaneous and overlapping talk, latching (adding onto another's utterance), and repetition (repeating own or other's utterance for emphasis) (Heath 1989).

Students walk into the classroom with “funds of knowledge” they have gained from their families and home lives (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Whether or not these “funds” valued by those in power depends on which language (or language ideology) exists in the mainstream. Communities are made up of individuals with varying amounts of power and agency (Pratt, 1987). As a result, students form their language in the larger context of the dominant group/ideology. In the seminal work *Other People's Children* (Delpit, 1995), the issue of language legitimacy is politicized and viewed as a problem of access to power. In the educational system, it is a problem of access to the strategies needed to succeed in mainstream academia. Within the scope of Delpit's philosophy of education, literature circle facilitators have the opportunity to guide students to make important connections between home culture and the knowledge acquired in school. Teachers should be vigilant and self-critical in the ongoing effort to eliminate the bias against “otherness.”

Since each student is a product of a particular sociocultural context, whose knowledge is a result of world view (Delpit, 1995), it follows that some children's ways of knowing will be looked upon more favorably by teachers than others. Heath (1985, 2000) argues that non-mainstream ways of knowing, learning, and using language are not

valued, that there is only one particular way of taking meaning from books that is privileged in the school setting. Those who do not fit the mold of the preferred way of knowing (in our case, the preferred way of comprehending a text) are placed at a distinct disadvantage.

James Gee, best known for his work in Discourse Analysis, New Literacies, and Video Games (Good Learning Principle), is not typically associated with literature circles; however, his work in discourse analysis and sociolinguistics can be used to make the case for literature circles as part of a developmental reading curriculum. The view of language as a social network suggests that knowledge is constructed in contextualized social settings in which information is exchanged with others. Collective knowledge is valued, and language “otherness” (outside the mainstream) is a cultural resource, not a problem to be fixed (1990, 1992). In fact, classrooms *should* be a site of language contact (Hornberger, 2002; Pratt 1987; Winford, 2003). Just as we can view otherness as a resource, we can also view mistakes or miscues as resources in a group discussion setting. Goodman (1984) expands on this view by adding that mistakes made in groups of learners have a unique value and provide insight into cognitive processes.

Building on Goodman’s work, Kathy Short described and analyzed classroom behaviors through the lens of an inquiry curriculum (1996). As its name indicates, an inquiry curriculum is built upon questioning. The questioning process is more the focus than any particular solution or correct answer. The theoretical assumption behind the inquiry curriculum is that students will end up knowing more from the process of working through a process of inquiry, even if the problem at hand is not solved, per se.

Closely related to inquiry curriculum and other sociocultural perspectives to text is critical literacy, a theoretical and instructional approach born out of critical pedagogy (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Janks, 2010). Critical literacy argues that the practice of literacy is more than decoding words—it is discourse about and analysis of a text using critical thinking and questioning. Critical literacy allows for multiple readings (interpretations) of the same text and use of multiple texts to create meaning (intertextuality).

Alim and Baugh (2010) claim that the classroom is the primary site of “language ideological combat” (p. 155). If classrooms are the site of language combat, then literature circles are the front lines. In a format where every student is given a voice, a chance to talk, the sky is the limit in terms of diverse language ideologies. Instead of viewing this arena of language contact as a problem or source of tension, developmental reading instructors should consider all the opportunities for learning. As participants in a literature circle, students can discuss language, power, and identity in the setting of a literature circle. They can investigate the language ideologies present at school, at home, and elsewhere. Through the critical exploration of language and identity, students can become critical thinkers, even “language and cultural theorists” (Fecho, 2000).

### **Historical Perspectives**

Like many other lines of inquiry, the body of research on literature circles suffers from multiple terms with conflicting and overlapping definitions. In a way, the very nature of the problem coined “terminology drift” by Harvey Daniels (2002) confirms the validity of a transactional theory of learning. There exist as many definitions or interpretations for any given term as there are readers. The phrase “book club” evokes a

very specific event for one person (a recreational reading group at a library) and for another person, it is the *other* “Book Club,” which is a highly structured four-part classroom-based reading intervention (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). According to the *What Works Clearinghouse*, book clubs and literature circles are synonymous, which would not be a problem if the reading research community could agree on what a literature circle is!

There is no doubt that people have been “talking about books” for centuries; however, the academic conversation about classroom-based literature circles (known simply as “literature circles” from this point forward in this paper) started about 30 years ago. Literature circles even have their own origin story—Legend has it that the fifth graders in Karen Smith’s 1982 classroom took ownership of a box of throw-away novels and formed in-class “book clubs” to discuss the texts (Daniels, 2002). At around the same time, Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) put forth the “Say Something” strategy, which was closely related to literature circles. Later, Eeds and Wells (1989) published a naturalistic study of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade “literature study groups.” Within a few years, various incarnations of in class peer led literature response groups popped up all over the place. As a result, publications on literature circles experienced a boom over the course of the 1990s: Short and Pierce’s *Talking About Books: Literature Discussion Groups in K-8 Classrooms* (1990); Keegan and Shrake’s “Literature study groups” (1991); Harvey Daniels’s *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* (1994); Raphael and McMahon’s “Book clubs” (1984); and Hill, Johnson, and Noe’s *Literature Circles and Response* (1995).

Indeed, each contributor to the academic conversation on literature circles has a slightly different definition of “literature circle.” Daniels (2002) offers a list of eleven principles:

1. Students choose own reading materials.
2. Small temporary groups are formed, based on book choice.
3. Different groups read different books.
4. Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss reading.
5. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide reading and discussion.
6. Discussion topics come from the students.
7. Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books; personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.
8. Teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor.
9. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation.
10. Spirit of playfulness and fun.
11. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and new groups are formed.

Harvey Daniels’s seminal 1994 book was republished in 2002 with a new introduction and a couple other significant changes. In the new introduction, Daniels acknowledges the literature circle “boom” that has taken place since the book’s first publication. He also responds to what he calls “role sheet backfire.” His claim is that he never intended for the role sheets to be a cornerstone of literature circles, and he clearly resents being known as the “Role Sheet Guy.” The two principles related to roles were removed from the original list that appeared in the first edition of Daniels’s book (1994).

See Table 1 for the defining characteristics of literature circles according to *Getting Started With Literature Circles* (Noe & Johnson, 1999):

Table 1

*Defining Characteristics of Literature Circles*

Literature Circles Are ...	Literature Circles Are Not ...
Reader response centered	Teacher and text centered
Part of a balanced literacy program	The entire reading curriculum
Groups formed by book choice	Teacher-assigned groups formed solely by ability
Structured for student independence, responsibility, and ownership	Unstructured, uncontrolled “talk time” without accountability
Guided primarily by student insights and questions	Guided primarily by teacher- or curriculum-based questions
Intended as a context in which to apply reading and writing skills	Intended as a place to do skills work
Flexible and fluid; never look the same twice	Tied to a prescriptive “recipe”

Short and Pierce’s (1990) edited volume is comprised of qualitative essays specific to literature discussion for kindergarten through eighth grade. Short went on to do work in the area of inquiry curriculum (1996), and traces of that theory are present in the older book. Short and Pierce acknowledge the importance of comprehension

strategies, but they argue that students need to participate in a dialogue about literature as part of a community of readers (1990). They also believe that overly structured comprehension strategy instruction “distorts the complexity” of literature discussion. While Short and Pierce (1990) do not offer a concrete definition of a literature circle, they offer a set of features of a community of learners:

1. Come to know each other.
2. Value what each has to offer.
3. Focus on problem solving and inquiry.
4. Share responsibility and control.
5. Learn through action, reflection, and demonstration.
6. Establish a learning atmosphere that is predictable and yet full of real choices.

Another important element of small group literature discussion, according to Short and Pierce (1990), is the equal weight of unique contributions to the conversation. In this sense, the more diverse a literature circle, the better. The goal should not be to become more like one another; instead, a literature circle participant should strive to improve the clarity of one’s own contribution and enhance the comprehension of contributions from others.

### **Related Lines of Research**

An important part of defining literature circles as a reading intervention is understanding what they are *not*. There are many interventions closely related to literature circles, but for various reasons, should not be confused with literature circles. For example, Harvey Daniels once observed a so-called “literature circle” that was, in reality, a round robin reading group (2002). This section lists several related, but

different, reading interventions which should not be confused with literature circles.

These related lines of research emerged during my exploratory search for the body of work on literature discussion groups in schools and the various terminologies applied to them. This inquiry was followed by a more targeted literature review of studies using a college reading student population and literature circles as an independent variable.

### **Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs**

This is a highly structured reading and writing intervention for English Learners. Two studies meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards with reservations. The study participants were second, third, fourth, and fifth English Learners (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999). This intervention is much more structured than literature circles and was specifically developed for English Learners.

### **Book Club**

Book Club (capitalized) is a highly structured reading and writing intervention with four parts: reading, writing/representation, instruction, and discussion (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). Book club (lowercase), on the other hand, typically refers to informal discussion of literature in a non-academic setting. There are lines of research (almost all qualitative) on book clubs in library settings, prison settings, and adult basic education settings. Despite its name, Book Club is far more structured than literature circles, and discussion is only one part of the larger multiple strategy intervention.

### **Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI)**

TSI has a lot in common with literature circles, but it is a significantly more structured intervention. TSI takes into account that meaning is determined through the interaction of prior knowledge and information conveyed through print, and that one

person's reaction is influenced by what other group members do, think, and say. Like literature circles, TSI is made up of teacher-facilitated student discussions, and the meaning that emerges is the product of the group's interactions. Unlike literature circles, a set of comprehension strategies are explicitly taught and modeled by the teacher: make predictions, relate text to background knowledge, ask questions, seek clarification, visualize meaning, and summarize. While the approach to facilitating a literature circle is relatively minimalist, the role of the teacher in TSI is very active, in a clear expert role, and requires extensive training, though the teacher role diminishes over time as children master the strategies (Pressley et al., 1992; McElvain, 2010).

### **Reciprocal Teaching (RT)**

RT is also similar to the literature circle format, in that a group of students reads the same text and holds a discussion which leads to comprehension. RT provides a dialogue between teacher and students for the purpose of constructing the meaning of a text. RT participants take turns assuming various roles traditionally identified with the teacher. The RT roles add structure to the discussion: Predictor, Clarifier, Questioner, and Summarizer (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

### **Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative Learning is a broad term referring to the act of learning together, as opposed to learning alone (Johnson & Johnson, 1988; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubek, 1999). Johnson and Johnson (1988) identified five elements of cooperative learning: positive interdependence (implies roles), individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and processing. Technically, literature circles are a type of cooperative learning; however, the theoretical underpinnings of cooperative learning treat

group work more as a way to work together to complete a task, rather than an opportunity to “think together collaboratively to co-construct meaning” (Short, 1990, viii.).

### **Dialogic Reading (DR)**

DR is another highly structured reading intervention, created by the Stony Brook Reading and Language Project (Whitehurst, 1992). Teachers use the acronym PEER: Prompt child to say something about the book, Evaluate the child’s response, Expand on child’s response (rephrase, add information), and Repeat the prompt. The acronym CROWD provides options for prompting: Completion, Recall, Open-ended, Wh-question, Distancing (Whitehurst, 1992). This intervention is typically only used for younger children, designed to enhance their language abilities and engagement with text.

### **Teacher Literature Circles**

Several articles and essays have been written on the implementation of literature circles for pre- and in-service teachers, usually as part of a professional development program (Beeghly, 2005). While this seems like an enriching activity, the program is not tied to any measure of reading outcomes, so this line of research is not relevant to the project at hand.

### **Electronic/Virtual Literature Circles**

The higher education research community is on the cutting edge of incorporating technological resources into instructional practices. One such example is web-based learning communities like WebCT (Burgess, 2009). Peterson and Caverly (2005) explored the benefit of online discussion for developmental students. Bowers-Campbell (2011) explored the impact of virtual literature circles for pre-service teachers. While this work is promising, the unique motivational challenges of college reading students—

combined with their reduced access to educational tools—beg for a face-to-face, book-in-hand experience.

### **Group Work**

There is a body of research on small group work across content areas. Many of these studies use the phrase *literature circle*, cite Daniels or Short one time in the introduction, and proceed to use an independent variable which in no way resembles literature circles as defined in this paper (peer led discussion of a book-length text in a school setting). While the term *group work* could mean literally any type of academic activity which takes place in a group setting, literature circles are a very specific curricular framework for collaborative reader response to a high-interest text.

### **Cooperative Learning/ Interteaching**

From the higher education research community comes the closely related concept of peer learning or *interteaching* (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Boyce & Hineline, 2002; Nelson, 1994; Slavin, 1983). Interteaching consists of peer-led reading and discussion groups, facilitated by faculty. This strategy is offered as a counter-balance to transmission ideology-based traditional college course lecturing. For the most part, this strategy has been implemented only for content area textbooks, such as law and philosophy, yet the concept is closely tied to that of literature circles and reader response.

### **Conclusion**

A review of the lines of inquiry tangentially related to literature circles was an important step of the literature review process, for it both clarified and narrowed the scope of which studies should be included and excluded. The consideration of other

related lines of comprehension strategy research confirmed the trend toward multiple strategy, peer-led, dialogic approaches to reading instruction.

### **K-12 Literature Circle Research**

The affective benefits of literature circles have been well documented across the K-12 age range. Even at the young ages of five and six years old, literature circles have been shown to help develop oral language skills (Souvenir, 1997). For elementary school children, literature circles have been found to positively impact social and leadership skills (Sportsman, Certo, Bolt, & Miller, 2011). The power of literature circles for English Learners and their families has been well documented (Fain & Horn, 2006; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000). Publications such as *Voices from the Middle* have held literature circle in high regard for middle school students and given literature circle advocates such as Harvey Daniels a sounding board. Indeed, students in the middle grades have enjoyed the rewards of literature circles more than students of other ages.

Guthrie and Humenick (2004) conducted a meta-analysis on reading motivation for students 8-14 years old. Through calculation of effect sizes, they identified a handful of motivational practices that positively impacted students' reading comprehension; namely, knowledge/content goals, student choice, interesting texts, and collaboration. The strongest quantitative work found in this review was a dissertation which used literature circles as an independent variable and middle school students as participants. Marshall (2006) randomly assigned students (limited by class period) to either literature circles or whole-class directed reading activities. Comprehension was assessed using cloze passages. No significant difference was found between the two types of instruction.

Work like this simultaneously confirms the potential benefit of literature circles (which when done well, address all four of these motivational practices) and signals the need for similar research to be carried out for the college developmental reader population.

### **Quantitative Intervention Studies**

Quantitative intervention studies using some form of literature circles as the independent variable were collected from a variety of sources, including large meta-analyses, such as the National Reading Panel (NRP), and intervention study databases, such as the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). An extensive article database search was conducted, as well as hand searches of relevant peer-reviewed journals. Finally, a search of published and unpublished theses and dissertations was conducted.

#### **The National Reading Panel (NRP)**

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was written at the request of the United States Congress with support from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the United States Department of Education. The NRP was the first national, wide-ranging, systematic review of reading research. Timothy Shanahan summarizes the basic premises of the NRP as 1) a desire to close the various achievement gaps in the education system, 2) the belief that research could provide the roadmap for improving achievement, and 3) the belief that research must be analyzed in a highly systematic way to minimize bias (2004). By necessity, the philosophical stance of the NRP is quite conservative. A particular instructional strategy had to have accumulated a fair amount of supporting experimental data across many studies to “make the list.” As a result, it is likely that many instructional approaches not included in the NRP’s recommendations are potentially effective. Instructional approaches which historically

“belong” to the qualitative/whole language camp simply did not have enough quantitative studies to even be considered by the NRP—literature circles are certainly one of these.

Shanahan’s 2004 review of the critiques on the NRP organizes the negative responses into five categories: 1) important topics were neglected, 2) panel was too limiting on allowable research designs, 3) implications of lack of evidence for a particular intervention, 4) criticism of panelists, and 5) the basic premise was flawed. Shanahan goes on to respond to each of these critiques, and in light of his arguments, it is clear that the second category is one of the more valid critiques. Coincidentally, it also the critique most relevant to the role literature circles could have played in the NRP section on comprehension. The NRP privileged quantitative over qualitative research, and within the scope of quantitative research, it privileged causal findings over correlational findings. The better the internal validity of a research design, the stronger the causal relationship, and the more value the study had for the NRP. This standard eliminated most action research and descriptive case studies, which forms the bulk of research on literature circles.

The NRP concluded that teaching students a bundle of strategies (as is used in Reciprocal Teaching) increases text comprehension, but the overall emphasis on single strategy instruction weakened the strength of the Panel’s claims (Pressley & Fingeret, 2007). Almasi, Garas-York, and Shanahan (2006) examined how the NRP’s report on text comprehension might have differed if qualitative research would have been included. They describe a systematic method of searching for and choosing studies—something the original panel implied could not be done with qualitative studies. The search yielded twelve studies which met the inclusion criteria. Taken together, these studies led Almasi

et al. to conclude that 1) qualitative studies enhance our understanding of prior knowledge activation with regard to comprehension, 2) qualitative studies enhance our understanding of which instructional methods foster multiple strategy use, and 3) the qualitative studies found using the search criteria were by and large more recent than the experimental studies examined by the NRP. Of the numerous responses to and criticisms of the NRP, the most compelling (and most relevant to the task at hand) is that the methodological narrowness fell short in terms of everything we know about text comprehension being a socially constructed, ever-changing phenomenon (Wilkinson & Son, 2011).

In particular, Hartman's highly analytic examination of the intertextual links made by readers using grounded theory serves as an exemplary model for the qualitative portion of this study (1995). Hartman articulated three types of reader profiles (intratextual, intertextual, and extratextual) and three types of reader stances (logocentric, intertextual, and resistant). It was concluded that prior knowledge was used, constructed, and reconstructed during the reading process. Furthermore, students were observed employing multiple strategies through interview responses and think-aloud activities. This creative response to and enhancement of the work of the NRP served as an inspiration for the mixed method approach to this inquiry.

### **What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)**

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) lists Literature Circles as a strategy (under "Book Clubs"), but currently, no studies meet the WWC standards for "evidence of effectiveness." Of 284 studies found by the WWC, only eleven studies were found to be within the scope of the review protocol. Of those eleven, eight did not have equivalent

groups, two had serious confounding factors, and one was a single-subject design which did not make at least three attempts to demonstrate an intervention effect.

### **Literature Circle Research Using Post-Secondary Developmental Reading Students**

The number of manuscript-length works and edited volumes on post-secondary developmental reading is far outnumbered by comparable publications at the elementary and middle school levels. Furthermore, among these works, the conversation about literature circles (and any literature discussion, for that matter) is silent. Stahl and Boylan's 2003 edited volume *Teaching Developmental Reading*, for example, includes large sections on the "reading-writing connection," English Learners, technology, and reading in content areas, but there is no mention of the act of talking about books with peers. The chapter on comprehension development in the most recent edition of the *Handbook of College Reading and Study Strategy Research* emphasizes self-regulation and generative strategies but does not mention literature discussion groups. An extensive database and hand search yielded five studies on literature circles and their impact on post-secondary developmental reading students.

Two descriptive articles (Dillon, 2007; Valeri-Gold & Commander, 2003) simply describe literature circle implementation and give instructions for how to use literature circles in the classroom.

One unpublished dissertation (Byrd, 2002) employed a qualitative methodology and a self-identified "naturalistic" approach. Outcome measured included individual interviews, audio and video taped discussion sessions, focus group sessions, a final reflective essay, journal entries, and a concluding group session. According to Byrd (2002), literature circles offer cognitive, affective, and social benefits to developmental

reading students. Students co-constructed meaning through connections with self, others, and texts. Finally, interaction patterns support the suggestion that adult learners need the opportunity to engage in “grand conversations” in order to better understand text and self.

Another dissertation (Kozak, 2008) used a self-described “mixed method action research” method which included an observational checklist, reflective journals, pre- and post-reading and speaking assessments, and pre- and post-self-assessments. While general “improvements” were cited in the findings chapter, no statistical tests or analysis were shared. Through the self-assessments, Kozak found that students’ confidence in reading and speaking improved. The participants of this study were English Learner students at an English Language School, which is nested under the University of New Brunswick. Technically, the participants in this study were not college developmental reading students, but given the lack of research in this area and the fact that many of these language school graduates are eventually admitted to the university and placed in developmental reading, the study was included.

The most promising study on literature circles and post-secondary reading students is a study described by its author as a quasi-experimental design with a qualitative component (Willingham, 2009). Outcome measures included the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (forms G & H), an attitude survey, and a qualitative questionnaire. While no significant difference was found between the treatment and control groups, the qualitative component of the study was beneficial. Through the attitude survey, Willingham found that students believe vocabulary instruction is important at the college level, and through the qualitative questionnaire, it was revealed that literature discussion

groups enhance vocabulary acquisition. The design of Willingham's study serves as a model for this inquiry.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the qualitative body of work on literature circles is strong, but the research is not equally distributed across all age groups, leaving an opportunity to do more work with college students. There is a good amount of work on literature circles and their benefits for pre-service teachers (i.e. education majors), but this is very different than using literature circles in college developmental reading courses. The quantitative body of work on literature circles is sparse across all grade levels, but especially for the college population. The methodologically sound studies unfortunately do not offer much in terms of positive significant differences between groups. All of the work previously carried out on literature circles has paved the way for me to carry out my inquiry. I seek to use a mixed method approach in order to both demonstrate a causal relationship between literature circle participation and improved reading comprehension and describe the phenomena of the literature circle experience, as described by the participants themselves.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

In order to examine the complexities of a literature circle in READ 1000, a mixed method design was selected to best address the research questions. Participants were randomly assigned to either a treatment group (literature circles plus post-testing) or a control group (independent reading plus post-testing). The literature circles met once per week for five consecutive weeks. The series of meetings included one introductory meeting (distribution of materials) and four “normal” book discussion meetings. Post-testing included four components: a qualitative post-test of reading comprehension (unfamiliar passages), a researcher-developed post-test of comprehension of the assigned novel (referred to henceforth as the “book test”), an oral re-tell of the assigned novel, and semi-structured interviews (affective). The participants, materials, and procedure used in this study are discussed in detail. Throughout this chapter, any reference to a facilitator or tester is a reference to me, the principal investigator.

#### **Participants**

To better understand the participants in this study, the larger population of developmental reading students at Central State University is described and analyzed in terms of the educational environment, placement and exit criteria, and READ 1000 curriculum.

#### **Developmental Reading at Central State University.**

Students who are admitted to CSU with low verbal/reading test scores are required to enroll in a developmental reading course (READ 1000) during their first semester. Students are not allowed to move on to the first-year English course (usually an introductory composition course) until they 1) meet the course requirements of READ

1000 with a grade of C or higher and 2) earn a 12.0 or higher grade equivalent score on either the Nelson-Denny Reading Test or the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test. READ 1000 has three course requirements: In-class reading skill kits, outside-of-class textbook exercises, and outside-of-class book reading (verified by in-class oral book reports).

#### **In-class reading skill kits.**

Reading skill development is emphasized in READ 1000; kit work makes up 50% of the total grade. Students read passages and complete multiple-choice tests which assess various reading skills, such as “find the main idea,” “locating supporting details,” or “draw a conclusion.” Test passages range from short paragraphs to longer stories/articles; most passages are non-fiction, but some are fiction.

#### **Outside-of-class book reading.**

Book reading (referred to in READ 1000 as *outside reading*) takes place outside of class on an individual, independent basis, and makes up 30% of the total grade. Students are required to select books (fiction or nonfiction) and read them alone, outside of class. Then, completion of the reading and basic comprehension are assessed by means of a one-on-one oral book report, in which the student first provides an oral re-tell and then is questioned by the proctor, whose goal it is to determine whether or not the student passed the oral report. Whether or not a student passes the report and earns the pages is ultimately the proctor’s decision. There are no standardized criteria for this decision. If students pass their oral book report, they are rewarded the number of pages in the book. The current model requires 1500 pages by semester’s end for a grade of C in “outside reading,” 1850 pages for a B, and 2200 pages for an A. Other than the oral book reports, books are not discussed during class.

**Outside-of-class textbook assignments.**

Each week, students are asked to read a chapter from a reading skills textbook and complete the end-of-chapter “check your understanding” questions. The assignments are graded, and students have the opportunity to make corrections to earn back partial credit.

**Placement/exit.** Students who have a score of 18 or lower on the reading portion of the ACT are required to enroll in developmental reading. Students can appeal the decision by taking the reading portion of the COMPASS placement test during summer orientation before the fall semester of freshman year. On the first day of READ 1000, students take the Nelson-Denny Reading Test as a last opportunity to test out of the course. After taking READ 1000, at the end of the semester, in addition to meeting several other course requirements, students must demonstrate a minimum of 12<sup>th</sup> grade equivalency on one of two standardized tests of reading comprehension: the *Nelson-Denny Reading Test* (Brown, Fishco, & Hanna, 1993) or the *Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test* (Karlsen & Gardner, 1995).

**READ 1000 Population Statistics**

The participants of this study are described through both an analysis of the larger population of developmental reading students at CSU and the smaller subset of students who agreed to participate in the study.

**Demographic data.** The Information Technology Department at CSU graciously provided a report on students enrolled in READ 1000 for the fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters. See Table 2 for the descriptive statistics on READ 1000 student demographic data.

Table 2

*READ 1000 Student Demographic Data*

Variable	Fall 2012	Spring 2013
Total students enrolled	311	142
Residency		
In state	88.1%	72.5%
Out of state (within U.S.)	3.5%	2.8%
International	7.1%	24.6%
Unknown	1.3%	0.0%
Gender		
Male	37.0%	43.7%
Female	63.0%	56.3%
Ethnicity		
African American	44.1%	39.4%
European American	19.0%	19.0%
Asian	4.5%	8.5%
Native American	0.6%	0.0%
Latino	0.3%	0.7%
Other	0.3%	0.0%
Not available/Not specified	31.2%	32.4%
Median Age	18	19
Mean ACT reading score	15.50	14.94
Most popular majors		
Undeclared	17.4%	12.0%
Nursing	12.2%	9.9%
Science	11.6%	9.2%
% of students repeating READ 1000	N/A	52.1%

**Reading ability (placement testing).** The average incoming ACT reading score was 15.5 for fall 2012 students. The average Nelson-Denny Reading Test score was 10.1 (grade equivalent) for fall 2012 students. The NDRT data exclude English Learners and Learning Disabled students.

### **Study Participants**

All participants were students registered in READ 1000 at Central State University. Participants were required to be at least 18 years old and registered in the *K* sections of READ 1000. Students registered in the *KC* sections of the course were excluded from the study. These students tested particularly low on the ACT reading test (12 or lower). Because data were collected in the spring semester, many students included in this study were repeating READ 1000 after not meeting the requirements the previous fall ( $n = 25$ ; 63%).

Initially, 46 students were recruited for the study. Students were randomly assigned to the treatment (literature circle participant) or control (post-test only) group. Post-test data were collected from 20 treatment and 18 control group participants; however, two of the treatment group participants completed the post-testing after quantitative analysis was complete, so only their interview responses were included and analyzed in this study. Since the participants were randomly assigned to a condition, group equivalence is assumed; however, independent samples t-tests were conducted to prove group equivalence on the Nelson-Denny comprehension and ACT reading scores. See Table 3 for the descriptive statistics of the study participants.

Table 3

*Study Participant Demographic Data*

Variable	Value
Gender	
Male	52.8%
Female	47.2%
Ethnicity	
African American	50.0%
European American	33.3%
Asian	8.3%
Latino	2.8%
Other	5.6%
Mean ACT reading score	15.0
Nelson-Denny comprehension reading score	
Mean raw score	19.9
Mean grade equivalent	10.0
% of learning disabled students (documented)	8.3%
% of English learners	22.2%
% of READ 1000 repeating students	63.9%

**Recruitment and Incentives**

In spring 2013, seven sections of READ 1000 were offered. I invited all non-KC students to participate in the study. Forty-six students volunteered to participate. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the literature circle (treatment) group, and half were assigned to the book report (control) group. When READ 1000 students pass a book report, they earn the total number of pages in the book towards a bank of outside reading pages: a student needs to have earned 1500 pages to pass the requirement. With the

permission of the director of the READ 1000 program, the following incentives were offered in exchange for participation in this study.

Control group participants (independent reading plus post-testing) earned a 50% page bonus as an incentive for completing the study. Literature circle participants (literature circle meetings plus post-testing) earned a 100% page bonus for completing the study. In terms of earning the pages for class, the only evaluative criteria for the treatment group was attendance to literature circle meetings and the post-test appointment. The only requirement for the control group was attendance to the post-test appointment.

### **Attrition**

Control group students were told to only attempt the post-testing if they had finished the book. The policy for literature circle participants was that they would be excused from the study if they missed more than one discussion meeting; luckily, none of the participants missed more than one meeting. Control group participants were excused from the study if they did not attend the post-test appointment. Anyone who left the study was welcome to schedule a “regular” book report with one of the READ 1000 instructors with the opportunity to earn pages, minus any bonus. Eighty-three percent of the recruited participants completed the study. Attrition was equivalent across the groups, so it can be assumed that the condition of participating in a literature circle was not overly burdensome on the READ 1000 students.

**Treatment group.** Twenty-three students were randomly assigned to the literature circle condition. Three of these students decided to withdraw from the study before the first meeting. Twenty students participated in the literature circles for five

weeks, but two of these students did not complete post-testing before the deadline for data analysis. They were interviewed after the data collection timeline, so their responses were considered for qualitative analysis, but their data were not included in the four quantitative measures, leaving a total of eighteen participants for whom quantitative data were analyzed.

**Control group.** Twenty-three students were randomly assigned to the control group. Three of these students decided to withdraw from the study before the post-testing appointment. Two more students did not attend their post-testing appointments, leaving a total of eighteen participants for whom data were collected. One student had to leave his post-test meeting before he completed the interview, so interview data were only collected from seventeen control group participants.

### **Materials**

The materials used in this study include materials for recruitment, the first (introductory) literature circle meetings, subsequent (book discussion) literature circle meetings, and the control group participants.

### **Book Selection and Choice**

In an ideal classroom setting, students would have freedom to form groups and choose books on their own. Due to the logistical constraints of an experimental design, I was unfortunately forced to take away some of the spirit of choice in the literature circles. Four novels were pre-selected before the semester began, so that the measure of reading comprehension could be developed and validated in advance. See Appendix P for the list of pre-selected novels. Together, the four books are high-interest, culturally diverse, critically lauded, “buzz worthy” young adult novels. At the time of recruitment,

participants were asked to read short descriptions of the books and rank their preference with a rating of 1-4. Hard copies of the books were left in the READ 1000 classroom during the recruitment period. Students seemed to enjoy handling the books, looking at the cover, reading the back matter, and otherwise flipping through the pages.

Using only two of the four books, I was able to honor participants' first or second choice for the literature circle condition, and I was able to honor control group participants' top choice. In term of data analysis, two books were better than four, but even the added complication of two different texts somewhat weakens the consistency of the intervention and related measures. However, this sacrifice of study design was outweighed by the importance of student choice—especially for college reading students. When readers have their say in selecting books, they exercise agency in the development of their identities and create richer relationships with the texts (Bang-Jenson, 2010; Paulson, 2006).

There were several other logistical challenges to book selection. The books could not already be in the READ 1000 library, for that would mean that repeating students from the previous fall might have already read them. The relative length of the books had to be similar for consistency in both the literature circle schedules and incentives. I settled on novels ranging in length from 325-375 pages long. The final two books used for the study were 350 and 357 pages long. The READ 1000 instructional staff asked that I avoid books that had been adapted as movies—a request I was willing to honor. Finally, I ensured that the Lexile ratings of the four pre-selected novels were relatively similar as well as comfortable for READ 1000 students. Lexile ratings are determined by both word frequency and sentence length. While Lexile ratings are not grade equivalents, the Lexile

ratings of the pre-selected novels fall into what might be considered a middle school reading range. The Lexile ratings of the four pre-selected books range in the 600s. The middle 50% (interquartile range) of fifth graders are measured to read in a Lexile range of 565L-910L. (Lexile-to-Grade Correspondence, 2013).

### **Novels Used in the Study**

*Shine*, by Lauren Miracle (2011). When her best friend, an openly gay teenager named Patrick, falls victim to a vicious hate crime, sixteen-year-old Cat makes a promise to God that she will figure out who did it. Cat delves deep into the dark secrets of a small town in the South and finds out how much strength it takes to challenge and question everyone you know in the name of doing the right thing. This book touches on many sensitive topics: poverty, drugs, bullying, and intolerance.

*I Am the Messenger*, by Marcus Zusak (2006). Ed Kennedy is an underage cab driver without much of a future. He is hopelessly in love with his best friend, Audrey, and utterly devoted to his coffee-drinking dog, the Doorman. His life is pathetically predictable until he inadvertently stops a bank robbery and begins receiving cryptic playing cards in the mail. The cards send Ed on a series of missions in his community, but he does not always know what to do or how to do it. What he *does* know, however, is that he faces death if he does not comply.

### **Recruitment Materials**

Recruitment packets were handed out to all READ 1000 students at the time they were invited to participate in the study. Packets included a cover letter, consent form (Appendix S), demographic data collection, schedule availability, and book descriptions (with preference ranking). Students also had access to hard copies of the four pre-selected

books. It was noted that many students took the opportunity to look at and flip through the books before completing the preference ranking. The recruitment packets were collected in a box in the READ 1000 classroom for two days. Each person who completed a packet received a copy of his or her signed informed consent.

### **First Literature Circle Meeting Materials**

At the first literature circle meeting, participants received their books, page stickies (for marking multiple pages), custom bookmarks (Appendices E & F), expectations contract (Appendix C), and a book insert with the participation guidelines and Star Connections (Appendix D).

### **Subsequent Literature Circle Meeting Materials**

Participants received more page stickies upon request. They received a blank half-sheet of card stock for their Quick-Write response, and they received the Quick-Write prompt on another half-sheet of paper.

### **Control Group Materials**

Control group participants received their books in the READ 1000 classroom. The books had an insert with my contact information as well as a reminder of when the book should be completed and the deadline for signing up for a post-test appointment. The insert also confirmed the total number of pages to be read and the total 50% bonus incentive.

### **Measures/Instrumentation**

Each measure is described in depth, including general description, validity and reliability (when relevant/available), rationale for use, development process, and scoring procedure.

**Oral re-tell of the assigned novel (“book report”).** At the conclusion of the study (literature participation for the treatment group and independent reading of the book for the control group), all participants were asked to give an oral re-tell (“book report”) for their chosen novel. In line with the READ 1000 policy, students were not allowed to have access to the book itself during the re-tell. Participants were given up to ten minutes to give the book report. The book reports were video recorded, transcribed, and scored. See Appendix K for the script read to students before they gave the re-tell. In order to somewhat standardize the re-tell process, the tester did not provide any sort of follow-up questioning. As a trade-off, the participants were given a list of names of the main characters. See Appendices L and M for the lists provided to the participants.

***Rationale for use of re-tell.*** The act of re-telling a text has been found to be beneficial as both a comprehension strategy (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1998) and a valid indicator of reading comprehension (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 1989; Marcotte & Hintze, 2009). The re-tell is especially relevant to this educational setting since READ 1000 students are required to participate in oral re-tells to earn credit toward required pages of outside reading.

***Development of re-tell.*** To become a content expert of each novel, I read the novel and created a running log of each discrete detail. Two research volunteers (with bachelor’s degrees and English/reading teaching experience) also did the same thing in preparation to serve as additional raters of the measure.

***Scoring of re-tell.*** To score the re-tell, the scorer watched and listened to the video of the re-tell and followed along with a typed transcript. The scorer counted the

number of correct, discrete details provided. A second scorer rated 33.3% of the re-tells with the result of 98.7% inter-rater agreement.

**Book test.** At the conclusion of the study, all participants were asked to complete a researcher-developed comprehension test whose format was modeled after the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-5) format (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). Two tests were developed—one for each novel used in the study. Each test contained twenty open-ended comprehension questions. Participants only took the test on the book they read for the study.

*Development of book test.* This test was developed with the help of volunteer subject matter experts (SMEs). All volunteers were college educated and had earned at least a bachelor's degree. Given the goals of the assessment, I felt that college educated individuals who read the novels were perfectly qualified to assist in the development of the measure. I used my own content knowledge of the novels and literacy instruction expertise to develop 25-30 open-ended questions. After volunteers read their novel of choice, they were given the questions and asked to 1) provide their "best answer" as if they were a participant taking the test, 2) provide all "acceptable answers" as if they were grading the test, and 3) indicate whether they felt the question was implicit or explicit, based on provided definitions. Answers to explicit questions were defined as "clearly, plainly stated, fully explained pieces of information that could be found in the text." Answers to implicit questions were defined as "pieces of information that should/could be inferred from the text, or pieces of information in the text which were stated subtly, through partial/indirect explanation or figurative language."

I used the SME feedback to eliminate bad items, improve the wording of the items, create an exhaustive answer key, and strike a balance between implicit and explicit questions. See Appendices I and J for the list of test items and their categorization as explicit (E) or implicit (I). It should be noted that the categorization was not included on the actual test. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal reliability for the researcher-developed test for each book. The tests for *Shine* (0.87) and *Messenger* (0.82) were found to have good internal consistency.

**Scoring of book test.** Tests were graded using the answer key developed through the SME validation process. Scorers were instructed to disregard spelling and grammatical errors and to use their best judgment on borderline answers. A second scorer volunteered to grade 29% of the *Shine* tests and 40% of the *Messenger* tests, and inter-rater percentage of agreement was found to be 100% for *Shine* and 96.7% for *Messenger*.

**Test of comprehension of an unfamiliar text (QRI).** At the conclusion of the study, all participants were asked to read and answer questions about two high school passages from the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-5) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). The QRI-5 was chosen as a measure of text comprehension. First, it is an informal reading inventory with a great deal of flexibility. One advantage of the QRI-5 is that the comprehension questions are open-ended, which is theoretically and philosophically aligned with the context of this inquiry. The disadvantage of this test format, however, is that the QRI-5 is not norm-referenced or standardized, so scores can only be interpreted with regard to the individual or sample, not to any norm group (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). The content validity of the QRI-5 is highly regarded, but the internal consistency of passages is questionable. No straightforward internal reliability indices are provided by

the QRI-5 authors for the passages. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal reliability for the combined QRI passages used for this study, which revealed questionable internal consistency (0.68).

The passages selected for this inquiry were "Where the Ashes Are" and "Where the Ashes Are, Part 2," a story about a South Vietnamese family captured by Viet Cong soldiers during the Vietnam War. These combined passages created a twenty-item comprehension test with ten explicit and ten implicit items. These passages were selected because they were the only fiction passages at the high school level. The authors of the QRI-5 chose the passage for their assessment packet because background knowledge of the Vietnam War was believed to be relatively low (and similar across students) for high school aged test-takers (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011).

Background content knowledge related to the passage was informally assessed. The tester asked each participant "What can you tell me about Vietnam?" and "What can you tell me about military operations?" Two participants from the treatment (literature circle) group and one participant from the control group demonstrated exceptional knowledge of military operations and the Vietnam Conflict. Since those with exceptional knowledge were distributed equally across groups, the scores were kept and used for analysis. All other participants had little or no knowledge of the content before reading the passage. All participants were asked how they felt about the assessment immediately after, as part of the semi-structured interview. See Chapter IV to find the results of the qualitative analysis of the affective portion of the semi-structured interview.

*Scoring of comprehension test of an unfamiliar text.* The QRI-5 provides an answer key for the tests but also urges scorers to accept similarly worded responses. In

this study, scorers were instructed to disregard spelling and grammatical errors and to use their best judgment on borderline answers. Furthermore, scorers were instructed to use their expert knowledge of the passage to accept any answers equivalent or synonymous with the keywords and phrases provided in the official QRI-5 answer keys (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). A second scorer volunteered to grade 33.3% of the tests, and inter-rater reliability was 98.3%.

**Semi-structured interviews (affective).** In addition to the oral re-tell and two comprehension tests, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each study participant. A semi-structured interview is a method of research used in the social sciences. While a script was used (see Appendix N), the format allows for flexibility. The questions for the semi-structured were conceptualized based on Seidman's (2006) three-interview design; however, due to testing time restraints, the design was modified. Instead of conducting three separate interviews, I conducted one 30-minute interview with three sub-sections mirroring Seidman's structure: life story (specific to sociocultural identity, reading, and education), reconstruction of experience (in a literature circle, reading independently, giving a book report, etc.), and reflection on meaning (various affective factors). The interviews were conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes of the participants, as well as to assess the depth of engagement with the assigned novel.

***Development of interview questions.*** Interview questions were conceptualized as a direct result of my reflection as a college reading teacher and literacy researcher. I conducted a series of brainstorm sessions and jotted down the types of information I wanted to learn. Using Seidman's three sub-section structure, I streamlined and organized

my questions into categories and arranged them into a logical order. I conducted a series of practice interviews using a loose adaptation of the cognitive interviewing process. I instructed interviewees to provide instant feedback on each question and to “put the question into their own words” in order to verify that they were answering the question I thought I was asking. Through this method, I was able to eliminate or re-structure weak items. Examples of weak items include questions which caused confusion, questions which elicited a construct different from the one that was desired, and questions which did not elicit enough information and therefore required the addition of follow-up questions.

*Scoring of responses.* Much valuable data were obtained through these interviews, but for the purposes of these research questions at hand, a subset of the (responses to) the questions were analyzed. For each of the four “connections questions” (see Appendix N), the respondent first answered “yes” or “no.” If the respondent answered “yes,” then the individual was asked to provide one or more examples of the connection. The respondent earned one “point” for each discrete connection articulated, which resulted in a simple score for each type of connection. If a respondent initially answered “yes” but could not articulate a connection, no point was earned. Multiple scorers volunteered to tally 29% of the interview responses, and inter-rater reliability was 100%.

### **Procedure**

This section details the process of how literature circles were carried out for this study, as well as how the experience of the control group participants differed from that of the treatment group participants.

## **Study Design**

In order to examine the complexities of a literature circle in READ 1000, a mixed method design was selected to best address the research questions. The study used the following four measures: an individual oral re-tell of the assigned novel, a comprehension test of the assigned novel (book test), a test made up of two QRI-5 passages and accompanying questions, and a semi-structured interview.

The strengths of an experimental design include equivalent groups and random assignment to treatment and control groups. By comparing a treatment group to a control group, the extent to which extraneous variables could explain any portion of the dependent variables is minimized (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). In other words, only a study design with a control group and random assignment can demonstrate a causal relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable(s). This study sought to demonstrate a causal relationship between participation in a literature circle and 1) comprehension of the assigned novel, 2) comprehension of an unfamiliar passage, and 3) the variety and frequency of connections made to the assigned novel.

With a large enough sample size and random assignment, quantitative findings can generalize from the sample to the population from which the sample was taken and determine the effect of an intervention on a literacy outcome. In contrast, well-constructed qualitative inquiries can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of phenomena that take place within a specific setting or sociocultural context (Onwuegbuzie & Mallette, 2011). When a mixed method design is implemented effectively, the qualitative inquiry provides a depth of understanding to the intervention and situates it in a context. Conversely, the quantitative approach bolsters the qualitative

inquiry with compelling evidence in support of a causal (or, at a minimum, correlational) relationship between the independent variable and outcome measures. Employing a mixed method approach for this study offers a middle ground between reliability (consistency), internal validity (minimal confounds), and external validity (generalizability).

### **Description of Independent Variable**

The independent variable (literature circle program) is described in as much detail as possible in order to provide insight into the intervention and the various components which contributed to the total effect (impact) of the activity on the outcome measures.

**Definitions.** Given the various contributors to the body of knowledge on literature circles and the scope of seminal theoretical work, it becomes necessary to offer a condensed definition of literature circles, as well as a slightly more specific definition of the intervention created for this study. The terms are defined as such:

***Literature circle.*** A literature circle is a small group of students who reads a novel and meets on a regular basis to discuss what they have read. The facilitator role is minimalist in nature. Specifically, the facilitator should make every effort to avoid the Initiate-Response-Evaluate discourse pattern (IRE). Cazden (1988) argued that IRE discourse creates an imbalance of power at the disadvantage of the students, suppresses higher order thinking and prior knowledge activation, and does not effectively measure “real learning.”

***Star Connections.*** The researcher-developed Star Connection literature circles are a specialized literature circle format with the following features: 1) a scripted passage on how to participate at the first meeting, 2) a Collaborative Oral Re-tell (COR) of the

assigned reading at each meeting, 3) a mini written response (Quick-Write) activity at each meeting, and 4) Open Discussion (i.e., peer-led discussion about the chosen novel).

**Book report.** In the context of this study and of READ 1000, a “book report” is a ten-minute oral re-tell of the assigned book, during which the student does not have access to the book. In READ 1000, instructors and graduate assistants are trained to ask questions throughout the book report to both help the student remember things and also determine whether or not the student read and comprehended the book. In this study, to somewhat standardize the procedure, the tester did not ask any questions. In exchange, the students were given a sheet with a list of main characters. The character list provided support for participants as they re-told the novel but did not give extra points to those who did not read or comprehend. In other words, simply reading the name off of the character list did not count as a discrete re-tell detail. The list of character names minimized the extent to which the re-tell tapped memory, as opposed to text comprehension. Many of the participants were delighted to use the list during the re-tell and were able to recall entire sub-plots after seeing a name on the list. The process was also standardized with a script which the tester read to each participant (Appendix K).

**Group size.** Every effort was made to create literature circles with five students plus one facilitator; however, due to attrition, novel preference, and scheduling issues, there were two groups of five students each, one group of four students, and two groups of three students each. The rationale for a target group size of five is based in the convergence of educational research on small group size and learning outcomes. While very few studies have systematically measured the effect of small group size on learning outcomes, Lou et al. (1996) found through meta-analysis that group size was significantly

related to learning outcomes. The best group size for learning, when compared to ungrouped classes, was 3-4 students. Groups of 5-7 and 8-10 students did not learn significantly more than whole-class participants. Considering issues of attendance and attrition, as well as the desire to provide this intervention to as many students as possible, I decided to recruit five students per group.

**Meeting length, location, and day/time.** Literature circle meetings lasted 45-55 minutes. Meetings took place on campus, either in the READ 1000 classroom or in a nearby office or classroom. Meeting days and times were completely based on student availability and preference. Literature circles were formed based on both schedule and book preference, so that each participant was able to read a first or second choice book.

**Frequency and number of meetings.** The literature circles each met once per week for five consecutive weeks. The series of meetings included one introductory meeting (distribution of materials) and four “normal” book discussion meetings. See Appendix O for a recruitment, data collection, and post-testing schedule.

**First meeting procedures.** At the first meeting, participants introduced themselves and learned each other’s names. Then, the facilitator distributed materials, including a copy of the signed consent form (Appendix S), the book, a custom bookmark (Appendices E & F), page stickies, an expectations “contract” (Appendix C), and a Star Connections insert (Appendix D). Also, the facilitator read aloud a script detailing the many ways in which one can participate in a literature circle, which can be found in the Facilitator Guidebook (Appendix Q). Participants were directed to the Star Connections infographic, at which point the various types of connections were explicitly named by the facilitator. Together, the participants and facilitator filled out the meeting days and times

on the custom bookmarks. The facilitator read aloud the “ways to talk about books” on the back of the bookmark. Throughout the intervention, participants were reminded to refer to the bookmarks and Star Connections sheets any time they ran out of things to say. Finally, the facilitator went over the “normal” discussion meeting format and the post-testing procedures, and the group confirmed the following week’s reading assignment. The facilitator asked students to read to the page listed on the bookmark and urged students not to read past that point.

While any sort of “lecturing” was minimized, the decision to read a scripted list of ways to participate in literature circles emerged from both my personal experiences as a literature circle facilitator (see the Pilot Inquiries in Chapter I) and the consideration of multiple theoretical perspectives. In the broader context of an inquiry wrought with issues of power and agency, I contend that students’ voices must be explicitly legitimized. In the case of this study, the script was designed to empower students to think about, talk about, ask about, and connect with books, using their authentic voices. The facilitator discussed each of the following “empowerment talking points” with all literature circle participants:

1. Ask any question you might have! There are no stupid questions or wrong answers in a literature circle. Asking questions about the book is just as important as “saying something interesting” about the book.
2. Be respectful: Please listen to and respect your literature circle peers. Avoid hurtful words.
3. Be yourself: Use the words/language/accent/dialect you are most comfortable using.

4. Remember the Star Connections. You should make comparisons between your literature circle book and your own lives; other books, movies, television shows, etc.; your friends and family; and the world around you (society).
5. Don't worry too much about the facilitator: You aren't reporting to the facilitator; you are having a discussion with your peers.

I suspect (and hope to explore in future research studies) that many of the students who end up in READ 1000 have not previously felt empowered/entitled due to the structure of schooling to apply their oral language skills to an academic activity. Therefore, it is not enough that the literature circle facilitator honor the contributions of the participants—the facilitator must explicitly legitimize the students, over and over again, throughout the intervention. Through my previous inquiries, I observed that students will unknowingly preserve the power imbalance they are accustomed to, even though it places them in the role of silent recipient/receptacle of privileged information (Freire, 1970; Heath, 1982).

**Subsequent meetings procedures.** After the introductory meeting, the “normal” book discussion meetings followed a set format. An effort was made to strike a balance between consistency, ability to establish fidelity, and flexibility for the individuals in the circles.

***Collaborative Oral Re-tell (COR).*** To re-tell a text with a peer group is to create shared meaning (Goodman, 1982). Since re-telling is a required part of developmental reading for READ 1000 students, I decided to take the concept of the “oral book report” and transform it into an activity which drew on the participants’ ability to make meaning through oral discourse and linguistic contact. Each literature circle meeting began with

this activity. The participants worked together to re-tell the events of what they read that week. This Collaborative Oral Re-tell (COR) was allowed to continue for up to ten minutes. The focus of the COR was the act of recalling and re-telling the “facts” of the story. Participants were reminded that opinions, interpretations, and predictions would be shared during Open Discussion. To see the scripted prompt and facilitator guidelines for the COR, refer to the Facilitator Guidebook (Appendix Q). In general, as with all other aspects of this intervention, the facilitator role in the COR is designed to be minimalist in nature but also as supportive as desired by the participants. A list of COR-specific “rescue prompts” were developed for use by the facilitator (Appendices G & H). When the group fell silent, the facilitator was instructed to wait at least five seconds before using one of the rescue prompts. Wait time was incorporated into the facilitator guidelines to minimize teacher floor time and maximize peer-led discussion. Rowe (1974, 1986) found that a wait time of greater than three seconds resulted in positive shifts in student language use and higher order thinking. If participants asked the facilitator explicit questions about a plot detail, vocabulary, or other element of the novel, the facilitator was directed to reflect the question back to the peer group first before offering any “definitive” answer to the question.

***Quick-Write.*** The COR was followed by a Quick-Write activity. Students responded individually, in writing, to a simple prompt given by the facilitator. The activity was timed at five minutes. Each prompt invited the participants to explore a type of connection with the novel: self, relationships, other texts, and society. For a list of Quick-Write prompts, see the Facilitator Guidebook (Appendix Q). The facilitator reminded students that simple responses were perfectly acceptable, including individual

words, phrases, bullet points, and graphic organizers. I learned through pilot inquiries that students felt less pressured when they were allowed to write responses on unlined half-sheets of colored card stock. Students were told to hold on to the Quick-Write responses, which they were free to discuss during Open Discussion, the final part of the literature circle meeting. The facilitator was instructed to invite participants to share their Quick-Write responses at the end of Open Discussion if they were not shared during that time. The facilitator collected the Quick-Write cards at the end of each meeting.

***Open Discussion.*** After the COR and Quick-Write activities, the participants were invited to take part in Open Discussion. The facilitator signaled the start of Open Discussion with a scripted prompt, explicitly eliciting opinions about what was read, other responses to what was read (“Were you surprised by what happened?”), and predictions. The facilitator played a minimalist role and only spoke if more than five seconds of silence passed. A list of Open Discussion rescue prompts was provided to the facilitator, which mirrored the elicitations in the scripted prompt in the Facilitator Guidebook (Appendix Q). If the group was particularly “stuck,” the facilitator was instructed to remind participants to utilize their bookmarks, Star Connections, and Quick-Write responses. Special instructions were provided in the Facilitator Guidebook for both particularly quiet and especially talkative participants. At the conclusion of Open Discussion, the facilitator confirmed the next meeting and reading assignment.

***Post-testing appointment.*** The post-test appointment was an 80-90 minute meeting, consisting of the following assessments: re-tell (10 minutes), written test of comprehension of assigned book (20 minutes), written test of comprehension of an unfamiliar passage (30 minutes), and semi-structured interview (20-30 minutes). Students

who were English Learners were permitted to have double the testing and reading time, if they wanted it. Students who had a diagnosed learning disability were permitted to have time-and-a-half for both testing and reading time, if they wanted it.

**Other communication.** The facilitator maintained contact with the literature circle participants via email and text message only to send meeting reminders.

**Fidelity.** All literature circle meetings were video and audio recorded. Two volunteers observed 20% of the intervention and completed a fidelity checklist to ensure that the literature circles were being conducted according to the description of the independent variable and Facilitator Guidebook. Two volunteers viewed video footage of 25% of the literature circle meetings and completed the fidelity checklist (Appendix R). Fidelity scores ranged from 88% to 100% with a mean score of 96%. Inter-raters agreed on 92% of the ratings.

### **Description of Dependent Variables**

Each measure used in this study generated a result score for each study participant. Each measure is described in terms of its “transfer strength” and the target construct tapped by the assessment.

**Oral re-tell of assigned novel.** The individual oral re-tell of the selected novel is known by READ 1000 students as an oral book report. In this study, the re-tells were recorded, transcribed, and scored. The target construct of this assessment was comprehension of a familiar book-length text.

**Book test.** The second measure was a researcher-developed book-specific twenty question measure, which was modeled after the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-5)

(Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). The target construct of this assessment was also comprehension of a familiar book-length text.

**Test of comprehension of an unfamiliar passage.** The mid transfer measure of reading comprehension was a twenty-item comprehension test of a two-part previously unassigned story-length passage (1,931 words) from the High School section of the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI-5) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). The comprehension tests included ten implicit and ten explicit items, as defined and established by the authors of the QRI-5. The passages were parts one and two of the story “Where the Ashes Are,” a first-person account of the capture of a family during the Vietnam War. Students were given five minutes to silently read part one, ten minutes to answer the questions for part one (without access to the passage), seven minutes to silently read part two, and ten minutes to answer the questions for part two (without access to the passage). The target construct of this assessment was comprehension of an unfamiliar story-length passage.

**Affective measure: semi-structured interview.** I conducted 30-minute semi-structured interviews with both literature circle participants and control group participants about their perception of and satisfaction with their respective reading activities. See Appendix N for the interview script.

### **Description of Control Activity**

Individuals assigned to the control group were instructed to read their assigned books individually, independently, and outside of class (a READ 1000 policy). Part of this “normal READ 1000 activity” included weekly reading logs. It was expected that all participants would complete the weekly required READ 1000 reading logs. The only additional activity was the 90-minute post-testing appointment.

## **Limitations of Design**

Each of the following is an acknowledged limitation of the study resulting from one or more aspects of the study design.

**Independent variable and facilitator presence.** In order to honor student choice and book preference, participants in the treatment group did not discuss the same book. Of the five groups, two groups (8 students) discussed *I Am the Messenger* and three groups (12 students) discussed *Shine*. While student choice was determined to be the higher priority, it should be noted that some internal validity was sacrificed. If there were differences between participants who read different books, it would be impossible to determine to what extent that difference was caused by the fact that the participants did not read the same novel. Furthermore, even if all groups had read and discussed the same book, the peer-led structure of literature circles causes both individual (within group) and between group differences in the intervention. To address this issue, the facilitator role was semi-scripted and was designed to be relatively minimalist, as defined in the Facilitator Guidebook.

**Inclusion vs. extraneous variables.** While diversity and inclusion was determined to be the higher priority, it should be noted that including English Learners in the study created a confound of design. When students are assessed in a language other than their native language, it is L2 proficiency which is being measured, not true reading comprehension (Krashen, 1988). Furthermore, including repeating READ 1000 students meant that some of the students included in the study were likely to have more profound reading problems than the students who were able to exit READ 1000 after the first attempt.

**Threats to validity.** One potential threat to external validity is the fact that the treatment group spent more hours with me, the principal investigator and facilitator, than the control group participants. For the measures on which the treatment group outperformed the control group participants, some portion of the variability could be attributed to the extra attention received by the treatment group participants. To put it in practical terms, if I spent the same amount of time doing any other activity with the treatment group participants, even silent, sustained reading, together in a room, would they still have outperformed the control group participants? This is known as the “Hawthorne Effect.” Since I believe that many of the READ 1000 students are disenfranchised and dealing with additional academic challenges, I felt that it would be unethical to ask the control group participants to spend an equivalent amount of time with me (or any other research) outside of class on a task only in the name of controlling for Hawthorne Effect. Also, I was restricted with my own schedule and unable to secure another researcher to spend time outside of class with the control group participants. To at least partially address this issue, however, I asked the control group participants to write in their reading logs (already part of the READ 1000 curriculum) as they read.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

This mixed method study was designed to examine literature circles and comprehension from two perspectives. First, I wanted to examine the impact of literature circle participation on various measures of reading comprehension. Second, I wanted to examine the impact of literature circles on textual engagement—in other words, the quality and quantity of connections made to and from the book. The following discusses the data collection methods and results of the study, as they relate to the original research questions.

### **Data Collection and Results**

This study was designed as an examination of the impact of literature circles on reading comprehension for college developmental reading students. Four distinct data collection methodologies were utilized in order to measure phenomena through multiple lenses. First, demographic data were collected from the study participants as part of the consent and release paperwork. Placement test data were also collected to verify group equivalence, even though equivalence could be assumed due to random assignment and adequate sample size. Then, literature circle meetings were recorded and observed to ensure fidelity of implementation of the intervention. Finally, at the individual post-test appointments, participants completed four tasks: an individual oral re-tell of the assigned book, a comprehension test of the assigned book, a comprehension test of an unfamiliar passage, and a semi-structured interview.

For the quantitative data collection, the oral re-tell was transcribed, analyzed, and given a count score based on the total number of discrete, accurate details retold. The two

comprehension tests were scored using a validated answer key; the resulting scores of each test ranged from 1 to 20 correct items out of 20 possible. Finally, the “connections” section of the interview was transcribed, analyzed, and given a count score based on the total number of discrete connections articulated. A one-way MANOVA test on the linear combination of the four independent variables (oral re-tell, book test, QRI-5 test, and interview connections) was conducted to determine whether or not the experimental group outperformed the control group and to control the error rate (alpha) inflation. Subsequent univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were performed to investigate the significance of the group effect on each dependent variable.

For the qualitative data collection, the methodological approach of ground theory (constant comparative) was employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interview questions relevant to the research question were drawn from the larger data set. Responses were transcribed and read multiple times through an analytic, sociocultural lens. Then, utterances were organized into descriptive categories. Later in this chapter, the categories will be named, defined, and illustrated with examples from the data set.

Each component of the data collection process provided insight to a different aspect of the study; combined, the multiple approaches provide a fuller picture of the phenomena. The consideration of all sources of data led to a deep and varied understanding of the impact of literature circles for college reading students.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question addressed the extent to which participation in a literature circle improved reading comprehension for college reading students. This question was important for several reasons. The students in READ 1000 must pass the

class in order to move forward in their degree plans. There is no room in the curriculum for activities which do not significantly positively impact reading comprehension—the construct being measured on the required standardized exit exam. Not only do READ 1000 students need strong text comprehension to pass the class, but they also need it to succeed in their other college courses and personal and professional lives, as well.

The first question was addressed by taking individual scores on the oral re-tell, researcher-developed “book test” and QRI passage test and comparing group means between participants assigned to literature circles (treatment) and those assigned to read the book independently (control).

### **Quantitative Analysis Procedure**

A one-way MANOVA test on the linear combination of the four independent variables (oral re-tell, book test, QRI-5 test, and interview connections) was conducted to determine whether or not the experimental group outperformed the control group and to control the error rate (alpha) inflation. Subsequent univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were performed to investigate the significance of the group effect on each dependent variable. Effect sizes were calculated to measure the strength of the relationships between the independent variable and the dependent variables. Cronbach’s alpha was also calculated to determine the internal reliability of the researcher-developed measures.

### **Statistical Results**

A one-way MANOVA revealed a significant main effect for group membership, Wilks’  $\lambda = .537$ ,  $F(4, 30) = 6.47$ ,  $p = .001$ . Given the significance of the overall test, the univariate main effects were examined. Significant univariate main effects for group

membership were obtained for the researcher-developed comprehension test,  $F(1, 33) = 9.67, p = .004, d = 1.10$ ; and the total connections articulated in the interview,  $F(1, 33) = 15.20, p = .0004, d = 1.34$ . The effect sizes for both measures are interpreted as large (Cohen, 1988). The two measures for which the group difference in mean was not significant—the QRI passages ( $d = .21$ ) and the oral re-tell ( $d = .21$ )—yielded small effect sizes. See Table 4 for descriptive statistics.

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MIN</i>	<i>MAX</i>
Individual Oral Re-tell	36	67.53	20.36	25.00	105.00
Literature Circle Participants	18	70.61	21.61	37.00	100.00
Control Group Participants	18	64.44	19.13	25.00	105.00
Book Test	36	11.92	4.91	1.00	20.00
Literature Circle Participants	18	14.28	4.20	5.00	20.00
Control Group Participants	18	9.56	4.49	1.00	19.00
QRI Test	36	9.63	3.51	3.00	16.00
Literature Circle Participants	18	10.00	3.50	3.00	16.00
Control Group Participants	18	9.25	3.58	3.00	15.00
Total Connections Articulated	35	3.89	1.76	1.00	8.00
Literature Circle Participants	18	4.83	1.50	2.00	8.00
Control Group Participants	17	2.88	1.45	1.00	6.00

## **Research Question Two**

The second research question addressed how participation in literature circles impacted both the quality and quantity of textual connections made by college reading students. This question is important for several reasons. Text comprehension is a difficult skill to both define and “tap into” with a standardized measure. In these types of tests, validity is often sacrificed for the highest possible reliability. Specifically, the content and construct validity of standardized comprehension measures have been questioned by many literacy researchers (Drum, Calfee, & Cook, 1981; Katz, Blackburn, & Lautenschlager, 1991; Royer, 1990).

While the results for research question one demonstrated that literature circle participation had a positive impact on comprehension of the assigned novel, the results for question two demonstrate that literature circle participants are able to articulate more textual connections than students who read independently. The content of responses and the types of connections made varied widely on an individual basis, but different qualitative trends based on group membership (treatment or control) were not observed and are thus organized and described as a whole or grouped by assigned novel.

The second question was addressed with two distinctly different methodologies. First, the question was explored through quantitative analysis of three sections of the semi-structured interview: general questions about textual connections, specific questions about textual connections, and specific questions about the lasting impact of the assigned book. Then, the question was explored through a sociocultural, qualitative lens. The specific questions about textual connections and the last impact of the assigned book

were analyzed using grounded theory techniques. Responses were transcribed, read multiple times, and organized into descriptive categories.

### **Quantitative Results**

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were analyzed using a relatively simple content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). Only the questions pertaining to connections to the assigned book were coded and scored. For each of the four “connections questions,” the respondent first answered “yes” or “no.” If the respondent answered “yes,” then the participant was asked to provide one or more examples of the connection. The respondent earned one “point” for each discrete connection articulated, which resulted in a simple score for each type of connection. If a respondent initially answered “yes” but could not articulate a connection, no point was earned. Examination of the univariate effects of the individual measures revealed a significant main effect for total connections articulated in the interview,  $F(1, 33) = 15.20, p = .0004, d = 1.34$ . In other words, the students who were randomly assigned to participate in literature circles articulated more connections to and from the assigned novel than students who read the book independently and did not participate in literature circles.

### **Qualitative Results**

The responses to select semi-structured interview questions were analyzed using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Responses were transcribed and read multiple times through an analytic, sociocultural lens. Then, utterances were organized into descriptive categories. Interview data were collected from 37 participants; of these, 20 participated in literature circles, and 17 were in the control group. Twenty-three participants read *Shine*, and 14 participants read *I Am the Messenger*. Two participants

(both from the literature circle group) completed the interview after quantitative data analysis, which explains the difference in sample size between quantitative and qualitative results. The findings are presented and discussed by interview question.

**Participation in book reports.** Each participant was asked the question, “How do you feel about doing book reports?” I asked this question to establish a baseline which would indicate the overall comfort level with the verification process currently in place for the required outside reading for READ 1000. Because the participants were students in READ 1000, they understood that the term “book report” referred specifically to the in-class individual oral re-tell activity. When students complete their books, they are required to successfully complete a book report in order to earn their pages for the outside reading grade. Students are not allowed to use the book during the book report, and they are subject to questions from the tester which are meant to test whether or not they actually read and understood the book. Since responses did not significantly differ between literature circle participants and control group participants on the individual oral re-tell, the responses to the “book report question” were analyzed as a whole.

Overall, participants had either a general positive ( $n = 20$ ) or neutral ( $n = 10$ ) response to book reports. A positive response was defined as a statement synonymous with “like,” “love,” “enjoy,” “fun,” or “easy.” A neutral response was defined as a statement synonymous with “okay,” “so-so,” or any indication of mixed feelings. A negative response was defined as statements synonymous with “do not like” or “do not enjoy.” Among those who expressed a negative response to book reports ( $n = 4$ ), a common theme was anxiety. Statements of anxiety were defined as those that expressed fear or anxiety of any kind related to giving book reports. One respondent admitted, “I

feel scared when I have to do it. It's one of my phobias." Another student said, "[Book reports] always make me nervous."

Some students mentioned that their comfort level with giving a book report depended on the tester ( $n = 4$ ): "It just depends on who gives them." Some reported that book reports aided their ability to remember the book ( $n = 4$ ): "I like it because it helps me keep track of what's going on." On the other hand, others reported the opposite—that book reports caused them trouble with memory ( $n = 2$ ): After agreeing that some test of comprehension is necessary to verify that the book was read, one respondent raised the concern that "sometimes the student doesn't remember everything."

Overwhelmingly, students reported that they enjoyed talking about the book and far preferred an oral activity to a written one ( $n = 14$ ). A few students recounted bad memories of being forced to write book reports in high school and appreciated that READ 1000 book reports are oral. Other students seemed to simply enjoy talking about a book to someone: "It's cool to tell someone what the book's about, especially if you liked it." Book reports gave some students a purpose for reading, or, more specifically, motivation to complete the reading assignment ( $n = 3$ ). One respondent put it well: "If I knew I wasn't gonna have a book report or something to look forward to, it would be easy to skip out." Many respondents explicitly stated that the book report is a fair, valid measure of comprehension of a book—in other words, students generally agree that it is not difficult to pass the book report, so long as the book was actually read ( $n = 12$ ). Students were quick to take responsibility for their performance on book reports: "Well, I guess if you read the book, you shouldn't have a hard time doing the book report, so that's not too bad."

The subset of the participants who participated in literature circles were asked to directly compare literature circles to book reports. I asked this question to elicit more information from literature circle participants about what they gained from the experience; however, some students chose to explicitly state a preference. Seven participants said that they preferred literature circles. No participants said that they preferred book reports to literature circle. One student stated that she had no preference either way but humorously noted, “It takes you five minutes to talk about a book in a book report and a month to talk about a book in a literature circle.” Some students chose to compare the two activities by describing the things they did not like about book reports. Three themes emerged as criticisms of the book report format: the relatively superficial content of book reports ( $n = 4$ ), the solitary nature of book reports ( $n = 8$ ), and the fear of forgetting something during a book report, ( $n = 3$ ).

In terms of content, one respondent noted that, in book reports, “you don’t get to play around with ideas as much.” Another student seemed to be touching on the relative lack of textual engagement: “During a book report, you don’t get into as much detail or what you think about what happened.” The solitary nature of book reports emerged as a theme when respondents kept using words and phrases such as “alone,” “by yourself,” “on your own,” “only you,” and “one person.” One example came from a respondent who explained, “In a book report you pretty much read a book by yourself, and you have to say what it’s about by yourself.” For some, the solitary nature of book reports led to a fear of “forgetting something important” in a book report: “If you’re just giving [a book report], there’s no one helping you. If you forget something, it’s hard to go back.”

**Participation in literature circles.** Only participants who participated in literature circles ( $n = 20$ ) were asked a set of questions about the activity: 1) How did you feel about participating in a literature circle, 2) How would you compare literature circle discussions to book reports, 3) How did literature circle participation impact your reading experience, and 4) Did literature circles harm your reading experience in any way? Each of these questions was intended to elicit responses which would reveal what, if anything, was gained by those who participated in the literature circles. Since the questions were all closely related, responses were combined for purposes of analysis. A secondary result of this set of questions was a critique of book reports, which was analyzed and discussed in the previous section of this chapter on participation in book reports.

Response to the literature circles was overwhelmingly positive ( $n = 17$ ). Positive responses were defined as any utterances synonymous with “like,” “love,” “enjoy,” or “fun.” More specifically, three individuals explicitly expressed a desire for more opportunities to participate in literature circles. One student who was initially reluctant shared, “I was hesitant at first. I didn’t quite like the idea. Now that it’s over, I really liked it, and I’m sad that it’s over.” When asked if literature circles harmed participants’ reading experiences, 17 individuals answered “no.” For the three participants who responded with either mixed or neutral feedback to this question, the emergent theme was that the forced pacing of the activity was uncomfortable for them. For example, one respondent explained, “I felt that I was slowed down with the pacing, which was frustrating.” However, other students noted the exact opposite:

If you did it on your own you wouldn't have read as much at all, and you would have waited until the last day to read it. With the literature circles, you stayed on top of it and remembered it and talked about it.

Beyond the general positive reaction to literature circles, analysis of the responses yielded five descriptive categories.

***Discourse.*** This category contained any utterances which mentioned an exchange or sharing of ideas. More than half of the literature circle participants cited discourse as part of the literature circle experience ( $n = 12$ ). One participant said, "I got to argue with people ... I got to tell people what I thought and vice versa." Another participant felt that literature circles "combined all the thoughts in a room," and that "maybe you understood something in a different way than they did." One participant, an English learner, enjoyed literature circles for reasons related to discourse: "I can get other people's opinion on the book, and I can think more about what will happen."

***Social Interaction.*** Distinct from discourse, several participants spoke fondly of the purely social aspect of participating in a literature circle ( $n = 8$ ). One particularly endearing description of the social benefits of literature circle participation was a respondent who said, "It reminded me of what you see on TV, like people having tea parties and talking about books." Another student reported that he "saw a few people around campus, and we'd talk about the book." One initially reluctant participant explained, "I thought it would have been weird with people I don't know, but after giving details about what we read, it actually opened me up."

***Support and Collaboration.*** While closely related to discourse and social interaction, support and collaboration emerged as a third distinct category of comments.

This category was comprised of all utterances mentioning the phenomena of helping, supporting, or working with other literature circle participants. Almost half of the respondents articulated the ways in which literature circle participants helped and supported one another ( $n = 9$ ). The phrase “vice versa” was uttered over and over again by participants to describe the literature circle as a space of mutual support. One such example directly addresses the previously described book report phobia of “missing something important”:

[The literature circle experience] was good because if I missed something they would've said it. If I said something that they missed, they would've got onto it.

We all came together and was like, “Aw, this happened to so and so.”

Another respondent described a specific example of how mutual support plays out in a literature circle: “Maybe I will pick up and they may know the points I'm talking about but elaborate on it or give specific details on it, to help people ... understand it.” One student felt empowered by the ability to provide support for peers: “It gives me a sense of knowledge that I can know something and somebody else might not know it. They can help me out, and I can help them out.”

**Motivation.** Many participants expressed that membership in a literature circle motivated them to complete their reading ( $n = 7$ ). As opposed to coming from a place of fear of failure, the motivation seemed to come from a desire to contribute to discussion and make good use of the time spent in the literature circle; in other words, “It encouraged me to keep reading.” Some students felt a sense of duty as literature circle participants. One said, “When you read together, you have to give feedback,” and another

said, “I didn’t want to miss [meetings].” Another respondent enthusiastically proclaimed, “Just make sure you read the book before the circle!”

***Improved Comprehension.*** Any utterances related to improved text comprehension or vocabulary, deeper engagement, improved understanding, or improved “book memory” were coded as the broader category of improved comprehension. Half of the participants identified ways in which literature participation improved their reading comprehension ( $n = 10$ ). One respondent very directly stated, “I think I understood this book better having that group than I would without.” One of the English learner participants felt that literature circle participation directly improved his vocabulary. Another participant made a connection between discourse, literature circles, and improved comprehension: “Literature circles help you understand more details because everybody has some differences in understanding.” One of the central arguments of this inquiry is that deeper engagement with a text leads to improved comprehension; as a result, utterances related to depth of engagement were included in this category. Any utterances related to overall connection with the text, as well as any mention of opinion, prediction, or other types of higher order thinking were considered types of textual engagement. One student reflected, “My mind opened more when we talked about the book instead of just doing a book report.” Another described the benefit of prediction-making in the literature circles: “We got to play around with how we though the book was gonna end: not just one way, but multiple ways.”

**Textual Connections.** All participants were asked to describe the connections they made to and from the assigned book. In order to maximize the quantity and quality of feedback, four types of connections were defined for the participant, and examples

were elicited based on the four categories: book to self, relationships in book to personal relationships, book to other texts, and book to society. First, the responses to questions about general textual connections are discussed. Then, the responses to the four book-specific connections questions are discussed. Quantitative analysis revealed that literature circle participants articulated more connections than control group participants. For the purposes of qualitative analysis, however, responses will be grouped by book, not by group membership, since no qualitative differences between groups were observed.

**General connections.** Just over half the participants confirmed that, *yes*, they make connections to “the self” ( $n = 15$ ) and “other texts” ( $n = 15$ ) when they read a book. Another portion was a bit more reluctant, saying that they *sometimes* make connections to “the self” ( $n = 12$ ) and “other texts” ( $n = 10$ ). Some participants did not seem to understand that it was possible to connect to a fictional text; for example, one respondent said, “Well, I like to read books that are real, so none of them relate to my life.” Others expressed the opposite idea—that non-fiction was relatable, but fiction was not. Another participant explained a unique way of connection book with self: “I put myself in the character’s perspective and envision myself being that character but changing what they do to what *I* want.”

In terms of intertextuality, several participants misunderstood my question or had a very narrow concept of the question. Responses included statements such as, “I will compare the movie and book versions of the same thing,” or, in response to the question “Do you tend to make connections between a book and other books, television shows, or movies?”, answered, “No, not unless I’m reading a book that already has a movie out.” Seemingly, these students are under the impression that the only possible book-to-movie

connection is from “Book A” to “Movie adaption of Book A,” as opposed to connecting from “Book A” to “Movie B.”

Other participants described the ways in which they make intertextual connections. Three individuals mentioned that their ability to make intertextual connections “depended on the book.” When asked about intertextual connections, one student replied, “If I’m not into [the book], not at all.” Participants mentioned other books, television shows, video game, and other texts when responding to this question. One participant even described a connection he made from the QRI test passage to his Marine basic training notebook: “You have to learn the Tet date to earn your pen, so every time I read about it in this story, I was going back to when I was reading my [Marine] book.”

Another control group participant shared a personal anecdote about how he connected READ 1000 texts to his own life. In his response, the word *kits* refers to the short passage skill development drills which are the primary activity in READ 1000:

In the READ1000 kits, there was a passage about a black kid. I was like, “Oh, okay.” Anything along the lines of African Americans or poverty, single parent homes, I instantly think about my own life, and intrigues me to know that somebody else has ventured on in these types of things as well, and I’m not the only person. I’m not alone in these things. Their life would interest me, and I would be like, “Hey, I’ve done that before, too. I know what that’s about.”

***Book to self.*** Participants were asked, “Did you make any connections between any person or people you read about in *Shine/Messenger* and yourself?”

*Shine*. Participants made connections to most of the characters in *Shine*, but the majority of respondents made a connection to Cat, the protagonist and narrator of the story ( $n = 10$ ). Several students related to Cat's detachment from her friends during high school. "When bad things happen, I kinda shut down." Others related to Cat's loyalty to her (then former) best friend: "Things that Cat did for her friend, I feel like I do for my friends, too. People aren't perfect, but when you have a person that you care about, you're gonna help that person." Still others related to Cat's environment and her ability to rise above: "I grew up in a neighborhood where everything was surrounded by drugs and violence, and I didn't get involved in that. I wasn't a product of my environment." Another emergent theme, especially for the male participants who chose to read *Shine*, was a connection between the self and Christian, Cat's older brother ( $n = 3$ ): "Christian kinda reminds me of me. How he was protective with his sister, I'm that way with my two sisters."

*Messenger*. Participants made connections to most of the characters in *I Am the Messenger*, but the majority of respondents connected specifically to Ed, the book's protagonist and narrator ( $n = 7$ ). Specifically, respondents tended to relate to Ed's lack of direction in his life: "There was a portion of my life where I thought I wasn't much of anything." One interviewee seemed to reason through his connection and make a discovery in the moment of his response: "Ed. Because I like helping my friends. Ed was helping strangers, though. Maybe I should help strangers."

***Relationships in book to personal relationships.*** Participants were asked, "Did you make any connections between relationships in *Shine/Messenger* and relationships in your own life?"

*Shine*. While many relationships were identified in *Shine*, the relationships that participants most connected with were the friendship between Cat and Patrick ( $n = 8$ ) and the sibling relationship between Cat and Christian ( $n = 6$ ). Among those who related to Cat and Patrick's relationship, the connection was either based on having a best friend with a major problem ("me and my suicidal friend") or losing touch with a best friend ("when they stopped talking, she noticed she needed to be there for him"). Among those who related to Cat and Christian's relationship, the connection was either based on being a protective older brother, having a protective older brother, or a lack of closeness with a sibling. One respondent describes the coexisting contradictions of sibling love brilliantly:

My brother wasn't really a 'brother' brother. We were never close to each other, but we were close. He was protective in a secretive way. If I was teased, he would talk to them. Like Cat and Christian. He was protective but didn't let it be known.

*Messenger*. The social network of *I Am the Messenger* is much smaller than that of *Shine*, so participants had fewer relationships to connect with. The most common relationship mentioned by respondents was the friendship/romance between Ed and Audrey ( $n = 8$ ). Of those who related to Ed and Audrey's relationship, the connection was based on being on one end of unrequited love ("me and this girl I loved") or the other ("I had a guy who felt that way about me"). A few respondents mentioned the friendship between Ed and Marv; namely, they related to the kind of friendship where you don't talk about important things ( $n = 3$ ): "Ed and Marv are close friends who don't say everything in their lives to each other."

***Book to other texts.*** Participants were asked, "Did you make any connections between the plot, setting, or characters in *Shine/Messenger* and any other books, movies,

TV shows, songs, or video games?” Because the word *text* was defined broadly in this study, participants were invited to connect not only to other books but also to movies, television shows, songs, video games, and more.

*Shine*. Participants made a variety of intertextual connections. The most popular types of intertextual connections were to movies ( $n = 8$ ), television shows ( $n = 5$ ), and books ( $n = 3$ ). Below are three particularly compelling connections articulated by participants:

1. Movie: *Shank*. “In the movie, it was about a gang who jumps a gay guy. One of the guys in the gang felt bad, and he was secretly gay. He went back to the guy, and they get together.” In *Shine*, a member of the “Redneck Posse” is secretly gay and turns out to be both Patrick’s secret boyfriend and his attacker.
2. Song: “Hometown Glory,” by Adele. “In the song, Adele is talking about the things she remembered from her hometown. It’s a pretty song. It reminds me of *Shine*. Cat is always reminiscing about her childhood memories.”
3. Video Game: general connection. The respondent describes the climactic scene in *Shine* (where Cat climbs up the edge of a cliff to stop a murder) to “climbing up the wall to the ‘final box’ in a video game.”

*Messenger*. The smaller cast of characters and quirky group of friends reminded participants of a variety of formulaic “sitcom” television shows, including *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *That 70s Show*, and *Big Bang Theory*. Many respondents noted the pop culture trend of the group of friends which contains a possible (but usually unrequited for some time) romantic pairing. Overall, textual connections articulated by participants

included television shows ( $n = 6$ ), movies ( $n = 4$ ), and books ( $n = 4$ ). One particularly fascinating intertextual connection came from one of the international student participants: “There is a Nigerian novel about a rich man with an irresponsible son who is always messing around. He gives the son tasks. If he doesn’t complete them, he’ll lose his inheritance.” Indeed, this is similar to Ed’s situation, in that he is being given “good Samaritan” tasks to complete, or else face death.

***Book to society.*** Participants were asked, “Did you make any connections between what happened in *Shine/Messenger* and what has happened, is happening, or might happen in the world you live in?”

***Shine.*** Participants who read *Shine* were reminded of several things they had seen in the news, including Trayvon Martin, Sandy Hook, and Matthew Shepard. The themes which emerged from the responses mirrored issues faced by students. Most students, still only in their freshman year at CSU, drew primarily on their high school experiences. Many students were concerned about homophobia and the difficulties of “coming out” in a hostile environment ( $n = 8$ ). More specifically, participants discussed bullying, hate crimes, and suicide as a result of both homophobia and racism ( $n = 11$ ). Participants represented a range of relative acceptance of homosexuality, yet even those who were strongly against it did not agree with bullying or hate crimes: “I don’t agree with it, but that’s their choice. That’s their decision. If it makes you happy, go with it. I’m not gonna hate you because you’re gay.” Another emergent theme was the prevalence of drugs in the small community of Black Creek (the setting of *Shine*), which reminded many students of the prevalence of drugs in their own communities, both past and present ( $n =$

6): “Drugs is out there. It’s taking people’s lives when we could be doing something far more.”

*Messenger*. *I Am the Messenger* is less politically overt than *Shine*, but participants still made connections between the world of the novel and the world in which they live. One such theme was rape and domestic violence ( $n = 3$ ). Indeed, one of Ed’s first missions in *Messenger* was to stop a man who raped his wife every day. Ed observes the family, talks to the young girl whose mother is the rape victim, and eventually runs the rapist out of town. This particular scene in the novel seemed to resonate with readers. One participant shared a story from his past that he had been thinking about more since he had read *Messenger*:

I was at work (at a grocery store), and a cop received a domestic violence call. He could hear what was going on, but we couldn’t. It’s sick how he has to hear that stuff on the radio. It brings reality back to you.

The other emergent theme was the act of helping strangers ( $n = 4$ ). Participants interpreted the question about connecting the book to society as an invitation to imagine how the world could be if more people were like Ed. One participant shared how he connected Ed’s transformation from do-nothing to good Samaritan to his vision for how the world could be: “I want it to happen in the world. If everyone would actually help people—if you could start with the street you live on—that would be amazing.”

**Satisfaction with assigned book.** All participants were asked the simple question, “Did you like *Shine*?” or “Did you like *I Am the Messenger*?”, followed by, “What did you like about it?” or “What didn’t you like about it?” Responses are grouped by assigned novel since no group-specific trends were identified.

***Shine.*** Of the 23 participants who read *Shine*, 22 of them had a generally positive response to the book, and one participant had a mixed/neutral response. The only specific criticism of *Shine* was that the book was “hard to get into.” In other words, the beginning of the book was especially challenging in terms of comprehension. When participants were asked to explain their yes/no answers, three themes emerged.

***Suspense and surprise.*** An overwhelming number of *Shine* readers expressed a constant desire throughout the reading experience to know “what happens next” ( $n = 16$ ). They enjoyed the investigation which took place throughout the book, the element of mystery, and the various plot twists along the way.

***Relatability of the protagonist and/or cast of characters.*** When asked why they liked *Shine*, several participants pointed to the novel’s protagonist, Cat, as well as the colorful cast of supporting characters ( $n = 6$ ). Many students were taken with Cat’s personality: “I think her personality of independence just really stands out.”

***Relatability of the plot and/or setting.*** Many participants enjoyed the fact that the events which took place in *Shine* were “real-life” situations ( $n = 7$ ). Readers articulated the ways in which they were able to relate to the various aspects of the novel, as well as the various ways in which the book was “real”: “It was ... what people go through every day, the raw aspects—family, social, everyday life.” Some participants gave specific examples of relatable elements of the story, such as Cat’s opinion that the local police department was not following all the possible leads: “Sometimes the police don’t care. They just do it because it’s their job.”

***I Am the Messenger.*** Of the 14 participants who read *I Am the Messenger*, 12 of them had a generally positive response to the book, and two of them had a mixed/neutral

response. The primary criticism of *I Am the Messenger* was that the middle of the book was not as exciting as the beginning or end: “It started off hot then leveled out.” When participants were asked to explain their yes/no answers, four themes emerged.

*Suspense and surprise.* As with the *Shine* readers, participants who read *I Am the Messenger* spoke positively about the action, mystery, and plot twists in the novel, and how these things led to a desire to know what happens next ( $n = 7$ ): “It had good twists and stayed interesting the whole time.”

*Ed, the protagonist.* Some participants found Ed, the protagonist and narrator of *I Am the Messenger*, to be a highlight of the reading experience ( $n = 3$ ). One respondent described his admiration of the main character:

Ed ... the kind of person he is, it's like someone who's been looked down onto, but then he became someone who everybody look up to after he complete the tasks. Everything he'd been through, just like the bible says, “Can something good come out of Israel?” Well, something good came out of Israel!

*Morality.* Participants articulated the moral lesson embedded in *I Am the Messenger* ( $n = 3$ ). Some respondents explicitly “liked the whole moral of the story,” while others were less direct:

The author shows you that, through life, you don't wanna just live and die. You wanna put a point to your life, like, “What am I living for?” Maybe you'll be the good thing in their life that they will remember. If everybody did that, that would be a perfect life.

*Relatability.* As with readers of *Shine*, those who read *I Am the Messenger* enjoyed the fact that the events which took place in the novel were “real-life” situations

( $n = 3$ ). In the case of this book, the readers articulated a day-to-day realism: “It’s kinda like an everyday life thing as far as the different situations that can happen.”

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Taken as a whole, the participants in this study demonstrated that—when given their choice of high interest, relatable fiction—they are able to read, comprehend, reflect, connect, form and defend opinions, make predictions, collaborate, and construct meaning. These are the types of activities that could be cultivated in a college reading class and would serve as effective tools in an upper division seminar, regardless of subject.

This chapter will discuss each research question individually. Then, it will address the implications of the findings of this study, taken as a whole. Finally, I will share recommendations for future research.

### **Research Question Findings and Implications**

This study was to some extent an exploratory inquiry, due to the relative lack of mixed method research on the effects of literature circles on reading achievement for college reading students.

My first question was, “Compared to independent reading, to what extent does participation in a supplemental literature circle improve reading comprehension for college students in a developmental reading course?” My hypothesis was that literature circle participation would have a positive impact on comprehension, as measured by the four selected assessments.

My second question was, “Compared to independent reading, how does participation in a supplemental literature circle impact the quantity and quality of textual connections made by college students in a developmental reading course?” My hypothesis was that literature circle participants would articulate more discrete textual

connections than the control group participants. For the qualitative portion, I did not formulate a hypothesis, since that is not methodologically appropriate for grounded theory analysis.

Indeed, the findings of this study confirmed my hypotheses. The following sections detail to what extent the hypotheses were confirmed, as well as to what extent the findings can be generalized. It is important to remember that no research question can be fully answered with one inquiry. Instead, these findings now hold a place in a line of research that needs much more work, in multiple settings, from multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives. My goal as a literacy researcher was to identify and describe the ways in which literature circles can enhance text comprehension, and thus improve academic, professional, and personal success, for college reading students.

### **Research Question One Findings and Implications**

This question was developed based on my hypothesis that participation in a literature circle improves text comprehension when compared to independent reading with no discussion. This question is important, for the place of literature circles in a college reading curriculum must be defended with causal evidence. This question was answered with four measures: an individual oral re-tell, a researcher-developed test of the assigned book, a QRI-5 high school level two-passage test, and a semi-structured interview.

Quantitative analyses revealed that, overall, literature circle participants significantly outperformed the control group participants. Specifically, literature circle participants significantly outperformed the control group participants on two of the measures: the researcher-developed “book test” and the total number of connections

articulated in the interview. Furthermore, the analysis revealed large effect sizes in favor of literature circles for two measures, the book test and the number of connections, and small effect sizes for the two remaining measures, the individual oral re-tell and the QRI test.

Larger sample sizes could increase the statistical power of the MANOVA and thus yield more favorable results for the individual oral re-tell and QRI passages. A one-way MANOVA revealed a significant main effect for group membership, Wilks'  $\lambda = .537$ ,  $F(4, 30) = 6.47$ ,  $p = .001$ . Given the significance of the overall test, the univariate main effects were examined. Significant univariate main effects for group membership were obtained for the researcher-developed comprehension test,  $F(1, 33) = 9.67$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $d = 1.10$ ; and the total connections articulated in the interview,  $F(1, 33) = 15.20$ ,  $p = .0004$ ,  $d = 1.34$ . The effect sizes for both measures are interpreted as large (Cohen, 1988). The two measures for which the group difference in mean was not significant—the QRI passages ( $d = .21$ ) and the oral re-tell ( $d = .21$ )—yielded small effect sizes.

One possible explanation for the non-significant results of the individual oral re-tell is the large range of results and resulting relatively large standard deviation. With so many possible details to recount from a 350-page novel, the measure needs much refinement and streamlining to serve as an effective measure of book comprehension. The QRI test was also found to not show a significant difference between groups. In the context of this study, the QRI test was selected as a measure of the extent to which any gains from literature circle would transfer to a new, previously unfamiliar passage. The other three measures—the re-tell, the book test, and the interview questions about the book—were all relatively more direct measures of the impact of the intervention. With

only five weeks of implementation, and only four weeks of actual book discussion, it is not too discouraging that the QRI test results did not reveal significant results.

### **Research Question Two Findings and Implications**

This question is important because comprehension is more than the ability to accurately re-tell details from the text (Drum, Calfee, & Cook, 1981; Katz, Blackburn, & Lautenschlager, 1991; Royer, 1990; Wilkinson & Son, 2011). The sort of text comprehension needed for success in college involves the ability to engage deeply and meaningfully with a book-length text. This question was developed based on my hypothesis that participants in a literature circle engage with a text more deeply and meaningfully than those who read independently, without peer-led discussion.

**Quantitative Findings and Implications.** Univariate analysis revealed that literature circle participants articulated a significantly higher number of textual connections during the semi-structured interview, when compared to the control group. This finding supports the study's results. The literature circles were designed around textual connections, so it is reasonable to expect that literature circle participants would be "better" at articulating connections than control group participants. The exciting thing about this finding is that the students showed such remarkable gains (significantly outperformed control group on test of assigned novel; articulated significantly more textual connections in the interview) after only five weeks of participation in a literature circle, which added up to about five hours. Such significant gains by the literature circle participants shows that peer-led discussion does impact textual engagement, but the underlying processes need to be teased apart in future research.

Guthrie and Humenick's (2004) meta-analysis on reading motivation pointed to four motivational practices which impacted reading comprehension: content goals, student choice, interesting texts, and collaboration. No doubt, each of these factors was present in the implementation of the literature circles in this study. Students were able to rank their preference for high-interest young adult novels, and those assigned to literature circles had the opportunity to collaborate as they discussed and made meaning with the novel. As discussed in Chapter IV, participants were very satisfied with the novels. Literature circle participants discussed the ways in which the meetings and reading goals motivated them to complete the assigned readings. The connection between gains in text comprehension and motivational/affective variables is likely at play in this inquiry and should be more thoroughly explored in future studies. No matter what the underlying cause-and-effect chain connecting intervention to gains in reading achievement, given that only five weeks of participation in a literature circle led to significant group differences, peer-led book discussion groups seem to be a promising addition to college reading classes.

**Qualitative Findings and Implications.** Through the use of grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), several themes emerged from responses to the semi-structured interview questions, yet themes were not specific to group membership (treatment or control). Therefore, the interview responses were analyzed either by whole group or by assigned novel. The significance and implications of these findings are organized by construct.

***Participation in book reports.*** Each participant was asked, "How do you feel about doing book reports?" The purpose of this question was two-fold: first, to determine

participants' comfort level with the outside reading verification process in use in READ 1000, and second, to establish a baseline for comparison with the literature circle experience. I was a bit surprised that the overall response to book reports ranged from positive to neutral. As a sociocultural thinker, I find the imbalance of power embedded in individual oral book reports to be problematic, but as an instructor of college reading courses, I can relate to the logistical challenges of developing and using a more equitable means of outside reading verification. Regardless, almost half of the respondents found the individual oral book report to be a fair, valid measure of book comprehension. This theme can be taken at face value—that the individual oral book report is an effective means of verifying outside reading. However, the trend could also be problematized using a sociocultural lens, and the question could be raised, “Are these students unwittingly maintaining the current power structure at play in the classroom?” (Foucault, 1972). It is important to verify that students are reading their assigned novel, and it is also important to give students an opportunity to engage with a text. I believe that there is room for both in a college reading classroom.

Taking the responses at face value for the purpose of this discussion, this participant pool generally either “likes” or “does not mind” book reports. I believe that the implementation of literature circles in college reading courses would address the complaints voiced about book reports: anxiety/fear of forgetting, superficial content, and solitary nature. Furthermore, the structure of the peer-led, minimalist facilitator Star Connection literature circles would potentially remove the “tester factor” (responses explaining that satisfaction with the book report depended on the tester). Also, the positive elements of book reports identified by participants (oral format, enjoy talking

about the book, aids in memory) would all be reinforced and enhanced by the literature circle experience.

*Participation in literature circles.* While no hypothesis was developed for the qualitative portion of this inquiry, the findings related to this construct are not surprising, given the theoretical perspectives and solid body of qualitative work on the power of literature circles. Response to literature circle participation was overwhelmingly positive. To put it plainly, the students in this study—even those who were initially reluctant—enjoyed being in literature circles and talking about books. For the students who elaborated on their enjoyment of the activity, five distinct “reasons” emerged.

*Discourse.* The fact that a majority of literature circle participants explicitly mentioned the exchange, sharing, and/or comparison of ideas comes as no surprise, given the body of work on language contact (Bakhtin, 1981; Hornberger, 2002; Pratt 1987; Winford, 2003). The oral exchange of ideas leads to linguistic contact, which results in any number of language and literacy phenomena: bilingualism, vocabulary borrowing, polyglossia, latching, and choral speech are just a few examples. One participant described the benefit of discourse better than I ever could: “Other people have their own opinion and can agree or disagree with your opinion of the book ... and having them all come together brings the book to life and adds more curiosity.” Indeed, discourse is directly related to the depth of engagement with a text (Lawrence & Snow, 2011).

In their chapter on “Oral Discourse and Reading” in the most recent edition of *The Handbook of Reading Research (Volume IV)*, Lawrence and Snow (2011) ask the question, “What is the role of talk in the learning and the reading we expect of students?” (p. 320). They define *oral discourse* as “extended oral productions, whether monologic or

multi-party,” and they define *oral discourse development* as “acquiring the skills uniquely required for participation in oral discourse” (p. 323). Their theoretical assumptions include the belief that participation in oral discourse is a vehicle to internalization and scaffolding of comprehension processes, which points straight back to Vygotskyian theoretical perspectives (1978). Both book reports and literature circles are both activities of oral production, but on the latter is an act of dialogic discourse. When asked about book reports, several participants stated that they liked to talk about the assigned novel, but none of the participants mentioned an oral exchange of ideas, something that emerged as a theme when they were asked about literature circles.

*Social.* Interview responses revealed that literature circle participants enjoyed the element of social interaction. In addition to data formally collected in this inquiry, as a literature circle facilitator, I often observed students talking excitedly about the book before and after literature circle meetings. From both a “common sense” and theoretical stance, these findings are not surprising. The inherent social nature of “talking about books” touches on the connection between speech act theory and literacy. Analysis of the speech act considers the context of the statement, the intentions of the speaker, and the roles of the participants. Analysis of the literacy event also considers context, intent, and role (Goodman, 1984). There is a transaction between text and reader during every literacy event, but in literature circles, an additional component of transaction and meaning-making is introduced through peer groups. The findings of this study confirm the importance of social networking (Gee, 1990, 1992) and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) to textual engagement for READ 1000 students. If the standardized placement tests are accepted as valid indicators of reading achievement, the students who must enroll in

READ 1000 have not benefited from traditional reading experiences (i.e. independent, solitary reading).

*Support/Collaboration.* The sheer number of participants who explicitly described the process of mutual (“vice-versa”) support in literature circles was a significant, yet not surprising, discovery. Mutual support was described in a variety of ways, including a described model of “coverage” (“If I missed something, they would’ve said it”) and a more structured prompt-and-response model (“I give the main idea; someone else gives the supporting details”). Students felt empowered when they were given the opportunity to provide support from a peer. This phenomenon is notable and should be considered by anyone weighing the benefits of adding literature circles to their curriculum. The importance of collaborative learning has been discussed extensively for both K-12 (Johnson & Johnson, 1988; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubek, 1999) and college (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Boyce & Hinline, 2002; Nelson, 1994; Slavin, 1983) populations.

*Motivation.* Several interview respondents viewed literature circle participation as a motivator to complete the assigned reading. I believe that this type of “pressure” is distinct from the type of motivation provided by book reports. While the motivation to complete the reading assignment before the literature circle meeting comes from a desire to be a part of the meaning-making experience, motivation to complete the reading assignment for a book report seems to come from a fear of failure:

If you pick a book and do it yourself, you're not guaranteed to understand what you read. You might really like the book, but if you don't understand what you read, when you go to the book report, you won't get your pages.

When the student says, “You won’t get your pages,” she is referring to the fact that, when students fail a book report, they lose the number of pages they read. If they do not pass 1,500 pages worth of book reports by the end of the semester, they cannot pass the course. I offer the suggestion that the type of motivation found in the context of literature circle participation is more constructive for college reading students and their long-term reading achievement. One participant explained the difference between the two types of motivation and the resulting reading experience:

A book report, if you didn't read it, you can wing it if you want to, just Sparknote it if you were desperate for the pages. The literature circle actually encourages you to read [the book], cause you get to know the people in the group, and you want to have that to talk about.

*Improved Comprehension.* Any reference by the respondents to improved comprehension, recall, or understanding of the book, along with any references to deeper engagement with the book, were considered as part of the larger category of improved comprehension. Even though I never asked the participants specifically about comprehension, half of the respondents who had participated in literature circles identified ways in which their reading was improved. This finding is perhaps the most illustrative example of the power of a mixed method approach to literacy research. I was able to not only quantitatively determine the positive effects of literature circle participation on reading comprehension, but I was also able to determine through participant interviews that the students themselves perceived gains in their reading comprehension.

**Connections.** Participants were asked about the ways in which they connect to books, both in a general sense and specific to the assigned novel.

*General.* In general, participants seemed stifled in their ability and willingness to make connections between the assigned novel and their own lives, other texts, or society. Over the course of their lives, some students seem to have created false “rules” about textual engagement. One example of an observed self-imposed rule *connections from book to self cannot be made with non-fiction texts*, as evidenced by statements such as this one: “I like books that are real, so none of them relate to my life.” Another observed self-imposed rule was *book-to-movie connections can only take place if the movie is an adaption of the book*, as evidenced by statements such as this one: “[I don’t make intertextual connections] unless I’m reading a book that already has a movie out.”

Over the course of the literature circle meetings and during the interviews, both literature circle participants and control group participants demonstrated the ability to engage with a text, yet when explicitly asked about whether or not they make connections as they read, the students did not tend to see themselves as connection-makers (no self connections,  $n = 9$ ; no intertextual connections,  $n = 11$ ). One student even stated that he specifically avoided making connections, answering, “No, I try to take [books] as their own thing.” These results point to the importance of the role of critical literacy in K-12 education (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Janks, 2010), as well as the importance that students be empowered to interact and make meaning with a text (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1969, 1978). One participant touched on the impact her experience in literature circles had on her general tendency to connect with a text. For both questions (self connection and intertextual connection), she said, “Not usually, but for this book, I did, and I feel

like I should start doing that more with other books to make it [gestures with hands to indicate waves].”

*Book specific.* After being asked about general tendencies to connect with a text (which did not yield promising results), the extent to which all participants were able to describe rich connections with the assigned book was pleasantly surprising. One informal observation during the study was that—over the course of the implementation of literature circles—I began to notice participants hanging out after literature circle meetings, hovering over a smart phone or iPad, looking up songs, music videos, television and movie clips, and the like: a direct result of an intertextual connection which had been discussed during the meeting. One literature circle participant who had read *Shine* told his peers about a documentary on drug use in community, called *Snow on the Bluff*. Later, during the interview, the same student told me about how he had gotten some friends together over spring break to watch the movie again, since he kept thinking about it after reading *Shine*. While it was not surprising to find that students were able to identify and articulate intertextuality (Hartman, 1995), the “explosion” of intertextuality which took place in the literature circle meetings shows the great potential of how we might be able to use connections between books and other texts (defined broadly) to empower students and improve not only reading achievement but also enjoyment of reading.

Another exciting finding of this qualitative analysis was participants’ ability and willingness to make connections between the assigned novel and “what’s going on in the world” (i.e., society). One participant stated, “The activities where you connect to yourself and other things; it helps you remember the book longer than just the week I

need to do the book report. I'll remember the book a year from now if someone asks me about it." Participants enjoyed tying the books to "issues": homophobia, hate crimes, bullying, and drug use with *Shine*, and domestic violence to *I Am the Messenger*. One surprising outcome of the exploration of connections between book and society come from a subset of readers of *I Am the Messenger* and their unique perspective on the question. Compared to *Shine*, *Messenger* is not as obviously tied to "hot topic" sociopolitical issues. As a result, I suspect that participants had to be a bit more imaginative when searching for an answer to my question. Several readers connected the good-deed-doing in *Messenger* with the way the world *could* and/or *should be*. These findings point directly back to Dewey's important foundational work on the connection between reading, education, and democracy (1902). Literature circles are an ideal space for the intersection of literacy and social reform.

***Satisfaction with book.*** The overwhelming satisfaction with the assigned book—be it *Shine* or *Messenger*—supports the body of research that student book choice is empowering and leads to better reading outcomes (Bang-Jenson, 2010; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Noe & Johnson, 1999; Paulson, 2006). Specifically, across books, participants pointed to three factors: amount of suspense/surprise, relatability of the protagonist and/or cast of characters, and relatability of the plot and/or setting. These factors which contributed to satisfaction with the novel should be considered when developing meaningful reading activities for college reading students.

### **Strengths of Study**

This section identifies and discusses the major strengths of this inquiry: validity, reliability, and replicability.

**Validity**

High rates of inter-rater reliability were established for each of the measures. The researcher-developed test was validated using expert readers and meta-cognitive strategies. Random assignment of participants to treatment and control groups maximized internal validity. While it cannot be quantified, the mixed method approach and sociocultural perspective throughout ensured a high degree of content validity, which is the extent to which a measure (or an inquiry) represents all the facets of a given construct.

**Reliability**

The internal reliability for both reader-developed book tests (0.87 for *Shine*; 0.82 for *Messenger*) was found to be acceptable for educational research standards. The reliability of the other measures is discussed in the limitations section.

**Replicability**

This study provides a detailed description of the intervention, along with a facilitator guidebook, a fidelity checklist, and an extremely high rate of fidelity of implementation with high inter-rater agreement. If another researcher wanted to replicate this study using the same books and assessments, it could be done. In terms of implementation, the developed Star Connections literature circles (and accompanying materials) could be used by reading instructors desiring to raise students' text comprehension. It should be noted, however, that replicability is methodologically irrelevant for the qualitative portions of this study. On the other hand, because the materials and procedures are carefully documented and disclosed, a researcher could use

the same interview questions to collect data and apply my categories of analysis to the responses.

### **Limitations of Study**

The findings of this study confirm that participation in a literature circle had a significant positive effect on text comprehension and reading achievement. Furthermore, there was substantial qualitative evidence that literature circles stretched students to make intertextual, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. This study can be used by college reading instructors as a successful model for incorporating literature circles in their classrooms, as the process and materials have been described in detail. What follows is a discussion of the limitations of the study. Next, these limitations are used as the basis for a set of recommendations for future research.

### **Threats to internal validity**

Any time a study design involves a treatment group who spends more time with the researcher, some portion of the variability could be attributed to the differential time spent together, as opposed to the actual independent variable. To counter this phenomenon, known as the “Hawthorne Effect,” the control group students would be given an unrelated task that took up the same amount of time as the actual intervention. As previously mentioned in Chapter III, I felt that it would be unethical to ask the control students to spend an equivalent amount of time with me outside of class on a possibly unhelpful task, only in the name of controlling for the Hawthorne Effect. To at least partially address this issue, however, I asked the control group students to write in their reading logs (already part of the READ 1000 curriculum) as they read. Another possible confound to the design was that I served as both literature circle facilitator and post-test

proctor. The literature circle participants spent more time with me, so it is possible that they felt more comfortable during testing, which could have impacted results to some extent.

### **Imprecision of measures**

While the researcher-developed comprehension tests held up well to analysis of internal consistency, the QRI-5 passages did not. While I do not regret this decision, I need to reexamine tests of unfamiliar passages to best measure skill transfer from literature circles. The oral re-tell was an important part of the study, as it closely mirrored the actual assessment used in READ 1000, but the results were so incredibly varied in length and quality that the use of an oral re-tell as an outcome measure must be reconsidered. The measure would need to be substantially revised and refined in order to serve as an effective indicator of comprehension of a text.

### **Barriers to implementation**

Overall, implementation of the intervention was a smooth process. Attendance was a problem throughout the course of the literature circle meetings, but no participant missed more than one discussion meeting. Another challenge of the study, and a suspected reason for most of the attrition from the control group, was the fact that post-testing took place immediately after CSU's spring break.

### **External validity**

The results of the quantitative portion of this study can be generalized to the larger population of READ 1000 students at CSU. However, it should be noted that there are some differences between the target population and the sample which was recruited for this study, due to the fact that there are differences between the fall and spring

semester READ 1000 enrollment demographics (see Chapter III's section on study participants). I also suspect that there was a slight sampling bias, in that the individuals who volunteered to participate in the study might be, in general, slightly more motivated than those who did not volunteer to participate. Another difference between the sampled group and the population is that there was a disproportionately large number of repeating students compared to the spring 2013 population, which can be explained by the fact that repeating students better appreciated the value of the page bonus incentive due to their failure the previous semester and thus were more likely to volunteer to participate in the study.

### **Study Significance**

There is no arguing the fact that text comprehension is of the utmost importance for college students. However, there is no real consensus on how best to teach text comprehension to college reading students. The only way to justify any particular instructional method or curricular activity is with the convergence of a number of studies employing a variety of methodologies. While there is a small handful of studies exploring the effects of literature circles on reading achievement for college reading students (Byrd, 2002; Willingham, 2009), much more research must be carried out using this population of students and this independent variable in order to establish a convincing body of research in support of literature circle implementation in college reading courses.

This study contributed to literacy research by providing quantitative and qualitative evidence that participation in a literature circle leads to improved text comprehension and enhanced textual engagement for college reading students, when compared to a control group of independent readers. Quantitative findings provide

compelling causal evidence of the positive impact of literature circle participation, and the qualitative findings provide context and depth of description of the phenomenon of the literature circle experience. The quantitative results provide evidence that literature circle participants described more textual connections than control group participants, and the qualitative findings contextualize that evidence by revealing the types of connections made in the form of descriptive categories. Quantitative analyses revealed that literature circle participants outperformed control group participants on a test of comprehension of the assigned novel, while qualitative analysis explored the ways participants described how it felt to be in a literature circle, as well as the impact of literature circle participation as perceived and articulated by the participants themselves.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

#### **Sample Size**

The statistical power of this study was low, due to the relatively small sample size. Replicating the quantitative portion of this study with more participants would increase the statistical power of the results for the measures which did not yield significant univariate main effects.

#### **Length of Study**

It should be noted that all the positive results found in this inquiry were yielded by only five weeks (five contact hours) of participation in literature circles, and only four of those hours were actual discussion meetings. Implementing literature circles over the course of an entire semester, using three or four novels, would likely yield even more dramatic results. Perhaps the literature circle participants would even outperform control group participants on standardized measures of reading comprehension.

**Scope/Scale**

Scaling up the study would minimize the threats to internal validity. For example, having multiple literature circle facilitators and different testers could minimize some of the threats to internal validity experienced in this study. Many studies found in the review of the literature served as helpful practical guides to implementation of literature circles (Dillon, 2007; Schlick Noe & Johnson, 1999; Valeri-Gold & Commander, 2003).

**Choice of Measures/Methodologies**

While it is important to include a measure of skill transfer to an unfamiliar passage, perhaps another test would be more appropriate for future studies. Regarding the QRI test, a Cronbach's alpha analysis of internal reliability revealed a relatively weak index of 0.68. This can be partially explained because the measure is open-ended, and the QRI manual states that graders should accept synonymous words and statements to those provided on the answer key. No matter which skill transfer measure is used, it is important that the measure assesses prior knowledge of the passage content and subject matter. In fact, the best approach is to quantify the amount of prior knowledge and quantitatively control for the factor by adding it to the statistical test as a covariate.

One possibility for future work is to add a standardized measure of reading comprehension. Regardless of how one feels about the external validity or ethical implications of standardized reading tests, these assessments are taken very seriously by various stakeholders in the education system and are a reality in the lives of students. Furthermore, standardized test are normed for different student populations, so the results can be generalized to populations beyond the sampled participants.

Finally, the individual oral re-tell component should be streamlined for future use. For example, participants could be asked to only re-tell the end of the book, which would both confirm that the book was completed and establish a concrete number of possible “points.”

Regarding qualitative analysis, it is recommended that discourse analysis and critical literacy be used to analyze the actual literature circle discussion meetings. This type of analysis could describe the inner workings of the literature circles, which would situate the testing and interview data in a sociocultural context.

### **Affective Factors**

Through the semi-structured interview, I collected data beyond the scope of this study: reading attitude, reading motivation, self-evaluation of reading ability, memories of reading both inside and outside of school at various ages, high school-to-college transition, and feelings about being placed in READ 1000. I plan to analyze these data using grounded theory in a series of future studies.

Another recommendation for future research is to measure affective shifts for individuals who participate in literature circles, compared to a control group.

### **Textual Engagement**

One possible future mixed method inquiry could focus on textual engagement for literature circle participants as compared to a control group. After only five weeks of literature circles (only four of those were discussion meetings), I did not observe any group differences in the quality of textual connections made by participants. However, if students were given the opportunity to be in literature circles for an entire semester, how might the depth and quality of their engagement differ from students who were not in

literature circles? While connections to and from a book were explored in this study, other types of textual engagement and higher order thinking could be investigated in future studies.

### **Use of Technology**

My informal observation of literature circle participants, gathered around smart phones, iPods, and iPads before and after meetings, sparked my curiosity about the role that technology could play in the context of literature circles. Comparisons could be made between “traditional” literature circles and literature circles in which participants each had a tablet device. With the book in one hand and the tablet in another, students could make immediate connections to the outside world. The tablet could serve as a launching pad for discourse and a portal into infinite potential for intertextuality and meaning-making.

### **English Learners**

While I believe that both monolingual students and English learners benefit from participation in literature circles, I suspect that they benefit in different ways. This difference could be explored in a future research project. English learners in this study seemed to especially appreciate the gains specific to vocabulary, so this is a good opportunity for an exploratory study.

### **Conclusions**

One of the new chapters in the most recent edition of *The Handbook Reading Research (Volume IV)* notes and encourages a “dialogic turn” in literacy research (Wilkinson & Son, 2011). The authors define “dialogue” in multiple, co-existing ways: discussion, voice/agency, collaborative inquiry, and the co-construction of knowledge.

When the qualitative findings of this study are viewed through the lens of this multifaceted definition, literature circles are found to address the dialogic turn on all counts. Indeed, “the interaction among different voices is the foundation for comprehension” (Wilkinson & Son, 2011, p. 361).

In the chapter on dialogue, four waves of comprehension instruction are identified: strategy instruction, multiple strategy instruction, transactional strategies instruction, and dialogic approaches. Within the “fourth wave” (dialogic approaches), Wilkinson & Son identify four sub-topics: content-rich instruction, discussion, argumentation, and intertextuality. Literature circles fall squarely into this fourth wave, and I contend that the literature circles relate to each of the identified sub-topics. While literature circles do not involve direct instruction, they could be included as one of many activities in a content-rich literacy curriculum. Discussion is the bedrock of literature circles, and argumentation touches on both the role of discourse in literature circles and the connection between text and society, which almost always manifests as a sociopolitical debate. Texts do not exist in a sociocultural vacuum (Bakhtin, 1981), so a literature discussion group is necessarily a space for intertextuality. Wilkinson and Son (2011) refer to intertextuality as “the sine qua non of dialogic approaches to teaching comprehension” (p. 374).

Explicit strategy instruction and dialogic approaches need not pointlessly compete for space in the reading classroom; instead, these complementary methods could and should be used in tandem. While teacher modeling and supervision of comprehension strategies give students an opportunity to add “tools” to their reading “toolkits” and practice using them under the helpful guidance of an expert, literature circles create a

space where students can be empowered to use their favorite tools, trade tools with a peer, use the same tool together with one or more peers, or create a brand new tool through collaboration and discourse.

It is in the spirit of the idea of complementary instructional methods and classroom activities that I suggest that literature circles be added to the college reading curriculum. This study found that literature circles improved reading achievement and the quality and quantity of textual connections, compared to independent reading, for college reading students, as determined by a reader-developed book test and a semi-structured interview. However, the quantitative gains in comprehension did not transfer to an unfamiliar passage. Furthermore, a standardized measure of reading comprehension was not used in this study. More mixed method work needs to be carried out on the college reading student population using literature circles as an independent variable in order to create a convergence of research and justify a place in the curriculum.

I, for one, plan to continue research in this line of inquiry, for I believe in the power of talking about an interesting book with a group of one's peers. Literature circles improve reading comprehension, facilitate deep and meaningful textual engagement, motivate students to read, and—perhaps most importantly—students truly enjoy them. One participant perfectly described the potential of literature circles as a permanent fixture in college reading courses:

I feel like if I got to do [literature circles] a lot more ... if people got to do that a lot more, it would strengthen their reading experience, because it really drew me in. I loved being with people that I could discuss the book with.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A****Student Self-evaluation Questions****Fall 2010**

- Did participating in the literature circle assist with your reading pages goal?
- Did you enjoy participating in the literature circle? Why or why not?
- As compared to reading alone and completing an oral book report, as a member of literature circle, did you feel more or less pressure to complete your assigned reading?
- Did you fulfill all of the requirements of participating in a literature circle (attended every meeting, completed assigned work, participated and contributed to the group, cooperated with other group members)?
- What is your preferred choice: oral book reports or literature circles? Why?

*Note: Only the questions marked with an asterisk were analyzed. The other two questions only generated “yes/no” responses.*





## APPENDIX C

### Literature Circle Expectations

Spring 2013

#### *What is a literature circle?*

A literature circle is a group of people who read, reflect, and talk about books together.

#### *What can/should you do in a literature circle?*

##### 1) *Ask questions!*

- There are no stupid questions or wrong answers in a literature circle.
- Asking questions about the book is just as important as “saying something interesting” about the book.

2) Be **respectful**: Please listen to and respect your literature circle peers. Avoid hurtful words.

3) Be **yourself**: Use the words/language/accent/dialect you are most comfortable using.

4) Don't forget the **Star Connections!** (They are on the back side of this card!)

- You could make comparisons between your literature circle book and...
  - Your own life
  - Another book
  - Your friends and family
  - Society/culture (something you saw on the news or online)

5) Don't worry too much about the facilitator. **You aren't reporting to the facilitator**; you are having a discussion with your peers.

6) **Use your book**: If you forget something you read, you should look it up or ask someone about it!

7) **Use your bookmark**: The bookmark has your reading assignments, meeting schedule, and suggestions for ways to “talk about books.”

#### *Expectations of literature circle participants:*

1) Bring your book and bookmark.

2) Complete the assigned reading before the start of the meeting.

3) Be respectful. (listen, avoid hurtful language)

4) Be an active contributor.

a. *What does this mean?*

i. Read, think, ask, and respond.

ii. Participate in activities during the meeting when asked to do so.

- 5) Miss no more than one meeting.
- a. Upon your second absence, you will be asked to withdraw from the group, as well as the study. You will no longer be eligible for the lit circle group incentive, but you can still do a “normal” book report for your READ 1000 class. *Note: you will not be permitted to join the control group.*
  - b. **IMPORTANT:** There is no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences.

***Literature circle participation incentive:***

Your literature circle book is \_\_\_\_\_ pages long. If you complete the readings each week, miss no more than one literature circle meeting, and complete the post-tests and interview, you will earn \_\_\_\_\_ pages towards your “outside reading” requirement for READ 1000.

**I have read the Literature Circle expectations and understand how to be an active contributor and how to earn the page bonus incentive.**

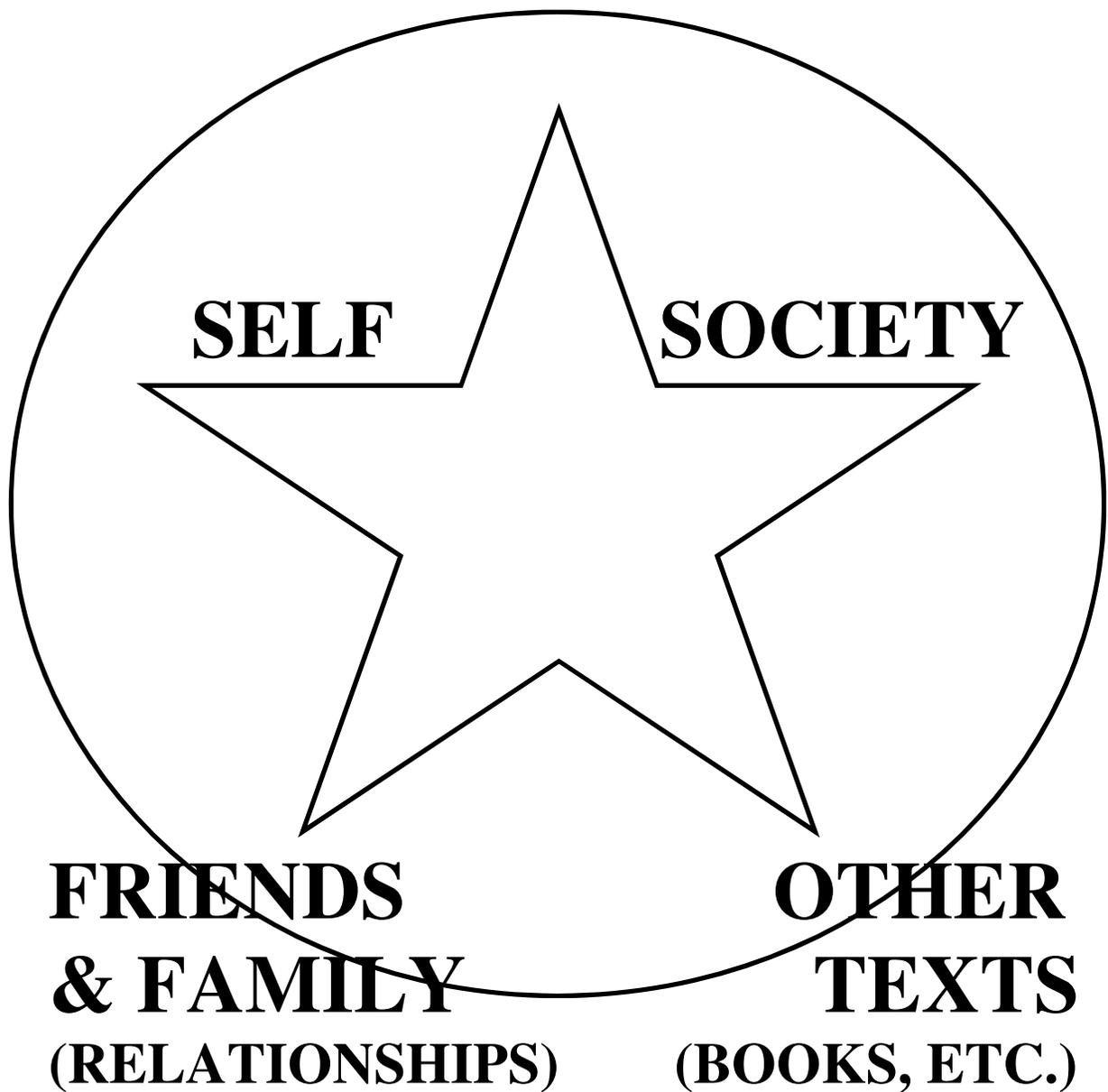
Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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

APPENDIX D

Star Connections for Literature Circles

# LITERATURE CIRCLE BOOK



**APPENDIX E****Literature Circle Bookmarks, Front*****I Am the Messenger***

*by Markus Zusak*

**Week 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Pages due: 3 - **91**

**Week 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Pages due: 95 - **180**

**Week 4:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Pages due: 183 - **262**

**Week 5:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Pages due: 265 - **357**

**Meeting Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pages:** \_\_\_\_\_ x 2

**\*Total credit:** \_\_\_\_\_

***\*Note: You must complete the weekly readings, attend all sessions, and complete the post-testing to earn the total credit!***

## APPENDIX F

### Literature Circle Bookmarks, Back

#### Ways to Talk About Books

- Discuss how something from the book reminds you of something from your own life or the lives of your friends and family.
- Explain why you agree or disagree with something that one of the characters did or said.
- Discuss how something from the book reminds you of something else you have read.
- Discuss how something from the book reminds you of something that is happening in the world/ country/ community right now or has happened in the past.
- Predict what might happen next in the book.
- Explain why you were surprised or disappointed by something that happened in the book.
- Find a theme in the book: black/white, rich/poor, men/women, family relationships, sex/romance, war, politics, crime... these are just a few possibilities!
- Ask about something that you don't understand—a word or phrase in the book or something that happens in the plot.

## APPENDIX G

### *Shine* Rescue Prompts

#### OPEN DISCUSSION RESCUE PROMPTS (each meeting)

- Did you like what you read this week? Why/why not?
- What did you think about what you read this week?
- Were you surprised by anything that happened?
- Did you accurately predict anything that happened?
- What do you think will happen next?

#### COR RESCUE PROMPTS (by week)

##### Week 2 (p. 1-82)

- Tell me about what happened to Patrick.
- Tell me about Cat.
- What does Cat remember about her time with Patrick and Mama Sweetie?
- What happens at church?
- Tell me about the “redneck posse.”
- How does Cat feel about Tommy?
- How do Cat and her brother, Christian, get along?
- What about Cat’s dad?
- What does Cat find out when she talks to Gwennie?
- What happened with the “candypants” on the first day of 9<sup>th</sup> grade?

##### Week 3 (p. 83-165)

- What happens at the library in Toomsboro?
- What does Cat find out when she talks to Destiny?
- Why is Cat so angry at Christian?
- What does Cat find out when she goes to Huskers?
- What does Cat find out when she goes to Wally’s trailer?
- How does Christian save Cat at suicide rock?
- What happened when Cat went to the hospital?

**Week 4 (p. 166-264)**

- What does Cat find out when she talks to Bailee-Ann?
- Tell me about Robert.
- What does Cat find out at church? (hint: hospital)
- What happens when Cat takes the bus to Jason's college?
- What does Cat find out when she talks to Jason?
- What does Cat find out when she talks to Robert?
- What happened to Ridings's cow?
- What did Cat find on her bed?

**Week 5 (p. 266-350)**

- What does Christian do to Tommy?
- What happens when Cat goes to Tommy's house?
- What happens when Cat and Jason go to Asheville?
- What does Cat find out from Billy the Kid?
- What happens to Jason's car on the way to suicide rock?
- What happens at suicide rock?
- What happens to Patrick?
- What does Patrick decide to do?

## APPENDIX H

### *I Am the Messenger* Rescue Prompts

#### **OPEN DISCUSSION RESCUE PROMPTS (each meeting)**

- Did you like what you read this week? Why/why not?
- What did you think about what you read this week?
- Were you surprised by anything that happened?
- Did you accurately predict anything that happened?
- What do you think will happen next?

#### **COR RESCUE PROMPTS (by week)**

##### **Week 2 (p. 3-91)**

- What happened at the bank?
- What happened at the courthouse?
- Tell me about Ed.
- Tell me about Ed and his “Ma.”
- Tell me about Ed’s friends.
- Tell me about Ed and Audrey.
- What about Ed’s dad?
- Tell me about the Doorman.
- What does Ed receive in the mail?
- What is his first/second/third mission?

##### **Week 3 (p. 95-180)**

- Did Ed shoot the man from Edgar street?
- Tell me about Darryl & Keith.
- Tell me about the “Stones of Home.”
- What is his first/second/third mission?

**Week 4 (p. 183-262)**

- What happened at the Sledge Game?
- What's the latest with Ed and Audrey?
- How does Ed figure out the Ace of Spades?
- What is his first/second/third mission?
- What happens at the movie theater?

**Week 5 (p. 265-357)**

- How does Ed celebrate Christmas?
- How does Ed help Ritchie?
- How does Ed help Marv?
- How does Ed help Audrey?
- What happens at the cemetery?
- Who gets into Ed's cab at the end?
- What happens in Ed's house at the end?
- Who do you think the man is?

**APPENDIX I****Test of Comprehension, *Shine***

1. Describe two specific things that Patrick's attacker(s) did to him. (E)
2. Describe the economic state of Black Creek (Cat's hometown). (E)
3. Why does Cat stop talking to all of her friends? (I)
4. How/why did Patrick's grandmother (Mama Sweetie) die? (E)
5. How did Aunt Tildy (Cat's aunt) handle "ugliness"? (E)
6. What is the relationship between Sheriff Doyle and the Lawson (Tommy's) family? (E)
7. How did Patrick tell Cat he was gay? (E)
8. How did Beef get the scar under his eye? (E)
9. How did Mama Sweetie feel about Cat's "spiritedness"? (E)
10. Why is Robert (Bailee-Ann's little brother) so small and "hyper"? (E)
11. What did it mean when someone ordered a peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwich from Huskers? (I)
12. How did Ridings McAlister's (roadside food stand owner) wife and child die? (E)
13. What did Tommy do after he shot Ridings's cow? (E)
14. Why did Beef choose to put a tongue on Cat's bed, as opposed to something else? (I)
15. Why is it ironic (hypocritical) that Jason (the college boy) called Cat a "mountain n-----"? (I)

16. How does Cat get “the Kid” to let her into the bar? (E)
17. Why does Beef wash Bailee-Ann’s truck for her? (I)
18. How does Cat save Robert at Suicide Rock? (E)
19. Why does Christian throw the gun into the water? (I)
20. What is the significance of Mama Sweetie’s chimes ringing at the end of the book? (I)

**APPENDIX J****Test of Comprehension, *Messenger***

1. Briefly describe the condition of Marv's car. (E)
2. What does Ed do to stop the bank robbery? (E)
3. What does the gunman/robber say to Ed at the trial? (E)
4. Milla (the old woman) keeps calling Ed "Jimmy." Who is Jimmy? (E)
  - 4a. How did Jimmy die? (I)
5. Why does Audrey refuse to love anyone? (I)
6. Why did Ed give Sophie (the running girl) an empty shoebox? (I)
7. How did Sophie do the first time she ran a race barefoot? (E)
  - 7a. How did she feel about it? (E)
8. Someone calls Ed's house and tells him to check his mailbox. What does he find there? (E)
9. What are the "stones of home"? (E)
10. How did Ed help Father Thomas O'Reilly? (E)
11. How did Ed feel about Audrey? (E)
12. What was Marv saving his money for? (E)
13. Why is Ed's mother so mean to him? (I)
14. How does Ed figure out the addresses for the names on the ace of spades (Green, West, Plath)? (E)
15. Why does Marv have to kiss the Doorman? (E)
16. Why does Ritchie listen to the radio by himself every night? (I)

17. Why are the “hearts” the last of the four aces? (I)
18. Why isn't the final conversation between Ed and Audrey in the file folder?  
(I)

**APPENDIX K****Scripted Prompt for Re-tell**

You have up to ten minutes to tell me everything you remember about *Shine/I Am the Messenger*. Please focus on the facts of the story. Tell me as much as you can about the book. Some things you can talk about include the following: a character's physical appearance, a character's personality, relationships between characters, and of course – the plot of the story: what happens, and in what order. Try your best to work from beginning to end, but if you remember random things as you are giving your report, you should say them. The sheet in front of you is a list of the main characters in *Shine/I Am the Messenger*. This way, you do not have to stress out if you cannot remember someone's name. I will NOT be asking you questions about the book. Just keep talking until you run out of things you remember about the book or until time is up, whichever happens first. Are you ready? Begin.

**APPENDIX L****List of Characters, *Shine***

Cat

Patrick

Aunt Tildy

Christian

Mama Sweetie

Tommy

Dupree

Beef

Bailee-Ann

Gwennie

Jason

Wally

Ridings McAlister

Robert

Destiny

Roy

**APPENDIX M****List of Characters, *Messenger***

Ed

Ma (Ed's mom)

Marv

Ritchie

Audrey

The Doorman

Darryl & Keith

Milla

Sophie

The family on Edgar street (daughter = Angelina)

The family at the park (mother = Angie Carusso)

Fr. O'Reilly

The Rose brothers, Gavin and Daniel

Lua Tatupu, the father of the Polynesian family on Glory Road

Bernie, the old man who owned the movie theater

## APPENDIX N

### Interview Questions

#### Part I. Life Story.

- 1) Please tell me about your childhood.
  - a. Where were you born?
  - b. Where did you grow up?
  - c. Who raised you?
  - d. How did you spend your time?
  - e. What is your fondest memory?
- 2) Please tell me about your school life before college.
  - a. Where did you go to school?
  - b. What was your school like?
  - c. What was your favorite thing about school?
  - d. What was your least favorite thing about school?
- 3) Please tell me about the role reading has played in your life so far.
  - a. What are your memories of reading in school?
  - b. What are your memories of reading outside of school?
  - c. Did your high school experience prepare you for college?
    - i. (if no) What could they have done differently?
- 4) Tell me the story about how you decided to go to college.
  - a. Why are you going to college?
  - b. What do you want to do after college?
- 5) How do you feel/what do you think about being in READ 1000?
  - a. Do you think you should be in a college reading class?
  - b. How do you feel/what do you think about the test you took? (Nelson-Denny)

#### Part II. Reconstruction of Experience.

- 1) For all participants:
  - a. How do you feel/what do you think about how you are asked to read books in READ 1000?
  - b. How do you feel/what do you think about giving a book report?
  - c. How do you feel/what do you think about the test on the Malcolm X story?
  - d. How do you feel/what do you think about the test on your assigned book?
  - e. Did you like the book? Why or why not?

- 2) For literature circle participants:
  - a. How do you feel/what do you think about participating in a literature circle?
  - b. How would you compare talking about a book in a literature circle to giving a book report?
  - c. How did reading and talking about the same book with a group of your peers affect your reading experience?
    - i. Did it improve your reading experience? How so?
    - ii. Did it harm your reading experience? How so?

### **Part III. Reflecting on Meaning.**

- 1) When do you feel most motivated to read a book?
- 2) When do you feel least motivated to read a book?
- 3) Do you think you will be a lifelong reader? (describe if necessary)
  - a. (if no) What would it take for you to become a lifelong reader?
- 4) When you read a book, do you make connections to your own life? Can you give an example?
- 5) When you read a book, do you make connections to other books? Can you give an example?
- 6) Describe your attitude toward reading.
  - a. Do you enjoy reading?
    - i. Why?
    - ii. Why not?
  - b. What do you like to read?
  - c. Do you think you are a good reader?
    - i. Why?
    - ii. Why not?

### **Part IV. Engagement with Text. (after re-tell)**

- 1) Did you make any connections between the people you read about in book and yourself?
  - a. (If yes) Describe the connection.
- 2) Did you make any connections between the people you read about in this book and your friends or family?
  - a. (If yes) Describe the connection.
- 3) Did you make any connections between this book and any other books, movies, TV shows, songs, or video games?
  - a. (If yes) Describe the connection.
- 4) Did you make any connections between what happened in this book and what has happened, is happening, or might happen in the world?
  - a. (If yes) Describe the connection.
- 5) What do you think you will remember about this book, even in a few months from now?

## APPENDIX O

### Schedule

#### Spring 2013 Semester

- Week 3 (1/28): Visit each section of READ 1000; hand out consent packet
- (1/30): Pick up signed forms
- Randomly assign students to groups
- Make literature circle meeting schedule
- Notify students of assignment
- Week 4 (2/4): 1<sup>st</sup> literature circle meetings
- Hand out materials
- Fill out bookmarks
- Confirm first reading assignment
- Scripted talk: “How to participate in a literature circle”
- Week 5 (2/11): 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting: normal format
- Week 6 (2/18): 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting: normal format
- Week 7 (2/25): 4<sup>th</sup> meeting: normal format
- Week 8 (3/4): 5<sup>th</sup> meeting: normal format
- Begin post-testing
- Week 9 (3/11): Spring break
- Week 10 (3/20): Complete post-testing

**APPENDIX P****List of Pre-selected Books**

Title: *Fearless Jones*  
Author: Walter Mosley  
Number of pages: 368  
Year of publication: 2001  
Lexile: Still awaiting response from MetaMetrics

Title: *I Am the Messenger*  
Author: Markus Zusak  
Number of pages: 357  
Year of publication: 2006  
Lexile: 640L

Title: *Shine*  
Author: Lauren Myracle  
Number of pages: 376  
Year of publication: 2011  
Lexile: 680L

Title: *This Is Not a Test*  
Author: Courtney Summers  
Number of pages: 336  
Year of publication: 2012  
Lexile: 610L

## APPENDIX Q

### Facilitator Guidebook

#### List of Materials

- 1) Informed consent (take home and file)
- 2) Expectations contract (take home and file)
- 3) STAR sheet (keep in book)
- 4) Bookmark (keep in book)
- 5) Book
- 6) Page stickies (keep in book)
- 7) Half sheet card stock for Quick-Write (only used at meetings)
- 8) Camera for video-recording
- 9) Attendance chart
- 10) Notepad for taking notes
- 11) Book sign-out sheet
- 12) Post-test sign-up sheet
- 13) Insert for book report only participants (control group)
- 14) Snacks for meeting

#### First Literature Circle Meeting Itinerary

- 1) Hand back photocopies of signed informed consents
- 2) Introductions
  - a. Confirm name pronunciation/nickname
  - b. Confirm emails & phone numbers
    - i. Get permission to text meeting reminders
  - c. Informal introductions (Don't forget to introduce yourself!)
    - i. Name/nickname
    - ii. Major
    - iii. Where did you grow up?
    - iv. Hobbies
    - v. Do you know any languages other than English?
  - d. Make sure all participants know all names
  - e. FACILITATOR: Take attendance with attendance chart
- 3) Go over Star Connections (card)

- 4) Go over typical discussion meeting format
  - a. Collaborative Oral Re-tell: 10 minutes
  - b. Quick-Write: 5 minutes
  - c. Open Discussion: 40+ minutes
  - d. Wrap-up, Confirm next assignment: 1 minute
- 5) Go over expectations document
- 6) Go over post-test appointment
- 7) Hand out books, bookmarks, and page stickies
  - a. Fill out bookmarks as a group
  - b. FACILITATOR: Book sign-out sheet
- 8) Confirm first reading assignment

### **Guidelines for Participation in a Literature Circle**

***FACILITATOR: Read these guidelines aloud to the students at the first meeting, and ask the students to keep the “STAR sheet” in their book.***

- 8) ***Ask questions!***
  - There are no stupid questions or wrong answers in a literature circle.
  - Asking questions about the book is just as important as “saying something interesting” about the book.
- 9) Be ***respectful***: Please listen to and respect your literature circle peers. Avoid hurtful words.
- 10) Be ***yourself***: Use the words/language/accent/dialect you are most comfortable using.
- 11) Don't forget the ***Star Connections!*** (They are on the back side of this card!)
  - You could make comparisons between your literature circle book and...
    - Your own life
    - Another book
    - Your friends and family
    - Society/culture (something you saw on the news or online)
- 12) Don't worry too much about the facilitator. ***You aren't reporting to the facilitator***; you are having a discussion with your peers.
- 13) ***Use your book***: If you forget something you read, you should look it up or ask someone about it!
- 14) ***Use your bookmark***: The bookmark has your reading assignments, meeting schedule, and suggestions for ways to “talk about books.”

## Discussion Meeting Format:

### I. Materials

- a. Replenish page stickies, bookmarks, STAR sheet, etc., if needed.

### II. Collaborative Oral Re-tell (COR)

- a. Set the timer for ten minutes.
- b. Facilitator: have a copy of the re-tell rubric to keep track of missed plot details.
- c. Everyone: use the book during this activity.
- d. Say: **“This week, we read from page X-X. Let’s work together to re-tell what happened. Let’s scan our books together to help remember the story. For the next ten minutes, let’s focus on the facts of the story; in other words, who did what, and in what order. Later, we will have Open Discussion where you should share your opinion, make predictions, and make connections. Okay, turn your books to page \_\_\_\_\_. What happened first?”**
  - i. Wait five seconds for someone to begin.
- e. If no one speaks, then say: **“The first thing I remember is \_\_\_\_\_.”**
  - i. Wait five seconds for someone else to speak.
- f. If no one speaks, then say: **“What happened next?”**
  - i. Wait five seconds for someone to speak.
- g. Facilitator: **Share the next important plot point.**
  - i. Wait five seconds for someone to speak.
- h. If no one speaks, then say: **“What happened next?”**
  - i. Wait five seconds for someone to speak.
- i. If no one speaks, then call on a student: **“NAME, what happened next?”**
  - i. *Continue to wait five seconds after each utterance before you speak. Only call on individuals if more than five seconds have passed between utterances. Call on students in random order. Do not call on a student more than once unless all students have already been called on once. Alternate between calling on students and sharing a plot point yourself. Use the “rescue prompts” sheet to guide the re-tell if students are reluctant to participate. Maintain a passive, supportive role. If students are talking, you should just listen and keep track of which plot points they do and do not discuss.*

- j. If participants miss an important plot detail and more than five seconds have passed since the last utterance, say: **“Something important happened after \_\_\_\_\_ (or between X and X). Does anyone remember what it was?”**
  - i. Wait five seconds for someone to speak.
  - ii. If no one speaks, then share the plot detail.
- k. When the timer goes off, transition to Quick-Write.

### III. Quick-Write

- a. Set the timer for five minutes.
- b. **Ask the participants a question, and ask them to jot down a response on the half-sheet card stock.**
  - i. *Emphasize that responses can be very short and need not be complete sentences/paragraphs.*
- c. Discussion questions should serve as a launching pad for the day’s discussion. Each week, focus on a different Star Connection:
  - i. Week 2: SELF
    - 1. IATM: Write down as many word and phrases as you can in five minutes that describe Ed, our main character and narrator of the story. Circle any of the words and phrases you would also use to describe yourself.
    - 2. SHINE: Write down as many words and phrases as you can in five minutes that describe Cat, our main character and narrator of the story. Circle any of the words and phrases you would also use to describe yourself.
  - ii. Week 3: FRIENDS & FAMILY/RELATIONSHIPS
    - 1. IATM: Choose either Ed’s relationship with his mother or one of his best friends (Marv, Ritchie, or Audrey). Drawing on your own relationships, write down at least one piece of advice for Ed on how to improve his relationship with the other person.
    - 2. SHINE: Choose either Cat’s relationship with her brother, Aunt Tildy, her father, or one of her old friends (Patrick, Gwennie, Bailee-Ann, etc.). Drawing on your own relationships, write down at least one piece of advice for Cat on how to improve her relationship with the other person.

## iii. Week 4: OTHER BOOKS/TEXTS

1. IATM: Does the plot, setting, or cast of characters in *I Am the Messenger* remind you of another book? Does it remind you of a movie, TV show, video game, song/music video, poem or play? Write down the “other text,” and write a few words describing the connection.
2. SHINE: Does the plot, setting, or cast of characters in *Shine* remind you of another book? Does it remind you of a movie, TV show, video game, song/music video, poem or play? Write down the “other text,” and write a few words describing the connection.

## iv. Week 5: SOCIETY

1. IATM: Does anything that happened in *I Am the Messenger* remind you of something that has happened, is currently happening, or might happen in the world? In other words, what connections have you made between the plot/setting/characters in this book and something you’ve seen on the news or read about online?
2. SHINE: Does anything that happened in *Shine* remind you of something that has happened, is currently happening, or might happen in the world? In other words, what connections have you made between the plot/setting/characters in this book and something you’ve seen on the news or read about online?

## v. If you use the Star Connection literature circles with another text, use your own teacher expertise to create Quick-Write prompts.

Here are a few guidelines:

1. Develop questions that generate a list of words/phrases, a personal anecdote, or an opinion+rationale.
  2. Connect your questions to the Star Connections (see above).
- d. If *everyone* is obviously finished before the end of time, feel free to stop the timer early.
  - e. Say: **“Feel free to use these notes during Open Discussion. Otherwise, you will have the opportunity to share your response at the end of the literature circle.”**
  - f. When the timer goes off, transition to Open Discussion.

#### IV. Open Discussion

- a. Set the timer for 45 minutes.
- b. Say: **“Now it’s time to discuss what you read this week. Did you like what you read? Were you surprised by what happened? What do you think will happen next? Remember that questions are good; there are no stupid questions. If you get stuck, remember that you have the notes you just wrote down, the back of your bookmark, and the Star Connections sheet. I am only here as a facilitator. If you have a question about the book or anything else, I will answer your questions, but please ask your peers FIRST. Okay, what did you think about this week’s reading?”**
- c. Wait at least five seconds. If no one speaks, then call on a random student and do one of the following:
  - i. **Assign the student(s) a random prompt on the back of the bookmark.**
  - ii. **Ask the student(s) to choose a connection on the Star Connections sheet and elaborate on it.**
- d. Presumably, the students will carry the discussion forward. When the discussion “fizzles out” or becomes clearly off-task (personal discussions are okay, as long as they are at least tangentially related to the text), **ask one of the “rescue prompts.”** (see list)
  - i. **Did you like what you read/what happened?**
  - ii. **Were you surprised by what happened?**
  - iii. **What do you think will happen next?**
- e. Continue to facilitate the meeting until at least 30 minutes have passed. As the discussion winds down, **ask the students to share their Quick-Write responses.** Some students may have already shared, and other students may not wish to share—this is fine.
- f. Other guidelines:
  - i. If twenty minutes have passed and one or more participants have not spoken yet during Open Discussion, do one of the following:
    1. **Assign the student(s) a random prompt on the back of the bookmark.**
    2. **Ask the student(s) to share their Quick-Write response.**
    3. **Ask the student(s) to choose a connection on the Star Connections sheet and elaborate on it.**
    4. Or, if students are on a specific topic and there is a long enough pause in the discussion, say: **“Let’s hear what \_\_\_\_\_ has to say about that.”**

- ii. If one or more students are dominating/controlling the floor to the extent that other students are visibly frustrated and/or not participating, say: “\_\_\_\_, **thank you for sharing so much. Now, let’s hear what \_\_\_\_\_ has to say about that.**”
- iii. If one or more students ask you (the facilitator) a direct question seeking clarification, definition, etc., first, redirect the question back to the entire group: “**What do you all think?**” If no one responds, then you may share your answer to the question.
- iv. When it comes up, explain that issues of symbolism, prediction, and other types of non-concrete comprehension are subjective and that your opinion is no more valid than the opinion of any other participant.
- g. Once the timer goes off or the discussion has come to a close, wrap up the discussion and confirm next week’s reading assignment.
- h. Collect the Quick-Write prompts and cards.

## APPENDIX R

### Fidelity Checklist

#### I. Collaborative Oral Re-Tell (COR)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator confirms that everyone brought their books.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator reads the following script:

This week, we read from page X-X. Let's work together to re-tell what happened. Let's scan our books together to help remember the story. For the next ten minutes, let's focus on the facts of the story; in other words, who did what, and in what order. Later, we will have open discussion where you should share your opinion, make predictions, and make connections. Okay, turn your books to page \_\_\_\_\_. What happened first?"

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator sets the timer for ten minutes.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator allows participants to begin COR.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator waits five seconds before asking, "What happened next?" or offering a plot detail.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator deflects questions from participants to other participants and only answers questions after all participants have been invited to answer.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator encourages participants to save opinions, critical response, predictions, connections for Open Discussion.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator asks, "What happened next?" after five seconds of silence.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator uses "rescue prompts" when participants are reluctant to participate. (see list of rescue prompts)
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator continuously directs participants to look in their books during COR.

## II. Quick-Write (QW)

11. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator sets the timer for five minutes.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator hands out half-sheets of blank card stock.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator reviews the previous weeks' connections (only weeks 3-5)
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator reads the prompt aloud.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator reads the prompt listed in the guidebook.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator hands out hard copies of prompt.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator reminds participants that short answers are encouraged.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator invites participants to share QW responses during Open Discussion.

## III. Open Discussion (OD)

19. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator reads the following script:

Now it's time to discuss what you read this week. Did you like what you read? Were you surprised by what happened? What do you think will happen next? Remember that questions are good; there are no stupid questions. If you get stuck, remember that you have the notes you just wrote down, the back of your bookmark, and the Star connections sheet. I am only here as a facilitator. If you have a question about the book or anything else, I will answer your questions, but please ask your peers FIRST. Okay, what did you think about this week's reading?

20. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator allows participants to begin OD.
21. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator waits five seconds before using a "rescue prompt." (see list of rescue prompts)
22. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator deflects questions from participants to other participants and only answers questions after all participants have been invited to answer.

23. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator explains that issues of symbolism, prediction, and other types of non-concrete comprehension are subjective and that the facilitator's opinion is no more valid than the opinion of any other participant.
24. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator uses one of these strategies if any participant does not participate at least once during open discussion: ask participant a rescue prompt question, ask participant to share QW response, ask participant to answer a question on the bookmark, or ask participant to make one of the Star connections. (self, relationships/friends/family, other texts, society)
25. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator urges others to participate if one student is “dominating/controlling the floor to the extent that other students are visibly frustrated and/or not participating.”
26. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator asks any remaining participants to share their QW responses.
27. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator collects QW prompts and responses.
28. \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitator confirms next week's reading assignment (if applicable).

Total # of Xs \_\_\_\_\_ / Total # of applicable items (28 - # of N/As) \_\_\_\_\_

Fidelity of implementation: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX S

### Informed Consent and Data Collection

**INFORMED CONSENT:** You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Davonna Thomas, PhD student, Literacy Studies, CSU. I hope to learn about how literature circles impact post-secondary developmental reading students. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are registered for READ 1000.

I have 40 spots for my study—20 literature circle participants and 20 book report participants. If more than 40 students express interest in participating, 40 students will be randomly selected for the study. You will be notified of your status (selected-literature circle, selected-book report, or not selected) via email by Friday, February 1.

If you are selected to participate, you will be randomly assigned to one of two groups:

- 1) **Literature circle participant:** If you are assigned to this group, you will meet **once a week for one hour** (in the afternoon/evening) **for five weeks in a row** to talk about your assigned book with a group of your peers. The literature circle meetings will be video recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym such as “Student A.” The recordings will only be used for transcription and analysis purposes. The total amount of time commitment for participants in this group is approximately **6.5 hours** (5 hours of meeting time and 1.5 hours for interviews and post-testing). If you miss no more than one literature circle meeting and complete the oral book report, interview, and post-testing, you will earn **double the pages** for your book.
- 2) **Book report participant:** If you are assigned to this group, you will read your book independently and sign up for a book report with me. Your book report will be video recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. You will sign up for a time to give your book report **outside of class**. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym such as “Student A.” The recordings will only be used for transcription and analysis purposes. The total amount of time commitment for participants in this group is approximately **90 minutes**: book report, interview, and post-testing). If you read the book and complete the oral book report, interview, and post-testing, you will earn a **50% page bonus** for your book.

All participants will be asked to complete the following during a final appointment:

- 1) Book report (10 minutes)
- 2) Interview (30 minutes)
- 3) Reading Assessments (40 minutes)

To be considered for this study, you must meet the following requirements:

- 1) Be at least 18 years of age
- 2) Have availability to meet for one hour a week from February 4 – March 8 on either Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evening (not including Spring Break)

Your scores on the following standardized test scores will be analyzed as part of this study:

- 1) ACT
- 2) COMPASS
- 3) Nelson-Denny Reading Test
- 4) Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing your name below, I plan to disclose portions of the interviews, book reports, assessments, and literature circle discussions, but this data will not be tied to your name or student ID in any way.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Central State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects at Central State University has reviewed and approved the present research.

If you have any questions about this test, I will be happy to answer them. You can reach me at [dmt3g@csmail.csu.edu](mailto:dmt3g@csmail.csu.edu). Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to the CSU Office of Compliance, Ingram Building 011B, 615-494-8918, [complian@csu.edu](mailto:complian@csu.edu).

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

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**YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE.  
 YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO  
 PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.**

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Sign Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**DEMOGRAPHIC DATA: The following data are being collected to help the principal investigator better understand the READ 1000 population:**

Gender:                    male / female

Ethnicity:                \_\_\_\_\_ American Indian or Alaska Native  
                                  \_\_\_\_\_ Asian  
                                  \_\_\_\_\_ Black or African American  
                                  \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic or Latino  
                                  \_\_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
                                  \_\_\_\_\_ White or European American  
                                  \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Learning Disability:    yes / no

\*Note: only circle “yes” if you have obtained paperwork from the CSU Student Services.

English Learner:        yes / no

\*Note: only circle “yes” if English is NOT your native language.

READ 1000 Repeat:     yes / no

\*Note: only circle “yes” if you attempted READ 1000 in a previous semester.

**SCHEDULE AVAILABILITY: Please circle ALL the times you are available to meet weekly** (except for spring break). Note: this will only be applicable if you are assigned to the literature circle group. You will only be assigned to ONE of the times you circle below.

Tuesdays:	2-3 p.m.	3-4 p.m.	6-7 p.m.	7-8 p.m.
Wednesdays:	2-3 p.m.	3-4 p.m.	6-7 p.m.	7-8 p.m.
Thursdays:	2-3 p.m.	3-4 p.m.	6-7 p.m.	7-8 p.m.

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**BOOK PREFERENCE: Directions: Please read the short description of each book. Place a “1” next to your most preferred book, a “2” next to your second most preferred book, “3” next to your third most preferred book, and “4” next to your least preferred book. If you are assigned to the book report group, you will be assigned your top choice. If you are assigned to the literature circle group, every effort will be made to assign you to one of your preferred books.**

\_\_\_\_\_ ***Fearless Jones, by Walter Mosley***

*Fearless Jones* transports the reader to the Los Angeles of the 1950s, a dangerous place and time for a black man. But Paris Minton seems to have beaten the odds. He owns a book store, but the LAPD visit and question him on a regular basis, suspicious that Paris is stealing books. Minton’s life is interrupted one day when a beautiful woman walks into his store. After he is beaten up by the men following her, his bookstore is burned to the ground, he decides that it’s time to track down Fearless Jones, hard-boiled detective. Minton and Jones embark on a wild ride through L.A. This is the first book of an African-American detective series.

\_\_\_\_\_ ***I Am the Messenger*, by Markus Zusak**

Ed Kennedy is an underage cab driver without much of a future. He is hopelessly in love with his best friend, Audrey, and utterly devoted to his coffee-drinking dog, the Doorman. His life is pathetically predictable until he inadvertently stops a bank robbery and begins receiving cryptic playing cards in the mail. The cards instruct Ed to send “messages” to people in his community—they range from heart-warming to life-threatening. *Who is sending the cards? And what will happen to Ed if he doesn’t follow the instructions?*

\_\_\_\_\_ ***Shine*, by Lauren Myracle**

When her best guy friend falls victim to a vicious hate crime, sixteen-year-old Cat sets out to discover who in her small town did it. Cat delves deep into the dark secrets of a small town in the South and finds out how much strength it takes to go against everyone you know in the name of doing what’s right. This book touches on many sensitive topics: poverty, drugs, bullying, and intolerance.

\_\_\_\_\_ ***This Is Not a Test*, Courtney Summers**

Sloan Price is a high school sophomore who has been raised by an abusive father. Her life is a living nightmare. Her only happiness is her older sister, Lily, who protects her and gives her strength. But then Lily runs away, leaving Sloane to deal with the consequences. When the zombie apocalypse strikes, Sloan and others find refuge inside her high school. Inside the school, the survivors try to understand and mourn their loved ones, all while hearing the zombies pounding on the doors. *What do good people do when they are forced to make ruthless decisions in a senseless world? After welcoming death for so long, will Sloan finally decide that she wants to live?* This book is quite thrilling, but it also contains mature language.

## IRB APPROVAL

December 17, 2012  
Davonna Thomas, Jeanne Gilliam Fain  
Department of Literacy Studies  
dmt3g@mtmail.mtsu.edu, Jeanne.Fain@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: "The Impact of Literature Circles on Reading Comprehension for READ 1000 Students"

**Protocol Number: 13-157**

Dear Investigator(s),

The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b) (2). This is because the research being conducted involves the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or public behavior.

You will need to submit an end-of-project report to the Compliance Office upon completion of your research. Complete research means that you have finished collecting data and you are ready to submit your thesis and/or publish your findings. Should you not finish your research within the three (3) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date. Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Your study expires on December 17, 2015.

**Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.**

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to provide a certificate of training to the Office of Compliance.

**If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers and their certificates of training to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.**

Once your research is completed, please send us a copy of the final report questionnaire to the Office of Compliance. This form can be located at [www.mtsu.edu/irb](http://www.mtsu.edu/irb) on the forms page.

Also, all research materials must be retained by the PI or **faculty advisor (if the PI is a student)** for at least three (3) years after study completion. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,  
Andrew W. Jones  
Graduate Assistant  
Compliance Office  
615-494-8918  
Compliance@mtsu.edu