

5-2016

# How Multicultural Literature Effects African American Students' Literary Responses

Samantha L. Davis

Saint John Fisher College, samanthadavis00774@yahoo.com

## [How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?](#)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education\\_ETD\\_masters](http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters)

---

### Recommended Citation

Davis, Samantha L., "How Multicultural Literature Effects African American Students' Literary Responses" (2016). *Education Masters*. Paper 329.

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit <http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations>.

This document is posted at [http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education\\_ETD\\_masters/329](http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/329) and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact [fisherpub@sjfc.edu](mailto:fisherpub@sjfc.edu).

---

# How Multicultural Literature Effects African American Students' Literary Responses

**Abstract**

This study questions the impact of multicultural literature on reader responses. Research declares students are learning from a Eurocentric curriculum cultivated by canonical literature that many African American students do not relate to or understand. Six African American students constructed literary responses and focus group discussions after exposure to several multicultural genres in contrast to mainstream genres exposing the inability to interpret mainstream literature. The cultural disconnect from mainstream literature reinforced how significant cultural identification is for effective literacy development. Cultural validation is acknowledged based on the literature's cultural relevance activating similar sociocultural experiences to help foster literary interpretations.

**Document Type**

Thesis

**Degree Name**

MS in Literacy Education

**Department**

Education

**First Supervisor**

Joellen Maples

Evaluating the Effect of Multicultural Literature on African American Students' Literary Responses

By:  
Samantha Davis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree:  
M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by:  
Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Education  
St. John Fisher College

May 2016

**Abstract**

This study questions the impact of multicultural literature on reader responses. Research declares students are learning from a Eurocentric curriculum cultivated by canonical literature that many African American students do not relate to or understand. Six African American students constructed literary responses and focus group discussions after exposure to several multicultural genres in contrast to mainstream genres exposing the inability to interpret mainstream literature. The cultural disconnect from mainstream literature reinforced how significant cultural identification is for effective literacy development. Cultural validation is acknowledged based on the literature's cultural relevance activating similar sociocultural experiences to help foster literary interpretations.

### **Evaluating the Impact of Multicultural Texts on African American Students' Literary Responses**

The societal construction of racial and cultural dichotomies has negatively separated white and black culture into two antagonistic groups suffering from their own racial history that has overtly redistributed power to mainstream society establishing dominance and white privilege. Subsequently, these dichotomies have unfortunately transferred over to education- forming a divided educational environment that's cultivated by mainstream culture; consequently, African American students, suffer academically especially in literacy due to this cultural disconnection. Ladson-Billings (2006) acknowledges and attempts to evaluate the deficiency of literacy skills of African American students that inadvertently confirms the literary disparity between white and black students, labeled as the "achievement gap" (p.3). This achievement gap works to reveal the academic danger of African American students as the acquisition of literacy is culturally obstructed. In other words, when black students are in classroom settings that utilizes mainstream literature to practice or enforce literacy skills, they face a cultural disconnection that blocks their ability to use their own culture or socially based experiences to construct meaning of the content- further hindering their literacy skills (simply due to their inability to culturally relate to the content not because students are inadequate of reading and writing).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015), African American students scored lower than any other ethnic group on a reading assessment measuring reading abilities. This academic achievement gap in conjunction with the NAEP reading assessments scores indicate that African American students are unable to develop literacy as other cultures do. This finding proves that there's an indefinite educational issue

that may be inadvertently prohibiting the reader responses of African American students. There's this cultural unfamiliarity within mainstream literature used to teach literacy in classrooms that ultimately hinders reader responses for blacks while simultaneously, initiating distant learning and negatively affecting their academic achievement. According to Flowers (2003), "there's a need for teachers to create culturally relevant literacy experiences" p. 58. This urgency for cultural pedagogy suggests that a Eurocentric curriculum of mainstream society may not be the best approach to instructing literacy to a diverse classroom because it is not equally understood by everyone.

It is this same social power in education that initiated an achievement gap resulting in the failure and plight of African American students. In other words, it doesn't help, motivate, develop relationships, or encourage student learning when culturally diverse students question the authenticity of content due to certain social and racial complexities they encounter by their educators. For example, experiencing being penalized, labeled, or considered destined to fail from the subjugation of an inferior culture is damaging to the student and their academic performance. Research declares that many white teachers are not only unwilling to teach African American students but may also encompass negative misconceptions or low expectations (accepting failure or students to become withdrawn) simply due to the lack of necessary cultural training to fairly teach the realities and complexities of other cultures (Williams, 2006). When classrooms function out of a Eurocentric curriculum enforcing mainstream learning, perspectives, and materials, then black students become bored due to the cultural disconnect and disengagement. According to Jackson (2005), African American students are simply stuck as they:

sit in classrooms waiting for opportunities that elicit their attention, creativity, and potential...waiting for a place in society but instead, misperceptions about their race and culture dominant the representation of their actual cultural identity and mainstream instruction takes place instead of cultural pedagogy. (p.1)

The growing trends of increasingly diverse classrooms, calls for a transformation of literacy instruction since the literacy skills of culturally diverse students are delayed due to an educational system that's fostered by mainstream society. As a result, majority of the literature, the teachers, the educational curriculum, and the overall student learning are perpetuated and enforced through the lens of mainstream society.

When African American students encounter reading canonical texts, they're unable to grasp an understanding since the literature pertains to a culture that radically differs from their own in every way. Clark (2003) discusses how cultures vary in social experiences, historical contexts, values, beliefs, and perceptions; as a result, students of ethnically diverse backgrounds read texts that prohibits connections, interpretations, and understandings as their "sense of identity their white counter parts disables them to respond to a text culturally" (p.97). Therefore, in order to learn in this educational mainstream system, African Americans can either encounter a cultural disconnect (leading to academic failures) or attempt to just adopt a mainstream perspective by marginalizing their identity just to understand the literature. This cultural omission often involves African American students to struggle with reader responses as they may undergo a lack of exposure to their own culture as well as cultures of others. However, the incorporation of multicultural literature can offer a chance to integrate different cultures into the classroom.

The use of multicultural literature can impact the development of literacy as it serves a range of different purposes; It functions as a cultural resource that transmits info, acknowledges, and reflects culture. The integration of multicultural literature can instantly diffuse negative feelings such rejection, feeling neglected, devalued, or even incompetent. This type of literature is purposely used for cultural purposes but more importantly, the cultural relevance stimulates a chance for African American students and any other students of diverse cultures to incorporate their socio-cultural experiences to advance their comprehension instead of contesting to this serious lack of literary abilities including constructing literary responses. According to Brooks and Browne (2012), multicultural literature is defined as a type of literature that encompasses authentic, literary experiences that awakens readers' cultural consciousness by dispelling stereotypes, questioning and/or problematizing cultural experiences, broadening cultural perspectives to encompass acceptance, and it may also foster similar cultural experiences and connections. Consequently, in this research action project, I wanted to assess whether or not multicultural texts would even have an impact or even a chance at improving African American students' literacy skills.

For the purpose of this study, I used multicultural materials in contrast to canonical literature and mainstream genres to see the actual effect on African American students' reader responses. I selectively choose certain urban fiction, Hip-Hop lyrics, slam poetry, and even black pop culture TV shows (that depicted black cultural experiences) to assess the true effect of cultural relevance and familiarity on the construction of reader responses (in contrast to canonical literature, Hip-Hop by white artists, poetry by white artists, and white pop culture TV shows that depicts mainstream lifestyles). By providing students with literacy journals and permitting free writing (including the freedom to incorporate their own language- black

vernacular), I had students construct a response of each genre discussing their initial thoughts, any similar experiences, feelings, problems, subliminal messages conveying racial or cultural messages. Then students were asked to assess the impact of cultural relevance and how it affects their learning. In my study, I found that all students unanimously agreed that the familiarity of the cultural material fosters insight and understanding because it operates within their cultural context and better yet, it also increases motivation and engagement as it partakes in interests out of their daily lives. The implications of this study reveal the significance of cultural sensitivity in conjunction with cultural pedagogical instruction to truly validate student's cultures and identities. Furthermore, in addition to integrating multicultural materials to awaken reader responses through cultural relevance, it's more important for educators to dispel misconceptions about black students and stop accepting failure or setting such low expectations. Ethnically diverse students would be more willing to gain some sort of perception and appreciation of the cultural literature considering that they may have undergone similar experiences that can ground their comprehension because they're simply tired of feeling disconnected, confused, or unable to understand or relate to mainstream content.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Literacy is a multidimensional, complicated ongoing process that is contingent on constructing and managing interpretations through our everyday social, historical, political, and cultural practices. According to Kucer (2014), "becoming or being literate means learning to effectively, efficiently, and simultaneously control the linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental dimensions of written language in a transactive fashion" (p.5). The

complexity of this cognitive process proves that if literacy is not instructed effectively, then it will obstruct development. The lack of reader responses for African American students attests to the existence of ineffective instructional practices in an educational system that needs to incorporate multicultural literature instead of the steady use of mainstream literature (as it clearly prohibits African American students from using their socially based experiences as an additional resource of understanding due to different cultural experiences) (Clark, 2003). The fact that literacy functions as a social practice itself proves the hardship culturally diverse students face when developing literacy because there's no cross-cultural references to cultural experiences (besides mainstream culture assisting only students of white culture).

The reader responses of African American students can be paradoxically impeded by their own culture due to the racial ideologies of their classroom teachers. Unfortunately, the cultural and racial dichotomies led to culturally different students being stigmatized because of their inferiority. For instance, according to the destructive "culture as disability" theory, this theory assumes that "those who are different from perceived norms are missing something, that is their doing, that they are locked out for a reason, that they are in fact, in reality, disabled" (McDermott and Vareene, 1995, p.324). This theory is suggesting that black culture has no ability or use-- literally to the point that the entire culture is suffering from inadequacy and therefore is simply labeled as disabled. This theory structured white culture as the norm and crafted cultural differences as suffering from a disease or disability. Anyone that was black carried this stigma and black culture was instinctively manifesting and assigning "modes of behavior" as "individuals who are ill" and this disability label was a result of African Americans "learning disabilities and illiteracy" (McDermott & Vareene, 1995, p.327). These ideologies are a product of white power and privilege as these cultural benefits

coach whites to think this way due to their supremacy. This type of thinking encompasses negative misconceptions about African Americans as either inadequate, unwilling, and/or even “ill” or disabled. This theory aimed to eradicate the black culture by implementing such a powerful, stigmatized, and provocative label.

As a result, cultural theories such as “culture as disability” maintained oppression and increased racial ideologies that impact instruction to this day. For instance, these cultural theories validating mainstream dominance influences how teachers instruct students, their pedagogical approaches, and whether or not they will incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy but with a deficit mindset of culture, this often leads to a cultural rejection that eventually damages the identity of the student and disables them. For example, they may omit and/or reject African American culture and as a result, this cultural rejection truly affects the cultural identity of the student and forces them to either transform, question themselves, lose their identity, or assimilate and marginalize in hopes of gaining a “more accepted” identity. This superficial educational curriculum does not embrace any other cultural contexts besides the dominant. It continues to embrace the utilization of the well-known, respected, white texts generated from the “literary canon”, continuing to employ instruction through a Eurocentric lens. It is theories like these, mindsets, racial ideologies, and cultural dichotomies and continued use of the mainstream culture that perpetuates academic disparities known as the “achievement gap” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Culture is constantly being devalued instead of being integrated with the use of multicultural literature despite the ever increasing demand of diverse classrooms and the detrimental role cultural relevance plays on impacting positive learning.

### **Research Question**

Given how culture is often used as a framework to make interpretations then, integrating multicultural materials would increase the cultural relevance that stimulates connections and sociocultural experiences that are generally used to facilitate comprehension. For this action research project I ask, what is the impact of multicultural literature to see how it influences literary interpretations?

### **Literature Review**

This cultural dilemma seeks the validation and effectiveness of multicultural literature on student learning; especially since mainstream texts are still consistently being applied in diverse settings to instruct and develop literacy skills. However, mainstream texts only negatively affect the reader responses of African American (or culturally/ ethnically/ linguistically diverse students) by hindering their opportunities to use their own culture for literacy interpretation. In addition, the type of literature that's selected for literary analysis impacts the students' interest, motivation, and performance. As a result, multicultural literature has been argued to be a powerful instructional tool in improving literary development; especially when teaching African American students.

In the following literature review, multicultural literature is researched and examined to analyze its role in African American's reader responses in three themes: cultural pedagogy and implications affects student learning, the significance of culture in student learning, and the overall lack of knowledge on implementing multicultural literature and teaching African Americans. The first theme discusses the impact of positive and negative cultural practices and how they can overtly challenge or affirm cultural associations and misconceptions.

Positive cultural implications confirm cultural differences and embraces diversity but negative implications reinforce mainstream culture by omitting the inclusion of African American culture in an effort to devalue the culture and hinder student achievement. The second theme discusses the significance of culture and how it impacts students reading comprehension since scholars rely on individual interpretation of books to make literary understandings.

Prioritizing culture as a pedagogical approach also impacts a student's sense of identity. The way culture is projected through literature and academics- determines how students construct, transform, or lose self-identities (depending on whether or not their culture is depicted in a positive or negative light). Lastly, the effectiveness of utilizing multicultural literature as a technique to address culture is also explored in this section. The third theme depicts the lack of knowledge educators need to adequately implement multicultural literature. With increasing demographics, studies also question the current curriculum in attempts of actually reflecting the social diversification in class and repositioning education to a more diverse approach instead of the current mainstream curriculum (that is argued to be constructed through a Eurocentric lens and therefore needs to be reconstructed a more diverse approach). In addition to reconstructing culture in education, there's a discussion for educators to achieve a knowledge base on cultures other than their own so that they may step out of their comfort zone and effectively teach African American students.

### **Cultural Pedagogy and Implications Affects Student Learning**

Teachers that enforce positive cultural implications celebrate diversity not marginalization and their goal is to ultimately achieve equality and diversity comfortably in class. Educators that possess positive cultural implications supports culturally diverse students and perspectives and in return, they will experience positive relationships with their students

because of their willingness to establish strong, supportive relationships that incorporate black culture, history, and ideas into their curricula (Guiffrida, 2005). Conveying a message of cultural acceptance will help to push students to new limits as they begin to feel instrumental in their own success due to their new cultural empowerment. In addition, McCullough (2007) also discusses how the inclusion of culture during literacy instruction needs to access, identify, enhance, and refine students' relevant cultural knowledge so that they are able to achieve multiple world views to transform and honor diverse backgrounds and perspectives on diversity. Positive cultural implications positions cultural knowledge as an integral factor to transform student perceptions on inclusion, equity, and diversity; therefore, it's essential to achieve positive perceptions of diversity so that students are able to parallel the actual diversity of not just their class but the actual demographics of this world. Haddix and Price-Dennis (2013) also agrees in cultural reformation with the incorporation of a culturally relevant pedagogy that utilizes the linguistic and cultural differences in class as a conceptual framework to influence shared inquires to a more diverse acceptance instead of rejecting cultural and linguistic differences that are different than mainstream. If students' cultures are not utilized, then they are simply ignored. Once students' cultures are abandoned or ignored, then this cultural rejection only reinforces mainstream culture as valid.

This dismissal of cultures solidifies the use of the dominant curriculum that only embraces the dominant culture instead of validating non-dominating cultures which is paradoxically redistributing power and maintaining oppression while marginalizing non-dominant students. The use of the dominant curriculum can influence an educator's cultural implications in a negative way if they adopt deficit mindsets, have a negative outlook on teaching non-dominant groups, and end up reinforcing negative stereotypes affiliated with the

culture (Costner, Daniels, & Clark, 2010). These negative outlooks and misconceptions on teaching African American students can be unconsciously reflected through their teaching; for instance, their Eurocentric preference influences their choices of academic materials, selection of texts, and eliminates any cultural pedagogy (unless it's of the dominant culture). According to Hill (2014), when educators apply negative cultural implications it is because many teachers "expressed concerns about urban students' behavioral issues and lack of achievement" (p. 319). These concerns and unwillingness to teach African American students are a direct result of the negative associations and stereotypes society assigns to the African American culture. Referring back to the study of Clark, Costner, and Daniels (2010), their research showed that faculty views teaching African American students as an "undesirable task" and find themselves less willing to acknowledge their race, or any historical, social, political aspects of black culture in an attempt to assimilate African Americans (especially their cultural behavior) due to their Eurocentric perspectives and dysconsciousness racism (where it is believed that white norms and privileges are needed to improve the intellect of an African Americans). If teachers deny diversity and reject non-dominant cultural identities, then they have no intentions on embracing other cultures in an attempt to maintain mainstream dominance. This denial and rejection negatively impacts students' perceptions on diversity, academic achievements, and most importantly, suggests that their cultural identities are either non-existent or insignificant.

The negative misconceptions, stereotypes, and labels tagged to African American culture results in cultural insensitivity rather than direct recognition as a distinct cultural group which can obscure student achievement. A popular example of this cultural insensitivity is the rejection of linguistic diversity. African American students speak a

variation of English that is often marginalized because “dominant society do not acknowledge this form of English as valid” since it opposes and contradicts Standard English to teachers who only seek to promote standard English (Williams, 2016, p.347). Students with varying linguistic backgrounds often struggle in mainstream school settings because of the different linguistic settings that limit words and the use of their home language. Lovelace and Stewart (2009) confirm Williams research through a study of African American vocabulary instruction which revealed that linguistically diverse students are at risk for academic achievement because “their word meanings may be incongruent with those of the school environment” resulting in conflict between the use of their home language and classroom expectations but educators tend to deny that interaction which in return hinders students’ abilities to learn or understand new words (p.169). Rejecting linguistic diversity in classroom settings is a way of enforcing mainstream discourse but it’s not the only means for a teacher to obstruct learning. Costner, Daniels, and Clark (2010) add that:

African American students at every educational level from elementary to postsecondary are forced to matriculate in a system where the faculty members have low expectations...faculty are reluctant to see African American students as able as their White counterparts. Furthermore, research indicates that academia does not express positive attitudes toward teaching African American students, and many of the assumptions, values, and practices of people and institutions hinder the learning of people of color. (p.41)

The more educators refuse to acknowledge cultural sensitivity, the more students struggle academically. When teachers view blacks as inadequate, they establish low expectations. Consequently, black students are barely required or pushed to meet those minimal

expectations rather than excelling academically and even if they wanted to, the lack of cultural sensitivity demolished any opportunities for building relationships with their teachers due to their cultural rejection. This lack of cultural acceptance obstructs student learning and it eliminates the opportunity for students and faculty to foster supportive relationships which hinders their learning even more as interactions barely exist.

As teachers engage in such negative cultural practices, students don't only lose the desire to learn, but for any student to succeed, they will need support; however, relationships don't exist with such negative pedagogical approaches. Guiffrida (2015) states: "African American students perceived White faculty as unapproachable because of their stereotypical comments, insensitivity to African American culture, and generalizations of students" (p.702). These practices happen in many traditional classrooms and these negative cultural implications can result in a loss of relationship among the student and instructor but in addition to that, the direct cultural rejection of students' cultural identities prohibits students from feeling safe and supported. Students internalize this rejection and teachers unfortunately, use this cultural rejection as a way to reposition students for future assimilation or marginalization to become more like the dominant culture instead of their own (Jackson, 2005). Diminishing cultural identities only perpetuates the learning gap as students lose motivation with the loss of their cultural identity once they are rejected, ignored, or marginalized. Then students suddenly begin to feel insignificant without any trust or respect for the facilitator and when teachers deny culture and reject linguistic diversity, learning for culturally diverse students is negatively impacted and academic achievement is obstructed as they begin to lose their identity and self-confidence (Perkins & Cooter, 2005). It is up to the educator to foster relationships in class and gain students' trust so that they can excel

academically so that students won't have to feel that their teacher is unapproachable due to their cultural insensitivity. If educators stop rejecting other cultures in hopes of assimilating students, then this loss of relationships, support, and academic achievement for African American students is finally supported by the educator.

Instead of educators ensuring that African American culture is celebrated and acknowledged, it is more so omitted and avoided through teaching within a Eurocentric framework. It's rare for African American culture to be of value. A partial explanation for this cultural exemption is due to the illusion of inclusion— "viewing children of color through the lens of European American children, and thereby, failing to see the strengths and beauty that they bring, or build on this largely untapped source of power" (Boutte & Strickland, 2008, p.131). In order to reverse this negative trend, it's imperative to extend the curriculum with more promising cultural material; otherwise, this educational inequity shortchanges African American students and reinforces how black culture is rarely examined due to its negative associations. Williams (2016) emphasizes how African American students are not only ignored culturally but the culture itself is ignored — while black students are being labeled as "unintelligent", aspects of black culture are instantly devalued as either "nonstandard" or "limited"; such as, methods of communication where Black vernacular is discredited as inadequate (p.347). It becomes a problem when it becomes a trend—African American students don't only face rejection from their cultural identity but their entire culture begins to get labeled as different aspects of their culture is overtly corrected, dismissed, or negatively labeled.

Studies discuss how African American students face cultural rejection because of their identity as a black student but it's more than their identity being rejected; aspects of their

entire culture is instantly devalued simply because it is associated with black culture (far more than just the varied English that African Americans use). For example, Jenkins (2011) used hip-hop as an example of mainstream society devaluing an important aspect of black culture— Hip-Hop was labeled as “poor influences” and “destructive to society” but Jenkins suggests that the authenticity of rap lyrics conquers and outweighs the negatives because through his study, Hip-Hop continues to offer critical and political insight into the “lived realities of urban poverty, street-level politics of struggle, and survival” offered by black men to other black students and cultures (p. 42). Hip Hop lyrics are simply verbal stories of black cultural experiences; however due to certain lyrical content, the intellect behind hip-hop is barely used as effective, cultural literature for students despite its rich literary analysis, content, messages, and instant student engagement that is activated from using something they relate to and use themselves every day. In addition to Jenkins’ study (2011), Petchauer (2015) also acknowledges the use of Hip-Hop as an instructional tool of culturally relevant pedagogy as it could function as both oppressive and empowering due to the misrepresentations that’s negatively affiliated with Hip-Hop but the grounded expressions doesn’t only encompass socio-historical and political content— they also function as cultural capital that elicits powerful emotions and significant meanings that could help scaffold analytical skills while affirming cultural identity. Despite society’s attempts at discrediting Hip-Hop, some educators still find it as a critical piece of multicultural literature to continue to improve student learning, critical thinking, and literary skills once the embedded messages are applied to a larger context. Lassiter (2015) would agree with both Jenkins (2011) and Petchauer (2015) about the cultural and literary value of Hip-Hop as he confirms that Hip-Hop is common denominator among students when his study demonstrated the literary

abilities flourishing from the plethora of shared connections; thus, resulting in students raising discussions of historical, political, and social issues embraced by Hip-Hop because it's simply a type of literature that resonates with them. It's refreshing that some teachers employ an Afrocentric lens to instruction instead of constantly promoting only Eurocentric views.

Despite the controversy surrounding Hip-Hop's educational implications, it still represents a distinct subset of black culture due to the messages, perspectives, and expressions; as a result, Hip-Hop is constantly challenged as a discourse of critical thought and critical literacy yet it is proven as a valid cultural approach to celebrate and acknowledge African American culture while simultaneously fashioning literary skills and validating student's cultural identities.

### **The Integral Role of Culture in Student Learning**

If teachers were aware of the pivotal role culture plays in learning, interpreting meaning, and developing identities, then a lot of pedagogical approaches would be culturally relevant. Culture enables literary interpretations as students position themselves culturally based on the roles, perspectives conveyed by the literature and once these feelings are internalized then students draw upon their own story as a method of constructing meaning (Brooks & Browne, 2012). Culture is prioritized as a cultural relevant pedagogical approach that aims to improve literary interpretations due to culture's influence on the reading process. In addition to Brooks and Browne's finding of the significance of culture on the reading process, Lovelace & Stewart (2009) confirms the same finding by stating: "these studies suggest that children's sociocultural experiences provide them with a foundation for interpretations of texts, which enables them to make connections to real-life experiences and activate background knowledge facilitating greater comprehension" (p.170). Interpreting story lines requires a sense of ownership and identification within a text in order to gain meaning

because culture facilitates as groundwork to foster meaning. Lee (1995) would agree with both studies but called these cultural markers used for constructing meaning as cognitive apprenticeships that again, validates culture as an important variable influencing knowledge base for interpreting texts and as a result, these cognitive apprenticeships is a way how “culture provides a matrix through which meaning is created and negotiated” (p.618). All three studies confirmed how essential the role of culture is to comprehending texts. Literature offers the readers to adopt a role they can identify with so that they may position themselves to reflect upon their world and utilize similar experiences as contexts for understanding the reading.

In order to assess the true cultural impact on student learning, it’s critical to understand how culture doesn’t only play a role in the reading process but it has an additional role: constructing cultural identities. Students encounter self-identity issues as this period of time involves constructing, exploring, and/or even transforming self-identities depending on their conceptions of identity reflected in literature, classroom acceptance, and academic settings (McCullugh, 2013). Cultural identities can either be constructive or destructive depending on how culture is addressed and its purpose. For instance, according to Boston and Baxley (2016), negative cultural depictions can destruct a cultural identity by either experiencing a loss of voice, loss of self-confidence, and/or a loss of identity that ends up suppressed— compelling the student’s identity to conform to limited roles; on the other hand, positive depictions and cultural acceptance fosters cultural competence into cultural affirmation and a positive self-identity. The way culture is presented and portrayed is the same way students will feel about themselves.

Due to the influence of literature and academics on a student's cultural identity, it's important to be aware of how things can be paradoxically portrayed. Brooks and Browne (2012) suggest literature has a binary impact on identity formation depending on the content of the literature and the cultural representations expressed in the book because they can either serve as explicit or subliminal influences on constructing positive and negative cultural identities. For instance, an explicit, negative, cultural influence on identity would be if a student considers the author's comical reference to a cultural stereotype as offensive even though it was used for humor. This comical reference depicting a cultural stereotype would count as a negative cultural identity that's expressed in the book but cultural representations vary according to the student's interpretation of the literature and its content. Similarly, Chandhri and Teale (2013) also agree that cultural depictions in books influence identities but adds it can furthermore either challenge or affirm ideological manifestations of racism also. Literature conveys messages and depictions but the manner in which it does can be explicit and intentional to confirm the dominance of mainstream culture or subliminal and concealed to stimulate critical thinking. Koss (2014) found the same in her research and confirms again that identities are reflected in literature affecting their conceptualization of self and belonging; however, she discusses an additional impact from the literature as the text can either serve as "mirrors" or "windows" to either see their own identity or the lives of others (p.32). Culturally conscious literature can evoke positive or negative self-identities depending on the content because it has the control of producing, constructing, and reinforcing identities. Literature is essential in cultural affirmation. However, studies show that these depictions of race and culture serve as insight into the ideological and cultural awareness; as a result, the role of

culture in literature constructs a student's perception of culture and their identity through the literary portrayals and representations.

Multicultural literature is the type of literature used to reach cultural backgrounds. This type of literature is reflective of diverse, urban, ethnic, multicultural perspectives and therefore can have a dualistic approach to constructing identities. For example, multicultural literature becomes an issue when writers of a different race or ethnicity try to explore the experiences of another race and depict that culture according to their own socially constructed interpretations (Boston & Baxley, 2007). Authenticity is no longer present when multicultural stories present an inside view of a culture that's different from the author's. Even though it may have good intentions that aims to share cultural knowledge, it can be paradoxically be influenced by cultural stereotypes and associations tagged to that culture. Socially constructed stereotypes impact the authenticity of these texts because some stories ironically reinforce stereotypes while others try to dispel them. Multicultural literature aims to provide cultural perceptions to increase awareness and/or share connections with readers; however, the context and content of the book can be supported by stereotypes if the author is not a part of that group. Chaudhry and Teale (2013) confirm this finding during their study and suggests these "books show how prejudice operates in subtle ways, like neglect, isolation, and invisibility" since their examination of multicultural literature showed depictions of negative trends and representations. For example, the character's environments are in urban contexts with negative family structures of either being dead, absent, or uninvolved, socioeconomic statuses are predominantly struggling, and the racial context of the characters are either disconnected from others around them or in isolation. These negative patterns and features of non-white characters can convey a message that life is a negative experience if it's

not a part of the dominant and privileged. In addition to Chaundhri and Teale's suggestion, Koss (2015) agrees with multicultural literature perpetuating stereotypes of African American characters and questions the messages being conveyed and suggests that:

Results of this study show that children who interact with current picture books predominantly see White faces and receive the message that, according to scholars of CRT, to be White is to be better. Finding books depicting non-white characters, particularly books depicting culturally specific elements, is rare and although there are books depicting culturally neutral and generic characters, they are often seen in the background and as support for the primarily white characters. This lack of titles that feature ethnically diverse characters tells non-white children that they do not matter. (p.37)

Both studies show that multicultural literature can have the opposite effect of affirming cultural identities and instead, reinforce negative stereotypes that are associated with that culture which can simultaneously affect their cultural competence, conceptualization, and self-belonging. This negative reinforcement can be an issue to students if educators lack knowledge of how to select literature that's appropriate. Therefore, it's essential for teachers' cultural knowledge to consist of more than just their own, so that they can pick up on negative cultural depictions or implications. In other words, an educator's ideological manifestations of ethnicities and stereotypes impacts their racial constructions and knowledge base of understanding the impact of their literature, texts, and activities that could depict and reinforce stereotypes.

On the other hand, multicultural literature attempts to examine culture and it has its cultural benefits as well. According to Dressel (2005), multicultural literature offers students a

frame reference of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective and it is used for both dominant cultures and non-dominant cultures to achieve cultural insight in hopes of valuing diversity as a natural aspect of society. There are countless benefits of integrating multicultural literature. It conveys a story through a minority voice to express and addresses authentic, cultural content through issues of racial identity, freedom, historical aspects, or socio cultural experiences. According to Boston and Baxley (2007), multicultural literature texts:

Help foster positive images and promote literacy by offering readers a literary experience that presents an authentic, inside view of culture. Students who share the author's cultural identity may gain insights about themselves, their families, and their communities and discover the value of their own experiences. (p.564)

Multicultural literature helps to confirm cultural identities and construct positive self-identities. It functions as a cultural resource that transmits info, acknowledges, and reflects culture by being either socially conscious or culturally conscious. As a reader internalizes this as an authentic literary experience, it allows students to position themselves for new perspectives to foster connections with the social and textual themes that break, question, or broaden their cultural perspectives through a positive literary transaction (Brooks & Browne, 2012). As multicultural literature is used to convey cultural messages and values about society, it also functions to explore diversity. According to Koss (2015), multicultural literature influences self-awareness “as they identify with not only their own culture but also cultures of others promoting discussions of diversity” and this positive identification of self affirms their cultural identity and belonging instead of feeling marginalized (p.32). Studies reveal that this type of literature improves cultural instruction and reader responses. Reading

comprehension improves due to the cultural relevance and there's also a positive influence on self-identities with the affirmation of authentic sociocultural experiences.

### **Educators Lack Knowledge on Multicultural Literature and Cultural Teaching**

Teachers are unaware of the significant role of multiculturalism in education and have little understanding of the impact of their personal beliefs; therefore, it's imperative to understand multicultural literature and how it can be embedded into diversity pedagogy. Iwai (2013) explored perceptions of pre service teachers' awareness of multicultural literature and results demonstrated a lack of exposure to multicultural literature but responded positively toward learning about these books and considered them as "key tools for children to foster children's awareness of diversity while developing respect and tolerance toward cultural differences and planned to utilize them in their future classrooms" (p.194). If teachers continue to lack a knowledge base on culture, then cultural biases or racial ideologies are still influencing their pedagogy but embedding multicultural education is providing all students with equal opportunities to learn. Boston and Baxley (2007) suggest that improvements in cultural education and literacy begins with the implementation of multicultural literature in the classroom because this pioneering literature prioritizes in releasing authentic, cultural practices and expressing accurate depictions of minority experiences that provides students a framework to explore race relations, social injustices, political, social, and historical movements to learn and affirm other cultures besides the mainstream. Students need this avenue to explore their literacy skills by addressing them through effective multicultural literature. Perkins and Cooter (2005) agree to the inclusion of multicultural literature as a solution to solve literacy issues for African American students and in terms of his evidence-based research, he emphasizes how students benefit from rich exposure of multicultural

literature in a variety of genres while also requiring deep training for teachers on how to correctly implement well researched teaching practices to promote effective practice of multicultural literature. Effective use of multicultural literature requires a knowledge base to select literature that responds best to the students as well as a knowledge base on their cultural identity so that literary instruction can be influenced by cultural relevance.

Although multicultural literature holds great potential for transforming cultural instructional methods for pre and in service teachers in diverse settings, training and knowledge on cultural pedagogy is essential in utilizing multicultural literature in class because it can be ineffective if it is not immersed and selected properly. The goal is to use multicultural literature as a cultural resource to expose students to their own reality and the reality of others. Haddix and Dennis (2013) address this lack of knowledge and state, “teacher education programs are underprepared to address these cultural and linguistic disconnects...teachers must be trained to employ culturally responsive pedagogies that are congruent with the cultural and linguistic identities of the class” (p.247-248). Students of culturally diverse backgrounds wouldn’t benefit from multicultural literature if only some cultures were acknowledged and others weren’t. Leaving out specific cultures would only reinforce the dominance of other cultures; therefore, multicultural texts could be integrated to have each culture positively identified and affirmed. Dressel (2005) suggests that cultural teaching starts with addressing any racial ideologies and using critical literacy theories to foster critical thinking of cultures. Teachers enter the workforce unprepared to address cultures and therefore struggle with facilitating culturally relevant pedagogy because multicultural literature helps cultural pedagogical instruction but it can also serve to show that social problems exist as its reflected through experiences portrayed in these texts; therefore,

teachers are losing valuable teaching lessons on critical literacy if they are unaware of how to embed it and apply it to a larger context.

Theoretically, multicultural literature is often linked to critical literacy theory because it offers experiences that can be problematized to reflect sociocultural issues in society. Hill (2014) utilized culturally relevant texts, critical literacy, and integrated students' experiences into the curriculum to construct meaning of controversial topics. Her case study found students actively addressing and discussing what they did not understand through critical thinking on these text sets that conveyed prejudice messages. That's the paradox of multicultural literature, if it is not properly selected for your academic purpose, then texts can often have negative cultural implications; which reinforces the need for teachers to gain the ability to analyze the social and cultural construction of multicultural literature (including any subliminal or intentional messages conveyed through multicultural literature). According to Gray, (2009) there's a big difference when literature is written by an African American writer and includes African American characters and cultural experiences versus a multicultural text that's written by a white author projecting insight on African American culture; therefore, "realism was the common thread that tied the students' together...but surveys indicate failure of teachers being able to properly select a text matching the criteria of the students and the teacher" (479). Selecting proper texts again is imperative for facilitating multicultural education. If teachers are struggling with incorporating multicultural literature, multicultural education, and culturally relevant pedagogical instruction, then training and preparation must involve learning pedagogies that respect and honor the diverse backgrounds and histories of the students they will have in their classroom. Siwatu, Frazier, Osaghae, and Starker (2011) took a look at what teachers aren't prepared for and suggested that preservice teachers could

benefit from culturally responsive teaching, ensuring that field experiences are carefully structured to entail enough exposure and field experience in classrooms with African American students, engaging in authentic learning activities, and training in teaching self-efficacy. Improving training, preparation, exposure, knowledge of culture and cultural resources as well as adequate experience with diverse populations with the elimination of racial ideologies are all attempts from studies to eliminate this cultural gap and disconnection. The lack of experience teaching different cultures in conjunction with the lack of knowledge of how to incorporate cultural relevant pedagogy could always be addressed using a multicultural approach to education.

Multicultural movements and cultural pedagogy plans to prioritize culture and transform the current curriculum from Eurocentric to social diversification. In order to do this correctly, Boutte and Strickland (2008) critique the ineffectiveness of the current curriculum's lack of culturally relevant teaching and adds that multicultural education implementation requires new guidelines for teachers:

CEEEAAS (state center that works with teachers on effective education of African American students) focusing on now helping teachers develop instruction which uses students' cultures and strengths (cultural capital) as a bridge to success in school achievement. Although there are certain tenets that teachers follow, culturally relevant pedagogy is not prescribed and there is not a series of steps that teachers can follow or a typical recipe for being effective with African American students or any other ethnic or cultural group. Whereas CEEEAAS model teachers' instructional styles and they vary widely from conventional, to progressive. Culturally relevant teachers follow a three-prong framework: start by building on students' strengths or cultural

backgrounds; teach the necessary skills or standards in an engaging manner; and expand the lesson beyond students' current worldview to a global level. (p.132)

Teachers fail to celebrate diversity and this disconnect among the significance of establishing reflective and conscientious world views begins with a lack of knowledge on how important it is to use a cultural approach; secondly, this need for redressing instructional styles to a more cultural approach begins with new training for teachers. Traditionally, remedies for educational problems are typically directed privately toward the treatment of students rather than the training of the staff; however, Costner, Daniels, and Clark (2010) state, "the significance of this research is that it shifts the focus from the traditional "fixing the student" approach to an approach that focuses on "fixing the teacher" beginning with recognizing Eurocentric attitudes and ideologies on teaching African American students" and they add that the educational system cannot only look into students for change but must also look at the factually who are teaching these students (p.41). Educators need to adapt the same mindset to become more open and willing to receive insight and training to improve their instruction. The study of Sarah, Bene, Li, and Hansel (2015) raises concern for the demographic trends fundamentally changing the U.S. to a true multicultural world which would really require curricular innovations and educators to obtain goals of achieving cultural diversity by repositioning the current Eurocentric curriculum to eventually reflecting the national diversity. Advancements in multicultural education require awareness, effective intervention strategies, and instructional techniques specifically highlighting cultural elements that again, preservice and in-service teachers are lacking. A multi-cultural pedagogical approach is an attempt to reach all culturally diverse students in an equal and integrative way. All four studies present the need for the educational system to implement some change in education

either through retraining, incorporating culture into the curriculum, and/or reexamining how teachers can change their instruction to incorporate cultural pedagogy while eliminating any remaining racial ideologies.

Not only is there a lack of knowledge on how to effectively infuse cultural pedagogy with multicultural approaches, but educators are also lacking a knowledge base in teaching African American students and other ethnically diverse students. Lee (1995) believes that as long as African American cultural differences are no longer used as problematic indicators that varies from the mainstream to devalue black culture but instead emphasize these differences as “unique” and provide students with support, designing a learning environment impacted by cultural relevance, and teaching different cultural backgrounds so students can achieve “knowledge of the social world represented in the texts as well as the customs, values, motivation, rules, social customs, and historical variables of culture” as cultural instruction (p.613). Identifying the cultural contexts and breaking down different aspects of culture in an engaging, relevant, and meaningful manner will offer students insight into their culture and into the culture of other people. Haddix and Dennis (2013) suggest the use of urban fiction since “popular culture texts and experiences such as those represented in urban fiction literature, are a part of how young adults make sense of and take power in their worlds” (p. 258). The inclusion of any literature besides the traditional canon is an attempt at having students make connections with texts. Lovelace and Stewart (2009) advocate for multicultural literature as she found through her study a direct effect on African American comprehension and the inability to recall story events with the use of texts that excludes depictions of black characters or culture but found that students had higher levels of acceptance and identity with culturally conscious texts; therefore, they suggests multicultural literature is needed for

adequate learning to occur since sociocultural experiences provide students with a foundation for interpretation. In addition to utilizing multicultural literature and urban fiction to teach African American students, there's an additional cultural resource that education often excludes due society's labeling and perspective of it being destructive. According to Alim, Baugh, and Bucholtz (2011) there's endless pedagogical possibilities and approaches through the analysis of Hip-Hop and having students indulge themselves in something that is a familiar cultural resource at home and at school. It's a great cultural resource for literary instruction. Students need literary analysis skills to deconstruct the depiction and status of Blackness conveyed based on "explicit attention to the contentious histories and uses of literacy as well as how literacy is invested with power relations for the purpose of raising social consciousness" (Alim, Baugh, & Bucholtz, 2011, p.140). Here are three various forms of cultural literature that offers African American students a chance to relate to what they are reading. These types of literature improve academics, reading comprehension, and reader responses all due to cultural relevance as a theoretical framework; furthermore, Hip-Hop, urban fiction, and multicultural literature offer insight into their own culture (instead of traditional mainstream culture— which overtly impedes the academic success of students from diverse backgrounds due to a lack of cultural relevance).

Teaching African American students made teachers feel out of their comfort zone teaching a different culture and this discomfort causes hesitation with employing cultural literature and cultural pedagogy effectively as an instructional tool to validate black culture and facilitate cultural teaching. Furthermore, Brooks and Browne (2012) added that educators with an expertise in African American culture can select literature with distinct textual features that provide rich and authentic depictions as a methods of validating students and

then use the literature as “tools that pass on traditions, beliefs, histories, and values to upcoming generations of African American students” (p. 79). It’s essential to understand culture in order to teach it. Brinson (2012), also confirms the same finding as she states, “this lack of identification strongly indicates a failure to know about and to integrate the culturally specific books that are needed in daily reading practices to reflect all children”; as a result, to ensure that teachers are selecting culturally conscious literature Brinson suggests using the “mirror” vs “window” theory to ensure that it is registering a cultural position for the student and defines mirror books as accurately reflecting and expanding upon the culture of the child reading the book, thus reinforcing the culture of that child and on the other hand, window books offer the child an opportunity to learn about the other cultures by providing a window into new experiences (Brinson, 2012). Whether this theory is reflective of the culture of the student or not it still reinforces how multicultural literature helps to increase cultural knowledge because it still operates on two platforms of either reflecting culture or expanding culture, both providing students with cultural insights. The “mirror” and “window” theory was also mentioned by Koss (2015) as a means of validating multicultural texts as well. In support of training preservice teachers, studies showed multicultural literature as transformative tools for diverse classrooms. Effective culturally sensitive instruction requires educators to be reflective in their teaching to evaluate the efficacy of their cultural instruction. Teachers must ensure that students are able to find cultural relevance in the texts and academics while also gaining knowledge and understanding of other cultures. Transforming education into multicultural education is affirming cultural identities and it's allowing educators to finally gain an understanding of the students they are teaching and how to teach

them in hopes of achieving diversity and dispelling negative cultural misconceptions and stereotypes.

Despite the fact that educators' lack knowledge of African American culture, educators still need to confront racial ideologies and shift to cultural acceptance and appreciation for diversity. Jackson (2005) mentions how educators can still struggle with teaching African American students as many educators easily misinterpret black student behavior as "not caring"—resulting in inadequate instructional responses perpetuating cultural misconceptions with low expectations; as a result, teachers need to grasp the interrelationship of culture and address relevant and meaningful cultural experiences so that learning is directly impacted by culture (in efforts to stimulate motivation, competence, engagement, confidence and instead of using the black culture as a barrier, use it as a bridge to access relevant connections and personal experiences). In other words, incorporating multicultural literature as a means to access culture empowers students because for the first time, they are granted the ability to construct, create, and communicate meaning through cultural connections—something black students were never given the chance or opportunity to do because academics typically links literacy to mainstream culture prohibiting blacks from establishing any cultural connections. If ideologies do not transform to a multicultural approach then "this lack of knowledge is perpetuated by opposing, contradicting, labeling, or penalizing students of color" when the cultural identify of a student is not marginalized (Williams, 2006, p.347). White ideologies and distribution of power continues to have a negative cultural impact on education. Guiffrida (2005) adds an additional cultural instructional technique to help teachers in this predicament and she suggests that schools should start: "facilitating cultural sensitivity among White faculty are imperative for

improving African American student experiences...facilitating meaningful relationships to conceptualize on the needs of African American students enhances the ability to understand and support African American students” (p. 703). Linking culture to education will enable students to explore and demonstrate their true potential by tapping into their critical and cultural connections and repositioning power in the classroom from dominance to equality is the only way for students of diverse backgrounds to feel valued and affirmed.

Studies show that multicultural literature acknowledges the presence of African American culture while dispelling negative stereotypes (that’s associated with the culture) while other studies argue that some texts may paradoxically reinforce stereotypes to reflect culture. However, studies did indicate a plethora of benefits including confirmation and construction of cultural identities and it also empowers students to make connections for literary interpretations. Due to the significant role of culture in student learning, multicultural literature is therefore linked to cultural pedagogy for enhancing a student’s overall performance (including student participation and installing confidence). Although many studies argue the significance of utilizing multicultural literature— it is still not embedded in the curriculum nor is it a requirement for teachers to expose students to other student’s cultural differences; furthermore, some educators lack cultural knowledge while others obtain an illusion of inclusion and both of these educational mishaps leads to a pedagogical approach without cultural relevance and an over reliance on the literary canon that marginalizes students instead of utilizing multicultural literature to acknowledge cultural differences.

Some teachers can either acknowledge students’ cultural identities or they can acknowledge their own dominant racial ideologies and maintain deficit mindsets that reinforce negative stereotypes of blacks. A teacher’s cultural implications can vary but their

cultural framework effects student learning, achievement, and shapes their pedagogy. Cultural educators gain an understanding and appreciation of diversity while ensuring that culture is acknowledged and valued in class including affirming identities, acknowledging cultural differences, and using cultural knowledge to embed diversity and dispel negative stereotypes. Studies showed the importance of ensuring cultural relevance in text and academics. There's much discussion surrounding the understanding of literary responses as powerfully personal evocations that influences not only literary interpretations but self-identities as well. So in order to improve African American's reader responses, then educators need to dispel their misconceptions, build a supportive environment, and gain a knowledge base of the culture so that literature and academics can reflect it instead of omitting it. It's time to transform education from relying on mainstream societal norms and maintaining this "illusion of inclusion" and actually implement multicultural literature to educate students of different backgrounds— otherwise, a lack of culture in school can only hinder student achievement. In conclusion, after examination of the positive and negative cultural pedagogical approaches and student's responses, a look at how critical culture really is in framing interpretations, reading comprehension, and in building cultural identity, as well as examining how educator's lack knowledge of cultural resources, how to implement multicultural literature effectively so that it fosters critical thinking and literacy skills, and knowledge on how to teach African American students it is safe to confirm that multicultural literature (in addition to a variety of genres including Hip-Hop lyrics, urban fiction literature, and culturally conscious literature, etc.), is a positive educational tool to increase reader responses for African American students. It's just essential to select just the right literature by analyzing the content, the

cultural depictions, and even the identity of the author to ensure that it serves to share cultural associations and dispel negative stereotypes.

## **Methods**

### **Context**

Research for this study took place in an urban city school district of about 70 schools (including charter schools). This school in particular instructs students starting at Kindergarten through eighth grade. According to the New York State District Report card (2013-2014), majority of the students receive free or reduced lunch. The school's student population encompasses approximately 655 students and out of those 655 students attending, 633 of them classify as economically disadvantaged; this means that more than half of the school's students live in a household surviving off of an income that qualifies as disadvantaged or deprived. That leaves only 22 students to be considered a part of a household that is economically stable.

In regards to the ethnic culture of this urban school, the New York State District Report card for 2013-2014, found the school's population to be dominantly African American students. Out of a total of 655 students, 533 are African American; leaving only 122 students to be ethnically diverse. The second largest culture at the school consists of students of Latino decent, then there are 37 students that are white, 27 students that are Asian, and 2 students that are American Indian. Lastly, the class sizes range from at least 21 students to about 28 students.

The participants of the study come from an 8<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts Class that occurs last period of the day. It is taught by a first year, white, young, male. The classroom size typically ranges from 15-20 students. In terms of gender, there are eight girls and 12

boys. The entire class qualifies for free or reduced lunch. There are two kids with IEPs and special education services while the other 18 students are instructed as general education.

### **Participants**

There was a total of six students that participated in this study. The gender of these participants included three boys and three girls, ranging in ages between 12-15. All of the participants are in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This group contained participants all of African American descent but despite their same culture, they all face different economic backgrounds, family structures (some have parents who are divorced, absent, in jail, and/or just separated), and academic achievements. The students in this study were selected based on their behavior, passion for ELA, response to instruction, effort, and their response to participation in 8<sup>th</sup> grade English class.

Dimen is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade female adolescent student currently coming into her identity. She is very outspoken and has a lot of ideas but struggles with following rules, respecting authority, and effectively communicating with others as she encompasses a direct, straightforward, vulgar attitude and personality; paradoxically, it is this same audacious character that encompasses her strength and ability to be express daring interpretations or fearlessly state ideas and concepts that others may be a little fearful about admitting. Currently, she's failing ELA and she makes it clear that it's a direct result of not getting along with the teacher. She's often misunderstood and it ends up getting her sent out of class, disciplined, or punished. This miscommunication really inhibits her ELA abilities to shine as she tries to restrain herself by staying quiet and refusing to apply herself academically.

Jay is the second 8<sup>th</sup> grade female participant. She's 15 years old, who's personality and behavior in class is the complete opposite of Dimen. Unlike Dimen's boldness, Jay is

quiet, shy, respects adults, and is very humble. She currently has a C+ in ELA but she is a hard worker. She willingly turns in all of her student work in without complaints or grievances. She doesn't give teachers a hard time and she smiles a lot. Her shyness prevents her participation. She's very hesitant to share ideas even if it's a great one. Despite her warm expression of smiles, she can be easily miscalculated as her constant smiles elicits a happy young female but in actuality, she hides a lot of frustration from drastic changes in her home life constantly dealing inconsistent stability. She maintains hope by dreaming of being a singer one day.

Quees is the last female participant in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She recently turned 15. She can be very sweet and even a great helper at times but again, she's another female with barriers and will only share this side of her if there's a bond or connection developed; otherwise, she can be a bit rebellious and feisty if she doesn't want to be bothered. She often tests the limits of adults to see who she can trust and who she can defy. As a result, she enforces barriers of resistance by projecting an attitude to guard her lovable, cooperative character on the inside. She can be very hard read or to tap into. She is a very logical and analytical thinker. If Quees applied these same concepts to her academics instead of just people, then she would soar but she insists that she's too irresponsible for school and her habit of losing things is her number one excuse to refuse to do homework or finish assignments. Despite her academic resistance, surprisingly, she will share her perception or input in class. Therefore, in a way, Quees will apply herself academically without a fight but only if she's captivated and engaged by the content but if she's bored or simply not in the mood to work, then her laziness will instantly replace her attempts at trying and blame it on her inability to keep track of her work.

West is one of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade male participants who is very liked and well-known in school. He stays out of trouble and he follows instructions. One of his most favorite items in the entire world, is his love for sneakers but his sports come second. He's respectful, loves to laugh, and maintains a good spirit and mood. His exterior personality may seem shy at first but once he establishes a level of comfort, he is less self-contained and contributes to classroom discussions as he questions his full potential and has a desire to reach it. West's secretive and mysterious personality always adds interest to content because you never know what he's thinking unless he decides to tap into his ambition once he feels comfortable enough to share it and he's always filled with surprises.

Drake is another 15-year-old male in 8<sup>th</sup> grade who also loves sports; basketball in particular. He finds himself to be very comical and he loves to laugh. Although he's physically short on the outside, his small physique reflects nothing of his mindset. He currently has an A in ELA. He easily absorbs content, makes connections and reflections and constructs intriguing interpretations- he encompasses such an analytical mindset that he unintentionally initiates certain aspects from critical literacy because he's the type of kid to question the foundation of content and quickly often finds a problem with it. His strength is his academics is ironically his weakness because the minute he's not academically challenged, bored, or disengaged, he can become a class clown and cause disruptions but a stimulating learning environment will maintain his interest and respect for learning. One thing about Drake is that he can easily snap. He knows it and admits to it and if he's tested or annoyed, his bad temper takes over but he already figured out how to positively redirect this anger as he plans on joining the army in the future.

Zyier is the last 8<sup>th</sup> grade participant. He is very sweet, lovable, and kindhearted. He never disrespects anyone and he very obedient. His warm smiles make him easily likeable and he always exerts his best. He cares a lot about school and he currently has a B in ELA. He's shy in class and will only speak if he's called on. He enjoys reading, video games, and football but one day he really wants to see if he can make it into the acting world; unfortunately, he openly admits to fearing that it may be just a dream that will never happen.

### **Researcher Stance**

As the researcher for this study, I am pursuing a degree in Literacy at Saint John Fisher College. My undergraduate degree is in English and Adolescent Education with middle grade certification, extending my qualification from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Currently, I teach in an urban district as the ELA intervention teacher. My job is to assess the reading levels of Kindergarten students up to sixth grade.

During my study, I was an active participant observer that was responsible for teaching and collecting the data (Mills, 2011). My role as the active participant observer required me to be present during my study as I had to instruct students on the purpose and use of multicultural literature and also converse with the students to initiate focus group discussions. My role impacted my research positively because it generated authentic productions without fearing how a person of the opposite race would feel. All six participants saw me as someone that they could culturally relate to, connect with, and understand due to racial confirmation. This positive cultural identification functioned as a form of validity and safety for the participants to elicit authentic notions, thoughts, and impressions as they felt free from being labeled and appointed to negative cultural stereotypes.

### **Method**

For this study, I collected qualitative data from a small focus group of six students to assess the impact of multicultural literature on reader responses in a small group setting. I specifically looked at how cultural relevance in multicultural genres impacted the participants. Since there were four multicultural genres total, there study took place over four different classes. Each genre presented two opposing cultural perspectives with one-two examples per culture; therefore, I collected student work encompassing their experience, response, and feelings to each culture- one of their own culture and the other of white culture.

In other words, each session had an urban concentration in conjunction with an alternative mainstream portrayal in each genre. There were four genres of both cultural perspectives including musical hip-hop lyrics, slam poetry, cultural texts, and scripted television shows as well as reality shows. There's a variety of multicultural genres so student data varies to evaluate the impact of cultural relevance or cultural disconnections from varying racial or cultural representations. Each genre required students to have at least six-seven minutes to share their reader responses, insights, experiences, cultural relevance (or lack thereof), connections, how race is portrayed, any stereotypes or cultural implications that were noticed, and/or overall interpretations of the genre.

The first session explored student ideas and prior experiences with multicultural literature in small, informal focus group setting that shared ideas, experiences, perceptions, and opinions in their small group setting. I began the discussion by asking the participants to define multicultural literature and what they think it involves while writing down student responses on the discussion board. I wanted to obtain their own personal opinions of multicultural literature without influencing or affecting their primary understanding and perception of it before I began my mini-lesson it.

After students discussed their perceptions and experiences, then I began a brief, mini-lesson on multicultural literature by providing them with a definition, the purpose for it, and how it is used to stimulate cultural connections (Appendix A). After this mini lesson on multicultural literature, participants were asked to reflect again on their socially based experiences to try to recall any prior experiences with multicultural texts in the past (at school or at home) as they had a clearer understanding of it. Then only two participants really had exposure to it and it was a personal choice to read these urban texts – it did not occur at school. After this debrief of sharing a common understanding of multicultural literature and their past experiences, participants were exposed to a variety of multicultural literature examples, including urban fiction novels to become familiar with what multicultural literature looks like (Appendix A). For each novel, I stated the title, ethnicity of the author, a brief summary of the book, and why it qualified as a “multicultural” text so that by the end of session one all six participants understood that this type of literature embedded authentic cultural relevance by encompassing social cultural experiences that exposed the value, traditions, and beliefs according to that culture.

After the first session explored the participants’ use of multicultural literature and they gained a solid knowledge base of it, the following sessions have consisted of a variety of multicultural genres including music, poetry, TV shows, and texts. Each urban genre was coupled with a mainstream genre so that these two diverging cultures could be detected within the same genre and for each genre, each participant was instructed to conduct a reader response analysis. Students were literacy journals and six to seven minutes to write down any literary or reader response experiences including any connections to the text, any shared experiences, any identity associations, how they processed this information, how they may or

may not relate to this information, how they feel race is expressed, any messages they noticed, any theories or problems they question, or any claims they find that could be applied to a larger context. It is open to solely their interpretation and experience as a reader.

The second session assessed the students' response to Hip-Hop (Appendix B). There will be an exploration of four Hip-Hop songs discussing the impact of race- two songs from black artists and two songs from white artists. It provides the participants with two cultural and racial public discourses through Hip-Hop's unique linguistic system that African American students can relate to. All four songs express a range of ideologies, cultural practices, privileges, and racism based on the experience and race of the artist. Students were introduced to the titles and the artists of each song and received a copy of the lyrics.

Immediately after they heard the first two examples of Hip-Hop lyrics from black artists discussing the effects of being black including crooked cops, criminalization of the black body being constantly a target, being labeled as a criminal regardless of their choices, being robbed of innocence, and questioning why America designed social injustice based on a skin color, they were instructed to write their reader responses. After seven minutes, they heard two more songs of the same Hip-Hop genre, but from a different cultural perspective: a white artist's perception of race and how his dominant culture allows white privilege to still take place even in a predominately black linguistic practice to show white dominance in all areas of life. They listened to the song once, referred to the lyrics as needed, and received seven minutes to note their experience as a reader.

The third session addressed poetry, including urban slam poem versus mainstream poetry. Participants watched two urban poems that discussed the cultural experiences of trying to survive in the ghetto. Participants received time to construct a response. Then they viewed

a mainstream poem discussing cultural relief of being white. Participants wrote their response. Then the context of the slam poems will transition from cultural representations to issues of identity and self-belonging. They saw a poem depicting an urban “self-conscious” identity (following a reader response) and a white person paradoxically wondering if life would be easier because of their environment (following a reader response) (Appendix C). Following the cultural responses to slam poetry, participants conducted a small focus group discussion. Insights were shared and then I asked critical questions dissecting the messages, the depictions of race, and how the last poem would be considered “paradoxical” (Appendix C).

The next genre is literature. The participants received a copy of a brief excerpt from an urban text and a brief excerpt from a mainstream text of the literary canon (Appendix C). I read both excerpts two times and the participants will assess whether there’s a similar reader response experience or not despite the cultural differences within the same context. Then the focus group began by when the students shared their initial ideas and then I asked the students to assess the racial messages depicted in each text.

The fourth session analyzed the portrayal of urban pop culture in TV shows and mainstream pop culture in TV shows. They will have received the same viewing time for each show. Participants viewed several clips of TV shows encompassing black families in comparison to white families (Appendix D). They constructed their responses. Then the focus group session began by instructing the participants to look at how family structures were portrayed on television and how mainstream culture may have impacted the authentic portrayal of black families as well as how these TV shows either overtly elicited racism or stereotypes or subliminally perpetuated stereotypes? (Appendix D). Then participants took another look at TV shows but reality TV instead. Two shows that were exactly the same in

content but portrayed through different racial lens. Participants wrote their second reader responses. At this point I asked students to take a look at how cultural differences are depicted through television during the second focus group discussion.

### **Quality and Credibility of Research**

According to Mills (2014), to ensure the quality and credibility of research, then it must also encompass transferability and dependability. The qualitative data collected for this research study incorporates all four aspects to certify that the following study is trustworthy. It incorporates credibility, transferability, dependability, and transferability. Credibility refers to the “researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (Mills, 2014, p.115). Credibility applies to this study because the different text genres and the variety of urban and mainstream samples presents a complexity of whether the material is equal in content and rigor; therefore, to make all genres of equal reading difficulty, Lexile levels were applied to the text excerpts, length of hip-hop lyrics were equivalent, slam poems were equivalent in sentence complexity and length, and TV clips were all the same length to ensure all genres are equal in content and rigor. This variety of data sources that were used with different methods to cross-check data as a triangulation approach to this study confirms the credibility credential of this study in addition to the collection of audio recordings, raw photos of group’s notes, and artifacts of student work will also verify the credibility of this study.

Secondly, transferability which is the second criteria for trustworthiness addresses how the study of the context should be able to be generalized to larger groups of people (Mills, 2014). Therefore, the reader response experiences written by the participants will serve as detailed descriptions of the context. Analysis of this data will formulate judgements of the

impact of culture on literacy that can be applied to the entire African American race (or any culturally or linguistically diverse group) based on the participants' experiences with multicultural literature.

Dependability is the third component and it "refers to the stability of the data" (Mills, 2014, p.16). Due to the use of the triangulation method of research, this study is ensuring that multiple methods are implemented to enquire and examine data just to compensate for any strengths or weaknesses of certain methods. For instance, in case one genre is not as culturally strong as another, there are multiple sources of genres that can compensate for the cultural strength or weakness of the others.

Lastly, confirmability is the last component and it addresses how the data must be neutral (Mills, 2014). Again triangulation ensures neutrality due to a variety of data sources being used and the different methods; specifically, with this study, there's multiple genres of multicultural literature being used as well as multiple reader responses being constructed. Moreover, due to the diverging cultures being elicited in each genre, there is also reflexivity being practiced to ensure that the materials being used for cultural relevance or a lack there of are socially labeled as a product of that culture due to biases and assumptions so that each genre to remain neutral due to its cultural differences because one genre will always apply to the urban culture while the other genre will always apply to the mainstream culture based on reflexivity.

### **Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

In order to conduct my research, I obtained assent forms from all six students involved in this study. I received signed assent forms from all of the student participants and I gave out parental permission forms for the parents and guardians of my participants for their

permission of their child to participate in a study that will be published. In addition, after the participants were asked to take home the forms, I spoke to each student's parent/guardian over the phone to explain the study in further detail, the purpose of it, and who I am to the students and I made sure the parents/guardians of the students were aware that all identities would remain anonymous.

### **Data Collection**

As stated earlier, three forms of data were collected: six literary journals of participant's reader responses, observational field notes, and audio-recorded/transcribed small focus group discussions. Through this qualitative student data, I experienced, enquired, and examined this information through a collection of a total of three forms of data (four sets of observational notes, eight-10 reader responses per participant totaling approximately 50 responses total, and five audio recorded focus group discussions) to confirm triangulation (Mills, 2011). The field notes were conducted every time students were instructed to generate a reader response. Primarily, students were introduced to the genre and were given their literary journals to note any ideas or perceptions. As soon as they viewed, heard, or read the material (each genre containing at least two examples depicting urban culture and mainstream culture), they were instructed to immediately generate a reader response to avoid any outside influences from a discussion that may spoil their initial perceptions. At this time, while they constructed their responses, I became an active observer by examining their writing behaviors using a clipboard, pen and paper and simply noting the time it took to start writing, their writing behaviors (whether it was furious, fast, writing or slow, thought provoking, adamant writing), I observed how they responded to what they saw and/or how they connected or disconnected, how they elicited any combatting feelings due to the nature of the content I

observed their physical body behaviors (if their legs were tapping or their pens were shaking, if they were zoned out or intrigued by the content).

After the completion of my filed notes and students were done writing their responses, focus group discussions would begin. Students' statements were transcribed on the discussion board. Participants would have the option of sharing any ideas to initiate the discussion; otherwise, it was facilitated by my focus group questions that elicited critical thinking of any racial or cultural profiles, dichotomies, representations, and social hierarchies. Furthermore, follow up questions were deemed as necessary. Finally, at the end of each session, each participant would hand deliver their journal to me and the discussion board containing student's statements were collected and photocopied.

Each participant was affected differently, based on the genre (some were more stimulating than others), the cultural message, and/or the cultural experiences. Student work was assessed, compared, and contrasted for any commonalities and thematic focuses. This qualitative student data will demonstrate the impact of cultural relevance on interpreting and decoding multicultural content in contrast to mainstream content. Data will also demonstrate the power of cultural familiarity, its receptivity by the students, and whether or not they chose to utilize their culture and sociocultural experiences as learning resource to facilitate greater comprehension. This study ensured the use of a variety of multicultural materials and genres so that there's a range of material the participants was exposed to be able to assess the impact of cultural relevance and its response to receptivity / learning (Mills, 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of the data was to assess how multicultural content influences reader responses for African American students. According to research, cultural relevance is the

transformative educational tool needed to improve this this lack of literacy abilities. As a result, all three forms of data were analyzed to assess the impact of culture on student responses.

Data analysis included reading the content several times and developing codes for each source of data: literacy journals, focus group discussions, and my observational notes. After focus group discussions were transcribed, it was time to read and analyze the data. When data was being analyzed, each journal, observational note, and focus group discussion was read multiple times, then each form of data is coded differently based on the context. Each code served as a label that captured the gist of the participant's main idea. For instance, there were several codes that continuously stood out in each journal, discussion, and set of notes due to its differing content. For example, in the literacy journal, there was a commonality among the codes, "cultural connection", "cultural resistance", or "similar cultural experience". This same type of coding occurred again across the focus group sessions. Each session was audio recorded and transcribed. Once the material was transcribed, the focus group sessions were also coded with similar labels such as "self-conscious identity", "black culture context", or "questioning societal practice". Lastly, field notes were also coded with labels that captured ideas of writing behaviors such as "culturally disconnected" or "culturally engaged."

Once all three pieces of data were read through twice, coded once, and read though an additional time, findings were organized based on the commonalities that led to identifiable themes within the content as well as any disconfirming findings that revealed otherwise. All student work was collected and analyzed in an attempt to answer whether or not multicultural literature has an effect on the reader responses of African American students. Throughout the

coding, reading, rereading, and concept mapping of the data, there were three emerging, related, prominent findings that led to the development of the three themes concerning this research question.

### **Findings and Discussions**

The study selected cultural materials that are familiar to black culture in conjunction with mainstream materials that's familiar to white culture. Each cultural genre that related to black culture had a white counterpart to make the genres equivalent in cultural depictions. As students were exposed to both sources of materials, their level of engagement in addition to their responses, or lack thereof, revealed certain patterns that answers how culturally relevant materials effects African American student responses. After examining this data across multiple sources, three themes emerged. Theme one validates the effectiveness of multicultural literature enabling interpretations and improving reader responses. Students used their culture and similar experiences to generate connections and ideas of interpretation. However, if there's a cultural disconnect in content, then it dispelled their interest and resulted in a resistance where students ceased all effort in trying to interpret materials that they have no understanding (or relation to). Theme two confirms the continued use of mainstream literature and instruction. Canonical literature functions as validation of mainstream culture but not their own. This dismissal of culture or lack of cultural relevance effects student engagement and the production of reader responses. As students continuously encounter learning based on mainstream culture while ignoring their own culture, then their interest and motivation decreases while academic failures increases (as they begin to abandon the reading experiences in class once they face their inability to relate or understand mainstream content). Lastly, theme three identified multicultural poetry as the most influential genre to foster

accurate responses and literary interpretations. Participants impressively internalized depictions of black culture conveyed through slam poetry. They inquired their own culture and suggested implications for inadequate cultural identities being reinforced by the dominant mainstream culture establishing the norm for behavior and beauty but participants convey feeling a sense of inadequacy and unattractiveness due to their different looks and how they are a part of a culture that behaves differently. This poetic genre had the most effective responses and discussions in comparison to the three genres conducted in this study.

### **The Effectiveness of Multicultural Literature on Improving Reader Responses**

As students read a brief excerpt from the urban, cultural text, “Monster” by Myers (1999), their literary interpretation showed greater understanding than the mainstream text from the literary canon, “Of Mice & Men” by Steinbeck (1994). The participants’ responses from their literary journals showed how these novels were comprehended differently. This difference in comprehension was a result of a cultural disconnect in the literature. The urban text entails authentic, cultural experiences that the mainstream text could not deliver because it’s not relevant to the student’s culture. According to Braxton and Bradley (2007), multicultural literature expresses accurate depictions of minority experiences that provide students with a framework to explore their culture and utilize their cultural experiences to obtain an understanding while acknowledging a culture other than mainstream culture. Therefore, the urban text, “Monster” fostered student reader responses because of the participants’ abilities to simply relate to the urban context more than mainstream content. The students were given a brief summary and after reading the excerpt, they were instructed to write a response in their literary journals. All six participants responded to the same urban excerpt from “Monster” where Steve’s lawyer, O’Brien gives Steve the harsh racial reality

behind his case as she states, “O'BRIEN: [...] You're young, you're Black, and you're on trial. What else do they need to know? STEVE: I thought you're supposed to be innocent until you're proven guilty?” (Myers, 1999, p. 80-81). Dimen wrote:

This book makes me think bout Travon martin and the kid who got shot, stereotyping that black men kill each other for no reason and when black people go to court- your already guilty. I feel angry becuz its sad wat ppl did to blks back then and still do it till this day. If I wanted to be something before it would've been something easy like cosmologist but now I want to go on and do more because girls are really smart and we can do more than we think we do. The boys only think they can try hustling be gangsta or go to jail and girls like my niece try to be inner city queen bein in the next video dancing for men. Reading black books and seeing black problems that I know push me to do more for my culture even though I still suffer from being labeled by my culture. I want to change that. I hate that. (Reader Response Journals, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

Dimen initiates her response based on O'Brien's blunt racial comment implying that all young, black men will stereotypically be perceived as guilty instead of being innocent. This racial stereotype inspired Dimen to break these negative cultural stereotypes that she's subjected to.; The novel begins to empower Dimen to overcome being labeled with failure. Consequently, she reassesses her cosmetology dream and aspires to be more than that to avoid being socially constructed by her culture's failures. When students are labeled to fail, it directly connects back to the study of Clark, Costner, and Daniels (2010), their research solidified unwilling faculty wanting to teach African American students due to their negative

misconceptions of inadequacy; as a result, black students' abilities are minimized as teachers tolerate failure and low expectations to verify inadequacy and sustain cultural rejection. This negative pedagogical approach that's influenced by negative misconceptions exhibits how the acceptance of failure perpetuates low academic performances. Ironically, black students matriculate in an educational system of failure within itself yet, black students are stigmatized as failures instead of teachers failing by even endorsing low expectations instead of enforcing success.

Another student also demonstrated a positive reader response to reading the urban fiction. He took a different route from Dimen by connecting all of his similar cultural experiences with the same system that is being conveyed in "Monster". Drake writes:

My uncle got shot and killed, my dad is in jail, there's nothing good in America for black people you can't even drive a nice car without being suspicious of it being stolen because black men are only post to drive busted vehicles and white people always think we dangerous that's why we always criminals in the system. (Reader Response Journals, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

Drake personally relates to the book by sharing similar experiences of his uncle and father enduring the same unfair system that Steve is subjected to. Then, Drake applies these unfair societal practices to a larger context and makes a connection exhibiting how unfair aspects of the justice system transfers over to limit, control, and judge black people. Drake suggests that blacks are expected to drive "busted vehicles" and if they do, then they will be judged as either dangerous, suspicious, or as a criminal to show how the justice system favor whites.

Drake made a real-life connection of driving “busted” cars to support his interpretation of the unfair justice system that’s also being portrayed in “Monster” (Myers, 1999). Drake’s interpretation of an unfair justice system is contrived by his own real-life experiences; similarly, to how Lovelace and Stewart (2009) suggest how real-life experiences eludes readers with literary interpretations when their study states, “sociocultural experiences provide a foundation for interpretations of texts, which enables them to make connections to real-life experiences” (p.170).

As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of multicultural literature doesn’t have to just be applied to literature; therefore, this study used multiple multicultural genres to conduct an assessment of how cultural materials can foster literacy. Hip-Hop lyrics was another genre used to assess African American students’ reader responses. Likewise to urban texts, data also showed a positive correlation with Hip-Hop and reader responses as it was culturally recognized by all six participants. This genre didn’t only surprise the students but it captivated their attention. This form of music is often presumed inappropriate and therefore rejected; however, this study’s authorization and use of Hip-Hop for educational purposes was appealing and fascinating to them because it truly resonates with them. Hip-Hop is familiar, easily recognized, and even listened to on a daily basis so the cultural relevance was so powerful that the literary responses from their reader response journals revealed higher order thinking as they willingly deconstructed the lyrics to interpret the meaning. Alim, Baugh, and Bucholtz (2011) also validated Hip-Hop to help foster literacy because it allows students to finally experience indulging themselves in something that is so familiar. When there’s familiarity when learning content, there’s validation from the identification. As a result, identifying that familiarity becomes reassuring to their learning. Furthermore, the vernacular,

slang, and Ebonics involved with the creation of Hip Hop truly builds literary skills as there's more to just decoding the content but it is ironically also compiled of significant literary elements to convey authentic cultural messages through rhyming, metaphors, similes, hyperboles, symbolism, oxymorons, alliteration, etc. Students were provided with two rap songs of black artists depicting the pain and suffering endured in black culture and two white artists describing the benefits and privileges associated with white culture. They listened to a total of four Hip Hop songs: "Why" by Jadakiss (2004) and "God Bless Amerika" by Lil Wayne (2013) for urban analysis and "White Privilege" (2016) by Macklemore and "White America" by Eminem (2002) for mainstream analysis (Appendix A). The two songs by Jadakiss and Lil Wayne questions black cultural disparities in direct contrast to two songs by white artists that validates the very existence of these disparities as a direct result of white privilege and the benefits that comes with being a part of the dominant race. Despite the differences of the artists' race and the cultural content conveyed by the songs, participants were still able to interpret the songs by white artists because it was being conveyed through the same familiar elements that defines Hip-Hop. Even with completely contrasting cultural content, students impressively analyzed content from both cultures because of their familiarity, understanding, and fluency. After listening to "God Bless Amerika", "Why", "White Privilege" and "White America", West writes:

This song sayin' will he die or go to jail today because most of black men end up in one of these places. When blacks get pulled over you gotta act white, can't be actin all ghetto but black people and kids act mad ignorant and always disrespectful in public places and on a regular basis and white people and white kids jus' different from us. When the other song said "and this is so true and we didn't even have to go through

the system we just went and picked up the microphone too” he basically sayin’ black people we had to go through a lot to start hip-hop but as a white person he didn’t because he’s white. That’s why he said “we still owe them 40 acres, now we have stolen 16 of their bars” bringing up how blacks went through slavery but whites didn’t but hip hop came from black people but it’s ok for whites to rap to because they white. I don’t get dis I wonder why there not black privilege? (Reader Response Literacy Journal, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

West shows his understanding of Lil Wayne’s song by explaining that as a black man, there are two promised places and it’s either jail or death. West doesn’t just comment or write down his ideas of understanding but instead, he elicits in higher order thinking as he reflects on his culture in an attempt to generate an answer for the differences in limited lifestyles, opportunities, and resources and he came to the conclusion that it could be the behavior that’s exhibited by blacks. He was faced with a harsh reality of his own culture’s behavior as he regretfully used the terms “ghetto”, “ignorant”, and “disrespectful” in an attempt to truly depict the behavior of blacks. As he realized his impolite diction, he also obtained an epiphany that presented differences in behaviors. The differing cultural behaviors paradoxically reinforces the existing cultural and/or racial dichotomies that results in such different lifestyles, hardships, and lack of privileges. He analyzed his own culture to try to understand why these cultural disparities exist and then he proposes that a black person has to change their behavior and assimilate or “act white” (in his terms) in attempts of being more accepted. His next description is a clear and accurate interpretation of Macklemore’s (2016) “White Privilege” when he explains that whites don’t have to endure rejection because they’re culturally accepted and he proclaims the idea that whites don’t have to go through what blacks

go through as he even quotes a line from the song to demonstrate his understanding: “we didn’t even have to go through the system we just went and picked up the microphone too” (Macklemore, 2016). Macklemore adheres to the benefits of his culture as he admits to not going through the “system” that blacks have to endure. This also means that the racial hierarchy grants access to whites but makes it a lot harder for blacks. Then West quotes Macklemore again: “we still owe them 40 acres, now we have stolen 16 of their bars” (Macklemore, 2016). He shows accurate understanding here as well by crediting the “40 acres” to symbolize slavery and “16 of their bars” to rap. West recognizes both forms of symbolism within Macklemore’s song. Blacks had to endure slavery, whites didn’t and Macklemore uses this historical occurrence as another example of how white privilege historically dominated and continues to. Lastly, it is clear from West’s response that he fully understands this depiction of white privilege being conveyed because he begins to elicit higher order thinking for a second time by problematizing white privilege by questioning, “where’s black privilege?” As West questions the existence of black privilege, he’s reinforcing the idea that black culture lacks the same resources, benefits, and privileges associated with white culture.

Again, as West was able to interpret both depictions of culture accurately, his literary response demonstrates accurate literary interpretations as he was able to accurately apply multiple literary skills and abilities. These lyrics definitely provided participants with the opportunity to explore their literacy skills by evaluating them through effective, authentic, cultural material of interest.

### **Canonical Literature Creates an Inability to Comprehend the Texts**

In the process of assessing how multicultural literature affects reader responses, participants confirmed their ability to use their culture as a resource to expedite their literary interpretations and connections. However, all six African American participants also unanimously conveyed that it's missing from their learning. The inclusion of mainstream materials was incorporated to see the difference in literary responses with multicultural literature versus mainstream literature of the canon. Data showed more writing, more responses, and more discussion during cultural genres instead of mainstream genres; however, exposure to mainstream materials generated the same disconnect all participants discussed experiencing in class. All six participants discussed the exclusion of culture and the continued use of mainstream literature despite its disconnect and ineffectiveness. Students grew increasingly frustrated as they realized how much mainstream literature is used when multicultural literature stimulates and advances their learning more. Drake writes:

I really struggle with understanding their point of view. Like right now, I hate reading this "White Gardenia" book in ELA it even has the name "white" in it and its being taught by a white teacher. This book is boring and I get tired of always reading white books (Reader Response Literacy Journal, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

Drake admits to struggling understanding canonical literature. He simply cannot relate to texts that the he can't apply to his culture. Likewise to Koss (2014) who confirms that literature either serves as "mirrors" or "windows." Novels that are "mirrors" helps to see into their own culture with relevance as it reflects authentic cultural experiences but novels that function as "windows" offers a look inside the lives of others and becomes harder to grasp since the cultural disconnect eliminates culture from being a resource to help ground comprehension.

Dimen felt similarly about the continued use of mainstream literature when she was unable to understand “Of Mice & Men”. She read, “For two bits I'd shove out of here. If we can get jus' a few dollars in the poke we'll shove off and go up the American River and pan gold” (Steinbeck, 1994, p.9). Afterwards, she responds and writes:

What's two bits? A few dollars in the poke? Why do they think America offers gold?

This book can't reach black people... that's why I have a D in English because I can't relate to nothin they teach us... I don't try or listen to the teacher... So if I'm taught by white books and white teachers makes me feel like I can't be something I can be.

(Reader Response Journal, March 10<sup>th</sup> 2016)

Dimen immediately adheres to the cultural disconnect again. She questions several of the terms and the concept of retrieving gold in America. Her lack of understanding and misinterpretation of the idea of “gold” hinders her interest in continuing reading as well as analyzing the content. The cultural experience depicted in “Of Mice & Men” is so different from Dimen’s sociocultural experiences that she infers that it “can’t reach” blacks. The differences in cultures have ideas from the book taken out of context. For example, Dimen interpreted this excerpt literally as she questioned their beliefs of America providing them with gold. When the literature is implying that the characters are so desperate to leave for America for the “American Dream”. The statement: “go up the American River and pan gold” suggests that once they live and work in America, their life will be as easy as someone selling gold (Steinbeck, 1994, p.9). Consequently, Dimen’s misunderstanding of the text is used to justify and rationalize her grades and academic performance as she proclaims that she can’t relate to nothing. The use of mainstream literature prohibits her from relating to content. As a result, she increasingly grows resistant to reading the literature and the instruction in ELA

class. Then the constant reference to a culture that she does not share makes her feel inferior and incompetent to deliver. She feels no identification with the literature or the teachers; therefore, this lack of reassurance or familiarity in mainstream literature (including teachers) obstructs her reader responses and even her academic performance.

The lack of literary responses shows that a book of no cultural relevance is hard to understand; as a result, students don't endure the same reading experience during multicultural reading. Their lack of understanding is internalized as more damaging than actually helping their learning and literacy. Zyier writes in his journal:

I dunno. I don't know why they want to dream in America? It not fun or even funny....white teachers and white books I feels more off a diservize for me being black. I get nothing out of it I don't understand any of them or what they show me just like they only see one side of us. (Reader Response Journal, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

Zyier's inability to understand the text was another display of a student reading content and not sharing any cultural relevance. He didn't have any experiences or connections to provide him with a framework to build his comprehension. He tried to understand George's concept of working to get to the "American Dream" but Zyier didn't recognize that concept as he takes the concept of the "American Dream" literally instead of the idea of it being a land of opportunities (when he questions what dream is he trying to have in America). Zyier instantly detected his lack of understanding and he used this book as justification and even as an example of the literature he's exposed to. He makes it clear that he has a lot of white teachers and reads a lot of mainstream literature and describes the dominance of mainstream teachers, instruction, and literature as a "disservice" because he is unable to understand or learn. Zyier does not include any interpretation of the text. He does not try to break down the context of

the novel or the novel's implications due to his lack of comprehension and he explains that he can't. He shows that it's hard to understand a novel of a different culture if he's a product of a completely different cultural realm. The inability to comprehend constructs a cultural disconnect that obstructs his reader responses. Mainstream reading experiences becomes a "disservice" to his learning.

Likewise to Drake, Dimen, and Zyier, Lil J also confirmed the same existence of mainstream literature and the inability to relate. She writes:

Well, blacks are nothing and whites started everything. They have different behavior so they use white books to help us act like that too but even though we can't really read and write in English I don't like white books I can barely connect to what most of the stuff they teach. (Reader Response Journals, March 10<sup>th</sup> 2016)

Lil J took a different route by justifying her lack of comprehension by culturally defining the origins of white and black cultures. She suggests that Whites started everything and Blacks did nothing. This belief is used as an excuse as to why she doesn't understand the content and why she's being taught by mainstream literature and white teachers. Then she feels that it is used so much that it must be because a way to "help us act like that too". Lil J's idea of using canonical literature to help change behavior of black students is integrating negative pedagogy in hopes of assimilation. Likewise to Jackson, (2005), diminishing cultural identities by ignoring and rejecting non-dominant cultures perpetuates the loss of cultural identities to feel rejected and ignored to reposition for future assimilation or marginalization to become more like the dominant. However, she also admits to the same idea from all of the other participants and also doesn't enjoy the use of mainstream literature due to her inability to understand it. She cannot connect to it and finds it culturally irrelevant. Lil J, Drake,

Dimen, and Zyier all were unable to accurately portray the depiction portrayed from “Of Mice & Men” and all four students wrote down ideas of cultural beliefs, cultural disconnections, and ineffective reader responses blocked from mainstream literature as a rationalization of why their literacy is prohibited and why they feel incompetent to interpret this excerpt. All three participants shared the same idea that they are only exposed to white books. Data shows that a text of no cultural relevance elicits no ability to make an interpretation as they can barely understand the context. This inability to understand the content transforms into a form of resistance due to frustrating cultural disconnections. The literary responses did not incorporate any similar sociocultural experiences, analysis, connections, insight, etc. Instead, of attempting to make a literary interpretation, participants unanimously wrote down how they felt instead and admitted to the continued use of mainstream literature.

### **Multicultural Poetry promotes the most Engagement in Student Responses**

The effect of multicultural materials was assessed across multiple genres; however, the poetic genre containing authentic slam poetry depicting black cultural identities elicited the most accurate literary interpretations and connections than any of the other genres. Students were shown two slam poems called “Dreams are Illegal in the Ghetto” and “Self-Conscious” (Appendix B). The participants truly identified similar feelings, emotions, and experiences throughout both poems that their literary responses and focus group discussions were so advanced. Their ability to live vicariously through the poem’s context due to such a strong connection to the content and words also shows the power of cultural relevance. Their ability to relate to the content was exhibited by their ability to not just interpret the poem’s message but students participated in such advanced higher order thinking that they analyzed and applied the implications to their entire culture.

One student initiated the discussion by instantly stating her interpretation of “Dreams are illegal in the Ghetto”. Dimen states, “Dreams are illegal in the ghetto is symbolizing the unhealthy lifestyles that holds back success. So, then it’s not the ghetto that’s the actual problem, it’s the violence, expectations, and tryna’ be grown that’s really the problem” (Focus Group Discussion, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Dimen detects the literary symbolism behind the title and content of the poem and explains that the environment’s lack of resources, opportunities, and low expectations becomes problematic as troubled lifestyles subjugate dreams of success by becoming accustomed to the ghetto. Then Dimen elicits higher order thinking and evaluates this societal issue in black culture and identifies three specific characteristics that hinder success in the ghetto: violence, lack of expectations, and maturing without guidance. After Dimen’s comment, West problematizes the expectations for the ghetto and states “the expectation is failure, not to be successful. Girls want the best weave and tightest jeans and boys want to be the richest hustlers – that’s considered success in the ghetto” (Focus Group Discussion, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016). West initiates critical thinking by inquiring the low expectations Dimen identifies as the source of failure in the environment and critiques the ironic ideas of success believed and perpetuated by the ghetto environment. Due to the cultural disparities and lack of opportunities, income, jobs, and resources that leads to the violence and criminalization. West identifies that black females in the ghetto prioritize looks and obtaining the best material items (such as weave) to get as much attention as possible while black males in the ghetto try to make the largest amount of money as fast as possible through selling drugs without dying or going to jail. Then Quees goes beyond the low expectations, ideals of success and problematizes the overall environment and declares the issues that perpetuate the very existence of the ghetto, as she states:

Black people don't got resources or help or privileges besides welfare and stuff and that only makes some black people more lazy so we kinda crippled by the government, I mean like we need white people to get what we want like the poem said. (Focus Group Discussion, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

Again, the analysis and higher order thinking is further advanced as Quees questions the existence of these dark realities in the ghetto. West and Dimen problematizes the actions and lifestyles of black people living in the ghetto but contrastingly, Quees problematizes the cultural disparities, societal hierarchies of power, and racial dominance to further explain the implications and message of the poem.

After listening to "Dreams are Illegal in the Ghetto", the participants listened to a second slam poem called, "Self-Conscious", describing how the world permits racial and cultural disparities that openly subjugates blacks to feel insignificant when white culture is the only culture being validated and used to establish the norms for how to behave and look; as a result, self-identities are questioned, lost, or invalidated and endures changes of assimilation or compensation to dispel feelings of inferiority. Two students shared similar insights and made direct connections to this poem; not only validating their literary development but also validating this same cultural intimidation from mainstream identities that are expressed in the poem. Dimen and Quees connected to the same feelings of inferiority and began questioning their own identity, how they should act, and wishing they could actually change to counteract their damaged black identity. Dimen summed up her cultural experience and identity as "I feel the need to change how I act and how I look" (Reader Response Literacy Journal, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Dimen judges and evaluates her identity and gains the impression through her environment, experiences, and lack of cultural sensitivity in school as an authentication that

black an identity is presumed invalid. She desires a change in how she looks and how she acts, taking the two aspects that defines her race and culture as problematic because it doesn't fit the norms established by mainstream culture. On the other hand, Quees provided an actual example of a cultural experience that this poem extracted. She actually shows an example of how society overpowered and suppressed her self-identity and self-competence through her doll experience: "A video I saw they had 2 doll 1 white 1 black. They had kids answer which one good, pretty, nice and which one bad, ugly, mean this made me feel bad bout myself" (Reader Response Literacy Journal, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Dimen obtains this desire to change her identity and this suggests that her culture is not being acknowledged so she feels the need to change how looks and talks to become more accepted. If Dimen's culture is not acknowledged or her linguistic diversity is rejected to enforce mainstream discourse, then she will feel invalid since she has not culturally accepted and has no identification with the mainstream cultural norms. Williams (2016) also confirms that linguistic diversity is rejected as a way of enforcing mainstream discourse and validates that African American students are ignored culturally to reinforce mainstream as valid, while being labeled with many negative cultural misconceptions or associations like "failure" or "inadequate" (p.357). As a result, Dimen questions her identity because the lack of cultural sensitivity does not encompass confirmation of her own identity but validation of mainstream identity. Secondly, the doll experiment for Quees functioned as a platform for how society manages to maintain mainstream dominance and authorize white cultural norms for identity standards of beauty and behaviors. As Quees begins to feel bad about herself, it's attributed to mainstream society dominating cultural looks and behaviors; as a result, she feels incompetent because she's not a part of the dominant race. These identity issues are a direct result of cultural rejection, being

culturally ignored, or too culturally different to be acknowledged. According to Ferdman (1990), cultural intimidation begins to damage a cultural identity since it's not validated in the classroom. Dismissing other cultures through the consistent use of instruction through the lens of one culture is damaging because the instruction based off of that culture is internalized as an invalid identity that has something wrong with their abilities, behaviors, or even attractiveness.

After students constructed their literary responses from the slam poem, "Self-Conscious" in their reader response journal, they participated in another successful discussion displaying the effectiveness of how the poetic genre advanced literary interpretations and development. The students began their discussion around the poem's last stanza: "Then I spent 400 bucks on this / Just to be like you aint up on this! / We shine because they hate us / floss cause they degrade us / Tryna buy back our 40 acres / and for that paper, look how low we will stoop" (Kanye West, 2004). The following focus discussion supports the idea that poetry fostered analysis, interpretations, and accurate implications. West related to the behavior described in the poem and applied to a larger cultural context by stating: "Man, all black people spend mad money of clothes, sneakers, cars, everything to make them look good on the outside- that's one of the problems cause' we'll buy the new releases instead of pay rent" (Focus Group Discussion, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016). West explains that blacks prioritize looks as a significant cultural value due to enduring feelings of insufficient attractiveness. After West made the conclusion that Blacks rely on materialistic items, the participants were asked why materialistic items are so significant to a black person's identity? Quees answers by stating: "umm I dunno' maybe cause' we probably don't feel good on the inside so if we buy something that we like it's gon' make us feel better on the outside...?" (Focus Group

Discussion, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Quees evaluates the value of material items and explains that it functions as an exterior display to hide the interior feelings of inferiority and the amount of money used to buy materialistic items represents one's worth to compensate for these feelings of unattractiveness. Both students took a look at the context of the poem and analyzed the language. They detected the feelings of inferiority when the poem depicts spending \$400 on something materialistic to feel better. Then the poem suggests that this behavior is a result from being hated and degraded so blacks try to recover their suppressed feelings of inferiority by flashing their status and worth through materialistic items. Then the statement, "look how low we will stoop" ironically implies that these materialistic values become the same reason for a lot of the violent crimes of robberies and killings. West and Quees accurately internalized, connected, and deepened their analysis and literary abilities by evaluating the effects, behaviors, and results of suffering black identity. They both successfully analyzed and decoded the song's implications, meaning, and purpose. Poetry functions as cultural capital that elicits powerful emotions and significant meanings that could scaffold analytical skills while affirming cultural identity (Petchauer, 2011). Their critical thinking of assessing black culture and the value on materialistic items also demonstrated rich literary analysis.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

It may seem merely impossible to equalize the current cultural dichotomies existing in this world but it's imperative to equalize the educational disparities that are currently existing among African American students and white students. The misperceptions, deficit mindsets, racial ideologies, and low expectations of black students need to come to a stop. Changing mindsets is the first implication needed to positively impact literacy for African American students. White teachers teaching in urban settings need to learn about linguistic and cultural

variation because their knowledge and newly gained cultural experiences will verify the cultural differences that would eradicate any previous deficit mindsets or habits of stigmatizing students that seemed culturally inadequate to learn.

Once these mindsets are transformed by a new knowledge base on culture, then my second implication is to enforce success instead of accepting failure. Educators should no longer accept failure or hold students of black culture to low academic expectations because it only perpetuates these academic discrepancies. Minimizing tasks or having low expectations because of “incompetence” is ironically the same reason why teachers are hired to teach. If students are performing at a low level, then we must teach them according to their learning style so that they could reach grade level, not believe their abilities are insufficient. Low expectations are disserving and devaluing students’ learning and this also needs to change.

My third implication discusses the need for teachers to embed cultural sensitivity and gain a knowledge base of cultural pedagogical instruction. Again, Haddix and Dennis (2013), address this lack of knowledge and confirms that white, middle class teachers are unprepared to address these cultural and linguistic disconnects and have no culturally responsive pedagogies that are congruent with the cultural and linguistic identities of the class. We will only see a change when teachers can understand the learning needs of culturally diverse students and actually recognize and validate how these needs can be met- initiating the actual learning. Once effective cultural pedagogical instruction is connected to the lives of the students in the classroom, changes will occur. Embedding cultural acceptance starts by signaling appreciation of students’ home dialects and cultural resources. It acts as a bridge to connect home dialects and literacy acquisition. Cultural acknowledgement helps students feel relevant, validated, and instrumental in their own success. As long as students are provided

with varying cultural instruction and literature to represent their cultural experiences, then literacy skills are growing. As a result, in order to diffuse these negative cultural insinuations and to begin acknowledging the cultural identities of the class, teachers need to embed culture on a daily basis with relevant, familiar, rich, culturally responsive materials.

My research has shown me the frustration from students due to the cultural discontinuities that interferes with bonding, validating culture, and developing literacy; ultimately, affecting their overall academic achievement. Consequently, as a black English teacher, my race and culture implies that I will need to induce cultural diversity in my classroom to develop a dynamic relationship between the students and I, in which we teach each other. Integrating cultural relevance and sensitivity within my materials and instruction will help me to understand different cultural intersections by recognizing the incompatibilities, minimizing the tensions, and bridging the gaps among different cultural systems within the classroom to eliminate any student that's not a part of the dominant culture to still feel a part of the class. If I am able to do that, then congruency between how the educational process is delivered and the cultural frames of diverse students will improve as well as their academic achievement.

Cultural sensitivity and acknowledgement is necessary for student learning. I must have my students feel recognized, respected, valued, seen, and heard by fostering warmth, unity, safety, and security. I must also enable ethnically and culturally diverse students to be open and flexible in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as being receptive to new ideas and information by fostering a safe classroom environment. As a result, it's vital to connect with students using their interest and teaching literacy with

multicultural books and incorporating culturally responsive inquiries to embrace and acknowledge all cultures and not just validating the dominant culture.

For the purpose of this study, I used multicultural materials with cultural relevance in contrast to canonical literature and mainstream materials of cultural dissimilarities to see the actual effect on comprehension and reader responses. I selectively choose certain urban content (that depicted black cultural experiences) to assess the true effect of cultural relevance, applicability, and familiarity on the construction of literary responses in contrast to mainstream materials of white culture and lifestyles). By providing students with literacy journals and permitting free writing (including the freedom to incorporate their own language-black vernacular), I had students construct a response of each genre discussing their initial thoughts, any similar experiences, feelings, problems, subliminal messages conveying racial or cultural messages. Then students were asked to assess the impact of cultural relevance and how it affects their learning. In my study, I found that all students unanimously agreed that the familiarity of the cultural material fosters insight and understanding because it operates within their cultural context and better yet, it also increases motivation and engagement as it partakes in interests out of their daily lives. The implications of this study reveal the significance of cultural sensitivity in conjunction with cultural pedagogical instruction to truly validate student's cultures and identities. Furthermore, in addition to integrating multicultural materials to awaken reader responses through cultural relevance, it's more important for educators to dispel misconceptions about black students and stop accepting failure or setting such low expectations. Ethnically diverse students would be more willing to gain some sort of perception and appreciation of the cultural literature considering that they may have undergone similar experiences that can ground their comprehension because they're simply

tired of feeling disconnected, confused, or unable to understand or relate to mainstream content.

If this study had to be conducted again, a limitation would be student absences. Whenever one student was absent it would disturb the consistency of obtaining a total of six perspectives. On the day that three participants were absent, I had to duplicate another session to obtain their reader responses and conduct another focus group discussion. As a result, I would conduct the study in fewer sessions or cover more than one genre per session to avoid make-up sessions or inform participants prior to the study (and on their contracts) that attendance is mandatory.

Literacy operates within a sociocultural context because it is defined by our social practices; therefore, our social identity will construct, influence, and frame the comprehension and interpretation of literacy depending on what we socially value by our particular culture and environment. We are a part of a constantly changing community that shapes our current use of literacy practices depending on what is considered necessary and meaningful and Kucer argues, “the way in which literacy is used or performed by the participants within a particular social configuration reflects the very nature of the group and the group’s position within the society” (Kucer, 2014, p. 228). So why do so many black homes devalue the role of literacy? Why is there a struggle to read as a culture? Why isn’t there isn’t a vital value or frequency placed on literacy acquisition at home? This lack of literacy acquisition at home is carried to school and influences how literacy is perceived. Nonetheless, all learning is constituted by the social, cultural, and historical interactions that permeated specific behaviors for each social group of people but if that’s the case then why are there such different reactions and perceptions that are negatively associated with black culture? For example, if a

white or Asian student reenacted black slang, appearances, and behavior, then it may seem odd or frustrating to a white teacher as the White teacher begins to either judge or self-question why they are pretending to behave as if they are black? Nevertheless, if a black student portrays their own culture and speaks their own black vernacular it is presumed as “unacceptable” and problematic as it perpetuates the negative labels that’s associated with the culture. Then here comes the downfall of education for both teachers and students. Teachers adopt deficit mindsets, instantly shortcoming education. While black students will forever be misunderstood, hindering their true academic performance because they’re trapped in communicative mismatches and misperceptions. There’s a dark reality in education that is disclosed by this vast educational gap- all because black students know much more than what they’re able to communicate in conjunction with being taught by mainstream, white teachers that are unwilling to appreciate cultural differences. As a result, the cultural needs, academic materials, and literature that black students are trying to discern remains unheard or in this case, invisible. When will that change?

Negative cultural pedagogical implications and racial ideologies need to dissipate from racist mindsets in order to adopt a positive mindset about culturally and linguistically different students. Students of different cultures bring rich resources and repertoires of practice that can facilitate literacy teaching and learning. Their bilingualism allows classrooms to grow into mini communities (with translators), in which understandings, languages, experiences allows all students to acquire an “in depth knowledge of, and facility with an array of social practices for navigating the social, economic, and geographic landscapes of their communities” (Bean & Dagen, 2012, p.232). Research has shown how these linguistic and cultural resources of practice can be drawn upon literacy teaching and

learning, thereby providing culturally responsive literacy instruction. For example, as a white teacher in a classroom setting of black students, embedding cultural pedagogy (such as multicultural literature) or even appreciating black vernacular instead of devaluing its inadequacy in comparison to mainstream standard English is a simple attempt at validating other cultures. Incorporating critical literacy or even a lesson on code-switching to show affirmation of black culture to confirm black students' cultural identities is an educational movement at transforming Eurocentric education. Ethnically diverse students especially black students are forever encountering cultural confusion as they suffer from questioning their identity of either fitting in or marginalizing to assimilate to mainstream to culture as the only option of success. The dismissal and disapproval of their own culture is the answer to their own academic failure including literacy skills. If culture is never validated, then their identity isn't either. Black students suffer from the precedent of failure and unfortunately, their environment's outlook, treatment, and behavior (in addition to the educator's mindsets) has to change in order to see a change from students.

### References

- Alim, S. & Baugh, J. & Bucholtz. (2011). Global literacies: hip hop cultures, youth identities, and the politics of literacy. *Review of Research in Education* 35(1), 120-146.
- Bean, R. & Dagen, A. (2012). *The best practices of literacy leaders*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Boston, G. & Baxley, T. (2007). Living the literature. *Urban Education* 42(6), 560-581.
- Boutte, S. & Strickland, J. (2008). Making african american culture and history central to early childhood teaching and learning. *The Journal of Negro Education* 77(2), 131-142.
- Brinson, S. (2012). Knowledge of multicultural literature among early childhood educators. *Multicultural Review* 17(1), 30-33.
- Brooks, W. & Browne, S. (2012). Towards a culturally situated reader response theory. *Children's Literature in Education* 43(1), 74-85.
- Chaudri, A. & Teale, W. (2013). Stories of multicultural experiences in literature for children, ages 9-14. *Children's Literature in Education* 44(1), 359-376.
- Costner, K. & Daniels, K. & Clark, M. (2010). The struggle will not continue: an examination of faculty attitudes towards teaching african american students. *Journal of Black Dressel, J. (2005). Personal response and social responsibility: responses of middle school students to multicultural literature. The Reading Teacher* 58(8), 750-764.
- Edward, C. (2003). *Studying and teaching afro-american literature*. College Language Association Journal 16(1), 96-105. *Studies* 41(1), 40-55.
- Ferdman, B. (1990). Literacy and cultural identity. *Harvard educational review*, 60(2), 181-204.

- Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (2006). *Benchmark assessment system 2 grades 3-8, levels 1-z*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gee, J.P. (2001). What is literacy? In E. Cushman, E.R. Kintgen, B.M. Kroll & R.M. (Eds.), *Literacy: A critical source book* (pps.18-25). Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.
- Gray, E. (20096). The importance of visibility: students and teachers criteria for selecting african american literature. *The Reading Teacher* 62(6), 472-481.
- Guiffrida, D. (2005). Other mothering as a framework for understanding african american students' definitions of student-centered faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education* 76(6), 701-723.
- Haddix, M. & Dennis, D. (2013). Urban fiction and multicultural literature as transformative tools for preparing english teachers for diverse classrooms. *English Education* 45(3), 247-283.
- Hill, D. (2014). Welcoming taye: how his english teacher embraced an african american transfer student in an affluent suburb. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 57(4), 319-328.
- Iwai, Y. (2013). Multicultural children's literature and teacher candidates' awareness and attitudes toward cultural diversity. *Journal of Elementary Education* 5(2), 185-198.
- Jackson, Y. (2005). Unlocking the potential of african american students: keys to reversing underachievement. *Theory into Practice* 44(3), 203-210.
- Jenkins, T. (2011). A beautiful mind: black male intellectual identity and hip-hop culture. *Journal of Black Studies* 42(8), 1231-1251.
- Kucer, S. (2014). *Dimensions of literacy a conceptual base for teaching reading and writing in school settings* (4th Ed.). New York: Routledger.

- Koss, M. (2015). Diversity in contemporary picture books: a content analysis. *Journal of Children's Literature* 41(1), 32-42.
- Ladson-Billings (2006). *From the achievement gap to the education debt*. Educational Researcher (35)7: 3-13.
- Larson, J., & Marsh, J. (2005). *Making literacy real theories and practices for learning and teaching*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lassiter, F. (2015). From toasts to raps. *Pedagogy* 15(2), 374-377.
- Lee, C. (1995). A culturally based cognitive apprenticeship: teaching african american high school students skills in literary interpretation. *Reading Research Quarterly* 30(4), 608-630.
- Lee, C. D (2007). *Culture , literacy, and learning: blooming in the midst of the whirlwind*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lewison, M., Flint, A.S., Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: the journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79(5), 382–392.
- Lovelace, S. & Stewart, S. (2009). Effects of robust vocabulary instruction and multicultural text on the development of word knowledge among african american children. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 18(4), 168-179.
- Mills, G. (2011). *Action research: a guide for the teacher researcher*. New Jersey: Pearson. Education Incorporation.
- McDermott. R & Varenne, H. (1995). Culture as disability. *Anthropology and education quarterly* (26)3: 324-348.

McCullough, R. (2013). The relationship between reader response and prior knowledge on african american students' reading comprehension performance using multicultural literature. *Reading Psychology* 34(1), 397-435.

Myers, W. D., & Myers, C. (1999). *Monster*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015). *Institute of education sciences*.

Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo/2015>.

Perkins, H. & Cooter, R. (2005). Evidence based literacy education and the african american child. *The Reading Teacher* 59(2), 194-198.

Petchauer, E. (2009). Framing and reviewing hip-hop educational research. *Review of Educational Research* 79(2), 946-978.

Sarroj, H. & Bene, K. & Li, J. & Barley, H. (2015). Raising multicultural awareness of fifth grade students through multicultural education. *Multicultural Review* 17(3), 39-45.

Siwatu, K. & Frazier, P. & Osaghae, O. & Starker, T. (2011). From maybe i can to yes i can: developing preserve and in-service teachers' self- efficacy to teach african american students. *Journal of Negro Education* 80(3), 209-222.

Steinbeck, J. (1994). *Of mice and men*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Books.

Wilkins, J. & Gamble, R. (1998). Evaluating multicultural education for use in classroom education. *Educational Connection* 26(2), 30-34.

Williams, C. (2006). You gotta' reach em': an african american teacher's multiple literacies approach. *Theory into Practice* 45(4), 346-351.

## Appendix A

### Session One: Introduction to Multicultural Literature

#### First Session:

- Facilitator asks participants:
  - “What is multicultural literature to you?”
  - Based on the name, “multicultural” what do you think this type of literature it incorporates?
  - Do you have any experience with this type of literature? At home or at school?
- After students share their opinions and perceptions, the facilitator provides students with an actual definition of multicultural literature, how it is used, and reveal the paradox of multicultural literature:
  - **Definition:** According to Dressel, (2005), multicultural literature offers students a cultural frame of reference where students can either connect culturally or gain cultural insights of other cultures in hopes of valuing diversity as a natural aspect of society.
  - **Purpose:** It is used for to convey stories of minorities; in other words, to express and addresses authentic, cultural content through cultural issues (like racial identity, freedom, historical aspects) and through socio cultural experiences
  - **Identify the problem:** Multicultural literature is responsible for stimulating cultural connections because it contains cultural representations- this could be good and bad.
    - Good if it is authentic and aims to provide cultural perceptions to increase awareness and share connections with readers, while fostering positive images of that culture and helping students find their cultural identity by vicariously living through the literature.
    - Bad if authenticity is no longer present and is replaced with subliminal messages portraying negative cultural depictions that reinforces stereotypes of that culture (this happens when writers of a different race or ethnicity tries to explore the experiences of another race and depict that culture according to their own socially constructed interpretations (Boston & Baxley, 2007). Examples of multicultural literature:
- Allow students to see at least three different examples of multicultural literature to increase their exposure and address the author, the race of the author, the summary of the book, and why it’s considered multicultural for each novel.
  1. “The Watsons go to Birmingham”
    - a. Author: Christopher Paul Curtis (Black)
    - b. Summary: It tells the story of a black family traveling by car encountering countless tragedies along the way to reach Alabama.

- c. Qualifies as multicultural because it reveals historical aspects of a black family during the 1960s that helps people gain some awareness of how racism impacts African Americans.
  2. “Monster”
    - a. Author: Walter Dean Myers (Black)
    - b. Summary: A 16-year-old black boy is on trial for murder as he is accused for taking a part in robbing a store and killing the owner.
    - c. Qualifies as multicultural because depicts how many black teens encounter a judicial system that portrays black males as “Monsters” due to the statistics, frequency, and quantity of the crimes committed by black men.
  3. “Passing”
    - a. Author: Nella Larsen
    - b. Summary: Clare is at a racial fault but she is one of many women who would go to extent of bleaching their skin just to pretend to “pass” for white simply for the economic and social benefits of the dominant culture while subduing and rejecting the real identity and culture of their own.
    - c. Qualifies as multicultural because it captures the historical fiction of this wild cultural phenomenon that discredited black identity to the point of denial to show just how bad African Americans were treated compared to Whites.
  4. “All Things Fall Apart”
    - a. Author: Chinua Achebe (African)
    - b. Summary: An African leader of a tribe kills his own adoptive son, shoots another boy and is exiled from his tribe for seven years and when he returns, he finds Christianity taking over so he takes an aggressive stance in reclaiming his Igbo people but ends up killing again (a messenger) and the story ends in his suicide.
    - c. Qualifies as multicultural literature because it offers a depiction of how white missionaries of the dominant race can marginalize and assimilate non-dominant groups beginning with religion but conveys an ironic message implying that no matter how hard a black man may fight; they still can never win a challenge when it deals with fighting against the majority/mainstream.
- Close session by asking students:
  - Any final thoughts?
  - Did any of your previous perceptions of multicultural literature change or were your depictions of it accurate?
  - Anything you would like to add or comment on?

## Appendix B

### Multicultural Genre: Hip-Hop Lyrics

Second session → assessing the impact of multicultural Hip-Hop Music discussing cultural disparities by both white and black artists

- Facilitator will play four Hip-Hop songs total, two from black artists and two from white artists. These songs are all surrounding the same context: the negative implications of being black versus the positive privileges associated with being white in America. Students will produce a reader response to both sets of songs.
  - 1<sup>st</sup>: play songs by black artists:
    - Jadakiss “Why”
    - Lil Wayne “God Bless Amerika”
      - Construct Reader Response
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>: play songs by white artists:
    - Macklemore “White Privilege” (lyrics)
    - Eminem “White America”
      - Construct Reader Response
- When it is time for students to construct their reader responses:
  - Provide them with their literacy journals (as well as pencils to the participants as needed)
  - go over what a reader response may include and keep these options visually available to the participants):
    - Note any connections to the text
    - Note any shared or similar cultural experiences
    - Note any cultural identity associations or confirmations
    - How did you process this information?
    - How did you relate to this information or what didn’t you relate to?
    - How is race expressed in this genre?
    - Do you see reckon any messages that is being conveyed within the content?
    - Are there any perceptions or problems that you want to question or address?
    - Do you see anything within this genre that could be applied to a larger context?
    - Remember: It is open to solely YOUR interpretation and experience as a reader
  - The facilitator initiates the Focus Group Questions by asking:
    - Initial ideas, responses, opinions?
    - Are there any cultural and/or racial representations subliminally depicted in each?

**JADAKISS “WHY” LYRICS:***[Jadakiss]*

Aha

It's dat real

Yo, why is Jadakiss as hard as it gets

Why is the industry designed to keep the artist in debt

And why them dudes ain't ridin' if there part of your set

And why they never get it poppin' but they party to death

Yea, and why they gon give you life for a murder

Turn around only give you eight months for a burner, it's goin down

Why they sellin' -- CD's for under a dime

If it's all love daddy why you come wit your nine

Why my -- ain't get that cake

Why is a brother up North better than Jordan

That ain't get that break

Why you ain't stackin' instead of tryin' to be fly

Why is rattin' at an all time high

Why are you even alive

Why they kill Tupac n' Chris

Why at the bar you ain't take straight shots instead of poppin Crist'

Why them bullets have to hit that door

Why did Kobe have to hit that raw

Why he kiss that whore

Why

*[Chorus: Anthony Hamilton]*

All that I been givin'

Is this thing that I've been living

They got me in the system

Why they gotta do me like that

Try'd to make it my way

But got sent up on the highway

Why, oh why

Why they gotta do me like that

*[Jadakiss]*

Why would -- push pounds and powder

Why did bush knock down the towers

Why you around them cowards

Why Aaliyah have to take that flight

Why my -- D ain't pull out his Ferrari

Why he take that bike

Why they gotta open your package and read your mail

Why they stop lettin' -- get degreez in jail

Why you gotta do eighty-five percent of your time  
 And why do -- lie in eighty-five percent of they rhymes  
 Why a -- always want what he can't have  
 Why I can't come through in the pecan Jag  
 Why did crack have to hit so hard  
 Even though it's almost over  
 Why -- can't get no jobs  
 Why they come up wit the witness protection  
 Why they let the terminator win the election  
 Come on, pay attention  
 Why sell in the stores what you can sell in the streets  
 Why I say the hottest shit but we sellin' the least

*[Chorus]*

*[Jadakiss]*

Uh, yea, yo  
 Why Halle have to let a white man pop her to get a Oscar  
 Why Denzel have to be crooked before he took it  
 Why they didn't make the CL6 wit a clutch  
 And if you don't smoke why the hell you reachin' for my dutch  
 Why rap, cause I need air time  
 Why be on the curb wit a "why lie I need a beer" sign  
 Why all the young -- is dyin'  
 Cause they moms at work, they pops is gone, they livin' wit iron  
 Why they ain't give us a cure for aids  
 Why my diesel have fiends in the spot on the floor for days  
 Why you screamin' like it's slug, it's only the hawk  
 Why my buzz in L.A. ain't like it is in New York  
 Why you forcin' you to be hard  
 Why ain't you a thug by choice  
 Why the whole world love my voice  
 Why try to tell 'em that it's the flow son  
 And you know why they made the new twenties  
 Cause I got all my old ones  
 That's why

*[Chorus]*

**LIL WAYNE: "God Bless Amerika" LYRICS:**

*[Verse 1]*

Uh, my mind's filled with mine fields  
 The ashes fall, the wine spills  
 The world stops, drops and rolls  
 It's Judgment Day or a fire drill

Yea, I pour out my heart, have a drink  
 They say the drunk never lie, they ain't never lyin' yea  
 My country 'tis of thee,  
 Sweet land of kill 'em all and let 'em die

*[Hook]*

God bless Amerika  
 This so godless Amerika  
 I heard tomorrow ain't promised today  
 The end of time is like a hour away

*[Verse 2]*

Damn, military minded, lost and can't find it  
 The stars on the flag are never shining  
 Uh, I saw a butterfly in hell today  
 Will I die or go to jail today?  
 Cause I live by the sword and die by the sword  
 Heard police was looking for me, I'ma hide by abroad  
 Shootin' stars in my pocket, -- sit on my rocket  
 I'm wired off a socket, but still shockin'  
 Everybody wanna tell me what I need  
 You can play a role in my life but not the lead  
 If there's food for thought then I'm guilty of greed  
 Mama said take what you want – I took heed yea  
 My little breed, yea

*[Verse 3]*

Back to life, back to reality  
 Been eating my girl and she's so sweet, got cavities  
 Granted we do it for vanity not humanity  
 But what's appealing to me is under banana trees, love  
 I go so hard, I tried to pay homage but I was overcharged  
 Ain't that a --? I'm just a nut tryna bust a nut in the nut shell  
 Used to say -- the police, now I say -- jail  
 Same shit, different air freshner  
 I don't play boy, I ain't Hugh Hefner  
 Tryna be a step ahead, but a few feet behind  
 Two fingers to my head, pop! Peace of mind  
 I be in the cloud, cloud number 9  
 And I just -- the clock and let it come to time  
 It's a cold world, I put on a mink  
 There's a chain of commands, I'm the missing link  
 Yeah

*[Hook]*

God bless Amerika  
 This so godless Amerika  
 I heard tomorrow ain't promised today  
 And I'm smoking on them flowers, catch the bouquet

*[Outro]*

Here we live by the sword and die by the sword  
 The police are looking for me, I'ma hide by abroad  
 Shootin' stars in my pocket, bitch sit on my rocket  
 I'm wired off a socket, but still shockin'  
 Everybody wanna tell me what I need  
 You can play a role in my life but not the lead  
 I saw a butterfly in hell today  
 Will I die or go to jail today?

### **MACKLEMORE "White Privilege" LYRICS:**

Now nod your head and wake up.

I see so many people lost who really try to pretend  
 But am I just another white boy who has caught on to the trend  
 When I take a step to the mic is hiphop closer to the end?  
 'Cause when I go to shows the majority have white skin  
 They marketed the windmill, the air flair and head spin  
 And white rappers albums really get the most spins  
 The face of hip hop has changed a lot since Eminem  
 And if he's taking away black artists' profits I look just like him

Claimed a culture that wasn't mine, the way of the american  
 Hip hop is gentrified and where will all the people live  
 It's like the central district, beacon hill to the south end  
 Being pushed farther away because of what white people did, now  
 Where's my place in a music that's been taken by my race

Cultural appropriated by the white face  
 And we don't want to admit that this is existing  
 So scared to acknowledge the benefits of our white privilege  
 Cause it's human nature to want to be part of something different  
 Especially when your ancestors are European Christians  
 And most whites don't want to acknowledge this is occurring  
 Cause we got the best deal, the music without the burden  
 Of being black in a system that really wants you to rock

Cause all you need is a program and you can go and make hiphop  
 And we hate the mainstream cause we're the ones that took it  
 Now we listen to Aesop Rock and wear t-shirts that say Brooklyn

But it's not about black and white right  
I mean good music is good music regardless of what you look like  
But when you don't give them props isn't that selfish?  
That's like saying rock was actually started by Elvis  
So where does this leave me?

I feel like I pay dues but I'll always be a white MC  
I give everything I have when I write a rhyme  
But that doesn't change the fact that this culture's not mine  
But I'm gonna be me so please be who you are  
This is something that's effortless and shouldn't be hard  
I said I'm gonna be me so please be who you are  
But we still owe 'em 40 acres now we've stolen their 16 bars  
Hiphop started off in a block that I've never been to  
To counter act a struggle that I've never even been through  
If I think I understand just because I flow too  
That means I'm not keeping it true, nope  
Hiphop started off in a block that I've never been to  
To counter act a struggle that I've never even been through  
If I think I understand just because I flow too  
That means I'm not keeping it true, I'm not keeping it true

Now I don't rap about guns so they label me conscious  
But I don't rap about guns cause I wasn't forced into the projects  
See I was put in the position where I could chose my options  
Blessed with the privilege that my parent's could send me to college  
Now who's going to shows the kids on the block starving  
Or the white people with dough that can relate to my content?  
Marketed the music now adapted to the lifestyle  
What happened to jazz and rock and roll is happening right now  
Where's my place in the music that's been taken by the media  
With white corperations controlling what their feeding ya  
I brought up aesop rock but I'm not even dissing dude  
We love hiphop and what do you think caucasians are listening to  
And I speak freely when I write this  
If a black emcee examined race there goes half their fan base, white kids  
And this is so true. and we didn't even have to fight the system  
We just went and picked up the microphone too  
And we got good at it so we should be rapping  
But only supporting them is like burning Jimmy and buying Clapton  
Now Clapton's incredible. but no Jimmy no foundation

So here comes history and the cultural appropriation  
White kids with do rags trying to practice their accents  
From the suburbs to the upperclass mastering a language

But hiphop is not just memorizing words  
 It's rooted in authenticity something you literally can't learn  
 But I'm gonna be me so please be who you are  
 This is something that's effortless and shouldn't be hard  
 I said I'm gonna be me so please be who you are  
 But as I'm blessed with the privilege, they're still left with the scars

Hiphop started off in a block that I've never been to  
 To counter act a struggle that I've never even been through  
 If I think I understand just because I flow too  
 That means I'm not keeping it true, nope  
 Hiphop started off in a block that I've never been to  
 To counter act a struggle that I've never even been through  
 If I think I understand just because I flow too  
 That means I'm not keeping it true, I'm not keeping it true

### **EMINEM "White America" LYRICS:**

America, hahaha, we love you, how many people are proud to be citizens of this beautiful  
 Country of ours, the stripes and the stars for the rights that men have died for to protect,  
 The women and men who have broke their neck's for the freedom of speech the United States  
 Government has sworn to uphold, or  
 (Yo', I want everybody to listen to the words of this song) so we're told...

I never would've dreamed in a million years I'd see,  
 So many -- people who feel like me, who share the same views  
 And the same exact beliefs, it's like a --' army marchin' in back of me, so many lives I  
 Touch, so much anger aimed, in no particular direction, just sprays and sprays, and straight  
 Through your radio waves it plays and plays, 'till it stays stuck in your head for days and  
 Days, who would of thought, standing in this mirror bleachin' my hair, with some peroxide,  
 Reaching for a t-shirt to wear, that I would catapult to the forefront of rap like this, how  
 Could I predict my words would have an impact like this, I must've struck a chord, with  
 somebody  
 Up in the office, cause congress keeps telling me I ain't causin' nuthin' but problems, and now  
 They're sayin' I'm in trouble with the government, I'm lovin' it, I shoveled shit all my life,  
 And now I'm dumping it on...

*[Chorus]*

White America, I could be one of your kids, white America, little Eric looks just like this,  
 White America, Erica loves my shit, I go to TRL, look how many hugs I get, white America, I  
 Could be one of your kids, white America, little Eric looks just like this, white America, Erica  
 Loves my shit, I go to TRL, look how many hugs I get...

Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself, if they were brown, Shady lose, Shady  
 Sits on the shelf, but Shady's cute, Shady knew, Shady's dimple's would help, make ladies

swoon

Baby, {oooh baby}, look at my sales, let's do the math, if I was black, I would've sold half, I Ain't have to graduate from Lincoln high school to know that, but I could rap, so -- school, I'm too cool to go back, gimme the mic, show me where the --studio's at, when I was Underground, no one gave a -- I was white, no labels wanted to sign me, almost gave up, I was

Like, --it, until I met Dre, the only one to look past, gave me a chance, and I lit a fire up Under his a--, helped him get back to the top, every fan black that I got, was probably his in Exchange for every white fan that he's got, like damn, we just swapped, sittin' back lookin' at S---, wow, I'm like my skin is it starting to work to my benefit now, it's...

*[Chorus]*

See the problem is, I speak to suburban kids, who otherwise would of never knew these words Exist, whose mom's probably would of never gave two squirts of piss, 'till I created so much --' turbulence, straight out the tube, right into your living room I came, and kids Flipped when they knew I was produced by Dre, that's all it took, and they were instantly hooked

Right in, and they connected with me too because I looked like them, that's why they put my Lyrics up under this microscope, searchin' with a fine tooth comb, its like this rope, waitin' To choke, tightening around my throat, watching me while I write this, like I don't like this, Nope, all I hear is, lyrics, lyrics, constant controversy, sponsors working 'round the clock, to Try to stop my concerts early, surely hip-hop was never a problem in Harlem, only in Boston, After it bothered the fathers of daughters starting to blossom, so now I'm catchin' the flack From these activists when they raggin', actin' like I'm the first rapper to smack a -- or Say faggot, shit, just look at me like I'm your closest pal, the posterchild, the --' Spokesman now for...

*[Chorus]*

So to the parents of America, I am the derringer aimed at little Erica, to attack her Character, the ringleader of this circus of worthless pawns, sent to lead the march right up to The steps of congress, and piss on the lawns of the White House, to burn the casket and replace

It with a parental advisory sticker, to spit liquor in the faces of in this democracy of Hypocrisy, -- Ms. Cheney, -- Tipper Gore, -- you with the freest of speech this Divided states of embarrassment will allow me to have, --*[vocal melody]*, He, hahaha, I'm just playin' America, you know I love you...

**Appendix C**  
**Multicultural Genre: Poetry &**  
**Mainstream Text of Literary Canon Vs. Urban Fiction**

Third session → assessing the impact of multicultural poetry & excerpts from a multicultural text vs. a text from the literary canon:

**Slam Poetry:**

- Facilitator instructs students: You will hear two slam poems from two different racial perspectives depicting how race suffers from a black perspective in a slam poem called “Dreams are Illegal in the Ghetto” and from a white perspective called “1-800-White Man Privilege Hotline”.
  - Construct a Reader Response
  - Focus Group Questions:
    - What do you think are the messages being conveyed by each poem?
    - Are they paradoxically conveying the same message?
      - Is one poem unintentionally supporting the other? Is life in the ghetto limited due to white privilege and white power?
  
- Facilitator instructs students: You will now hear two different perspectives of conflicting self-identities by a slam poem called “Self-Conscious” discussing how the black identity can easily suffer from not being a part of mainstream society; however, the second slam poem presents the irony of a white person insisting life would be less of a burden if his skin color was anything but white in a poem called “The Whitest Thing”.
  - Construct a Reader Response
  - Focus Group Questions:
    - What’s the irony between these two poems?
    - How is cultural identity being depicted as a positive and a negative?

Appendix C Continued

**Text Excerpts:**

- Facilitator provides students with a copy of the following excerpts from “Monster” (Myers, 1999) and “Of Mice & Men” (Steinbeck, 1994). Instruct students to read and examine the following excerpts.
- Brief summary of “Monster”: A young black Teen was at the wrong place at the wrong time and now he is presumed guilty for a murder.
- Brief Summary of “Of Mice & Men”: Two men are on the hunt for a better life.

- Excerpt from “**Monster**” (Myers, 1999):
  - O'BRIEN  
[...] You're young, you're Black, and you're on trial. What else do they need to know?  
  
STEVE  
I thought you're supposed to be innocent until you're proven guilty? (p. 80-81)
- Excerpt from “**Of Mice & Men**”:
  - “For two bits I'd shove out of here. If we can get jus' a few dollars in the poke we'll shove off and go up the American River and pan gold” (p.9)
- Focus Group Questions:
  - Initial ideas, responses, opinions?
  - Any cultural and/or racial representations subliminally depicted in each?

### Multicultural Genre: Family Scripted TV Shows & Reality TV

Fourth session: → Black and White Portrayals of Race on TV Sitcoms & Reality Shows: Facilitator asks the participants if they are familiar with any television shows that may depict black or white culture? Then show the students a variety of black and white TV sitcoms and reality shows.

#### Family TV Sitcoms

- Black Family TV Shows reinforcing ideas and portrayals of race & family:
  - “The Cosby Show”:
    - The Reggae Episode
  - “Fresh Prince of Bel Air”:
    - “Carlton learns about discrimination”
  - “The Cleveland Show”:
    - “Black Siri”
  - Construct a Reader Response
  - Focus Group Questions:
    - Are these accurate cultural portrayals of black families?
    - Do they incorporate any stereotypes? Do you feel as if there are any negative depictions or mocking the culture?
    - Do you notice any similarities between the family set up between “The Fresh Prince of Bel Air” & “The Cosby Show”?
    - How do you think mainstream culture still control and impact how black families are portrayed on TV?
- White Family TV Shows reinforcing portrayals and perceptions of race and family:
  - “Full House”
    - Steve Urkel Cameos
  - “Family Guy”:
    - Racial stereotypes
    - “Racist joke”
  - Construct a Reader Response
  - Focus Group Questions:
    - Why do you think the produce of Family Guy felt the need to create the same show but of a different race?
    - Do you feel like “The Cleveland Show” is mocking black culture since the producer is white?
    - Do you think the sarcasm or humor in Television eliminate the harm of the subliminal cultural messages?

## Appendix D Continued

**Reality & Scripted Television**

- Black Cultural Representations through: “Empire” & “Housewives of Atlanta”
- White Cultural Representations through: “Nashville” & “Housewives of Beverly Hills”
  - Construct a Reader Response
  - Focus Group Discussion Questions:
    - What are the similarities & differences culturally?
    - How do the topics, priorities, and fights differ for the black wives from the white wives?
    - How come “Empire” & “Nashville” are about the same content but express it in such a different way? How do these shows perpetuate cultural differences?