

**Members of The Jury Please Rise: Children Interact with African American  
Children's Literature**

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DISSERTATION

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*“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might ” – Ecclesiastes 9:10*

To God be all glory and praise for the wonderful things He has done.

W.E.B. Dubois and his fellow editors of *The Brownies' Book* had a dream to allow “children of the sun” the opportunity to have their questions answered and their writings recognized. The works appearing in TBB in 1920 still have meaning for artists today, including myself. I took on this task not knowing what would ultimately transpire. But I am grateful for visionary artists, like the TBB editors and contributing young writers, who paved the way for generations of future artists to come.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. Reader Response Theory.....	RRT
Connecting.....	CONNECT
Constructing.....	CONS
Engaging.....	ENG
Evaluating.....	EV
Imaging.....	I
2. African American Children’s Literature.....	AACL
Celebrating Culture and Race.....	CCR
Encourage, Inspire, Uplift.....	EIU
Entertain.....	ENT
Foster Achievement.....	F
Informing, Passing Along Messages.....	IP
Redressing Negative Images.....	RNI
Self Discovery.....	SD
3. Coretta Scott King.....	CSK
4. The Brownies’ Book.....	TBB

## SUMMARY

Since the last publications of *The Brownies' Book* (TBB) and *Ebony Jr.*, there have been few to no instances of public exchanges of African American children's writing in response to literature with a focused attention on their culture, identities, experiences, and history. In an effort to reconnect with youth, much in the way that TBB and *Ebony Jr.* correspondences allowed, this study sought to once again gauge the reactions of children after reading African American children's literature (AACL).

The current research employed descriptive case study methodology (Yin, 2006) in order to examine the reactions of children after interactions with AACL. The current inquiry examined the following questions: what are children's reactions after reading AACL, and how do the written reactions align with the historical purposes of this literature. This study aimed to add to existing literature on reader response theory and the significance of AACL and its impact on children's understanding of their worlds.

As a result of the present study we now know that children reacted to AACL by discovering new knowledge, making a range of connections, and negotiating cultural and racial evaluations and insights. In the written reactions addressed to internal and external audiences, participants also addressed racial challenges and appropriated historical language. As a result of the present study it is clear the five participants, although divided into two discussion groups, reacted to AACL in similar ways. These findings are significant because AACL gave participants the opportunity to discuss literature written about authentic Black life and to have their questions, opinions, and writings recognized.



## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Historically, Black artists wrote stories to inform, to make change within their social environments, and to inspire themselves and future generations. Rudine Sims-Bishop, a leading scholar in African American children's literature (AACL), offers that history is passed on through story (2011). During the past fifty years, authors and illustrators of AACL have played a prominent role of passing on history through their written and illustrated works. African American children's literature, both historical and contemporary, was also written to foster the achievement of Black students. For example, the 1960s marked a period when artists created AACL focused on three prominent aims that included combating negative images of Blacks, inspiring young Black children, and teaching Black history.

While literacy practices and textual productions are in flux and digital shifts in literacy spaces are trumpeting the value placed on writing for today's children, my observations inside and outside of schools over the past decade lead me to assess that AACL is still beneficial for children today. Therefore, I am interested in examining intersections of AACL and children's writings. I conducted a study to explore this intersection to examine children's writing after their interactions with AACL

In this chapter, I review literature that provides a lens for examining the intersections of AACL and writing. Taking a sociohistorical view of AACL, I reviewed literature that offers insights into significant shifts of AACL, the historical significance of this literature, and prevailing narratives in AACL from its inception to present day to outline the purpose and significance of this research.

## Statement of Research Problem

Franklin Lewis wrote to *The Brownies' Book* (TBB) editors hoping to get some answers. In his letter, written in 1920, the Philadelphia native states: “*My mother says you are going to have a magazine about colored boys and girls, and I am very glad. So I am writing to ask you if you will please put in your paper some of the things, which colored boys can work at when they grow up*” (cited in Johnson-Feelings, 1996).<sup>1</sup>

Many more letters similar to Lewis’ poured into TBB, January 1920 – December 1921, from African American young readers. Children and teens asked questions, requested books, offered feedback, and presented ideas for future stories.

W.E.B. Du Bois with Jessie Fauset and Augustus Granville Dill planned TBB to give literature for Black children a new image. The writings, illustrations, photos, and artwork by Black writers and artists in each publication of TBB aimed to celebrate achievements of Black Americans. As the editor of TBB, Du Bois’ idea was to create a new outlook for a new generation by creating a new genre in children’s literature.

*The Brownies' Book* had a Jury Section, a feature of the publication designed to invite children’s responses, questions and written reactions to stories and happenings in their lives and their worlds. One young girl, Eleanor Holland, wrote:

*“I am writing to ask you to refer me to some books on the Negro. I want to learn more about my race, so I want to begin early. I am twelve years old and I hope to, when I am old enough, bend all of my efforts for the advancement of colored people”* (cited in Johnson-Feelings, 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Similarly another young girl, Pocahontas Foster, wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson-Feelings, D. (Ed.). (1996). *The Best of the Brownies' book*. Oxford University Press, 25

<sup>2</sup> Johnson-Feelings, D., 26

*“I read these stories to a little friend of mine, Beatrice Turner, who is only eight years old, [and she] would like so much to know the story of John Brown. I do wish you would tell that story sometime in The Brownies’ Book. Nine-year-old Beulah Martha Howard wrote, I am a dear lover of books. Seeing The Brownies’ Book there I was delighted to read it. For the past six months I’ve been trying to write little poems. One of them I send you for publication”* (cited in Johnson-Feelings, 1996).<sup>3</sup>

*The Brownies’ Book* became the first published forum of its kind to net public written interchanges from Black youth. These youth had a new literary platform to read literature and write in response to texts aimed at their positive identity development. The aim below, written to Black children in the first poem by Fauset, outlined the purpose of the magazine which became an outlet for creative expression and collective empowerment for new voices representing Black characters:

“To Children, who with eager look scanned vainly library shelf and nook, for history or song or story that told of Colored Peoples’ glory- we dedicate *The Brownies’ Book*” (cited in Johnson-Feelings, 1996)<sup>4</sup> -  
Jessie Fauset

Langston Hughes, one of the most celebrated Black writers in the U.S., began submitting his writings to TBB in 1921. Hughes wrote about his frustrations and concerns for his future. Du Bois had concern for cultivating the aptitudes of Blacks like Hughes and made it his aim to help reconstruct a nation of people to greater success.

*The Brownies’ Book* served its purpose and opened the door to new voices, new portrayals, and a renewed spirit among many Black youth. This renewal was reflected in their writings that have become a part of a storied lineage of Black writers (Mullane, 1993). However, two years and 24 issues later, TBB magazine printed its last edition.

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson-Feelings, D., 54

<sup>4</sup> Johnson-Feelings, D., 25

Fifty years after the final edition of TBB, John H. Johnson, a Black entrepreneur and publisher, introduced, *Ebony Jr.* This outlet for children had similar aims of TBB. A new generation of children was the focus of this children's magazine that aimed to provide stories of Black culture, heritage, and pride. Since the last publications of both, there have been few to no instances of public exchanges of African American children's writing in response to literature with a focused attention on their culture, identities, experiences, and history. Despite the presence of both TBB and *Ebony Jr.*, there is little research that examines young children's reactions to AACL, literature written by artists with the same aims as both magazines. This makes it difficult to gauge the influence of AACL on children's writings in today's society.

In an effort to reconnect with youth, much in the way that TBB and *Ebony Jr.* correspondences allowed, this study sought to once again gauge the reactions of youth after reading AACL. Therefore, the current inquiry examined the following questions:

- 1) What are children's reactions after reading AACL, and
- 2) How do the written reactions align with the historical purposes of this literature?

This study aimed to add to existing literature on reader response and the significance of AACL and its impact on children's understanding of themselves and the world. Studying the interaction of AACL and writing can be useful for understanding the presence or absence of its influence.

### **Overview of African American Voices in Children's Literature**

For more than three hundred years, Black writers used their pens to define self, nurture resilience, engage others, and build capacity (Mullane, 1993; Tatum, 2012; Wall,

2005). They passed along encouraging and uplifting messages for Black people in general, and for U.S. and international audiences more broadly, while discovering more about themselves (Brooks & McNair, 2009). The voices of Black writers emerged from a long-standing tradition of African storytellers who used oral art forms to build community, entertain, inform, and instruct one another (Bishop, 2007). At the core of many of the oral tales was a propensity to moralize and address stories of African history (Osa, 1995).

The oral tradition framed historical and cultural messages that are now present in literature written for children. Evidence of this framing can be found in stories like *Chike and the River* (Achebe, 1966), a tale of eleven-year-old Chike who dreams of crossing the Niger River to the city of Asaba. African American children's literature emerging from the African oral and literate traditions functioned to pass stories, poems, songs, history, and religious messages to future generations and to redress negative images in literature written from a Eurocentric perspective (Figure 1 presents an overview of writings about AACL from the 1900s to the present).

Figure 1

### *Timeline and History of AACL (1800s – present)*

#### **Prior to the Golden Age of AACL 1800-2000**

*Ten Little Niggers* - books with racist messages (1860-1980)

Whites writing about Blacks for White audiences (1870-1960)

The story of *Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman, 1899)

#### **Golden Age of AACL 1900-2000**

*The Crisis* (1912) NAACP journal published for children

White & Black authors writing for Black audiences (1920-1980)

Harlem Renaissance (1920-1930)

*The Brownies' Book* magazine (1920-1921)

Few Stories published by Black authors (1950-1960)

Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968)

Positive images emerge (1960)

Black authors writing for all audiences (1960-present)

*The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) Caldecott Award

African heritage takes center stage (1970-1980)

Coretta Scott King Award created (1970)

Just Us Books (1987) first publishing co. dedicated to Black children's lit

Almost 200 of 5,000 books published by and about Blacks (CCBC 2012)

For the first half of the 20th century, incentive for creating AACL was driven by a need to recreate the literary image of Black children and youth in books. As early as 1817, *The Christian Recorder* (Gilchrist, 1864), one of the earliest publications by the African Methodist Episcopal church, began providing child-related material with moralistic and religious stories. In 1912, *The Crisis*, a journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was born (Du Bois, 1921). This journal included one annual issue dedicated to children.

### **Social and Political Expansion of AACL**

The creation of AACL was purposeful, filling a void of works used to foster the achievement of Black children through their interactions with books (Sims Bishop, 2011). Many writers began producing books for Black children during the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement in the 1920s that was also known as the Black Arts

Movement. Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and Carter G. Woodson wrote several books for children about African American life during this most influential movement in African American literary history. The Harlem Renaissance artists played key roles in the birth of AACL, literature that reflected the social and cultural history of Black people in America. This time period sparked a golden age for AACL and mainstream literature and served as a critical turning point.

More books became available for Black children of all ages soon after the Harlem Renaissance. These books spoke directly to Black people because the authors confronted historical realities of the past and acknowledged children's realities and truths (Martin, 2004). Authors and illustrators of AACL have continued to write and illustrate books to pass along culture and to share new stories with more positive depictions of Black life and culture.

Despite the change in direction, few books were published about the Black experience until the 1960s. Tensions in the U.S. were high during this decade because of the landmark 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision and the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott that sparked the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement had a vast impact on the ways in which Black characters were featured in children's stories. Books like *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) was the first picture book featuring a Black child to win a Caldecott Award. In 1966, the Council on Interracial Books for Children was established and researchers began examining the content and characterizations of children categorized as minorities (e.g., Asian, Black, and Latino) in children's books.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center began keeping statistics on the number of books published in the U.S. written by and about African Americans in 1994 in

response to requests and interest in books with accurate portrayals. Of the 5,000 children's books published yearly since 2000, approximately 250 have been published by Black authors and illustrators.

Late in the 20th century, more authors focused on writing and illustrating books with accurate and authentic cultural representations and depictions of racial and ethnic groups. The new millennium has continued with accurate and authentic cultural representations, including representations that celebrate blackness (Martin, 2004). *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children* (Pinkney & Pinkney, 2000), *Happy to Be Nappy* (Bell Hooks & Raschka, 1999) and *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) are three powerfully illustrated examples of children's books that depict blackness in healthy ways. Other authors have created newer versions of children's picture books to replace demeaning portrayals of blackness with vivid artwork, positive depictions, and memorable characters. For example, *Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman, 1899) was given a facelift with the publication of *The Story of Little Babaji* (Marcellino, 1996) and *Sam and the Tigers* (Lester & Pinkney, 1996).

Illustrated stories written within the past decade also contain renewed images and messages. *Heart and Soul* (Nelson, 2012), *Dave the Potter: Poet, Slave* (Carrick Hill & Collier, 2011), *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball* (Nelson, 2009), *Rosa* (Giovanni & Collier, 2006), and *Goin' Someplace Special* (McKissack & Pinkney, 2002) are several examples. Individuals and families are portrayed in a positive light. One such example is *I Have Heard of a Land* (Thomas, 1998). In this book, the author tells the story of a woman dreaming of making the land run to a place where she can build her home. Readers are given the portrayal of a strong African American family



traveling across open land with two horses, a buggy, and all of their possessions in search of this free land. Amidst a dark sky and threatens a storm, the family continues on their journey. Photos depict the same woman dreaming of working in her own yard. Finally, she holds a hammer high above her head and begins building. This is significant because portrayals of strong African American families in general, and African American woman in particular, have been rare in African American children's literature. *A Sweet Smell of Roses* (Johnson, 2007) confronts race in a direct way. This story centers on a march during the Civil Rights Movement. Two young girls sneak out of the house in the early hours of the morning to join a peace march and to listen to a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The story portrays a loving African American family, an active community during a time of unrest, and pays tribute to all of the children who contributed to the Civil Rights Movement.

Over the past fifty years, AACL has changed and enhanced the children's literary world. Many Black writers and illustrators accomplished these goals as they wrote picture books that contributed to children and youth discovering the world of literature (Osa, 1995). Black children and youth can be empowered by the knowledge they come from a legacy of artists (Gill Willis, 1995). As they interact with stories and illustrations, children personalize them by making life-to-story or story-to-life connections (Dahl & Freppon, 1995).

In a review of extant literature, seven purposes of AACL, written and illustrated over the past century, were identified: 1) celebrate culture and race, 2) uplift, encourage, and inspire, 3) entertain, 4) foster achievement, 5) inform and pass along messages, 6) redress negative images, and 7) advance self-discovery.

## **In Search of Students' Written Reactions**

As a writer of AACL and one who reaped dual benefits from the storied writing tradition of Black writers, I was interested in creating a platform to capture students' written reactions after they interact with the content and illustrations in AACL. I am also interested in examining how students' writings align with seven central aims identified in the review of literature. Therefore, the current inquiry aimed to recreate a quasi-literary platform similar to TBB with a particular focus on its Jury feature. Dyson and Genishi (1994) assert that we all have a basic need for story and for organizing our experience into tales. That said there is historical precedent that AACL can stimulate writing.

While the research is well documented on the reading and writing connection, few studies examined the text and illustrations in AACL to stimulate students' writings. To that end, this study was planned to describe students' written reactions after reading AACL. The following chapter will highlight a selection of related research used to inform this investigation.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Overview of Review of Literature**

In this chapter, the literature used to inform this investigation is discussed. Several extant literature reviews were referenced and key findings identified as a starting point for this review. In their reviews, Martinez & Roser, 2001; Brooks & McNair, 2009; and Sims Bishop, 2007 identified the following: 1) the recurring cultural themes found in AACL; 2) culturally relevant literature as a necessity for student success, 3) context as key for eliciting meaningful student responses, and 4) culturally relevant pedagogy affects children's responses. Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory also figured prominently in multiple existing reviews of literature. Reader response theory was used as a lens to approach this work. Rosenblatt (1978) believed that meaning is achieved at the intersection between a reader and the text and without this intersection meaning could not be achieved.

To locate literature for this investigation, education research databases were searched for peer refereed journal articles. Terms used to initiate this search, included: *AACL, Black literature, writing, children's literature, reader response, elementary school, middle school, and writing response*. Studies published between 1960 to present that involved elementary and middle school students in grades 3-8 were examined. This review focused on students' reactions after interactions with AACL. Any studies not meeting these criteria were not included.

### **Response to Literature and Children's Writing**

Response to literature research has evolved from a focus on how children respond and differences in response, to literary meaning making and interactions with literature

(Martinez & Roser, 2001). The current review yielded two main responses to literature ideas: the importance of cultural knowledge and personal connections for children. Interactions with AACL specifically provide a means to enhance the educational experience by immersing children in stories of Black people (Collier, 2000). Researchers note that a lack of interactions around historical and cultural knowledge can influence a child's textual interpretations and written responses (Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Pantaleo, 2010; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992)

Two studies in particular (Hefflin, 2003; Sipe & Daley, 2005) aimed to gauge children's reactions after interactions with AACL. In both studies, students were given the opportunity to evaluate and define their experiences with the texts. Findings of the studies revealed that the interactions afforded the students greater literary understanding and personal connections to the texts. Using six books, Hefflin's (2003) exploratory case study aimed to answer questions regarding the power third-grade students found in AACL. Four students read one book each week for six weeks. Students who participated in this study made connection to their cultural heritage, connected with characters and events, experienced joy, and discovered the opportunity to pass along stories.

The students in these studies exhibited greater literary understanding and were able to make connections. However, it was unclear if AACL was the sole influence on these findings. No association to other bodies of literature was provided.

Altieri (1993) was interested in using AACL to determine how the use of books with Black characters impacted the writings of 60 third-grade Hispanic, Caucasian, and African American students. More specifically, the researcher wanted to know if ethnicity played a role in the students' writings and engagement with the texts. The classroom

teachers read six books with Black characters, two books each week for three weeks, and asked the students to write in response. The students' writings indicated no significant difference between ethnicity and level of complexity, and responses ranged from little or no evidence of story experience to highly inventive elements (Altieri, 1993).

McGinley & Kamberelis conducted a yearlong study of children's literacy practices and understanding of themselves and their worlds. They sought evidence that writing for the 27 third- and fourth-grader students was enhanced over time by observing the reading and writing activities. The researchers conducted weekly observations across a school year and collected interview data, observed writing activities, and took field notes. Students were interviewed and their writings and response journal entries examined. Data revealed a) the children's reading and writing operate for them in a variety of personal and social ways; b) reading and writing were used to explore possible selves, to remember personal experiences or interests, to reflect upon emotions, and to engage in the storied lives and worlds of imaginary characters; and c) children wrote most frequently about personal experience, as an arena for personal growth (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1996).

Lehr and Thompson (2000) aimed to understand children's attempts at making meaning of two stories, *The Friendship* (Taylor, 1998) and *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 2014). Over a two-month period, researchers read the stories to two groups of fifth graders and created a framework for analyzing the participants' conversations and written responses. Although students often lacked the historical knowledge to make sense of the literature (Lehr & Thompson, 2000), a) the children often relied on personal frameworks

and autobiographical information and b) in both urban and rural settings they had sophisticated oral and written responses reflecting diverse cultural perspectives.

Moller and Allen (2000) also examined the interactions of elementary school students around, *The Friendship*. Using the tenets of reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) as lenses for their work, the researchers described the response development zone that was created as a result of the students' small group interactions. For each meeting during a two-week span of time, the girls read 10-15 pages of the book and wrote responses to the researcher's prompts. The researchers discovered that their "stories functioned as ways to explore or envision possible selves, remember personal experiences, reflect on problematic emotions, participate in imaginary lives, negotiate social relationships, and develop their understanding of social issues" (Moller & Allen, 2000).

Likewise, Dressel (2005) aimed to determine what her 123 eighth-grade students learned from reading multicultural novels and wanted to uncover what their written responses revealed about their feelings of characters from differing cultures. Dressel gave students three novels to read and had three goals in mind, for students to enjoy the novels, to learn about a culture different from their own, and to understand themselves more clearly. After the novel readings, the students completed written responses, which were analyzed using a questionnaire and survey. The writings revealed that students became personally involved, but the books alone did not increase their understanding of others.

These written reactions were mainly for self-discovery and to foster achievement. Although the use of AACL can enhance a child's educational experience with stories of Black people and by developing a cultural image, which reflects a reader's place in the

world as valid (Collier, 2000), the books alone are not enough. These investigations revealed the need for discussions around historical and cultural knowledge to elicit meaningful responses, discussions Lewison and Heffernan (2008) call critical writing pedagogy.

While teaching third-grade students, Heffernan (2008) discovered that students were able to discuss social and political events, however their ideas were not appearing in their written responses. She began to introduce discussions and literature focused on social and political issues, and her use of a critical writing pedagogy was birthed to help students relocate their personal stories to analyze and critique their social worlds (Lewison & Heffernan, 2008). For 17 weeks, Heffernan's 19 students discussed, read, and wrote in response to social issue books or disruptive stories (Yeoman, 1999). Lewison & Heffernan (2008) conducted a textual analysis of the students' writings, which became a means of broadcasting their own tales of injustice (Lewison & Heffernan, 2008). Data revealed that students used writing as a form of social action, and the social narrative writing helped to create a safe space to share personal and social concerns and provided a way for students to see literacy as a community resource and tool for taking action (Lewison & Heffernan, 2008).

A synthesis of the response research yielded five main response types. There was evidence of: a) connecting, b) constructing, c) engaging, d) evaluating, and e) imaging (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Purves & Beach, 1972). Each is defined below:

1. Connecting is defined as relating one's experience to the text
2. Constructing is defined as creating alternative worlds.
3. Engaging is becoming emotionally involved.

4. Evaluating is judging the quality of one's experience with a text.
5. Imaging is creating visual images.

The literature alone did not influence the students' written responses or their understanding of others, however, with the addition of discussion and personal frameworks, writers were able to use AACL for greater literary understanding.

### **Studies of African American Children's Literature**

Research shows children are open to interacting with culturally conscious literature, and enjoy, identify, and deeply engage while interpreting it (Sims, 1983, Smith, 1995; Spears-Bunton, 1990). This culturally conscious literature tells students who and what a society and culture value, what kind of behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and what it means to be a decent human being (Sims Bishop, 1990). AACL was created with the aims of teaching Black history, encouraging, informing, fostering achievement, and enjoyment. Research proved young children are reading this literature for enjoyment; some are even using the works to develop understanding of the world, and themselves.

In a landmark study of AACL, Bishop (1982) found that culturally relevant literature is essential to the educational and psychological wellbeing of all children. Bishop conducted a survey and analysis of contemporary realistic fiction books about Blacks published between 1965 and 1980 to look at images and representations (See Figure 1). The literature was used to foster a social consciousness in other children, assimilate African American children to the melting pot, and share stories of growing up African American, which Bishop calls culturally conscious fiction.

The following year while conducting a case study of 10-year-old Osula, an avid reader, Sims Bishop (1983) learned of the characteristics of AACL that were appealing to



Osula. Bishop interviewed Osula to uncover her reactions to books about Black culture, and discovered that although Osula was open to reading about cultures other than her own, she enjoyed reading books with characters that most resembled her and books with stories that most related to her own life. Based on Osula's assertions, Bishop determined that the exclusion of Blacks from literature was harmful to Black and White children and Black children are denied their humanity and white children are fed poison of racism when presented with false pictures of the world.

Consistent in much of the research is the support for the use of culturally relevant literature, similar to works appearing in TBB. Within AACL for example, recurring cultural characteristics exist and considerable attention has been given to works containing these cultural characteristics (Brooks & McNair, 2009). In 2006, Brooks conducted a qualitative case study to determine how readers of differing ethnicities interpret AACL. She interacted with a group of 28 Black and Latino students during their eighth-grade reading classes. The students read, and for ten weeks participated in eighteen large group discussions and produced 270 written responses to literature. Brooks analyzed the novels for recurring themes, linguistic patterns, cultural practices, and examined the writings for evidence of these themes. The data revealed that recurring cultural themes, African American linguistic patterns, and ethnic group practices were identifiable. The participants actively used cultural knowledge, experiences, and the textual features to develop literary understandings.

In 2009, Young sought to discover whether culture exists in *The Freedman's Torchlight*, TBB, and *Bridge: A Cross Culture Reading Program*. Young conducted a context analysis of cultural remnants in The Jury section of TBB in particular, which

indeed revealed the echoing themes. Data revealed that classroom use of TBB and its themes motivated children to learn.

Debatably, the most important purpose of AACL is to connect all readers around African American culture. However, some research revealed that readers remain drawn to stories that reflect only their own existence. When cultural relevance is not evident in literature, readers will attempt to make surface connections on their own, and that on their own, children aren't able to connect with the historical significance of AACL. This was evident in the following studies asserting that the race and culture were not factors.

Grice & Vaughn (1992) studied third graders' ability to connect with culturally conscious and melting pot books. Their study aimed to determine whether positive or negative images of Black characters in picture books affect which picture books Black children preferred to read, the level of interaction with illustrations, and the messages children receive from images of Blacks. The 13 participants were introduced to 24 books over a six-week period of time. The class held group discussions over each book, and after the readings and discussions, three of the students were randomly selected to answer questions - one comprehension, one involvement, and one evaluation. The data revealed that students easily understood and enjoyed the content, were less affected by racial characters, the stories about community, friends, and biographies to be most realistic, and readers preferred happy stories with hopeful messages (Grice & Vaughn, 1992).

Similarly, the presence of stereotypical images did not affect which books students preferred to read when McKenzie, Ray, & Johnstone (1998) asked African-American students to respond to images of Blacks in children's picture books. Fifth grade students from two classes were asked to discuss, rank, and challenge five picture books

with images of Black central characters. The students' answers revealed they favored *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991) and shied away from *Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman, 1923), indicating to researchers that the presence of stereotypical images does not affect which books students prefer to read, students did not judge offensive nature of image features, students were not aware of context in which stereotypes existed, and students disliked books they did not perceive as believable (McKenzie, Ray, & Johnstone, 1998).

These studies expose a need for conversations around AACL, to help children understand the literature fully, make personal connections and responses, and to further interracial respect between children of all races (Grice & Vaughn, 1992).

AACL serves as a guide for exploring the world and other worlds. This literature was created to teach Black history and to present positive images of Blacks. Research has proven the importance of AACL, although, research has also uncovered that young children are missing the significance of AACL, and prefer reading stories that resemble their own lives. Examining AACL can elicit deeper personal connections, yet across all of the research on AACL are the missing writing voices of young children. Texts we present to children matter, especially for those attempting to make sense of the literature in connection to their lives. For many students, these common textual features are familiar, but this literature also provides a window for all children.

### **Summary of Reviewed Research**

In addition to the ways children respond to literature, findings from previous response research revealed that young children use literature as a lens to understand their worlds and to confirm beliefs, form opinions, and answer questions (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1996) and to recount their life experiences, to recast stories that have been

told to them, and to share stories of wonderment (Amour, 2003).

In this review, I set out to explore how writing is an important part of the cultural toolkit needed by all students (Bruner, 1996). The research suggests that AACL can be the impetus toward building that cultural toolkit. This examination of children's reactions to AACL was significant to demonstrate the need for opportunities to provide interactions with use of AACL, literature that was intended for celebrating culture, fostering achievement, uplifting, informing, entertaining, redressing negative images, and self-discovery. Given the existing research, it is clear that children enjoy stories most resembling their lives. It is also evident that students use writing to construct and negotiate their cultural identities, but the responses to literature are surface and impersonal without context. We still seek to understand children's responses to AACL, which is the area where the current inquiry explores in depth. In the following chapter, the methods used to conduct this research are outlined.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The current inquiry employed descriptive qualitative case study methodology (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) in order to describe students' interactions with AACL. All CSK awarded picture books written by and about Blacks for this research because of the alignment in these works with the seven main principles found in AACL. Similar qualitative inquiries were previously conducted to examine how children verbally respond to this literature (Grice & Vaughn, 1992; McNair, 2012; Sipe & Daley, 2005; Smith, 1995; McKenzie, 1998; Sims, 1983, Smith, 1995; Spears-Bunton, 1990; Eckhoff, 1983). These studies helped to provide guidance for this investigation.

A qualitative case study was selected in particular for this research to examine AACL and reactions of children, a method useful for studying multicultural issues and in-depth, real-life contexts (Barone, 2004; Duke & Mallette, 2004; Schulze, 2003; Yin, 1994). Children's discussions, interviews, and writings following their interactions with AACL were examined.

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are children's reactions after reading AACL?
2. How do the written reactions align with the historical purposes of this literature?

Next, the theoretical framework and research methodology used for this study are described. In the following chapter, group discussions, written artifacts, and interview data are analyzed.

#### **Theoretical Framework: Reader Response Theory**

This study was grounded in reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978). Rosenblatt argued that meaning could not take place in the absence of the reader's feeling, experience, and thoughts. And it is further believed that when a reader describes, responds to, or interprets a work, a new text is being produced (Rosenblatt, 1978). Researchers of literary response are interested in several questions: a) what different processes operate during reading; b) what types of responses do readers make; c) what stances do readers bring (Hait, 2012); d) how has knowledge and reading experiences influenced their responses; e) what types of strategies are used; and f) what is the influence of their knowledge, ability, attitude, interest, personality, or purpose on their responses (Beach & Hynds, 1991).

### **Tenets of Reader Response Theory and African American Children's Literature**

The five tenets of reader response theory: connecting, constructing, engaging, evaluating, and imaging (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Purves & Beach, 1972) were used in order to answer research question one, what are children's reactions to AACL:

- Connecting is defined as relating one's experience to the text
- Constructing is defined as creating alternative worlds
- Engaging is becoming emotionally involved
- Evaluating is judging the quality of one's experience with a text
- Imaging is creating visual images

The seven main ideologies of TBB and AACL: celebrating culture and race, encourage, entertain, foster achievement, inform, redress negative images, and self-discovery were used to answer research question two, how do the written reactions align with the historical purposes of AACL:

- Encourage is to give support,
- Entertain is to provide enjoyment and to bring cheer,
- Foster achievement is to push or stimulate some type of realization or recognition,
- Inform is to give information or share knowledge, to
- Redress negative images is to set wrong images right, and
- Self-discovery is gaining knowledge or understanding of self.

The five tenets of reader response theory together with the seven main ideologies of TBB and AACL were used to analyze all data sources.

## **Methods**

### **Framing the context for the study**

Children's activist Marian Wright Edelman wrote that *The Brownies' Book* (TBB) was a magazine for parents and children to read together to spark their desire for more knowledge. This idea was central while developing context for this study. TBB also had central aims that were important to consider while planning this research. Three aims in particular helped guide this study, adults and children learning together, showing children The Jury section, and introducing history and positive illustrations created by Black artists.

The aim for children and the researcher learning together in the present research study intended to give children the opportunity to ponder, question, and state opinions about the selected texts. In addition to this collaboration, showing children The Jury section of TBB gave members of The New Jury an idea of what was important to children during TBB time period. This insight was intended to help make sense of their

thoughts, dreams, and desire for more knowledge. The decision to provide historical content about Blacks, created by Blacks was purposeful, and intended to educate about Black history, instill a sense of pride, and provide context for their experiences today.

A close examination of previously conducted research on AACL and children's responses also helped to frame the current research. Insight gained during a pilot case study of two participants two years prior to this study was also used. During the pilot, the researcher read two CSK award-winning picture books. The participants were asked to write their reactions to the stories. Both participants had interest in reading and writing outside of the study, and used the writing response time to create stories of their own. One participant paid more attention to the illustrations and wrote a detailed description of what was happening in the images. The second participant wrote a story, along with questions for the author. During this investigation, it was discovered that each participant responds in uniquely creative ways, and the selected AACL helped to educate about African American artists and helped each make meaningful connections to their lived experiences. The pilot study resulted in questions regarding the role of illustrations and text for participants' reactions.

### **Text Selection**

The Coretta Scott King (CSK) awarded books chosen for this study were a select body of literature representing the evolution of the genre of AACL and reflect African American life over the years (Martin, 2004). The CSK books chosen for examination were instrumental in reshaping, changing, and expanding the definition of AACL and picture books in particular (Martin, 2004), providing a tradition of excellence and of expanding the boundaries of the genre in content and form (Martin, 2004). Books



selected for this study were picture books and contain the purposes of AACL: to encourage, inspire, and uplift, celebrate culture and race, entertain, foster achievement, inform and/or pass along messages, redress negative images, and for self-discovery

Picture books were selected for this study in particular because they tell the tale of historical movements similar to TBB content and based on a selection criterion, which includes the purposes of AACL. The picture books also allowed The New Jury to consider the negative portrayals of the past in comparison with the more positive portrayals in the selected contemporary works. Four books were exemplars and met 100% of the selection criteria, books with:

- 1) Historical content;
- 2) Suggested reading level of ages four and older;
- 3) Standard picture book length of 32 pages;
- 4) Recognition in CSK author or illustrator category
- 5) Cultural appeal, and
- 6) Content similar to participant's interests

To provide further context for this research, six letters were chosen from The Jury section of TBB, letters containing similar themes as the chosen books and based on the participants' interests that were uncovered during their individual interviews (see Appendix A). Books not meeting these criteria were not chosen. The selection criteria helped narrow more than seventy-five books to four (See Figure 2).

Figure 2  
*Text Selection Criteria*

	<b>Purpose and Titles</b>	<b>In the Time of the Drums</b>	<b>The Great Migration: Journey to the North</b>	<b>The Negro Speaks of Rivers</b>	<b>Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom</b>
1	Encourage, uplift, inspire	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Self-discovery	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Entertain	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Inform, pass along messages	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Redress negative images	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Foster achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Celebrate culture and race	✓	✓	✓	✓

## **Participants and Recruitment**

The current inquiry was conducted with collaboration with the reading clinic at a large research University in the Midwest. The reading clinic serves as a space wherein students have access to children's literature and literacy enrichment programming. Such collaboration provided existing contact information for potential participants for the present study. The researcher worked with staff members in the reading clinic to recruit the participants. The Jury section of TBB was designated specifically for interchanges with children. The five participants, referred to throughout the remainder of this research as The New Jury (see Figure 3), were recruited for this study through a process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or

activities are selected. Interested students who were able to write their reactions independently were selected to participate. A questionnaire was sent to parents, and children were interviewed individually, to gauge interest and reading experiences. In the end, all children who expressed an interest in this study were selected for participation. Research was conducted in two separate small groups. All members of The New Jury expressed interest in either reading or writing and did not receive incentives for participating (See Figure 3).

### **The New Jury**

The New Jury consisted of four boys and one girl and was comprised of four Black students and one White student. All members of The New Jury were in grades 5-7 during the time of the study. Each member resided in a large Midwestern city in the United States. Four members attended urban, public schools and one member attended an urban, private school. The New Jury members - Devon, Emery, Logan, Jordan, and Cory - were all assigned pseudonyms for the present study (see Figure 3).

Figure 3  
*Members of The New Jury*

<b>Jury Member</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Interest</b>
<b>Day</b>			
Devon (M)	Black	Urban/public	Friendship
Emery (M)	Black	Urban/public	Sports
Logan (M)	White	Urban/private	Magic
Jordan (TH)	Black	Urban/public	Film
Cory (TH)	Black	Urban/public	Fantasy

The New Jury was divided into groups based on their availability. There were three members in a Monday group and two members in a Thursday group. Monday's

group included gender and racial diversity, and included one girl and one White student. Two Black males, who were related, made up Thursday's group.

The New Jury met for a total of eight hours - once weekly from 4:30-6:30 p.m. for four weeks. Three members of The New Jury expressed an interest in writing and brought examples of their out-of-school writings to share with the group. These members also talked about plans to publish their writings.

### **Monday's New Jury Members**

Devon was eager to participate in the study and admitted loving reading and writing. Her reading interests included stories about family and relationships. Emery liked to entertain people, in person and in his writings. His interests included sports, comedy, playing basketball, and reading graphic novels. Logan had an interest in reading books with Black characters and learning about Black culture. He remembered reading stories about Black people during slavery times.

### **Thursday's New Jury Members**

Cory participated in the present study because of his love of writing science fiction and adventure stories that include a lot of action. He described himself as an adventurous writer as well. His interests included playing the clarinet in his school's band, spending time with his cousins, and traveling around the U.S. with his family. Jordan participated because of his love of writing. He wanted to be a famous actor and liked writing song lyrics, stories, and poems that he also enjoyed performing. He also liked writing about his travels.

**Researcher.** I am a Black woman, educator, and author. Over the years I've spent most of my memorable times with books in hand. Maya Angelou once said, "There is no

greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” As a young reader, I was desperate for story characters that mirrored my own life experiences and relationships. But few of my favorite books included characters with African American girls that I could really relate to. I began writing stories that reflected my life experiences. I found a way to satisfy my thirst for reading characters like myself and discovered more about myself in the process. Years after my first attempt at mystery writing, I went on to complete my first young adult novel, *Sellout* (Wilkins, 2010), a story of an African American teen girl who struggles with relationships, self-concept, and cultural awareness. While considering how text has played a role in my own writing life, it was my hope with the present study to explore the possibility of nurturing the writing voices with children.

Prior to the first session of the present study, each member of The New Jury was interviewed to gauge how they described themselves as writers and to gain insight into their reading and writing habits. Each member was asked:

1. Describe yourself as a writer,
2. Talk about a time when you wrote about yourself,
3. What do you know about AACL?
4. Describe the last book that you read that had Black characters.

These questions were asked to help inform the discussions on AACL, the illustrations selected for discussion, and the questions to introduce the written responses. In the present study, the researcher’s role was one of participant-observer responsible for leading group discussions, reading the picture books aloud, and helping clarify and answer questions about the selected materials as needed. Taking position as participant-observer allowed the researcher to rely on prior insight and knowledge.

## **Research Site**

The present study took place with two small participant groups meeting in the reading clinic of a large urban Midwestern University. The groups met once weekly. Normal clinic operations had ended for the summer, allowing access for participants after the school day, from 4:30-6:30 p.m. once weekly for four weeks. The New Jury selected for this research was assigned to two groups based on their availability. Each group met for a total of four sessions. The setting resembles a children's library and is supplied with AACL of varying disciplines and genres, laptops for student use, writing supplies, and recording equipment for interviews.

## **Pedagogical Routine**

**Discussion Questions and Session Materials.** Each of the four sessions with the two participant groups was broken into four main parts to allow each activity to build upon the next. The New Jury members were introduced to one pre-writing activity, given writing response time after all reviewed materials, listened to a read aloud of one picture book, and engaged in small group discussions. Four picture books and six sample letters from The Jury section of TBB were selected for the present study. The discussion questions during the four sessions were designed to:

1. Highlight the role of writing for Black children historically and presently.
2. Demonstrate how literature written about Black lives can stimulate writings.
3. Display the style and content of writing that The New Jury could model.
4. Provide background knowledge of young Black writers.

To help provide context, The New Jury members were introduced to sample letters first appearing in TBB. One of the sample TBB letters provided an example of one

teen searching for a home. This letter was chosen in particular because of the writers' goals to educate, to find a home, and to learn more about self. These themes also appeared in the pre-interviews of The New Jury members. The TBB letter reads:

I am a girl sixteen years old. I am an orphan, having neither mother nor father. My mother has been dead eleven years and my father, four years. White people have kept me –that is, I have worked for them to earn my living. Realizing that I did not always want to be a scrub girl, I have tried to educate myself, as I could not go to school do you think I could through *The Brownies' Book* get a home among a good Christian colored family? -Anonymous

The sample TBB letters for this research were chosen based on the writing age of the author, interests of The New Jury members, and content similar to the four selected picture books in the present study. After the story read aloud and response time, the researcher read sample letters from TBB. The New Jury was asked to write externally focused responses and encouraged to write on any subject that they desired. There were no parameters or restrictions placed on content of their writings. The writers were invited to share their work with the entire group.

During each of the four sessions, a) the researcher read one picture book, b) The New Jury wrote reactions to the selected book, and c) the researcher and The New Jury members discussed the writings. The researcher read so that participants could pay close attention to the selected books and would not be encumbered by reading difficulties or text complexity. Group discussions directly related to the book contents (See Table 1).

Table 1  
*Methodology & Session Routine*

Session routine	Discussion questions for the new jury	Time spent (min)
Pre-writing activity	Why do we write? What does my writing say about me? Who will read what I've written? What change will come from my writings?	5

Illustration & writing warm up	Describe what you see in this illustration.  Describe what this image reminds you of. How does this image make you feel?	15
Read-aloud  Sharing & discussion of context + picture book + illustration	How does the photo support the meaning of reading? Talk about the parts of the story that draw your attention. What parts stand out to you most? Does this story sound familiar to other stories you've read or heard about?	25
Writing response  Internally-focused written response to picture book	How does the photo add/take away from story? What does this story mean to you? How do you feel about this story? How do you identify with story characters? What stands out to you most about the story?  How does the story connect to you?	10
The Jury Letter  Discussion + externally focused written response	What was their purpose in writing? What were the writers trying to say? What will your letter say?	20
Individual interviews	Why did you write what you did? What message do you send about/with your writing?	45

To begin each session, The New Jury was invited to talk about the reasons for writing, the potential audiences for writings, and potential changes that could come from their writings. Five minutes were allotted for this discussion. For example, during one session The New Jury Member, Cory, said his reasons for writing were:

To express our feelings, to write a poem, to waste time, maybe you need to get something off your chest and your write about it.

After this discussion, the researcher asked The New Jury to review one image that was chosen from the picture book of the week (see Figure 4). Because picture books send two images simultaneously and the impact for young children is strong and lasting (Lechner, 1995), The New Jury was then asked to complete a pre-writing activity



involving selected illustrations from the book of the week. The illustrations were chosen to invoke questions and to spark discussions about the reading materials prior to the read-aloud. Additionally, the illustrations were chosen to serve as writing prompts.

Each image was chosen from one of the CSK awarded books, which align with the historical purposes of AACL. The images also reflect a topic mentioned by The New Jury members – traveling, familial relationships, and playing with friends. Every week, both participant groups reviewed the same illustration, same book, and same sample as the TBB letter. Once the participants had completed their initial written response, they were asked to share their writing with the group.

The New Jury members were also asked several questions related to this illustration, a) describe what you see in this illustration, b) describe what this image reminds you of, and c) how does this image make you feel. These questions were asked to help generate thoughts and ideas for a written response. Once The New Jury spent time discussing each question and their thoughts about the illustration, they spent five minutes writing a response, and then given the option to share their writings aloud.

The researcher then led a picture book read aloud following the illustration pre-writing exercise. The New Jury was asked to think about a few things during the read aloud: a) how the illustration supports the meaning of the story, b) how the parts of the story that draw their attention, and c) identify if the story was similar to others they have read. The picture book of the week was then introduced and the researcher addressed any observations or questions from the groups. Once the introduction was complete, the researcher read the book aloud, allowing for discussion and questions throughout.

The New Jury members were also invited to ask questions and include their opinions throughout the read aloud time. Once the read aloud was completed, The New Jury was invited to discuss a) how the illustration supported this reading, b) talk about parts of the story that stood out most, and c) familiarity to other stories.

Figure 4  
*Pre-Writing Activities*

	<b>Books</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Illustration</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>The Jury Letters</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	<i>The Great Migration: Journey to the North</i>	Eloise Greenfield and Jan Spivey Gilchrist	A young boy standing in front of vehicle	Migration of African American families to the North	1	Career Legacy Request for inclusion
<b>Week 2</b>	<i>In the Time of Drums</i>	Kim L. Siegelson and Brian Pinkney	A young boy standing in front of his grandmother	Slavery Family Legends	2	Studies Family Relationship Livelihood
<b>Week 3</b>	<i>The Negro Speaks of Rivers</i>	Langston Hughes	Three young boys playing near the water	Tradition Family Stories Water History	3&4	Friendship Family Pride Education
<b>Week 4</b>	<i>Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom</i>	Shane Evans	Three figures standing in a dark place	Escape Freedom Family Underground Railroad	5&6	American Soldiers Welcome Family Freedom Rights

### Weekly Steps

Although texts were different each week, the process remained the same during all four sessions. The New Jury members were given the option to answer any combination, or all of the questions listed.

Step one – The New Jury was asked to review one image (see Figure 4).

Step two - The New Jury members were then asked to write, a) what you see in this illustration, b) what this image reminds you of and c) how this image make you feel.

Step three – The researcher then led a read aloud and asked The New Jury to

write, a) how the illustration supports the meaning of the story, b) how the parts of the story that draw their attention and c) if this story was familiar to others they have read.

Step four – The New Jury was then invited to write a) how the illustration supported this reading, b) to talk about the parts of the story that stood out to you most and c) to write how the story sounded familiar to other stories.

Step five – Then, the researcher led a group discussion of a sample letter from TBB (See Figure 5) to introduce the externally focused written response activity.

Step six – The New Jury members then wrote externally focused reactions.

### **Post Session and Final Questions**

After The New Jury completed their written responses, each member was asked to reflect on the writings and answer why they wrote what they did and what messages they hoped to send with their writings. The post session and final questions included: a) talk about your writings, b) describe how your writing changed, c) what were you paying attention to most during writing, d) what do these writings say about you, e) what message did you intend to send with your writings, f) describe how the books we read influenced your writings, and h) what do you want others to know about your writings. Each post session lasted for 120 minutes (See Table 1).

The pedagogical routine was designed with multiple levels of interactions to allow one activity to build on the next and to provide additional context for their writing activities. The multiple levels of interactions are explained in the following chapters.

### **Data Sources and Data Collection**

Data sources for this study included a) written artifacts, b) participant interviews, and c) audio-recorded group discussions. A total of 60 writing artifacts were collected

during the course of this study, which included a written response about an illustration and read aloud written response, an open letter (externally focused) response, and an explanation of the written reactions (internally focused). Additional data sources included 25 interviews and 16 hours of audio-recorded group discussions. Similar to related studies (Sims, 1983; Graves, 1975; Eckhoff, 1983), the individual experiences were examined with the selected literature and writings, because the literary experience can function as a source of personal and social understanding (McGinley & Kambrelis, 1996).

### **Written Artifacts**

During each session, The New Jury wrote three written responses, one in response to the illustration, one in response to the picture book, and one open letter to the audience of their choice. Throughout their writing process, the researcher answered questions about grammar and word choice, and provided further explanation of the questions as requested. After four sessions with the two groups, a total of 60 written artifacts were collected to analyze. The artifacts gave insight into their experiences and interests.

### **Interviews**

A total of 25 interviews were audio-recorded. The New Jury members were asked to participate in one pre-interview and four individual post-session interviews (see Appendixes A-F). A semi-structured interview protocol (Sacks, 1992) was used with open-ended questions (Noaks & Wincup, 2004: 80) to allow room for some flexibility and to allow for detailed and personal answers about The New Jury's reading and writing lives, but also to allow for quickly establishing rapport with each participant.

The pre-interview allowed for learning how each member of The New Jury viewed themselves as writers and what their present reading and writing practices included. The researcher conducted the interviews, with each lasting approximately 15-20 minutes in a separate area of the clinic space. The pre-interviews were scheduled for the first few minutes of the first session. Those interviews lasted for 8-10 minutes. The post-interviews helped to understand how the participants situated themselves within the literature, how they represented themselves in their writings, and the messages they hoped to send with their writings. The 25 interviews were transcribed precisely using Sacks' (1992) assertion that researchers ought to work with actual occurrences of talk, rather than relying completely on observation notes. The researcher also employed Atkinson and Heritage's (1984) method of conducting close, repeated listening to recordings, which often revealed recurring features of the talk.

### **Group Discussions**

All eight sessions with The New Jury members were audio-recorded, which resulted in 16 hours of audio-recorded discussions. Group discussions took place around the selected illustrations, four picture books, six sample letters from TBB, and The New Jury's written responses that were shared aloud. Group discussions took place throughout all four of the two-hour sessions, once prior to the pre-writing activity, once after the pre-writing activity, once after the picture book read aloud, and after reading the sample letter from TBB. All members of The New Jury were present during group discussions. While transcribing the interviews and group discussions, small notes were made in the margins to recall any non-verbal communicators from The New Jury not recognizable on the audiotapes. Notes were also made to explain these nonverbal occurrences.

## Data Analysis

Data for the current inquiry was analyzed using the extensive analysis framework (Silverman, 2011), which involves three main phases of analyzing and interpreting the collected data (see table 2). For each data type, a thematic analysis was employed using the following steps:

- 1) Transcription of audiotapes (King & Horrocks, 2003);
- 2) Coding of written artifacts, interviews and group discussions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)
- 3) Triangulation of data sets using cross-case analysis (King & Horrocks, 2003).

This analysis also included a search for elements of repetition across all of the data sets and line-by-line coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) (See Table 2).

Table 2  
*Phases of Interpreting, Analyzing and triangulating data*

Phase	Data Collection <i>May 2014</i>	Research Questions	Data Analysis <i>November 2014</i>
1	Writing artifacts, group discussions, pre-and post- interviews	#1 What are young children's reactions after interactions with AACL?	Thematic analysis, Selective coding using theoretical categorizing (Strauss, 1987)
	Writing artifacts	#2 How do the writings align with the historical purposes of AACL	
2	Writing artifacts & interviews		Triangulation and outsider coder to calculate inter-rater agreement

*\*Transcription of all data took place June-August 2014*

### Phase 1: Coding Writing Artifacts

To answer research question one, what are children's reactions after reading AACL, the five main tenets of reader response theory (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Purves

& Beach, 1972) were used to examine The New Jury's reactions to the literature and during individual interviews, which included: a) Connecting, to relate one's experience to the text; b) Constructing, to create alternative worlds; c) Engaging, to become emotionally involved; d) Evaluating, to judge the quality of one's experience with a text; and e) Imaging, to create visual images (See Table 3). Webster's definitions of each of the five tenets were used to guide the exploration of the writing artifacts and the interviews. A working definition was identified for the written artifacts. While analyzing the data, a reaction was defined as one sentence and/or a complete thought. Each reaction could be coded in multiple categories.

For example, in line 01 below, *I felt angry* after reading *Underground* is coded as evaluating and *my mom left once too* is coded as connecting.

01 I felt angry after reading *Underground* because my mom left once too.

If one reaction appeared later in the same written response, but in a different sentence, it was counted as a new reaction. For example, line 02 would be coded as a new evaluating reaction.

01 I felt angry after reading *Underground* because my mom left once too.  
02 I felt angry after reading *A Negro Speaks of Rivers* too.

Below is one example of how I coded for the tenets of reader response theory:

01 I really care about immigration because when I was little,  
02 my dad left us when we were asleep

The shaded portion in line 01 was coded as engaging. Below is a second example of how I coded for reader response theory tenets:

01 I think that back in the day when Dr. J was playing basketball that  
02 blacks should play more than whites because we couldn't play  
03 basketball with the whites until Martin Luther King Jr. made that big  
04 speech. But if Martin didn't make that speech then we would get shot  
05 or be in JAIL. And I don't want to be in jail. So do you think that it is

06 fair to get in jail for playing basketball with a white friend? That is  
 07 CRAZY!

The shaded portion of line 07 is coded as engaging.

Table 3  
*Coding Scheme Reader Response Theory Tenets*

CODE	DEFINITION	THE JURY	EXAMPLE
<b>Connecting (CONNECT)</b>	To relate one's experience to the text	Referencing personal experience before, after, or during discussion	<i>I really care about immigration because when I was little, my dad left us when we were asleep</i>
<b>Constructing (CONS)</b>	To create alternative worlds	Telling, retelling, or writing a story	<i>I might seem like your normal everyday 14 –year-old teenage boy, but I'm 37 not. I have bluish yellowish eyes, African American, 5'8 with cheek 38 dimples, and broad cheek bones, but I wasn't born here.</i>
<b>Engaging (ENG)</b>	To become emotionally involved	Expressing orally or in writing any type of feeling or emotion	<i>Recently I have gone through (don't laugh) a very serious heartbreak.</i>
<b>Evaluating (EV)</b>	To judge the quality of one's experience with a text	Any type of comparison to or opinion stated of related literary works	<i>After I heard the story my head was filed with questions about slavery.</i>
<b>Imaging (I)</b>	To create visual images	Using descriptive language with the intention of painting a picture	<i>We were playing this 11 game they liked to play in Mississippi. It's called Peg. You have like these small 12 soft balls and we soaked them in water and threw them.</i>

To answer research question two, how do the written reactions align with the historical purposes of this literature, The New Jury's written responses were examined according to the seven main purposes of AACL and TBB ideologies, which included:

a) Celebrating culture and race, to honor or recognize African American culture; to make colored children realize that being "colored" is a normal, beautiful thing (Young, 2009);



b) Encourage, uplift, inspire, to give support, confidence, or hope to someone or a cause; to inspire them to prepare for occupations and duties with a spirit of sacrifice (Du Bois 1919, 286; Young, 2009);

c) Entertain, to provide enjoyment and to bring cheer; to point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life;

d) Foster Achievement, to push or stimulate some type of realization or recognition; to make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race;

e) Inform, pass along messages, to give information or share knowledge; to turn their hurts into emulation, ambition and love (Young, 2009);

f) Redress Negative Images, to set right; to correct; to make right negative images; to make them know that colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons (Murray, 1865); and

g) Self Discovery, gaining knowledge or understanding of self; ability; character; feelings; to teach them a code of honor and action in their relations (Young, 2009), purposes also evident in works appearing in TBB, to determine what, if any, story-to-life connections (Dahl & Freppon, 1995) were made (see Table 4).

Below are examples coded using the purposes of AACL:

01 I really care about immigration because when I was little,  
02 my dad left us when we were asleep

The shaded portion of line 01 was coded as self-discovery. Line 02 was coded as informing, passing along messages. Below, I provide a second example of how I coded for the purposes of AACL:

01 I think that back in the day when Dr. J was playing basketball that  
02 blacks should play more than whites because we couldn't play

03 basketball with the whites until Martin Luther King Jr. made that big  
04 speech.

The shaded section of a) 01-04 was coded as celebrate culture and race, fostering achievement, and inform, passing along messages.

Table 4  
*Coding Scheme Purposes of AACL and TBB Ideology*

CODE	DEFINITION	THE JURY	EXAMPLE
<b>Celebrating culture &amp; race (CCR)</b>	To honor or recognize African American culture.	Mentioning or recalling a tradition, literary work, or practice specific to African Americans	<i>The story connects to the spirit of Africa. It feels like I'm from Africa</i>
<b>Encourage/inspire/uplift (EIU)</b>	To give support, confidence, or hope to someone or a cause.	Sending a motivating message	<i>Never give up and to live life</i>
<b>Entertain (ENT)</b>	To provide enjoyment and to bring cheer.	Response with the intent to or result of bringing joy, cheer, happiness	<i>It just stands there like a sack of potatoes not moving just lying there.</i>
<b>Foster achievement (F)</b>	To push or stimulate some type of realization or recognition.	Evidence of deeper questioning of literary works or realization of a stance	<i>Dear Editor, why did segregation happen? I know it isn't happening now but why?</i>
<b>Inform/pass messages (IP)</b>	To give information or share knowledge.	To offer an opinion or advice to another; to spread the word	<i>Never give up and to live life</i>
<b>Redress negative images (RNI)</b>	To set right; to correct; to make right negative images.	To offer a positive or new image to a once negative image or picture	<i>The message is not to let anyone call you out of your name or disrespect you</i>
<b>Self-discovery (SD)</b>	Gaining knowledge or understanding of self; ability; character; feelings.	To acknowledge a feeling about oneself; ones belief; or something about self	<i>It reminds me of sadness. The image makes me feel sad</i>

**Phase 2: Triangulation and Outside Coder Agreement.** Once a third pass through the written artifacts was completed, the written samples and coding schemes

were sent to a fellow literacy researcher to test for inter-rater reliability. The outside coder examined all written artifacts. The coding results were primarily consistent, resulting in 86% agreement (see Appendix F). In the following chapter, detailed findings of the current inquiry are presented

## IV. FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings of this research are presented. The findings displayed below explain reactions for both the Monday and Thursday groups of The New Jury, groups with unique composition, and yet similar reactions to African American children's literature (AACL). To answer research question one, the findings were framed around the tenets of reader response theory (RRT) (see Table 3), and outlined in three categories found across all data sets, a) discovery of new knowledge, b) historical, emotional, and racial connections, and c) cultural and racial evaluations and insights. To address research question two, the findings were framed around the seven main principles of AACL (see Table 4), and are outlined also in three categories, a) adopted audiences, b) racial challenges, and c) appropriated language.

The selected picture books were chosen because of the historical content and also because of the illustrations depicting Black history. *The Great Migration: Journey to the North* (Greenfield & Spivey Gilchrist, 2011) met the selection criteria and provided an account of one family's journey for a better life in the North. The story includes meaningful poems and pointed images of the many families journeying from the South. *In The Time of the Drums* (Siegelson & Pinkney, 1999) tells the story of an enslaved grandmother and her grandson who is coming of age during a difficult time period for Blacks. The grandson learns about the struggle of his people and a fairytale about an underwater journey back to Africa, a tale he will pass along to his future children. The story prompted discussions of familial traditions and stories passed on from generation to generation. *A Negro Speaks of Rivers* (Hughes, 2009) also prompted discussions of grandparents and the many messages passed along across generations. The book

highlights a poem and song written by one of TBB's authors, Langston Hughes. This story inspired written reactions from The New Jury around ancestry, strength and courage. *Underground* (Evans, 2013) offered The New Jury members a visual depiction of one family's struggle to escape slavery. The images are realistic, dark, and provide a look into the desperation to hide away in the darkness while hoping to make it to freedom. The depiction prompted discussions of what life, as an enslaved person, would look like. The New Jury members were able to situate themselves within the story. The four selected picture books were significant to the present inquiry for giving The New Jury members' clear and accurate portrayals of Black history and Black life.

The selected letters from *The Brownies' Book* (TBB) were significant because a child wrote each during 1920 -1921 with similar interests and questions addressed by The New Jury members. The letters ranged from inquiries around finding a place to call home to opinions expressed about the treatment of Blacks and requests for additional copies of TBB. These letters spurred conversations around Black history, but also about the treatment of Blacks present day as witnessed by the five members of The New Jury. The contents of the letters appeared not only in discussions, but also in the written reactions for both Monday and Thursday's groups. Reactions from The New Jury and evidence of the influence of the texts are outlined throughout this chapter. Following this explanation, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the influence of AACL and with a summary of the generated findings of this research.

### **The Monday Group**

The New Jury was divided into two groups based on their availability. The separation allowed for extensive across case analysis. On Monday's, The New Jury

members Devon, Emery, and Louis met to discuss and respond to the selected materials. Monday's group was comprised of gender and racial diversity, with two members related to each other. An explanation of this diversity in relation to the findings is discussed in the following chapter. A brief description of each member is provided below.

**Devon.** Devon was an upper elementary student, attending a public school in a large city in the Midwest at the time of this study. Devon was eager to participate in the study and admitted loving reading and writing because she was able to express herself. Devon described herself as a *peaceful person*, evident in both writings and discussions. She was able to place herself into each story and make meaningful connections to her personal experiences and beliefs. After hearing about the history of AACL, Devon was particularly interested in Black children and their interactions while writing letters to TBB editors. Prior to the present study, she had never heard of Black children writing to Black editors of any publication. Throughout the present study, Devon wrote mainly to foster achievement and least to entertain. She talked mostly about discovering self and least for entertainment. For example, in one reaction, Devon revealed:

*I just face life, kind of like whatever happens, happens. And if it's something bad, I want to fix it, and if it's something good, I want to keep it going. Like how they changed how segregation was we are working together whites and blacks right now. So, It got better. But I mean it can always get better. I can get better and better until amazing.*

During her individual interviews, Devon expressed concern for equal treatment of all children in her school and disclosed that she dislikes bullies and takes personally their acts against other students. She liked reading books with Black characters and fondly remembered reading, *Brothers in Hope: The Lost Boys* (Williams & Christie, 2013), a story of war and separated families she likened to *Underground*, read during week four of

the present research. Devon was pensive and vocal during the group discussions about her reactions to each of the stories. She had questions that she posed to the group and offered her opinions freely about the text and her feelings when asked. Her group members responded to her well and followed her lead many times. For example, while reading *A Negro Speaks of Rivers* Devon talked about what this story meant to her, which sparked further conversation:

*That's why he's talking about the river so much. Because probably those are his like family members... Ancestors, and that's why he said his soul was like a river.*

**Emery.** Emery was also an upper elementary student. Emery reported early on in the study that he liked to entertain people, in person and with his writings. He also liked to entertain his peers during the present research study. His outside interests included sports, comedy, and playing basketball. Because he was concerned with equal treatment for all children, in one of his letters he chose to write to the editor of his own, writing:

*People said that blacks can't [sic] play basketball at all.  
Can you put this in your book because I love basketball [sic].*

During group discussions, Emery was a quiet participant, and often he would wait until the researcher or his peers would ask him to join in before offering his opinion. Once asked, he would offer an opinion, a joke, or refer to a similar story that he had read in school. During his individual interviews, Emery shared that he likes writing about comedy and sports, but he enjoys reading about athletes and playing basketball with his friends even more. He couldn't remember a time when he had written about himself, but he did recall the last book with African American characters was a book about his favorite player. In his writings, Emery recounted a story about the search for a family member, and referenced his memories of this search during group discussions as well.

When retelling the story, he used vivid details, but many of these details did not make it to his written responses. The message he hoped to send with that story appeared in internally focused written response:

*Parents should leave a note when they go out so as not to worry their children.*

**Logan.** Logan was a middle school student at the time of this research. He had interest in reading books to learn about Black culture. He remembered reading stories about slavery, referencing *The Rock and the River* (Magoon, 2009) as one of the books he remembered fondly. In his individual interviews, Logan described himself as a magician-in-training. His favorite subject in school is math, but he also likes music, reading and attempting magic tricks on his own. His writing interests included mystery stories. He described the last story that he wrote:

*It was about in the future when this robot guy and then there was a robot principal and there were robot police officers. This robot went all crazy and he was giving people punishments for no apparent reason.*

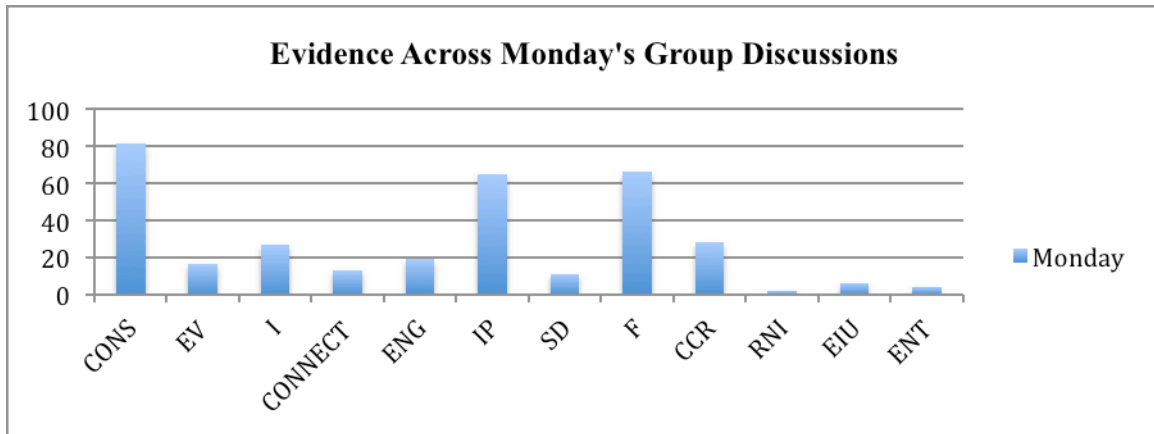
In our group discussions, Logan asked questions to understand the content of the books and also to understand the authors meaning in the stories. He listened with interest to opinions of his peers about what they believed to be depicted in the stories. He was especially concerned with equal treatment of White and Black children in the stories and had a hard time understanding unequal treatment based solely on skin color. He paid close attention to racial disparities and wanted to send the message in his writings about care and equality for all people. Logan felt the stories influenced his writings because he got the opportunity to write about black people more than he has before.

#### Group discussions



The selected AACL and TBB letters had clear influence on The New Jury's reactions, both during group discussions and as seen across the written responses. In the following section, evidence of this influence is provided. During group discussions, Monday's group worked together to investigate the author's meanings and to find solutions to the characters' impasses. The selected AACL in the present study led to the following tenets found across The New Jury's group discussions, including a range of connections, a discovery of new knowledge around these connections, and cultural and racial evaluations and insights. The chart below demonstrates the concentration on constructing new stories and also reveals a lack of focus on relating the selected materials to personal experiences.

These revelations are significant because it shows an effort of the three members to work together as one unit to understand the historical content, and also to formulate a collective narrative. The lack of focus on relating to personal experience was particularly interesting because of the familiarity among two of the members in this group who were related to each other. Many of their experiences were shared, however, one member of the duo was uncomfortable with revealing too much about their shared experiences in the presence of the third member and researcher. Further explanation of these revelations is provided below.



### Discovery of New Knowledge

Despite the lack of rapport early on between the three members of Monday's group, they began working together session one to construct a collective story after learning about the children writing to TBB and after reading *The Great Migration: Journey to the North*. The three helped recall details about slavery and voiced stories told by family members about the ill treatment of Blacks during that time period. Devon was vocal about hearing a story of Blacks being treated like animals. Emery had heard a similar story. But for Logan, this was new information. During the discussion he voiced disappointment, but also disbelief. It was clear he was grappling with the new information, and was searching for a way to make sense of the inequality he was learning about. The example below came from part of the discussion when the three members were discussing why slavery began, why it continued, and if it still continued during present day. Each participated, with Logan initiating this line of questioning:

*I wonder why whites thought that black people were less than them. I wonder how it started, if it was just one person started and then everybody?*

Logan's line of questioning continued throughout the following three sessions as well. Of the three members, he was least familiar with AACL at the time of the study,

and therefore appeared to question more than his peers in Monday's group. During week one, he was most focused on his love of magic, and by week four he was interested in learning about Black magicians, which he had never considered. This dispositional change was evident as he questioned during group discussions and stated opinions of fairness in his written responses. This shift was significant because Logan was able to accurately consider the time period, situate himself within the stories, and formulate new opinions about what was being discussed and read. For example, his opinion stated during week one after the picture book reading:

*It was sad that all the black people had to go because of just some white people saying that they can't have the same rights as them.*

There were other occasions during group discussions where despite his lack of knowledge of AACL, Logan relied on his fellow group members to derive deeper meaning from the selected materials. While constructing new narratives as a group, the three members of Monday's group also used imaging, descriptive language with the intention of painting a picture, to help further their understandings. For example, while discussing *A Negro Speaks of Rivers*, Monday's group had a discussion of the three little boys standing by the waterside. The group debated about how and why the boys were there alone and what the illustration revealed to them. This statement below occurred during this discussion:

*It looks like Poseidon because he's sticking out of the water with his staff.*



\*Image from *A Negro Speaks of Rivers*

Picture books were selected deliberately for this inquiry because authors and illustrators of AACL since its inception have played a prominent role of passing on Black history through their written and illustrated works. The New Jury's reactions to the illustrations speak to the influence and importance of these illustrations. When considering the influence of the AACL illustrations, the selected images had direct impact on the children's reactions as they attempted to make connections for themselves. Further explanation of this influence will follow in the remaining chapter.

### **Historical, Emotional, and Racial Connections**

Monday's group also approached the AACL by making a range of historical, emotional, and racial connections to personal and contemporary events. For example, during the discussion of *In the Time of the Drums*, the three members of Monday's group were amazed during the section of the story where an old grandmother turns into a young woman, swims underwater with a group of enslaved Blacks, and leads them back to Africa. The group discussed realism, fantasy, and the author's intent and meaning in writing this portion of the story, a tale of a young boy's strength and a grandmother's aim to prepare him for adulthood by sharing her life story and the story of his ancestors.

Devon shared with the group a conversation with one of her own family members about her ancestors and her relationship with her own grandmother. This discussion of ancestry continued during and after the TBB letter reading about a teen musician searching for career options for colored boys. Devon shared this connection during this discussion:

*I identify the way that they feel because I like...relationship with my grandma...whenever I read it...it kind of feels like I'm from Africa.*

### **Cultural and Racial Evaluations and Insights**

Monday's group also used discussions of the selected AACL to make cultural and racial evaluations and insights. The members of this group also used their discussions to make judgments about their experiences with the materials, but also to make comparisons to related literary works. For example, during the discussion of the illustration selected from *Underground*, the group grappled with the idea of what exactly the three men in the illustration were doing standing in the dark. *Underground* is a tale of enslaved Blacks hiding from White slave masters and escaping to freedom. The image below depicts three Blacks hiding in the dark. Prior to reading the story, their initial thoughts about the illustration were of theft, weapons, war, and sneaking around on someone's property. Emery's evaluation was closest to the actual content of the *Underground*:

*They're running away...from Slavery. Or from Old man Hackler.*



*\*Image from Underground*

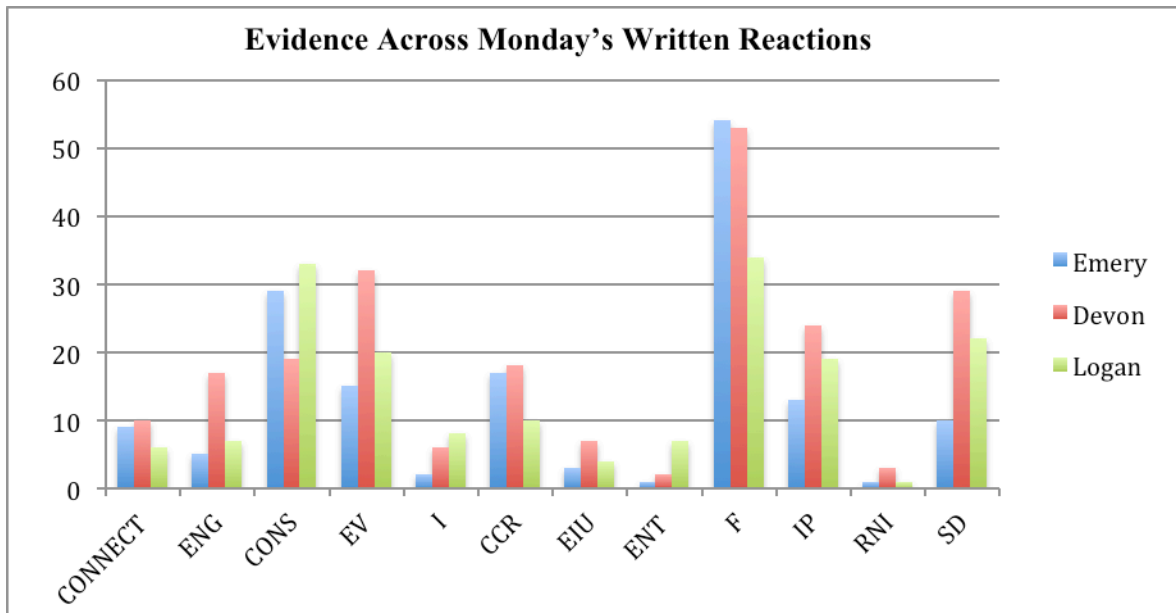
After reading the story, the group examined the image more closely and discussed the detailed sketches – the hats on the three men, the backpack on the first man, and the cartoon-like features of the characters. The discussion then returned to war in Sudan, slavery, and Old Master Hackler, a character who owns slaves in the historical fiction story, *Trouble Don't Last* (Pearsall, 2003). Both Devon and Emery were familiar with the story. In the example below, Emery offered an idea about prisoners escaping from war and shared about the news report he'd seen on TV:

*They're going to leave the war, so they won't get killed.*

The findings from analysis of Monday's group discussions are noteworthy because as a result of the discussions around AACL in particular, Monday's group members were together able to question and evaluate historical and present day racial practices, and to evaluate and reevaluate personal and foundational understandings. This significance was also evident across the written reactions.

## **Written Reactions**

The discussions of AACL led to written responses that aligned across four of the seven main historical purposes – fostering achievement, discovering self, informing/passing along messages, and celebrating culture and race. The written reactions also revealed the areas that showed less alignment – encouragement, entertainment, and redressing negative images. These findings show the influence of AACL on children’s writings. In the chart below the writings are displayed by Monday group members. A look across all three members’ writings displayed evidence of deeper questioning and realizations around Black history and literature designed to teach this history. The writings also revealed the three members wrote least to redress the prevailing negative images reviewed in the selected materials during this study. This finding reveals the children’s focused desire to evaluate and understand, and less to correct previously held negative images. Three main categories were evident across their written reactions, a) adopted audiences, b) racial challenges, and c) appropriated language. Examples from each category as well as explanation of the alignment with the historical purposes are outlined below.



### Adopted Audiences

In their writings, Monday's group took up the historical purposes most as they pushed for further realization about Black history. During a discussion of the first TBB letter, Emery questioned why the young author was not able to choose a career as an architect solely because of his skin color. He and his group members also wrote to gain understandings of self. After a discussion of the attempted escape of slaves in *Underground*, Emery later wrote his ideas of how to escape on his own terms. These findings were most evident in their writings to various audiences, as the three wrote dialogues with the editors of TBB, dialogued with family members, and dialogued with peers. It was evident that the group discussions had direct impact across the written reactions as well. For example, after the discussion of *A Negro Speaks of Rivers* and ancestry, Devon wrote her externally focused letter to one of her ancestors, but chose a present day concern to investigate:

*Dear ancestor, I am writing because I am not happy about pollution and how it affects our planet Earth...pollution is coal, oil, gas and all of that.*



*But how are we going to change this? Do we have anything to replace it?  
Can you look into the future?*

Devon's writings are evidence that despite the main aims of AACL children are taking up this literature in many ways. In her letter, Devon addresses her concerns about pollution, but The New Jury also wrote about love relationships, science, poverty, technology, and bullying. This finding is significant because children are able to make connections to present day, connections that may or may not be related to Black life.

### **Racial Challenges**

Logan, Devon and Emery also wrote to inform or pass along messages. In these messages, their writings revealed recognitions of past and present racial challenges and efforts to share the opinions and advice to others about what they had discovered. For example, after the discussion of *The Great Migration: Journey to the North*, Emery recalled reading a story about racial disparities on the basketball court. His favorite sport was basketball and he had trouble understanding why this idea existed. He wrote about racial challenges on the basketball court in two different letters, one to the editor of TBB requesting more information, and one to a fellow ball player and friend of his:

*Dear Mr. Editor, people said that blacks can't play basketball at all. Can you put this in your book because I love basketball?*

And in the example below, he wrote to a fellow ball player:

*I think that back in the day when Dr. J was playing basketball that blacks should play more than whites because we couldn't play basketball with the whites until Martin Luther King Jr. made that big speech...so do you think that it is fair to get in jail for playing basketball with a white friend? That is crazy!*

The evidence of racial challenges across Emery's writings revealed understandings of a racially divided past, but also acknowledgement about how that

relates to present-day interests and the struggles that have occurred in an effort to support This finding was significant because Emery's realization transformed, and he used his writings to give advice, offer his opinion, and pass along the message to others.

### **Appropriated Language**

Analysis of the written artifacts also uncovered The New Jury's attempts to recognize Black culture and race. On several occasions the members requested stories of Black heroines, or mentioned a tradition or related literary work highlighting Black life. For example, Logan's mentioning of *A Rock and the River* (Magoon, 2010), a coming of age story of a young boy learning about civil rights and the Black Panther party. Also appearing across Logan's writings was his use of appropriated historical and racialized language. For example, after reading and discussing *The Great Migration: Journey to the North*, Logan wrote his externally focused letter to the editor of TBB, requesting information about Black magicians. He had never heard of Black magicians before:

*Dear Mr. Editor, I know there are a lot of white people who are magisions [sic] but I don't know any colored people who are...in your magazine can you put a list of some colored people who are magision [sic] please?*

Logan's appropriation of racialized language is significant because of his acknowledgment of current knowledge, a discovery of new knowledge of racialized language, but also of his attempt to resolve his lack of knowledge while offering racial solutions in his written reactions. These offerings of racial solutions did not appear during the group discussions. And despite the evidence of adopted audiences, racial challenges, and appropriated language across all three members' writings, the findings did not reveal noteworthy writings to inspire, redress negative images, or entertain others, which reinforces The New Jury's push for deeper personal understandings around Black history.

## **The Thursday Group**

The selected AACL and TBB letters had clear influence on Thursday's group as well. In the following section, evidence of this influence is provided. During group discussions, Thursday's group dynamic differed from Monday's group in that both members, Jordan and Cory, are related to each other. A brief description of each member is provided below.

**Jordan.** Jordan was an upper elementary student in a public school in the Midwest during this research study. Jordan participated in the present study because of his love of writing. He wanted to be a famous actor and liked writing song lyrics, stories, and poems. At the time of the study, he was talking with a family member about appearing as an actor in a film. Jordan was very excited about being in front of the camera and talked often about his acting practice time. He also liked to write about his travels. In the group setting, Jordan was vocal and engaged. He would often ask questions about the selected materials and shared related stories about his own family during discussions. When AACL was discussed, Jordan said the books help him learn:

*How blacks were treated then and now.*

Jordan was particularly affected by one of TBB letters written by an African American boy about his age. The letter talked about Black boys not being able to do what White boys could do. In his written response, Jordan wrote that Black boys can make their own decisions and pick whatever job they wanted to and choose whoever they want to be friends with. In subsequent responses he wrote personal letters to his parents about how he was feeling after the sessions:

*It tells me I can be a good author. I can have people want to keep buying my books, reading them. I could make people want to talk to me. I can make people want to be my friends.*

**Cory.** Cory was a middle school student at a public school in a large city in the Midwest at the time of this study. Cory participated in the study because of his love of writing science fiction and adventure stories that include a lot of action. During his individual interviews, Cory described himself as an adventurous writer as well. He also liked writing personal stories, but he did not like sharing his work with others. His interests outside of writing included playing the clarinet in his school's band, spending time with his cousins, and traveling around the world with his family.

*I like to write about action ... I can tell good scary stories. And I play the clarinet, so I like to express how I'm feeling while I'm playing the clarinet. Like it might be a certain song that I might be playing and that you'll know how I'm feeling because it's like I connect to it...*

Cory had knowledge of AACL and believed the books are written:

*To help kids know about their culture and about the past periods.*

In our group discussions, Cory took the lead when offering his opinions of the literature and the selected illustrations. He had a lot of questions about the writer's choices and often let the group know how he would have written the story in a different way. Cory often compared the historical themes in the literature with details of the movie, *Roots*, which he and his school classmates in school were watching at the time of the present study.

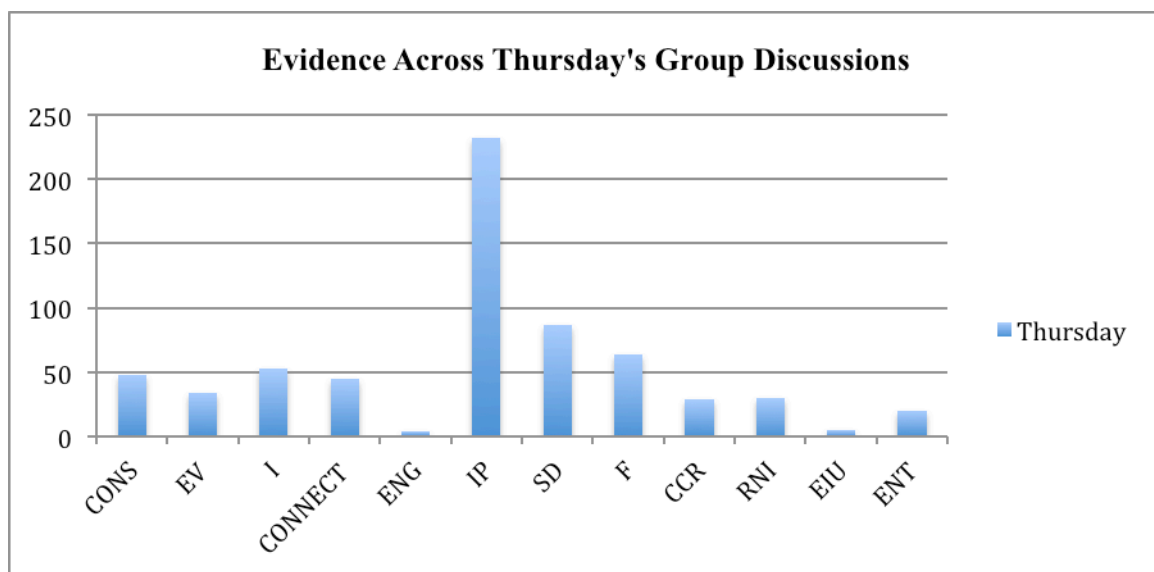
In his writings, he made connections between the stories content and school events. Also in his responses, Cory wrote about his feelings, like a heartbreak that he had experienced. The messages he wanted to send with his responses were related to his

personal experiences and comprised of advice for his peers. Many of these messages came through clearly in his writings. He also wanted others to know that his writing is different from other authors:

*I'm different. I just don't like how some authors always focus on one part of history that they base their stories on. I can write about anything... Don't have it vanilla, don't be regular. Don't be vanilla.*

## Group Discussions

Many of the Thursday group discussions centered around shared familial experiences. As indicated in the chart below, the two members shared mostly to pass along messages, to discover self, and to create visual images. Despite their familial relationship and apparent comfort level, Jordan and Cory wrote least to engage emotionally with the materials. The analysis of their discussions revealed three main areas, a) discovery of new knowledge, b) historical, emotional, and racial connections, and c) cultural and racial evaluations and insights. Examples of are outlined below.



**Discovery of New Knowledge**

Unlike their counterparts in Monday's group, Jordan and Cory attempted to pass along messages about the background knowledge they had prior to the present study as well as new information garnered during this investigation. For example, the two told story after story of family vacations and playground antics that were only unfamiliar to the researcher. Each story was descriptive, detailed, and painted a full picture of their relationship. At times the stories connected to the selected AACL and other stories were related but not relevant to the content of the materials. One story was presented during week one when the two were questioned about the reasons for writing. In the example below, Cory offered that he writes to recall information about a book read:

*If you read a book and you want to write it down so you can remember it.*

Jordan agreed, but offered a different approach. He only wrote after reading for a class assignment. He preferred to dictate the story and to create illustrations. At the time of the present study, Cory was working on a novel about a teen boy from another planet. He was also working on a book collaboration with Jordan and another family member. In the example below, Cory shared some of their process while writing the story during the group discussion:

*We had to start over because it was like all out of sequence... we would talk about one thing and skip all the way to t this other thing... we had skipped like five years into the future without explaining what had happened.*

A look across Jordan and Cory's discussions revealed their desire to situate the selected materials for the present study within the background knowledge of personal experiences and previously read AACL. Their discussions also uncovered their collective desire to pass along messages about their shared prior and gained new knowledge.

### **Historical, Emotional, and Racial Connections**

The discussions with Thursday's group also revealed an attempt to make historical, emotional, and racial connections to contemporary events. This attempt was evident as they used the selected AACL to discover more about self and to discover more about related literature on Black history. After reading the selected letter from TBB and *The Great Migration*, Cory likened the story to several other literary works with similar content. He also began to recall details of the movie, *Roots*, which he was watching with his classmates at the time of the present study. In the example below, Cory shares about the film and his thoughts on the enslavement of Africans by other Africans:

*I never knew they actually had other Africans take Africans to put them in the cages and stuff. And like when they locked the cage up, they didn't really lock it. They just put like a door in front of them. I was like, why didn't yall just get up and walk out. Yall could have knocked the door down and walked out.*

A look at Cory's example is significant to understand his thought process while learning about history and also his ability to situate himself among the characters in the story, but also to demonstrate the connections being made, the connections between related literary works about Black history. A further look at the connections made between this group revealed stories of future literary goals, heartbreak, and family hurt. This finding is significant because of the familial connection discussions were generally more personal during Thursday's group discussions.

### **Cultural and Racial Evaluations and Insights**

Both groups read the same books on the same weeks. There were apparent differences between the two groups. A look across Thursday's group discussions revealed more evaluations of related literature and opinions stated about the selected AACL. There was also evidence of cultural and racial evaluations made across Thursday's group

discussions. For example, discussion of *The Great Migration: Journey to the North* sparked a conversation about Jordan's preference for southern living. He had traveled extensively around the U.S. with his family members and had lived both in the South and the North. Throughout the discussion with Jordan, few details from the book were presented, and instead contained story after story of his lived experiences in the South. In the line below, Jordan explains his preference for life in the South:

*It's crazy how I love the south, but I hate the north. I like country. That it's like dirt and I can play in it. I got a lot of family in Mississippi and also it's just I feel it's hotter.*

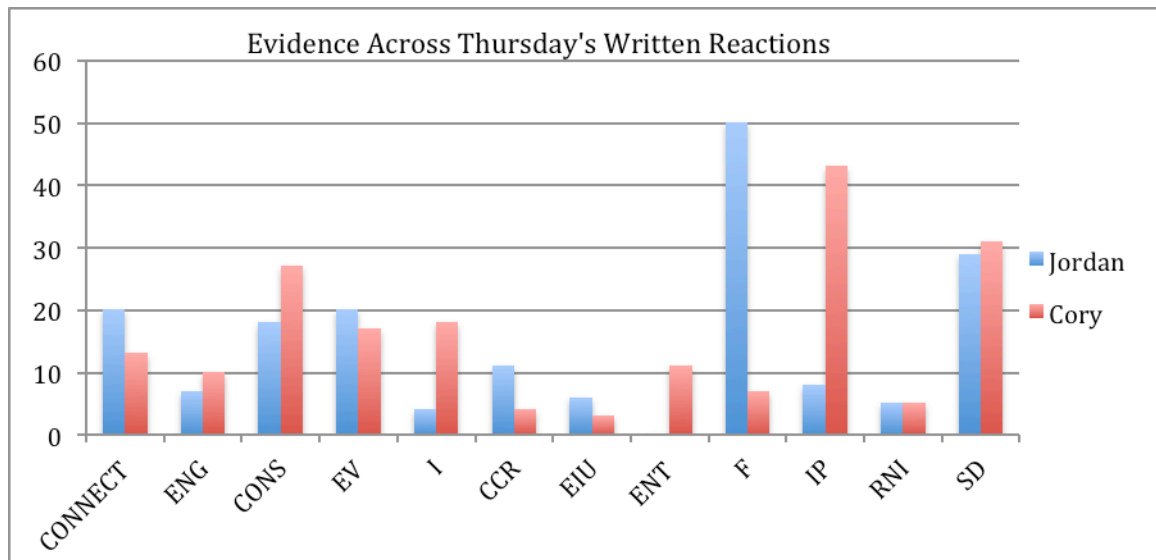
Despite the desire to share stories, there was not as much evidence of encouragement of others or of discussions of emotions across Jordan and Cory's discussions. Jordan and Cory spent much of their discussion time recalling familiar stories. These findings are significant because unlike Monday's group, the selected AACL prompted conversations around shared familial stories and insights. When considering the influence of AACL, it is clear group dynamics are also play when soliciting reactions from children. Like their counterparts in Monday's group, the discussions influenced Jordan and Cory's written responses. That influence is described below.

### **Written Reactions**

Similarly to Monday's group, Thursday's group discussions between Jordan and Cory led to written reactions across three main areas, a) adopted audiences, b) racial challenges, and c) appropriated historical and racialized language. Examples from each category as well as explanation of the alignment with the historical purposes are outlined below. As the chart below indicates, Jordan and Cory wrote mainly to foster



achievement, pass along messages, and discover self. The same was revealed across their group discussions.



### Adopted Audiences

A look across Jordan and Cory's written reactions revealed alignment to the historical purposes of AACL in three areas – fostering achievement, informing, and discovering self. The written artifacts also revealed areas with the least aligned – redressing negative images. This is significant to understand how children react and do not react after reading AACL. After a discussion of the loss, broken relationships, and separation of families in *The Great Migration: Journey to the North*, Jordan wrote a letter about a recent heartbreak he had experienced. His letter demonstrated his desire to understand his feelings, his ability to situate his own experience within the context of the AACL being discussed, and his need to share his experience with others. In the lines below, he describes his surprise about his experience:

*Recently I have gone through (don't laugh) a very serious heartbreak. I'm only 12 years old and I thought feelings like that didn't come till [sic] I was like a junior in high school. I still think about her A LOT [sic]. I'm*

*just confused. And every time I think about her I just get this feeling in my stomach that I hate.*

In subsequent letters, Cory wrote similarly to push for understanding and answers across several audiences. One letter was written to the creator of his favorite video game. In the letter Jordan requested updates and explanation of services that he did not agree with. In another letter in response to *Underground*, Cory wrote to Captain Davies, one of the characters in the movie, *Roots*. In his writing, he wanted an explanation about Captain Davies' actions towards Blacks:

*If you knew that taking slaves from Africa wasn't a Christian thing, why did you do it?*

In Cory's writings there is evidence of deeper questioning and a desire to share opinions on the AACL. These findings are significant to understand how he reacted and did not react to the materials in the present study.

### **Racial challenges**

Similarly, there was evidence of Cory's desire to share his opinions about what he learned after reading AACL. For example, after reading *In the Time of the Drums* and the TBB letter during week two about a teen musician seeking career advice, Cory wrote a story about a racial challenge he had personally experienced during a game he was playing with a group of friends and his cousins on a summer vacation. In the lines below, he writes about the moment the game changed:

*I threw a ball at a kid we were playing with, and he got mad and pushed me into the pool and I asked what was that for? He called me the n-word [sic].*

Despite his anger and frustration about the experience, Cory was able to recognize the racial challenges for the characters in the materials in the present study and also the

challenges he experienced. In his writings, he was able to give personal offerings and solutions for how to address racism. He was able to share this message in the group discussion, and also address a letter to one of his peers with similar messages. This is significant because the discussion of the AACL prompted deeper questioning and desire for understanding around the historical purposes for creation of this body of works.

### **Appropriated historical and racialized language**

There was evidence from two of the five members of The New Jury of appropriated historical and racialized language across their written reactions. For example, in response to *The Great Migration: Journey to the North* and the first letter from TBB about a young teen desiring a career as an architect, Jordan had questions regarding the reaction from his friends and family, who discouraged his architecture dreams because of the color of his skin. Jordan wrote a redressing negative image and celebrating culture and race reactions after this discussion. In the lines below, there is evidence of Jordan appropriating historical and racialized language and proposing racial solutions for the author of TBB and uses his own experiences and friendships as examples for why he should pursue architect:

*Why did that ... man tell the boy that colored boys can't do what white boys do [sic]. In my life now I live being around white people and black because they are people and I can be friends with them if I want to.*

Jordan proposing racial solutions is significant because he, unlike his fellow members of The New Jury, wrote to redress previously held negative images of the relationship between Blacks and Whites. Jordan was able to situate himself within the time period and address racial disparities and propose and offer solutions based on his own experiences. Like Monday's group, Thursday's group also did not write for

entertainment or encouragement purposes. This is significant because children, in their discussions or in their writings, are not recognizing two of the main purposes of AACL.

The chart below provides further evidence of the RRT tenets and the AACL principles found in the written reactions from The New Jury during week four, after interactions with *Underground*. While discussing the selected illustration from *Underground*, and after evaluating their own experiences with the book, The New Jury constructed related stories. When considering how their written reactions aligned with the historical purposes of AACL, a similar occurrence was found. After discussions of *Underground* mainly centered on passing along messages, discovering self, and fostering achievement, The New Jury then wrote to these main principles as well. These findings are significant to understand the influence of not only the selected AACL, but also the discussion around this body of literature. The findings also reinforce how The New Jury reacted to each phase of the pedagogical routine during each of the four sessions.

Evidence of RRT and AACL across Written Reactions to *Underground* (Evans, 2011)

RQ1:					
<b>What are Young Children's Reactions After Interactions with African American Children's Literature?</b>					
Week Four - <i>Underground</i>					
	IMAGE	TEXT	TBB	DISCUSSION	INTERVIEW

Devon	Evaluating Constructing	Evaluating Engaging	Constructing Evaluating	Constructing Imaging Connecting	Evaluating Constructing
Emery	Constructing	Constructing Connecting	Constructing Connecting	Evaluating Engaging	N/A
Logan	Constructing Evaluating	Evaluating Engaging	Constructing Evaluating		Evaluating Constructing
James	Connecting Constructing Evaluating	Connecting Evaluating Constructing	Connecting Constructing		N/A
Cory	Constructing Imaging	Constructing Imaging Evaluating Connecting	Constructing Evaluating		N/A
RQ2:					
<b>How Do the Written Reactions Align with the Historical Purposes?</b>					
Week Four - <i>Underground</i>					
	IMAGE	TEXT	TBB	DISCUSSION	INTERVIEW

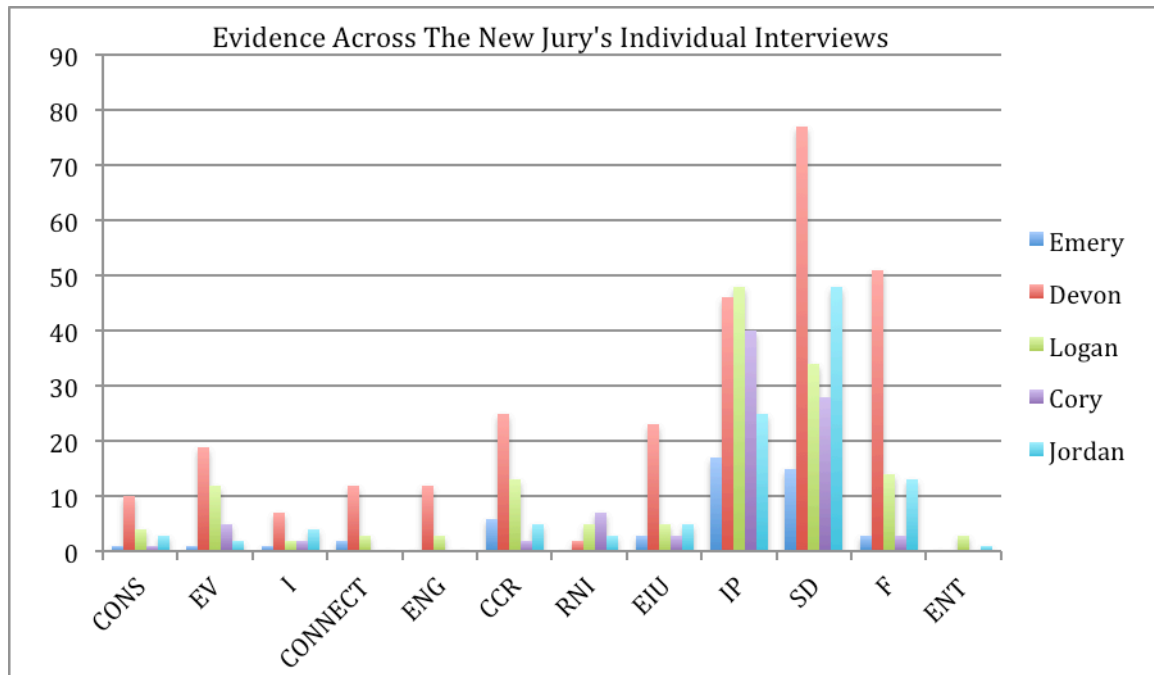
Devon	Foster Achievement	Foster A CC & Race Self D	Foster A CC & Race Self D Inform	Inform Foster A Self Discovery CC & Race	Self D Foster A Inform CC & Race Encourage
Emery	Foster A CC & Race	Foster A CC & Race Inform Self D	Foster A CC & Race Inform Self D	RN Images Encourage	Inform Self D CC & Race Foster A Encourage
Logan	Foster A CC & Race	Foster A Self D Inform CC & Race	Foster A Self D CC & Race Inform		Inform Self D Foster A CC & Race
James	Foster A CC & Race Self D	Foster A Self D CC & Race	Foster A		Self D Inform Encourage
Cory	Inform Self D	Inform Self D	Inform Self D		Inform Self D RN Images Encourage

*\* Discussion data includes all five new jury members*

### **Individual Interviews**

Members of The New Jury were also interviewed individually to provide further explanation for their reactions. The pedagogical routine was designed to incorporate multiple levels of interaction to see how children reacted after reading AACL, during individual interviews, and the group discussions. The individual interviews revealed that

The New Jury reacted in similar ways. The reactions are outlined in the chart below.



A look across cases reveals that The New Jury reacted most by evaluating the materials for discovering more about themselves and for fostering achievement, with all five members asking questions and sharing opinions about the AACL in this research and about lived experiences. A look at the reactions individually reveals minor differences. For example, Cory spoke most to state his opinions about related literary works and least about his emotions. This is significant because Cory was the oldest member of The New Jury and he also participated in this research with a relative, yet he was hesitant to reveal too much about his emotions throughout this study. Emery, Jordan, and Logan rarely engaged emotionally throughout the study. Devon, however, talked openly about her feelings throughout. This is significant because gender was not a factor in a majority of group discussion and written reactions. Gender did play a role during interviews, as there were far more RRT tenets and AACL principles evident across Devon's interviews. She

shared mainly to evaluate her experiences with the texts and least about her personal experiences.



After discussing the illustration and reading *The Great Migration: Journey to the North*, the idea that some families would not be accepted in their new homes prompted a discussion of wartime and bullying at her school. In her interviews, Devon revealed how she was feeling about bullying at school:

*Whenever you give me a picture I think of something beyond black history. I think about war, I think about robberies, I'm worried about a lot.*

The one girl in the present research was able to react most about her emotions. Her engaging reactions led to more self-discovery reactions. This is significant when considering the ways to help boys react in similar ways. Another finding worth noting is The New Jury did not react by redressing negative images of Blacks in the literature, or



to provide visual images as they discussed the AACL and their reactions. This finding is significant because one of the central aims in creation of this body of literature was to redress negative images. Findings were consistent in that members of The New Jury did not react to this aim during group discussions, in their writings, or while interviewed. This finding is significant because one of the reasons AACL was created was to redress negative images. We now know The New Jury did not react in line with this historical purpose.

### **Summary of Generated Findings**

We now know children are constructing new narratives, asking meaningful questions, and passing along what they are learning to others. This examination prompted The New Jury to learn more about themselves and to evaluate and formulate new ideas about their personal experiences. Also significant, this investigation uncovered the ways in which The New Jury did not react to AACL. There were limited reactions for encouragement, entertainment, or to redress negative images of Blacks. This is significant when considering the main historical aims and creation of AACL.

Analysis across all of the reactions revealed that The New Jury discovered new knowledge, made a range of meaningful connections, and prepared useful evaluations of the selected materials in the present study. In their writings specifically, The New Jury adopted audiences to aid their evaluations of the literature, addressed racial challenges both in the stories and in their lived experiences, and at times situated themselves within historical contexts by appropriating historical and racialized language, language similar to the time period in which TBB was created.

There are several conclusions to be drawn as a result of The New Jury's

interactions with AACL. These findings are significant because each level of interaction influenced the reactions. Below, a brief overview of the findings is provided.

The pedagogical routine directly influenced The New Jury's reactions. For example, after the interactions with AACL, The New Jury members evaluated their experience while fostering achievement, made personal connections while constructing new stories, and discovered more about self while informing others. A shift began to emerge as the study continued. Monday's group offered ideas that were mainly externally focused, to give information to others, to tell a story, or to send a letter. By week four, the Monday jury's responses were also internally focused, to remember a special day, to reflect on an event, and to express feelings. The new jury members in the Thursday group's answers were primarily internally focused, to remember a book read, to write a poem, to write for fun, to waste time, or to express feelings. Both groups mentioned writing to express feelings, and to entertain and to make others laugh, despite the fact entertainment was least written about across all of their session responses.

The New Jury reacted to the main principles of AACL, but also beyond these principles. Topics uncovered across their reactions were vast, including reactions about family, pollution, love, ancestry, racial disparity, animals, war, crime, homelessness, world travel, bullying, love and relationships. Several concurrent factors outside of this research also impacted the new jury's reactions, as members of the new jury wrote about family encounters, related literary works, relationships, global news, and travels.

The historical content in the selected works also had direct influence on the reactions. Members of The New Jury wrote in response to characters present and past, slave owners, authors of the four picture books, editors of TBB, contemporary pop stars,

creators of video games, family members, and U.S. presidents. The Internally focused responses also varied about history, strength, sadness, happiness, change, family, and stereotypes. The externally focused responses also varied. The new jury wrote about heartbreak, gave critiques, expressed disappointment, questioned for understanding, shared background knowledge, gave praise, and requested additional information. A close examination of the reactions also revealed how The New Jury did not react. Few reactions solely to entertain others or provide visual images were found.

All of The New Jury members wrote about strength and empowerment in their reactions. But a look across individual reactions revealed some differences: a) The New Jury members James and Cory wrote more to inform and pass along messages than Devon, Emery, and Logan, b) James and Cory also wrote more to redress negative images and to discover more about themselves, and c) Devon reacted with discussions and writings about her emotions more than any other member of The New Jury. Initial reactions to the selected illustrations ranged from creative stories, predictions about the story, and descriptions of the photo, to recalling family memories and contributions of historical figures. While initial reactions to the picture books and TBB sample letters included writings about family separations, racial disparities, opinions and stances about story and characters, inspirational messages, comparisons to personal lives, ideas of freedom, questions about history, and references to similar literary works.

The data from this study provided evidence of the writers' foremost desire to evaluate their experiences with the texts, to investigate the materials further, to formulate opinions about the works and to create their own stories. The data also confirmed aims to inform and pass along messages to others and to discover more about themselves. The

written reactions aligned with the historical purposes of this body of literature. Alignment was most evident across three categories, to foster achievement, to inform, pass along messages, and self- discovery. There was less alignment across encouraging, entertaining and redressing negative image principles. Four main conclusions can be drawn after analyzing the data in its entirety. The New Jury members utilized interactions with AACL, to learn about the past and present, to learn about self and others, to formulate opinions, and generate stories to share with others.

In the remaining chapter, the findings are discussed further.

## V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, findings from the present study are discussed. Also addressed in this chapter are the reactions from The New Jury in comparison to the jury of *The Brownies' Book* (TBB) era. For this study, a quasi-literary platform similar to TBB was designed to examine children's reactions after reading African American children's literature (AACL). This research was significant to understand the presence and absence of its influence. Editors of TBB designed the magazine for this type of interaction, as outlined below:

“It will be a thing of Joy and Beauty, dealing in Happiness, Laughter and Emulation ... It will seek to teach Universal Love and Brotherhood for all little folk, black and brown and yellow and white” (Du Bois 1919, 286; Young, 2009).

The above declaration suggests the significance of children exploring their storied lives with the support of purposeful literature. The present study attempted to give each member of The New Jury an opportunity to make sense of AACL in their own way, particularly through their writings. Rosenblatt (1938) believed that meaning occurred at the intersection of reader and the text. And this research shed light on the intersection between children and AACL. In this final chapter, a brief overview of the purpose of the study, research problem and questions, summary of the results and generated conclusions, and recommendations for future study are provided.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study revisited a historical tradition in literature written about African American children, and letters written by children appearing in The Jury

section of *TBB*. This study also attempted to recreate this literary platform that provided opportunity to explore students' reactions after reading, and to connect the historical importance of *TBB* with present day works that are awarded for African American historical focus. Research is clear on the intersection of reading and writing, yet few studies have used AACL to encourage the written reactions of children. This study aimed to fill that gap. The long storied literary tradition of African American writers is evidence enough for the need for children today having the same opportunity.

Despite the presence of both *TBB* and *Ebony Jr.*, we did not have a clear understanding of children's reactions to AACL, literature written by African American artists, with the same aims as both magazines. This made it difficult to gauge the influence of AACL on children in today's society as it was gauged almost 90 years ago. Few outlets have existed since the creation of *TBB* and *Ebony Jr.* for young children to interact with literature and to have their writings recognized. This study also aimed to examine the idea that AACL serves "as a mirror and window" (Sims Bishop 1997) in which children see their own life experiences and learn about another child's life. It is important to study the influences of AACL because the literature is written about authentic Black lives and can empower all children.

With that challenge in mind, a descriptive qualitative case study was designed, a quasi-recreation of the literary platform of *TBB*, to examine the following questions: what are children's reactions after reading AACL and how do the written reactions align with the historical purposes of this literature. This

study is significant for three reasons: a) knowing more about children's reactions to AACL can help improve ways to use AACL during literacy instruction; b) analyses of students' writings following the reading of AACL can help literacy instructors understand the role this literature plays in helping children understand more about themselves and the world, and c) using the historical model of *TBB* serves as a writing mentor for children and their writing.

### **Summary of Generated Results**

This research explored children's reactions after interactions with AACL. Two questions served as a guide for this investigation: 1) what are children's reactions after reading AACL, and 2) how do the written reactions align with the historical purposes of this literature. In the following section, the generated results are discussed. Previously conducted research suggests writing as an important part of the cultural toolkit needed by all students to become fully participating members of society (Bruner, 1996). After reviewing relevant research, it is evident a) children enjoy book characters and stories most resembling their lives, b) *TBB* and recurring cultural themes motivate children to learn, c) without context, children's responses to literature are surface and impersonal, d) culturally relevant literature and critical writing pedagogy are key for eliciting meaningful written responses, e) students use writing to construct and negotiate their cultural identities. The present examination was significant to demonstrate the need for writing interactions with the use of AACL.

The findings from the present research add to the conclusions drawn from Hefflin's (2002) study, examining the recurring cultural themes found in

children's writing after interactions with AACL. Hefflin concluded 1) the literature must tap into the content of students' lives, 2) the methods must tap into their home and community interaction patterns, and 3) a "culturally relevant pedagogy" is necessary to bring together methods and materials (Hefflin, 2002). Results of this research also build upon the conclusions of McGinley & Kambrelis' (1996) study, in which children used reading and writing to explore possible selves. Therefore, there are several conclusions to be made as a result of this research.

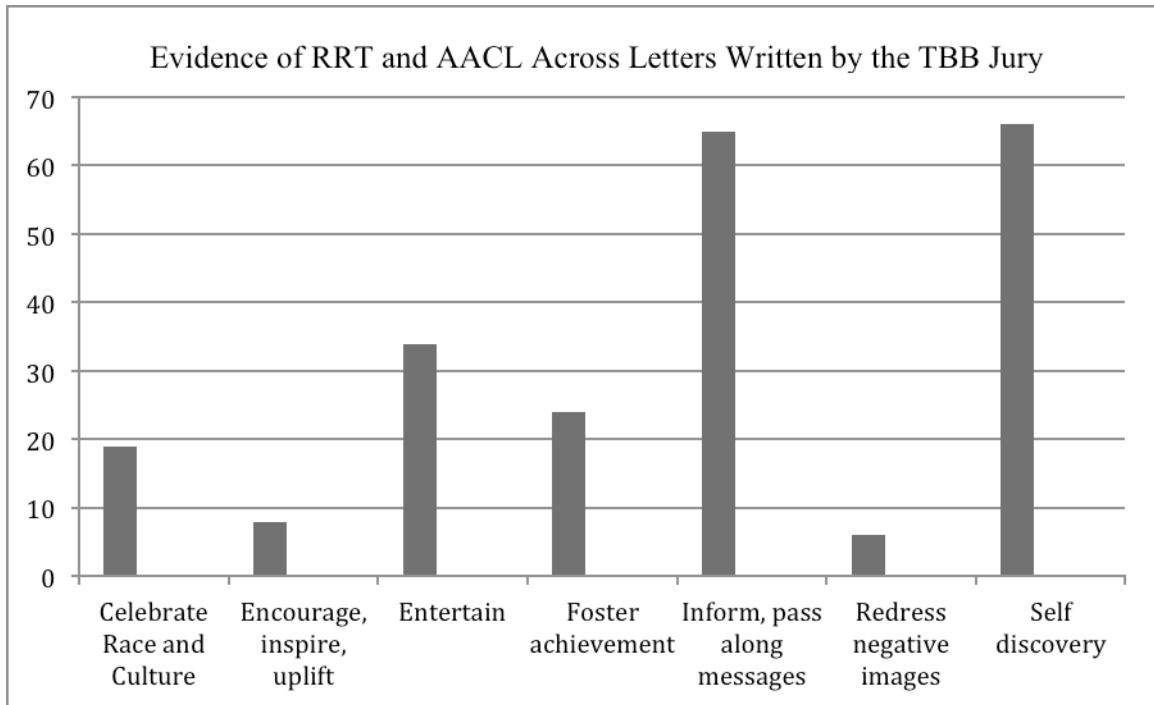
Prior to this research the influence of AACL on children's reactions was not clear. As a result of the present study we now know that The New Jury reacted to AACL by discovering new knowledge, making a range of connections, and negotiating cultural and racial evaluations and insights. In the written reactions addressed to internal and external audiences, The New Jury also addressed racial challenges and appropriated historical language. A majority of reactions from The New Jury were directly aligned with the purposes of AACL. The reactions not aligned with the purposes of AACL were also revealed. As a result of the present study it is clear the five members, although divided into two discussion groups, reacted to AACL in similar ways. These findings are significant because AACL gave members of The New Jury the opportunity to discuss literature written about authentic Black life and to have their questions, opinions, and writings recognized.

This research is also significant because the four Black members of The New Jury were able to react to literature written about their lives. As discovered



in Sims Bishop's (1983) research, children enjoy stories most resembling their own lives. This research also gave the one White member of The New Jury the opportunity to learn about Black life. The selected AACL in the present study allowed Logan to question, and formulate his own opinions about lives unlike his own. Prior to this research, Logan had limited knowledge of the negative images and treatment of Blacks during TBB era. Interactions with the AACL and with the other members of The New Jury gave Logan a safe place to learn and add his opinions about race, difference, and Black life. Logan's reactions are consistent with the disruptive stories found in Lewison and Heffernan's (2008) research, in which students used writing to create a safe space to share personal and social concerns.

The TBB was a safe place for writers in 1920. The present study also provided a similar safe place for members of The New Jury. As evidence in the chart below, consistent themes of correspondence were found between reactions from the 97 letters written by the jury of the TBB era and The New Jury in the present research, including reactions to discover self and to pass along messages. Both juries wrote least redressing negative image reactions. Literature about Black children prior to TBB contained negative and demeaning images. The editors of TBB aimed to provide a forum to celebrate Black culture and to redress negative images of Blacks. Members of both juries went a step further, discussing the historical significance of the creation of AACL, while reacting in ways to discover self and to inform others. This consistency reveals that all children desire to be heard, to learn about self, and to share what they learn.



Findings from the present study also revealed consistent findings across all levels of the pedagogical routine. This finding is significant in that it reveals that the selected AACL, group discussions, and illustrations together influenced the reactions from The New Jury. The AACL in the present study is different than other literature in that it focuses on Black life exclusively. The selected AACL and multiple levels of interaction were used in this research specifically to allow Black children the opportunity to react to literature written about their lives. The literature also gave the one White member of The New Jury the opportunity to learn and understand more about authentic portrayals of Black life. Content appearing in TBB addressed Black race and culture directly and openly, and it was important for The New Jury to address Black race and Black culture in similar ways. As a result of interactions with AACL, The New Jury was able to receive personal guidance, give advice based on the text, and negotiate personal feelings.

The four illustrations selected for the present study served as visual clues, story reminders, and writing prompts for The New Jury. Each image was discussed prior to the picture book reading and each member of The New Jury wrote reactions to the illustrations prior to the story reading. Historical fiction picture books were used with this age group specifically to include visual images of the historical content similar to the content found in TBB. Furthermore, at times illustrations tell a story outside of the book content. Historical fiction was chosen to allow The New Jury to make story to life connections (Dahl & Freppen, 1995) within the reactions. In the present study, the findings revealed disconnect between the illustration reactions and story reactions. Members of The New Jury together constructed stories not relating to the book content. For example, in the illustration below selected from *In the Time of the Drums*, Monday's group constructed a story about a young boy cooking with his grandmother when they ran out of ingredients. Thursday's group constructed a story about the young boy getting caught cooking on his own and upsetting his grandmother. The story is actually about a young boy coming of age and learning lessons about life and tales of his family history from his grandmother, who would soon be leaving him to lead a group of enslaved Blacks back to Africa. These findings were significant because interactions with the illustrations and AACL made room for discussions around multiple interpretations, diverse perspectives, and difference in the images of Blacks we see, as well as discussions around the impact of their writings.



\*Image from *In the Time of the Drums*

Findings from the present study also reveal the AACL indeed stimulates writing. As indicated in the written reactions, the AACL offered The New Jury the opportunity to take up moral stances in their writings. Primarily though, the written reactions from The New Jury were to construct new stories, evaluate their experiences with the texts, and inform, pass along messages to others. There was also evidence of connecting to personal experiences. For, example, Devon wrote about her ancestors after reading *A Negro Speaks of Rivers*. She talked with a family member about her ancestors and she used this story to seek further understanding. The written reactions also revealed a desire for self-discovery. For example, New Jury Member Emery wrote his externally focused response to a fellow basketball teammate after reading, *A Negro Speaks of Rivers*. The story prompted him to write about Martin Luther King Jr. and his speech on equal rights for

Blacks. The findings of this research are significant because The New Jury had consistent across all data sets, which means each level of interaction was meaningful in seeking reactions.

Several outside factors also influenced reactions from The New Jury. Family discussions, lived experiences, occurrences happening concurrently to this study, and previously introduced literary works also contributed to the reactions. Group dynamics also influenced the reactions. In this research two small groups made up the jury, one group of three writers and one group of two writers. Both groups contained members who were related in some way. The level of comfort and familiarity already present among the writers helped foster open and personal discussions within the group.

AACL is most often called upon to educate children about Black history. However, AACL is beneficial for furthering achievement in many other areas. The New Jury in this research reacted beyond the historical purposes of AACL, with reactions around nature, pollution, care of animals, war, homelessness, world travel, relationships and love, and bullying. These writers wrote about the selected historical and contemporary texts, but also about queries they had about themselves and their worlds. Writers in 1920 wrote to the TBB to discover self and to inform and pass along messages to others. The New Jury wrote across the same platforms. When considering what young children in 1920 wrote to TBB editors, young children today are writing across similar categories. Ninety-five years ago children wrote mainly for self-discovery and to pass along messages to others. Children today desire the same opportunity to write, express their views, and reflect on their own lives (Sims Bishop, 2007), and it is now clear how children react when given the opportunity. The present study afforded children the

opportunity to write to purposeful literature, materials created to present authentic Black life. The members of The New Jury reacted to AACL, with evidence of each of the main principles across their reactions. AACL afforded them the opportunity to use history as a guide to negotiate beliefs, ideas, and opinions.

### **Study Limitations**

There are limitations to address with this research. It was my intention with this research to engage my love of children's literature and writing, and investigate what the intersection means for writers today. My familiarity of children's literature and background as a writer of children's fiction permitted me to draw from my background knowledge and may have influenced my thinking when conducting this research. And although I made an attempt to code each piece of writing, there could be words or sentences I missed, or misinterpreted.

The small sample size is also a limitation of this study. A larger sampling could produce different results. The small sample size in this research also limits the generalizability of the findings. This research was conducted in a reading clinic setting, so implications for classroom use may be limited. Results may differ for young writers in a classroom setting. Four members had family relationships within The New Jury. This familiarity and comfort level influenced reactions within this investigation. Jury members who are not related could produce different reactions.

Using the historical model of TBB and four contemporary picture books with historical content influenced the reactions. When thinking about linking social conditions to historical contexts, the reactions from The New Jury may be different using different texts. Use of other genres of AACL could also produce different reactions

## Implications

Findings of the present research are useful for future research, theory and practice. The use of AACL to stimulate writing and seek reactions from children is valuable for present and future generations. Thus, there are key implications to be drawn as a result of this study. Children 95 years ago were able to evaluate literature written about their lives and receive correspondence with elders. Creating safe spaces provides opportunities for children to correspond similarly to children more than 90 years ago using literature as a guide. An analysis of The Jury letters, first appearing in *TBB* in 1920, revealed that young children embraced the opportunity to interact through writing. Findings from the present research revealed the same. Children today used AACL to investigate beliefs, lived experiences, and to push writings.

Discussions around AACL are necessary for Black children, and all children. This finding builds upon Lewison & Heffernan's (2008) study in which children read and wrote to culturally relevant literature. Data from the present research revealed the discussions around the Jury letters, the discussions around historical and contemporary works, and the free writing response time were crucial for their reactions. When educators use critical pedagogy and culturally relevant literature with students the result is meaningful writing and personal connection for students. Children submitting writings to *TBB* had the opportunity to write stories, request information, ask advice, and form their writing identities. Members of The New Jury were encouraged to do the same. However, the present data also revealed the areas not frequently taken up in writing. If we want young children to take up writing across the platforms not as prevalent, the materials and instruction introduced to young writers need to reflect this aim.

Young children will write to discover themselves and make sense of their experiences and their worlds. If history is any indication, we know that young children benefit greatly from the opportunity to write to purposeful literature. Writing is an important part of the cultural toolkit needed by all students (Bruner, 1996). In order for students to be as prepared –in the workplace, in advanced courses, and in life –writing must be central. Despite the fact that writing is neglected across much of the curriculum, students are required to meet certain expectations around writing. To that end, AACL can serve as impetus for students’ writings and writing instruction. This study is significant in that we now know how young children react in writing after interactions with AACL.

Findings of this study are also significant because knowing more about children’s reactions to AACL can help improve ways to use this literature during writing instruction. Analyses of students’ writings following the reading of AACL can help writing instructors understand the role this literature plays in helping young children understand more about themselves and the world. Using the historical model of TBB serves as a mentor text for children and their varied writing voices and ability levels.

More research is needed to get a more full picture of how AACL can be used today. The present study looked to extend existing research by examining reader’s responses following their interactions with AACL. Findings from this study reveal that historical lenses are beneficial for inciting children’s reactions. Future research might be needed to investigate different genres of literature. Also, an examination of the interactions with AACL in traditional literacy spaces would be informative. Analysis of The New Jury’s reactions was limited to RRT tenets and AACL principles. A study using alternate methods of analysis would be useful for future research as well.



The Jury section of TBB has preserved the reactions and writings of African American children of the 1920s. This study attempted to do the same for children today, which is significant in three ways. First, it provided a modern-day update of children's correspondence and reactions, allowing researchers to track similarities and differences across the decades. Secondly, the results of this study can inform writing educators about the ways to use AACL during writing instruction. Thirdly, since AACL is written about African American children's lives, it has the potential to empower Black children, and all children. Children can be empowered by the knowledge they come from a legacy of artists (Gill Willis, 1995).

During week four of the present study, The New Jury Member, Cory, encouraged his fellow jury members to not "be vanilla." At the time, he was referring to a standard option on his favorite video game. But he later referred to his writings as an attempt to break away from the norm. Literature tells students who and what a society and culture values (Sims Bishop, 1990). By tapping into a rich writing history with use of AACL and culturally relevant materials and discussions, The New Jury was able to discover more about themselves, and follow Cory's lead. Reactions from The New Jury reinforced the necessity for all children to have meaningful interactions with AACL, literatures written about authentic Black life.

## APPENDIX A

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

*Pre-study Interview Protocol #1*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe yourself as a writer.
2. Describe your writings.
3. Tell me about a time you wrote about yourself.
4. Tell me what you know about African American children's literature.
5. What is the last book you read with African American characters? What stood out to you most in the story?
6. Is there anything else you want to share?

## **APPENDIX B**

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

#### *Illustration Protocol*

1. Describe what you see in this illustration.
2. Describe what this image reminds you of.
3. How does this image make you feel?

## APPENDIX C

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

#### *Post-read aloud Interview Protocol #2*

1. Describe your reactions to this story?
2. What did you notice most about this story?
3. Does any part of this story describe you/your life? If yes, how?
4. Describe your writing. Why did you write what you did?
5. Does your writing say anything about you? If yes, what?
6. What do you want others to know about your writing?
7. Anything else you want to add about this story?

## APPENDIX D

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

#### *Post-session Interview Protocol #3*

1. Describe how your writings changed from writing one to writing three
2. What did you pay attention to while writing?
3. What message do you send with your writings?
4. Describe how your writings changed from session #1 to #4?
5. Describe how the books we read influenced your writings?
6. What do you want others to know about your writings?
7. Anything else to add?

## APPENDIX E

### Appendix E. Sample Script

#### **Researcher:** (Appendix A)

Thank you for participating in this study. We are going to read a picture book and then I will ask you to write your reactions to this story. First, let's start with a few questions:

*Describe yourself as a writer.*

*Describe your writings.*

*Tell me about a time you wrote about yourself.*

*Tell me what you know about African American children's literature.*

*What is the last book you read with African American characters? What stood out to you most in the story?*

*Is there anything else you want to share?*

**Researcher:** Take a look at the illustration in front of you. What do you think is happening in this photo? Take a few minutes to answer the following questions (Appendix B)

*Describe what you see in this illustration.*

*Describe what this image reminds you of.*

*How does this image make you feel?*

**Researcher:** Now, I'm going to read you a story. Feel free to stop me to ask questions and/or make notes as we read. Once we've finished reading, I'll ask you to write any reaction you have to this story.

**Researcher:** Please write your reactions to this story by answering the following questions. (Appendix C)

*Describe your reactions to this story?*

*What did you notice most about this story?*

*Does any part of this story describe you/your life? If yes, how?*

*Describe your writing. Why did you write what you did?*

*Does your writing say anything about you? If yes, what?*

*What do you want others to know about your writing?*

*Anything else you want to add about this story?*

**Researcher:** Thank you for writing your reactions to this story. Now, I have a few questions for you (Appendix D)

*Describe how your writings changed from writing one to writing three*

*What did you pay attention to while writing?*

*What message do you send with your writings?*

*Describe how your writings changed from session #1 to #4?*

*Describe how the books we read influenced your writings?*

*What do you want others to know about your writings?*

*Is there anything else to add?*

**Researcher:** Thank you

## APPENDIX F

### *Inter-rater Agreement and Sample of Inter-Rater Agreement of Writing Artifacts*

	<b>The Jury</b>	<b>Researcher Coding</b>	<b>Outside Coder</b>	<b>Agreement of Codes</b>	<b>Percent of Agreement</b>
1	Devon Week two Internal Response	EIU, IP, EV, CONNECT, SD, F, ENG	CONNECT, EIU, IP, CCR, CONS, SD, ENG,	5/7	71%
2	Emery Week four External Response	IP, F, SD, CONNECT	IP, F, CONNECT, SD	4/4	100%
3	Logan Week three Illustration Response	I, ENT, CONS	CONS, I, EV, ENT	3/4	75%
4	Jordan Week two External Response	SD, ENG, CONNECT	ENG, SD, CONNECT	3/3	100%
5	Cory Week one Internal Response	IP, SD, ENG	ENG, SD, IP	3/3	100%
<b>Total Agreement</b>			18/21	86%	
<b>Results</b> <i>*Listed in order of greatest number of references</i>			<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Outside coder</b>	
Reader Response Theory Tenets			Constructing Evaluating Connecting Engaging Imaging	Constructing Evaluating Engaging Connecting Imaging	
African American Children's Literature Purposes			Foster Achievement Self Discovery Inform, Pass messages Celebrate culture & race Encourage, inspire, uplift Entertain Redress Negative Images	Self Discovery Inform, Pass messages Foster Achievement Celebrate culture & race Encourage, inspire, uplift Entertain Redress Negative Images	

Figure 1  
*Timeline and History of AACL (1800s – present)*

<p><b>Prior to the Golden Age of AACL 1800-2000</b></p> <p><i>Ten Little Niggers</i> - books with racist messages (1860-1980)  Whites writing about blacks for White audiences (1870-1960)  The story of <i>Little Black Sambo</i> (Bannerman, 1899)</p>
<p><b>Golden Age of AACL 1900-2000</b></p> <p>The Crisis (1912) NAACP journal published for children  White &amp; Black authors writing for Black audiences (1920-1980)  Harlem Renaissance (1920-1930)  <i>The Brownies' Book</i> magazine (1920-1921)  Few Stories published by Black authors (1950-1960)  Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968)  Positive images emerge (1960)  Black authors writing for all audiences (1960-present)  <i>The Snowy Day</i> (Keats, 1962) Caldecott Award  African heritage takes center stage (1970-1980)  Coretta Scott King Award created (1970)  Just Us Books (1987) first publishing co. dedicated to Black children's lit  Almost 200 of 5,000 books published by &amp; about Blacks (CCBC 2012)</p>



Figure 2

*Text selection criteria by Purposes of CSK Award-winning picture books*

	<b>Purpose &amp; Titles</b>	<b>In the Time of the Drums</b>	<b>The Great Migration: Journey to the North</b>	<b>The Negro Speaks of Rivers</b>	<b>Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom</b>
1	Encourage, uplift, inspire	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Self-discovery	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Entertain	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Inform, pass along messages	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Redress negative images	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Foster achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Celebrate culture & race	✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 3

*Demographics of Participants*

<b>Participant Day</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Devon (M)	Black	Urban/public	Friendship
Emery (M)	Black	Urban/public	Sports
Logan (M)	White	Urban/private	Magic
Jordan (TH)	Black	Urban/public	Film
Cory (TH)	Black	Urban/public	Fantasy

Figure 4  
Pre-writing activities

Session	Book	Author	Illustration	The Jury Letter	Content
Week 1	<i>The Great Migration: Journey to the North</i>	Eloise Greenfield & Jan Spivey Gilchrist	A young boy standing in front of a vehicle	1	Career; Legacy; Request for inclusion;
Week 2	<i>In the Time of Drums</i>	Kim L. Siegelson & Brian Pinkney	A young boy standing in front of his grandmother	2	Studies; Family relationship; Livelihood
Week 3	<i>The Negro Speaks of Rivers</i>	Langston Hughes	Three boys standing near the water	3&4	Friendship; Family; Pride; Education
Week 4	<i>Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom</i>	Shane Evans	Three figures standing in a dark place	5&6	American soldiers; Welcome; Family; Freedom; Rights

Figure 5

*Sample letters from The Jury section of The Brownies' Book (1920-1921)*

	Letter	Author
1	<p>Dear Mr. Editor:</p> <p>My Mother says you are going to have a magazine about colored boys and girls, and I am very glad. So I am writing to ask you if you will please put in your paper some of the things, which colored boys, can work at when they grow up. I don't want to be a doctor, or anything like that. I think I'd like to plan houses for men to build. But one day, down on Broad Street, I was watching some men building houses, and I said to a boy there, "when I grow up, I am going to draw a lot of houses like that and have men build them." The boy was a white boy, and he looked at me and laughed and said, "colored boys don't draw houses." Why don't they, Mr. Editor? My mother says you will explain all this to me in your magazine and will tell me where to learn how to draw a house, for that is what I certainly mean to do. I hope I haven't made you tired, so no more from your friend.</p>	Franklin Lewis, Philadelphia, Pa.
2	<p>I wish you would tell me what to do. I am fifteen years old, and I want to study music. My mother and father object to it very much. They say no colored people can succeed entirely as musicians, that they have to do other things to help make their living, and that I might just as well start doing this first as last. Of course, I say that just because things have been this way, that's no sign they'll be like that forever. But they talk me down. Won't you tell me what you think about this? And tell me too, about colored musicians who have made their living by sticking to the thing they love best? Of course, I know about Coleridge-Taylor and Mr. Burleigh.</p>	Augustus Hill, Albany, NY.
3	<p>I live in the Philippines, but I have an aunt in the United States, and sometimes she sends me magazines. Last time she sent me a number of The Brownies' Book. I was very pleased and delighted. I showed it to my teacher and friends. We had never seen a magazine with pictures of pretty colored children in it. I have told my aunt that I should like all The Brownies' Books I could get. I am eleven years old and am in the sixth grade.</p>	Minnie V. Kelly, Philippine Islands.
4	<p>It is a full year since I am reading The Brownies' Book and it pleases me so much that I can't stay still. Now my dear lectores (readers), I have all as my best friends. I am a Cuban born, but my parents are natives of St. Kitts. Think for one instant and then answer these few words: Would you like to have me as a friend? Tell me what would please you to know of Cuba. Now I am looking out in the next number to see all my friends and if there is any that can read and write Spanish. I will finish dedicating these simple verses to The Brownies' Book in Spanish. I want to see who is going to be the translator or translators of it in the next.</p>	Claris Scarbrough, Nuevitas, Cuba.
5	<p>I am a girl sixteen years old. I am an orphan, having neither mother nor father. My mother has been dead eleven years and my father, four years. White people have kept me –that is, I have worked for them to earn my living. Realizing that I did not always want to be a scrub girl, I have tried to educate myself, as I could not go to school do you think I could through The Brownies' Book get a home among a good Christian colored family? I would like to be in a family where they had no large children. I wouldn't mind one small baby, as I love them. I wouldn't mind being with elderly people. Just anywhere among good Christian people, where I could go to good public schools. I can do any kind of work and am a good cook and</p>	Anonymous

	housekeeper. I am a dark brown skin girl, with Negro hair, not being very tall nor good to look at. But I wear my clothes nicely. I would ask you please not to put my full name in The Brownies' Book, if you will advertise for a home for me. I don't want anyone to support me. I want to be among MY people, and have a chance for an education.	
6	When the inhabitants of Chambery heard that their town was going to have American soldiers, it was a great joy. Everyone was eager and impatient to show to these brave soldiers our gratitude and our admiration. About a year ago the first boys arrived. It was on a spring day; all nature was in feast to welcome them. In the streets, the little babies who knew only one English word were crying very loudly, Goodbye, Goodbye, and the American soldiers took the babies in their arms or caressed their faces. Men and women came near the soldiers and shook hands with them and said to them words of welcome. The homes of the French families were open to them and those merry men were received like children of France. They passed sweet moments and everyone was anxious to make them a nice stay. Among all, the happiest were the colored boys. They were unhappy in America, and for that reason they were particularly cherished among us. They were eager for a good word and glad to see that the French made no difference between them and the white, -and when time came for them to return to America, one of them wrote –“my stay in paradise is over I shall hold the dream forevermore of those glad moments found in Chambery” If the black Americans shall hold forevermore the dream of the glad moments found in Chambery, we, also, shall keep forevermore the remembrance of their self-sacrifice. They gave their blood for France. We shall remember, also, forevermore, their affection and we shall not forget that in America they are unhappy, and on this side of the ocean we shall do all that we can to help them. The old world must help a part of the new to conquer their liberty and rights.	Gabrielle Gonay, Chamery, France.

Table 1  
*Methodology & Session routine*

<b>Session routine</b>	<b>Discussion questions for The Jury</b>	<b>Time spent (min)</b>
Pre-writing activity	Why do we write? What does my writing say about me? Who will read what I've written? What change will come from my writings?	5
Illustration & writing warm up	Describe what you see in this illustration.  Describe what this image reminds you of. How does this image make you feel?	15
Read-aloud  Sharing & discussion of context + picture book + illustration	How does the photo support the meaning of reading? Talk about the parts of the story that draw your attention. What parts stand out to you most? Does this story sound familiar to other stories you've read or heard about?	25
Writing response  Internally-focused written response to picture book	How does the photo add/take away from story? What does this story mean to you? How do you feel about this story? How do you identify with story characters? What stands out to you most about the story?  How does the story connect to you?	10
The Jury Letter  Discussion + externally focused written response	What was their purpose in writing? What were the writers trying to say? What will your letter say?	20
Individual interviews	Why did you write what you did? What message do you send about/with your writing?	45

Table 2

*Phases of Interpreting, Analyzing and triangulating data*

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Data Collection</i> May 2014	<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Data Analysis</i> November 2014
1	Writing artifacts, group discussions, pre-and post- interviews	#1 What are young children's reactions after interactions with AACL?	Thematic analysis, Selective coding using theoretical categorizing (Strauss, 1987)
	TBB Letters, picture books, writing artifacts	#2 How do the writings align with the historical purposes of AACL	
2	Writing artifacts & all interviews		Triangulation and outsider coder to ensure inter-rater agreement

*\*Transcription of all data took place June-August 2014*

Table 3  
*Coding scheme Reader Response Theory Five Tenets*  
(Beach & Marshall, 1991; Purves & Beach, 1972)

CODE	DEFINITION	THE JURY	EXAMPLE
<b>Connecting (CONNECT)</b>	To relate one's experience to the text	Referencing personal experience before, after, or during discussion	<i>I really care about immigration because when I was little, my dad left us when we were asleep</i>
<b>Constructing (CONS)</b>	To create alternative worlds	Telling, retelling, or writing a story of a world not all study participants are aware of	<i>I might seem like your normal everyday 14 –year-old teenage boy, but I'm 37 not. I have bluish yellowish eyes, African American, 5'8 with cheek 38 dimples, and broad cheekbones, but I wasn't born here.</i>
<b>Engaging (ENG)</b>	To become emotionally involved	Expressing orally or in writing any type of feeling or emotion	<i>Recently I have gone through (don't laugh) a very serious heartbreak.</i>
<b>Evaluating (EV)</b>	To judge the quality of one's experience with a text	Any type of comparison to or opinion stated of related literary works	<i>After I heard the story my head was filed with questions about slavery.</i>
<b>Imaging (I)</b>	To create visual images	Using descriptive language with the intention of painting a picture	<i>We were playing this game they liked to play in Mississippi. It's called Peg. You have like these small soft balls and we soaked them in water and threw them.</i>



Table 4

*Coding scheme by Purposes of AACL and TBB Ideology*

CODE	DEFINITION	THE JURY	The Jury Writing EXAMPLE
<b>Celebrating culture &amp; race (CCR)</b>	To honor or recognize African American culture.	Mentioning or recalling a tradition, literary work, or practice specific to African Americans	<i>The story connects to the spirit of Africa. It feels like I'm from Africa</i>
<b>Encourage/inspire/ uplift (EIU)</b>	To give support, confidence, or hope to someone or a cause.	Sending a motivating message to someone	<i>Never give up and to live life</i>
<b>Entertain (ENT)</b>	To provide enjoyment and to bring cheer; To point out the best amusements and joys and worth-while things of life	Response with the intent to or result of bringing joy, cheer, happiness	<i>It just stands there like a sack potatoes not moving just lying there.</i>
<b>Foster achievement (F)</b>	To push or stimulate some type of realization or recognition.	Evidence of deeper questioning of literary works or realization of a stance	<i>Dear Editor, why did segregation happen? I know it isn't happening now but why?</i>
<b>Inform/pass messages (IP)</b>	To give information or share knowledge.	To offer an opinion or advice to another; to spread the word	<i>Never give up and to live life</i>
<b>Redress negative images (RNI)</b>	To set right; to correct; to make right negative images;	To offer a positive or new image to a once negative image or picture	<i>The message is not to let anyone call you out of your name or disrespect you</i>
<b>Self-discovery (SD)</b>	Gaining knowledge or understanding of self; ability; character; feelings.	To acknowledge a feeling about oneself; ones belief; or something about self	<i>It reminds me of sadness. The image makes me feel sad</i>

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Woodson, J., & Reagon, T. (2003). *The other side*. Recorded Books.

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## Ebony J. Wilkins

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### AREA OF PROFESSIONAL INTEREST

Creative and fiction writing, writing for social justice, writing for social change, children's and young adult literature, African American children's literature, culture in literature, culture in writing, equity in literacy, and urban education.

### DISSERTATION

*I conducted a qualitative case study, a quasi-recreation of the literary platform of The Brownies' Book, to examine young children's written reactions after interactions with African American children's literature. This study aimed to discover the role this literature plays in helping students understand more about themselves and the world, and ways to use the historical model of The Brownies' Book as writing mentor texts for children's varied writing voices and ability levels.*

### PUBLICATIONS

#### Children's and Young Adult Books

**Wilkins, E.J.** (In progress). *Second Chances*. (YA fiction)

*Jamal is a teen boy trying to make a name for himself around his Chicago neighborhood. But he is torn between his friends, a malicious younger brother, and his new crush. At every turn, he is faced with tough decisions that change his world forever.*

**Wilkins, E.J.** (2014). *Leading By Example: Arron Afflalo on and off the court*.

Columbia, MD: U.S. Dream Academy Inc. (PB)

*Childhood best friends Arron and Nick are pulled in separate directions for the first time. When a new crowd of friends and troubles at home tempt Nick, Arron has some tough choices to make—to follow his friend and the new crowd or continue on the path to fulfilling his professional basketball dreams.*

**Wilkins, E.J.** (2010). *Sellout*. New York: Scholastic Press. (YA fiction)

*NaTasha doesn't fit in with the white kids in her small suburban hometown. When she runs into trouble at school, she is humiliated, frustrated, and lost. She does the only*

*thing she knows to do...run away and hide. But she escapes to Harlem with her grandmother Tilly and runs into a whole new set of problems in the big city, where everything is unfamiliar. It's a summer that will change her life forever.*

**Wilkins, E.J. & Lewis, D. (2008).** *Someone to Hear Me*. Lulu Publishing (Adult non-fiction) *Someone to Hear Me is a personal account of how Dorene Lewis survives daily abusive relationships and finds the strength to make drastic life-style changes to better her life and the lives of her children*

**Wilkins, E.J. (2004).** *The Will to Dance*. Lulu Publishing (Adult non-fiction) *A fast-paced, true story of how an NFL football cheerleader secretly survived the daily abuses of unhealthy relationships to excel in the world of professional cheerleading.*

#### Book Chapters, Edited Journals, & Refereed Articles

**Wilkins, E.J. (2015).** Using African American Children's Literature as a Model for 'Writing Back' Racial Wrongs. In K. Fasching-Varner, L. Martin, R. Reynolds, and K. Albert (Ed.). *Trayvon Martin, Race, and American Justice: Writing Wrong*, Sense Publishers: Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

**Wilkins, E.J. (2014).** Increasing Opportunities for Excellence in Educating African American Students- Evidence and Insights: Children's Literature As A Pathway of Possibilities. *Journal of Education*. 194(1), 67-68.

**Wilkins, E. J. (2012).** Writing for Social Change: Using the Brownies' Book as a Model Platform to Nurture a New Generation of Writers. *Black History Bulletin*, 75(1), 26-30.

Lopez Reyna, N., Bay, M., Guillory, B., & **Wilkins, E.J.**, Ed. (2012). Reforming Special Education Teacher Education Programs: Preparing Culturally Competent Teachers. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*. Baton Rouge, LA, Southern University and A&M College. Vol. 2(3)

Fortune, A., Landay, D., Muhammad, G. E., **Wilkins, E. J.**, & Tatum, A. W. (2011).

Parents: Every child's first teacher at home education strategies from birth through high school. *Tavis Smiley foundation*. 24 pp.

### Works in Progress

**Wilkins, E.J.** Children's literature and the Literacy Development of Black Male Youth. In A.W. Tatum (Ed.), *The Formation of the Literacy Development of African American Males*, Teachers College Press: New York.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL AND RESEARCH ACTIVITY**

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Special Education

Monarch Center Technical Assistance Research Grant

*Graduate Research Assistant*, 2010-2014

Principal investigators: Norma Lopez Reyna, Barbara Guillory, & Mary Bay

- Prepared data and narratives for analysis and grant submission
- Performed surveys, interviews, and observations according to research protocol
- Maintained detailed records and prepared written reports
- Edited and readied manuscripts for Education publications

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Curriculum & Instruction

*Co-Instructor*, CI546: Children's and Young Adult Literature, 2011

Lead Instructor: William Teale

- Mentored English & language arts teachers toward building classroom text sets
- Delivered literature instruction and guided book talks for pre-service teachers
- Utilized Blackboard virtual learning environment
- Tracked progress of student work and growth throughout course

Stephen Wise Early Childhood Center, New York, NY

*Head Teacher*, 2007-2010

- Mentored pre-service and early career teachers
- Served as leadership team liaison between administration & pre-k teachers
- Developed & facilitated Reggio Emilia-inspired curriculum for pre-k classroom
- Functioned as member of Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative team

Tribeca Learning Center, New York, NY

*Head Teacher*, 2004-2007

- Provided literacy-related professional development for team teachers

- Modeled lessons and provided documentation assistance to pre-service teachers
- Developed weekly lessons for students encouraging creativity & exploration

Hamilton Southeastern School District, Department of English & Language Arts,  
Department of Special Education, Fishers, IN

*Mastery Learning Center Coordinator and Instructional Assistant, 2001-2004*

- Coordinated second-chance learning & resource center for high school students
- Provided career & academic counseling to assist at-risk students
- Team-taught grade nine English and earth science classes
- Created supplemental materials for students with special needs

### **INVITED PRESENTATIONS AND NATIONAL CONFERENCES**

Muhammad, G. & **Wilkins, E.J.** (2014). Birmingham City School District, Birmingham,

*AL Historical enactments of literacy development: developing literacy collaboratives in middle and secondary writing classrooms*

**Wilkins, E.J.** (2013). National Council of Teachers of English, Boston, MA

Paper Title: *The Formation of the Literacy Development of Black Males: Linking History to the Future of English Education – Children’s Literature and Black Male Youth*

**Wilkins, E.J.** (2012). Literacy Research Association, San Diego, CA

Paper Title: *The Formation of the Literacy Development of African American Males: Children’s Literature and African American Male Youth*. Paper Session at the 62nd Annual Convention of the Literacy Research Association.

### **HONORS AND AWARDS**

University of Illinois at Chicago Graduate Research Assistantship, (2010 -2014)

New School University Scholars Award & Writing Scholarship, (2004)

International Library of Poetry Editor’s Choice Award, (2004)

Nettie Hubbard Service & Leadership Award, (1999)

Hearst Distinguished Journalism Award, (1999)

Purdue Black Caucus Faculty & Staff Academic Achievement Award, (1997, 1996)



## **SERVICE AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The National Association for Education of Young Children

National Council of Teachers of English

Literacy Research Association, Reviewer

International Bible Study Fellowship, Leader

Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents

Children's Literature Assembly

Willow Creek Community Church

JRD/Doolittle Elementary School, Volunteer

Social Media Team

Neighborhood Group Leader

## **LANGUAGES**

English –fluent

Spanish –Basic

Portuguese -Intro

## **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL**

South Africa, Canada, UAE, Costa Rica, Switzerland, London, Amsterdam

## **EDUCATION**

2015 PhD, University of Illinois at Chicago, Curriculum & Instruction: Literacy, Language and Culture

2006 MFA, New School University, Creative Writing

2004 M.Ed., Indiana-Purdue University at Indianapolis, Elementary Education

1999 B.A., Purdue University, Journalistic Communication