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MILES IS NOT THE PROBLEM: EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF RACISM ON
STUDENTS OF COLOR IN THE LITERARY CANON THROUGH COUNTERSTORY

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MILES IS NOT THE PROBLEM: EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF RACISM ON
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Abstract

The English Language Arts classroom has depended on canonical texts for years. These texts have commonly been known for their use of literary and rhetorical devices. Through the history of fiction, very few books have been written by and about people of color. These statistics are mirrored in canonical texts often taught in ELA classrooms. Because classroom texts are not always diversified, instructors miss a very important opportunity to accurately represent the student in their classes. This counterstory works to reveal the inner struggles people of color may have when studying canonical texts without instruction that values individuality and intersectionality. Furthermore, this work stands as one form of representation for the underrepresented and could further discussion and instruction surrounding cultural inclusion for all students and the dissection of the literary canon.

Keywords: Racism, Literary Canon, English Language Arts, The Crucible

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a student of color from a low-income background, I have dealt with racism in academia from both teachers and students. However, the most impactful forms of racism that I've experienced in academia are those I term as implicit. It is the unobvious issues that often plague me more than anything, partly because their hidden nature makes me doubt that they're real.

This issue persists throughout the education system. Students of color usually face racism daily, whether it's from preconceived perspectives in the form of a deficit lens, or it's in the novels they read in the ELA classroom. This thesis stands to support fellow students of color by working to show that the racism that impacts the lives of students of color is not always easily seen and heard. Through scholarship and a realistic, fictional counterstory of a young student of color, Miles Jackson, it is my hope to create an understanding about what happens in the ELA classroom when students are pushed to read canonized texts with implicit forms of racism.

The Problem

In my own high school experience, we mainly worked out of textbooks and workbooks. Instruction was rarely tailored to what would work best for us; matter of fact, my English 10 experience was basically a grammar class, presumably because ensuring our grammatical correctness was more important than ensuring our ability to comprehend. The next year, we focused on American literature. Throughout our unit on *The Crucible*, one thought rang through my head, *why is the only black woman the front runner witch?* To me, the play painted her as evil and an instigator. This continuous thought brought forth several feelings, a big one being shame. Instead of following along in the textbook as the audiobook played, I was focused on

Tituba, how bad I felt for her, and also how upset I was that I'd let myself fall into the trap of viewing her as evil. I'll be honest, I cannot remember the assessment for this unit, nor do I want to, but I most certainly remember how I felt as Tituba received more and more blame, and was portrayed as nothing more than an evil, ignorant slave. Before that instance, I had a love for the ELA classroom, but after trying to rationalize Arthur Miller's choices for Tituba's portrayal, I found myself becoming resistant to go to class and learn. I began to feel as if I was the issue, that there was something wrong with me because I couldn't connect to the story. While my experience with canonical literature has been less traumatizing since high school, I've realized that the same trauma I went through could also be real for other students of color. Due to their age, origination, and target audiences, canonical texts could be harmful for the academic lives of students of color. In light of this realization, I have developed the research question: to what extent could racism in canonical literature affect the academic lives of students of color.

Exploring this question is critical because it could show the extra work involved for students of color to feel safe in the ELA classroom. Whether at the primary, secondary, or higher education level, students of color are often discriminated against and misjudged due to preconceived ideas (Martinez, 2016). In these situations, I've seen students are left to take the blame for misunderstanding the text, while instructors defend their materials and strategies. But when these materials are made for and by white individuals, students of color are not given the opportunity to find an active role in learning (Martin, 2014).

Study Purpose and Make-up

The purpose of this study is to highlight the experience of students of color in the English Language Arts classroom when reading canonical literature. This highlighting is achieved through counter-storytelling, a Critical Race Methodology. Counterstory enacts storytelling and

“also aims to expose race neutral discourse to reveal how white privilege operates within an ideological framework to reinforce and support unequal societal relations between whites and people of color” (Marriweather Hunn, Guy, & Manglitz, 2006). In order to honor the elements of critical race theory, the counterstory created features the narrative of a student of color.

In addition to counterstory, I also perform a literary criticism using a popular canonical text, *The Crucible*, which was chosen through survey responses by seasoned & veteran teachers in Oklahoma. The survey responses help to bring credibility to choice of text for the criticism because it is a text currently being taught in the ELA classroom.

There are five chapters in this thesis, each having its own subchapter which consists of one section of the counterstory. Chapter 1, this introduction, gives readers insight into critical terminology such as, conterstory, counter-storytelling, Critical Race Theory, and Critical Race Methodology. This chapter also serves as a base understanding for the structure of this thesis, as well as an overview of the counterstory and its main characters. Chapter 1.1 will consist of an introduction into the life of the main character, Miles. It is in this chapter that the reader will learn about Miles as both a student and a black teenager.

Chapter 2 of this thesis is comprised of a review of literature. In consideration of the research question, the literature review has been dissected into two topics: 1) Racism in the Literary Canon and the English Classroom and (2) Racism & Critical Race Theory in Education. Chapter 2.1 will be a continuation of the counterstory, which will focus on classroom readings and Miles’s feelings throughout the classroom experience. This chapter will show the reader how Miles interacts with the assigned classroom texts.

Chapter 3 is the methodology section. This section will provide character construction and rationale, as well as discuss the survey process and procedures. This section will also discuss

critical race methodology, particularly counterstory, and how its use benefits this thesis. Chapter 3.1 revolves around Miles' own personal inquiry into what's happening to his identity as a good student.

Chapter 4 is the literary criticism of the spotlight text and collected surveys. Chapter 4.1's counterstory is where Miles analyzes his feelings toward the ELA classroom and talks to his teacher about making changes to the material. This piece of the counterstory will help the reader understand the need for individualized instruction.

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusion and implications of the study. This chapter will contain discussions based on the need for intervention in the classroom and consideration for the lessened value of certain texts within the literary canon. Chapter 5.1's counterstory brings an end to Miles's story.

For years, the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom has relied on the literary canon (a popular collection of literary texts) to contribute to student learning. Though texts in the literary canon are taught commonly, they are also contested due to a lack of inclusivity and racism perpetuated by white authors (Hill & Malo-Juvera, 2019; Martin 2014; Webb, 1993), which in turn disables students from connecting with characters and authors. In order to display what could happen to a student of color in a classroom that focuses on racialized canonical texts, this thesis includes a counterstory intertwined throughout.

The main character of this counterstory is Miles Jackson. He is a 15-year-old from Oklahoma City. Miles identifies as Black and has an understanding of the racial and cultural differences in his school. Once Miles entered middle school, he was assigned to advanced classes for English and math, studying a grade ahead in both subjects. Now in his sophomore year, Miles has entered Ms. Deen's American Literature class. Though he was originally excited about the

opportunity to be in Ms. Deen's classroom, he comes to realize that he may not be as prepared as he thought he was. Once Ms. Deen assigns the reading material for the semester, Miles begins to struggle. He knows he's having a hard time connecting to the assigned texts but can't articulate why. He is both reading and comprehending on level; however there are pieces of the assigned material that he is not making satisfactory grades on. At the end of the first semester, Miles sits down with Ms. Deen, who is also surprised by his struggles, and talks about what's going on. Through the length of this conversation, Miles comes to the conclusion that maybe the problem doesn't lie in him, but the readings. After this conversation, Miles reflects on his feelings. He thinks of the texts he's read and realizes that there were very few that he connected with. Once he digs a little further, he sees that the assigned texts are misrepresentative of his race, which in turn makes him feel underrepresented and isolated in the classroom. Feeling empowered by his new-found revelation, Miles goes back to Ms. Deen and tells her that he's figured out what's wrong. Ms. Deen listens intently and agrees that the texts may not be representing the voices of the current students. She tells him that she is willing to adjust instruction for the next semester and incorporate more stories about and by people of color.

Ms. Deen, Miles' teacher, is a 36-year-old white woman. She has taught American Lit for five years and loves every bit of it. Her classes are usually more than 50% white. For the past three years, Ms. Deen has taught *The Crucible* in her classroom. While teaching this texts, she generally utilizes similar strategies each year. For the most part, the white students understand and absorb the texts, however, the students of color in her class always seem to struggle with understanding the material. While they make decent grades in the class, Ms. Deen often feels like they aren't taking the time to identify with the characters or connect to the story.

Among the students in Ms. Deen's class, she's already gained a bit of excitement about a 10th grader, Miles, who has advanced scores in reading comprehension and writing. She's excited about the chance to teach such a bright student and has great expectations for his work.

Throughout the story, Ms. Deen will work closely with Miles. Eventually, she will see that he is experiencing a bit of trouble in the classroom. This discovery will throw Ms. Deen off just a bit. Through several conversations with Miles, and finally an all out heart-to-heart, Ms. Deen will realize that in order to effectively teach all her students she must make changes to her instruction.

April is a supporting character for Miles. She is an eleventh grader who identifies as a Black woman. April is a proficient student, but seems to lack creativity to most teachers in the school. She is usually very quiet, and almost always sits with students she racially identifies with. April prides herself on knowing about her history and understanding aspects of the education system most may not.

April and Miles have both been in classes together before, but throughout the new semester they will come to be good friends. Because April works to understand the racial tensions that happen in the education system, her educational experience is completely different than Miles'. Throughout the counterstory, April will act as a role of solace for Miles. He will confide in her and she will help guide him through turmoil.

Mrs. Houston (Mrs. H) is also a supporting character for Miles, as a teacher of color and Miles's former teacher, she understands that sometimes the English classroom doesn't always benefit students of color. Throughout the story, Mrs. Houston will be a voice of reason for Miles. As he progresses through his class, he'll talk with Mrs. Houston about his troubles. She will help

aid him in understanding why he may not connect with the texts and ways to navigate that difficulty.

Through this thesis I hope to enact change while employing elements of critical race theory. The four characters in the counterstory all play crucial roles in the conversations of how race affects students of color in educational domains. While each character is different, they are all inspired by my own lived experience or scholarship. The counterstory employed throughout should not only stand as a cautionary tale, but one of hope and overcoming.

Chapter 1.1: This is a Story All About How...

It was the first day of sophomore year at Highland Prep and I was ready to get rolling. My mom always called me a rare case — I loved school. I never really had those first day jitters or trouble sleeping the night before. Knowing that soon I'd be in front of a textbook was extremely comforting... plus, I was good at school. I had been advanced in both English and math since the sixth grade. I was basically a walking advertisement for the education system.

When I arrived at school, the big hallways were empty. I had missed the white, speckled tile flooring and midnight blue lockers so much. The halls were pretty wide, but I guess they had to be to serve 1,500 students. Immediately to the right of me was the front office. Ms. Kelp, the school secretary, looked up from her desk and smiled at me. I waved from behind the glass wall separating us and moved on down the hall. I had a pretty good relationship with the school's staff and administration. Most of them knew my father, a pretty prominent preacher in our city. My parents also took my education very seriously and were adamant on showing up to parent teacher conferences and open houses. It was pretty embarrassing most of the time.

As I stopped I could hear a bunch of noise coming from the cafeteria. While Highland Prep wasn't always the greatest place on earth, all us students did agree that breakfast almost made everything worthwhile. Every once in a while, they'd fix this french toast that was absolutely fire! Those were the days students would get here early for a fresh piece. This morning, pancakes were on the menu, a solid favorite, but nothing like that french toast.

I checked my schedule and looked closely at the combination and locker number I'd been assigned.

"Locker D201," I said to myself. I noted the numbers in my head, repeating them as I walked into the sophomore hallway. This hall held every sophomore core class, as well as our

advisory teams. I paid close attention to the locker numbers as I walked, but I just wasn't spotting mine. I stopped in the hallway and paused. *Maybe the office made a mistake*, I thought to myself.

"Miles! How are you?"

I looked up to see Mrs. Houston in the doorway of her classroom. She was my English teacher last year. She's actually one of my favorite people in the school. Pretty quiet, but also very stern. She might be the only person in the school who can control the students with a look. And I do mean just a look, not a glare or a scowl. Every student she'd had in class respected her rules without question, but that's what happens when you're fair to your students. She never made us do anything, but she did make learning pretty fun. She was also one of the only black teachers in the school.

"Good morning, Mrs. H. I was just looking for my locker."

Mrs. Houston smiled and shook her head. "There's still 20 minutes left of breakfast, Miles. You should be enjoying pancakes!" She wagged a finger at me jokingly and walked over, holding her hand out for my schedule — her way of offering help.

I handed her the schedule and adjusted my backpack.

"Looks like you're on D-hall with the eleventh graders instead of C-hall with us kids."

She winked after finishing her sentence.

"Oh! But, I'm a sophomore. I've always been with my class."

"Yeah, but by the looks of your schedule, you have a lot more junior classes than sophomore this year." She handed me back the schedule and folded her arms. "This way, you won't have to trek back and forth from D-hall to C-hall." She ended her sentence with a nod.

“You’re right,” I said, taking off my backpack to put up my schedule. “See, you always thinkin’ Mrs. H... I mean, you’re always thinking,” I said, being sure to enunciate.

Mrs. H laughed and waved her hand at me. “Miles, I know you know how to speak Standard American English. Leaving off a ‘g’ won’t change the way I think about you.”

I nodded and slipped my backpack back on. “Thanks, Mrs. H,” I said before turning to walk down the hall.

“Hey, Miles,” she said.

I turned around and gave her my attention.

“You’re welcome. Let me know if you need any help in Ms. Deen’s class, okay?”

I nodded, but kept walking. *Why would I need any help? I got this,* I thought to myself. *It’s not like Ms. Deen’s class would be any harder than last year’s.*

I walked to the entrance of D-hall and, for a moment, I felt pretty amazing. I mean I was basically an eleventh grader; this was exciting news. I’d never really been one for extracurriculars outside of academics. Don’t get me wrong, I appreciated sports, but I just wasn’t the guy to play them in an organized manner. A pick-up game or two at the local Y was just about my speed. My friends called me crazy, but school work challenged me. So succeeding in school ultimately gave me the same feeling of shooting the winning shot just seconds before the final buzzer.

I really enjoyed English class. It was probably my favorite subject. Last year, Mrs. H was my favorite teacher because she made me think about things both inside and outside of the classroom. We read books like *The Hate U Give* and *The Kite Runner*. Even though they were kind of hard to get through at times, I think the books really opened the students’ eyes to the fact

that real shit happens in the world. That's why I loved her class, she made sure we understood & knew both the way things are and were.

I walked over to my locker, opened it, unzipped my backpack and began to put my things away. I kept out my schedule, and English notebook. I knew English was next, just wasn't sure where the classroom was. I took a look at the schedule and saw that the room number was D106. I looked through the hall and inspected each room's door number having no luck finding 106, that was until I looked above me. My locker happened to be right next door to the classroom. *This will come in handy on those days Ma's late dropping me off*, I thought to myself.

Without hesitation, and a world of confidence, I walked into class, sat down in one of the desks closest to the front of the room, and unzipped my backpack. I'd heard from all my friends that this class was difficult, but all my interactions with Ms. Deen seemed to be pretty good. Of course, she was stern, but what else could you expect from an English teacher. I also knew that Ms. Deen demanded excellent work, but I'd already figured I'd need to do more to keep up with the curve. I heard she usually had her students create portfolios and had some pretty deep self-reflection work. I knew it would be a challenge but I was excited nonetheless.

I could tell that Ms. Deen loved teaching English just by the way her room was set up. That day, her desks were in groups of four. A couple of kids last year said she would switch up her room at least three times a semester. I remember they hated sitting with new people. Her walls were pretty much covered in bookshelves. She had separated the books by genre. The biographies and creative non-fiction were closest to the door and fiction lined the back wall. I skimmed the spines as I sized up the room. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *Children of Blood and Bone*, and *Speak* were a few titles that stood out to me. I was happy to see

interesting books in her classroom. It was always a good sign when teachers had more than just the classics on their shelves.

As class time approached, upperclassmen started piling into the classroom. The school exercised a strict tardiness policy, so everyone pretty much got to class on time most days. I watched everyone take a seat and did my usual first day of school inventory. Most of the time there weren't many Black students in my classes. I immediately realized that this year wouldn't be any different. All the students of color were sitting together. All together, there were six of us in class, and only two of us were black — me and April. April was an eleventh grader who I'd been in class with for the past couple of years. I don't really know anything about her grades, but I knew her to be pretty cool. Her final project last year was over *The Hate U Give*. We had to create an informational project about a social justice issue and she filmed a five episode docu-series about police brutality and its effects on students our age. I remember thinking that most students wouldn't have ever thought of doing anything like that and that it had to have been a lot of work.

To be completely honest, I was a little intimidated by her. She seemed like she always had a pretty good sense of what was happening in the world, something that I'd never been that great with. We generally spoke to each other when we would see each other, but it was never more than a, "what's up," and head nod.

The other students of color were sitting at the same table as April. I felt self-conscious for a second, like I should have been a part of their group. *I wonder if they think I'm purposely distancing myself...*

"Aheem!" Mrs. Deen rushed in the classroom clearing her throat. "Hello, everyone!" She said, sitting a pile of copies on the desk beside her.

I straightened up in my chair and opened the notebook I brought into the room with me.

Ms. Deen cracked a smile and nodded her head after listening to the bell ring. She looked around the room and I could tell she was running through a mental checklist before speaking. “It’s good to see that all 25 of you have made your way to class this morning. I would like to start off by getting to know you all a bit,” she said before passing out index cards of different colors to everyone in the room.

“Go ahead and write your name and preferred pronouns on these cards.” She stepped in front of her desk and waited for us to start writing. “I’m Ms. Deen, for those of you who don’t know, and this is American Literature. We’ll get into the particulars of class later, but for right now. If you’re done with your index card, go ahead and raise your hand and I’ll come by and pick them up.”

While Ms. Deen picked up the index cards, I listened to the students at my tables talk about how their summer was. Each year, it was the same thing. Someone’s parents booked a trip to Hawaii or the Bahamas. I was usually quiet. My parents made enough money and all, but hell, school tuition was expensive enough to fund a couple of trips to Hawaii. There was no way I’d have the audacity to push for a fancy vacation too.

“So, I want to let you know that I’m excited for this school year. I know this will be a great class,” Ms. Deen said, taking a seat on the edge of her desk. “First things first, I want to hear from you all today. So, let’s go around and everyone can say their name, one thing they love to do, and anything else you’d like to share with the class.”

I listened to everyone as they stood up and said their names. There was Bryce who sat in the group nearest mine. His favorite hobby was playing ball. And then there was Raina who said that she loved to read. Pretty much everyone had the basic answers, rarely giving extra

information. When it was my turn, I told everyone my name and joked about school being the one thing I loved and the only thing they needed to know about me. It got a couple laughs, including one from Ms. Deen.

After we introduced ourselves, we did a couple of activities to get us acclimated to working in our groups. They were pretty cool. For one, we had to build a bridge out of play-dough, but it needed to hold the weight of two *Children of Blood and Bone* books. Let's just say that a lot of bridges collapsed under pressure.

"I'm going to go ahead and pass out the syllabus for class," Ms. Deen said as we cleaned the last bit of playdough off the desks.

She handed each person in the room a syllabus that had the basic information on it. It looked like she was pretty strict on late work, though she did give a chance to redo each assessment once. She also had a classroom agreement she wanted us to sign at the bottom of the page. It essentially said that we'd do our work and put forth our best effort. If we didn't, the note said we'd be subject to a whole letter grade deduction. I stuck one hand in my backpack while keeping the rest of my body above my desk and fished out a pen. I signed on the signature line and ripped that part of the syllabus off for Ms. Deen to have.

"In this class, we'll be looking at American Literature. We will study character, story, and literary elements. To do this," Ms. Deen paused and made sure that we're all paying attention. "We will be looking at a few texts. Your final assessment will be based off an individualized assessment approved by me. This pace generally works for most students, so no excuses!" She turned from the board and pointed a finger at us but smiled kindly.

When she turned back around, she wrote our mandatory texts on the board, which included Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

For many years, scholars have discussed the English language, classroom, and American culture and how people of color fit into the three categories. People of color have historically been marginalized for their languages. One very distinct instance of this is the opening of the first Indian boarding schools in the late 19th century (Dawson, 2012). These schools stripped away Native Americans' cultures and distinctions in order to "civilize" them. This included forbidding languages, some of which have become completely extinct (Dawson, 2012). Another very real instance of this is the deeming of other languages as less valid in reference to Standard American English (SAE). As teachers of English, we teach that the dominant and most valuable language is SAE, hence automatically reinforcing the idea that any other language spoken by our students, is ultimately not worth cultivating.

While the foundations of the classroom may be unsettling, there are steps teachers can take to lighten the burden for students of color, one being making curriculum/readings relevant to them. However, while current ELA teachers make attempts to push for diversifying curriculum, many people cling to the literary canon and believe that it should beyond a doubt be taught. While the canon may hold classic texts, it also holds a history of racism and prejudice. These texts were not necessarily written for an audience that included people of color, yet students are often required to read these texts in order to succeed in the classroom. This issue has led me to the question, to what extent could racism in canonical literature affect the academic lives of students of color. This literature review works to cover two topics: 1) Racism in the Literary Canon and the English Classroom and Racism and Critical Race Theory in Education.

Racism in the Literary Canon and the English Classroom

The English classroom is often seen as a space for students to explore different cultures and develop a sense of empathy that will help them navigate the world. Unfortunately, not all students feel welcomed in the classroom setting. In this section of the literature review, I will discuss three areas of alienation for students of color in regard to the ELA classroom and the canonical literature: 1) Negative feelings of belonging, 2) Racial alienation through texts, and 3) deficit perspectives. In order to accurately research these areas, I used search terms pertaining to CRT, deficit perspectives, perspectives of black males in education, and racism in canonical texts.

Before understanding the complex racism within the canon, it is important to understand the literary canon's use and existence. Reading texts from the literary canon has been a long-standing tradition in the English Language Arts classroom (Hill and Malo-Juvera, 2019). The literary canon has been described as a "collection of classic literary texts that are distinguished by overall literary quality, lasting significance, and a distinctive style that is worthy of study" by Cole (2008, as cited in Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016, 32). In Mike Pike's 2003 article, which examines the canon and its relevance to adolescent readers in the 21st century, he traces the creation of the canon to the 1930s. Pike analyzes readers from a three year case study to measure the relevancy of texts with the literary canon to students in the 21st century. Pike's (2003) goal is to "refocus the debate so that literary as well as political arguments inform decisions about the curricular value of literature written in England before 1900" (356). Pike (2003) both expresses that the canon was made for the scholarly elite and explains that "canonicity is inextricably bound up with notions of power" (356). However, Pike also states that the ways in which students relate to the canon cannot be measured strictly because of its age (2003). The author states that these texts have a place in English classrooms when teachers create relevance to the

human experiences of the past (Pike, 2003). Though Pike's examination states that appropriate pedagogy could make the texts of the canon relevant, recent studies, such as that of Jennifer Martin, has seen instances in which even the most mindful of teachers slip between the cracks when teaching canonical literature that is outdated and racialized.

While Pike makes a claim to cherish the canon, there are some who believe that though the canon may have prestige that it should be paired with newer texts, mostly young adult literature in order to connect with today's students. Katie Rybakova and Rikki Roccanti's 2016 article focuses on the relationship between newer YA novels and canonical classics as well as how those connections are taught and fostered. Because of its old age, the canon is often seen as distinguished, which makes it easier to defend in the classroom setting (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016). However, newer, more culturally relevant literature like YA, emerged from children's lit in 1957, making it more difficult to justify in relation to the classics (Liang, 2013 as cited in Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016). Hence, children are left to continue to read canonical texts containing racist rhetoric. Meaning, if a teacher's goal is to have students become exposed to narratives current narratives, that curriculum choice is harder to justify without using a source of canonical literature. It is in this article that the authors claim that the most effective way to balance canonical texts and YA is to create pairings and use both canonical and newer texts together (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016).

While research has been done to understand ways to mitigate the use of the canon when texts are outdated, there is a more in-depth problem; canonical texts display forms of racism. Though the canon is distinguished, there are obviously controversial texts that have been up for debate in the English classroom. Teachers are usually tasked to find texts that are not only a good fit for their curriculum, but also deemed appropriate by parents and school officials. This is

usually the reason that most teachers stick to common canonical texts. For one teacher, Jennifer Martin, who conducted a study that explored the reading of *Huckleberry Finn* through a CRT lens, the canonical text caused students of color's alienation in her classroom. This study showed stark differences between students of color and white students in levels of teacher trust and student discomfort (Martin, 2014). At the beginning of the study, Martin (2014) talks about the reading of *Huckleberry Finn* in her classroom and about the use of the N-word throughout the book. When she refers to her observations of students while reading, Martin (2014) says, "I felt a little piece of Josiah, an African-American male, disappearing — 219 times" (244). Throughout the study, we begin to understand that though it's the students that may have difficulty with these texts they are not the ones at fault for their own difficulties:

English teachers often have to grapple with teaching historical narratives, but ignore in the classroom...without problematizing historical and current issues of race in our lives, is to succumb to institutionalized racism (Martin, 2014, 248).

Unlike Pike, Webb (1993), who also studied the use of canonical texts in curriculum, has noticed the same issues as Martin and argues that readers' cultural backgrounds influence their interpretations and responses to *Huckleberry Finn*. This is interesting in light of the fact that the majority of those making curricular decisions are white (Martin, 2014, 248). Hence, those making curricular decisions are almost certainly incapable of interpreting texts like *Huckleberry Finn* in a way that is culturally productive for students of color.

In addition to students being affected by the texts they read in academic settings, students are also affected by the deficit perspective — the idea that the fault of a student's inability to learn comes from external forces, not the classroom, instruction, or the instructor. These perspectives sometimes lay foundations for the ways students view each other and themselves,

consequently causing students to believe in the perspectives projected onto them (Bryan, 2017). This perspective can often be seen through statistics and the results they bring. In a 2013 article, Diedre Houchen talks about his experience studying African American student perspective on achievement and engagement in the classroom environment. In 2010, 70% of white students passed this exit exam with a level 3 or higher during their 10th grade year. However, only 36% of African American students scored a level 3. Florida statutes mandate that every middle and high school student scoring a level or 2 must enroll in an intensive reading course the year following the score for remediation, thus large populations of African American students fill intensive reading courses throughout the state during their middle and high school years” (Houchen, 2013).

In the case above, African American students are alienated because of their test scores and required intensive reading course. This perspective centers the students as the issue, not the instruction they were given previously to taking the test. Deficit perspective also doesn't account for the various issues students face in their common lives such as living in low socio-economic statuses. One teacher, Erin Miller, talks about her own deficit perspective years ago and the effect it had on her instruction and attitude. This teacher's perspective was focused centrally on parent involvement in the opening of the article, the author says:

...I assumed that the parents of the students I taught lacked knowledge of ways to support their children's growing literacies. I carried what I refer to now as an "If Only" mentality: If Only parents knew how important it was to read to children multiple times a day in loving and playful contexts, If Only parents understood how crippling the popular strategy "sound it out" is to emerging readers, If Only parents provided authentic

reading and writing experiences at home and relied less on workbooks and worksheets to supplement the curriculum in school. If Only... If Only... If Only.... (Miller, 2010).

Miller attempted to implement a Parent University once a month at her school. Her plan was to teach parents strategies that help reading outside of the classroom, but slowly noticed that less and less parents came (Miller, 2010). When speaking of this lack of success, Miller also tells readers how her deficit perspective was fueled: “It was far too easy to excuse the lack of success as further evidence that the parents of the children I taught did not care” (Miller, 2010, 244). Eventually, Miller realized that the fault did not lie in the fact that the parents did not care, but that she was missing important perspectives. This ultimately hurt her relationship with the parents of her students, and in turn her students as well.

Furthermore, many understand that students of color face hardships in education and believe that educators must work harder, change their mindsets, adjust curriculum and ask more questions in order to better serve students of color (Alim & Paris, 2017; Corbett & Wilson, 2009; Friedrich & Mckinney, 2010; Houchen, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2007, 2009; Martin, 2014; Pollock, Deckman, Mira and Shalaby, 2010). This is not only a common belief for students of color at the secondary level, but also the post-secondary (Gray, 2013; Martin, 2015; Martinez, 2016). Perceived language barriers seem to be one of the most stand out details of the student of color experience, especially in English courses. For instance, Aja Martinez’s 2016 article, which utilizes counterstory, follows a Chicana identifying student throughout her academic career. We also see her downfall due to assumptions others make about her identity and ability. Students of color are often exposed to these assumptions, negatively affecting the way they see themselves in the world of academia (Gray, 2013; Martinez, 2016).

Broadly, in academia, students of color face issues. These issues can include their own perspectives being altered in negative lights and fighting deficit perspectives. With the previously mentioned issues in mind, when students of color also face alienating texts within the classroom, the effects can be harmful (Martin, 2014). While racism in academia has prevalent research, issues regarding both racism and student of color experience in the ELA classroom specifically is somewhat lacking. In addition to this hole, research surrounding racism in the canon also gapped quite heavily. In the next section of this review of literature, I will build on top of the struggles students of color face and the ways in which we view racism in education, specifically through critical race theory.

Racism and Critical Race Theory in Education

This section of the review of literature serves as an overview of how critical race theory (CRT) is used to examine education. CRT was developed through legal scholarship and is used to dissect the relationship between real world application and race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Though CRT initially made waves as a law movement, many scholars have adapted it to work within the realm of education. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic describe the CRT movement as “a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. In the 1970s, advances made during the civil rights era stalled. In response, a number of lawyers, activists, and scholars set out to create new theories and strategies that would highlight the subtle forms of racism people of color were experiencing, hence the creation of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, 4).

Delgado & Stefancic (2017) reported Alan Freeman, Angela Harris and Charles Lawrence as a few early leading figures in the movement. For a long time, CRT has served as a useful lens for educators who want to eradicate racism and change perceptions in their

classrooms. For the purpose of having a clear understanding, I would like to bring in Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) recall of CRT:

...critical race theory in education is a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (see Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In the last 50 years, scholars like, Richard Delgado, Maxine Greene, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Bell Hooks, and Dolores Delgado Bernal dedicated their work to understanding and eradicating racism in education. These authors have created solid foundational bridges and aided in a majority of scholars' work. This section will highlight literature inspired by the previously mentioned that show how CRT is used to analyze/improve both teacher education and pedagogical decisions.

In 2017, Christine Sleeter critiqued teacher education through elements of critical race theory. CRT elements can be used as roadmaps for researchers to follow when using a CRT framework (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Michael Luna, 2016; Sleeter, 2017; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). These elements, or themes, are staples that form CRT's "basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy" (Solórzano, 1997). The elements are: 1) Intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of oppression, 2) The utilization of interdisciplinary approaches, 3) The challenge to dominant ideology, 4) The centrality of experiential knowledge, and 5) The commitment to social justice (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). The elements state that research should be framed in the premise that race and racism are central to

educational outcomes for students of color, include interdisciplinary lenses that show how race and racism function in education, challenge deficit perspectives and dominant discourses, incorporate/recognize personal experience as valid when thinking of how race and racism function in education, and have a purpose of promoting social justice (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017).

Using the elements of CRT, Sleeter (2017) claims that because education is dominated by white people, curriculum works to serve white students. “In general, teacher education programs attempt to prepare their predominantly White cohorts to teach racially and ethnically diverse students through a course or two (often a foundation course) on multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, teaching English language learners, or social justice teaching” (Sleeter, 2017). As Sleeter stated, one way to approach social justice teaching is through Culturally Responsive Pedagogies (CRP). These pedagogies enact CRT by decentering white, dominant narratives and focusing on the perspective of students of color (Alim & Paris, 2017).

Another way CRT has been used in education is to understand how community and pedagogy affect the classroom environment. Matias & Liou (2015) use counterstory to present how an urban teacher can employ critical race teacher activism. The authors state that because white teachers see urban teaching as heroic, urban schools are perceived as “deficits that need to be saved” (Matias & Liou, 2015). As educators of color from low-income backgrounds, who grew up in urban schools, the authors share their own experiences as voices of students who are often unheard. Furthermore, through using CRT as a framework, it is easy to see the power struggles these authors face.

For example, in our respective urban-focused teacher preparation programs, dominated with White teacher candidates, we are still subjected to colorblind rhetoric that strategically renders race—and thus our experiences—irrelevant. This works in

opposition to the literature that often describes professors as having more institutional power than those of her or his students (Matias & Liou, 2015).

CRT within education is used to expose undervalued voices and redefine normative speech. Within the classroom, whiteness plays a critical role in access to knowledge. Literature supports that in order to make the classrooms work better for students we must begin to understand their stories and decenter whiteness (Alim & Paris, 2017; Matias & Liou, 2015; Miller, 2010). CRT creates a foundation appropriate for such goals.

Summary

This chapter served as a review of literature and covered two topics: 1) Racism in the Literary Canon and the English Classroom and 2) Critical Race Theory in Education. While racism in the canon and classroom can oftentimes be obvious and seen, there are also times when the harm caused by these discriminations happen in silence (Martin, 2014). The literature shows that consequences of not alleviating the racism in our classrooms can alienate students, give them negative self-views, and become targets of deficit perspectives (Houchen, 2013; Martinez, 2014; Miller, 2010).

CRT in education has become a very important player in understanding the classroom for students of color. Because the majority of the teaching force is white and female, teacher education programs must work to push candidates to understand that teaching students of color is not a heroic task and rather yet a job that takes more work than meets the eye (Martin, 2014; Matias & Liou, 2015; Osher et al., 2012; Webb, 1993). The previously stated literature calls for teachers to understand their students on a cultural level as well as work toward decentering the whiteness in the classroom.

Chapter 2.1: Tell me a Story

April and I were sitting in the cafeteria together eating lunch. This had become our routine. We'd split after first hour and met up again for math fourth hour. Then, we'd head straight to lunch. I'm not sure when we became close enough to eat lunch together, but I didn't mind it. April was cool. She had a lot of knowledge about how things worked and why she thought everything was corrupt. She preached to me a lot, but it usually never got too bad.

We'd been in school for a few months and Ms. Deen's class had lived up to its reputation. Don't get me wrong, I could keep up, but she did expect a lot out of her students. We had just finished up a unit on poetry. We'd read the *Poet X* and *A Long Way Down*, but we never really got a chance to talk about the topics within them. We strictly analyzed why the poems worked. Even though a lot of kids didn't get some of them, I did. I wish we could have talked about why Will felt the need to avenge his brother so much. About the cycles of poverty that continually way people down... I wish that we could have talked about how none of this was his or his brother's fault.

"Can you believe this woman wants us to write 10 pages over the history of Salem?" April rolled her eyes while waving the assignment directions in her hand.

In Ms. Deen's class, we had transitioned into talking about the Salem Witch Trials. Ms. Deen was really excited for us to read *The Crucible*. She said we'd like it a lot since it was all about betrayal and secrets. I had never really heard anything about the play before her class, so I was willing to give it a chance.

I picked up my sandwich and chuckled. "I mean, it is an English class, what do you expect? We're supposed to write things," I said before taking a bite.

I could feel April glaring at me from the other side of the table, but I refused to make eye contact with her. I knew if I did, there would be some type of sermon and God knows, I'd need to finish my lunch to make it through it. No disrespect or anything. Lately, April had seemed really against the choices Ms. Deen was making.

April rolled her at my comment, then picked up her ham on wheat and pointed it at me. "My dear, Miles," she says before taking a bite. "Don't you see that we're not learning anything of importance."

"*The Crucible* is a well-known play. We read it because it matters a lot to some people. Just because you don't like a text doesn't mean others can't read it."

A blank, unbothered type stare came over April's face. "Oh, honey. The people that book matters a whole lot to probably don't look like you and me. You don't see it right now, but you'll get it eventually." She stood up and gathered her trash. "I'll see you later."

As she left the table, I noticed a book, *I Tituba*, sticking out of her bag. For someone who was against reading about the Salem Witch Trials and *The Crucible*, she sure had taken her own liberties to understand one of the most important characters.

As I walked from my last class, I looked down at my phone. My mom had texted me three thumbs up emojis. I instantly knew she must have seen my grades. Thanks to mom, I knew when I aced a test before I even got it back. The only assignment I hadn't had graded was the informational essay over the history of Salem, so I knew that had to be it.

Shows April! I thought to myself. *I'm doing just fine.* I smiled and tucked my phone back in my pocket.

I was meeting April in the library to talk about the math homework for that night. When I walked in, April was reading at a table and had already spread her math book, and what looked like everything else in her bag, across it.

“What’s up?” I asked as I took a seat across from her.

Instead of speaking, she lifted a finger and continued reading.

“What are you reading?” I had tried to peek at the cover, but she had it tilted down, just out of view.

Without a word, she lifted the book so I could see its cover and still continued to read. I noticed the title. It was the same book I’d seen poking out of her backpack earlier.

“Is it any good?” I asked.

April finally looked up, making eye contact with me. “Yeah. It’s pretty good.” She placed the book on the table and grabbed a bag of chips that had been spewed from her bag.

“Why are you reading it? You using for the character analysis we’ve got coming up?”

“No.” April chuckled and held out her bag of chips to me. “We can’t use outside sources for that, remember?”

“Oh, yeah,” I said. “You are right.” I grabbed a few chips from the bag and stuffed them in my mouth.

“I’m reading it,” she said, laying out her math notebook. “Because I want to hear her voice.”

I shook my head and chuckled. April was all about voices. Sometimes, she’d even go out of her way to ask questions to the kids who were softer spoken in class. When I asked her why she told me that their opinions mattered just as much as ours. That’s why I hung out with April. Even though she was a bit frustrating sometimes, she stood up for the people who needed it.

“You chuckle now,” she said. “But at some point we have to do the extra work ourselves to understand the stories that everybody else can easily connect to. We’ve got to read the work of others sometimes just to understand what we don’t understand. It’s completely bogus.”

“Alright, April,” I said, still chuckling slightly. I could just see her as an adult. *She’ll be a force to be reckoned with.*

Chapter 3: Methodology

Critical Race Theory and Methodology

This thesis is grounded in critical race theory. As stated in the review of literature, CRT is employed by elements that can serve as guides for the framework (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Michael Luna, 2016; Sleeter, 2017; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). For years, scholars have used CRT to serve their writing and enact social change. CRT's origination in law has provided scholars with a firm foundation to continue research and build platforms for social justice literatures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

In education, scholars have used critical race theory to improve instruction so that they decenter the dominant narrative and to ultimately better serve their students (Corbett & Wilson, 2009; Friedrich & McKinney, 2010; Houchen, 2013; Martin, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2007, 2009; Pollock et al., 2010). In addition to better serving students, CRT is also used to educate future teachers (Sleeter, 2017).

This thesis is framed through CRT and is guided by its elements, which include: 1) Intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of oppression, 2) The utilization of interdisciplinary approaches, 3) The challenge to dominant ideology, 4) The centrality of experiential knowledge, and 5) The commitment to social justice (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). These elements will be used to guide my literary criticism of the spotlight text, with emphasis toward challenging the dominant ideology. The spotlight text will be Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. This choice was informed by the survey responses received by teachers around the state of Oklahoma

In order to further honor these elements, I also employ counterstory throughout this thesis. As explained by Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso counterstory as a critical race

methodology, can be used to work toward social justice. These scholars define critical race methodology as:

a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color (Solórzano & Yossa, 2002).

The counterstory employed in this thesis serves as a connection to those feelings of one student of color. In addition to the previously mentioned definition of counterstory, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) add that “the counterstory is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (32). Through using the perspective of a person of color, the counterstory exhibits the elements of critical race theory by opposing stereotypes and removing the dominant narrative in regard to the failure of students of color.

In this counterstory, I create characters using multiple streams of data, i.e scholarship and personal experiences. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) state that data used for counterstory can be gathered from both professional and personal instances: “we created counter-stories from (a) the data gathered from the research process itself, (b) the existing literature on the topic(s), (c) our own professional experiences, and (d) our own personal experiences” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002,

34). In this instance, this story highlights the racialized tension people of color may possibly experience in the English classroom.

character reasoning in the counterstory. This section of the methodology will discuss the reasoning behind the motivations for each character of the counterstory. These characters have been crafted based on scholarship and real life experiences.

miles. As a person of color who has seen first-hand issues of racism in education, I employed this method of counterstory in order to show what the perspective of a student of color looks like. The experiences of this student, Miles, are compilations of my own experiences and the common feelings of people of color in education. Through Miles I employ the CRT elements of challenging the dominant ideology. The story does this by showing his excellence as a student, economically stable family, and his willingness to take initiative in his learning.

Within this counterstory, I write using a young black male's point of view. I acknowledge that as a black woman, I live a different experience than that of a black male. However, I use the male perspective in order to show the victimization of black males in academia and society. Black males are among the most likely to face negative consequences such as suspension and expulsion in schools (Noguera, 2003; Okilwa & Roberts, 2017). These students are also victimized through the School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) (Noguera, 2003; Osher et al., 2012). In school settings, this racial oppression and discrimination can be seen in the way we refer to students; "Language, such as 'offender,' 'crime,' and 'victim,' is problematic in school settings because it is likely to augment the criminalization of Black males" (Payne and Welch, 2015 as cited in Okilwa & Roberts, 2017, 252).

The culmination of these ever-present issues continue to make black boys targets amongst white educators. In a 2017 article, Nathaniel Bryan uses educational scholarship as well

as his experience as an instructor for preservice teachers to discuss how black males are unfairly treated in school systems as well as how black children are painted as less than by white teachers to other students. This issue lies within the fact that the majority of the teachers who enter the workforce are white, which can lead to disproportionate and unfair treatment of students of color (Bryan, 2017; Sleeter, 2017; Osher et al., 2012). Research shows that “only 3.6% and 4.2% of African American and Hispanic students, respectively, are identified by schools as gifted and talented in comparison with 13.1% and 8% of Asian and White students, respectively” (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009 as cited in Osher et al., 2012, 285). Yet these students make up large proportions of those funneled through the STPP (Okilwa & Roberts, 2017; Osher et al., 2012). With these pressures on youth, specifically hyper focused on male students, I felt creating a male character added more agency to the issue. Not only does Miles have to worry about his grades, but also about how he is viewed within society.

In order to fight against the negative notions of students of color being less motivated to learn and more likely noted as less intelligent than others (Osher et al., 2012), Miles’ character is considered to be an excellent student. Miles cares about his own education and takes initiative, making him a self-motivated student. On top of Miles being a top student, he also comes from an economically stable family, which fights against the stereotype of people of colors’ struggle living in poverty. Throughout the counterstory, we see Miles transform from a confident, advanced student, to someone who doubts themselves with a fear of being held back.

April. April acts as a supporting character to Miles. April is inspired by my current self – the me I wish I could have been during earlier years of my life. As Miles begins to feel uncomfortable throughout the story, April will be the person prohibiting him from staying complacent. April’s role actively thinks about double consciousness and concepts such as the

black tax. By questioning everything, April becomes an important part of Miles' journey, taking away his ability to hide behind naiveness.

As I have furthered my education, I have noticed the inequalities within the education system more and more. My current experiences, from the scholarship I've read to my daily interactions among colleagues and peers, remind me that students of color struggle in academia every day in order to survive. With my experiences, April holds the ideas of a more liberated me – someone who questions the status quo and actively thinks about whether the spaces students of color occupy are accepting and safe for them.

In order to adjust and feel safe, there are times when students of color must adhere to socialization (Gardner, 2008). This process looks different for everyone (Martinez, 2016). However, black people must also think about concepts such as double consciousness and those ideas that stem from it. Cedric Burrows' 2016 article discussed black graduate students' double consciousness through an imposed "black tax" (Burrows, 2016). Burrows explains:

I define the black tax as the societal charges placed on African Americans in order to enter and participate in white spaces. At the heart of the black tax is the notion that if African Americans work hard and rise above their situation without complaining about racism, they will gain privileges that whites already have. One mechanism or institution enforcing the black tax is education (Burrows, 2016).

This tax is seen through four concrete characteristics: (1) Presenting an acceptable form of blackness to the white world, (2) appreciating the generosity of white society for being allowed into their institutions, (3) representing the race, and (4) recognizing that the African American subject is an intrusion to white institutions (Burrows, 2016).

In this counterstory, I equip April with the voice to speak about the issues within her education that employ characteristics of the black tax. It is with these skills that April serves as a, radically perceived, voice of reason.

ms. deen. Ms. Deen's character is based on an average teacher who has good intentions in the classroom but does not think about differentiating instruction based on student needs. In this counterstory, Ms. Deen's character views students through a deficit lens. In relevance to critical race theory, this behavior among white teachers is studied frequently (Berchini, 2017; Sleeter, 2017; Osher et al., 2012). Though teachers may be well meaning, like Ms. Deen, research has stated that whiteness may be a part of the issue as to why students of color are expedited into the STPP:

Part of the reason for these disparities may be the shortage of teachers of color. The mismatch between the demographics of the U.S. student population and the teaching work-force is stark. Although 45% of the 49 million public school students in the United States are students of color, only 16.5% of the 3.2 million teachers are of color (Coopersmith, 2009 as cited in Osher et al., 2012).

The disparities between white teachers and teachers of color leads to the underrepresentation of critical experiences that shape these students. Without confronting her deficit perspective and understanding as a white teacher her possible role as a perpetuator of the STTP, Ms. Deen does very little to understand her students color on a more effective level.

Ms. Deen represents those teachers, whom I've had, who think that their instruction is not the problem, but instead the problem lies within the student, parent, or communities surrounding them (Miller, 2010). Ms. Deen's character suffers from viewing students through a deficit perspective. Sleeter (2017) speaks about how teachers who feel that they are being culturally

responsive often still view their students through a deficit perspective. In an unpublished article, Sleeter surveyed teachers about different aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy. Sleeter (2017) states:

Of optional written comments, testing (such as pressure to teach to the test) was the main policy-related factor. Chosen far less as explaining low student achievement were teaching-related factors: cultural match/relevancy (33%) and poor teaching (8%). It appears that although most teachers believed that they knew what culturally responsive pedagogy is, most attributed their students' academic difficulties to factors within the student and family rather than to pedagogical factors under educators' control. What most teachers had learned about culturally responsive pedagogy was not sufficiently potent to disrupt deficit theorizing about students, particularly in schools under pressure to raise student test scores (156-157).

Regardless of her bookshelf and intent behind the way she teaches, Ms. Deen still does not succeed in supporting her students of color because of a highly active deficit lens.

mrs. houston (mrs. h). Mrs. Houston's character is inspired by me as well. As a teacher of color who cares about her students, I hope to continue to enact change within the classroom. Mrs. H goes above and beyond to ensure that her future, current, and past students feel seen and heard. It is through Mrs. H that I show how teachers should work to care for students, particularly students of color in order to support them. A 2013 article by Jennifer Waddell, details a qualitative study and shows the retention of students of color in a teacher education program on a predominantly white campus. Though the results of this article are fashioned toward college students of color, I feel a few results could also be connected to secondary education. Waddell (2014) seeks to employ a focus on diversity. This means that in order for

students to feel comfortable and succeed, curriculum should be centered around a diverse set of topics (Waddell 2014). The author also calls for support from staff and faculty. Waddell (2014) states that the students felt more supported when they believed that their academic, personal and professional selves were cared about.

Through employing deeper connections with students of color and a focus on diversity, teachers can work to decenter the dominant narratives and work to enact culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017). I use the above statement as inspiration for Mrs. H. Her purpose in the story serves to ensure that Miles receives support and is heard in a productive way.

Survey Methods

Participants. Participants of this survey included 34 teachers from English classrooms across Oklahoma. The participants of this survey were all anonymous. In order to participate in the study, participants had to verify that they were both over 18 and seasoned teachers in Oklahoma of three or more years. Teachers with a minimum of three years of experience were chosen to participate due to their adjustment into becoming seasoned teachers.

Materials. An online survey (https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2t9Y31TjOwMjLvV) was used to gauge the texts being taught in ELA classrooms. The survey consisted of seven questions: two pre-screening questions, three regarding texts taught in the classroom, and one regarding instructional strategies used to teach the previously mentioned texts. There was no time limit to complete this survey. However, participants were told that it would take no longer than 20 minutes.

Procedures. The survey used in this thesis was made accessible through ELAOK, a private Facebook page which serves over 4,500 educators. After participants verified their age, they were prompted to verify their status as a seasoned teacher and then asked to consent to the survey. Completed surveys were saved on a secure network.

How Both Work Together

These surveys were used to inform me of the popular texts taught within Oklahoma classrooms by the survey participants (see chapter 4 for further discussion). While canonical literature remains a staple in the ELA classroom, multiple texts within it contain racist rhetoric. Students of color who are forced to read these texts could possibly experience emotional trauma in the classroom. This thesis' purpose is to explore to what extent racism in the literary canon affects the academic lives of students of color. In order to explore this topic, I am using data collected from surveys to gauge popular text taught in Oklahoma classrooms (one of which will act as the spotlight text for this thesis), in addition to critical race theory to guide a literary criticism of the spotlight text and a critical race methodology to employ counterstory.

Chapter 3.1: And it All Falls Down

Ms. Deen placed the assignment in front of me softly, as if not to break my heart even more. I picked up my paper and stared at the C in its top right corner. I closed my eyes for a second and took a deep breath. There was no way I could continue to make grades like this. My mom made it her life's purpose to snoop on my grades every day and I could tell by the way my phone was vibrating in my pocket that she'd just completed her daily inspection.

I had been struggling heavy in Ms. Deen's class lately. We'd started reading *The Crucible* a week ago and honestly, I wasn't keeping up. I was trying, like really trying, but nothing was helping. As the bell rang, I said my goodbyes to April. Once everyone had left the classroom, I approached Ms. Deen's desk where she was marking a few papers.

"Ms. Deen, can I talk to you for a second?"

She looked up from her papers and nodded. "Sure. Let's sit at a table. Okay?"

We both sat there in silence for a moment. Mostly because I couldn't get words to form in my mouth. I'd never had a conversation like that before and honestly, I was nervous.

"I guess," I started. "I'm just having a lot of trouble in this class lately."

Ms. Deen smiles and nods. "I've noticed. I'm worried about you as a student. You started off so well. What's going on with you?"

I took a deep breath before speaking and looked Ms. Deen in the eyes. "I'm not sure. Before this class, I hadn't had any issue in any of my classes."

"Well, maybe it's something at home? Do you need some extra support? I can try to arrange a meeting with your parents... Maybe see if they want to come and sit down with you and me. We can all go through future assignments so they know how to help you at home."

I shook my head. "No, my parents are super supportive. That's not the issue."

“Hmm. Okay.” Ms. Deen adjusts in her seat. “Well, do you understand the assignments?”

“Yeah, I get them, but... I don’t know.”

I watched as Ms. Deen took a deep breath. “Well, what about the quick writes we did last week.”

“The one about who I relate to most?”

“Yes. That’s the one. You didn’t even answer the prompt.”

“I know. I just couldn’t think of anyone in the text I relate to.” *I mean... was I really supposed to be able to form a bond with John Proctor’s character? Hell, I probably would have been locked away with Tituba to be honest.*

“I want to remind you that this lack of quality work can result in the deduction of a letter grade,” Ms. Deen said, sliding the signed copy of the classroom agreement over to me. I stared at my signature and shook my head. I don’t know where that Miles went to, but I sure wanted him to come back.

“I understand.” I wondered if she heard the defeat in my voice. It made me cringe. I felt like I was officially being benched, no longer the game winning, buzzer shooting star player I once was.

Ms. Deen nodded her head and stood up. “Well, maybe you just weren’t ready for the workload of this class. All the teachers I’ve spoken to have raved about you. Do you think we should talk with the counselor and see what can be done?”

I didn’t reply automatically. Instead, I tried to process it. *Do I really not belong here? Maybe she has a point.* “No. I’ll get figure out what’s going on,” I said, taking a deep breath. I’m sorry, Ms. Deen, I’ll try harder.”

At lunch that day I sat across from April as she read another one of her books. She was completely engrossed in it. *Look at that! She's decided to go on vacation the day I wouldn't mind one of her sermons.* "Hey," I said, waiting for her to look up.

April looked up at me and then sat her book then. "Hey," she smiled. "What's up?"

"How are you doing in Ms. Deen's class?"

She raised her eyebrow for a second but answered anyway. "Right now, I have B. What do you have?"

"Same," I said. "But if I fail this character assignment, I'm dropping to a C, maybe even a D."

"I'm sure you'll do great. You're a smart guy," April said before popping a baby carrot into her mouth. She had completely ignored her lunch until this moment.

"I don't know. I talked with Ms. Deen today. She doesn't think I should stay in the class."

April dropped the baby carrot that was supposed to go in her mouth back into the tupperware below her. "Excuse me?"

"I mean... I'm not doing that great on the assignments. I don't know. She could be right."

"The hell with that. You belong in that class just as much as me or any other student." April had slightly elevated her voice and had started to attract a few onlookers.

"Chill, April," I said. "It's not a big deal."

"Dude! You've literally moped all of lunch."

I opened my mouth to reply, but she quickly cut me off.

“Just because I was reading doesn’t mean that I couldn’t see you absent mindedly poking random holes through your sandwich with your straw!” She pointed to exhibit A, my holey ham and cheese. “It’s a big deal. You are not the problem. You are not a bad student.”

I nodded my head more than anything to appease her, but I couldn’t help but think to myself, *Why do I feel like I am then.*

Chapter 4: Analysis

In an effort to answer my research question — to what extent does racism in the literary canon affect the academic lives of students — this thesis uses a mix of scholarship, counterstory, and literary criticism to explore the research question. In order to enact counterstory, a spotlight text needed to be identified. This text was chosen through surveys outlined in the previous section (see chapter 3). The following sections work to analyze survey responses and the spotlight text.

Survey Analysis

The survey used for this thesis helped inform the choice for a spotlight text on which a literary criticism is conducted in the next section. The link to the survey was accessed through the ELAOK Facebook page, which is a group of Oklahoma English Language Arts educators that has over 4,500 members. The survey consisted of seven questions: two pre-screening questions, three regarding texts taught in the classroom, and one regarding instruction strategies used to teach the previously mentioned texts. In order to participate in the study, participants had to verify that they were both over 18 and seasoned teachers in Oklahoma of three or more years. The surveys were all anonymous.

The link to the survey was accessed 34 times. Of those 34 original participants 11 either did not participate or did not consent, leaving them ineligible to move forward in the survey. From the 23 remaining surveys, 13 were not filled out. This left a total of 10 completed surveys.

Survey Development. The survey was designed to gain an understanding of texts, specifically canonical texts, being taught in classroom in Oklahoma. Expectations were that teachers would be able to give concise details about the books they teach and strategies they use

to do so. Questions were broken into three different categories: pre-screeners, texts taught, and strategies (see appendix). The surveys were secured through Qualtrics and stored under a password protected log-in.

Emerging Themes. Within the collected, completed surveys, there was a wide range of answers about the texts teachers use as well as the ways they teach them. Common themes in answers regarding texts taught include mentions of teaching culturally relevant YA like *The Hate U Give*, *The House on Mango Street* and *The Poet X*. Out of the 10 participants, six identified *The Crucible* as a canonical text taught within their classrooms (see fig. 1). This text was placed in a list with seven other texts: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *The Odyssey*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. Participants were allowed to choose more than one text.



Figure 1. Participant selection of common canonical texts used in their classrooms.

Another common theme was that teachers felt the need to discuss the American Dream, how it is accessed and who it is accessible to, as well as what it means to be American. However, only one teacher talked about using class time to talk about religious or cultural aspects in these discussions.

Survey Limitations. Though the survey link was posted in a Facebook group with over 4,500 members, yet only 10 surveys were fully completed. This serves as a limitation because the number of participants could have increased with more exposure and time. Such few responses does not give a holistic idea of what is currently being taught in classrooms. Further,

the survey could also be distributed to a larger population in order to gain variety and understand readings not just across Oklahoma classrooms, but in classroom across the world as well.

Limitations to this survey also include the phrasing of question eight (see appendix). The original purpose of question eight was to understand the topics instructors speak about in classrooms and the strategies they use. However, some of the responses proved to be somewhat vague in respect to strategies stated. This could be mitigated by further analysis of the question and by instructing participants to provide more detail.

The main purpose of the surveys used in this thesis was to inform the spotlight text. In the next section, the spotlight text, which was chosen as a popular text among teachers will be critiqued under a critical lens.

Literary Criticism of Spotlight Text

Within the collected survey data, teachers chose the most popular taught text among them to be *The Crucible*. In this 1953 play, Arthur Miller creates a fictional recount of the Salem Witch Trials. This text is commonly known for the parallels it drew between the heretics of the witch trials and what was modern day America. Many believe the inspiration for this play to have come from the string of events put in motion by John Raymond McCarthy's actions. McCarthy was a Wisconsin United States Senator from 1947 – 1957. As part of his political endeavors, he claimed that communist spies had infiltrated the US government. This led to a witch-hunt of sorts in the US. In a 1996 article for the New Yorker, A. Miller confirms this, saying:

I was motivated in some great part by the paralysis that had set in among many liberals who, despite their discomfort with the inquisitors' violations of civil rights, were fearful,

and with good reason, of being identified as covert Communists if they should protest too strongly (A. Miller, 1996).

In addition to A. Miller's explanation, Christopher Bigsby – the author of an introduction to his play – deepens A. Miller's original claim, writing, "What took him [A. Miller] to Salem was not, finally, an obsession with McCarthyism nor even a concern with a bizarre, and at the time, an obscure historical incident" (1995). Bigsby (1995) goes on to explain that A. Miller's inspiration came from studying the ways in which humans are turned against the ones they love most. Regardless of A. Miller's motivation, his play has become a literary staple across the United States (Hill and Malo-Juevera, 2019).

As a recognized part of the literary canon, and a text with great theatrics, *The Crucible* is taught all over the world. While the commonly believed dominant narrative asserts and reproduces the belief that the text is just simply an allegorical tale relating to McCarthyism, there are considerable amounts of racist undertones that are left unexamined. These unexamined racist tones could possibly affect the ways students interact with the text. The epitome of these tones are seen in Tituba, "the negro slave." Tituba, a Barbadian woman who has been brought to Salem by Samuel Parris to act as his family's slave, is found at the center of the chaos in the first scene. Crucial to the story line, Tituba is used not only as a scapegoat, but also as access to the devil in a small Puritan town in Massachusetts. In this analysis, I claim that A. Miller's Tituba is portrayed through a racial lens that silences her and binds her character in racism and discrimination, which in turn can be harmful for students of color who read the text. I plan on analyzing Tituba's portrayal as a Black Barbadian slave, focusing on the racism applied to her character. I will conduct this analysis through a lens of critical race theory, which allows me to decenter the dominant ideology of the text (that of a white man) and center the individual

story of Tituba. In addition to decentering the dominant ideologies, using this lens also enables me to use experiential knowledge as a Black woman to speak against the racist rhetoric within the text.

The story is set in Salem, Massachusetts, during the time of the historical witch trials. In this setting, A. Miller creates scenes that show a fictional account of how the trials unfolded. Salem's community is Puritan and appears to be religiously devout. Hence Tituba's predetermined state of discrimination, as she is not of a Puritan background. At the beginning of the play, Tituba is immediately mentioned as an instigator in the strange happenings within Salem. When Betty, Parris' daughter, comes down with a sudden illness, he claims that he had seen Abigail, his niece, and Betty dancing in the woods while Tituba "waved her arms over fire" (A. Miller, 1953, 9). Parris' statement begins the accusations of Tituba's involvement. This action is foreshadowed in the stage directions as A. Miller states, "she [Tituba] is also very frightened because her slave sense has warned her that, as always, trouble in this house eventually lands on her back" (A. Miller, 1953, 7-8). Not only can one interpret this as proof that Tituba is often faulted for issues that do not stem from her, but one can also infer that it happens due to her lessened value as a slave.

From the way she speaks, to the color of her skin, Tituba is noticeably the only person considerably different in the town of Salem. I assert that this difference and her portrayal as a Devil worshiper are not a coincidence and are due to her non-white, non-puritan status. Throughout the play, Tituba is named as the connection between the Devil and the rest of Salem. Not only does Tituba speak to the Devil, but she addresses him with respect, saying, "His Majesty" (p 112). Though Sarah Good refers to him in the same manner, she happens to be unable to see the Devil considering that when she calls out to him, Tituba corrects her, saying,

“That don’t look like His Majesty; look to me like the Marshal” (D. Miller, 20017, 112). Tituba’s characterization as evil continues with the way she speaks of interactions with the Devil. A. Miller even goes as far as stereotyping a whole country as being an enjoyable oasis for the Devil:

Oh, it be no Hell in Barbados. Devil, him be pleasureman in Barbados, him be singin’ and dancin’ in Barbados. It’s you folks – you riles him up around here; it be too cold ‘round here for that Old Boy. He freeze his soul in Massachusetts, but in Barbados he just as sweet... (A. Miller 1953, 113).

Though one could assume that Tituba’s speech should be taken as sarcasm, A. Miller does not note in the stage directions that Tituba dramatize the dialogue in any specific way, which leaves the reader to infer their own conclusions. Therefore, the lack of direction for Tituba’s character creates opportunities for students to perpetuate harmful rhetorics.

Besides Tituba’s perceived relationship to the Devil, she is also discriminated against because of her ties to voodoo — a west African custom, deemed as witchcraft and evil by A. Miller (1953). In his article, D. Quentin Miller (2007) states “the link between blackness and evil in the play, melded in the furnace of language, is forged through the evocation of voodoo” (444). D. Miller (2007) argues that while witchcraft is commonly seen as fake, voodoo — especially in the time of the play being published — has been seen as an evil practice instead of a Caribbean custom (D. Miller). Throughout the play, Tituba’s perceived and misrepresented practice of voodoo is one used to stereotype her. In addition, the custom, which originated from black societies, is illustrated as frightening. However, the original Hatian custom (vodou) was meant to serve as a religion but has since become a vision ... synonymous to black magic, almost exclusively associated with black bodies (McGee, 2012; Murphy, 1990). A. Miller perpetuates

the fear factor of voodoo as black magic throughout *The Crucible* and does not work against such rhetoric in order to deepen the audience's understanding of Tituba's character.

Tituba also serves as a scapegoat throughout the play, which is made possible from the defamation of her character through her connection with the devil as well as her status as a slave. We see this notion exhibited by Abigail in the first act when she is being questioned by Reverend Hale. Abigail says, "I never sold myself! I'm a good girl! I'm a proper girl" (A. Miller 1953, 40). However, before this encounter, Abigail has blamed all of the night's events on Tituba and denied any activity of her own, insinuating that Tituba is in no way "proper." Before Reverend Hale's questioning, Abigail originally displays her disdain for Tituba's role as a slave and devalues her identity as a black Barbadian, saying "They want slaves, not such as I. Let them send to Barbados for that. I will not black my face for any of them" (A. Miller, 1953, 11). In these instances, Abigail uses her white privilege to attack and demean Tituba's character.

A. Miller also enacts discrimination in this piece is by taking away Tituba's own ability to speak for herself. Though Tituba is the first to confess to witchcraft and is pegged the sorcerer of the evil in the woods, she is not given the chance to explain herself throughout the play. Matter of fact, Tituba is only seen in parts of the first and fourth acts of the play, leaving her without a voice. Regardless of A. Miller's intent to having Tituba admit to witchcraft, he does not give us insight to what she may feel in the predicament. We are left to guess her motives, leaving the dominant narrative to speak for her instead of her having her own voice.

In Act One of the play, the girls who were in the woods the previous night are having a conversation about the roles they each played. It is in this conversation that Abigail tells the girls that Parris saw them in the woods. While the girls begin to talk about their mutual activities in the woods, Abigail is quick to stop them, saying, "Now look you. All of you. We danced. And

Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this. Let either of you breathe a word... about the other things, and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you." It can be inferred that Abigail's continued use of Tituba as a scapegoat displays that, due to her slave status, Tituba's voice matters less.

While A. Miller's (1953) intent on Tituba's characterization is unknown, I argue that Tituba's situation in the play only works to marginalize and not liberate her. Though one may argue that Tituba, being the only considerably different character in the play can be seen as A. Miller bringing awareness to racial tensions, that idea is not continuously exhibited throughout the piece considering Tituba herself is not seen in order to disrupt the dominant narrative. The simple fact that her race and speech are the main factors of her definition as different does not serve to uplift students of color. Therefore, Tituba does not appear to embody resistance because "resistance theories demonstrate how individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions" (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal 2001, 315). Tituba's silence and ultimate invisibility for half of the play works in direct opposition of CRT's goal to show resistance toward dominant narratives. Instead, Tituba's narrative disappears within the play, both figuratively and literally.

Though this play is critically acclaimed, the silencing of Tituba, the degradation of her and her home country, her use as a scapegoat for the white characters involved, and her assumed relationship with the Devil show displays of racism. Regardless of if these displays are micro or macro aggressions, they can still affect readers of color in various ways (see chapters 2 and 4.1). I want to be clear that the purpose of this criticism is not to necessarily say that *The Crucible* cannot be read, but to bring awareness to the fact that implicit racism can lie within even the most prestigious of texts. If we do not speak against dominant narratives, as stated in the

literature review by Rybakova & Roccanti (2016), educators can always create pairings with newer texts to show relevance between them and bring up current social issues. These pairings are not set in stone and depend more so on the ways in which we interact with the texts. For instance, pairing *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Great Gatsby* to discuss to the American Dream without discussing how race has played a part in how this dream is achieved does not work to fight against dominant narratives or center the stories of people of color. Ultimately, the choice to teach texts such as *The Crucible*, which embody both implicit and explicit racism is up to educators of the future. In any regard, in order to continue using *The Crucible* in classrooms we must look to complicate the way in which we view canonical literature.

Chapter 4.1: You 'Sposed to Hold Me Down, But You're Holding Me Back

I walked into the house and sat my backpack down in one of the dining room chairs. Momma was standing at the sink, wiping it down with a dish rag.

I walked over to my mother and kissed her on the cheek before trying to make my way downstairs to the basement. I knew eventually she'd want to talk about my grades, but I just needed a break today.

"Young man!" My mother's voice was soft yet commanding. She'd stopped me in my tracks right as I was about to pass over the kitchen's threshold.

Shit. "Yes ma'am?" I answered.

"Can we talk?" She turned around and looked me straight in the eye. My mother was not a harsh woman, but she knew how to scare the shit out of me with a look.

"Yes ma'am." I sat on a barstool on the other side of the island and folded my hands together. I looked down at them even though I knew she was waiting for me to look at her.

She put her hand over mine and squeezed just a bit. I watched as her brown hands matched the color of mine, just like my grandmother's matched the colors of hers.

"Baby, tell me what's happening."

I looked up at her and she smiled hopefully, willing me to tell her some magical secret that could give her some input to my recent demise. "Ma," I said. "I really don't know. I'm just really not feeling this play we're reading. I mean for the last couple of weeks all we've done are assignments dealing with the Salem Witch Trials and I get that it's important but I just don't understand what's going with the text. I can't focus."

“Okay.” My mother nodded her head and then quickly folded her arms over her chest. “Tell me what it is that makes you not be able to focus? Is it your friends from class? Should we get you in another hour?”

“No, Ma,” I said waving her off. “It’s not that. I haven’t figured it out yet, but I’ll let you know when I do.”

I was sitting on the couch flipping through *The Crucible* when April busted into my basement.

“Hey!” she said before taking a seat across the room. “How’s the character analysis going?”

I raised my brow and stared at her. “I can’t find shit in this script.” I close the book and sit down on the table in front of me. “Like honestly, I’m trying to analyze Tituba but there’s barely anything there.”

April laughed and shook her head. “That’s because she’s silenced,” she says. “You should have been like me and wrote about how Abigail is selfish and a mediocre character.”

“I just haven’t been feeling this class. I don’t really know what’s wrong with me.”

“I know I’ve said this before,” April said. “But, what if it’s not you?”

I pause for a moment, not quite understanding her. “What do you mean?”

“What if the issue is not you. Think about it,” she says readjusting in her seat. “You’re reading it by yourself trying to figure out where you fit in part to the text. Sure, it’s about teenagers to some extent, but they’re white females — you identify as neither. Then, the males are all white and, let’s be honest, a little crazy. And at the end of all this, you have a black slave who literally is seen as a devil worshiper and is in two acts of the whole play. I don’t think it’s a you problem. I think it’s the text.”

“I guess, man.” I tried to let what April was saying sink in but I was too frustrated. To be honest, April had said all the things I’d thought while reading this play... and more to be honest.

Later that night, I was in my room lying in my bed with the lights off. The street lights peeked through my curtains and landed on my face, making me turn my head just a bit.

I could hear my mother coming before she ever knocked on the door. She had this walk, this rhythm. It changed depending on the mood she was in. This one was her worried walk. Each foot hit the stairs rapidly. She’d then pause at the top only to go back down the stairs and do the same thing again. She was contemplating posing the issue again. She’d let me off easy the first time, so when I heard the soft rap at my door, I wasn’t surprised. Already knowing this would happen, I had unlocked my door and turned on the lights in my bedroom to avoid furthering questioning.

“Come in, Ma.”

She had started to open the door before I’d even said a word. “Hey, baby.” She walked in and I sat up in the bed, giving her space to sit. “I was just checking on you. You didn’t come down for dinner.”

“I’m good, Ma.” I said staring at the Godforsaken play on my desk. We sat in silence for a moment before I spoke again. “Do you think I’m the reason I’m failing?”

She scrunched her face for a second. “Yes and no.” She nodded her head, congratulating herself on being so diplomatic.

“Say more, Ma.”

She laughed a little, and I did too. “What have you done so far to understand what’s happening with you?”

“I mean...” I think for a minute. “I don’t know, I just kind have been trying to do my best.”

She nods again, taking in what I’m saying. “Baby, your teacher is responsible for teaching you. But let’s be honest. You’re black and you’re a young man. Sometimes when you’re having trouble, even though it’s not fair, you have to do the work yourself. I don’t want to get you down even more, but you know this. We talk about it all the time. People are going to see you differently; your teacher probably thinks you’re not working hard enough. You need to show her that she’s wrong. That it’s her choices that aren’t helping you succeed. At the end of the day, that is her job – to help you succeed.

I look at her with my mouth slightly agape. “I guess I wasn’t taking all of this into account.” I roll my eyes and then mumble to myself. “April was right.”

My mom laughs and pulls me into her. “If the girl was right, give her her props.”

It had been two hours since my mom left my room and I’d been on the computer researching all kinds of things about racism in classrooms. To be honest, school was my domain. I never really thought about adding the idea of race into it. My teachers had all liked me. However, I did always make them happy. Now that I was a disappointment, I wasn’t a praised pupil anymore... I was just the black kid who couldn’t keep up.

That was about to change.

The next day, I got to school earlier than usual, waved to the office aids, and proceeded to Ms. Deen’s classroom.

When I got to her room, Ms. Deen’s door was closed. I could see her sitting at her desk, sipping coffee from one of those 32-ounce mugs.

My stomach curdled for a second before walking in her room. I'd knew I'd be anxious, but this was a lot. I thought of turning away. I was risking a lot. *What if she feels like I'm trying to attack her... What if I make my grades worse... What if she gets so angry that I get suspended?*

I took a deep breath. Now that I could do what Ma and April had been saying, there was more to think about. Black kids get in trouble and no one thinks the difference. *Is further risking my academics and reputation worth it.*

Maybe I can wait for April... No then both of us could get in trouble. I turned away from the door and walked in the opposite direction. To be honest, I don't know what I was thinking. I couldn't come in there like that. It would always be my word against hers.

I continued down the hall, looking at my tennis shoes as I walked. *At least my shoes are still fresh.*

"Hey, kid!"

I looked up to see Mrs. Houston standing next to her classroom door. I honestly didn't even realize I had walked toward her classroom.

"What's up, Mrs. H?" I walked over to her and adjusted my back on my shoulder.

"Well, you tell me," she said with her arms over her chest. "You walk down my hallway, face all long, head all down. What's going on?"

I stood there quietly not sure of what to say. *I can't bash her colleague in front of her. Hell, she might not believe me either.*

"Come into the classroom and have a seat. Maybe we can talk about it there." She held her door open and waited for me to walk through.

I nodded my head and walked into the classroom.

I took a seat at a table near the door and Mrs. H pulled up a chair next to me.

“Now, tell me what’s up.”

I looked at her unsure of what to say. *I think your colleague may be racist?* That wasn’t going to be a productive conversation.

I could feel Mrs. H staring at me, waiting. “I don’t know. I’m just struggling in English.”

“Uh huh... Ms. Deen’s class, right?”

I nodded.

“Listen, I get it. You don’t want to say the wrong thing, but if you don’t tell me I can’t help--” she paused in the middle of her sentence and took a deep breath. “I’m here to help my students,” she said. “There’s nothing you can say to me that would make look at you any differently. While Ms. Deen is my colleague, you are my student. Your success is all that should matter to each and every teacher here.”

“Okay,” I said, taking a deep breath before diving into the conversation. I told her everything. That I’d been feeling stupid in the class, that I felt like I couldn’t find myself in what we were doing. “And then last night I was looking up all this stuff about how the things we read in school are sometimes really racist. I think *The Crucible* might be one of those racist texts and I just don’t know how to feel.”

“Have you talked to her?” Mrs. H stood up from her seat and walked to the dry erase board. She started writing standards and objectives for the day. “I’m still listening, go ahead.”

“I was going to this morning, but I backed off.”

She turned on her heels and scrunched her face. “Why?”

I hung my head. “I mean... I guess I was scared. If she doesn’t like what I have to say, she could get upset. It’s her word against mine.”

Mrs. H stood in front of me for a moment and nodded before walking to her desk and grabbing her phone, jacket and coffee. “Let’s go.” She walked out of the classroom and didn’t even look back.

I followed her out. “Mrs. H, where are we going?” I asked, walking behind her.

“To talk to Ms. Deen,” she said, not breaking stride.

“But, but –”

“Listen, I am here for you. If you don’t want to talk about it and want me to stop walking now, let me know. But, if you want to try to change things, you have my full support. I won’t take another step unless you want me to.”

I looked at the ground and then back to Mrs. H. She was right. Even though it shouldn’t have been my responsibility, it was. And in order to survive, I needed to change it.

Together, we walked into Ms. Deen’s room and I realized for the first time, that I truly understood what April had meant by “doing extra work.”

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The pages of this thesis have worked to examine ways in which racism, specifically in the literary canon in the English classroom can affect students' academic lives. Though there is much research surrounding the use of the canon and its texts, there needs to be more about racism within the canon. The research that does include topics of racism are usually only talked about around obviously racialized texts (*Huck Finn*/*to Kill a Mockingbird*). In order to further support students, we must analyze the texts we're reading in the classroom and identify the ways in which it can affect students emotionally.

When studying CRT, we realize that the education system is the epitome of institutionalized racism (Miller, 2010). While some teachers work hard to understand this racial tension, others are blind to the issues. Teachers of English cannot afford to be blind. In our classrooms, we are faced with teaching literature that exhibits both obvious and hidden racism. Hence, if a teacher is blind to the racial tension within the education system, they do an injustice to their students, particularly their students of color by not addressing these aspects of discrimination. Complacency in the ELA classroom when it comes to canonical literature cannot be accepted. We must begin to understand the ways in which these racialized texts effect harm in our students' academic and personal lives. In order to support students of color and better their learning experiences, we must hear their stories and work to eradicate racism involved in our curriculum. As educators, we may not be able to change the stories within the canon, but we can change the ways we approach them.

Future researchers can widen survey criteria by moving beyond the state of Oklahoma and seek more teacher input for relevant texts used in the classroom. In addition to seeking more teachers, future researchers should also seek the commentary and stories of students of color

from around the world. These stories could expose the real instances of harm students experience through these texts.

I end this thesis with a small clip of Miles entering into Ms. Deen's classroom after winter break. With nervousness and apprehension, Miles still walks into the classroom with his head held high, trusting that his teacher will do right by him now that she's become aware of the issues within her curriculum. It is important to hear the voices of students of color and know their stories. Because voices of color have been stifled for so long, I end this hoping that Miles' voice will inspire you to think more in depth about how students of color are viewed, positioned and thought of in future curricular choices.

Chapter 5.1: Flip it and Reverse it

It was the first day of the new semester and I'm not going to lie, I was nervous. I'd have to walk back in Ms. Deen's classroom and take what was to come head on. I know we talked before the semester was over and that she had offered to hear my input, but I wasn't sure if she'd really heard me.

I checked my watch as I walked down the hallway. I had 20 minutes to kill until the bell. My usual plan included walking into class and catching up on whatever happened on twitter that I missed while doing homework the night before, but I hadn't had any homework and honestly, though pleasingly comical, once you've seen black twitter take down one racist, you've kind of seen it all.

"Good morning, Miles," Ms. Deen said. She was standing at her doorway smiling. I hope you're ready for today's class.

I smiled back and nodded before walking into the classroom and taking a seat. I hadn't even noticed my feet had taken me to her door.

A few minutes later, April walked in and sat her bag down before sliding into the chair next to me. "What's up, Miles."

"Nothing much," I answered. We sat there in silence for a moment before April said anything else.

"Bro, if you're going to tap your foot the whole class, I'm moving."

"I'm sorry." I took a deep breath and stilled my leg. I hadn't even noticed I was doing it. I knew I was nervous, but I didn't realize I was that nervous. I was honestly just hoping that I hadn't offended Ms. Deen. I felt like my entire academic career was on the line and I was positive I wouldn't have been able to handle that.

10 long minutes later, the bell for class rang. I took a moment to clear my thoughts while everyone else chatted amongst themselves.

As Ms. Deen made her way to the front, everyone quieted. She took a minute before speaking, like she was trying to choose her words carefully. My imagination began running wild with things she was about to say.

“Good morning, everyone,” Ms. Deen said. “It’s good to see you all back from winter break. I want you all to know that I have thought very hard about what we should do this semester. I know I promised some of you *The Great Gatsby* would be covered this year, but I’m not sure it will be.

Beside me, April released a small “hmm.” And, it was hard to tell, but I think it was one of approval.

Maybe this semester really will be different, I thought.

Before continuing, Ms. Deen made eye contact with me and smiled. “I think I’ve made a mistake,” she said. “I was so focused on the literary texts of the past that I didn’t realize they don’t show anything except the narratives of the privileged.”

At this time, April’s hand shot up and I instantly shook my head, knowing what she was going to ask.

“Are you speaking of white privilege, Ms. Deen? I just want to be sure I’m following you.”

Ms. Deen nodded her head. “Yes, April,” she said seriously. “I was teaching you through my own lens of privilege and someone made me realize that before we left for winter break. I’m very sorry they had to though. That shouldn’t have been work they did for themselves. That was my job, and in that regard, I failed you.”

For the next 45 minutes, Ms. Deen asked us to help her brainstorm ways to make our classroom a healthy environment for everyone. She talked to us about the texts we read and asked what other types of texts we'd like to read. She also provided us with a list of twenty books or so that we could choose to do an independent book report over. I nodded my head as my eyes scrolled over *Dear Martin*.

I couldn't help but let a small smile escape over my face. Maybe things really could change... Maybe there was hope after all.

— END —

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Appendices

Appendix A – Initial IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: May 13, 2019 **IRB#:** 10767
Principal Investigator: Danetra Lynnette King **Approval Date:** 05/13/2019
Status Report Due: 04/30/2020

Study Title: Racism in the Literary Canon & Students of Color: A Counterstory

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

Requirements under the Common Rule have changed. The above-referenced research meets one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. However, as Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit an annual status report to the IRB.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- **Submit an annual status report to the IRB to provide the study/recruitment status and report all harms and deviations that may have occurred.**
- **Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.**

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.

Appendix B – IRB Modification Approval



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Approval of Study Modification – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: October 30, 2019

IRB#: 10767

Principal Investigator: Danetra Lynnette King

Reference No: 696752

Study Title: Racism in the Literary Canon & Students of Color: A Counterstory

Approval Date: 10/29/2019

Modification Description:

Removing student interviews and revising the teacher recruitment.

The review and approval of this submission is based on the determination that the study, as amended, will continue to be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46.

To view the approved documents for this submission, open this study from the My Studies option, go to Submission History, go to Completed Submissions tab and then click the Details icon.

If the consent form(s) were revised as a part of this modification, discontinue use of all previous versions of the consent form.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the HRPP office at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. The HRPP Administrator assigned for this submission: Nicole A Cunningham.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Aimee Franklin'.

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix C – Survey Questions

Books Taught

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q4 Consent to Participate in Research at the University of Oklahoma[OU-NC IRB Number: **10767** Approval Date: 5/13/2019] You are invited to participate in research about racism in canonical literature and its effects on recent high school graduates who also identify as people of color. If you agree to participate, you will complete this online survey. There are no risks or benefits associated with this study. If you participate, you will receive this compensation: \$0. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be anonymous. We will not share your data or use it in future research projects. Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason. The time commitment for this survey should take no longer 20 minutes. Data are collected via an online survey system that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. No assurance can be made as to their use of the data you provide. If you have questions about this research, please contact: Danetra King Email: danetra.l.king@ou.edu Or Crag Hill Email: crag.a.hil@ou.edu You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant, or if you don't want to talk to the researcher. *Please print this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.* Are you 18 years of age or older?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Consent to Participate in Research at the University of Oklahoma [OU-NC IRB Number: 10767 ... = No

Q5 Are you a teacher of more than three years?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you a teacher of more than three years? = No

Q8 Do you consent to participating in this study?

- I consent (1)
- I do not consent (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you consent to participating in this study? = I do not consent

Page Break

Q6 Which of the following texts do you teach in your classes? Select all that apply.

- The Great Gatsby (1)
- Romeo and Juliet (2)
- Hamlet (3)
- The Odyssey (4)
- Of Mice and Men (5)
- The Crucible (6)
- To Kill a Mockingbird (7)
- Huckleberry Finn (8)

Q7 Are there any more texts that you currently teach in your classes? If so, please specify.

Q8 Please give a detailed description of how you teach these texts. (Topics you cover, discussion goals, classroom objectives, assessments.)

Q9 Do you currently use textbooks to interact with text? If so, please provide the name and published year/edition of the text book.

End of Block: Default Question Block

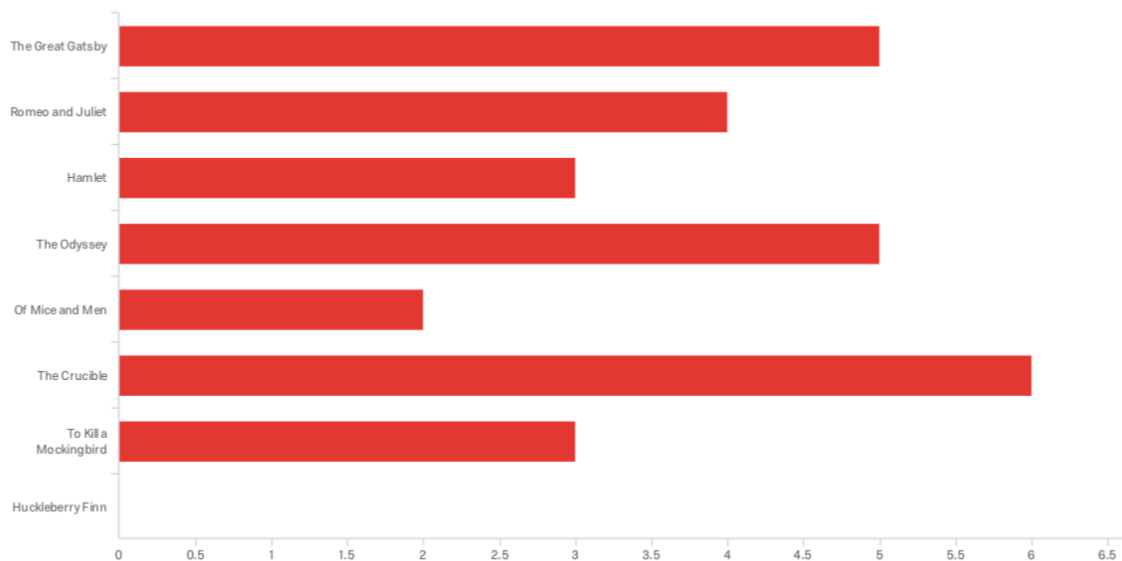
Appendix D – Survey Responses

Default Report

Books Taught

December 12, 2019 6:30 PM MST

Q6 - Which of the following texts do you teach in your classes? Select all that apply.



#	Field	Choice Count
1	The Great Gatsby	17.86% 5
2	Romeo and Juliet	14.29% 4
3	Hamlet	10.71% 3
4	The Odyssey	17.86% 5
5	Of Mice and Men	7.14% 2
6	The Crucible	21.43% 6
7	To Kill a Mockingbird	10.71% 3
8	Huckleberry Finn	0.00% 0

28

Showing rows 1 - 9 of 9

Q7 - Are there any more texts that you currently teach in your classes? If so, please specify.

Are there any more texts that you currently teach in your classes? If so,...

The Outsiders, Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone, The Giver, Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief, I Am Number Four, The Compound, Hunger Games, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Have a Hot Time Hades

The House on Mango Street, The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Farewell to Manzanar, Speak, Dear Martin, Persepolis Part 1, American-Born Chinese, Anya's Ghost, Anthem, Big Mouth and Ugly Girl

The Giver, The Outsiders, Anne Frank, and Flowers for Algernon

The Catcher in the Rye, A Raisin in the Sun, Tuesdays with Morrie

Refugee by Alan Gratz Independent Reading Picture Books Bøærs & Saints Maus 1 & 2 A Raisin in the Sun We are Displaced

Night, The Outsiders, A Long Walk to Water, Macbeth, The Hate u Give, A Long Way Gone, Flowers for Algernon, and The Hobbit.

Night The Invention of Wings The Hiding Place

Most of the canon from American and British lit.

Macbeth, The Life of Pi, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, The Hate U Give, The Poet X, Tulsa Burning, Dreamland Burning, All-American Boys, Frankenstein

Lord of the Flies

A Raisin in the Sun, The Hunger Games, Americanah.

Are there any more texts that you currently teach in your classes? If so,...

The Outsiders, Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone, The Giver, Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief, I Am Number Four, The Compound, Hunger Games, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Have a Hot Time Hades

The House on Mango Street, The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Farewell to Manzanar, Speak, Dear Martin, Persepolis Part 1, American-Born Chinese, Anya's Ghost, Anthem, Big Mouth and Ugly Girl

The Giver, The Outsiders, Anne Frank, and Flowers for Algernon

The Catcher in the Rye, A Raisin in the Sun, Tuesdays with Morrie

Refugee by Alan Gratz Independent Reading Picture Books Bøærs & Saints Maus 1 & 2 A Raisin in the Sun We are Displaced

Night, The Outsiders, A Long Walk to Water, Macbeth, The Hate u Give, A Long Way Gone, Flowers for Algernon, and The Hobbit.

Are there any more texts that you currently teach in your classes? If so,...

Night The Invention of Wings The Hiding Place

Most of the canon from American and British lit.

Macbeth, The Life of Pi, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, The Hate U Give, The Poet X, Tulsa Burning, Dreamland Burning, All-American Boys, Frankenstein

Lord of the Flies

A Raisin in the Sun, The Hunger Games, Americanah.

Q8 - Please give a detailed description of how you teach these texts. (Topics you cover, discussion goals, classroom objectives, assessments.)

Please give a detailed description of how you teach these texts. (Topics y...

Build background knowledge with research, gallery walks, articles, etc. move into characterization, diction and setting as we begin reading. Consider multiple perspectives through hands on activities, writing assignments, and class discussion. Read and analyze story elements, language, and author's craft. Illustrate point of view and symbols. Assess through writing assignments, reading checks, exit tickets, and final projects.

We do in-depth character analysis, compare and contrast books with the movies. Themes, tone and mood. Main objective though it to have kids improving their comprehension.

I use Discussion Packets Thematic projects Essays (mini and full length)

Students read 90% of the text independently with light annotation and frequent graded Socratic discussions focusing on supporting ideas with textual evidence, paraphrasing and building on others' ideas, asking student-generated questions, exhibiting deep thinking, and encouraging thinking and discussion in others.

Romeo and Juliet and The Odyssey are the only two texts we study as a whole class, meaning we read it together and have several discussions and creative quizzes. The other texts are taught through books clubs and the assessments are discussions and summative writing assignments.

The specifics vary based on the text itself, but overall, I use novels and plays to teach almost every standard. I teach Life of Pi to introduce cultures from around the world. We do research projects over the religions and cultures discussed in the book. We discuss the science and geography in the book. Assessments are either project-based or writing assessments. Part-Time Indian, THUG, The Poet X, Tulsa Burning, Dreamland Burning, and All-American Boys are used in my English III class (American Lit). They are paired with short stories, poems, non-fiction pieces, and films to explore what it means to be an American. How is the American identity created? Who creates the identity? We discuss the creation of the country, civil disobedience, patriotism, etc. Assessments are done through class discussions and notebook writing. The objectives are simple: get kids to read and then have kids use text to discuss how they think and feel about what they have read. Frankenstein is used in English IV, with seniors. We collect quotes and vocabulary words during our reading, making note of specific ideas and themes throughout. Students have several discussion tests throughout-sometimes I provide the questions, and sometimes I only provide the topics. The students then have to write the discussion questions and answers-which are then shared with the class in a quasi-Socratic Seminar. When we finish the book, students write an argumentative essay and participate in structured debates.

Typically we focus on the major themes of the book and apply reading terms and strategies as we go. We read a chapter, discuss the importance of what we learned, how we can apply it to society now, and how the text makes them feel.

For Hunger Games we explore the novel as a means for commenting on societal problems and studying author's craft and purpose, as well as the history of using writing to challenge the status quo within America. In the end, they write analyses using critical lens of excerpts from the novel, produce their own dystopian short story using writing elements to address a social issue of their choice, and then analyze the mode of writing for its effectiveness in delivering their message. We use A Raisin in the Sun and excerpts from Americanah to address the concept of intersectionality and how the American Identity has always been defined by diversity. We talk about racial identity in the 60s and 70s and how identity can impact one's ability to attain their goals. The goal is for students to see how the character identities within specific environments can positively or negatively impact their attainment of the American Dream, as well as exploring stereotyping, microaggressions, and discrimination. In the end, they write a reflective response in which they address how their own identities, others' identities we interviewed, and the characters in the novel were impacted in their ability to attain their dreams and why that matters and shows about American society as a whole.

For The Great Gatsby and A Raisin in the Sun, the focus is on the concept of the American dream the story of America and who gets to tell it. We also do a look at the history of the concept of the American dream and where it came from, poetry from that time frame, the Harlem Renaissance and other literary pieces. when I teach The crucible we do it as a film study as opposed to the play version in the focus is on the concept of power hysteria and jealousy which are all common themes that run through that. The goal with this one is for them to take the lessons that should have been learned with the Salem witch trials and see how we as humans have continued to fall into hysteria throughout history including McCarthyism the Muslim scare after September 11th and others. The catcher in the rye is purely a focus on coming of age I do parent with other classic pieces of literature and film including Dead Poets Society and I have them do a lot of individual personal reflection as we read the story. Tuesdays with Morrie is a focus on failure and death and how those two things are inevitable and we do a lot of poetry analysis with it.

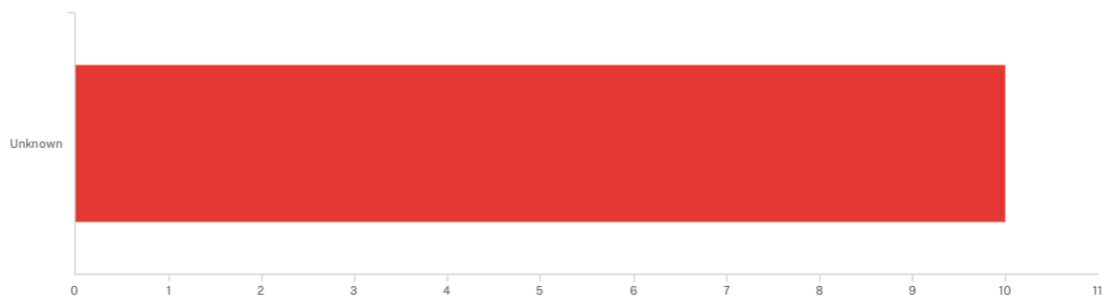
Please give a detailed description of how you teach these texts. (Topics y...

I cover social justice issues and teach students to use their voice, while aligned to the Oklahoma State ELA Standards. I only give formative assessments and project assessments.

Q9 - Do you currently use textbooks to interact with text? If so, please provide the name and published year/edition of the text book.

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Q9 - Topics



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Unknown	100.00% 10

Showing rows 1 - 1 of 1