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Reading the World: Reading *Red Scarf Girl* in a 9th Grade English Language Arts Class

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Abstract

This study examines how one teacher implemented the study of a multicultural literary text in a rural 9th grade English Language Arts classroom. Specifically, it examines the kinds of classrooms conversations that arose as a result of the study of *Red Scarf Girl* (1997), a memoir set during the Cultural Revolution in China. The findings show that the choice of a culturally distant text from another nation encouraged conversations about what it meant to be an American, and provided potential discursive spaces for discussion about self, nation, and world. However, there were also tendencies towards non-critical readings and thinking in problematic binaries. Implications for rethinking multicultural literature to include conversations about self, nation, and world are discussed. In thinking about text choice, I suggest that we need to begin to think about students both as Americans and global citizens in order to bring culturally relevant conversations into the classroom.

Keywords: Multicultural Literature, Local and Global Literature, Citizenship, Curriculum and Instruction, English Language Arts

The growth of media and technology has made the world a much smaller, and at the same time, a much bigger place. Air travel makes possible a meeting in New York City, U.S.A. one day followed by another meeting in Melbourne, Australia or a beach holiday in Pattaya, Thailand, the next. With today's technology, communication is almost instant – at the click of the “enter” key on one's computer keyboard or through one's mobile phone. In today's world, travel beyond one's boundary, whether in physical or virtual space, is inevitable. The reach of globalization is such that young people today engage in transcultural flows of information without leaving the comfort of their home (Lam, 2006). Within America itself, immigration is fast changing with the demographics moving towards an even more racially and ethnically diverse population (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2004). More young Americans easily move across states and continents whether for travel or jobs. Cross-cultural interaction has become an inevitable fact of life.

These changing demographics necessitate a new look at what counts for learning in a globalized society (Kelly, Luke, & Green, 2008). Teaching and schooling have been “developed as technologies of nation, nationality, and nationalism” (Luke, 2004, p. 1437) but to think only within the confines of the nation is to disregard changing global dynamics that require viewing the local and global as paradoxically intertwined. In terms of curriculum practices in the Literature classroom, there is a need to rethink knowledge by re-envisioning multicultural education beyond diversity within the nation to view the student as a both American and world citizen. Student awareness of self in relation to community, nation, and world is an essential attribute in a world of cross-cultural interactions. My argument in this paper is that in this fast-changing world of mass migrations and mass media, an awareness of the global alongside the local is required. This means that we need to rethink the role of multicultural literature as it is usually conceptualized in the United States, as generally confined to diverse literature within the U.S. Instead of thinking only about diversity within the local (in this case, the United States), I suggest that it is important for educators to think about the global (the world) alongside the local (the nation) in their choice of literary texts for literature classes.

While teacher guides such as *Breaking Boundaries with Global Literature: Celebrating Diversity in K-12 Classrooms* (Hadaway & McKenna, 2007) and practitioner accounts (e.g., Binen, 2002; Reese, 2002; Robinson, 2001) contribute towards discussions about expanding the literature curriculum to multicultural literature from out of the United States, most scholarship and research on multicultural literature in the U.S. have tended to focus on diversity within the country, whether in the area of race and ethnicity (e.g., Brooks, 2006; Glazier & Seo, 2005; Godina & McCoy, 2000; Smith, 2005), gender (e.g., Athanases, 1998; Sutherland, 2005) or social class (e.g., Beach, Thein, & Parks, 2008) which in its own way tends to a particular ethnocentricity (Jordan & Purves, 1993). Also, studies that have examined students reading multicultural literature set in other countries usually do not make qualitative distinctions between such multicultural literature with diverse literature within the U.S. (e.g., Boyd, 2002, 2003; Dressel, 2005).

The research in multicultural literature have been useful and remain useful to inform our understanding of how students read particular kinds of texts in particular contexts but there remains a gap in research regarding how students read diverse literature from beyond the United States, or what some others have termed international or global literature (see Hadaway & McKenna, 2007 for discussion of definitions) or culturally diverse literature (Jordan, 1997; Jordan & Purves, 1993; Purves, 1991). This study seeks to begin the dialogue with the qualitative case study of a 9th grade class

reading *Red Scarf Girl*, a memoir set in China during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

Theoretical Perspectives

The Critical Transformative Potential of Literary Texts

Narratives can be critical transformative sites where students are able to engage in dialogue about the self, others, and the world (Applebee, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Langer, 1995). This transformative potential of literary texts is visible in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (e.g., Said, 2000), in the context of reading communities of romance novels (e.g., Christian-Smith, 2001; Parameswaran, 2002; Radway, 1991), and of book clubs (e.g., Long, 1993; Twomey, 2007). In the American context, the centrality of textual narratives can be seen in the ongoing debate about what should be on the English curriculum - about whether knowing a fixed set of texts and knowledge is the mark of a culturally literate American (Hirsch, 1987) or whether texts and conversations need to change with the times to be culturally relevant to students (Applebee, 1996). The canon, whether on university or school curricula, remains a set of books that selectively illustrate the national characteristics or values of the nation (Corse, 1997; Purves, 1993). This “official curriculum” serves to inculcate individual understandings of what it means to be American through both the texts studied and dispositions encouraged in the classroom (Apple, 1992; Collins & Blot, 2003). Thus, the official curriculum serves as a reminder of what is important to the national culture, and books brought into the classroom can provide discursive spaces for engagement in conversations about such issues.

In a sense, the debate about what counts as knowledge in the ELA classroom has in part its roots in the issue of what it means to be American, whether in the form of a monological culture (e.g. Hirsch, 1987; Ravitch, 1987) or a postcolonial embracing of cultural difference and hybridity (e.g. McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2003). As Apple (1990) has shown, historical choices for school curriculum materials have been driven by the need for homogeneity and acculturation of immigrants, but changing contexts of diversity have raised new questions about what should count as knowledge in these new times (Kelly et al., 2008). Banks, well-known for his work on multicultural education, recently argued in relation to citizenship education that:

Cultural and group identities are important in multicultural democratic societies. However, they are not sufficient for citizenship participation because of worldwide migration and the effects of globalization on local, regional, and national communities (Banks, 2004a). Students will need to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable them to function in a global society. (Banks, 2008, p. 132)

Among the skills that Banks speaks of is the need for an understanding of difference and complexity, both within the country and beyond (M. M. Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hillard, 2004). While citizenship education engages explicitly with what it means to be American, literary study can be said to contribute discursive spaces for discussions of what it means to be a member of a community, whether of nation or world. The study of particular kinds of literary texts can be said to provide spaces for reflection about what it means to be a particular kind of person as well as to provide room for “ongoing conversations about things that matter, conversations that are themselves embedded within larger traditions of discourse that we have come to value” (Applebee, 1996, p. 3). Being literate in this day and age requires understanding engagement in issues that matter to nation and world, and literature provides a place for such engagement to take place.

The choice of particular kinds of textbooks or texts for instruction may constrain or open up the possibilities for instruction. In his critique of U.S. postwar basal readers (*Fun with Dick and Jane* series), Luke writes:

Lacking allusion, connotation, and nonliteral inference, missing temporal and spatial deixis, omitting a critical narratorial voice, they [the basal readers] preclude the reader from expanding/testing his or her schematic repertoire, of constructing and overlaying multiple possible worlds. By portraying and modelling a universe of speakers (rather than thinkers), this effect is compounded. These textbooks express little about the possibilities of self-reflection or even the strategic use of oral language as mediating factors in social relations. (1988, p. 119)

In the same manner, the kinds of literary texts that students are exposed to at middle and high school level can either limit or encourage students' exposure to different kinds of texts as well as critical ways of reading. Given that students at a later stage of their education are more mature and able to engage in thought-provoking issues present in narratives (Appleyard, 1990), serious thought need to be given to the kinds of conversations that the secondary literature curriculum raises for students.

Dialogic Interactions: Reading Self and Others

I draw on Bakhtin's (1981; 1986) idea of dialogicity and self-authoring to focus on the relation between the reader and text in the context of reading in the classroom. A key concept in Bakhtin's work is the idea of dialogism (Holquist, 1990), which he applies in his discussions of novels, of speech, and of self. Central to dialogism is the notion that the self and works are always authored in response to another. In Bakhtin's (1981) *Discourse in the Novel*, he writes that

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented towards a future answer-word: It provokes an answer, anticipates an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. (p. 280)

Thus, the literary text is not written in isolation but in response to the past, present and perceived future. Worldviews are embedded within the texts and within the characters in the texts. The reader, with his or her own histories brought to the reading experience, is provided an opportunity to explore worldviews through the literary text (see Booth, 2006 about the ethics of literature). The reader orientates himself towards particular positions when reading a text, or what Bakhtin terms "a specific conceptual horizon" (p. 282), just as the writer writes from a particular conceptual horizon. In the intermingling of the reader and text in a particular context, the reader makes new meaning and discovers new understanding of himself or herself and the world around him or her. Worldviews are re-affirmed, enlarged or shifted in the reading process.

The literary text thus becomes a discursive space for exploring self in relation to others. It is through our view of the Other that we become aware of how we position Self. Holquist, explaining Bakhtin's notion of dialogism in relation to the self, writes that "in order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of others" (1990, p. 28). Understanding self is ultimately a relational activity, where through interaction with others, whether in life or in text, the individual begins to construct an image of what he or she dislikes, who he or she is, what he or she stands for. Sumara (1998) calls the act of reading an act of remembering, of re-organization of identity which takes place as the reader engages with the worldviews present in the text to rethink his or her own worldviews. The reader positions himself or herself in relation to worldviews presented within the text and re-authors the self as text (Bruner & Weisser, 1991) even as s/he

engages with the text, whether in affirmation, negotiation or resistance. The worldviews of the reader and the worldviews of the text interanimated within the context of the ELA classroom allow for engagement in conversations about self and others that are raised within the text or suggested by the text.

Studies on the Use of Multicultural Literature

Studies on the use of multicultural literature in the ELA classroom have tended to come from two key perspectives: using multicultural literature for culturally responsive perspectives or from cross-cultural perspectives. Studies on the use of multicultural literature from a culturally responsive angle have shown that texts that feature protagonists that students can relate to, often from the same race or ethnicity, may affirm the cultural identities of students from marginalized groups (e.g., Bean & Rigoni, 2001; Brooks, 2006; Godina & McCoy, 2000; Henry, 1998). From a Bakhtinian perspective, the vision of the self as reflected by others who may share similar experiences allows for identification with as well as differentiation from these characters.

Brooks (2006) demonstrates how some 8th grade African-American students respond variedly to the study of culturally conscious books by African-American writers such as Mildred Taylor's (1991) *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and Walter Dean Myers' (1988) *Scorpions* in her study of an urban 8th grade classroom using *culturally conscious* African-American texts. Culturally conscious texts are written by and about African-American writers that tend to recognize the genuine experiences and subtleties of African American lives (Sims Bishop, 2003 in Brooks, 2006, p. 375). Brooks suggests that while these texts written by African-American writers may serve the function of validating and empowering some African-American readers, teachers need to be aware that student responses, coming from different backgrounds and perspectives, are culturally complex. Brooks identified key themes and analysed student responses to the themes in three different books through close textual analysis. She showed how the students responded in different ways to the text despite coming from seemingly homogenous African-American backgrounds. The identification of themes became a starting point for conversations about recurring themes and ethnic group practices. Students realigned and positioned themselves differently as they read the texts, drawing on their own experiences and understandings of the world. For example, in dealing with the theme *Surviving City Life* during their reading of *Scorpions*, one student, Cedric, responded by focusing on one main character's decision making when facing family pressure:

*The part I liked the best was when Jamal was telling Tito that he was going to run away from home because of family problems. I like this part because it's a situation where is (?) though Jamal is making a decision where as if he is going away from them. **Something like this has happened to me. If Jamal were my friend I would tell him the best thing to do is work out your problems don't run away from them.*** (p. 385, *emphasis mine*)

Cedric is in fact positioning himself as someone who would advise a friend to stay and deal with his problems given a similar situation. In Cedric's response to the story and character, he engages with the story-world and repositions himself in response to the characters in the text, given his own cultural background and experiences. Yet, readers are complex and even students who come from similar race and background can have varied responses to the texts studied.

Sutherland's (2005) study of six African-American girls' responses to Toni Morrison's (1994) *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates how discussing a culturally relevant text can give rise to conversations that matter to students. She found that the story encouraged the girls to talk about race- and gender-related notions of beauty and

expectations that others had for them. Like the students in Brooks' (2005) study, these students positioned themselves differently at different times, showing the complexity of student responses to conversations raised by the same book. Despite their seeming homogeneity as African-American women, their personal experience and frameworks directed different and even contrasting responses to issues raised. In the course of their discussions, these students were able to negotiate their sense of self as African-American young women and in relation to their community.

Both Brooks (2005) and Sutherland (2005) show in their studies that the kinds of literary texts chosen matter for the kinds of conversations that arise in the classroom. Within such discursive spaces, the students negotiate their understanding of difference and complexity in life through their engagement with the text and others. While the books studied were culturally relevant to the students in terms of race and gender issues, literary narratives that are more distant can still prove to be culturally relevant to the students because they engage in students in issues about the world. Issues that may seem culturally distant are in fact less so in a world where understanding diversity within and beyond nation is a necessary part of life.

Studies on the uses of multicultural literature from cross-cultural perspectives have demonstrated this potential for students to question self in relation to others who are different within their own community and nation (e.g., Athanases, 1993, 1998; Beach et al., 2008; McGinley & Kamberelis, 1996; McGinley et al., 1997; Spears-Bunton, 1990; Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007). In Athanases' (1998) study of two high school classes, the students reported retrospectively that their study of a variety of multicultural literature provided opportunities for them to revise their notion of others who were different from them, and to rethink stereotypes, particularly with regard to race, ethnicity and gender. In a classroom environment where the teachers provided literary texts from diverse cultures and encouraged open conversations, the students were able to extend their understanding of self as well as others, and their own positioning with regard to others in their community and nation. Identities were shifted and negotiated in the reading of these multicultural texts, and students were able to envision a more complex world that included different Others.

In another study, Beach et al. (2008) examined how students in two high school classes constructed alternative identities as they read multicultural literature with their socially conscious ELA teacher. In their study which focused on social class, Beach et al. were interested in tracing students' understanding of diversity, which they acknowledge is an essential skill in this globalized world. Students constructed different versions of identities as they read these texts in the classroom, relying on different cultural models they were familiar with or open to in order to make sense of both the text and the world. By exposing students to the tensions inherent in reading culturally unfamiliar texts (in their case, the difference was at the level of social class), they suggest that students can "increase their understandings of *how* their beliefs and values are formed and *why* other people think differently" and "therefore acquire the *capacity* to engage in and value perspective-taking through their literary experiences as a primary value for reading literature" (Thein et al., 2007, p. 55). Beach et al. suggests that change should be seen "as the increase propensity to try on, amend, and revise discourses and cultural models of race, class, and gender" (p. 250) rather than actual volcanic shifts in attitude. What is important is students' willingness "to examine the limitations of their status quo discourses and cultural models" when faced with "dialogic tensions portrayed in texts and articulated in discussions" (2008, p. 250).

These studies discussed illustrate how multicultural texts can provide discursive spaces for students to engage in conversations about self and others. While the studies discussed have focused on diverse literature within the United States, I was particularly

concerned in this study with how the students position themselves and re-author themselves in relation to their reading of a culturally distant text set in another nation. I wondered if different kinds of dialogue and interactions between self and text would arise during the reading of a culturally distant text set in another nation when compared with reading diverse texts within the nation. How did students as active readers respond to the reading of the text and how did their readings have an impact upon their self-constructions, if at all?

The use of the term *culturally distant* is meant to act as a marker of the distance between the reader and the text. While some American students may be familiar with particular kinds of texts as a result of their cultural and reading practices, others may not be. Thus, no one set text can be said to be completely distant to all American students. It is with this caveat that I focus on one group of students reading a text that was culturally distant for them.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- (1) What kinds of conversations – as evidenced in classroom discussions, student reflections and responses – arise when students read a culturally distant literary text, *Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997) in their ELA classroom?
- (2) Specifically, how do students perceive themselves and others as they read *Red Scarf Girl*?

Research Methodology & Methods

Research Design and Methods

The qualitative case study is a “bounded” study (Merriam, 1998). The choice of a qualitative case study allowed for a microscopic study that helped me “*understand* complex social phenomena” (Yin, 2003) and gain insight into how students in this one class read one culturally distant text from beyond America. Purposeful selection (Patton, 2002) of a suitable classroom was employed in this study. Colleagues made recommendations based on my criteria that I wanted to work with a teacher who was involved in teaching a multicultural text. Eventually, I connected with Claire Dickinson at Salmon Creek High School (all names used in this paper are pseudonyms). She had just completed an East Asian professional development course over the summer holidays and planned to teach *Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997) to her 9th grade class during the fall semester of 2007.

Data was collected from September 2007 to January 2008. I visited the class twice in September 2007 and recruited students from one of Claire’s 9th grade class. Four focal students – two European-American girls and two European-American boys – participated in more detailed case studies. Interviews were conducted with the teacher and focal students. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. I observed the class on a regular basis, twice a week, for from October to December 2007. My role was more of an observer than a participant though I answered questions that students asked and chatted informally with them on many occasions. During the observations, I took field notes and memorandums. Keeping in mind the reflective turn (Schön, 1991) that would help sharpen the insights learned, I reflected not just on the classroom observations, but also on my role as a researcher, reader, and teacher in my memorandums.

The analysis of the data followed the constant comparison method (Patton, 2002), and I looked for patterns across class observations, memorandums, interviews

and written artefacts submitted by the students. However, to avoid “neat narratives” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), I also kept an eye out for deviations and what was unusual. In analyzing the data, I paid particular attention to the metaphor of conversation, looking for conversations in classroom discussions, written artefacts, and from the students’ own sharing during the focal sessions.

The Setting

The study took place in a 9th grade classroom in a rural school in the Northeastern part of the United States. There were 22 students in this 9th grade classroom, which was considered a large class by the school’s standards. There were 15 girls and 7 boys, mostly European-American, with one African-American female student and one Hispanic male student. This lack of diversity within the class is reflective of the school demographics. As I walked around the school, I only occasionally saw Hispanic or African-American students, and one Asian-American student stood out as being the only Asian-American student in the school. While a majority of the students in the class had travelled somewhat within the United States, only a handful indicated that they had stepped foot outside the United States. An informal survey also indicated that the students seldom read books that were set in different cultures, and that romance, adventure and fantasy were among the most popular genres read for leisure. Reading *Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997) in this school context would be an imaginative step for the students out of the U.S. into another culture in another country.

The teacher, Ms. Claire Dickinson, was in her 4th year of teaching, after a career switch from social work several years back. Claire welcomed my presence into her class as well as my feedback as a doctoral student interested in literature and literacy. In addition, she felt that my heritage and experiences as a Chinese, albeit Singaporean-Chinese, might allow me to contribute insights to the reading of the text. A popular teacher with a lively and easygoing style, Claire was open to discussion and suggestions about her teaching.

Claire perceived both potentials and problems with teaching a culturally distant text to her students who live in a rural, generally white community. She felt that it would be good to expose her students to another culture through a literary text although she was worried that the students who had not been exposed to much diversity might be resistant to the reading and understanding of *Red Scarf Girl*. She also felt that the text had cross-disciplinary potential as students would be studying the Cultural Revolution in the 10th grade history curriculum. In an interview I had with Claire before she started teaching the text, she expressed that her aims were for her students to learn about another culture, understand the story, make connections from literature to life, to learn cultural awareness, and to learn literary conventions. From her lessons, it was clear that she sought to fulfil these aims in varying degrees, engaging students in discussions about the main character, about their own understandings, and through their written reflections and their completion of a personal memoir at the end of the unit.

Claire met the class for 40 minutes everyday. For most part, the students studied *Red Scarf Girl* as a class although chapters were often assigned as homework reading. In class, Claire would read parts of the text with students and punctuate the reading with clarifications, questions and reflections. On other days, there would be group-work or individual written work. Like most teachers mentioned in Applebee’s (1993) study of literature instruction, Claire took an eclectic approach to literature teaching which included a New Critic approach with close reading of the text and a reader response approach with emphasis on students’ personal responses to the text. Her choice of texts (in part mandated by school policy but also reflective of personal belief) reveal a tension between a cultural heritage view in which Shakespeare’s (2006) *Macbeth* and George

Orwell's (1993) *Animal Farm* were desired class readings to be coupled with adolescent literature such as *Speak* by Laura Halse Anderson (1999) which she felt were culturally accessible by her students and relevant to their experiences as juniors. In addition, as in many ELA classes across the United States, Claire also saw the literary text as a vehicle for the teaching of English language. Reading *Red Scarf Girl* provided an opportunity to learn new vocabulary and learn about descriptive writing. In terms of literary learning, it provided an opportunity to learn about literary terms and the specific form of the memoir. A variety of activities including online research, group discussions, vocabulary exercises, essays, comprehension type worksheets and tests, individual written reflections were some of the classroom activities that Claire planned to help students engage in *Red Scarf Girl* as well as learn requisite language and literary skills.

The Literary Text - *Red Scarf Girl* by Jiang Ji-Li (Jiang, 1997)

Red Scarf Girl is a memoir written by Jiang Ji-Li (1997), a Chinese residing in the United States. Anne Frank's (1993) *The Diary of a Young Girl* was Jiang's inspiration to write a memoir that "will help Americans to understand China, and the Chinese to learn about the United States" (Jiang, 1997, pp. 271-272). Jiang traces her family's fall from favour and persecution during the Cultural Revolution in China during the 1960s when she was 13. Jiang's *Red Scarf Girl* is different from Anne Frank's *Diary* in that it is written from the perspective of an older Jiang who survived the Cultural Revolution and eventually settled in the U.S. with her family. Jiang's intention is made clear and various themes such as the danger of concentrating power in a group of people, the importance of family and loyalty are made explicit in the course of the memoir. The author's own position that U.S. democratic values are far preferred to China's communist ones are clear in her epilogue, even though she maintains her kinship with China, her "country" (p.272).

The clear voicing of the author's worldview influenced substantially the reading of *Red Scarf Girl*. I had been unaware of the impact of the author's clearly stated position until I read the students' reflections at the end of their study of the book. Most students re-voiced the author's intentions and understanding, adopting it when especially when it aligned with their own knowledge of the world. Peter's reflection succinctly captures the author's intention and worldview:

I think that Jiang Ji-Li wrote this memoir about her life because Jiang Ji-Li wants everyone to know what life was like during the Cultural Revolution and under the power of Chairman Mao. Jiang Ji-Li hoped that young American readers would learn about how poor living conditions were when Red guards ransacked people's homes and destroyed everything. Jiang Ji-Li hoped that young American readers would learn how lucky they are that they didn't have to live through such a terrible tragedy that ruined many people's lives and hoping that people would understand what Communist government is and what the cultural revolution was and who chairman Mao is.

(Peter's reflections, November 26)

Classroom Connections

From Text to Life and Life to Text

Teachers are mediators of the kinds of readings that students do in the classroom. Claire constantly made connections between text and life to help students understand the text better and to make the text meaningful to their lives. In the early chapters of *Red Scarf Girl*, Jiang and her fellow students were encouraged to destroy what Chairman Mao termed *Four Olds*: "old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old

habits” (Jiang, 1997. p. 21). Claire helps the students understand the concept of *Four Olds* by having them give cultural equivalents in the United States.

Teacher: This is unfathomable to me. People destroying things that represent the old. What could represent the old here?

Student: The Statue of Liberty

Student: Our houses.

Student: Pentagon.

Student: The libraries and school.

Claire also tries to get students to share their understandings of unfamiliar objects and links them from the culturally distant text to what might be culturally closer – New York City Chinatown.

Teacher: What’s a pedicab?

Student: It’s a cart with an attached bicycle.

Teacher: It’s like Canal Street in NYC.

[Continues reading.]

Teacher: Dried duck gizzards. Why would anyone eat it? But that’s all about culture. To someone else, that could be tasty.

(Class observation, October 23)

The cultural connections that Claire attempts to make in class become bridges for students to understanding *Red Scarf Girl*. Unfamiliar objects and concepts were discussed in class in order to help students to read the text in context.

Distancing Oneself From One’s Cultural World

A particular lesson entitled *The Four Olds* that Claire designed on cultural awareness stood out by making explicit discussion about culture and turning the students’ vision inwards on their own culture, American culture. Students had to pretend they were aliens sent down to earth by Captain Xenophobic to study humans in Salmon Creek School. This was an especially inventive lesson that was completed over three days. On the first day, students were introduced to the task and wrote down their findings about American culture on newsprint. On the second day, students looked at each other’s newsprints and discussed what might be considered *Four Olds* or traditional and backward items. On the third day, the students had a class discussion on what culture means and what it means to be culturally aware before completing reflections which they handed in to Claire at the end of the class.

During the class brainstorming sessions on the first day, students came up with observations about Americans and their lifestyle, items that the students themselves normally took for granted. The list consisted of items such as *chewing gum, smoking, drugs, cracking fingers, talking back, taking showers, different dress styles, football is big, money is valued*. In their discussion of American culture, Claire pointed out that different cultures exist even within the United States, and the students compared different cultures in different areas of the U.S., for example, between the East and West coast, between different socioeconomic groups and different cultural and ethnic groups. The culturally distant text, *Red Scarf Girl*, became a way for students to distance themselves from American culture to examine their own culture from an outsider perspective.

The following class discussion occurred on the third day as students thought about different cultures that they have had contact with or what people might find unusual about American culture. Here, the classroom conversation inevitably turned to how other cultures may be different from American culture.

Teacher: What are we destroying in our Four Olds?

Students: Smoking and cigarettes.

Teacher: In some cultures, more people smoke. There used to be more smoking when I was a kid.

Schmitt: Flag.

Student: Video games.

Teacher: Why would we have to throw out video games?

Student: Cos they're fun.

Student: Television.

Teacher: You'd hate my home. I have an old TV.

Sam: We value green paper called money.

Teacher: We're a capitalist society. That's our economic system.

(The students list a few other items.)

Students: Taxes, Poverty, Government.

Teacher: We'd have to get rid of the current system of government then.

Student: Phones

Some students: No!

(the discussion continues)

Isabella: Sickness and disease?

Sammy: How do you get rid of that?

Teacher: Is sickness and disease an old habit or way of thinking?

(Writes and cancels disease.)

Student: They might take away women's rights.

Students: Human rights, The White House.

Jake: Statue of Liberty, the Pentagon

Teacher: Things that represent everything American. They will have to go or be reworked.

(Teacher points to items on the board. Students indicate that these things are particular to the North American culture. Some of these items might be different in South America. More items are listed)

Sammy: We eat pure grease all day.

Matt: We don't eat bugs.

Isabella: Eyes. Our eyes.

Student: Eating deer.

Teacher: I grew up in Jersey, people didn't eat deer in Jersey... Some cultures, perhaps less developed cultures might think it's weird we don't talk to each other but email.

(Students murmuring among themselves.)

Teacher: Some things seem very normal to us. Within the US, there are different cultures, similar but different aspects of culture in the U.S..

Matt: In the South, they're more polite?

Student: Some cultures value big houses.

Student: Famous people are different.

(Teacher compares east and west coast of the United States.)

(Class Observation, November 8)

From this extract, we see how the nature of the culturally distant text allows for Claire to design an instructional unit to allow for thinking about culture within the United States, and to compare that with other cultures that the students are familiar with. The events in *Red Scarf Girl* where items that symbolized the traditional were destroyed became a launching pad for the students to reflect on what could be considered traditional in American culture, and to think about what would have similar symbolic value in their own culture. The instructional unit also allowed the students to extend their thinking about what cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding means.

The following worksheet (Figure 1) is representative of many of the students' structured reflections, and illustrates how students have at least interpreted the official talk of the classroom about cultural awareness and understanding. There is some understanding that culture is everywhere and that while differences exist, there needs to be an awareness of difference instead of a normalizing of one's one culture.

Step Four:

Reflection (even Martians must reflect!):

The observations that went into your report and the things you chose to be destroyed are all aspects of our **CULTURE**. By now, you may have guessed that culture is more than just a nationality, a country or a religion.

What is meant by the term culture?

Culture is the way of life. They way people live there life like what they do, what they wear, how they eat, what they eat etc.

What does the word AWARE mean?

Aware means to look out for.

What does it mean to be "culturally aware?" Must you understand and accept the ways of a culture in order to aware of it? Explain fully.

Culturally aware means to be aware that other people live differently than you. So when you go to a different state or country be aware that some things will be different than what your used to.

Figure 1 (Jessie's Reflection Sheet)

For Schmitt, one of the focal students, the lesson was interesting in helping her to think about difference and about what constituted culture and specifically to situate her understanding of culture within America:

I thought it was a little disorganized. But it was probably a good thing to do, because that got you into the idea of the book. It made you think how it's so different, to have to take things you know so much and consider them four olds or something like that. Just to think about them... You don't even think about them as culture, you just think they are there.

(Schmitt, December 26)

While it was initially difficult for the students to grasp the task, the students did begin to learn about cultural awareness over the three-day lesson, captured in Sammy's comments made during an interview:

It was a little bit hard at first cos we're so used to our customs and we're so used to what we like it was a little bit hard to recognize what was so different about what we do. Cos if we were like doing another research report, or research on somewhere else, like the kinds of food they eat, it would be easier...

Well, I realize that everybody has their own different way of showing something. Like Christmas, and everywhere we're doing a book in another class, and how different these things are, even though we think it's based around the same thing. It's still quite different.

(Sammy, November 12)

To stay at the level of superficial cultural differences in terms of food and festivals would have been far easier for the students than to engage in conversations about concepts of culture. However, when challenged, the students were able to rise up to the task expectations and to begin to think about what culture and cultural awareness meant. The exercise became a way for them not just to reflect on the text and on cultural others, but on themselves as cultural beings in a diverse community.

Dialogic Interactions: Student Reflections and Interviews

Reading Binaries

The students wrote final reflections after their study of the memoir. Their reflections gave an insight into the kinds of internal dialogues that the students engaged in as they finally wrapped up their study of *Red Scarf Girl*. To answer the question, “What did I learn by reading *Red Scarf Girl*?”, Kate wrote:

I learned a lot by reading this book. One thing is that I realized how easy it can be for other cultures to be brainwashed by their leaders and how it could happen in our society. I learned that the Chinese culture values many different things compared to us. They think that having a bathroom is amazing and very few people have them. They also live in a one room house. That actually sounds pretty neat considering we don't have many of those types of houses in our culture. Before I read the book I didn't realize how much a culture would have to destroy the Four Olds. They also have a different school system. They get chosen to go to a high school, like our colleges. So must (much?) of the stuff I learned was about how their culture differs from the American culture.

(Kate, November 26, *emphasis mine*)

A close textual analysis to the words that follow after the pronouns showed how Kate reads the text for facts, making distinctions between Them (the Chinese) and Us (Americans). What she takes away from the reading of the text are the differences between the two cultures, particularly in terms of lifestyle and values.

Students, it seems, tend to read a literary text, particularly if it is a memoir, for facts, and where there are cultural differences, binaries often define what is the norm (US) versus the different (THEM). In this reflection, Kate compares the living conditions and schooling conditions of the Chinese with the Americans without situating the text in a particular sociocultural context – during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. Thus, on a surface reading of her reflection, Kate assumes a static view of culture and even though the memoir is set during the Cultural Revolution, seems to think that Chinese culture is the same today as it was then. She learns that Chinese culture is different from American culture, but it is a superficial view that rests on binaries between East and West, Them and Us. However, Kate acknowledges the scenario where leaders brainwash citizens is something that can also possibly happen in the American context. Reading *Red Scarf Girl* set in one particular cultural and political context does not preclude the discussion of ideas that can be applied in different contexts.

In an interview with Matt and Sammy, they reflect on their attention to differences in terms of cultural objects and events. Like Kate, they pay attention to events and things that are different in the two cultures. Housing and food differences stand out for them.

Sam: Some things that are unfamiliar to us, we treat a little differently, like there are some things they have in their culture that we don't have in ours. Like the kind of food they eat, like green bean popsicles. We don't eat green bean popsicles.

Matt: Yeah.

Sam: And her having a toilet is a luxury!

Interviewer: Do you read books from another culture differently?

Sam: We just read it.

Matt: Yeah, we just read it.

Sam: I don't think there's any special way that we read it if it's from another place. We're just reading it.

(Sammy & Matt, November 5)

Moreover, students did not perceive themselves to read the text differently simply because it was set in another country. There is little or no particular attention to the sociocultural context. While the focal students acknowledged that a culturally distant text was more difficult because they had to try understand the context (for example, Sam explains of *The Pearl* studied the year before that “it was hard to understand because they had some foreign concepts in it, like they had to sleep on a mat), they did not explicitly recognize any need to try other means of decoding meaning. It was the author's job to make the task easier, which Jiang did in the form of a glossary at the end of the book. Writing specifically for an American audience, Jiang (1997) had ensured there were explanations in her memoir and a glossary to make accessing the text easier. When reading more difficult “cultural” texts that they could not understand, Schmitt and Matt admitted that they would give up after a short while. Yet, learning to be literate should involve students acquiring the ability to deal with “difficult” texts that are culturally different. Students should learn to see the text as encoding culture, and to learn to read different texts with that awareness, knowing the techniques to look for meaning when meaning is not easily found.

Positioning as Americans

Matt: I think it's odd how they think of us as big nose Americans.

Sam: Yeah, they think of us with big noses. Of course we would think of someone else, like what Ms. Grant said in class, like we would think of Chinese people with slanty eyes and draw them [laughs]. They draw us with big noses. Kind of like a stereotype.

(Sammy & Matt, November 5)

Students also tended to position themselves as Americans (as opposed to racial or gender or social class markers) in their response to the text. Reading a text set in another culture provided room for comparison, not just between physical differences but even in terms of understanding how they themselves perceived others. Sammy points to the concept of stereotypes which she recognizes that both Chinese and Americans are susceptible to (here, they position themselves as European-American and position European-American as the norm for the definition of American – Matt and Sammy refer specifically to “big nose” Americans).

Students also compared government styles, particularly because of the nature of *Red Scarf Girl* which focused on a young girl's growing up in the shadow of Communist China. The text portrayed what could happen to the citizens of a nation in one particular political context and as such, students tended to evaluate government styles of both nations in their discussions and reflections. The students are in part re-voicing the opinions of the author as conveyed through her memoir (through the portrayal and her explicit comments in the epilogue) and classroom conversations. Through their agreement with the author's perspective, they reaffirm their own worldviews about what it means to be American and their preferred political systems. Jet writes in his reflection that:

The experiences of Jiang Ji-Li as portrayed through the historical novel Red Scarf Girl let me realize how fortunate I am to live in this country. After reading the novel I had a better appreciation of our own government and lifestyle. My

*change in view was inspired as I read about Jiang Ji-Li's hardships. How she was treated like dirt for being in a black family. How her life changed because of the Cultural Revolution. They took her father away for a crime against the Revolution. I couldn't even imagine the mental trauma it had on her during that period of 2 years. **If I had learned anything from her experiences, it is that I am so blessed to be an American in this day and age.***

(Jet, November 26, *emphasis mine*)

Jet understands that *Red Scarf Girl* is set in a particular time in history during the Cultural Revolution. What stands out in this reflection is how the study of *Red Scarf Girl* becomes an affirmation of what it means to be American. Jet begins to have a sense of his own good fortune because of the economic blessings he has in comparison with Jiang Ji-Li's experiences during the Cultural Revolution in China. Jet re-authors himself in his reflection upon reading the book, as an American who is "so blessed to be an American in this day and age" not to have to go through what Ji-Li had to in her lifetime.

Similar to Jet, Lyn brings America into her reflections. Her reflections demonstrate an awareness of the cultural-historical specificity of the text:

*Before I read Red Scarf Girl I had no idea about the Cultural Revolution or anything that went on in China. In fact, I didn't even know that China was Communist, and I had never heard of Mao Ze-dong. But, after reading Red Scarf Girl I actually learned more than I thought I would. I learned all about the Cultural Revolution and how Mao Ze-dong manipulated all the young people to follow his ways. He had the young people search houses, hurt people, and embarrass people. Even though adults and older people say they were for the Cultural Revolution, I don't think they believe they really were. If they did agree I think it is because they feared for their lives. They were the ones who were being targeted... After reading Red Scarf Girl, **I realized how hard the Cultural Revolution really was for people and it made me realise how much I would never want this to happen in the United States.** I'm glad we got to read this book because I actually liked it. I got to know more about a time in China than I thought I ever would. I really liked this book and I hope we read more books like this in the future.*

(Lyn, November 26, *emphasis mine*)

For Lyn, understanding what happened in another country at a particular time in history made her realize this was something that she would not want to happen in the United States. Like Jet, she reflects on the Other in order to come to conclusions about her own perception of her country and what she would want for it. Reading *Red Scarf Girl* as well as interacting about the text in class allowed the students to understand a cultural Other and to reflect on themselves as Americans and what they perceive America to be.

This explicit positioning of Self as American stood out because Claire did not deliberately use her lessons to discuss citizenship issues although comparisons between democracy and Communism were brought up, and reflections on the two different cultures engaged in during class. It seems that the author's own words, the setting of the memoir, the students' own backgrounds overlapped, and in a Bakhtinian sense, when the worldviews of the text resonated or agreed with that of the students, there was a reaffirmation of the students' own worldviews and beliefs in terms of what they saw as their national heritage. The choice of text allowed for both external and internal conversations about what it means to be American. Even though there was little in-depth discussion of the issue, the mere choice of text meant that the potential for raising conversations about what it meant to be American was at least possible in this ELA classroom.

Conceptualizing Political Systems

As Lyn's and Jet's reflections show, they gained some understanding about China at a particular time from reading and discussing Jiang's (1997) memoir. Reading *Red Scarf Girl* also got them reflect on themselves as Americans and what they desired for their country. In addition, they begin to gain an understanding of political systems and its impact on individual citizens. In addition, the text becomes a way for students to understand complex concepts in a more personal way.

Sammy articulates a complex understanding of Communism as a "good concept but not necessarily a realistic one" in one of the later interviews:

Sam: It was easy to understand. It was well-written. And now I totally understand about what most of Communism is, and how they went through it, and how it couldn't work. It turned out to be a bad thing. It is a good concept but not necessarily a realistic one.

Interviewer: What do you mean, it's a good concept? What made you think, did it come from the book?

Sam: Well, I was thinking while I was reading it. It's a good concept. Everyone wants to be equal, everybody wants to be the same. But people want to own stuff, so it's not necessarily a good thing. Cos people have their own possessions and make themselves unique, even though they want them to be equal.

Interviewer: Do you think Ms. Dickinson should teach the book again next year?

Sam: Yeah, I think she should. It would really... It teaches you a lot since it is a memoir of an exact moment from a certain point of view, and you don't really learn a lot of that kind of stuff in history. I think it'd be good to teach it.

(Sammy, December 26)

For Sammy, a more mature student in terms of her readings and understandings of the text, *Red Scarf Girl* helped her to understand Communism from a more personal perspective compared to history. Her personal interaction with the text shows an understanding of a ideology situated in one particular context and an expansion of her worldview in both understanding the concept of Communism and of the world. The conversations in the literary text have allowed Sam to increase her understanding of the world through the reading of the text.

Understanding Other Worlds

Some students engaged with the text to think about other worlds beyond that of China and America, and beyond the Cultural Revolution and present-day America. In an interview with Schmitt and Matt close to the end of their study of *Red Scarf Girl*, they show an awareness of the problems that America as well as other countries may have.

Schmitt: Red Scarf Girl was a pretty good book to pick for creating cultural awareness. Like America has problems, but other countries have their own problems. We're so stuck up in our own problems, we're creating more for no reason.

Matt: Like Iraq and stuff like that. Those are problems we don't need to have.

Schmitt: If you think about it, there's no point in starting a war. You can just talk. Actually, they're all about religion if you think about it.

Interviewer: Is there anything in Red Scarf Girl that stood out to you or that you connected with?

Matt: Well, I thought it stood out because of how the Red Guards acted, how they just barged into people's houses and them whenever they wanted.

Schmitt: It kinda reminds me of World War II –

Matt: - Yeah –

Schmitt: - of Hitler. And with the boards, how they painted the boards with like mushroom clouds. That reminds me of billboards, along the roads.

(Matt & Schmitt, December 26)

Notice how Schmitt especially makes intertextual connections between the text world, the current world of America and World War II. In my first interview with Schmitt, I had been quite surprised to find out that she would like to be a pilot with the U.S. airforce. In continuing interviews, I could see her general interest in military matters as she discussed *Red Scarf Girl* and other texts. In this interview, she compares the events of the book to that of World War II (using her own knowledge, both gained in school and through other media sources). In her dialogic interaction with the text, she positions herself through her opinions about America: “*Like America has problems, but other countries have their own problems. We’re so stuck up in our own problems, we’re creating more for no reason.*” She identifies with America yet criticizes particular political stances of the government.

Schmitt’s final reflection is an exception when compared to her classmates’ reflections in that she does not draw from the author’s explicit message about the purpose of the book. She engages with text and uses it as a discursive space for her own debate about America’s political stance regarding war and intervention in other countries’ policies. In her final reflection, she re-interprets the author’s intentions, working her own worldview into the reading.

One of the reasons she [Jiang] wrote the book is to show people that their country isn’t the only one having trouble with culture. America makes a big deal every day about going to war and having nuclear weapons that we get over-confident. Plus America is always caught up in our problems. She hoped that young Americans would learn respect for other countries’ problems. We’re supposed to set an example to other countries because they look to us for help. If we say no, people look down on us. Each young reader can learn different things about the book from their point of view.

(Schmitt, November 26)

For Schmitt, reading *Red Scarf Girl* provided a way for her to re-voice her stance on America and its relations with other parts of the world. The text provided an opportunity for her to compare her own country with another, and to suggest an alternative vision of her nation.

Discussion

...we must expand the horizons against which questions of how and what to read and write are both posed and answered.

(Said, 1993, p. 385)

The study illustrates how the choice of a particular text can provide a discursive space for dialogic interactions in classroom and for internal dialogues about self, nation and world. What really stood out in this study of students reading a culturally distant text situated in another country is how students position themselves and respond to the texts as Americans because of the choice of text set in another country. While lessons such as *The Four Olds* can raise specific conversations about cultures and cultural awareness, students also engage in internal dialogue with the text to articulate their own views about self, nation and the world.

Dialogic Interactions: Between Cultural Responsiveness and Cultural Expansion

Viewing reading a literary text as a dialogic interaction between the reader and the text in context allows us to identify the different stances and positions that both writers and readers take in this dialogic interaction. The text mediates the different

worldviews between the students, the text and the world in which the student exists, allowing for conversations about issues that are raised, whether explicitly or implicitly in the text. Situating reading as active dialogic interaction between reader, text and context provides a flexible framework for thinking about text choice and instructional methods. The reader brings his or her own worldviews to interact with the worldviews of the text which must be made culturally relevant in the context of study.

I have argued that it is important for students to be exposed to diverse texts from both within and beyond the nation. Qualitatively different conversations arise in the classroom and internally as a result of the kind of multicultural text that is used for study. The study of a culturally distant text set in another nation may allow for conversations about Self as American and Self as American in relation to Others. In that sense, the study of literature is relational. The text becomes a way to envision other worlds (Langer, 1995; McGinley et al., 1997), to discuss other worlds in order to return our worlds to make our decisions (Booth, 2006) about how to relate self to others. The literary text is a space where we can begin to see alternative visions of the world and continuously revise our sense of self and the world as we respond to the text. Literary texts situated within the country, from different perspectives and with different worldviews embedded in them allow for discussion of diversity within the nation whereas diverse literary texts from beyond country allow for conversations about self and others beyond the nation. It is not so much exposure to every possible perspective but to different kinds of perspectives that allow the student to begin to understand and respect difference. In a sense, redefining what counts as knowledge requires redefinition of what a literate student ought to know – being aware of self in relation to both nation and world is an essential disposition in this day and age. Through curriculum choice and appropriate instructional methods, students can be given the opportunity to engage in culturally relevant conversations in a world where interaction with difference and complexity is inevitable as a daily fact of life.

In terms of text choice, arguments in multicultural literature about the need for culturally responsive literature remain instructive. However, most research has tended to emphasize either culturally responsive multicultural texts or texts that promote cross-cultural understanding. In choosing literary texts, it is necessary to take cultural responsiveness into account in order to begin to engage students with the text and the talk about literature and life. However, at the same time, a cross-cultural perspective should permeate curriculum planning, such that students move from texts they are culturally familiar with to that they are less familiar with in order to learn more about the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). There needs to be a balance between choosing texts that are students are culturally familiar with and texts that expand the students' cultural conversations in order to expose students to conversations about diversity and change in different contexts.

Close textual analysis of literary texts, with particular attention to the worldviews in the text and potential conversations that could be raised is a way to determine the kinds of literary texts that are appropriate for a specific group of students in a specific context. Attention to worldviews of students as well as text provides a guide for choosing texts that are culturally relevant and culturally expansive in a progressive manner. Students may start off the year with culturally relevant texts and move gradually into culturally expansive texts to expose them to different perspectives. Paying attention to diversity both within the local and the global provides a way to select texts that will allow students alternative views of the world beyond their immediate community.

Critically and Culturally Reflexive Readings

Beyond *what* students read, there is the issue of *how* students read. Beyond reading content, attention needs to be paid to the kinds of reading dispositions that we encourage in our students through our own practices and classroom instruction. This study has shown how students tend to read a literary text such as a memoir for facts, often neglecting the socio-historical context in which the story is set. In addition, reading a text that is culturally unfamiliar often leads to binary thinking of Them versus Us.

Relevant here is Lewis' (2000) argument that the most commonly misused reader-response theory in the classroom is attention to personal response and identification to the neglect of a critical response. Lewis suggests that paying attention to the critical dimension of literary reading requires deliberate attention, and that getting students to distance themselves from the text may allow for a more critical reading where the reader is more aware of self as a reader and of the constructed nature of the text. Students who understand their role as active readers are able to critique the text rather than assuming that the text is what it says it is. A critical reader looks to the world of the reader, the world of the text, and the world in which both reside in order to truly make sense of what the text is trying to say and of his or her response to the text in his or her world context. Criticality involves being critical of self as a reader and even of untrammelled celebration of diversity without critique.

In addition to being a critical reader, an essential reading disposition in this fast-changing world is cultural awareness. Students need to learn that texts are culturally situated as are their ways of reading. This means that understanding the socio-historical milieu and place in which a text is set and written can contribute to one's understanding of a text. In addition, recognition of cultural differences, both in terms of the writing style and content allows students to move away from binary thinking to an understanding of multiplicity and difference in a globalized world. Students should be encouraged to be "aware" readers who are alert to the cultural embeddedness of a text, including those they are used to reading. As critically and culturally reflexive readers, students look from the text to themselves and vice versa to learn more about literature and life. Thus, beyond mere exposure to different kinds of texts, instructional practices that highlight critically and culturally aware reading should permeate class readings.

Self-Constructions as Americans and Global Citizens

This study has shown how students construct themselves as American citizens in their study of *Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997), a culturally distant text set in another country. In their study of *Red Scarf Girl*, China, Communism, the Cultural Revolution become the Others against which Self is measured. The students, positioned as Americans, decide what they do not want when they encounter an alternative political system as it is played out in another nation in a specific milieu. Students tend to re-voice the views of the author especially since it is in alignment with their own, and a few students like Schmitt used the text to make her own commentary about America's political involvement at a global level.

As an observer sitting in the classroom, I was often reminded of Arthur Miller's (1992) *The Crucible*, a far more complex text about the power of the masses and the failure of political leadership in a context where Communists and suspected Communists were the target rather than the aggressors in America. To complicate the study of *Red Scarf Girl*, studying *The Crucible* after *Red Scarf Girl* could have brought the reflection back home, and common themes explored. Recognizing that particular texts may give rise to conversations about self as American may provide for a way to think about organizing lessons to explicitly engage with issues of self in relation to nation and self in

relation to world. Beyond simple nationalism, students need to engage in critical and constructive discussions of the complexity of human nature in different cultural contexts.

Finally, the student as citizen needs to engage with issues of self as a global citizen in an increasingly interconnected world. What this study has shown is how students can envision another world through the study of a culturally distant text set in another nation. However, to think about self as a global citizen requires a view that while these books are set in and/or about another nation, the heritage that we are drawing on is that of the world; and reading these books can help us gain insight into the different traditions, values, human emotions, and historical happenings that have influenced the course of world history. Discussions of complexity in human relationships and relationships between nations or between Self and Others can be brought up in class even as comparative texts are used as likely and unlikely pairs to raise encourage discussion about self as American and self as global citizen. Through the study of culturally diverse literature within and beyond the United States, students can learn to understand difference and complexity in both the world and the word.

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