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CONNECTING, RESISTING, AND
SEARCHING FOR SAFER PLACES:
STUDENTS RESPOND TO
MILDRED TAYLOR'S THE
FRIENDSHIP

Karla J. Möller
JoBeth Allen
UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

*We analyze the discussion that developed when four fifth-grade girls, three African American and one Hispanic, and Karla Möller, a European American, transacted with Mildred Taylor's *The Friendship* (1987). Framing our analysis within the intersection of reader-response theory and sociocultural and critical theories of literacy learning, we show how participants' responses to Taylor's text and adult and peer guidance helped to create a response development zone that allowed for a dialectic of connecting with and resisting the evocation. The girls, all struggling readers, used reading, writing, and discussion to address comprehension difficulties and construct multiple levels of meaning. They became increasingly aware of historical racism and connected that knowledge to events from their own experience, including encounters with the Klan and memories of a relative's murder. We present the group's discussion as a metaphorical play and the girls as spectators who become actors as they engaged in this "theater of discourse" (Boal, 1985).*

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Um, and I don't like when folks, um, treat Black folks like they could, um, 'cause I like, I'm a like, all White folks, um, I don't know, I want them to like me, but I don't know. They might not like me. 'Cause they might be trying to kill and stuff, 'cause I'm scared of the Ku Klux Klan, boy, I swear.... They might want to spend the night at school and see everyone coming in the school. (Tamika, 2/10, p. 25)

TAMIKA, A FIFTH-GRADE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT sharing her responses to Mildred Taylor's *The Friendship* in a small-group discussion, was doing what many educators (e.g., Harris, 1996; Sims Bishop, 1997; Taxel, 1991) have suggested will happen when children read books about social issues. Sims Bishop (1997) stated, "The main purpose of a literary work ... is to encourage its readers to reflect on the human condition" (pp. 18–19). She argued that all children should have opportunities to see themselves and their experiences mirrored positively in the literature they read and to talk about the realities of oppression, past and present.

The function of multicultural literature is to ensure that students have the opportunity to reflect on it in all its rich diversity, to prompt them to ask questions about who we are now as a society and how we arrived at our present state, and to inspire them to actions that will create and maintain social justice. (p. 19)

Such texts open for consideration important social and political questions. Tamika reflected deeply on the people and issues in *The Friendship* and connected them to society as she experienced it in a small Southern city. She and her peers frequently read and discussed social issues through the books their classroom teacher, Ms. Stroup, introduced for literature circles (Daniels, 1994). Such books prompt readers to consider, as Taxel (1993) noted,

what it means to be human; the relative worth of boys and girls, men and women, people from various racial, ethnic, and religious communities; the value of particular kinds of action; how we relate to one another; and about the nature of community. (p. 11)

These researchers have gone beyond the notion that the sole purposes of multicultural literature are to reflect our own experiences or to allow us a clear view of others' lives. As Desai (1997) pointed out, claims of literature providing mirrors of our own culture and windows into others' cultures far outweigh the evidence that this really happens, nor do they reflect the complexity of the response process and the role that culture plays in that process. Desai wondered about the impact of the stories chil-

dren read on the stories that comprise their lives, calling for reader-response researchers to "carefully consider the roles that the culture or ethnic background of the author, reader, and interpretive community play in the development of our responses" (pp. 168–169) and to look at "the role literature plays in the growth of our cultural and ethnic understandings" (p. 169). Though we are individuals, "there is no such thing as an individual reader. We are each a product of our interpretive communities and of our ethnic and cultural backgrounds" (p. 169).

Children's emotional responses to literature dealing with social and political issues will not always be comfortable (Harris, 1997; Taxel, 1991; Zack, 1991). When these issues become intertwined with comprehension difficulties, transactions that are already neither easy nor safe become even more complex. We address this complexity by examining the interpretive community formed by four fifth-grade girls, all struggling readers, and Karla as they discussed *The Friendship* (Taylor, 1987), bringing to bear their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, their unique personalities and experiences, and their connections to the novel's central issue: racism.

Theoretical Framework

Focusing on the experience that results from aesthetic transactions with literary texts, many response theorists assume that there is a "live circuit" connecting the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1995). An evocation or "poem" is created in the active coming together of the text, the reader's cumulative life experiences and perspectives, and the context of the reading event (e.g., classroom literature discussions). Over 60 years ago, Rosenblatt understood the need to create "informal" and "friendly" (p. 67) spaces for students to talk, spaces in which they feel safe to express their own "unself-conscious, spontaneous, and honest reaction" (p. 64) to a text.

Firmly believing in the basic tenets of reader response as Rosenblatt (1978/1994, 1995) described it, we have broadened our awareness of the interplay of reader, text, and context through a number of other theoretical perspectives. Vygotsky's work on the sociocultural nature of learning and the zone of proximal development (1978, 1934/1986) and Bruner's work related to the notions of scaffolding (1986) and individual interpretations of events (1990) have increased our understanding of how people construct knowledge from experiences. Work on literature groups (Daniels, 1994; McMahon, Raphael, Goatley, & Pardo, 1997; Samway & Whang, 1996) has shown ways to incorporate these views of learning in children's book discussions. Critical literacy theorists have highlighted the need for dialogue on social-justice issues (e.g., Shannon, 1995) and the need to provide children with tools they can use to understand "systems of domination," to

“tie language to power, tie text interpretation to societal structures, or tie reading and writing to perpetuating or resisting” (Edelsky, 1994, p. 254), and to reconstruct tacit racist, sexist, or classist assumptions. Britton (1993) described how we create representations of the world based on our past, using them to generate “expectations, which, as moment by moment the future becomes the present, enable us to interpret the present” (p. 12).

Integrating these areas of scholarship through the conceptualization of a response development zone, Möller (1998) discussed the need to provide support for students as they read texts dealing with intense social-justice issues. Within this zone, the reader actively constructs meaning, drawing on prior knowledge and experiences as well as on textual and contextual information, in a setting where support is provided by knowledgeable peers and a teacher who mediates learning and encourages shared knowledge and social interaction. Initial response is viewed as valuable, but is not seen as the only product of a transaction. Likewise, teachers do not reject one interpretation, but they do value and teach toward multiple levels of interpretation (Eeds & Peterson, 1997). Defining learning as a social act, Vygotsky (1978) wrote, “learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p. 90). A response development zone draws as well on Vygotsky’s (1934/1986) and Bakhtin’s (1986) theories on language. For Vygotsky, the basis of human consciousness was the word; for Bakhtin, it was dialogue. Bakhtin’s (1986) term “dialogicity” referred to the connectedness of our utterances to all that has gone before. Speech and thought are always dialogical, even within one individual. Our words are always tied to voices and contexts in which they have previously been uttered. Both theorists believed that thinking was not simply verbalized through speech, but was transformed in the process.

Realizing how intimately people are connected through language illuminates the dialogic nature of responding to literature. Our responses are personal, but not singularly ours (Shannon, 1995). They are socially constructed by experiences and mediated through language. Focusing on response as social process reveals the possibilities for growth both within and through individual and group responses to literature. By reading a variety of culturally diverse literature and discussing personal, societal, and political issues, teachers and students guide each other toward multiple or alternative interpretations of text, self, and the world, creating a new kind of socially connected knowledge (Desai, 1997; Nodelman, 1996). This response development zone is continually shifting, affected by individual conceptual development, discourse patterns, peer interactions, and other personal, social, and contextual factors.

Reading and conversation are powerful tools for mediating understanding of difficult social issues. As Nodelman (1996) emphasized,

To deprive children of the opportunity to read about confusing or painful matters like those they might actually be experiencing will either make literature irrelevant to them or else leave them feeling they are alone in their thoughts or experiences. Similarly to deprive them of knowledge of painful or confusing matters they haven’t yet experienced deprives them of the opportunity to prepare themselves to deal with those things in a conscious and careful manner when they do inevitably occur. (p. 86)

However, it would be irresponsible simply to give children books that aroused intense emotions without providing time, space, and guidance as they interpret the content and work through strong feelings. By encouraging social reading from a critical literacy perspective, “children’s literature can be a powerful, positive force in the lives of children. It can make them less innocent. It can make them conscious that there is more than one way of being normal” (p. 114).

Delpit (1995) stated, “One of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power” (p. 66). Across all these lines, participants in this study connected their experiences to those of characters in another time and place and to those of fellow group members. The readers were not just responding to a distant, voiceless text. They were in dialogue, sometimes heated, resistant, revisionist, with Taylor’s *The Friendship* (1987), with their peers and Karla, and even with themselves. Taylor’s creation of the text and the time, space, and guidance Karla provided brought together reader response and critical literacy and created a collective response development zone.

Review of Related Literature

According to Bruner (1986), stories provide “map(s) of possible roles and possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-determination are permissible or desirable” (p. 66). McGinley et al. (1997) agreed, wanting children to realize “that stories can be a means of personal and social exploration and reflection – an imaginative vehicle for questioning, shaping, responding, and participating in the world” (p. 43). For this to happen, however, readers need “opportunities to read, write, and talk about themselves, their family and peers, and their communities and cultures” (p. 43). Wilhelm (1997) concurred, seeing the need to replace functional literacy with a “literacy of thoughtfulness” (p. 38; citing Brown, 1991) and

to recognize how literature offers possibilities beyond space, time, and self; questions the way the world is; and offers possibilities for the way it could be.

Opportunities for Students With Reading Difficulties

J L R
er & Allen

Despite research that shows the rich educational possibilities associated with reading and discussing literature (e.g., McMahon et al., 1997; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989), few have researched how struggling readers fare in these structures. The legacy of comprehension taxonomies and sequenced instruction has kept many struggling readers working on decoding, and at best, low-level comprehension. Walmsley and Allington (1995) argued from extensive research that “at-risk” readers “have routinely been denied access to the literacy experiences and materials afforded better readers” (p. 28). Keeping struggling readers in simple texts and focusing on word analysis and factual recall “withhold[s] the tools of intellectual engagement until students have proven themselves worthy of their use” (Dudley-Marling & Fine, 1997, p. 254). Perhaps because students with reading difficulties often do not receive literacy instruction focused on whole texts (Walmsley & Allington, 1995), they are rarely the focus of response to literature studies, although those writing about literature circles have emphasized the inclusion of all children (e.g., Daniels, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989).

Notable exceptions provide evidence that struggling readers progress when the focus is on meaning rather than isolated skills. Studying literature discussions in a multiethnic, varied ability, fifth/sixth-grade classroom, Samway and Whang (1996) wrote, “To deny a student access to these rich times of sharing because of a lack of fluency as a reader is counterproductive. Therefore, struggling readers should be given help” (p. 62) such as buddy reading, read-along tapes, and shorter texts. Knapp and Associates (1995) conducted a 2-year study of 140 elementary classrooms. Teachers in meaning-oriented classrooms provided time to read and talk about texts, focusing on higher-level comprehension. Using standardized reading tests, the authors determined that “the more classrooms focused on teaching for meaning, . . . the more likely the students were to demonstrate proficiency in . . . reading comprehension” and that these approaches “were likely to work as well for lower achieving children as for higher ones, and sometimes better” (p. 142). Goatley (1997) studied elementary students with learning difficulties engaged in book discussions, reporting “growth in their perspectives about literature, their confidence in sharing their interpretations with others, and their awareness of multiple purposes for discussing text” (p. 134). With time and support from the teacher, students moved from a narrow focus on factual recall to connecting books with their lives.

Similarly, Wilhelm (1997), found that “less engaged” readers in his middle school classroom needed different kinds of support. When he created space for artistic and dramatic response options, they responded in the same evocative, connective, and reflective dimensions as the engaged readers had from just reading and responding.

Studies of Response to Literature With Social-Justice Themes

Literature dealing with social-justice issues can lead readers to construct alternative versions of the world and themselves (Beach, 1997; Taxel, 1993). A central factor in this transformation, however, “is an awareness of how one’s own ideological stance shapes the meaning of one’s experience with literature” (Beach, 1997, p. 83). Readers and their responses are affected by the ideological discourses of race, gender, and class, as well as other societal influences (e.g., ability grouping). An overemphasis on unexamined individual opinions, combined with a lack of adult and peer guidance, can support avoidance of difficult issues.

The European American high school students Beach (1997) described resisted multicultural literature, reacting in a variety of ways, including open hostility, denial, acceptance of stereotypes, and even feelings of shame at recognizing their own racism. European American college students in a study conducted by Chappell (1994) initially resisted even discussing ethnic discrimination in *Farewell to Manzanar* (Houston & Houston, 1974), and some persisted in rationalizing U.S. policy or blaming the victims themselves. However, high school students can, with effective support, respond in deep and thought-provoking ways to novels dealing with social injustice (e.g., Henly, 1993; Kritzberg, 1990; Spears-Bunton, 1990).

Reports of discussions of books with social-justice themes in the middle grades have become more prevalent in this decade. Following Sims’ (1983) study of one 10-year-old Black girl’s response to fiction about African Americans, Smith (1995) wrote about the responses of three fifth-grade African American students, one of whom responded to a Langston Hughes poem with one of her own, commenting, “People used to say dark skin was ugly, but it ain’t” (p. 573). Walker-Dahlhouse’s (1992) fifth-grade students responded to *To Be A Slave* (Lester, 1968) by creating a panel discussion on slavery and writing essays on “the progress made by African Americans since slavery and roadblocks that still remain today” (p. 420). In a related study, Michalove (1999) detailed how her fourth-grade class used both literature and film first to examine social-justice issues historically, and then to focus on their communities, families, and their own prejudiced behavior toward classmates. Other edifying middle-grades research

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includes fifth-grade students' poignant responses to books about the Holocaust (Zack, 1991) and literature discussion circles in which seventh graders discussed child abuse, the Vietnam War, and censorship (Noll, 1994).

In some discussions, students had difficulty relating to or dealing with strong emotions. Enciso (1994, 1997) read *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990) with fourth and fifth graders, predominantly European Americans, who often ignored or sidelined race as a joking matter or as irrelevant. Diaz-Gemmati (1995) described the ignorance and open hostility along racial and gender lines that were unleashed when her ethnically diverse eighth-grade class discussed *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). But they learned to talk with each other and slowly moved toward deeper understanding and dialogue on previously unexplored, volatile issues and feelings that "always were there.... We just never acted on what we thought" (Diaz-Gemmati, 1995, p. 21).

In most of these studies, teachers struggled with their roles. A fourth-grade teacher (Desai, 1997) felt she had a "moral imperative" to address uncomfortable issues head on (p. 174). When characters' repeated use of a racial slur caused her students discomfort, the teacher asked them to write and then discuss their emotions. She also "share[d] her own discomfort with the term and allow[ed] the students the opportunity to deal with a difficult issue" (p. 174). Educators are not always clear on how to negotiate the emotional terrain of response to social-justice themes in literature. However, these teachers recognized their essential role in helping students within a response development zone, rather than letting them struggle alone with confusing, uncomfortable, and frightening emotions.

Although many of these studies shared passages from children's discussions and events leading to epiphany moments, adding much to the literature on response to texts with strong social-justice themes, gaps remain. Only Enciso (1994, 1997) focused on an in-depth group discussion of one text, sharing extended dialogue as the students struggled to create meaning and maneuver a discussion about a book that dealt directly with racism. None of the studies explicitly addressed the collaborative meaning making of struggling readers or of young students of color transacting with a text that exposed racism in an uncompromising way. Rogers (1997) wrote of the need for "curricular spaces in which [students] can explore complex and conflicting images in their social and cultural world, and in which they can communicate with others about matters that concern them" (p. 112). Others have called for research into the ways multicultural literature might both inform and transform students' lives and their perception of others (e.g., McGinley et al., 1997) and have found that there "has been little consideration of exactly how a child interacts with multicultural texts" (Desai, 1997, p. 162), especially those with social-justice themes. We offer

the insights of four students and two researchers in an attempt to begin to fill these gaps.

Method and Design

This was an interpretive, inductive, and generative field study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Patton, 1990). Karla was a participant observer with four fifth-grade girls in a book discussion group that met for 25 to 75 minutes outside Ms. Stroup's classroom for 5 days over a period of 2 weeks. All three adults are European American. JoBeth and Karla were collaborative researchers with Ms. Stroup in her classroom in a small, southeastern city. Karla and JoBeth analyzed the discussion of *The Friendship*; Ms. Stroup read and commented on their interpretation. The authors are writing a piece with Ms. Stroup on the role of the teacher in literature discussions.

Nicole, Jasmine, Carmen, and Tamika (pseudonyms) were part of a research project on meeting the multiple literacy needs of a group of fifth graders who were reading and writing significantly below grade-level norms. Working together with Ms. Stroup, Karla and JoBeth had observed and interacted with the girls in class and at lunch and recess since school began. All four girls had experienced difficulty in the student-led literature-circle discussions implemented in the classroom. Because of this, the authors and Ms. Stroup decided in February that focused, small-group instruction with Karla might be beneficial.

For each meeting, the girls read 10 to 15 pages of *The Friendship* (Taylor, 1987) and wrote responses to Karla's prompts intended as springboards to understanding the characters, story line, textual themes, and related issues. For example, to build on ideas discussed the first day, she asked: (a) Who is Jeremy? How does he act with the Logan children? Why do you think he acts this way? (b) How does Cassie react to how Mr. Tom Bee is treated? How does she react to Jeremy? What kinds of things is she thinking about? (c) Why do the men treat Mr. Tom Bee as they do? How does this part of the story make you feel? Karla chose this award-winning book, because it was readable, relatively short, ripe with discussion material, and had an African American female main character about the same age as the girls. Karla audiotaped and transcribed all group sessions, took limited field notes, and collected the girls' written work.

Literature-Circle Participants

Ms. Stroup was primarily concerned with the four girls' depth of understanding, based on close observation of them and on analysis of an informal

Reading Inventory she administered. The girls had scored 85% to 90% word recognition on the fourth-grade passage, and they had difficulty with inferential comprehension and vocabulary. Like many readers in their age group (especially students of color), according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the girls had difficulty reading longer texts with interrelated ideas, understanding complicated information, and making generalizations (Campbell, Voelke, & Donahue, 1997). Early in the year, Ms. Stroup described Tamika and Nicole as “very engaged, love to answer questions, but [they] have conceptual problems that show up, for example, in science. Both are highly motivated, but need to focus on deeper understanding.” She observed that Carmen and Jasmine were very artistic but worried that motivation was key for Carmen, who “gets along with no one,” and that Jasmine masked her difficulties in understanding complex ideas with “cute” responses. Tamika, Jasmine, and Nicole are African American; Carmen is White, of Hispanic descent.

The four girls rarely socialized with one another, with the exception of Jasmine and Carmen. In the classroom literature circles, Jasmine and Carmen left a group that had excluded or taunted them to work together. They had trouble completing books they started, often claiming the texts had gotten “boring.” However, during independent reading, Jasmine often seemed engrossed. Carmen, who tended to be withdrawn and ostracized, had been a virtual nonreader in fourth grade. When others put her down, Jasmine often took up for her. Referring to her classroom literature circle, Tamika said, “I think our group starting to go bad” (2/2, p. 1). She exhibited hostility toward her group, because they accused her of not reading the book. In fact, she felt she could not read all that was expected. When Karla initially explained the focus of the new group, Tamika countered distrustfully, “I believe y’all are going to try to get us held back. I believe that’s why we’re getting to go out of this class” (2/2, p. 5). Nicole was disgruntled with her discussion group:

In our group, man, it ain’t, folks ain’t getting nothing done and stuff... We discuss something like Yolanda and the cake, and ... the next day, we get to go in the literature circle again, they, um, they still talking about the cake and stuff, like ... they keep saying the same thing over and over and over and over, and I don’t like it. (2/2, p. 15)

One of Karla’s roles in this small group was to help the girls develop strategies for participating in meaningful student-led book discussions in the classroom. She initially attempted to stay in the background as much as possible while also helping the girls to keep conversations going, to remember turn-taking and inclusion of all members, to understand the book on multiple levels, and to find support for their ideas and interpretations

in the text. Karla’s difficult dual roles were to guide the students’ learning within a limited time frame as well as to encourage dialogue that was self-sustaining and not overly dependent on teacher intervention. As we show in the following sections, Karla provided scaffolding in multiple ways. Her supportive tone and gestures (e.g., smiles, hugs, eye contact) helped create an atmosphere that allowed the girls to explore uncomfortable areas in the text and in their lives. Her questions and statements as well as the writing prompts based on the girls’ inquiries focused the discussion at times on specific textual or contextual aspects that needed to be addressed, though she was cautious not to overwhelm the girls with lectures on historical fact or to silence their voices by imposing hers.

Analysis

We read the transcripts and generated analytic memos to get a feel for how the participants constructed the discussion. We analyzed each girl’s contributions, selected key narratives, wrote individual descriptions of each girl, and identified initial categories. Next, we returned to the whole discussion in context, viewing the interaction of the girls’ talk as they connected their experiences and thoughts to the events in the book and to each other. We generated categories from our multiple readings, which we modified as we discussed our interpretations. Finally, we examined the categories in relation to the entire 5-day interaction and identified key points where there was a qualitative shift in the discussion. After describing and analyzing the development of the group’s discussion, we share the categorical analysis.

Summary of the Text Used

Mildred Taylor’s *The Friendship* (1987), winner of the Coretta Scott King Award, is based on an actual event in her father’s life as a Black child in rural Mississippi in the 1930s. The Logan children, who are Black – Stacy, Cassie, Christopher-John, and Little Man – enter John Wallace’s store. The White owner’s sons yell at Little Man and threaten to cut off his “filthy” hands for putting them on the glass counter. As they are about to leave, Tom Bee, an old, Black friend of the Logan family, arrives. He and the sons also argue, and the situation turns serious when he asks for their father by his first name. John Wallace enters, rebukes his sons, but tells Tom Bee that he should not call him by his “Christian” name in front of others, because it “makes him look bad” (p. 32). Tom Bee reminds him of his promise – after Tom Bee was a surrogate father to him and saved his life twice, John Wallace had pledged, contrary to the racist custom of the times, that Tom

Bee could always call him "John." The children witness this exchange, along with Jeremy, a White boy Cassie's age, who makes shy overtures of friendship to the Logans.

When Tom Bee reenters the store, his request, "Ey there, John!... Give me some-a that chewin' tobacco!" (p. 46), sparks the inevitable confrontation. Stacey tries desperately to coax Tom Bee out of the store, but John Wallace, goaded on by his sons and White customers, shoots Tom Bee, ripping open his leg. The children watch in horror as Tom Bee drags himself away from the store, shouting that he will call him John until "the fires-a hell come takes yo' ungrateful soul! Ya hear me, John?... John! John! John!" (p. 53).

The Meetings: Transforming the Dramatic Action

To explore the transaction with *The Friendship*, we used a metaphor (a play) and terms (e.g., spectator) that have been used in different ways by other response theorists and researchers (e.g., Britton, 1993; Langer, 1995; Wilhelm, 1997). Although response literature informed our analysis, Boal's (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed* provided the clearest interpretive lens. Boal, a political activist in theater and government circles in Brazil, sought to tear down the walls that ruling classes had raised between audiences and actors. He created a different role for the audience (in our case, the reader). His objective was to empower spectators to change from passive beings into "actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (p. 122). These spectators-turned-protagonists did not just participate in the story, they changed the dramatic action. They sought to unmask and challenge oppression. Boal created novel dramatic structures to elicit this transformation. In "simultaneous dramaturgy," the audience "writes" the work as the actors perform it, discussing alternatives, suggestions, solutions. In "forum theater," through skits about acts of oppression, audience members become the actors and "lead the action in the direction that seems most appropriate" to address the oppression (p. 139). The girls engaged in this "theater as discourse" as they "rewrote," sometimes with the characters ("she should'a") and sometimes by becoming the actors ("I would'a"). We present the group's discussion as a metaphorical play, and the girls as spectators who became actors.

The play as the girls lived it was much more street theater than Broadway. It did not occur in textual acts, clearly delineated by the 5 days of discussion or by discreet passages. Rather, its phases were marked primarily but not exclusively by the focus of response. In Act 1 (Understanding characters and specific actions), the girls primarily focused on reading the playbill, trying to figure out who the actors were, the historical setting, and

why people acted the way they did. This act took place in just over 2½ days. In Act 2 (Shift to the big picture – historical and textual racism), the girls moved to another level of interpretation, understanding racism as a major theme. This act began during the third day of discussion and continued into the fourth day, when the girls became actors, pulling the theme of racism into their own lives in Act 3 (Shift to the present – personal fear and the search for safety). At this point, the play almost closed. The spectators-turned-actors had to decide: Should we leave this play? But as you will see, they stayed, creating Act 4 (Actors in real and possible worlds). Because this was a lived drama, these acts overlapped and interconnected, creating layers of meaning.

Act 1: Understanding Characters and Specific Actions

Before the discussion of *The Friendship* (Taylor, 1987), Karla talked with the girls about their classroom literature circles and about this literature circle outside the classroom. Although Tamika was concerned that they were being labeled the "dumb" group, all four girls seemed genuinely interested in working with Karla. They talked, read a bit, and decided how much to read for the next day. Karla asked them to use Daniels' (1994) Discussion Director sheets (see Appendix) as an aide for creating meaningful discussion.

The girls arrived the next day ready to talk about the opening scenes in which the Logan children entered the store and the owner's sons humiliated Little Man. They emphasized family loyalty and love, connecting the characters to their lives. Although bringing in several accurate factual statements, they had an equal number of factual inaccuracies, which caused major problems in understanding. They thought Tom Bee had a car and that Christopher-John was the store owner. Jasmine had trouble determining who was speaking, and all of the girls were unsure about the identity and race of various characters. The factual misunderstandings were intertwined with key inferential misunderstandings. For example, the girls heatedly renounced the White store owner's verbal abuse of Little Man and inferred that this hurt Little Man's feelings, but did not connect this to racism. Tamika fumed, "That man didn't have no business fussing at that little boy 'cause that ain't his dad,... ain't his mama, ain't no teacher ... so he ain't be fussing at him 'cause he ain't his child" (2/3, p. 3). Finally, Karla prodded, "Why do you think the man said that like that?"

Tamika: 'Cause he didn't like their family.

Carmen: He, probably, um, back then they didn't, didn't like Black people.

Karla: Was the shop owner Black?

Nicole: Um-hm.
 Tamika: I don't think he was.
 Karla: He was?
 Nicole: I don't know –
 Tamika: No, no. I don't think he was.
 Nicole: No. [Sounding irritated]
 Karla: What else about that? ...
 Tamika: They said something about plantation. So I think he might be White, I don't know. (2/3, p. 3)

Despite Carmen's insight that back then they "didn't like Black people," the other girls did not pick up on this important inference, perhaps because they still did not know who was White and who was Black. Although another possible explanation for the girls not "seeing racism" initially was that they were uncomfortable with or resisted that conversation because Karla was White, they had not shied away from talk of racism in earlier discussions. In the first 2 days of discussion, they spent a great deal of time sorting these factual aspects out through their own and Karla's questions, references to the text and the illustrations, and through talk. Despite the comprehension problems, the girls engaged in animated discussion. They said they wanted to read more of Taylor's books, and Tamika commented, "This book good, I swear!" (2/3, p. 7).

The text for the next day (2/4) featured Tom Bee and Jeremy. Karla had asked the children to write about Jeremy; again, none of them spoke about racial differences as being a factor, although Carmen wrote about the "Wite boy." Likewise, the girls felt the Wallaces treated Tom Bee badly and had differing interpretations as to why, but no one mentioned racism. Nicole thought they saw him as part of the Logan family and treated him badly by association; Jasmine and Tamika attributed the treatment to his age, even though Tamika read a passage aloud that explicitly addressed race. Tamika did note, however, that "them Dewberry folk think they own everybody" (2/4, p. 13). Afterwards, Nicole wrote that she liked "all of the charter [characters] exslep [except] Dewberry and the wite people in the story." Before the literature circle the third day, responding to a writing prompt from Karla asking what kind of relationship Tom Bee had with John Wallace, Jasmine wrote, "Mr. Tombee and John Wallace don't seem like friends. Well Mr. John Wallace called mr. Tombee A nigger, what a bad name." They were beginning to understand that the race of the characters was significant.

Various forms of comprehension remained problematic on the third day, but the girls were highly engaged, making numerous personal connections to the characters. Tamika began the discussion by expressing her outrage over the treatment of Tom Bee and connecting with a central char-

acter: "I feel like that girl Stacey sometimes" (2/5, p. 3). The girls had discussed that Stacey was a boy on previous days, yet perhaps because she was so personally involved, Tamika envisioned Stacey as a girl. Tamika and Nicole liked the way the people in the book talked, but it was too "country" for Jasmine. Tamika remained optimistic that John Wallace would honor his word, predicting that he would stand against his sons and for Tom Bee. Nicole and Jasmine were not convinced that these men were friends; Jasmine noted, "John, Wallace ... he don't seem like a friend to me ... because it seemed like in the story he was, um, he was calling, um, Mr. Tom Bee bad names and stuff" (2/5, p. 5). Tamika defended her interpretation:

If you read the book, in the way, and imagine you in the store, and back in the old days, and a White man is standing there talking to me and how everybody else used to treat Black people and how he treated Mr. Tom Bee, I think, I think he nice. I think they friends. (2/5, pp. 5–6)

Recognizing that racism in the 1930s often took the form of overt injustice, Tamika applied differing criteria for what might have constituted a friendship between the two men "back then in Black and White times." Building on Tamika's insights, Karla prompted the girls to discuss the historical setting of the book, which led to a discussion of whether slavery still existed. The recognition of the racism undergirding the scene closed the curtain on many uncertainties and set the scene for a major spotlight in the next act.

Act 2: Shift to the Big Picture – Historical, Textual Racism

Tamika provided the spotlight, leading the group to a scene in which Little Man, having been verbally abused by the store owner's sons, lost his excitement over candy from Tom Bee.

Tamika: I picked that [scene] because ... how that little boy feels when he, he still, he still think about that they hurt his feelings, and he still think about what they said to him – that he was dirty and stuff.
 [All are silent.]

Karla: What do y'all think about that passage? (2/5, p. 11)

Their responses were pivotal in their collaborative meaning making. As they recounted Little Man's reaction to being called "dirty," they revealed some confusion brought about by a literal interpretation and Jasmine's acceptance of the insult as the truth. Through discussion, they finally verbalized the motives behind the White men's harassment of Little Man and Tom Bee.

Jasmine: I, well, that boy do seem dirty to me though... Um, he seemed dirty to me because some man had told that boy that his skin so black you can put seeds in him and grow flowers out of him and stuff.

Tamika: Well, I'd say he dirty but he probably not that dirty. No, I don't think they dirty....

Carmen: I did not like that man! [softly but with strong feeling]

Karla: Why do you think they said that to them about his hands being –

Nicole: Because of the color of his skin.

Karla: Why would they say that to him because of the color of his skin?

Tamika: 'Cause they don't like Black people.

Nicole: 'Cause they don't like Black people.

Jasmine: 'Cause they racist. (2/5, pp. 11–12)

Following this chorus of understanding, Tamika moved directly to an insightful and unprompted soliloquy comparing Tom Bee to Martin Luther King, Jr.:

I think Tom Bee ... was like Mr. Martin Luther King.... He didn't worry about nothing nobody say. When they, when they said something to him, he ain't said nothing back. He just went on about his little business.... He called the father in there.... And he tell them children not to worry about nothing nobody say. And he tell them what true and what not true. And, um, you know, Martin Luther King had four children, too, so he got little four peoples. (2/5, pp. 13–14)

As Tamika described these historical and metaphorical connections, Nicole joined in, talking alongside Tamika, repeating and elaborating on her contributions. Carmen added softly, “I think he was just standing up for his rights.” Jasmine nodded agreement.

After this connection, which reverberated with all five discussion participants, Karla asked the girls to write about what kind of person Tom Bee was for the next meeting (2/10). Racism was central to their meaning making. All of the girls wrote about Tom Bee standing up for his rights. Jasmine wrote, “The black people stand up for they rights. The white people always mean and call the blacks you know what (*nigger*)” (underlined three times). To clear up some remaining comprehension difficulties, Karla asked several questions formulated from the girls' comments. They decided that Jeremy was indeed White. They set the story after slavery time and before Martin Luther King, Jr. using cues such as the Black people's freedom, the meanness of the Whites, and the Black people's lack of money (and shoes).

Next Karla asked why the text was called *The Friendship*. The girls commented on the friendships between Mr. Tom Bee and the children, the friendship among the siblings, and the more cautious “friendship” between the Logan children and Jeremy. When Karla asked pointedly about John

Wallace's and Tom Bee's relationship, Tamika remembered that “Tom Bee says, ‘He promised me a long time ago that I could call him by his first name’” (2/10, p. 13). Jasmine, who had earlier expressed confusion about their friendship, focused her growing racial awareness, saying, “John Wallace, all these White people in the story start saying stuff, they start saying ‘Shoot him’ and ‘Get him out of the store’ and all that stuff and he picked up a gun and shot him in the leg. He fell on the ground” (2/10, p. 14). This prompted the others to investigate the relationship between the two men in a deeper and more text-based manner than previously.

Carmen took one of her biggest roles in this critical exchange, recalling that the tension between the two men was because “he called him John,” a key point in the escalation of the story line. She offered hesitantly (and then trailed off), “Probably his friends that he's got now” (2/10, p. 15), seeming to draw the accurate inference that John Wallace felt shamed in front of his White friends to have a Black man call him by his first name. She then insightfully filled in a textual gap, creating an inferred explanation for Wallace's failure to honor his promise to Tom Bee:

And, uh, [John Wallace] went somewhere. I believe he had made some friends, and ... he told them about this old man, Mr. Tom Bee and, um, they were, and he said that [Tom Bee] was Black and, um, they were talking about how mean they'd be. (2/10, p. 16)

Many teacher-led and student-led groups might have stopped here. Children for whom reading is difficult are rarely given opportunities to explore personal and social connections to complex texts, because the focus often remains on their decoding or factual comprehension (Dudley-Marling & Fine, 1997; Dugan, 1997). However, the group persisted, and moved into a deeply personal enactment of Taylor's work that was both powerful and dangerous.

Act 3: Shift to the Present – Personal Fear and the Search for Safety

Turning their attention to Jeremy after a question from Karla about the reasons for his shy behavior, the girls decided he was shy because “he's the only White boy playing with Black children” (2/10, p. 17). Jasmine then brought the discussion of racial discomfort into the present: “That's how I feel when I go to church,” she remarked self-consciously. “I go to a White church.... I feel weird” (2/10, p. 17). Nicole expressed surprise:

I ain't never been to no White church, ... and I know if I go to White folks' church I won't like it. I probably would like that how they talk and their speech and stuff, but I don't know, 'cause I wouldn't like it 'cause I'm the only Black person. (2/10, pp. 18–19)

After this subtle step into the present, the girls enthusiastically shared their views on cross-racial church attendance and on their own churches. Karla asked if there were other connections to modern day. After Jasmine mentioned slavery as an issue that related to their lives today, Nicole responded, "Yeah, slavery, and I don't know... How White folks treated Black people." Karla asked, "How is that still relevant today?"

- Nicole: Because that still is how. I don't like, on Black History month, they still be talking about how be, how White folks treat Black folks.
Tamika: And I don't like folks to talk about this.
...
Nicole: And it still some [pause]; y'all, whoever hired them Ku Klux things?
Tamika: Oh, I'm scared of them for real. I real scared.
Karla: Oh, the Ku Klux Klan people. Oh, I saw a Klan rally when I was driving down to South Georgia one time. It was awful.
Nicole: I did, too. They had a little light on. They would catch you.
(2/10, p. 21)

It was Jasmine's step to the present that set the stage for the explosion of feeling, of connecting the book to themselves in ways that went far beyond earlier, more benign comparisons. Building on the historical connection to slavery, Nicole forcefully moved the discussion from the past tense ("treated") to the present tense ("treat"). She connected it to her own life as a child of color, reminded of her current and historical position every February. She then suddenly brought the Ku Klux Klan into the discussion, although it was not mentioned or implied in the text. The other girls built on Nicole's extratextual historical connection to life in the South in the 1930s by asking questions, offering information, and sharing times they had witnessed the Klan in person or seen it on television. They shifted radically from spectators of the mistreatment of people in Taylor's world to actors in their own racist society. Tamika (2/10, p. 21) became very emotional, expressing resistance:

- Oh, I don't like talking about the Klan... I have bad dream about this junk ... I don't like talking about slaves 'cause I be feeling sorry for them folks, man... and I don't like when White folks don't like Black folks. I want everybody to like each other. (2/10, p. 21)

Despite this stated discomfort, she did not pull back from the conversation. However, as the girls talked about the Klan, they shifted uncomfortably in their seats, looking and sounding frightened.

- Jasmine: Who, who is Que Klux? Who, who, who is that people?
Tamika: Don't be talking about that.
Nicole: White folks – people that don't like Black people.
Tamika: And they dress up in –
Nicole: Sheets.
Tamika: Pointy hats and, um, –
Nicole: And sheets.
Tamika: And a white thing with a little sign up there.
Karla: I'll find you, I'll find you a –
Tamika: And they'll burn a cross
Carmen: I saw a movie about it.
Tamika: And they'll burn a cross in your yard and put you on it and they'll burn you up.
Karla: So you didn't know about the –
Jasmine: They real?
Tamika: Yeah.
Nicole: It's called, it's a –
Karla: You didn't know about the Ku Klux Klan?
Tamika: Don't talk about that. I'm scared they gonna come. (2/10, p. 22)

Though Jasmine had seen a movie with racial violence, she neither knew of the Klan by name nor was aware that such a group still existed. At first incredulous, she asserted, "They ain't going to come," then asked uncertainly, "Do they come?" (2/10, p. 23). The intensity of her engagement was clear in the closing remarks of this exchange: "I know, but I ain't know about them until now y'all told me. And, um, I'm afraid now they gonna come to my house" (2/10, p. 23). Nicole and Tamika (see introductory quote) shared Jasmine's fear. This fear was a key factor in the dialectic tension that ensued between connecting with and resisting the discussion.

No longer were the girls simply relating to the characters. They had become actors in the drama of racial oppression: young women of color who feared the Klan just as surely as Cassie and Little Man feared the White store owners. The book and related dialogue both intrigued and frightened them. And so, to continue the conversation but lessen its emotional impact, the girls attempted to create safer places for themselves. They called on a variety of authorities (parents, Karla, and the media). Although earlier Nicole had assured the group that violent Klan activities were a thing of the past, she now turned to Karla: "They can't uh, they can't, uh, do that stuff no more, like burn crosses in your yard, no more, and like, and put stuff. They can't do that no more. Can they?" Tamika countered Karla's response, "It's against the law," with "They can write on your windows, and they spray on your windows, say 'We come back to kill you.'" Jasmine asked hopefully, "You, mean, they are arresting them if they, um, they come to

your house?” (2/10, p. 26). Then Nicole described a frightening Halloween visit by the Klan. She and her cousins hid behind a car while the night riders in army jeeps spray painted and hollered, “shot birds,” and threw tomatoes at her grandmother’s house. Tamika asked if they were hiding so as not to be killed. Jasmine, noting this occurred one county away, queried poignantly, “You mean they don’t come here in [her city]? You mean children be safe?” (2/10, p. 28).

- Nicole: They come here, but they don’t be showing like that. They don’t, they don’t let you know they coming... All my cousins be –
Tamika: But grown people ain’t scared of ‘em.
Jasmine: Children are.
Nicole: Yeah, ‘cause my brother and all them grown ups, they was just throwing stuff back at them and everything, too. And we were behind the car.
Jasmine: Do they kill you?
Nicole: And they was throwing, huh?
Jasmine: Do they kill people?
Carmen: Some of them.
Nicole: Yeah, they kill people.
Carmen: Some of the Klu Klux.
Tamika: I’m scared. (2/10, pp. 28–29).

Though Tamika twice commented that she was “scared,” she tried to assure herself that adults could stand up to these people. Jasmine’s first question was framed very personally, “Do they kill you?” her second more impersonally, “Do they kill people?” She seemed to be desperately seeking safety in her town and in the fact that she was just a child and that children must be safe. The girls attempted to counter their fear both by believing in the power of adults in general and by appealing to Karla to deny the violence, knowing at the same time through personal experiences and from television news that “this stuff was real.”

Even as the girls and Karla searched for a safer space for their discussions, they realized that it had to be an honest space and this brought on new dilemmas. When Carmen connected the Klan to the movie *A Time to Kill* (Milchan et al., 1996), she and Nicole spoke realistically about how the girl in the movie was beaten, raped, and then hung, surviving only after the rope broke. Tamika tried to make a safe ending for the girl in the movie, but Nicole cut in with a dose of reality saying, “She ain’t run home to her mama” (2/10, p. 29). Despite Tamika’s earlier comment that she had seen Klan activities reported on the news, Nicole repeated her tentative assertion that “They can’t come out here and do things like that... They can’t come out. They can’t come, to [her city]. I don’t know. That’s what it said

on the news” (2/10, p. 32). Though Karla asserted that those things were against the law, she and the girls were painfully aware that racist violence made it difficult to create and stay in safer places.

Tamika, shifting between connecting and resisting, attempted to create a safe place with Nicole. They drew on their understanding of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and on their faith. Karla, building on an earlier statement by Carmen, asked the girls about the “things that made you mad about the story, about the way people were treated” (2/10, p. 30).

- Tamika: I’ll, I *hate* when they treat them boy like that. I felt sorry for Mr. Tom Bee now. I did. I feel real sorry now.
Karla: You feel real sorry for him now, after –
Tamika: At first I ain’t feel, I felt sorry for him, but not bad, now as I did at first. Now I feel real bad.
Karla: After we talked.
Tamika: Um-hm. I don’t like that. I think they need to be friends with them.
Karla: Um-hm.
Tamika: I think, I think, some fools be trying... I think that man turned against him ‘cause his sons didn’t like him, and his sons had to treat him like that, tell him the way he lives and stuff. If I was Mr. Tom Bee, I just wouldn’t go to his store. I’d just not have anything to eat. I’d kill myself.
Karla: [Softly] Wow.
Tamika: If I lived in a world like that, I swear.
Karla: It’s a good thing we don’t live in a world like that.
...
Nicole: I’m glad Martin Luther King came along.
...
Tamika: I think God put Martin Luther King down here to help us.
Nicole: ‘Cause this world would still be like this. I mean, like that. (2/10, pp. 31)

Tamika became an actor in Tom Bee’s world. She planned resistant scripts, ranging from boycotting the store to not eating to killing herself. At the point of despair, she strengthened the hypothetical tie between herself and the story world: “If I lived in a world like that, I swear,” indicating that she does not live in such a world. By invoking God and Martin Luther King, Jr., Nicole and Tamika tried to reassure themselves that higher powers could protect them and that things were safer than before Martin Luther King, Jr.’s time; safer than in Tom Bee’s time.

Should we leave this play? But in reality, there were no safe places. Tamika seemed to feel that the only way to feel safe was to stop talking about the Klan and racism. When Karla tried to pull them back to the book to find a space for joint closure to this frightening discussion, three of the girls joined

in, but Tamika resisted. “I don’t want to talk about it no more,” she stated, then a few minutes later commanded, “Don’t talk about it no more,” and finally declared emphatically, “I’m not going to get back on that topic, I’m gonna tell you” (2/10, pp. 31–32). She suggested another book, which, though it dealt with slavery, was less emotionally intense. In this way, she could disengage from the current conversation but remain connected to the group.

The girls were not alone in their fear. Karla grew increasingly concerned as she participated in the revelations. In the role of teacher, she could not promise protection from harm, though she desperately wished she could. It seemed a fine line between offering comfort while not denying the harsh realities of the world. She offered the girls a way to disengage from the conversation briefly, but to continue to engage with the topic: She asked them to write about the story, their discussions, and how they felt. Tamika countered by asking to get another book, and Nicole said she was tired of writing. They almost left the theater. But they didn’t. They wrote.

Act 4: Actors in Real and Possible Worlds

Karla, torn between respecting Tamika’s strong resistance and her perception that they all needed some closure before returning to the classroom, asked them about what they had just written. Jasmine replied immediately.

Jasmine: It was like, the story, I was comparing the story with my life, and I said at first I didn’t know who the Klu Klux Klan was and then, um, at first I didn’t know what the Klu Klux Klan was, at, until y’all told. And now I’m afraid to sleep in my bed.

Karla: Well, we’re going to talk some more. It’s nothing to make you not sleep in your bed, okay?

Tamika: I’m scared too.

Nicole: They can’t come here and do things like that – [hesitated]

Karla: Go ahead, say it, tell her. Go ahead.

Nicole: They can’t come out. They can’t come, to [her city], I don’t know. That’s what it said on the news.

Karla: That’s what they said in on the news?

Tamika: They ain’t allowed to do that stuff no more.

Nicole: Yeah, they can’t do that no more. (2/10, pp. 33)

Writing seemed to give the girls a way to continue thinking and talking about racism, to express their fears and reassure each other, however tentatively. Tamika was, however, “still scared,” and Nicole, referring back to the incident at her grandmother’s house, added, “But on Halloween, girl!” Despite assuring each other that violent behavior was no longer legally

sanctioned or accepted, the girls and Karla could not deny that such violence still occurred. The girls called on the media, and Karla called on the authority of a peer, wondering about her place as a White woman in comforting children whose fears were not the unrealistic nightmares of monsters under the bed, but historically grounded fears of violence at the hands of people with skin like hers.

Karla was concerned also about broader repercussions arising from her choice of this text and the intensity of the girls’ responses to the discussion of it. To address these concerns and to encourage the girls to talk with their parents about the issues raised, she had previously recommended that the girls ask their parents to read the assigned sections with them. Knowing that Jasmine had indeed read the text with her mother and brother, Karla privately suggested that she talk about the Klan with her parents that night. Jasmine did so and reported the next day:

I didn’t know about the Kru Klux Klan until now. Now I am scared to sleep in my bed . . . If I forget about this I’ll be safe again. But now, first, it seemed that I was safe . . . but now I feel unsafe, but later on, in life, I hope they never come to my new house. . . . My mom said, she, my mom said, wait, my mom said that, that her, and my dad and my puppies and my brother will protect me. (2/11, p. 4)

Although Jasmine’s father was open about the existence of the Klan, he convinced her that if they came to their house they would have “to get through [him] first. And the puppies. Which they going to be big by that time” (2/11, p. 5). Jasmine sought a safe place by pushing this imagined invasion of her home into the future when her family – and her puppies – could protect her.

They continued their discussion by pointing out that the Klan hated Mexicans and Jews, too. But Tamika declared, “They hate Black people most of all of them” (2/11, p. 5). The girls referred again to *A Time to Kill*, and to the Jerry Springer show where “they showed two of the Klan on there. . . . And they said, um, they said, ‘We kill Blacks,’ Nazi, and all kind of stuff” (2/11, p. 6). Then Jasmine connected the talk of fear, death, and violence to her life in other acutely sad ways, not related to the Klan or even White racism. She recounted her cousin’s murder in a purportedly drug-related assassination of her cousin’s boyfriend. Jasmine’s cousin, a high school girl, had tried to find safety by turning to her mother.

Tamika: Well, they say they cut that girl’s tongue off. She tried to call . . . her mama on the answering machine. She couldn’t talk. She was –

Jasmine: Well, she did do that. . . . But her mama wasn’t home. And they shot her in the head. (2/11, p. 7)

At this most bleak and depressing point, where personal connections of fear and death seemed too much for anyone, much less fifth-grade children, to bear, Tamika created a poem of possibility. We share it in the final section.

Engaged Connecting, Resisting, and Searching for Safer Places

Looking through a narrative lens, McGinley et al. (1997) argued that we need a “better understanding of the specific ways that stories may function as a means of organizing and interpreting experience” in order to gain insight into children’s development as readers and the possibilities reading might offer to young people “who are also coming to know themselves, their family and peers, and the society in which they live” (p. 44). These researchers found that stories functioned as ways to explore or envision possible selves, remember and revisit personal experiences, reflect on problematic emotions, participate in imaginary lives, negotiate social relationships, and develop their understanding of complex social issues. The girls in our study engaged in all these, but perhaps the most salient aspect of their dialogue was the dynamic tension, or dialectic, that arose between their intensely personal engagement and the resistance spawned from the fear that these close connections created.

Britton (1993) wrote of internalizing or “drawing in from the outside world” and externalizing or “projecting our own wishes, our hopes and fears and expectations about the world” (p. 14) in our attempts to create a coherent representation, especially when our world view is confronted and we must modify our perception, explain away, or ignore the conflicting event. The girls built on their reading and writing as they interacted to address the textual and emotional complexities the book aroused, constructing deepened and multifaceted understanding through discussion. Their dialogue revealed how the growing understanding of the centrality of racist conflict in the historical novel connected to present-day racism. As the four acts of their metaphorical play demonstrated, the girls and Karla shared and developed their factual, implied, and world knowledge, retelling and rereading parts of the story as they interconnected narratives about their own lives. Text and experiences, past and present, knowledge and emotion, consensual and resistant transactions with the text became intertwined as the group worked together toward increased personal and social meaning.

This was not a dialogue of resolution, but a living dialectic between engaged connecting and resisting, the latter category including both engaged resisting and disengaging, in which space was created for a critical

dialogue within a response development zone. As the tension within this zone intensified toward the third and fourth acts described above, the girls and Karla, in various ways and perhaps for different reasons, began searching for a safer place to live, to read, and to continue their group discussions while simultaneously recognizing the impossibility of insuring absolute safety for anyone living in a racist society. In the following sections, we focus on the tension that arose as the girls’ heightened personal and socially influenced responses supported their move from being spectators, in the Boalian (1985) sense, of the injustices suffered by Tom Bee and Little Man and his siblings to becoming actors in a play that connected the book discussions to their own lives in a world that is often neither just nor safe.

Engaged Connecting

Engaged connecting operated on multiple levels, incorporating a range of involvement from simply participating in a discussion to intensely embracing dialogue about text and life (see Table 1). In the early acts, the girls connected mainly with the author’s craft and made self, family, and community connections through empathizing, sympathizing, and personalizing

Table 1. Engaged Connecting

Response categories	Examples from discussion
Engaging by connecting with ...	
CA: the author’s craft	I liked it because it just ... describes what kind of boy he is, like ... a fly buzzed near his face and he just brushed it away, instead of doing like this [flailing arms].
CS: self and experiences; empathizing, sympathizing	I feel sorry for Mr. Tom Bee.... He is too old to be treated like that.... I felt like crying.
CF: own families	[W]hen I get at my brother, sometimes I feel like killing him, but then when I be thinking something happened to him, I start feeling bad that I be saying something like that.
CC: local community	My grandma, they stay ... on the other road, like, they don’t stay on like her row of houses.... Ku Klux Klan like behind them, on the other road.
CH: history	They just got through with the Civil War and all, and they, some White folks still treat Black folks wrong.
CP: present social issues	You know you look at a book, and Barbie dolls, White folks’ Barbie dolls, they be on the big side ... and Black dolls be in a little box on the side.

their reading in relatively nonthreatening ways. As they became more aware of the underlying issue of racism, they added historical and present-day connections. Beach (1997) said if students are “to break down resistance to engagement with multicultural literature, they need to empathize with characters grappling with racism, and then connect that experience to their own real-world perceptions,” adding that “vicarious experiences are certainly no substitute for the actual experience of discrimination” (p. 83). For these girls, experiences with racism were all too real.

The girls made several references to *Taylor’s craft as a writer*, especially (with the exception of Jasmine) her use of dialect. Tamika shared a passage remarking, “I like these books ... Um, I like the way they talk. I like how they country and stuff” (2/3, p. 7). Noting that she “talk[s] like that sometimes” (2/4, p. 7), Nicole later read aloud a passage about Jeremy, because she liked the descriptive language the author used. Soter (1997) worried, “Perhaps we have fallen too far into the trap of thinking first of the text, then of the reader; we may find it provocative in our discussions to consider again the artistry, the power to move, of the writer” (p. 227). These girls had not fallen into that trap. Having been moved, however, they also became vulnerable.

The girls connected with the Logan children, Jeremy, and Tom Bee in many ways that related to their *own experiences, families, and community events*. They both sympathized and empathized with the children. Nicole knew just how they felt when the White men harassed them, because “I don’t like nobody fussing at me” (2/3, p. 3). Tamika stated, “I take up for my little brother and don’t like when people fuss at him” (2/3, p. 1). Tamika was especially in tune with Little Man’s hurt feelings and later extended her sympathy, stating that she “felt sorry for Mr. Tom Bee now” (2/10, p. 31). All of the girls extended the connections to their communities, having, for example, an extensive discussion about the churches they attended (2/10).

Some of the most powerful engaged connections, with both *historical events and current social issues*, were in the discussions of racist discrimination – economic, personal, and social. For example, Tamika’s passionate comparison between Tom Bee and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the third act connected all four girls around the central issue of Tom Bee’s courageous stand against the store owner’s blatant and eventually violent racism. Writing separately just before group time on the fourth day, all four girls commented on how Tom Bee and the Black people in the story stood up for themselves and their rights, with Carmen and Tamika adding that they liked the story for this very reason. The girls also engaged in ways that brought history into their present lives through connections to contemporary movies, television shows, news reports, or personal encounters with racism. Jasmine wrote and spoke about the comparisons she saw between

the story and her life, especially in reference to fear of the Ku Klux Klan and to her pain at her cousin’s murder. Nicole shared a frightening personal encounter between her family and the Klan. In addition to focusing on violence, both Tamika and Nicole described their experiences with subtle economic racism in relation to toy advertising and sales.

Resisting

As they engaged more deeply with *The Friendship*, there was a dynamic tension for the girls between connecting and resisting the very meaning they were making (see Table 2). Their engaged resisting was not only to the text (they critiqued or rewrote the characters’ actions or rewrote themselves into the story) but also to implied outcomes (they predicted less negative outcomes) and to discussion of the disturbing personal, social, and historical connections (they stated discomfort). In its most intense forms, resisting took the form of detachment – attempts to disassociate from the characters or to disengage from the book and the related discussion.

Table 2. Resisting

Response categories	Examples from discussion
Engaging but resisting by ...	
RCA: critiquing characters’ actions	But I still think ... [the children] shouldn’t go with [Tom Bee].
RRC: rewriting characters’ actions	He could’a said, um, um, “Could you go wash your hands?” or something.
RRS: rewriting with selves	I would’a had talked back.
RPO: predicting less negative outcomes	I think if they ... [Wallaces] would’a beat [Tom Bee] up or something, um, all them three men, I think Cassie ... would’a probably went and got them other kids and probably would’a help, helped fight.
RSD: stating discomfort	I don’t like talking about slaves because I be feeling sorry for them folks, man. They had to do all that stuff.
Resisting through detachment by ...	
RDC: disassociating self from characters	[M]y mama was reading like they were county. I said they country before she read. And then she started reading like that and we were laughing at the whole story.
RAD: attempting to disengage	I want to read! [Pause] Another book.

Engaged resisting. Resistance has often been discussed in literature on school and textual knowledge. Student resistance to the teacher and to “official” knowledge has been described (e.g., Fordham, 1996; Giroux & McLaren, 1996; Willis, 1997). Referring to Fetterly’s (1978) work, Cai (1997) examined a resistance in which the reader is attuned to the messages, voices, or themes in a text, but rejects them, reading against the text. Beach (1997) focused on suburban White or “mainstream” students’ resistance to works that required readers to reflect on their role in a racist society. However, the *engaged resisting* we documented was a very different kind. It grew out of deep engagement and identification with characters and their experiences or with textual events and the intercontextual connections these sparked in discussion. Readers may identify strongly with characters or story events, but resist the feelings of helplessness or danger that this arouses. For example, in her heartfelt sympathy for Little Man, Tamika stated,

I don’t think that man should’a did him like that, cause if I was in this book I think I’d kill that man. . . . Um, he gave that man a hatchet; told him he gonna’ cut that boy’s hand off and tried to scare him. . . . And I don’t think he should’a did it. (2/3, p. 4)

When the engaged connecting pulled the girls into uncomfortable positions and their awareness of racial hatred made it feel imminent and personal, the girls exhibited engaged resisting. The resistance escalated as they increased their textual comprehension and emotional interactions through reading and dialogue. It was not resistance to the text per se, as exemplified by Beach’s (1997) students, or to institutionalized knowledge, as described by Giroux and McLaren (1996). It was resistance to the pain of engaging intimately with frightening knowledge that directly related to their lives. It was resistance to the fear and anger aroused by the racial injustices of the 1930s and the present dangers of the Klan. It was resistance that helped them deal with the risk of engaged connecting, of being drawn fully into a dangerous world.

Resisting by critiquing characters’ actions resulted at times from difficulties in making inferences from the text. For example, because Tamika did not initially connect the nastiness with which the Wallaces treated Tom Bee to their racism and the historical context, she was confused and frustrated at the unfairness of the situation in the store: “Why do Mr. Wallace think someone is going to respect him? Why do Tombee let people rule him?” (2/5, writing). On other occasions, the girls’ critiquing of characters’ actions developed out of insightful readings of the text. Nicole and Tamika judged the adults for placing the children in harm’s way or for not protect-

ing them. Tamika commented, “I think that that lady should’a sent some adult with them to the store even though her head was hurt. Because she’s seen them folks didn’t like they family and she still gonna’ send them little kids to the store” (2/3, p. 5). Tamika saw no reason for Aunt Callie to compromise the children’s safety against their parents’ wishes. She continued her critique of Taylor’s story logic: “And then if her head hurt real bad why she’s gonna’ bring, why that man bring some fish to eat that she gotta’ cook?” (2/3, p. 5).

The girls also *resisted by rewriting themselves into the story*. Tamika repeatedly commented on how she would react as a member of the story world, either by refusing to eat or resorting to violence for protection or escape. Nicole would have told Aunt Callie, “My mama told me not to go to the store” (2/3, p. 5). In discussing the scene in which Little Man is threatened for touching the glass, Carmen responded, “I would’a had talked back” (2/3, p. 16), positioning herself as a powerful actor in the script. Tamika stated defiantly:

I would’a said something back to them ‘cause I, um, the big brother, he, he was just standing quiet and he just went over there and put his arms around [Little Man]. But I would’a said, um, I would’a had to ask them if we could have our stuff and then I would’a got it and left out of the store. I ain’t fuss in nobody’s store. And I would’a told that, told that lady, Miss, Aunt, Aunt Callie not to bring, not to tell me to go to that store any more. And I would’a told that man, “And leave my little brother alone.” (2/3, p. 17)

When Karla asked why the brother stood by quietly, Tamika shifted her viewpoint, saying, “I don’t think he wanted to get in on, get in an argument and then they would’a started a big ol’ problem” and finally deciding she “wouldn’t say nothing back to them ‘cause, um, the family already arguing with their family and they don’t like them . . . So I would’a left and got my little brother” (2/3, p. 17). Although the girls understood the desire to stand up for one’s family in the face of abuse, they were also aware that safety might well depend on avoiding confrontation. In a second narrative on the scene, Tamika focused on rewriting the story with the characters: “[The Wallaces] could’a gave them the headache medicine without fussing at them . . . [Stacey] should’a hold [Little Man’s] hands while he was in the store or should’a left him outside with his friends” (2/3, p. 8). She first tried to create a safer place for the children, a place where they could shop without harassment or where an older brother could keep a younger one from harm. She did not question why the men were so mean. She then shifted to the younger boy, and said he could have just been quiet and not gotten “stuff started back up” (2/3, p. 8).

Another way the girls resisted was by *predicting less negative outcomes for the characters*. After looking ahead at the last pictures in the book, Nicole realized the men “gonna’ beat him [Tom Bee] up... They gonna’ shoot him” (2/4, p. 13). However, Tamika, who was optimistic that John Wallace would stay true to his word, predicted he would stand against his sons: “I think that ... John Wallace is going to help him even though his son, you know, in the fight, I think John Wallace is going to help Mr. Tom Bee in the fight” (2/5, p. 4). Tamika was looking for hope that John Wallace would treat his surrogate father justly.

At times, however, when engagement became too painful or too close to home, the girls *stated their discomfort* directly even while remaining engaged in the discussion and with the text, saying “I’m scared” (2/10, p. 22) or “I don’t like folks to talk about that” (2/10, p. 21). All the girls seemed very uncomfortable during the discussion of the Klan, and Jasmine and Tamika said it affected their sleep (2/10). For the most part, the girls pushed beyond resistance in an attempt to create a safer place from which to remain engaged. Their resistance to the fear and pain of engaging with text and society and each other’s experiences transformed the collaborative response development zone into a powerful and uncomfortable, even scary, but almost liberating space that allowed for strong emotions and increased solidarity among the girls.

Disengaging. There were times, however, when the only way the girls could create safer places for themselves in the face of such intense discomfort was by disassociating themselves from the characters (Jasmine) or by attempting to detach themselves from the discussion topic (Tamika). Reacting to the characters’ language with humor and relying on appearances and literal interpretations of the text at times helped Jasmine to deflect some of the fear she felt. Though Jasmine said she liked the story, she distanced herself from the characters by situating this as a story “about cōntrēy [country] Black people and White people” (2/10, writing) and stated clearly, “I don’t like the way they talk” (2/5, p. 3). Jasmine also noted with disdain that the children were dirty and did not wear shoes (2/5). This disassociation exemplifies Enciso’s (1997) claim that sometimes “enjoyment is made difficult when children are placed in positions that require them to align with problematic representations of themselves and others” (p. 38).

As the topics turned increasingly toward issues related to racial hatred in the present day, Tamika’s resistance grew. At the end of the fifth day, after a lengthy discussion of violence toward Blacks and females, Tamika’s disengagement became an overt, focused refusal to continue. Not only did she not want to “talk about it no more,” she also directed the group to stop talking about it. After begrudgingly complying with Karla’s request to write,

Tamika joined in the final conversation, but commented, “I’m still scared” (2/10, p. 33).

Searching for Safer Places

Attempts to create safer places overlapped with engaged resisting and disengaging as the need for safety both developed from and helped maintain the tension in the connecting/resisting dialectic. The girls felt the need for protection from evil. They could rewrite the story through discussion, creating safer places for the characters. They could stop talking about it. They could wish, figuratively, symbolically, that a leader such as Martin Luther King, Jr. could come back to help. They could assume a world in which adults could always protect children. They could wish to forget the real-life violence their transactions had brought into the open. It is important to clarify that the safer places the group sought and found did not provide shelter or safety from a dangerous world. They did, however, help to create safer places from which to engage in a dialogue that directly addressed frightening past and present realities.

Even finding a place for discussion of “risky” books is difficult (Robertson, 1997); some teachers may shy away from such books and discussions in favor of less personalized textual analyses. This collaborative response space did not feel comfortable or safe much of the time for any of the participants. Fearing for their personal well-being, the girls, especially Nicole, Jasmine, and Tamika, responded to the text in ways that Karla, being a European American, could not. As Tamika put it, “They [the Klan] ain’t ... gonna’ get you ‘cause you White” (2/10, p. 22). The discussion also felt unsafe for Karla. Although she was a seasoned teacher who was knowledgeable about the field of reader response, multicultural literature, and literature discussion groups, Karla still found herself caught off balance by the raw intensity of the discussions, sometimes instinctively comforting the students and at other times at a loss for any words that could possibly ease or even adequately address their pain and fear. The very act of opening up space for this response development zone felt unsafe. These were not her students. Though she knew the girls, she had not had the opportunity to establish relationships with the students’ families. She was not certain that other adults would see the value of reading literature such as Taylor’s work or of allowing the children to engage in such charged dialogue, especially given the fear it aroused in them.

Despite the girls’ and Karla’s fears, the group succeeded in creating a space that was safe enough – safe enough for them to want to contribute to the discussion, safe enough for them to ask to remain together as a group for another book they chose that dealt with slavery. The girls had risked a

lot by engaging in this conversation. They risked their identities as capable students in this pull-out situation. They risked making personal and social connections that went beyond the surface. They risked connecting with story children whose situation in the historical South reflected on the danger these girls felt as Southern children of color in the present. They risked the group interaction, having all been in situations where they were derided, embarrassed, and excluded from their in-class groups' book talk. These girls, who did not all socialize in class, found space not only to come together but to address painful issues.

Educators unfortunately cannot make the world a "safe place." We cannot assure our students that there will be no more shootings in school; that they will be treated fairly and honestly in a racist, sexist, and classist world; or that there is no such thing as the Ku Klux Klan, murder, or violence in their own neighborhoods. These girls had already experienced some of these things. How can we as teachers and as parents comfort children without belittling their very real understandings? If we pretend that we live in a world where these things do not happen, we not only reveal ourselves as dishonest to children, who often know more than we give them credit for, but we also fail to prepare them for the world that we and they must work together to change.

The issues this group addressed will not simply disappear or be resolved in silence, and as Nodelman (1996) made clear, "ignorance is always likely to do more harm than knowledge" (p. 86). The key is to "discuss these matters with children, and to share our own attitudes with them" because what each of us considers to be "harmful" or to be "painful and confusing" for children will differ somewhat (p. 86). Issues for which there are no simple or satisfactory answers cannot be ignored, especially in response to literature, because the alternative can lead to the loss of intensity of the reading experience. As their needs shifted, these girls needed different kinds of teacher support – first textual and contextual guidance, then more emotional guidance. Because reading comprehension was a struggle, books often did not engage these girls or hold their attention. *The Friendship* (Taylor, 1987) became emotionally powerful for the girls only after they, with peer and teacher guidance, began to resolve their difficulties with content comprehension and transact with the text on multiple levels. Then Karla's guidance shifted to support the intense reactions by offering to talk after the group, suggesting sharing these feelings with their parents, providing time to write and to share that writing if they chose, and by prompting further discussion and writing. The girls came to see the story characters not as passive beings but as powerful actors within the constraints of their time. For example, Tamika moved from wondering in writing "Why do

Tom Bee let people rule him?" (2/4) to comparing him with Martin Luther King, Jr., a symbol of strength and hope for her.

Implications for Teaching: Opportunities, Risks, Discomfort, and Hope

We believe that the combination of many elements – a rich text with a strong author's voice and sympathetic characters, extended time to talk and write, peers available to co-construct meaning, and a teacher who challenged and supported inquiry into historical and present-day racism – created a response development zone. Within such a zone, response is not seen as separate from the text or the context, but as integrated with those and other factors. Similarly, initial reaction is not seen as the sole product of a transaction, but as a valued response that can be further enriched by individual reflection and by the perspectives of others. In this study, the participants created and sustained a dialectic tension that allowed the girls to connect racial realities of their own world with those in the Logan's 1933 world. Although the text was an important catalyst, so was the space that was created – a small group of four girls, all serving at times as more capable peers, talking together under the guidance of an active mentor. Though the purpose of this paper was not to analyze closely the pedagogy that helped to create a zone in which personal responses could shift and grow, we share other researchers' interest in the teacher's role in encouraging and supporting students as they engage in open dialogue on difficult and uncomfortable issues (e.g., Allen, 1999; Diaz-Gemmati, 1995; Lewis, 1997; Spears-Bunton, 1990; Walker-Dahlhouse, 1992). For that reason we have noted where Karla pushed the girls' thinking with questions, have tried to convey the internal conflicts that she faced as she taught, and have included as much dialogue as space allowed.

Opportunities for In-Depth Learning

Higher-order concepts (such as critical thinking) are built on everyday concepts, which are developed through experience. Instruction in a response development zone, mediated by text, teacher, peers, and dialogue, is important for all students. For students who have difficulty with comprehending a text, mediation must help them clarify factual and implied information without confining them to a singular, "expert" determined meaning. That mediation may be through the teacher, peer discussion, opportunities to write and reflect, and other supports. McGinley et al. (1997) suggested that educators rethink the study of literature to shift "from

comprehending, analyzing, or interpreting literature texts to reading life through texts and texts through life” (p. 63). However, as Dudley-Marling and Fine (1997) pointed out, “privileging the role of the reader in making sense of text . . . can conflict with certain cultural practices that venerate the authority of texts” (p. 255) and may deny some students explicit instruction in learning from texts (Delpit, 1995). In this study, the girls needed the interpretive community of the group and guidance from Karla to sort out textual confusions. Left on their own, they regularly abandoned books half-read, becoming bored by a story they had trouble following.

We shortchange struggling readers terribly, however, if we focus only on these limited interactions with texts. Further, it does not serve these readers well to wait until they have “mastered” lower-level comprehension abilities before encouraging them to grapple with deeper, more connected ways of understanding. As Gordon Wells (1997) said, personal interpretation need not wait “until the conventional meaning has been understood” (p. 111). He continued,

In practice, however, it is often *only* by engaging with a text dialogically – by bringing one’s personal experience and current concerns to the transaction with it – that any coherent meaning can be made at all. Only then is it possible, by entering into dialogue with others about the different interpretations that each has constructed, to work toward a consensus concerning the conventional meaning. (p. 111)

We argue for the essential interrelatedness of comprehending, analyzing, and interpreting with the kinds of deep personal connections made in McGinley et al. (1997) and in this study.

This literature group offered the girls a response development zone where such multidimensional learning could occur. Carmen, though relatively quiet, had a more extended and valued voice than in the classroom literature circles, where she had been silenced. In this group, writing helped her to have an uninterrupted voice and having two other girls read her work out loud on the final day was tremendous validation. Jasmine, whose role in the classroom was often to be “cute,” was able to talk seriously about almost paralyzing fears. Tamika had a receptive audience for her insightful comments and peers who helped her sort out difficult areas without quizzing her about book content as had happened in her classroom group. Nicole moved beyond a focus on “hard” vocabulary and “getting stuck” on one topic and found space to tell of her encounter with the Klan. They all worked through some realities of racism across time and settings in a supportive group. They all learned that they had something to say and that people would listen. They consulted, and sometimes rejected, the text authority without being taught that their own knowledge was not valuable.

The links between engagement, motivation, and reading achievement are well documented (e.g., Gambrell, 1996). The key for many struggling readers is engagement itself.

Discomfort and Risk

Although the personal, small-group atmosphere made participating in the literature circle less risky, this discussion zone was anything but easy or comfortable. This text, with its strong themes of friendship, betrayal, and injustice and the explosion of physical violence in the end left little room for a safe place, even less so as it intersected with these girls’ lives. Nicole, who had witnessed Klan intimidation, sought safety in her hometown, but refused to let her experience be glossed over. Jasmine’s mom tried to reassure her that she, her dad, her brother, and the puppies were all there to protect her. However, as Jasmine and Tamika reconstructed the murder of Jasmine’s 16-year-old cousin, Jasmine realized that sometimes when you call on your mother, she is not home. Jasmine needed more: “I was talking to my puppies, too, but they ain’t know what to say” (2/11, p. 8).

Fairbanks (1998) pointed to the necessity of both students and teachers taking risks, citing Greene’s (1988) statement that if teaching and learning are to be meaningful “they must happen on the verge” (p. 23). Teachers must “open spaces and nourish conversations,” Fairbanks (1998, p. 201) argued, even when the only support they can offer students who risk revealing personal truths and terrors is their own participation in the dialogue. Karla felt she was “teaching on the verge” – the verge of discomfort, the verge of parental disapproval, even the verge of psychological competence in supporting the girls emotionally. Rogers (1997) wrote that teachers who allow literature to become “a subject of critical and social as well as literary inquiry” (p. 112) do not turn away “from the role of power and ideology in social institutions and interactions, or from the facts of racism, violence, poverty, and discrimination in hopes of finding some timeless truth in texts and some imagined peaceful place of straightforward teaching” (p. 113).

Neither can teachers or students find an “imagined peaceful place” for learning in a world that cannot always protect its children. Zack (1996) worried about the risk of bringing her fifth graders “face to face with evil” (p. 305), but tempered that concern with her belief that the harshness children see through literature “must be reflected against the wider reality that at this very moment children in some parts of the world are experiencing the very conditions the literature described” (p. 305). Nodelman (1996) was somewhat critical of what he saw as adults’ need for hope in children’s books. However, we do feel there is need for hope – not an idealistic hope

for a perfect world, but a hope that despite harsh realities there is always a chance for change, for compassion, for justice. Reflecting on her role in helping tensions related to race and gender surface in her eighth-grade classroom, Diaz-Gemmati (1995) noted,

Ignorance is bliss and safe, but can I truly affect the lives of my students by reciting pre-rehearsed lines on a make-believe stage? Do I want to defer these discussions of race and prejudice to dark alleys which are constantly punctuated by the sound of gunfire? (p. 21)

For real change to occur, students have to learn about injustices in a forum in which they have support to explore and connect, but also to resist and even disengage if the issues threaten their personal well-being.

A Poetic Soliloquy

In her powerful essay *Poetry is Not a Luxury*, Audrey Lorde (1984) spoke of “poetry as the revelatory distillation of experience.... I could name at least ten ideas I would have found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poetry” (p. 37). Many of Tamika’s statements indicated that she found racism intolerable, incomprehensible, and frightening. Taylor (1977) explained that we must face racism and tell its ugly stories, in order to create peace and hope. She expressed hope that her books, books that

mirror a Black child’s hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness to bitterness to disillusionment, will one day be instrumental in teaching children of all colors the tremendous influence that Cassie’s generation – my father’s generation – had in bringing about the great Civil Rights movement of the fifties and sixties. (p. 407)

This hope of a better future was found in Tamika’s poetic narrative on the final day of the group’s discussion of *The Friendship*. Tamika had often resisted the powerlessness of the text, commenting five times that she felt like killing others or even herself. But she, along with Jasmine, was also vocal in wanting people to like her and in hoping that people would learn to get along. As Tamika read her writing, Jasmine spontaneously asked,

Is this a poem?... It sound like a poem, ‘cause, um, see how she was reading it and, um, and she said the same thing over again, that she wanted Martin Luther King to live. Well, usually when someone says a poem, they say the same thing over. (2/11, p. 9)

Jasmine was right. Tamika had created a poem. As Lorde (1984) wrote, “[T]here are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt”

(p. 39). Tamika embodied this, especially as she read a second time with renewed confidence after the groups’ approving reactions. At the end of this reading, Jasmine softly commented, “It’s beautiful.”

Tamika’s voice and dramatic presence, including eloquent gestures and body position, added much to her poetic soliloquy. She stood up to deliver her piece, because “I wanted, I don’t know. I just wanted everybody to hear ... and, I like, I want this dream to come true, too ... I swear.” (2/11, p. 9). What Tamika helped us find was not an “imagined peaceful place” for teaching or learning or even responding to literature. She gave us honesty and a poetic possibility for a better world, one in which fear is not discounted, but neither is hope – figurative or real. Hope is kept alive by our very desire for change, by our refusal to ignore or passively accept the way things are.

Tamika. [Ms. Möller]. 2-10-98.
I don’t like how Black people are treated.
And I want *everyone* to be friends
In this world.
Like our Martin Luther King
And like each other –
People.
I want Martin Luther King to come back alive.
And he *can’t* die! [dramatic pause]
I want *him* to help *us*.
I want *everyone* to love each other.
No Klu Klux Klan! Klu Klux Klan.
I’m scared! [dramatic pause]
This is a, this is tied
This is tied to the book that we read.
Because *how* the Wallaces’ treated Mr. Tom Bee.
They ain’t like Black people.
And how scared the kids was.
And *I’m* scared like that, too. (Oral version, 2/11, p. 11)

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APPENDIX
Discussion Director Sample

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

A1

Name [Tamika]
Group Ms. Muller
Book The frog ship
Assignment p 26-p 42

Discussion Director: Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. Don't worry about the small details: your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read, which you can list below, during or after your reading. Or you may use some of the general questions below to develop topics for your group.

Possible discussion questions or topics for today:

1. Why do Mr. Wallace think someone is going to rule him?
2. Why do Tombee let people to respect him?
3. rule him.
4. _____
5. _____

Sample questions:

What was going through your mind while you read this?
How did you feel while reading this part of the book?
What was discussed in this section of the book?
Can someone summarize briefly?
Did today's reading remind you of any real-life experiences?
What questions did you have when you finished this section?
Did anything in this section of the book surprise you?
What are the one or two most important ideas?
Predict some things you think will be talked about next.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

Assignment for tomorrow p _____ p _____

WEAVING CHAINS OF AFFECT
AND COGNITION: A YOUNG
CHILD'S UNDERSTANDING OF
CD-ROM TALKING BOOKS

Linda D. Labbo
UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

Melanie R. Kuhn
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

This qualitative case study employed Wittrock's Generative Learning Model to examine in-depth one kindergarten child's comprehension when reading considerate and inconsiderate CD-ROM talking books in a classroom computer center. A CD-ROM talking book consists of a story told through multimedia modes of information that has been digitized on a CD. Considerate CD-ROM talking books are those that include multimedia effects that are congruent with and integral to the story. Inconsiderate CD-ROM talking books are those that include multimedia effects that are incongruent with or incidental to the story. Findings indicate that considerate CD-ROM talking books supported the child's understanding and retelling of the story and involved meaning-making processes that wove together affective responses, cognitive processes, and metacognitive activity; however, inconsiderate CD-ROM talking books resulted in the child's inability to retell the story in a cohesive way and fostered passive viewing. Implications for research and practice are drawn.

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