

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF DRAMA PEDAGOGY AS A TEACHING TOOL

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by

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## ABSTRACT

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During the 2015-2016 school year, three Texas high school English teachers implemented a researcher designed drama pedagogy curricular unit for the American novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Two of the teachers used the unit with their regular-education English III classes and one used the unit with all of her high school English students. The research question for this study was: What are teachers' perceptions of using a drama pedagogy curricular unit as a teaching tool? The following research is an exploratory case study of their perceptions and experiences using a drama pedagogy unit for the first time. No teacher had the same perceptions, although each saw increased cooperation, engagement, comprehension, and inferencing abilities in their students.

**KEY WORDS:** Drama pedagogy, Secondary classrooms, English language arts, Teacher perceptions

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
I WHY DRAMA PEDAGOGY? .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Research Questions and Purpose of the Study.....	12
Methodology .....	13
Significance of the Study .....	15
Limitations .....	17
Delimitations.....	18
Operational Definitions.....	19
II AN IMPACT OF THEATER ON LITERACY LEARNING .....	21
Reading Comprehension.....	21
Language and Speaking .....	23
Connections to a Text .....	25
Critical Thinking and Making Inferences .....	29
Writing .....	33
Drama as a Teaching Tool .....	36
Summary.....	36

III METHODOLOGY .....	38
Method and Paradigm.....	38
Purpose and Research Questions .....	40
Study Setting.....	41
Participants.....	43
Instrumentation .....	50
Data Collection .....	53
Data Analysis .....	54
Reliability and Validity.....	55
Ethical Considerations .....	56
Summary .....	56
IV FINDINGS .....	57
Ms. Brett’s Experience and Perceptions .....	57
Ms. Lee’s Experience and Perceptions .....	59
Ms. Harper’s Experience and Perceptions .....	61
External Factors that Affected the Teachers.....	65
Overarching Themes.....	69
Summary .....	73
V DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....	74
Ms. Brett .....	74
Ms. Lee .....	77
Ms. Harper .....	80
Implications for Teachers .....	83

Implications for the Classroom.....	88
Future Research .....	92
Final Thoughts .....	92
REFERENCES .....	95
APPENDIX A.....	109
APPENDIX B .....	173
APPENDIX C .....	178
VITA.....	195

## CHAPTER I

### Why Drama Pedagogy?

Imagine sitting in a classroom full of teenagers, attempting to get through a text as difficult and complex as *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1850/1994) or *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1959). It is likely that traditional methods are not working in your favor. You have probably come to the sad conclusion that the majority of the students in your regular level English classroom lost the joy of reading in fifth grade or they never learned how to enjoy reading at all. You may also find yourself recounting how many students in that classroom are identified as a Section 504 student (students with mental or physical impairments such as dyslexia or asthma that limit one or more life activity) (Department of Education, 2013), special education students or English language learners (ELL). With such a large range of ability and interest filling the seats of the modern day classroom, how can you ever hope to help them discover the joy and freedom literature has to offer?

Now imagine that same classroom filled with discussion and laughter about those same texts. One group of boys is in front of the room with a large picture behind them of a woman being subjected to ridicule and persecution. The boys have worked to recreate the image and add dialogue to bring that same image to life. They may not fully understand the cultural and social elements of the persecution, but their participation in this activity has helped them develop an understanding of how Hester Prynne might have felt while standing on the platform in front of the entire town (Hawthorne, 1850/1994). The boys' use of drama pedagogy has opened the door of discussion and connectivity to the text.

Drama pedagogy is a fairly new term, but it encompasses a variety of older drama



activities. The umbrella term covers activities such as readers theater, writing-in-role, role-play, creative drama, tableau, and improvisation. According to Lee, Patall, Cawthorn, & Steingut (2014), drama pedagogy can be defined as a collection of drama-based teaching and learning strategies to engage students with the content they are learning. It is teacher led, uses academic content, focuses on the process and experience of students during the process, and can incorporate any type of drama strategy.

I have worked with dyslexic actors who worked hard to make sure they got each word correct, and one actor in particular was so good at not only learning the words correctly but also finding the depths of his characters and making them so realistic the audience could not help but be enthralled. That particular actor used his love of theater and his drive to understand the character to overcome parts of his learning disability. His growth as a learner was not something he realized once he got to college; he had been using theater to help him grow since he had been a high school student. After watching him succeed, I felt even more strongly that drama pedagogy could be used successfully in the secondary English language arts (ELA) classroom as a teaching tool.

As a theater teacher turned English teacher and Reading Specialist, I hoped to discover how drama pedagogy could be used to help my secondary students improve their literacy skills. I asked the question: Can drama pedagogy help secondary students improve their literacy skills? My first instinct as a theater and English teacher was to say: Absolutely. Every time I have used drama pedagogy activities with my students, they have been highly engaged in the content discussions, willing to share their thoughts and opinions about characters and their motivations, and eager to play.

In one activity with *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960/1988), my students were separated into character-based segregated groups within the role-play of a town hall meeting. Students had been assigned a random character from the book where some were “real” and others were people I had created who would likely have been a part of the town’s makeup. I facilitated the town meeting, thereby working in role myself and maintaining the ability to “lead” the discussion (that particular class had a habit of getting excited about one thing and taking off on a tangent). In our role-play, I shared that we had several things we had to decide on as a town. I told the students that everyone, regardless of character race, had to agree on certain things before they could happen. The students thought it was a game and it was clear to me that they expected it to be easy. I was not sure what would happen, but was pleased at the outcome.

After several loud arguments among the “townspeople” about things such as what to do about the new teacher, the need for additional taxes, and a change in trash pick-up, the students realized that the town of Maycomb would never be able to make a decision as a whole. They were able to recognize the struggles Atticus Finch faced as he defended a black man accused of the rape of a white woman. It was a remarkable way for the students to fully think about the text, and what they realized through that activity was something that only the most skilled high school reader would have seen in the text; the nuances of the town would always be at the center of any problem.

Unfortunately, little research has focused on the use of drama pedagogy with secondary students and literacy. Most explore the use of theater and drama either with elementary students (Dupont, 1992; Hertzberg, 2003; Keehn, 2003; Cremin, Gouch, Blakemore, Goff, & Macdonald, 2007; Demircioglu, 2010) or adult learners (Nordin,

Mohd Sharif, Fong, Wan Mansor, & Zakaria, 2012). The little that is centered on secondary learners takes place primarily in middle level classrooms (Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho, 2008; Certo & Brinda, 2011; Rothwell, 2011).

Studies have consistently highlighted the steady decline and stagnation of reading and writing scores for students in the United States (Gallagher, 2009; National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Many secondary students no longer appear to find the value in or desire to read a text and “progress appears to halt as children enter their teenage years” (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Their writing, comprehension, critical thinking, inferencing, and speaking skills all suffer because of the importance placed on standardized testing and taken away from thinking critically and analytically (Crumpler, Rogers, & Schneider, 2006; Gallagher, 2009; Robinson, 2015).

Theater, a tactile activity, has been a way for people to voice ideas, concerns, and stories for thousands of years (Brockett, 1999; McDougall, 2003). Literacy, arguably the most important skill any human can acquire, has become a part of the social standards and expectations of nations around the world (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003; Robinson, 2015). Some researchers believe combining literacy and drama might lead to new ways of teaching and learning in the current traditional structure of the secondary classroom (Crumpler et al., 2006; Keehn, Harmon & Shoho, 2008; Tanner, 2012).

Theater is not just a performance for an audience; it is also the design or creation of a character or setting and the implications of words on a page (Wagner, 1999; Guthrie, 2015). Dewey (1938) believed that all students need experiences in order to effectively learn and retain content material. He sought to inform educators of the need for

movement, play, and participation within classrooms. Vygotsky (1978) too, believed students needed experiences in order to grow and make gains in their learning.

Few studies have been performed examining the use of drama pedagogy to increase literacy skills among secondary students (Tanner, 2012; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1995); however, some research has been done with theater and learning in general (Nordin, et al., 2012; Yavuzer, 2012). Although the current research stresses the need for more studies and examination, there is a fledgling consensus that drama pedagogy can help students improve their comprehension, vocabulary, critical thinking, inferencing, writing, and speaking skills to become more wholly and successfully literate (Crumpler et al., 2006; Keehn et al., 2008; Rothwell, 2011; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1995; Wolf, 1994).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Researchers have begun to find connections between using drama pedagogy activities in the ELA classroom and gains in literacy activities (McDougall, 2003; Thompson, 2003). Much of the available research focuses on elementary students and how the activities encouraged by Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (2006) have increased comprehension, language use, speaking, critical thinking, inferencing, and cooperation among students. Many teachers have published their own classroom action research articles in popular journals like *The Reading Teacher* and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, and although the research on secondary learners is sparse, there is support to encourage additional study (Crumpler et al., 2006; Zanitsch, 2009; Tanner, 2012).

The idea of using drama in the classroom, be it elementary, secondary, or post-secondary is not a new one. Education reformers as far back as the 1800s suggested

increasing drama to help students become well-rounded (Goldstein, 2014). During World War I, Caldwell Cook (1918) wrote about using drama to help keep his young male students not only interested in their lessons, but also engaged in the day-to-day activities of the class. In the 1940s and 1950s, educators Dorothy Heathcote and Winifred Ward encouraged using a variety of drama activities in classrooms to help students learn more effectively (Ward, 1957; Wager, 1999).

Table 1

*Drama pedagogy through history*

Practitioner	Dates	Drama Activity	Purpose of Activity	Age Group for Activities
Cook	1914-1918	role-play	classroom management	primary boys
Cook	1914-1918	improvisation	public speaking	primary boys
Ward	1940s-1950s	role-play	choosing characters to perform; changing student attitudes	primary and middle level
Ward	1940s-1950s	script writing	turning children's stories into plays for performance	primary and middle level
Heathcote	1950s- 1980s	writing-in-role	think like someone else	all levels
Heathcote	1950s – 1980s	role-play	expand understanding of historical events; develop alternate points of view	all levels

## **Theoretical Framework**

Since the beginning of humankind, people have used drama and performance to learn not only how to adapt to the world, but also to teach others new ways to perform tasks (Buckland, 2012). The South African theater actor and director Andrew Buckland performed a story of natives hunting buffalo where one hunter taught the other to disguise himself as a buffalo in order to sneak into the herd - the goal being to kill a buffalo and take home the meat. According to Buckland, the use of play and drama may have been a survival technique and if we stop using our imaginations then we will lose the ability to adapt and think in the moment (Huizinga, 1950; Buckland, 2012).

The goal of drama in education is not a final, polished performance. Rather, it is to learn through the process and work on developing the techniques of empathy, critical thinking, and adaptation (Wagner, 1999). Dorothy Heathcote, often thought of as the mother of drama in education, worked with children from all sorts of backgrounds. Her goal was not to close the gaps in their life experiences, but to help them develop the desire to learn and understand lives, events, and details those students would never actually experience (Wagner, 1999).

Heathcote not only worked with students, she also worked with teachers and traveled the world discussing the use of drama in the classroom. In addition to increasing the use of drama in education, she aimed to help teachers become comfortable and successful using drama. She believed that drama was one of the most effective ways to help students learn and that “teachers are creators of learning situations for others” (Heathcote, 1985b). For her, the role of drama in the classroom was one for which the teacher needed to take responsibility as he or she worked with students, they faced

improvisation, role-play, and the challenges drama in education can produce (Heathcote, 1985c).

In the 1960s, the Belgrade Theater Coventry developed the original Theater in Education (TIE) program in which they created plays focused on social justice and controversial topics of the time (Turner, 2010). The plays were then performed at local schools or for students as a way not only to draw attention to social issues, but also to encourage discussion among those involved in education. The Belgrade Theater company successfully produced TIE productions for years until the educational system in England restricted the use of non-traditional forms of teaching and learning (Turner, 2010).

**Play in the classroom.** Many researchers have also begun to explore and collect data on the importance of play while learning (Cook, 1919; Ward, 1957; Wagner, 1999; Robinson, 2015). As the body of research grows on the use of play, the secondary classroom needs to continue to expand the teaching tools available to educators (Robinson, 2015; Noddings, 2005). One way for teachers to use play in the classroom is to add drama activities. Those activities challenge students to rethink their perceptions about a situation and gives them a safe place to explore those perceptions (Heathcote, 1985a; Bruner, 1983; Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006). As students' experiences with the drama activities become more intense, they begin to work "in a different dimension of communication" (Heathcote, 1985a) and learn they are not only able to connect to an abstract or distant idea but also to realize they care about what they are learning (Huizinga, 1950; Bruner, 1983, Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). The students begin to see the value in learning and move into a new level of learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Play in the classroom is not limited to the students, a teacher should also be prepared to play with the students. When a teacher plays, he or she adds a level of safety for the students, increases the necessary tension in an improvisation or role-play, and can help students think about a situation in a different way (Heathcote, 1985a; Bruner, 1977; Bruner, 1983; Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). In Bruner's study of thought and language use in the classroom, he found that children were more successful when an adult was involved in the play with them (Bruner, 1983). It is not about just playing a game to take up time in the school day; it is also about helping students discover they have the ability to explore and understand social situations from different cultures and times (Huizinga, 1950; Heathcote, 1985b). When a teacher is involved with students and their playing to learn, students are more likely to take the activity as a method of learning, and ultimately, the play can lead to preparations for life (Huizinga, 1950; Vygotsky, 2013; Berger, 2002). In addition, for teachers, participating in a new method and trying new things, such as play in the classroom, can lead them to find creative thinking and improvisation that may help them adapt to any situation (Lindgren, 1959).

Play in the classroom also offers teachers the opportunity to differentiate instruction so all students can be included in the lessons (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences identifies multiple ways in which he believes people learn (Gardner, 2006). When a lesson includes more than one style of learning, it is more likely to reach more students, which will in turn increase the engagement within the classroom. If students are not engaged in the activity, they are less likely to learn (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978; Wagner, 1999; Robinson, 2015)



**Building meaning.** Students build their learning as they gain experiences (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978). When students interact with one another, especially in theater activities, they cannot avoid creating experiences (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). Dewey (1938) believed students needed to have experiences, positive and negative, in order to learn how to learn. Without trying new things how would they ever know what works and what does not work for their own learning? Without building knowledge, as the constructivist theory suggests, students would simply do as they are told.

Through drama, students are not only building excitement about the content, they are also making meaning together - meaning that deepens and expands their understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003; Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006). The goal of any good teacher is, or should be, to help students develop their own paths and thoughts (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003; Noddings, 2005; Robinson, 2015). As students build their understandings, they enlarge their frames of reference and ultimately become better learners (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 2013; Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006; Robinson, 2015). If we do not have a foundation to stand upon, or a background with which to connect, how can we possibly understand what we are reading or being taught (Bruner, 1977)? Without the schema, we are simply receiving teaching, we are not actually learning (Berger, 2002; Bruner, 1977).

Schema is important to learning because students need to have a background, or build one, in order to fully understand situations, texts, or appropriate responses. When students have a schema they are able to understand nuances of a situation and are less likely to skip over information or change things into what they understand (Schunk,

2008). In a classroom, students who lack schemata of a situation or text are often the ones who may stare ahead and pretend to pay attention but are obviously lost. Using drama activities can help them to build the background they lack so they are able to build comprehension and understanding.

Students need to make associations about new content in order for the new information to stick. Drama pedagogy activities, such as role-play, can help teachers create associations for students. Since play is a safe activity and supports the “do-over.” Students are able to “try on” different ways of doing things and see which results in their desired outcome (Heathcote, 1985d; Ward, 1957; Bruner, 1983). When students are able to participate through role-play or writing-in-role, they are building new meaning and connections (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003).

According to Robinson (2015), students in today’s world need to be able to construct their own meaning in order to succeed once out of school. Teachers too need to build lessons that will help students construct their own meaning (Robinson, 2015), incorporating the way students think and learn today as well as knowledge of who their students are (Gardner, 2009; Robinson, 2015). Not only do teachers need to build lessons that challenge their students to gain new knowledge and understanding of the content, teachers also need to become learners in those same situations (Heathcote, 1985d). Part of building knowledge is accepting that each person involved is a learner, whether that person’s title is student or teacher (Edmiston, 2014).

Dewey (1938) urged educators to give students meaningful experiences in order to foster learning; using drama pedagogy activities can help students develop those experiences in a safe and positive way. If our students have no physical or tactile

experience with content, they will likely learn it for the duration of the semester and then promptly forget it all (Bruner, 1977). Using theater offers students and teachers a way to see how ideas and knowledge interact. If we do not help students build their schemata and make connections using experiences, we have failed them as educators. Through play, students of all ages can learn how to increase their abilities and discover how to react when faced with a variety of rule structures (Vygotsky, 2013).

According to Vygotsky, play creates a student's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 2013). If students are stuck at one level, they will not learn nor will they build the schemata they need to function as they move through the school system and into the world. We all learn by working our way through problems and conflict. Without that social aspect of learning it is hard to believe we would actually retain any information (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978; Forman & Cazden, 1985/2013).

### **Research Questions and Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this exploratory multiple-case study was to discover perceptions of teachers using a drama pedagogy curricular unit as a teaching tool in their secondary classrooms. The following question arose after creating and using drama pedagogy in my own classroom as well as sharing a drama pedagogy curricular unit with a colleague who wanted to change the dynamics of her classroom.

The following question was used to guide the qualitative data collection during the study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of using a drama pedagogy curricular unit as a teaching tool?

A second question presented itself during the course of the study. That question was also used as a guide to the analysis of the study.

2. What external factors might affect the way a teacher implements and feels about a drama pedagogy unit?

### **Methodology**

This study was designed as an exploratory multiple-case study. The purpose of which was to discover perceptions of teachers as they used a drama pedagogy curricular unit in their secondary classrooms. For the purposes of this study, perceptions were defined as the sensory experiences of the world within the classroom that involved both the recognition of environmental actions as well as the response to those actions (Cherry, 2015). Teacher perceptions included:

- Emotional reactions to the activities.
- Classroom value of the activities.
- Observed student levels of motivation.
- Changes in classroom dynamics or environmental makeup.
- Inspiration or motivation to explore new strategies based on the activities.

The participants came from a convenience sample of schools that allowed me to conduct data collection with some of their teachers. The schools involved were both classified as rural schools in the state of Texas. One was one of the smallest public high schools in the state and the other was a hill country high school with approximately 1400 students. The teachers involved had a variety of years of experience in the classroom and little to no experience using drama pedagogy in their classrooms. The curricular unit was qualitative and all data were based on transcripts of interviews and reflections from the teachers.

The curricular unit was examined through the use of teacher reflections and transcripts of recorded interviews. The activities were designed and organized for use in the classroom of a secondary teacher who did not have a background in theater education, although all three participants had some experience in theater. The curricular unit was designed around a whole classroom text typically taught at the junior level and not of great length. Because of its consistent teaching in English III classrooms and its layers of meaning, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1885/1994) was the focus text.

I coded all the responses using Saldana's (2013) *Qualitative Coding Manual*, and analyzed responses weekly looking for themes. Once I received and transcribed all interviews and reflective journals and completed first-cycle coding, I looked for initial themes in teacher perceptions and coded a second time looking more specifically for teacher perceptions as defined above.

The curricular unit used in each classroom was created to last six weeks in length and was designed as a way to study a traditional English III level American literature novel. The curricular unit combined drama pedagogy activities along with class readings and writing assignments. Some activities suggested the involvement of the teacher in role, others involved the teacher as facilitator. All drama pedagogy activities were designed with the understanding that the teacher and students had little to no experience using drama pedagogy in the classroom. Each activity was broken down into several sections including: Activity description; Goals of the Activity; Rationale; Activity Rules/Guidelines; Debrief; Reflection.

## Significance of the Study

Many studies have focused on the use of drama pedagogy, using various other terms, in elementary and middle level classrooms. There is very little research in the world focused on using drama pedagogy in the secondary ELA classroom (Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1995; Whitney, 2006; Carlson, 2007; Zanitsch, 2009; Gallagher & Ntelioglou, 2011; Tanner, 2012). From my experience in the classroom, I have seen the needs of students at the secondary level change, and as the ways students learn change, it has become a requirement for teachers and educational researchers to explore new types of teaching tools that can be used in all classrooms. By examining the use of drama pedagogy as a teaching tool in secondary ELA classrooms, this study offered new ideas to teachers hoping to diversify their strategies and continuously engage their students.

Teachers have used drama pedagogy activities and drama itself in their classrooms for decades, and today many blog about their experiences (Provenzano, 2011; Modnay, 2012; Macpherson, 2014; Flynn, 2014; Davis, 2014; Caldwell, 2015; Guthrie, 2015; King, 2015). When exploring the Internet, it is also easy to find reputable sites such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Adlit.org* with posts on how to use drama activities in the classroom to increase understanding, comprehension, and discussion (Bafile, 2005; Kener & Abrams, 2012; Kener & Gonchar, 2012; Kener & Schulten, 2012a; Kener & Schulten, 2012b; Schulten, 2012). The Smithsonian has even held programs using drama to bring history to life for patrons and engage in authentic discussions (NMAH, 2011), and in the 1980s the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) issued a position statement on the importance of using drama in the classroom (NCTE, 1982).

A Google search using the terms “how to use drama in the secondary classroom” revealed over 12 million sites; some are undoubtedly meant for high school drama or theater classrooms, while others are for content area teachers to use as resources for their own classrooms. On the site [teacherspayteachers.com](http://teacherspayteachers.com), a search using the terms “using drama in the English classroom” returned almost 200 results of lessons, units, and games teachers have designed to use in English classrooms, speech classrooms, and in building rapport and positive environments with their students. The abundance of hits online suggests that teachers at all levels are using drama in their classrooms. Because of the abundance of use in classrooms the need for more research to support them should be increased.

The lack of research at the secondary level does not appear to be hindering the creativity and positivity of using drama pedagogy that teachers are seeing with their own eyes (Provenzano, 2011); however, it could make a difference for them in the future. As many districts consider cutting arts programs to make room for more test preparation (Dillon, 2006; Office of State Representative Lon Burnam, 2013; Walker, 2014), students are losing those outlets. If secondary teachers are able to bring the arts into their classrooms as they work with struggling students, then those students will regain a small part of their lost arts programs. With research to support them, teachers in the English classroom will be able to go to their administrators and school boards to show that what they are doing, which to many may look like play and wasted time, is in fact helping their struggling learners or disconnected and disenchanted students to become engaged and develop a desire to learn.

## **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size. Although the research focused on teachers' perceptions of using the drama pedagogy unit, having so few participants caused generalizability of the study to be limited. One participant was the only teacher of English in her school district, while two were second year teachers and the only ones who taught regular English III in their district. Class sizes were also very different for each of the participants, as well as the number of classes that used the drama pedagogy unit. One participant had fewer than ten students in each class and there were no honors classes in the district. The other two taught regular-education students, which include English language learners, special education, and gifted and talented populations; this school had an Advanced Placement English III class.

The fact that there were no observations in the classroom during the use of the unit, limited the description of the classrooms. I completed no classroom observations to limit biases from all involved. The two participating schools were ones where had previously I taught, and many of the students in the participating teachers' classrooms had me as a teacher. I did not want to interfere with the level of participation or the teachers' perceptions of the activities with my presence. There was a chance that the students who had me as a teacher before would have responded differently to the activities if I had been in the classroom; they may have felt they needed to please me, which would have led to inaccurate data.

All descriptions came from the teachers involved, and self-reported perceptions caused some bias in information and findings. Since all teachers had volunteered to introduce a new way of teaching to their classroom, they struggled to integrate the unit



into their style of teaching and all had different reactions to the high levels of classroom activity required.

Another limitation may be the time of year the unit was implemented. The teacher participants were asked to teach the unit in the spring semester of 2016, but there was not a specific month in which they were being asked to begin. Additionally, none of the teachers completed the entire unit, which may have been a limitation to their overall perception of the unit. Those teachers who had minimal classroom structure in place may have had more difficulty with the unit than those who had strong classroom management. The lack of a daily organizational pattern in a classroom could have added limitations that affected the way the teacher felt about the unit as a whole or was able to facilitate the activities in the classroom community.

### **Delimitations**

The study took place in two different Texas high schools, Steady High School and General High School. The schools were chosen through convenience sampling. Two teachers were English III teachers and the other taught 5<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade English classes. Those teachers were asked to use the intervention with all of their classes reading the novel. By having the teachers use the unit with all of their classes reading the novel, it was easier to develop reliable themes based on teacher thoughts and experiences.

The study took place during the second semester of the 2015-2016 school year, beginning in January of 2016 and ending by May of 2016. All regular-education teachers at Steady High School and General High School who taught *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885/1994) participated. Interviews were transcribed and coded using discourse analysis as well as Saldana's (2013) coding handbook to search for themes. The

teacher participants were asked to keep reflective journals in which they were asked to explore their feelings about using, participating in, and facilitating drama pedagogy in their classrooms.

### **Operational Definitions**

The uses of theater and drama elements in the classroom have multiple definitions, and can be named by any or all of them dependent upon the activity and regional location. The use of theater and drama elements to teach has become common in universities throughout the United States, however there is not one specific term. For the purposes of this study, I used the term drama pedagogy; however, the additional terms have been defined below. Each term has been defined according to generally accepted definitions that can be found easily by searching online.

**Creative Drama** – An improvisational, non-exhibition form of drama in which participants are guided by a facilitator, usually a teacher, to explore both abstract and concrete educational concepts. Creative drama is a way to create learning experiences that help students to make connections with ideas (What is Creative Drama?, 2001).

**Drama in Education (DiE)** - “A set of practices which privilege make-believe play as a significant learning medium in the human lifespan. DiE refers to artistic activity where participants can role-play situations, act out imaginary scenarios, or demonstrate fictitious images for the purposes of insight and growth” (Drama Education, 2014).

**Drama Pedagogy** – A collection of drama-based teaching and learning strategies to engage students with the content they are learning. It is facilitated by a teacher, uses academic content, focuses on the process and experiences of students during the process, and can incorporate any type of drama strategy (Lee, Patall, Cawthon, & Steingut, 2014).

**Process Drama** – Process drama is a dynamic teaching methodology in which the teacher and the students work together to create an imaginary dramatic world and work within that world to explore a particular problem, situation, theme, or series of related themes, not for a separate audience, but for the benefit of the participants themselves (O’Neill, 1995).

**Readers Theater** – A form of scripted theater that does not need to be memorized, have sets or costumes, or an audience and can serve as a framework to understanding dramatic production. This activity can be used in classrooms as a way to increase reading fluency and comprehension through multiple readings (Shepard, 2004).

**Theater in Education (TIE)** – Theater in Education focuses on a theatrical performance, usually done by professionals, for school children in which they interact with each other to explore ideas of cultural, social, or political significance within modern day dilemmas and issues (Belgrade Theater, 2014).

## CHAPTER II

### **An Impact of Theater on Literacy Learning**

#### **Reading Comprehension**

In their study of eighth grade struggling readers, Keehn et al. (2008) introduced Readers Theater to students in an attempt to improve specific literacy skills: (a) fluency, (b) comprehension, and (c) vocabulary. The 6-week study incorporated participants in two different reading classes with similar demographics, the same teacher, and in a low socioeconomic, urban, south Texas school. The intervention classroom spent an average of five days per week on each text, focusing on Readers Theater activities; the control classroom spent an average of three days per week per text. Using five different ideas to guide their study: (a) effect on reading level, (b) effect on prosody and fluency, (c) effect of participation on reading comprehension, (d) effect on vocabulary learning, and (e) response of participants, the researchers found statistically significant gains in the intervention classroom at the end of the study.

Unlike Keehn et al. (2008), Smagorinsky and Coppock's (1995) study examined secondary level participants who were at risk and had been committed to a rehabilitation facility. The study focused on the use of drama/theater at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility and students who developed a "dramatic interpretation of 'The Use of Force,' a short story by William Carlos Williams" (p. 373). The participants represented a variety of grade levels, had a range of standardized test scores, and worked together to interpret the story in any way they chose. The teacher presented different interpretive options, including art supplies, video equipment, musical instruments, and theatrical props. The participants decided upon the creation of a dramatic script and

performance and not only had to interpret the text, but also had to develop trust with each other and the teacher. The researchers utilized a video camera during the study for a process called “stimulated recall” (Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1995, p. 377), “a method originally developed by Bloom (1954)” (as cited in Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1995, p. 377). Upon completion of the one-hour process, the researchers and participants met to watch and discuss the video of the activity. Smagorinsky and Coppock (1995) found that the participants involved (a) “refined their own thinking about the story” (p. 387), (b) made connections to outside contexts in order to increase comprehension, (c) worked through pre-existing social standards to become better informed and (d) created a logical and thoughtful dramatic interpretation of the text.

The comprehension gains found by Keehn et al. (2008) and Smagorinsky and Coppock (1995) support DuPont’s (1992) findings in her study of struggling fifth-grade readers. The study consisted of students from three elementary schools in south-central Pennsylvania. Two classes from one school, Group 1, received the full creative drama intervention; two classes from a second school, Group 2, received a combination of the creative drama intervention and traditional teaching; and two classes from a third school, Group 3, served as the control group. The quantitative study revealed statistically significant gains in posttest scores in only Group 1. DuPont’s (1992) research on fifth-grade remedial reading students who completed a six-week creative drama unit showed positive gains on standardized reading tests.

The researcher worked to teach students reading skills in conjunction with the use of creative drama activities. The researcher concluded that the use of creative drama, taught in conjunction with the teaching of reading skills, helped struggling fifth-grade

students to increase their comprehension abilities. Participants were able to better understand the text they had acted out in class and easily connect to and comprehend stories they had not acted out.

The gains in comprehension skills and cooperation between learners demonstrated by Keehn et al. (2008), Smagorinsky and Coppock (1995), and DuPont (1992) illustrate the possibilities that theater has allowed students to make in the past. Their learning growth through working with one another did more than traditional lecture and writing lessons used in many schools.

### **Language and Speaking**

The use of theater in the ELA classroom has not been widely accepted by many schools in the United States, although foreign educational systems have begun to use it more and have seen positive results (Cremin et al., 2007; Rothwell, 2011). Australian researcher Rothwell (2011) studied students during an action research project as they used theater to learn a new language (i.e. German), thus becoming more proficient in their literacy skills and abilities for speaking. The study consisted of 21 eighth-grade students of similar backgrounds and knowledge of the new language. Rothwell (2011) used process drama (i.e. the act of performing a scene or skit for a purpose) to discover whether the activity would allow participants to learn and retain basic beginning knowledge of the new language.

The research project consisted of participants taking on specific roles as exhibited in the picture book *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2007). Researchers videotaped the participants during the process drama activities, which lasted a period of several weeks over the course of two terms. Participants also responded to questionnaires about their

experience with the process drama. The process drama activities introduced students to unknown vocabulary and encouraged the use of kinesthetic and verbal language to assist participants in learning and retaining new words. Rothwell (2011) found that participants showed an increased desire to participate in class as well as a “positive correlation between multi-modal language work, dramatic narrative enrollment work and language” (p. 590).

Additionally, although not focused on specifically speaking or writing, Keehn (2003) conducted a study using the Readers Theater strategy with second-grade students in a rural district of central Texas to measure how the strategy affected student fluency. Her goal was to continue her previous studies of how Readers Theater can increase student gains in literacy skills. The study focused on four classrooms chosen at random with teachers who had a range of experience and had not previously implemented Readers Theater in their classrooms. Data was collected using Accelerated Reader (AR) scores, the *Gray Oral Reading Test*, and portions of the *Qualitative Reading Inventory*. Over the course of the nine-week study, two classrooms received Treatment 1 that included Readers Theater and explicit fluency lessons, and two classrooms received Treatment 2 where only Readers Theater was used for fluency lessons. Keehn (2003) found that all students made statistically significant gains in multiple measures; however, the lowest-ability student group was the only one to make consistent gains in each of the treatment groups.

Researchers around the world like Rothwell (2011) and Keehn (2003), have begun to see connections to student gains in language (i.e. speaking and writing) and the use of theater. Each study introduced a unique way to incorporate drama activities in

order to help students increase their literacy skills related to language. Although each study focused on different outcomes, the findings were similar: Students' abilities and knowledge increased.

Demircioglu (2010) worked with 9-10-year-old students in Turkey using creative drama activities to increase English vocabulary. The study, which took place in Turkey, was an experimental study in which 50 students participate (25 students were in the control group and 25 were in the treatment group). The students were learning English and spent eight hours a week practicing their new language. Through the study, they participated in five lesson plans designed to help them learn new vocabulary. Each lesson lasted 120 minutes (Demircioglu, 2010). Students were taught a total of 32 new vocabulary words by using drama activities. The teacher acted out stories with the words in them in a variety of ways, the students participated in activities using the words, and the students reflected on the activities and process. The researcher found that there was significant difference between the students' learning in the treatment group and those in the control group. That significance lead him to believe that using drama to teach vocabulary is an effective and efficient technique.

### **Connections to a Text**

Students often struggle to make connections to texts that go deeper than simply how to pass a test and teachers appear to be uncertain of the ways to change the current standards and expectations in the classroom (Gallagher, 2009; Gardner, 2006). Teachers and researchers are interested in making classes more accessible and inclusive for learners. In research performed by Wolf (1994), a class of 17 third- and fourth-grade students, many of whom were classified as special needs, participated in a year-long



study where a theater expert worked with the students over the course of ten sessions to help them make stronger connections with text. Almost all of the participants were low achieving readers, and many preferred to create stories combining events from popular movies and TV shows as opposed to creating their own stories to act out. Participants were taught the academic vocabulary used when acting as well as how to script out a scene before performing, ultimately creating an authentic atmosphere for the study.

Towards the end of the study, participants were asked to choose their own texts and create their own scripts, therefore placing importance on their comprehension of the texts at hand. A variety of data were collected throughout the school year that ranged from observational outcomes to school records and participant reflections. Wolf (1994) found that participants moved past their prior shallow connections to characters in texts through the use of theater and became more critical and analytical readers. Some participants became better overall students and class members through the improvement of attendance and interaction within the classroom (Wolf, 1994).

The focus on helping students make connections in the text is not just something researchers are exploring with elementary students. Secondary students also struggle with making connections to text, possibly because of the focus on standardized testing and covering information broadly (Anderson, 1984/2013; Brown, Palincsar & Armbruster, 1984/2013; Gallagher, 2009). In his research focused on eleventh-grade ELA students, Tanner (2012) found participants not only increased their comprehension of the text *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925), they also discovered connections to the text they had previously missed by using theater activities in the classroom. His action research study focused on ten students in three of his ELA classes, the participants upon

whom he collected data had class grades ranging from A to D averages. Tanner (2012) used a variety of data collection tools to evaluate the dramatic activities he used in the classes: (a) surveys, (b) questionnaires, (c) quiz grades, and (d) observations. The use of dramatic activities before quizzes allowed participants to increase their comprehension. Reader's theater and tableau activities encouraged participants to connect more effectively with the text and increased classroom discussion, analysis, and retention of textual information.

Arguably, urban middle school students are often the ones who suffer the most with making connections to text. Many urban students are not exposed to enough literature throughout their younger years and often lack the interactive abilities needed to delve deeply into texts (Alvermann & Moje, 2013; Certo & Brinda, 2011; Rowsell, Kress, Pahl & Street, 2013). Certo and Brinda (2011) created a literary/theater project for urban, middle school students where the researchers incorporated the arts, including theater, with the intention of increasing connections to texts. Researchers focused on two sixth-grade classrooms in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area, urban schools that had no formal arts program. Less than 50 percent of the students scored at the proficient level on the state standardized tests, none of the students scored at the advanced level. Certo and Brinda (2011) observed and interviewed the students and teachers involved in the study as they participated in artistic and dramatic activities in the classroom as well as when they attended theatrical performances of the three texts read during the study.

During the study, students read *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt (1975), *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942-1945* (1994), and *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor (2003). In

addition to dramatic activities and seeing performances of each text upon completion of the novel units, participants were asked to write and design for characters. Their writing, design, and dramatic interactions with text allowed them to make stronger connections, feel more empathy toward characters, more fully understand the inferences in the texts, and become enthusiastic towards reading (Certo & Brinda, 2011).

The young adult novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* (Curtis, 1995) is the focus text of a study conducted by Kelly (2006) with a class of students in third, fourth, and fifth grade and their teacher Toni. The students participated in developing connections to the text through creating an imagined trial for the character of Byron and family dinners as each of the characters in the text. The classroom was broken up into five groups of students and each group took on the role of one of the five members of the Watson family. The study was a five-week long unit where the students and teacher worked to read the novel and participate in role-playing activities to increase their understanding of character motivation, the historical aspects of American in 1963, and how the characters might have responded to situation in the story.

What Kelly (2006) discovered as she worked with the students was that the process of “becoming” the characters and participating in a mock trial for one of the characters as well as family dinners was very difficult. The students had to have not only a deep understanding of the text, but also a strong connection to the way a family worked, the tensions of the United States for Black Americans in the 1960s, and how to work with others who were also portraying the same characters.

The researcher and teacher discovered through watching the students, especially in the Joetta group, that using process drama helped the students focus on the characters

as people, but did not appear to help them think about the racial issues. The study achieved more than their initial two goals of helping students improve their reading comprehension and increase awareness of social issues, even though the students did not obviously focus on the issues of race the novel raised. The researcher found that the outcomes of the study, where the students were able to “become” someone else and value them allowed students to develop stronger connections to the text, even if those connections were not what the teacher and researcher had originally hoped for (Kelley, 2006).

### **Critical Thinking and Making Inferences**

Epstein (2004) examined the use of tableau and hotseating, drama pedagogy activities, with fifth- and sixth-grade students while learning the stories of the bible in a Jewish religion class. The researcher had previously worked with the children in their traditional bible classes and was concerned that the children were not actually understanding the stories of the bible, they had not made any connections to the stories and were simply approaching the lessons as stories to be heard. The researcher worked with children on one bible story about Sarah and Hagar in an attempt to get the children to think about why the story was important. Through the use of hotseating, a technique where children assume the role of a character and others ask questions, she was able to get the students to express questions they had about the text. The use of tableau, a frozen “picture” made by students without props, she was able to help the children bring the bible stories to life and increase their literary understanding of the importance of the text and event.

Hertzberg (2003) worked with 11-year-old students in Australia to help them think critically about the text *Onion Tears* (Kidd, 1989) as they read it instead of focusing on thinking about the text after it had been read. The article focuses on one lesson within a larger study she conducted in 2000. Her purpose was to engage the students in critical thinking and reading. She used the process drama activity called still image where the students created tableau or frozen moments depicting a moment from the text the children felt was important. As the students worked together to create images they felt were dramatic and full of tension, they were also using the drama activity as a way to negotiate their idea, work cooperatively, and construct meaning together. They were thinking critically about the text and they were learning how to use their bodies to share moments. The authors found, through student reflections, that the students were not only playing with the text but also engaging in and retaining the English lesson.

Carlson (2007) worked with urban high school students to understand classic novels using drama activities to explore and discuss the ideas within the texts. Although his piece is not a research article, he talked about using different drama pedagogy activities to help students connect to and think about classic texts like *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1475/2003). In his article, he discussed how he worked with high school students to bridge their knowledge with that of the classical text time period. He asked students to take what they knew about the text and create original talk shows. Students were in groups of five and each group was asked to create a contemporary talk show with the stories from *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1475/2003). The goal of the talk shows was to help students think more critically about the tales and learn new ways to talk about them.

Rozansky & Aageson (2010) worked with low-level eight grade readers using Image Theater (developed by Augusto Boal) to think about and discuss world issues. Students were asked to read articles from national newspapers and explore the meanings through body positioning. Over the course of the study, students in two periods, on block schedule worked with their teacher and four university students to create images representing difficult social issues. The students were asked to read articles about topics ranging from children trying to reach their parents in different countries to Langston Hughes' 1951 poem about dreams.

In order to help the students who were weak readers learn how to think about the critical issues presented in complicated texts, the teacher and researchers helped students think about the texts by using their bodies to tell the stories. Students participated in games designed by Augusto Boal, and then decided how they could create an image to represent the important issues they saw within the article. Rozanky & Aageson (2010) found that the students were able to engage in critical conversations. They also found that in order to help students continue to engage in those critical conversations they had to continue helping the students work on their reading while incorporating the games of Augusto Boal and using body positioning to help students see how people might realistically deal with difficult situations (Rozanky & Aageson, 2010).

Students attending an alternative education school in British Columbia who participated in the Youth Literacy Project were given the chance to be a part of a study involving literacy and drama (Winters, Rogers, & Schofield, 2006). The students were between the ages of fifteen and nineteen and all had left the traditional school setting either by choice or force, the students all struggled to learn but had enrolled in the Youth

Literacy Project in an effort to avoid becoming dropout statistics. The students in the study read the play *Antigone* by Sophocles (441/2005) and used drama as a way to connect to the text and think more deeply about it, students were asked to update the story and decided to set their version in a gang culture. The researchers, Winters, Rogers, & Schofield (2006) worked with the students to use the skills they already had as a way of exploring the play. Throughout the year-long project students participated in drama games, improvisation, writing-in-role, and an updated performance of the classical play.

The study focused on three students who appeared to have gained the most from using the drama activities. One student had been a promising poet, yet he refused to revise and polish any of his pieces. The researchers found that throughout the course of the project the student enjoyed being in the spotlight, but when he did not earn a lead role in the performance he decided to create a narrator position. The student, Sam, wove his poetry with the story to fill the audience in with information about setting, character motivation, and background information. He discovered that he had to revise his writing to make it powerful. The researchers believe that without the drama activities that Sam would never have discovered how to revise for a reason, he wanted his words to stay passionate and real and have movement.

Two other students, Joey and Jason, were able to discover their abilities to think deeply about the play as they played the drama games. Joey initially struggled to understand the play, but when he was given the large role of King Creon, he pushed himself to think like the king and through that critical thinking he began to understand the play. Participating in the drama helped Joey transform from a self-diagnosed poor reader

and writer to someone who was able to think deeply about the nuances of a play about honor, family, and right versus wrong.

Jason discovered that he could visualize the story. He became so excited about the reworked story that he ultimately created a movie trailer, something that was not a requirement but involved deep thought. His trailer involved what he felt were key scenes from the play and he used his knowledge of drama and film as a way to show people how real and honest the situations the characters were in could be in the stressful situation of family strife. He had to think critically about how to shoot his scenes and which would accomplish his goal. He also shared with the researchers that he felt drama should be used in all classrooms because for him, it made reading exciting and reading had always been boring to him before (Winters, Rogers, & Schofield, 2006).

The students in the Youth Literacy Project used drama to think critically about more than just the play *Antigone* (Sophocles, 441/2005). They were also able to think critically about their own literacy skills and were able to make gains in those skills, without feeling like it was forced on them.

## **Writing**

Gallagher & Ntelioglou (2011) worked with high school drama students in a four-year study to create original and thought-provoking short plays dealing with personal and cultural experiences. The study was conducted as a part of a four-year ethnographic study with participants in Toronto, Canada; Boston, MA; Lucknow, India; and Taipei, Taiwan. This part of the study was from data collected in the Toronto area school. The purpose of the study was to explore how students learn in different ways as well as how teens discover self-narration and empathetic understanding.



Although not an English classroom, the students in the drama classes engaged in a variety of writing levels, all of which lead to the final goal of creating an original performance. The students wrote initially from the same prompt, then revised those prompts to become monologues. Their monologues, dealing with student selected topics reflecting difficult times in their lives, were then revised again to create a collectively themed play. They edited their original pieces and chose the parts they felt were most relevant to create a conducive performance piece. The students used the combination of writing and drama to become comfortable with sharing difficult personal experiences with their peers and an audience. The researchers found that the combination provided not only a safe way to explore heavy topics with teens but also a way for those teens to feel safe about writing them down (Gallagher & Ntelioglou, 2011).

Whitney (2006) worked with high school students and four generic characters (Mom, Dad, Buddy and Sis) to engage in creative fictional writing. In his workshop with students, his goal was to increase student engagement in the English classroom as well as help students develop new writing skills. The students were presented with four generic names written on the board: Mom, Dad, Buddy, and Sis. The names were not assigned genders, nor were any ideas from the students excluded from the planning process. The students were put into groups of four and asked to create backgrounds for the characters as well as scenarios of disagreement. Students used their knowledge of familial units as well as their experiences with others to create the situations. Each situation was then performed by each group. Whitney found that the students were not only enjoying the activity, but they also began to make decisions as authors because of their character development and presentations. He also found that the students wanted to engage with the

English lesson and for the course of the workshop that the students did not respond negatively to writing.

Cremin, Gooch, Blakemore, Goff, and Macdonald (2006) worked with elementary students connecting drama to writing through improvisation. Their study was designed with the intention of adding to the field of study examining drama and writing. The researchers worked with three teachers seeking their master's degrees and teaching at elementary schools in the south of England. The research was designed as a case study where the researchers and teachers investigated the relationship between writing and drama. They gathered their data through observations of the children as they experienced the process drama activities in the study. The researchers conducted a pilot study as well as a primary research study, which lasted for two terms and resulted in data from eight sessions. Each session lasted approximately an hour and a half. The students were asked to participate in two different types of combinations: genre specific and seize the moment. Before the writing could occur, students participated in a drama activity designed to create tension. In the genre specific activities, the dramas were designed to elicit a genre specific piece of writing. In the seize-the-moment activities, the dramas were less designed and more of an organic creation within the lesson.

Cremin et al., (2006) found that when students wrote during the seize-the-moment activities, the writing was not the primary focus for the students. The researchers' final analysis revealed that the students struggled less when writing in conjunction to the drama activities than they had when writing without drama. The students had found inspiration, comfort, and motivation to write when they had experienced moments within a drama that caused them tension.

## **Drama as a Teaching Tool**

In Smith and Herring's text *Dramatic Literacy: Using Drama and Literature to Teach Middle-Level Content* (2001), the two teachers discuss different ways they and others have used drama in classrooms to help students connect to learning. The authors not only provide reasons for using drama based activities in all content areas, they also provide examples of lessons and how to design a lesson with drama as a central characteristic. Each chapter addresses a different aspect of using drama in the classroom. They begin by defining the terms they will use in the book as well as the terms most often found in lessons with middle school students. The book progresses as the authors explain how to use drama in an English language arts classroom in several ways: dramatizing an experience and creating drama from a story. The authors conclude the text with several chapters on how to use drama in other content area classrooms: social studies, science, and math.

The book was designed as a guide for teachers at the middle-level to use upon deciding to integrate their classrooms with drama pedagogy activities. The explanations of how drama can be a useful learning tool for students as well as the examples of lessons, helps to indicate that there is interest in increasing the use of drama pedagogy in the classroom. It also helps novice teachers and researchers see how others are already using the activities in classroom settings.

## **Summary**

Each of the articles and books reviewed here suggest the positive uses of drama pedagogy in the classroom. Although this is not a review of every piece of literature about using drama pedagogy in the classroom, it is a review of the literature that is most

appropriate to using drama pedagogy in the secondary classroom. As the use of drama continues to grow in the secondary classroom, the body of literature should continue to grow as well. Perhaps soon more research will be done in secondary classrooms who use drama pedagogy; that research could help teachers and policy makers change the structure of the secondary classroom.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

This chapter will describe the planned method for this study. It will explain the use of an exploratory, or particularistic, multiple-case study, as well as a brief examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the method. It will revisit the purpose of the study and will describe the participants and study setting. Finally, it will explain how the curricular unit was designed (See Appendix A).

#### **Method and Paradigm**

This study was designed as an exploratory, (Yin, 2014) or particularistic (Merriam, 2006), multiple-case study. The purpose of this study was to discover perceptions of teachers as they experienced using a drama pedagogy curricular unit in their secondary English language arts classrooms. For this research, a case was defined as the teacher using the unit, and each teacher, no matter how many were at a school, remained an individual case. Case studies are traditionally used as a way to study a real-world phenomenon with the intent to understand important contextual conditions (Strake, 1995; Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The use of drama pedagogy is not well documented for secondary English classrooms and the use of it creates a specific context for the learning community. The participants of the study worked within the contextual conditions of the designed curricular unit (See Appendix A) and drew conclusions about their own perceptions of the experience. The unit took place in three classrooms during the course of a regular school year, and the study was within the framework of the real world (Yin, 2014).

Any researcher should use an exploratory case study to discover how or why an intervention is perceived within the bounds of the case, yet she should have no clear, single set of outcomes in mind (Yin, 2003; Streb, 2010; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2012). The researcher should use a particularistic case study when examining any particular situation or event (Merriam, 2006). For the purposes of this study, both terms apply. Since the research of secondary drama pedagogy outcomes is limited in scope, the planned intervention (i.e., curricular unit) has no clear set of outcomes, but is a particular situation to be studied. The exploratory nature of the design is to discover what perceptions surround using drama pedagogy in the secondary classroom, as well as any possible direction for future research.

Using a multiple-case study design cannot only expand the potential for future research, but, it can also increase the reliability of the study itself (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013). Data from a multiple-case study could be used to replicate the study but also to triangulate the data. Triangulation of the data can help the researcher decide about any necessary changes in the study's design based on discovery during data collection (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2013). This study triangulated data in several ways: 1) Several non-researchers with knowledge of secondary education or theater education read and evaluated the unit; 2) Each teacher participant provided feedback on the researcher descriptions of classrooms and how the teacher has traditionally run his or her classroom to ensure the information is valid; 3) Since the researcher asked teacher participants to respond in the same way to specific reflection questions, the researcher could determine whether or not the data were similar in different circumstances (Stake, 1995). Data from

multiple-cases and locations could decrease questions about the reliability of the data as well as increasing the chance of exemplary outcomes (Merriam, 2009).

This study satisfied each of the above definitions. The research design focused on multiple teachers in different schools. The classrooms were closely replicated because they not only worked with the same curricular unit, but they also were designed based upon the same set of state standards (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). Focusing on multiple teachers increased the reliability of the research by producing more generalizable data. In addition, this research explored contextual conditions in the use of drama pedagogy activities which were pertinent to the “life” of the case study (Yin, 2003). Not only did the data have the chance to become more generalizable from the case study when focusing on multiple teachers, but also the bounds of the study were set within the classrooms of the teacher participants, the timeline of a six-week period, and the design of the curricular unit. The teacher participants in the study did not use their real names in order to maintain confidentiality, all teachers chose their own pseudonyms.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this exploratory multiple-case study was to discover perceptions of teachers as they experienced using a drama pedagogy curricular unit in the secondary classroom. The research question arose after creating and using drama pedagogy in my own classroom as well as sharing a drama pedagogy curricular unit with a colleague who wanted to change the dynamics of her classroom.

The following questions were used to guide qualitative data collection during the study:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of using a drama pedagogy curricular unit as a teaching tool?

2. What external factors might affect the way a teacher implements and feels about a drama pedagogy unit?

### **Study Setting**

The study took place in regular-education classrooms (i.e., no honors, Advanced Placement, or resource classrooms) of multiple teachers for primarily English III classrooms. In each school participating, Steady High School and General High School, regular education English teachers were used to collect data and serve as case study participants. The purpose of conducting the case studies in multiple areas was to encompass a variety of demographics as well as differences in classroom communities when participating in a drama pedagogy curricular unit.

**School 1 – Steady High School.** The school where Ms. Kristy Brett taught was one of the smallest public schools in the state of Texas, which caused her to adapt the unit slightly. Initially she planned to teach the curricular unit to her freshman class, the largest class she had. After she looked at her numbers more closely, she expanded the unit to include her sophomores and juniors as well. The students had her class at a different times of day, but because she was in such a tiny district, she was able to complete activities with all the students because the other teachers were willing to share their students with her.

Ms. Brett's school, Steady High School, mimics those in much of the rest of the state in demographic data, albeit a much smaller version of those schools. According to the 2014-2015 Texas Academic Performance Report Campus Profile, 69% of the students at Steady HS were classified as economically disadvantaged, 39% as at risk students,



64% Hispanic, and 30% White, other recorded race categories equated to less than 3% each of the school population (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

Ms. Brett taught more than just the high school English classes, she also taught students in fifth- through eighth-grade English. She was responsible for the majority of the English education of students in the district, a district where 25% of the population was enrolled in the school's English as a Second Language (ESL) program, 2% of students were classified as Gifted and Talented (GT), and no students were identified or enrolled in a Special Education program (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

**School 2 – General High School.** Both Ms. Jo Lee and Ms. Melanie Harper taught at General High School. In fact, they were grade-level teammates and the only two in the school who taught regular education English III (i.e., not honors or Advanced Placement). Ms. Harper taught one more period of English III than Ms. Lee did because she was also the cheerleading sponsor and had a period designated to cheer. Otherwise, both classroom communities were made up of similar demographics and the women planned their lessons together so their classes would be equitable and they could help one another work through potential problems. The two worked well together and got along, even though their classroom styles were different. The fact that they were both second-year teachers and started at General H.S. at the same time helped them to both grow in their individual confidence working with one another. It also meant that there was not a veteran teacher working with regular education English III students.

According to the 2014-2015 Texas Academic Performance Report Campus Profile, 45% of the students at General H.S. were classified as economically disadvantaged, 49% as at risk, 41% Hispanic, and 54% White, other recorded race

categories equated to less than 2% each of the school population (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

The students who made up Ms. Lee and Ms. Harper's classes may have been equally distributed when examining racial break-down, but the school recorded 2% of students in the ESL program, 9% in the GT program, and 9% of students classified or participating in the school's Special Education program (Texas Education Agency, 2015). With such small percentages, it is unlikely that each had equal numbers of ESL, GT, or Special Education students, and since the focus of the study was on the teachers and their perceptions of the use of drama pedagogy, no data were collected on classroom student demographics.

### **Participants**

The study used two Texas high schools, as well as teachers from each of the schools who taught regular-education English III students; however, one school, Steady H.S., worked with all of its high school English classes. All teachers used the designed curricular unit (See Appendix A) with their students and reflected on the process of teaching the unit and how they believed the students reacted to the unit.

The study imposed no criteria for the level of classroom experience teachers had; however, the researcher preferred teachers with little or no experience using drama pedagogy in the classroom. Teachers who had little to no experience using drama pedagogy in their classrooms were likely to approach the unit differently from those who had backgrounds in using drama in their classrooms regularly.

Each of the three participants had experience in the field of drama through their personal high school career, but none felt they understood what drama pedagogy actually

was. They all expressed excitement at the opportunity of adding drama activities to their classrooms, yet their definitions tended to focus more on the aspects of writing scripts, memorizing lines, or attempting accents. None had ever used drama pedagogy in their classrooms to assist their students in discussing or exploring the ideas of a text.

**Participant 1 – Kristy Brett.** The first participant, Kristy Brett, worked at Steady High School, one of the smallest public high schools in the state of Texas. Ms. Brett shared that she began teaching in 2000 but had not been in the classroom for many years. She was an older teacher, who had taught theater and English for several years before leaving the classroom to help care for her sick father. Her teaching background included working primarily in small west Texas schools, but she did not begin until after working as a school aide for many years. Ms. Brett's experiences as a classroom teacher began at a much later age than most of her peers and she felt she often struggled because of that.

Ms. Brett shared her experiences in the classroom in the past and revealed that she had attempted to use some drama in her classroom through the use of student-designed skits or a simulated poetry and prose competition. She said those activities helped her as the One Act Play director to figure out whom she would like to approach for the year's competition play. She did not use any other sort of drama activities in her classroom, but said she was excited to try new things.

When I asked her what her daily classroom activities were, she said she did not have any specific things she did with her students daily. She did not have a daily structure she followed with her students, and believed she needed to be more organized. Even though there was no daily activity schedule in her classroom, she did say she attempted to

do a bell ringer or some sort of activity each day but that she also liked to give the students some sort of reward at the end of class for working that day.

After being out of the classroom for so many years, she said she felt behind and she was worried about the state standardized tests that her students would be taking. She mentioned her concern about classroom management, something she said she had struggled with in the past. She also mentioned that she did not feel she was doing enough with her students. Ms. Brett was very open about her fears, and shared that she hoped participating in the unit would be beneficial for her and her students. She was teaching all of the high school and middle school English classes at her school, her daily schedule required her to complete six preps a day. Each of her classroom preps was for a different grade-level and number of students.

She was very excited about participating in the study, but she seemed apprehensive as well. When I asked her how she reacted to new ways of teaching, she said she felt that she always reacted positively and thought there was something she could learn. She thought that there was no way she could know everything and even though she was older than many of her colleagues, she knew she still had things about teaching to learn. She kept saying she wanted to give me good data and help with the research in any way she could. When I explained to her that all data are good, she seemed a bit perplexed, but she remained excited to experience using drama in her classroom in a new way.

**Participant 2 – Jo Lee.** Ms. Lee was a second-year teacher at General H.S. in the Texas hill country. She was also the cheerleading coach and married to one of the coaches at the school. She was entrenched in the school community, and enjoyed

building positive relationships with the students with whom she spent time. Ms. Lee did not begin her path to education in the traditional manner; she originally went to school to become a lawyer but decided that she did not want to spend all of her time in such a highly charged atmosphere. She began to explore the world of education and decided that was the right fit for her.

Her background in law may contribute to the type of teacher she became. She said she liked to give her students choices because in life people are surrounded by choices every day. She taught juniors, who did not have to take a state standardized test, and she tried to help them learn to think more analytically and explore options in their own educations. She also believed that if any students decided not to participate or produce work on any given day, then the students had made their choices to receive a zero for the day. She did not believe in pushing students who refused to participate, but she let them have the final say in their level of output during the class period.

Ms. Lee shared that she minored in theater in college and took a drama-in-the-classroom class where she watched an elementary math lesson using drama, but because the lessons were geared toward elementary students, she did not think she understood how they could be created for secondary students. She said she loved the idea of incorporating drama into the secondary classroom, but had no idea how to do more than to add some script writing activities and reading with accents and expression. She seemed excited about the few activities she had done with her students and said she wanted to do more with drama in the secondary classroom.

When I asked her about her favorite unit to teach, she quickly cited the short story unit she did with her juniors. She believed that the unit, in which students were able to

create different parts of the same story and build it as a class, gave them freedom and creativity to fully understand the structure of a story, move around the room, and come up with new and exciting ideas. She enjoyed the unit so much because the students enjoyed it and they were able to build on knowledge they already had from years before.

Ms. Lee was not a fan of social media sites such as Pinterest or other groups where thousands of teachers share ideas and build off of one another, she said it was just not who she was. However, she did share that she had a huge binder full of lessons, worksheets, and ideas from her student teaching that she would refer to when she wanted something to change a lesson or unit. She said she preferred simply going to a search engine online and typing in a search criterion to see what was available for free. If she found something she thought would work to add to or adapt a lesson she was planning, she would take it and make any adjustments needed for her classroom. She said that one day she hoped to be able to create her own lessons and units from start to finish, but for the time being, as a young teacher, she did not believe she had the knowledge or confidence to do so.

She was excited to try a new unit. She said repeatedly that as a second-year teacher, she believed she should try anything available to her. She had not yet finalized her teaching style and thought that exposure to all new styles would benefit her. She also thought that her participation in this study would work well in her classroom and with her current teaching style. She was excited to be given a unit full of drama activities and to see how they would work in her classroom.

She was a bit concerned about how she would manage those students who would refuse to participate. I attempted to explain that there would also be students who wanted

to refuse at first, but in my experience those students typically decided to join in when they saw the others having fun and the teacher participating as well. She seemed relieved to hear that the activities were designed for all levels of student participation. Her apprehension seemed to be more about how to manage the classroom than about the content of the unit itself.

**Participant 3 – Melanie Harper.** Ms. Harper was also a second-year teacher at General H.S., but this was her first year teaching only juniors. Her first year she taught freshmen and juniors and was excited to be able to focus on just one preparation level. She was also excited to no longer have the stress of the state standardized test or other teachers telling her what and how she had to teach her classes. She wanted to give her students active learning experiences, model activities for them, and help her students develop academic responsibility. She also worked hard to establish a strong classroom management style so her students knew what was expected of them and were not allowed to get out of line without facing a consequence.

She was excited to use drama in the classroom, but she had little to no experience. Like Ms. Lee, she had done some script writing during her *Crucible* (Miller, 1952/2003) unit but had not done anything else. Her experience with the script writing was also a mixed one. She said some of her students enjoyed it, but others struggled with it. She shared that she believed drama activities would be good for her classroom, especially role-playing activities to allow the students a chance to be metaphorically in the shoes of a character or author. As excited as she was about the possibilities of using drama in her classroom, she said she had not found a way, nor had she the time, to implement drama activities.

When I asked Ms. Harper about her classroom and her favorite lessons to teach, she was quick to share her experience with her poetry unit. She said when she was in high school she hated the poetry unit, and was still not a big poetry lover, but she loved the unit because of what she had seen it do for her students. She shared that she loved the unit because she saw her students start the way she had – disliking poetry -- but as they worked through the unit and she told students over and over that each person sees art and poetry differently, she saw them change their opinions. She incorporated art into the introduction of the unit to help students understand that there is rarely a right or wrong answer when it came to art. Her experience watching her students gain confidence in their own opinions helped her to build confidence in herself and the activity, and it became one of her favorite units to teach.

Like the other two participants, Ms. Harper also said she enjoyed learning new ways of teaching and building experiences in her classroom. She believed that every new thing she could learn for her classroom benefited her and her students, and each of those new strategies or activities made her into a better teacher. She still was not completely confident in herself when it came to designing lessons and often used the Internet and fellow teachers with experience in that grade level or content area as resources. She said she was not yet ready to rely on herself to design something for her students. She thought her lack of experience in the classroom limited her to designing only small lessons or activities.

When I asked Ms. Harper why she was willing to participate in the study, she said that partly she volunteered partly because she had done theater in high school and knew how beneficial that experience had been for her. She learned what it was like to see ideas



and experiences from a different perspective, and she believed that, for her, that was the best way to learn. She was excited to participate, but she was also a bit nervous because she was expected to teach a unit she had never taught and could not modify. She was initially worried about whether or not the unit would be good for her and her students, and that made her nervous. She was afraid that she may not be able to handle the situations that might arise from students having the freedom to voice their opinions and explore what it might be like to be a character from the novel.

Even though she was nervous, her excitement about the new learning experience was her stronger emotion. She was looking forward to exploring a new teaching style and having additional opportunities to interact with her students, something she valued highly.

### **Instrumentation**

I designed the unit and then asked for feedback from several people with experience in either high school education, theater, or both. Their feedback guided my editing and rewriting of any activity they felt was unclear. Three of those who evaluated the instrument were either current or former high school teachers who worked closely with secondary education students. Two of the evaluators worked in the theater world, one ran the theater education program at a community theater, and the other was studying theater at a public university. Their knowledge of students' needs at the secondary level and theater helped to determine the reliability of the original instrument.

I designed each activity to elicit thought and connections to the text and to allow teachers an opportunity to experience a new way to teach. Many of the activities (e.g.,

tableau, writing-in-role, and improvisation) were similar to those teachers and drama educators have used many times before with students of all ages.

In addition to each activity being designed based on what other educators have used in their classrooms, each activity was directly tied to one or more of the English III state standards, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Not only did the use of the TEKS help to make sure the unit was aligned appropriately to the state standards, were appropriate to the expectations of education set by the state and supported by the districts, and that teachers were covering the appropriate standards.

I also asked teachers to keep reflective journals throughout the course of the unit (See Appendix C). The purpose of the journals was for the teachers to consider their own self-efficacy and concerns about using this drama pedagogy unit. The journals were also used as data in the case study.

**Interview Protocols.** I intended to conduct interviews multiple times during the course of the six-week unit either in person or via video chat, dependent upon what was most convenient for the teacher participant. Interviews were designed in a semi-structured way (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I asked all participants the same questions (See Appendix B), but remained open to the possibility that additional questions could arise from their answers, and then I asked those questions organically.

The protocols were created to elicit the best information possible associated with the activities (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Protocols for each interview (e.g., before the unit, during the unit, and after the unit) were semi-structured and used to collect information and descriptions of the teachers' perceptions that may not occur naturally in

reflective journals. The protocols for the mid-unit and after unit interviews were never used because of a variety of complications discussed in Chapter 4 and 5.

The researcher audio recorded and transcribed each interview within a week of each meeting. She also kept notes for each interview. Notes were made as quickly as possible after the interview had taken place to ensure relevant description and initial assertions could be made. In addition to notes kept during all interviews, once transcriptions were complete additional notes were made before the coding process began. The researcher also kept a record of emails and text message communications between the participants and herself. Those emails and text messages were used to supplement the circumstances surrounding difficulties the teachers reported in their reflective journals.

**Teacher Journaling.** Teachers were expected to journal daily about their experiences from the day's activities. They then sent the entries to the researcher each Saturday during the unit to be coded and analyzed several times. Initially journals were coded as a way to identify general themes and concepts the teachers experienced. During all additional coding the researcher used the journals for new information, as well as a way to compare the changes the teachers experienced. The researcher also used journal entries when conducting cross case analysis.

The journals filled in descriptive data from the daily activities in the classroom because no researcher observations took place. The journal entries also led to a more complete understanding of how the teacher felt, adapted, and may have changed throughout the course of the curricular unit. The teacher received instructions on how to keep a reflective journal as well as guiding questions for each activity (See Appendix C).

Some studies have found that when teachers were asked to keep reflective journals they struggled to actually write reflectively unless they had guiding questions or tasks (Zeki, 2012; Liu & Zhang, 2014). For teachers to become comfortable, confident, and successful in the classroom, they need to reflect upon their actions and the lessons they teach (Lakshmi, 2014; Rahgozaran & Gholami, 2014). Using a reflective journal as a part of this multiple-case study helped the teachers to more clearly understand their perceptions. The unit was designed with the goal of teacher reflections in mind. Each activity had a section with questions for teachers to consider in her reflections as well as questions for them to use after each activity with her students (See Appendix C). The goal of the guiding questions was to help teachers focus their thoughts about the activity so they were truly being reflective. Some participants still struggled to write reflectively.

**Curricular Unit Design.** I designed the curricular unit based upon the activities I used in the classroom, as well as those other teachers and drama education experts used. Activities such as writing-in-role, tableau, or improvisation are often used in classrooms to elicit connections to and discussions of texts. Historically, improvisation has been used to help students interact with ideas and experiences they could not realistically experience (i.e., traveling to America aboard the *Mayflower*, fighting in the Civil War, marching with Martin Luther King, Jr., or being heckled by an angry mob) (Heathcote, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c, 1985d; Wagner, 1999).

### **Data Collection**

Before the curricular unit began, the researcher interviewed all participants to determine their levels of comfort with drama pedagogy as well as to determine a general description of them as teachers, their regular classroom behaviors, the cultures of their

classrooms, and the structures of their typical lessons. The researcher conducted all initial interviews in person and via video chat. All interviews were audio recorded to transcribe the interviews for correctness. Teachers were interviewed at a time and place convenient to them, in as relaxed and open a setting as possible, thereby avoiding interrupting the school day and increasing the potential for honest and complete answers (Birks & Mills, 2015). The researcher then transcribed all interviews.

The researcher attempted to collect data weekly. That allowed the researcher to more quickly identify themes as well as any changes that may have taken place in the teachers' perceptions of using the unit, all of which provided important data.

All responses from participants, either in writing or by verbal interview, were transcribed, organized by date and activity, and then coded using Saldana's (2009) coding descriptions as a guide. Themes emerged throughout the course of the curricular unit. As themes emerged, the researcher analyzed cases through cross case analysis (Creswell, 2013). A cross case analysis can help to focus themes and identify generalizability of teacher perceptions.

### **Data Analysis**

There is not one way to conduct data analysis, so this study used interview transcripts, researcher notes, emails and text message conversations, and teacher reflective journals as the source of data. All data were analyzed to determine whether the themes were generalizable for teachers and students at the secondary level.

The researcher analyzed the data as it was returned and kept a codebook of all information that may have led to themes. She ignored no data because it may have presented surprising outcomes.

## **Reliability and Validity**

The design of the curricular unit and questions used were the same for each classroom involved, thereby keeping the instrument reliable. The researcher approached all elements in the same way, and teachers received training video examples of how to facilitate each drama pedagogy activity. The access to examples was intended to help teachers with no experience using drama in their classrooms develop a schema for how the activity might play out.

The design of the curricular unit used activities that had been used by other researchers (i.e., role-play, writing-in-role, etc.) successfully with primary and middle level students, which contributed to the validity of their design. The curricular unit design for reflections and interviews were created using Cox & Cox's text *Your Opinion, Please! How to Build the Best Questionnaires in the Field of Education* (2008). The purpose of using different types of questioning tools was to avoid a response set in which the respondents might see a pattern in the questions and could respond in a similar way and/or not read each question fully (Cox & Cox, 2008).

In addition, to increase reliability and validity of the created curricular unit, I included only activities I had used, seen used, or have read about being used in secondary classrooms. This was intended to ensure that a field test of the drama pedagogy activities had been done and each activity would have been adapted accordingly. I also sent the unit to fellow researchers, drama teachers, theater education professors, and secondary English teachers to check for clarity of instructions, expectations, and relevance. I took their feedback into consideration and used it to make sure the unit was clear and appropriate before it was presented to the teacher participants.

**Ethical Considerations**

I recruited teachers through multiple steps. First, I contacted people in my own network and asked for names of principals they thought might be willing to allow the research in their schools for the 2015-2016 school year. I then sent a letter of request and brochure to principals who were open to the study. If the teachers did not wish to participate in the study, that school was taken off of the list.

When designing the curricular unit, I created activities with the intent of encouraging students to consider a different perspective, develop empathy towards characters, and elicit discussion within the classroom. Each activity had specific student goals in order to help the teacher be more aware of the emotions students might feel while participating in the drama pedagogy activities. All activities were ones that I had used in my own classroom, although in slightly different ways and with different texts (See the entire unit in Appendix A).

**Summary**

The above explanation of the method planned for this multiple-case study design addressed not only the instrumentation of an original drama pedagogy unit, but also the reasons behind using an exploratory case study design.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

Each of the participants received the curricular unit in the spring of 2016 and each completed the pre-unit interview, but none completed the mid-unit or post-unit interviews. That is where the similarities stop. Ms. Brett ended up using the entire semester for the unit because of a variety of health problems she and her family members encountered, but she still was unable to complete the unit. Ms. Lee and Ms. Harper were only allowed to complete two weeks' worth of the unit because one of their curriculum administrators deemed it inappropriate. The principals at both schools had been sent the entire unit in January of 2016 and there were no concerns shared with the researcher. More details about the truncation of the unit at General High School will be explained in the following chapters.

#### **Ms. Brett's Experience and Perceptions**

Ms. Brett seemed to struggle in the writing of her reflections, many times she would write what the students had shared in their own reflections or assignments and not write what she had experienced. At the beginning of the unit, I had to remind her multiple times that all data were important and to explain how she felt, good or bad, about an activity or the results in her classroom. She repeatedly had to be reminded to expand the explanations in her reflections because I was not observing her classroom.

She also made the choice to include students from all of her high school English classes, which seems to have caused her to struggle with the implementation of the unit itself. She had to rely upon the other teachers in the school allowing her to borrow the students during different class periods in order to increase the size of the student groups.



She wrote several times that teachers let her borrow the students but that she “struggled with having different students in different classes trying to complete these activities. Each student is at a different learning level and several students are in different classrooms, so reading the novel and understanding the text has been a real challenge.”

Ms. Brett wrote multiple times that she needed “to do a better job of explaining the activities to the students” and she “continue[d] to struggle...with explaining or setting up each activity for students.” She rarely reported feeling confident or comfortable with the unit, but her minimal reflections made it hard to determine the possibilities for her discomfort. She did write that she was uncomfortable not knowing what her students might say, that “sometimes our students can tend to be on the somewhat lazy side,” and “motivating them through these activities has been a challenge.” Since her implementation of the unit took her the entire spring semester, it is unclear how quickly she expected students to read the novel, nor is it clear how far apart the activities were spaced from the time students completed each chapter.

In the role-play activities, *Getting to Know You* and *Realizations on a Raft*, Ms. Brett wrote about her concerns with students “breaking character”, “relaying this understanding to their audience,” and “getting into their character quickly.” She appeared to have had expectations for her students as if they were not playing with the novel but actually performing it. She seemed to expect students to “delve (as) deeply ...into the inner workings of the novel,” yet she did not explain how she expected students to achieve that. She did not share any of her strategies for classroom reading or discussion of the novel.

Despite the struggles she wrote about within her classroom, she did begin to see changes in the students' understanding, motivation, and connections to the text the deeper in the unit she and her students progressed. She wrote that "students do seem to have a little better understanding with each new activity" and that "perhaps my frustration is not always warranted." By the time she and her students began *Gossipmongers – Huck's Disappearance*, she wrote that "students have made improvements on understanding the information," "the students are beginning to make connections with these characters that I had not previously seen," and "seeing their progression has been a real joy for me!" Regardless of the struggles she thought she and her students were facing, she did see her students make progress and she began to relax with the activities and reported enjoying the atmosphere they helped to create in her classroom.

### **Ms. Lee's Experience and Perceptions**

Ms. Lee had a very negative overall reaction to the two activities she completed with the unit. She received the unit in March 2016 during her pre-unit interview and at the time expressed not only great interest in seeing how drama could be used in her secondary classroom, but she also expressed her excitement to be involved. She did not speak with me about the unit again, until after she decided to go to one of her curriculum administrators with concerns about the unit. According to her reflective journal, she felt that asking students to interact with the events in the novel, specifically "playing gangs in a high school classroom" and "watching students act out a drunk and violent father," were inappropriate and too mature for her juniors.

After completing the first activity, *Building a Gang* (see Appendix A), she wrote in her reflection: "As I heard children talk about killing one another, I realized that there

is no way administration actually read the activities.” Ms. Lee felt that her students were unable to handle the mature and complex character issues in the novel. She did not feel that using drama pedagogy activities with her students was the best way for students to make connections or inferences, or to comprehend the novel.

Ms. Lee stated multiple times in her two journal reflections that her students used “vicious language” toward one another during the first activity and that she felt uncomfortable not knowing what her students were going to say. During the second activity, *Improvised Interview with Pap*, she wrote that she “frequently had to redirect the line of questioning to get away from questions about the type of liquor Pap drinks, how much it takes for Pap to get drunk, explain the satisfaction Pap receives from beating his child, etc.” She also frequently wrote that she believed there was a more appropriate way for students to understand the novel, yet she never offered additional suggestions or thoughts.

What she did not share was how she taught the reading of the novel. It is unclear how she discussed the events of the text with students before beginning the activities, nor is it clear how she set up each activity. She may have simply read the instructions to the students and let them begin without facilitating each activity. She did say that during the first activity, *Building a Gang*, she decided to play with one of the groups “to steer away from ideas of violence and gore.”

Despite her negative response and perception of the unit, she did write that her students interacted well in groups, had great energy, seemed engaged in the activity, and enjoyed watching each other perform. She also noted, after completing the second activity that: “students increased their understanding of the story and characters during

this activity. Most of the student[s] were engaged during the activity, although not everyone asked questions.” She also appeared to have no problem gaining student volunteers to play lead roles, “I only had one (out of five) class that did not have a Pap volunteer.”

As a researcher looking at the teacher reflection journal, I am concerned about the amount of negativity Ms. Lee felt; however, it is clear to me that her students were motivated while participating and that the goals of the two activities - to increase comprehension, connectivity, and inferencing skills with the novel – were reached at least in part. A more in-depth discussion of Ms. Lee’s experience and my interpretation of her journal can be found in Chapter 5.

### **Ms. Harper’s Experience and Perceptions**

Ms. Harper’s overall experience with the unit was incredibly positive and she expressed a great deal of excitement, even when she felt a bit uncomfortable. She, like Ms. Lee, also received the unit in March 2016 after her pre-unit interview and expressed excitement and interest about using the unit. Unlike Ms. Lee, Ms. Harper spoke with me several times about concerns she had of how to implement the activities. She also spoke with me to clarify how to complete the activities with her classes. Those discussions resulted in her ability to adapt the activities somewhat to her classroom and try facilitating them in different ways.

Despite such a positive experience and perception, Ms. Harper was not allowed to complete the unit because of Ms. Lee’s concerns. The two worked at the same school, and after Ms. Lee decided the unit was inappropriate and reported that to the curriculum administrator, the unit was pulled from Ms. Harper as well. Ms. Harper was angry,

irritated, and frustrated and felt devastated for her students. She also shared with me how easily she had been able to defend the use of the unit to the curriculum administrator, to no avail. Ms. Harper believed that her students “were excited about the novel and the things we were doing in class.”

Unlike Ms. Lee’s experience, Ms. Harper shared how she had introduced each of the activities with her students and none had “behaved in a violent or inappropriate manner” during any of the three activities she completed with her students. In her reflections, she shared how she had “discussions with [my] classes about what the word gang meant in the context used in the book.” Ms. Harper did not feel the activity *Building a Gang* was inappropriate and she saw her students realize “these were just young boys playing a game” and “most students agreed that the boys were just following the lead of Tom, who was trying to recreate things he had read in a book.” She helped her students see that the boys were not actually planning to enact any sort of real violence, but were trying to please Tom.

In addition to Ms. Harper’s positive experience with the activity *Building a Gang*, she also had a positive experience with the activity, *Improvised Interview with Pap*. While she and her students read the chapter, she asked them questions such as: “How is Pap behaving towards Huck?” “Why do you think he’s acting this way?” She wrote that those questions helped her students come up with answers and that they were frustrated because they had so little information about Pap, but she “could tell that they were really trying to figure out why Pap was treating his son so horribly.”

Ms. Harper also completed the activity, *Writing-in-Role – A Letter from Huck*, with permission from her curriculum administrator. Ms. Harper had to beg for that

permission, since the Friday before she had planned to complete the activity she had been told to stop the unit. Ms. Harper felt strongly that the unit was helping her students and even though she was typically a quiet rule-follower, she stood up for what she saw and was allowed to complete the activity although not the rest of the unit. See Chapter 5 for a more complete interpretation of her experience.

After reading her students' letters from Huck, she wrote: "I think that by asking the students to write from the perspective of Huck, it allows them to really make those connections with his character." She was seeing her students write "more than what the text was saying," and that excited her. She also saw her students make connections, through the first two activities, with Huck's choices. "In their letters, students expressed that perhaps Huck was deeply hurt and saddened by the treatment of his father, but he was too scared to express those feelings for fear of more beatings." That type of comprehension was new for many of her students and she thought the students were able to begin to understand Huck's relationship with Jim because of his lack of one with his father.

Ms. Harper expressed discomfort with the activities a couple of times, yet each of those times was in relation to the novel. With the activity, *Building a Gang*, she wrote that she felt "some apprehension about completing this lesson. I was worried about how students would interpret the word 'gang' and if they would understand how it was used in the book" and "I never know what I am going to get from my students." She used her uncertainty as a learning experience for her students and she built their prior knowledge about the usage of the word "gang" and how it had changed connotations since Mark Twain's time.

The only other time she reported feeling uncomfortable was while preparing for the activity *Improvised Interview with Pap*. She wrote that she had decided she wanted a student to play the role of Pap, but knew she had to choose a student who not only understood the novel, but would “also be able to provide answers from the mindset of Pap.” She was keenly aware that the subject of the chapter was Pap’s abusive treatment of Huck and that the subject could make some students, and herself, uncomfortable. She was worried about whether or not her students would “be mature enough to handle it,” but knew students would face many of those elements throughout the novel because, “there are so many topics in the book that are uncomfortable.” Her discomfort was not in how her students were reacting or handling the activities; her discomfort was with the novel itself – unlike Ms. Lee’s experience.

Throughout the three activities Ms. Harper was able to complete with her students, she reported many positive changes in her classroom dynamics. She “felt like they [students] were truly participants in their learning,” thought “students were completely engaged,” and “was definitely surprised at how well each class performed.”

After the first activity, she wrote:

“All students seemed to be very engaged in the lesson, so there really wasn’t anyone who was off task during the lesson. That was definitely something I appreciated. It is hard to find something that all students can relate to or are willing to participate in, so this was a nice experience.”

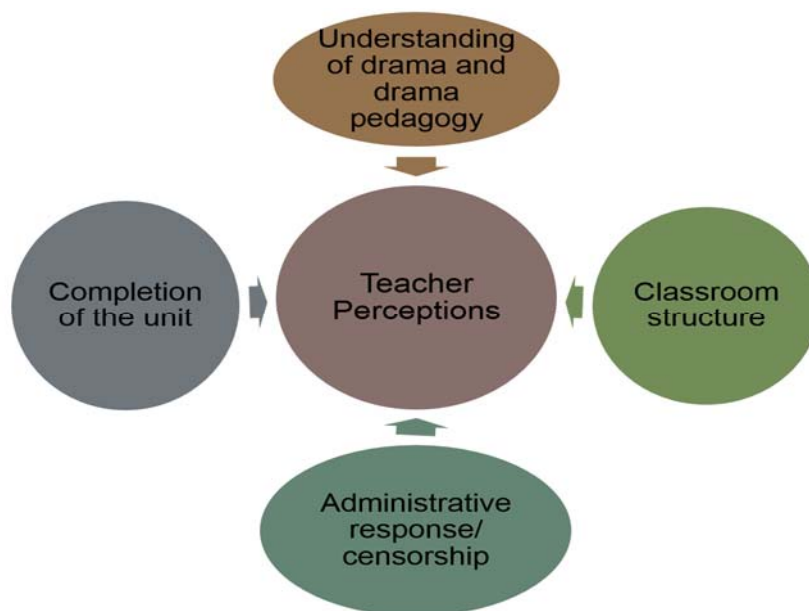
Ms. Harper repeatedly wrote that she saw her students making connections and inferences, and caring about the novel. For her, the experience was incredibly helpful and positive in her classroom. She also wrote that even though she was not allowed to

complete the unit, something she sincerely wanted to be allowed to do, that she planned to use more drama pedagogy activities in her classroom in the future.

### **External Factors that Affected the Teachers**

Several external factors were discovered during the course of the study that affected the teachers and their perceptions of the unit: 1) The teacher's understanding of drama and drama pedagogy affected the expectations they had for their students; 2) the classroom structure, expectations and management styles of each teacher affected how she felt the unit was working; 3) the administrative responses and censorship in one case limited what the teachers were allowed to do with the unit; 4) the communication the participants had with the researcher affected their understanding when they experienced confusion or concern; 5) and the differing levels of completion of the unit affected what teachers believed their students were able to achieve as well as their personal excitement about the unit. Figure 2 shows some of the external factors that may typically affect teacher perceptions of the use of drama pedagogy, whether the teacher is participating in a study or not.





*Figure 1.* Typical external factors that may affect teacher perceptions.

Ms. Brett wrote several times about her students breaking character or struggling to connect with their audiences. She seemed to believe that using drama pedagogy in her classroom was equivalent to asking students to perform a rehearsed piece of theater. As previously noted, without understanding the difference between drama for performance and drama pedagogy, she struggled allowing her students to work through the text at the beginning of unit.

Ms. Brett also expressed her concerns about being able to facilitate the activities effectively, but she also reported having little to no daily organizational structure in her classes. Her lack of daily routine may have caused her problems when attempting to implement a highly structured unit such as one filled with drama pedagogy.

Ms. Lee too wrote about her concerns with the language and focus on violence her students had during the two activities she completed. She did not share any details about how she structured her classroom during those activities or about how the daily

management of her classroom was handled. She may not have had a structured or consistent set of expectations for her students, which may have caused the problems and negative emotions she felt during the course of the activities.

None of the teachers completed the unit, for at least two of the teachers, Ms. Harper and Ms. Brett, the inability to complete the unit was primarily because of external factors. Ms. Harper experienced the loss of the unit after her partner teacher, Ms. Lee, complained to an administrator, something that revealed several unexpected outcomes. As previously noted, Ms. Brett was unable to complete the unit because of several instances throughout the semester of major illness within her family.

Ms. Harper believed that because of the concerns of Ms. Lee the unit was taken away from her. The administrator who made the final decision was quick to stop the use of the unit, for which she had given her consent as part of the administrative approval process. The administrator did speak with me about her decision, although the discussion was not one of mutual respect and communication. It was one in which I was instructed to meet with her before each activity so she could decide whether or not it was what she felt was appropriate for students or that the unit would be stopped immediately.

She firmly believed that the novel was wonderful, but that when asking students to participate in activities that they might then go home and talk about was dangerous. She told me that if parents only heard part of what their son or daughter was saying about the activity then there could be angry phone calls and lack of understanding. There had been no phone calls, so her concerns did not seem warranted.

After our meeting, the administrator did not speak with me again about the unit or what had occurred, nor did Ms. Lee. Ms. Harper did. She called me a few days later and

shared that she had been called down to the office again and essentially told not to be upset with Ms. Lee about losing the unit. In Ms. Harper's case, the administrator and emotions of another teacher became the external factors that affected the way she was able to work with the unit.

Only one teacher had consistent communication during the course of the study. Ms. Harper visited with me several times when she felt confused or concerned about how to facilitate an activity or hold a discussion with her students. She openly asked questions and reported feeling more comfortable with the sensitive topics within the activities. Neither Ms. Brett nor Ms. Lee communicated with the researcher, which may have been an additional reason why they had difficulties with the implementation of the unit in their classrooms.

Finally, since none of the teachers was able to complete the unit as a result of external factors, they each felt differently about what the use of drama pedagogy could do for their classrooms. Ms. Harper believed her students were making progress, and she was very excited about what drama pedagogy could do for them. Ms. Lee felt that the unit was inappropriate for her students and chose not to continue the use of the unit, but she told Ms. Harper she wanted to continue using drama activities in the classroom. Ms. Brett began to notice what she felt was growth in her students towards the end of the unit, but the gaps in her attendance may have made her participation in the study frustrating for her as well as for her students. When her participation in the unit went from a six- or nine-week period to an entire semester, she may have felt overwhelmed, unqualified, or discouraged.

## **Overarching Themes**

The following are themes that resulted from an analysis of the teachers' reflective journals. They have been broken down into the initial perceptions described in Chapter 1.

**Emotional reactions to the activities.** Whenever a teacher is asked to implement a new style of teaching, unit, or lesson into his or her classroom there is always an emotional reaction. The three participants in the study all experienced strong emotional reactions to the unit and the novel.

*Positive emotional reactions.* Ms. Brett and Ms. Harper were the only two who reported positive emotional reactions. They felt excited and encouraged when they saw their students making connections and inferences. They were surprised at what their students shared with them through role-play, and enjoyed the laughter and excitement from their students. They were also relieved when their students were able to participate in the difficult activities with maturity, empathy and reflective thought.

*Negative emotional reactions.* All three experienced some negative emotional reactions to the unit or the novel; however, Ms. Lee shared only negative emotions about her experience. She felt concerned about what her students would say, frustrated in the way her students participated, and nervous about the ideas from the novel upon which they chose to focus. She also felt strongly that asking students to interact with the adult themes of the novel was inappropriate. Ms. Harper and Ms. Brett also experienced some negative emotions about the activities, but they reacted as they did because of the uncomfortable topics within the novel and their uncertainty about how their students would respond. They based their negative emotions on preconceptions of what their students might do instead of what they actually did during the activities. Once the

activities were completed, Ms. Brett and Ms. Harper no longer felt negative emotions about the activities.

**Classroom value of the activities and perceived levels of student motivation.**

Classroom value can be built or pre-determined. Regardless of the origins of the classroom value for each participant, their perceptions of student responses and motivations helped to determine their reactions to the activities.

*Teacher Perceptions of Student Response.* Overwhelmingly the participants reported a belief that their students felt connected to the text. They wrote about the emotions they saw their students display when interviewing Pap or writing as Jim telling his history. Teachers also reported that the majority of each of their classes were engaged in the activities, even their students who rarely wanted to participate in any activity were asking questions and interacting within their role-play groups. That level of engagement also allowed teachers to believe that their students were interacting well together within their assigned groups and that the students were not only cooperating well but were also supporting each other through the entire length of each activity. From what the teachers wrote, the positive classroom dynamics and cooperation in each class increased and teachers thought that was important for their students and their learning.

*Teacher Perceptions of Student Growth.* Although this study was a qualitative study, the participants were asked to share what they saw happen with their students during the unit. The perceptions that stood out in the teacher reflections were: a.) students increased their understanding of the story and its characters, b.) the students were really trying to figure out a character's motivations, and c.) the students wanted to know more about the story and were ready to read more. Most of the teachers wrote repeatedly how

excited they were to see students making connections and asking questions about the characters and the story. The teachers were also excited that much of the classroom discussion and what the students discussed and wrote about in their reflections was not just a restating of the chapter or repeating of teacher comments. The teachers felt that, even if students only participated in a few of the activities, they were making educational growth.

**Changes in classroom dynamics or environmental makeup.** All of the participants experienced some sort of change in their classroom dynamics or environmental makeup. Ms. Brett combined all of her high school classes, which may have been a good idea in theory, but in reality might have caused some of the frustration she felt during several of the activities. She also reported seeing her students work together to help a new student catch up on what he had missed and be able to participate in the activities. She wrote that she was impressed with how patient several of her students were with the new student and that even though some of her students did not seem to understand the novel as well as others, those students were still willing to participate and do their best.

Ms. Lee had the fewest positive changes in class dynamics, but she did write about her attempt to play with the students to control what she felt was an out-of-control situation. Her students were willing and able to work well together and she wrote that they were almost all engaged during the activities, despite what she also said were activities filled with discussions and laughter about violence. She changed the dynamics of her classroom when she became a part of the activity and not just an observer.

Ms. Harper reported being impressed with how her students handled the difficult situations presented by Pap in the text as well as increased student interest and a willingness among her students to support one another and their ability to work through their frustrations with the text and its characters. She was excited her students had taken an interest in their own learning and reported they were incredibly upset when she had to tell them they could no longer complete the activities.

Through the use of the activities, the teachers and students in each class were forced to become more than just observers and their choice to participate together led to higher engagement, positive peer pressure, and increased student interest.

**Inspiration or motivation to explore similar activities in the future.** Each of the participants expressed their interest in using drama pedagogy activities again. Ms. Harper and Ms. Brett were both vocal about her interest and planned to incorporate more drama pedagogy activities, Ms. Lee did not directly tell me of her interest. I learned through Ms. Harper about Ms. Lee's interest in continuing to use drama pedagogy activities in her classroom. After the two were told they could no longer use the curricular unit for this study, Ms. Harper shared with me that Ms. Lee still wanted to use some drama activities with their students and since they planned their classes together they were searching for other drama activities they could use with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Ms. Harper shared several times how excited she had been using the activities and that she hoped to use part of her summer break to decide how to incorporate similar activities into the other units she taught throughout the school year. She had the most

success and was highly motivated to continue helping her classroom experience the same positive results she perceived with the designed unit.

Ms. Brett, too, shared her excitement at seeing students make connections she did not realize they were making. She seemed motivated to continue to incorporate drama pedagogy activities into her classroom, although on a much smaller scale so that she could more easily explain and involve those in her classroom.

### **Summary**

It is clear that even though none of the participants completed the unit as it was designed, they all experienced some of the intended goals. They all wrote about their students making stronger inferences, increasing text comprehension, increasing motivation to participate, and connecting to the characters. Whether the teacher had an overall positive or negative perception of the unit appears to have to do more with the novel choice, teacher preparation, and classroom management styles than the rationale for each activity. There will be a more in-depth discussion of those issues in Chapter 5.



## CHAPTER V

### Discussion and Implications

In the following chapter, you will read my interpretation of each teacher's reflective journals, emails, and discussions with me. Those discussions lead to implications for the use of drama pedagogy in the secondary classroom as well as suggestions for future research.

#### **Ms. Brett**

When I initially interviewed Ms. Brett, she told me how she often would ramble on about a topic when speaking with peers and how excited she was to try something new in her classroom. She shared that she hoped she could become a stronger teacher for her students through the experience. Her reflective journal did not show her making any growth as a teacher, instead it showed her to be somewhat negative about her students, have a lack of classroom structure, and unable to fully reflect on her own thoughts about the activities.

Perhaps she struggled when reporting her perceptions because she did not fully understand her role as a participant: to write all of her feelings about the experience with the activities in the classroom. At the beginning of the unit, which she started in January 2016, she would often send emails saying things such as, "we are all enjoying this unit, so hopefully we'll give you some good feedback and data." Or after telling the students it was my research, something I had explicitly asked her not to do: "I just felt that they might participate better if they knew it was you; like it might mean more to them to know it was you." I had taught many of the students she was currently teaching and I did not want their reactions to the unit and interactions with Ms. Brett to potentially be affected

by my past with those students. Those statements and her apparent confusion about what to write in her reflective journal have caused me to believe that she thought she was not supposed to write about *her* perceptions, but those of the students. Several times she attempted to send me student reflections and I had to contact her to tell her that I could not use them since they were not the focus of this study. She would also write student responses or examples of their writing in her own reflections, making several of her reflections almost useless.

In addition to her apparent confusion of how to participate in the research, she was also very uncommunicative. She was expected to send in, via email, her reflections for each week of the unit, yet her emails were spread apart by weeks or months. I found myself having to contact her multiple times via text and phone call before she would respond and tell me what she had completed and when I could expect her reflections. Unfortunately, I had to contact her assistant principal several times and ask for some help in communicating the need for a response. Once I would finally receive a response, Ms. Brett would tell me she had been in the hospital with one of her parents or had herself been sick.

Because of her spread-out communication and work with the unit, it is unclear how connected her responses were to the actual completion of the activity in her classroom. Her reflections may have been limited because she did not write them as quickly as was requested and recommended. It is likely she did not remember some of the things she felt or noticed during the activity because she wrote the reflection so much later. She also appeared either to have skipped some of the activities or not written

reflections for them, because she sent reflections in an order different from how they were designed to be completed in the curricular unit.

Despite her poor communication and limited explanation in her reflections, Ms. Brett went from struggling to implement the unit to seeing her students grow in their understanding, cooperation, and connectivity to the text. In the beginning, she did not appear to have much confidence in her classroom management and since she did not have any specific classroom structure policies in place, moving from a randomized day to a highly structured unit most likely caused her confusion, frustration, and negative responses from students who had not had any consistent classroom design. Her choice to combine her classes, even though students were not all in the same grade or class period, may also have contributed to the struggles she felt. It most likely made the class she began with, freshman, feel as though they could not handle the activities on their own and may have caused them to become shy around the older students.

In her last reflections she reported feeling as though her students had made progress, progress that she had not previously noticed. That may be because she went from facilitating the activities as if they were a rehearsed performance, in which students were expected to stay in character, relate to their audience, and show emotion, to allowing herself and the students to play with the activities. The turn from apparent performance expectation to participating and understanding seemed to happen after the second writing-in-role activity, *Dreamweaving*. She wrote that she “realized that most students can relate to Huck as a character and they can easily become him when needed” and that she saw a change in several of her students’ writing which excited her: “Perhaps that is one of the purposes of these activities!” She also began to find joy in the growth of

her students and shared that one of her students “wrote with such conviction and passion that it was hard to think that this was just fantasy and that she was writing as a dream.”

When she stopped expecting her students to immediately be able to think deeply about the text or instantaneously know how to understand the characters and their motivations and she allowed her students to grow with each activity and build their schemata throughout the novel, she saw the value of the unit and began to enjoy it more. She stopped writing about how she struggled to explain the activities, how difficult students were to motivate, how students often got off track, or how they all failed because the outcome was “not quite what I was hoping for as a teacher.” When she relaxed with the unit and understood that each activity was designed as a stepping-stone to understanding, she was able to actually witness what her students were doing and her perceptions of the unit changed from a lack of confidence and fear in *doing it wrong* to a joy in watching her students grow – no matter how limited that growth might have been.

### **Ms. Lee**

Ms. Lee had, by far, the most negative reaction to the unit. Her reactions appear to have been primarily emotional on her part, perhaps because she either did not fully understand how to teach the novel and unit together, or perhaps because her decision to allow students to choose whether or not they participated in the daily classroom activities had not allowed her the opportunity to build a strong and appropriate classroom community. In addition to what I suspect is a weak classroom community, Ms. Lee did not seek clarification or support from me about the unit. I do not know if that choice suggests whether she felt secure in the unit before beginning it or she did not read the unit until she began to implement it. It is hard to believe that if she had read the unit before

she began it she would not have experienced some of the same negative reactions about which she wrote. Most teachers I have worked with are aware immediately upon reading something that it causes them discomfort and either seek clarification or work to adapt the activity.

Ms. Lee did not appear to have any discomfort until she took the unit to her curriculum administrator. Of course, if she did have any discomfort she did not share it with me. She did not actually speak to me about any of her concerns until after her administrator had contacted me to set up a meeting, and even then it was more of a defensive statement. She told me, essentially in passing one another in the hall, that she would not apologize for taking it to her administrator, did not think many of the activities were appropriate, and that she was surprised none of her parents had called to complain. When I responded that she did not need to explain her feelings to me, simply write them in the reflection, she kept trying to explain herself. Her defensive reaction and need to explain herself to me struck me as odd; perhaps she realized she had not dealt with the situation in a professional manner or she wanted me to agree with her about her decisions. Regardless of why she was defensive, it seemed to have come from nowhere since we had not spoken about the unit since her initial interview.

According to her reflections, the classroom dynamics were primarily negative. She reported having to redirect students many times in an attempt to keep them from making inappropriate remarks or focusing on “the type of liquor Pap drinks, how much it takes for Pap to get drunk, explain the satisfaction Pap receives from beating his child, etc.” Her reflections indicated only one truly positive classroom dynamic, or one that should have been positive. During the *Building a Gang* activity, after the first group, she

decided to play with the students as the leader of the gang and “tried to steer away from ideas of violence and gore.” It does not appear that her playing with the students did anything to change the direction of their conversation. Nor does it appear that she actually used those instances to lead classroom discussion about the purpose of the violence, gore, abuse, and alcoholism written into the novel.

I suspect that she either did not know how to lead those conversations or did not fully understand the overall purpose of the unit as a whole because she wrote: “I attempted to help them make that comedic connection to Twain and the gang scene. Some understood, and some were still distracted by the vicious language.” It does not appear that Ms. Lee saw how the unit was designed to fit together with the novel and Twain’s building of character motivations or the deeper meaning behind the text as a whole.

In direct contrast with Ms. Lee’s discomfort with the unit, she reported seeing her students make better inferences and connections with the novel. She wrote that “students seemed engaged in the activity, and they enjoyed watching other groups perform.” She also shared in her reflections that she felt “students increased their understanding of the story and characters during this activity.” Regardless of her negative feelings about the unit, which I suspect were related to her classroom management and text discussions, her students were, according to Ms. Lee, making connections, highly engaged, and making inferences about the novel and its characters.

Ms. Lee’s decision to take her concerns to her curriculum administrator led to issues that I had not previously considered. Those issues will be discussed later in the

chapter and are serious issues for all researchers and teachers implementing into her classroom new ways of teaching.

### **Ms. Harper**

Ms. Harper felt cheated out of the chance to finish what she felt was a highly engaging unit. When Ms. Lee complained to her curriculum administrator, Ms. Harper was called to the office and asked to explain her thoughts and reactions to the unit. Ms. Harper then called me to tell me what happened. It was not until three days later that I received any sort of communication from the administrator or Ms. Lee.

Ms. Harper shared with me on the phone that day how she had easily explained how she was teaching the same activities to her students and seeing wonderful things in her classroom. Ms. Harper was not typically a teacher who liked to make waves with her administrators or peer teachers, she preferred to stay under the administrative radar. That day, however, she was, without hesitation or discomfort, not only defending the unit but also realizing that her students were enjoying the unit so much that she became heartbroken and worried about how she would tell them they could no longer use it. She shared with me that she felt her students were being cheated and she did not know how she would find something as engaging for them to use with the novel.

Ms. Harper's anger, frustration, and disappointment at losing the unit was not just because something she and her students were enjoying was being taken from them, it was also because she saw her students growing in their understanding, connectivity, and excitement for the novel. In the three activities she was allowed to complete, she pleaded to be allowed to complete *Writing-in-Role – A Letter from Huck* activity - she saw her students become passionate about Huck and his life. She shared that her students were

angry about the way Pap treated Huck, and when they got to question Pap during the improvised interview, her students told her that “it was nice to have a real person in front of them playing the part of a character, sort of bringing the character to life for them.”

She too was uncomfortable with some of the content in the unit, but unlike Ms. Lee, Ms. Harper used that discomfort as a teaching tool. She realized that her discomfort was not entirely because she did not know what students might say during the activities, but that it was also caused by the novel. She wrote several times that there were many uncomfortable ideas, situations, and relationships in the novel, but she felt it was important to explore those topics in order to understand the novel completely. She did not view the novel as just a piece of comedy Twain wrote to entertain the masses, but recognized the overall connection between each activity of the unit and the themes and overall meaning of the novel.

During her preparation for the *Building a Gang* activity, Ms. Harper led a discussion with her students about the meaning of the word “gang” and how it has changed since Twain’s time. She had been apprehensive about the activity after reading it and during her preparation, but she “had discussions about what it meant for these boys to be in a gang, and whether or not students actually believed that the boys would murder and rob people.” Ms. Harper took the actions from the boys in the novel and compared them to the actions of modern day gangs and through discussion, her classroom community, and classroom management helped students realize that the boys were simply playing pretend in an attempt to please Tom, the coolest kid in their world. Her discussions helped her students see that the boys were simply children and wanted to please those they felt had more power, imagination, or adventure than themselves.



Before completing the *Improvised Interview for Pap*, she made sure to ask students questions about Pap's behavior and decisions. She was deliberately setting up her students to think about the character and not just the acts of abuse and drunkenness Pap constantly created. Her discussions during reading helped her students to think of the questions they wanted to ask Pap. It also helped Ms. Harper to see her students make inferences, even though they "had limited information on Pap and that frustrated them, but that did not stop them from piecing together information and making assumptions."

Ms. Harper's use of classroom discussion while reading the novel, openness with her students about the uncomfortable elements in the novel, trust within her classroom community, and strong classroom management allowed her to build upon what her students already knew and watch her students' knowledge of the text grow (she did not report any of her students using inappropriate or violent language or behavior). She felt that the use of drama pedagogy was a valuable one in her classroom that helped her "students make connections with the text that they might otherwise miss." She also shared how several of her students told her they felt they had achieved a better understanding of the novel and could actually retain the information and lessons from the text because of their participation in the activities.

In Ms. Harper's final reflection, she shared that she did not believe her curricular administrator understood the book. She also thought that if the administrator had observed her students in action during one of the activities or "really looked at what we were asking students to do" that administrator might have understood the benefits of the activities. In conversations after the unit was pulled from her classroom, she shared with me several times her concerns about the administrator's textual knowledge. Ms. Harper

believed if her administrator had a deep understanding of the novel then she would not have had an issue with the unit – all of the activities, lines, and situations in the unit were directly related to or taken from the novel. Ms. Harper believed that perhaps there was an underlying problem with the teaching of the novel that her administrator was not willing to admit. Before ever agreeing to participate in the research, Ms. Harper had asked about the appropriateness of the novel with junior level students and had been told by the same administrator that the novel could easily be defended.

It saddened me to watch Ms. Harper find a unit she embraced so wholeheartedly and with which she had such positive success in her classroom be wrenched from her hands because of another teacher. I was excited to learn that she had been inspired by the few activities she had been allowed to complete and wrote that she “will be able to use some of these activities next year when teaching different units.” Clearly her perceptions of using drama pedagogy in her secondary classroom were overall positive and showed her a way to increase engagement and student understanding in her classroom.

### **Implications for Teachers**

In any research outcome, there is never one way that will work for all teachers; however, the above findings and discussion lead me to believe that teachers who use drama pedagogy in their classrooms can help their students to become more engaged and increase their connectivity and understanding of the novels they are reading. That said, teachers must also have a firm grasp of classroom management and community. They cannot simply include a new style of teaching without building their own understanding of it first.

As in all things, teachers who incorporate any amount of drama pedagogy into their classrooms cannot do it blindly. The activities in drama pedagogy are not meant to stand on their own; they are intended to work with the classroom discussions and teaching of the content. If teachers implement any new strategies or activities without properly teaching the content and helping students see how the two are connected, they will most likely have a negative experience.

It is the responsibility of all teachers to understand the novels they teach, the strategies they use, and the reality of not having complete control over what teenagers will say or do in the classroom. Teachers must build strong classroom communities and maintain solid classroom management so that students have the freedom to be themselves and express their thoughts while still behaving appropriately for the classroom setting. When teachers have been responsible in their classrooms, there should be little reason for administrators to feel the need to censor the activities in the classroom. After all, teachers are expected to be the experts in their classrooms, especially in content and how to achieve an end goal, but sometimes external factors that can change the course of action for educators.

The following sections are a further discussion of two of the major external factors that affected the perceptions of the teachers involved in the study.

**Administrative Censorship.** At General High School, one administrator ended up with all the power. She decided whether or not to allow the continuation of the unit, a unit she had given permission to use with the two 11th-grade teachers. The day we met she came to me to tell me how the research would continue at the school. When I informed her that the unit would not be changed, but the teachers could choose to stop

using it, she essentially slammed her copy of the unit closed and told me it was not appropriate for her school. The following implications are based upon what I witnessed during the meeting. They do not mean to suggest that the administrator did not have a different perspective of the unit or its proposed outcomes.

Before her attempt to control the content of the unit, she told me that had she ever used the same activities at her old school she would have been fired, as it was unacceptable to ask white and Hispanic students to participate in blackface (no activity was close to asking students to participate in blackface; see Appendix A), and that asking students to do performance without training was ridiculous. She did not share her understanding of drama pedagogy, but several of her statements suggested she believed the unit was more about rehearsed performance than the opportunity to learn through dramatic activities. She did not appear to have any idea how the unit and the novel fit together; she may not have actually been given the unit when it was sent to the principal in January of 2016. Nor is it clear whether or not she understood the state standards requiring junior English students to “analyze the way in which the theme or meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on the human condition” and “infer word meaning through the identification and analysis of analogies and other word relationships” and how those fit into several of the activities (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, 2008, 110.33).

That became especially clear when I reminded her that each activity and all the parts of the activities came directly from the novel, at which point she told me that she had no problem with the novel. It is unclear to me how she could have no problem with the themes and events in the novel but felt asking students to write from Jim’s

perspective in the novel was asking students to do blackface. Her reasoning behind that complaint was that students would have no way of knowing how Jim felt, so it was inappropriate to ask them to write as a slave from the pre-Civil War South. I assured her that if the novel was being read and discussed in the classrooms, the students would certainly know Jim well enough to write as he would. I also attempted to explain that the students were not being asked to write from the sole perspective of a slave, but to think as Jim, one of the main characters in the novel who plays an integral part in the overall theme of the novel and Huck's growth as a person. Additionally, one of the state standards in Texas that supported the activity was that junior students are expected to be able to analyze characters and their motivations through the use of language (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, 2008, 110.33).

She seemed incredibly angry about the activities in which students, or the teacher, were asked to role-play characters, write as the characters, or create backgrounds for the characters in the novel. It is worth noting that she had been a math teacher before becoming a curriculum administrator, so she may not have had a deep understanding of how the state standards for ELA can be and are regularly interpreted and implemented in high school classrooms across the state of Texas.

The students reading the novel and participating were not elementary or middle school students, but juniors in high school – many of whom had their own children, were addicted to drugs, or lived in severe poverty. Those students are the ones who so often become lost in the modern day school system. When she, as the curriculum administrator, decided that the unit was inappropriate for the students of General High School, she told

me there were better ways to help students understand the themes of the novel but did not offer any suggestions.

It is unlikely that her reaction to this unit, which asks students to participate with a novel and not just read a novel to answer comprehension questions is a unique one.

Teachers all over the state must be aware of the administrators at their school and how those administrators may respond to new ways of teaching, drawing attention to difficult themes within canon texts, and the unspoken amounts of censorship.

**Classroom Management.** Teachers who do not have strong classroom management or lack confidence, are usually the ones the most concerned about not knowing what their students may say or do in activities such as drama pedagogy. Those activities are designed to give students freedom of thought and choice, and it can be scary for teachers to give up so much control of their classroom; however, I would suggest they may not have true control of their classrooms if the fear exists in the first place.

A teacher who has strong classroom management has built a community inside the walls of the room and has taught his or her students the expectations for behavior, response, and cooperation. Secondary teachers may need stronger classroom management skills than those in elementary school. In fact, I am inclined to think that strong management skills are a requirement in secondary school. Students in secondary classrooms are at an age when they want to push the boundaries, be allowed to refuse to work, and, for some, see if they can take over the classroom for the fun of it.

The teachers who struggled with the unit did not appear to have strong classroom management skills, nor did they appear to have great confidence in their ability to engage all students appropriately. I do not know how they set up their classrooms at the

beginning of the year, but because of some of the language and behavior that was reported by at least two participants, it is clear to me that the students were allowed to make inappropriate remarks that went unchecked prior to the institution of the unit. Had those students been consistently trained how to respond to difficult situations the teachers may not have had such seemingly out-of-control situations.

Additionally, the inappropriate language and focus on abuse and alcohol reported by at least one participant may not have been an issue in the classroom if she had spent time with her students discussing the novel and exploring the characters. It is possible that she did not spend any time discussing the novel before presenting the students with the activity and saying “go.” Without proper management of expectations for students, a teacher can expect his or her students, especially at the secondary level, to push the boundaries simply to see what they can get away with and how or when the teacher will react. Those instances point to poor classroom management skills.

After reading the reflections of the participants, I believe that any teacher who decides to implement drama pedagogy in his or her classroom must first evaluate the effectiveness of his or her classroom management. Those same teachers must also be honest with themselves about whether or not they are ready, willing, or able to allow students the opportunities to honestly explore ideas and events within a text, especially if the text deals with uncomfortable topics.

### **Implications for the Classroom**

It is my belief, despite the negative reaction of Ms. Lee, that drama pedagogy can be a useful tool and engaging strategy to use with secondary students. Ms. Harper and Ms. Brett both saw many positive outcomes for their students after participating in the

unit. Even Ms. Lee reported seeing her students make gains in comprehension and inferencing during the two activities she completed.

Like all strategies, activities, or lessons, drama pedagogy will not work every time for every teacher with every text, but it can help make a difference, especially for those learners who struggle to make connections. Ms. Harper wrote several times that her struggling students told her how much the activities helped them understand the novel and characters better and even how those activities had helped them to remember what had already happened in the novel.

In addition to positive learning experiences, the teachers also saw their students work more cooperatively and become more engaged with one another during the activities. I believe drama pedagogy can help classrooms where students may be standoffish toward one another to build vulnerable and trusting relationships with one another in the classroom. After all, if students refuse to communicate with one another, how will they ever learn how to learn from those around them? It is unlikely that they will and more likely that the teacher in charge will have numerous behavior problems to deal with on a daily basis. Learning cannot take place in a room fraught with problems.

**Student Engagement.** Each teacher who used the unit reported high classroom engagement. Students were excited to be up and moving in the classroom, and they enjoyed being able to have their own voices. Very few secondary students actually enjoy reading silently and then answering a series of comprehension questions. Using drama pedagogy activities in the classroom can help break up the monotony of the worksheet-filled day, and from what Ms. Harper saw, it can also help students develop empathy



toward characters, push themselves through frustrations, and maintain the drive to find out more about the story than just what the words on the page say.

Student engagement is key in all classrooms, and in secondary classrooms if students are not engaged in the lesson teachers can expect their students to retain nothing. School is about learning the content, but it is also about helping students discover how to think for themselves, develop empathy, and make their own decisions about the content, especially in ELA.

**Classroom Value.** As I read through each participant's set of reflections and looked for themes and ideas that stood out to me, I found myself identifying statements that led to either teacher-defined classroom value or value created by the students and teacher while participating in the activities. In two of the three classrooms, the teachers reported a variety of predetermined or defined classroom values:

- Students did not delve as deeply into thought as the teacher expected.
- The text had adult themes, and the teachers were not sure students could handle them appropriately.
- Teachers had to redirect students who were not participating the way the teacher felt was acceptable.
- The teacher made decisions for the students about who would play what role.
- Teachers were afraid of what their students would say.

Those predetermined, teacher-defined classroom values may have worked against the teachers and their experience of teaching in a style they had never worked with before. When teachers set multiple defined values and also decide to try a new technique, the

teachers do not often feel comfortable enough to allow the learning and activities to happen organically – especially if there were already classroom management problems.

In all classrooms, the teachers reported many examples of class-created value that changed the dynamics in a primarily positive way. Some of the created value the teachers wrote about were:

- students offered encouragement to one another when it was time to share
- students expressed anger and emotion toward a character and not the text or assignment
- the study created an exciting and engaging atmosphere in the classroom
- students began to analyze characters without being instructed to analyze
- there was shared laughter in the classroom
- shy students wanted to participate
- students cared about the text and paid closer attention during the reading so they could be successful in the next activity

The created value was one of the most important findings from the research. Too many times students in secondary school struggle through a text because they are required to read it and pass a test. In this situation the students wanted to pay attention to the novel and cared about it because they wanted to play with it and get to know the story and characters more. What the teachers saw, at least for two of them, was unique and exciting; the interaction, excitement, and cooperation from their students during activities was not something they had seen happen in their classrooms before participating in the curricular unit.

## **Future Research**

I believe that there is value to using drama pedagogy with secondary students, especially as more and more of those students seem to disconnect with literature and reading. In the future, I recommend a second study using the same unit, but with more than three teachers. The small sample size and lack of completion of the unit in this study do not allow for any specific generalization to be formed, but I believe with additional research done using the same curricular unit that similar positive outcomes may occur.

A third study focusing on the student perceptions of the unit should also be conducted, although that study would require a larger research team and the use of only one school to increase the likelihood of the activities being taught to all students with similar discussions and questions asked during the reading.

A fourth study focusing on different student populations would also be valuable. Students in all parts of the world have different values and experiences, I believe hearing from their voices would contribute not only to the body of research related to drama pedagogy, but also to the body of research related to how students around the world learn.

It is important to conduct more research on the use of drama pedagogy activities in the secondary classroom since teachers are constantly seeking new and exciting ways to motivate their students and help them connect intrinsically with the content.

## **Final Thoughts**

Although the participants in the research did not finish the unit as I had hoped, their data were valuable. Their responses confirmed much of what I had seen in my own classroom, and identified the need for more specific training for teachers who implement

drama pedagogy without having a background in theater education. The results are also exciting because I believe they indicate the importance of future research using drama pedagogy at the secondary level.

My experience with the curriculum administrator was difficult and it has made me realize that many teachers may not be willing to try new things in their classrooms for fear of losing those new strategies or lessons. Teachers should be allowed to teach the best way they know how, there should not be an administrator, of any type, telling educators how to educate. Teachers are in the classrooms with students and know what is best for their students, and they should not have to change their best practices because of a possible complaint from a parent. Teachers have had to handle complaints from parents since public education began and nothing is going to change that reality. Why should students have to suffer and lose out on a potentially extraordinary way of learning because of someone else's fear?

Additionally, perhaps schools need to step back and take a serious look at the texts they are requiring students to read. If a student is to honestly read, reflect upon, and consider texts like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, they need to be allowed to look at it as Twain intended. He did not intend it to be a work of comedy, although there are many instances of humor throughout the novel. He intended it to be a reflection, and ultimately discussion, of the realities in his time, the cruelty of man, the state of human nature, and the changes that children could make in the future if they were only allowed to do so.

It is my belief that drama pedagogy can help teachers build bridges with students who struggle in English classes, break down barriers between classic texts and today's

short attention span generation, give teachers more freedom in how to work through a text in their classroom, and help to make school more exciting for everyone in the classroom. I am confident that the more research, experimentation, and use of drama pedagogy in secondary classrooms will make a difference in a system that is bogged down with standardized testing, college preparation, and an overabundance of administrative duties and paperwork for teachers. Drama pedagogy may not be the magic bullet so many educators crave, but it can help make a difference for everyone involved.

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## APPENDIX A

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

Drama Pedagogy Unit

Designed by Sara J. Ranzau 2015

### Unit Timeline

The following timeline is a breakdown of suggested time, some activities may need more time to complete, use the time that is appropriate for your students. On days scheduled as reading days, lead that instruction as you would any other novel. Some chapters are very short, so activities may be able to begin early.

Day 1 – Read Chapters 1-2

Day 2 – Building a Gang Role-play

Day 3 – Read Chapters 3 – 5

Day 4 – Improvised Interview – Interviewing Pap

Day 5 – Read Chapters 6-7

Day 6 – Writing-in-Role – A Letter from Huck

Day 7 – Read Chapters 8-10

Day 8-9 - Role-play – Getting to Know You

Day 10 – Read Chapter 11

Day 11 – Adapted Tableau – Gossipmongers

Day 12-13 - Read Chapters 12 – 17

Day 14 – 15 – Role-play – Realizations upon a Raft

Day 16 – Read Chapter 18

Day 17 – Writing-in-Role – Dreamweaving

Day 18 – Read Chapters 19 – 20

Day 19 – 20 – Role-play – Selling Your Story OR Telling Your Story

Day 21 – Read Chapters 21 – 24

Day 22 – Improvised Interview – Interviewing about the Wilks’ world

Day 23-24 - Read Chapters 25 – 31

Day 25-26 – Soliloquy – Good Angel/Bad Angel

Day 27 – Read Chapters 32 – 35

Day 28 – Writing-in-Role – The Cruelty of Man

Day 29 – Read Chapters 36 – 39

Day 30 – Improvised Interviews – Interviewing Tom, Huck, and Jim

Day 31 – Read Chapters 40 – 41

Day 32 – Adapted Tableau – Gossipmongers

Day 33 – Finish Novel

Day 34 – Test

Rubrics for the Writing-in-Role activities and soliloquy and monologue activities are provided at the end of this unit. You may use any additional quiz you feel is necessary.

Also, use whatever test is available to you.

## Guiding Standards

The following standards are based on the English III set of TEKS for Texas high school students.

(1) Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to:

(B) analyze textual context (within a sentence and in larger sections of text) to draw conclusions about the nuance in word meanings;

(2) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Theme and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

(A) analyze the way in which the theme or meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on the human condition;

(B) relate the characters and text structures of mythic, traditional, and classical literature to 20th and 21st century American novels, plays, or films.

(5) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

(A) evaluate how different literary elements (e.g., figurative language, point of view) shape the author's portrayal of the plot and setting in works of fiction;

(B) analyze the internal and external development of characters through a range of

literary devices;

(C) analyze the impact of narration when the narrator's point of view shifts from one character to another.

(8) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze how the style, tone, and diction of a text advance the author's purpose and perspective or stance.

(13) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

(A) plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea.

(14) Writing/Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas. Students are responsible for at least two forms of literary writing. Students are expected to:

(C) write a script with an explicit or implicit theme, using a variety of literary techniques.

(24) Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:

(A) listen responsively to a speaker by framing inquiries that reflect an understanding of the content and by identifying the positions taken and the evidence in support of those positions; and

(B) evaluate the clarity and coherence of a speaker's message and critique the impact of a speaker's diction and syntax on an audience.

(25) Listening and Speaking/Speaking. Students speak clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to give a formal presentation that exhibits a logical structure, smooth transitions, accurate evidence, well-chosen details, and rhetorical devices, and that employs eye contact, speaking rate (e.g., pauses for effect), volume, enunciation, purposeful gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively.

(26) Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, offering ideas or judgments that are purposeful in moving the team towards goals, asking relevant and insightful questions, tolerating a range of positions and ambiguity in decision-making, and evaluating the work of the group based on agreed-upon criteria.



### Supporting Theory and Rationale

Since the beginning of humanity, people have used drama and performance to learn how to not only adapt to the world, but also teach others new ways to perform tasks (Buckland, 2012). The idea of using drama in the classroom, be it elementary, secondary, or post-secondary is not a new one. Education reformers as far back as the 1800s suggested increasing drama to help students become well-rounded (Goldstein, 2014). The goal of drama in education is not a final, polished performance. Rather, it is to learn through the process and work on developing the techniques of empathy, critical thinking, and adaptation (Wagner, 1999). Dorothy Heathcote, often thought of as the mother of drama in education, dreamt of helping students from all backgrounds develop the desire to learn and understand lives, events, and details those students would never actually experience (Wagner, 1999).

One way for teachers to use play in the classroom is to add drama activities, those activities challenge students to rethink their perceptions about a situation and gives them a safe place to explore those perceptions (Heathcote, 1985a; Bruner, 1983; Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006). As students' experiences with the drama activities become more intense, they begin to work "in a different dimension of communication" (Heathcote, 1985a) and learn they are able to not only connect to an abstract or distant idea, but also realize they care about what they are learning (Huizinga, 1950; Bruner, 1983; Baldwin & Fleming, 2003). The students begin to see the value in learning and move into a new level of learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

## Operational Definitions

The following definitions are from [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

Aside - a part of an actor's lines supposedly not heard by others on the stage and intended only for the audience.

Monologue - a prolonged talk or discourse by a single speaker, especially one dominating or monopolizing a conversation.

Role-play - to assume the attitudes, actions, and discourse of (another), especially in a make-believe situation in an effort to understand a differing point of view or social interaction.

Soliloquy - the act of talking while or as if alone.

Tableau - a picturesque grouping of persons or objects; a striking scene; a representation of a picture, statue, scene, etc., by one or more persons suitably costumed and posed.

Activities:

One Line – To play this game, students need to be in groups of three. In each group, one person may speak anything they like. The other two people need to draw a specific line from a container; they may then only say the line they have drawn in response to anything else that is said. Once the three have drawn their lines and heard the rules of the game, explain the situation they are to role-play.

Writing-in-Role – A form of role-play where one writes as if the character he or she is portraying, as a way to expand the understanding of a character

## Role-play for Chapters 1-2

### Building a Gang

**Activity Description:**

Have students break up into small groups to create their own “gangs”. Students will determine the rules they all have to follow, but some of the “gang” members can only respond with one specific line. The students who can only respond with one line will need to change the way they say it, using their tone of voice and emphasis in order to show emotion and understanding. See Operational Definitions for more specific details about the game.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Like Huck and his friends, they all believe Tom is the most knowledgeable of them all. They are willing to believe anything he says, mostly because they have no idea what he was talking about – nor does Tom half the time. Students will have limited knowledge of what their “leader” is talking about and since they will only be able to respond with one line each time they speak, it should help them connect with the relationship between Tom and Huck.

**Rationale:**

Part of understanding the characters in the text is being able to connect to their motivations and realizations. By experiencing the building of a gang and having no clue about how to do anything but participate, it may help students understand how and why Huck reacts the way he does.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Have students break into groups of three or four

2. One student will be the “leader” of the gang, that student is the only one who can “talk”. All other “gang” members will only be able to respond with one specific line
3. Students who are not playing the “leader” will choose a line from a jar (see the lines on the next page). That line is the only one they are allowed to say
4. Once all students have their characters, instruct them that like Tom and Huck, they will need to decide on the rules of their newly formed gang
5. Each group will only have 3-5 minutes to decide and agree upon all the rules of their gang, following the rules of the game
6. Have groups come up one at a time – do not allow for any planning or rehearsal – and act out the planning for their gang

\*If students struggle making up the rules about their gang, offer suggestions like: What happens if someone betrays the gang? When will the gang meet? What is the purpose of the gang?

**Debrief:**

Once all gangs have performed, lead a discussion on what it was like not being able to fully respond. Ask students what that might mean for Tom and Huck’s futures in the text and what it helped them to understand about being a child in this book.

**Teacher Reflection:**

When writing about this activity, think about how your students interacted with one another. Also, think about how you felt not knowing what the students were going to say. Explain how you felt facilitating this activity, especially if you ended up playing with the students.

Address the following questions as well: What did you notice about the choices your students made? Were you surprised by anything that happened during the role-play?

How did your classroom change while the students were playing? How did you deal with any off task behavior, if there was any?

In blood	Never tell any secrets
Kill the families	We are highwaymen
Why can't we ransom them?	How can we do it if we don't know what it is?
Keep them 'til they're dead	I'm agreed
I ain't got nothing to say	What's the line of business with this gang?
It ain't in the books	I can only get out on Sundays
Don't forget to be polite	Are you ignorant?
Kill the people and take their watches and money	It wouldn't be fair and square
Only robbery and murder	How can they get loose?
What if they fall in love with you and never want to go home?	It's a fool way
Kill the women, too?	It's the sign of the band

I'm tired	I'm scared
Why couldn't you said that before?	Well, I don't know
It's best	He mustn't sleep 'til he killed them
What should we do?	There's a guard

## Improvised Interview for Chapters 3-5

### Interviewing Pap

**Activity Description:**

After reading about Huck's encounter with Pap, have students participate in an improvised interview. One student, or the teacher, should role-play the part of Pap. The rest of the class will interview him about his plans and choices.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Pap has reappeared in Huck's life unexpectedly, no one but Huck seems to be concerned. Pap is not willing to admit anything he plans to do, nor does he feel it is inappropriate for the societal norms. By doing an improvised interview with Pap, students should be able to begin making predictions about what will happen next for Huck. It may also help students continue to build an understanding of Huck's motivations.

**Rationale:**

Struggling readers often miss important details and foreshadowing elements, a character can present to them. In the case of Pap, students may not be able to see how he affects Huck beyond the fear he induces. By interviewing Pap, students may be able to think past the words he says in the text and begin to see his importance in the story, thus making inferences.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Either a student volunteer, or the teacher, will play the role of Pap
2. Have a student volunteer act as the interview mediator
3. Ask Pap to step outside with the mediator, while Pap is outside have the rest of the class brainstorm some questions to ask him

4. Send Pap to the front of the room
5. The interview mediator will then ask the other students for questions they have for Pap
6. If Pap is being played by a student, the teacher will only interfere if the questioning goes off course

\* Since this is the first time students are reading the book, they may struggle to respond as Pap, the teacher may need to help Pap answer the questions based on inferences from the book.

**Debrief:**

Once the interview seems to have run its course, bring all of the students back to a central focus. Thank the student volunteers for taking on their roles with no time for rehearsal. Remind the students of the purpose for this activity. Then ask them to fill out the reflection form and turn it in.

**Teacher Reflection:**

While the students are filling out their reflection form, fill out yours. Once you have read all of the students' reflections, add to your reflective journal. What do their responses tell you about their inferences or predictions for the text? What was it like for you, not knowing what the student playing Pap might say, or the questions the audience come up with? What did their questions make you think about? Did you notice anything new about how your students were thinking about the story as they asked questions and received responses?



## Interviewing Pap – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about Pap by participating in this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What predictions can you make about Huck's future now that Pap is in town? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating questions for Pap on the spot? If you were Pap, what was it like having to answer questions for the character? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. How does Pap affect Huck's life? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Interviewing Pap – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about Pap by participating in this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What predictions can you make about Huck's future now that Pap is in town? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating questions for Pap on the spot? If you were Pap, what was it like having to answer questions for the character? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. How does Pap affect Huck's life? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Interviewing Pap – Teacher Reflections

1. What did you notice about how your students approached this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Did the interviews give you something new to think about? If so, what was it? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What positive outcomes did you notice during this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. How well were your students able to ask questions of Pap? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What inferences or predictions did you notice your students making? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. How did you feel during the activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Writing-in-Role for Chapters 6-7

### A Letter from Huck

**Activity Description:**

After reading chapters 6 and 7, ask students to write a letter to a character Huck trusts - Judge Thatcher, Tom Sawyer, or the Widow - explaining what it is like to live with Pap.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Develop a deeper understanding of Huck's character and how he views the world by writing from his point of view about the miserable situation he finds himself in with Pap. You should be able to determine how much of the text and characters the students are understanding. The goal is to evaluate understanding, not traditional grammatical structure. If students choose to write the way Huck speaks, accept it.

**Rationale:**

Students often find it difficult to read past the words and make inferences about how a character really feels about his or her situation. By writing-in-Role, the students can take on the perspective of Huck and explore the feelings they believe he has about living with his father, feelings he is unlikely to say aloud, especially to Pap.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. After reading chapters 6 and 7, ask students to imagine they are Huck Finn
2. Explain that they are going to write a letter as if they are Huck. Their letters will go to one of the characters he trusted: Judge Thatcher, Tom Sawyer, or the Widow
3. The letters should be about what it is like living with Pap
4. There is really no correct "answer"

**Debrief:**

Once all the letters have been turned in, ask students to share some of what they wrote.

Use this debrief as a general discussion of the story and the character development.

**Teacher Reflection:**

After reading all of the letters, think about how students have responded to texts in the past. What changes, if any, do you see in their responses about the story while writing as Huck Finn? Do they seem to have made stronger connections? Did they share something unexpected? Were they able to make inferences about the characters? Did they write more than just what the text said was happening? How much of the story have students been able to comprehend? What types of inferences have students been able to make?

Are there any statements students have made in their letters that cannot be justified by the text?

## Role-play for Chapters 8-10

### Getting to Know You

**Activity Description:**

Students will pair off and play the roles of Huck and Jim. Each pair will create a 'getting to know' you conversation. Their conversations need to be based on what they have learned about the characters from reading chapters 8-10.

**Goals of the Activity:**

If students are beginning to think about the text, they should be able to create the conversations, which tell a lot about character development. The goal is to see how students interpret Huck and Jim's initial relationship.

**Rationale:**

When a student cares about a text and the characters in it, they have made connections. Those connections allow students to make more in depth inferences and retain more information about the story.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Have students choose from those chapters they feel represents the relationship Huck and Jim might develop in the future, each group should choose a different scene.
2. Scenes will be chosen from a container
3. Students will use their text to guide the dialogue; some dialogue should be from the text, other dialogue should be created based on what students know about the two characters



4. Groups will begin their role-play in a tableau (a frozen silent “picture”) of how they believe Huck and Jim are arranged
5. They will stay in their tableau long enough to gain attention, then will come out of it in mid conversation
6. Once their conversation is complete, return to the beginning tableau

**Debrief:**

Once all students have performed their conversations, lead them in a discussion of the characters. What has the author done to help develop those characters? What was it like for them having to create a conversation for the two? What did they have to “make up” in order to have a conversation? Did anything stand out as character motivation?

**Teacher Reflection:**

Describe your reaction to the students’ conversations. How did they handle working together? Did you notice any change in how they appear to understand the characters?

## Getting to Know You Scenes

First meeting	Luck is coming Jim's way
How Huck died	Finding the right place to live
Talking about the dead man	All the bad luck
In the floating house	Catching the giant catfish
First meeting	Luck is coming Jim's way
How Huck died	Finding the right place to live
Talking about the dead man	All the bad luck

In the floating house	Catching the giant catfish
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## Adapted Tableau for Chapter 11

### Gossipmongers

**Activity Description:**

One student, or the teacher, will take on the role of Huck. The rest of the class will form small groups of town members. Each group will create a tableau of their townspeople talking about what happened to Huck, Pap, and Jim. As Huck walks slowly by each group, they will come to life and share their gossip. Once he is past them, they will return to their tableau.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Students will work to create gossip that could have circulated after Huck disappeared. As Huck learned of the gossip, the new knowledge would have helped him make a plan for what to do next. This activity can help students see how easily stories and gossip could have spread during the period, and why it was so easy for Huck to travel without anyone knowing it was him.

**Rationale:**

In the 1800s, real news traveled quickly, but gossip traveled faster. Students may not initially understand why Huck is so quick at making up stories about his identity or how he gets away with it. This activity could help students see how his stories could have worked to his advantage.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Have a volunteer act as Huck, or the teacher can do it
2. Have students break into groups of three or four

3. Ask each group to choose one fact about Huck's disappearance that he has shared, which they know to be true. Each group should choose a different fact, they can draw if you prefer
4. Instruct them to surround that fact with gossip about what happened to Huck, Pap, and Jim
5. Ask students to avoid using the story from the lady Huck met
6. Have them spread around the room and create their tableau, then have Huck slowly stroll through town and listen to the gossip

**Debrief:**

After all the gossip has been shared, have Huck write down the story he was able to piece together on the board (or share with the class and the teacher can write it down). As a class, read the story Huck pieced together (the one on the board) and discuss how the gossip affected the reality. If only one version of the gossip existed, what might have happened? How might the gossip affect the course of Huck's new life? Then have the students answer the reflections.

**Teacher Reflection:**

Think about the gossip your students created, was it superficial? Was it just a retelling of what the woman said? What did you find interesting or unique about this activity for your students? What did you notice about the classroom during this experience? If you played Huck, what was it like to play with the students? How might this activity affect your students' understanding of the story in the future? What did you notice about your students' reflections?

## Facts about Huck's Disappearance

<p>Took the gun</p>	<p>Escaped by water</p>
<p>There was a story about a prowler</p>	<p>The river had been flooding</p>
<p>Pap left about 3:30 in the afternoon</p>	<p>There was a hole in the side of the shack</p>
<p>The food had all been stolen</p>	<p>The ammunition had been taken</p>
<p>Someone had tried to cover the tracks of going in and out of the shack</p>	<p>There was blood all over the place</p>
<p>The door had been smashed in with the wood axe</p>	<p>A body had been tossed into the river</p>
<p>Huck's hair was found on the axe</p>	<p>There was a trail of corn meal leading toward a small lake</p>
<p>Pap's whetstone was found next to the small lake</p>	<p>The death occurred before dark</p>

## Gossipmongers – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about the element of gossip in Huck's world? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How do you think the gossip will affect the decisions Huck will make? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating gossip for the townspeople? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. When working with your group, what difficulties did you have to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Gossipmongers – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about the element of gossip in Huck's world? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How do you think the gossip will affect the decisions Huck will make? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating gossip for the townspeople? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. When working with your group, what difficulties did you have to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Role-play for Chapters 12 – 17

### Realizations upon a Raft

**Activity Description:**

Students will pair up to recreate scenes upon the raft as described by Twain. The students will act as Huck and Jim. During their reenactments, they will add in asides. Each will have at least one aside during the scene. Their asides should be the characters sharing what they have learned about each other or themselves during their days together on the raft. See Operational Definitions for more specific details about an aside.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Students should begin to see the honest friendship the two are developing as they travel down the river. They should also begin to see how Huck struggles with himself and his view of Jim as a person. This activity can help students think more deeply about the undertones and nuances of the text, and not just about the literal words said during the raft trip.

**Rationale:**

When an author has written about a difficult situation, like the one Huck faces with himself, students may not realize the changes taking place within the character. As Huck struggles to decide how he truly feels about Jim and the fact that Jim is a runaway slave, he also begins to realize he trusts Jim and cares for him. Students need to understand the subtleties of the friendship to appreciate the intricacies of the novel.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Pair up and choose characters: Huck and Jim
2. Each pair needs to choose a scene from on the raft in chapters 12 – 17

3. Instruct each group that as they reenact the scenes they have chosen they need to add at least one aside for each character
4. When characters share their asides during the reenactment, the moment is so the character can share with the audience how he feels about his relationship with the other. The asides are also a way to share what he has learned during the raft trip

**Debrief:**

As a class, discuss the asides. What did the students feel Huck and Jim had learned about themselves and each other? If there was one aside or group that stood out, discuss what made it so important or poignant.

**Teacher Reflection:**

Write about what the students did, but also about their depth of thought. If they shared character insights you did not expect, explain why it was surprising to you. What did you notice about their thought processes as they recreated scenes from the raft? How did you feel about this activity? Did you feel the students were making connections to the characters?

## Writing-in-Role for Chapters 18

### Dreamweaving

**Activity Description:**

After reading the chapter where Huck talks about having nightmares, have students write about a dream they think Huck may have had. You may want to allow them access to an online dream dictionary to help them choose images for the dreams, especially if they want to create a specific meaning.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Huck struggles to understand his morals throughout the novel, his dreams may reveal some of those struggles. When students write about Huck's dreams, they are making inferences and connecting with Huck.

**Rationale:**

It is said that dreams lead us to our subconscious thoughts, and Twain uses the idea of Huck struggling through his dreams as a way to show the readers the subtle changes Huck is going through.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Instruct students to imagine they are Huck
2. Ask the students to think about what they know about Huck as well as what they have discovered about him through the past several drama pedagogy activities
3. Ask them to describe a dream they feel Huck might have had while on the raft. Remind them to describe the dream in great detail and explain what Huck thinks it might mean
4. Have several students share their dreams with the class and discuss them

**Debrief:**

After volunteers have shared their dreams, have the class discuss why Huck might have had that dream and what it might mean. Also discuss whether the dreams were actually possible for Huck to have, and why they think that. If they used an online dream dictionary to create the images, ask them to share why they made those decisions.

**Teacher Reflection:**

Once you have read all of the dreams, reflect on any changes you have seen in the students' writing skills. Did you notice any new inferencing abilities? Were the students able to write in more detail? Talk about your experience reading their dreams. What did you think about this activity as a way to discuss the text?

Role-play Options for Chapter 19 – 20  
Selling Your Story or Telling Your Story

**Activity Description:**

Students will choose one of the two activities: Writing-in-Role as Jim or Role-play as the Duke and the King. If students choose to write in role as Jim, they will write their life stories and share with the class. If students choose to role-play as the Duke and the King, they will create their version of introductions. Students who choose the role-play will imagine themselves as the Duke and the King and how they might introduce themselves to gain the trust of strangers.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Students will explore the lives of the characters Huck spends the most time with in the novel. Their explorations are actually analyses of the characters and what Huck may not know about them. Their stories help the reader examine the motivations of those characters.

**Rationale:**

A main theme within the novel is Huck discovering the truth about the people around him. Students who can create life stories, whether true or false, are able to think past the words and begin to analyze characters within the text and develop an understanding of the historical elements and societal norms in the text.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. If Writing-in-Role as Jim, write your life story. Be sure to use any details provided in the text
2. If creating the stories of the Duke and the King, choose a partner

3. Together, create a story about who you are and where you come from. The goal is to gain the trust of strangers and stay the center of attention
4. After planning and rehearsing your stories, present them to the class

**Debrief:**

After all groups and Jims have shared their stories, discuss what it was like for the students to create them. How did they come up with the stories? What were they able to use from the text? How did creating the stories change the way they had been thinking about the characters of Jim, the Duke, and the King (if it did)? If Huck knew those stories, would it change the way he sees them?

**Teacher Reflection:**

Think about the stories your students created, what did you notice about them? Think about how students explored and analyzed characters in the past, what was different about it this time? What was the atmosphere of the classroom like as the students created and shared their stories?

## Role-play for Chapters 21-24

### Guided by Providence

**Activity Description:**

The class will interview the primary players in the Wilks' story. The Duke, the King, Mary Jane, Dr. Robinson, Huck, and Abner Shakledford all have different perspectives of the situation. Interview them to discover how they rationalized their choices.

**Goals of the Activity:**

As students participate in this activity, they should be able to begin to see multiple sides of the situation. If students only ever understand one side of a situation in a text, they will struggle making inferences and understanding nuances of the text.

**Rationale:**

Making inferences and understanding the nuances of the text help students connect to the story and develop a deeper comprehension of the novel and its characters.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Have student volunteers play the role of the Duke, the King, Huck, Mary Jane, Dr. Robinson, and Abner Shackelford
2. The rest of the class will write interview questions for each character about the situation involving the money and the true identities of Harvey and William Wilks
3. Set up the room like an interview/panel TV show
4. The teacher will act as the host/mediator
5. The host/mediator will begin the line of questioning and ultimately invite the audience to ask their questions

**Debrief:**



Discuss with the students what they learned about the characters. Ask them why the characters made the choices they did when they answered questions. Also, ask students why the town was willing to believe the Duke and the King so readily.

**Teacher Reflection:**

When your students interviewed the characters from the Wilks situation, what did you notice about their questions and answers? Were students able to think past the literal actions of the text? Were students able to make inferences into the characters? What was the atmosphere like in the classroom during the interviews? Think back to your previous experience with this situation, how do you feel about using this drama pedagogy activity?

## Soliloquy for Chapters 25 to 31

### Good Angel/Bad Angel

**Activity Description:**

Students should group up and write a monologue for Huck and the two sides of the argument he is having with himself about Jim. It is clear that Huck is unsure of what is right and wrong in the situation, but his definition of right and wrong about slavery is different than ours is today. The monologue should have three voices, Huck, the “good angel” and the “bad angel”. As the monologue progresses, and Huck begins to see things in a different way, the “good angel” and the “bad angel” should begin to overlap in their suggestions.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Through the monologue, students should be able to see that Huck does not actually fit into his world. They should also be able to analyze why he struggles with right and wrong as defined by the south in the 1800s.

**Rationale:**

Huck struggles with his conscience when deciding what to do about Jim. In the novel, Twain shows us through Huck’s struggles the humanity needed to make the right choice. As Huck argues with himself, we are able to see that he does not actually think the same way as everyone in his world, even though he feels like he must.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Have students break into groups of three
2. One student will act as Huck Finn as he struggles with his decision about what to do about Jim

3. One will act as the “good angel” and the other the “bad angel”
4. All three will work to write a group monologue about whether or not to turn Jim into the authorities, whether Jim is actually a person, and whether or not Huck is a bad person for wanting to steal Jim
5. As students present their monologue, ask students to notice when, and if, the “good angel” and “bad angel” ever switch sides of the argument, or agree on a similar viewpoint

**Debrief:**

Have students answer the reflection questions on the next page. Ask them to think about their experience writing a monologue with three voices, and what those voices taught them about the theme of the novel.

**Teacher Reflection:**

What did you notice about your students’ monologues? Were they able to connect to the theme of the novel? Was their writing more detailed? Did they struggle to establish the three voices in the monologue? What did you learn about your students as they wrote and performed their monologues?

## Good Angel/Bad Angel – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about Huck's internal conflicts while creating the monologue? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How did the expectations of good and bad affect Huck's decisions? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like writing a monologue for three people? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. When working with your group, what difficulties did you have to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Good Angel/Bad Angel – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about Huck's internal conflicts while creating the monologue? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How did the expectations of good and bad affect Huck's decisions? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like writing a monologue for three people? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. When working with your group, what difficulties did you have to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Writing-in-Role for Chapters 32 – 35

## The Cruelty of Man

**Activity Description:**

Students will write either as Huck or as Jim. If writing as Huck, they will focus on what happens to the King and the Duke at the end of Chapter 32 - and talk about the irony of how cruel humans can be. If writing as Jim, they will write about being captured and seeing Tom and Huck in the cabin. They will be asked to write about why he trusts the two boys so much, even though he is a prisoner.

**Goals of the Activity:**

To explore the irony presented by Mark Twain about the cruelty of people during the period, students will think as one of the main characters. Several characters mention how poorly people treat each other, yet the plight of slaves is never mentioned or acknowledged.

**Rationale:**

Irony is one of the most difficult literary elements for students to identify and discuss, so Writing-in-Role offers students the chance to explore Twain's use of irony without the pressure of "being right."

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Choose either Huck or Jim
2. As your chosen character, write about the cruelty of man presented in chapters 32 through 35
3. If writing as Huck, focus on the Duke and the King

4. If writing as Jim, focus on his feelings of being captured and taken prisoner as well as why he trusts Tom and Huck when they first arrive at his shack
5. Have volunteers share their writing

**Debrief:**

Once volunteers have shared their work, discuss how each addressed the irony that people are cruel to each other, but ignore the real cruelty of slavery in the novel. Why did Mark Twain decide to explore irony in the way he did?

**Teacher Reflection:**

After reading the Writing-in-Role pieces, what have you noticed about your students' understanding of the text and their writing content? What did you learn from the experience? Was the activity helpful in exploring author's purpose and a difficult element like irony?



## Improvised Interviews for Chapters 36 – 39

### Interviewing Tom, Huck, and Jim

**Activity Description:**

Interview Tom, Huck, and Jim about the elaborate plans to break Jim out of prison.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Tom has obviously taken charge of Jim's prison break, and Huck is not entirely sure why. Interview the three of them to determine how each feels about the plans to break Jim out of prison and return him to freedom. This should help students continue to see the motivations of the characters. It may also help students see any changes the characters have made throughout the novel.

**Rationale:**

Huck and Jim have not only been on a physical journey - but also an emotional journey. By interviewing them about Tom's plans, students should be able to identify and analyze the changes each has gone through. It should become obvious to the students that while Tom is still "the brains" of the operation, Huck has matured and is now willing to add his voice to the decision making process. They should also be able to see how Jim has changed from one who is scared all the time, to one who is trying to have his own voice.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Ask three student volunteers to act as Huck, Tom, and Jim
2. The teacher will act as the mediator of the interview
3. Send Huck, Tom, and Jim out of the room
4. While Huck, Tom, and Jim are out of the room have the rest of the students come up with 3-5 interview questions

5. Once Huck, Tom, and Jim are invited back into the room, have them sit in the front of the room.
6. The interview mediator will begin the questioning, then ask the other students for questions they have for the three

**Debrief:**

Once the interview seems to have run its course, bring all of the students back to a central focus. Thank the student volunteers for taking on their roles with no time for rehearsal.

Remind the students of the purpose for this activity. Then ask them to fill out the reflection form and turn it in.

**Teacher Reflection:**

While the students are filling out their reflection form, fill out yours. Once you have read all of the students' reflections, add to your reflective journal. What do their responses tell you about their inferences or predictions for the text? What was it like for you, not knowing what the student playing Huck, Tom, and Jim might say, or the questions the audience might come up with? What did their questions make you think about? Did you notice anything new about how your students were thinking about the story as they asked questions and received responses? What was different about this improvised interview activity than the first time you did it?

## Interviewing Tom, Huck, and Jim – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about how the characters have grown by participating in this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What predictions can you make about how Huck will make decisions in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating questions for Tom, Huck, and Jim on the spot? If you were one of the three, what was it like having to answer questions for the character? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. How have the three characters affect each other's lives? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Interviewing Tom, Huck, and Jim – Student Reflections

1. What did you learn about how the characters have grown by participating in this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What predictions can you make about how Huck will make decisions in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating questions for Tom, Huck, and Jim on the spot? If you were one of the three, what was it like having to answer questions for the character? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. How have the three characters affect each other's lives? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Interviewing Tom, Huck, and Jim – Teacher Reflections

1. What did you notice about how your students approached this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Did the interviews give you something new to think about? If so, what was it? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What positive outcomes did you notice during this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. How well were your students able to ask questions of Pap? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What inferences or predictions did you notice your students making? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. How did you feel during the activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Adapted Tableau for Chapters 40 - 41

## Gossipmongers

**Activity Description:**

One student, or the teacher, will take on the role of Huck. The rest of the class will form small groups of town members. Each group will create a tableau of their townspeople talking about the threat from the gang and Jim's escape. As Huck walks slowly by each group, they will come to life and share their gossip. Once he is past them, they will return to their tableau.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Students will work to create gossip resulting from the tricks played by Tom and Huck. The gossip from each community member has added to what actually happened during the escape. As Huck learned of the gossip, it would have helped him make a plan for what to do next. This activity can help students see how easily stories and gossip could have spread during the period, and help Huck see how his tricks affected the town.

**Rationale:**

Like today, gossip can change the course of a person's life and their actions. By creating the gossip surrounding Jim's escape and the threat of the Indians, students should be able to see how it affects Huck.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Have a volunteer act as Huck, or the teacher can do it
2. Have students break into groups of three or four
3. Ask each group to choose one fact about the escape that they know to be true
4. Instruct them to surround that fact with gossip about what happened



5. Have them spread around the room and create their tableau, then have Huck slowly stroll through the room and listen to the gossip

**Debrief:**

After all the gossip has been shared, have Huck write down the story he was able to piece together on the board (or share with the class and the teacher can write it down). As a class, read the story Huck pieced together (the one on the board) and discuss how the gossip affected the reality. As a class, discuss how the gossip affected the reality. If only one version of the gossip existed, what might have happened? How might the gossip affect Huck and his decisions to set Jim free? Then have the students answer the reflections.

**Teacher Reflection:**

Think about the gossip your students created, was it superficial? Was it just a retelling of what the woman said? What did you find interesting or unique about this activity for your students? What did you notice about the classroom during this experience? If you played Huck, what was it like to play with the students? How might this activity affect your students' understanding of the story in the future? What did you notice about your students' reflections?

## Gossipmongers – Student Reflections

1. How did the gossip affect the reality of the situation? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How will the gossip affect the decisions Huck will make? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating gossip for the townspeople? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. When working with your group, what difficulties did you have to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Gossipmongers – Student Reflections

1. How did the gossip affect the reality of the situation? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How will the gossip affect the decisions Huck will make? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What was it like creating gossip for the townspeople? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. When working with your group, what difficulties did you have to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What did you like or dislike about this activity? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Writing-in-Role for Chapters 42 – Chapter the Last

### The Truth Revealed

**Activity Description:**

Students will write either as Huck or as Jim. Now that the truth has been revealed about Jim's freedom and who Huck and Tom really are, have students reflect on the growth each character has made because of their adventures.

**Goals of the Activity:**

Characters in novels are expected to grow and change because of their experiences; Huck and Jim are no different. Students often struggle to explain why characters have changed, by writing as either Huck or Jim they can explore how the characters' experiences in the novel have affected them. Students will also be able to write about the truth that has been revealed at the end of the novel, something that will also affect the growth of the characters.

**Rationale:**

Part of understanding a text and comprehending its nuances is understanding how and why characters change throughout the course of the text. If students can write about the change characters have gone through, it shows they are able to understand a character's motivations.

**Activity Rules/Guidelines:**

1. Choose either Huck or Jim

2. As your chosen character, write about the choices and changes that character has experienced – especially since the truth has been revealed in the last two chapters
3. If writing as Huck, focus on his struggle about freeing Jim
4. If writing as Jim, focus on his feelings of the discovery that he has been free the whole time
5. Have volunteers share their writing

**Debrief:**

Once volunteers have shared their work, discuss how the truth at the end affected the characters. Did it change the way they viewed themselves? Did it offer students a different view of the characters themselves?

**Teacher Reflection:**

After reading the Writing-in-Role pieces, what have you noticed about your students' understanding of the text and their writing content? What did you learn from the experience? Was the activity helpful in exploring character motivations? What thoughts and tales did the students create that you did not expect?

## Writing-in-Role Rubric

Category	20	15	10	5
Character Voice	The writing is clearly from that of the specified character. The author has been able to make connections to the characters.	The writing is mostly from that of the specified character. The author has been able to make some connections to the characters.	The writing is weak and only occasionally reads like the specified character. There is little to no connection.	The writing sounds nothing like the specified character. There is no attempt at a connection. The author appears to have little comprehension of the character.
Focus	The writing is related to the assigned activity. The text allows readers to develop a deeper understanding of the characters.	The writing is mostly related to the assigned activity. The text allows the readers a glimpse into the character's thoughts.	The writing is weakly related to the assigned activity. The text gives few ideas about the character's thoughts.	The writing appears thrown together and does not add any details about the character's thoughts.
Creativity	The writing contains many creative details and/or descriptions that add to the reader's enjoyment and increase the imagery of the text.	The story contains some creative details and/or descriptions that add to the reader's enjoyment.	The story contains few creative details. It appears the reader has a primarily literal understanding.	The story has no creative details. The author has only a literal understanding of the text and appears to have simply listed ideas.

Category	20	15	10	5
Accuracy of Facts	All facts presented in the text are accurate. The author has used what he/she has learned from the novel and made appropriate inferences.	Most facts presented in the text are accurate. The author has used what he/she has learned from the novel and made mostly appropriate inferences.	Some facts presented in the text are accurate. The author has made few inferences and has only used literal knowledge.	Very few facts presented are accurate. There is no attempt at inferencing and the author seems to only be listing information.
Organization	The story is well organized. Ideas follow one another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.	The story is somewhat well organized. One idea may seem out of place. Transitions are mostly clear.	The writing is hard to follow. Some ideas are in a logical order, others are not. Transitions are weak if they are used at all.	The writing appears to be very random and thrown together. There is no logical sequence of order.



## Soliloquy Rubric

Category	20	15	10	5
Character Voice	The writing is clearly from that of the specified character. The author has been able to make connections to the characters.	The writing is mostly from that of the specified character. The author has been able to make some connections to the characters.	The writing is weak and only occasionally reads like the specified character. There is little to no connection.	The writing sounds nothing like the specified character. There is no attempt at a connection. The author appears to have little comprehension of the character.
Focus	The writing is related to the assigned activity. The text allows readers to develop a deeper understanding of the characters.	The writing is mostly related to the assigned activity. The text allows the readers a glimpse into the character's thoughts.	The writing is weakly related to the assigned activity. The text gives few ideas about the character's thoughts.	The writing appears thrown together and does not add any details about the character's thoughts.
Creativity	The writing contains many creative details and/or descriptions that add to the reader's enjoyment and increase the imagery of the text.	The story contains some creative details and/or descriptions that add to the reader's enjoyment.	The story contains few creative details. It appears the reader has a primarily literal understanding.	The story has no creative details. The author has only a literal understanding of the text and appears to have simply listed ideas.

Category	20	15	10	5
Accuracy of Facts	All facts presented in the text are accurate. The author has used what he/she has learned from the novel and made appropriate inferences.	Most facts presented in the text are accurate. The author has used what he/she has learned from the novel and made mostly appropriate inferences.	Some facts presented in the text are accurate. The author has made few inferences and has only used literal knowledge.	Very few facts presented are accurate. There is no attempt at inferencing and the author seems to only be listing information.
Organization	The story is well organized. Ideas follow one another in a logical sequence with clear transitions.	The story is somewhat well organized. One idea may seem out of place. Transitions are mostly clear.	The writing is hard to follow. Some ideas are in a logical order, others are not. Transitions are weak if they are used at all.	The writing appears to be very random and thrown together. There is no logical sequence of order.

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## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocols

#### Pre-unit Interview Protocol – Individual Teacher

Project: Teacher Perceptions of Using Drama Pedagogy as a Teaching Tool

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Description of project: Thank you for joining me today. My name is Sara Ranzau and I am a doctoral candidate at Sam Houston State University. The project you have all signed consent forms to participate in, is my dissertation research. My research involves using what is called drama pedagogy, things like role-play and creative drama, in high school English classrooms. I am interested in knowing about your general knowledge of drama in the classroom as well as your teaching style.

Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself as a teacher.
2. Describe one of your favorite lessons or units to teach. Why is that one of your favorites?
3. Describe one of your most challenging lessons or units to teach. Why is that one of your most challenging?
4. When a new way of teaching is introduced to you, how do you typically react?
5. Why do you think you react in that way?
6. When you want to change the way you are teaching a lesson or unit, where do you go for inspiration or ideas? Why?

7. What do you know about using drama activities in the classroom? How often do you use them and how?
8. How do you feel about teaching a unit you did not design?
9. Why did you agree to participating in this research study?
10. Are there any questions or concerns you would like me to address before we conclude this interview? Is there anything else you would like to share with me about yourself as a teacher or the community of your classroom?

Thank you for your responses and I look forward to your responses and thoughts as you work through the unit.

Mid-unit Interview Protocol – Individual Teacher

Project: Teacher Perceptions of Using Drama Pedagogy as a Teaching Tool

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Instructions: Now that you have been using the unit for approximately 3 weeks, please think about what you have seen happen in your classroom both amongst your students and in yourself as a teacher. I'd like you to reflect on your use of the drama pedagogy unit as you answer the following questions.

Questions:

1. Describe how you have used the unit; have you had to adjust any of it for time or student understanding?
2. How well do you think the unit has been received by your students?
3. How have you felt when teaching the unit?
4. What has it been like for you to participate in some of the activities with the kids?
5. What concerns do you have about using drama pedagogy with high school students?
6. Think about your students' engagement in other units and lessons you have taught, how does it differ from their engagement in this unit?
7. Describe the environment in your classroom when a drama pedagogy activity is happening.

Thank you for your responses and I look forward to your reflections and thoughts as you continue to work through the unit.

Post-unit Interview Protocol – Individual Teacher

Project: Teacher Perceptions of Using Drama Pedagogy as a Teaching Tool

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Instructions:

Now that you have completed the unit, think back on your experiences. The following questions are intended to help you reflect on your experience using the drama pedagogy to teach *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Questions:

1. What type of changes in classroom engagement did you notice as you worked through the unit with your students?
2. What type of changes, if any, did you notice in the way you approached teaching the novel on the days you read in class? Did you stop more to talk about the chapters? Did you find yourself more excited to discuss the chapters?
3. What elements of the unit do you think you might try to incorporate into future units for other novels?
4. Do you think you will use this unit again the next time you teach *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? Why or why not?
5. What did you enjoy about using the unit with your students as a teaching tool?

6. What did you struggle with or dislike about using the unit with your students as a teaching tool?
7. How do you feel about using drama pedagogy to teach? Would you recommend it to other teachers? Why or why not?

Thank you for your responses and honesty throughout the course of the unit. I hope it has proved useful and educational for you as not only a professional development opportunity, but also as a pedagogical tool.



**APPENDIX C**

Teacher Reflective Journal Guide

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Teacher Reflective Journal

Directions:

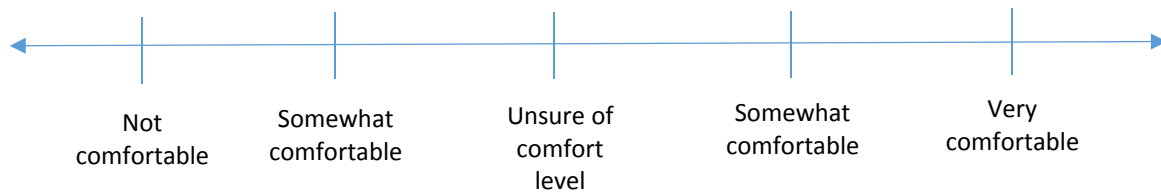
Each activity in the curricular unit has guiding questions for you to think about after conducting each activity. Please use those and this file to write your reflections about using the unit in your classroom. Before writing your reflection, please answer the Likert

Scale for each activity as well (use the highlight tool to identify your choice).

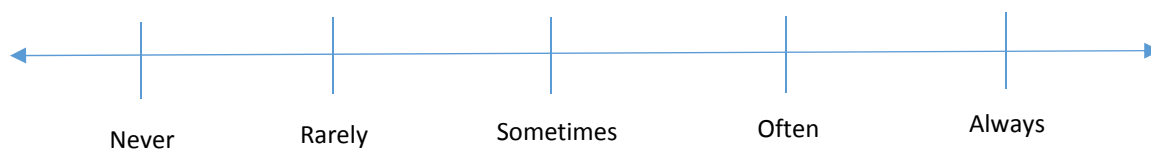
Your feedback on the Likert Scales and thoughts about the unit and guiding questions will all be used as the data for this research project. Please be sure to share anything you thought about, witnessed, felt uneasy about, or were excited about when using the unit with your students. Also, please do not feel you have to limit your reflective response to a small space, but write as much as you need to say.

### Before Beginning the Unit

What is your comfort level participating in drama activities?



How often do you use drama pedagogy activities in your classroom? (That does not mean when reading a play)

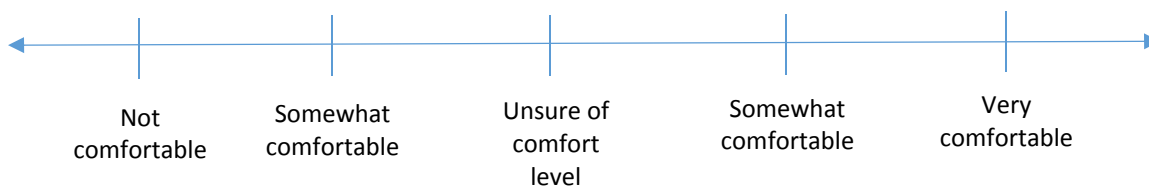


Please explain your choices:

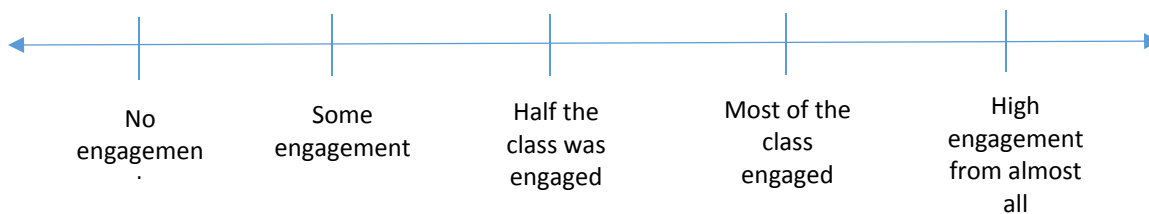
Write your reflection here:

## Building a Gang Role Play

How comfortable were you allowing the students time to create a role play?



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

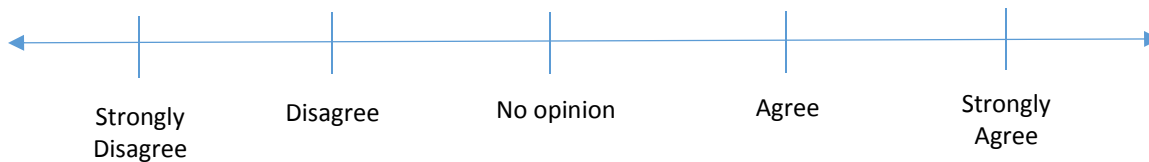


Please explain your choices:

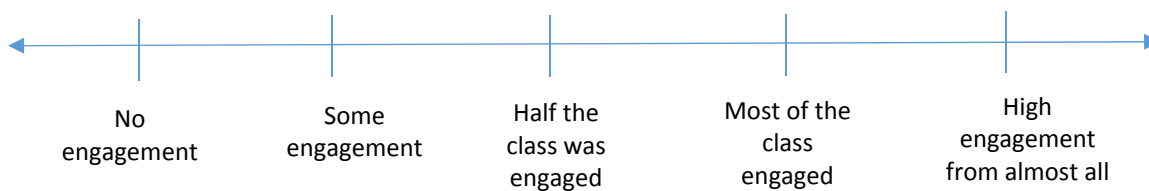
Write your reflection here:

## Improvised Interview for Pap

Students appeared to increase their comprehension or inferencing of the story during this activity?



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

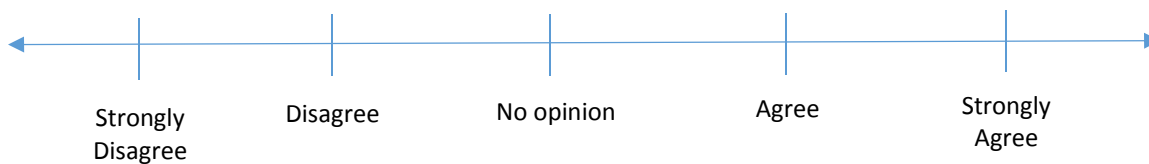


Please explain your choices:

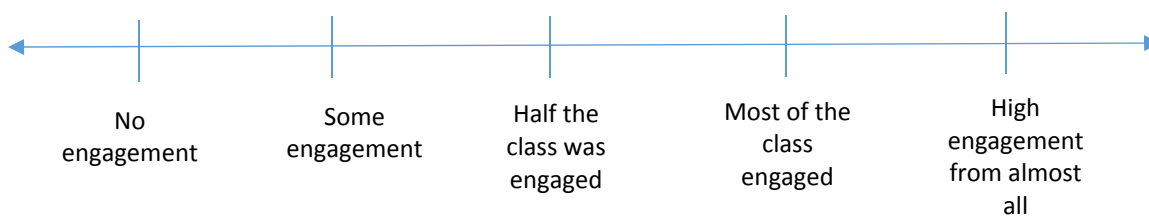
Write your reflection here:

### Writing-in-Role – A Letter from Huck

Students were able to make connections to the text when they thought like Huck.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

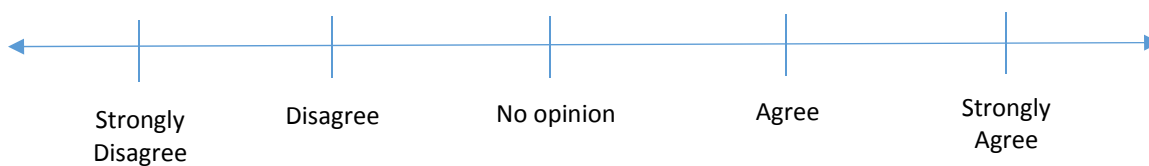


Please explain your choices:

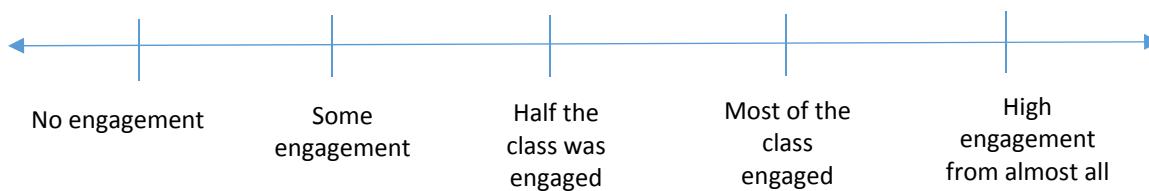
Write your reflection here:

### Getting to Know You Role Play

Students created unique and appropriate “getting to know you” conversations for Huck and Jim.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

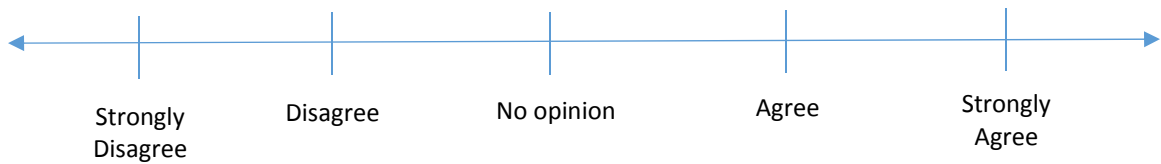


Please explain your choices:

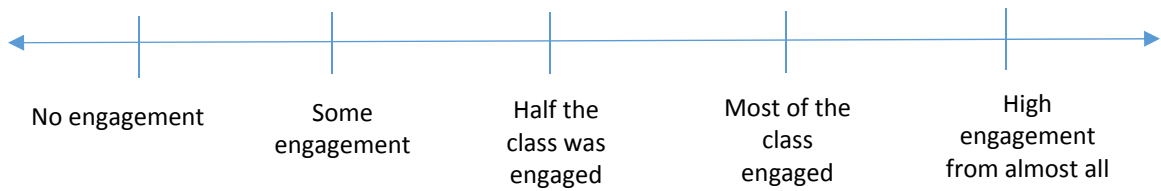
Write your reflection here:

### Gossipmongers – Huck’s Disappearance

The adapted tableau experience helped the students to make inferences about the text.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

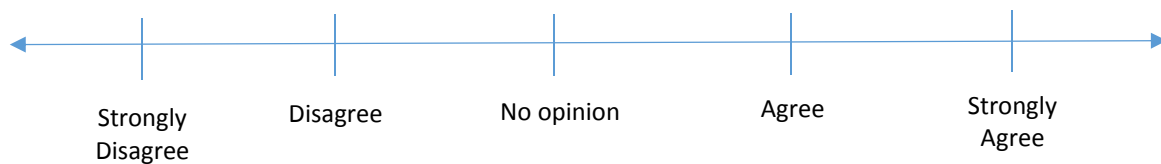


Please explain your choices:

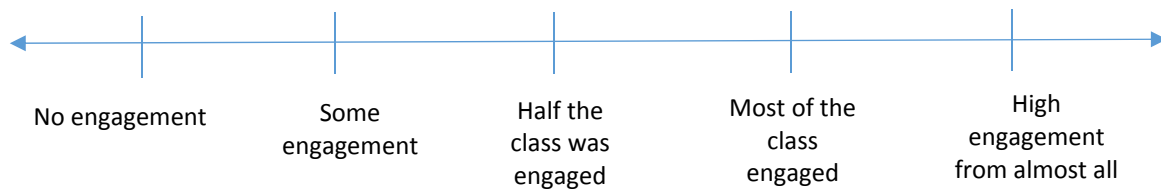
Write your reflection here:

## Realizations upon a Raft Role Play

Student asides suggested they made strong connections to the characters' motivations.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?



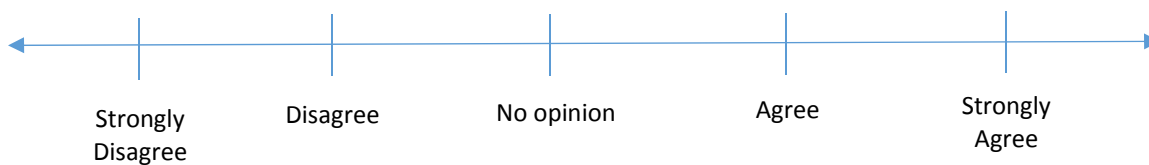
Please explain your choices:

Write your reflection here:

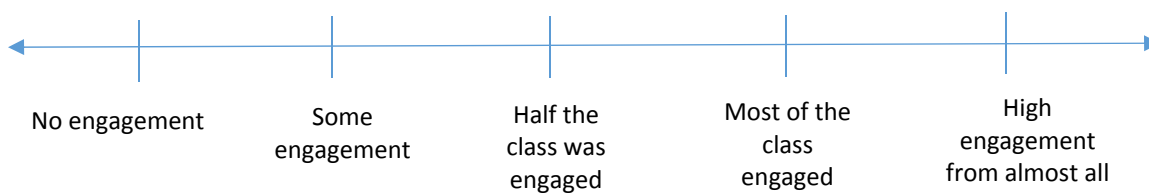


## Writing-in-Role – Dreamweaving

Students were able to build upon their comprehension to connect to Huck.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

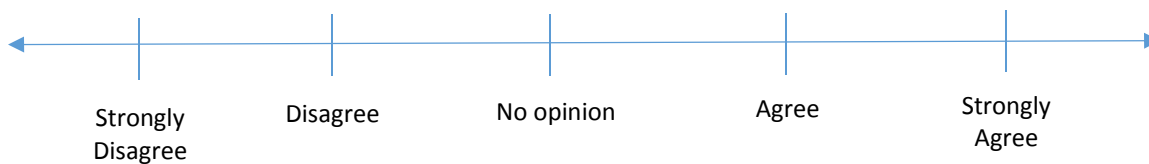


Please explain your choices:

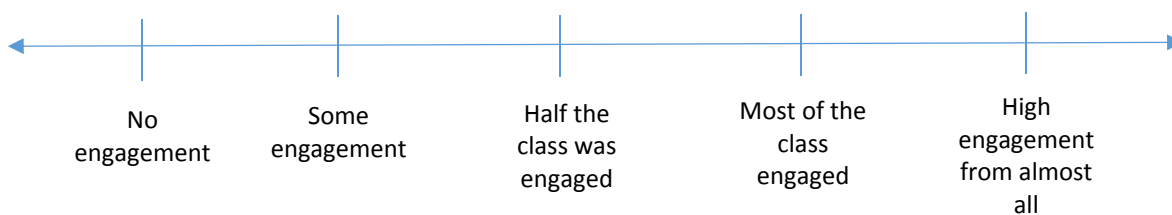
Write your reflection here:

### Selling Your Story or Telling Your Story Role Play

Students have shown deep comprehension about the four main characters.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

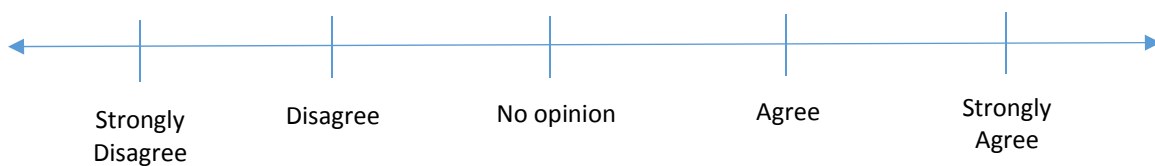


Please explain your choices:

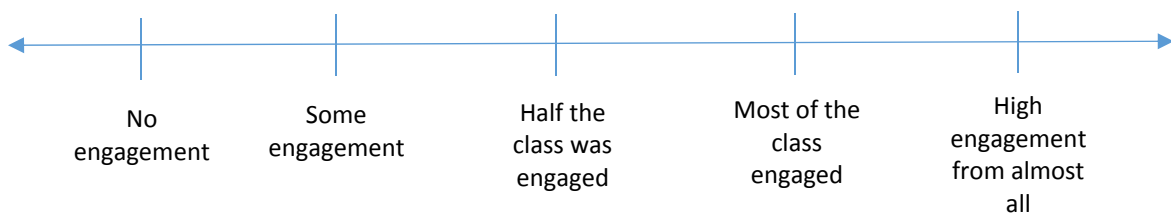
Write your reflection here:

### Improvised Interview – Guided by Providence

Students appeared to increase their comprehension or inferencing of the story during this activity.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

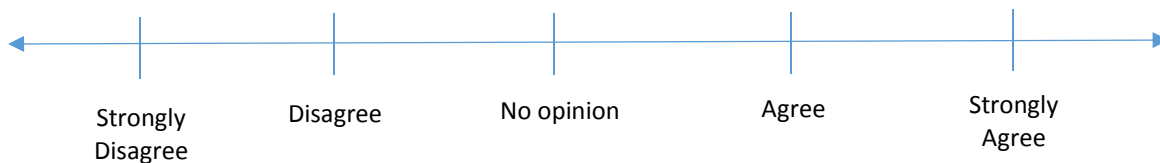


Please explain your choices:

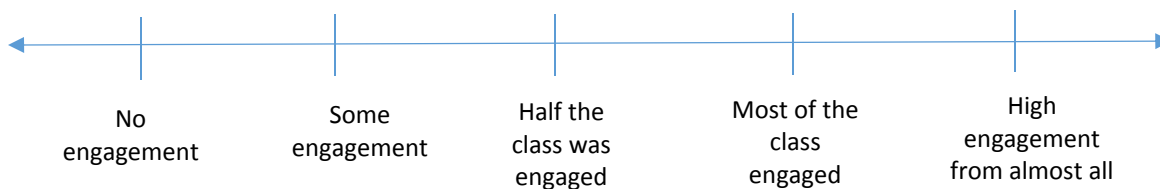
Write your reflection here:

### Good Angel/Bad Angel Soliloquy

Students were able to make inferences and explore the confusions Huck feels about Jim.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

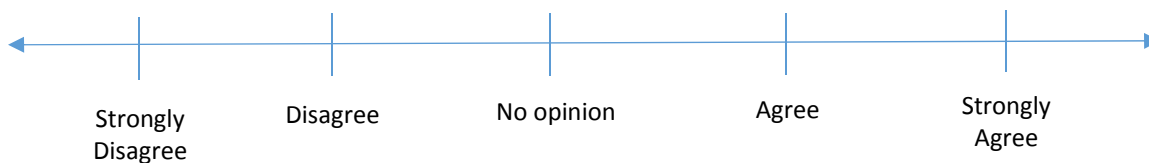


Please explain your choices:

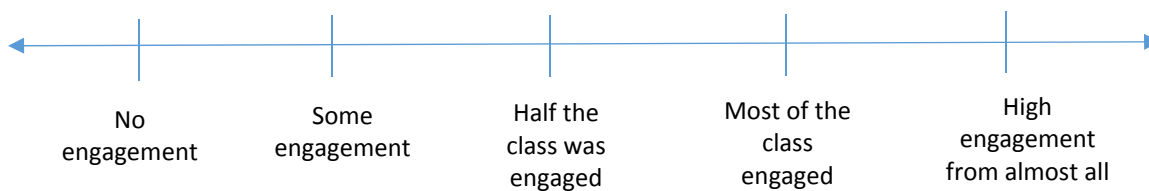
Write your reflection here:

## Writing-in-Role – The Cruelty of Man

Students were able to build upon their comprehension and explore the realities of the time period.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

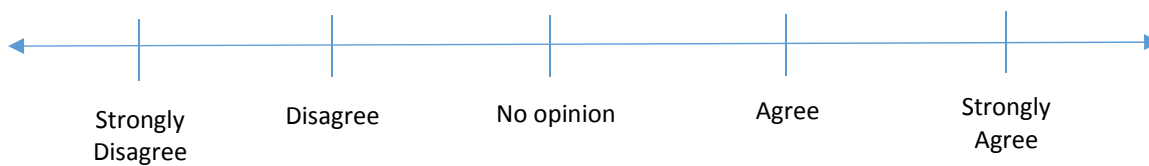


Please explain your choices:

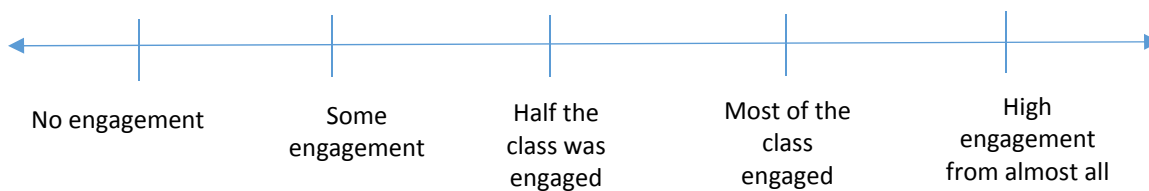
Write your reflection here:

## Improvised Interviews – Tom, Huck, and Jim

Students appeared to increase their comprehension or inferencing of the story during this activity?



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

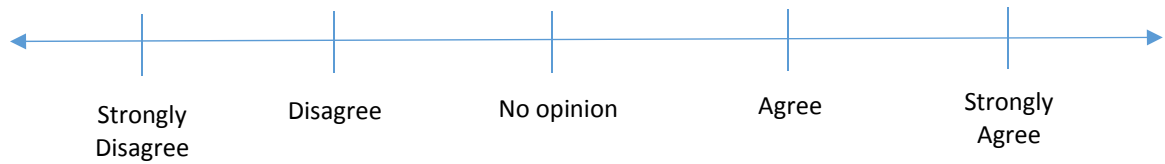


Please explain your choices:

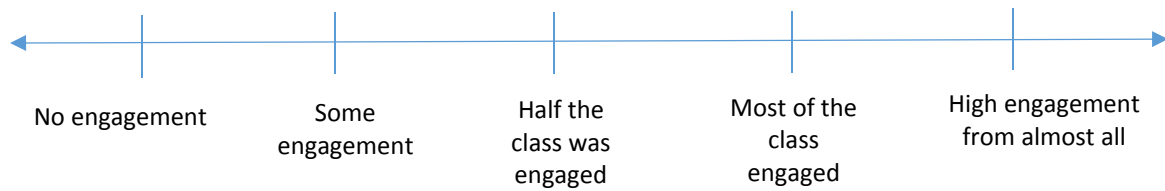
Write your reflection here:

## Gossipmongers – Jim’s Escape

The adapted tableau experience helped the students to make inferences about the text.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?

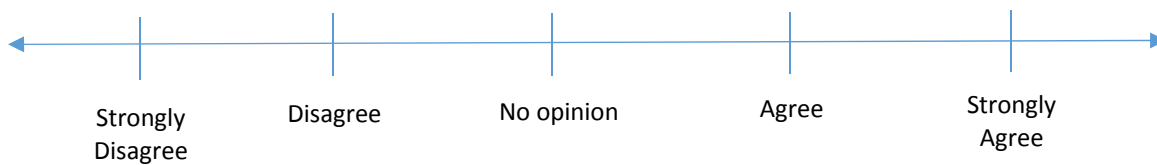


Please explain your choices:

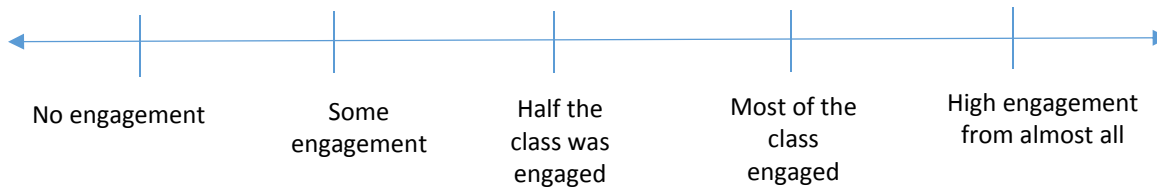
Write your reflection here:

### Writing-in-Role – The Truth Revealed

Students were able to think more deeply than before about the meaning of and character development in the text.



What was the engagement like in your classroom during this activity?



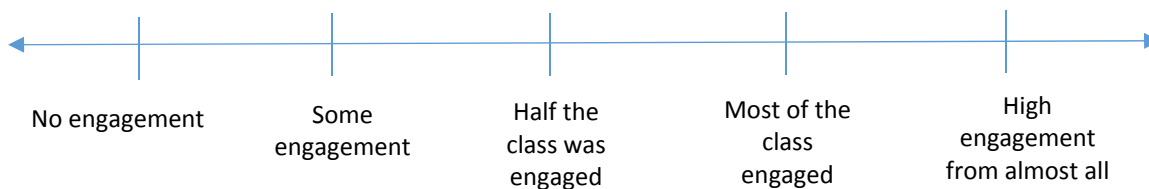
Please explain your choices:

Write your reflection here:

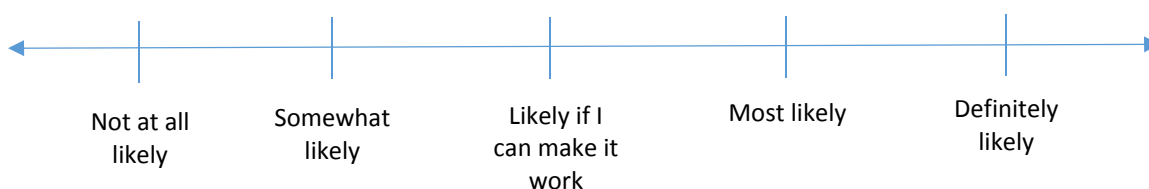


## Post Unit Reflection

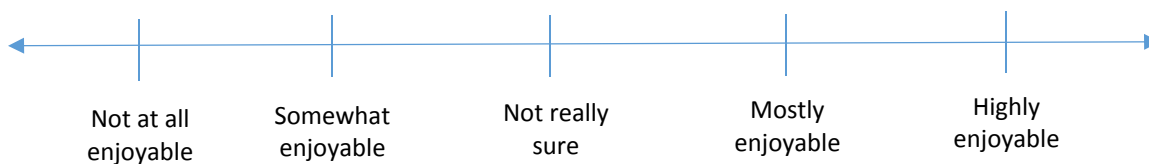
What was the engagement like in your classroom during this unit?



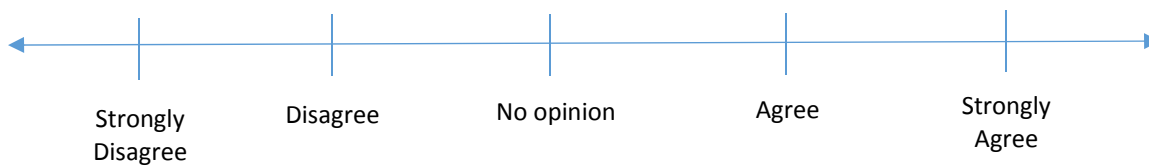
How likely are you to use drama pedagogy activities in your classroom in the future?



How enjoyable was it for you to experience drama pedagogy with your students?



Students enjoyed using drama pedagogy as a learning tool.



Please explain your choices:

Write your reflection here

## VITA

Sara J. Ranzau

### EDUCATION

Doctoral Candidate in Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Populations at Sam Houston State University, August 2013 to present

Dissertation Title: Teacher Perceptions of Drama Pedagogy as a Teaching Tool

Master of Arts (May 2010) in Reading and Literacy from The University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX

Bachelor of Fine Arts (May 2003) in Theater Education from Texas State University – San Marcos, San Marcos, TX

### TEXAS EDUCATOR CERTIFICATIONS

English Language Arts/Reading 4-8

English Language Arts/Reading 8-12

Theater Arts 6-12

Reading Specialist EC-12

### PUBLICATIONS

Ranzau, S. (2016). Why Drama Pedagogy? *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin Collegial Exchange*, 82-4: 11-14.

Ranzau, S. & Thomas, A. (in press). Learning How to Use Drama in the Classroom: A Student Teacher's Journey. *English in Texas*.

### PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Ranzau, S. Using Drama in the Secondary ELA Classroom to Increase Engagement and Learning – Poster Session at the 2016 Texas Association of Literacy Educators Literacy Summit. University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, TX. February 2016.

Gerber, H. & Ranzau, S. Exploring Story through Technology in English Education. 2014 Annual Convention of the National Council of Teacher of English, CEE Strand Commission on New Literacies, Technologies, and Teacher Education. Gaylord National Resort, Washington, D.C., November 2014.

Ranzau, S. & Mirk, S. Making Music for the Classroom. The English Teacher's Friend Summer Symposium. Holiday Inn Conference Center, Viera, FL, June 25-29, 2012.

Ranzau, S. & Castillo, J. Linking Lessons to CScope Curriculum. CScope Conference, San Antonio, TX, July 2011.

Ranzau, S. Theater History Curriculum at the Texas Educational Theater Association's annual TheaterFest. January 2010.

Friedrich, J. & Ranzau, S. The Acting Experiment at the Texas Educational Theater Association's annual TheaterFest. January 2008.

Ranzau, S. Tech Theater for the Stageless at the Texas Educational Theater Association's annual TheaterFest. January 2006.

Morthole, J. & Ranzau, S. Commedia Del'Arte. At the Texas Educational Theater Association's annual TheaterFest. January 2005.

#### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Delta Kappa Gamma – Eta Xi Chapter

National Council of Teachers of English Commission on Arts and Literacies

National Council of Teachers of English

Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

Texas Association of Literacy Educators