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READING CONNECTIVITY  
THROUGH INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research took place in a high school in the Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania. The majority of the sixteen participants originated from New York City or urban New Jersey schools and were in a twelfth-grade college preparatory English class. Students participated in a research project that helped them engage in texts. The class brainstormed the ideas that were present in the texts to create a classroom list from which students chose topics of their own interests to investigate. Students researched their individual topics using classroom laptops and electronic databases. Students collected information, created an outline, formed connections with the text and their lives, and cited their sources. Students presented their information once during the three novel project. This presentation included a visual element that they either acquired from their research or created. Students used travel logs, documents that helped them compile and organize researched information, to prepare and deliver presentations that were scored using a rubric. While participating in this project, students were able to identify interesting topics within school-related texts and ultimately form personal connections with the literature. Based on collected and analyzed data that included classroom observations, surveys, and student work, student motivation and

engagement increased through the use of technology and by giving students autonomy to individualize their own curricula.

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## RESEARCHER STORY

### Stance

An occasional reader as a child, I often separated school reading from leisure reading. I knew, while dissecting a novel during homework, I needed to be cognizant of plot elements, character traits, literary elements, and the myriad of other technicalities that are required in school-related reading assignments. I interpreted the word “leisure” to mean relaxing. If my mind wandered on a few lines while reading books from the Hardy Boys series, I did not feel the need to reread sections because I was not worried about passing an exam. However, while reading George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* for English class, my mind was checking off a “to do list” for a five paragraph essay, and I would spend long nights agonizingly rereading the text. During the summer, the Hardy Boys invited me to join them on their exotic mysteries, asking me to help them solve problems with the clues we found along the way. On the other hand, Boxer and Old Major from *Animal Farm* only seemed to irritate me because I could neither figure out how they symbolized figures from the Russian revolution nor why it was important to fill in a plot graph.

This mindset shifted dramatically during my twelfth-grade British Literature class, which catapulted me into the world of classical works. Although I still viewed this as academic reading, my teacher showed me

how to enjoy deciphering language by learning about new cultures. I realized the literature reflected the time in which it was written. England's rich history of dynamic monarchies and thousands of years worth of writings encouraged me to further research the United Kingdom. I explored British Literature at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, which eventually enticed me to pursue an English Education degree. My undergraduate classes focused on efferent aspects of literature: striving for reading comprehension, completing plot graphs, analyzing characters, and deciphering literary elements, which became second nature. Knowing how to teach these skills to students was imperative so they would understand the complete scope of authors' purposes and pass standardized exams. With this solid background knowledge, I felt ready to actualize my pre-service teaching. I began in a large school outside of Pittsburgh, where my preparation had proven beneficial. I engaged students in the art of dissecting texts in order to discuss symbolism and various forms of conflict. Teaching seemed typical and scripted. I noticed teachers making copies that had dates from prior years and wondered if this was all it took to be an effective educator. This is when my teaching experience became dynamic.

I completed my pre-service teaching at a performing arts college in Worcester, England. This school specifically geared its curriculum toward

the arts and performance. English classes no longer solely focused on the regimented elements of literature. Students became engaged in texts by experiencing them. They created interpretive dances to the events in *Hamlet*. Students related to the characters portrayed in novels by role playing and interviewing each other in order to gain a better sense of characters' altruism and what positive motives each had to carry out their part of the plot. Students were not simply reading texts, but interacting with them. They were truly experiencing learning rather than reading as an outsider, and even seemed to enjoy participating in the activities. This allowed me to realize the difference between reading texts and experiencing texts.

Returning to the United States, I internalized my varied educational background and have utilized aspects of these experiences every day during the past seven years of teaching. Teaching seventh grade and grades nine through twelve has given me the opportunity to learn from an array of students and identify their needs. It seems to me students are increasingly having difficulty connecting what they read to their lives. This disconnection tends to create a dislike for reading that is not easily overcome. Dewey poses, "How many [students] found what they did learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them no power of control over the latter?" (1938, p. 27). Not every student feels the

ability to connect to the words of William Shakespeare; however, the universal themes could allow them to make current connections to their lives when given the power to identify these elements. The purpose of reading is not always for comprehension. Reading can impose satisfaction and other emotions by triggering recollections and personal associations between text and reader. It is imperative, therefore, to have a sense of purpose when reading in order to take advantage of the text's potential. Without taking into account the author's purpose or intent, the reader may be disappointed, then disinterested with the subsequent pages.

Expanding on my undergraduate knowledge of teaching English, my Master's of Education program at Moravian College has permitted me to develop a sense of community with my students. This community encourages student engagement, inquiry-based learning, and authentic learning tasks. This atmosphere sanctions me to focus my research on motivating reluctant readers by showing them that reading is not an independent process. Reading and learning take the ability to associate what is being read with elements and people in their lives. Using readers' experiences to connect to texts increases reading interest and comprehension, moving readers closer to authors' true purpose, finding usefulness and enjoyment from reading. Dewey states, "Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past,

while teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective connection with the material” (1938, p. 18).

### **Research Question**

Throughout my seven years of teaching, I have noticed the inability of students to place relevance in curriculum texts, therefore, leading me to closely study reading habits. As I read Rosenblatt’s transactional learning theory (1993), she directed me to further explore the area of making connections to reading and aided me to develop my research question: What will be the observed and reported experiences when twelfth-grade college preparatory (CP) English students independently research areas of interest present in their assigned readings?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Learning theories support independent student choice in order to form personal connections with texts. Metacognitive learning incorporates the readers' knowledge of learning strategies in order to better connect to texts. Transactional learning shows the correlation created between reader and text by associating reading as a multiple step experience. Schematic learning links readers' previously established associations with latest readings. These theories, coupled with independent research, allow students to fashion reading connections.

### **Learning Theories**

Various learning theories aid in increasing the connections made while reading. Metacognitive learning, transactional learning, and schematic learning illustrate methods to interact with texts.

### ***Metacognitive Learning***

Andrew-Vaughan and Fleischer (2006) suggest using introspective questions to create the opportunity for educators to discover their best teaching habits; "How do you think your future students might feel if you simply assigned a genre without giving a lot of background—a sonnet, for example, or any other genre that might seem uncomfortable or scary to them?" (p. 40). These questions can be used to delve into the learning

process. For instance, by completing an Unfamiliar-Genre Research Project, students used metacognition journals to reflect upon the learning process. This journal highlighted the students' weaknesses as well as strengths and illustrated the journey along the way.

Warian (2003) studied students from elementary school through high school and noted elementary students were more successful at learning and using metacognitive strategies than middle and high school students. Warian (2003) suggests elementary teachers modeled, taught, and evaluated these strategies, where middle and high school teachers did not. Students need to continue to use these metacognitive strategies throughout their educational careers, not solely in the early years.

According to Wolters (2003), metacognition enables students to monitor and adjust their cognition based on the varying needs while learning. This core element of self-regulated learning encourages students to recognize their individual learning needs and helps them establish individual effective learning strategies. Metacognitive learning processes not only require students to learn these tactics but also to have enough time to fully develop the ability to use them. Sharp and Ashby (2002) note students were unable to take ownership of their newfound metacognitive skills due to the short nature of the study, less than half a year. Had this

particular study continued, the students probably would have been better able to incorporate these methods into their own learning.

### ***Transactional Learning***

The founder of transactional learning, Rosenblatt (1993), describes reading as a two-fold process where the reader experiences both an efferent stance, the ability to carry out a task from what is learned from reading, and an aesthetic stance, the overall experience and feelings reading has created. Although different in intention, these two stances work in a continuum, rather than independently struggling for control. According to Rosenblatt (1985), efferent reading is a nonaesthetic approach in order to carry out a task, e.g., bake a cake or take the appropriate medicine dosage. This “instrumental” form of reading is necessary for proper communication between the reader and the text. The aesthetic transaction, however, is unique to each reader. Readers experience events by identifying with emotive language or imagery and relate these occurrences to their lives. Readers must identify their purpose for reading, whether efferent or aesthetic, in order to fully experience texts. Some texts will be a combination of both transactions and will vary for readers. This transaction between reader and text is ongoing and is unique to each reader.

Martin (2003) describes Rosenblatt's theory by noting that to decipher meaning within a text, the reader must not focus on merely interpreting print, but also on interacting with the words to develop a give-and-take relationship with literature. The connotation of words and phrases may differ with various readers depending on their experiences and interests. Galda and Liang (2003) explain transactional theorists as believing reading combines the experiences of the writer and the reader to construct meaning. This collaboration between two strangers creates a unique meaning to the individual reader.

***Aesthetic learning.*** Palmer (1981) explains aesthetic learning through the self-corrective lens of reflecting upon what is read and continually questioning beliefs regarding the topic. This engagement with the reading allows for constant evaluation of both independent beliefs about the topic and the writer's beliefs. Rosenblatt (1985) goes on to associate aesthetic reading with the ability to attach a qualitative description to the text, allowing for a deeper connection.

Peters (1992) found, while conducting a research study, the tendency for pre-service teachers instructed in aesthetic-based learning to focus on characters in texts as actual people. The responses to questions revolved around how readers felt emotionally regarding the characters and discussed them as if they were actual people. These pre-service teachers

reported having deeper connections to the text; “I could see the boys and almost feel their fear. I could see the look of terror and disbelief on their faces” (p. 8).

***Efferent learning.*** Palmer (1981) explains “a key characteristic of efferent (expository) reading is that it focuses upon what will remain *after* the reading, hence, *efferent* from the Latin *effere*, to carry over” (p. 64). This form of learning denotes a practical application to reading. Once proper comprehension occurs, the reader is able to complete a task. Rosenblatt (1985) describes this leftover material as being a residue. The reader attends to the meanings of the words in order to take something away from the reading. This is often seen in poem analysis, where poems are dissected into set structures, literary elements, organization, rhyme schemes, and more.

Peters (1992) found efferent learners appeared to have a detachment to the characters by simply discussing them in an analytical manner, outlining their characters using literary elements rather than human characteristics. They analyzed the text for symbolism rather than reading to create vivid images. Pre-service teachers within this research group were either unable to answer questions regarding whether or not they agreed with the actions and emotions the characters exhibited or

uncomfortable supplying an answer. Their narrow reading focus prevented them from personally connecting with the text.

### ***Schematic Learning***

Schematic learning is also a theory based on forming connections. Anderson and Pearson (1984) depict schema theory as juxtaposing preexisting images with novel information. Readers associate or organize information into categories that explain what is happening. Readers infer events based on traditions or their remembrance of ceremonies. This allows the writer to omit certain details the reader can independently devise.

Derry (1996) illustrates the importance of working memory, prior knowledge or experiences, to build new experiences and help the learner interpret the newly received information. The use of memory-object schemas are long-term memories that allow for new associations or the assimilation of new knowledge.

Iran-Nejad and Ortony (1983) show in a biological study regarding the brain that memories are not static long-term in nature, rather transient and changing based on the ever-present newly acquired knowledge. They suggest memory recall is not simply searching for long-term stored facts. Iran-Nejad and Ortony (1983) see memories as transient, which is less structural and more “biofunctional”.

## **Guiding Student Research**

Guiding student research in the twenty-first century requires effective use of electronic databases and the Internet.

### ***Internet Research***

Pierce (1998) describes many obstacles students face while conducting independent online research. Students have to overcome numerous distractions while researching and do not necessarily possess the necessary skills to research effectively. According to Pierce's study conducted in 1998, students felt they had a high level of knowledge regarding credible Internet researching skills; however, their searches rarely used anything other than commercial (.com) websites.

Ebersole (2000) found that despite the wealth of credible research available on the World Wide Web, students are unable to locate the information or are not looking for the correct information. They revert to recreational Internet surfing instead of seeing research as a different purpose. Ebersole (2000) warns against simply trusting students to understand how to research effectively on the Internet and to provide proper training to prevent using inaccurate information.

Vansickle (2002) also mirrors these sentiments with a study that produced significant results regarding students' inability to effectively research on the Internet. Students need direct instruction from a

knowledgeable teacher who can guide them through the process of using appropriate search engines and deciphering credible websites from unreliable websites.

### ***Independent Choices***

Regarding independent choice when researching, Pierce (2000) discovered the inability of students to distinguish the difference in purpose for various search engines. When choosing search engines, students generally used engines they were most familiar and comfortable navigating. Pierce (1998) also found that students generally performed simplistic searches when left independently.

On the other hand, studies have shown having independent choice when reading is beneficial. Alfaro (1999) conducted a study regarding the use of the Waterford Early Reading Program to increase enthusiasm in reading. This technology-based system provided an additional tool for students to become engaged in reading. The study concluded with a parent/student survey that showed an increase in reading interest at home. This interest allowed students to independently choose what texts to read on their own. This new enthusiasm ultimately increased reading readiness in young children when beginning new grades. In 1996, Cordova and Lepper found “contextualization, personalization, and choice all produced dramatic increases, not only in students’ motivation but also in

their depth of engagement in learning, the amount they learned in a fixed time period, and their perceived competence and levels of aspiration” (p. 715).

Comparatively, a long-term study was conducted by Deci, Nezlek, and Sheinman (1981) where the effects of promoting autonomy were evaluated in students throughout an entire school year. They discovered giving students choices throughout lessons enabled them to feel in control of their education and increased their intrinsic motivation to learn. Control-based teachers, however, had the opposite effect on students. Teaching through traditional abstract methods did not promote autonomy nor allow students to become genuinely interested in the material.

### **Making Connections**

Incorporating authentic learning environments fosters motivational environments for students to become engaged in reading.

### ***Student Motivation***

Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000) conducted a study using the CORI reading program to increase student motivation in reading. This program incorporates facilitating hands-on activities, researching, reading relative texts, and presenting information to others. Guthrie et al. (2000) found a significant increase in reading curiosity after using this system rather than traditional teaching methods. They highlighted the positive

effect participating in real-world problem solving had on increasing student interest and effort.

In order to determine how mood affects motivation and goal attainment, Fishbach and Labroo (2007) studied participants and discovered people who are happy and have positive attitudes work harder and stay on task versus people who are unhappy and in a bad mood. Happy, goal-oriented people are motivated to continue setting new goals once previous goals have been reached. Similarly, Brinol, Petty, and Barden (2007) looked at the relationship between emotions, such as happiness and sadness, and how reading certain material would affect the persuasiveness and effectiveness of certain arguments. These researchers found participants who felt cheerful after reading about a topic had higher thought confidence regarding their opinions on the topic.

Conducting a study dealing with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Pittman, Emery, and Boggiano (1982) found that individuals intrinsically motivated to carry out tasks generally chose more complex challenges in order to master certain skills. Neither intrinsic motivation nor extrinsic motivation decreased interest in the studied activities; free choice only altered the complexity of the activities. Deci et al. (1981) also found by affording students independent choice intrinsic motivation would increase.

This intrinsic factor is also discussed in Cordova and Lepper (1996). Their study found students who were more intrinsically involved in activities used more complex operations to problem solve, therefore, learning more during the process than students who were not motivated by the activities.

Similarly, the study by Iyengar and Lepper (1999) shows a direct link between student choice and intrinsic motivation. They note this autonomy allows students to express their personal preferences in an effort to establish their own identity.

### ***Authentic Learning***

Creating a writing project that incorporated authentic learning allowed Andrew-Vaughan and Fleischer (2006) to see a direct relation between their classroom work on writing genres and their students' home lives. They explain authentic learning as using knowledge in realistic situations. Students were able to transfer their knowledge of genre writing to their everyday living situations, "As a reader, I will now pay more attention to different formats and styles of writing so I can incorporate them into my own. . . . I found myself just today reading my dad's newspaper and paying attention to the special way it was written" (p. 42). This leads to the idea of literacy as a social theory. Dressman (2007) concluded literacy, or the varying degrees of literacy, serves as a societal

bond shared by individuals. Varying groups exist depending on the individual level of literacy.

These newfound associations and practical skills can be juxtaposed to the study conducted by Deci et al. (1981) that shows the correlation between intrinsic learning and positive outlooks on learning and the feeling of autonomy. They found an increase in self-esteem among students with this strong sense of autonomy. Students were also able to adapt easier to dynamic surroundings and teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Establishing connections while reading increases when incorporating metacognitive learning, transactional learning, and schematic learning. Allowing students to research online will increase motivation and student engagement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

In order to discover if students are making connections as they read, several procedures were conducted using triangulated data sources. The independent nature of this project required students to possess a basic level of computer research knowledge.

### **Setting**

This research study was conducted in a suburban high school located in the Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania. A growing population of approximately 1,500 students is enrolled in the high school; many students have migrated from urban New Jersey and New York schools. The classroom was outfitted with many pieces of technology from the Classrooms for the Future Grant. These items included 30 laptop computers, wireless Internet, color printer, LCD projector, digital camera, digital camcorder, web camera, and Promethean Board.

### **Participants**

The study was conducted in a 12<sup>th</sup> grade College Preparatory English class with 25 students in the fall semester of 2008. There were 15 females and 10 males. Five of the students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that required extra time for reading and taking exams. The class was ethnically diverse with no one subgroup acting as a majority. As

college preparatory is the second level of English in this particular school, many of the students were bound for either two-year colleges, trade schools, or the work force upon graduation.

### **Trustworthiness Statement**

As an English educator, I have an inherent interest in increasing student reading motivation. While I hoped to see an increase in reading connectivity throughout my study, I based my findings on collected data. These data were gathered in a triangulated format, therefore, creating more valid findings. Surveys began and ended the study. Classroom observations were used to create field log reflections, which were reflected upon in a timely manner to limit information loss and to prevent inaccurately adding details. Students completed travel logs, which enhanced collected data. Hendricks (2006) reminds researchers to use many forms of data to increase the credibility of the results. These data, while being kept secure, were only discussed with my research support group using pseudonyms for confidentiality. While I could not ignore any biases regarding my prior childhood learning experiences, I attempted to focus on current trends I documented during class observations. Ely, Anzul, Downing, and Vinz (1997) “feel that a responsible research report is a report that can be believed” (p. 34). Additionally, I was open to unforeseen outcomes in my study recognizing the study’s full potential.

Seeking and acknowledging alternate points-of-view regarding data and analysis increased the validity of my results, while illuminating further research topics. MacLean and Mohr (1999) suggest outside readers will find research trustworthy if “reporting of your research is accurate, rich with context, and fully documented” (p. 122). Since this is a qualitative study, the goal was not for readers to mimic this application, but to decide what worked and to personalize the procedures. Achieving readers’ trust increased the study’s validity and attempted to inspire fellow educators to implement their own version.

To perform an ethical and effective research study, I obtained written permission from my school’s principal (Appendix A) to conduct the study within my classroom and signed permission by students and their parents/guardians (Appendix B). If students or parents required additional support during or after the study, a guidance counselor as well as a college representative was listed on the permission forms for reference. Despite this agreement, parents and students could withdraw from the study at any time. According to Hendricks (2006), obtaining such authorization can be tedious but will protect the researcher and the subjects from potential harm. Although my study had little chance of harming students, I submitted and received approval from Moravian College’s Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) (Appendix C)

to conduct the study with high school students. To further improve the ethical standards, students were not only introduced to the study before participating, but also were debriefed following the conclusion to ensure harmlessness.

### **Procedures**

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Hamlet* were the three major curricular works that were used for this study. Each of these units lasted approximately two school weeks. To make reading relevant, students chose personally interesting topics to research. For instance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* prompted several students to explore medieval weaponry. Through class presentations, students learned how weapons were hand-made and even how other weapons portrayed specific social class status. For *Lord of the Flies*, Tyranny chose to investigate tropical fruit. She discovered many varieties and provided brilliant photos that initiated a class discussion where numerous students asked genuine questions. *Hamlet* interested a student in the reoccurring idea of feigning insanity. Researching this topic included looking at a psychologist's career, finding information about psychiatric hospitals, and discovering famous people with mental disorders.

**Day 1**

I explained to the students the rationale behind making connections to texts. This elucidation provided examples, showing reasons why this skill was worthwhile. A project directions sheet (Appendix D) was distributed to show the students the requirements and the study's purpose of helping them form personal connections while reading. Students were given a pre-survey that addressed reading interest and reading frequency (Appendix E). Students responded to various questions describing their reading experiences using a Likert Scale and composed responses regarding what makes reading interesting and boring. The same survey questions were asked in the post-survey (Appendix F) for comparison data at the conclusion of the study.

**Days 2-7**

For each unit, students read a text and chose one topic present in the reading to independently research. To aid in this selection, students brainstormed ideas and concepts that were present in the text and compiled a list using the Promethean Board, which was saved for future reference. Students independently drafted a list at their seats for five minutes and then added their ideas to the class list on the board. This provided a menu of research topics for students to select.

In order to ensure that proper researching techniques were available, a list of reference tools (Appendix G) was provided; Google was avoided when possible in order to expose students to alternate credible electronic databases. Our high school subscribed to several electronic databases that provided professionally reviewed sources; however, few students incorporated these tools when exploring online and simply used Google. Exposure to databases such as, CLIO, Grolier Online Encyclopedia, COIN, and others were part of the librarian's workshop on effective online researching techniques, which the students took part in before beginning the project. A handout that included an example of a proper outline and how to make text-to-self connections was distributed and explained (Appendix H). Since the majority of these students were unfamiliar with formal outlines and making connections, a visual representation aided them in their implementation.

Students employed our classroom laptops to begin researching and were given the travel log (Appendix I) to focus their research and guide them through the process. This resource calmed ambivalent researchers and served as a step-by-step process for research exploration. This log required students to explain how their topic was presented in their text, allowing them to make further connections in their future research. A skeleton outline was started for them to complete as they discovered

information. They chose the direction of the outline to personalize their research. Other sections required students to make personal connections to their interests and lives. Finally, a list of sources written in Modern Language Association (MLA) format was essential to provide credibility to their findings.

Two 90 minute blocks of classroom workshop time were spent researching topics and completing travel logs for each text. If students needed additional time to complete the travel log, they completed it as homework. Students were permitted to share useful websites with their classmates, but travel logs had to be completed independently because of the personal nature of text-to-self connections. A minimum of three sources were consulted to encourage credibility. A mini-lesson aimed at identifying credible sources was taught to help students avoid highly-biased websites. They looked for suitable authors, absence of advertisements, and credible domain names to determine validity. This lesson lasted approximately 20 minutes.

### **Days 8-9**

Once students completed their research and supplementary materials, they had to volunteer to present their findings for at least one of the three units. This autonomy prevented students from feeling pressured to present for every text and gave them the opportunity to choose an

appropriate time to share their findings. Plus, this shortened our units, as not everyone had to present for each text. During these presentations, students shared their topics and their findings with us, based largely on their travel logs, which they referenced during presentations. Students had to incorporate a visual they made or acquired through research to increase student engagement. Most students used pictures, graphs, or videos they found while researching, but some chose to create posters or diagrams by hand. While sharing their information, personal connections were made, and presenters asked classmates questions and answered inquiries. Instead of the teacher incorporating a few focused topics to learn, students introduced many topics I would not have anticipated to be beneficial or relevant.

### **Assessment**

In order to assess the project, travel logs were collected and evaluated using a rubric (Appendix J), allowing students to receive points for their diligent work. Items on the rubric corresponded to the methods previously explained throughout the project. MLA format was also assessed due to the ongoing maintenance of this skill as part of the English department curriculum. Comments were given to encourage growth for the next researched novel. Additionally, the presentation was graded using a rubric (Appendix K) to award points for student preparation, thorough

content, and effective visuals. A formative overall reflection sheet (Appendix L) was also completed by the students at the conclusion of the study to receive participant feedback regarding the process.

### **Data Sources**

Several data collection methods were used to achieve triangulation. Both participant and non-participant classroom observations were incorporated into a field log. I kept copious notes on behaviors, problems students encountered, and student comments. In order to keep data accurate, my objective observations were located in a separate column from my reflections.

Student surveys (Appendixes E & F) were given before and after the survey for comparison. Questions regarding students' previous encounters with reading were surveyed using a Likert Scale. Additionally, open-ended questions were asked for students to relay specific aspects of reading that are interesting and characteristics of reading that are boring.

Students completed a written reflection [Appendix L] of the project highlighting positive and negative aspects of their experiences. This supplemented the surveys but aimed to achieve student opinions by means of personal voices. Since each response was unique, comparing and contrasting reflections was unnecessary. Comments were coded and inserted into the field log.

Next, student research in the form of travel logs were collected and analyzed using a rubric (Appendix J). This rubric addressed each section of the travel log looking for thoroughness, organization, and insight. This research was conducted mainly during class instruction; however, some students required additional independent research to complete travel logs.

Finally, a presentation rubric (Appendix K) was incorporated to help students understand the purpose of sharing their information with other students. Content, preparation, and visual elements were assessed. Students had to choose one text on which to present their findings and only received a presentation grade once.

### **Data Analysis**

Analyzing the field log provided evidence regarding the effect of this study. Observational notes were analyzed for behavior patterns or changes throughout the course of the study. Reflective memos and analytical memos were coded for common themes. After analysis and coding of the field log for emergent themes, a coding index was created to offer quick references to data.

An Excel spreadsheet highlighted comparisons in the pre-survey and the post-survey responses. After the answers to the questions were recorded, a column was added to the spreadsheet to highlight the changes between the pre-survey and post-survey. These positive or negative

changes could be a result of the study. Special attention was given to answers at the extreme ends of the Likert scale and the subjective completion section because these answers connoted either strong positive or negative feelings toward reading facets.

The student reflection page was analyzed for emergent text-to-self connections. Given this was a completion section, student responses varied and provided insights for the study via original voices. In these reflections, students included how they related the topics they chose to their lives. This information led to student reading recommendations through simple online searches for books by topics.

The travel log was analyzed for thoroughness and the selected types of research tools. In individual sections aimed at making connections, students wrote how they connected their topics to their lives and why they found the information interesting. These associations were a motivating factor to continue researching independently when reading.

### **Summary**

Throughout the semester, students investigated interesting topics they discovered in three major texts, to encourage reading interest and to increase students' connections to the texts. Providing an environment where independent research took place potentially encouraged students to

become lifelong readers and showed them that connections to their lives can be made from what they learn in school.

## **MY STORY: THE GLOBAL JOURNEY IN ROOM 107**

### **Introduction**

To encourage students to become life-long readers and to gain meaning out of the texts, I devised a research study where, as students read, they chose topics from texts that interested them. Then students researched to learn more about these topics, anticipating the formation of connections with the texts.

### **Finding a Crew**

Over my seven years of teaching various grade levels and students from various cultures, I have noticed the ambivalence that arises when students are forced to read in school. Whether students have difficulty relating to curricular texts or are given books that exceed their reading ability, they are often uninterested in interacting with school-related texts. As a child, I enjoyed leisurely reading but was not as interested in reading books for school. I did not associate school books with fun. I read these texts with a specific assigned purpose, to find literary elements and to identify the plot.

To begin this journey, I needed to assemble a trusting crew. Giving students the opportunity to identify school reading as relevant and to show them how to connect with what they read required convincing students it was worthwhile.

**Mr. Snyder-** “We are about to embark on a journey where what you learn is up to you.”

*I expected their eyes to light up; however, I suspect in their twelve years of schooling they may have heard this line before.*

**Mr. Snyder-** “As we read the next three texts, you be exploring some of the ideas you find interesting within the texts. What you choose from the text will be up to you. We will be finding information about your topics using the laptop computers and projecting any interesting visuals onto the Promethean Board.”

**Darla-** “Do we have to write an essay?”

**Mr. Snyder-** “Writing is a small component of this project, but you will not be writing an essay. I am more concerned with what you find interesting from each text and what information you can locate by researching.”

**Jose-** “But Mista, how are we gonna get a grade?”

**Mr. Snyder-** “Certain stages of the project will be assessed. This will help give you a sense of accomplishment and let you know you’re on the right track.”

**Darla-** “No essay? This is going to be easy.”

After our initial talk, I explained how I would be incorporating the data from the project into a thesis document for graduate school and distributed the consent forms. Having seniors, I did not have any parents concerned about their children participating in this study; however, students took over two weeks to return their consent forms. The few students who did not return their forms were informed they would be participating in the daily activities, but they would not be part of the collected data for the published study.

### **Reliving Past Journeys**

Now that I had my crew, it was time to discover their reading history. Students completed a pre-survey (Appendix E) regarding their experiences with reading in school and at home. Using a Likert Scale, students rated their experiences with several aspects of reading, e.g., connecting what they read to real life, enjoying assigned school readings, getting ideas for future books to read from classes in school, and more. In

addition to the Likert Scale, students responded to the open-ended questions of “What makes reading fun?” and “What makes reading boring?” The pastiches (Figures 1 & 2) reflect some of the students’ answers. The majority of the answers concerning what makes reading fun were positive. There was one response, “Nothing,” that showed the variety of reading backgrounds present in the crew. Common themes include autonomous selection of texts, stress-free environments, and relevant, interesting topics. The nature of the question regarding what makes reading boring warranted more negative responses. Pressure from school, irrelevant topics, and complicated texts add to student frustrations with reading in school. Although it was not suspected at the time, these common phrases would become the essence of this research study.

### What makes reading fun?

I like reading about violence.

Nothing

If the story does not get too into detail.

It brings me to a new world.

Romantic novels are the best, especially ones with lots of details.

When it's about something you can connect to.

When it is something interesting.

Interesting topics that I would like to learn more about.

Reading is more fun when you are doing it under your own will and when it makes connections to your life.

If it is something you want to know about.

Reading what you choose—for absolutely no reason—then there's no pressure.

If it is something about sports.

My imagination

**Figure 1: Pre-survey Pastiche**

### **What makes reading boring?**

When one story never ends.

No pictures

I don't like books with no pictures.

Without pictures I can't get the right visualization.

If it has no surprises.

I'm only into certain genres.

*Reading about something you are completely not interested in and forced to read.*

When it doesn't make sense, and I have to read it.

Stories that are way too corny and have no importance in my life.

### **When you are forced into reading something you don't like.**

When I'm not hooked from the start, it usually makes the entire book a bad experience.

When it is hard to understand or on a topic that you don't care about.

### **The pressure of school**

*I just don't like to read. I think it is a waste of my time.*

**Figure 2: Pre-survey Pastiche**

### **Choosing a Vessel**

Selecting my crew and learning of their past experiences led me to introduce them to our exploration vessel, online databases. Taking advantage of the technology available in our classroom, each student had access to a laptop computer with wireless Internet access. Although our classroom printer was inoperable due to networking problems, students were able to save their information and access it again because they were assigned a specifically numbered computer. They were also able to save information onto a portable memory stick, commonly called a “jump drive,” to continue working at home.

With these computers in hand, students had the opportunity to experience a database workshop presented by the librarian, where several of the school subscribed electronic databases (Appendix G) were explained and utilized in an informational treasure hunt. The librarian sent students on a search for information that required them to select the proper database and perform a search. Students viewed this game as a speed contest.

**Librarian:** “Who can find what date the Apollo 13 landed on the moon?”

*Students frantically typing and scanning text. Utter silence except for mouse clicking and keys tapping.*

**Jill:** “I found it! 1970!”

*Groans from a few students who were just about to discover the same date.*

**Andrea:** “Wait a minute. Apollo 13 never landed on the moon. They had problems and had to turn around.”

**Librarian:** “Very nice job closely reading your information. Be careful when researching information. The hardest part is actually reading sources carefully and completely. It was tempting to choose the first date you found that was associated with Apollo 13 because of the way I worded my question.”

**Jill:** “Give us another one. I want to redeem myself.”

**Librarian:** “Okay. With this one, you’ll have to decide which database is most appropriate for finding the necessary information. Who can summarize the job description of a nanotechnologist?”

**Jim:** “How do you spell that?”

**Librarian:** “You should be able to discover the proper spelling while researching. Try entering the word as it sounds first.”

*Thirty seconds of silence before students remember COIN is the most appropriate program to find career-related information. Students then take the time to read this source carefully as it is unfamiliar. A few hands go up eagerly, but the librarian waits a few more seconds for more students to join the wave.*

**Librarian:** “Andy, what does a nanotechnologist do?”

**Andy:** “Nanotechnology is the science of using small computer components to make machines work faster and more efficiently. So, a nanotechnologist basically makes super small computers. I bet this is why cell phones keep getting smaller and more powerful.”

**Librarian:** “Excellent connection Andy! You’re right. Much of the technology we use everyday is being improved through nanotechnology. Although this is a relatively new field, it is growing rapidly. These jobs will be in high demand in the near future.”

*After a few more information treasure hunts:*

**Librarian:** “Everyone did a great job researching today. I hope you are better able to decide which databases will benefit your research project for Mr. Snyder. These databases the school subscribes to are quite expensive and you are lucky to have the access to use them. Take advantage of these credible sources and let me know if you have any questions or would like me to revisit with you to help you along with your projects.”

Practice using these resources eased the anxiety unfamiliar computer programs create. Since this project was conducted using three texts, we reviewed these databases before beginning each new book. By projecting CLIO, Grolier Encyclopedia, Facts on File, and other databases on the Promethean Board, students recognized the importance of these tools and applied them.

### Charting Our Course

Since my crew had a vessel to sail upon, we had to chart our course. Before students could begin researching, they had to select an interesting topic to investigate. As a veteran teacher, I knew allowing students to choose a topic would not be easy for everyone. Some students are trained to do or to write what the teacher assigns, therefore, experiencing difficulty when left to make these choices independently. To help with this process, students brainstormed and created a class topic list. For the smaller work, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, we created the list after reading the story. For the longer texts, *Lord of the Flies* and *Hamlet*, we stopped periodically during reading to add items to the list. This made brainstorming more manageable and lessened the chances students would forget topics before having the chance to add them to the list. Figure 3 displays student-generated topics for the three texts. Glancing at the assortment of subjects on the list elicits the overall purpose of the study, which is to engage students in reading and to show they can find relevance and interest in school-related texts. Designing lessons including all of the topics on the lists is implausible; however, allowing students to explore these ideas for themselves expands their background knowledge and personalizes their education.

**Sir Gawain and  
the Green Knight**

Medieval Weapons  
 Knights  
 Castles  
 Medieval Clothing  
 Decapitation  
 Magic  
 Monarchy  
 Arthurian Legend  
 Giants  
 Horses  
 Chivalry  
 Medieval Food  
 Mead  
 Shields  
 Round Table  
 Bravery  
 Hauberk  
 Medieval Games

**Lord of the Flies**

Atomic Bomb  
 Parachuting  
 Survival  
 Wild Pigs  
 Fire  
 Sea Animals  
 Plane Crashes  
 Tropical Weather  
 Building Shelters  
 Coral Reefs  
 Stars  
 Hunting  
 Survival Gear  
 Conch Shells  
 War  
 Coconuts  
 Tropical Islands  
 Diarrhea  
 Face Painting  
 Tribal Dances  
 Deserted Islands  
 Diseases-Fever  
 Savages  
 Religious Rituals  
 Separation Anxiety  
 Coast Guard  
 Demons  
 Fishing  
 Mother Nature  
 Navy  
 Boats  
 Law of Gravity  
 Mental Illnesses  
 Phobias

**Hamlet**

Ghosts  
 Fencing  
 Local Hauntings  
 Suicide  
 Poison  
 Flowers  
 Royal Families  
 Pirates  
 Shakespeare  
 Denmark  
 England  
 Usurpations  
 Christianity  
 Demons  
 Murder  
 Mental Illness  
 Psychiatric  
 Hospitals  
 Medieval War  
 Vikings  
 Wittenberg  
 Playwriting  
 Revenge  
 Acting  
 Black Plague  
 Iambic Pentameter

**Figure 3: Student-Generated Topic Lists**

### **Discovering New Lands**

Once students prepared for their journey and charted the direction they would travel, they were ready for discovery. While most of the students were confident of their success, others were ambivalent about setting sail. As students began researching, I focused my attention on the reticent fingers poised over some keyboards. Mostly, students simply needed reassurance in their choice of databases. Five minutes later, every student joined the chorus of clicking and typing.

Just when success seemed inevitable Noah protested, “Great! Figures!” as he encountered difficulties accessing websites through the school’s online filter. The following poem (Figure 4) incorporates comments from Noah and other students regarding blocked websites. While these comments may seem unassuming, small frustrations manifest into learning anxiety, which prohibit students’ progress.

*Researching Roadblocks*

Great!  
Figures!  
Another blocked site  
What's scandalous about islands?  
Who decides what is inappropriate?

GOD!  
Ugh!  
What isn't banned?  
I guess I can't do weapons.  
I'll just wait until I get home.

**Figure 4: Researching Poem**

Not every student, however, had difficulty while researching. Many had eureka moments throughout their exploration. While the class was diligently researching, I noticed Charlie had strayed to a music website and was not engaged in the project. I redirected him to investigate medieval music if this is what interested him.

**Charlie:** They had music back then? I guess I can check it out. Wow, I actually found something. These media files aren't working, but I know another site I can check. Do you think I can bring in some instruments and play some of the music I find? I think that would be really cool.

Charlie recognized the purpose of this project. He was interested in music but never thought to actually choose music as his topic. It took encouragement for Charlie to tailor his learning to his interests, even when given the freedom to accomplish this independently. Having this freedom may be foreign to Charlie since, like most students, he is used to teachers telling him what is valuable to learn. He rarely becomes engaged in learning, and his idea of performing examples of medieval music will allow his classmates to see him as a capable contributor of knowledge.

During the class research for *Lord of the Flies*, a reluctant reader, Bill, chose to research aspects of World War II, as this novel was written

during the 1940s and atomic war was the backdrop for this text. Bill began by looking at photos and reading stories about concentration camps. At one point he called me over.

**Bill:** I found more photos. Look, there are people standing in line waiting to be gassed.

**Mr. Snyder:** Why do you think they would willingly stand in that line?

**Bill:** Maybe they didn't know they were going to be killed, or maybe they wanted to be.

**Mr. Snyder:** Why do you think it's possible they wanted to die?

**Bill:** Well, I'm just saying that maybe their living conditions were so bad that they would rather be dead. I keep seeing references to death marches. What are they?

**Mr. Snyder:** I'm not sure. It sounds related to what you already found. You should look into it.

**Bill:** Here, it says the Nazis forced people to walk miles to their own deaths in terrible conditions with little clothing to protect them from the elements. Why would people do that to each other?

**Mr. Snyder:** Wow, you found that information fast. You're a good researcher. It seems like you're well on your way to understanding this horrific situation. Keep reading and researching until you find the answers you're looking for. Let me know if you get stuck or if you find something else you want to share with me.

Bill's excitement in his research was truly astounding. This student was never interested in what we read in class, but suddenly he found an authentic purpose to this class. He was able to associate what happened in history as inhumane and wanted to discover why it had happened. This is the essence of learning for authentic means.

Jennifer, on the other hand, researched something that at first seemed trite to me. She chose to examine tropical fruit. I thought she chose this because it would be easy for her to find information; however, I quickly realized she genuinely was interested in learning what fruit the boys would have on the island in *Lord of the Flies*. As I stood near her to monitor her progress, Jennifer said, "I love peaches. Did you know peaches come from Persia? That's really cool."

“Where’s Persia?” Noah asked.

“Well, according to this site, Persia isn’t a country but a region. The Persian Gulf is in the Middle East” Jennifer shared.

“I’ve heard of the Persian Gulf. I wasn’t sure they were the same thing. You know what I love? Canned peaches. I love the syrup that comes with them. I’m pretty sure I could pour that on anything and eat it” Noah added.

This brief dialogue allowed Jennifer to share her enjoyment of peaches with a fellow student and anyone else who was listening. She talked about the fruit’s origin and even taught us where Persia was located. I would have never imagined that a mini lesson on peaches would be interesting or relevant to any of the students. Without this project I may have been unable to engage Jennifer in anything from the text. Plus, I may have never learned the origin of peaches.

Once we finished the first two units on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Lord of the Flies*, I thought our classroom research workshops would be routine and perhaps even uninteresting. Once we started our final round of research, however, regarding *Hamlet* I could have never imagined the following events.

**Setting**

High school classroom during second block. Desks are arranged in three rows shaped in a half moon.

**Cast**

Twelfth grade college preparatory English class research study group.

**Drama**

*Class is busy independently researching on laptops, finding and recording information. The teacher, Mr. Snyder, circulates around the room pausing to interact with students and to monitor progress. All of a sudden, 8 students crowd around one computer and begin making outbursts followed by laughter.*

**Mr. Snyder:** Is everything okay over there?

*No response. Mr. Snyder walks over to group to see what they have found.*

**Mr. Snyder:** What are you all watching so intently?

**George:** Shhh. Wait one second.

*All of a sudden, a black screen flashes with a scary image of a face and students jump.*

**George:** This is awesome. Wait until you see some of the other pictures I found.

**Mr. Snyder:** What is your topic George?

**George:** Well, I noticed that *Hamlet* talks a lot about ghosts and spirits, so I thought I would look up stuff about it. I always watch *Ghost Hunters* on TV. I found all of these images that prove ghosts are real.

*Other students begin switching their topics to ghosts and use the same website George has found.*

**Mr. Snyder:** Since today is day one of research for *Hamlet*, it is okay if you decide to switch your topics. While it's not a problem if more than one student researches the same topic, you should try to conduct your own research, rather than using websites of other classmates. Perhaps, those of your researching ghosts could start with George's source and branch out from there. This is truly a great site and would be entertaining for us to

see. I'm wondering what other sources are out there and if you will find a specific subtopic under ghosts to explore further.

*Students get the hint and begin researching their topics. Some stay with George's website for a few minutes before seeking alternatives, but most try to locate more sites to share. Two of the students who changed to ghosts switched back to their original topics once the novelty wore off.*

**Noah:** I have a book about haunted places in the Poconos. It's really cool. My brother and I have gone to some of the places at night and have gotten really freaked out. Did you ever hear of the Buckhill Inn? It's incredibly creepy. I'll bring in the book if anyone wants to see it.

**George:** Definitely, I could use it for my presentation. This would be a great unit for Halloween.

Thankfully, I did not overreact to this interruption, as genuine learning took place. This episode reminded me how dynamic student learning can become. Student interests rapidly adjust to their surroundings. Just as fashion trends and music tastes change, so do learning interests. This highlights the implausibility of creating a

structured curriculum that covers all student interests. The independence of researching day-to-day empowers students to take control of their learning.

### **Recovering Artifacts**

Along their journey, students discovered numerous amounts of treasure in the form of newly-revealed information recorded on the travel log (Appendix I). This log organized their information as they read, created opportunities for them to express personal connections to their topics, and provided students with a template to prove their credible sources by listing bibliographic information. These travel logs became artifacts from each of the three units, serving as evidence of their travels.

### ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

While reading *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Silvia noticed Sir Gawain's chivalrous attitude toward his host and decided to investigate the complexities of chivalry. Her findings are brought to life through the following interview, which is based on her responses in the travel log.

**Mr. Snyder:** I understand that you chose to learn more about chivalry because you read how Sir Gawain acted with seemingly unusual kindness to his opponent. Tell me more about what you found.

**Silvia:** Yes, as Sir Gawain's interaction with other knights and the decisions he made influenced me to learn the reasoning behind this way of thinking. I uncovered information regarding chivalry, or the overall code knights lived by.

**Mr. Snyder:** What are some of the factors associated with chivalry?

**Silvia:** The four virtues I found are: having great strength in battle, maintaining courage, displaying courtesy even to enemies, and showing generosity towards higher ranks.

**Mr. Snyder:** What interested you the most in your research?

**Silvia:** Courtly love was interesting to me because I find it so romantic how men will do anything to win women's hearts.

**Mr. Snyder:** Are you searching for a man to treat you this way?

**Silvia:** Definitely. I am going to deal with men or boys all of my life, and they are either going to follow the virtues of chivalry or not.

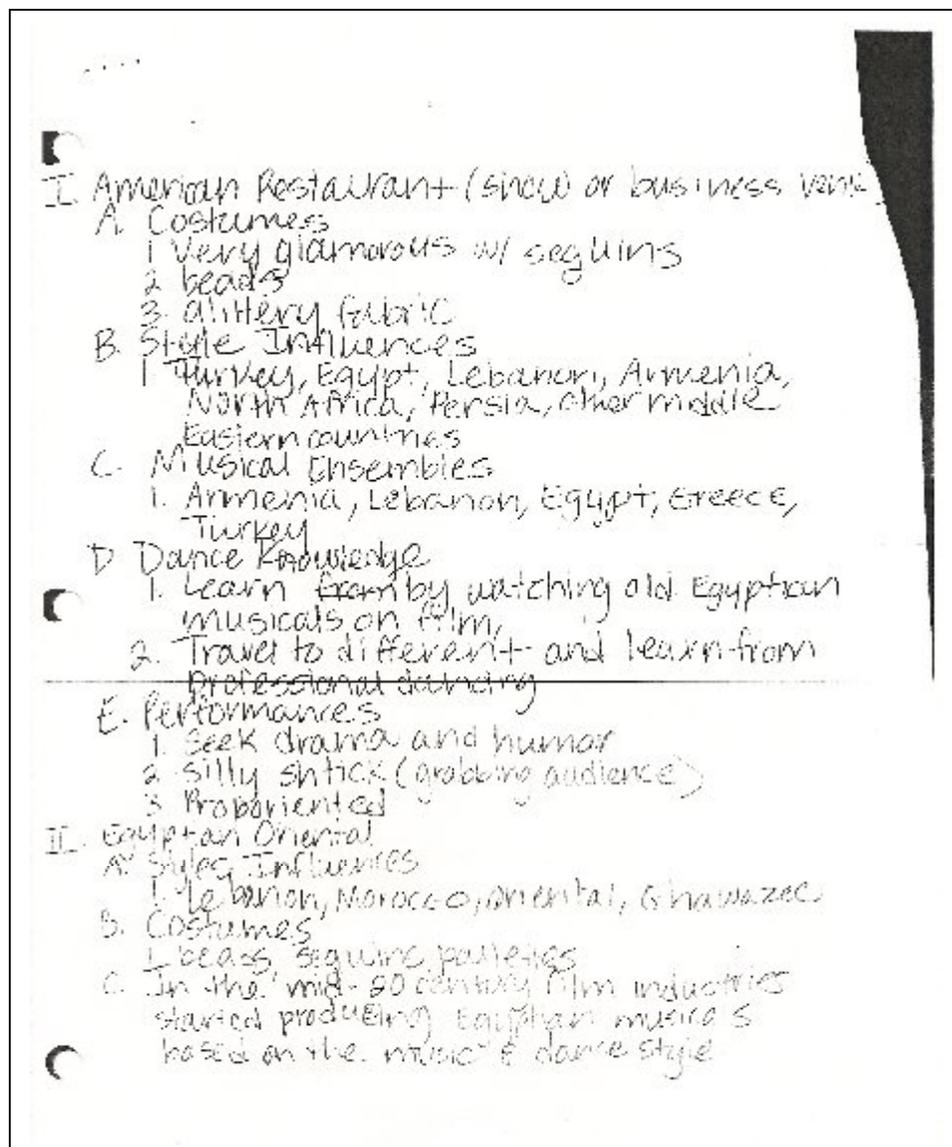
Seeing how men from different cultures interact with women and even foes allowed Silvia to realize what she valued in a relationship. She hoped to carry those medieval ideals to her relationships. By experiencing different cultural values regarding partnerships, Silvia conclusively formed modern perspectives on dating.

### ***Lord of the Flies***

Using the exotic setting from *Lord of the Flies* as inspiration for her research topic, Meghan expanded her background in dance by investigating the methods and origins of belly dancing. Her travel log (Figure 5) included an inaccurate reference to the relationship between her topic and *Lord of the Flies*. Belly dancing was not specified in the text; however, the children often participated in tribal dances when celebrating their successful pig hunts. While this connection may have seemed detached from the text, it was an outlet for her to feel personally connected to the events taking place with a strictly male list of characters.

Initially, I believed Meghan failed to include an outline on her travel log, as she did not use the skeleton outline provided on the travel log. She submitted a separate sheet (Figure 5) that consisted of an extensive outline of the information she discovered. This logically organized outline followed the suggested MLA format and displayed a plethora of details regarding the many avenues of belly dancing. This outline became the

classroom model for future travel log outlines, as it showed an inherent interest in the topic and a concerted effort for gathering pertinent details.



**Figure 5: Student Sample Outline**

### **Hamlet**

Flowers were a prominent theme associated with Ophelia in *Hamlet*. She uses flowers to represent specific feelings while dealing with her father's death and Hamlet's bizarre behavior. Jill found the symbolism some flowers display fascinating and decided to probe for particulars. Her

travel log (Figure 6) exhibited a surplus of information regarding her topic, but in an unorthodox organizational manner. She began by listing information in a pseudo outline format, but strayed to a more random listing of flowers and their meanings. While this seemed outlandish and sloppy at first, I considered the depth of knowledge she gathered from her inquiry.

Appendix E

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 12/16/08

### Travel Log

This travel log will serve as a guide as you research your topic. Please thoroughly complete each section.

1. Topic: Flowers <sup>journalism</sup> <sup>symbolism</sup> <sup>of the dead</sup>

How it's presented in Lord of the Flies: Phelia and she had some "crazy" sprays of flowers - then later she dies but flowers with thorns ~~themselves~~

Outline of important parts of your topic (you provide the lines):

1. Mentions - rose - columbine - daisy - orchid - flower  
 - nutlet - orchids - bird (etc.)

A. At time of death → falls from willow tree  
 dove from a wreath from made garlands made from - feathers, needles, clusters of long purples, - mentions marmadee lies - strong - murder death - water

Flowers:  
 Rose → courtship, romance  
 Daisy → innocence  
 Columbine → ingratiation, broken down  
 Rose → repentance & reward

Other symbols:  
 willow tree → love, death, innocence  
 nutlet → submission  
 bird → power, death

One of the most interesting pieces of information about my topic:  
 Symbolism: Flower garden's reflection of lives & sentiments (symbol of)  
 willow tree: first rule is feeling no pain - heal wounds or fragile  
 bird/song: Nature → wash away injuries  
 marmadee: double aspect of human nature  
 singing: an encroaching feeling of victims -  
 must something dirty messy - penis death

Figure 6: Jill's Travel Log Outline

**Mr. Snyder:** Jill, I see you were able to find a large amount of information on flowers. I'm wondering why you chose not to format this into a more formal outline.

**Jill:** Well, I started to if you look at my information directly under letter "A." I couldn't decide what I wanted to leave out, so I listed everything I found interesting first. Then, I went back and thought about what I could eliminate if I decided to present.

**Mr. Snyder:** It is difficult to figure out what to include and what not to include during initial research. Realizing you have too much data is a better situation than finding out you don't have enough. Can you tell me why you chose to research this topic?

**Jill:** Well, Ophelia's mention of symbolism is interesting, but it bugged me not knowing whether or not she killed herself. After this research, I am sure that she did. Although this poetic event goes against Shakespeare's common dumb woman figure in this play, I don't think Shakespeare included this by accident. I took a closer look at precisely what Shakespeare said and am confident that Ophelia wanted to die.

**Mr. Snyder:** Wow, Jill. You just discovered the power of research. I like how your curiosity led you to research a particular part of this play and helped you come to an educated conclusion about Ophelia's mental state. I hope you decide to present this information. I bet a lot of your classmates would find this interesting.

### **Sharing Loot**

Having successfully gathered various artifacts, individuals were prepared to share with the crew. Students were required to share their findings once during the three units. Through this sharing, they connected their topics to their lives and included why they found the topic interesting, thus, creating an aesthetic connection to the text.

### ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

Stefan, who is math oriented and rarely interested in English, chose medieval weapons and quietly found information online. He volunteered to present and used the projector to show his website to the class.

**Stefan:** I chose medieval weapons because I'm interested in how war was different in the past, and I thought that the weapons they used would give me a good idea of how it differed. I was able to find this company that sells reproduction weapons online. You can actually buy these weapons and have them shipped to your house. I'm not sure how it's legal, but it's really

cool. I'll just show you some of the weapons and explain them. Here is a full body of armor and a battle ax, just like in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. It says that the ax is made out of solid steel and is 3 feet long. I bet it's really heavy. Here is a mace that would have been effective against warriors who wore armor. These spikes could penetrate plate mail if swung hard enough. Where should I click next?

**Lucas:** Click on helmets.

**Stefan:** Oh yeah, there's a really cool one I want to show you. This one looks like the one Beowulf wore in the first poem we read this semester. Do you see how it almost matches perfectly the one from the front cover? Do you have a copy we could see Mr. Snyder?

**Mr. Snyder:** Definitely. I'm glad you made this connection. Here it is.

**Stefan:** (Showing the cover of *Beowulf* to the class) Look how the sides come down like side burns. Notice how this Anglo Saxon helmet is different than the ones from the Medieval Period. These ones seem more ornate than the others.

**Jennifer:** How would they be able to make them, since they didn't have much technology?

**Stefan:** I know. I thought that same thing. I looked up how they would have done it, and I found that they would use hammers to pound the pieces by hand. They would also use smaller tools to engrave patterns into the armor for special knights. I can imagine it would have taken a long time to create these weapons. No wonder they were so protective over them. Seeing all of this makes me realize how strong warriors would have to be in order to use these weapons while fighting. It seems vastly different than our modern strategies and weapons. You don't necessarily need to be strong to use a modern weapon. I could show you more, but I know other people need to present today. If you want I can give you some of the web addresses and you can check them out on your own. There is even armor for horses. It's pretty neat.

**Mr. Snyder:** Thank you Stefan. That was incredibly interesting and informational. Your visuals really helped us understand the reason you chose this topic (Round of applause).

Creating the opportunity for Stefan to research something that interested him constructed a situation where Stefan was able to find value in English class. Coming from a student who has been known to say, “I’m no good at English. I’m a math person,” Stefan suddenly realized he *is* good at English. He learned how to effectively research and to make personal connections while reading.

Unfortunately, not every presentation went smoothly. Two students with the same topic chose to present for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Kaleb completed his presentation on Medieval games by showing us a website that listed several games and focused on one in particular named *Knuckles Bones*. He explained the rules of the game and shared some visuals. A few students asked trivial questions before he finished. While it was not a stunning performance, Kaleb completed the project, which was atypical. Following Kaleb was Bill, who sits next to him.

**Bill:** I also chose Medieval games.

*A few sighs are heard among the class.*

**Mr. Snyder:** It is okay if some of you chose the same topics. In fact, it will be interesting to see how Bill’s presentation differs from Kaleb’s. Even

though the topic is the same, I bet Bill found different information or is interested in other aspects of Medieval games that Kaleb was not.

**Bill:** Actually, I used the same website as Kaleb because it was one of the few that was not blocked by the filter. I also chose *Knuckles Bones* for my presentation because we looked at it together. Basically, what you do is toss chicken bones in the air and attempt to catch them on the back of your hand. You get different points for different patterns of the bones. I found it interesting because they found an interesting way to entertain themselves with food leftovers.

While the brief presentation included information about the game, it mimicked Kaleb's presentation almost entirely. I had torn feelings regarding how to grade these two students. While they clearly did not use much originality or creativity for this project, it was their first attempt at researching and presenting. Also, these students consistently maintain the lowest grades in the class. Simply completing the project may be an accomplishment for them and could serve as a stepping stone to advance to the next unit.

### ***Lord of the Flies***

Dina has a high absentee rate and has problems controlling her anxiety. Although she is an avid reader and a highly-skilled writer, her grades do not always reflect her ability. When reading *Lord of the Flies*, she noticed the younger children, the “Little ‘uns,” had nightmares as their brains reminded them of the past events leading to their island isolation. Dina chose to research the intricacies of dreaming and how psychologists interpret them.

**Dina:** I researched why we dream and how psychologists interpret those dreams because I find this natural phenomenon interesting. The Little ‘uns have nightmares in *Lord of the Flies* and I discovered that Golding [author] used this for a deeper purpose than to simply make the story seem realistic.

By mentioning the overall connection we can make from nightmares, Dina was not only showing the functioning of dreams but also has recognized the therapeutic effects of dreaming. Referencing a specific scene from *Lord of the Flies* brought the class to a central concept that everyone could identify and understand.

**Dina:** Sleep cycles consist of four stages, one through four. Stage 1 occurs when you begin to drift off. It's referred to as light sleep. You are still aware of your surroundings and sounds in the room. Stage 2 creates a drop in body temperature and the relaxation of muscles. This is the stage where your immune system repairs itself. Stage 3 is deeper sleep than stage 2 and your metabolic levels are extremely low. Stage 4 is referred to as the REM stage or rapid eye movement. This occurs between 90-100 minutes after falling asleep. Your involuntary muscles become paralyzed and your eyes start moving around under your eyelids. The majority of dreams occur in this final stage.”

Assuredly, not everyone understood all of the terms Dina used, but all eyes were focused on her and her information. This class was really interested in sleep psychology. I like how she has organized this presentation. She had hooked us from the beginning by promising a big connection and now has taught us the essential information to get us to that conclusion.

**Dina:** I found a few websites that have dream reference sections where you can look up common objects or events from dreams and read what could be causing these to appear.

She had an excellent source that was both user-friendly and resourceful. Students' hands darted up to ask her to click on objects they had seen in their dreams. Dina quickly continued with her thoughts, not allowing the students to take control of her presentation.

**Dina:** We can look at some of the objects you have had in your dreams after I finish showing you the connection to the book. For instance, the Little 'uns dream of beasts. As you can see on this page, beasts signify foolishness and ignorance. This can be seen in the kids' reactions to the beast, which isn't even real. They stop thinking about the decisions they make and begin acting foolish. They lose sight of being rescued and become ignorant of reality. This definition also states that seeing faceless beasts indicates a situation you are refusing to see or confront but are aware of in some passive way. It also suggests that something in your life is bringing feelings of fear and insecurities. Remember Sam and Eric are unable to see the beast clearly in the firelight? Well, this illustrates how the kids are unable to acknowledge their actual situation of being stranded and their need for survival and rescue. Once the beast is introduced they become fearful and certain members of the group use this fear to control each other.

This dialogue and cognitive thought may seem unrealistic for a student labeled at a CP level; however, it shows the potential for learning and forming connections that a research project of this magnitude can create. Dina had the time to form these connections as she was discovering information regarding sleep. She carefully collected her information and prepared a thorough presentation illustrating all of her connections to the text. After her presentation, a few students asked her how she knew all of this information, and Dina simply replied, “By researching.”

Having a student exhibit such an elevated level of learning and dedication for a project inspired Dina’s peers to better prepare for their subsequent presentations. Dina’s personal interest in sleep psychology was modeled through her enthusiasm and her ability to transfer that to her audience. Following this presentation, we only had 15 minutes of class remaining. I did not want to make anyone feel nervous about presenting after Dina because of her stellar performance. Plus, the interest surrounding dream interpretation convinced me to allow students to use the Internet to research objects and events they have seen in dreams to form their own connections. The remaining 15 minutes was filled with gasps and students eager to share with each other what they found. Some students even commented about continuing their research when they got home from school.

### ***Hamlet***

Since several students chose to wait until the last unit to present, I knew at least two days would be devoted to presentations. This round of research produced many projects pertaining to ghosts; however, one particular presentation was unique. Silvia decided to use Ophelia's suicide in *Hamlet* and research assisted suicides. Although Ophelia apparently commits this act on her own, Silvia pointed out that Hamlet is the direct cause of her death as he played with her emotions and drove her to insanity. Rather than researching suicide in isolation, Silvia chose to compare Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy with the signs associated with suicide and Hamlet's internal struggle regarding his father's death (see Figure 7). While presenting, Silvia regularly referred to Shakespeare's play and showed how conducting background research allowed her to further understand the implications of Hamlet's decisions and made him seem like a real person, not just a character.

### **Hamlet's Decision**

The pain of my father's death  
Keeping this secret  
Why shouldn't I take my life?

Depression  
Focusing on my failures  
Recognizing the disappointments

Suicide  
Pain exceeds coping  
I can't give in

Who will avenge my father?

***Figure 7: Suicide Poem***

### **Reminiscing**

Having taken this extended inquiry voyage, the crew took time to reminisce about their various research adventures. Students wrote reflections on a handout (Appendix L) that revolved around aspects of the journey they found beneficial and non-beneficial. Their answers are presented in the form of an interview.

**Mr. Snyder:** I want everyone to take a moment to reflect on the reading research process. Please share your thoughts regarding this project and tell us what you found beneficial and what you did not find beneficial.

**Charlie:** The aspect I found beneficial was including the computers, for it wakes me up and makes me want to work on something because I'm used to working on a computer. I also enjoyed researching a topic of our choice instead of something assigned. The only thing I did not find beneficial was reading the Shakespeare side of *Hamlet*. I couldn't figure it out early enough to understand it, so I lost interest in reading it fast.

**Meghan:** I feel that because we were allowed to choose our own topics, it made us eager to find information about a topic we like. Presenting definitely encouraged us to be less nervous in front of the class. I love that we learned so many random things, because it's actually interesting and fun.

**Hank:** I liked that we used our skills from reading books to research new things.

**Dina:** I honestly did not really learn anything beneficial that helped me understand the story any better, although I did learn interesting facts about certain topics. I really did not like to present in front of the class.

**George:** I like how in every project we did it was our thoughts and how we feel. It feels good when you write how you feel about topics. There wasn't too much I didn't like. It was all pretty cool and creative.

**Silvia:** This project made us look further into what we were reading and made us interested. I didn't like that we had to present.

**Kaleb:** The research project I thought was a good learning tool. I liked how we got to look up things that we chose and what we wanted to look up depending on what we liked. We learned about things we wanted to learn about. I didn't like to cite the things we used to find our information.

**Christian:** I enjoyed doing travel logs and learning more about what I wanted to learn about. I think honestly, this year's English class was a lot better compared to other years.

**Becca:** I liked how there was a lot of choices you could pick for your topic to research. That made it easier to find a topic that I was interested in. Also, I liked how we didn't have to present every time.

**Tyranny:** I very much enjoyed the research process. I benefited because I learned what topics relate to what books. When researching the topic I discovered several things which could be of great benefit for the future. There wasn't really anything that I did not like about it. It taught me and showed me new information. Why wouldn't I want to take that in?

**Rodrigo:** What I liked about the research process is that it gives you time to truly reflect on the book. It gives you more information on the topic and better connects you with the book.

**Jill:** The first time I was busy thinking of my other thoughts, so I just took it as another thing to do. The second time I was a little flustered, but it was because I was researching so many things that it was hard to pick just one. The ideas presented in *Lord of the Flies* interested me so much that I'd still look for more of them. The last time, however, I was really on a mission, so I stuck with that one topic, found my answer, actually felt better and got it all done by the end of the block, purely because I had the drive to.

**Noah:** The thing I liked the most about it is that it made me really try to relate to the story more. Plus, it made me appreciate how many different things there are even in a short story that I can relate to. There wasn't

much that I didn't like about it other than the thinking it took. But in the long run, I think the more I do this the more it'll help me snap out of my laziness. It'll help me appreciate reading more.

**Stefan:** It was interesting to learn about different things and find out what other people thought was interesting.

These genuine student reflections mark the end of our long journey reading and discovering new concepts. This project introduced students to new concepts while improving many skills, i.e., reading comprehension, researching abilities, forming personal connections to texts, and more. For some of these students, the journey will continue in the form of further research of their topics or new adventures during future readings.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Student Surveys**

Students' past experiences and opinions regarding reading were essential to use as comparative data following the research study. Surveys were administered beginning and ending the study. These surveys and corresponding data were included in the field log for further analysis.

#### ***Pre-Surveys***

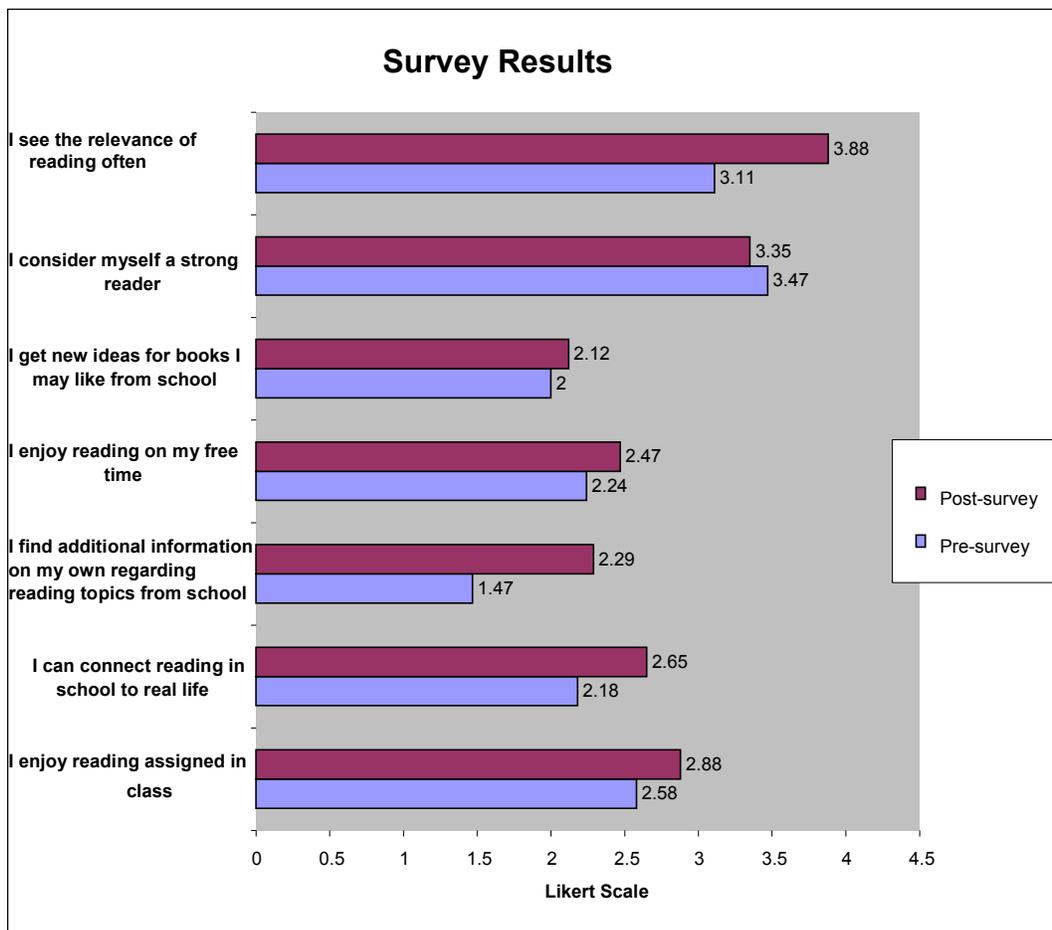
To begin the research study, students completed a pre-reading survey (Appendix E) consisting of seven questions using a Likert Scale and two short response questions. These questions targeted students' past experiences with independent and school-related reading. Surveys were collected and entered into the field log. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to enter student responses for later use.

#### ***Post-Surveys***

Following the study, the same survey was administered as a post-reading survey (Appendix F). The data were updated in the spreadsheet in order to create a chart that depicted the average opinions of the class before and after the study. Answers from the short responses were incorporated into vignettes and pastiches throughout the story. These pastiches illustrated the pattern of negative, neutral, or positive student responses.

## Survey Analysis

Pre-survey data was compared to post-survey data using a chart (Figure 8). These data show a change in student opinions regarding reading after completing the research project.



**Figure 8: Survey Results**

### ***Student Reflections***

The final collected artifact from the study was a student written reflection (Appendix L). This handout had students consider the entire process and comment on the effectiveness of independently choosing and researching topics found in literature. These reflections were collected and placed in the field log. These documents were quoted in vignettes to show students' genuine opinions regarding reading and research. These responses provided a genuine student voice regarding the project, creating additional credibility to the positive effects.

### **Student Work**

#### ***Topic Lists***

Before research could begin, students created class topic lists while reading their assigned texts. These lists provided students with topic choices for their research. The initial list created from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* consisted of approximately half as many ideas as the remaining two texts, *Lord of the Flies* and *Hamlet* (see Figure 3). Upon juxtaposing these lists, the breadth and spontaneity the topics exhibit showed the numerous directions students were able to focus their research, creating interesting and dynamic class presentations.

### ***Travel Logs***

While researching, students used a travel log (see Figure 6) to organize and record information from their sources. These logs guided their presentations and helped display their newfound knowledge. The travel log also included sections for students to form connections from their topics to the text and to their lives. Travel logs were collected following each unit, scored using a rubric, and placed in my field log. I used various student responses in vignettes, poems, and dramas throughout the story. The data collected from these logs helped steer my teaching regarding researching methods and creating proper MLA outlines. Some students were able to follow the template, which encouraged them to find deeper meanings within their work, while others struggled with the set format for the information they needed to collect.

### ***Presentations***

Students presented their findings at least once during the three unit project. This presentation incorporated a visual that students either acquired online or individually created. Information from their travel logs was included in the presentations, which were scored using a rubric (Appendix K). Observational notes were kept for each presentation and were inserted into my field log. The data were used in reflective memos and as later references when referring to the book during class discussions.

No pattern was observed for the elements students chose for comment during presentations, which shows the unpredictability of student interests.

### **Class Observations**

Throughout our research project, classroom observations were kept and inserted into a field log. Student actions and comments were noted and later reflected upon in order to analyze the progress of the study. I then coded these reflections to emphasize the themes present in the study. These reflections became crucial in capturing the events that transpired in the classroom and showing the effectiveness of the research process. These observations were analyzed in reflective and analytical memos. Also, student comments and actions were integrated into various figures throughout my thesis. Observations showed students' genuine reactions to the study as it was unfolding, which helped me gauge the level of learning taking place.

### ***Reflective Memos***

Periodically, I consulted the classroom observations in my field log to generate reflective memos. I based my reflections on the recorded actions and dialogue that occurred throughout the project. Even when we encountered several snow days and researching roadblocks, these insights

motivated me to continue with the project. I employed these data to affirm my study was progressing and to refine any ineffective procedures.

### ***Figurative Language Memos***

Analyzing student language was an essential formative assessment to monitor students' progression and understanding. While students researched on the laptop computers, they verbalized their excitement when they discovered new and interesting information. Documenting these comments helped me understand what topics interested them and what researching method students found useful. In addition, students who had difficulties with electronic research also exhibited verbal and nonverbal behavior that enabled me to devise more comprehensive methods to teach them how to research more effectively. Writing figurative memos became a medium to better evaluate how to help students and to continue motivating them.

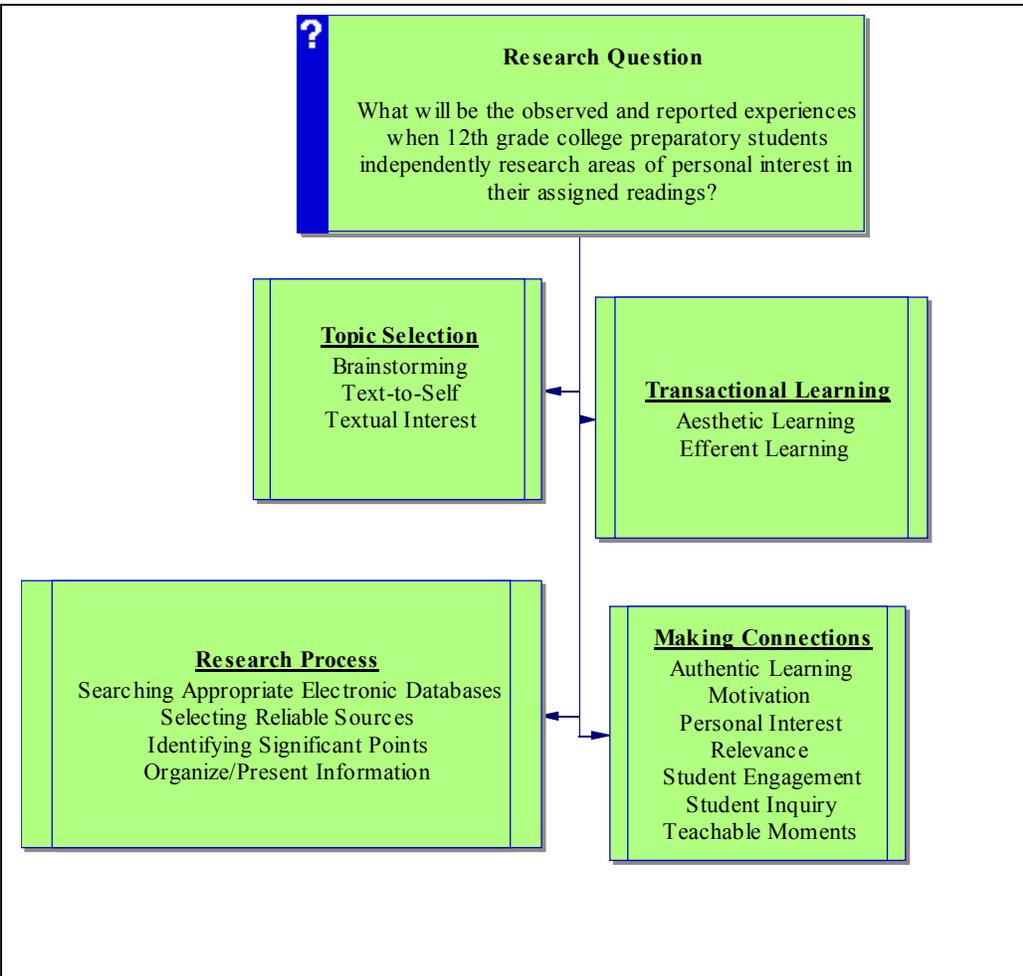
### ***Analytical Memos***

As my study progressed, I analyzed my field log and drafted memos looking at aspects of my study from theorists' points-of-view. I used Dewey (1938), Delpit and Dowdy (2002), Vygotsky (1978), and Freire (2003) to validate my procedures in these memos. Dewey (1938) provided the educational framework to explain the necessity of preparing students for future endeavors by showing them the power of research. Delpit and

Dowdy (2002) supported my work concerning students connecting to the text. Vygotsky's (1978) insights on intellectual development and the role play has on learning repeatedly related to the data regarding my research question. Freire (2003) discussed metaphors related to fear that correspond to reading and research anxiety.

### **Bins**

After compiling an extensive field log, I read through my observations and artifacts and coded them. These codes represented the underlying themes of the study that led to the creation of organized bins (Figure 9). These coded bins became an illustrative representation of my original research question and were written into cohesive theme statements to produce my findings.



**Figure 9: Bins**

## FINDINGS

***Topic Selection: Whole class brainstorming, which creates a list of topics from the text, enables students to find an area of individual interest that connects them to the text.*** Student autonomy can be daunting for some inexperienced students. Education tends to train students to complete teacher tasks as assigned, rather than encourage students to personalize their learning by planning some of their curriculum. To combat this anxiety, students collaborated and created a classroom topic list while reading various texts. This menu of items highlighted the dynamic topics that exist in literature, while giving students tangible options to research. Not only were students better equipped to choose their topics wisely, but also they avoided the daunting task of simply thinking of a topic in isolation.

Dewey (1938) asked, “What is the place and meaning of subject-matter and of organization *within* experience? How does subject-matter function?” (p. 20). Although I must use the school-established curriculum to heighten learning, my study allowed an amount of student autonomy that empowered them to cater their learning to fit their own interests. The curriculum is organized but students’ interests are dynamic. Since interest is unpredictable, allowing for more freedom enhanced students’ education and improved student engagement.

***Research Process:* When students research using appropriate electronic databases, they learn to identify reliable sources and to organize significant points regarding their research focus.** According to Dewey (1938), “In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality” (p. 47). Likewise, students who participated in this research project will be able to assimilate these researching skills in their future endeavors, whether they be in a collegiate setting or a workforce setting. My study not only presents students with credible skills, such as researching and organizing, but also teaches students how to learn. These proactive learners realized they are no longer dependent on teachers to dispense knowledge; rather, they have the skills to seek those answers themselves. Students’ future careers will flourish as a result of their newfound leadership abilities, and their personal lives will benefit from having the ability to improve the quality of their lives through constant learning from experiences, enabling them to select positive experiences to continue a lifetime of learning.

Pierce (1998) cautions that students need to avoid distractions when conducting online research. By learning how to utilize the online databases subscribed by the high school, students were able to avoid advertisement distractions and were better focused on their topics.

Students also learned to identify credible websites and sources in order to focus on reliable information, ultimately becoming more effective researchers.

***Making Connections: When students are autonomous in choosing a research topic from the text with which they have a personal interest, they are motivated to conduct further inquiry because of the relevance they discover in authentic learning.***

Delpit (2002) states, “When students’ interests are addressed in school, they are more likely to connect with the school, with the teacher, with the academic knowledge, and with the school’s language form” (p. 45). Giving students the opportunity to select topics from readings that interest them illuminated an educational notion that their interests matter. This educational control was evident throughout my procedures and field log observations.

Dewey (1938) poses the questions, “How many found what they did learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them no power of control over the latter? How many came to associate books with dull drudgery, so that they were “conditioned” to all but flashy reading matter?” (p. 27). Dewey shows experiences as the one link every student shares. The experiences may be different, but everyone has them and uses them to determine their future. Students who have had negative

past reading experiences may associate literature with negativity and have a difficult time overcoming this feeling; however, showing students how to connect texts to their lives has motivated them to push their prejudices aside and heal past wounds.

Since students discovered information on their own, they were more impressed when they learned something interesting. This autonomy has shown them they are truly in charge of their education and has introduced them to metacognitive thought. Wolters (2003) reinforces this concept by recognizing that students alter their learning methods as they identify their changing needs.

Cordova and Lepper found “contextualization, personalization, and choice all produced dramatic increases, not only in students’ motivation but also in their depth of engagement in learning, the amount they learned in a fixed time period, and their perceived competence and levels of aspiration” (1996, p. 715). Following our research project, students noted their increase in reading interest and some even conducted further research on their topics. Even if they had connected to texts in the past, they were now able to identify what form text-to-self connections manifest.

Freire (2003) comments, “The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher”

(p. 81). Students were able to realize their role in education was not simply to listen to teachers lecture but to become part of the process through inquiry. By interacting with research and sharing information with peers, students assigned meaning with their content to their lives and showed other students how it could relate to them.

***Transactional Learning: When students recognize their personal involvement in the reading, they make aesthetic and efferent learning connections to the text.*** Basing my research study on Rosenblatt's theory of transactional learning, my class respected reading as a layered process. Rosenblatt (1993) explained the reading process as taking two forms, efferent and aesthetic. Efferent reading enables a person to complete a task after reading and aesthetic reading results in a feeling or experience rather than a concrete product.

Juxtaposed results of the pre-survey and post-survey show students' answers to questions about their experiences and philosophies regarding reading. All but one question resulted in an increase in opinion by the students following the survey (Figure 8). The question referring to being a strong reader decreased because of one extreme answer to the question.

Since transactional learning involves individual experiences, students did not progress in synchronization. "Development in children never follows school learning the way a shadow follows the object that

casts it” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 91). Some students were able to form connections immediately upon researching while others found it more taxing. Students that identified more experiences with their particular topic were able to form stronger connections with the text.

### **Conclusion**

Many insights were uncovered from analyzing my data. By allowing the autonomous selection of research topics, student motivation increased. Students became more engaged in learning while using technology and presenting new ideas. Also, students utilized transactional learning methods to form connections with the text and to see the relevance of their chosen topics.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Taking into consideration this study's entire process, I recognize the need for further investigation into more efficient researching methods for students to access using school equipment. Students experienced periodic issues with blocked websites and confusing search engines. Ebersole (2000) suggests students are unable to locate credible sources and information given the vastness of the Internet. I need to find a more condensed method for students to learn about various topics in order to help those who feel overwhelmed. This more concise researching method would also benefit those students with learning disabilities.

In moving forward from this research study, I want to discover alternative learning theories and research studies that support student-selected curriculum material and how to incorporate this autonomy into already prescribed school curricula. My study shows a direct link between student choice and an increase in student motivation and engagement. I want to collect further data that incorporates student achievement.

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**APPENDIXES**

## Appendix A

### *Authorization for a School to Serve in*

#### *a Research Study*

**Project:** The purpose of this study is to examine if students researching topics present in texts will create greater connectivity and allow personal connections to be made to the reading.

**Researcher:** Nathan Snyder ext. 2107

**Employment Affiliation:** English Teacher

**Location of study:** East Stroudsburg Area North High School Room 107

**Supervising College Professor:** Dr. Charlette Zinke, Moravian College

**Purpose of Study:** In partial fulfillment of my Masters in Education from Moravian College.

**Procedures:** Students will be given a pre-survey that addresses reading interest and reading frequency. The same survey questions will be asked in the post-survey for comparison data at the conclusion of the study. A project sheet will be distributed to show the students exactly what will be required of them and its purpose. While reading texts throughout the semester, students will choose one topic present in the text to independently research. Class-generated lists will be created in order to provide students with a menu of choices in case they are unable to choose one on their own. Major works will be used such as *Lord of the Flies*, *Hunger*, and *Sir Lancelot and the Green Knight*. Each of these units takes approximately two weeks. The chosen topics from each unit should be something interesting to them in order to make reading relevant. A list of reference materials will be provided in order to ensure proper researching techniques are available; Google should be avoided if possible. Students will be given these resources to expose them to appropriate reference works. Access to classroom laptops will be provided in order to conduct research. A minimum of three sources must be utilized to encourage credibility. A mini-lesson titled "Identifying Credible Sources" will be carried out in order to help students avoid highly biased websites. They will look for authors, advertisements, and domain names in order to determine validity. While researching, students will complete a travel log that focuses their research and guides them through the process. A handout that includes an example of a paper outline and examples of how to write references in MLA format will be distributed and explained.

**Duration of study:** Fall semester 2008

**Person having access to records and data:** Nathan Snyder

All and other records will be destroyed directly following the study in December 2008. I understand that participation in this project is voluntary, and I understand that a student or parent or guardian may withdraw his/her child from this study at any time by notifying the researcher.

**Statement of confidentiality:**

The participation of the students in this project is confidential. Only the researcher and supervising professor will have access to the students' identities and to information that can be associated with their identities.

Please check the appropriate box and sign below.

I give permission for my school to participate in this project. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

I do not give permission for my school to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B

September 11, 2008

### Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I will be conducting a study in our classroom that has been approved by the principal to determine how allowing students to research topics present in our texts will allow personal connections to be made to the reading. I am contacting you in order to obtain your permission to use the data that I collect from your child in my study entitled, *Reading Comprehension Through Independent Research*. Throughout my six years of teaching, I have noticed an increasing number of students whom are becoming disinterested in reading and are unable to make essential connections to texts in order to realize personal relevance. It is my hope by allowing students to choose topics or themes of interest that exist in their readings and to conduct independent research will result in a newfound interest in reading and create an atmosphere where students will personally connect these readings to their lives. After collecting information and becoming experts on their topics, students will present their newfound knowledge in the class and share how they find it useful. I will collect various forms of data to determine if this research method is successful: topic lists, research gathering sheets, presentation outlines, an observational field log, and student surveys. The study will only include regular classroom activities. This research study is for partial fulfillment of my Masters in Education from Moravian College and the collected data may be included as part of my published thesis document. All students will be given pseudonyms in order to respect confidentiality. The study will take place in our classroom (room 107) and will last during the fall semester of 2008.

By participating in this study, your child will benefit by increasing reading enthusiasm, honing research skills, acquiring knowledge, refining presentation skills, and taking the next step in becoming a life-long learner. If you decide this study is not appropriate for your child, he/she will still be expected to complete normal classroom activities, such as reading, researching, and presenting. Your child, however, will not be included in the data collection and will not appear in any of my results. You or your child may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Only I will have access to information that can be associated with your child's identity, which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet until the conclusion of the study when it will be destroyed via paper shredder.

The use of your child's data is voluntary. You may contact me at any time with any questions regarding this study or your child's participation. I can be reached at the following number: 570-588-4420 ext. 2107 or by email: N5andy@msad.net. If your child experiences any stress as a result of this study, he/she can contact Sandy Dietz, guidance counselor, at Dietz@sandy.net. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Catherine Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-825-7958, [czales@moravian.edu](mailto:czales@moravian.edu) or the high school principal, Mr. Stephen Zall, 570-588-4420 ext. 2400, [zall@msad.net](mailto:zall@msad.net). Any questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Debra Weicher-Horadnick, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018, 610-861-1415.

Sincerely,

Mr. Nathan Snyder  
English Teacher  
East Stroudsburg North High School

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Teacher's Signature

Date

## Appendix C



**MORAVIAN COLLEGE**  
A SMALL NATIONAL TREASURE

1200 Main Street  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 2018-6650  
TEL 610-861-1500  
WEB www.morav.edu

September 3, 2008

Nathan Snyder  
800 Saw Creek Estates  
Bushkill, PA 18324

Dear Nathan Snyder:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal "Reading Connectivity Through Independent Research." Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSTRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSTRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file these changes or extensions with the HSTRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail ([mcshwb02@moravian.edu](mailto:mcshwb02@moravian.edu)) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetzhor-Hendricks  
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board  
Moravian College  
610-861-1415

## Appendix D

### Research & Exploration

Throughout the semester, we will be reading *Lord of the Flies*, *Hamlet*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In order for you to find connections within these texts, you will take part in a research exploration. You will be researching a topic of your interest that is addressed in each text. Please follow these directions:

1. Choose a topic that you find particularly interesting from each text. You may choose from the class-generated list or your own topic from the texts.
2. Review the provided list of resources and select the most appropriate for your topic. Avoid Google if possible, and definitely avoid Wikipedia.
3. Conduct thorough research on your topic and complete a **Travel Log** for each text to guide your research.
4. Prepare a short presentation on your findings. Try to pass your enthusiasm for the topic onto your classmates. Your presentation should include all of the major information from your travel log. Consider showing us something with the projector. Perhaps, we will benefit from seeing a visual or viewing a website you found useful.
5. Your grade will be based on the thoroughness of your research, the completed travel log, the visual, and the effectiveness of your presentation.

Do not hesitate to email me questions regarding this research activity. I hope you are able to make connections between what you are reading and your life.

Mr. Snyder

## Appendix E

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Reading Survey (Pre)

*The following survey is designed to gain an understanding regarding your reading interests. Please answer each question as accurately as possible.*

Question	Rating				
	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Always (3)	4	5
1. I enjoy reading that has been assigned in class.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can connect what I am reading in school to real life.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I find additional information on my own regarding topics I read in school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I enjoy reading during my free time.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I get new ideas for books I may like from classes in school.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I consider myself a strong reader.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I see the relevance of reading often.	1	2	3	4	5

What makes reading fun? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What makes reading boring? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Reading Survey (Post)

*The following survey is designed to gain an understanding regarding your reading interests. Please answer each question as accurately as possible.*

Question	Rating				
	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Frequently (4)	Always (5)
1. I enjoy reading that has been assigned in class.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can connect what I am reading in school to real life.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I find additional information on my own regarding topics I read in school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I enjoy reading during my free time.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I get new ideas for books I may like from classes in school.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I consider myself a strong reader.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I see the relevance of reading often.	1	2	3	4	5

What makes reading fun? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What makes reading boring? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix H

### Making text-to-self connections

This research project is designed for you to be able to connect what you are reading to events that are happening in your life. There are a few methods you can use to make these connections while you read. While you are not required to use a particular method, these are possibilities for you to use as you read.

#### Sticky Notes

While reading, have a pack of sticky notes handy to jot down ideas that you come across in your book you find interesting. These ideas may just grab your attention or you may instantly associate it with something in your life. Once you jot it down, you can either place the note on the page where you found the information or right down the page number and place your sticky notes in order on a sheet of paper to refer to later.

After you finish reading, you will have a list of ideas that you could choose to further research.

#### Reading Journal

While reading, some people find it helpful to write a reading reflection journal. In this journal, you simply write your thoughts after reading a particular section. What happened in the plot? How did it make you feel? Do you agree with the characters' actions? Do you relate to anything that is happening?

All of these questions can be useful when writing reflections in your journal. You can refer to your journal after finishing the book to look for possible topics that might interest you and relate to your life. You do not have to worry about grammar or sentence structure, as it is informal writing.

#### Underlining

Typically, highlighting would be more effective, but seeing that we cannot damage our books, simply use a pencil to underline interesting ideas when you come across them in your book. You may want to use a bookmark to mark the pages where you underline ideas, so you can save time later when trying to find where you made these marks. *Just remember to erase your marks when you finish your project.*

## Appendix I

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Travel Log

*This travel log will serve as a guide as you research your topic. Please thoroughly complete each section.*

1. Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

How it's presented in *Lord of the Flies*: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Outline of important parts of your topic (you provide the lines):

I. \_\_\_\_\_

A. \_\_\_\_\_ (etc.)

One of the most interesting pieces of information about my topic:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

|

How does this topic affect your life? How can you connect with it?

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List the sources you used (Please follow MLA format found online):

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## Appendix J

### Travel Log Rubric

*Your travel log will be assessed using the following criteria:*

#### Travel Log

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The topic is both present in the text and relevant so significant research can be found <b>(3 points)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The topic is related to the text accurately and thoroughly <b>(5 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | An organized outline is provided that gives important details concerning the fully developed topic. This is where you will place the majority of your information. Be sure to organize this in a logical manner <b>(15 points)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A major idea present from your research is written in a concise manner <b>(5 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A thorough explanation of how your topic connects to your life is stated <b>(5 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A minimum of three credible sources are listed in MLA format <b>(5 points)</b>   |
| <hr/>                    |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The topic is present in the text but does not represent a relevant idea that will produce adequate research <b>(3 points)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The topic is related to the text accurately but not in a detailed manner <b>(3 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | An outline is provided that follows a logical organization but does not contain significant information. Additional research needs to be conducted <b>(10 points)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A brief aspect of your research is presented as the most significant findings <b>(3 points)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | An underdeveloped personal connection is given <b>(3 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | One or two credible sources are listed in MLA format <b>(3 points)</b>   |
| <hr/>                    |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The chosen topic is not relevant to the text <b>(0 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The topic is not related to the text accurately <b>(0 points)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No outline is provided <b>(0 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A personal connection is not given <b>(0 points)</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No sources are listed in MLA format <b>(0 points)</b>  |

Comments:

Total \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix K

<b>Research Presentation Rubric</b>	
<b>Content</b>	_____ (5 points)
~Sufficient content for audience to understand ~Important/Relevant information provided ~Credible source(s) used	
<b>Presentation Skills</b>	_____ (5 points)
~Enthusiasm ~Eye Contact ~Volume ~Poise	
<b>Visual</b>	_____ (5 points)
~Appropriate ~Thorough explanation ~Relevant	
<b>Total</b>	_____ (15 points)

