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Integrating the Arts in the English Curriculum: A Literature Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study displayed fifth grade students exploring various forms of the arts (visual, theatrical, musical, and kinesthetic) in an English classroom over a twelve-week span of time. With minimal guidance, the teacher encouraged students to explore the arts through mini-projects and small activities in order to deepen their experiences and understanding of two Civil Rights-centered texts, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis, and *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* by Phillip Hoose. In the beginning of the study, students completed a mini-project, using one form of art to depict the most important scene from the first whole-class text. After the first week, the students used a different art form each week to explore a different aspect of the text being studied in that week. At the conclusion of the study, students were required to create a project using their two favorite forms of art to show a thematic message, which came from one or both whole-class texts. Throughout the study, the teacher gathered several sources of data including surveys, student work, and observations. The data collected in the study suggests that student understanding and analysis deepens when supported by various forms of art.

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Researcher Stance

I never wanted to be a teacher. For my entire academic career through grades K-12 I was relatively smart, but I never loved school. In fact, I rarely could have said that I even *liked* school. As a relatively competent child, I got by using rote-memorization to ace my assessments, but nothing ever stuck with me. I remember taking double-entry notes in high school, sitting for long periods of time, falling asleep in math class, and not really caring about any of those things, because I still got good grades. This worked out pretty well until my 10th grade year, when I stopped reading our whole-class novel because I was bored. I stopped trying and stopped asking for help. I was sick of doing work just to get a grade that inevitably would be between an 88-94%, because that's how it always was — until I failed 10th grade Honors English.

Surprisingly, I was not emotionally affected by my failure because I knew that I was more than capable of passing the course I had failed. I knew how to comply with the expectations set for me as a student. I knew that I had to sit and listen and do my work, and until 10th grade I'd had the internal motivation to do so. But what I did not know was that there were other students who did not have this choice. I did not realize that I took my education for granted.

Flash forward to my college career: My younger brother was now in high school and struggling. He had many of the same teachers who had taught me, and he was going through the same boring routines, and was not retaining any

information. Unlike myself, my brother did not have the internal motivation to sit and listen and ingest information. He was struggling and needed help—but he never got it. His idea of a five-paragraph essay in 11th grade was five sentences (one for each paragraph). I tried everything I could to help him, and realized that he actually just did not understand how to think deeply and critically about much of anything. He could not put ideas to paper, because he could not recall the information he read in class. He needed something other than a lecture in order to succeed. My brother's academic struggles became my reason for becoming a teacher.

As I went through my undergraduate education courses and learned about theorists, educational philosophy, and teaching tactics, what always stuck with me was a fascination with Howard Gardner. I learned about Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, and even took several personality assessments in various courses that were based on Gardner's work. As a college student, I wondered why this was the first time I'd ever heard a confirmation of the idea that *people learn differently* through these multiple ways of processing information. I wondered why I'd never been exposed to the idea, and later realized that very few of my teachers had implemented such work.

I recall two teachers who had implemented different learning styles consistently into lessons—two teachers, in 13 years of my education. Both of those teachers used theatre and visual arts in my English classes. I remember

pretty vividly that in my high school English class (round two of 10th grade English, after I'd failed the first time), we performed scenes from *Othello*. Everyone was excited and involved in the lessons, even those who were not typically active participants in class. I remember actually understanding Shakespeare, which I definitely had not done the first time in tenth grade English because I could see the play happening right in front of me. I was actually a *participant* in my own learning.

My first teaching job, aside from student teaching, was at a performing arts middle school, and it was here that I was truly able to integrate the arts into the English curriculum. I learned that when using the arts in my classroom, my students felt that learning just came naturally. English was fun, because it didn't feel like there was room for lecture. English felt collaborative, unique, and challenging in a different way than other subjects did. I centered my English curriculum around the performing and visual arts because I had to, but in having to, I realized that I was catering to the multiple intelligences in my classroom. I was ultimately reaching the students who would have been out-of-reach sitting in a literature discussion-based classroom. After two years at the school, I left seeking a new challenge.

As I approach my fourth year as a full-time teacher, I am in a very different school setting than where I originally began. While I started out teaching seventh and eighth grade English and theatre at a suburban performing

arts charter middle school, I now teach fifth grade English in an inner-city charter school. My fifth grade students are held to expectations of mastery and excellence daily (something I truly could not say about my previous teaching experience). The curriculum I work with is pre-written, down to the daily lessons, by a network literacy team. There is little wiggle room for a different approach to learning.

For the purpose of this study, I will call my school Scholar Excellence Charter (SEC). Scholar Excellence Charter Schools are a network of K-12 charter schools in four boroughs of New York City. SEC operates on a dual-mission: To build world-class schools that prove all children from all backgrounds can succeed in college and in life; and serve as a national model for education reform.

Scholar Excellence Charter is one of the highest performing schools in New York State, scoring in the top one percent in mathematics and the top three percent in English Language Arts on the 2015 New York State Exams, regardless of race or class. The school I work in is one of nine middle schools in the Scholar Excellence Charter network. At the school I work in, 80% of scholars receive free lunch and ten percent receive reduced lunch, as 90% of scholars come from low-income families. Within the fifth grade population, 68.9% of scholars are Black, 24.4% of are Hispanic, 17.8% are American Indian, 7.8% are Multiracial, and 2.2% are White. All students are called scholars, and they are expected to act like scholars by exhibiting the Scholar Excellence Charter ACTION values:

Agency, Curiosity, Tenacity, Integrity, Others, and No Shortcuts. Scholar discipline, meaning scholars who exhibit our core ACTION values, is how my students are expected to learn—but I expect more. I still vow to be unique, and out-of-the-box as a teacher, even under the most rigid circumstances.

At Scholar Excellence Charter schools, the curriculum is pre-written down to every single lesson. All teachers within the same grade and content area are expected to be on the same lesson within the same one-to-three day window of time. The work is relatively the same on a day-to-day basis for the scholars. In a 50-minute literature period for example, scholars are expected to read, turn and talk about their reading, and then participate in a whole-class discussion about it. In writing, scholars watch as teachers present an exemplar model under the projector; then scholars are given a question to answer independently. The teacher then pulls scholar work to show under the projector; scholars critique the work, come up with a next-step, and then all scholars go back to revise their work based on the class discussion about the work that was looked at under the projector. While the routine is comfortable for scholars because they always know what to expect, I can't help but think about how boring each day must be no matter how engaging the teacher is. I've always felt that group work, partner work, and memorable activities were better for learning, regardless of the familiarity of a routine. I believe that scholars can still be held to rigorous standards while having more fun doing so. I now have more of a reason to

believe in my research question and to feel passionate about the bar of excellence studying the arts allows us to reach.

In order to tap the highest quality thinking from students, each should discover new learning through skills they are already familiar with using. As Howard Gardner has gracefully stated, “people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles” (Gardner, 2006, p. 5). Learning should be tailored to these individual cognitive strengths and styles to target specific goals, because at the end of the day if we are forcing students to take standardized assessments, we need to allow them to learn the material in the most accessible, most memorable way possible. “Are the chess player, violinist, and athlete ‘intelligent’ in these pursuits? If they are, then why do our tests of ‘intelligence’ fail to identify them?” (Gardner, 2006, p. 5). Students should feel as if they are the experts in certain areas, as if their wants and needs are most important in the classroom, and that those wants and needs are what ultimately makes them successful. Let them create, let them share, let them show. This creates a meaningful learning environment, and allows students to explore other multiple intelligences. From previously working in a performing arts middle school, I know that the best way to tap into the multiple intelligences is through the visual and performing arts. As I mentioned, using drama in my 10th grade English classroom was meaningful for me, but there is no guarantee that it was meaningful for everyone. If I could reach everyone in a classroom, allowing each

student to feel like they are experts in a creative art, then I will feel truly satisfied.

And so I dive in to the question I am desperately excited to find answers to: *What will be the observed and reported experiences when fifth grade scholars participate in arts-based multi-genre projects during a literature unit?*

A Review of the Literature

Arts Integration and The Common Core

The Common Core literacy standards call for students to practice “critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015). The Common Core (2015) was designed to prepare students for life outside of the classroom, and “lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person who is prepared for success in the 21st century.” The major problem faced in the English classroom is that students are unable to realize these connections enough to make them on their own. Connections must be facilitated and modeled by the teacher in order for students to grasp them. It is interesting to look at the purpose of the standards, knowing that it is difficult to choose instructional material that holds the interest of everyone and also covers what is necessary according to the curriculum (Buschick, Shipton, Winner, & Wise, 2007). Reidel, Tomaszewski, and Weaver (2003), reiterate this idea, stating that all students learn differently and that it is up to teachers to find a way to reach these diverse learners through the use of different strategies. Richard Deasy (2002) does just this when he uses dance, music, acting, and visual arts at various grade levels in the classroom. The arts may incorporate multiple intelligences, which can be used to allow students to become independent, creative thinkers, yet they are not used as much as they could be in most classrooms. “No one can tell another what must be accepted as

good music, good art, or good literature. A teacher must lead a student to self-discovery of what is best.” Therefore students should be able to choose not only to work with their arts in the English classroom, but also to choose the literature they want to study (Eutsler, 2013).

A Need for The Arts

Parsad and Spiegelman (2009) found that 91% of public secondary schools reported that they offered music and 89% offered visual arts during the 2008-09 academic year. What needs to be taken into consideration, though, is that these arts are *offered*, not required, and not available to all students. Even more disturbing, is that during the same academic year, only 12% offered dance, and 45% offered drama/theatre (Parsad & Spiegelman). This is important to note, because students in these schools are not being exposed to the arts, which can enrich and enhance their knowledge in a variety of areas. In addition, if these arts are not touched on in any of the academic areas (math, science, language arts, social studies, etc.), then students are lacking part of the academic curriculum that is required knowledge for many standardized assessments (Parsad & Spiegelman). Parsad & Speigelman’s study showed that classroom teachers rarely integrated the arts into the academic curriculum. A small 12% reported that music was integrated into their classrooms, 21% used visual arts, 31% used dance, and 47% used drama and theater in some way.

Benson (2008) argues that nonprint-based literacy is no less valuable than print-based literacy, basing her argument on theories of de Saussure and Pierce, who both believe that meaning-making is part of a multi-dimensional model. Teaching a literary canon imitates “factory mass production techniques...and continuing through post-Sputnik concerns about American students’ inability to master basic reading and writing skills” (Benson). Benson pits the traditional and sociocultural theories against the multiliteracies stance, recognizing that there is a problem in the sociocultural model because it limits students’ abilities to use literacy in contexts other than school (Benson). The study examines how teachers could include multiple genres by putting text into non-print forms such as music, film, photography, Web pages, etc. The study was conducted in an 11th and 12th grade language arts course in which students looked at multiple texts and came up with their own non-print and print modes of the text. The study concludes with Benson stating that there is a need for more *multiliteracy*-oriented research due to the fact that [it](#) has proven to instill powerful literacy practices.

Why Arts Integration?

In order for students to be engaged in their academics, connections must be made with their interests. According to Garvis and Pendergast (2011), “School-based arts experiences should be diverse, based on models of effective practice, and embedded from the early years through to graduation in order to unlock the creative potential of young people,” meaning that middle school

students should be exposed to these diverse experiences in the classroom. By integrating the arts, we can enhance critical thinking and writing skills (Eustler, 2013).

Eustler writes about a [program](#) that was present in Indiana from 1995-2001, where schools are supplied with *Arts Indiana* magazine as a supplemental classroom resource. The program received four national awards in its first four years, but later stopped due to lack of philanthropic support (Eustler). Within the program, teachers received a classroom set of the magazine, including a specific teachers' guide highlighting questions for written and oral discussion and classroom activities designed to promote higher levels of thinking (Eustler). The resource was soon used by the entire faculty.

During the school year, Educational Outreach Committee members visited classrooms and met with teachers and students. An honorarium was given to the teacher who made the most creative use of the program and to the student who wrote the best essay demonstrating critical thinking and writing. (Eustler)

The program's popularity spread to 100 different schools (Eustler). After the program collapsed, Eustler later completed a study using *Arts Indiana*. He found that arts can easily be, and should be offered in schools by using arts-based supplemental resources when funding is not available for full arts programs. He also found that students were less disruptive and that at-risk students involved in

the program performed better than non-arts at-risk students (Eustler, 2013). “There is also data finding significant improvements in the spatial temporal IQ scores of arts participants contrasted with non-arts participants” (Eustler). The arts benefit the curriculum through interaction, integration, and/or interdisciplinary studies, and are proven to produce cognitive gains and increases in standardized test scores (Eustler).

According to Pamela Ball (2003), students don’t see literature as important; rather they are accustomed to the instantaneous gratification given to them by the media and the technology they have access to. Ball also remarks that this same technology has suggested how much information can be altered. A solid curriculum should encourage students to question, to discover, and to use their creativity (Ball). The curriculum should be arts-infused, as arts-integrated teaching brings benefits of cultural legacy, communication, imagination, and life lessons (Ball).

Research-Based Best Practices in Arts Integration

Visual art. Numerous justifications have been presented to validate the integration of visual art in the general curriculum, though the English curriculum allows much room for its use (Charland, 2011). The Common Core (2015) Literacy Standards ask for students to “Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information to enhance understanding of presentations,” which means that students need to be exposed to visual arts in

English classrooms. Through visual arts, students are able to make different connections with grammar, literature, and writing, as opposed to the connections made when students look at grammar, literature, and writing cold. White (2011) writes, “Aesthetics becomes the study of everything that goes into the human capacity to make and experience meaning (p. x). If that is the case, then the experiences with artworks that my participants undergo can all be classified as ‘aesthetic,’” (White). Aesthetic connections allow students to make meaning through visual contexts. White discusses the idea of students making *aesthetigrams* in which “participants take brief notes while looking at a work” (White). Aesthetigrams are aesthetic connections, which allow students to make meaning through visual contexts (White). In these *aesthetigrams*, students are able to make real, authentic connections to a work of art. Interestingly enough, the Common Core (2015) also calls for students to “Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.” The student connections in White’s (2011) study started as a web-like map, and ended with a long written description, which was detailed. White uses two students’ aesthetigrams, which allow students to compare two unlike works of art with one another. Similarly, students should be able to make meaning between English and art (two things that, in the students’ minds are completely unlike).

A different artistic approach was taken by Cynthia Morawski (2010), who had her students complete what she called *body biographies*, in order to portray characters from a novel. She began by requiring students to complete a visual life-size outline of themselves, filled in with images to “write” their own visual biography using images rather than words (Morawski). Students then used this body biography to create one for the protagonist when studying the novel, *The Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. “They filled in their body outlines with pertinent quotes, descriptive words, symbols, phrases and physical features such as clothing and facial characteristics” (Morawski). Morawski describes her students interacting with their perception of a life-size sketch of Charlotte Doyle. She continues, “Across the floor, curious split-images of Charlotte Doyle appeared. Lace and jute, pink bonnet and weathered skin, coward and hero,” displaying the students’ different interpretations of the character based on opinion and textual evidence (Morawski). The article shows that students can have the most valuable interactions with text and character when given the ability to be creative and think differently.

Drama and movement. To master literacy skills, students must learn to speak in “a variety of contexts and communicative tasks” (The Common Core Standards, 2015). According to Hyland (2000), “Drama in education methodologies can exploit several intelligences at once,” so they would be essential in a classroom targeting different multiple intelligences (Hyland).

Cawthon and Dawson (2011) discuss a program called *Drama for Schools* (DFS), which is a professional development program that focuses on arts integration for K-12 teachers. Drama is an important piece of the English curriculum at all grade levels, yet many teachers focus on the drama piece itself, rather than using the elements of drama to invite more interactive learning experiences into the classroom. The English curriculum should include the use of interactive games, improvisation, and role-play to critically engage students in all areas, not just drama itself. Using these drama techniques has helped teachers in several academic areas get enthusiasm and positive responses out of their students, because they allow students to not only be involved in theatrical-type experiences but also to interact through dance and movement (Cawthon & Dawson).

Drama allows students to play with interactions and dialogue. In *The Destinee Project*, Thorne (2012) plays with the transfer of dialogue into poetry. The Destinee Project allows the teacher to use the dialogue between teacher and student, in order to create poems. The teacher selects a snippet of dialogue, and then creates a poem about that piece of small dialogue (Thorne). This is a technique that students could use when interacting with each other, or when interacting with characters. The tools used by Thorne are useful in creating a different spin on the English and arts curriculums.

Bruce Pirie (1997) notes that, “We need to clarify exactly why we use drama in English. (p. 51)” He notes that drama can bring dynamic opportunities

for learning into the English classroom (Pirie, 1997). The problem when teachers use drama in the classroom is that often, drama is associated with mindless filler time (Pirie, 1997). While every student may enjoy drama projects, how do we measure their understanding of literature or language in depth (Pirie)? Drama in the classroom can easily turn into a great experience for some, and an easy half-hearted activity for others but if done properly, can be extremely beneficial.

Pirie claims there are three main benefits to using focused drama instruction in the classroom. The first, is that “Dramatic work stretches us not only beyond a fixation on individual *characters* in literature, but also beyond individual *readers* of literature,” meaning that not only does it push us to discover deeper character motivation, it also both showcases and develops different readers’ ideas of those characters (Pirie). Secondly, drama serves “to push us beyond words to the nonverbal signs that comprise the bulk of everyday communication” (Pirie). Even strict readings of text call for imaginary sights and sounds from the reader (Pirie). Lastly, drama “unfolds in time: it is about *living through* the experience” (Pirie).

Instrumental and vocal music. Music, specifically singing, has always been valued in the elementary classroom as an essential memory tool. Music education does not just mean children only playing in the school band or singing in the choir, but rather having regular opportunities in class time to explore the arts and personal expression (Heyning, 2011). Wiggins (2011) describes the

interviews held with her students regarding their passion for playing and listening to music. She discusses the students describing their connection to music as a visceral one, and that when they hear music they automatically respond and feel the need to reproduce that music in one way or another (Wiggins, 2011). The response which Wiggins' students describe is one which should be reproduced, so that students who feel a connection to music, should feel the same connection and response if they were to have to learn that music through a content (English) skill or concept. This is interesting, given that students are expected to interpret multiple sources of information from grades six-12 (The Common Core, 2015).

Music is also is a place for students to learn about history, grammar, vocabulary, etc. In her research article "Sung solechisms," Cynthia D. Biggs (2011) found that using hip-hop music in the classroom, an idea that initially made her cringe, was effective in gaining student engagement. She writes:

Admittedly, I was at one time skeptical about hip hop's non-prescriptive approach to teaching and learning until a former ninth grade student asked me who is Cassius Clay. Out of curiosity, and before I offered a response, I asked what prompted the question.

He said he heard the name in a rap song. (Biggs, p. 49)

Biggs (2011) realized that the revolution of hip hop music was something that could work with her, and not against her, as she once assumed. Even the rap icon

Lil' Wayne's song "6 foot 7 foot" includes lyrics which read, "I got through that sentence like a subject and a predicate," opening an opportunity for a grammar lesson. In addition, and probably the most valuable aspect of teaching using such an approach, is that teachers are able to show students that famous rappers and hip hop artists need to be educated, too. The lyrics about Cassius Clay and subjects/predicates also indicate that artists still use these learned skills in their careers.

Summary

Extensive research has been done on the importance of the arts in schools all around the United States, as well as research done on specific arts being integrated into classrooms. It is easy to find studies on drama in the classroom, music in the classroom, art in the classroom, yet there is not nearly as much on combining or integrating all of the arts into the curriculum. The combination of several arts makes learning more accessible and authentic for students, especially those students who are involved in them. The primary goal of integrating the arts in academic classrooms is to bring the content of the arts, such as music, drama, or visual art, into non-arts curricula, in order to engage students and improve the learning experience (Cawthon & Dawson, 2011). In addition, The Common Core (2015) demands more use of "textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements," in which the arts are essential in order to truly use the standards in the classroom. "The English language arts curriculum, especially with the viewing

and representing strands, deals with the benefits of the arts that can be realized when teachers work with the curriculum” (Ball, 2003).

Research Design and Methodology

This study was conducted over 12 weeks and was created to integrate the arts into a very rigid fifth-grade English curriculum. Over the course of these 12 weeks, students learned different performing and visual arts techniques and explored them throughout the course of their literature unit studies, sometimes with heavy-handed guidance and sometimes with none at all. Students were required to let go of what they felt was a “normal” way to learn, and embrace their creativity using visual art, dance/movement, vocal music, instrumental music, and theater.

Setting

The study took place in a fifth grade English classroom at what I will call the Scholar Excellence Charter School in Harlem New York, New York (HSEC). The Harlem Scholar Excellence Charter School is a grades four through six alternative public school. Scholar Excellence Charter Schools is a network of several charter schools represented in all New York City boroughs, operating on a dual-mission: To build world-class schools that prove all children from all backgrounds can succeed in college and in life; and serve as a national model for education reform. The HSEC’s students (or “scholars,” as we call them) come from mainly the Bronx and Harlem. At HSEC, students operate on a nine-and-a-half hour school day, receiving 250 minutes of daily academic instruction and 100 minutes of electives-based instruction, some of which is also academic depending

on individual need (struggling scholars have academic electives in English and/or Math for an additional 50 minutes of the day). Grade four has a total of 84 students, 43 which are male, and 41 are female. Grade five consists of 85 total students, 47 which are male, and 38 are female. Grade six has 69 total students, of which 31 are male, and 38 are female. Of the total 387 students, 68.9% identify as black, 24.4% Hispanic, 17.8% American Indian, 7.8% multi-racial, and 2.2% identify as white. There are 40 total staff members at the Harlem Scholar Excellence Charter School.

Participants

The students included in this study are from a fifth grade ICT English class of 27 students, 16 of which are male, and 11 female. 23 students chose to participate in this study (13 male, ten female). The student age range is nine-11 years old. Of the 23 participants, six students have an IEP and five are on a 504-plan. 50% of the students in the class are considered to be “low” or academically struggling students, having failed the New York State Exams in 2015 and/or 2014. The rest of the students are a mix of general education and gifted. Fifth grade is not tracked, but it does have two ICT classrooms, based on the significant amount of students with IEPs in the grade. Of the 23 students participating in the study, 18 are required to participate in an academic elective in place of an elective activity once per day.

Procedures

Over the course of twelve weeks, I integrated five artistic genres: dance/movement, theater, instrumental music, vocal music, and visual art, into my English instruction. I did this by incorporating these arts into the English curriculum, in order to make the material personal, meaningful, and challenging for my students. Over these twelve weeks, I used the arts to explicitly teach new content once per week (usually on Wednesdays), and infused the material at least one other day throughout the week.

Week 1: End of unit reading projects

- Hand out parent consent forms
- Distribute introductory survey
- During the first week, students turned their whole-class novel, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis, into an arts-collaboration project. They discussed their whole-class novel and then came together as a group to create a short production or art piece that summarizes the novel they read. They then completed a survey about how they felt about using their arts in English class.

Week 2: Multi-genre/multi-modal text study

- Students learned about and [viewed](#) several different multi-genre projects, and discussed the purpose of each project, what they measured, how they were a good form of a summary or an assessment, etc. We looked at modes such as visual essays, music to show tone and mood, theatrical performance as a means of summarizing and making inferences; and dance, movement, and monologues to show character development.

Week 3: Introduction to the new whole class text

- During week three, students began reading *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* by Philip Hoose. They used painting and sketching as ways to express the setting in the very beginning of the novel.

Week 4: Character development through monologues, dance, and graffiti

- This week, students focused on the character development in *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*, and expressed the development of a particular character through theatrical performance (monologues), expressive dance, or graffiti art. The students worked independently, but collaboratively, to exchange ideas on how they could best portray the development of their character.

Week 5: Imagery and figurative language through any art form

- This week, students focused on learning about imagery and figurative language. They were exposed to visual imagery in the visual and performing arts, and figurative language in both music and the theatre arts. They applied this knowledge to the imagery and figurative language in the book, and presented a passage to the class at the end of the week, [which shows](#) imagery *or* figurative language through the use of any art form they chose.

Week 6: Main idea

- The major themes in the book: individual versus society, coming of age, and segregation, were discussed this week, and students had to present the themes in different modes of art. Sculpture, painting, vocal music, movement/dance, etc. were all used this week in portraying main idea.

Week 7: Tone and mood with instrumental music

- In week seven, tone and mood in the book were explored through the use of instrumental music. Listening, playing, and creating soundtracks to portray the tone and mood were all involved in this week's lessons.

Week 8: Student Interviews and finishing the novel

- At this point, the students focused on reading in order to finish-up the book, but I [also conducted](#) student interviews to find out how

the students felt about studying a novel alongside of facing the challenge of connecting it to different forms of art.

Weeks 9-11:

- Students had free-reign of a topic or concept to learn on their own (with my guidance), and incorporated it in a project using two art focuses they enjoyed the most during the unit. They produced a project based on that concept and art, and created an artifact to display their knowledge and understanding. Students still needed to use textual evidence to find the major topics discussed in the unit, displaying that they were capable of doing the same work they would do in a written assessment. (See Final Project Attachments)

Week 12: Wrap-up

- In the final week, students presented their projects and completed the exit survey.

Data Sources

Student Work. I gathered student work in various forms including drawings, videos, photographs, and student notes.

Planning Organizers. I collected several planning organizers designed for students to plan mini projects as my study progressed. (APPENDIX F)

Survey Data. At the beginning of my study, I administered and collected a survey for students to complete, gathering their thoughts on using different forms of art in our classroom. At the conclusion of my study, students received the same exact survey to complete. (APPENDIX D, APPENDIX G)

Observational Data. During the study, I kept double-entry style notes on what was happening in my classroom. In my notes, I recorded observations of student conversations, movement, my own thoughts and [noticing](#), and visually apparent student struggles and progress.

Summary

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), ninety-one percent of public secondary schools offered music in the 2008–09 school year. 89 percent of these schools offered visual arts and 12 percent offered dance, and 45 percent offered theater. While arts education may be provided and/or offered in many schools, it is not always a part of an everyday learning environment. This is surprising, considering the push for multiple-intelligences-based instruction, and its researched benefits. In literature, there is considerable focus on learning music through bodily movement and recognition that movement is a vital part of children’s learning (Wiggins 2011). Having previously worked in an arts-based charter school, I have seen much potential and opportunity to consider arts integration in the academic curriculum. As an English teacher, I have found that drama is always something easily able to be integrated into the

curriculum. Integrating music, dance, and visual arts is a little more challenging to do on a daily; even weekly basis.

Trustworthiness Statement

To ensure trustworthiness and validity throughout this research study, clear guidelines were followed. Prior to beginning my study, I created a letter describing my research study to present to the principal of my school, asking for permission to conduct my study. I also drafted an informed consent letter for parents, explaining the study and the purpose of the data collection. I then included these documents in the materials that I presented to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board, in order to obtain approval to conduct my study. Once I obtained approval from the Human Subjects Internal Research Board, I obtained written permission from the principal of my school to conduct the study. After receiving approval from my principal, I discussed the study with my scholars to invest them in the work that was going to take place in our classroom. I also provided parents with the approved consent letter, which outlined my study and explained that all of the data used would be coded by pseudonyms, and all materials disclosing scholar information would be kept in a secure location. The letter also stated that I would only be using data from students who were granted parental permission to participate, and that they could be withdrawn from the study at any point without penalty.

Once the participants and parents granted their consent, I was able to begin my study. In order to gain the most insight about scholar work and participation, I discussed my study with my colleagues and kept an open mind in regards to interpreting data and analyzing my research findings. In conversing with colleagues, I was able to gain insight on scholar perspectives from different angles. With that in mind, I was able to speak with the participants of my study openly in order to gain validity on my interpretations of their work. I collected multiple sources of data so that I was always gaining the most information possible. I collected work not only from my classes, but also from Science, Math, and History. In addition, I looked at the scholar paycheck data (our discipline system), to gain insight on how the study was affecting participants both inside and outside of my classroom.

After concluding my study, I will continue to confer with participants about the results I've gathered and interpretations I've made. I communicated any changes I made over the course of the study openly, so that my results did not conflict with any of the information I've presented when telling my story. When sharing the study with others, I included detailed information about the setting, participants, methods, and materials used in the study. In validating the accuracy of my results, I hope to present detailed information that could be compared by or used by any educator regardless of their students' grade level or demographic information.

My Story

I began my M.Ed. coursework while teaching in a performing arts middle school. For two years I dedicated all of my attention and research to incorporating the visual and performing arts into my self-written English curriculum. I worked in a freely structured environment, where I was trusted to do whatever worked for my particular students and me that year. I met their needs and made learning interesting and complex.

I decided to leave my first school after serving two years of teaching there. I sought a more normal public school experience where I could find more stability and the opportunity for tenure. Little did I know I would find something completely the opposite.

At the end of my first year teaching at Scholar Excellence Charter School, I told my principal that I would not be able to return unless I was given permission to complete my research study in my classroom. She gracefully granted me permission, having no idea what it would require. I returned for my second year, being promoted to the fifth-grade English Content Lead for all eleven of [the](#) Scholar Excellence Charter Middle Schools.

I was worried about completing my study at this school. Scholar Excellence Charter works on a fixed curriculum with pre-scripted lessons and a pacing calendar that all teachers at all eleven middle schools must follow. All assessments for all eleven middle schools are given on the same exact dates in

every school, and are written by people who do not teach inside of the schools. This may sound like a dream to many, but to a true teacher this is a nightmare. The curriculum provides minimal if any flexibility to deviate from what is already there. This is why it was significant for my principal to allow me to complete my study, but this is also why she had no idea what it meant to do action research in a classroom. It is also ironic that I was promoted to lead the 5th grade English team of 30 middle school English teachers, as I stood out because I taught in a unique way and tried to digress from the norm as much as I possibly could.

You can imagine that in such an environment, the students also have no idea what it is like to experience something unique in a lesson. They sit ever-so-perfectly at their desks with their backs straight and their hands folded. They rarely move from their seats (because that *could* create too much chaos). And if a principal were to walk into a loud classroom, she would scoff at the pandemonium and characterize the teacher as one who lacks classroom management skills.

So my worries were legitimate. I'd been granted permission from my principal, but what about my students? *How would they react to something so outlandish?*

Introducing the Study to My Students

I told my fifth grade students that we would be using the visual and performing arts in English class. Immediately they were confused but excited. I informed them that bringing art into the classroom would give them an opportunity to learn in different ways and for those who typically struggle in class, to have an opportunity to feel successful. The reactions were interesting, as some students initially seemed skeptical. This was to be expected, as my students were not used to having any choice in school, especially within a lesson. Their initial surveys proved how unsure they were.

Interpreting the Initial Survey Data

On day one of my study, students took the initial survey. The survey was accompanied by confusion, as my students could not fathom some of the questions asked (see *Table 1*).

Question	Response	Results
1. The art form I am most interested in is:	Visual Arts	6
	Dance	5
	Vocal Music	2
	Instrumental Music	4
	Theater	6
2. I believe that I could relate this art to English:	Yes	9
	No	14
3. I would like to be able to perform or use an art in English class:	Yes	22
	No	1
4. On a scale of 1-10, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/or draw certain things in English class would make class more	1-3	3
	4-5	12
	6-8	2
	9-10	6

exciting:		
5. On a scale of 1-10, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class would make class more memorable:	1-3	5
	4-5	11
	6-8	5
	9-10	2
6. Comments:	Reflected Excitement	15
	Reflected Confusion	6
	Reflected Displeasure	2
7. Questions about using the arts in English class:	Reflected Excitement	7
	Reflected Confusion	11
	Reflected Displeasure	5

Table 1. Initial Survey Results

Looking at the initial survey results made me realize that allowing my students into the world of arts-integrated lessons would be challenging. On the third question, 22 students said “yes” they would want to be able to use an art in English class. Only one student answered “no.” The fourth question listed above concerned me more. 60% of my students circled a five or below. This meant that more than half of my students did not believe that using the arts in English class would make it more enjoyable. The results were even less for the last question.

This is where I started. My students wanted to use the arts in English class, but did not think that it would make class more enjoyable or more memorable. Something did not add-up here. After reading the questions and comments allowed at the bottom of the survey, and speaking with students the following day in class, I realized why. Questions and comments ranged from “How is this gonna work?” to “I don’t get this” to “Wait, so we’re going to art class

tomorrow?” My students could not wrap their minds around my ideas, because they have had no exposure to progressive or creative ways of learning.

Throwing Them Right In: Arts Mini Projects

In the first week, students were ending their unit on *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis. In order for me to assess their ability to use the arts in English and to get an idea of what their final end-of-study project would be like, students completed mini arts projects. My idea was to use the projects as a tool for pre-assessment around my students’ ability to think outside-of-the-box, and to apply an art to the literature we had been studying in class. Looking at the work would hopefully give me an idea of who I needed to push to be creative, and who would do so instinctually. The purpose for myself as a teacher was to be able to tap more into my students’ abilities to express their learning in various ways.

My students were given the following options for their first projects, to depict what they felt was the most important scene from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*:

- Script (theater)
 - A script would entail a group of students coming together to both write and perform a scene from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham--1963*. Writing the script would require teamwork, collaboration, and ownership.

- Playlist (music)
 - Writing a playlist required students to either choose a chapter, or use the whole book to create a moment-by-moment or chapter-by-chapter soundtrack. Students had to choose songs of any type, list them, and explain how each song fit that particular chapter or moment in the book. These students would have internet access on their iPads to search and listen to music.
- Comic Strip or drawing (art)
 - Students had to draw-out the most important scene in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham--1963*, highlighting the most important details, as they saw fit.

It was incredible to see that students understood how to write a script with absolutely no direction from me. When these project ideas were presented to my students, I made it clear that their verbal directions were all that were being given to them, and that they had to use their own ideas to express their learning. I had two groups working on scripts and both seemed extremely successful. Daria's group wrote out not only a script, but also stage directions to go along with it (see *Figure 1*)! Ty's group asked me if they could use a Google doc to share their script with one another. I was feeling much better than I had prior to the start of

my study and after day one. My students *were* able to be a lot more independent than I had expected them to be. And then I circulated the rest of the room...

I encountered three students who chose to write chapter-by-chapter playlists: Melissa, Mike, and Michael. Two out of the three were *my* best and brightest students, and they were all struggling. It looked like they had barely completed any work (see *Figure 2*). After some thought, I assumed that they expected this task to be the easiest of their options. I was right. As I stood over her desk, Melissa said to me, “Ms. Dahlinger, this is SO hard!” I asked if she expected it to be easy. All three of the students nodded their heads. I looked at the three of them and told them that none of the work we would be doing would be easy. If anything, it required more thought and more care. I remembered my principal once telling me that there is a fine line between creativity and what people think is creativity but does not challenge students. The last thing I wanted to produce was a room full of meaningless tasks.

Students who were drawing and creating comic strips also seemed to be struggling (see *Figure 3*). It appeared that many of them were trying to take the easy way out. I saw low effort in their work, with what appeared at first glance to be lazily scribbled. *Ms. Gonzalez would be so angry*, I thought (Ms. Gonzalez is our incredible art teacher).

I questioned many things after that 40-minute period:

- *Was I expecting too much of fifth graders?*

Wool Pooh scene

Kenny: Oh man! Colliers Landing. Lets go!

Joey: Uh-Uh Kenny you heard Grandma Sands tell about that little boy getting lost in the water. What was the thing that she said got him?

Byron: Didn't you hear what she said Joey? She said that he got caught by the Wool Pooh.

Joey: Is that a Fish?

Byron: Uh-Uh you know who Winnie the Pooh is?

Kenny and Joey nod

Byron: The Wool Pooh is Winnie's evil twin brother. Don't no one ever write about him cause they don't want to scare y'all kids. What he does is hide under water and snatch stupid kids down with him.

Joey and Byron start walking away.

Byron: If Kenny wants to take his stupid little behind down there and get snatched let him.

Byron starts pulling Joey.

Joey: But Byron what if the Wool Pooh comes down to where we're going? Can't he swim down there and get people too?

Byron: Naw, Joey the Wool Pooh don't come on public beaches, he just grabs folks that are too stingy to let peons come to their land, like this Collier guy.

Byron: What you gonna do punk?

Joetta: Come on Kenny! You know what Grandma Sands said

Figure 1. Daria's group's script with stage directions

Track No.	Song Title and Artist	How it fits this chapter
1	lean on me	When the family ^{catch} leaves other
2	stronger	When kenny has to be
3	Bad Blood	the class and has to be when W turned
4	Bad Blood	
5	Yakety Yak	
6	Am I Wrong	
7	the Man	
8	get outta my dreams into the car	
9	Stay with me	
10	Dancing in the dark	
11	See you again	
12	uptown funk	
13	save me	
14	Ticking bomb	
15	glory	

Figure 2. Mike's Self-Created Playlist

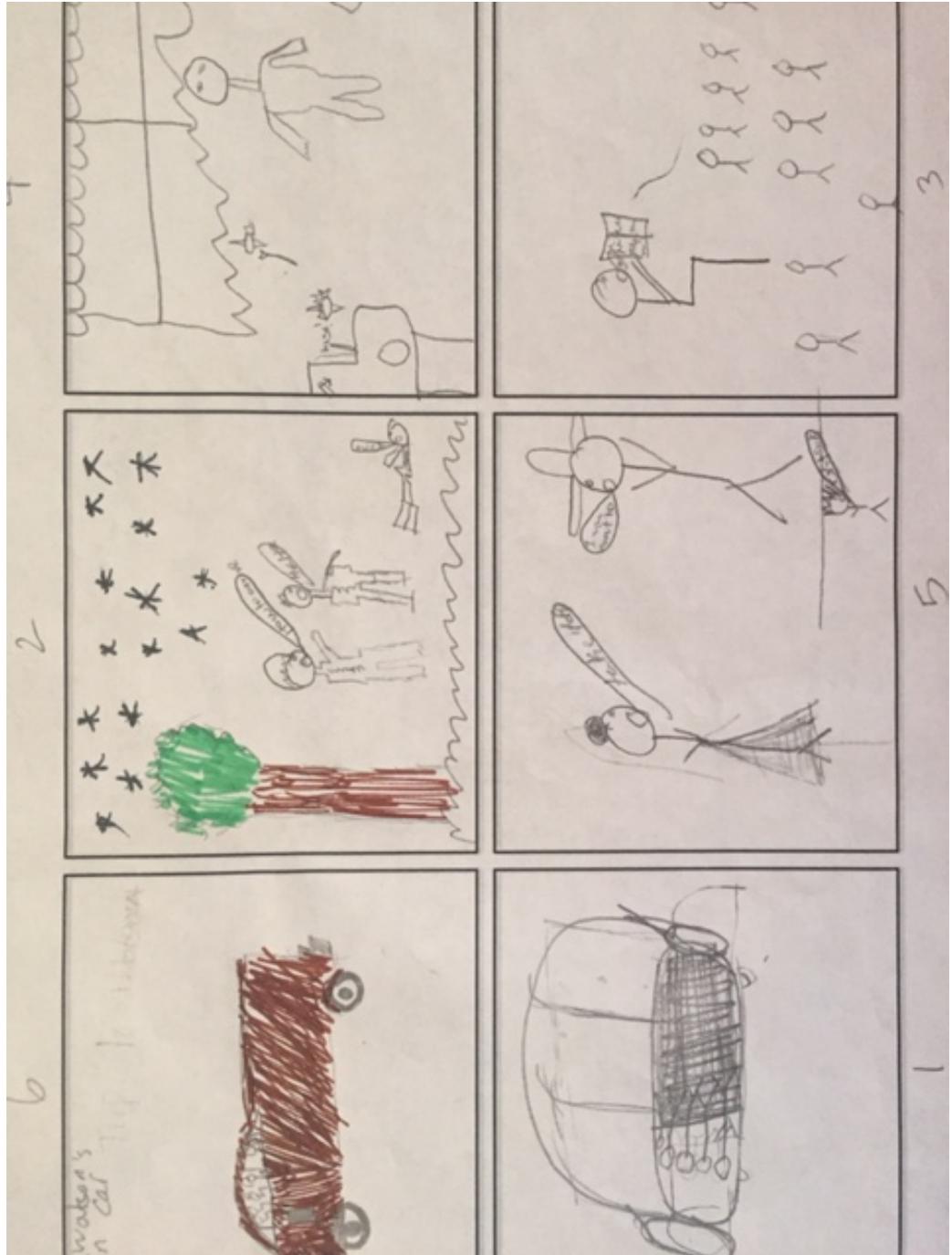


Figure 3. Sample Student Comic Strip Work

- *Were they really showing me low effort?*
- *Maybe I shouldn't expect them to be so great. Maybe they take pride in some of the work they did for me today.*
- *Why is it that my most struggling students thrived today and my brightest ones failed?*

These questions were ones I let linger, but were later answered by my discussions with my students, and closer observations of the student work.

On the second day of working on our mini-projects, I led a class conversation centered on the students' projects. Initially, the students thought that these mini-projects would be a fun and easy break from the everyday academic monotony, and I suppose in a sense they were, because academic monotony was absolutely not on my list of things to achieve (see *Table 2*). What was clear was that students did feel like the task was different; challenging. Students were able to interact with one another much more than they were ever able to do in an academic class and arguably even more than they did at recess. Relationships were being built that I had never seen before. Unfortunately, the difficulty was that students did not know when to turn the "silly" off.

“How’s it going?”

Daria

“It’s going really well. At first we were unsure how to act in ELA but in time we found a scene we could do.”

Mela

“Doing something we like while learning helps us to understand what the characters are doing and saying.”

Charlie

“Goin’ better than it could be goin’. Bad part is, Roman doesn’t know what car he is kissing.”

Kevin

“I thought this would be easy and silly like we’d just fool around.”

Table 2. Student Responses to Whole Class Check-In

On the final day of working on these mini arts projects, only two of the three groups that created scripts were able to perform. One group had so many behavior issues that three of the five students had to be removed from the room. There was a significant positive influence the first few days of research had on my class, and an unfortunately severe negative influence. Dana, Mela, Charlie, and

Kevin—all in acting groups—got to shine in an activity so different from what they were normally used to, and these students typically fell behind in any normal academic class. Roman, Jay, and Amy, on the other hand, could not handle any of it. On the following day, the students who had to be removed from the room understood that they had missed out on a significant educational opportunity, and vowed to take all of the work they did in the classroom seriously, no matter how silly it felt.

Powerful Messages through Visual Essays

In the second and third weeks of my study, students explored how to make meaning through the use of visual essays. For the benefit of my class, students were asked to make meaning of images from the Civil Rights Movement, in order to tell a story. It took them a little while to warm up to the activity, even though it was engaging for them. I watched some students (like Melissa) who would normally out-perform other students, show very low effort on the essay, while others like Daron (who is extremely low-performing in English) performed extremely well on the assignment.

At a certain point, I found myself getting very frustrated with the slight chaos in the room, but I forgot that my students are just not used to having any freedom and having worked at Harlem Scholar Excellence Charter for two years now, I'd grown accustomed to not letting loose in the classroom. Despite what I

thought looked like unproductive work time, students seemed to have incredibly positive reflections on this activity (see *Table 3*).

After looking at the work product (see *Figures 4-5*), it is clear that some students took the assignment very seriously and worked hard on it, while others

“How’d it go?”

Jeron	“A little fun because we got to be creative and tell our own little story.”
Ty	“Fun because we got to learn a lot of Civil Rights and it was fun to pick pictures.”
Roman	“It was fun for me because I got to use the floor and some of your feedback.”

Table 3. Student Reflections on Creating Visual Essays

created sloppy work that did not follow my basic expectations. In speaking with a colleague and sharing the work, I did realize that the quality of writing on this assignment was better than usual.

Just three weeks into my study, it was evident that using the arts in English class was academically beneficial for all of my students. Roman, who struggled through the mini project, saw so much success in creating his visual

essay. The visual essays really showed a different form of literacy being built within my classroom. Students making meaning of simple pictures from the Civil Rights Movement and symbols of equality, allowed them to express ideas and bring about prior knowledge from the previous lessons and background knowledge they had. I could not wait to see what else they would surprise me with.

Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice

When we finally dove in to the next Civil Rights book we were studying, I felt much more comfortable throwing imaginative ideas at my students. Students began *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* by drawing while reading in order to establish a clear vision of setting and to show their understanding of the material read.

At first, all of my students struggled to remember to draw while we read. I told them that while I read aloud, they could either follow along in the book or just listen and draw. Most chose to follow along in the book, as they have had little experience with just being read to. I took observational notes on eight specific students. Within the first five minutes of the task, only three of those students were drawing images that represented setting. The other five students were drawing character-related images. Brielle asked me if she could move. Once I allowed her to move to the floor, she began drawing more setting-related

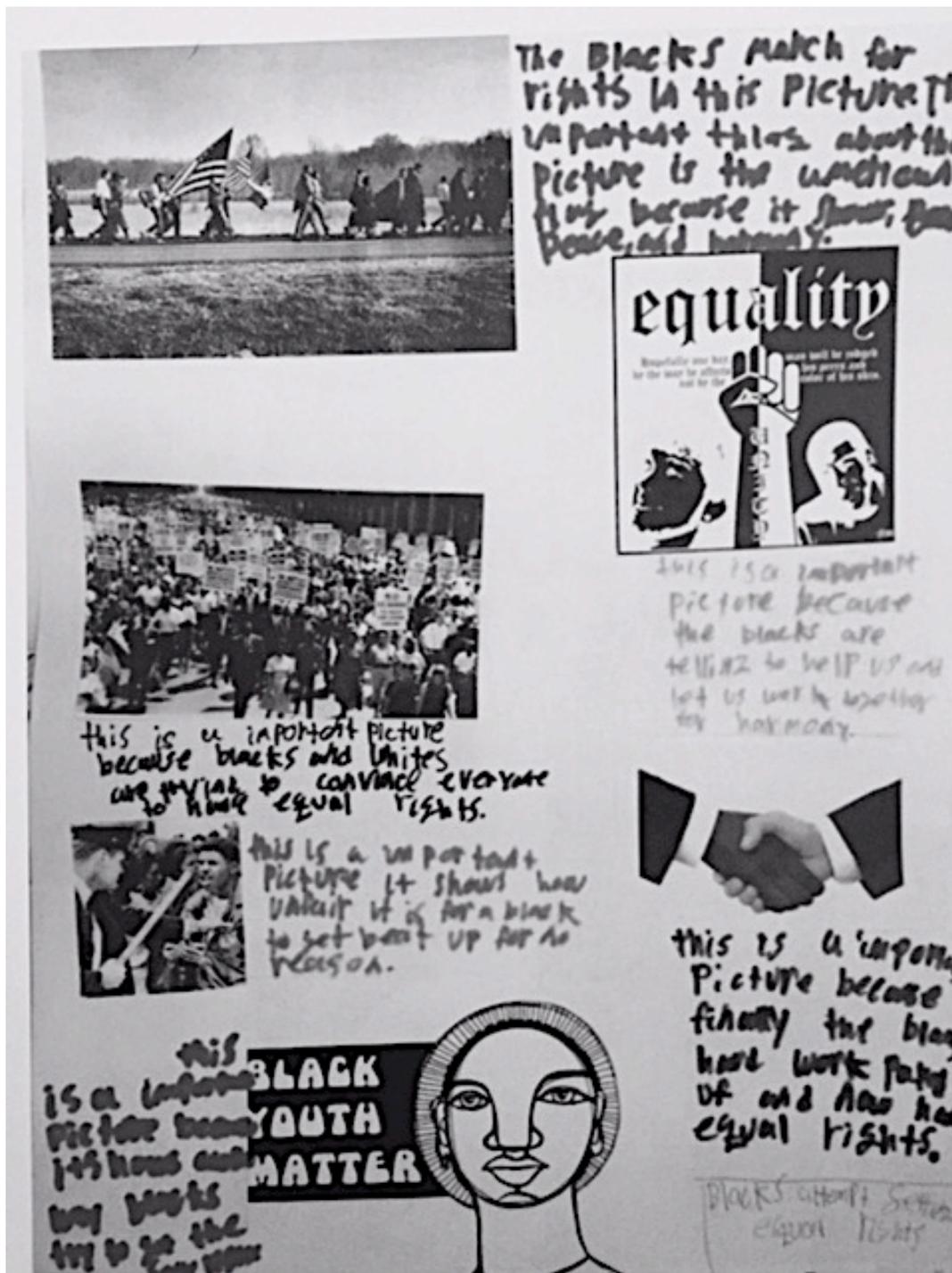


Figure 4. Visual Essay Sample 1

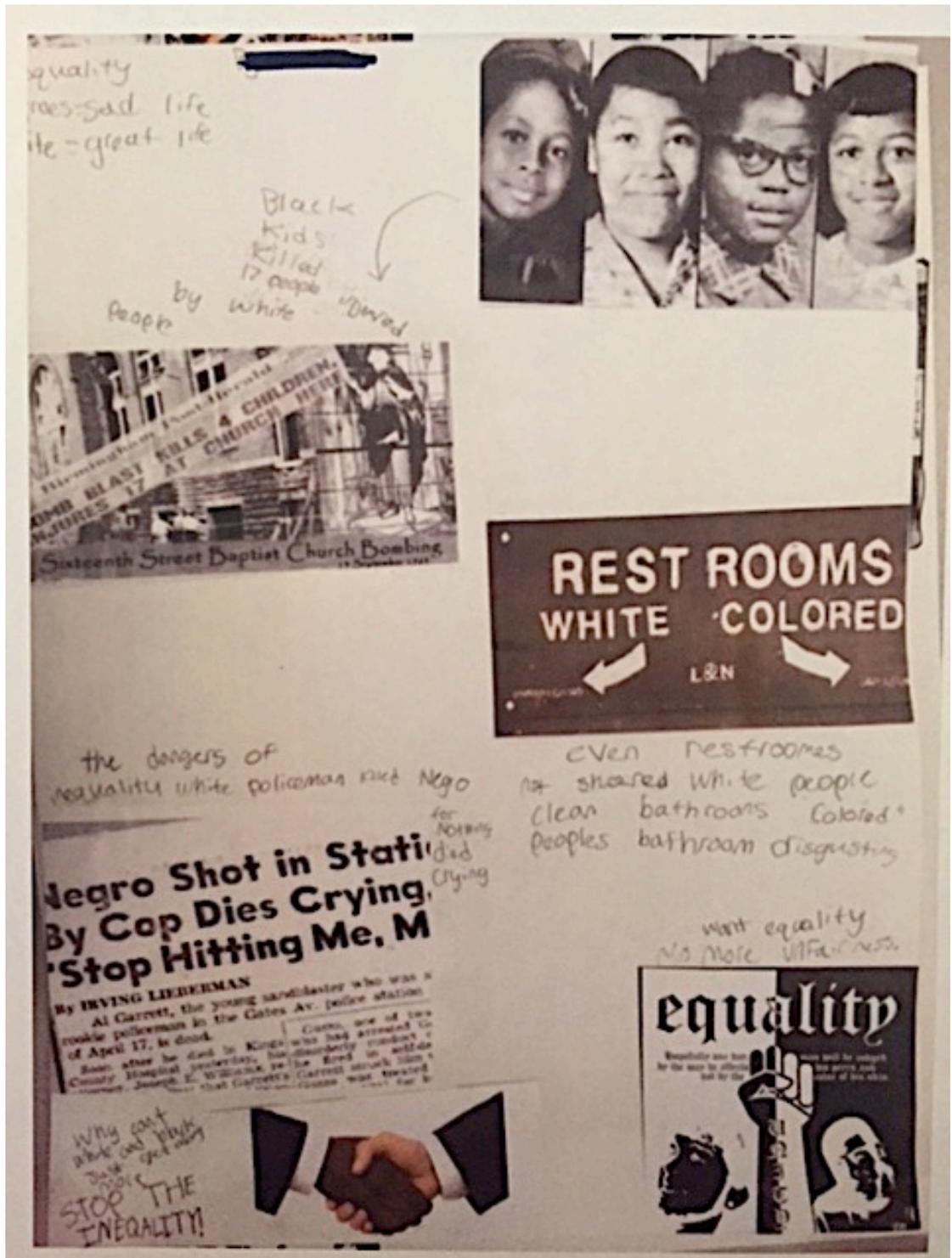


Figure 5. Visual Essay Sample 2

images. This made me wonder: *Was it her own setting that influenced her inability to envision the setting of the book?* It very likely could have been, because as soon as she got comfortable, she was able to envision the setting, which was evident in her final work product.

After reading the first five pages together, I required students to continue reading and drawing on their own. Midway through doing independent work, Amy blurted out a thought-provoking comment (see Figure 6). Her question

They don't do this separation no more do they? It's amazing that they could do this stuff. She's talking about how her dad has his own special chair in front of the store.

Figure 6. Amy's Thoughts while Drawing

made me realize that the simple act of drawing while reading required my students to do more thinking and in turn they were digging deeper into the material they were studying. But not every student felt that this was the case (see *Figure 7*). I watched Jarod draw and listened to him think aloud for me. In this instance, I was sitting next to him. Because I was sitting next to him, he was feeling the need to tell me about every thing he was doing when he started drawing (probably out of expecting that I would judge him on his drawing skills).

Me: Do you feel that drawing while reading actually helps you to understand what you're reading?

Jarod: Reading helps me understand what I'm reading. We had to stop and draw something and then it looks sloppy and I'm a bad artist.

Me: So if you brought me your work would you be able to tell me about the chapter through your work?

Jarod: Yes

Figure 7: Conversation with Jarod on Drawing while Reading

Jarod was scribbling to represent the ghosts. When he told me that his scribbles would represent the ghosts, I think he expected a reaction from me. I just glanced at his work and let him continue. My silence caused him to assume that his drawing was not good enough. I later had a conversation with him about his work. Jarod felt as though drawing was not helping him, but in analyzing our conversation, Jarod was really just self-conscious about his drawing. His response to my second question shows that he was finding success in this activity, even if he did not realize it yet.

A week later we explored character development through dance, monologue writing, and graffiti. Students were asked to either work alone or form groups. It was completely up to them to choose to choreograph a dance, write a monologue, or draw graffiti to represent the thematic message they

thought was most prevalent in *The Watsons go to Birmingham—1963* and *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. I gave my students little guidance on this assignment. If they were unsure about how to properly create graffiti or craft a monologue, they could use their iPads to look up helpful information. The assignment was completely exploratory and I was merely an observer in the room.

I observed three of my students, Brielle, Mae, and Fatima practicing the dance they were creating to represent the author's thematic message. The thematic message they were trying to re-create was that *an individual had the ability to change society, just as a society had the ability to overtake an individual*. The girls decided that two of them would dance to represent society; repeatedly doing the same routine over and over again. Brielle danced alone in between Mae and Fatima, representing the individual getting broken down by society. The thinking the girls needed to do to come up with this idea is the most significant, because they first had to actually wrap their minds around the thematic statement the author was making. They then needed to think of a way to represent that statement through dance. Finally, the girls needed to actually come up with a routine that effectively communicated the message.

Out of the whole class, four students chose to write monologues. As they sat together in the back corner of the room, I watched many of them struggle to understand how to write a monologue. I told them that the only help I would give them was for them to use their ipads to research monologues. Jay and Ty

struggled with this because they always wanted instant answers to their questions. In the thirty minutes of work time given to them, each wrote one-to-three sentences of a sad attempt at a monologue. Daron, who loved acting, also struggled. He knew what he wanted to do but expressed to me that he was unsure how to put it on paper. When I asked him to visualize himself as Martin Luther King Jr. (the role he wanted to play), he seemed to understand a bit more. At the end of the class period, Daron had written a small paragraph in third person. Daron did not love writing, as it was not his strength, but he did very well on the initial mini-project during the first week, writing a script with his group. This disconnect is something I would have loved to explore more. Why would he do very well with script writing, but be unable to conceptualize monologue writing? Was it the pressure to complete the task on his own, or was it the inability to understand what an internal dialogue looks like?

Mel had me beaming about the incredible monologue she wrote. In her monologue, she aimed to act as Claudette Colvin. Having no prior knowledge of how to write or deliver a monologue, Mel independently researched and wrote her own. In her delivery, she expressively acted as the enraged teenager bound by segregation. It began with an expressively read: “Is it *fair*? Is it *fair* to treat us like *dogs*?” Mel was able to express the theme of individual versus society, while taking on the character of Claudette Colvin, and recording a well-written monologue with feeling and rage written all over it!

The majority of the class chose to work on a graffiti image representing the thematic messages we explored in class. At this point it was unsurprising that the students who chose graffiti were also the least successful in their abilities to express a message. On average, the work product was subpar. No pieces stood out as well done. For the most part, students were unable to successfully finish their work in the time given. Many of the graffiti artists spent too much time researching styles of graffiti and ran out of time creating their own products.

The students explored imagery and figurative language the following week. Unfortunately due to time constraints, days off, and assessments, students did not create any work products as initially planned this week. Instead, we explored the imagery and figurative language used in the nonfiction text. In class, I modeled my noticing of imagery and figurative language to my students, and asked them to think creatively about how they would express it in an art form. We brainstormed as if we would have created a work product. This was still productive, as it forced students to think outside-of-the box and to analyze the language used in the work we were studying. At this point in the study, my students became so open to discussing how we could connect the arts to what we were doing in class—and were so quick to share-out ideas both inside and outside of the classroom setting.

In the last two weeks prior to their final projects, I interviewed students on their favorite part(s) of the arts-integrated activities so far, and asked if there was

anything we had not done that they would have liked to do (see *Table 4*). I found it fascinating that all students except for one of them enjoyed the visual essay activity the most, which was the one I assumed would be the most difficult for them prior to beginning my study. While Jay's and Brielle's responses were very

“What has been your favorite part of the arts activities so far? What haven't we done enough that you would like to do more of?”

Jay “Listening to music when we read calms us down. Puttin' pictures on the paper to make a poster for the Civil Rights Movement seemed fun. We haven't been in groups more...only once in a while.”

Sierra “My favorite part was what we did about black and whites about restrooms and buses. When I put the pictures and wrote what it meant it felt like I was expressing what it felt like back then. I want to do more of learning about segregation.”

James “My favorite part was making the poster. It was meaningful. I got to be artistic.”

Joe “I liked drawing when you read cuz since there's not really a lot of pictures in the books it creates an image.”

Jeron “The Civil Rights poster. Instead of writing a short response we got to use the visual pictures and actually describe them. I felt

older. I'd like to do more projects—go outside—basketball.”

Brielle

“The one with the pictures. I don't know. Dance.”

Table 4: Student Interviews

basic and were exactly what I would have imagined any kid would say, Joe's, James', and Jeron's were more thoughtful. These students showed me that they truly saw the value in the work they were doing and that it brought something to each of their tables, educationally. I found that all of the activities brought my students closer to Civil Rights history and more invested in wanting to learn more.

By far, my favorite reflection was Joe's. Joe's simple comment about reading with pictures in the book showed me that he truly understood the value in using multiple strategies to comprehend the literature. Saying that drawing while reading creates an image that is not already there both shows that Joe not only feels that images are necessary, but also feels the desire to interpret the meaning of the literature through art. Drawing while reading offers a level of analysis one would not have by simply just reading.

Show Me

In the last weeks of my study, students planned their final projects, which required them to combine two or more forms of art to focus on sending a message about one theme we've studied over the course of our current and past units. The project was designed to take the place of writing a thematic essay on *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* and *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. Instead of writing an essay with words, students would combine the chosen art forms with the idea that they had to do whatever they could to convey their message to their audience. They were encouraged to be as creative as possible in order to get their messages across.

After I introduced the task to my students, they began brainstorming alone and in groups, to come up with ideas for their projects. Upon completing their final ideas, students submitted a project proposal. The plans were not as elaborate as I would have liked them to be due to time constraints, but even the short plans from some students did reflect deep thinking and planning (see *Figure 8* and *Figure 9*). It is clear that in the first project proposal, Fatima was able to show that her group would address the theme of segregation and planned to use two art forms (theater and movement) in order to show it. She was even able to articulate the exact types of movement that would be used. In the second proposal, Jeron's group was unable to articulate their ideas as well, and neglected

to include the theme they would be studying. For the sake of time, we had to move forward with the projects regardless of what the proposals looked like. What I did not realize was that Jeron's group would have a brilliant idea. As my students worked on their projects, I learned that Jeron, Ty, Jay, and Kevin were plotting to present a basketball game, in which the blacks would play the whites. They planned to present both the themes of segregation and coming of age by using characters from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* and facts from *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. To do this, the group planned to script out a scene of a basketball game. The two teams, The Blacks and The Whites, would be playing in the same game. The Whites would be ahead for the majority of the game. A few times, The Blacks tried to make a comeback, but The Whites would shut them down. In the end, The Blacks made a drastic turnaround to win the game. The purpose of the game being scripted this way was to show how the blacks were given equal rights in the end. The boys' thinking around this scene using movement and sports was brilliant in that it allowed for them to truly present their learning in an abstract way which required both higher levels of thinking and creativity.

Daria and Mel worked together using visual arts and theater. They created a script about the bus boycotts along with a magnificent cardboard prop, which was the frame of a bus, windows, and all! They were the only group to combine visual arts and any type of movement-related art, which I found interesting. Most

Final Multi-Genre Project Proposal

Name(s): _____

The theme that I/WE would like to retrace is: Segregation

1. My/our idea for my/our project is as follows:
Our project is to Skit of segregation
and Ice skating/Dancing/sports

2. I/we plan to carry this out by:
 (What steps will you take to complete this assignment productively?)
I will get all the Acting/Dancing/
Sports get checked and Ill communicate
with my Partner

-----do not complete anything below this line-----

Miss Dahlinger's Comments:

____ Approved ____ Not Approved

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Figure 8: Fatima's Project Proposal

Final Multi-Genre Project Proposal

Name(s): _____

The theme that I/WE would like to retrace is: Sports and theater

1. My/our idea for my/our project is as follows:
Making a movie about
basketball.

2. I/we plan to carry this out by: Making a movie about
 (What steps will you take to complete this assignment productively?)
Gym, basketball, timer, cheerleaders, referee,
Byron and Bophead VS
Kenny and Perry

-----do not complete anything below this line-----

Miss Dahlinger's Comments:

____ Approved ____ Not Approved

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Figure 9: Jeron's Project Proposal

students combined movement and theater or visual art and music. Some combined two different types of visual art.

As students worked on their projects, some groups seemed extremely productive, while individuals seemed less productive. This was more evident on the days we presented the final projects, when the students who worked alone had less impressive presentations than those who worked with one or two other students in the last few weeks.

The students took two days to present their final projects. As students presented, I asked others to rate the presentations along the following criteria (see *Table 5*). The groups that were well planned and clearly working every day presented stellar projects. Ten out of the sixteen presenters on day 1 received As and Bs on their projects because they showed their hard work, uniqueness, and used two or more art forms. Their thematic messages were clear, and if not, explained to their audience. The other 5 of the sixteen presenters received low grades mostly because their project did not appear to have taken a lot of time and effort to complete. All student evaluations seemed to agree with my own, but students were more lenient with their peers than I was.

After both days of presenting, I asked students to tell me why they were giving most groups passing grades, as in my own opinion, the level of effort still did not reach the bar I was hoping for it to. The students showed empathy and understanding when others' project presentations did not seem to go smoothly.

Arts Project Evaluation Criteria

1. On a scale of 0-5, how interesting was the project?
0=not at all; 5=very cool

2. On a scale of 0-5, how much effort do you think these people put into their project?
0=none; 5=a lot of effort

3. What letter grade do you think this group deserves?
A, B, C, D, or F

4. Used two or more art forms?
Yes or No

Table 5: Arts Project Evaluation Criteria

Whereas I would have had the mindset that students were unprepared or not taking their projects seriously, my students gave one another the benefit of the doubt in compelling ways. Many of them expressed that it was because they felt everyone had worked hard, even if their products did not turn out the way they expected them to.

End of Study Survey Results

What a difference these twelve weeks made in my students' perspectives on English class as a whole, and on using the arts in the English classroom (see

Table 6)! At the end of my study, almost all of my students both saw the connection between English and the arts and enjoyed being able to use the arts in class. In the exit surveys, several students commented on wanting to continue to use the arts in class for every unit. Jill remarked that it “made me actually want to come to ELA class.”

Question	Response	Results
1. The art forms that I completed my project on were:	Visual Arts	13
	Dance	11
	Vocal Music	1
	Instrumental Music	1
	Theater	8
2. I believe I connected my art form to ELA:	Yes	21
	No	1
3. I liked being able to use an art form in ELA:	Yes	20
	No	2
4. On a scale of 1-10, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class made class more enjoyable:	1-3	0
	4-5	1
	6-8	2
	9-10	19
5. On a scale of <u>1-10</u>, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class made class more memorable:	1-3	1
	4-5	0
	6-8	4
	9-10	15
6. Comments:	Reflected	13
	Excitement	2
	Reflected	0
	Confusion	
	Reflected	

7. Questions about your project:	Displeasure	
	Reflected	8
	Excitement	4
	Reflected	0
	Confusion	
	Reflected	
	Displeasure	

Table 6. Exit Survey

Reflection

After the first day of my study, I asked myself several questions about what I was asking my students to do:

1. *Was I expecting too much of fifth graders?*
2. *Were they really showing me low effort?*
3. *Maybe I shouldn't expect them to be so great. Maybe they take pride in some of the work they did for me today.*
4. *Why is it that my most struggling students thrived today and my brightest ones failed?*

The work my students did over the course of the study allowed me to not only answer these questions, but to answer them thoroughly and confidently.

1. Fifth graders will rise to almost any task you allow them to. When given the space to be creative and show their own ways of thinking about their ideas, my student not only met but surpassed my expectations of them.

2. Unlike the quality of traditional academic work, such as writing, it is not easy to gauge whether or not your students are giving you their best work when they are using the arts in class. This is because like academic abilities, all students have different artistic abilities. This does not matter, though. What matters is what I as the teacher was able to get from the work I was seeing.
3. Fifth graders are sensitive and they take pride in their artistic work, even if it does not seem artistic in adult eyes. After all, they are kids, and even though they can exceed expectations and do amazing things on a daily basis, their creativity may not always look amazing on the outside.
4. My most struggling students are the ones who were most successful using the arts in class because they were able to express their ideas differently, display their unique ways of thinking, and shake-off the same everyday pressure of academic demand.

Throughout my study, I saw a tremendous amount of growth in my students' grades and mindsets in English class. I watched students who normally struggle to understand concepts in English thrive. I watched students with bad attitudes admit in the end that they loved using the arts in class. I saw students actually understanding how using the arts made them more aware of the themes

and concepts we'd been studying. These gains are the most valuable in any classroom.

The unfortunately sad ending to my study is that my research will never majorly contribute to my own practice for the rest of the year with my students. Because the school environment in which I completed my study focused on state testing and a rigid curriculum, I was only granted the permission to carry out my study because of my position as Middle School ELA Content Lead. I currently cannot encourage others to try similar projects within their classrooms, as the leadership team within our school and our network of schools would not accept them. Luckily, that is not the case for all schools and all teachers. What I learned while conducting my study is that the school environment I completed my study in is not one where I would like to continue to teach. The lessons and projects my students performed in this study are too valuable and mind opening to be discouraged by other teachers.

DATA ANALYSIS

As I carried out my study, I collected several sources of data to ensure a well-rounded analysis of the work done in my classroom. The collected data included various sources of student work, student planning organizers, student surveys both pre- and post-study, and non-participant observation notes. By collecting these sources of data, I was able to ensure that my study and findings were valid (Hendricks, 2009).

Student Work Analysis

Visual Art Study. I was able to gain a lot of interesting knowledge and insight when looking at the various visual artworks completed by my students, even though I initially thought that the visual art work done was the least valuable because it did not look like quality work at first glance. When looking at the very first activity done by students, I was able to gain a lot of information about their comprehension and retelling skills. When looking at the comic strips, I learned which students were strongest in retelling the most important details of their reading (see *Figure 10* and *Figure 11*). The first comic strip reveals Joe's work, which displays his attention to specific details throughout the text. He first shows the Watson family on their couch, and then zooms in on Mr. Watson, forcing the family to watch the weather. Here Joe shows not only the events occurring, but

also the characterization he sees when reading the first few pages of the book,
showing me that he has a strong sense of comprehension, not

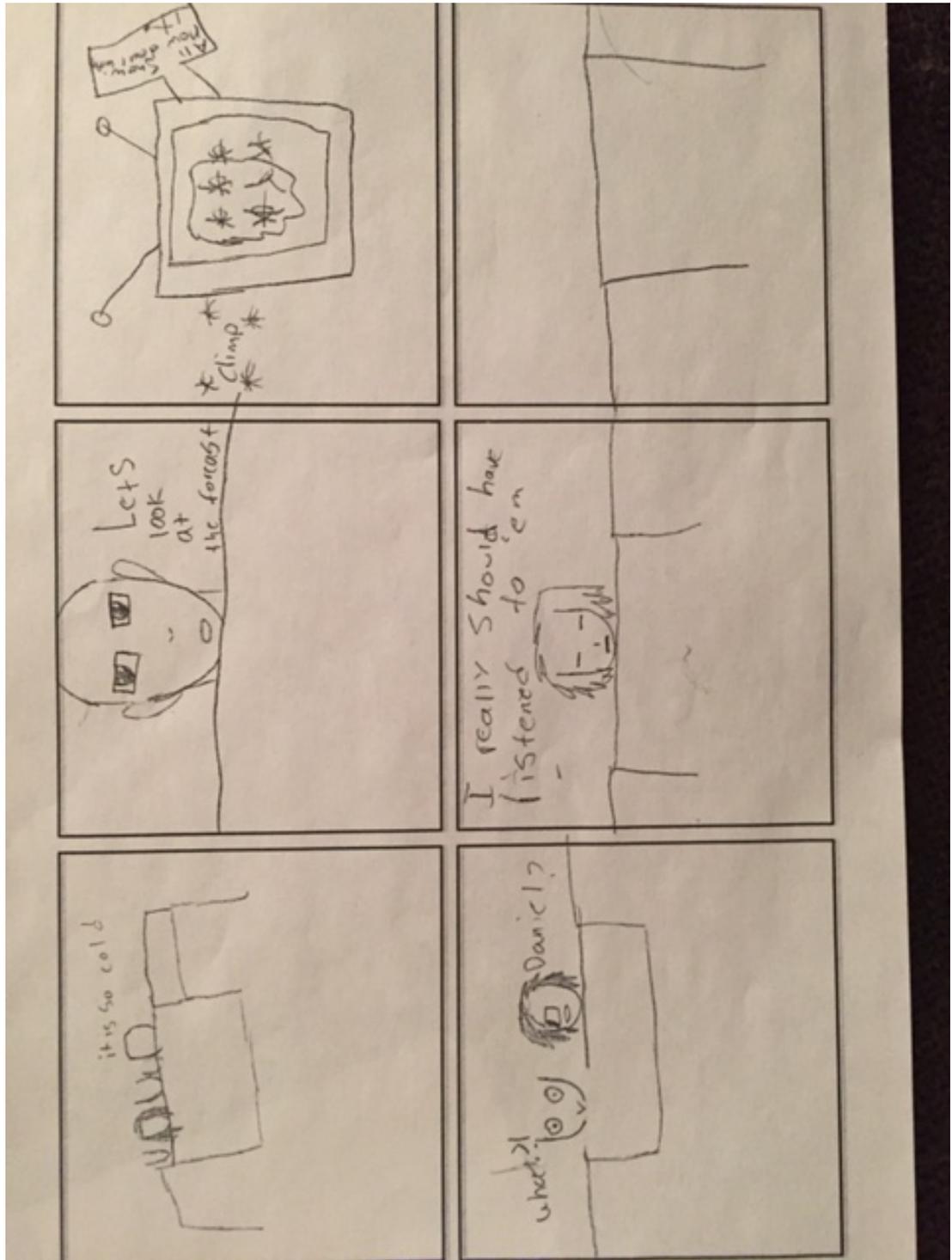


Figure 10. Comic Strip 1: Joe's

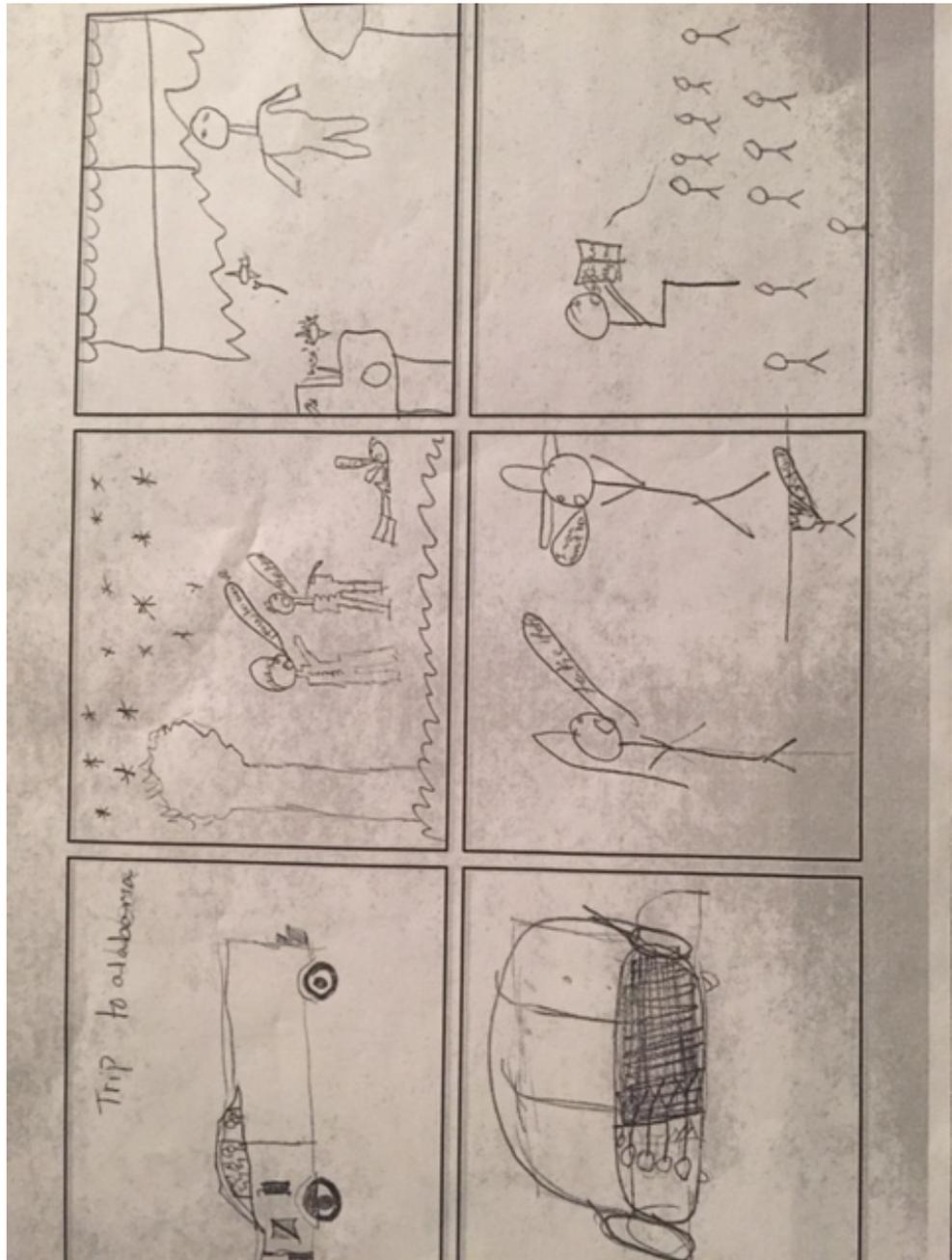


Figure 11. Comic Strip 2: Mae's

only retelling one specific event, but also recreating the scene in his mind. Joe does not go beyond this scene in his comic strip. In fact, he stops his comic before the 6th panel in order to end his scene where he felt it was appropriate. Mae, on the other hand, showed different qualities in her work (see *Figure 11*). In Mae's work, the comic strip is out of chronological order. Mae did not show one particular scene in her work; instead she showed 6 different scenes. When trying to make sense of the work, I initially wanted to think that Mae just did not understand the task at hand, but the comic strip reveals much more than misunderstanding the task. What it reveals is the inability to give textual details beyond a literal, surface-level interpretation. It is clear that Mae understood what happened throughout 6 different scenes in the book, but she does not create each scene in detail in her panels. Additionally, within these scenes, Mae chose to include only the most important details from the scenes in 2 of her 6 panels, again showing her lack of comprehension around what is most essential in the text.

Analyzing drawings also gave me insight on the reading comprehension of my struggling students versus my more advanced performers. One of the lowest readers, Daron, showed high-level comprehension when asked to visualize and

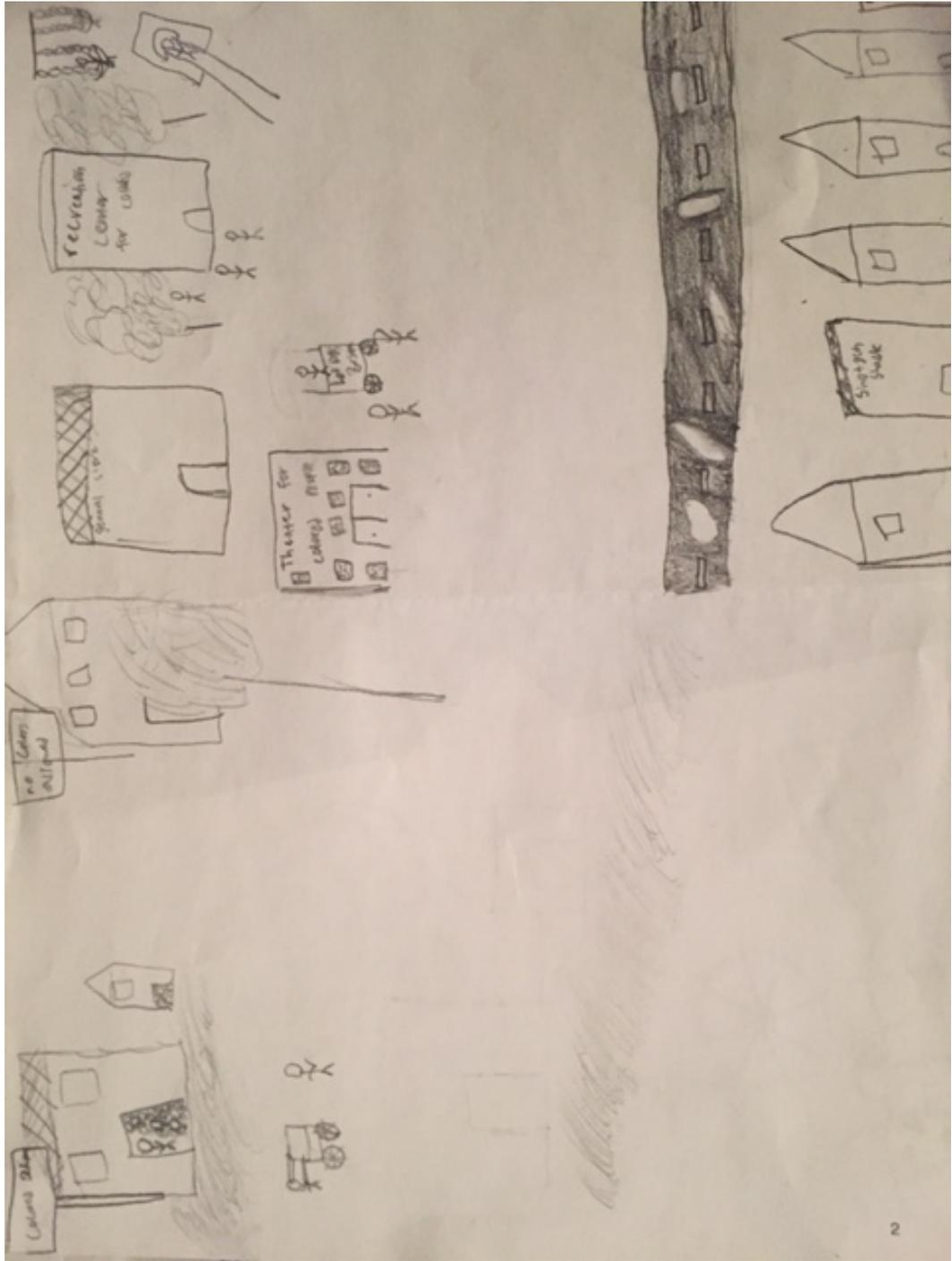


Figure 12. Daron's Setting

draw the setting established in the beginning of *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* (see *Figure 12*). In his drawing, Daron showed his ability to follow the text and the various details in the setting established in the beginning. Daron's drawing allows both him and outside observers to understand the drastic separation between black and white citizens that was caused by segregation. Daron is someone who is typically unable to express the main idea of a text in words, so the fact that he was able to do this while drawing made me more aware of the way he thinks about his reading when he is reading. This also helped me discover the reason Daron may have struggled with monologue writing but not with script writing, early on in the study. Because he was able to establish a setting in the script, he could visualize what he was writing about, unlike when writing his monologue as he did not have one specific focal point or stage directions to write.

Music study. The audio and video recordings of my students' music pieces revealed both authentic talent and thoughtfulness in my students. In his final project, Charlie rapped about the connection between being a black male, knowing the history of Martin Luther King Jr., and learning about the Civil Rights Movement through a fictional text, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. His opening words were: "Watsons had to witness—they [whites] tried to explain but didn't finish the sentence—people dyin' they ain't listenin'..." In just the opening line, Charlie's words not only display his understanding of the events in the first

text we read as a class, he also shows his deep understanding of the segregated society he and his ancestors grew up in. Charlie was one of the few students to attempt using music in a project on his own. Most students were less likely to choose a task that was seemingly more complicated or difficult than another, and therefore did not choose to create their own music.

Theater Study. Almost every student chose, at some point in the study, to create a script or act out a scene. Like visual art, theater reflected both comprehension levels and analytical levels. In one group's script from the mini project at the beginning of the study, student-to-student collaboration was most evident (see *Figure 13*). The scene this group chose to write out was difficult because it was already a dialogic one. The group successfully turned an already talk-heavy scene into one of their own words. In fact, no one repeated exact lines from the text in their scripted for lines. Because this script was completed in a Google Doc, each student was held accountable for understanding the scene, while also infusing his or her own personality into the work. It is clear that Ramon was playing Byron, because the words Ramon scripted Byron reflected Ramon's personality. Amy's line as Mrs. Watson, "WE GOT TO HELP YOU," showed her sassy attitude shining through. Writing a script allowed students to take their understanding a step beyond those who created artwork, because these students were able to reflect their own selves in the work.

Script For Watsons

Kenny: "I'm not doing your work Byron I'm serious I'm not.

Byron: Man shut your stupid mouth.

Kenny: I'm serious I'm not hitting me with all those balls.

Byron: I gotta do something more important right now no way yo momma and daddy gave birth to something as beautiful as me (kissing himself on windows) mmh mmh MMH KEHEE HEL KEHEE I SHUCK.

Kenny: I'm not playing oh your really stuck momma, dad Byron is stuck to the windows.

Joetta: Byron! Are you okay! Are you okay! Are you okay! Momma.

Mr. Watson: Can't you see it's obvious this little fool was kissin his reflection and got his lips stuck to the car.

Mrs. Watson: WE GOT TO HELP YOU.

Joetta: I'm right on it momma.

Mr. Watson: don't do that that'll just make it colder.

Mr. Watson: well well well well looks like you ain't in a good boy situation huh ... WAAAIT.

Byron: No doh do dat sta kehee momma hel.

Mrs. Watson: ok ok i'm here let me try to pour some hot water.

Mr. Watson: don't do that that'll just make it colder.

Joetta: Try pulling him.

Mrs. Watson: ok baby look it's gonna be alright stay calm i'm gonna try pulling you uh ahhhhhhhhhh ah see we got you out everythings gonna be alright.

~~_____~~
~~_____~~

Figure 13. Script for Watsons

Survey Data Analysis

I began and ended my study by administering surveys in my classroom. The initial and exit surveys were designed to measure the changes in student mindset about using the arts in an academic setting (see *Table 1*). The results showed an evenly distributed interest level between the different forms of art, except for vocal music, which only two students selected as their top choice. If music were a combined choice, though, six students would have chosen it, making all of the results comparable. This surprised me because knowing my students I would have expected the majority of them to choose dance as their top choice, leaving behind the other options.

I was also surprised to see that the majority of my students (14 out of 23) did not believe that they could relate an art they were interested in to English. I noticed that many of them did not feel that this would make class more exciting or more memorable. This was unexpected because almost all of them said that they would like to be able to perform or use an art in English class, meaning that while they did want the opportunity, they could not see how it would be beneficial or fun. And while it may not seem significant, I was bothered by the fact that seven of the questions and comments on these initial surveys reflected displeasure in participating in the study, even though 22 comments and questions reflected excitement.

Question	Response	Results
1. The art form I am most interested in is:	Visual Arts	6
	Dance	5
	Vocal Music	2
	Instrumental Music	4
	Theater	6
2. I believe that I could relate this art to English:	Yes	9
	No	14
3. I would like to be able to perform or use an art in English class:	Yes	22
	No	1
4. On a scale of 1-10, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class would make class more exciting:	1-3	3
	4-5	12
	6-8	2
	9-10	6
5. On a scale of 1-20, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class would make class more memorable:	1-3	5
	4-5	11
	6-8	5
	9-10	2
6. Comments:	Reflected	15
	Excitement	6
	Reflected Confusion	2
	Reflected	
	Displeasure	
7. Questions about using the arts in English class:	Reflected	7
	Excitement	11
	Reflected Confusion	5
	Reflected	
	Displeasure	

Table 1. Initial Survey Results

On the last day of my study, students took the exit survey, which asked questions similar to the initial survey (see *Table 6*). The exit survey showed a stunning difference in comparison to the initial one. For question 1, students could circle more than one art this time, but no more than two. The results still showed a huge change in mindset, in that at the end of the study most of my students chose to complete their final projects using visual arts and/or dance over theater or music (both types).

My second major finding concerned the number of students who thought they could use an art in English in the initial survey versus the number of students who said they connected their art to ELA in the exit survey. Not only did the same number of students answer “Yes” to this question, but the same student said “No” on both surveys. This illustrates how this student was unable to change her mindset around using the arts in class, possibly due to the fact that she was not very invested in the first place.

I was impressed with the differences in students who felt that using the arts in class made class more enjoyable and more memorable. Initially, only six students chose “9-10” as their rating for believing using the arts would make class more enjoyable, but on the exit survey nineteen students circled nine or ten. This shows how overall, students changed their thinking about the arts, English class, or both. Similarly, many more students thought that using the arts in English class made class more memorable. Initially, only seven students chose between a six

and a ten on question number five. On the exit survey, nineteen of them chose between a six and a ten.

The entrance and exit surveys reflect more than a change in mindset. The students were able to show that they'd not only enjoyed using the arts in class, but also felt it was a helpful learning tool. Looking at questions four and five, one could easily make this assumption, but this was also clear when reading student comments. Several students asked if we could continue to learn in this way, and others reflected a desire to learn more about the Civil Rights Movement.

Question	Response	Results
1. The art forms that I completed my project on were:	Visual Arts	13
	Dance	12
	Vocal Music	1
	Instrumental Music	1
	Theater	8
2. I believe I connected my art form to ELA:	Yes	22
	No	1
3. I liked being able to use an art form in ELA:	Yes	21
	No	2
4. On a scale of 1-10, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class made class more enjoyable:	1-3	0
	4-5	1
	6-8	3
	9-10	19
5. On a scale of 1-20, being able to dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in	1-3	1
	4-5	0
	6-8	4
	9-10	15

English class made class more memorable:		
6. Comments:	Reflected	13
	Excitement	2
	Reflected	0
	Confusion	
	Reflected	
	Displeasure	
7. Questions about your project:	Reflected	8
	Excitement	4
	Reflected	0
	Confusion	
	Reflected	
	Displeasure	

Table 6. Exit Survey

Observational Data

Throughout the study, I kept a field log where I recorded observations of and discussions with my students. The observational data I recorded allowed me to record my sighting and later reflect on and interpret what I saw happening in my classroom. Recording my observations allowed me to rethink and restructure some of my lessons, while reflecting on my observations allowed me to have peace of mind when days were seemingly hectic, or sometimes even seemingly pointless. My observations also allowed me to notice and reflect on the growth my students made throughout the study. They also allowed me to collect data on some of the arts used in my classroom, in which I was unable to collect student work samples.

Movement study. Document data were the most difficult to gather on dance and movement in the classroom, as the only solid evidence to be gathered was observational. The data around movement in the classroom appeared through my discussions with and observations of students working in the moment. Analyzing the meanings behind the movement happening in the classroom was also challenging, because movement was the least concrete to grasp, and understanding student ideas through movement still required some explanation beyond what could be observed.

In studying my field log, I could conclude that students who chose to use dance or a form of movement in any of their projects were typically students who had the most difficulty grasping and expressing the concepts we learned and discussed in our reading of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* and *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. These were also students who often failed both internal assessments and end-of-unit assessments. In analyzing the observations I made, the students who expressed thematic concepts through movement *did* understand the thematic concepts taught in class, but were unable to express them in words, specifically in longer pieces of writing. Allowing these students to express their learning through movement was the only way for me to actually gain this information.

Coding, Bins and Theme Statements

After gathering all of my observations, I was able to sit down and sift through my recordings alongside of the work I had from my students. Using the initial and exit surveys, the student work, and the observational data, I was able to sort through the work, code it, and organize it into meaningful bins, or buckets which reflected the outcomes of my study.

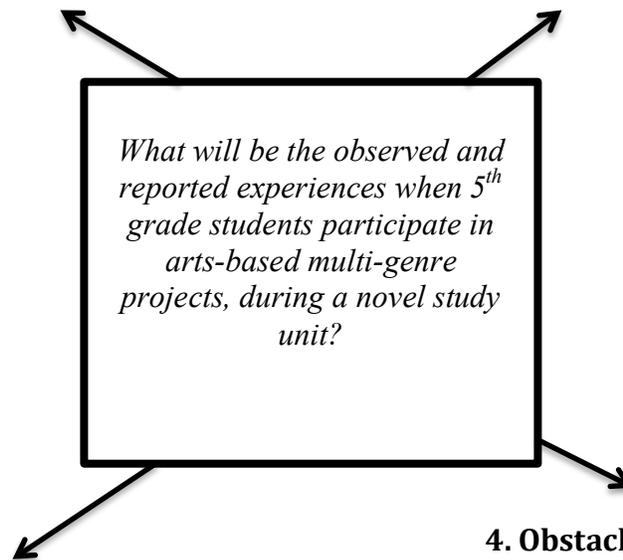
Over the course of my study, I coded all of the data that was collected. The coded data included my field log and observational notes, student work, and survey data. Coding the data provided great insight on the work that I'd done and highlighted the patterns and trends in my classroom. After carefully reviewing the data, I was able to code and sort the trends I saw in my classroom. I was then able to construct theme statements around these organized coded bins to reflect key takeaways.

1. Multiple Intelligences and Arts-Centered Instruction Strategies:

- Visual
- Body/Kinesthetic
- Interpersonal Skills
- Intrapersonal Skills
- Auditory
- Visual Art
- Movement
- Theater
- Music
- Drawing while reading

2. Student-Centered Learning:

- Ownership
- Student choice
- Project-centered and discovery-based
- Arts-based
- Positive attitude
- Negative attitude
- Content connections
- Student frustration
- Students overcoming struggles on their own



Influence of Setting:

- Whole group
- Small Group
- Room Spots
- Interruptions from outside teachers/students
- Moving class location

4. Obstacles and Teacher Frustration:

- Curriculum restraints
- Students have a tough time with so much choice
- Low vs. high effort on arts-based assignments

Figure 14: Coded Bins

Theme Statements

1. Using a variety of arts-centered and multiple intelligences-based instructional strategies can assist teachers and students in learning a variety of student strengths and potential weaknesses that may redirect a teacher's instructional lens.
2. When students are accustomed to an adult-centered learning environment where they have little choice, they can struggle to adapt to a student-centered classroom environment, causing them to shut down and have a negative attitude toward change, or embrace it and have the most positive experiences. Students must take ownership over their own learning in order to make decisions that will ultimately benefit their learning by allowing them to make connections between content areas.
3. The unique environment a teacher creates with her students is sacred and any interruption or change can entirely throw-off the atmosphere and focus of a classroom community.
4. When adapting to a progressive, arts-centered and student-centered classroom, both teachers and students have obstacles to overcome. The teacher needs to scaffold responsibilities so that students can be successful when using the arts both to learn and to prove their learning.

Figure 15: Theme Statements

Research Findings

The purpose of the study was to observe what would happen when fifth grade students would be asked to explore various forms of the arts in an English classroom. Working in a rigorous academic charter school, I saw much potential and opportunity to consider arts integration in the academic curriculum.

Unfortunately, the curriculum, while rigorous, was monotonous. It left little room for creativity and student exploration, which in my mind, are elements that belong in a fifth grade classroom. I decided to integrate a more project-based, personal approach to the arts and English, in an attempt to allow students to learn using the multiple intelligences, rather than rote-memorization.

Multiple Intelligences and Arts-Centered Instructional Strategies: Using a variety of arts-centered and multiple intelligences-based instructional strategies can assist teachers and students in learning a variety of student strengths and potential weaknesses that may redirect a teacher's instructional lens.

Using the arts in the classroom was something I explored and loved in my first years of teaching, but coming into Scholar Excellence Charter two years ago, I was forced to surrender my creativity to a world of “test prep” and rigorous instruction taught through tight routines. Many of the students in my class this year had failed the state test last year; some categorized as double-fails, failing in both third and fourth grades. Because of this, allowing teachers to deviate from

the fixed curriculum is something that is almost never done within the network of schools. Given permission to conduct my research, I had to prove to my principal that it would be worth it, and then had to follow through with positive results.

What I found was that exploring the multiple intelligences by using the arts in my classroom allowed me to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of my students, further allowing me to better instruct them and meet them where they were in terms of reading comprehension, retelling, sharing the most important details in a text. Allowing students to both enjoy what they were doing and feel successful doing it, allowed me to gain more student investment in English class.

Student-Centered Learning: When students are accustomed to an adult-centered learning environment where they have little choice, they may struggle to adapt to a student-centered classroom environment, causing them to shut down and have a negative attitude toward change, or embrace it and have the most positive experiences. Students must take ownership over their own learning in order to make decisions that will ultimately benefit their learning by allowing them to make connections between content areas.

A handful of my students initially struggled to adapt to having choice in the work they completed in class. In the initial survey, some students were not open to the idea of using the arts in class, and expressed a lack of desire to even participate in the study. After seeing that others were excited about it, and learning that the only other option was to continue working as they had been in

previous English classes (reading and responding by writing short responses), they opted in. Even then, it was not easy investing all students in exploring all of the arts. Some students who were interested in the arts previously only wanted to explore the art form they knew well and felt comfortable with. For example, my students who had taken art as an elective were more inclined to draw than to explore theater or music. As the study progressed, students began to explore and own their learning. A group of students asked why sports couldn't be involved in the study and I posed the question: *Could basketball/baseball/football be considered a form of dance, or even a form of movement?* The students decided that staging a basketball game using script and movement would suffice.

Investing in such learning allowed students to dive even deeper into the material we were learning in class, allowing them to enjoy their work even more.

Influence of Setting: The unique environment a teacher creates with her students is sacred and any interruption or change can entirely throw-off the atmosphere and focus of a classroom community.

For the most part, our classes were free of interruptions, but once per week three of my students were pulled for either speech or occupational therapy. The brief interruptions from the speech and occupational therapy providers were enough to breach the warmth of the community. There is something sacred about a classroom; that I know, but there is something even more sacred about a classroom where students are responsible for their own exploration and learning.

In such an environment, any interruption is harmful. It is like being mid-musical-number of a Broadway rehearsal and pulling the lead role out—the rest of the rehearsal is not the same and cannot run as smoothly. In the classroom, there is no understudy and interrupted time cannot be gotten back.

Obstacles and Teacher Frustration: When adapting to a progressive, arts-centered and student-centered classroom, both teachers and students have obstacles to overcome. The teacher needs to scaffold responsibilities so that students can be successful when using the arts both to learn and to prove their learning.

Allowing fifth grade students to explore the arts in any classroom without teacher support and scaffolding, is impossible. I initially made the mistake of assuming my students would be able to run with the options I was giving them in my classroom, but what I did not initially realize is that my students had been so accustomed to routine, that they did not know how to handle having options. In order to set my students up for success, I had to scaffold the options and responsibilities for them a little more than I had initially planned to. For example, the first assignment the students were given was to explore *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* in a mini-arts project, expressing the most important scene in the novel in any way, using any form of art. My students had trouble taking this assignment and “running with it” because they were used to having all directions and expectations laid out for them. What they are accustomed to is sitting up

straight with their feet flat on the floor, hands folded, eyes tracking the teacher, listening to everything that was told to them and regurgitating it back word-for-word. My students truly had little experience with exploring material on their own. They had never learned in “centers” and had rarely even done partner work. For this reason, I had to go back and script directions and expectations for each lesson until they got the hang of being creative on their own. They were later more successful as I eased them out of the routines to which they had previously been accustomed.

Next Steps

As a result of this action research study, I will be approaching my career at Scholar Excellence Charter Schools much differently. This action research study opened my eyes to my practice as a teacher in the environment I currently teach in. While I learned a great deal about the benefits of using the arts in the classroom, I will never be able to carry out such immense projects while working at Scholar Excellence Charter as a teacher, because as a teacher in this school system, I do not have much control of the curriculum or the lesson plans I am required to teach.

As a result of my dedication to my job despite my strong opinions about teaching in this environment, I have accepted a promotion to work for the Scholar Excellence Charter Network, rather than in one of the schools, where I will work on the literacy team to oversee the writing and implementation of the literacy curriculum. In this new position, I will not only be able to use my findings to impact the curriculum, but also be able to train teachers on how to implement creative, arts-based instruction effectively.

While it saddens me to temporarily (or possibly even permanently) leave my role as a teacher, I am confident that I will impact other teachers and the quality of their instruction, student relationships, and classroom joy. My hope is that with small curriculum changes, my work can speak loudly against such a

rigid curriculum, and open doors to a more progressive classroom environment for all teachers within the network.

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Appendix

Appendix A: HSIRB Approval

Part I: RESEARCHER

1. Proposer: Kristina Dahlinger	2. Department: Master of Education
3. Mailing address: 160 E 117 th St Apt 2B New York, NY 10035	4. Phone: (484) 241-5133
5. E-mail address: kadahlinger@gmail.com	
6. This is a (please check): <input type="checkbox"/> New Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission of a rejected Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request for modification	7. Research Start/End Dates: Make sure you clearly define the start and end dates. Format as month, day, year. Start: 09/02/2015 End: 12/23/2015
7. Title of Proposal: Integrating the Arts in the English Classroom: A Novel Study Unit	
8. Faculty Advisor: Joseph Shosh	

Part II: PROPOSAL TYPE

1. This research involves **ONLY** the use of **educational tests** (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude or achievement).

Yes
 No

2. This research collects interviews or surveys **ONLY** of **elected or appointed public officials** or candidates for such.

Yes
 No

3. This research involves **ONLY** observations of **public behavior**.

Yes
 No

4. This research involves **ONLY** existing data, documents, records or specimens.

Yes
 No

5. List the **research funding sources**, if any.

6. The results of this research will be published.

Yes
 No
 Uncertain

If you marked “yes” or “uncertain”, please provide a brief description of the possible forum of publication (for example, peer-reviewed journal, conference presentation, etc.)

Description of publication forum:

Published and kept in the college library.

*In this next section, you will provide extensive details about the research project. Please make sure that your explanations/descriptions are **clearly written and grammatically correct** so that the committee can accurately follow and assess your proposal.*

Part III. DETAILS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1. In this section, you have the option of either addressing each of the following subheadings individually or together (since there may be some overlap) in your proposal narrative. If providing a narrative, please make sure that each of the following topics is clearly identified in the narrative.

- a. Objectives:
- b. Design:
- c. Procedures (makes sure you clearly describe what is required of subjects):
- d. Outline procedures/steps to reduce risks to subjects:

The action research question I am choosing to explore is: *What will be the observed and reported experiences when 5th grade students participate in arts-based multi-genre projects, during a novel study unit?* Working in a rigorous academic charter school, I have seen much potential and opportunity to consider arts integration in the academic curriculum. I would like to use my 5th grade English class, in order to integrate a more project-based, personal approach to the arts and English.

Over the course of ten to twelve weeks (50-60 week days), I plan to integrate 5 artistic aspects: dance, theater, instrumental music, vocal music, and visual art, into my English instruction. I plan to do this by incorporating multi-genre assignments throughout my novel study unit, allowing students to use painting, sculpture, dance, movement, theatre, instruments, and singing, to show points of conflict, tone/mood, imagery, etc. in the novel(s) studied in the unit.

Week 1: End of unit reading projects

During the first week, students will be turning their whole-class novel into an arts-collaboration project. They will be discussing their whole-class novel and then coming together as a group to create a short production or art piece that summarizes the novel they read. They will then complete a survey about how they feel about using their arts in English class.

Week 2: Multi-genre/multi-modal text study

Students will be learning about and viewing several different multi-genre projects, and will be discussing the purpose of each project, what they measure, how they are a good form of a summary or an assessment, etc. We will be looking at modes such as visual essays, music to show tone and mood, theatrical performance as a means of summarizing and making inferences, dance/movement/monologues to show character development, etc.

Week 3: Intro to the new whole class text

During week 3, students will begin to read the assigned whole-class text. They will be using painting and sketching as a way to express the setting in the very beginning of the novel.

Week 4: Character development through monologues, dance, and graffiti

This week, students will be focusing on the character development in their novel, and expressing the development of a particular character through either theatrical performance (monologues), expressive dance, or graffiti art. The students will work independently, but collaboratively, to exchange ideas on how they can best portray the development of their character.

Week 5: Imagery and figurative language through any art form

This week, students will focus on learning about imagery and figurative language. They will be exposed to visual imagery in the visual and performing arts, and figurative language in both music and the theatre arts. They will apply this knowledge to the imagery and figurative language in the book, and will be presenting a passage to the class at the end of the week which shows imagery OR figurative language through the use of any art form they choose (including figure skating).

Week 6: Main Idea

The major themes in the book will be discussed this week, and students will have to present the themes in different modes of art. Sculpture, painting, vocal music, movement/dance, etc. will all be used this week in portraying main idea.

Week 7: Tone and mood with instrumental music

In week 7, tone and mood in the book will be explored through the use of instrumental music. Listening, playing, and creating soundtracks to portray the tone and mood will all be involved in this week.

Week 8: Student Interviews and finishing the novel

At this point, the students will be focusing on just reading for this week in order to finish-up the book, but I will also be conducting student interviews to find out how the students feel about studying a novel alongside of being faced with the challenge of connecting it to different forms of art.

Weeks 9-11:

Students will have free-reign of a topic or concept to learn on their own (with my guidance), and incorporate it in a project using two art focuses they enjoyed the most during the unit. They will produce a project based on that concept and art, and create an artifact to display their knowledge and understanding. They will still need to do use textual evidence to find the major topics discussed in the unit, displaying that they are capable of doing the same work they would do in a written assessment. (See Final Project Attachments)

Week 12: Wrap-up

In the final week, students will be presenting their projects and completing the exit survey.

2. This research involves the following GROUP(S) vulnerable to risk. Check all that apply.

- Subjects under the age of 18
 Prisoners
 Pregnant women
 People with mental, cognitive, intellectual, or physical disabilities
 Volunteer sample so vulnerable group membership may be unknown

Research Design Note: *If you are asking for **volunteer participants**, you will not necessarily know whether or not your participants are under 18, pregnant and/or disabled. In fact, your volunteers may themselves not know whether they fall into one of these categories. Therefore, if you are asking for volunteer participants, you need to think carefully about whether or not your research project could adversely affect someone in any of these categories, and if so, how you might try to either screen out these individuals and/or design the project so that the risk to these individuals is minimized.*

- 2a. If you checked any or all of the groups identified above, explain why you need to use the group and the methods you will use to minimize risk. If your research design proposes no special risks to these vulnerable individuals even if they happen to be included in your sample, please state why:

This study will be done in my regular English classroom. All data sources will kept in a locked filing cabinet and shredded at the conclusion of the research study. All students will be given pseudonyms. Students may choose to not participate in the study and can drop out of the study at any time.

3. This research might affect people with special vulnerabilities (for example, pregnant women, people with allergies, people taking some medications, people with cognitive impairments such as ADHD, etc.)

Research Design Note: Think carefully here again about whether or not your research design could negatively affect people with special vulnerabilities. For example, does your research design require so much concentration and/or computation that it might result in considerable stress for someone with a cognitive impairment? Are people completing your instrument in solitude or in a group setting? Might comparative performance result in excessive stress?

Yes
 No

If you checked “Yes”, explain the methods you will use to minimize risk to these people.

4. Describe your subject pool including:
- a. the intended number of subjects
 - b. subject characteristics/demographics

This study will be done in my regular English classroom of 26 students ages 9-11.

5. Describe in detail the methods you will use to recruit your subjects.

This study will be done in my regular English classroom.

6. This research involves **deception** of subjects.

Yes
 No

If you checked “Yes”, describe the nature of the deception and your debriefing procedure. You will need to provide the debriefing statement with the full proposal

submission. Even if the debriefing will be done orally, you need to submit the text of the verbal statement that will be read to participants.

7. Explain by whom and how the subjects will be informed of the purposes of this research project. *(Remember to provide a copy of the informed consent form with this proposal form.)*

My school principal and the parents of the students in my class will sign a consent form prior to the start of the research study. My students will also be informed of the study taking place in the classroom.

8. This research collects information, which (check all that apply)

deals with **sensitive aspects** from the participant's point of view.

identifies the subject by **name** or **number codes**.

might place the subject at **risk of liability** if made public.

might place the subject's **financial standing or employability** at risk if made public.

Research Design Note: *Think carefully about whether or not your research deals with topics that may be sensitive from the participant's point of view. Sometimes it is not obvious to the researcher that the subject of their research may be a sensitive topic for others.*

If you checked any or all of the categories above, explain the methods you will use to

- a. safeguard the data you collect (you need to describe this safeguarding procedure in detail, including but not limited to a description of how the data will be protected (for example, in a locked cabinet), whom will have access to the data, and how and when the data will be destroyed)
- b. inform subjects of available support services (If your participants are drawn from the Moravian College community, please provide contact information for the Counseling Center, Campus Safety and the Health Center—contact information available on the HSIRB website. For participants drawn from other communities, please provide the comparable support service information.)

c. minimize the risk of identification of subjects.

a. This study will be done in my regular English classroom. All data sources will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and shredded at the conclusion of the research study. All students will be given pseudonyms.

b. My school principal and the parents of the students in my classroom will be provided with a consent form to sign, which outlines the goal of my research study. Students may choose to not participate in the study and can drop out of the study at any time.

c. All students will be given pseudonyms.

Appendix B: Parent Consent

May 5, 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am currently working towards a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. This program is based on teacher action research, helping me to create the best learning experience for my students as I investigate and implement teaching strategies research has proven to be most effective. The title of my research is *Integrating the Arts in the English Classroom: A Novel Study Unit*. During this study, I will conduct class by teaching our Common Core standards and assessments through student-centered, arts-integrated multi-genre projects. Rather than writing traditional papers and essays, students will explore multimodal means of sharing textual information. I hope to give the students a better appreciation for English, as well as their arts electives here at [REDACTED].

I will be allowing students to take more ownership and creativity in their own acquisition of the English curriculum. Students will be using their arts on a daily basis, in order to create a deeper meaning for English concepts.

The study will take place in my English class from September 2nd to December 23rd. I will gather data to support my study through observations, student journals, interviews, and student work samples. I will only use information collected from students who have your permission to participate in the study in any written reports of my research. All student names will be kept confidential, as will the name of the school and any participating faculty members. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If your child is withdrawn, I will not use information pertaining to him or her in my study.

You may contact myself or [REDACTED], the school principal, if you have any questions or concerns about the design of my study, or your child's participation. You may contact me by e-mail at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] by phone, at [REDACTED] or by e-mail, at [REDACTED]. In the event of unanticipated negative physical or mental effects during this study, you may contact [REDACTED] in the main office at [REDACTED].

If you are willing to allow your child to participate in this study, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Kristina A Dahlinger

.....
I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand the consent form, and received a copy. Kristina Dahlinger has my permission to conduct this study in her English class at [REDACTED].

Appendix C: Principal Consent

April 5, 2015

Dear [REDACTED],

I am currently working towards a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. This program is based on teacher action research, helping me to create the best learning experience for my students as I investigate and implement teaching strategies research has proven to be most effective. The title of my research is *Integrating the Arts in the English Classroom: A Novel Study Unit*. During this study, I will conduct class by teaching our Common Core standards and assessments through student-centered, arts-integrated multi-genre projects. Rather than writing traditional papers and essays, students will explore multimodal means of sharing textual information. I hope to give our students a better appreciation for English, as well as their arts electives here at [REDACTED].

I will be allowing students to take more ownership and creativity in their own acquisition of the English curriculum. Students will be using their arts on a daily basis, in order to create a deeper meaning for English concepts.

The study will take place in my English class from September 2nd to December 23rd. I will gather data to support my study through observations, student journals, interviews, and student work samples. I will only use information collected from my students who have parental permission to participate in the study in any written reports of my research. All student names will be kept confidential, as will the name of the school and any participating faculty members. Any child may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In the letter to parents, I have listed my contact information. If a child is withdrawn, I will not use information pertaining to him or her in my study.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He may be contacted at Moravian College by phone at [REDACTED] and by e-mail at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns about my in-class action research study, please feel free to contact me at school. If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Kristina A Dahlinger

.....
I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand the consent form, and received a copy. Kristina Dahlinger has my permission to conduct this study in her English class at Harlem North Central.

[REDACTED] _____
Name

____8/30/15_____
Date

Appendix D: Initial Student Survey

Arts Integration Survey

*Circle the answer you choose after each question below.

1. The art form I am most interested in is:

Visual Arts Dance Vocal Music Instrumental Music
Theater

2. I believe that I could relate this art to English:

Yes No

3. I would like to be able to perform or use an art in English class:

Yes No

**4. On a scale of 1-10, being able to
dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class
would make class more *enjoyable*:**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**5. On a scale of 1-10, being able to
dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class
would make things more *memorable*:**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Comments:

7. Questions about using the arts in English class:

Appendix E: Final Project Outline

Final Multi-Genre Arts Project – The Watsons Go To Birmingham

As we have discussed several times throughout our reading of *Night*, there are several themes that linger throughout the memoir:

- Loss of faith
- Familial Relationships
- Coming of Age
- Segregation and Identity

ASSIGNMENT: Choose one theme to retrace throughout the text, and create a work of art which incorporates **TWO** major art forms (theater, dance, visual art, vocal music, instrumental music), to follow that theme's progression. This project is 100% your own. You may do whatever you would like with it as long as it includes:

- The progression of ONE major theme throughout the novel
- The use of at least 5 quotes spread throughout the novel that display the theme of your choice
- TWO art forms
- *Creativity! This may NOT be an essay...
 - ...it **may** be...
 - 100% performance-based
 - digital/technology-driven
 - tangible (sculpture, quilt, etc.)
 - recorded on video, DVD, CD, mp3

*I do not want any written explanation of what you have done (unless you write a script/song). The work should stand 100% on its own.

Examples/Ideas:

- Sculptures that are molded to music that's tone reflects that of the theme's change
- A skit that uses your 5 quotes and has sculptures as props
- A painting/paintings that shows the 5 quotes and is worked into a dance to show the theme's progression
- A song that uses the quotes in its lyrics and is performed as music for a figure skating routine to show theme

The options are endless...

YOUR PROPOSAL MUST BE APPROVED BY MISS DAHLINGER BY: _____

Appendix F: Final Project Proposal

Final Multi-Genre Project Proposal

Name(s):

The theme that I/WE would like to retrace is: _____

My/our idea for my/our project is as follows:

I/we plan to carry this out by:

(What steps will you take to complete this assignment productively?)

Date of Proposal: _____

-----do not complete anything below this line-----

Miss Dahlinger's Comments:

____ Approved ____ Not Approved

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Exit Survey

Arts Integration Exit Survey

*Circle the answer you choose after each question below.

1. The art forms I completed my project on were:

Visual Arts Dance Vocal Music Instrumental Music
Theater

2. I believe I connected my art form to ELA:

Yes No

3. I liked being able to use an art form in ELA:

Yes No

**4. On a scale of 1-10, being able to
dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class
made class more *enjoyable*:**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**5. On a scale of 1-10, being able to
dance/sing/play/perform/draw certain things in English class
would made the novel more *memorable*:**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Comments:

7. Questions about your project: