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CLOSE READING AND CRITICAL THEORY

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CLOSE READING AND CRITICAL THEORY

By

Kimberly L. Rosewall

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

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By

Kimberly L. Rosewall

Close reading is the very foundation of literary studies, yet this interpretive practice can be very difficult, especially for undergraduate students. The purpose of this study was to explore my own action research and examine the ways in which the teaching of critical theory affected both my teaching of close reading practices, and my students' ability to conduct close readings of selected passages of texts in a general education English classroom. I also examined how the teaching of critical theory enriched my students' understanding of the world, their lives, and society. Collected data for this action research study included the student participants' pre-and post-annotations, which were analyzed using open and axial coding. Five student participants were selected, and these pre- and post-annotations were compared and analyzed to examine the ways in which critical theory affected the students' close reading practices. The close reading pre-annotations revealed that prior to lessons in critical theory, the student participants focused largely on language and structure. Close reading post-annotations revealed an increased focus on the social world, along with frequent consideration of connotative definitions of words. Metacognitive analysis of this data revealed that my teaching of critical theory greatly improved my students' ability to proficiently close read a selected portion of a text. With the introduction of critical theory, my students began to engage with books as discourse, not merely as words on a page. They also gained valuable critical vocabulary to better understand and explain our society.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *Modern Language Association* and the Department of English.

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INTRODUCTION

In this study of my own action research (West 2011), I examined how the teaching of critical theory affected the teaching and learning of close reading practices in a 100-level general education English course. Specifically, I analyzed if teaching a different critical theory in conjunction with each of the course's five assigned novels would enable the students to conduct a more in-depth and meaningful close reading of a short passage of text. The student participants in this study completed two sets of annotations of selected passages for each of the course's assigned novels. Each set of annotations were different and unfamiliar to the students. These annotations are a reflection of their close reading of each passage. One set of annotations, the pre-annotations, were completed at the beginning of each text's learning unit, prior to the introduction of that text's corresponding critical theory. The students completed the second set of annotations, the post-annotations, at the end of each learning unit. The students' post-annotations were completed after approximately two weeks of learning a corresponding critical theory and discussing the novel/s through that particular theoretical lens. These two sets of annotations were analyzed using Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin's (1990) grounded theory procedures and techniques to assess the effect of critical theory on the practice of close reading.

My interest in this study has many layers. First and foremost, as a student of English, my own relationship with close reading began on rather contentious terms. I spent a large part of my undergraduate studies questioning what close reading actually was. Many of my undergraduate English courses required final analytical papers that revolved around the practice of close reading, and I struggled with what that meant. To me, a non-traditional student acutely suffering from imposter's syndrome, close reading was something my professors and other students did. I

continually worried that I had missed something. Of course, I understood that close reading clearly went beyond “regular” reading. As an avid reader already, I was sure that I knew what it meant to read something. I knew I had to move beyond “regular” reading, I just didn’t know how to do that. What does one *really* do when close reading?

I struggled with the concept of close reading until I took a class in applied literary theory. In this class, some of the first critics I studied included the New Critics. Through the words of John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, and T.S. Eliot, I finally began to understand the concept of close reading. Ransom defined the New Critics, a group of early twentieth century literary scholars in his 1941 publication of *The New Criticism*; however, Ransom first explained the purpose of the New Critics in his 1937 essay, “Criticism, Inc.” (Selden et al. 11). “Criticism, Inc.” outlines the need for literary criticism to become a more scientific process. In this essay, Ransom argues, “the student of the future must be permitted to study literature, and not merely about literature” (973). Ransom contends that the field of literary studies has traditionally placed too much emphasis on historical and ethical factors, and that art must be appreciated for art’s sake (Wellek 611). According to Ransom, literature is “an artistic object, with a heroic human labor behind it, and on these terms it calls for public discussion. The dialectical possibilities are limitless, and when we begin to realize them we are engaged in criticism” (978). Close reading to the New Critic involved heightened attention to the words on the page, and attempted to dispense with biography, history, ethics, paraphrase, and linguistics. Ransom helped me to understand that “plot is an abstract from content” (979). To engage in close, critical reading is not simply to read a book and write a summarized report. Close reading enables readers to understand what a book means not merely what happens in a book.

However, Mark Jancovich argues that the New Critics' approach to close reading should not dispense entirely with the outside world. Jancovich maintains:

[Close reading] was not an attempt to seal the text off from its context, but an introduction to the reading of literature *as* literature... It was supposed to direct students to an awareness of paradoxes and contradictions of social and cultural activity, and hence to a critical engagement with their society and culture. (88)

I soon learned that the New Critics' definition of close reading was not a universal concept.

Different critics and theorists envision the close reading of literary texts in different ways;

however, they all seek to construct meaning from texts by lending increased attention to

language, form, and at times, other external factors.

Reader response theorists engage in close readings of texts in an attempt to construct meaning based on the reader's personal response to the text. Deconstructionists conduct close readings to emphasize a text's inherent contradictory meanings, since they hold that language is fluid and meaning can never be fixed. Critical theorists approach close reading to highlight how a text places readers in relation to social markers, such as race, class, and gender (Hinchman and Moore 443). With the many and varied definitions of close reading, it became clear to me that the question I should have asked my own professors was not what close reading meant; rather, I should have asked what close reading meant to them. Elaine Showalter (2003) considers close reading "a neutral first step in understanding literature" (56). This study explores the teaching and learning of this "first step."

Theoretical Framework: The Socioformal Approach

The first step in this study was to make plain my own understanding of close reading so that the students had a concrete definition to reference. However, in order to define close reading, I first had to select a theoretical lens. I wanted students to be able to draw from multiple theoretical approaches in order to find meaning within a text, and I did not want to box them in

with the New Critics' approach to close reading. I also wanted the students to benefit from their theoretical knowledge in ways that extended beyond our classroom needs and texts. As all of my students were non-English majors, I wanted literary theory to help them understand the world, not merely the books we read. To that end, I selected Paula Moya's (2016) socioformal approach, which is closely related to the fields of social and cultural psychology. Moya's method for close reading "attend[s] to the social dimension of literary form by describing how the thematic and formal features of a text mediate the historically-situated cultural and political tensions expressed in a work of literature" (10). Moya's socioformal approach assumes that since literary texts are not written in a vacuum, they should not be read or interpreted in one.

Moya contends that "thinking through literature is one of the best ways to confront social issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality because literature allows writer and reader alike to explore them in all their particularity and embeddedness in the social world" (10). In the current political climate, issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality surface daily in news reports, social media, and entertainment. As students are expected to continually navigate these social issues, a deeper understanding of them is surely warranted. According to Moya, "literature is one of the key sites in which the social order can be imaginatively examined and reshaped...works of literature have the potential to move people emotionally by activating structures of identification and empathy toward others not like themselves" (40). In short, literature allows readers to vicariously appreciate and understand different people, places, and cultures, and the socioformal approach highlights these differences.

In an attempt to underscore the social and cultural implications of Moya's approach, I assigned the students literary texts and theoretical lenses that directly engaged each of these social markers separately. The course was divided into five separate units, and the following

novels and corresponding critical theories were covered: *War Dances*, by Sherman Alexie, side-by-side with post-Indian theory; *Fight Club*, by Chuck Palahniuk, augmented by Marxism; *Palestine*, by Joe Sacco, supplemented by postcolonial theory; *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, by Maryse Condé, along with postcolonial feminism; and *Native Son*, by Richard Wright, through the lens of critical race theory. I selected literary texts that highlighted key terms and concepts in each of these theories. In turn, I selected individual theories that examined the social markers of Moya's socioformal approach. The theme for this general literature course was "Resistance in Storytelling," and each of the selected texts and theories focused on the different ways people in society resist oppressive forces. It was my intent to remind students that most of the world resists oppressive forces in some way, including many of us, in hopes of encouraging an increased tolerance and understanding of the resistance of others.

Text selection for this study was further complicated in the period following the end of the class in December, and the writing of the study in the weeks and months after. In late February 2018, several indigenous women writers accused Sherman Alexie of sexual harassment and career sabotage. In addition to his despicable sexual behavior, these women writers maintain that Alexie negatively affected their careers by blocking publication of their work. In his official response to the press, Alexie did not deny the accusations (Neary, "It Just Felt Very Wrong"). Because of this revelation, Alexie's place within the study was suddenly on very shaky ground.

As this course sought to bring to light the marginalization of certain people within society, and the resistance of those oppressed people, Alexie's actions are in complete opposition to my goals as a teacher and a researcher. However, to completely remove Alexie from this study is unrealistic. In reality, the student participants produced close reading annotations of Alexie's novel that greatly informed this study, and the way in which I will approach teaching close

reading in the future. Despite my personal feelings about Alexie's poor behavior, he is a part of this study, for better or worse. Alexie's contribution to the literary canon is undeniable; however, this does not afford him a free pass. In keeping with the spirit of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, this study includes Alexie's work only as is absolutely necessary to ensure the integrity of the data and the project, and only after due attention is given to Alexie's own role as an oppressor. While it is surely impossible to remove Alexie from this research after the fact, future attempts to teach this course will not include any of Alexie's works. Instead of Alexie, future focus on Native American writers in my classroom will involve the works of Eden Robinson, Laura Tohé, Arigon Starr, and other indigenous women writers.

Current Research

There is surprisingly little existing research involving close reading strategies and approaches (Hinchman and Moore 443). However, Jane Gallop, Elaine Showalter, and John Schilb have identified a large gap between the teaching of close reading and its practice (Gallop 182, Showalter 56, and Schilb 513). Multiple researchers have noted that while close reading is expected of undergraduate students, many instructors neglect to explicitly teach the process of close reading to their students. Schilb maintains, "Close reading remains a hazy concept. The term functions largely as a catachresis, a placeholder, substituting for a more exact description of interpretive strategies" (513). Much like my own experiences as a student in undergraduate English courses, many other students are aware of the concept of close reading, yet are completely unaware of what it is or how to do it.

In addition to improving the reading skills of students in English courses, researchers argue that the explicit teaching of close reading makes for better students all around (Paul and

Elder 36). Gallop (2007) maintains that close reading is an important skill even outside the field of English. Gallop argues the benefits of close reading:

Not because it is necessarily the best way to read literature but because it, learned through practice with literary texts, learned in literature classes, is a widely applicable skill, of value not just to scholars in other disciplines but to a wide range of students with many different futures. Students trained in close reading have been known to apply it to diverse sorts of texts—newspaper articles, textbooks in other disciplines, political speeches—and thus to discover things they would not otherwise have noticed. This enhanced, intensified reading can prove invaluable for many kinds of jobs as well as in their lives. (183)

As close reading instruction has potential effects that far exceed the teaching of literature, continued research in this topic is needed to ensure the best possible outcomes for students within higher education.

This study also considers research that includes the use of critical literary theory as a means to bridge the gap between the teaching and the practice of close reading. Many educational researchers maintain the importance of scaffolding lessons in close reading with lessons in critical theory in order to achieve optimal close reading skills (Axelrod and Axelrod 113, Cheyfitz 112, Zavarzadeh 25). Mas'ud Zavarzadeh (2009) argues that the teaching of critical theory along with literary texts leads to what is known as the “intelligibility effect.” According to Zavarzadeh, the “intelligibility effect” gives students “a historical understanding of the material processes and contradictory relations through which the discourses of culture make sense” (25). This approach to close reading assumes that since literature is a product of culture, literary studies must include an understanding of the culture that has produced them.

This study is my own attempt to add to the existing limited research in close reading practices and strategies. I am particularly concerned with the effect of teaching critical theory in order to bridge the gap between the teaching of close reading and its practice. I approached this project with the following research questions in mind: 1.) How does teaching critical theory

affect my teaching and the students' learning of close reading strategies in a 100-level general English course? 2.) How does the teaching of critical theory enrich my students' overall understanding of the world, their lives, and society? It is my belief that even a cursory knowledge of literary theory can aid and inform the difficult process of close reading, and that even 100-level general education students can effectively learn and apply literary theory. As such, this study focuses entirely on close reading and literary theory. The following sections outline a review of the literature that informed this study, the methods employed to analyze the collected data, the results of the analyzed data, and a metacognitive reflection of those results. This is an action research study (West 2011), and all data collected was analyzed using Stauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory procedures and techniques, including open and axial coding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines critical texts, studies, and articles that define close reading and explore approaches used in the teaching of close reading. This section also examines critical articles focused on the teaching of critical theory in combination with the teaching of close reading, and critical texts and articles that engage the critical theories and pedagogies found to be most useful with my own students during the course of this study. As there are many ways to approach the practice of close reading, multiple definitions and approaches to will be explored. In an attempt to ease the act of close reading for my students, and make that experience more meaningful and informed, the use of critical theory to augment close reading will be examined. It became apparent through the course of this study that even though close reading is now a central part of even K-12 education, there is surprisingly little literature on the subject, and even fewer case studies. Despite this, the importance of teaching close reading and the inclusion of critical theory is obvious and urgent.

Close Reading: Definitions and Approaches

The act of close reading, the very foundation of literary study, is defined by Elaine Showalter (2003) as “slow reading” with “a deliberate attempt to detach ourselves from the magical power of story-telling and pay attention to language, imagery, allusion, intertextuality, syntax, and form” (98). Showalter asserts that the generalized definition of close reading can cause readers to view texts strictly through a New Critic’s lens, excluding all outside information and leaving only the words on the page. According to Showalter, this closed and restricted method is not the only way to teach students to read more closely and think more deeply. Showalter argues that structure, language, and form must be understood “before or along with

attention to factors outside the text” (56). Showalter argues that students often use the phrase “close reading” to merely signify the techniques required to gain deeper understanding of books, without actually understanding what those techniques are (56). Students require more detailed, systematic instructions to engage effectively in the close reading of very small selections of a literary text. Showalter notes, “This sort of reading is far from natural or intuitive, and if we want students to learn how to do it, we need to give them both models and practice” (56). Showalter posits that step-by-step teaching is needed, along with much repetition.

According to Moya (2013), close reading is “the kind of intensive reading and re-reading that calls for a heightened attention to literary language and form, considering both as semantic structures that mediate authors’ and readers’ perceptions of the social world” (9). This technique, which Moya defines as the socioformal approach, considers the social, cultural, historical, economic and political environments in which a literary text is written and read, with an emphasis on sociological and psychological scholarship (Moya 10). Moya argues that close reading should involve “heightened attention to literary language and form in a way that acknowledges the shaping force of culture and society on a text’s development and expression” (10). Moya further asserts that the socioformal approach to close reading should be at the center of teaching literature to undergraduates because it forces students to come face-to-face with important social issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Moya asserts that the socioformal close reading of books “allows writer and reader alike to explore [social issues] in all their particularity and embeddedness in the social world – which is, after all, the only way that they enter the world as issues in the first place” (10).

While few case studies on close reading are available, Theresa Tinkle, Daphna Atias, Ruth M. McAdams, and Cordelia Zukerman did conduct a 2010 study. The study assessed one

hundred and twenty undergraduate students of varying majors and literary interests to understand how students learn to conduct close readings and write appropriate analyses based on those readings. The participants were all enrolled in the class “*Beowulf* to Milton,” a survey course of English Literature before 1660. The study also explored whether or not close reading can effectively be taught and learned in a large class setting. Instead of relying on traditional lecture-style teaching where students are passive recipients of an instructor’s knowledge, active learning was encouraged through development of close reading skills. According to Tinkle, Atias, McAdams, and Zuckerman, “We designed a course that forced us to discuss and reflect on our own close reading practices – to articulate to each other and our students just what it is we do when we analyze texts – and that, as significant, required students regularly to engage in close readings and reflect on their experiences” (506).

Tinkle, Atias, McAdams, and Zuckerman maintain that students demonstrate close reading through writing, and because of this, progress and mastery of close reading skills for their study was assessed through informal writing assignments, activities, quizzes, and two formal essays based on a close reading of a literary text. According to Tinkle et al., substantial improvement in close reading skills was noted from the first essay to the second. Twenty-two percent of students improved their essay grade by two thirds of a letter grade or more, and thirty-five percent of students improved their grade by one third of a letter grade. While the results were not as drastic as the researchers had hoped, independent of class size and style, “most students’ grades do indicate a significant improvement in their ability to write persuasively about literature” (Tinkle, Atias, McAdams, and Zukerman 524).

Kathleen A. Hinchman and David W. Moore (2013) argue that the newly implemented Common Core State Standards (CCSS) demands a drastic shift in literary instruction. Despite

relatively few conducted studies and the scant attention paid to close reading in the past, new Common Core standards are increasingly focused on the act of close reading. These new standards require students to conduct close readings to gain evidence and knowledge from a text, and demand that close reading activities be at the center of every literacy classroom. New standards also expect that texts worthy of close reading are progressively more complex, culminating in books that are more difficult, such as *The Odyssey* (Hinchman and Moore 442). In addition to the close reading of more complicated literature, Common Core standards also require students to answer text-dependent questions, provide textual evidence, and compose evidence-based arguments. According to Hinchman and Moore, “Students across the grades will compare and synthesize ideas across multiple texts. They will take part in academic discussions, and they will write after reading. They will use research and digital literacies/21st-century skills to conduct and share short- and long-term inquiries” (442). Close reading is becoming more commonplace in K-12 education, calling for a greater emphasis in postsecondary education.

Close Reading and Critical Theory

J. B. C. Axelrod and Rise B. Axelrod (2004) argue the importance of teaching critical theory to inform and supplement the close reading of literary texts. According to Axelrod and Axelrod, teaching techniques of the past often avoided the inclusion of theoretical perspectives in teaching close reading; however, this may not be the most advisable approach. Axelrod and Axelrod assert that close reading strategies that reject critical theory “themselves employ theory in subtle ways for invisible ends. They obscure the ways that theory, and for that matter ideology, functions in texts by positing as inappropriate or unnatural this entire realm of analysis” (113). Additionally, Axelrod and Axelrod maintain that the exclusion of critical theory in the teaching of literature can negatively affect both a student’s understanding of a text and

their reading practices. To combat this, Axelrod and Axelrod argue the importance of explicit teaching of theory:

“[Theory is] necessary for students to learn to read critically, to learn to look closely at texts of all kinds and to recognize what they are seeing, what the salient features are when viewed from a particular theoretical perspective. We advocate teaching close, critical reading and writing precisely by teaching students to perceive, analyze, and apply theoretical concepts in a range of academic contexts” (113).

However, Axelrod and Axelrod warn that the teaching of critical theory in conjunction with literary texts is not a risk-free approach to enriched and meaningful close reading. While critical theory has the ability to shed new light and meaning on texts, easing the act of interpretation, it can obscure or even erase important meaning within a text. Students must master a critical vocabulary in order to enable themselves to select the appropriate critical lens for literary interpretation (Axelrod and Axelrod 113). While this approach to teaching close reading may seem in-depth and complicated, Axelrod and Axelrod maintain that if instructors “scaffold the students' understanding of the theory with carefully guided questioning and attention to relevant keywords, even those students with little confidence in their ability to read theory will achieve a basic understanding of the concept” (116).

Lisa Schade Eckert (2006) argues the value of teaching sociological theory. According to Eckert, sociological theory can enrich and inform close reading through introducing not only theoretical perspectives, but also ideological concepts. Eckert states, “Sociological criticism implies more than the study of society; it includes the study of ideologies that privilege certain aspects of society while oppressing others, perpetuating the concept of the “other” in social stratification” (102). The study of sociological criticism allows students to interact with theories that engage questions of race, Marxism, feminism, and cultural studies in order to extract new meaning from literary texts. As asserted by Eckert, sociological theory is a lens through which a

student must assume that in order to fully understand a literary text, they must also understand the society in which the text was written, along with the society that the text represents.

Additionally, Eckert maintains that students are able to grasp these critical approaches easily and readily because they have years studying cultural and social history in primary and secondary schools (103). Literary interpretation is not the only benefit of teaching sociological criticism; it also supplies students with important personal, social, and ethical insight. Eckert maintains, “Ideological assumptions help each of us determine how we fit in the world, what we believe, and how we should treat others, and are often unconscious, unarticulated, and embedded in in daily social and personal interaction” (104). Understanding ideology is vital to understanding ourselves.

Eric Cheyfitz (1996) argues the importance of teaching critical theory in conjunction with literary texts in an attempt to redistribute the cultural wealth within education. The literary canon, as Cheyfitz maintains, is “a radically unequal distribution of this wealth” (112).

Cheyfitz’s approach to teaching literature alongside critical theory is multicultural and offers up the formation of an entirely new canon. Cheyfitz’s “new canon” is enriched with the voices of marginalized people; however, this does not mean that we should stop teaching and reading the “classics.” Cheyfitz argues:

Rather, we me make visible their historic cultural entanglement with a whole range of texts that have traditionally been rendered invisible by the politics of canon formation, and in doing this, we obliterate the notion of the “classic.” This, however, does not stop us from ascribing value to texts. What it does is make us as conscious as possible of the politics of such ascription, its strategies. (112)

Critical theory, with its focus on ideology and politics, is a crucial component to understanding texts in a way that realizes Cheyfitz’s vision of a more fair and balanced education. Making visible the past politics of oppression is itself a political act, as is the function the education.

Cheyfitz maintains, “The questions that confront us, then, is not that of depoliticizing education, but of what political form we want our education to take – that is, the question that confronts us is: What kind of human beings do we want to produce? The curricula we devise are answers to this question” (111).

Zavarzadeh argues, “Poetry is as much a theory of reality as any other discourse; it produces intelligibility/knowledge, and knowledge is always an effect of cultural and political institutions” (25). If poetry, or literature as a whole, is theoretical, then the teaching of the close reading of that literature cannot be atheoretical. Zavarzadeh notes past literary scholarship often resists theory, leaning only on the rhetorical, removing the outside world if it is not explicitly marked on the page. Zavarzadeh advocates for a different understanding of theory to aid in the close reading of literature known as an “intelligibility effect.” An intelligibility effect, as defined by Zavarzadeh, is “a historical understanding of the material processes and contradictory relations through which the discourses of culture make sense” (25). Literature is a product of culture, and is certainly part of the machine that produces meaning in discourse. As such, Zavarzadeh maintains that the teaching of literature must also reflect the teaching of critical theory. Teaching the close reading of literature without the use of theory not only leads to a decreased understanding of the passage and piece as a whole, but also risks something much greater. Zavarzadeh states:

Reading poetry as an atheoretical and transhistorical discourse produces the reader as a nonconstrained, self-same (speaking) subject who is marked by autonomy and a direct, unmediated access to the plentitude of the imagination: an instance of presence free from all social contradictions. This notion of the subject is necessary for the maintenance of the existing exploitative social arrangements. (26)

The first step to correcting these exploitative social arrangements to make them visible within the products of culture, such as literature.

Critical Theories and Associated Critical Pedagogies

According to Henry A. Giroux (2001), critical theory “refers to the nature of self-conscious critique and to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions” (8).

Approaching education through critical theory causes instructors to steer away from traditional approaches, those that may promote specific ideologies leading to inequality. Giroux states:

Critical theory points educators toward a mode of analysis that stresses the breaks, discontinuities, and tensions in history, all of which become valuable in that they highlight the centrality of human agency and struggles while simultaneously revealing the gap between society as it presently exists and society as it might be. (36)

Critical theory exposes the power structure within society, and focuses on those who have traditionally been silenced.

Per Sandy Grande (2004), with critical theory comes critical pedagogy. Grande defines critical pedagogy as a “kind of umbrella for a variety of educators and scholars working toward social justice and greater equality” (21). Grande asserts that critical pedagogies can be as different as the theories in which they are based, and post-modern, feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial scholars, and numerous others, have all developed their own practice to this educational approach. Critical pedagogy seeks to make democracy multicultural, and more reflective of the true body politic. In particular, Grande advocates for a “Red pedagogy,” in which the culture and education of indigenous peoples are highlighted (29). Grande states, “The hope is for a Red pedagogy that not only helps sustain the lifeways of indigenous peoples but also provides an explanatory framework that helps us understand the complex and intersecting vectors of power shaping the historical-material conditions of indigenous schools and communities” (29). Red pedagogy focuses on the Native cultures and peoples colonized within America.

Gerald Vizenor (1999) asserts the importance of post-Indian theories of survivance due to the widespread “cruelties of national and colonial authorities” (*Manifest Manners 2*). Vizenor’s post-Indian theories of survivance focus on Native American identity and culture after the arrival of white European settlers on Native lands, which led to the assimilation and genocide of millions of Native people. Survivance, or native presence over absence, is necessary to counteract this cruelty. Vizenor states:

The theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company. The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions and customs...survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry. (*Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence 1*)

Vizenor’s theories highlight the true presence of the native Indian – both in native works of art and literature, and in society as a whole – by correcting the false representation of the indigenous by white colonizers. Vizenor’s theories focus on the importance of native stories, in all the forms that they may take, and places an emphasis on language (*Survivance 2-3*). Vizenor states, “Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason, tragic wisdom, and the provenance of new literary studies” (11). Post-Indian theories uncover native stories told in native voices, effectively redistributing a small portion of the cultural wealth in education.

According to Annette Zelman (1965), teaching American students about Marxism and other aspects of communism has been met with much anxiety from teachers and resistance from students since it was first encouraged educationally in the 1950’s (1). The last 60 years has done little to change this hesitant approach to Marxism. Per Zelman, “most [teachers] are ‘skeptical’ about [Marxism], feeling inadequately prepared to teach it. Some fear that their own ‘orthodoxy’ will be called into question as a result of their classroom discussions” (31). Plainly put, will

students believe you are a communist if you dare to teach from a Marxist perspective? Sadly, the ending of the Cold War has done little to erase this fear, and as argued by Zelman, “in some places fear of attacks from the ultra-Right has led teachers to shy away from using methods and discussing topics which might be considered controversial” (33). While often difficult, and certainly intimidating, “teachers have insisted upon maintaining the classroom as a free marketplace of ideas, despite ultra-Right pressure and attack” (Zelman 33). Zelman urges teachers to continue teaching Marxism to students regardless of current popular politics.

As argued by Terry Eagleton (1976), teaching Marxism is crucial to understanding literature. Eagleton maintains that that the close reading of books requires an “understanding [of] the total social process of which it is part” (6). From a Marxist perspective, art is part of the superstructure of society (Eagleton 5). As Eagleton argues, “[Art] is...part of a society’s ideology – an element in that complex structure of social perception which ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as ‘natural,’ or not seen at all” (5). Without an awareness of the superstructure of society, and the ideologies that fuel it, literature cannot be fully appreciated.

As argued by Linda Dittmar and Pepi Leistryna (2008), postcolonial theory “has the double benefit of engaging students’ empathic identification via literature and visual culture while teaching them to see through the ideology that propels the West’s effort’s to sustain its hegemony” (5). According to Dittmar and Leistryna, this power “depends for its strategy on the flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7). The teaching and learning of postcolonial theory disrupts this power, placing the East and the West on more equal ground. It allows students to see the world not in terms of East and West, or us and them,

but in terms of hybridity. It is this in-between, or hybrid, space as defined by Homi K. Bhabha (1989) “that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha 2372). As a prime product of culture, literature is better understood in light of postcolonial theory.

Critical race theory, according to Lois Tyson (2105), “began at a time when the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s ceased to be a political or social force. And though critical race started out as a critique of constitutional law...it has spread to other disciplines, including those in the humanities” (352). Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2017) have defined the basic tenants of critical race theory. These tenants include everyday racism, interest convergence, race as a social construction, differential racialization, the intersectionality of identity, and the importance of a voice of color (Delgado and Stefancic 8-9). Critical race theory brings these considerations to light, placing them front and center in literary analysis and understanding. Danya Davis and Melissa Steyn argue that the teaching and learning of critical race theory is vital to a more just society. Pedagogy that involves critical race theory “speaks truth to power and challenges students in dominant positionalities to own their own role in either perpetuating or challenging oppression” (Davis and Steyn 37).

Summary

In summary, the teaching of critical theory in conjunction with that of close reading is incredibly useful to students. In addition to calling attention to language and form, the inclusion of critical theory to close reading practices sheds light on the social, political, and economical environment in which a literary work was produced, enriching interpretation and generating new meaning. As an effect, the use of critical theories and pedagogies within American classrooms leads to a more enhanced educational experience, lending voice to marginalized and silenced

groups. The teaching of close reading alongside critical theories exposes students to positive and authentic representations of women, people of color, and other disenfranchised groups.

METHODS

This study is an examination of my own action research, based on Chad West's (2011) definition of the teacher as researcher. According to West, by conducting research in their own classrooms, teachers can build and improve their skills, leading to a better learning environment for students (89). The common characteristics of action research include practical inquiry, transformation, and method (West 89). Practical inquiry enhances and generates new knowledge, which in turn, transforms traditional power structures within education. Action research can be accomplished through various methods of data collection and inquiry, such as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research (West 89-90). West maintains, "Teacher research becomes action research at the point at which the teacher's findings compel a new direction in his or her practices or a new study in his or her classroom" (91). This action research, based on a study in my own classroom, has compelled a new direction in my teaching practice.

As the questions of this study are identified in the previous sections, this section will examine the collected data. All data was analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory procedures and techniques. This technique was chosen due to the qualitative nature of the study, and because the study revolves around question asking and the making of comparisons. Qualitative data was collected in the form of the student participants' pre- and post-annotations. The following sections examine the participants, consent, setting, data and data collection, and procedures used over the course of this action research study.

Participants

Participants of this study include twenty-one undergraduate students enrolled in a general education course designed to expose students to human experiences through the reading of

books. As this course is a general elective, the students enrolled in it differ greatly from one another. Participants are a mix of age and gender, vary in class from freshmen to senior, and have a wide breadth of ability and knowledge. In an effort to reduce the amount of data collected and make it more manageable, five students were selected randomly from the twenty-one total students enrolled in the course. An English Department professor was enlisted to randomly select five student identification numbers for use throughout the study. I was not involved in the selection of the five students and remained unaware of student identities throughout the course of the study. I elected to make this study blind so that my interpretation of the collected data would not be influenced or biased by knowing the identity of the selected student participants.

Consent

I sought and obtained clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on September 20, 2017 (see Appendix A). I explained to all twenty-one of the student participants on the first day of class that some of their work would be used as data in an academic study. All student participants were given the chance to object; in the absence of objections, consent was obtained.

Setting

Data for this study was collected at a mid-sized state regional university located in the rural American Midwest. The student population is 84.6% white and is made up of mostly in-state students. The course in question took place in the fall semester of 2017 and met twice weekly for an hour and forty minutes.

Data Collection

Data for this study consists entirely of the students' annotations. Since students demonstrate proficiency in close reading through writing (Tinkle et al. 523), it became clear that writing had to be central to the study. However, as a 100-level general education class, this

course did not have a writing prerequisite, nor did the class have a writing requirement. In short, formal writing is not a focus of the course. Since it was unrealistic to expect the students to demonstrate their close reading skills through the writing of a formal literary analysis, students were asked instead to annotate specific, short literary passages. I provided the student participants with handouts of particular literary passages taken from the class texts and instructed them to annotate the passages in a way that reflected their close reading of it.

Close Reading Pre-annotations. The pre-annotations were completed prior to the instruction of a corresponding critical theory. The student participants were instructed to conduct a close reading of the specific passage, focusing on both the words on the page and the social world. Students were provided with a very specific definition of close reading and given class time to think and write about the literary passage in question. In lieu of their names, the student participants labeled their pre-annotations with their student identification numbers and placed their papers in a manila envelope upon completion. The envelope was then delivered to the recruited professor, who would withdraw the five random student identification numbers that she had preselected, and label them A, B, C, D, and E. This process was repeated for each text read during the study.

Close Reading Post-Annotations. The students also completed a post-annotation for each course text. After approximately two weeks reading and discussing each text, along with a corresponding theory, the student participants were asked again to annotate a passage that reflected their close reading. The students were again supplied with the very specific definition of close reading and given ample time to think and write about the designated passage, this time with basic knowledge of a corresponding theoretical concept. Different critical theories were introduced to the students through lecture, multimodal presentations, and student activities and

discussions. On the last scheduled day of each text, the students completed the post-annotation. Post-annotations were also collected and labeled, following the same pre-annotation procedure. Throughout the course of the semester, the student participants read five novels, learned about five major critical theories, and completed ten annotations.

Procedures

I began the course with a lesson on close reading. Student participants were introduced to close reading as the very first step to understanding literature. Close reading ensures active reading, and considers what a text means rather than what it says. My lesson plan and definition of close reading was highly informed by the works of Moya (2016) and Showalter (2003). The student participants were supplied with the following definition of close reading for constant reference throughout the course of the semester: The intensive reading and rereading of a very small portion of text that calls for increased attention to words, language, and form that reflects both the authors' and readers' perception of our social world. The students were told that many different definitions and approaches to close reading could be found; however, for the purposes of this course, this would be the unchanging definition of close reading. The students were also supplied with a detailed list of considerations to ease the act of close reading (Wheeler 2017) that they were instructed to reference during close reading exercises. This list included considerations for language, punctuation, and symbolism, among several other things (see Appendix B). In addition to supplying a hard copy of this list to each student participant, I also projected this list during all in-class close reading exercises and annotations using the classroom's document camera. This list of close reading considerations and the concrete definition of close reading was intended to help generate thought, instead of simply expecting the students to think deeply on

command. I also demonstrated several close reading exercises, along with passage annotation examples, to ensure a solid understanding of close reading, how to do it, and what it looks like.

The course was broken down into five separate units for each novel and corresponding critical theory. On the first day of each unit, I supplied the student participants with a short biographical introduction of each of the authors, along with a brief description of the text, i.e. a graphic novel, poetry, fiction, etc. The student participants were assigned approximately the first fifty pages of each text prior to any instruction of critical theory. After reading the first fifty pages, the student participants were provided with the passage for annotation. I selected a short passage, usually a paragraph, from the first fifty pages of the text. Pre-annotation passage selection was based on passages that I found particularly worthy of close reading. I determined the worthiness of a passage based on its representation of the social markers identified in Moya's socioformal approach, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. The theme of this course was resistance in storytelling, and each of the selected passages reflected power and oppression in some way. After in-class completion of the pre-annotation for each text, the student participants began to learn about theories that complimented each text.

While the student participants learned five different theories and explored several different theorists, each unit followed the same basic structure. I began with a general overview of each of the theories. The student participants were familiarized with the general aims and focus of each critical theory, along with an overview of important vocabulary. I found it unrealistic to expect a 100-level course to read articles and essays on critical theory, so these concepts were taught through short lectures, video clips, photography, and art. The student participants were introduced to these theories in short bursts, using minimal jargon, with much allotted discussion time in order to generate increased knowledge of the theories and practice

applying them to material. Class discussions often revolved around applying these theoretical lenses to class texts, and students would often conduct entire close readings aloud in class. Student participants were instructed to arrive to class every day with a selected passage for close reading in order to ensure ample practice and proficiency, and fuel class discussions. After approximately two weeks spent reading each text and learning the corresponding theory, the students completed the post-annotation. Again, I selected short passages that contained increased meaning when considered through a particular theoretical lens, and instructed the student participants to annotate that passage in a way that reflected their close reading, this time with the corresponding theories informing their reading. I then compared the pre- and post-annotations to assess the role of critical theory in the process of close reading. Specifically, to assess the effect that the teaching of critical theory has in closing the gap between the teaching of close reading practices and the students' ability to actually conduct close readings.

Example of unit instruction. On the first day of the first two-week unit, the student participants were introduced to the theories of Gerald Vizenor after reading the first fifty pages of Alexie's *War Dances* and completing their initial pre-annotation. The student participants were first given a biographical introduction to Vizenor. Again, it was unrealistic to assign the student participants to read and absorb Vizenor's work. Because of this, I instead focused on Vizenor's specific theories and provided several examples. The students' first focused on the theory of survivance. In *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, Vizenor defines survivance as "elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition" (1). Because of this definition, I did not see the value in lengthy lectures to teach this concept. Instead, popular culture was used as an example. I informed the student participants that Vizenor defines survivance as "native presence over absence" that resisted "dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy,

and the legacy of victimry” (1). As survivance is best described as a feeling, the students were shown a short video clip that visually captured the theory of survivance. The student participants viewed approximately ten minutes of the television mini-series, *Into the West* (“*Into the West – Carlisle Indian School*”). This clip features a young Indian boy who, when forced into a native boarding school, refuses a white name, Western clothing, and short hair. He runs from the boarding school only to sing a native song aloud and defiantly cut his long hair using a knife. This young boy’s refusal to assimilate to white culture and surrender his native identity on white terms reflects Vizenor’s theory of survivance, and it does so without lengthy readings and confusing language. After viewing this clip, the student participants were asked to identify survivance within the boy’s behavior. After a short discussion, the students were placed into groups and asked to isolate examples of Vizenor’s theory of survivance within Alexie’s novel, *War Dances*.

During the second week of the first unit, the student participants were introduced to Vizenor’s theory of manifest manners as the false representation of native image, custom, and culture present within American society (4). In order to highlight this concept, the students viewed an interview with Sherman Alexie in which he talks at great length about the negative representation of native culture and identity in the form of school logos and sports team mascots (“10 Questions for Sherman Alexie”). The student participants also viewed an episode of the *I Love Lucy Show* (“The Indian Show”), in which native people are continually depicted as violent, savage, and uncivilized. After viewing these video clips, the students engaged in a critical discussion in which they analyzed modern representation of native images in the form of logos, mascots, and even Halloween costumes. After two weeks spent discussing Alexie’s novel

in light of Vizenor’s theories, the student participants were ready to complete their first post-annotation informed by critical theory.

Data Analysis

First, the pre- and post-annotations were collected and reviewed. I then separated the annotations into two piles, pre and post, and began the process of open coding the pre-annotations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). According to the procedures and techniques of Strauss and Corbin, “during open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (62). The first step of this process was labeling students themes. I examined each pre-annotation separately, looking for reoccurring concepts. Similarities within the individual pre-annotations began to emerge, most notably, the analysis of language including the connotations and denotations of words, and the thinking and writing about the author’s use of metaphor and other literary devices (see Figure 1 for an example of pre-annotation open coding). These themes were then placed into categories for further analysis. It became clear that some students themes could be combined into the same categories, such as writing about the author’s use of metaphor and language analysis, as both of these themes involve language.

I then began open coding the post-annotations separately. Again, the first step of this was labeling student themes and looking for reoccurring concepts. Similarities were also noted in the post-annotations. While the student participants continued to focus on language analysis, the use

Figure 1
 Sherman Alexie *War Dances* Pre-Annotations

Student Themes	Frequency of Occurrence
Language Analysis (connotation/denotation)	3
Reoccurring Literary Themes	4
Author’s Use of Metaphor	2

of critical theory also began to emerge. Student participants began to use theoretical language in the interpretation of passages during close reading exercises, and open coding of this data reflected this. It became clear that these student themes could also be combined into similar categories, such as language analysis or critical theory (see Figure 2 for an example of post-annotation open coding). The process of open coding was repeated for each pre- and post-annotation completed by the five selected students. Axial coding was then employed to make “connections between a category and its subcategories” (Strauss and Corbin 97).

Summary

Data collection to explore this action research study (West 2011) included the student participants’ pre- and post-annotations. The student participants were given focused lessons on close reading and critical theory, and spent a significant amount of time discussing these subjects and applying them to assigned texts. The student participants also analyzed popular culture in an effort to become more comfortable with different theoretical lenses and concepts. The completed

Figure 2
Sherman Alexie *War Dances* Post-Annotations

Student Themes	Frequency of Occurrence
Survivance	5
Author’s Use of Metaphor	2
Culture and Identity	5
Trickster Hermeneutics	1
Manifest Manners	1
Language Analysis (connotation/denotation)	1
Post-Indian Warrior of Survivance	1

pre- and post-annotations were collected and analyzed for this study.

Grounded theory procedures and techniques were used to analyze the collected data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Open coding techniques were used to isolate and label students themes within the pre- and post-annotations, with multiple similarities emerging. Similar themes were then placed into categories, and axial coding was employed in order to further analyze the similarities and connections between categories and subcategories. This data was closely examined to formulate phenomena about teaching and learning that will be discussed in the following section.

RESULTS

To answer research questions one and two, the student participants' pre- and post-annotations were collected, analyzed, and compared for differences. Since the class definition of close reading included both analysis of words, language and form, along with consideration of the social world, I noted all references to language, words, form, and the social world within the students' annotations. All pre-annotations were completed at the beginning of each learning unit prior to the teaching of a corresponding critical theory. Similarly, all post-annotations were completed at the end of each learning unit, after the teaching of a corresponding critical theory. Students were instructed to explicitly apply the theoretical lens they learned during the unit to their close reading annotation. The study began with five randomly selected student participants, labeled A, B, C, D, and E. However, one or two student participants are missing in the units occurring later in the study, indicative of student absences as the semester wore on. As this study is qualitative – and each unit provided plenty of data, despite student absences – all collected data was utilized.

All annotations were analyzed through the processes of open and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Comparisons of the pre- and post-annotations revealed an improvement in overall close reading skills, as evidenced by the amount of writing contained in a single annotation, along with an enriched understanding of the social world. However, the amount of attention the student participants paid to language, words, and form decreased as knowledge of critical theory increased. The following section outlines the collected and analyzed data for each of the five teaching units throughout the course of the study.

Sherman Alexie's *War Dances* and Post-Indian Theory

Pre-annotations. The close reading passage of Sherman Alexie's *War Dances* revealed strong concentration at the language level. Student participants highlighted or underlined multiple individual words. They looked for similar words within the passage, or words that they considered "loaded" with meaning, such as "Indian," "sovereignty," and "identity." Most of the students thought deeply about the word "charlatan," and posed questions about individual Indian identities and authenticity. A few students considered language on the metaphorical level, seeing Alexie's blanket, for example, as more than a protective covering. In addition to multiple incidences of highlighting and underlining, the student participants considered specific words three times, wrote about false knowledge or fraud four times, thought about the use of metaphor three times, and explicitly questioned identity twice.

The attention that the student participants' paid to the passage on both the language level and the social level was evenly split. After axial coding, it was noted that student participants explicitly wrote about language six times in their annotations (not including underlining and highlighting). It was also noted that students wrote about the social world six times. This inclusion of the social world was used to find meaning within the text. For example, one student wrote about Alexie's title, "Blankets," and stated that blankets are "prominent in Native culture from what I know. This may mean he's relating to himself or home." The students used their understanding of the world around them to find meaning within the text.

Post-annotations. The Alexie close reading post-annotations revealed a remarkable use of theory in constructing meaning from the passage. The students explicitly wrote about Vizenor's post-Indian theories on eight separate occasions, using the following language:

survivance, trickster hermeneutics, manifest manners, and post-Indian warrior of survivance. In addition to the connections drawn to specific post-Indian theories, the students also considered native culture, identity, and history while conducting their close readings. One student wrote, the “bigger picture [is] faith, or their culture. [Faith and culture] won’t heal all the pain Indians have dealt with.” Another student noted that the passage “uses the word sing/song fifteen times in this short section. Not only does this help paint a picture of the scene, it helps us understand the significance of music in native culture.” The student participants’ understanding of Alexie’s text was greatly enriched by their new knowledge of Vizenor’s post-Indian theory.

While the Alexie post-annotations revealed remarkable use of theory, they also revealed a marked decrease in the use of language analysis to interpret meaning during close reading. Combined, the post-annotations contained only two incidences of writing about metaphor. Increased attention to individual words dropped to one. Overall, the students underlined and highlighted words less. While students did take note of the words “faith” and “song,” their thinking about these words was more culturally informed, not linguistically focused. However, the students did begin to make connections between the language and form of the passage and post-Indian theory. One student noted that Alexie’s repetition of the phrase “would not” was in itself evidence of survivance – Alexie knew that his faith and culture would not make his father well, but he believed in it anyway. Another student saw this same repetition as emphasis on native history and the foreshadowing of the upcoming death of Alexie’s father.

Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* and Marxism

Pre-annotations. Analysis of the student participants’ pre-annotations of a short passage of *Fight Club* also reflected a central focus on language and individual words. The students again underlined and highlighted words, and noted things such as repetition and short sentence

structure. One student participant commented on the structure of sentences within the passage, stating, “Short sentences help the author to sound mundane.” This insight allowed the student to also interpret irony in the author’s word choice, isolating words that have “a positive connotation, but ironic delivery makes [them] very negative.” Two students also considered the choice of the word “sofa” versus a different word, such as “couch.” One student noted, “Couch sounds more familiar/comforting, while sofa sounds technical and cold.”

The student participants also turned to the social world to construct meaning during this close reading exercise. Two student participants viewed the passage as a metaphor for something greater. One student noted, “This section really seems like one big metaphor for relationships.” Another student stated, “Obviously, this passage is a jab at consumerism. The message seems to be that stuff is just stuff. Don’t attach any other meaning to it.” Connections were drawn to addiction, suffering, and loneliness, and while the students did consider language and structure, they were thinking deeply about the social world as well when constructing meaning within Palahniuk’s passage. Like the previous pre-annotations, the close reading pre-annotations of *Fight Club* paid an equal amount of attention to language, words, form, and the social world.

Post-annotations. Throughout the Palahniuk post-annotations, student participants specifically wrote about Marxism eleven times. One student noted that the passage reflected commodity fetishism, while two students compared the passage to revolution. A student participant wrote that the last sentence of the passage “sounds like a war cry, or a call to revolution,” while another student noted the trouble the bourgeoisie would be in “if all service [and] minimum wage workers ‘rose-up’ in rebellion.” Most of the student participants noted class-consciousness within Palahniuk’s passage. They divided the people within the passage into either proletariats or bourgeoisie, and then they noted their place within society. One student

wrote, “Class consciousness [is] shown by listing the commoner jobs – serving the people at the top and not serving themselves.” Another student noted, “The proletariats do all the hard work/labor for almost no money while the rich get everything done for them.” In each of the *Fight Club* post-annotations, student participants relied heavily on Marxism to construct meaning within the selected passage.

The student participants’ post-annotations of Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* revealed a marked decrease in language analysis. Only two students wrote specifically about language and words during their annotations. One student pointed out the repetition of the word “we,” and found repeated use of the word to be “referring to the working class who support the rich bourgeoisie.” Another student noted, “Starting every sentence with the word ‘we’ reinforces the lower class, while also emphasizing how large the class is.” It was noted that even when the students were focused on language and how it is used within the passage, they were still relying on Marxism to inform that interpretation.

Joe Sacco’s *Palestine* and Postcolonial Theory

Pre-annotations. The student participants’ pre-annotations of one selected page of Joe Sacco’s graphic novel, *Palestine*, revealed very little in terms of language analysis. In the two previous groups of annotations, students paid considerable attention to individual words and meaning. However, when faced with a multimodal text, students’ focus became largely image related. Three students remarked on the size of the images within the text. One student participant noted, “This scene takes up most of the page; he wanted to amplify the hatred! Lots of emotion.” Another student remarked of the same scene “there has to be a reason his head, teeth, mouth, [and] fist are so big (and the words). To make a point.” Through analysis of the Sacco pre-

annotations, it became clear that when presented with a graphic text, the student participants' focus shifted to questions concerning image, rather than words and language.

The pre-annotations of *Palestine* also reflected a fair amount of question asking. The student participants became confused when approaching this graphic novel. They questioned who was speaking and to whom, and what conversation bubbles belonged to which character. However, even with these questions, they attempted to construct meaning within the passage using the social world. One student considered why the journalist, a Westerner, always wears glasses that obscure his eyes while interviewing the Palestinians. The journalist's continual wearing of glasses prompted the student to consider just what he is able to see, and in return, how he is seen. Another student noted that once the conversation between the journalist and the Palestinians becomes heated and "unhinged," it "hints at how unstable things are in the Middle East." The student participants' mentioned power and oppression four times within the Sacco pre-annotations, and they each perceived the Palestinians as oppressed in relation to Israelis.

Post-annotations. The post-annotations of Sacco's *Palestine* also reflected decreased attention to individual words. However, language analysis was not wholly absent, as was the case in the pre-annotations. One student considered Sacco's use of the word "pigeons" to describe the Muslim women. The student highlighted "pigeons," underlined the word, and drew a line to an annotation, stating, "rats of the sky." While another student also underlined the text that included the word "pigeons," only one student specifically wrote about this word choice. Another student wrote about the author's use of the word "veil" to refer to the hijab. After circling this word, the student asked, "Why call it a veil? [This is the] incorrect word, it 'others' the hijab." In total, the students only wrote about specific words on two occasions. It became

clear that all of the Sacco post-annotations were heavily influenced by postcolonial theory and the social world.

One student noted that the post-annotation passage for *Palestine* relies on “our Western view of feminism,” causing the reader to see the Muslim women as “face-less” and with “no identity.” Another student remarked on Sacco’s surprise when he learns that many of the Muslim women speak English. The student wrote, “He’s in shock that she knows English. This is Bhabha’s hybridity. She challenges the power through language.” Many of the students relied upon their understanding of Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism and the concept of the “other” to construct meaning within Sacco’s passage. One student participant interpreted Sacco’s reaction to the hijab as “bias perspective. He knows that the hijab is common in the East and is only foreign in the West.” The same student noted that “othering” the women made them “less important in the context of their own culture. This is how the narrator sees them through his eyes.” In total, the student participants called upon postcolonial theory on eight separate occasions while close reading a single page of Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*.

Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* and Postcolonial Feminism

Pre-annotations. The close reading pre-annotations of a selected passage of Condé’s *I, Tituba* reflected a return to language and concentration on words. One student underlined all of the words that she found to have a “beautiful” or “magical” connotation, such as “invisible world,” “superior gift of nature,” and “admiration.” The student wrote, “This passage reminds me of the term ‘woman.’” Another student considered the author’s choice of punctuation and multiple question marks. The student wrote, “Tituba is asking a lot of questions about her identity.” For this student, the use of questions and words that imply opposites had the effect of

“reinforcing Tituba’s confusion.” In total, the student participants focused on language and words on five separate occasions within the Condé pre-annotations.

Most of the student participants considered the word “witch.” They questioned where this term originated and remarked on the different perspectives or ideas of what makes a witch. One student noted, “To me there is not an actual definition of a witch. It could be good or bad.” Another student noted that this passage marks “the first time in [Tituba’s] life where she finds out her gift is perceived with fear.” The students likened the word “witch” to a tool used to oppress certain women. However, one student remarked that Tituba’s “ability to communicate with the invisible world” implied power itself. This caused the student to question who really had the power in this passage, especially since Tituba’s gift was “not supernatural, but [natural].” Throughout the pre-annotations, the student participants called on the social world to construct meaning within Condé’s passage four separate times.

Post-annotations. The student participants’ post-annotations of *I, Tituba* also revealed decreased attention to individual words and language. One student underlined the word “stewing” and noted how this word served to emphasize how sick Susanna Endicott was. Another student wrote about the mock wedding ceremony within the passage. As the preacher asks the gathered crowd if anyone objects to the union, he says, “Let him come forward and speak.” The student participant circled the word “him” and questioned, “Why use ‘him,’ not ‘them?’” The student’s questioning of this pronoun is reflective of the postcolonial feminist theory that was taught in tandem with Condé’s novel. In total, the student participants only wrote about words or language twice during the Condé post-annotations.

Throughout the post-annotations of Condé’s passage, the student participants wrote specifically about critical theory multiple times while conducting their close readings. The

lessons for this unit revolved around postcolonial feminism, specifically the theoretical concepts of diaspora and the white savior complex; however, students also utilized postcolonial theory in a more general sense. The students called upon their understanding of Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the phenomenon of mimicry in order to find meaning within the assigned passage. One student saw the slaves dressing in the master's clothing as a form of mimicry, stating, "The slaves were mocking the rich white men by dressing up in [their] clothes." Another student noted that this reflection of hybridity and mimicry had the effect of "[the slaves] taking back the power by imitating the white man." One student even utilized Marxism to construct meaning within the passage. When confronted with the multiple wives the men on Tituba's plantation take, this student stated, "Men having more than one woman relates to commodity fetishism and objectifies these women. The more you have, the happier you'll be." In total, the students successfully utilized three different theories on twelve separate occasions while close reading one short passage of Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*.

Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Critical Race Theory

Pre-annotations. All of the student participants' pre-annotations of Wright's *Native Son* focused on the author's choice of language. The students wrote about specific words and the sense of powerlessness and oppression that the words imparted. Students underlined or highlighted multiple words in the passage, including the words "hated," "powerless," "fear," and "despair." One student noted, "'Powerless' is probably the most important word in this passage. [It] shows Bigger wants to help [his family], but can't, in his mind, so he doesn't." Another student underlined the word "consciousness" and noted that Bigger's consciousness represented an "in-between state of reality and suppressing emotions." All of the student participants wrote about Bigger as a powerless entity at the mercy of society; however, none of the student

participants wrote specifically about racism when interpreting this passage. While the student participants questioned why Bigger felt powerless, they did not specifically point to racism as the root of his powerlessness. While all the student participants wrote about words and language in their Wright pre-annotations, they either virtually ignored the social world or simply did not comment on it.

Post-annotations. However, the students' post-annotations of Wright's *Native Son* revealed much interaction with the social world. Annotations that specifically concerned language and words dropped to four. Instead, the students thought critically about the social world through the application of several theoretical lenses. The student participants used four different theories fifteen times over the course of this one close reading exercise. The students called on critical race theory most frequently, using the basic tenants in order to construct meaning while conducting their close reading. Each of the student participants underlined or highlighted Bigger's description of himself as "black and at the bottom of the world." Each student interpreted this description as internalized racism or a product of the systemic racism that Bigger deals with on a daily basis. Bigger's anger begins to soften in this passage, and one student noted, "Bigger no longer felt inferior. [He] realized the social construction of race is what was holding him [back] and making him feel angry." Every one of the students' post-annotations of *Native Son* was focused on race and racism, and they used the language of critical race theory to describe this close reading passage.

Most of the students also supplemented this close reading with other theories, in addition to critical race theory. One student found evidence of Said's "other" within the passage and then related Bigger's preoccupation with violence to an attempt to regain some lost power. The student stated, "[There is] power in violence. [This is] related to [Bigger] feeling emasculated

and regaining his masculinity through violence.” Another student found Vizenor’s theory of the post-Indian helpful when interpreting this passage. The student wrote, “I see survivance in this because after all the racism and hardship [Bigger] has faced, they cannot make him feel anymore.” Yet another student utilized Marxism to construct meaning within this passage. This student divided the characters within the passage into proletariats and the bourgeoisie, and likened the murder of Mary Dalton to revolution. The student wrote, “Although [Bigger] is still considered to be a lower class citizen, he starts to feel free and alive for the first time because he murdered a ‘bourgeoisie.’ Revolution.” It became clear during the final three books assigned during the study that the student participants began to utilize different theories at different times, often allowing multiple theories to inform the close reading of a single passage.

Summary

The student participants’ ability to conduct a close reading of a short passage of text was greatly impacted by the teaching of critical theory. As the definition of close reading utilized during the study called for increased attention to both language and form, and well as the social world, I noted all references made to language, form, and the social world during close reading exercises. The students’ pre-annotations, those close readings that were not informed by critical theory, revealed close attention to language and structure, along with some consideration of the social world. The students’ post-annotations reflected an increased understanding of the social world using different theoretical lenses. As the students began to speak and view the world in the vocabulary of critical theory, their attention to language, words, and form decreased considerably. It was also noted that when faced with a multi-modal text, such as a graphic novel, the student participants’ focus shifted to image, virtually ignoring language and words. By the end of the study, it became clear that the student participants could easily grasp the concepts and

vocabulary of multiple critical theories, allowing different theories to inform and enhance even a single close reading.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of teaching critical theory on the teaching and learning of close reading practices. Specifically, the study examines the effect of short, frequent, and condensed lessons in critical literary theory in the close reading practices of 100-level general education English students by comparing close reading pre- and post-annotations. Comparisons of these two groups of annotations reflected both an increased interaction with the text on a social level, and a decreased interaction with the text on a language level, after instruction in critical theory. This study also brought to light significant student difficulty in interpreting graphic novels during exercises in close reading, and the value of teaching postcolonial theory to supplement literary texts involving issues of race, identity, and gender. Other instructors may benefit from this research by implementing critical theory lessons in other undergraduate English classrooms, enabling students to access texts in new, exciting, and meaningful ways. Additionally, other instructors of English literature might benefit from this study by simply considering how they currently teach close reading strategies to undergraduate students.

Emergent Themes

Pre-annotations, language, form, and structure. The student participants' close reading pre-annotations revealed that, in the absence of a formal theoretical lens, students focused primarily on language, form, and structure during close reading exercises. Nearly all of the student participants' first pre-annotations, a close reading of a passage in Sherman Alexie's *War Dances*, belabored Alexie's use of the word "charlatan." Four out of the five students had written the definition of this word in the margins, and then used this definition in an attempt to

find greater meaning in the passage as a whole. The students also underlined or highlighted multiple words in the passage, such as “pretend,” “Indian,” “literature,” “white,” and “dying.” All of the students noted these words in some way, and then considered them in context with Alexie’s use of the word “charlatan.” Each one of the student annotations contained writing and question asking about identity, false identity, or fraud. Students wrote about the narrator feeling as if he is “not good enough,” or “trying too hard to stand out as Indian.” One student participant wrote about a Native character who is only “pretending to know the Indian world.” The student participants’ close reading pre-annotations aligns with the close reading definition as understood by the New Critics. The student participants each wrote to varying levels about this reoccurring theme without the outside influence of critical theories or pedagogies. This close reading exercise relied entirely on the text and the student participants’ schemas.

A schema, as understood by Moya (2016), is a term that “refers to the active organization of past experiences (physical and emotional) and past reactions (sensory-motor and cognitive-affective) through which a person apprehends and interacts with incoming stimuli” (15). Plainly put, schema are past experiences that shape how we see and understand the world and society. As each student participant arrived at each close reading exercise with different experiences, they each relied on different sets of schema. The student participants showed varying levels of knowledge and comfort in writing about social conditions different from their own; however, most had, at least, a basic knowledge of Native stereotypes and racist expectations based on the poor representation of Native Americans in popular American culture prior to reading Alexie’s passage. These preconceptions were reflected in their close reading pre-annotations.

It became clear when analyzing the pre-annotations that where the student participants were lacking schema, they compensated with attention to language. In the close reading

annotations of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the students largely ignored the social world. Most annotations were reflective of interpretation and meaning constructed at the language and word level only. The students again underlined and highlighted words, and then focused on the connotations of these words. The selected passage was heavily reflective of the racism that Bigger, Wright's main character, faces in 1930's Chicago, and the all the students commented on the negative meanings of words such as "shame," "misery," "fear," and "despair." However, not one student participant used Bigger's racist society as a source from which to construct meaning within Wright's passage. All of the student participants focused on the word "powerless," yet did not talk about Bigger's race as the source of this powerlessness. One student even questioned, "Why is he powerless?" The student participants lacked either the schema or the confidence to engage with issues of race directly during the *Native Son* pre-annotations. To compensate, they turned their focus to language. During the *Native Son* close reading pre-annotations, the student participants effectively ignored the second half of the class definition of close reading. They closely examined only language, form, and structure, without lending any weight to the social world of the author. As a predominately-white audience, the student participants approached Wright's passage with predominately-white experiences and schema fueling their interpretation. In short, the students were unable to access the social and cultural aspects of Wright's passage.

Critical theory as a tool of access. While the student participants' close reading pre-annotations reflected varying levels of critical engagement with society and culture, the post-annotations reflected a high level of interaction with the social world. The student participants consistently relied upon society and culture to construct meaning within their close reading post-annotations, and they frequently used critical vocabulary to express themselves. Focused lessons in critical theory armed the student participants with the knowledge and confidence to interact

more directly with social and cultural situations that differed from their own experiences. Critical theory served as a supplement to the student participants' existing schemas, giving them the specific language to talk, write, and think more deeply about literature and the world (Axelrod and Axelrod 113).

For the novice reader, such as the student participants in this study, close reading can present significant challenges. It can feel a bit like deep thinking on demand or under pressure. Because of this, students do not always approach literature ready and willing to analyze and interpret meaning. In *How to Read a Poem*, Terry Eagleton argues:

Most students, faced with a novel or poem, spontaneously come up with what is commonly known as 'content analysis.' They give accounts of works of literature which describe what is going on in them, perhaps with a few evaluative comments thrown in. To adopt a technical distinction from linguistics, they treat a poem as *language* but not as *discourse*. 'Discourse,' as we shall see, means attending to language in all of its material density, whereas most approaches to poetic languages tend to disembody it. (2)

Inexperienced readers tend to focus purely on language; however, as Eagleton argues, language is never pure. The true meaning of a word is equally dependent upon the definition and the person who is speaking it.

When the student participants approached the Alexie pre-annotation, they used their prior assumption about of Native Americans and issues of identity to find increased meaning in the word "charlatan." They approached this word as discourse, not simply as language. However, even with this solid attempt at close reading, the student participants still spoke of native identity in rather general and apprehensive terms. After the student participants were introduced to post-Indian theory and began to learn and apply critical vocabulary, the students began to think much more deeply about individual words as discourse, and this was reflected in the post-annotations. The student participants went from considering obvious words, such as "charlatan," to more subtle, commonplace words. One student participant isolated Alexie's use of the word

“temporary” in describing a healing song he sang with his sick father. The student wrote, “‘Temporary’ is used twice. [This is] survivance. He is doing what he can in this moment to live and stay purposeful.” This student’s interpretation of the importance of the word “temporary” relied on Vizenor’s theory of survivance, or native presence over absence (Vizenor 1). In this interpretation, Alexie knows that the singing of the healing song, and the Native presence it conveys, is only temporary. When the song is over, only an absence will persist. For this student, Vizenor’s theory brought new meaning to the word “temporary” as used by Alexie. Post-Indian theory gave the students the tools and confidence to interact more closely and write more deeply about literature and culture.

The close reading post-annotations of Wright’s *Native Son* also revealed the student participants’ treatment of the text as discourse, not merely language, as was noted in the pre-annotations of the same text. While the pre-annotations reflected zero interaction with the social world, the post-annotations critically engaged social matters on fifteen separate occasions. The inclusion of critical race theory, specifically the basic tenants (Delgado and Stefancic 8-9), enabled the students to think more deeply about the passage, allowing them to read between the lines. Similar to the pre-annotation passage, the post-annotation passage provided to the students included themes of race and racism. After two weeks spent learning and discussing critical race theory, the students successfully analyzed Wright’s passage using critical vocabulary. One student participant wrote, “This passage shows a lot of critical race theory. From internalized racism to systemic racism, it really shows Bigger’s train of thought when it comes to feelings about himself and how people think of him as a Black American.” Another student focused on Wright’s description of Bigger as “black and clownlike.” This student noted, “Bigger makes the assumption that black equals clownlike; it seems he’s been programmed to think this.” With a

basic knowledge of critical race theory, the student participants were no longer hesitant to directly engage matters of race and racism when close reading and discussing a text.

Close reading, language analysis, and the multimodal text. The student participants' close reading pre-annotations of a single page Joe Sacco's *Palestine* revealed a marked departure from the analysis of language and individual words. The *Palestine* pre-annotations were entirely image focused, rather than language focused, as noted in the other pre-annotations. As a graphic text, *Palestine* presented the student participants with a completely different approach to literature and culture. Graphic novels are becoming more commonplace in the modern classroom. In addition to offering students a fun alternative to traditional forms of literature, graphic novels provide other academic benefits as well. Janette Hughes and Laura Morrison argue, "The inherent multimodal nature of this form, which combines text and image and asks readers to interpret or "read" other non-linguistic elements such as frames and "camera" angles, allow struggling readers to draw on literacy skills beyond the linguistic" (117). As the text and image of a graphic text must be read as one, multimodality encourages students to think beyond words. However, in the case of the student participants' pre-annotations of *Palestine*, the graphic nature of the text caused a virtual departure from language analysis.

The highlighting and underlining that the student participants had relied so heavily on during previous close reading annotations was almost completely absent in the *Palestine* pre-annotations. One student participant did underline the words "Israelis" and "Europeans," but did not write further about them. The same student also paused on the word "Westerner," and questioned, "What makes a Westerner," but did not elaborate. The student participants remarked on the size of the images, and considered how size added to the tone of the passage. One student noted that certain images were "drawn in to look larger than the others to put focus on what he

says,” yet did not consider what the character was saying. Another student noted, “Very threatened look in this slide, almost like a figure of power or leader,” but did not elaborate on that power. As a whole, the images in *Palestine* completely took over the text during the student participants’ close reading pre-annotations.

While there was definite improvement in the student participants’ close readings of *Palestine* after learning and discussing postcolonial theory for two weeks, the post-annotations of Sacco’s passage still reflected considerable difficulty with multimodal text. Some of the students returned to the practice of underlining or highlighting key words and phrases, but use of this close reading practice was drastically decreased when compared to the other annotations, both pre and post. On average, the annotations were shorter, and contained more questions than other annotations. Despite all of the student participants using the theories and vocabulary of postcolonialism to interpret the text and construct meaning, post-annotations of *Palestine* applied critical theory less than any other text. The student participants called on postcolonial theory on eight separate occasions during the Sacco post-annotations. All other post-annotations relied on different theoretical lenses in excess of ten, twelve, and even fifteen times. Dale Jacobs argues that the reading and understanding of graphic novels and comics “involves a complex, multimodal literacy” (19). Students cannot simply be given a graphic text with instructions to read it; rather, they require at least some foundational knowledge in the interpretation of multimodal texts. Overall, the graphic nature of Sacco’s text greatly affected the student participants’ ability to conduct a close reading.

Close reading and postcolonial theory. Despite the student participants using postcolonial theory the least during the *Palestine* reading unit, postcolonialism was the theoretical lens that the students applied most frequently over the course of the study.

Throughout the study, the selected student participants relied on postcolonial theory during post-annotations a total of fifteen times over three texts (see Figure 3 for frequency of theory use). In addition to Sacco’s *Palestine*, the student participants were also able to successfully apply a postcolonial lens to Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* and Wright’s *Native Son*. In order to construct meaning during close readings, the student participants frequently turned to Said’s (1978) theory of orientalism and the concept of the other (5). Bhabha (1989) proved to be another class favorite, and the student participants found great meaning within the liminal spaces of double-consciousness and hybridity (2372).

While theory in the undergraduate classroom is often debated in academia, Kristin Czarnecki (2002) argues theory’s importance. Czarnecki states, “Theory is crucial to understanding literature’s historical and cultural significance, as well as its perpetuation of, or resistance to, conventional notions of class, race, and gender. Postcolonial theory interrogates such issues particularly well by acknowledging that throughout history white western cultures and values have been imposed on people of color” (109). This opinion is certainly reflected in the students’ use of postcolonial theory to interpret and understand the works of Sacco, Condé,

Figure 3
Frequency of Theory Use

Critical Theory	Frequency of Use
Postcolonialism	15
Postcolonial Feminism	6
Critical Race Theory	10
Post-Indian Theory	14
Marxism	14

and Wright. In the close reading exercises involving *I, Tituba*, one student wrote about the description of the slaves on Tituba's plantation as "Africans." The student wrote, "Pride in the homeland is a postcolonial attitude. [But this] is not Tituba's culture since she doesn't consider herself from Africa, but from Barbados. Many of the slaves might not be native born Africans." Postcolonial theory caused this student to appreciate differences in culture that often go unnoticed in western culture.

Postcolonial theory also affected the way students wrote in pre-annotations, even when they were not actively using theory to inform their reading. In one *Native Son* pre-annotation, a student underlined the word "consciousness" and wrote in the margin, "Living in the in-between state of reality and suppressing his emotions. A 'haze'." Even when not explicitly utilizing a postcolonial lens, the language of this theory still found its way into the annotation. It was evident in the pre- and post-annotations that the student participants found postcolonial theory highly accessible and useful when conducting close readings of multiple texts.

Implications for Research and Practice

While this study sheds light on the benefits of teaching critical theory in an undergraduate general education English class, more research is needed. This study considers how a basic understanding of critical theory can aid students in the close reading of literary texts. Comparison of close reading pre- and post-annotations revealed that the inclusion of literary theory leads to an increased depth and understanding of language and people, as well as teaching the students valuable critical vocabulary to write, think, and discuss cultural and social situations different from their own. With a basic knowledge of critical theory, student participants considered commonplace words differently, and found new meaning in sentence structure and punctuation. Despite relatively few studies available on close reading in the undergraduate

classroom, this study emphasizes the importance of teaching critical theory in tandem with literary texts to inform and enhance close reading, even in a general education English classroom.

More research is needed to examine close reading strategies in the classroom. Students often have a poor understanding of close reading (Showalter 56). The definition of this interpretive process is often undefined, leaving students to intuit the meaning and teacher expectations of close reading. As such, a deeper appreciation of the process is warranted. New Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have shifted to place a greater emphasis on close reading (Hinchman and Moore 442), and post-secondary teachers must be ready to meet more experienced readers with new challenges. In addition to an enriched reading experience, Moya's socioformal approach to close reading "allows writer and reader alike to explore [social issues] in all their particularity and embeddedness in the social world – which is, after all, the only way that they enter the world as issues in the first place" (Moya 10). Along with making students better readers, close reading allows for an increased understanding of the world.

This study revealed that undergraduate students in a 100-level general education humanities course can effectively learn and grasp essential characteristics of applied critical theory, and that they can apply that knowledge to a literary text in the form of a close reading. For example, prior to learning critical race theory, the student participants had difficulty interacting and discussing issues of race and racism in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. After learning about the basic tenants of critical race theory (Delgado and Stefancic 8-9), the student participants began to write and speak more easily about Wright's novel. Knowledge of critical race theory allowed the students to appreciate Wright's character of Bigger Thomas more fully and deeply. Most importantly, the vocabulary that critical theory afforded the students made

them more willing and comfortable to speak and write about delicate social issues, such as race and racism. This skill is of particular importance due to the diversity of the modern world.

If this study were to be repeated, I would eliminate the use of graphic texts. While graphic novels have proved their place in academia by improving literacy in reluctant readers and students who speak English as a second language (Hughes and Morrison 117), in the context of this study, a multimodal text was problematic. Student participants became overwhelmed with the visual images within the graphic text, virtually ignoring language and words. As such, the close readings reflected minimal interaction with the text on the language level. Overall, the student participants annotated the graphic text less than traditional texts, and they nearly ceased underlining and highlighting key words and phrases all together. If graphic texts were to be taught in future studies, the students would greatly benefit from basic lessons in the differences between graphic and traditional novels. A foundational knowledge of multimodal literacy (Jacobs 19) is crucial prior to the scaffolding of additional theoretical lenses. I would also implement more close reading exercises to provide ample demonstration and practice. Practice is a key factor in effective close reading (Tinkle et al 506), and students require much practice and demonstrative examples in order to succeed.

Limitations

A major limitation to this study was the use of a graphic novel. In addition to being generally inexperienced readers, most of the student participants did not have prior exposure to graphic texts. As such, the student participants had considerable difficulty conducting a close reading of both image and text. Future attempts to reproduce this study will not include a graphic novel. Furthermore, in the future, graphic texts will not be used in any capacity without first teaching my students applicable theories related to multiple literacies.

Conclusion

This study of my own action research examines the ways in which the teaching of critical theory affects both my teaching of close reading practices and my students' ability to conduct a close reading. I began this study because I have a history of struggling with close reading as an undergraduate student, and those struggles were lessened greatly after I learned about literary theory. This study considers critical theory as a tool to help bridge the gap between the teaching of close reading and students' close reading practices. Throughout the course of this study, I have learned the value of teaching critical theory in conjunction with the teaching of close reading. My students' close reading practices improved greatly after the inclusion of critical theory. The close reading post-annotations were longer and more in-depth, and considered specific connotations of language more than the pre-annotations. The teaching of critical theory alongside the teaching of close reading practices allowed my students to interact with books as a discourse, not simply as words on a page. The explicit teaching of close reading and critical theory does more than simply create better students of English; it creates better students. Sound close reading skills easily translate to any academic classroom, making better students of science and mathematics through better reading and critical thinking skills. This extends even beyond the classroom. Proficient close reading skills can be applied to newspaper articles or political speeches, and can help us understand people who are different from ourselves.

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APPENDIX A



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Memorandum

TO: Kim Rosewall
English Department

CC: Lisa Eckert
English Department

FROM: Dr. Robert Winn *RJW*
Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences/IRB Administrator

DATE: September 20, 2017

SUBJECT: IRB Proposal HS17-877
"Student Annotations"
IRB Approval Dates: 9/20/2017 - 9/20/2018
Proposed Project Dates: 9/27/2017 - 12/7/2018

Your proposal "Student Annotations" has been approved under the administrative review process. Please include your proposal number (HS17-877) on all research materials and on any correspondence regarding this project.

Any changes or revisions to your approved research plan must be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to implementation.

If you do not complete your project within 12 months from the date of your approval notification, you must submit a Project Renewal Form for Research Involving Human Subjects. You may apply for a one-year project renewal up to four times.

All forms can be found at the NMU Grants and Research website:
<http://www.nmu.edu/grantsandresearch/node/102>

APPENDIX B

Things to Consider When Conducting a Close Reading

1. **First Impression:**

- What is the first thing that you notice? The second?
- Do these things complement or contradict one another?
- What mood or feeling does the passage create in you? Why?

2. **Vocabulary and Diction:**

- Which words do you notice first?
- Why do you think the author chose a particular word (diction)? What if a different word was used? How would the passage change with different word choices?
- How do important words relate to each other?
- Are there double meanings to any words (double entendre)? What are the connotations?
- Look up words you don't know!

3. **Patterns:**

- Is this passage similar to others in the book? Is it similar to other books?
- Is there something about the writing that stands out? Short sentences? Odd punctuation? Repetition?
- What is the style and/or tone of the passage? Is it excessively wordy or short? Is it funny or ironic?

4. **Characterization and Point of View:**

- Does the passage appeal to your senses? Colors? Sounds? Tastes?
- Why are these appeals important within the passage?
- Who is speaking and to whom do they speak?
- What is the point of view of the speaker or narrator? Are they omniscient?

5. **Symbolism/Figurative Language:**

- Are metaphors used?
- Could this passage represent the entire book?
- Do any objects represent something else? How?
- Do any objects have traditional, religious, or popular connotations?

Wheeler, Dr. L. Kip. "Close Reading of a Literary Passage." *Dr. Wheeler's Website*, Carson-Newman U, 2017. <https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/index.html>.