

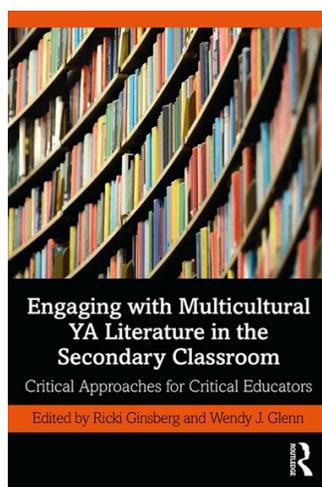
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Review of Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom: Critical Approaches for Critical Educators

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“Explicitly teaching students to understand reading as a tool for justice and liberation can open opportunities for civic engagement and using literacy as a tool to address inequity” (Kaplan & Garcia, 2019, p. 183).

Overview of the Book

When reading *Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom*, the quote above remained a theme throughout that Ginsberg and Glenn, the editors of the collection, highlight in their assembling of this book. In a nation founded on and entrenched with the “imperialist [W]hite supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” as hooks (2009) would call it (p. 8), we are forever in need of tools that address inequity, particularly in our schools. As Ginsberg and Glenn underscore in the introduction, public schools in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse while our nation becomes increasingly bifurcated. We owe our K-12 students (and ourselves) critical approaches that promote a more equitable world.

To do so, we can turn to young adult novels and accompanying critical pedagogies. Until recently, teachers selected mostly canonical, traditional novels for their instruction that featured predominantly White, cisgender, straight, middle class characters, largely due to discomfort addressing multicultural aspects in young adult novels (Ginsberg & Glenn, 2019). As more teachers begin centering books that feature diverse voices, teachers should simultaneously pair them with critical pedagogies to foster a more equitable education, and thus a more equitable world. Therefore, Ginsberg and Glenn provide their audience, particularly teachers and teacher educators, with a noteworthy text that highlights a number of necessary voices, an array of multicultural titles, and creative, justice-oriented pedagogical strategies.

In each chapter, scholars provide us with pertinent information regarding the approach with which they will use to ground their examination of the book and instructional practices (e.g., critical race theory, queer theory, critical comparative content analysis, and more). From there, each author applies these approaches to a designated young adult novel, offering a lens through which teachers and students can read the text. To conclude each chapter, authors describe critical literacy activities that teachers might pair with their chosen book. Ginsberg and Glenn note that these descriptions are not meant to provide a scripted means of implementing these pedagogies but should serve as a guide that teachers can adjust for their own students. Following each chapter, the authors list supplemental, related texts that teachers might also use, include in their library, and suggest to students.

In the continued review below, I will provide a summary of each chapter and then offer a brief analysis of the collection. Prior to delving into the chapter summaries, it is imperative to note that Ginsberg and Glenn do not organize the chapters by topic or theme to provide a more intersectional reading experience. Following their lead in this review, I also move through these chapter summaries sequentially and do not group them by topic or theme. There is much to be learned from this text, and while each chapter can be read individually, I encourage readers to read *through* the collection and make connections *across* the chapters, as well.

Discussion of the Chapters

The first chapter in the edited book offers readers texts and critical literacy practices that address the notion of meritocracy. Specifically, Jennifer Buehler uses positioning theory and *American Street* (Zoboi, 2017) to explore how the characters explore power, social locations, and moral choices as they pursue

the American Dream. Buehler pairs this theoretical framework and text with drama-based activities, like role-playing, to help students become attuned to the ways in which individuals' identities--first the characters in *American Street* and then their own--are impacted by opportunities they were (or were not) afforded based on their position in various sociocultural circumstances.

Patricia E. Enciso, Nithya Sivashanakar, and Sarah Bradford Fletcher also suggest drama pedagogies in chapter 2 to help students analyze how social divisions form, specifically between races. Using a theory of social minds to engage with *Out of Darkness* (Perez, 2015), the authors argue that fictional social minds help us understand how fictional worlds operate. As students use drama pedagogies while reading *Out of Darkness*, this work can translate to their own lives, understanding how social minds are formed in the real world. Inevitably, this involves examining social divisions. Dramatic inquiries based on the novel, like circle readings and creating word carpets (i.e., embodied dialogue), help students understand the depth of hate and injustice, potentially inspiring acts of love and justice.

After a brief discussion of neoliberalism in Chapter 3, Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites introduce an accessible framework alongside *Marcelo in the Real World* (Stork, 2009) to help them understand how neoliberalism operates in their own lives. The novel includes "superspecial individuals" who can accomplish great things against all odds (Connors & Trites, 2019, p. 33). To analyze neoliberalism and "superspecial individuals," the authors suggest having students consider how the characters experience various institutions in the novel, whether the text accounts for identity markers (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), and how the characters experience success (i.e., as a result of individual or collective efforts). By applying this framework to *Marcelo in the Real*

World, students might then analyze how neoliberalism affects their own lives.

Emily Wender summarizes *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (Medina, 2013) and describes a theoretical concept in film theory known as dominant and oppositional gazes in chapter 4. Focusing mainly on the dominant gaze, Wender uses the visual of a window frame to help students see how the dominant gaze emphasizes and subjugates certain ways of knowing and being--attributes in line with the dominant gaze fall inside the frame while all others are on the outside. Wender suggests starting with the topic of teenagers to illuminate how the dominant gaze affects teenagers' lives. From there, students can begin using the window frame to analyze the dominant gaze in *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*. By engaging with this concept via the novel, students will gain a keener sense of how dominant gazes operate in the world, as well.

In chapter 5, Cammie Kim Lin reminds us that "multicultural" often describes spaces where people of multiple cultures come together, but the term can also describe individuals who are of multiple cultures, specifically multiple races or ethnicities. She calls upon the characters in *Little & Lion* (Colbert, 2017) to discuss mixed youth and create a theoretical approach she names an alloy identity lens, an approach that would value both identities without aiming to see them as separate parts. To help students develop the alloy identity lens, Kim Lin first suggests having students read supplemental texts that highlight the experiences of mixed people. After engaging with these texts, students might then turn to *Little & Lion* to refine their theory of the alloy lens. Kim Lin, then, reminds readers of a point that is evident throughout her chapter: Providing opportunities for students to theorize--about life using literature--is an imperative aspect of teaching.

From there, Ricki Ginsberg draws on Gloria Anzaldúa in chapter 6 to discuss how teachers and students might use *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (Gansworth, 2013) to examine borders, borderlands, and spaces between. Ginsberg reminds readers that borders are more than physical spaces, but they also might relate to one's race, language, gender, sexuality, emotions, age, and more. While reading the book, students can interrogate the broader notion of borders--both what they limit and afford--in the text and their own lives. Ginsberg provides thought-provoking activities in the chapter to help teachers and students do just this. In addition to reading *If I Ever Get Out of Here*, she recommends having students learn about indigenous people, borders, and sovereignty to acknowledge the various ways people have, unfortunately, engaged with borders throughout time.

Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides, then, turns readers' attention in chapter 7 to the concept of racial melancholia using *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2007). Drawing upon Freud, Sarigianides first provides readers with an outline of the theoretical concept of racial melancholia and briefly examines how it operates in *American Born Chinese*. When discussing racial melancholia, the text Sarigianides chose proves to be generative because of its format as a graphic novel. To examine racial melancholia, teachers might examine key visual scenes, produce their own writing, analyze the media, as well as read supplemental texts. To conclude the chapter, Sarigianides reminds readers of a significant principle when teaching multicultural texts: To prevent reinforcing stereotypes or fostering trauma, teachers must do more than just have marginalized people groups represented in the texts but simultaneously engage in critical learning experiences so that students can analyze the systems of privilege and oppression at work in the novel.

In chapter 8, Alyssa Chrisman and Mollie V. Blackburn respond to the lack of intersectional LGBTQ curriculum in schools, as well as the problematic "it gets better" discourses that permeate the queer community. Using Ahmed's conceptualization of happiness (2010), they analyze how happiness is more difficult for Aaron, a queer character in *More Happy than Not* (Silvera, 2015), because of the privileges he is not afforded. In two separate applications of Ahmed's theory, Chrisman and Blackburn explain how teachers might use concepts like conditional happiness and proximity to happiness to examine Aaron's experiences in *More Happy than Not*. With each of these applications, they also suggest critical activities that will help students translate this to their own lives, understanding that there can be power when one is close to unhappiness. Using that understanding, Chrisman and Blackburn hope that students might then realize avenues for dismantling systems of oppression, like homophobia in *More Happy than Not*, that make happiness, as a social construct, less attainable for certain people.

Continuing with queer young adult literature in chapter 9, Ryan Schey discusses queer reading practices using *Brooklyn, Burning* (Brezonoff, 2011). While representing LGBTQ+ people in young adult literature is important, Schey asserts that we must also interrogate *how* we read these texts. In reviewing queer theory, Schey reminds us that queer theories destabilize the notion of stable identities and acknowledge the fluidity of these categories--and, at times, the necessary suspension of them. *Brooklyn, Burning*, a novel that presents characters without identified genders, serves as a model text for students when centering queerness and providing them with such ruptures to interpret. Schey provides readers with three possible pedagogical approaches they might apply in an effort to read *Brooklyn, Burning*, and any other text, queerly.

Angel Daniel Matos discusses the coming out process in chapter 10 with *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (Albertalli, 2015). While coming out is a prevalent, central, and often necessary narrative in queer young adult literature, Matos points out that books often describe the characters' processes as linear, eventually settling on a particular, stable sexual identity. In many ways, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* upholds and reinforces this narrative. Matos argues for a needed complexity in this conversation and suggests pairing novels like *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* with other novels that discuss coming out in an effort to interrogate this process, specifically revealing the ways in which certain characters--and people--experience privileges and oppressions that complicate this process. To do so, Matos provided generative questions to deepen and diversify students' understandings of coming out narratives.

Continuing with another chapter that grapples with identity processes, Wendy J. Glenn discusses how students might critically examine how space and place affect their identities. *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai, 2011), which Glenn centers in chapter 11, affords fruitful opportunities to consider just that, focusing specifically on an immigrant story that productively complicates the notion of "home." By reading *Inside Out and Back Again* and implementing various critical place-based pedagogies, Glenn demonstrates how teachers and students might consider the impact places have on our identities, as well as recognize the significance of the spaces we might navigate in transition.

Chapter 12 proposes how teachers might use *Copper Sun* (Draper, 2008) to interrogate the historical violence against Black bodies, particularly Black women. The authors, Chonika Coleman-King and Susan L. Groenke, open the chapter with overviews of the Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name movements. They underscore the importance of

engaging with the aims of these movements in school curricula. From there, Coleman-King and Groenke describe how small-group literature circles might serve to examine the violence imposed upon Black bodies in *Copper Sun*. Assuming the literature circles will yield further questions, Coleman-King and Groenke also suggest having follow-up conversations that interrogate the lack of representation (and misrepresentation) in school curriculum regarding the violence against Black bodies in the United States, particularly Black women and girls.

Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino, Karly Marie Grice, and Caitlin E. Murphy explore how educators might employ a Critical Race English Education (CREE) framework when reading *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015). A CREE stance, which draws upon critical hip-hop literacies, asks that teachers name and examine the role they play in dismantling White supremacy when engaging with literacy. When implementing it, the authors argue that tools within this framework have the potential to heal and transform in the face of police brutality. Rebellino, Grice, and Murphy start by providing an overview of *All American Boys* while suggesting supplemental activities to pair with reading the novel. As an example, the authors recommend watching the music video of "Ordinary Day" by Todrick Hall and critically analyzing its message. In doing so, students might recognize and interrogate--via provided prompts--the inherent racism that is too everyday in our society. Importantly, this chapter highlights the necessary work teachers must always do on themselves and in preparation of their lessons to engage effectively with critical pedagogy and not further traumatize already marginalized students.

On a related note, Christina Marie Ashwin and Sara Studebaker note in chapter 14 that racism is sustained in United States' classrooms through

teachers' color-blind ideologies and deficit-oriented perceptions of students of color. Racism can take the form of linguistic discrimination, which is evident in *The Hate U Give* (Thomas, 2017). Ashwin and Studebaker promote Critical Language Pedagogies (CLP), which assert that all dialects are equally correct, encourage students to identify dominant perspectives of language, and critique those beliefs. To consider racial and linguistic discrimination that takes place in the US, teachers might facilitate the following when reading *The Hate U Give*: compile a dictionary of terms in the text related to linguistic discrimination, discuss and reflect how Starr navigates multiple linguistic identities, document how students navigate their own multiple identities, and examine how language used (and not used) in the media influences public opinion. Like the other chapters in this collection, the hope is that students then recognize and resist both racial and linguistic oppression.

Because the authors believe students can initiate social change, in chapter 15, Amanda Haertling Thein, Mark A. Sulzer, and Renita R. Schmidt offer a method to examine how young people are positioned as readers in young adult literature. Using two versions of *I Am Malala* (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013; Yousafzai & McCormick, 2014), the authors demonstrate how young adult versions of texts often omit considerations of privilege and oppression that are more fully discussed in adult versions of the text. This move by authors of young adult texts assumes it is inappropriate to discuss social injustice with young adult readers. Thein, Sulzer, and Schmidt introduce critical comparative content analysis (CCCA) and recommend engaging students in this process using *I Am Malala*. In doing so, the authors claim students will expand their ability to critique how authors might position young characters and readers in problematic ways.

From there, Francisco Torres argues in chapter 16 that popular culture has the potential to inform us about systems of privilege and oppression. Torres focuses on the racialization of bodies in the superhero genre, specifically in *All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. 1: The Magnificent Seven* (Waid & Ross, 2016). Through the discussion of superhero texts and certain writing exercises, Torres asserts students might recognize the following: people of color can be superheroes, that racialized systems affect every person (of color) regardless of their abilities, and that youth of color can resist these systems to imagine a more just future. Torres notes the importance of drawing upon real-life experiences when outlining possible writing opportunities so that students can see themselves--and their potential--represented in their own versions of superhero stories.

Drawing upon another creative genre in chapter 17, Christine N. Stamper and Mary Catherine Miller pair magical realism and arts-based pedagogies. In doing so, Stamper and Miller outline how teachers might use *When the Moon Was Ours* (McLenmore, 2016) to examine the intersectional ways in which gender and sexuality are embodied. More specifically, the novel allows for a consideration of the multiple ways of being trans. Stamper and Miller point out that magical realism, as a genre, might offer an alternative, more subtle means of initiating those conversations compared to realistic fiction. Rather than implementing traditional pedagogies, *When the Moon Was Ours* lends itself to more creative approaches like arts-based pedagogies. The authors suggest that certain activities might help students analyze the characters'--and their own--gendered transitions, including visual autobiographies, found poetry, collages, and drawings.

In the final chapter, chapter 18, Rebecca G. Kaplan and Antero Garcia examine how science fiction and fantasy provide students with opportunities to

imagine alternative futures. While much of science fiction and fantasy whitewash characters and promote meritocratic ideals, Kaplan and Garcia note that Afrofuturist fantasy novels often do not. Therefore, *Akata Witch* (Okorafor, 2011) serves as a helpful novel when discussing more just futures. Throughout the chapter, the authors offer five concepts, along with suggested activities, and demonstrate how Afrofuturistic texts help reimagine these concepts. For example, while fantasy tends to promote individualism, *Akata Witch* demonstrates the strength in collectivism. Kaplan and Garcia suggest having students examine examples of biomimicry, a model where people investigate a problem and then emulate a solution for that problem based on what other systems in nature have done to solve similar challenges (e.g. learning from kingfisher birds how to maximize efficiency of wind turbines). In short, Kaplan and Garcia demonstrate the power of introducing students to Afrofuturistic novels to help them imagine more just realities in their own world.

The editors, Wendy J. Glenn and Ricki Ginsberg, then offer culminating thoughts as a conclusion to this edited collection. In doing so, Glenn and Ginsberg offer guidance for educators engaging in approaches to critical literacy like the ones outlined in the book. For instance, they outline resources that contain titles of multicultural young adult literature. They also discuss three challenges teachers might encounter when critically engaging with multicultural young adult literature: teaching topics that are beyond one's personal experiences, addressing sensitive subjects, and navigating censorship concerns. With each of these challenges, Glenn and Ginsberg provide guidance and explore possible responses. In doing so, the editors remind readers here that teachers have certain responsibilities: Teachers must engage their students in learning experiences that address social (in)justice, and in these moments, teachers are as

much learners as their students are teachers. Although our world is rife with injustice to be fought and the responsibility to teach critically is significant, there is literature to help teachers do just that.

Critical Response

Ginsberg and Glenn have provided us with an edited collection that could not be more appropriate for the times we are facing. As mentioned in the introduction, the United States is becoming increasingly diverse and divided. Currently, the division is increasingly noticeable amidst calls for racial justice by Black Lives Matter while Donald Trump stokes the always simmering (and often blazing) fires of White supremacy. Days ago, nationalist, White supremacists forcefully--but easily--made their way into the Capitol. Recently, a misogynist published a piece of national news refusing to acknowledge Dr. Jill Biden's academic credentials--and her intelligence--because she is a woman. And as I write this, certain members of Congress are disputing the need for gender-neutral language. The list of injustices goes on.

And because it goes on, educators have a responsibility to speak truth to power, to disrupt the very systems that have oppressed too many people for far too long. With this edited collection, Ginsberg and Glenn offer many means of doing just that. In compiling this collection, a number of scholarly voices are represented. The authors of the chapters offer unique, critical perspectives, and together, the book provides a number of strategies by which teachers and students can engage in justice-oriented learning. As one of the greatest strengths of the text, teachers have a number of various critical approaches in their hands with just this one text. While teachers might implement the ideas from one particular chapter, they also can pull ideas from multiple chapters to more specifically

address their students' learning needs and experiences. Similarly, another strength of the text is the numerous titles provided by the authors throughout the book. These titles extend beyond the widely used genres like realistic fiction to discuss social justice but include an array of other genres. Like Jones & Woglom argued (2016), this collection also asserts that reading alternative genres produces different ways of thinking and being. Ginsberg and Glenn's edited book effectively demonstrates how teachers can *and should* use a variety of genres to engage students in critical literacy practices.

While the authors of the text provide readers with a number of titles and approaches, some of the activities outlined by chapter authors could be more pedagogical. If certain scaffolds and structures are not put in place while enacting these pedagogies, teachers run the risk of perpetuating curriculum violence against already marginalized students. Even with good intentions, without careful implementation, teachers can still traumatize students (Jones, 2020). In my reading of the book, some chapters largely assume that the teachers facilitating these pedagogies are experienced at doing so. Additionally, certain chapters describe only having implemented these pedagogies with pre-service teachers. Demographically, pre-service teachers are likely different than the more diverse students a teacher might engage in a K-12 classroom. As such, the enactment of such a pedagogy should be modified, which some authors do note. While it remains necessary to engage students in these

learning experiences, teachers must ensure the appropriate structures are put in place to limit the possibility of inflicting curriculum violence. As a reader, I would like to have seen more discussion of this in certain chapters. Fortunately, Glenn and Ginsberg provide some guidance in the concluding chapter for teachers who might be hesitant or inexperienced with critical literacy pedagogies. If teachers seriously consider their recommendations, I believe that will mitigate the risk of curriculum violence.

Despite the risks and discomfort that might come with engaging critical approaches to young adult literature, educators have a responsibility to engage students in justice-oriented learning experiences. Ginsberg and Glenn have provided readers with an edited collection that helps teachers do just that. Teachers are provided with numerous ideas they can implement with their students. Teacher educators have a text that illustrates models of critical literacy pedagogies for pre-service teachers. Researchers will have their interest piqued with ideas they might further explore in empirical studies. Needless to say, Ginsberg and Glenn leave us with an edited book that is essential for secondary teachers using young adult literature and striving for social justice.

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