DIVERSE VOICES FOR DIVERSE EXPERIENCES: WHAT CAN POST-BELLUM, PRE-HARLEM WRITERS TEACH SECONDARY STUDENTS?

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ABSTRACT

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o remarked almost forty years ago that "[l]anguage carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world [...] at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings" (1986 [1992], 16). Although his comment originated in post-colonial literary thought within an East African linguistic context, these words retain increasing significance today and are more broadly applicable to any sociologically-informed literary discussions in the American classroom. To this end, the literature of the Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem (cf. Chesnutt 1931, *inter alia*) offers a window into the complex sociocultural, historical, and political context of the United States in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had previously been defined as the *Black Nadir*. Accordingly, this paper presents the results of a four-week instructional unit, which took place in a tenth-grade English classroom at a semi-suburban high school in north-central New Jersey, that required students to read and engage critically with James Weldon Johnson's (1912 [1927]) *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Most importantly, the present study advocates a departure from 'interpretation by free association' (*Reader Response Theory*) and, instead, proposes a more nuanced understanding of the United States at the *fin de siècle* through student-driven questioning of and conversations about the sociological, cultural, historical, linguistic, *and* literary dimensions of such works.

Keywords: African American literature, literary theory, discourse analysis, secondary school, pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986 [1992]) remarked almost forty years ago that "[l]anguage carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world [...] at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings" (p. 16). Although his comment originated in post-colonial literary thought within an East African linguistic context, these words retain increasing significance today and are more applicable to any sociologically informed (literary) discussions in the American classroom. Broadly construed, this would seem to indicate that literature can—and perhaps should—be used as a vehicle to understand the human experience both synchronically and diachronically.

Nevertheless, despite historical and contemporaneous metaphorical calls to arms to 'decolonize the (literary) canon' or simply to increase the 'diversity of perspectives' in the classroom, educators at the

secondary level have been overwhelmingly stymied in this endeavor in a way that post-secondary educators have not, partially due to the predeveloped content found in textbooks adopted for middle and high school education, partially due to institutional barriers that prevent or limit adoption of other materials, and partially due to the fact that ethnic American literature is still generally restricted either to particular genres or periods the year (e.g. "African American History Month" or "Hispanic Heritage Month"). As a result, unless an elective survey is offered that covers African American literature, students are oftentimes exposed simply to a tokenized, small sample of authors from particular literary periods or to overwhelmingly white authors engaged in discourse on racial inequity, thereby limiting access to emic perspectives. Such heavily contested themes and public spaces, however, require equitable representation from those who are most at risk of disenfranchisement, not strictly those who resemble the hegemony, as wa Thiongo (1986 [1992], p. 15) further states:

> Thus, the second aspect of language as culture is as an image-forming agent in the mind of a child. Our whole conception of ourselves as a people, individually and collectively, is based on those pictures and images which may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality of the struggles with nature and nurture which produced them in the first place. But our capacity to confront the world creatively is dependent on how those images correspond or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of our struggles.

As a result, this article aims to demonstrate how the successful incorporation of (now) lesser-known and lesser-taught voices allows students of all backgrounds to confront the lived experiences of their classmates, friends, family, and strangers. To this end, the present study is a description of and reflection upon a successful attempt at introducing high school students to literature written by and foregrounding the experiences of people of color from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, two periods of American literary history where such voices are frequently underrepresented not only in textbooks and curricula, but also in the classroom more generally. In particular, two overarching goals are advanced in this article.

First, while teachers-in-training are exposed to a variety of literary theories during their undergraduate education, the two that appear to be most frequently employed are *New Criticism* ('formalism') and *Reader-Response Theory* ('interpretation by free association'). Although the parenthetical qualifications are my own, this is a view espoused also by Appleman (2009). Both of these allow students to perform well on standardized state assessments; however, neither enables students to approximate the "entire body of values" that wa Thiongo describes. Thus, a syncretic approach is advocated for here that encourages students and educators alike to view and conduct themselves as active participants in the process of reading, active agents in the construction and dismantling of racialized discourse, *and* experiential beings who are capable of connecting personally or abstractly to literary and non-literary texts. Such interdisciplinary approaches have been engaged previously, albeit for practitioners and scholars (cf. Narayan 2012).

Second, while teachers-in-training are quite well versed in different literary genres and educational psychology, they have rarely taken more than one or two courses in linguistics in pursuit of their degree. As a result, recognizing how discourse analytic theories inform our understanding of students' metatalk sheds new light on *genuine* student performance and engagement during instructional time. In particular, the perspectives engaged here include Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Critical Pedagogy (CP), and Conversation Analysis (CA), all of which allow educators to understand not only *what* students are saying, but *how*, *why*, and *to what purpose* they are issuing specific remarks. After one excludes simple platitudes concerning the literary merit or value of the text, it becomes apparent that students are

oftentimes even themselves unaware of the intertextual, interpersonal, and cognitive genesis of their own remarks.

In order to reach these objectives, this paper is structured into an additional four parts. Section 2 presents a literature review of the Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem literary period, an overview of the teaching of African American literature, and a brief introduction to the two types of literary theory most commonly utilized in the classroom. Section 3 defines the classroom setting, the essential questions guiding the unit, and the instructional resources used during lessons. Section 4 presents an overview of the three discourse analytic approaches in which the resulting discussion is couched and offers exemplars from students' metatalk during successive Socratic Circles. Section 5 concludes this paper by offering final thoughts for reflection and areas for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem Literature

There are few clearly, definitively demarcated temporal periods in the history of African American literature. In fact, most anthologies organize literary works according to author, genre, or sociopolitical correlates. For instance, there are often sections dedicated to 'slave narratives, 'Negro spirituals,' the 'Harlem Renaissance,' and the 'Civil Rights Movement.' On the other hand, some have gone as far as to suggest that the literary periods identified by scholars either too closely resemble those of the Euro-American literary tradition (cf. West 1973) or that African American literature, which no longer even exists as a separate category of literature, refers to a very narrowly defined period of literary history. For example, Warren (2011, pp. 1-2) defines African American literature as "a postemancipation *[sic]* phenomenon that gained its coherence as an undertaking in the social world defined by the system of Jim Crow segregation [...] until it was finally dismantled, at least judicially and legally, in the 1950s and 1960s."

Placing aside these sociological and somewhat philosophical debates, however, there is one point that remains clear: The period immediately after the end of the American Civil War and prior to the start of the Harlem Renaissance remains understudied and undervalued (ca. 1877-1915/1917/1919), and many of the African American authors of this period are oftentimes subsumed by the Harlem Renaissance or completely forgotten. Indeed, this period has historically been named *The Dark Ages of Recent American History*, *The Decades of Disappointment*, *The Nadir of American Race Relations*, *The Age of the Negro Nadir*, and *The Age of Lynching and Jim Crow* (cf. Bruce Jr. 1989; McCaskill and Gebhard 2006). Due to the negative connotations surrounding this nomenclature, Charles W. Chesnutt (1937 [1931]), one of the most well-known authors from this period, defined this period instead as the *Post-Bellum*, *Pre-Harlem*, referencing its interstitial status and detracting from its characterization simply on the basis of increasing rates of racially-motivated lynching during this time.

Nonetheless, as evinced by the following section, many of this period's phenomenal authors are no longer taught—likely due to the lasting stigma associated with this time—in the United States at the secondary or post-secondary levels, only a small collection of whose names include the following, listed alphabetically: W.E.B. Du Bois, James D. Corrothers, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Alice Moore Dunbar-

Nelson, Mary Weston Fordham, Sutton Elbert Griggs, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, James Weldon Johnson, and Booker T. Washington[2].

2.2 Teaching of African American Literature

Although some may argue that there need not be deliberate instruction in African American literature, as all literature from the United States is *a priori* 'American' literature, West (1973) remarks that "[t]he purpose of teaching black literature is to fill the void left by the exclusion of the black American in many aspects of American education […] students must be made aware of the total literary contributions of all people in this country [including] the black American." (pp. 459-460). After noting that the teaching of such literature is oftentimes strictly symbolic or even exoticized, demarcating African American literature as 'special' and white literature as 'typical,' he suggests that there must come a day where authors like Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Lorraine Hansberry are as commonplace as the widely held 'Literary Greats.' In order to teach such literature, however, he says the (white) educator must be aware of "the historical background of the black American, the historical development of the Negro novel, and contemporary currents in black thought" (p. 462). It is precisely these currents that Gross (2016, p. 28) tackles by rhetorically presenting the twenty-first century reader (i.e. educators in this context) with a list of questions for self-reflection:

> How do we teach African American literature? Or, more precisely, how do we teach African American literature in the age of mass incarceration? How do we teach it in the age of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Sandra Bland, and so many other victims of state and non-state violence? How do we teach African American literature in the era of voter ID laws and the rollback of the Voting Rights Act of 1965? How do we teach it in an era of mass incarceration and for-profit prisons?

Above all, while these two scholars wrote over forty years apart from one another, their beliefs reinforce both the timelessness of literature and also the significance of an analysis that transcends beyond analyses rooted solely in *New Criticism* and *Reader-Response Theory*.

The question remains, however, as to the actual selection of such works. Fortunately, Whitlow (1975) created, distributed, and collated responses from a questionnaire submitted to two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities, in order to identify how widely African American literature is being taught and which literary pieces are most frequently selected. This resulted in three overarching conclusions. First, if the school has greater student enrollment, it is more likely that there will exist courses specifically focusing on African American literature. Second, if the school is a public institution, it is more likely to offer such courses than its private counterparts. Third, there is remarkable similarity among institutions in the choice of authors and specific literary works. As opposed to non-fictional essays and speeches, fictional genres dominate these courses. Additionally, the five most commonly taught authors included, in descending order, the following: Richard Wright, Ralph Elison, James Baldwin, Imamu Baraka, and Langston Hughes. Unsurprisingly, these are generally the names that still constitute most of the African American literature to which secondary students are exposed almost five decades later.

[2] Some twenty-five literary works by these authors have been digitized and reformatted for use in the secondary classroom at the following link: http://troyspier.com/OER/.

This is not to say, however, that the fields of African American literature or African American literary theory have remained stagnant. At the post-secondary level, on the contrary, anthologies are now widely employed (see e.g. Graham 2004; Mitchell and Taylor 2009; and Gates Jr. et al. 2014a, 2014b), edited collections emphasize the teaching of African American literature (see e.g. Graham, Pineault-Burke, and Davis 1998), and there exist volumes of African American literary theory or bibliographies (see e.g. Napier 2000; Hudson-Weems 2004; Beaulieu 2006; and Gates Jr. 2014). Unfortunately, not much of this body of scholarship seems to be actively implemented in the secondary curriculum or classroom.

2.3 Literary Theory at the Secondary Level

There are, likely as a result of the continuity of the textbook industry, truly only two competing literary theories to which most secondary students are exposed: *New Criticism* and *Reader-Response Theory* (cf. Appleman 2009). Rather than speculate on the impressionistic objectives of these two analytical perspectives, we will, instead, consult the primary sources to understand their implementation more fully.

New Criticism has its roots in the 1940s/1950s as an overly formalistic approach to literature. As a result, it has often been described as the theory in which the author is 'dead,' as his or her life, personal experiences, etc. should have no bearing on the reading of a work. In fact, if an author has created a piece of literature that has genuine merit, then this should be borne out by the reading itself. Thus, recurse to the biography of the author is only a last resort[3], as Wimsatt and Beardsley noted in *The Intentional Fallacy* (1946, pp. 468-469, emphasis added):

> We argued that *the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art*. […] One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? *If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do*. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem.

This also indicates, however, that the reader him- or herself plays a somewhat passive role in the reading process, as the reader is the agent responsible for using the literary work as both the object of study *and* the tool of inquiry. In a college-level textbook released shortly before Wimsatt and Beardsley's seminal work but reprinted well into the 1970s/1980s, Brooks Jr. and Warren (1949, p. ix, emphasis added) proposed three principles of formalism to be recalled during every reading and subsequent literary analysis:

> 1. *Emphasis should be kept on the poem as a poem.*
> 2. *The treatment should be concrete and inductive.*
> 3. A poem should always be treated as an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation. [...] These analyses are intended to be discussions of the poet's adaptations of his means to his ends: *that is, discussions of the relations of the various aspects of a poem to each other and to the total communication intended.*

[3] It is for this reason that the oft-quoted literary semi-aphorism was born: "The author is dead."

On the other hand, a more reader-centric approach has recently come to dominate many classrooms at the secondary level. Spearheaded by Wolfgang Iser and as a direct response by the formalism espoused earlier, *Reader-Response Theory* attempts to position the reader's personal experiences, opinions, and insight alongside the literary work itself. This is not to say that the reader had previously been entirely dismissed; however, it became apparent that the agency involved in the writing process should logically and analogously also be translated into an active role in the reading process. To this end, Iser (1994, p. 265ff, own translation) remarked in *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie Ästhetischer Wirkung* that a literary work is not a self-contained system from which meaning can be accessed directly; instead, literature contains 'gaps' or 'blank spaces' into which the readerly experience can—or perhaps should—be embedded during the process, which approximates the relevant meaning during that particular reading:

> Ist der Text ein System solcher Kombinationen, dann muß er auch eine Systemstelle für denjenigen haben, der die Kombination realisieren soll. [...] Denn es kennzeichnet die Leerstellen eines Systems, daß sie nicht durch das System selbst, sondern nur durch ein anderes System besetzt werden können. [...] Leerstellen regulieren daher die Vorstellungstätigkeit des Lesers, die nun zu Bedingungen des Textes in Anspruch genommen wird.
>
> [If the text is a system of such combinations, then it also must have an [access] point for the person who will realize the combination […] Because it characterizes the gaps of the system that cannot be filled by the system itself, but rather by another system […] Therefore, these gaps regulate the imaginative activity of the reader, which are now used with reference to the text.]

This means, however, that every subsequent reading is influenced directly by one's experiences leading up to that particular moment. Although this is not a point with which the present study disagrees, the typical secondary school student is often less capable of developing genuine connections between his or her own experiences and the text but, rather, in offering either mere platitudes or superficial criticism, thus resulting in my (perhaps pejorative) characterization of *Reader-Response Theory* as 'interpretation by free association,' i.e. students who are not in advanced English/Language Arts courses (Honors or AP) more often define a text on the basis of their own level of interest, resorting to comments regarding which parts were otherwise 'boring' or 'exciting.'

3. CLASSROOM SETTING AND INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

The present study took place during the spring semester of the 2018-19 academic year at a semi-suburban high school in north-central New Jersey and had, at the time of instruction, slightly over one thousand students (N=1,227). The instruction described here, however, was undertaken among four sections of tenth-grade students, constituting a total of eighty students (n=80) with approximately equal distribution among the sections. Each instructional session lasted seventy-five minutes, and three-quarters of this time was dedicated explicitly to discussion of and engagement with the literature, while the remainder of the session was allocated for daily activities, including a journal response, editing activity, new vocabulary, and independent reading, all of which supported and supplemented formal instruction.

It should be noted, however, that students had been exposed earlier in the year to different literary units in which authorial and readerly positionality, argumentation (*pathos*, *ethos*, *logos*, and *kairos*), allusions/intertextuality, and close reading were emphasized. As a result, they had spent substantial time in lexical acquisition and transparent discussions of the relationship between 'form' and 'content,' relying upon textual evidence to explain and exemplify the arguments presented. Thus, it must be understood that

the conversations analyzed in Section 4 are not solely the result of student engagement with a singular African American novel, but rather the continuation of such instruction with other complex texts from ethnic American literature (e.g. Apess' *An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man*), neither of which was in the curriculum and both of which required departmental approval.

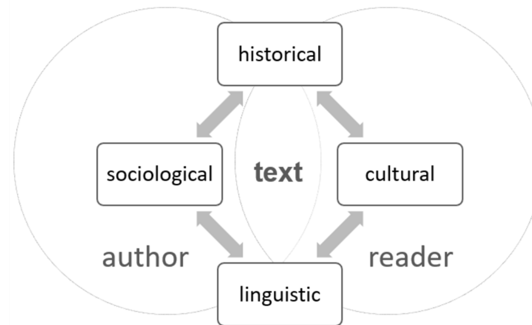
Nevertheless, this instructional unit was taught during a period of four weeks (ten sessions); relied upon an eleven-chapter novel by James Weldon Johnson (1912 [1927]), i.e. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*; foregrounded a variety of sociocultural, historical, linguistic, and literary topics; and was designed to allow for greater skill development in deeper rhetorical analysis of the relationship between the textual and sociological elements discussed. In particular, students were required to complete daily reading and to come to class with a completed graphic organizer (see Appendix 1) to demonstrate extensive, independent engagement with the reading prior to instruction. To this end, the graphic organizer contained five separate sections corresponding to the following: (1) unknown vocabulary, people, and places; (2) setting and characters; (3) two significant quotes; (4) a paraphrase of plot; and (5) two questions for in-class discussion. The primary goal was to ensure that students were not only researching and taking notes on unknown lexical items and references, but also to enable their preparedness at any point to advance the discussion, either through the use of their selected direct quotes or questions for clarity/discussion. To this end, the essential questions found in Table 1 below illustrate the overarching goals of this instructional unit.

Table 1: *Essentials Questions Guiding the Unit Plan*

1. How can a person's decisions and actions change his or her life?
2. To what extent does power or the lack of power affect individuals?
3. What is oppression, and what are the root causes?
4. How are prejudice and bias created? How do we overcome them?
5. How can literature serve as a vehicle for social change?
6. What are the causes and consequences of prejudice and injustice, and how does an individual's response to them reveal his/her true character?
7. How do we form and shape our identities?

In order to address these questions and build a bridge between the *New Criticism* and *Reader-Response Theory* to which students had been exposed for their previous decade of instruction, all conversations regarding the text necessitated a heterarchical positioning of the author and reader in relation to the text, which itself rested upon four interconnected dimensions to contribute toward a more nuanced, semiotic understanding. Consequently, students were required to confront not only the literary aspects of these works, but also the sociological, cultural, linguistic, and historical dimensions that inform and contribute to the construction of meaning. Thus, the text itself functioned as the central focus from which non-strictly literary analogues were addressed, as seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: *Framework for Literary Engagement*



To this end, the **historical** dimension was approached through the history of lynching in the United States and the relative temporal positioning (i.e. the interstitial period mentioned earlier) between the era of slavery and the Harlem Renaissance; the **sociological** dimension, through 'race' as a social construct but a lived reality, whiteness and passing as privileges, freedom of movement, microaggressions in everyday life, and the (in)appropriateness of specific vocabulary (e.g. *race*/*ethnicity* and *Negro*/*Colored*/*Black*/*African American*); the **cultural** dimension, through ragtime music, erstwhile 'Negro' spirituals, and songs consumed by popular culture (e.g. Nina Simone's "Strange Fruit"); the **linguistic** dimension, through literary dialect (e.g. African American Vernacular English), diachronic change, and traditional elements of literary analysis (e.g. allusions, characterization, and plot development). Examples of the implementation of these four dimensions can be seen in Appendix 2, where two sample plans are provided for the readers' consideration. These do not contain the specific student learning outcomes or academic standards, as these were not the weekly lesson plans submitted to administrators but rather a guide for the instructor. Similarly, the blank final exam can be found in Appendix 3 and set of responses in Appendix 4 to illustrate what students were able to complete independently by the end of the unit.

Finally, given the demographic makeup of the student population, thorough engagement with each of these domains is necessary for greater understanding, as Wells (1973:463) reminds educators not only of the general value of teaching African American literature but also that "[w]hite middle-class students may or may not have had much contact with blacks. It is important, therefore, to present all issues to ensure or at least stimulate well-rounded consideration when these white students hear about, read stories in newspapers, or see on television news concerning black Americans." Given the particularly heightened ethnic tension in the United States, students gain knowledge from the literary work that enables them to engage with public discourses surrounding the disproportionate violence inflicted upon African Americans by law enforcement, for instance (cf. the list of questions from Gross presented earlier).

4. METHODOLOGY AND STUDENTS' DISCUSSIONS

The present study is inherently interdisciplinary and methodologically is situated firmly within the expansive field of Critical Studies. Thus, not only were the essential questions for this unit constructed within this framework, but the exemplars of students' discussions presented below are similarly understood through these lenses, viz. the valuable perspectives offered by *Critical Discourse Analysis*, *Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis*, *Critical Pedagogy*, and *Conversation Analysis*.

Proponents of **Critical Discourse Analysis** (CDA) insist upon the semiotic primacy of language due to its constituting a social process (cf. Fairclough 2003). As such, CDA refers to a loosely thematically

organized perspective, as opposed to a clearly, narrowly defined methodology, with the shared goal of investigating the "relations between *[sic]* discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships" (van Dijk 1993:249). Thus, any classroom discussion of African American literature from the *fin de siècle* requires acknowledgment not only of the 'inner workings' of the semiotic system (i.e. the text) but also of the positionality of the analyst him- or herself (i.e. the student/reader). Because neither a text nor a reader is free from ideological underpinnings, students' preconceptions—and those of the educator—surface upon closer investigation through CDA. Additional seminal works that foreground these issues include Bloor and Bloor (2013), Fairclough (1995), Janks (1997), Simpson (1993), Simpson and Mayr (2010), van Dijk (1995, 1998), van Leeuwen (2003), Wodak (1989), and Wodak and Meyer (2015).

Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis (CCDA) attempts to apply similar assumptions to educational environments, as classroom discourse, like all other forms of discourse, is constructed on the basis of sociocultural, political, historical, and linguistic factors and capital, which students collectively and individually bring to the classroom. Approaches to such discourse, according to Hammond (2013), tend to focus on one of two areas, which is generally informed by the theoretical preoccupations of the researcher, i.e. in purely linguistic terms or from a Conversation Analysis perspective. These broadly refer to 'talk-in-interaction' and 'ways of understanding and constituting the social world,' both of which are considered here. Additionally, the aforementioned essential questions were constructed following Kumaravadivelu (1999:473), who argues that "[t]he objective of language education should be not merely to facilitate effective language use on the part of language learners but also to promote critical engagement among discourse participants; therefore, CCDA should be concerned with an assessment of the extent to which critical engagement is facilitated in the classroom." Other important theoretical contributions of CCDA are found in Cazden (2001), Christie (2002), and Rymes (2008), and the application of CCDA to classroom interaction can be found in, among others, Rogers (2011) and Sadeghi et. al (2012).

On the other hand, **Critical Pedagogy** (CP) aims to instrumentalize teaching as a student-centered, inquiry-based activity, as educational institutions are, following the bold claim in Postman and Weingartner (1969), "the principal medium for developing in youth attitudes and skills of social, political and cultural criticism." This means that instruction should not be inherently—or perhaps solely—guided by fulfilment of academic standards or the approximation of predefined 'correct' answers, but rather as an endeavor in which students are encouraged to question and, where appropriate, dismantle the *status quo*. This is, of course, not the typical approach toward the secondary classroom, which is precisely why the essential questions outlined in Table 1 urge students to become "instruments […] who have been educated to recognize change, to be sensitive to problems caused by change, and […to] have the motivation and courage to sound alarms when entropy accelerates to a dangerous degree."

Finally, **Conversation Analysis** (CA) enables scholars to 'make sense' of otherwise mundane everyday interactions. This distinct discipline developed during the late 1960s and early 1970s in the coalescence of sociological research and applied linguistics through investigation into topics ranging from institutional speech on a suicide hotline, the telling of dirty jokes, or the ways in which conversations come to an end (see e.g. the overview in Ten Have 2007). Through the expansion of CA through Gricean pragmatics (cf. Grice 1975), the publication of formal conventions for transcription (cf. Jefferson 2004), the analysis of micro-level conversational 'moves' *vis-à-vis* appropriate adjacency pairs (cf. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1997), and the release of longer introductions to the discipline as a whole (see e.g. Lerner 2004, Ten Have 2007, and Clift 2016), the field has blossomed.
Consequently, as mentioned previously, each of the three short excerpts listed below arrive from successive Socratic Circles in which students were free to discuss—and guided by their completed

graphic organizers—any issues in the text that caught their attention and merited additional discussion, contextualization, and/or collaboration with classmates. Although the educator established the basic guidelines of the Socratic Circle, viz. that each voice or opinion is valued and that socially conventionalized 'rules' still apply (e.g. not insulting or interrupting one another), he remained otherwise inaccessible to the students unless questions were raised and the class was unable to reach a consensus or answer their own questions. In particular, the three examples below all engage issues of narratorial identity and address in one way or another almost all of the essential questions.

The first example of student metatalk, found in Table 2, contains an excerpted conversation undertaken primarily by three students but certainly contextualized more by one of these three. Student A begins the discussion with a prepositioned, epistemic clausal hedge ('*I think [...]*') that qualifies a degree of uncertainty about the comment s/he[4] is about to make. There is a distinction made between the 'real world,' which the narrator is now experiencing and which is directly contrasted with a proposed 'non-real world' prior to his witnessing of the lynching, i.e. an indirect proposition that the narrator's life was easier before this moment. S/he then continues by referencing the lynching directly but making a joke about students' classroom preparedness, presumably to save face as a result of the earlier insinuation about the narrator's life. This is met by laughter from multiple students, including those who are otherwise unrepresented in this particular segment.

Using this laughter as affirmation, Student A offers more context about the internal change of the narrator, drawing an impersonalized comparison between the spirituals he heard in church and the samples from prior instruction, viz. "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and a few work songs in Jackson (1999). This is positioned immediately before a characterization of the lynching as a way of questioning the shift in narratorial identity ('*[...] it was like a full 180 degree turn*'). One also sees that this student has not quite mastered the nuance of terminology, utilizing a non-quotative usage of the word 'colored.' Nonetheless, Student B establishes a conceptual bridge through latched speech between the abstract reflection of Student A and the text, after which Student C's latched contribution provides textual evidence for the feelings of the narrator, i.e. because the narrator has been able to pass as non-black during the many episodes of his adult life, recognizing the fate of the lynched man as a possible outcome for himself—under different circumstances—created inside him a desire to be distanced physically and ethnically from African Americans more broadly. This commentary represents an awareness both of identity development and of hierarchical power differentials, which can have drastic consequences for those involved.

Table 2: *Excerpt of Student Discussion #1*

A:	I think the narrator like really got a taste of how cruel the real world is like towards the end of chapter 10 when he saw like the lynching happening yall know what lynching is at this point since everyone did their homework RIGHT=
Multiple:	=(LF)
A:	I love how like there was a sudden change in the narrator's heart when he was like YE:::AH after he went to this church he was like seeing the songs that the people were singing like the one ( ) mr spier played on the smartboard he was like so happy and he like agreed to like for the teacher or something like that or the student and it was like

[4] All pronominal references here are ambiguated for anonymity and to prevent readers from, for instance, assuming that a particular student is male or female due to the use of a specific discourse marker, such as hedges or tag questions.

SHI::ny or something like that um he agreed to go with him for a little bit and then once he witnessed the lynching it was like a full 180 degree turn all of a sudden he was like he turns back on his race of like the colored man no longer identifies as colored or white he just wants to be he sees himself as and when he goes back to new york it explicitly states that he's ashamed or something like at the end of chapter ten he is so ashamed that hes like turning his back on the whole entire thing like he doesn't want to be a part of like this whole entire situation=

B: =its (2) to add to that remember it said like he would change his name and like I don't know like who=

C: =change my name, raise a mustache, and let the world take me for what it would and then he said he was leaving the negro race out of shame unbearable shame after seeing what happens with the lynching and after (2) what is it called (.) the big meeting he really didnt change a lot

On the other hand, the second example of student metatalk in Table 3, which occurred shortly after the first excerpt, brings attention to an earlier scene when the narrator is in transit. Although latched speech is still common, it occurs far less frequently in this sample, as new student voices were heard and conventions of turn-taking followed more closely. Nonetheless, Student D initiates this portion of the conversation by stating more succinctly that the narrator has been the firsthand witness of prejudice to a degree unseen before, though there is another epistemic hedge (‘*I mean*’) to indicate uncertainty or a lack of confidence. It is, thus, unsurprising that Student C successfully initiates other-repair when Student D incorrectly identifies the specific mode of transportation. However, this does not impede the flow of the conversation, as Student D quickly continues where s/he left off, mentioning tacitly that a conversation took place near the narrator in which words were exchanged to indicate racist beliefs. Most importantly, Student D is able to acknowledge that there are multiple instantiations of prejudice, i.e. it is not only realized through deliberate acts of violence.

Student E makes this more explicit by relating the ‘inconvenien[ce]’ of blackness to the aforementioned conversation to the actual lynching. Once again, Student A emphasizes this ‘inconvenient’ truth and concedes that it appears, at least to the reader, that this transformation has quite quickly taken place, hinting that bread crumbs of such a change must have been planted in the mind of the reader prior to this particular scene, a point with which multiple students agreed through verbal affirmation. Next, Student E begins with self-repair, calling attention to his/her early use of the word ‘inconvenient’ as perhaps missing the mark, instead describing the narrator’s feelings toward blackness as ‘disgraceful.’ Student F’s utterance latches onto this remark, references both lexical items, relies on adverbial qualifiers (‘*kinda:*’) and an intraclausal tag question (‘*you know’*), and establishes a continuum (*inconvenient → disgraceful → disgusted*). Finally, Student E returns to the broader issue and questions the normalization of violence against African Americans. These keen observations, though impressionistically unlikely from secondary students, are feasible and realistic if students are provided with the appropriate tools to construct and access meaning.

Table 3: *Excerpt of Student Discussion #2*

D: that chapter he sees a lot more prejudice than he has I mean when he was on the what is it uh the [boat

C: the train]

D: he saw the man complaining about um the guy sitting in that one seat sitting next to him I mean you get to see that like that's another side of prejudice=

E: =yeah and uh (1) in that like same part (.) its kinda funny cuz at the beginning we have a quote to be black its no disgrace to be black, but its often inconvenient and like he really

starts to see that as the chapter moves on (.) with like (2) the quote thing and then on the train when they were arguing about equal rights uh and then later on in uh even more like drastic sense with the lynching

A: but in a sense suddenly all of a sudden he said that he was [ashamed of his race

Multiple: yea::h]

E: yeah now its not only inconvenient but disgraceful to him=

F: =him because I think it started off as him seeing it as an inconvenience you know on the boat but then I think once he saw the lynching he kinda:: realized that he did feel disgraceful there was also like a build up of like being unsure about his identity to going to you know a little bit uncomfortable to just being completely disgusted by it

E: the fact that it could be the inconvenience part is a little scary because it was like not normalized but like the man who was in the hotel with him oh where they were staying like was just like oh lets just go outside you know it wasnt like he was like making a big scene out of it he was just (2) like you know what I mean almost as if it was normalized

Finally, although the author of the present study managed to remain an observer for most of these conversations, as prior teacher-directed instruction was provided, he was asked directly at one point by a student to respond to a question about the supposed criminal behavior of the victim of the lynching, as seen in the third example of student metatalk below in Table 4. Student G offers an incredibly insightful comment about the binary opposition of oppressor/oppressed, supporting a previous comment by Student I and asking his/her classmates for validation. Student H does not acknowledge this remark directly but, instead, questions the ethnic identity of the narrator. As a biracial man who has been able to pass for much of his adult life, he is now confronted with the two most damning aspects of each according to the novel: To be white means to perpetuate horrific crimes, but to be black means to be guilty from birth and the potential victim of such crimes.

Thus, Student I asks the teacher which crime(s) the narrator was accused of having committed, to which the teacher guides the conversation in a direction that activates their prior knowledge. The teacher makes an unintentional joke to contrast the severity of a crime like murder or rape with a petty crime like the theft of a shovel, to which multiple students laugh and reiterate the word ‘shovel’ with elongation. This, however, leads Student H and Student G to question the basic veracity of the accusation in the first place, to which Student J reminds us that this lynching was carried out by the people without the rule of law, mentioning that there is no reference to a credible witness. Student H’s subsequent utterance is latched and affirmative, after which point Student G mentions that the real impetus for the lynching was simply to take the life of an African American. Although not represented in this excerpt, other students felt comfortable to enter the conversation at this point, recognizing that this behavior, contrary to what Student G historicizes, is analogous to contemporaneous crimes against African Americans, particularly by law enforcement.

Table 4: *Excerpt of Student Discussion #3*

G: thats almost what I was saying before how you know picking one side looking at the situation like [Student I] said you can either be oppressor or the one being oppressed you know?

H: do you wanna be black in a time period where black people get burned alive I dont know what that guy did but he probably did something pretty big because the lynching was usually about little things like do you really wanna be that NO YOU DONT but you dont want to be associated with people who burn other people either

I: what was he accused of what was he accused of mr spier

Teacher: what are (1) perhaps two of the worst crimes you can commit in a civilized society?

G:	murder
Teacher:	murder (3) and?
I:	rape=
Teacher:	=rape OK so were not talking about petty crimes they dont think that maybe he stole somebody's shovel=
Multiple:	=(LF) a sho::vel (LF)
Teacher:	they actually scream out murder they say rape because thats what they're accusing this individual of having committed=
H:	=but what did he actually do?
G:	do you think he actually did that?
J:	well the lynching was (2) done (1) without (.) an official trial so there was no actual witness=
H:	=yeah they were just accusations=
G:	=yeah there was probably no real person who did it (1) it was just probably (.) they probably (.) just wanted him to be killed so they said an accusation and it just escalated and thats just how it used to happen you didnt have to prove it you just had to say it

5. CONCLUSION

The present study has attempted to reach and present two overarching goals. First, the manner in which theory is integrated into the secondary classroom does not effectively and fully enable literary works to function as a vehicle for broader understanding of the world and engagement with the text. This is primarily due to the restrictive implementation of *New Criticism* and/or *Reader-Response Theory*. Given the tragic history surrounding race relations in the United States, accessing the deeper meaning of African American literature, particularly from the Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem period, requires students to be equipped with a different skillset, i.e. the proposed framework for literary engagement in Section 3. Second, once educators transition from either of those approaches and start to incorporate more lesser-known—or at least lesser-taught—voices in the classroom, particularly those that address more polemic topics from ethnic American issues, utilizing discourse analytic perspectives to frame essential questions and develop inquiry-based instruction/discussion results in perhaps unlikely, yet fascinating insights from students. In fact, as many educators expect far too little from typically-functioning students in secondary classrooms, we oftentimes do not see them rise to the occasion and engage the sociological, cultural, historical, and linguistic dimensions of a literary work, instead foregrounding prototypical aspects of literary elements.

Nevertheless, there are other areas where additional research into these areas could expand not only the results of the present study, but which also can expand access more broadly to such literary works. Given the ever-increasing incorporation of Open Educational Resources (OERs) at the post-secondary level and the growing financial deficits experienced at the secondary level, it would seem straightforward that practitioners and administrators alike could learn something from this ‘win-win’ situation. Because the twenty-first century student is well equipped to and familiar with electronic resources, especially as a result of the consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic, literary works that have entered the public domain are eligible for inclusion at no expense to school districts, assuming departmental or institutional approval. Still, although three approaches to discourse analysis are offered here (Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis) in conjunction with socially proactive instruction (Critical Pedagogy), this is not an avenue that has been widely pursued in the past. Indeed, while much scholarship has highlighted the importance of educational metatalk (student-student, student-teacher, teacher-teacher) and the significance of scaffolded essential questions to access literary

elements, the oft-touted, highly desired 'critical thinking' is only truly accessible when Critical Studies are understood and actively applied to the development of unit plans prior to instruction.

Additionally, as described throughout each part of Section 2, greater research into the incorporation of literary theory into and the teaching of African American literature at the secondary level, especially from the *fin de siècle*, is a moral imperative. As the present study took place among a mostly ethnolinguistically homogenous student body, which itself is reflective of many rural and semi-suburban school districts in the United States, it is important for our instruction on such literature to internalize the following two quotes:

> "America would not have been America without Blacks and America cannot become America until it confronts not only the Blacks but the gifts the Blacks bear" (Bennett 1964).
> "I judge there is not a single Negro writer who is not, at least secondarily, impelled by the desire to make his work have some effect on the white world for the good of his race" (Johnson 1928).

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Appendix 1: *Blank Graphic Organizer*

Name: ______________________________________ Date: ________ Section: ____

Close Reading Graphic Organizer

Part A: General Information

Novel: **Author:** **Chapter:**	*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* James Weldon Johnson
Pages:	

Part B: Unknown Vocabulary, People, and Places

Part C: Setting and Characters

Part D: Significant Quotes

1. 2.

Part E: Paraphrase of Plot

Part F: Questions for Discussion

1.

2.

Part G: Other Notes

Appendix 2: *Sample Teacher Guide A*

Name: ____________________________________ **Date:** ________ **Section:** ____

***The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Chapter 3)**

Part A: ***Vocabulary***		
assail	unsanctioned	diminish
stoic	bombastic	discern
derive	peroration	countenance

Part B: ***Comprehension Questions***
1. What is the first book the narrator reads that actually resonates with him and teaches him something not only about himself but also his existence within the world? Why? 2. Why did the narrator and his mother *actually* move to the North? What does his parents' relationship look like? 3. After his mother becomes ill, what happens to their income source? How does it change?

Part C: ***Higher-Order Questions***
1. Since the narrator's love of reading is so often mentioned, is there any significance to the particular individuals alluded to? Think about King David and Robert the Bruce from his past, but also consider Frederick Douglass and Alexander Dumas from his present. 2. When the narrator begins to question his plans after high school, what does he start to request? How do the tastes of his mother and father differ when it comes to college? Why is this an important issue?

Part D: Applications
1. The narrator remarked, "I have since known of colored men who have been chosen as class orators in our leading universities, of others who have played on the Varsity foot-ball and baseball teams, of colored speakers who have addressed great white audiences." Is there equal and fair representation of people of different ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds? 2. After listening to Shiny's speech, the narrator states, "I felt leap within me pride that I was colored; and I began to form wild dreams of bringing glory and honor to the Negro race." Track the development of this character's thoughts toward himself from the beginning.

Appendix 2: *Sample Teacher Guide B*

Name: ______________________________________ Date: ________ Section: ____

***The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Chapter 7)**

Part A: *Vocabulary*			
habitue	multitude	dapper	condescension
lithograph	tragedian	homage	delineate

Part B: *Comprehension Questions*
1. What is the appearance of the place that the narrator refers to as the "Club"? What takes place there? 2. The narrator notices a very distinctive woman who enters, and he watches her night after night. What interests the narrator so much about her? Why is it so important?

Part C: *Higher-Order Questions*
1. Although the narrator previously expressed his disappointment with the residents of Atlanta through his delineation of black individuals into one of three groups, he engages in the same activity in New York City with white individuals. How are these two taxonomies related? What does their creation say about the narrator? 2. The narrator has hinted quite a few times already that there are certain characteristics that serve to define someone as cultured. In fact, this chapter indicates that world travel, bilingualism, and musical abilities do just that. Do you agree or disagree? What do you believe makes someone "cultured"?

Part D: Applications
1. If you had to take all of the people in your school, in your community, or in your country and reduce them to three groups, what would the groups be and how would they be demarcated?

Appendix 3: *Final Exam for Students*

Name: ______________________________________ Date: ______ Section: ____

Novel Test ____ / 40

The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man

Directions: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) was initially published anonymously at the *fin de siècle* by James Weldon Johnson. The following three questions require you to read the prompt, to examine critically and draw inspiration from the provided quote, and to provide evidence from your understanding of the text. You may use all of your graphic organizers to bolster your answers. Although I will not count your sentences, responses of fewer than ten sentences likely have not exemplified the question sufficiently.

	WOW!!	Excellent	Very Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Question #1	10	9	8	7	≤6
Question #2	10	9	8	7	≤6
Question #3	10	9	8	7	≤6
Mechanics	10	9	8	7	≤6

(1) **The narrator frequently references the "Race Question" in the United States. What is the explicit or implicit role of prejudice in the novel? Which specific events or scenes indicate to the reader that issues related to prejudice are still present during the lifetime of the narrator? Think about the narrator's preconceptions and those that are both *spoken* and *acted out* by other characters.**

"These pages also reveal the unsuspected fact that prejudice against the Negro is exerting a pressure which, in New York and other large cities where the opportunity is open, is actually and constantly forcing an unascertainable number of fair-complexioned colored people over into the white race" (Johnson, Preface, p. 2).

(2) **Although cultural and artistic practices (such as music, opera, literature, etc.) are present in and intertwined throughout the novel, arguably the most important arrives in the form of music—both sung and played. In fact, the reader is even introduced to call-and-response songs, many of which have a religious overtone—think about the one heard in class. What role does music play in the life of the narrator? Where does it take him? Who does he meet? When and where did it all begin?**

"Swing low, sweet chariot.
Coming for to carry me home.
I look over yonder, what do I see?
Coming for to carry me home.
Two little angels coming after me.
Coming for to carry me home" (Johnson, Chapter 10, p. 15)

(3) **The narrator has always had a tenuous relationship with his own identity. In fact, he spends much of the novel trying to figure out who he truly is and where he belongs, even traveling in his adult life from one city, state, or country to another, sometimes multiple times. There are, however, four places in particular that impact his identity greatly: Jacksonville, FL; Atlanta, GA; New York, NY; and Paris, France. What are his experiences and lifestyle like in each of these places, and how do they impact his identity and future?**

> "When I reached New York, I was completely lost. I could not have felt more a stranger had I been suddenly dropped into Constantinople. I knew not where to turn or how to strike out. I was so oppressed by a feeling of loneliness that the temptation to visit my old home in Connecticut was well nigh irresistible. I reasoned, however, that unless I found my old music teacher, I should be, after so many years of absence, as much of a stranger there as in New York; and, furthermore, that in view of the step which I had decided to take, such a visit would be injudicious. I remembered, too, that I had some property there in the shape of a piano and a few books, but decided that it would not be worth what it might cost me to take possession" (Johnson, Chapter 11, p. 1).