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THE MONSTERS UNDER THE BED AND INSIDE THEIR HEADS:
ADOLESCENTS' AESTHETIC TRANSACTIONS WITH GOTHIC TEXTS IN THE
READING CLASSROOM

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside their Heads: Adolescents' Aesthetic Transactions

with Gothic Texts in the Reading Classroom

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This qualitative study employed case study methodology and design research to examine what aesthetic transactions adolescent students constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit created by the researcher. Secondary inquiries included descriptions of the aesthetic transactions that participants constructed during the unit, as well as tensions that arose in the development of aesthetic transactions. This study also explored what participant Discourse(s) evolved, as well as which one(s) remained unchanged at the conclusion of the unit. The study was conducted in a seventh grade reading classroom in a Central New Jersey suburban middle school. Eight students (four male and four female) comprised the study's participants.

A combination of thematic and discourse analyses was used during and after data collection. The data was triangulated across interviews, participant conversations, classroom observations, and unit artifacts. The findings revealed that participants constructed myriad aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with the Gothic unit texts. Participants enhanced these initial aesthetic

transactions and formed new ones individually and collectively as a result of pedagogical practices that also nurtured their construction of aesthetic transactions.

As a result of these unit dynamics, in which aesthetic transactions were prioritized in the text and related context, the students were positioned as active apprentices within the unit experience. Participants gleaned literary, self, and world knowledge as a result of these aesthetic transactions. These understandings aided in the development of their various Discourses, which held positive implications for them academically and personally. The findings suggest that prioritizing adolescents' construction of aesthetic transactions in both the text choices and related context is critical in order for academic reading to be a gratifying and meaningful experience that educates the whole person.

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Dedication

To my students,

You are the reason behind this work,

Your voices will be heard;

To my parents,

Kathy and Joe Renner

my first and most beloved teachers;

to my sister,

Kathleen Renner,

my forever friend and biggest cheerleader;

and to my husband,

Ray Del Nero,

without your steadfast commitment,

unending patience, and unwavering faith,

this study would not exist;

and finally, to my children,

Grace and Ray,

my life's greatest joy, and reminder

of how the beautiful reading journey

begins.

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What are/ : Monsters
There's a different one for all
For some can make a fall
For a child
Bully or fictional figure
That makes them insecure
For the teens
Society or peers
Can draw out all tears
Monsters to me
Carry the demons inside
Killing spirits
Killing souls inside
We want to hide
For the monsters are out
On the prowl
Ready to attack
But
We shall hit them
Oh right back!

*-Written by student participant, Matt (pseudonym)
at the conclusion of the Gothic unit*

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Are the monsters imagined? The childhood ones. Figments of our imagination. The creatures lurking under our beds. Threatening our childhood security, yet vicariously transport us into other exciting worlds and experiences. The stuff of our fears and fantasies. Are the monsters real? The ones in the news. We see them every day. Corrupt authority, natural disasters, and catastrophic events. Testing our endurance. Unsettling life as we know it. Are the monsters reflected in the mirror? Hidden behind the mask. Demons just below the surface. Do we dare look them in the eye? What do we gain by confronting these monsters?

Matt reflected on the many faces of ‘the monster’ in his poem, above. The poem was written at the conclusion of a Gothic studies reading unit that occurred over a six-month time frame within a seventh grade classroom. This poem showcases the various associations, feelings, attitudes, ideas, and images Matt developed as he studied a particular trope, manifested in Gothic texts. His musings manifest a powerful message: Monsters come in many forms, real and imagined, outside oneself and deep within. However, the poem ends on the hopeful note, “We will hit them, oh right back!” The poem’s concluding line suggests that in the end, the monsters are defeated, or, at the very least, they come up against a prepared opponent.

In many ways, this poem encapsulates the journey and collective story of the eight student participants in response to this unit implementation. Within the context of meaningful academic reading endeavors with Gothic texts, these students gleaned powerful knowledge that enhanced their reading skills and enlarged their self and world views. The goal of the Gothic studies reading unit was a relatively simple one: to make

the literacy experience, as it exists for the adolescent reader, the focus of the academic reading context. This study explores that journey. Like all stories, this one must start from the beginning. The story begins with a problem, or challenge within the context of adolescent academic reading instruction.

The process of assisting students in becoming engaged readers who comprehend academic texts in meaningful and enjoyable ways is a challenging and complex task for adolescent reading teachers. Literacy theorist Louise Rosenblatt (1994/1995/2005) argued that reading engagement acts as a catalyst for students to respond to texts in meaningful ways. In Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) view, such engagement is the starting point of a "literary experience and the construction of meaning" (p. 8). This notion lies at the heart of what Rosenblatt deemed reading 'transactions,' or the meaning that is created when a particular text and individual come together at a specific time and place (Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005). Rosenblatt (1994/1995/2005) was particularly concerned with the promotion of aesthetic transactions, which she defined as attitudes, feelings, associations, ideas, and sensations that occur within the reader during and after a reading event, as she felt that aesthetic experiences are not given enough priority in academic reading (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/ 2005).

Aesthetic transactions are concerned with dynamic, personal, and imaginative interaction with texts (Connell, 2000/2001; Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Takolander, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1995; Vasudevan, 2010). While aesthetically transacting with a text, reading is "living through" not simply developing "knowledge about" texts (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38). In order for students to have such experiences, texts must hold some link to readers' interests, values, feelings, and experiences as they occur within their current

phase of development (Rosenblatt, 1995). Such parallels form the basis of ‘high-interest’ reading materials (Rosenblatt, 1994). These materials hold the potential to engage readers; textual engagement paves the way for aesthetic transactional reading experiences to occur (Rosenblatt, 1995).

The crucial first part of Rosenblatt’s (1994/1995/2005) aesthetic transactional theory involves careful consideration of academic texts in that they contain potential links back to the adolescent reader. However, academic reading does not occur within a vacuum (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). The reading-related activities surrounding texts influence readers’ aesthetic transactional experiences. In Rosenblatt’s (1994/1995/2005) view, texts and the surrounding context (related activities) must work in tandem to nurture aesthetic transactional reading experiences within the classroom context.

In relation to Rosenblatt’s aesthetic transactional theory of reading, linguist and literacy scholar James Paul Gee asserted that academic reading tasks are more meaningful when students see the connectivity between what they are doing outside of school to what is occurring in the classroom; this connectivity, in turn, can promote meaningful evolution or change to individuals’ various Discourses, or multiple identities (Gee 2005/2008). Gee (2008) defined ‘Discourses’ as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities” (p. 3). Specifically, in relation to Discourse studies, Gee defined identity as “different ways of being in the world at different times and places for different purposes” (Gee, 2011, p. 207). According to Gee (2008/2011) everyone is “made up of multiple Discourses and each Discourse represents one of our ever multiple identities” (p. 4). Under Discourse theory lies the value of paying attention to what

students are reading outside the classroom as a way to inform academic reading practices (Gee 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995; Wilson & Casey, 2007). Such an alliance promotes the social nature of reading and shows students that what they care about matters in the classroom; thus, academic reading experiences become more engaging, relevant and meaningful (Gee, 2005/2008).

Though Rosenblatt (1994/1995) and Gee (2005/2008) approached the topic of meaningful academic literacy experiences from two different perspectives (Rosenblatt, a literacy theorist and Gee a linguist) their research shares a common theme: valuing what students are connected to and interested in and finding a means to incorporate these interests within the classroom as a means to improve students' academic reading experiences. Both Rosenblatt (1994/1995) and Gee (2005/2008) argued that engaging students in personally meaningful and relevant academic reading experiences is critical to literacy learning as a whole. Within this message lies the consideration of the texts that adolescent teachers utilize in the reading classroom and the pedagogical techniques that accompany them.

This study explored adolescent students' construction of aesthetic transactions with texts within the reading classroom. A secondary focus involved paying attention to what, if any, student Discourses evolved as they engaged in these aesthetic transactional experiences. Specifically, in order to examine such processes, I (with the assistance of the teacher participant) designed a reading unit that was implemented in a seventh grade reading classroom. The unit texts are of a genre that is prevalent in adolescents' out-of-school literacy experiences: Gothic literature (Blackford, 2012; Coats, 2008; Hogle, 1999; Jackson, Coats, & McGillis, 2008; McGillis, 2008). In considering a genre

prevalent in adolescent students' leisure reading practices, this study explored how adolescent students aesthetically transact with Gothic texts when those texts are brought into the reading classroom in the form of both well-known contemporary and traditional lesser-known texts. The textual links between the Gothic as a literary genre and adolescence as a developmental phase provided the basis for student construction of aesthetic transactions. Related discussions and activities that nurtured the aesthetic reading experience enhanced readers' aesthetic transactional text experiences. This research illuminates what encourages and discourages students from constructing aesthetic transactions with texts throughout the academic reading process. Such information is critical in better understanding the relationship between text choices, students' out-of-school literacy experiences, reading-related activities, and Discourse alignment and subsequent development as they relate to adolescents in the academic setting.

Study Rationale and Research Significance

Research documents a lack of engagement amongst adolescents in academic reading practices (IRA Position Statement; N.J. Task Force on Middle Grade Literacy Education, 2004). A lack of engagement in academic reading directly relates to students' ability to aesthetically transact with texts; students often feel disconnected from assigned academic texts, making the construction of aesthetic transactions difficult (Gee 2005/2008; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt 1994/1995; Vasudevan, 2007; Wilson & Casey, 2007). Research also illustrates that out-of-school literacy experiences are undervalued in the adolescent reading classroom (Gee 2005/2008; Guthrie, 2005/2008; International

Reading Association Adolescent Literacy Position Statement, 2009; Vasudevan, 2007; Wilson & Casey, 2007).

Students often feel that assigned texts are irrelevant to their interests and experiences and fail to connect to their social practices as conducted outside of the classroom (Gee, 2008; Gibson, 2010; Hull & Schwartz, 2001; IRA Position Statement; N.J. Task Force on Middle Grade Literacy Education, 2004). As such, students are often unable to engage in academic reading practices that meaningfully align and subsequently influence their various Discourses (Guthrie, 2005/2008). Research suggests that adolescent reading classrooms do not afford enough opportunities for students to aesthetically experience academic texts. They do not readily consider what texts adolescents value as a means to potentially encourage aesthetic transactional reading experiences (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005). Nor do related reading tasks frequently capitalize on the aesthetic reading experience, which aids in the construction of aesthetic transactions (Rosenblatt, 2005). Lack of engagement negatively influences students' overall attitudes towards academic reading practices (Guthrie, 2008; IRA Position Statement, 2009; N.J. Task Force on Middle Grade Literacy Achievement, 2004). There are not enough opportunities for teachers to help students forge paths to becoming life-long readers who acknowledge the pleasure and wisdom derived from meaningful experiences that occur when students aesthetically transact with texts (Rosenblatt 1994/1995; Wilson & Casey, 2007).

Particularly in the United States, this is a critical point in time for the future of students' aesthetic transactional experiences in the classroom. Schools across the U.S. are implementing national Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that have major

implications for academic reading in terms of what is taught and how it is taught. These reading standards call for adolescents to ‘read deeply’ and achieve complexity in textual comprehension; however, it is unclear (based on the actual rhetoric of the reading standards) where students’ textual interests and their aesthetic transactions play a role in regards to this comprehension goal (www.corestandards.org; Pearson, 2012; Wixson, 2010). In order for students to comprehend texts in the means the CCSS outline, students’ aesthetic transactions with texts during and after reading events must be prioritized in curricular designs. These transactions are the catalyst for textual understanding and enjoyment (Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005). One means of accomplishing this goal is embracing students’ out-of-school reading interests within the classroom (Hull & Schultz, 2001).

Despite well-documented resistance and disinterest in ‘school’ reading, both male and female adolescents have an abundance of out-of-school reading experiences with the Gothic literary genre (e.g. Blackford, 2012; McGillis, 2008). This is evident in the recent popularity of Gothic texts such as the *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and the *Hunger Games* series (Blackford, 2012; Jackson, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008; McGillis, 2008). As is often the case, a text can encompass multiple literary genres. Though the texts mentioned above contain numerous themes and elements consistent with the Gothic genre, they also contain elements of other genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and dystopian literature. However, for the purposes of this study, I focused on Gothic traits and themes of these and other texts, and the aesthetic transactions students construct with them.

Though a more comprehensive exploration of the Gothic genre is discussed in a later section, in general, the Gothic genre involves exploring the societal ‘other’ or

‘thing’ existing on the borderlands that both fascinates and horrifies; although this ‘other’ is initially repressed, it ultimately manifests in some mode that permanently changes the text’s reality and ‘Truth’ (Farnell, 2009). The ‘thing’ can be located inside or outside one’s home, family, or self, and gives rise to ambivalent senses of pleasure and horror, or beauty and disgust, in confrontations with the unknown (Farnell, 2009). Exploring a way to incorporate students’ out-of-school reading experiences in the classroom is critical. Neilsen (2006) stated that it is essential to understand what texts resonate with adolescents and why. However, despite its popularity with adolescent audiences, “Surprisingly little critical attention has been paid so far to the Gothic” despite its “mainstream” position in young adult literature (Jackson et al., 2008, p. 1).

This study addresses this gap in the research in exploring how students aesthetically transacted with Gothic texts when they are brought into the classroom setting in the form of well-known popular culture texts and lesser known contemporary and traditional texts. The unit capitalized and extended upon students’ out-of-school literacy experiences; it showcases a means to encourage students’ construction of aesthetic transactions and promote meaningful Discourse alignment and subsequent development within the reading classroom (Gee, 2008).

Undervaluing students’ out-of- school literacies is widely discussed in the literature surrounding adolescent reading; thus, studies are needed that address these issues in a means that educators can directly utilize (Guthrie, 2004; Quirk, Unrau, Ragusa, Rueda, Lim, Velasco, & Loera, 2010). Current research notes the popularity of the Gothic genre with adolescent readers, but does not explicitly explore how this information can be potentially used to inform reading classroom practice (Coats, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008).

This study fills this gap in the research by exploring how adolescent students aesthetically transacted with Gothic texts throughout the reading process within the classroom context. Contrastingly, I also examined what tensions arose in the development of aesthetic transactions during the unit. Such inquiry was conducted with the understanding that a means to encourage engagement with texts involved considering what students are interested in, and that aesthetic transactional experiences are necessary in order for students to meaningfully comprehend a text (Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005). A secondary consideration was the evolution of students' Discourses throughout this experience. However, within this topic, I also explored moments of resistance or tensions that arose in regards to students' aesthetic transactional experiences and/or evolution of students' Discourses. Such tensions occasionally surfaced throughout the unit, such as when a participant expressed not understanding what the point of the story was. Leftstein and Snell (2002) noted that bringing students' out-of-school literacy experiences into the classroom can introduce new and unforeseen dilemmas. Thus, I aimed to present a complex and holistic account of how adolescents responded to this experience.

Adolescent reading research aims to improve classroom conditions for young adults. Research conducted in classrooms, illustrating how reading processes are carried out and interpreted on the ground level, is crucial information for researchers and educational stakeholders, particularly during this critical phase of transition of adopting national standards for reading. This study is one means to explore this overarching topic in specifically examining the aesthetic transactions students constructed with texts of a genre prevalent in their out-of-school literacy experiences.

Research Questions and Methodology

I conducted a single instrument case study (Creswell, 2007) where I explored the aesthetic transactions that students constructed in a six month reading unit using Gothic texts. The classroom teacher taught the unit lessons in her seventh grade reading classroom. I collected, analyzed, and interpreted data under the following questions:

Primary Research Question:

- (1) What aesthetic transactions do adolescent students construct in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit?

Secondary Research Questions:

- (1) What kinds of aesthetic transactions occur during the unit?
- (2) What tension(s) arise in the development of aesthetic transactions during the unit?
- (3) What student Discourse(s) evolve during and after the unit?
- (4) What student Discourse(s) remain unaltered at the conclusion of the unit?

Case study research presents an appropriate tradition for this study because it offers a means of investigating complex social webs, such as adolescent reading experiences, in the classroom (Merriam, 1998). I considered how the Gothic texts, in conjunction with the related activities, encouraged students' construction of aesthetic transactions within the context of the unit experience as a whole. This research was conducted to explore the issue holistically. In particular, the study examined the complexity surrounding the construction of aesthetic transactions as they occurred within the classroom context. I designed the plans for this Gothic reading unit, which the teacher-participant adapted and the students actively altered throughout the experience. Thus, this study also utilized design-based research to transform the status quo in this classroom setting by encouraging adolescent aesthetic transactional experiences within the reading classroom (Kelly, 2003; Lamberg & Middleton, 2009; Rubin, 2011).

As noted by Ruthven, Laborde, Leach, and Tiberghien (2009), design tools “bring into focus the design problem to be addressed and provides a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching activities in addressing that design problem” (p. 340). The problem lies in the fact that many adolescent students find academic texts in reading static and devoid of connectivity and personal relevance (Wilson & Casey, 2007). This study documented a potential solution to this problem by focusing on how students aesthetically transacted with texts that stemmed from out-of-school literacy experiences and any Discourse changes that happened throughout this endeavor.

Conceptual Framework

This study aligns with social constructivism, as I looked at what the nature of reality was for the classroom teacher and her students in regards to the research questions (Creswell, 2007). I conducted this research under the belief that meaningful knowledge arises from studying human practices and the interaction between peoples in social contexts (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998). Reliance on the participants’ views and the aesthetic transactions they constructed with Gothic texts guided this study. This approach aligns with Oldfather’s (2002) social constructivist framework for studying academic reading practices based on the premise that insider views hold “important clues” for understanding the aspects surrounding literacy learning (p. 2). Social constructivism also champions a research process “informed by the needs and aims of the participants,” which is what this study accomplished in exploring students’ responses to an implementation aimed at addressing these issues (Burr, 2003, p. 155).

Exploring students’ aesthetic transactional experiences with texts lies at the heart of this research and is the foundation of one of the major theories that informs my study:

Rosenblatt's aesthetic 'transactional' reading theory. Emphasizing connectivity between individuals' home and academic experiences is at the heart of Gee's research on Discourses, which is the second theory informing my research.

Theoretical Framework

Adolescent Aesthetic Transactional Reading Experiences

Defining aesthetic transactions and textual needs of adolescents. Reader-Response critics value readers' reactions to texts as central to the understanding of reading processes. In their view, books are merely pages with ink spots until a reader engages with the text in a way that results in construction of meaning and understanding (Rosenblatt, 2005). Both the text and the reader are of equal priority and importance (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). One of the most notable Reader-Response critics, Louise Rosenblatt, and her transactional reading theory, informed my rationale for this research.

Reading 'transactions' are defined by Rosenblatt (2005) as follows:

Every reading act is an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context. Instead of two fixed entities acting on one another, the reader and text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation. The 'meaning' does not reside ready-made 'in' the text or 'in' the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text. (p. 7)

Rosenblatt (1994) grounded her transactional reading theory in the work of John Dewey and Arthur Bentley's (1949) coined 'transactional' terminology. Dewey and Bentley (1949) argued against learning as 'interaction' between different factors because it "implies separate self-contained, and already defined entities acting on one another" like "billiard balls colliding" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 17). Instead they proposed 'transactions' or "an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 17). Transactions are

more complex in the fact that the two factors are constantly influencing one another. This adds a component to the text/reader relationship: each transaction between an individual reader and text produces a unique meaning specific to the time and place or context of the merger known as the ‘poem’ (Rosenblatt, 1994).

During a transaction, individual readers’ understandings of the text are created. Each reader will co-create (with the author) a different ‘poem,’ which is what Rosenblatt (1994) referred to as the ‘magic’ of reading:

The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. (p. 20)

In Rosenblatt’s (1994) view, you never understand the needs of a reader without taking into account the interests of the reader at a specific time and place in their development. However, it is important to note that although Rosenblatt’s transactional literacy theory celebrates individual interpretations, it does not support literary relativism, where “each and every personal interpretation is automatically acceptable” (Connell, 2008, p. 109). Indeed, Rosenblatt emphasized how a ‘valid’ text reading includes consideration of the context and purpose of a reading event, is supported by text details, and projects meanings related to the words on the page (Connell, 2008). The job of teachers, then, becomes aiding the students in constructing valid text readings that are a delicate balance between “the organic relation between reader and text in a meaning-making process that also considers continuity and social context” (Connell, 2008, p. 122).

As Connell (1994) noted, crucial to Rosenblatt’s (1994/1995) transactional perspective is “that engagement with and personal response to a text are the starting point of a literary experience and the construction of meaning” (p. 8). Critical to this theory is

considering what the reader needs, brings, and adds to the experience. As Rosenblatt (1995) stated, “Books must hold some link with the young reader’s past and present preoccupations, anxieties, ambitions” (p. 69). Unfortunately, adolescent reading classrooms often do not nurture student construction of aesthetic transactions experiences with academic texts (Rosenblatt, 1995). This study addresses this problem by utilizing texts that adolescents encounter in leisure reading and analyzing reading-related activities in the English classroom.

The efferent and aesthetic reading stances. Transactions, in general, denote the meaning that readers derive from texts. In regards to reading experiences, aesthetic reading and corresponding meaning resides on one side of the continuum, while efferent reading and corresponding meaning is on the opposite end (Rosenblatt, 2005). Efferent reading is a stance where individuals engage with a text in order to acquire information for retention (Rosenblatt, 2005). Texts are read to absorb facts to be used for various forms of recall and analysis (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). Most reading falls somewhere in the middle of the efferent/aesthetic continuum and both are critical to comprehension. However, the efferent mode of reading dominates students’ reading experiences in the academic setting (Cai, 2008; Eisner, 2002; Lewis, 2000; Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005; Vasudevan, 2010). As Greene (2001) noted, aesthetic education is frequently looked at as “frill” and not worth serious academic attention: It is viewed as “fun and games that are not serious.” (p. 19). Such an unbalanced treatment of texts and related reading experiences lead to students dissociating with academic texts, or failing to meaningfully engage with them (Rosenblatt, 2005). Likewise, Rosenblatt (1995) made an analogy

between traditional literature teaching and American spectator sports: “The student sits on the sidelines” while the instructor transacts with texts (p. 57).

Under this dynamic, reading and related tasks often become a matter of finding the ‘right’ answer to satisfy the instructor (Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005). Such passivity in understanding and focus on adult transactional text experiences are not conducive to an environment where students are encouraged to transact meaningfully with texts (Rosenblatt, 1995). Overemphasis on the efferent, at the expense of the aesthetic reading stance, is counterproductive to reading growth; it inhibits students’ imaginations and interest in the material (Rosenblatt, 2005). Over the years, students are schooled to “learn to ignore or distrust their own responses to literature. They may therefore reject literature altogether as irrelevant to them” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 68). Such rejection stunts their academic and personal reading growth (Rosenblatt, 2005).

Contrastingly, Greene (2001) defined aesthetic education (in general) as:

The intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. When this happens, new connections are made in experience, new patterns are formed, new vistas are opened. (p. 6)

Thus, aesthetic education is a process where teachers attempt to nurture an environment conducive to students deriving meaning from a work of art (such as a text) in a means that enlarges their experiences (Greene, 2001). The end result is “intensified consciousness, heightened appreciation. It is not the ability to replicate, to recite, to demonstrate mastery of skills” (Greene, 2001). Eisner (2002) & Greene (2001) also noted how unlike efferent knowledge, aesthetic growth cannot be measured tangibly in traditional assessments, nor is it predictable. These experiences cannot be made to happen,

but teachers can facilitate environments where aesthetic transactions are more likely to occur (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001).

Reader construction of aesthetic transactions with texts. Specifically, in regards to reading, the aesthetic mode involves consideration of the attitudes, feelings, associations, ideas, and sensations that occur within an individual during and after a reading event (Rosenblatt, 2005). The literature review of this study details the specific types of aesthetic transactions that readers construct with texts. However, in general, readers constructed aesthetic transactions that fell into two major categories that I labeled meaningful connection and imaginative contrast. Under the meaningful connection category, readers constructed moments of personal identification with story characters, events, and scenarios (Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1995; Strum & Michael, 2009). For example, an adolescent reader may identify and connect with a fictional character that feels estranged from his or her parents. Readers may learn more about their own lives and experience a sense of comfort and confidence through participation in such moments of textual connectivity.

However, it is important to note that aesthetic transactional possibilities are often oversimplified as only resulting in personal identification with a storyline or character (Cai, 2008; Lewis, 2000). This category represents one large possibility; however, aesthetic reading and its resulting transactions are more complex and varied. On the opposite end of the spectrum, readers also aesthetically transact through vicarious participation in textual circumstance that contrast their lives (Cai, 2008; Howard, 2013; Lewis, 2000, Rosenblatt, 1995). Such circumstances are categorized by textual phenomena readers either cannot experience in real life (falling in love with a vampire,

such as in the *Twilight* series), have yet to experience (for example, the death of a parent as occurs in *Harry Potter* series), or may never experience (standing up to a corrupt president, such as in *The Hunger Games* series).

These aesthetic transactions involve learning through the senses by imaginative participation (Connell, 2000/2011; Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1994; Takolander, 2000; Vasudevan, 2010). As Eisner (2002) noted, aesthetic education engages “the imagination as a means for exploring new possibilities. They enable us to step into the shoes of others and to experience vicariously what we have not experienced directly” (p. 10). These aesthetic transactions prepare adolescents for future feelings and situations they may encounter (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Additionally, they encourage reader development of empathy for people in circumstances contrasting their own (Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1995). Finally, such aesthetic transactions allow adolescents to vicariously step into imaginative worlds and situations that are enjoyable as they stimulate the imagination and allow for escapism from real life (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Likewise, Rosenblatt (2005) argued that in the teaching of literature, instructors’ primary responsibility is “to encourage, not get in the way of, the aesthetic stance,” as such encouragement will nurture passion for reading that will result in academic growth as well as nurture life-long reading enjoyment (p. 83). This goal involves careful consideration of the texts and related activities to ensure that they hold the potential to capitalize and extend upon students’ aesthetic transactional experiences with texts (Rosenblatt, 1995). The job of a teacher is to create settings that make such experiences possible (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1995). My study explored a means to

nurture such an academic setting in utilizing a genre prevalent in students' leisure reading practices.

One of the ways to nurture such a balance is to utilize texts that naturally reside in students' interests. The fact that the Gothic genre plays a prominent role in adolescent students' out-of-school literacy experiences suggests that it may be a meaningful venue for nurturing students' aesthetic transactional experiences within the classroom. Taken together, aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast involved participants actively drawing on reservoirs of past experiences, partaking in various sensations and emotions through vicarious participation, and, as a result, gaining personal, social, and political knowledge that shaped their lives at large; these new understandings influenced participants' various Discourses (Cai, 2008; Eisner, 2002; Gee, 2005/2008; Iser, 1978; Lewis, 2000). Using students' out-of-school literacy experiences as a means to inform classroom practices underlies Gee's work on Discourses, which is the second major theoretical influence on this study.

Aligning students' primary and secondary Discourses.

Discourse theory: An overview. Gee (2005/2008) advocated for the examination of students' out-of-school literacy practices as a means of potentially understanding ways to engage students in personally meaningful academic activities. Such exploration potentially promotes alignment and growth of students' various Discourses. According to Gee (2008) everyone is "made up of multiple Discourses and each Discourse represents one of our ever multiple identities" (p. 4). Identity is defined as "different ways of being in the world at different times and places for different purposes" (Gee, 2011, p. 7). In accordance with Discourse theory, each individual begins with a primary Discourse.

Specifically, Gee (2008) defined primary Discourse as “a culturally distinctive way of being an everyday person” that gives individuals’ their “initial and often enduring sense of self” (p. 156). Primary Discourses denote the Discourse “to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings” (Gee, 2008, p. 201). Individuals’ primary Discourses begin in the home and grow to include other experiences that shape their ever-evolving core sense of self, or everyday ‘non-specialized’ persona (Gee, 2008). These experiences include the influence of relationships that individuals form with extended family, friends, and exposure to aspects of society at large, such as the news, and popular culture in the form of T.V. shows, texts, and the Internet. Individuals’ primary Discourses serve to inform and set up the foundation for subsequent Discourses to develop, known as secondary Discourses (Gee, 2008).

A ‘secondary Discourse is “any way of being a certain kind of person through words, actions, interactions, values, and language-connected to the larger public social institutions” such as school (Gee, 2011, p. 202). Academic reading in a particular classroom setting, for instance, is a secondary Discourse (Gee, 2008). For this secondary Discourse to successfully develop, teachers must take into account what occurs within students’ primary Discourses in relation to reading practices (Gee 2005/2008). Gee (2005) used the term ‘cultural model’ to refer to “often tacit and taken-for-granted schemata that tell a group of people within a Discourse what is typical or normal from the point of view of that Discourse” (p. 721). By the time students are in middle school, they have established cultural models that include an understanding of the norms that govern academic reading.

The most meaningful learning experiences occur when students see the connections between their primary and secondary Discourses, in this case, the connections between leisure and academic reading in a specific classroom context (Gee, 2005/2008). Specifically, in relation to this study, I provided adolescents with numerous opportunities to draw meaningful connections between their literacy practices outside of school (that comprise their primary Discourse) and those within the classroom (developing secondary Discourse) by devising a unit that incorporates both popular culture and traditional texts of a genre prevalent in their leisure reading practices. Such connectivity promoted alignment, and subsequently, meaningful evolution to participants' primary and secondary Discourses.

Discourse alignment. In line with Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) argument that student aesthetic transactional experiences are not given enough consideration within the classroom, Gee (2008) argued that schooling, for a variety of reasons, is often at odds with students' primary Discourse experiences. Students often perceive academic reading experiences as 'alien' or 'oppressive' in relation to their primary Discourses, or out-of-school reading identities (Gee, 2008). Gee argued that identity and identification with learning processes through meaningful connections with previously established Discourses are essential features of learning (Merchant, 2006). Thus, "valuing and including these [home] identities is a pre-requisite to accessing the academic language which is central to school success" (Merchant, 2006, p. 90).

As Gee (2005) rightly noted, meaningful learning cannot occur unless learners make an "extended commitment of self" because learning in a newer domain (academic reading) requires the learner to "take on a new identity" to make a "commitment to see

and value the work” (p. 2). This can only happen if the student understands the relevance of the academic reading practices in terms of how they relate to and extend what they read outside of school (Gee, 2005). Gee (2008) explained that Discourses are not “units or tight boxes with neat boundaries” (p. 155). Individuals’ Discourses are fluid and influence one another in complex and reciprocal ways. As such, “Primary Discourses work out, over time, alignments and allegiances with and against other Discourses, alignments and allegiances that shape them as they, in turn, shape these other Discourses” (Gee, 2008, p. 157).

In order for secondary Discourses, such as academic reading within a classroom context to successfully develop, “alignments and allegiances” between the secondary and primary Discourses must occur (Gee, 2008, p. 157). Gee (2008) argued that the teacher’s job is to encourage such alignment or connectivity by using “culturally relevant materials,” or in this case, texts, students will find personally meaningful because they connect in some way to their primary Discourses (p. 114). Relatedly, Gee asserted that “Classrooms must constitute active apprenticeships in ‘academic’ social practices, and, in most cases, must connect with these social practices as they are also carried on outside the class” (Gee, 2008, p. 180). In Gee’s (2008) view, literacy knowledge is naturally acquired, as opposed to overtly learned. Students glean literacy knowledge when they are positioned as apprentices within the classroom context; under this dynamic, students are actively engaging, questioning, manipulating, and shaping literacy practices in personally meaningful and relevant ways (Gee, 2008). Such interactions occur when teachers utilize culturally relevant materials that connect back to what the students are

doing socially outside of the classroom and afford them the agency to actively interpret these materials (Gee, 2008).

Gee (2008) noted that such apprenticing in culturally relevant materials is connected with identity work, as through such experiences, Discourses meaningfully evolve. This understanding aligns within Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) aesthetic transactional theory of reading as cultivating personal points of engagement with texts holds the potential for encouraging both deeper text and self-knowledge. Consequently, this research utilized Gee's Discourse (2008/2011) theory as it aligned adolescent students' primary and secondary Discourse experiences in using 'culturally relevant' materials, (in this case, Gothic texts) in the classroom setting to promote meaningful Discourse alignment and subsequent development. Related reading discussions and activities afforded students the opportunity to act as apprentices in forging these connections (Gee, 2008).

Exploring students' out-of-school literacy experiences has the potential to nurture aesthetic transactional experiences in the reading classroom. Students' out-of-school literacy experiences, or more specifically in this case, students' leisure reading interests, contains useful information in relation to finding ways to align students' primary and secondary Discourses in regards to reading practices.

Leisure reading practices as holding clues to Discourse alignment. Aesthetic transactional experiences are encouraged by curricula that include popular culture texts alongside more traditionally-based academic texts. Such curricula show students that what they are interested in holds value within the academic classroom setting (Hagood, Alvermann, & Heron-Hruby, 2010; Wohlwend, 2013). Additionally, using popular

culture texts within the classroom as a way to connect students' leisure and academic reading practices promotes student connectivity with more traditional academic texts that may otherwise appear to be irrelevant and unconnected to students' experiences (Hagood, et al., 2010). The literature review of this study details examples of studies that used literacies (such as popular culture texts) from individuals' primary Discourses as a means to encourage Discourse alignment and subsequent development of secondary Discourse.

Popular culture texts are defined as “mass generated print and non-print texts that use multiple modes to entice audiences to use them” (Hagood et al., 2010). Neilsen (2006) discussed how adolescents transact with these texts:

First the text-particularly if it is interesting to the reader/viewer-is incorporated into lived experience; then, it is reread and rewritten so that it is more productive and more able to sustain its original appeal. (Neilsen, 2006, p. 9)

Advocates of utilizing students' out-of-school literacy experiences (such as popular culture texts within the classroom) understand that this information is critical to the ways in which students view reading as connecting back to what occurs outside of the classroom (Harper & Bean, 2006; Heath, 1983; Neilsen, 2006).

Popular Gothic texts such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games* are prevalent in adolescents' leisure reading practices; this prevalence suggests that the genre may be a way to tap into information that will help researchers and educators better understand what kinds of aesthetic transactional experiences are encouraged when an attempt is made to better align students' primary and secondary Discourse experiences with regard to literacy practices.

Situating Theories within the Context of this Study

The underlying message connecting Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) and Gee's (2008/2011) research involves making students the center of literacy endeavors throughout the reading process in order for academic reading to be meaningful (Gee 2008, 2011; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Both Rosenblatt (1995) and Gee (2008) insisted that literacy instruction should be more than skill development, or making students better readers. Transformative literacy experiences, that also enlarge readers' self and world views, hold the potential to make readers better people. Both Rosenblatt (1995) and Gee (2008) argued that such holistic education of the student is critical to their success and growth as individuals; this ideal represents the ultimate aim of academic literacy endeavors. Such growth occurs when academic reading holds relevance and connectivity back to the adolescent reader (Rosenblatt, 1995; Gee, 2008). As such, this study promoted such experiences by prioritizing the aesthetic transactional experience of literature, as it exists for the adolescent reader, throughout the academic reading process.

Despite many similarities, there are notable differences between Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) transactional theory of reading and Gee's (2008) Discourse theory as it relates to literacy. Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) aesthetic transactional theory explores the "lived through" or aesthetic transactional text experience. It is a Reader-Response theory emphasizing the importance of the reader (within the reader-text relationship) under the belief that the reader co-constructs the text. Each reader produces his or her own unique textual meaning; Rosenblatt (1994/1995/2005) believed these meanings must be prioritized within the classroom context. In contrast, Gee's (2008) Discourse theory considers how literacy practices as a whole (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and

viewing) serve to encourage (or discourage) the development of individuals' various Discourses or multiple identities and implications such development hold for academic literacy instruction. Gee (2008) argued that literacy is acquired when students are positioned as active apprentices within the classroom setting, using through study of 'culturally relevant' materials that connect social practices to the classroom.

Aesthetic transactions denote moments in which readers engage in the construction of meaning that holds implications for them as individuals. Over time, these aesthetic transactions can result in transformative experiences that shape participants' Discourses in relation to reading practices. This evolution occurs when newfound knowledge (gained through aesthetic transactions) influences the development of individuals' self and world views in ways that result in meaningful changes to their various Discourses. Within the context of this study, I designed a reading unit implementation aimed at nurturing aesthetic transactional experiences throughout the academic reading process. This design used texts and related activities revolving around Gothic literature, a genre prevalent in adolescent students' leisure reading experiences. The unit included both popular culture and traditional academic texts. Thus, the qualities of the texts afforded many aesthetic transactional moments for the participants. Reading-related activities capitalized on the aesthetic reading experience and further encouraged students' construction of aesthetic transactions.

Taken together, this combination text + context prioritized adolescent readers' 'lived through' experience of literature (Rosenblatt, 2005). Participants gleaned meaningful knowledge from these texts and related activities through the construction of myriad aesthetic transactions (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). The Gothic studies reading

unit positioned students as ‘active apprentices,’ roles from which they utilized culturally relevant materials in ways that meaningfully connected what they were doing in the classroom to their social practices as conducted outside the classroom (Gee, 2008). This knowledge enlarged readers’ literacy, self, and world understandings (Gee, 2008). As a result, these changes acted as a catalyst for the evolution and development of participant Discourses (Gee, 2008). The findings sections of this study showcase this process in great detail. The next section highlights the other research domains informing this study.

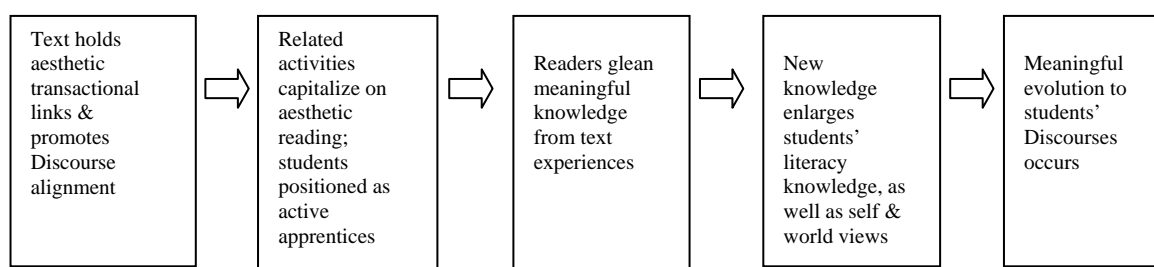


Illustration 1 The intersection of Rosenblatt and Gee's research within the context of my study

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introducing the Research Topics

The purpose of this section is to discuss the areas that inform my research questions and to situate my study within this research. This study explored the aesthetic transactions that students constructed in response to texts in a Gothic reading unit, as well as points of resistance or tensions in the development of transactions. As Rosenblatt (1995) noted, meaningful comprehension is directly linked to students' ability to aesthetically transact with texts. She argued that when teachers utilize books that hold a link to students' preoccupations and interests, such texts pave the way for aesthetic transactional experiences to occur (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Related activities that capitalize on the aesthetic text spectrum support students' construction of aesthetic transactions (Rosenblatt 1994/1995). Likewise, Gee (2005/2008) noted that students derive meaning when there is connectivity between their primary and secondary Discourses in regards to literacy practices; such meaning positively enhance students' various Discourses. As such, this research explored adolescents' aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts (a genre that is prevalent in their leisure reading practices) within the reading classroom.

It is important to assess the relationship between students' aesthetic transactions with texts and acquisition of skills defined by the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. The new standards for reading call for complexity in comprehension (www.corestandards.org). However, it is unclear within the current rhetoric of the standards whether students' aesthetic transactions with texts are prioritized (www.corestandards.org). Amidst these educational policy shifts, student aesthetic

transactional text responses must be nurtured in the classroom in order for meaningful reading experiences to occur; this crucial comprehension component cannot be overlooked (Rosenblatt 1994/1995).

This study examined students' responses to a genre that is prevalent in their leisure reading practices; what aesthetic transactions unfold when this genre is brought into the classroom? Consequently, this research builds and extends on existing literacy research, specifically, Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) transactional reading and Gee's (2005/2008) Discourse theories (as they relate to adolescents). The results illustrate how aligning students' primary and secondary Discourses encourages students' aesthetic transactional experiences in an academic setting. A Gothic curriculum aids in the evolution of students' Discourses.

To frame this discussion, the following areas were examined: (a) present educational policy and students' aesthetic transactional reading experiences, (b) adolescent reading engagement (c) potential aesthetic transactional moments and pedagogical practices that enhance students' initial aesthetic transactions (d) adolescent out-of-school literacies-popular culture texts, (e) the aesthetic transactional potential between Gothic texts and adolescent readers.

I begin by addressing the concern that the new reading CCSS do not prioritize student aesthetic transactional experiences. This section is contrasted by discussing text components critical to student engagement, and how these components hold the potential to promote various kinds of aesthetic transactional experiences in alignment with Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) transactional reading theory. Within the classroom setting, students' aesthetic textual transactions are shaped by the pedagogical practices that

teachers utilize during and after reading events (Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005). The subsequent section of the review discusses specific pedagogical techniques that deepen students' aesthetic transactional experiences with texts.

In the spirit of Gee's (2005/2008) Discourse theory of aligning students' primary and secondary Discourse experiences, following my discussion of the Common Core Standards I review the potential of popular culture texts to promote student aesthetic transactional experiences and meaningful change to student Discourses. Research indicates the prevalence of the Gothic genre in adolescent students' leisure reading practices (e.g. McGillis, 2008). One of the reasons this genre resonates with adolescents is that the characteristics of the genre are connected to the developmental norms of adolescence (Blackford, 2012; Coats, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008; McGillis, 2008). Through these aesthetic transactions, the reader is able to move back and forth from the text to his or her own life experience in a means that encourages deeper text, self, and world understanding, which enriches students' Discourses (Gee 2005/2008; Rosenblatt, 1995).

This study explores the possibilities surrounding student aesthetic transactional experiences with texts that hold links to their preoccupations and interests (Rosenblatt 1994/1995). Thus, this literature review concludes with an examination of the Gothic genre in terms of characteristics or themes and specific moments of connectivity between the genre and adolescence as a developmental phase. Both Rosenblatt (1994/1995) and Gee (2008) argued that the most meaningful literacy experiences have the capacity to enrich and better students as individuals and members of society at large. As such, the

literature review ends with potential moments of such evolution through adolescents' aesthetic transactional experiences with Gothic texts.

Present Educational Policy and Students' Transactional Reading Experiences

The CCSS: Prioritizing students' aesthetic transactions with texts?

An overview of the reading CCSS. The CCSS were developed to ensure that all students across the nation are adequately prepared for college and the workplace by the end of high school. Once fully implemented in 2015, they will have a strong influence on academic reading practices (Pearson, 2012; Starnes, 2011). The following statement outlines the overall goal of the secondary reading CCSS standards:

Students who meet the [reading] Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. (www.corestandards.org)

CCSS concerns in regards to student aesthetic transactional experiences. The rhetoric of the reading standards supports complex, active, and engaging reading processes, which positively distinguishes them from the more static standards of the past (Pearson, 2012). However, Eisner (2002) discussed how, in general, universal standards (such as the CCSS) hold tension in regards to aesthetic experiences. Due to traditional lack of teacher professional development in relation to implementation, the standards frequently become prescriptive measures. They dominate teaching in a means that does not nurture emergent instruction where students have a hand in framing curriculum and day to day instruction (Eisner, 2002). Universal student standards do not prioritize individualization of instruction or account for knowledge that does not necessarily reveal

itself immediately or through traditional testing, both of which categorize aesthetic educational endeavors (Eisner, 2002).

Additionally, analysis of the specific secondary reading standards on the Common Core State Standards website reveals little, if any consideration in regards to the goal of prioritizing and cultivating students' aesthetic transactions with texts (Pearson, 2012).

Below are the major standards for English Language Arts: Reading Grade 7 as obtained from the website (www.corestandards.org). I highlighted specific words in the rhetoric of the standards that emphasize efferent, rather than aesthetic reading goals:

Cite several pieces of **textual evidence** to support analysis of what the **text says explicitly** as well as inferences drawn **from the text**.

Determine **a theme or central idea** of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an **objective summary** of the text.

Analyze how particular **elements of a story interact**.

Determine the **meaning of words** and phrases **as they are used in a text...**

Analyze how a drama's or poem's structure contributes to **its meaning**.

Analyze **how an author** develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

Compare/contrast written story to its audio, filmed, stage or multimedia version.

Compare/contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period of a means of understanding how **authors of fiction** use or alter history. (www.corestandards.org)

Analysis of the discourse of these overarching standards (which inform the more specific standards comprising each of these major categories) reveal an emphasis on information derived solely from or "in the text" in order to obtain meaning as the author intended it. Not present in these standards is any language of the aesthetic domain, or focus on the sensations, feelings, ideas, images, associations, attitudes, and beliefs that the texts bring about in the reader. Thus, pedagogical practices, as highlighted in the rhetoric of the CCSS, do not prioritize students' construction of aesthetic transactions. As a result, whether or not adolescent reading teachers will prioritize cultivating students' aesthetic

transactional experiences with texts (if such a goal is not explicitly outlined and prioritized in the rhetoric of the standards) is a point of current concern.

CCSS concerns in regards to the role of student text interests. Relatedly, text selection marks another area of worry in regards to the CCSS and students' construction of aesthetic transactions. The CCSS website notes the following in regards to academic reading text selection: "Along with high-quality contemporary works, these texts should be chosen from among seminal U.S. documents, the classics of American literature, and the timeless dramas of Shakespeare" (www.corestandards.org). The CCSS initiative clearly supports the traditional canon remaining prominent in adolescent reading curriculum. Not explicit in the standards movement is where (if at all) student text interests, such as popular culture texts, are considered.

The CCSS website purposefully refrains from providing a reading list, claiming those decisions must be made more 'locally': "They [the exemplar list] expressly do not represent a partial or complete reading list" (www.corestandards.org). Yet, included on the website is an Appendix containing "Text Exemplars" that secondary reading educators can use as a guide (www.corestandards.org). According to the website, the following criterion was used in selecting these exemplar texts (the website suggests that educators utilize the same criteria for text selection): complexity (based on qualitative and quantitative indices), quality (texts of recognized value), and range (broad range of sufficiently complex, high-quality texts (www.corestandards.org)). Consequently, none of these goals suggests any consideration of texts that hold links back to the student readers' preoccupations, interests, and concerns as they exist during a particular time and phase of

development. Nor is there any goal of linking academic reading to students' out-of-school literacy practices.

Below is the list of fictional texts (novels and short stories) on the exemplar list for six-eighth grade students. The list is available in its entirety in Appendix B of the CCSS website):

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*
 Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
 L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*
 Cooper, Susan. *The Dark is Rising*
 Yep, Laurence. *Dragonwings*
 Taylor, Mildred. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*
 Hamilton, Virginia. "The People Could Fly"
 Paterson, Katherine. *The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks*
 Cisneros, Sandra "Eleven"
 Sutcliff, Rosemary. *Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of the Iliad*
 Fletcher, Louise. *Sorry, Wrong Number* (www.corestandards.org)

Analysis of this list reveals a lack of diversity in terms of what counts as an "exemplar" within the context of this particular group of texts as perpetuated by the CCSS.

This list suggests that contemporary works, particularly texts that are currently prevalent in students' leisure reading interests, such as popular culture texts, are not currently given consideration by the CCSS Initiative. In order for adolescent students to see the relevance and connectivity between their leisure and academic reading experiences, texts that the *students* deem 'good reads' must play a role in curriculum (Guthrie, 2004). However, unless such individualization and support of aesthetic transactional experiences is explicitly outlined in the standards, whether or not they will be prioritized by instructors is a concern.

The need for teacher support amidst CCSS goals. The CCSS website maintains that these standards represent the outcomes, rather than the means to achieve them; the

means will be left up to the discretion of individual districts and teachers (www.corestandards.org). However, assisting students in becoming sophisticated readers amidst complex texts, while encouraging reading engagement, is a daunting task. Without proper support, teachers may only enact practices as explicitly outlined in the standards (Pearson, 2012). As Eisner (2002) stated, teachers must feel empowered to use their professional judgment to take risks in the classroom. This confidence encourages “pedagogical improvisation in the service of meaningful teaching and learning. The ethos of much of what flies under the flag of standards-based reform flies in the face of such improvisation” (Eisner, 2002, p. 164). Standards must be viewed as heuristics for planning, rather than contracts or prescriptions that override teacher judgment and expertise (Eisner, 2002). During this critical time of transition, teachers must be encouraged to develop curricular practices that address the CCSS but in *support*, rather than at the expense of student aesthetic transactional experiences with texts by encouraging alignment between students’ primary and secondary Discourses reading experiences. This entails working with teachers to find ways to address the CCSS while simultaneously encouraging student aesthetic transactional text experiences.

Consequently, the unit plans I designed align with the reading CCSS, while utilizing texts from a genre that is prevalent in adolescents’ out-of-school literacy experiences (see Appendix I for lesson plans and adherence to the CCSS). I sought to assist a middle school teacher in exploring a way to encourage students’ aesthetic transactions that align with the comprehension expectations as noted in the CCSS secondary reading standards (www.corestandards.org). Such research, which provides instructors with tangible ways to address the CCSS and students’ aesthetic transactions

with texts, is important, particularly during this critical time of transition. My assumption that aesthetic transactions are a necessary component in academic reading experiences aligns with Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) aesthetic transactional reading theory. The following section outlines how relevant curriculum practices promote reading engagement and pave the way for aesthetic transactions before and after text experiences.

Adolescent Academic Reading Engagement

Adolescent Disengagement with Academic Texts

As Guthrie (2004) and Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunarinensingh, Mogge, Headley, Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt, and Dunston (2007) noted, the closer academic reading curriculum aligns with the interests of students, the more likely students will be engaged in the material. Furthermore, akin to Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) link between aesthetic transactional experiences and comprehension, Brophy (2008) stated that when students are engaged, learning, or specifically in this case, comprehension, occurs naturally because the material holds relevance to the students. Yet, student engagement is not given enough priority in many adolescent reading classrooms (Guthrie, 2008; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Taylor & Alderman, 1999, p. 3).

Guthrie and Cox (2001) issued a jeremiad in regards to the current state of adolescent reading instruction: "Growing disengagement of [adolescent] students is approaching crisis proportions. If students are to navigate the transition into middle school, high school, and the workplace, they need undiluted dedication to their engagement in reading" (p. 26). Conversely, as noted by Lapp and Fisher (2009), most adolescent students agree that the 'worst literary experiences' are when they are assigned

reading that feels disconnected from their personal experiences and interests.

Unfortunately, this is all too often the case in the adolescent reading classroom.

Part of capturing student interest in reading involves valuing what students like to read. Unfortunately, current research frequently notes a ‘mismatch’ between what students want to read and what they are actually reading in the classroom (Ivey & Broadus, 2001; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Lenters 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007). Lenters (2006) and Pitcher et al., (2007) offered a plausible explanation for this gap; these authors claimed that schools devalue adolescents’ out-of-school reading “by not stocking [within the school] the kinds of texts students want to read” (Lenters, 2006, p. 3). A common problem in today’s adolescent reading classroom is that texts aligning with students’ interests are not readily explored in the reading classroom (Rosenblatt 1994/1995). Aligning students’ primary and secondary Discourse experiences in regards to reading are not given enough priority in schools (Gee 2005/2008).

Lenters (2006) asserted the following damaging effect on students’ growth as readers and their level of academic reading engagement when their out-of-school reading practices are devalued:

As these [adolescent] students explore identity themes, they don’t look to school-assigned literature for help but instead use out-of-school literacies to accomplish this purpose. Thus, when schools fail to validate these literacies, students often perceive this lack of acceptance as personal rejection. (p. 3)

Studies in adolescent reading document that much of today’s reading curriculum is irrelevant, outdated, and devoid of means for students to make authentic connections to their real life experiences and interests (Bean 2002; Lenters 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007). Lack of connectivity does not encourage students to make connections between and

encourage growth of their primary and secondary Discourse experiences (Gee 2005/2008).

In a study of adolescent reading resistance, Lenters (2006) maintained that the lack of interest in school reading materials is mentioned universally as a point of contention by students. As Rosenblatt (2005) rightly noted, literature is currently “an endangered species,” amongst adolescents (p. 277). Providing students with ‘interesting’ material (defined by their standards) is an effective vehicle for nurturing reading engagement, thereby expanding the possibility for student to aesthetically respond to texts in the academic setting. The Gothic genre is prevalent in adolescents’ leisure reading practices (e.g. Blackford, 2012; Jackson et al., 2008). Consequently, my study explores adolescent students’ aesthetic transactions with Gothic popular culture and traditional texts in the reading classroom.

Promoting Adolescent Reading Engagement: Textual Connectivity and Relevance

Rosenblatt (1994/1995) and Gee (2005/2008) urged literacy educators to prioritize students’ needs and interests in the classroom. Guthrie (2008) discussed that when reading teachers select texts, they must take into account how students may connect with the texts, thereby encouraging reading relevance, and therefore, engagement amongst readers. This notion aligns with Rosenblatt’s (1995) call for promoting aesthetic transactional text experiences by selecting books that hold connections to students’ interests and preoccupations. It also relates to Gee’s (2008) notion of aligning students’ primary and secondary Discourses by using students’ out-of-school literacy practices in the reading classroom as a means of emphasizing points of connectivity between the Discourses, thus, aiding in the growth of individuals’ Discourses. Relatedly, Guthrie

(2008) noted that when teachers connect what students are learning with “real life outside the classroom,” students report higher levels of text interest or engagement (p. 20).

Akin to Rosenblatt’s (1995) argument that individuals aesthetic transactions with texts are the starting point for comprehension, Cambria and Guthrie (2010) stated that “students do not become dedicated to reading unless it is important to them...Students’ first reason for being a dedicated reader is that the texts are relevant to them” (p. 25). Such text experiences promote interest and reading engagement (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Akin to this, Brophy (2008) discussed how students derive pleasure, joy, wisdom, and self-satisfaction when reading is aligned with their interests. Atwell (2006) echoed this message in noting that adolescents respond “voraciously” to academic tasks when they are personally significant: They want reading to matter “to them and to matter now, not in some nebulous someday” (p. 312).

Guthrie (2008) explained how a ‘relevant’ text (as defined by students) leads to knowledge attainment, and a ‘non-relevant’ text acts as a block to such potential:

A relevant text is essentially a *bridge* [italics my emphasis] between the individual and his potential. Because the relevant text is slightly familiar, its topic is slightly known. The content is slightly understood before reading. There is an overlap between the knowledge of the reader and the content of the text. Because the individual is in a constant state of exercising his interests, the text is a bridge to potential knowledge and beliefs. (p. 96)

Guthrie’s (2008) ‘bridge’ between the student and knowledge is similar to Rosenblatt’s (1994) notion of aesthetic transactional experiences: it is *how* students interact with knowledge (in this case, texts) that influences what is actually learned. Through exploring texts of relevance, the potential for student aesthetic transactional experiences to occur increases, thus increasing the potential for meaningful text comprehension (Rosenblatt 1994/1995).

Aesthetic Transactions

An Overview

In this study, I collected, examined, and interpreted data exploring how adolescents aesthetically transact with Gothic popular culture and academic texts. The types of aesthetic transactional moments that can occur between text and reader (described below) are a result of Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) research, additional research on reading aesthetic transactions, as well as the aesthetic transactional moments that I witnessed amongst students during this unit; this aligns with the combination of inductive and deductive nature of this study, which is discussed further in the methodology section (Boyartiz, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Ruona, 2005). These five categories denote over-arching transactional categories. More specific transactional possibilities, in relation to Gothic texts and adolescent readers, are explored in a latter section of this literature review.

Types of Aesthetic Transactional Moments

Connection with a story character or event. Strum and Matt (2009) noted that adolescents "look to identify with story characters-to see themselves in their reading." Relatedly, Guthrie (2008) discussed how adolescent readers bring a "sense of self" to text encounters; as such, they enjoy texts in which they are able to connect their sense of self with what they are reading. Students are more likely to engage with texts when they are able to connect in some way with characters (p. 25). When readers identify with characters in texts, such connectivity potentially offers a vehicle for readers to consider possible identities or future selves (Rosenblatt 1994/1995). As Rosenblatt (1995) noted, such personal "experiences offered by literature can have a particularly significant effect"

when readers see characters grappling with similar problems or issues that they have (p. 191). Rosenblatt (1995) stated that such “experiences may enable the reader to view his own personality and problems” more objectively (p. 212). Such knowledge is illustrative of an aesthetic transaction. Throughout the study, I looked for evidence of moments where students meaningfully connect with characters by discussing such similarities.

Contrasting story character or event. Individuals also aesthetically transact with texts by constructing moments of imaginative contrast to their lives and experiences (Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Whether it is as extreme as the fantastical situation of going to school with wizards (*Harry Potter*), or something more realistic, such as a character losing a parent (*Down a Dark Hall*), individuals aesthetically transact with moments of imaginative contrast in texts; they are able to vicariously experience new situations and circumstances (Howard, 2012; Rosenblatt, 1995). These aesthetic transactions enlarge individuals’ experiences and knowledge about themselves and the world around them (Rosenblatt, 1995). Such moments, particularly in regards to fantastic elements that can categorize Gothic texts, provide entertaining escapism from day to day life. Students are able to participate imaginatively in different worlds and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Other experiences of contrast that are more realistic (such as losing a parent) broaden individuals’ knowledge and empathy for others (Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1995). Thus, I explored moments where students signal aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts that contrast their personal experiences.

Speculation as to what may happen next. Throughout my own experience as a classroom teacher, I noticed that when students appeared to be engaged with texts, they spontaneously commented to me and one another what they believe might happen as the

story progresses. These conversations often continued outside the classroom in the lunchroom, during homeroom, and outside of school in general. Students would sometimes even read ahead on their own to test out their predictions. Moments of spontaneous speculation as to future events in a story represents an aesthetic transactional moment of imaginative contrast where the student is engaged in co-constructing the text with the author, as they are adding their own creative spin on a text (Dugan, 1997). Such spontaneous and active meaning-making is less likely to occur if students are indifferent or uninterested in the text; thus, I examined moments where such speculation does not occur as potential moments of conflict or tension in regards to students' aesthetic transactions with texts.

Characters and events as imaginative 'trial and error' experimentation.

Rosenblatt (1995) insisted that when students aesthetically transact with texts, the text issues, themes, characters, and/or events act as vehicles for readers to grapple with past, current, or future life problems, choices, difficulties, and contradictions. In other words, aesthetic transactional experiences with texts may lead readers in "imaginative trial and error or experimentation" with issues that occur in real life (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 212). When a reader engages in personally making meaning about an aspect of real life as stimulated from the contents of a book, such an occurrence represents an aesthetic transactional text experience as the reader uses a textual situation to understand situations. As such, I explored moments where student participants use situations or issues present in Gothic texts to question, understand, and reflect on life circumstances or events. I also examined moments where students appear resistant, unable to, or not interested in such reflections.

Personally engaging texts as stimulating an emotional response. “Emotional impact” is evidence of readers aesthetically transacting, where texts are “felt as well as thought” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 226). Indeed, what is often most enjoyable about a textual encounter is when it stimulates joy, fear, sadness, or other emotions in the reader (Rosenblatt, 1995). Such emotions suggest that the reader is vicariously stepping into the shoes of a character in terms of the reader feeling similar emotions as evoked in the text. Such emotions are evidence of the reader meaningfully interacting with a text, as the text’s contents resonate with the reader in a way that conjures an emotional response. As such, I looked for moments where students emotionally respond to a text, as well as moments where they appear to be indifferent to what is occurring.

These five general transactional moments formed the basis of my preliminary thematic analysis tool, which is discussed in greater detail in the methods section. Academic aesthetic transactions begin between reader and text; however, they are influenced by the reading-related activities that occur during and after reading events (Connell, 2001; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Prioritizing the aesthetic domain in reading-related activities is essential for students’ to further enhance aesthetic text transactions, as well as construct new ones. The following section highlights the characteristics of discussions and activities that nurture the aesthetic reading experience in the academic setting.

Capitalizing on Aesthetic Transactional Experiences in Related Reading Activities

Encouraging the construction of aesthetic transactions during discussions.

Rosenblatt (2005) discussed how teacher questioning poses a potential threat to the aesthetic reading experience. Following a reading, instructors frequently dive right into

questioning students about the texts. Such an approach hurries students away from their initial aesthetic transactions under the pressure to verbalize what they think the teacher wants to hear:

Out of misguided zeal, the student is hurried into thinking that removes him abruptly and often definitively from what he himself has lived through in reading the work. It therefore becomes essential to scrutinize all practices to make sure they provide the opportunity for initial crystallization of a personal sense of the work. (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 66-67)

Unfortunately, academic discussions are often teacher-directed, where students passively answer the instructor's questions that seek one definitive answer; these qualities de-emphasize and subsequently diminish individuals' initial aesthetic transactional experiences (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1995/2005).

Reading, particularly as it occurs within the classroom, is socially constructed; textual meaning is co-created with others in the classroom (Connell, 2008; Dugan, 1997; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994). When students aesthetically transact with a text, they are eager to share these experiences and hear about others (Rosenblatt, 1994). Rosenblatt (1995) discussed the importance of capitalizing on students' initial aesthetic transactions with texts in related discussions:

He [the student] should be made to feel that his own response to books is worth expressing. Such a liberating atmosphere will make it possible for him to have an unself-conscious, spontaneous, and honest reaction. When the student feels the validity of his own experience, he will cease to think of literature as something that only a few gifted spirits can enjoy and understand in an original way. (p. 64)

Discussions that allow students to explore their aesthetic transactional experiences with others serve to deepen and enhance these transactions. Students also construct new aesthetic transactions as a result of these discussions, where they obtain ideas and insights

from their classmates (Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994). In order to create an atmosphere where students construct aesthetic transactions in reading-related discussions, there are certain characteristics that must be in place.

Whenever possible, reading-related classroom discussions should be organic and originate from the students; teachers must be willing to relinquish control and take a less prominent role (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 2005). This dynamic allows students to gear the discussion towards their aesthetic transactional experiences with texts. Instructors must also be willing to afford the time for such discussions to take place, as they are more time-consuming than if a student simply states an answer to a teacher-posed question (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001). However, this does not mean that the teacher should not be a part of the conversation, rather he or she contributes to the discussion based on the flow that develops from the students. He or she also facilitates in-depth discussions through the posing of thoughtful questions that emphasize text complexity and ‘Truth’ as it exists for each reader (Connell, 2003; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003). Additionally, it is particularly helpful when teachers model their own aesthetic transactions with texts because it provides students with a tangible example and subsequently, makes them feel more at ease in sharing their own (Dugan, 1997).

When students’ aesthetic transactions are prioritized in the reading classroom, it deepens the level of trust between the students and the teacher (Rosenblatt, 1995). Students feel that the text meanings they derive are important and respected by the classroom instructor, which increases their level of security. Discussions become a liberating experience because students are able to verbally express their aesthetic transactions with texts (Rosenblatt, 1995). Such a dynamic also positively influences the

rapport amongst students. Sharing aesthetic transactions increases communication and trust amongst students where the text moves from an individual to a shared experience amongst readers where meaning is collectively constructed (Rosenblatt, 1994). Listening to other students' textual transactions compels students to reflect on their own, which serves to deepen these initial transactions (Connell, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994). Additionally, students get to know one another better when they are able to share what a text personally means to them, which increases their rapport with one another (Connell, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994). This increased rapport has a domino effect: The more comfortable students feel in the classroom, the more likely they are to further share and deepen previous aesthetic transactions and construct new ones (Connell, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003).

Given that the nature of my study explores the aesthetic transactions students constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit, I paid attention to the characteristics of the classroom discussions that occurred during and after a reading event. Additionally, I solicited information from the participants during interviews regarding how the discussions encouraged or discouraged their construction of aesthetic transactions with the unit texts. Individuals' aesthetic text transactions are also influenced by the characteristics of reading-related activities during and after a reading experience, which the next section explores.

Encouraging the construction of aesthetic transactions during activities. The characteristics of reading-related activities also shape students' aesthetic transactions with texts. Activities that capitalize and extend upon aesthetic principles encourage further development of initial transactions, whereas activities that do not focus on

aesthetic principles can diminish students' initial transactions (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1995/2005). As Rosenblatt (1995) noted, "Our assignments, our ways of testing, our questions about the work, our techniques of analysis should direct attention to, not away from, the work as an aesthetic experience" (p. 271). Unfortunately, in the adolescent reading classroom, it is not uncommon for reading activities to consist of tasks such as worksheets or questions that the students complete on their own (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005). These questions often focus on labeling, generalization, paraphrasing, summary, character and plot analysis; such efferent and isolated reflection on what solely resides in the text does not encourage individuals to further develop their initial aesthetic transactions or construct new ones (Rosenblatt, 2005).

In contrast, Rosenblatt (2005) discussed how instructors must scrutinize reading activities under what she defines as the 'acid test': "Does this practice/approach hinder or foster a sense that literature exists as a form of personally meaningful experience? Is the pupil's interaction with the literacy work itself the center from which all else radiates?" (p. 71). Eisner (2001) and Greene (2002) insisted that at the core of all aesthetic experiences is imagination. Activities that push at the boundaries of traditional assignments, encouraging creative and imaginative thinking and producing, encourage further development of initial aesthetic transactions and construction of new ones (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Haselhuhn, Al-Mabuk, Gabriele, Groen, & Galloway, S. 2007; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Marsh, 2005; Wohlwend, 2013).

As with discussions, there are characteristics of reading activities that capitalize on the aesthetic reading experience. The first characteristic is student agency in regards to text activities (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008). This includes affording students control over

the form and/or content of an assignment where they can express their aesthetic transactions with texts. Additionally, reading assignments should be open-ended in nature where multiple text interpretations are celebrated, rather than activities that require one definitive answer (Brophy, 2008; Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005).

Assignments that veer from traditional paper and pencil tasks that respect and promote students' multiple literacies also encourages student self-expression, which aids in the development and expression of aesthetic transactions (Bean, 2002; Lenters, 2006; Marsh, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wohlwend, 2013). Whether it is an opportunity to respond to a text by producing a YouTube video, poster, dance, or drawing, etc., such multimodal tasks afford students the opportunity to produce a tangible representation of their aesthetic transactions with texts (Rosenblatt, 2005).

Finally, allowing students the freedom to collaborate with one another during reading-related assignments increases the aesthetic transactional potential of a text (Connell, 2003; Guthrie, 1996/2008; Pike, 2003). As Wohlwend (2013) noted, releasing students from the pressure of individual authorship and responsibility creates a more enjoyable learning environment where creativity flourishes. In this paradigm, “collaborative, collective meaning-making experiences are emphasized and improvisation and connectivity are valued more than individual production” (Wohlwend, 2013, p. 17). This ‘shared’ literacy experience emphasizes the aesthetic nature of a reading.

In sum, the characteristics of reading-related activities influence the aesthetic transactional experience of reading. As such, the teacher-participant and I attempted to gear the activities of the Gothic unit towards capitalizing on the aesthetic reading experiences of the students. During data collection and analysis, I paid attention to the

characteristics of these activities and how they encouraged or discouraged students' construction of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts.

In an attempt to further encourage relevance and connectivity, and therefore, aesthetic experiences with academic texts, I purposefully designed a reading unit utilizing popular culture and traditional Gothic texts. Adolescent reading research supports the notion of bringing popular culture texts into the academic classroom as a way to encourage connectivity and relevance between adolescents' leisure and academic experiences (Wilson & Casey, 2007), which the next section will detail.

Adolescent Out-of-School Literacies-Popular Culture Texts

Pop Culture Texts, An Overview

Educators must take into account what students are reading and the conversations they are having about these texts outside the confines of the classroom (Alvermann, Hagood, Heron-Hruby, Williams, & Yoon; 2007; Marsh, 2005; Sheridan-Thomas, 2007). As Sheridan-Thomas (2007) noted, adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices are "high interest, connected to their activities and social interactions and accessible to them because of familiar content and engaging formats" (p. 124). Bringing texts into the classroom that reside in students' out-of-school reading experiences and using such texts to extend and further develop students reading repertoires, is critical; such 'hybridization,' or using popular culture and traditional academic texts achieves this goal (Lenters, 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Tatum, 2006; Wilson & Casey, 2007). By emphasizing the connectivity between primary and secondary Discourses, individuals' secondary Discourses, such as academic reading, are more likely to develop successfully (Gee, 2008).

One major facet comprising the umbrella category of ‘out-of-school literacies’ is popular culture texts, which are commercialized, have wide appeal, and appear across multiple modes, such as print, comics, illustrations, video games, and movies (Alvermann et al., 2007). Pop culture resources are “often appropriated by young people for pleasure, identification, and a sense of personal power; these technologies help them circumvent the limits on learning and meaning” in the reading classroom” (Mahiri, 2001, p. 382). In terms of adolescents, Gothic texts such as the *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *Hunger Games* series fall into the pop culture category as they align with the three main components that comprise the definition. By including popular culture and academic texts, student interests are given priority, while also encouraging them to expand their literary experiences to lesser known texts that comprise the genre.

Pop Culture Texts as a Rare Experience in the Adolescent Reading Classroom

Unfortunately, units that incorporate students’ out-of-school literacy experiences, such as popular culture texts, are rare in today’s reading classroom (Dyson, 1997; Hagood et al., 2010). Schools are not readily encouraging teachers to build curriculums that support students’ out-of-school literacies (Gibson, 2010; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Hagood et al., 2010; Hruby, Hagood, & Alvermann, 2008; Mahiri, 2001; Marsh, 2005). As Williams (2007) wrote, “rare is the discussion of popular culture’s role in shaping perceptions of adolescents about literacy practices and about themselves as readers” (p. 680). Another issue is that teachers at worst often dismiss popular culture texts as inferior, or “trash literature,” or, at best, are ambivalent about its role in the adolescent reading classroom (Arthur, 2005; Gibson, 2010; Hagood et al., 2010, Hopper, 2006). As Lewis (1998) argued, “The stances teachers take toward pop culture matter. When we exclude

and police, or when we look the other way, we set up limiting dichotomies” (p. 116). By disenfranchising what students value, teachers send the message to students that some texts are worthy of serious analysis while others (often the ones they are interested in) are not (Lewis, 1998; Marsh, 2005). Gibson (2010) championed teachers redefining their standards for what they believe counts as ‘good’ literature and abandoning sole reliance on traditionally defined ‘school texts’ (Gibson, 2010). Rather than viewing students’ nontraditional out-of-school literacy preferences through a “deficit lens, it may be helpful for educators to challenge their conception of literacy and use these texts as an opportunity to engage with students” (Gibson, 2010, p. 572).

Studies that examine the potential of students’ out-of- school literacy experiences, such as this one, can harness “the largely unrecognized power of leisure reading in engaging adolescents and enhance their reading skills” (Gibson, 2010, p. 567). Using texts that reside in students’ current interest shows them that their literacy preferences and identities are respected in the classroom (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2011; Gibson, 2010; Hagood et al., 2010; Lenters, 2006). By pairing contemporary and traditional Gothic texts, I aimed to encourage students in seeing the connectivity between current and traditional Gothic texts. Without building this understanding by utilizing contemporary materials, students may not as readily personally engage with the more dated material if they do not see how it is relevant to their experiences (Gibson, 2010; Lenters, 2006; Lewis, 1998; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wilson & Casey, 2007).

As Lewis (1998) suggested, “Instead of persuading students to revere all that has been deemed ‘great literature’ and abandon the books they love, “we need to engage students in conversations about the uses they have for a range of texts in their lives” (p.

119). However, it is difficult for adolescent teachers, without explicit support and direction, to veer from traditional reading instruction, which typically features the classics or reading canon (Gibson, 2010; Hopper, 2006; Lenters, 2006). As Arthur (2005) stated, “the polarization of ‘high culture’/ ‘low culture’ works to exclude popular culture from educational settings and positions many children as outsiders” (p. 175).

Consequently, I designed a unit that uses a genre in adolescents’ out-of-school literacy experiences (in the form of popular culture and traditional academic texts) as means of assisting teachers in addressing this gap. Throughout the literature surrounding popular culture and literacy learning, there are various studies that explore teachers incorporating popular culture in academic activities, thus aligning students’ in and out-of-school literacy practices in a means that encouraged Discourse alignment and subsequent development. These studies served as usual models for me during unit design.

Models of Popular Culture Lessons: Utilizing Students’ Multiple Literacies

A number of studies document teachers utilizing popular culture ‘texts’ as a means to promote engagement with and personal response to literacy activities. This section touches upon some of these studies as a way to highlight the goal of my own research in incorporating a genre prevalent in students’ out-of-school literacy practices as a way to encourage meaningful aesthetic transactional experiences in an academic setting. These studies explored individuals’ responses to popular culture ‘texts,’ such as parents’ perspectives on the power of popular culture in their children’s leisure time (Marsh, 2005), children bringing their popular culture knowledge into a school film unit (Wohlwend, 2013), and lessons in which the following popular culture ‘texts’ are brought into the classroom: superheroes in comics, T.V., and movies (Dyson, 1997), the T.V. and

movie series, *Star Wars* (Guthrie, 2008), advertisements (Guthrie, 2010), and rap lyrics (Hagood et al., 2010).

Marsh's (2005) study, while it did not directly explore how popular culture is utilized in the classroom, looked to parents for information on the role popular culture plays in their children's daily experiences. The study was broken up into two projects. In the first, parents of young children kept a 'literacy diary' for four weeks where they documented their children's practices across a range of media (T.V., computers, print, comics, magazines, etc.). Some of these parents were interviewed on their perspective of the role popular culture plays in their children's lives. In the second project, parents filled out questionnaires regarding their children's popular culture experiences and some are subsequently interviewed. The findings were consistent across the cases: all of the children inhabited a rich, multimodal world where they moved from mode to mode with ease within their favorite 'texts.' Whether the favorite popular culture text is *Thomas the Tank Engine*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, or one of the Disney princess stories, these children often simultaneously played, read, and watched these 'texts,' which formed the basis of their initial literacy experiences (Marsh, 2005). These stories spilled into every aspect of the day from eating (using plates with the text's emblems) to bath time (character bath toys). In all cases, "the children were active agents in the process of meaning making" (p. 46).

Given the central role these texts played in the lives and identity construction of all the children, Marsh (2005) warned: "Marginalizing these texts serves only to ask of children that they cast off aspects of their identities as they move from home to school" (p. 39). In order for curriculum and pedagogies to remain relevant and build upon children's literacy identities, these texts cannot be ignored or shunned in school (Marsh,

2005). Though this study was conducted with young children, it illustrates the powerful role popular culture plays and how it begins in early childhood and continues through adolescence. By stressing the importance of incorporating the ‘texts’ from children’s leisure reading practices in school, Marsh’s (2005) findings are relevant for children of all ages.

Wohlwend’s (2013) study: *Literacy playshop: New literacies, popular media, and play in the early childhood classroom* documented the experiences of six teachers and their students in designing and implementing (with the support of the author) an experimental play-based literacy learning unit focusing on media production. Akin to Marsh’s (2005) study, Wohlwend (2013) documented how these teachers realized that the “commercial free stance that prohibited popular media toys in their school distanced children from their home cultures” contributing to a disconnect between the young children’s primary and secondary Discourse experiences in relation to literacy practices (p. 21). In contrast, this unit capitalized and extended upon students’ previous knowledge making them active agents in the learning process where they were not only consuming, but producing texts. Using what the children already know and connecting with other children through shared popular media knowledge “is an important way for children to access play groups and reconfigure classroom power relations” (Wohlwend, 2013, p. 3). The bonds between the children grew stronger when they realized they shared an affinity for the same book, movie, or toy (Wohlwend, 2013). Utilizing what students already know placed them in a position of power, where they actively merged their leisure and academic experiences within the classroom setting (Wohlwend, 2013).

The result was teachers and students actively working in partnerships to interpret and produce media in an exciting and relevant manner. Wohlwend (2013) concluded her study by noting, “In an era when teacher expertise is repeatedly devalued through highly scripted curricula, prescriptive legislation, and reformist films, it is important to reclaim teacher’s professional judgment and knowledge.” Wohlwend (2013) argued that teachers must be able to exercise agency in order to develop meaningful and relevant pedagogical practices through experimentation with new models. However, such a task is daunting without proper support. This goal aligns directly with my study, as I aimed to capitalize on students’ leisure reading practices and empower an instructor in a tangible means to merge students’ primary and secondary Discourse reading experiences. Such research was conducted under the belief that children of all ages are “active and knowledgeable learners who can be trusted to explore productively, to collaborate, and to teach one another” (Wohlwend, 2013, p. 51).

Dyson’s (1997) seminal work, *Writing superheroes: Contemporary childhood, popular culture, and classroom literacy*, documented elementary students’ responses to the incorporation of superheroes in academic writing tasks. Though this study explored the effect of such combination of in and out-of-school literacy practices with elementary students, the findings of this study are relevant to the discussion of incorporating students’ out-of-school experiences in academic literacy at large. Akin to frequent teacher dismissal of texts that comprise students’ leisure reading practices, Dyson (1997) noted that children’s “unofficial” worlds are not readily welcomed in “official school teacher-governed ones” (p. 3). In terms of “cultural capital” such material was not highly valued (Dyson, 1997). Dyson’s (1997) ethnographic study of a classroom teacher

embracing an out-of-school literacy practice, specifically in this case, superheroes, revealed that children's use of such stories "provided an access" to the dynamics of "school literacy learning" including how the child used such materials to "orient themselves" to the "institution of school" (p. 4).

As such, Dyson (1997) discussed how embracing students' popular culture interests within the academic setting served to connect students' in and out-of-school literacy practices; such connection encouraged alignment between students' primary Discourse and further development of a secondary Discourse through engaging in texts that are meaningful to students (Rosenblatt 1994/1995; Gee, 2005/2008). Specifically, Dyson (1997) asserted that students must be active contributors to classroom literacy curriculum in order for learning to be properly situated within the "ideological complexity of children's lives and contemporary times" (p. 6). Thus, school curricula must be "permeable, not impervious" to children's out-of-school practices; my research aimed at encouraging such permeability by utilizing a genre that exists in adolescent students' leisure reading practices (Dyson, 1997, p. 7).

Guthrie (2008) discussed another means to align students' leisure and academic literacy practices in relation to science textbook reading. He detailed how a secondary classroom science teacher became frustrated by her students' lack of engagement with science textbooks, as they were unable to see the connectivity or relevance of the material to their own life experiences (Guthrie, 2008). After many unsuccessful attempts to encourage student engagement in the material, the teacher showed the *Star Wars* movie and had students concurrently read a small excerpt of the text, *The Science of Star Wars*, which dealt with physics aspects that she wanted to convey to her students. As Guthrie

(2008) noted, “the reading prompted myriad questions that fueled an enthusiastic dialogue about quantum physics” (p. 21). As a result, “Student response was overwhelming” and reading engagement “was boosted by the connection of the book” to student experiences (Guthrie, 2008, p. 21).

In a latter study, Guthrie (2010) illustrated the influence of other ways to incorporate popular culture into the literacy classroom and student responses as a result of such inclusion, this time, through the use of media advertisements and writing in a fourth grade classroom. Such connection between what students were seeing in the media and what was occurring in the classroom encouraged student “sheer enjoyment in this literacy event” (p. 23). This encouraged engagement in the curriculum, as the activity illustrated that academic reading meaningfully related to students’ out-of-school reading practices (Guthrie, 2010).

Finally, Hagood et al., (2010) discussed a variety of approaches to the inclusion of popular culture in reading and writing activities. Specifically, one example referenced a middle school reading teacher who utilized rap lyrics in conjunction with a unit on bullying (Hagood et al., 2010). Such exploration encouraged students to think personally and deeply about academic curriculums (Hagood et al., 2010). As such, this teacher “devised a plan that enabled her to show the qualities of pop culture texts that related to the canon and yet genuinely tapped students’ interests” (Hagood et al., 2010, p. 43). Similarly, the Gothic unit I designed for this study used popular culture texts alongside traditional academic texts as a way to encourage participants’ aesthetic transactional experiences across the genre.

Dyson (1997) noted that children's "unofficial use of diverse cultural material *can* provide substance for official engagement and reflection-for critical resistance and thoughtful negotiation" (p. 181). She issued a warning as to the consequence of schools devaluing such experiences:

They [students] appropriate cultural material to participate in and explore their worlds... Their attraction to particular media suggests that they find in that material compelling and powerful images. If official school curricula make no space for this agency, then schools risk reinforcing societal divisions in children's orientations to each other, to cultural art forms, and to school itself (Dyson, 1997, p. 181).

When teachers engaged students with 'texts' that were situated amidst their lives, such engagement encouraged student aesthetic transactional experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). These units also meaningfully aligned students' various Discourses (Gee, 2005/2008).

As Rosenblatt (1994/1995) noted, texts most hold connectivity to readers' preoccupations, interests, and problems as they exist at the point in time where text and reader meet in order for aesthetic transactional experiences to occur. In an earlier section of the literature review, I highlighted general categories of aesthetic transactional experiences. This final section of the literature review explores more specific aesthetic transactional possibilities within these categories, specifically, in relation to the Gothic as a literary genre and potential points of alignment with adolescent readers. As already highlighted, I believe that a reason why the Gothic genre is prevalent in adolescent students' leisure reading practices is at least in part, due to the points of connectivity between aspects of adolescence as a developmental period and traits and themes that comprise the Gothic genre as a whole. As such, a reason why this genre is popular with adolescents may be due to the aesthetic transactional possibilities it affords for these

young men and women at this particular time in their development. The final section of the literature review explores some of these potential aesthetic transactional moments between adolescent readers and Gothic texts. I also highlight potential aesthetic transactional moments by illustrating specific Gothic texts examples and the relevance these examples potentially hold to adolescents' experiences at large.

The Transactional Potential between Gothic Texts and Adolescent Readers

The Gothic Genre: An Overview

McGillis (2008) wrote that he was interested in asking why the Gothic genre is particularly popular with adolescents and prevalent throughout young adult literature. However, before addressing this question, a general understanding of what defines the Gothic literary genre must be addressed. Answering this question is problematic; there are many different views as to what essentially is 'Gothic.' Wisker (2007) artfully explored the genre's ambiguity: "[It] explores and challenges cultural, social, psychological, and personal issues...Gothic texts are about crossing thresholds in terms of their metaphors, their narrative tropes, and the ways of reading they can enable" (p. 404). As suggested by this definition, the Gothic genre features characters caught in liminal spaces, or existing between thresholds. Liminality is derived from the Latin word, *limen* meaning 'threshold,' is a defining feature of Gothic texts (Aguirre, 2007). In other words, Gothic texts often feature characters caught in the push and pull between spaces or 'worlds.' (Aguirre, 2007). For instance, the monster in *Frankenstein* is a liminal character as he is neither dead nor alive. He exists on the threshold between both worlds, yet, does not belong or fit into either. Harry Potter in *The Harry Potter* series is caught between the worlds of wizards and humans (Muggles). This positioning causes characters

unrest and anxiety because their lives are in such flux and outcomes are ambiguous as they engage in crossing various thresholds or boundaries (Wisker, 2008). Taken together, this liminal state plays upon the internal and individual psyche; what ultimately serves to manifest awe, terror, and fear is felt by the individual reader (in terms of what the reader personally finds frightening, alluring, uncanny, or disturbing).

The Gothic genre originated in England with Horace Walpole's novel, *Castle of Otranto* (1764) and play, *Mysterious Mother*, (1768). These first Gothic texts were born out of the Reformation and were a response to a host of crimes by religious leaders. Canonical American Gothic works were born in the nineteenth century during the rise of Realism and Naturalism, both restrictive and oftentimes, a cover for social and political corruption (Oates, 1996). In both cases, the Gothic genre was born out of cultural anxiety, uncertainty, flux, and "assaults upon individual autonomy" (Oates, 1996, p. 3). Gothic texts manifest this anxiety through "pre-Freudian exploration of the psyche, with ruined castles and deep dungeons providing a physical map" for the buried inner turmoil of those without agency (Cox, 2010).

Likewise, Hogle (1999) described a traditional view of the Gothic as exposing situations where heroes and heroines are "thrown into antiquated spaces with hidden depths that vomit forth haunting specters of class conflicts, ideological battles, family secrets, and psychological struggles of past and present" (p. 1). However, he acknowledged that even this overarching definition excludes certain texts. Hogle (1999) argued for a more inclusive definition of the Gothic as grappling with "cultural anxiety" and complex symbolic realms where conditions and quandaries we want to "throw off from ourselves" face us in "half-repulsive, half-attractive specters or monstrosities that

transform the fragments of otherness into aberrant figures or supposedly archaic settings, all of which are made to seem more alien to us than they really are” (p. 1). In other words, the ‘monstrosities’ are manifestations of the societal and/or personal conflicts and confusion surrounding beliefs that we have as individuals. The Gothic genre serves as “a critique of current versions of reality, and the suggestion of alternatives while exposing flaws in situated and valorized knowledge” (Wisker, 2007, p. 420).

As discussed in the introduction, I argue that the Gothic genre involves exploring the societal ‘other’ or ‘thing’ existing on the liminal borderlands that both fascinates and horrifies; although this ‘other’ or ‘monster’ is initially repressed, it ultimately manifests in some mode that permanently changes the text’s reality and ‘Truth.’ It is “the pulsation of sublimation and abjection that produces a ‘Gothic affect’” (Farnell, 2009, p. 122). This ‘Gothic affect’ allures audiences of all ages, but particularly adolescent populations, evident in the explosive popularity of texts such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*. Rosenblatt (1994) emphasized the ultimate test in selecting high interest literacy materials for adolescent readers: “The valued test of what books should be read by youth is not what adults or critics of the past have found ‘good,’ but what is ‘good,’ meaningful, and effective for this particular young human being at this stage of his emotional and intellectual development” (p. 113). In alignment with Rosenblatt’s (1994/1995) aesthetic transactional theory, I explored potential moments of engagement that adolescent readers may have with Gothic texts due to the commonalities in characteristics between the Gothic genre and their experiences during this developmental life phase.

Seeped in Darkness and Mystery: Setting Characteristics of the Gothic Genre

The settings of Gothic texts are typically dark, mysterious, isolated, and fraught with anxiety about what could be lurking around the corner (Coats, 2008; Hogle, 1999; McGillis, 2008). As McGillis (2008) discussed:

The Gothic is not a cheery genre. Human failure is possible in the Gothic. The Gothic world is decidedly not a pleasant place; it is ambiguous at best. It is not safe. The Gothic is the opposite of pastoral. It thrives on darkness, deep forests, and dank city streets... Murkiness is the state of the Gothic. (p. 227-228)

As such, Gothic texts carry a high level of nervous anticipation for both the characters and readers as events are in constant motion and unrest. Examples of this tension include Kit attending an isolated boarding school in *Down a Dark Hall* or two young men picking up a lone girl on the side of a deserted road in the short story, “Lavender.” Such tension is enjoyable as readers “experience the pleasure of a good shiver, confident that he or she does not live in the world the story evokes. Everyone loves a good shiver because it shakes us free of security while leaving our security intact;” it promotes a safe means of vicariously experiencing risk through aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast (Jackson et al., 2008, p. 11).

Additionally, Gothic texts commonly contain fantastic elements. Some Gothic tales, such as *Down a Dark Hall*, featuring students in a haunted boarding school, or *Harry Potter* featuring a world of wizard characters, are unquestionably fantastic. Adolescents enjoy vicariously entering fantastic worlds that contrast their personal experiences (Jones, 2002). These settings encourage readers to utilize their imaginations, which is a hallmark of aesthetic reading (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Jones, 2002; Smith, 2008). This characteristic provides another place for adolescents to forge aesthetic

transactions of imaginative contrast. Jones (2002) noted that “play, fantasy, and emotional imagination are essential tools of the work of childhood and adolescence” as partaking in such aesthetic transactions nurtures their overall development (p. 12). Jones (2002) expands on this concept by noting that adolescents need to “fantasize, and play, and lose themselves in stories. That’s how they reorganize the world into forms they can manipulate. That’s how they explore and take control over their own thoughts and emotions” (p. 60). The fantastic settings and characters of some Gothic texts afforded adolescent readers this opportunity.

The Gothic, as a genre, is ambiguous; very little is straightforward (Jackson et al., 2008). Iser (1978) discussed how such textual spaces or gaps make the reader bring the story itself to life—he “lives with the characters and experiences their activities. His lack of knowledge concerning the continuation of the story links him to the characters to the extent that their future appears to him as a palpable uncertainty” (p. 56). The gaps left open in Gothic texts invite reader co-construction and interpretation, which affords opportunities for students to construct aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1994). An example of such ambiguity is that it is often unclear whether a Gothic text falls into fantasy or realistic fiction: Does the narrator of the “Midnight Mass of the Dead” really attend a church ceremony for the deceased, or does she simply dream it? Is the cat statue truly possessed by evil demons or a figment of the narrator’s imagination in “Cat in Glass?” These questions are never definitively answered, which gives readers the opportunity to cast his/her opinion on the piece. This ability to co-construct the text is an empowering experience for readers (Iser, 1978; McGillis, 2008).

Additionally, the undead or spirits of the dead are common liminal characters of Gothic texts (Coats, 2008; McGillis, 2008). Harry Potter and his peers cohabitate Hogwarts with various ghosts. The short story, “The Woman in the Snow,” features the spirit of a woman who is unable to rest because she is wronged in life. These are only a couple of the many examples of the spirits that haunt Gothic texts. This characteristic may compel students to reflect aesthetically on their thoughts surrounding the supernatural. Such questions, in which there is no definitive answer, provides a gap where readers cast their own views on the topic, thereby constructing aesthetic transactions with the text (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Closely related to the nervous anticipation that defines the mood of Gothic texts is the dark humor that frequently exists. Jackson, et al., (2008) discussed the wide variety of humor that Gothic texts promote ranging from “the exaggerated grotesque of the villains to the subtle play of parody that has been at the heart of the Gothic since its inception” (p. 4). Aesthetically transacting with the humor that Gothic texts promote has a wide range of reader benefits. The ability to satirize an exaggerated circumstance or character in Gothic texts requires sophisticated analysis and understanding: A reader has to understand why Bella, the main character in the *Twilight* series, is so depressed before he or she is able to make fun of her for it (Cross, 2008). Additionally, humor that spurs from comic distancing due to extreme behavior, such as the narrator’s of “The Tell Tale Heart” decision to kill an individual because of the appearance of his eye, empowers readers as it places them in a position of power over the character (Cross, 2008). Such supremacy, particularly over an adult character, is pleasurable for adolescent readers who typically reside under adult influence (Cross, 2008).

Readers can also laugh at themselves for becoming scared by the tense and scary mood comprising Gothic texts. Such dark humor has psychological benefits as it serves as ‘comic relief’ by helping to “allay the fears and anxieties thrown up by the Gothic aspects...humor can serve to release excess emotion and/or nervous energy that is vented through laughter to a beneficial effect” resulting in the construction of aesthetic transactions that are soothing and pleasurable for readers (Cross, 2008, p. 59). Aside from setting characteristics, there are moments of potential alignment between adolescents and Gothic texts due to the external forces influencing the characters.

Voice to the Voiceless: Grappling with External Forces in the Gothic Genre

Characters in Gothic texts grapple with a variety of forces that heighten story tension. This section focuses on the external forces that impact the characters. Berger (2000) and Trites (2000) noted that adolescence is a phase in life when burgeoning notions of sexuality and attraction to others becomes a new, powerful, and confusing terrain for young people to navigate. Despite its taboo nature, “sexual interest during adolescence is a normal, (even essential) part of development” (Berger, 2000, p. 488). Yet, rarely is such attraction towards others and the challenges it poses addressed in the academic setting. The one exception is health class; however, topics such as anatomy, pregnancy, and disease permeate the discussions, rather than the emotional experience and challenge of desire and attraction (Ashcraft, 2009). Compounding the problem is that this sterile and scientific academic approach vividly contrasts the messages of sexuality that dominate media and popular culture; such a duality serves to only further confuse adolescents:

Bombarded with messages telling them both that sex is the ticket to love, glamour, and adulthood, and that it is bad and will kill them, adolescents

in America are ultimately left with little guidance...in the area where they need it most: human relationships. (Ashcraft, 2009, p. 1)

Ashcraft (2009) championed the use of literature as a forum to discuss, reflect, and explore issues surrounding desire, attraction, and romance. Such literacy topics help teens develop their own burgeoning sexual identities and help them realize that these feelings are a normal part of growing up (Trites, 2000).

The Gothic genre explores “the repression and sublimations of sexuality in ‘respectable lives,’” (Hogle, 1999, p. 4). Thus, it provided a venue for exploration of these issues in the adolescent reading classroom. Reading teachers can couch such discussions using the terms ‘attraction’ or ‘romance,’ and discuss the emotional ramifications of these feelings without explicitly discussing sex or sexuality. For instance, in the *Harry Potter* series, as the characters enter adolescence, they begin to explore their sexuality (Trites, 2001). One example is the attraction that develops between Ron and Hermione as the series progresses and how this dynamic influences the characters’ interactions and the novels’ overall tensions. The Gothic genre affords opportunities for adolescents to vicariously experience and learn from the romantic tensions that often categorize the genre, which can result in meaningful aesthetic transactional experiences of imaginative contrast that may help them prepare for future scenarios.

Berger (2000) also articulated the fragile and turbulent nature that defines the adolescent cognitive developmental stage:

Adolescence can be a time of agonized reflection about the world and one’s place in it, because such reflection leads to novel, provocative, and sometimes frightening thoughts. God and religion come up for analysis: the meaning of life is open to question; and the misdeeds and moral failings of national heroes and one’s own parents take on heavy significance. (p. 471)

Unlike earlier developmental stages, adolescence is a time when individuals begin to question the ‘status quo’ and speculate about their place in society (Blackford, 2012; Strum & Michel, 2009). As Csikszentmihalyi (1984) noted, they confront “raw reality” and face “the discrepancy between the way they want the world to be and the way the world actually is” (p. 233). Despite having a more complex awareness of humanity and society, adolescents are without much agency to exercise their thoughts and actions as burgeoning adults; they exist in liminal spaces between the worlds of childhood and adulthood (Berger, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1995, Trites, 2000). The Gothic genre features characters in a state of powerlessness against other individuals and/or societal forces (Blackford, 2011; Coats, 2008; Latham, 2007; Priester, 2008; Trites, 2000). Examples of this include the narrator’s powerlessness against her dominating husband in the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” or the narrator’s helplessness against what she believes is the evil force behind a glass statue in “Cat in Glass.” This shared characteristic between the genre and adolescence can serve as a point of meaningful connectivity between adolescents and Gothic texts, resulting in the construction of aesthetic transactions.

Aside from having little agency, heroes and heroines of Gothic texts frequently have to grapple with authority figures that wield their power immorally (Coats, 2008; Jackson, et al., 2008). An example of this tension manifests in the *Harry Potter* series, when the main character, Harry, questions the authority and motives of various influential figures at his school, such as Professor Snape. What perhaps is even more disturbing to Harry is the realization that his father, James, acted in less than admirable ways. As Blackford (2012) notes, Gothic texts often feature characters distancing, or even severing parent and/or other authoritative relations in order for them to grow as individuals. A

vivid example of this occurs in *The Hunger Games* series when the reaping tributes are forced into an arena to fend for themselves and defend their lives without any parental support. Ultimately, the main characters of both texts, Harry and Katniss, realize that adults in positions of authority often wield their power in corrupt ways.

As Latham (2007) noted regarding adolescence, behavior is “highly regulated by an adult society, in which teens have essentially no political voice. Any real political or social power comes through a testing of boundaries, a subversion of the power structures in which they are bound” (p. 61). Akin to this, Trites (2000) discussed how a fundamental characteristic of adolescence is the desire to “test the degree of power they hold” (p. 1). Likewise, heroes/heroines of Gothic texts often rebel against their powerless state, whether it is something small, such as Harry Potter’s Invisibility Cloak that allows him to go into restricted areas of Hogwarts, or Katniss’s complete rebellion against President Snow in *The Hunger Games*. By observing Gothic characters grappling with their powerless state and questioning those who hold power, adolescent readers are offered a means to explore the tensions surrounding the legitimacy of power in terms of the authority figures that they have regular contact with, such as parents, teachers, and coaches (Trites, 2000). This moment of meaningful connectivity is another potential aesthetic transaction adolescents may construct with Gothic texts.

Finally, given the fact that the Gothic genre explores the darker side of society and human nature, violence, destruction, and death occur in these texts (Coats, 2008; Cross, 2008; Hogle, 1999). Unlike children’s literature, that often depicts death as part of a life cycle (such as in *Charlotte’s Web*) and deals with it in a delicate manner, Gothic literature does not shield the reader from the abruptness, definitiveness, and sometimes

unnaturalness of death (Trites, 2000). The narrator in “The Tell Tale Heart,” murders a man because of his appearance, the monster in *Frankenstein* kills his creator/father, and Harry Potter has to face the brutality in which his parents were killed and ultimately revenge their death by slaying their murderer himself. Developmentally, adolescence is a period of time where individuals begin to truly understand death in all of its complexity and inevitability (Trites, 2000). Texts that feature characters grappling with death in complex ways may help adolescents sort through their own anxieties, resulting in the construction of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast that aid in their individual development (Trites, 2000).

Destruction and violence are also common features of Gothic texts. Rather than shying away from these texts, it is helpful for adolescents to directly confront these issues and explore them in literature (Jones, 2002). Individuals, particularly adolescents, who are coping with so many changes and a lack of voice in society, may very well feel anger, even rage towards themselves and others (Cross, 2008). Jones (2002) conducted a study of young people and their affinity for fictional violence. He concluded that they use these stories to “feel stronger, access their emotions, to take control of their anxieties, to calm themselves down in the face of real violence, to fight their way through emotional challenges and lift themselves to new developmental levels” (Jones, 2002, p. 6). All of these scenarios represent healthy aesthetic transactional possibilities between Gothic texts and adolescents. Exploring these emotions through characters in Gothic texts is a healthy and productive means for adolescents to release and thus, reduce these feelings (Cross, 2008; Jones, 2002). Young people are constantly bombarded with news and information about real life violence, corruption, death, and destruction. Jones (2002) expanded on this

by noting that “It’s when people are most anxious about real violence that they want to see it in make-believe. It [stories] can help people take control of their fears and approach life’s scarier aspects more realistically” (p. 98). Exploring such topics in literature provides an aesthetic transactional means for individuals to grapple with their anxieties surrounding real life situations (McGillis, 2008).

Monstrosities and Mayhem: Grappling with Internal Forces in the Gothic Genre

Berger (2000) noted the instability surrounding the adolescent:

Except perhaps for the first few months of life, no other developmental period is characterized by such multifaceted and compelling biological changes. Nor are developing persons at any other age likely to experience a more fascinating, unnerving, and potentially confusing sequence of intellectual and social transitions. (p. 529)

Berger (2000) noted that adolescence is categorized by internal flux, transition, upheaval, and conflict, particularly in regards to issues of ‘normality.’ These are the same qualities that liminal characters in Gothic texts experience (Wisker, 2007). Liminality also relates to adolescence as a developmental stage. Adolescents are on the border or threshold of childhood and adulthood (Berger, 2000). Dealing with the push and pull of ambivalent feelings that categorize this liminal state, particularly in confrontation with the unfamiliar, lies at the cornerstone of adolescent developmental experiences and their grappling with these various ‘monsters’ as a result of this state.

Relatedly, Rosenblatt (1995) communicated the traits with which adolescents come to the reading experience, which illustrate their internal dilemmas and concerns. These included: concern with ‘normality,’ self-consciousness, feelings of being alone or estranged, turbulent and often conflicting thoughts, and feeling that life as a whole lacks in consistency and is in upheaval (Rosenblatt, 1995). As discussed in earlier sections, the

essence of the Gothic genre is the exploration of the societal ‘other,’ which often manifests as some monstrous being (Blackford, 2011; Farnell, 2009). In addition to lacking agency, Gothic texts feature characters as outside the borders of society (liminal spaces) whether due to physical, psychological, or a host of other circumstances. Harry Potter is an ‘outsider’ even in terms of the wizard world in regards to Voldemort’s inability to kill him. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is an outsider as she refuses to adhere to societal expectations surrounding women.

Quintessentially, adolescence is often defined as a period of ‘otherness’ (Blackford 2011/2012). They linger on the borderlands of society, often ‘monstrous’ mystery to their parents, teachers, and especially themselves due to this liminal state (Blackford, 2011/2012). Due to these abrupt biological changes and/or psychosocial crisis, adolescents may feel ‘haunted’ and ‘monstrous,’ existing in societal outskirts or borderlands much like the actual monsters, demons, vampires, ghosts that haunt Gothic texts (Blackford, 2012). Examples of this theme are prevalent throughout Gothic texts. In “Cat in Glass,” the narrator becomes figuratively and literally ‘monstrous’ once she harms her family and permanently disfigures herself. The narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is ‘monstrous’ or abnormal and eventually exposes this condition to her husband in the final chilling scene where she creeps along the floor tearing at the wallpaper to allow the hallucinated figures hidden inside the walls to be released.

Using literature as a means to explore what is ‘monstrous’ or ‘unnatural’ unearths the complexities surrounding these terms. Such text explorations of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast may lead students in understanding how social stereotypes shape our perceptions of ‘normal’ and ‘good’ in often inaccurate and self-

perpetuating ways; the narrator of the ‘Yellow Wallpaper’ becomes what her husband deems her to be from the start-insane. The monster only becomes ‘monstrous’ after constant societal rejection. These topics are potentially engaging, as particularly for the adolescent reader, “the desire for self-understanding and for knowledge about people provides an important avenue into literature” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 52). As McGillis (2008) articulated, Gothic hero-villains “are us in our most unrepressed moments,” (p. 231). In fact, Jackson et al., (2008) discussed that a reason why the Gothic genre appeals to adolescents is the fact that it overturns conventional notions of normalcy. Observing characters that thrive despite or because of what makes them different provides a potential source of aesthetic hope for the reader; it serves as a model for them to potentially release some of the pressure associated with conforming to all the conventions surrounding normality.

Relatedly, it is during adolescence that students become aware of the many facades or ‘masks’ that people wear, which makes true understanding of others difficult (McGillis, 2008). Exposing people’s darker sides, or dark psyche and unveiling the masks that people wear are themes at the heart of the Gothic genre; this tradition illustrates that even ‘good’ or ‘normal’ people have dark sides. An example of this theme is in Nancy Etchemendy’s Gothic short story, “Cat in Glass.” Despite attempting to repress her dark psyche, the narrator’s darker nature ultimately takes over her rationality, which leads her to her harming beloved family members. In the *Harry Potter* series, Harry strives to be ‘good,’ yet he shares commonalities with the evil Voldemort. Though grappling with the various psyches (both dark and light) of consciousness is something that all individuals experience, it is particularly powerful during adolescence when

individuals are even more likely to experience “double consciousness or psychic dissonance” (Franzak & Noll, 2006, p. 662).

The question of what really constitutes ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ and exposure of an individual’s true nature, manifests in Gothic texts. Through exploration of the Gothic, adolescent readers can potentially understand that everyone possesses a ‘dark psyche,’ or darker side of their being, but that it is the control of darker impulses that ultimately defines who we are in a moral sense. Such potential understandings through meaningful aesthetic transactions with texts “give us relief from the pressure of always having to be good. Indulging in unapproved passions helps us to accept our imperfections” (Jones, 2002, p. 145). Issues that the Gothic genre exposes lies at the heart of the human experience; having the opportunity to reflect on and share these aesthetic transactional experiences in a classroom setting may serve to bring readers together as they recognize their shared interests, concerns, and anxieties.

The Gothic Genre as a Unifying Force Amongst Adolescent Readers

Wellington (2008) documented the change in rapport amongst her students in a particular class as a result of her teaching of a Gothic unit at a state college in Utah. In a traditionally Mormon community, where students were “acculturated to defer to authority,” and practice strict forms of obedience, one of her students stood out in the classroom borderlands or liminal space as “least compliant” due to her dressing in traditional Gothic attire including black clothes and tribal tattoos (Wellington, 2008, p. 173). Initially, this liminal identity made her as an outsider of this classroom community. However, after months of analyzing and discussing Gothic texts, students came to realize that they were all ‘Gothic’ in some way or another:

What [they] had in common, they soon found, was a love of Gothic fiction, whose non-canonical otherness afforded them a means of identification and dissent. The Gothic, as it turned out, was *theirs*-what they had in common despite their differences. In fact, by the semester's end, the consensus among the clean-cut was that they had all been closet Goths for whom this course was a 'coming out.' (Wellington, 2008, p. 173-174)

In essence, the Gothic genre, in exposing various 'monsters' that cause trepidation and fear is really a genre about human anxieties, and what causes them. For adolescents, these anxieties, or 'monsters' are particularly powerful because many of them are new, such as concerns with normalcy, feelings of powerlessness, etc. (Blackford, 2011/2012; McGillis, 2008). Thus, the older adolescent students in this class, through aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts, found points of connectivity not only with the genre, but with one another, which resulted in meaningful changes to this particular classroom Discourse in terms of rapport (Wellington, 2008).

Both Rosenblatt (1994) and Gee (2008) argued that literacy learning must transcend beyond reading and writing into the social and emotional dimensions of individuals. Such teaching is "ultimately a moral act" where individuals not only become better readers, but also more open-minded human beings (Gee, 2008, p. 114). Rosenblatt (2005) noted that "Imaginative sharing of the human experience through literature can be an emotionally cogent means of insight into human differences as part of a basic human unity" (p. 53). Utilizing the Gothic genre in the classroom, which rebels against categories and limitations, provides a potential means of showing students how they are similar, particularly at a time when they are actively developing their identities. This realization represents another potential aesthetic transaction between adolescents and Gothic texts that can hold positive implications for potential Discourse evolution.

In sum, this final section of the literature review explores some of the many possibilities for adolescent reader aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts due to moments of potential alignment between characteristics that define the genre and characteristics that define adolescence as a developmental phase. Within this review of the literature, I situated my own research as a way to build upon Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) transactional reading and Gee's (2008) Discourse theories in exploring adolescent students' aesthetic transactional experiences with Gothic literature (a genre that is prevalent in their leisure reading interests) within the reading classroom, as a means to potentially align and promote growth in students' primary and secondary Discourses in regards to reading practices. The following chapter outlines my research methods.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of this research is to explore adolescent students' aesthetic transactions with Gothic literature, a genre prevalent in students' leisure reading practices. A secondary inquiry focuses on how students' Discourses evolved during and after the unit experience. In order to collect and analyze students' aesthetic transactions authentically and accurately, tension or conflicts in the development of aesthetic transactions and Discourse evolvment are also explored. Research informed by the participants is critical in understanding social practices such as academic reading (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998, Oldfather, 2002). As such, an effort was made to focus on the nature of reality of the participants in regards to the research questions throughout data collection and analysis. Given that this research focused on the needs of the participants, this study is also design-based research as it includes an implementation (the Gothic reading unit) designed by the researcher aimed at addressing a problem and altering the status quo within the classroom (Rubin, 2012). Several questions guided this research.

Primary Research Question:

- (1) What aesthetic transactions do adolescent students construct in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit?

Secondary Research Questions:

- (1) What kind of aesthetic transactions occur during the unit?
- (2) What tension(s) arise in the development of aesthetic transactions during the unit?
- (3) What student Discourse(s) evolve during the reading unit?
- (4) What student Discourses remain unchanged at the conclusion of the reading unit?

The following sections detail information regarding the study setting and participants. All the names in regards to the setting location and participants are pseudonyms.

Setting

I conducted this study at Hillside Middle School, a middle class suburban public school in Hillside, New Jersey. The district is composed of an elementary and middle school. Hillside, along with four other middle schools in the county, feeds into a regional high school. All demographics listed below were reported in 2012. Hillside has a total population of 7,103. Income per capita is \$51, 151, per household, \$119, 792, and individuals at or below poverty line is 1.4%. Hillside Middle School houses grades 5-8 grade with a total population of 572 students. Less than 1% of the students are classified as having limited English speaking abilities. Five percent are on a reduced lunch plan. The racial breakdown is 62% Caucasian, 26% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% Hispanic, and 5% African American.

Hillside Middle School's average class size is 21. The district spends an average of \$14,671 per student. Seventy-seven percent of teachers hold a BA/BS, while the remaining hold an MA/MS. As reported in 2012, 86% of the seventh grade students met or exceeded the state average on the language arts/literacy sections of the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) the state average being 61%. Hillside Middle School tracks the students in 'inclusion,' 'regular,' and 'green' (honors) English Language Arts (ELA) classes. The classroom in which this study took place was a seventh grade 'Green' ELA class comprised of 23 students. I taught six and seventh grade English Language Arts at this school for five years (fall 2003-spring 2009) prior to commencing full-time doctoral studies in the fall of 2009.

Rationale for Site Location

I chose Hillside Middle School as the site for this research as I generally had positive experiences there as an educator. During my final year teaching at the middle school, I utilized a few popular culture and traditional Gothic texts in a mini Gothic studies reading unit with my seventh grade students that lasted one week. I had the idea in part from the students, who communicated leisure reading practices falling under the category of the Gothic genre. Additionally, I took a Gothic literature studies class during my master's program at Rutgers University-Camden, where I spent the semester immersed in Gothic contemporary and classic texts. As a result of this course, I felt confident in my knowledge on the genre, as well as its popularity, particularly with adolescents. From my observations as an instructor, my students as a whole appeared interested and engaged throughout the unit; on my end of the year surveys, many of the students listed the unit as the highlight of the year. This impromptu experiment as a teacher led me to further research this and related topics as a doctoral student.

Additionally, given that the nature of this study required that I go into a school and significantly alter the curriculum, the rapport I developed and maintained with the district, as well as insider knowledge of the curriculum expectations from that of a teacher's perspective, were strong advantages of this site. I carried out a small version of this study with the teacher-participant's eighth grade regular education class in the spring of 2012 for two weeks. This pilot allowed me to observe the students' reception of some of the material, as well as test out and refine my various protocols (see Appendix A for pilot study findings). For example, as a result of the pilot, I realized my original research questions were too broad (I was originally looking at students' overall responses to

Gothic texts). Thus, the research questions and all related instruments were refined to focus on students' aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts. Entrée was granted through superintendent and principal consent for me to carry out the full study in January 2012, which was officially approved by the Hillside Board of Education in September, 2012. Data collection commenced with pre-observations in mid-October 2012 and was completed with participant debriefing of the initial findings in June 2013. This study was approved by Rutgers Internal Review Board (IRB) in the summer of 2012 and by my dissertation committee in October, 2012.

Participant Selection

Teacher-participant. The teacher-participant, Mrs. Carson, enthusiastically volunteered to participate in this study upon learning the overall aims of the project in January 2012 and signed a consent form denoting her agreement in September, 2012 (see Appendix F for consent forms). Mrs. Carson is a woman in her mid-thirties who holds her BA in English education. She is a tenured seventh and eighth grade English Language instructor at Hillside Middle School and has been teaching in the district for eleven years. She served as my mentor during my first year as an English Language Arts teacher at Hillside. The superintendent, principal, and vice-principal approved this selection. I selected Mrs. Carson as the teacher-participant for this study because as colleagues, we have established rapport, trust, and a spirit of professional candidness that supported the design-based nature of this project (Rubin, 2012). She is also a passionate teacher who is open to new ideas to enhance student learning. These qualities are essential as the design-based nature of this study required that Mrs. Carson voluntarily devote personal time in

becoming acclimated with the Gothic texts and curriculum, which she did during the summer (2012).

Student participants. Due to scheduling and consideration of students' needs, Mrs. Carson and I mutually agreed that the study would take place in her seventh grade 'green' (honors) ELA class. The homogeneity of the class in terms of skill is a study limitation. Future studies in other classroom contexts will need to consider the aesthetic transactions of student participants with a wider skill range. Despite this limitation, there were a number of advantages. This class had a relatively equal number of male and female individuals (ten males and thirteen females, respectively) who come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, despite the homogeneity in terms of reading skill, Mrs. Carson remarked that the class demonstrated variation in terms of reading enjoyment and text interests. Taken together, these qualities added complexity to the study (Creswell, 2007). Mrs. Carson afforded me entrée into this class in September 2012 where I introduced the general nature of the study to the class as a whole and conducted pre-unit observations to become acclimated with the class routines and the students.

All of the students were given parental consent forms (see Appendix F). Out of the twenty-three students enrolled in the class, twenty-one parents granted permission for their child to be study participants. Though the entire class participated in the unit, because of time and resource constraints, eight individuals (four males and four females) were selected as study participants. I determined the participants based on a number of criteria. The students were given a pre-screening survey (see Appendix B) in order for me to gauge their willingness and level of comfort associated with the data collection methods of this study. Given that the research questions focus on the aesthetic

transactions students constructed in response to texts in the Gothic studies reading unit, it was essential that the student participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings in order for me to portray their experiences as accurately as possible. From this information, I eliminated students that expressed discomfort with any of the data collection measures, as this represented an ethical concern, as well as the potentially limiting information that would influence the accuracy of the study findings.

The survey also solicited general information in terms of students' overall enjoyment of reading, as well as genres and topics they like to read. I included an equal number of male and female participants from different backgrounds. Thus, I utilized purposeful sampling, specifically, maximum variation, in terms of selecting student participants for this study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). This range allowed me to examine the complexity surrounding moments and tensions with regards to aesthetic textual transactions in response to the unit texts. Using the survey, initial classroom observations, as well as informal conversations with Mrs. Carson, I selected twelve student participants that demonstrated varying degrees of general reading interest, enjoyment of ELA class as a whole, as well as variety in terms of text interests. I conducted preliminary interviews with twelve students and narrowed the selection down to eight study participants based on the outcome of the initial interviews. The participants assented to participate in the study (see Appendix G for the assent form). The following table outlines the study participants in terms of initial self-reported information both in the survey and during the preliminary interview:

Table 1

Student Participant Profile

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Anna	Female	12	Columbian/Haitian
Diana	Female	12	Iranian
Eliza	Female	12	Chinese
Emily	Female	12	Caucasian
Kurt	Male	12	Chinese
Matt	Male	13	Caucasian
Ray	Male	12	Caucasian
Victor	Male	12	Indian

Unit Design and Implementation

Unit implementation commenced on October 19, 2012 and concluded on April 16, 2013 for a total of five months or 20 weeks of instruction (one month in total was lost due to a two week hiatus due to Hurricane Sandy in October, 2012 and one week off for winter break in December 2012 and spring break in March 2013 respectively). During the summer of 2012, Mrs. Carson and I discussed (in person and over the phone) my early unit lesson ideas and potential list of unit texts. I provided Mrs. Carson with a selection of potential popular culture and academic texts based on the following criteria: school-appropriateness (based on the school's specified criteria), age-appropriateness, representative of various genres (short story, informational text, etc.), popularity with readers (determined from my past teaching experience and adolescent reception to texts on online book review forums, such as Amazon), and illustrative of Gothic traits and themes discussed in the literature review section of this proposal. I also invited Mrs. Carson to share with me any Gothic texts she had previously taught that she wished to

include. Mrs. Carson indicated her text preferences, which formed the major texts comprising the unit (see Appendix K for full text list).

With Mrs. Carson's assistance, I designed the reading unit and coinciding lesson plans, assessments, activities, and resources to complement the text choices and capitalize on students' aesthetic transactional experiences with texts, as well as align with Mrs. Carson's teaching philosophy. I relied on research on the pedagogical qualities that enhance and deepen individuals' aesthetic transactions with texts as presented in the literature review (see Appendices I & J for the unit plans and resources). Additionally, all the lessons were aligned with the Common Core State Standards as per administrative request; as such, the unit is an example of curriculum and pedagogy meeting mandates while simultaneously encouraging student aesthetic transactions and Discourse alignment and subsequent development. The initial plans were adapted and altered by both the teacher and student participants based on the nature of the aesthetic transactional experiences they communicated in ways that could not be foreseen by Mrs. Carson or myself in advance. This approach aligns with the design-based nature of the study where the design tools need to be flexible and open to potential modification (Lamberg & Middleton, 2009). More details regarding the ways in which the participants made this unit experience uniquely theirs will be discussed in the findings section.

Once unit instruction commenced, Mrs. Carson was fully responsible for executing the daily lessons Monday through Friday, during the ELA block (9:24 AM-10:38 am) with the exception of interruptions due to conferencing, teacher illness, field trips, assemblies, as well as material she needed to occasionally teach that were not a part of the unit (grammar, NJASK prep instruction, etc.). All of the initial materials were

presented to the classroom teacher, principal, and superintendent for approval prior to unit commencement. I provided a copy of the texts to Mrs. Carson over the summer to allow her ample time to become familiar with the resources. I also purchased the texts and resources for the twenty-three students in the class.

In alliance with the design-based research tradition, a strength of this research was the ongoing communication that existed between myself and Mrs. Carson throughout this process from her feedback of early lesson ideas, spur of the minute adjustments due to the response of the students, and reflection over the experience as a whole once it concluded. “Democratization” between researcher and practitioner, where the two merge and work together for the common good of the students, was one of the study goals (Burr, 2003, p. 154). Such research was empowering as the participant became actively involved in the research process and problem-solves issues unique to her situation (Burr, 2003). The following section details my role in the classroom environment.

Positioning the Researcher

I chose to situate myself as a ‘participant observer,’ or stance where I observed and interacted closely enough with members to “establish an insider’s identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership” so that the students see my role as distinct from the classroom teacher (Merriam, 1998, p. 101). Using Finder’s (1997) study as a guide in terms of researcher positioning amongst adolescents, I purposefully dressed more casually than the classroom teacher in order to further differentiate my role from that of teacher. Additionally, I did not react to any ‘off-task’ student behavior that occasionally occurred during my observations such as

straying off-topic in discussions, engaging in other activities other than what is teacher-directed, etc., which a teacher would look to address and correct (Finders, 1997).

I was in the classroom every day the unit was implemented (except for a few missed classes due to personal illness); thus, the students became comfortable with me being a part of the classroom environment. I engaged in informal conversations with all of the students throughout the study. When the students approached me to comment on a book they were reading, project they were working on in-class, movie they saw over the weekend, etc., I readily engaged in these informal, rapport building conversations. However, on the rare occasion that a student asked me an evaluative or pedagogical question, I immediately directed them to Mrs. Carson. This stance as an ‘adult peer’ was enacted to encourage students to be candid with me during interviews.

My prior experiences with this subject include spending five years as a middle school ELA Instructor at Hillside Middle School. During that time, I developed my own beliefs surrounding the teaching of reading to adolescent students. I do not intend my own understandings to purposefully bias my interpretations. My previous interaction with middle school readers, however, informed both the data collection and analysis. Throughout the course of the study, I strove to minimize the influence of my teaching beliefs as much as possible. Though I was a teacher at Hillside Middle School, enough time had passed that none of the student participants attended the school when I was a teacher. Additionally, the years removed from Hillside aided in my ability to approach the study from that of a researcher. To limit my impact on the participants, I ensured that the lesson plans included Mrs. Carson’s perspective and aligned with her teaching philosophy; she also had the agency to alter the lessons.

Consequently, while introducing the study, I stressed that I was in the classroom to learn more about their thoughts about reading, specifically, their responses to ‘books,’ and that I was not in the classroom as another teacher. The students understood that Mrs. Carson was responsible for unit instruction and grades. I did not make the students aware of my part in text selection and unit design, which encouraged them to be candid with me in regards to their aesthetic transactions and tension to these experiences. The students were given partial disclosure of the goals of my research in order to best capture their authentic personal responses to these unit texts (Patton, 2002). Taken together, these measures were carried out to assist me in capturing students’ aesthetic transactions with the unit texts and Discourse evolvment as accurately as possible. The next section details the data collection measures.

Data Collection

In keeping with case study design, multiple data sources including field notes, classroom conversation transcripts between the participants independent of the teacher, interview transcripts, and student artifacts (completed and/or produced during unit instruction) were collected in order to develop a detailed and complex account of student aesthetic transactional experiences with the Gothic texts as well as any evolvment of participant Discourses during or after the unit (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2001).

Observations

Observations were an appropriate method for data collection for this research as they shed light on classroom phenomena that is not always discussed during interviews (Patton, 1987). As Patton (2002) noted, “through direct observations, the inquirer is better able to understand and capture” data holistically in regards to study participants (p. 262).

Additionally, classroom observations provided context for further understanding and eliciting of material for interviews (Patton, 2002). I observed Mrs. Carson's seventh grade reading class five times prior to unit implementation in September, 2012 in order to become acquainted with the classroom routines and students. Once unit instruction commenced in October 2012, I observed the classroom every day of the school week for the entire class period until unit instruction was completed in April 2013. Throughout the observations, I positioned myself in various places in the classroom to gain different perspectives on what was occurring. Jottings were taken during each observation, which were written up as field notes later that day in order to best capture observational nuances (Emerson, Fretz, & Shawl, 1995). To further insure that relevant data was captured, I utilized an observation protocol adapted from the Community College Resource Center English Classroom Observation Protocol (2012) and Creswell's (2007) suggestions for observational protocol to guide each visit and to maintain rigor and relevancy of the data in regards to the research questions (see Appendix C for observation protocol).

The main focus of the observations was to capture the aesthetic transactions that the students constructed in response to the Gothic texts, as well as moments of tension. I also examined how students' aesthetic transactions were influenced by teacher pedagogy and how the Discourse of the classroom evolved throughout the unit experience. Though language in regards to what was said by participants was given priority during the observations, I also noted physical behaviors. Though these non-verbal cues were not as reliable as what the students say, they nonetheless provided additional information in terms of students' responses to in-class text experiences that informed subsequent observations and interviews (Patton, 2002). For example, I noticed that during Mrs.

Carson's reading of the Gothic short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," many of the participants were exhibiting behaviors suggesting tension to constructing aesthetic transactions, such as slouching over their desks, counting how many pages were remaining, staring out the window, etc. This inability of students to aesthetically transact with this particular text was confirmed by many of the participants during interviews and will be discussed in greater depth in the findings.

During whole class discussions, (which comprised the vast majority of discussions during the unit) I relied on jottings alone. I was unable to audio tape whole-class discussions, as I did not have parental consent to audiotape two of the students present in Mrs. Carson's classroom. However, Mrs. Carson structured whole class discussions so that only one student spoke at a given time. Though the jottings alone are not as accurate of a collection measure as transcriptions, such turn-taking allowed me to capture the vast majority and essence of what the participants communicated.

Audiotapes of Classroom Conversations

Silverman (2011) argued for the importance of including 'naturally occurring' conversation in qualitative research. Studying natural turn taking as it occurs in the field, and not how it is 'set up' or arranged in an interview setting, is a rigorous means of tapping into the authentic perspectives of participants as they occur in real time (Silverman, 2011). Such responses may occur more readily in small group work, particularly when the teacher is not directly present or directing the conversation. Consequently, when students worked in groups to complete tasks and/or discuss the unit texts, Mrs. Carson grouped the study participants together so that I was able to audiotape the conversations in addition to jottings. Parental consent and student assent for this data

collection method were obtained for all study participants (see Appendices F & G). Voice recorders were placed in the center of the student participants as they discussed the texts and completed related activities. The audio tapes were downloaded into digital files and transcribed verbatim. Within these conversations, I analyzed participant discourse as they discussed their aesthetic transactions with the unit texts, as well as any evidence of Discourse change. I also explored moments in which tensions or conflicts arose in regards to these topics.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants in order to maintain structure, but also allow some flexibility for participants to deviate meaningfully into other related areas they wanted to discuss in relation to their response to the Gothic unit (Patton, 1990/2002). Listening to individual's perspectives in regards to their aesthetic transactions within the Gothic studies reading unit ensured the relevancy of the data in regards to the research questions; the method also aligned with the social constructivist framework of this study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990/2002). I employed Weiss's (1994) qualitative interviewing resource as a guide in creating all of the interview questions; I sought to phrase questions in a way that encouraged participants to share their authentic perspectives and responses in regards to the research questions. I audiotaped all interview sessions, which were saved and stored as digital files and transcribed verbatim.

There were a total of six interview protocols, as I interviewed the students and teacher-participants on three separate occasions: pre, during, and post the Gothic unit implementation (see Appendix H for interview protocols). I conducted multiple interviews with all of the participants in order to best capture the evolution of their

responses to the Gothic unit texts; as such, the during and post unit interview protocols evolved as a result of the initial findings of earlier data collection methods. As the classroom teacher, Mrs. Carson offered up an important perspective in regards to her perceptions of the participants' experiences related to the research questions. The interviews also shed light on educational policy influencing student aesthetic transactions about which the students lacked knowledge.

The student interviews were held in a conference room during Mrs. Carson's reading period. During the second and third interview rounds, Mrs. Carson taught other lessons, so that I did not miss any observations in relation to the unit. During the first round of interviews, questions elicited information in regards to students' aesthetic transactions (or lack thereof) with texts both in school and at home and information regarding students' primary Discourses. The second and third interviews focused on the Gothic unit and students' evolving responses regarding the research questions.

Unit Artifacts

Unit artifacts in the form of student notes, projects, journal responses, and other activities were collected and analyzed in light of the research questions (Merriam, 1998). Silverman (2011) noted that the advantages of using artifacts in data collection is additional data "richness," in that close analysis of written texts can reveal "subtleties" in regards to research queries (p. 230). Artifacts are also readily available and remain static in time for ongoing analysis (Silverman, 2011). Paper-based documents were photocopied and any identifying information was removed to maintain participant confidentiality. Larger student projects were captured by a digital camera and scanned to

my computer. Internet artifacts, such as YouTube videos created by the students, were analyzed in the privacy of my home.

Taken together, these data collection methods captured information that yields a complex account of adolescent students' aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts as well as Discourse evolvment and moments of resistance or tension, which aligns with the social constructivist nature of this study (Creswell, 2007). The next section details data analysis procedures.

Data Analysis

The Cyclical Nature of Analysis

The cycle of observing, questioning, reflecting, and amending protocol, all while doing beginning analysis, is critical particularly to case study design (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Merriam, 1998). During all phases of data collection, analysis was ongoing. The digital recordings obtained during interviews and participant classroom conversations were transcribed between visits. Field notes, transcripts, and documents were analyzed throughout data collection. These measures allowed me to review data collected immediately and pursue areas not originally considered. During data collection and analysis, I kept a researcher's journal where I reflected daily on my experiences. I utilized the journal as a way to be continuously reflexive in order to minimize bias; reflecting on my own role in the study helped to keep my experiences and perspective distinct from the participants (Emerson et al., 1997; Patton, 2002; Ruona, 2005).

Additionally, utilizing Emerson et al., (2007) and Ruona's (2005) suggestions for qualitative memo writing, I composed memos once a week during data collection and after every session of coding during data analysis. In these memos, I elaborated on ideas

and began to “link or tie codes and bits of data together” (Emerson et al., 1997, p. 162). This process allowed me to conduct early analysis that informed future data collection measures and see how the various pieces of data related to each other. These memos also included my questions, dilemmas, and surprises. Additionally, they helped me make decisions on study breadth, identifying ‘leads,’ as well as developing ideas (Ruona, 2005). With regards to data coding, I utilized Boyatzis (1998) and Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) research on thematic analysis and code development and Gee’s (2011) research on discourse analysis, which is discussed in the following section.

The Little ‘d’ discourse of Big ‘D’ Discourses

Within the larger domain of Discourses as language *and* “distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, and believing” is consideration of the language component of Big ‘D’ Discourses; this component is referred to as little ‘d’ discourse, which is “any stretch of spoken or written language (often called a ‘text’ in the expanded sense where texts can be oral or written)” (Gee, 2011, p. 205). Analysis of these ‘texts’ is known as discourse analysis, or “the study of language in use” (Gee, 2011, p. 8). Specifically, the knowledge gained through discourse analysis is understanding what language means and is doing (Gee, 2011). As such, “we can learn about the context in which the language was used and how that context was construed (interpreted) by the speaker or writer and listener(s) or reader(s)” (Gee, 2011, p. 20). According to Gee (2011), discourse analysis relies on the researcher asking particular questions related to the language segments that are salient to the research. For this study, I applied discourse analysis by constantly reviewing the data for moments where students signaled (in verbal or written language) aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts, in their discussion of

associations, feelings, attitudes, ideas, and images that the texts and related activities/discussions brought about, or in contrast, tension to such experiences in alignment with Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) aesthetic transactional theory of reading.

In regards to the secondary research question (examining the evolution of students' various Discourses) I applied Gee's (2011) guidelines for discourse analysis in terms of exploring what participants 'say' in regards to Gothic texts in the reading classroom. Analysis of student discourse in response to Gothic texts allowed me to identify specific instances where students' signaled a change to one of their various Discourses. Specifically, I relied on Gee's (2011) Big 'D' Discourse analysis tool, which he defined as follows:

For any communication, ask how the person is using the language, as well as ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, dressing, and using various objects, tools, and technologies in certain sorts of environments to enact a specific socially recognizable identity and engage in one or more socially recognizable activities. (p. 175)

In utilizing this tool, I continually analyzed students' signaling of their primary Discourse experiences, as well as any shifts within this Discourse during the Gothic unit experience. I also sought to understand participants' secondary Discourse evolvment as students in Mrs. Carson's reading classroom. In conjunction with discourse analysis and for the further development of codes, I also utilized research on thematic analysis to aid me in analyzing the data in light of the research questions.

Thematic Analysis

An overview. As Ryan and Bernard noted, "discovering themes is the basis of much social science research" (p. 86). Relatedly, Boyartiz (1998) explained that in this sense, thematic analysis is not a "separate method, such as grounded theory or

ethnography but something to be used to assist the researcher in the search for insight”

(vi). Thematic analysis is the process for ‘encoding’ qualitative information (Boyartiz, 1998, vi). Codes are derived from themes present in the data (Boyartiz, 1998). A ‘theme’ is described by Boyartiz (1998) as follows:

A theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of a phenomenon. A theme may be identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent level (underlying the phenomenon). (vvi)

My research sought to understand student aesthetic transactional experiences with texts in a Gothic studies reading unit (Rosenblatt 1994/1995). As such, thematic analysis of aesthetic transactional ‘moments’ fit the overall nature of this research, as these ‘moments’ served as the foundation for codes and subsequent theme development. My initial coding scheme consisted of deductive codes from my prior experiences as an instructor, as well as knowledge I gleaned as a result of the texts comprising the literature review of this study. During and after data collection, this coding scheme was continuously altered to reflect inductive codes that became salient in participant responses. I used a combination of inductive and deductive coding in the final version of my coding scheme (Boyartiz, 1998; Ruona, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

The process surrounding data analysis of the documents remained consistent in order to maintain rigor and produce reliable data (Creswell, 2009; Ruona, 2005). Using Ruona’s (2005) recommended four “stages” of qualitative data analysis, the next section outlines how I consistently and routinely worked with the data. These steps are also presented in a condensed format in my data analysis protocol (see Appendix D).

Stages of thematic data analysis

Data preparation. Ruona (2005) noted that the first step in data analysis is to transform the collected data into a form that the researcher can manipulate. As such, all of the data collected during the study was converted into Word documents and stored on my home computer. Each piece of data was assigned its own title denoting the type of data, instance, and date it was collected. I initially organized my computer documents (the four kinds of data collected in this study, memos, and journal entries) according to source in folders on my personal desktop and USB drive (Ruona, 2005). All identifying information was removed from the documents to protect participants' identities. Later in the analysis process, the sources were also uploaded and stored under data type and each individual participant using ATLAS ti qualitative data software (Muhr, 1996).

Familiarization using discourse analysis. Preparing the data merges with the familiarization analysis phase (Ruona, 2005). During this phase, I was involved in listening to audiotapes, reading and rereading the Word documents, making notes, underlying key phrases or words, looking for repetition and distinctions amongst documents, and constructing memos; such activities that involve active engagement on the part of the researcher with the data categorizes this phase and aligns with thematic analysis as a whole (Boyartiz, 1998; Ruona, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Coding. As Ruona (2005) noted, coding lies at the heart of data analysis as a means to organize, label, and condense the data. I conducted preliminary coding throughout data collection as a result of the activities conducted during the familiarization phase. Each Word document was copied and pasted onto a new document with the heading 'preliminary coding' attached to the title, leaving the original document unaltered. More systematic and formal coding in ATLAS ti began after data collection.

For each code, I used Boyartiz's (1998) recommendations for thematic coding that "captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon" and has the following elements: a title, definition, and illustrative examples from the data (p. 10).

As I continuously returned to the data, the coding scheme evolved. Once the documents and codes were uploaded to ATLAS ti, I examined bits of data under each code heading. My coding scheme consisted of nine categories. I coded every document concentrating on one specific code category at a time as I found it was too overwhelming to examine the data for multiple code categories simultaneously. At the end of each coding session, I reflected in a memo on how the codes linked to one another, as well as any issues or difficulties I had with the current code scheme and subsequent ideas for future revision. Engaging in this process resulted in a variety of modifications. New codes that became salient during analysis were added, and initial codes that were not supported by the participants' responses were deleted. Additionally, I found that some codes were repetitive, and were subsequently condensed. In contrast, examining some codes yielded distinctions that had not been accounted for; thus, one code was altered to two. Each time the codes changed, I recoded the previous documents; thus, I constantly engaged in a recursive process of "coding, editing the previous coding system, and recoding" (Ruona, 2005). During this phase, my two peer dissertation readers tested out the coding scheme on small segments of data and provided me feedback, which resulted in additional changes.

The final coding list contains a total of 54 codes organized under 9 categories (see Appendix E for full code list). Each code category was analyzed a final time for any additional changes that needed to be made. The Gothic text qualities that the participants

expressed having an aesthetic transactional experience with are explored under the first category. For example, all of the participants discussed having connectivity with the Gothic quality of characters existing in a state of powerlessness, as they felt that many external forces limited their agency. Moments of tension in regards to aesthetic transactions with Gothic traits were also identified in this code category. Readers' overall affective reactions to a text denote another type of aesthetic transactional response. These responses comprised the second code category. For example, all of the participants discussed how they enjoyed the fusion of popular culture and traditional texts in the unit.

The third category of codes included the qualities of in-class discussions that encouraged participants' construction of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts. For example, Mrs. Carson allowed many of the discussions to be led by the students with little interference. This quality allowed students to share their aesthetic transactions with one another, which deepened the transactional nature of their overall experiences with the unit texts. Mrs. Carson's use of reading-related activities that encouraged participants' construction of aesthetic transaction encompassed the fourth code category. As a whole, participants discussed that activities where they exercised creativity enhanced their aesthetic transactional text experiences and allowed them a means to tangibly represent these experiences.

The fifth, sixth and seventh code categories captured participants' Discourse evolution and tensions to changes during and after their participation in the Gothic unit. The fifth category denoted participants' primary Discourse evolution via a secondary Discourse (in this case, Mrs. Carson's reading classroom during this unit experience). For example, some of the participants discussed how the aesthetic transactional

experiences they engaged in with Gothic texts helped them become more tolerant of people's differences, reflecting an alteration in their core values as individuals. In contrast, with regards to changes in their primary Discourse related to leisure reading practices, some students indicated no change because they were already reading Gothic texts prior to this unit.

Changes within the students' secondary Discourse of being a reading student in Mrs. Carson's classroom comprised the sixth category of codes. All of the student participants discussed how the unit increased their knowledge and understanding of one another as readers and individuals, resulting in stronger rapport within the classroom. However, in terms of their views regarding academic reading, some of the participants signaled no change as they knew that this unit experience is temporary and things would return to 'business as usual' following the unit. The seventh category of codes captured instances where participants signaled a change in another secondary Discourse (such as an after school club) as a result of the Gothic unit experience in their secondary Discourse as a reading student in Mrs. Carson's classroom. For example, one of the student participants was an active member of 4-H, specifically, an anime club. In her final interview, she discussed how as a result of her experience in Mrs. Carson's classroom, she created and researched Gothic anime with other individuals in the club.

The eighth and ninth category of codes contrasted the aesthetic transactional experience and Discourse growth that occurred during this reading unit in Mrs. Carson's class with participants' typical academic reading experiences, as well as what participants speculated in terms of future reading experiences. The eighth category focused on what participants' describe as a lack of priority to aesthetic transactional experiences in the

reading classroom. For example, many of the students discussed how typical reading units in previous reading classrooms were comprised strictly of texts from the traditional canon, which they did not feel is relevant to them. The ninth category of codes detailed participants' responses to a reading curriculum initiative at Hillside Middle School that commenced in the fall of 2013. The reading curriculum at Hillside is now solely comprised of the texts listed on the CCSS 'Exemplar Text' list. The participants indicated how they believed this initiative is to the detriment of their future aesthetic transactional experiences with academic texts and Discourse growth. Mrs. Carson discussed how a lack of agency in regards to text selection inhibited her ability to customize the reading curriculum to reflect the unique needs and interests of her classes, thereby limiting students' aesthetic transactions with academic texts and ability to connect their in and out-of-school reading experiences. During and after coding, I analyzed these codes in terms of their relationship to one another and the data itself, which resulted in overarching themes and a transition into the generating meaning stage of data analysis.

Generating meaning. The final stage of analysis involved going “beyond” the codes and categories in terms of exploring how the codes interact with one another (Ruona, 2005). The codes formed the basis of preliminary themes, which were altered throughout coding and initial drafting until the themes reflected the significant findings from the data. I used Ruona's (2005) recommendations in terms of the following criteria for determining ‘significant themes’ in light of the research questions: a concept that is prevalent throughout the data, unique and worthy of retaining, and/or areas of inquiry not readily recognized in current research. During this stage, I explored the relationship between themes in terms of similarities, contrasts, paradoxes, irregularities, and surprises

(Ruona, 2005). The themes were connected with prior and ongoing research, as well as my own ideas (Ruona, 2005). I remained close to the data in order to respect the meaning as derived from the participants (Ruona, 2005).

Reporting. In the findings section, I tell the story of the student participants in terms of the aesthetic transactions they constructed with Gothic texts during the reading unit, as well as what evolutions they signal occurred to their various Discourses as a result of the unit experience. The findings are organized into three chapters: the aesthetic transactions the participants constructed with the traits of the Gothic texts, the qualities of reading-related activities that encouraged participant construction of aesthetic transactions during the Gothic studies reading unit, and participant Discourse evolution during and after the Gothic unit experience. There are two layers to reporting the data: findings unique to each participant, and the similarities and contrasts amongst all the participants in regards to the research questions. The discussion chapter explores how the data sheds light on the research questions in terms of summarizing the salient findings alongside the literature (Creswell, 2009). These summations conclude with study implications for instruction and future research, as well as the limitations of this particular study (Creswell, 2009).

Validity

In keeping with case study design, multiple measures were used to ensure validity (Creswell, 2009). These measures include: (a) thick, rich description, (b) triangulation, (c) disconfirming evidence, (d) member checks, (e) peer debriefing, (f) researcher's journal, and (g) audit trail (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998).

Thick, rich description. Accuracy of research findings is grounded in attention to detail during data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). As such, through participant vignettes, I provide descriptions detailing the experiences of the participants in relation to the research questions in order to ensure that the detail allows the reader to understand what aesthetic transactional experiences students had during the Gothic unit and understand the evolution that occurred to their various Discourses.

Triangulation. I used four different data sources, which converged “several sources or perspectives of participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 5). Such an approach yielded a complex picture of students’ aesthetic transactions, as well as Discourse evolution (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I employed two types of triangulation: across participants and the various methods of data collection in regards to subsequent theme development (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Disconfirming evidence. The fusion of an out-of-school literacy experience within the reading classroom can hold some unforeseen negative consequences for the participants (Leftstein & Snell, 2002). Additionally, though the aim of the unit was to encourage students’ aesthetic transactional experiences within the classroom and positive evolvment of student Discourses, there were times when such goals became problematic, as discussed in the findings. As such, two of my secondary research questions explore potential tensions or conflicts in regards to students’ development of aesthetic transactional experiences, as well as Discourse evolvment. Highlighting and analyzing this disconfirming evidence enhanced the accuracy and complexity of the findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Patton, 1990).

Member checks. After establishing preliminary findings, I conducted brief follow-up interviews with participants in order to allow them to individually examine and verify the data. This included presenting participants with excerpts of transcripts, as well as preliminary themes I derived based on early data analysis. Together, we discussed the findings and participants had the opportunity to ask questions and modify the themes as needed. This procedure aligns with the social constructivist theory of including the participants' thoughts in the validity process (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Peer debriefing. Creswell (2009) recommended enhancing the accuracy of an account by asking a peer to regularly "review and ask questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher" (p. 192). Throughout data collection and analysis, I shared my dissertation-in-progress with two peers from my doctoral program; they provided me with insightful and critical feedback that informed my subsequent revisions.

Researcher's journal. I kept a journal of my observations, reactions, and evolving outlook regarding the research questions during all phases of data collection and analysis. The journal helped me refer back to key incidents and provided a detailed account of the various phases of data collection and analysis procedures I engaged in. This account aided me in making these processes transparent to the reader.

Audit trail. The method of data collection and analysis used throughout this study was described in thorough detail for transparency, rigor, and to ensure that others can replicate this study.

Contextualizing the Setting and Participants

This study explores the aesthetic transactions adolescent students constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit. Before presenting this information, an initial overview of both the classroom setting and the participants is provided in this section. This information is essential for contextualizing the students' later experiences during the unit.

Contextualizing the Classroom Setting and Teacher-Participant

Before you enter room 318, Mrs. Carson's ELA classroom at Hillside Middle School, you gain a sense of her playfulness and enthusiasm for student instruction, as well as her attempt to cultivate a positive learning atmosphere. Posted on the outside of her classroom door was an illustration of a fairy from the book series, *Rainbow Magic*. Underneath the illustration read, "I am the English Language Arts Fairy. I guard students from the grammar goblins and I inspire reading and writing." When you walk into the classroom, you see that the student desks are arranged in rows facing one another with a gap in the middle, which form a center aisle. Mrs. Carson is a master storyteller; I observed her use this center aisle to walk up and down the rows, making dramatic gestures and modulating her voice while reading aloud. Each row of student desks was three to four deep. Mrs. Carson often sat with her legs crisscrossed on top of a spare student desk when reading aloud to the students or engaging in a discussion. She often positioned herself like one of the students, rather than the official 'teacher.' In regards to this stance, Mrs. Carson shared: "To me [reading] always comes back to something that we can talk about as a class, not just me talking at them, but us talking together as a shared experience." Mrs. Carson recognized the importance of giving students the

opportunity to share their thoughts in reading-related discussions, which can enhance their aesthetic transactions with texts (Connell, 2008; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003).

In the front of the classroom was an easel where Mrs. Carson posted the daily ‘Do Now.’ On the front wall of the classroom was a large white board. Attached to that white board was a SMART board utilized frequently throughout ELA lessons. In the beginning of the study, the bulletin board next to this white board displayed a poster of the mocking jay pin from *The Hunger Games* series illustrating respect for texts residing in students’ popular culture (e.g. Marsh 2005; Wohlwend, 2013). Later on, this and other bulletin boards displayed student projects in relation to the unit. As Mrs. Carson proudly discussed on multiple occasions, unlike “many of the ELA teachers” at Hillside, she was “not a literary snob. I like the highbrow classics, but I also read what the kids read. They give me recommendations, and I share mine. Last year, *The Hunger Games* was so popular that we read snippets of it and discussed it in-class.” Even though classic texts dominate the curriculum, Mrs. Carson enjoyed the current flexibility of the curriculum; she occasionally pulled in more contemporary, popular culture texts encouraging alignment between students’ primary and secondary Discourses in relation to reading (Gee, 2005/2008; Hagood et al., 2010; Lenters, 2006; Wohlwend, 2013).

On the right-side wall of the classroom were large windows. The window shades were open in Mrs. Carson’s classroom, which overlooked the school parking lot. Against the back wall of the classroom was a large closet, which was also decorated with student work. Next to the closet was a row of four computers on a large rectangular table. Above the computers (attached on small strip of cork) was a large Common Core State Standards poster that listed the standards for grade English/Language Arts. Every time

Mrs. Carson addressed a standard, she called on a student volunteer to go to the poster and highlight that standard with a yellow marker. Above the CCSS poster was a popular quote from *The Hunger Games*: “May the odds be ever in your favor.”

Early in the study, Mrs. Carson noted her anxiety about “covering” all the standards, preparing the students for the NJASK, and still teaching in a way that makes learning meaningful, relevant and not “scripted.” Relatedly, Mrs. Carson noted the following adverse effects when engagement is not prioritized:

When people don’t care, they go through the motions of what they are doing just like we do at the DMV while waiting in line because we’re not actively engaged. I don’t want my kids to have a DMV education; I don’t want to run my classroom like a drive-thru.

In the corner of the back wall and left hand side wall was Mrs. Carson’s desk. You would only find her sitting there during her prep period. Above her desk were pictures of her two children, as well as a small post card with the words, “Keep Calm and Carry On.” On the left-hand side of the classroom was another set of white boards where Mrs. Carson wrote the CCSS, daily objectives, agenda, and homework for her sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes. Throughout the course of the double ELA period, Mrs. Carson taught grammar, writing, reading, reading-related vocabulary, and NJASK prep.

A ‘typical’ day in Mrs. Carson’s classroom began with the daily ‘Do Now,’ which was either a grammar warm-up, brief writing prompt, or journal response to a previous reading. For instance, approximately midway through the Gothic unit, one of the ‘Do Now’ tasks that Mrs. Carson impromptu devised was displayed on the easel and visible to the students as they walked into the room: “Gothic Good to Go: Jot down any ideas or questions you have about the Gothic at this point.” ‘Do Now’ tasks were followed by a grammar, writing, or NJASK prep lesson. The second half of the double period was

allotted for reading and related activities. However, writing or grammar lessons commonly spilled over into the reading portion of the period, or vice versa. As Mrs. Carson frequently joked, she hardly ever addressed all ELA topics on any given day. Instead, she preferred to remain flexible and adjust to what she referred to as “the pulse of the classroom.”

Such flexibility and room for improvisation aligned with the aims of aesthetic education (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001). For instance, if Mrs. Carson felt the students were particularly “in the zone” during writing time, she extended this time into the reading portion of class. This flexibility was a cornerstone of her teaching philosophy; yet, she frequently discussed her anxiety over “being behind,” particularly when she compared herself to other ELA instructors and the demands of the honors seventh grade curriculum. When I asked Mrs. Carson to speculate on how her students would respond to the Gothic unit, she felt they would be excited to do some “unusual things” but in terms of enjoyment of the texts, she discussed how the class was “a very diverse group, so I think we’re going to see a wide range of responses.”

Contextualizing the Student Participants

In order to understand the student participants’ aesthetic transactional experiences within the Gothic unit, as well as Discourse evolvment, background information is essential. I gathered this information through initial observations and pre-unit interviews. The following section contains general information on the participants and their thoughts about reading (both in and outside of school) prior to the start of the unit.

Anna. Strolling into the classroom with neon laced sneakers, leggings, and off the shoulder sweatshirt, Anna prided herself on dressing fashionably with a slight “edge.”

Though she carried herself with self-confidence and was outgoing in the classroom, she later confessed that she struggled with anxiety and saw a therapist to help her manage it. She loved soccer and lacrosse and hoped to be a prosecutor when she grows up. During her pre-unit interview, Anna explained how her favorite book was *The Tale of Despereaux* because “it’s filled with everything: mystery, suspense, fantasy, and fiction.” Thus, Anna detailed the text characteristics she found pleasurable. Anna loved watching T.V. and movies. Her favorite T.V. shows were *The Walking Dead* and *The Following*; she had a particular affinity for zombies.

During her pre-unit interview, Anna discussed her enjoyment of the qualities of the Gothic genre, though she never used the word, ‘Gothic.’ She proudly remarked how she believed “in all things fantastic” and particularly loved “scary things.” Anna liked reading, but only texts that she read at home. Anna found it difficult to experience aesthetic transactions with school-texts. She elaborated that school reading was boring, lacked any “edge” in contrast to what she read at home, and really “doesn’t have anything to do” with her personally. Thus, she detailed a disconnect between her primary (leisure) and secondary (reading class) Discourse experiences regarding reading (Gee, 2006/2008).

Diana. Diana was always one of the first students to arrive to ELA class with her long brown hair pulled back in a ponytail and a smile on her face. She was one of the quieter students in the classroom; however, she was talkative during interview sessions. Diana was close to her family, and during all her interviews, she detailed her responsibilities at home, particularly assisting her mother with meal preparation. Diana is Iranian; her parents immigrated to the United States before she was born. Many of her extended family members live in Iran. During interviews, Diana frequently discussed her

immediate family's anxiety for these loved ones and the trials they experienced under what she referred to as a very "corrupt dictator." During her pre-unit interview, Diana discussed distaste for anything "too violent" both in texts and on T.V. Instead, she loved a "good joke" and enjoyed anything humorous. Such statements led me to believe that Diana might be a disconfirming case regarding enjoyment with Gothic texts, as well as potential for aesthetically transacting with the Gothic unit texts. However, she did discuss her enjoyment of the Gothic traits in both *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* series.

At the beginning of the study, she was reading *The Hunger Games* series; she relished the aesthetic transactions she constructed with these texts. Specifically, she enjoyed making connections between the corrupt government in the series with what she felt was the corrupt government her extended family was living under; such a connection helped her to "better understand what my family's coping with."

During her pre-unit interview, Diana detailed how her favorite aspect of reading was aesthetically transacting with a text when it served as temporary escapism and gave her relief from day to day pressures: "With school, there's a lot of homework. I have a lot of after school activities, and I'm also learning Persian and Spanish. Sometimes it's just really stressful. When you read, you can forget about all of that for a little bit. Then, you go back refreshed." Unlike many of the participants, during her pre-unit interview, Diana discussed how she liked many of the classic texts that comprised Hillside's curriculum. However, Diana also discussed how her favorite school subject was math because "there's only one answer." Academic reading tasks often promoted anxiety and confusion for Diana: "With reading [in school], it's hard to know if you're right or wrong and even when a teacher says there's no right answer, they usually have an answer in

their head that they think is more correct than other answers.” Such a statement suggests that Diana saw the dominant Discourse surrounding past classroom reading experiences as valuing the ‘right’ answer over celebrating the complexity of aesthetic transactions in reading-related activities and discussions.

Eliza. With her serious expression, glasses, straight black hair, shy nature, and slight form juggling a hefty backpack, Eliza, (of Chinese ethnicity, but adopted by Caucasian parents) slipped into class, dropped off her bag, and often quickly went to talk to a friend on the opposite end of the classroom before class commenced. Like Anna, Eliza unabashedly professed a love of horror and violence both in books and movies/TV during her pre-unit interview: “It’s sort of like an adrenaline rush. I like that feeling, I’m weird like that.” Gothic texts often contain these traits, thus, I assumed that Eliza might enjoy the unit texts, affording the possibility of aesthetic transactions. Eliza was an active member of Rutgers’s 4-H, particularly the herpetology and anime clubs. She spent a great deal of time after school doing “outdoorsy” things and caring for her two cats, dog, lizard, and bird. Her favorite subjects were art and science. She disliked anything “romancey.” During her pre-unit interview, Eliza described reading as “okay, but I’d rather do more active things. It’s not super-high on my priority list.” Like Anna, Eliza felt that the majority of academic texts were devoid of any aesthetic transactional potential: “Most of them are realistic fiction about stuff in the past. It’s hard to get into them.”

Emily. Emily was considered one of the ‘popular girls’ and two of her best friends were in ELA class. She loved to occasionally act silly and quote her favorite song and movie lines with her friends. However, Emily was a deep thinker and not afraid to politely speak her mind. Typically donning a jersey, jeans, and UGGs, she loved all

things related to sports and was involved in many at Hillside. Emily enjoyed reading on occasion, but only the books that she chose to read. Like Anna and Eliza, Emily disliked academic reading and discussed this sentiment in her pre-unit interview: “I feel like the books in the curriculum are too old and every year it’s the same thing.” For Emily, academic reading was static, lacking in diversity, and devoid of anything that captured her attention. She also pointed out in her pre-unit interview that the curriculum lacked diversity in terms of including more contemporary texts, which prevented her from having many academic aesthetic transactional experiences. She firmly stated, “I don’t like anything that’s old” in her pre-unit interview.

However, within this same interview, Emily eloquently discussed the myriad aesthetic transactions she constructed with texts of her choosing. For Emily, the best part of reading was the imaginative component of it: “When you read a book and get a picture inside of your head, and compare it to other things.” She also aesthetically transacted with texts in learning “lessons” from some of the characters: “I learn stuff from them and I think that helps me.” I chose Emily as a participant thinking that she would represent a disconfirming case regarding the construction of aesthetic transactions within the Gothic unit. In her pre-unit interview, she expressed an extreme dislike for anything “deep, or disturbing,” claiming to be “happy go lucky,” and discussed an affinity for either sports-related books (such as the Mike Lupica series) or “bubbly girl genre” books that followed a predictable pattern through which she could “see the older popular girls, and how to get there.” Her preferred reading contrasts the characteristics of the Gothic genre.

Kurt. Kurt energetically walked into class often talking and smiling with other classmates. His self-professed favorite attire is “sweatpants and a T-shirt.” He was of

average height and kept his black hair in a short, no fuss buzz cut. Kurt was an expert at everything involving Greek gods and the *Percy Jackson series*. During his pre-unit interview, he discussed at length how he found the books funny and enjoyed how they “combine ancient and modern stuff together.” During his pre-unit interview, Kurt talked at length about these books with a huge smile on his face while making hand gestures depicting the action scenes. Like Diana, Kurt was relatively quiet in the classroom setting. He enjoyed playing badminton and watching the news. He wished he could play video games and watch T.V. shows, both of which his parents restricted.

During his pre-unit interview, Kurt discussed how he enjoyed leisure reading a great deal. He loved constructing aesthetic transactional moments of meaningful connection in terms of thinking about how he or one of his friends were like the characters in the books he reads. Like Eliza, he also enjoyed the adrenaline rush of action, and talked about how he often felt vicariously nervous, just like the characters in the book, an additional aesthetic transactional experience of imaginative contrast. Kurt believed school reading was “okay” but did not initially elaborate on this view.

Matt. Matt exuded an air of calm confidence when he strolled into the classroom, books under his arm, with a pencil behind his ear doing a slight wave of his head to move his long, brown bangs away from his eyes. Matt enjoyed snowboarding, Ultimate Frisbee, and his mom’s Italian cooking. His favorite T.V. shows included *Hawaii 5-0* and *The Walking Dead*. He planned to go into the military after high school, following in his grandfather’s footsteps, who passed away the summer prior to this study. Matt also loved to write and enjoyed learning anything that helped him improve his craft. Matt particularly enjoyed mysteries. During his pre-unit interview, he discussed how his

favorite books were the *Sherlock Holmes* series, which his father read to him when he was younger. He enjoyed them because “they are creepy, weird, and exciting. You have to sort of figure out what’s happening.” Thus, Matt detailed text characteristics he enjoyed as well as the aesthetic transaction of becoming absorbed in a plot through which he was actively co-constructing the text and making predictions. Mystery and suspense are characteristic of the Gothic genre, so I assumed Matt might be interested in the unit texts, paving the way for aesthetic transactional experiences to occur.

During his pre-unit interview, Matt candidly described his indifference and at times dislike of academic reading because of his inability to aesthetically transact with the texts: “I get the pieces and everything. There’s just nothing personal about them and I forget them after the test. If you don’t enjoy something, you don’t care about it, so you won’t remember it.” This statement aligns with Rosenblatt’s (1994/1995) aesthetic transactional theory of literature and aesthetic reading research, detailing how pleasure and relevancy are necessary ingredients for meaningful reading experiences that can result in the retention of knowledge (Connell, 2011; Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Pike 2003). Like Emily, Matt claimed that academic reading rarely, if ever, comprised the kind of texts he would choose to read. As with many of the participants, such a statement suggests a disconnect between students’ in and out-of-school reading experiences, as well as little alignment between their primary and secondary Discourse experiences in regards to reading practices (Gee 2005/2008).

When I asked Matt to reflect on the reasons behind his dislike of academic reading in his pre-unit interview, he simply shrugged his shoulders and said, “Because it’s school.” This statement suggests that the Discourse of Matt’s previous academic

reading classrooms regarding text choices and related activities ultimately failed to capitalize on the aesthetic transactional nature of reading for Matt, resulting in the “DMV” model of reading that Mrs. Carson discussed. Over time, this disconnect between his primary and secondary Discourse experiences negatively impacted his view of academic reading. He developed attitudes, values, and behaviors surrounding academic reading that simply involve “getting it done and moving onto the next thing” (Gee 2005/2008). He unquestionably assumed that this was how academic reading “works.”

Ray. Matt described his “good buddy,” Ray, as having a “strange mind,” and this was something Ray was proud of. He frequently announced in-class that he had a zombie survival guide, so he would be ready in case of a zombie apocalypse. Like Emily, Ray participated a great deal in reading class. Having developed a reputation as a rebel, Ray frequently got into trouble during school, though he was typically “good” in Mrs. Carson’s classroom because he liked her and “loves reading,” as he stated in his pre-unit interview. Ray walked into class with the hood of his sweatshirt over his head, and wore shorts even in winter. He often sat sideways in his desk, with his pen in his mouth, bouncing his leg up and down, as he admitted he had trouble sitting still. He hoped to become a filmmaker and considered Alfred Hitchcock the greatest filmmaker of all time. His favorite contemporary T.V. shows were *The Walking Dead* and *The Following*.

Ray was an avid reader of both contemporary and classic texts at home. This affinity for classic texts outside of school may account for why he, like Diana, also discussed liking the texts that comprised the curriculum at Hillside during his pre-unit interview. He summed up academic literature as mostly “classic realistic fiction” that he found “entertaining and cute.” However, he insightfully recognized the underlying

purpose of academic texts: “They’re obviously tailored to our age where the main character is really good and we’re supposed to learn from them.” He also discussed how the primary purpose of academic reading was to “analyze what the author means,” suggesting that reading-related tasks did not prioritize readers’ aesthetic transactions with texts. However, his main complaint was that academic texts often don’t have anything “different” about them the way that his leisure reading texts did. When asked to elaborate on this during his pre-unit interview, he said, “You know, different problems, plots, different worlds. They’re [academic text] just really...normal.” Such a statement, coupled with the fact that his favorite book was *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children*, (a contemporary Gothic text), led me to believe that Ray might construct aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts. Like Diana, Ray discussed how his favorite aspect of reading involved moments of imaginative contrast through which he was vicariously “sucked into different worlds.”

Victor. Victor was the quietest student in class, raising his hand to volunteer an answer only a handful of times during my observations; when he did, his soft voice rose barely beyond a whisper. However, he was talkative during interviews. Often wearing a sweatshirt, jeans, and glasses, Victor unobtrusively slipped into the back of the classroom, ruffling his short, black hair as he sat down and pushing his glasses higher up on his nose. He enjoyed basketball and reading, particularly *Pendragon* and the *Harry Potter* series because of the fantastic elements comprising both. Like Diana and Ray, he aesthetically transacted with these texts by simultaneously imaginatively contrasting them and meaningfully connecting them back to real life:

In fantasy, things happen that can’t happen in real life, which is interesting because there’s a lot of unexpected twists. But, he [Pendragon] sometimes gets

bored when he is not hanging out with his friends. I sometimes get bored when I'm at home and my mom says I can't have friends over.

In alignment with many of the study participants, Victor said he preferred leisure over academic reading because what he selects is “more interesting.”

Like Emily, in his pre-unit interview, Victor bemoaned the lack of diversity in Hillside's reading curriculum, noting that it had hardly any fantasy, and what little fantasy was included, “isn't interesting, it's just about a talking car or something like that.” Victor felt that the elementary nature of the fantasy texts that were included in Hillside's curriculum failed to catch his attention or promote his construction of aesthetic transactions with texts. He concluded his pre-unit interview by stating that “reading teachers need to include kids' interests when selecting books. They should poll or interview them [students] to find more of what they like.”

Summary

All of the participants found the various aesthetic transactions they constructed with self-selected texts to be the most meaningful and enjoyable aspect of reading, which aligns with aesthetic transactional reading research (Connell, 2001; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt 1994/1995). Yet, they also detailed how such experiences were unusual in school because in their view, the curriculum rarely incorporated texts that held interest, connectivity, or relevance to them as individuals. Nor did the participants detail reading teachers often exercising pedagogical practices that capitalized on the aesthetic reading domain. During their pre-unit interviews, all of the participants discussed liking Mrs. Carson as a teacher, but only two of the students (Diana and Ray) discussed transacting beyond an efferent level with any of the texts they read in her class (or the year prior) to unit commencement. Both Mrs. Carson and the student participants noted that the

majority of Hillside's reading curriculum was made up of classics. Realistic and/or historical fictions were the central literary genres, which aligns with current adolescent reading research noting the dominance of the canon and lack of text diversity in many adolescent reading classrooms (Gibson, 2010; Hopper, 2006; Lenters, 2006). Overall, the curriculum did not forge many allegiances and alliances with students' primary Discourses (Gee, 2005).

This disconnect seemed to be unquestionably accepted by the students as part of the Discourse that defines academic reading classrooms, as only Victor suggested an action that teachers could take to remedy the situation. However, it is important to note that only one of the eight participants (Emily) desired complete removal of classic texts from reading curriculum. Throughout their interviews, the other participants discussed wanting the classics to remain a part of academic reading. Diana, in her pre-unit interview, stated, "School introduces you to books you wouldn't normally read on your own, which is good." Thus, Diana acknowledged the important role of academic reading in introducing students to texts that they would not normally read on their own. However, the participants desired traditional texts in conjunction with and not at the expense of texts featuring "different" characteristics, such as fantasy, or usual/bizarre happenings, as well as some popular culture, contemporary texts. Thus, the students echoed researchers' call for a more hybrid and diverse curriculum (Marsh, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007; Tatum, 2006; Wilson & Casey, 2007; Wohlwend, 2013).

During their pre-unit interviews, all of the participants (to one degree or another) illustrated aesthetic transactions with the traits and texts of the Gothic genre as they arose in their leisure reading practices, though none of them used the word "Gothic."

Participants' initial impressions, as observed during the first day of the unit, confirmed that students were unaware of the Gothic as a literary genre. This lack of overt knowledge aligns with Gothic literary research noting that while participation and engagement with the genre is widespread, particularly for adolescents, rarely is it explored or discussed (Coats, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008). Participants' initial impressions are detailed in the subsequent chapter, which highlights the findings in regards to the aesthetic transactions the participants constructed in response the text qualities comprising Gothic texts.

Participants Initial Impressions of “Gothic”

On the first day of the unit, Mrs. Carson posted the word, “Gothic” on the SMART board and asked students to write down whatever came to mind. Document analysis of this free writing exercise the participants responded to in their Gothic journals revealed that six of the participants thought of dated architecture, noting images such as “old churches,” “ornate columns,” “medieval castles,” and “middle ages architectural stuff.” Four participants wrote about “Goth” people who dress in black and have multiple body piercings. A couple of participants mentioned specific people, such as Adam Lambert, Jean Simmons, and Ozzy. Six participants indicated words surrounding mood, such as “dark, scary, depressing, and gloomy.” Three participants, (Emily, Victor, and Anna) mentioned fantastic Gothic beings, such as zombies and vampires.

The participants' initial views of the genre conjure old and unhuman images (whether it be physical structures or fantastic creatures), and those that are human are extreme, stereotypical, and far removed from them as individuals. As Mrs. Carson noted during her mid unit interview, “It was all very superficial; it was very distant from them. They were outsiders looking in.” Initially, participants did not express any personal

connectivity with the Gothic, offer any extensive knowledge about it, or overtly realize that the genre was prevalent in their leisure reading activities. Many of the students contributed adjectives that define the setting of Gothic texts. However, as evident in their initial associations, none of the participants directly connected ‘Gothic’ to literature, any particular writers, or ‘texts’ including books, movies, or T.V. shows. In reflecting on this lack of knowledge of the Gothic as a literary genre in her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson stated, “I think we, myself included, had a very pigeon-hole view of what the Gothic can be.” This introductory lesson marked the beginning of a five-month quest in participants’ exploration of the Gothic as a literary genre and the aesthetic transactions they constructed during the reading unit resulting in subsequent Discourse evolution.

Overview of the Study Findings

The findings of this study are divided into three chapters. It is important to note that throughout the unit experience, participants constructed aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts during and after text readings and as a result of discussions and activities surrounding the topics that arose in these texts. However, the text qualities formed the basis for which the aesthetic transactions occurred. In other words, students would be unable to have a discussion or activity on an idea, topic, image, theme, etc., of interest that did not arise within the text itself. This understanding aligns with research stating the importance of the content of academic texts holding links back to the adolescent readers’ interests, preoccupations, ideas, etc., at their particular time and place in their development (e.g. Brophy, 2008; Guthrie, 2008; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

Therefore, the aesthetic transactions that the participants constructed in regards to specific Gothic text traits and qualities are discussed first in chapter four. Chapter five explores the aesthetic transactions the students constructed with the Gothic studies reading unit as manifested during reading-related discussions and activities that were designed to capitalize on the aesthetic reading experience. Contrastingly, I also explore moments where there were tensions to participant construction of aesthetic transactions throughout the unit experience in order to portray a holistic account of participant responses to the design implementation. Students' aesthetic transactions were explored as they were constructed at various points throughout the unit experience to portray an accurate and complex account of the research inquiry, in line with the social constructivist nature of this study (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998). Additionally, such research was conducted under the belief that within the classroom, aesthetic transactions are always shaped by a combination of text+ context, as reading within a classroom always takes place within a social setting (Connell, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 2005), which shifts over time.

Aesthetic transactions denote the "lived through experience" of a text for an individual (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Thus, focusing on readers' aesthetic transactions increases the relevancy and meaning that readers derive from academic reading experiences. According to Gee (2005/2008/2011), meaningful academic literacy tasks, such as reading that promotes allegiances and alliances with students' various Discourses, can result in the growth of these Discourses. As such, I was also interested in understanding what student Discourse(s) evolved during the reading unit, as well as

which ones remained unchanged. Thematic analysis and Gee's Big 'D' Discourse tool were utilized in order to analyze the data in light of the research questions.

The social constructivism framework I used demands a complex consideration of the events that inform the research questions. Therefore multiple forms of data were collected and analyzed. In line with case study design, the participants' responses were carefully considered both individually and across cases (Creswell, 2007). The primary focus of the findings is students' responses to the unit implementation; however, Mrs. Carson provided valued insight into her students' responses. Consequently, her thoughts in relation to the research questions were also incorporated. This study's aim was to capture participants' perspectives; thus, I used a combination of emic and etic language for the section headings.

Chapter 4: Participant Aesthetic Transactions with the Traits of Gothic Texts

Introduction

I was interested in understanding what aesthetic transactions adolescent students constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit, in which the emphasis was on nurturing such transactions during and after students' academic reading experiences. This research aligns with Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) belief that students' aesthetic transactions are an essential component for successful academic reading comprehension and enjoyment, but are often not capitalized upon in the classroom.

In this chapter, I examine the aesthetic transactions students constructed in response to the Gothic traits of the unit texts. For the purposes of this study, I utilized Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) definition of aesthetic transactions as any associations, feelings, (including the expression of pleasure), attitudes, ideas, and/or images that individuals constructed with a text. In examining what aesthetic transactions students constructed in response to the Gothic texts, I looked for moments in which students signaled one or more of the components of Rosenblatt's definition, analyzing to which element the Gothic textual element was linked. This section is followed by students' affective reactions and responses; the fusion of Gothic popular culture and traditional texts encouraged aesthetic transactions. Finally, the participants contrasted their affective response to the Gothic studies unit with their previous academic reading experiences.

Participants' Aesthetic Transactions with the Traits of Gothic Texts

This section details the aesthetic transactions the participants constructed in response to the various text qualities that comprise the Gothic as a literary genre. These

aesthetic transactions are discussed in six sections. The first section explores the aesthetic transactions participants constructed with the setting of Gothic pieces, particularly in regards to the mood and tone. The subsequent sections discuss the aesthetic transactions the participants constructed with the following topics: external forces influencing characters, internal forces influencing characters, the Gothic as a literary genre that reveals more questions than provides answers, the fusion of popular culture and traditional Gothic texts, and the overall unit as curriculum.

Participants' Aesthetic Transactions with the Setting of Gothic Texts

Throughout the course of the Gothic unit, all eight student participants recounted setting qualities of Gothic texts they found aesthetically enjoyable. For the purposes of this study, 'setting' refers to the time, mood, and place of a text.

"It is a grow up factor:" Gothic texts as a departure from children's literature. As Ray described in his mid-unit interview, Gothic texts have a "dark and creepy feel. They definitely have a different feel from the stuff we usually read in school." All of the participants discussed how they believed the darker nature of Gothic texts contrasted with the mood and tone of the texts that comprised their past academic reading experiences. These sentiments align with the research discussing how the Gothic as a literary genre delves into the 'other' or darker/lesser known side of a person or circumstance (Hogle, 1999; Coats, 2008; Jackson, et al., 2008; McGillis, 2008). For example, the narrator of "The Tell Tale Heart" explores the dark aspect of human nature, as it is told from the point of view of a male who murders an innocent older man. Mrs. Carson also reflected on the students' signaling that the Gothic texts felt 'different,' evident in her mid-unit interview: "I often heard kids saying things like, 'We're used to

stories that end happily.’ They’re coming from an elementary background where everything is happy-happy.” Prior to this experience, Mrs. Carson believed that participants were most familiar with the mood and tone that defined children’s literature and their elementary reading experiences.

All eight participants discussed that the Gothic texts, for them, marked a significant departure from the mood and tone characteristic of children’s literature and a signaling of a more mature, adult phase of their literacy journey. Developmentally, middle school students are on the liminal cusp between childhood and adulthood (Berger, 2000). As Diana stated in her mid-unit interview, they have reached a developmental stage where “little books” about every day events “no longer sustain us. Those everyday topics aren’t as interesting anymore.” Eliza was proud of this change. In her mid-unit interview, she discussed how reading Gothic texts made her feel more “adult” as she felt that the Gothic genre was “for this [their] age group because lots of little kids would be really be just scared.” Thus, Eliza signaled how the Gothic, as a literary genre, is developmentally appropriate for adolescents (Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt 1994/1995).

Kurt also stated in his mid-unit interview that “scary things” used to frighten him, but now, he enjoys the darker characteristics of the Gothic genre: “I’m more mature and can handle it. They [Gothic stories] actually make me sometimes feel better and calmer somehow.” Kurt expressed surprise that scary stories can paradoxically have a calming influence on readers; however, this type of aesthetic transaction between Gothic texts and adolescence is well-documented in the research. By exposing what individuals fear and bringing these anxieties out into the open, Gothic texts make these feelings less

frightening because they are exposed; readers can learn from the characters how to handle ‘scary’ situations (Jones, 2002; McGillis, 2008; Taylor, 2008).

Emily, Anna, and Diana aesthetically transacted with the dark and dense qualities surrounding the mood and tone of Gothic texts because they felt it was more realistic than the mood and tone characteristic of children’s literature. As Anna noted in her post-unit interview, “When you read the happy endings of little kid books, they usually tend to think that everything in the world ends happily. When in real life, it doesn’t always have a happy ending.” Anna aesthetically transacted through meaningfully connecting real life with the mood and tone comprising Gothic texts. In Anna’s view, Gothic texts were more representative of real life than children’s fiction.

Emily, in her post-unit interview, also described a similar transition, noting how in the beginning of the unit Gothic traits and themes were scary to her: “I was really against it [Gothic texts]. I didn’t want to have anything to do with it.” Emily described her evolution in learning to appreciate and enjoy Gothic texts as a “grow up factor” where she matured into these texts. Through repeated exposure to Gothic as a literary genre throughout the course of the unit, Emily learned to be more comfortable with the mood and tone of Gothic texts, which caused her to appreciate and even prefer them over the texts she initially liked by the unit’s conclusion: “I feel like those happy stories I used to read are fun, but are they capturing what actually goes on in society today?” Emily noted how the unit was almost a ‘coming of age’ experience in which, like Anna and Diana, she aesthetically transacted by meaningfully connecting the mood and tone of Gothic texts with the mood and tone that often comprises real life circumstances.

These sentiments align with developmental research, as often beginning in adolescence, individuals become keenly aware of the world as a more complex and dark place where bad things can and do happen (Berger, 2000). Gothic texts often delve into that which is dark, uncomfortable, and ‘unhappy.’ Sometimes these issues are resolved, but it is not uncommon for Gothic texts to end on an unsettling, or even unhappy note (Cross, 2008; McGillis, 2008). Interestingly, the word ‘happy’ is used by virtually all the participants (including Mrs. Carson) in describing children’s literature. ‘Happy’ oversimplifies and misrepresents the mood and tone of all of children’s literature. Many pieces do not end ‘happily’ (i.e. *Charlotte’s Web* as one of many examples where one of the main characters, Charlotte, dies at the conclusion of the novel). However, it is interesting that both the teacher and student participants categorized children’s literature as such and asserted that the Gothic genre represents a significant departure from this characteristic. There are two plausible explanations for this view. One is that the students’ elementary academic reading experiences do not capitalize on the diverse nature of children’s literature, exposing children primarily to texts that end ‘happily,’ therefore skewing their perception of children’s literature as a whole.

The second and more likely explanation is not that the elementary texts necessarily end ‘happily’; rather, the pieces more often than not successfully tie up all loose ends in a way that satisfies and reassures the reader. Thus, the elementary reader closes the text with a sense of security that all is explained, order is restored, and everything is as it should be. Such endings are a defining characteristic of children’s literature (Trites, 2001). In contrast, Gothic texts often leave issues unresolved or in question, which leads to the darker, mysterious, and unsettling nature of the texts

(Jackson et al., 2008). Additionally, Gothic texts often delve into circumstances rebelling against the natural order. Charlotte, in *Charlotte's Web*, dies, but it is at the natural end of her life's cycle (Trites, 2001). Contrastingly, in Gothic stories such as "Cat in Glass," (featuring a narrator who unknowingly causes her granddaughter's demise) death is often abrupt, unexpected, senseless, and/or against the natural order. Regardless of the explanation, participants recognized and appreciated the contrast in the mood and tone of Gothic texts from that of their previous reading experiences, identifying them as more "grown up" reading endeavors that they felt aligned with them developmentally, promoting the construction of aesthetic transactions.

"You're out there in the wilderness:" Physical isolation in Gothic texts.

Whether it be as dramatic as stranded in a haunted house or something more commonplace such as lost Internet connection or electricity, Gothic texts often feature characters in times and spaces where they are physically isolated. In the contemporary, popular culture text *Down a Dark Hall*, the main character (along with three other girls) is physically isolated at a boarding school with no connection to the outside world. Such a state represents a common human anxiety (isolation) that the genre exposes (Cross, 2008; Taylor, 2008). Six of the participants discussed aesthetically transacting with this Gothic text quality (as manifest in the unit texts) during interviews. During her mid-unit interview, Anna stated that reading about characters in Gothic texts that are alone for extended periods of time served as an important life lesson and reminder to her: "You remember that it's unhealthy to stay by yourself for long periods of time because the human body was not made like that. It was made to communicate." Anna aesthetically

transacted with this Gothic text quality and interpreted it as a reminder to interact regularly with others and value communication.

Matt and Diana aesthetically transacted with the Gothic text quality of physical isolation because these textual moments reminded them of instances in which they felt the same way. When asked what, if any, Gothic texts traits appealed to Matt during his mid-unit interview, he discussed enjoying the trait of physical isolation, common to many unit texts. When I asked him to elaborate on this enjoyment, Matt recounted a meaningful connection:

When I go camping with my dad, a lot of spooky things happen in the woods when you are by yourself and it kind of lets your mind think a lot when you are just out there alone. Like, no phone service, no Internet, you are just out there. That's what I really like about it [the Gothic].

Matt aesthetically transacted with Gothic unit texts by drawing a meaningful connection with physical isolation in unit texts back to his own life. He reflected that such a state heightened his mental awareness, which he appreciated.

Diana also aesthetically transacted with this Gothic text trait when she constructed a moment of meaningful connectivity, but hers is more something unsettling that she needed to overcome. While reading *Down a Dark Hall*, which features girls at a school that are without Internet access, Hurricane Sandy hit New Jersey, causing many people to lose their Internet and electricity for an extended period of time, resulting in isolation. This happened in Diana's home. During her mid-unit interview, she reflected: "It [*Down a Dark Hall*] where the girls are by themselves, it was like that. I didn't know what to do. I had to find other things to do which is tough. It made me think about what if we lost power for good? People would be lost." For Diana, this aesthetic transaction with this Gothic text quality, spurred a moment of meaningful connectivity, as well as gave her

pause on a more philosophical level. She became aware of her (and many people's) overreliance on technology and why she feels that is problematic.

Finally, during interviews, Ray and Eliza discussed how they aesthetically transacted with the physical isolation quality of Gothic texts. However, they communicated aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast in which they were vicariously transported into the isolated settings of these texts, settings that contrasted their real lives. As Eliza noted in her mid-unit interview, "They [Gothic stories] have a creepy and eerie vibe, which is cool and different." Ray also believed that physical isolation increased suspense, but like Matt, he also discussed (during an interview) a heightened awareness because of this state in which he was vicariously transported into the story and was isolated alongside the characters: "With isolated settings I feel everything else just goes away and you are really focused on the story. It's a different feeling than reading about people like in a big city. You're like out there in the wilderness or a remote place." For Ray, such isolation drew him further into the story and promoted vicarious experiences in which he became part of the text.

"You become a detective": Gothic texts promoting predictions. As Mrs. Carson eloquently described during an interview, the Gothic genre is like an "object in motion where the characters are living moment to moment and we're forced to live moment to moment with them except when we pause to make a prediction about what might happen next." Mystery and suspense are common components of the setting of Gothic texts as characters often face the 'other' or repressed, darker side of nature, society, another individual, and/or themselves, which creates a mood of mystery and

suspense as (often with the characters) readers find themselves holding their breath wondering what ‘monsters’ they might internally or externally encounter (Hogle, 1999).

The adrenaline pumping and suspenseful mood and tone of Gothic texts were important features for all eight participants. As Anna enthusiastically announced to the class in the beginning of the unit, “I love anything scary!” In attempting to understand the phenomenon of why fear can be pleasurable, Mrs. Carson drew the following comparison: “Why do people like rollercoasters and fun houses with scary stuff? People just like a good scare. If we can tap into that love, pull it into the classroom, and it can have a positive impact, then why not? If it works for Six Flags, why can’t it work for us?” Indeed, during interviews, the participants described Gothic texts in words ranging from “action-packed,” “adventurous,” “page turning,” “suspenseful,” “mysterious,” and “adrenaline rushing.” What these words hold in common is they suggest reader interest and absorption in the texts, both of which fall under the domain of aesthetic transactions (Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1995). In fact, all eight participants confessed that they read ahead in at least one of the unit texts as they were anxious to find out what happened next. During her mid-unit interview, Diana discussed: “I was so absorbed in *Down a Dark Hall* that I woke up early in the morning so that I could read the next three chapters because I was so excited to see what would happen next and I had never done that before [with an academic text].”

All eight participants constructed aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast by creatively and imaginatively filling in the gaps left by Gothic texts; all eight recounted such experiences as pleasurable (Iser, 1978). As Kurt reflected in his post-unit interview, “I think it’s fun to predict what will happen, especially in a Gothic book. There are so

many possibilities.” In addition to discussing these moments during interviews, I also witnessed all eight participants spontaneously expressing their predictions (whether orally, written, or both) on numerous occasions throughout the unit. Early in the reading of *Down a Dark Hall*, Emily spontaneously raised her hand and announced to the class her prediction that the boarding school is possessed by ghosts when the students begin behaving in odd ways. After Mrs. Carson read aloud the portion of “The Tell Tale Heart” where the narrator kills an old man and claims he hears a thumping sound where he hides the body, Matt waved his hand in the air and offered the prediction: “Maybe the sound is the old man’s spirit.” Kurt smiled and added, “Oooh. I bet he’s only hearing it in his mind!” These are only a few of the many examples of the predictions the participants made throughout the Gothic unit.

As Matt reflected, when reading Gothic texts, “it’s kind of like being a detective. You always want to figure out who is doing what or what is going on and who is in trouble or who is not. It keeps you guessing, that’s what I like.” Mrs. Carson discussed how the Gothic unit acted as a catalyst for a wealth of predictions because of the mysterious and suspenseful mood and tone that categorize the genre as a whole. In her post-unit interview, when I asked her to speculate on why the students found filling such gaps in Gothic texts enjoyable, she maintained that the pleasure of predicting came from “finding order”:

It’s empowering to solve a mystery. And, maybe it gives you a little sense of control in an otherwise out of control world. There’s no risk in making one even if you are wrong. You have the pleasure of making the prediction and then the pleasure of anticipation. You have the pleasure of being right or the pleasure of being surprised if you aren’t right.

Mrs. Carson's repeated use of the word pleasure to describe the process of prediction suggests that she believed the experience yielded a high level of enjoyment in regards to this process for the students, which they confirmed in interviews (Iser, 1978; Pike, 2003). In line with Mrs. Carson's view, Matt, Ray, and Victor discussed the pleasure of predicting, regardless of the accuracy of the prediction. Matt discussed the pleasure in constructing these aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts in his post-unit interview:

Matt: I definitely like how in the Gothic you're always predicting stuff.
 Me: Okay, and why is that? Why do you think that's something you enjoy doing?
 Matt: Because if something happens, you can be like 'Oh, I guessed that!' Or, if something doesn't happen, you're like 'Oh okay.'
 Me: So either way...
 Matt: It's fun. Yeah, definitely.

Akin to this sentiment, Victor in his mid-unit interview stated, "Gothic texts make you want to make predictions because there is so much foreshadow[ing] of events and circumstances to come. It's fun to try to fill in the pieces." A democratic relationship where the reader and text are of equal importance is what Rosenblatt (1994/1995) describes is possible when readers are aesthetically transacting with texts by such active plot co-construction.

"It has a richer cake feel, but light and fluffy:" Dark humor in Gothic texts.

Humor is not a trait of the Gothic genre that I gave much thought to prior to conducting this study; however, all the participants discussed how the humor in Gothic texts, which many of them labeled as "dark humor," was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the genre, affording opportunities for the construction of aesthetic transactions. In conducting further research on this during the unit, I was surprised to find out how much humor and the Gothic intertwine (Cross, 2008). As Jackson, et al., (2008) noted, intermixed with the dark, mysterious, and scary mood and tone of Gothic texts often lie moments of comic

relief; the genre lends itself to various types of humorous experiences for readers. For example, while reading the “Tell Tale Heart,” Ray aesthetically transacted with the Gothic humor quality of comic distancing due to an exaggerated or extreme circumstances (Cross, 2008).

This aesthetic transaction was constructed following Mrs. Carson’s reading of the part of the text where the narrator kills an old man because he claims to not like the look of the old man’s eye:

Matt: The guy [narrator] killed the old man because he didn’t like his eye?

Mrs. Carson: [Shrugs her shoulders] Apparently, that’s what he claims.

Ray: [Throwing up his arms] What’s next? A guy walks into McDonalds and the cashier doesn’t give him pickles on his hamburger and he’s next? [Class laughs].

Mrs. Carson: [Laughs] That would be a good modern spoof!

As this excerpt reveals, Ray created an impromptu parody of this Gothic text moment. As Cross (2008) noted, such humor affords opportunities for readers to satirize or think of parodies in relation to the extreme circumstances or characters in Gothic texts. These moments are empowering because in that moment of parodying, the reader is superior to the fictional character (Cross, 2008). This type of aesthetic transaction can be particularly pleasurable for adolescent readers who may often feel disempowered in real life, particularly by adults (Cross, 2008). As many of the students noted, having these moments to laugh is a nice break in the otherwise often serious and dark mood and tone that dominate Gothic texts. When I asked Diana to speculate further on why she enjoyed the humor that Gothic texts can afford during her mid-unit interview, she reflected, “I think no matter what age you are, everyone loves a good laugh, and even though Gothic texts are dark and heavy, there are funny moments in them. It’s like a good cake. It has a

richer cake feel, but light and fluffy.” For Diana, this ‘fluffiness’ came from the moments in Gothic texts that provide comic relief.

Additionally, participants discussed how they aesthetically transacted in moments when they laughed at themselves, the characters, or one another while reading the Gothic texts. This aesthetic transaction also allowed readers to put their fears at a distance through the humor (Coats, 2008). As Matt noted in his final journal entry reflecting on the Gothic unit experience as a whole and text qualities he enjoyed, “it [humor] helps with the scariness.” In reading the various ‘scary’ scenes in Gothic texts, many of the participants discussed how they laughed at themselves when they felt scared. Mrs. Carson reflected in her post-unit interview, “That’s part of why we like the Gothic because we can get totally sucked into it and then laugh at ourselves because we got sucked into it.” Mrs. Carson discussed how becoming scared is representative of an aesthetic transaction of imaginative contrast as the reader gets absorbed into the text enough to have this emotional reaction to a fictitious event. This emotional reaction produces thrill, illustrating that there is something inherently alluring in seeking out ‘the monsters’ of Gothic texts.

Participants’ Aesthetic Transactions with External Forces in Gothic Texts

“Romance is sort of a key thing:” The Gothic and ‘impossible’ romance.

Mina’s attraction to a vampire in *Dracula*, and the love triangle that exists between Katniss, Peeta, and Gale in the *Hunger Game* series, are two of the many examples of Gothic romance, a force affecting a character that heightens the suspense and tension of Gothic texts. Gothic romance is often dark and complicated in nature as the attraction that develops is rarely straightforward and without controversy (Hogle, 1999). The most

common obstacles are characters' attraction for someone who is 'dark' or 'forbidden' (i.e. a human's attraction towards a vampire or vice versa), as well a romance seemingly fraught with 'impossible obstacles' such as Peeta and Katniss's mutual attraction despite the fact that they are in competition against one another for their lives. Four of the eight participants (Emily, Eliza, Ray, and Matt) discussed how they constructed aesthetic transactions with this trait of the Gothic genre.

In their interviews, participants Matt, Emily, and Ray discussed how they aesthetically transacted with the Gothic trait of impossible romance by meaningfully connecting it back to adolescent developmental experiences as a whole. When I asked Emily to expand on why the Gothic text quality of impossible romance "sticks out" to her during her post-unit interview, she responded, "It sticks out because everyone in class, even if they claim like 'whatever' [in regards to the trait of impossible romance] they get it, they just hide it. Teenagers feel a lot of this stuff." Emily detailed meaningful connectivity between the impossible romance that categorizes Gothic texts and adolescence (in general). Emily reflected that this connection is particularly strong for adolescents as they are likely to hide these feelings out of the fear that they will not be returned, making the likelihood of the romance more 'impossible.' Akin to this sentiment, Matt reflected in his mid-unit interview that the drama that categorizes Gothic romances is interesting because "it ties romance and kind of like the bizarre together in a way." Like Emily, he constructed an aesthetic transaction of meaningful connectivity with the trait to adolescence in general noting that there's "a lot of [romantic] drama in our grade."

The aesthetic transactions some of the participants constructed with the romance that categorizes Gothic texts aligns with adolescent developmental literature.

Adolescence is often when individuals first experience desire or attraction to another individual (Ashcraft, 2009). Likewise, the experience of these new emotions is an exciting, yet unnerving experience; handling the feelings can be frightening and overwhelming (Ashcraft, 2009; Berger, 2000). During her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson echoed adolescent developmental research on this phenomenon when she reflected on the fact that any text dealing with attraction and desire poses both challenges and attractions “at their age because it’s [feelings of attraction and desire] new.”

Mrs. Carson also believed that qualities central to Gothic romance are particularly powerful because the characters face obstacles surrounding desire, which the students find relatable. The way characters cope gave the students hope. She pointed out that Bella in the *Twilight* series is depicted as an outcast who is clumsy and rather ordinary, yet she charms a dashing vampire: “She’s not Cinderella, yet she’s still attractive to someone. I think it gives the kids hope, which, if nothing else, may quell the loneliness a kid might feel whose feelings aren’t returned or who has not yet experienced this.” Eliza initially indicated that she disliked anything “romancey” in her pre-unit interview. Yet, in her post unit interview, she discussed how reading about characters that grapple with romantic desire in Gothic texts is something “teenagers can relate and connect to. I’ve haven’t been on a date yet, but it [the texts] gave me an idea of what it’s like and problems you can run into. I know with even the not so popular people romance is sort of the key thing in their life.” Eliza aesthetically transacted with the romance quality inherent in Gothic texts as she felt that reading about it helped her prepare to handle it in the future. Thus, Eliza constructed an aesthetic transaction of imaginative contrast in regards to this Gothic trait. She engaged in imaginative trial and error with future real life

scenarios through this particular aesthetic transaction (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1995).

“I can’t really say why, I just enjoy it:” Death and destruction in Gothic texts.

Whether they label it “violence,” “horror,” “gore,” “death,” or “destruction,” all eight participants discussed the aesthetic transactions they constructed with this external element affecting the characters of Gothic texts, including the participants that initially expressed avoidance of texts containing this trait (Emily and Diana) during interviews. Gothic texts always feature some form of death or destruction, whether it be physically killing another individual (such as the ‘monster’s killing of his creator, Dr. Frankenstein, in *Frankenstein*), mental destruction (the narrator’s descent into madness, becoming ‘monstrous’ in “The Yellow Wallpaper”), or destruction of communities, such as the obliteration of Katniss’s home in *The Hunger Games* series by corrupt ‘monsters’ in authority. Some participants proudly and public announced their aesthetic transaction of experiencing feelings of pleasure associated with this Gothic text quality (such as Anna announcing to the class that she likes anything with “horror” in the beginning of the Gothic unit), while others, (particularly Ray, Victor, and Eliza) discussed liking this element, but almost sheepishly. Eliza admitted in her pre-unit interview (in response to my solicitation of what kinds of things she enjoyed reading for fun) “I like violence and gore, [smiles and shrugs her shoulders] I’m weird like that.” Eliza initially viewed her affinity for violence and gore as being something that distinguishes her from her peers. However, research suggests that adolescents’ affinity for these traits is completely normal (Jones, 2002; Jackson et al, 2008).

Though some of the participants were able to pinpoint reasons why they aesthetically transacted with this trait during interviews, over half of them were unsure when I asked them to reflect further on this affinity. Ray noted in his post-unit interview, “I can’t really say why, I just enjoy it,” or Eliza, in her mid-unit interview, reflected, “For some reason I like reading about dead bodies and dead stuff.” The two main reasons for the enjoyment of this trait, cited by participants, include how they imaginatively contrasted and meaningfully connected this trait to their real life experiences, which aligns with literature on adolescents, Gothic texts, and their affinity for fictional violence (Cross, 2008; McGillis, 2008; Jones, 2002). All eight participants discussed how they aesthetically transacted with this trait in finding entertainment in the death and destruction present in Gothic texts. As Eliza stated in her pre-unit interview, “I like battle and fight scenes, like in *The Hunger Games*. Things like that hook me into books. A lot of teenagers fighting to the death, it’s different from typical stuff.” Thus, Eliza affirmed how she found pleasure in this quality because of its contrast to real life.

In addition to moments of imaginative contrast, six participants discussed how they aesthetically transacted through meaningfully connecting moments of death and destruction in Gothic texts to events in their own life. After reading the scene depicting how Kit, the main character in *Down a Dark Hall*, lost her father, four participants (Emily, Matt, Anna, and Ray) raised their hands and unsolicited, verbalized their construction of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection by how they too lost loved ones. Emily shared that she lost an uncle, Matt, his grandfather, Anna, her mom’s godmother and grandmother, and Ray his granddad. During an interview, Anna noted that constructing aesthetic transaction with such moments in Gothic texts helped her heal

from the death of her grandmother: “I realized that even though it was a book, a lot of other people [characters] are dealing with the same thing.” Anna aesthetically transacted by meaningfully connecting to the sadness the characters feel, and upon reflection on this sadness, aesthetically transacted as the moment provided some ‘relief therapy’ in helping her deal with the ‘monster’ that is her grief (Cross, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1995). Death is a prominent feature of Gothic texts and an inevitable part of life that causes anxiety for everyone; however, such fear can be particularly powerful for adolescents because unlike when they were children, they have recently come to understand death in its permanence and inevitability (Berger, 2000; Trites, 2001). Gothic texts help adolescents deal with this by exposing it, providing an outlet for their anxiety (Coats, 2008; Cross, 2008; Trites, 2001).

In addition to constructing an aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection, Emily also forged aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with death and destruction as present in *The Hunger Games*, particularly the scene discussing how the main character, Katniss, loses her father. In an interview, she reflected, “I feel like kind of changed a little bit, like, ooh, I have to really think about how lucky I really am. It kind of gets me thinking and like how to be grateful and stuff.” Emily aesthetically transacted with this moment by imaginatively contrasting the experience of a fictional character with her own life experiences, as her father is still living. Through this contrast, she experienced gratitude and appreciation for the fact that she has not undergone this experience.

Additionally, in her mid-unit interview, upon reflecting on the death of Kit’s father in *Down a Dark Hall*, Emily discussed how aesthetic transactions of imaginative

contrast aided her in developing empathy for what would be foreign situations of some of her peers:

I'm reading from the point of view of somebody different than me. Somebody that's not been through the same things I've been through. Somebody that's lost a parent, somebody that is now controlled by the stepdad that doesn't like her and she doesn't him. I feel like I can kind of pinpoint some of those characteristics to some of the kids in my grade. I feel like I'm getting a better understanding of the people beside me.

This quotation showcases Emily constructing aesthetic transactions with the 'monsters' that a character faces in the Gothic unit text, *Down a Dark Hall*, in complex ways. She imaginatively contrasted her own life with this textual moment, but she also explored how vicariously experiencing the personally foreign phenomena of losing a parent and spiritual estrangement with a step-parent helped her better connect to and understand her peers that are coping with similar issues. Emily discussed how through constructing this aesthetic transaction, she experienced personal transformation in her development of empathy for others. Such transformative aesthetic transactional experiences broaden individuals' knowledge about people and society resulting in literacy education with positive moral repercussions that are developmentally critical for adolescents (Gee, 2008; Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1995).

Diana constructed an aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection with the Gothic trait of death and destruction by drawing a connection to the 'wars' that go on between groups of people in Gothic texts (such as in the *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* series) and the death and destruction that occurs in the Middle East and areas that surround her extended family. Upon prompting during her post-unit interview, Diana reflected:

When I read about destruction, like in the *Hunger Games*, I think about how that does happen. It happens in Iran, and it's sad because it has such a wonderful history. They have so much culture, but it's ruined by this president which is not really a president, he's a dictator. He's been in office forever, and he's trying to I don't know, like build a nuclear bomb and just threatens stuff. It's really sad.

In a latter portion of the interview, Diana expanded on these sentiments by stating how her dad is always calling extended family in Iran and how her immediately family is constantly worried about their relatives' welfare. Diana aesthetically transacted in meaningfully connecting the death and destruction present in Gothic texts to circumstances of her extended family.

Diana also meaningfully connected Gothic textual moments of death, destruction, and violence with the Newton school shootings that occurred in Connecticut December, 2012 in her post-unit interview: "Bad things happen all the time everywhere, and it's scary." Research in Gothic literature reveals that the genre's current appeal can be traced to the turbulent times in which adolescents are currently living (McGillis, 2008). Mrs. Carson in her post-unit interview also reflected on the real life events resulting in death and destruction that occurred during the Gothic unit experience:

This year, our community was devastated by Hurricane Sandy. Then, there's the tragic shooting of young children in a place where they are supposed to be safe [referring to the Sandy Hook shootings]. That was as horrible as anyone could possibly dream of and we weren't allowed to directly talk about it with the kids. And, now, we just had the Boston Marathon bombings. We think about what these kids have been through this year and thank God we had these [Gothic] pieces because it was the only way I could help the students deal with all of this.

In this impassioned reflection, Mrs. Carson expressed disapproval over the administrators' decision to make teachers refrain from directly talking about real life events about death and destruction, such as the Sandy Hook shootings in school; it was communicated to her that such conversations are better had at home and would only serve

to make the students more anxious. However, Mrs. Carson felt that not discussing it only increased her students' fears because they were repressed. She expressed that the death, destruction, and violence as present in the Gothic unit texts afforded her a means of indirectly giving voice to real life moments of connection, which would have otherwise been completely silenced within this classroom context.

Despite the benefits of adolescents aesthetically transacting with texts containing these traits, schools are often fearful of utilizing such texts, as they are afraid it will promote real life violence amongst teens (Jones, 2002). Such thinking suggests that most adolescents are unable to draw a distinction between reality and fiction, which underestimates their capabilities (Jones, 2002; McGillis, 2008). Additionally, such assumptions erroneously forge a direct correlation between individuals' exposure to fictional violence (as it manifests in videogames, T.V. shows, movies, etc.) to the likelihood that they will personally engage in such violent acts. This assumption ignores the much more complex and many reasons behind why a small percentage of individuals engage in such heinous acts, such as the Newton shootings (Jones, 2002). All eight participants discussed how they find it entertaining to read texts featuring death and destruction; however, they distinctly drew the line between fictional and real life violence.

Despite their enjoyment of this trait as it manifests in Gothic texts and the aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast they forged with it, none of the participants have a history of severe discipline issues and/or violent tendencies. As Matt simply noted in his post-unit interview, "I don't support violence, but I find it cool to watch or read about it in books and T.V. shows." Victor also reflected on

this issue in the conclusion of his post-unit interview when I played devil's advocate, following his sentiments where he expressed pleasure in engaging in fictional violence:

Me: Some adults think that kids shouldn't be reading about this stuff in school. What do you think?

Victor: Kids need to know about these things. Schools don't think kids are responsible. Actually they are. Just because we enjoy reading about this stuff doesn't mean that we'd actually do any of it. It's not like we're going to rip off wallpaper [referring to the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" who tears the wallpaper off her bedroom walls] just because we read [about] it.

Victor astutely asserted that adolescents are mature enough to handle reading texts that feature such characteristics without acting upon them. He wished that 'schools' or adults in positions of authority making curriculum decisions would understand that.

"Power's something we long for; we all want our voices to be heard:"

Powerlessness, corruption, and rebellion in Gothic texts. "Characters in a state of powerlessness definitely hits home," Emily expressed in her post-unit interview in response to solicitation about what, if any, Gothic texts traits 'stuck out' to her. Six of the participants (Emily, Eliza, Anna, Kurt, Victor, and Matt) discussed how they constructed aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity with this Gothic trait. The Gothic commonly features characters thrown into situations where they are powerless against individuals, society, or some other external force (Blackford, 2011; Coats, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008; McGillis, 2008). During cooperative group work with peers, Matt vented his meaningful connection to this trait and real life frustration: "Kids always feel like their parents are trying to control them. I get into fights with them [his parents] about it, so I totally get that [text quality]." Adolescence is a period of time where individuals keenly feel their lack of power (Blackford, 2011/2012; Coats, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1995). Mrs. Carson stated that teens understand this trait because they are constantly answering to

“teachers, principals, coaches, and parents. They’re old enough to question. This is the big era of questioning authority. ‘Why do we have to do this?’”

Yet, in her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson also acknowledged that school does not empower students as much as it should: “They [students] might question, but ultimately, most of them end up doing what they’re told to do by teachers without always understanding why.” Emily echoed this sentiment in her post-unit interview when she discussed the meaningful connection she forged between characters in a state of powerlessness to her own feelings of powerlessness in school. She discussed following the rules governing school, and how she was “good at it [school]. But, just because I’m good at it doesn’t mean I get it [why the rules exist].” Anna also constructed a meaningful connection with this Gothic trait in reflecting on adolescents’ lack of power in society at large in her post-unit interview: “Society tries to push you down this one path, where you can only do this, only do that. Power is something all human beings long for; we all want our voices to be heard.” Thus, the aesthetic transaction of meaningfully connecting with characters that also desire more power resonated on some level with all of the participants.

In addition to meaningfully connecting with this Gothic text trait, five of the participants (Emily, Eliza, Anna, Ray, and Victor) shared their emotional reactions to moments where characters are powerless in Gothic texts. Such a stirring of a response in the reader to a character and fictitious circumstances constitutes aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast (Connell, 200/2001; Rosenblatt 1994/1995). For example, Victor, in an entry in his Gothic journal responding to the fact that the characters in *Down a Dark Hall* are powerless to communicate with the outside world, wrote, “I feel bad for the girls

because even if their letters were sent, their parents wouldn't believe them." This aesthetic transaction also illuminated Victor's speculation that even if the girls achieve success in their goal, they would still be powerless, as he speculated that the parents would more likely believe the adults in authority over their children.

Despite participants' frustration with their lack of power in relationships with authority figures such as teachers, parents, and coaches, they understood that these individuals cared about them. Yet, Gothic texts often feature characters in a position of power that are corrupt and do not have the main characters' best intentions at heart (Franzak & Noll, 2006; McGillis, 2008). Dr. Frankenstein's abandonment of his creation, the 'monster,' because of his appearance, is one example. As Diana eloquently stated, "When I think of Gothic, I think of dystopian and dysfunctional societies." A vivid example of this is the corruption wielded by the head teacher, Madame Durrett, in *Down a Dark Hall*, who infringes on the rights of her students and threatens their well-being to make money. Upon learning of her evil intentions, seven of the eight participants (Kurt being the only one who did not outwardly display any reaction) illustrated a strong negative emotional reaction towards Madame in their Gothic journals or during class. Diana reflected in her journal, "I REALLY HATE MADAME DURRETT RIGHT NOW!!!!!" Both Emily (verbally during a class discussion) and Victor (in his Gothic journal) expressed a wish that Kit would punch Madame in the face and run away. As Mrs. Carson reflected, hatred towards Madame was "very visceral, very real." She believed this was because the students cared about the welfare of the main character and felt anger towards anyone that threatened her. Such emotional response to a character is evidence of an aesthetic transactional experience of imaginative contrast. Emily echoed

this belief when she reflected, “When you get attached the characters on a personal level, and something bad happens, you feel it.”

This moment also cultivated further reflection about corrupt authority in real life both in the United States and other parts of the world. Both Kurt and Anna (during interviews) discussed how they often heard about corrupt authority when they watched the news. Anna said, “You see it all the time...people doing anything for money. That’s basically why everything’s so corrupt in our world.” For Diana, the connection was deeply personal as the text moment in *Down a Dark Hall* caused her to reflect on the corruption of authority in the Middle East and all of the wars as a result. In thinking about the conversations she had with extended family members in Iran, she reflected during an interview: “The people there live in fear every day of doing something wrong, saying something wrong. It’s just really bad.” For Diana, reading texts containing this trait promoted the aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection as well as an outlet for discussing her fears about her family.

As Mrs. Carson reflected during her mid-unit interview, the students “connect” with corruption in authority and the struggles that result:

They see characters struggling to survive and we live in a world that is economically challenged. Our leaders often wield their authority in corrupt ways. Some of these kids’ parents are losing their jobs and struggling to make ends meet. They’re being told that it’ll be hard for them to get a job when they graduate. All of it’s hard for them to take in.

Mrs. Carson discussed how witnessing characters’ attempts to survive despite the external forces (or monsters) that threaten survival (such as corrupt authority) was meaningful to adolescents because they saw and heard such themes in real life. Whether on the small scale of a singular woman acting out against her restrictive husband in “The

Yellow Wallpaper,” or several communities actively rebelling against an oppressive president in *The Hunger Games*, Gothic texts emphasize corruption followed by rebellion. Gothic texts often feature characters that rebel against oppressive and/or corrupt authority (Coats, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008; McGillis, 2008). Six participants, (Matt, Kurt, Victor, Emily, Diana, and Anna) discussed aesthetically transacting with this Gothic trait through either imaginative contrast, meaningful connection, or both.

During interviews, Matt and Emily discussed how they did not personally connect with this trait; however, they constructed aesthetic transactions when characters rebel in Gothic texts, imaginatively contrasting the characters’ actions with their real lives (Rosenblatt, 1995). At the unit’s conclusion, Matt reflected “it [Gothic texts] shows the ‘Average Joes’ who don’t question things and take the safe road’s boring” and not something he wished to strive for. Instead, in regards to characters in Gothic texts that take a stand for what they believe in no matter what the cost, Matt said, “I always find that I’m like, wahoo! Good for them.” Mrs. Carson reflected, “People don’t always make choices that empower them. But, they [the students] like to cheer for the people who are underdogs. Maybe they don’t have the courage to do so, but they appreciate those that do.” When reflecting on the scene where the students walk out of Madame’s corrupt school at the end of *Down a Dark Hall*, Matt stated in his mid-unit interview, “I thought that moment was cool. I wouldn’t be able to do that. But, it’s cool they did.” In conjunction with these aesthetic transactions in relation to rebellion in Gothic texts, Mrs. Carson stated:

These kids come to school, they follow the rules, they do what they are told. At this age, none of them really have the opportunity to be that noble. They aren’t necessarily that kind of hero, but I think they all would like to be.

Matt felt he had not personally rebelled in any dramatic way, but he appreciated reading Gothic texts about characters that do; through constructing aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast, he enlarged his experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Emily, during interviews, also discussed how she had yet to experience standing up against someone in authority in her own life. She appreciated reading about moments in which characters did, as she believed doing so would prepare her in the future. During an interview, she specifically pointed to the scene in which President Snow visits Katniss in the second book of the *Hunger Games*. Snow attempts to intimidate Katniss and fails because she stands her ground. Emily enjoyed this moment because, as she stated, “I’m only 12, so I haven’t had those experiences. But, when I’m reading, I feel like I’ve gotten that experience and it helps prepare me because I’ll know what to do.” Thus, like Matt, Emily detailed the aesthetic transaction of imaginative contrast in vicariously experiencing a situation that she had not experienced in real life; she felt this constituted a meaningful experience (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Finally, Diana and Kurt experienced aesthetic transactions in meaningfully connecting the theme of rebellion to real life circumstances. Both participants (during interviews) pointed to the wars going on in the Middle East and the rebellions that exist as a result. However, Diana and Kurt moved beyond connecting text and life events in discussing how these situations increased their empathy for others. Reading texts showcasing rebellion helped them better understand this situation: “When you read books about this, you can relate it to what’s actually happening on the news. You get a much better idea about what people are going through,” Kurt reflected in an interview. Both Diana and Kurt noted that such transactions made them better able to relate to people in

such circumstances, which is an aesthetic transaction that increased their sensitivity towards the plight of others (Rosenblatt, 1994). Such understanding through connectivity also occurred between the participants and the internal obstacles characters face in Gothic texts.

Participants' Aesthetic Transactions with Internal Forces in Gothic Texts

Aside from grappling with external forces, Gothic texts also showcase characters' internal struggles, or struggles that have to do with their sense of self. Students aesthetically transacted with this quality of Gothic texts through moments in which characters' inner psyches' are revealed, grapple with their existence as 'not normal,' and sometimes, even survive and thrive despite these obstacles.

“Katniss acts tough, but inside she’s crumbling. She wears a mask of toughness:” Gothic and the inner psyche. The above quotation was Emily’s reflection on Katniss in the *Hunger Games*, which she shared with the class during the opening lessons of the Gothic unit when the class discussed characters’ various struggles in *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games* series. Gothic texts often expose characters’ inner psyches as darker and fraught with turmoil (Franzak & Noll, 2006; Hogle, 1999; McGillis, 2008). Perhaps the most extreme textual example is the narrator of “The Tell Tale Heart.” On the outside, he appears a very rational and sound individual. However, he ultimately succumbs to his dark, inner psyche in killing an innocent old man. The reader is exposed to these darker feelings well before any of the other characters in the story. Another example is the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” and the reader’s witness to her inner psyche gradually taking over her outwardly rationale façade.

Diana reflected how she aesthetically transacted with this Gothic text quality through expressing her feeling of appreciation for how this characteristic complicates a text by creating “layers” or depth to character. During an interview, she specifically pointed to the example of Peeta, and how he fights his “dark side” in *The Hunger Games*: “Peeta says he’s trying to keep his humanity and he doesn’t want to kill, you know anyone. He doesn’t want to be brought over to the dark side...a lot of [character] layers. It’s interesting.” All of the participants recounted the aesthetic transactions they constructed with this Gothic trait. As Mrs. Carson reflected in her mid-unit interview, “They [adolescents] like the dark side. The dark side [of individuals] is not something we typically explore in-class.” Akin to this sentiment, during interviews Victor and Emily expressed sentiments of pleasure in reading texts featuring characters that are mentally instable to some degree, or as Emily noted, a little “demented and different.”

As Mrs. Carson stated in her mid-unit interview, “With these kids, there’s their public face versus what goes on inside of them, so they connect to this [trait].” Three of the participants, (Emily, Eliza, and Kurt) discussed (during interviews) their aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection with the Gothic trait of wearing a façade that was not representative of their true selves. After being witness to numerous class discussions in which other students expressed their affinity for horror and gore, elements of many popular culture Gothic ‘texts’ such as in T.V. shows, videogames, movies, etc., Eliza reflected in her post-unit interview, “With me, I hear people say that I’m not the type of person who would go home and watch horror movies and stuff. So, I guess every person is just different in their own home.” Eliza drew a meaningful connection to herself and to others in recognizing the gap between individuals’ public and personal personas. While

Eliza connected with this Gothic textual trait in a general sense, Kurt and Anna specifically pointed to specific incidences of meaningful connectivity within their own lives: During his mid-unit interview when he reflected on his connection to the Gothic trait of wearing a mask or facade, Kurt confessed: “Mental instability, well, I experienced that when I went to a piano competition. I was going crazy on the inside because I didn’t know if I was going to do well or not.” Thus, Kurt detailed a specific instance of high anxiety during a competition, representing an aesthetic transaction of meaningfully connecting a quality of Gothic texts to a circumstance in his own life.

Emily discussed her connectivity with this trait during her post unit interview. “I get it [text quality of wearing a façade]. Those feelings everybody has and they know it’s there, but they don’t want to bring it out.” She further reflected that although she appeared confident, on the inside she had a lot of anxiety and “trust issues”: “I don’t trust people. I have all those feelings bottled up but I don’t really want to tell anybody. There’s always that backstabbing person, the one you can’t trust or the one that you trust but they’ll all go say something. It’s the mask.” Thus, Emily aesthetically transacted with this Gothic text quality through meaningful connection. Through this aesthetic transaction, Emily explored some of her own inner demons. The Gothic texts afforded Emily an outlet for releasing some of this anxiety in facing these inner ‘monsters’ with which she grappled.

The aesthetic transaction of participants meaningfully connecting with the Gothic text trait of featuring main characters that are in some way different, not normal, or monstrous in some way, was the most universally illustrated transaction of this study: All eight participants recounted multiple moments of constructing aesthetic transactions of

meaningful connectivity with this trait, and how such aesthetic transactions resulted in meaningful reading experiences (Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995; Strum & Matt, 2009). Whether it is a physical state of monstrosity as ‘other than human’ such as the liminal ghost who longs for human companionship in the short story, “Lavender,” physical characteristics that set individuals apart from others (Harry Potter’s scar), or characters’ existence as ‘other’ due to distinguishing mental characteristics (Bella’s attraction to a vampire, or the narrator’s slow decent into madness in “The Yellow Wallpaper”) Gothic texts always feature liminal individuals positioned outside societal borderlines due to their existence as ‘other’ and not ‘normal.’

As a result, Gothic characters grapple with the internal struggle of spiritual isolation as a result of these differences, or as Ray noted, “in Gothic texts, characters battle themselves” (Blackford, 2011/2012; Cross, 2008; Hogle, 1999; Jackson, et., al 2008). The monster in *Frankenstein* repeatedly looks for connection amongst the human race, which he never finds. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” suffers and ultimately succumbs to mental distress. Kit is able to channel the energy of a dead musician in *Down a Dark Hall*. Harry Potter often feels alone in his existence of half Muggle/half wizard, which keeps him from fully feeling comfortable in either world. These are a few of the many textual moments illustrating this Gothic trait that the participants are exposed to during the unit.

It’s a trait that speaks a lot to teens because they don’t feel normal: The Gothic and overturn of ‘normalcy’. Concern with ‘normalcy’ is powerful in adolescence. Developmental changes physically occur at a rapid rate, which can make teens feel unstable and ‘monstrous;’ it is also a time when individuals lose the confidence

of childhood and become paranoid and self-conscious about how they are judged by the outside world (Berger, 2000). It is perhaps not surprising then, that meaningful connectivity between the participants and characters in Gothic texts due to lack of ‘normalcy’ and existence in a liminal state was the most universal of all the aesthetic transactions that the students illustrated constructing during the study. During her post-unit interview, in reflecting on the connectivity between adolescence and this particular Gothic text trait, Emily said that such turbulence makes the adolescent years “stink”: “In some respects, it’s just ‘ouch!’” was how she described the developmental stage. During her post-unit interview, Anna reflected, “Teens can relate to the Gothic genre. Most kids feel they need to be perfect. Seeing people like them [imperfect Gothic characters] helps get them through [this time].” The aesthetic transaction of meaningful connectivity that Anna forged with this trait as it manifests throughout various texts in the Gothic unit provided a sense of reassurance that she felt is a source of comfort for teens (Rosenblatt, 1995). Eliza echoed this by also reflecting in her post unit interview, “Teenagers might feel like they don’t fit in, so it [texts with this trait] interests them more.” During his post-unit interview, Ray shared, “So many teens have angst. It’s a trait that speaks a lot to teens because they don’t feel normal.”

Interestingly, most of the participants spoke of meaningful connectivity with this trait through the general terms “teens” or “teenagers,” but subsequently relayed personal examples. Such positioning and discourse suggested that this was a personal connection of understanding liminality, but that they were more comfortable discussing liminality in impersonal terms. Mrs. Carson also reflected on the universality of this trait and how it was difficult for students to address directly:

These emerging teens feel freaky a lot of the time. There's a lot of instability. They want to feel good about themselves, yet at this point in their lives they're probably plagued with more doubts than they'd ever want to talk about. No matter where they're coming from, what they look like, who their friends are, or what activities they do, this characteristic seems to universally speak to all of them.

As Mrs. Carson discussed, Gothic texts provided an outlet for the students to explore those normally repressed feelings and thoughts through characters' struggles with the trait, which provided an indirect means of promoting reflection that was comfortable for them in a way that direct confrontation might not be. However, by the unit's conclusion, some of the participants were able to reflect on this trait in personal terms, which a subsequent chapter details.

“You feel like, ‘Oh, I’m just like them. I can overcome too:” The Gothic and hope. Not all of the characters in Gothic texts succeed in overcoming their internal issues; however, many Gothic texts showcase characters fighting these obstacles, and sometimes succeeding despite them. Paradoxically, even though Gothic texts are by definition dark, heavy, and even depressing, there is often an element of hope as characters often fight (regardless of personal costs) against their shortcomings and fears in order to survive (Coats, 2008). Despite their own internal anxieties and existence as liminal ‘others’ for a variety of reasons, both Katniss and Harry in *The Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter* series struggle within difficult circumstances; ultimately, they are successful despite these shortcomings. Even characters that ultimately fail in overcoming their internal issues (such as the narrators in “The Yellow Wallpaper” and “Cat in Glass”) fight to overcome their inner demons. All of the participants (with the exception of Matt, as it did not directly surface in any of his responses) illustrated constructing aesthetic transactions with this trait as it manifests within the Gothic unit texts.

In their Gothic response journals, Victor and Diana discussed their admiration of these characters because they questioned whether or not they would be able to do the same if faced with a similar situation. Both participants noted the same moment in *Down a Dark Hall* when Kit, despite her anxiety and self-doubt, stood up to Madame Durrett. Diana reflected, “Kit’s so brave. I could not have done that.” Victor wrote, “I feel scared for Kit. If I were her, I’d run away.” Both students experienced emotional responses for Kit and admiration of her bravery and constructed aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast between what she does and what they feel they would do. Indeed, I witnessed many students in the class verbally cheer for Kit, and some students even high fived each other when Mrs. Carson read this particular scene. Relatedly, Mrs. Carson noted in her post-unit interview that the “survival theme” of Gothic texts, and triumphing against the odds, “is something that speaks to students because it gives them hope.”

Aside from expressing sentiments of pleasure and imaginatively contrasting this Gothic text characteristic, six of the participants, (Diana, Anna, Emily, Eliza, Ray, and Victor) discussed how seeing participants fight against personal shortcomings was something that gave them hope and served as a model for real life, which illustrated another aesthetic transaction the participants constructed. Ray, Eliza, Emily, and Anna discussed aesthetically transacting with this text quality using abstract terms. Ray noted how in the Gothic, “You see a bunch of protagonists overcoming obstacles and feeling different or like an outcast, but they prove themselves to be special in some sort of way.” Ray, Emily, Anna, and Eliza reflected how “teens” are always battling personal demons or monsters. As Ray noted in his Gothic journal “Teens are always having to overcome problems.” In his mid-unit interview, upon reflecting on what he enjoyed about Gothic

texts, Ray shared, “People in Gothic stories overcome something, so I guess they feel maybe empowering [empowered]. There’s usually a sense of hope that probably a lot of teenagers like.”

Anna expressed similar views to Ray, but in more personal terms during her post-unit interview, “It really helps people because they read Gothic things and they see someone imperfect overcome stuff. It makes you feel like, ‘Oh, I’m just like them, I can overcome too.’” Diana also verbalized a meaningful connection with this trait: “I really like seeing characters in the Gothic overcome their flaws. I learn something from that struggle. Like, studying for a big test, I get nervous, but I know I have to do it.” Diana felt her nervousness was a flaw that would prevent her from success; seeing characters overcome their flaws was helpful in reducing her test taking anxiety, resulting in a personally meaningful aesthetic transaction. Overall these aesthetic transactions of contrast and connection allowed students to learn from characters’ experiences and made their outlooks on their own personal struggles a bit more positive.

Participants’ Aesthetic Transactions with the Ambiguity of the Gothic Genre

Rarely are Gothic texts straightforward, neither do they answer all the questions they pose; the gaps left open in these texts invite reader active co-construction (Crandall, 2008; Iser, 1978). Participants constructed aesthetic transactions with this Gothic text quality as it manifests in the unit texts in two ways: the Gothic fusion of fantasy and reality releasing the imagination in terms of contrast to real life and participants philosophically questioning the real-life existence of the supernatural.

“These stories suck you into their interesting worlds without straying from the issues teens face every day:” Fantasy and reality intertwined in Gothic texts.

Gothic texts run the gamut in terms of intermixing fantasy and reality. Some Gothic texts are unquestionably fantastic, such as *Frankenstein*, while others leave the possibility of whether the piece is steeped in reality or fantasy up to the reader's interpretation: Are the women in the wallpaper real or a figment of the narrator's imagination in "The Yellow Wallpaper?" Is the old man's heart really still beating after he dies in "The Tell Tale Heart," or is this only in the narrator's head? Regardless of where each text falls on this spectrum, the fantastic elements of Gothic genre release the participants' imaginations, which lie at the heart of aesthetic reading experiences (Connell 2000/2001; Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Takolander, 2000; Vasudevan, 2010). All eight participants during their interviews utilized some derivative of the word, "imagine" in describing their aesthetic transactions with this particular quality of Gothic texts.

All of the students expressed pleasure in association with constructing moments of imaginative contrast between the fantastic elements and worlds of Gothic texts and their own lives. In reflecting on such flights of fantasy, such as wizards battling one another to the death in the *Harry Potter* series, Victor stated in his mid-unit interview, "This [kind of event] doesn't happen in real life, which makes it interesting." Victor appreciated the fantastic components of some Gothic texts because of the contrast they hold to real life. Anna also discussed the imaginative component behind this element in her mid-unit interview upon reflecting on the fantastic nature that comprises some Gothic texts: "Knowing it's not real makes it interesting because it gets to be real in my imaginative world." Many of the participants enjoyed the 'different worlds' depicted in the various Gothic unit texts and the moments of imaginative contrast to real life that they afforded.

These depictions released participants' imaginations in their visualization and transportation into these worlds (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995; Takolander, 2009). Diana, in her mid-unit interview, reflected, "I like to imagine myself in worlds like that." In her post-unit interview, Eliza specifically mentioned *Dracula* and how reading about a character "that sucks peoples' blood was interesting because it's not real in real life, but it's real while I'm reading it." Thus, musings on this particular fantastic Gothic monster was a source of intrigue, appeal, and interest for Eliza. In reflecting on students' enjoyment of the fantastic elements characteristic of Gothic texts in her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson stated:

It's that quality of something beyond that I think helps students. Fantasy takes them away from their current situation. They often see their own lives as humdrum and not exciting, so they enjoy reading about characters that have ultra-exciting lives

Mrs. Carson echoed the students' reflection that the fantastic elements vicariously transported them into different worlds because of the contrast to real life. Aesthetically transacting through transport is a source of imaginative power for the reader as it provides temporary escapism from real life; the escapism relies on readers' imaginations; therefore, the experience is highly personalized and subjective (Jones, 2002; Smith, 2008). However, Mrs. Carson discussed how the majority of Hillside's curriculum falls on the extreme ends of the spectrum: realistic, historical fiction which is completely representative of reality, or completely fantastic pieces, such as a story that feature a boy traveling in a talking car visiting different 'lands' so that he eventually learns to not be lazy (*The Phantom Tollbooth*) which Mrs. Carson felt was far removed from students' realities and "elementary" in nature.

In contrast, Mrs. Carson argued that even the Gothic pieces that are unquestionably fantastic still feature circumstances that resonate with adolescents, such as the monster in *Frankenstein* “longing to find companionship and fit in.” In their interviews, Ray, Victor, Eliza, Anna, Emily, and Diana specifically discussed enjoying the blend of contrast and comparison to real life that Gothic texts promote. As Ray noted in his post-unit interview: “These stories suck you into their peculiar and interesting worlds without straying from the issues teens face every day.” He used *Frankenstein* as an example of this combination and stated that Gothic texts are “entertainment plus reality.” Likewise, Eliza, in her mid-interview, noted how Gothic texts are “reality and fantasy at the same time.” Specifically, she pointed to the example of *Down a Dark Hall*, where Kit has to deal with the fact that her body and mind are being used against her will to channel famous dead artists, yet she still faces issues that adolescents can relate to, such as a crush on a teacher, and trying to make friends at a new school. Victor discussed appreciating the combination of fantasy and reality in Gothic texts similar to the Goldilocks syndrome in his mid-unit interview: “It’s not too fantastic and it’s not too realistic. It’s in the middle, which I like.”

Additionally, it is not uncommon for Gothic texts to leave the question of whether a text falls into reality or fantasy open to reader interpretation; such a gap promotes aesthetic transactions as students are able to engage in plot co-construction (Iser, 1978). For example, the narrator in the Gothic short story, “Cat in Glass,” insists that a glass statue that has been in her family’s possession for generations is possessed by demons. She rationally defends this position, but ends up in a mental asylum because the other characters do not believe her. Ultimately, whether or not the cat is truly possessed is left

up to reader interpretation. The nonfiction Gothic pieces of the reading unit, such as *The Secret History of Vampires*, which explores the real-life history of vampires, also blurs the line between fantasy and reality. In their interviews, Ray, Diana, Emily, Matt, Anna discussed aesthetically transacting via reflection on the gaps left open in some Gothic texts, and how this openness is enjoyable. Diana and Anna specifically pointed to the ambiguous ending of “Cat in Glass” and how it was pleasurable.

Anna, in her post unit interview, discussed how she enjoyed this text because she aesthetically transacted by co-constructing the outcome of the story: “it’s [the conclusion] left open for the reader to cast their opinion on it.” Diana also reflected on the ambiguous ending of this particular unit text in her post-unit interview: “It’s really, do you believe the narrator or not? Was it real or wasn’t it real? To be honest, I’m on the border with this, whether I really believe the glass cat was responsible.” As Matt noted in his post-unit interview, “It’s common for Gothic texts to leave you thinking, ‘Could it be? Is it possible?’” For these students, aesthetically transacting by sitting and playing with the various possibilities inherent in the ambiguity characteristic of some Gothic texts constituted pleasurable experiences.

Closely related to the question of ‘What if’ that Gothic texts frequently pose, is that the pieces often feature characters that cross the boundary between living and dead: ghosts or spirits frequently haunt the Gothic, such as in the unit texts, “The Midnight Mass of the Dead,” “Lavender,” “The Woman in the Snow,” “The Ghostly Little Girl,” and *Down a Dark Hall* (Cross, 2008; McGillis, 2008). Some of these spirits are menacing, such as those in *Down a Dark Hall* and “The Midnight Mass of the Dead,” and some are benevolent and stuck between the worlds of the living and the dead in a liminal space

because of some unfinished business, such as the spirits in “The Ghostly Little Girl” and “Lavender.” Regardless of where the ghosts fall on this spectrum, the presence of them in Gothic texts served to promote reader reflection on whether or not the spirits of the dead linger on Earth.

All of the participants (with the exception of Kurt) communicated their construction of aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with this Gothic text trait during interviews. Ray, Diana, and Eliza expressed sentiments of finding this Gothic text quality enjoyable because of the thrill that accompanies fear and suspense. Diana, in her mid-unit interview simply stated, “Everyone enjoys a good ghost story.” Ray, in an interview, expressed how ghosts in Gothic texts “make a unique atmosphere, which I really like.” Likewise, Eliza thought ghosts add “creepiness and mystery” to Gothic stories and nonfiction texts, such as “The Mysterious Grave Visitor,” (a newspaper article about a mysterious being who visits Edgar Allen Poe’s grave) because they raise the question of whether or not such supernatural beings exist in real life.

Before reading aloud the ghost story, “Lavender,” Mrs. Carson engaged the class in the following poll as recorded during my observation:

Mrs. Carson asks the students to raise their hands if they think ghosts are real. A number of students’ hands go up. She then asks the students to raise their hands if they think ghosts don’t exist. No one raises their hands. She then asks people to raise their hands if they are unsure. Multiple students raise their hands. Ray states, “I’m not sure.” Emily agrees that she too is undecided.

The results of this class poll suggested that the students were at least open to the possibility of spirits and ghosts existing in real life. Gothic texts featuring such characters encourage the aesthetic transaction of further reflection on this gap (Iser, 1978). Diana, Matt, Ray, and Victor enjoyed constructing this aesthetic transaction with Gothic texts.

Specifically, during her post-unit interview, Diana offered the following reflection on how Gothic texts afforded her the means to reflect on this philosophical issue:

The whole situation like with Kit and her dad [as present in *Down a Dark Hall*]. Some people believe in ghosts and some don't. It's never been scientifically proven that there are no ghosts. I've never experienced it, but there's people that say they have. Some people, like my dad, definitely don't believe in them. Some people have this picture in their head that's getting filled in and when the crayon goes outside the line, they try to bring it back inside. It's something that really logical people don't believe in. But, I think it's possible, and even if it probably isn't, what does 'probably' mean? So, it depends on what you believe.

As Diana communicated, she remained unsure, but was open to the possibility of the supernatural, and she enjoyed constructing this aesthetic transaction with Gothic texts.

Akin to these statements, Mrs. Carson stated, "Everyone loves the supernatural, the 'What if?' People want to know and probe: Is it true? Could it be? I think the Gothic genre involves a lot of things that fall into the grey area between cold, hard fact and complete fantasy." She felt that the students liked this shade of grey that is characteristic of Gothic texts, where there is no clear cut right or wrong answer because of the various aesthetic transactions such moments afford the reader.

Finally, the students constructed aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection with this trait by detailing examples of apparent hauntings and feelings of a spiritual presence they personally experienced following the death of a loved one. Thus, they forged connections between the supernatural experiences of the stories, nonfiction texts, and their own lives, which increased text relevance (Rosenblatt, 1995; Strum & Matt, 2009; Guthrie, 2008). After reading the ghost short stories, both Matt and Emily recounted examples of hauntings in real life. In his post-unit interview, Matt specifically mentioned the experiences of his cousin: "He's a cop and I trust him. When he was

young, there was a ghost in his house and he used to be able to see it. So, he believes in them and I do too.”

For Matt, the connectivity between this Gothic text trait and his own life was particularly powerful during this time. Matt was extremely close to his grandfather who died the summer before this unit commenced. In his interviews, Matt discussed his meaningful connection to Gothic texts where the spirits of the dead exist and are felt by those that are still living. Specifically, in reflecting on a moment in *Down a Dark Hall* where Kit believes that she feels the presence of her deceased father, he reflected, “My grandfather died a couple of months ago. We kept his NAVY rifle and suit. And, you get this weird feeling when you touch it. It’s like he’s in the room with you. Then when you don’t touch it, you’re back to reality.” Matt reflected that through objects of significance, he was able to feel the presence of his deceased grandfather; Gothic texts that blur the lines between the living and the dead were enjoyable to him because they reinforced his belief that his grandfather’s spirit remains with him.

Regardless of the participants’ personal views on the supernatural, the Gothic genre exposes this topic, which Mrs. Carson believed is an aspect of the genre that acted as a catalyst for students’ construction of aesthetic transactions:

The Gothic is all about mystery and the ‘what ifs.’ All of the sudden, they are getting the idea of ‘Wow! There might not be a multiple choice answer to this. There might not be a right or wrong, it might be a maybe.’ I think they enjoy that uncertainty because knowing there’s not just one right answer can be empowering. Then, the quest becomes more important than the finding [of a right answer].

Mrs. Carson detailed how the open-ended nature of Gothic texts gave students the opportunity to construct aesthetic transactions where ‘Truth’ became relative and personal in a way that gave the students ownership over textual interpretation (Iser, 1978;

Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Additionally, the fusion of popular culture and traditional Gothic texts aligned participants' primary and secondary Discourses in relation to reading. Thus, this hybridity also encouraged students' construction of aesthetic transaction experiences, which the next section explores.

Alignment between Leisure and Academic Reading Using Popular Culture and Traditional Gothic Texts

I purposefully incorporated a mix of popular culture and traditional Gothic texts in the reading unit as a means to promote alignment between students' academic and leisure reading experiences (Gee 2005/2005; Hagood et al., 2010; Lenters, 2006; Marsh, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007; Wohlwend, 2013). As such, the unit fused as Rosenblatt (2005) deemed 'moderns amongst masterpieces' in an attempt to show students that their literacy identities outside of school were respected in school (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2011, Marsh, 2005; Wohlwend, 2013). The unit commenced with a reading of excerpts and a discussion on the popular culture series *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Hunger Games*. The unit novel was the popular culture text *Down a Dark Hall*, by Lois Duncan, and nonfiction excerpts (*The Secret History of Vampires*) and the short story, "Cat in Glass," are considered contemporary pieces. All eight participants discussed enjoying the fusion of popular culture and traditional Gothic texts because of the allegiances and alliances the texts held between their primary and secondary Discourse experiences in relation to reading practices (Gee 2005/2008; Rosenblatt, 1995).

All eight participants discussed enjoying the introductory lesson using Gothic popular culture text excerpts both in class and during interviews. As Anna noted in her post-unit interview when I solicited her thoughts about this fusion, "I thought it was a very smart, a very wise idea. Because I don't think ever, any teacher in any classroom has

ever done that before, so we had more to relate to.” Indeed, Rosenblatt (1994/1995) echoed this assertion: In order for individuals to aesthetically transact with texts, the texts must hold links to readers’ interests and experiences. In her mid-unit interview, Anna discussed how the introductory texts “caught her eye” and hooked her because she “already knew about them [the texts].” Additionally, Anna reflected that “knowing about it [the texts] got me excited about what was coming.” Anna relayed that using these texts fueled excitement for future unit texts. Relevance and connectivity cultivated interest in the Gothic as a literary genre, as well as enthusiasm about the upcoming texts, which the other seven participants also indicated throughout their interviews (Gibson, 2010; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wilson & Casey, 2007). Anna’s reflection that such integration was uncommon aligns with the literature discussing the rarity of such a fusion of modern and traditional texts in reading curriculum (Dyson, 1997; Hagood et al., 2010; Vasudevan, 2007; Williams, 2007).

All of the participants read at least one of the popular culture series prior to the beginning of the unit, as evident in their pre-unit interview discussions. Thus, they were immediately vested in the unit because it used texts from their world: “This was something they cared about,” as Mrs. Carson reflected in her post-unit interview. As Diana stated in her post-unit interview, “It didn’t even matter if everyone liked the books or not. Everyone’s heard of them and knows at least something about them, so we all had something to share.” Emily relayed the most impassioned view on using popular culture texts as way to introduce the unit, claiming in her post-unit interview, “If we didn’t have the pop culture texts to begin with, I wouldn’t like this unit because I wouldn’t have seen how I connected with it.” Discussing the Gothic elements of popular culture texts such as

The Hunger Games (a series she chose to read on her own) made Emily realize that she was more open to Gothic texts than she initially thought.

As noted by Eliza, beginning a unit with texts that students were familiar with was “unusual.” Upon reflecting in her mid-unit interview on how Mrs. Carson began the Gothic unit with discussion on popular culture texts, she shared: “I think it was a good idea, using a book or something like that and most people in class were familiar with them. So, they already sort of made a little connection to that. Before, we were just thrown into a new genre.” According to Eliza, reading teachers infrequently afforded students the opportunity to bridge their in and out-of-school reading practices. Such a disconnect is widely noted throughout adolescent reading research (e.g. Gee, 2008; Guthrie, 2005; Rosenblatt, 1995). In contrast, Mrs. Carson, in her post-unit interview, reflected that this experience showed her the benefit of using popular culture texts to establish relevancy in the beginning of a reading unit:

You need that buy in factor, and this was a great way to get it because they [the students] see these texts in some way, shape, or form as being *theirs*. They were so excited that *their* books were brought into the classroom. They see how this [the Gothic] is something they are a part of *right now*” [Italicized words stressed by participant].

Mrs. Carson indicated that the students appreciated how the Gothic unit took into account what they were reading outside of the classroom; the unit felt current, and not just something to be studied from the past (Alvermann et al., 2007; Marsh, 2005; Sheridan-Thomas, 2007). Eliza and Diana echoed this sentiment by coming up to me after a book fair and expressing how so many of the books everyone’s reading now are Gothic; because of this, they felt it’s “cool” that they were studying the genre in school.

Diana and Eliza also appreciated the issues presented in contemporary texts, (such as loss of cell phone usage in *Down a Dark Hall*) because such moments resonated with their day to day experiences and afforded them opportunities to construct aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection. Eliza, in her post-unit interview, stated: “You can understand these concepts. In the other books [academic texts] there were no cell phones or something like that. People can relate to a kid who has a cell phone, the Internet, and all that stuff.” Diana specifically noted her appreciation for how the unit connected her primary and secondary Discourses in relation to reading practices in her post-unit interview: “I read those kinds of books on my own anyway. To be able to read that in-class, it’s like joining together school work and what I do for fun. It’s nice to have the opportunity to bring those two cultures together.” For all the participants, the inclusion of these popular culture texts within school united their leisure and academic reading experiences (Gee, 2008; Hruby et al., 2008; Mahiri, 2001; Marsh, 2005).

Additionally, six of the participants (Anna, Eliza, Emily, Ray, Kurt, and Matt) discussed during interviews how immediately aesthetically transacting with the Gothic genre through exploring popular culture texts they already knew gave them confidence in further exploring the genre. As Anna stated in her mid-unit interview, “I like how I already had knowledge about it [the Gothic]. It’s not like I’m stepping into something I don’t know anything about.” Connectivity and relevance increased students’ confidence and therefore, engagement in academic material, as it created a bridge between what was already known and what was yet to be learned (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Guthrie, 2008). Ray reflected in his mid-unit interview, “It was really helpful to explore Gothic themes in stories you already knew. So, you’re already familiar with them, and then it’s easier to

pick them [themes] out in the stories you don't know." As Mrs. Carson shared, such an approach "Doesn't fight what they're already doing. It just makes them think about what they're already doing. Maybe the magic is that it's already there."

Finally, in response to the overall inclusion of popular culture texts throughout the unit, all of the participants, with the exception of Emily (whose view is further examined in a latter section), enjoyed the "variety" and "mixing" of "old" and "modern" texts. During their interviews, Matt and Ray discussed how they enjoyed seeing how Gothic characters, such as vampires, evolved over time from something that is feared (as the vampire portrayed in *Dracula*) to something that is almost a 'Gothic fad' such as the romantic intrigue of the vampire, Edward, in the *Twilight* series. Examining both popular culture and traditional vampire texts afforded Matt and Ray the opportunity to construct this aesthetic transaction of comparing and contrasting a Gothic trope [the vampire] as it manifests through time and throughout various texts. As Ray reflected in his post-unit interview, "We got to see Gothic from all different time periods. Instead of just reading old Euro-ethnic texts, we also read the popular culture pieces, so we were more engaged." Akin to this statement, Anna discussed enjoying the constant "shifting back and forth between traditional and contemporary stuff," which blurred the boundaries between the two.

Mrs. Carson specifically commented on this unification in her post-unit interview:

This unit has both ends of the spectrum and is designed to illustrate the parallels between the two [classic and popular culture texts] rather than being a divisive force, not just among these students, but amongst literary appreciation types. It's bringing them together. It's showing the students that there are things about the one that you will probably like about the other.

As Mrs. Carson noted, if the primary purpose of academic reading is to enhance and expand students' appreciation of literature [what she feels it should be] then she questions why academic texts "have to be canonical." In fact, the two texts the participants expressed the greatest overall enjoyment of (*Down a Dark Hall* and "Cat in Glass") are both contemporary texts, which Mrs. Carson agreed are "masterfully crafted." She believed that the students gleaned as much reading knowledge that enhanced them academically and personally from these pieces as they did with the more traditional texts. This point is validated in the myriad of aesthetic transactions the participants constructed with these two texts as illustrated in this chapter. Without an expanded definition of what 'counts' as appropriate 'academic' texts, neither one of these texts would have been considered.

As a whole, due to the many points of alignment between the qualities inherent in Gothic texts and adolescence as a developmental period, the unit texts encouraged participant construction of rich and varied aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast. This resulted in personally meaningful academic reading experiences for all eight participants. However, there were some tensions that arose in participant construction of aesthetic transactions with the unit texts, which the next section explores.

Gothic Texts and Aesthetic Transactional Text Tensions

In alignment with the social constructivist framework of this study, one of my secondary research questions focused on moments of participant tension in the construction of aesthetic transactions in response to the traditional and popular culture texts in the Gothic studies reading unit. I conducted such inquiry to explore the research

topic in a complex and holistic manner (Creswell, 2007; Oldfather, 2002). These moments are discussed in regards to a text that most of the participants were unable to construct aesthetic transactions with and one participant's inability to construct aesthetic transactions with the traditional Gothic texts.

“It’s yellow wallpaper, get over it!” “The Yellow Wallpaper” and aesthetic transactional tensions. To one degree or another, all eight participants constructed aesthetic transactions with the various texts comprising the Gothic unit, with the exception of the classic Gothic short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Excluding Ray, the participants were unable to construct aesthetic transactions with this text. Unlike my thought process governing the decision to include the other unit texts (which prioritized the aesthetic transactional potential of the texts with adolescent readers) I included this piece of literature because of its status as a ‘quintessential’ classic Gothic text, and admittedly, my personal enjoyment of this story. Looking back, I realize that as a result, I did not prioritize the aesthetic transactional potential of this text with adolescent readers.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” takes place in the early 1900s. It is told from the point of view of a woman who recently bore a child and is taken to a retreat by her husband. Due to her mental distress, he confines her to a room (decorated with yellow wallpaper) in an attempt to cure her. Ironically, his treatment of her mental distress exacerbates it, as the reader witnesses her descent into madness as the story unfolds in a series of journal entries. The more depressed and disconnected the narrator becomes from reality, the more she fixates on the wallpaper. This instability leads to the story’s climax where the narrator ultimately believes there are women trapped in the wallpaper that she needs to

release by tearing it down. This story exposes the issue of postpartum depression and serves as a critique of the confines of domesticity.

The following is an excerpt from my field notes the day Mrs. Carson introduced this particular short story:

Mrs. Carson walks up and down the student isles passing out photocopies of “The Yellow Wallpaper.” As she is walking, she tells the students, “With this piece, a lot is left up to you to figure out.” She also tells the students, “It’s noteworthy that the writer of this piece is female. It’s unusual for a classic piece because women didn’t write much back then.” Once all of the students have a copy of the short story, Mrs. Carson begins reading it aloud while the students follow along with their copy. She walks up and down the student aisles. After she reads a few paragraphs, I notice the following behaviors: Many of the students are slouched in their desks. Eliza and Victor are doodling on their copies of the story. Kurt and Emily (on more than one occasion) flip through the pages, appearing to be counting how many are left. No one interrupts Mrs. Carson’s reading to ask questions or to share a comment. At the conclusion of one of the narrator’s early journal entries, Mrs. Carson stresses the repeated story line, “But, what is one to do?” pauses and looks around the classroom. The bell rings and as the students pack up, Mrs. Carson says, “Hopefully, you got a little feel for the narrator and the other characters.”

This classroom vignette suggested that students were experiencing tension in constructing aesthetic transactions with this particular unit text. Such tension was evident in their non-verbal behavior and silence. These behaviors starkly contrasted students’ previous mannerisms that I witnessed during the Gothic unit, where the majority of the students frequently jotted down questions and comments, interrupted Mrs. Carson’s reading to make relevant remarks, and spontaneously discussed the pieces. This behavior remained consistent the following day when Mrs. Carson finished reading the story and attempted to initiate a discussion (this moment is examined in the next chapter).

Later observations and interviews confirmed my initial suspicions. With the exception of Ray, all of the students labeled the text as “confusing,” “boring,” or both in their post-unit interviews because they were unable to understand the narrator’s obsession

with the wallpaper and why she experiences mental distress. This confusion was evident in Victor and Matt's conversation during cooperative group work on another unit text. However, the conversation digressed back to their sentiments regarding "The Yellow Wallpaper":

Victor: I just didn't get it ["The Yellow Wallpaper"]. There was way too much description of the wallpaper.

Matt: Yeah, it's yellow wallpaper. Get over it. What's her problem?

This inability to understand the purpose behind the descriptive nature of this piece and what the narrator's "issue" is led to a disconnect between reader and text. This breach ultimately resulted in participant frustration. The majority of students (both male and female) did not construct aesthetic transactions with this text.

During post-unit interviews, all of the participants were able to summarize the basic story plot, but they did not articulate anything beyond basic surface recall of story events. Ray was the only student who verbalized the significance behind the wallpaper description: "It serves as a metaphor for her mental state," he shared with me in his post-unit interview in explaining what his classmates "didn't get" about the story. Ray understood that the more mentally unstable the narrator becomes, the more she focuses on the wallpaper. Unlike the other participants, he appreciated this significance, and, as a result, discussed how he aesthetically transacted with this piece in enjoying that layer of complexity. He further reflected in the same interview: "The details really give me a visual of where the narrator is. I feel like I'm there," illustrating another aesthetic transaction where Ray indicated vicarious transportation into the story through the descriptive details.

When I asked Ray to elaborate on why he was able to construct aesthetic transactions with this particular unit text (he actually claimed it was one of his favorites), he shrugged and responded, “Unlike a lot of people, [classmates] I sometimes read classics [outside of school].” Ray communicated that his ability to aesthetically transact with this particular text resided in the fact that he read traditional texts, such as this, in his leisure reading. While this may account for part of the explanation, the rest of the participants were able to construct aesthetic transactions with the other traditional unit texts, such as “The Tell Tale Heart,” *Frankenstein*, and *Dracula* suggesting that this justification does not paint the full picture.

Ray did not offer any additional insight as to why he was able to construct aesthetic transactions with this text when the other participants did not. One explanative may be due to the fact that Ray appreciated texts that devote a great deal to describing setting and are “atmospheric” in terms of vivid depictions as he relayed in his pre-unit interview, and subsequently brought up again in follow-up interviews. The setting of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is extremely critical to the storyline and vividly depicted, which may account for another reason Ray appreciated it. Additionally, it may be that Ray was able to forge meaningful connections with the issue of mental instability as it manifests in this piece in some way, possibly in the experiences of someone he knows. Whatever the reasons behind it, Ray, in his post-unit interview, illustrated understanding that the story documents the narrator’s gradual descent into madness in an indirect and subtle manner as it manifests in the narrator’s building obsession with the detail of the wallpaper.

However, the other participants did not appear to understand the significance behind the description. Additionally, many of the students did not “get” why the narrator

is depressed. Eliza, in her post-unit interview, said, “I don’t get it. After all, she just had a baby.” Such a statement suggests that she failed to understand the complexity and range of emotions that a woman experiences after bearing a child. Due to these disconnects, the story was given a poor review by the vast majority of participants. As Emily bluntly stated in her post unit interview, “It stood out because it’s horrible.” Kurt also insisted that it was a “bad” piece: “It’s too much about useless wallpaper. The woman is just too crazy, who in their right mind would rip up wallpaper?” The irony behind Kurt’s comment was that the students began reading “The Yellow Wallpaper” immediately following the classic short story, “The Tell Tale Heart,” which arguably contains a more mentally unstable narrator who kills another individual because he does not like the look of a man’s eye. However, this extreme behavior was not critiqued by any of the students, including Kurt, who discussed enjoying this text. This contrast suggests that it is not necessarily the fact that the narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is “crazy,” but that the reason behind her mental instability was not understood by the participants. This lack of understanding prevented them from constructing aesthetic transactions with this text.

Mrs. Carson reflected on the negative reception of this short story in her post-unit interview and offered an explanation as to why she felt the majority of students failed to construct aesthetic transactions with it:

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is related to postpartum depression, which I think is something the kids just can’t relate to. They think, ‘you have a baby, you should be happy.’ And the relationship problems between the narrator and the husband are subtle. She keeps saying how wonderful he is and you have to pick up on the fact that what he’s doing is actually making her worse, but that’s really tricky. He’s not necessarily a bad guy like the narrator in “The Tell Tale Heart,” he’s just clueless. It’s [the story] not about monsters or zombies, but it’s not about what the kids experience either.

This reflection provides valuable insight into the reasons why the majority of the participants were unable to aesthetically transact with this text. Mrs. Carson detailed how the piece lacks relevance and connectivity back to the students at this point in their lives, both essential ingredients for aesthetic transactional experiences of meaningful connection (Cai 2008; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt 1994/1995). However, Mrs. Carson also stated how “The Yellow Wallpaper” did not reach the other end of the continuum; it did not differ enough from real life for the students to aesthetically transact with it through imaginative contrast. Thus, for most of these adolescent readers, the piece failed on both ends of the spectrum: It is neither so fantastic that the students imaginatively contrasted it to real life, nor was it realistic enough in regards to their current experiences for them to forge meaningful connections.

Participants’ inability to construct aesthetic transactions with “The Yellow Wallpaper” and provide more than a surface synopsis of the story, provides insight into what happens when students fail to construct aesthetic transactions with academic texts; students’ attitudes, participation, and overall text understandings significantly contrasted that of the other textual experiences within the Gothic unit. This disconnect between adolescent readers and an academic text reinforces the critical nature of prioritizing the aesthetic transactional potential of a text with readers at students’ specific place in development when selecting curriculum pieces. All in all, this tension illustrates that regardless of a text’s status amongst literary critics and adult readers, if the student reader is unable to construct aesthetic transactions with a text, they will likely glean no more from it than a basic plot summary at best, which hinders their growth as readers (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

“I feel like an outsider looking in:” Emily and transactional tensions with classic texts. Overall, the classic texts of the Gothic unit (with the exception of “The Yellow Wallpaper”) such as “The Tell Tale Heart,” *Frankenstein*, and *Dracula* contain characteristics that the participants aesthetically transacted with. Some participants (like Kurt) detailed how beginning with the popular culture Gothic texts gave him an appreciation for these subsequent classic Gothic texts, and some participants (like Ray) argued that the Gothic genre as a whole constitutes a meaningful experience for adolescents because of the links back to this developmental stage. The participants that detailed having difficulty constructing aesthetic transactions with traditional academic texts in their pre-unit interviews illustrate (in varying degrees) construction of aesthetic transactions with the traditional texts in the Gothic unit, with the exception of Emily. Emily insisted that she was unable to aesthetically transact with any classic texts prior to the start of the unit; this position remained unchanged by the unit’s conclusion.

I initially selected Emily as a study participant under the belief that she would be a disconfirming case to aesthetically transacting with the unit texts as a whole. In an early journal entry she wrote, “I don’t think I like or connect to the Gothic genre. I haven’t put too much thought into it, but basically it takes a scary role in my mind. It’s never been on my interest list.” However, after experiencing many aesthetic transactional moments with the contemporary and popular culture unit texts, Emily unabashedly claimed “I am Gothic!” in her final unit interview. She discussed how much she enjoyed the genre because of the many aesthetic transactions she experienced. However, despite this radical shift in perspective towards the genre as a whole, Emily maintained that she experienced

difficulty in aesthetically transacting with any classic text, including those in the Gothic unit.

Unlike the rest of the participants (who indicated how beginning with popular culture texts increased their excitement about future classic Gothic texts), Emily, upon reflecting on this issue in her post-unit interview, said that she was “disappointed” in this shift; the initial discussion of the modern texts gave her the false impression that the unit was comprised entirely of contemporary pieces:

When we were talking about modern things in the beginning, I was like ‘This is going to be fun, this will be different, for once I won’t be ripping my hair out because we’re going to read current things.’ I think I got let down when I realized we were still going to read classics.

Emily was the only participant who expressed a distaste and dislike for all classic texts (including the unit texts); however, she is not alone. Research documents that adolescents commonly experience difficulty engaging with the classic, canonical texts that comprise reading curriculums (Gibson, 2010; Hopper, 2006; Lenters, 2006).

When I asked Emily to expand on her sentiments about classic texts in her post-unit interview, she stated that her inability to aesthetically transact with all classic texts was due to her inability to forge connections between dated texts and her own life experiences:

The vocabulary, the characters’ experiences, the problems, everything in the classic texts doesn’t suck me in like modern texts do. I feel like an outsider looking in on those texts. There’s nothing I can really relate to in this day and age, so it makes me not want to have anything to do with it [classic texts].

Emily described how classic pieces did not afford her the opportunity to construct aesthetic transactions because to her, they lacked connectivity and relevance. As a result, she experienced these texts on the efferent spectrum, where she was able to summarize

the plot, but nothing further because of her outsider status in regards to these texts (Rosenblatt 1994/1995). Emily experienced a myriad of aesthetic transactions with the modern Gothic texts resulting in pleasure and the formation of associations and ideas that she did not experience with the classics. This distaste for all classic texts and her inability to construct aesthetic transactions with them remained stable throughout the unit.

Emily is a reflective individual and expressed how it “bothers her” that unlike many of her peers in Mrs. Carson’s class, she was unable to aesthetically transact with any of the classic texts in the Gothic unit during her post-unit interview. She relayed to me how she discussed the issue with two of her friends in Mrs. Carson’s class and ultimately believed that her major obstacle was that in attempting to relate to classic pieces, she placed them “in a more modern setting” in her mind. Unfortunately, visualizing these classic texts in this manner was not supported by textual details, which ultimately resulted in Emily being pulled away from such aesthetic transactional attempts and her frustration as a result: “I did this with *Dracula*. I kept thinking, ‘Why are they just writing things down? Why can’t they just pick up the phone?’ Then, I get frustrated when I remember that they don’t have phones.” This explanative illustrates that Emily made active attempts to aesthetically transact with these texts, but was ultimately unable to.

This tension sheds light not only on Emily’s difficulty in regards to constructing aesthetically transacting with classic canonical texts that dominate academic reading curriculums, but perhaps other students’ difficulty as well. Emily’s distaste for classic texts may be a result of rebellion (whether purposefully or unknowingly) against ‘old,’ or ‘outdated,’ material, in a desire to be separate and distinct from the past, which is a

common phenomenon that occurs during adolescence (Trites, 2001). Additionally, all of the participants noted the dominance of classic texts in the reading curriculum throughout their years at Hillside, as well as how instructors did not typically prioritize their aesthetic transactions with texts in related reading activities (explored in the subsequent chapter). Therefore, Emily's distaste for classic texts might have been a result of pedagogical strategies that failed to assist students in constructing aesthetic transactions with traditional texts. Over time, this position, associated with Emily's view on the secondary Discourse of academic reading (as carried out in various classrooms) and subsequently, of classic texts became fixed, and therefore, hard to influence and change (Gee, 2005/2008).

Additionally, a common misconception of instructors is that adolescent readers do not care and/or are indifferent to their academic reading experiences (e.g. Hopper, 2006). Within the classroom context, Emily's complex sentiments regarding classic texts were undetectable; therefore, it is easy to assume that she was merely indifferent to her inability to construct aesthetic transactions with academic texts. However, within the personal context of interviews, Emily illustrated that she was quite aware of this disconnect. Moreover, it bothered her enough that she sought out individuals to discuss it with. She was able to pinpoint reasons why she failed to construct aesthetic transactions with the classic texts. Emily felt bad about her inability to construct aesthetic transactions with the vast majority of academic texts, including the traditional texts in the Gothic unit. This knowledge suggests that other students (who may appear indifferent about academic reading) might share similar sentiments and undergo more internal inner reflection and turmoil than their classroom personas indicate. Thus, chalking up a negative reception of

academic texts to “indifference” fails to encompass the complexity surrounding adolescents’ ability or inability to construct aesthetic transactions with academic texts.

For Emily, this unit experience marked the first time she recalled constructing aesthetic transactions with academic texts. In reflecting upon the unit experience as a whole in her post-unit interview, Emily shared: “This is the first time the stuff we’ve read in school is fun and actually makes me think!” As a whole, the Gothic unit nurtured allegiances and alliances between Emily’s primary and secondary Discourses in relation to reading practices (Gee, 2005/2008). Therefore, particularly for students like Emily who experienced difficulty aesthetically transacting with classic texts, it is critical that reading curriculums include contemporary/popular culture pieces that hold aesthetic transactional potential back to adolescent readers. This fusion ensures that students, like Emily, are at least occasionally afforded opportunities for aesthetic transactional experiences in school (Hagood et al., 2010; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rosenblatt, 2005).

Participants’ Overall Aesthetic Responses to the Gothic Unit Texts

All eight participants discussed high levels of enjoyment in regards to the Gothic unit because of the many aesthetic transactions they constructed with the texts. Interestingly, in some of the participants’ overall reactions to the unit texts (as expressed in their post-unit interviews), the word “actually” occurs frequently [*italic words my emphasis*]: “We read stuff we *actually* like. This was *actually* something you wanted to learn. It’s *actually* interesting.” Kurt remarked. Matt reflected, “I *actually* really like it [the unit texts]. It’s nice to have a break where you *actually* enjoy what you’re reading.” Diana stated, “It [the unit texts] flows well. You *actually* get really into the stories.” Such discourse reflects students’ surprise that academic reading experiences can be personally

meaningful and pleasurable. Participants confirmed this view in contrasting their overall response to the texts of this unit with previous academic texts.

Kurt noted in his post-unit interview that the Gothic texts were “way better than the books we read last year.” Emily was critical of the classic Gothic texts, however, like Kurt, she too reflected during her post-unit interview, “I was very privileged to take part in this unit, where the other classes just did the same old cookie cutter kind of stuff. I didn’t like the classic Gothic stories, but they were still better than the stuff we usually read.” All of the participants were critical towards the texts that typically comprised reading units, but six of the participants (excluding Diana and Ray) had particularly harsh critiques: “I hated the [academic] books in the past, they are so horrible,” Kurt noted in his post unit interview. Anna echoed this sentiment in her post-unit interview, offering “They [teachers] usually make us read books that no one wants to read.” Eliza reflected, “Before [this unit] I really didn’t like reading because the books are boring.” The word “boring” also came up in Emily, Victor, and Matt’s critique of previous academic texts. Eliza expanded on this by stating, “I read these books and don’t feel anything.” Such indifference suggests a lack of aesthetic transactional experiences in regards to the texts that Eliza typically encountered in school reading. This disinterest aligns with adolescent reading research documenting students’ lack of engagement and connectivity with academic texts because the text content fails to meaningfully link back to the reader (Bean, 2002; Brophy, 2008; Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Ivey & Broadus, 2001; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rosenblatt, 1995).

In general, participants constructed aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts either through imaginative contrast or meaningful connection. The Gothic unit contained

texts with both “different” and “relatable” qualities that the participants detailed constructing aesthetic transactions with. The word, “different,” came up in Kurt, Ray, and Victor’s overall response to the Gothic unit texts because they feature topics that are not traditionally discussed in school; the topics were “interesting” because of the imaginative contrast they held to real life. As Kurt noted in his post-unit interview, “This unit is different because we don’t usually read scary things with blood and corruption in school.” Thus, Kurt shared textual characteristics of the Gothic unit texts he found enjoyable. In their interviews, Kurt, Ray, and Victor appreciated the contrast the Gothic texts held to real life because they promoted imaginative thinking, which falls under the aesthetic spectrum (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Takolander, 2000; Vasudevan, 2010).

During his post-unit interview, Kurt expanded on this by discussing how most of the reading texts at Hillside were historical, realistic fiction. He specifically contrasted the texts of the Gothic unit with the two main texts he read the previous year in sixth grade, *I, Juan de Pareja* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Both texts are classic pieces falling into the category of historical fiction. The first features the experiences of a slave in Spain during the 16th century, while the second is about an orphaned boy living in England in the 19th century who discovers he comes from royal blood. In reflecting on these texts, Kurt stated, “They were just boring, and like the same old thing we always read [in school]. They lack intensity.” Diana, Emily, Matt, and Ray used additional words such as “adventurous,” “mysterious,” “pizazz,” and “suspenseful” in discussing the qualities of Gothic texts, and how those traits were rare in the texts they typically read in school. Kurt discussed how texts like *I, Juan de Pareja* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* are realistic, but in a means that does not necessarily afford meaningful connectivity back to

the adolescent reader. Kurt, in his post-unit interview, stated “it’s hard to connect with [these] distant characters,” such as a Spanish slave or orphan royal because these experiences are so far removed from the students, which Diana, Emily, Matt, and Eliza echoed in their critiques. In contrast, all eight participants discussed the aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection that they constructed with the Gothic unit texts. Matt stated in his post-unit interview, “We all connected to this unit in some way.”

However, it is important to note that such sentiments as expressed by the participants do not simply suggest that academic curriculums should not include classic, canonical texts at all like *I, Juan de Pareja* or *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Indeed, one of the goals of academic reading should be to engage students in meaningful experiences with texts that they would not necessarily read on their own (Rosenblatt, 1994). However, as Rosenblatt (2005) asserted, ‘masterpieces’ of the past must be combined with ‘modern’ texts in academic curriculum in order to help students forge aesthetic transactions with the more dated material, resulting in more meaningful learning experiences with academic texts as a whole.

Additionally, Mrs. Carson echoed Rosenblatt’s (1994/1995) position that all texts, classic and contemporary, must be carefully analyzed (in terms of content) for the aesthetic transactional potential back to the adolescent reader in terms of aligning with readers’ interests, preoccupations, ideas, and experiences at a particular time and place in their development. Instead, academic texts are often selected for their history of celebrated status amongst adult critics, rather than the aesthetic transactional potential for the student reader (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). As a result, during interviews, participants detailed how they typically only experienced academic texts under an efferent stance. In

his post-unit interview, Matt reflected: “I get the pieces [academic texts] and everything. I do good on the tests, there’s just not a connection. There’s nothing personal about it.” Eliza echoed this stance in her post-unit interview: “When I don’t relate, I don’t feel any emotion at all, just overall boredom and nothing else. I’ll remember it [the text] long enough for the test, but after that, I won’t.” Retaining textual information just long enough for test success was something that Eliza, Kurt, Victor, Matt, and Emily also discussed as comprising the value system surrounding the Discourse of academic reading as it existed in past classroom contexts: remembering content just long enough to pass a test and then the slate is wiped clean (Gee, 2005/2008). This phenomenon supports Rosenblatt’s assertion that without the aesthetic component of reading, engagement and comprehension of literature are superficial, at best (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

All eight participants discussed how the aesthetic transactions they constructed with the Gothic texts led to more meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences that they would remember long-term. Unlike his typical recollection of academic texts, Kurt shared (during his post-unit interview) how he would “remember all the great plots of the stories because they [the texts] actually sparked excitement in my mind.” Matt detailed a similar reflection in his post-unit interview: “I definitely paid attention a lot more to the stories than I usually do. They [the texts] kept me thinking so I didn’t just drift off into my own little mind the way I usually do. It’s nice to enjoy what you’re learning.” Ray and Emily also detailed how forging aesthetic transactions with academic texts made the learning more meaningful and therefore, longer lasting. Ray, in his post-unit interview, asserted: “When you’re interested [in textual content], it keeps you into your learning and makes you want to learn more. I’m taking stuff out of the literature that I’ll hold onto.”

In sum, all eight participants constructed varied aesthetic transactions in response to the traits of the popular culture and traditional texts in the Gothic unit. The students discussed how aesthetically transacting with academic texts was rare, and that constructing these transactions enhanced their enjoyment and overall learning of literature in school. However, in the academic setting, where reading is a shared event amongst other individuals in a classroom, students' aesthetic transactions with any academic text are influenced by pedagogical practices that accompany the text. The next chapter discusses the qualities of the reading-related discussions and activities of the Gothic unit in regards to how and they influenced participant construction of aesthetic transactions with the unit texts.

Chapter 5: Qualities of Related Activities that Encouraged Participants' Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study focused on the aesthetic transactions that adolescent students constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit. Within the academic context, pedagogical practices surrounding the reading event influence individuals' construction of aesthetic transactions with texts (Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt 1995/2005). The qualities of discussions and activities can enhance or diminish the aesthetic reading experience (Connell, 2008; Dugan 1997; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 2005). Capitalizing on the aesthetic domain throughout the entire reading event (text + context) enhances readers' individual aesthetic textual transactions and aids them in the construction of new ones (Rosenblatt, 2005).

This chapter explores the qualities of the discussions and activities that coincided with the texts in the Gothic studies reading unit implementation. Particularly, the aesthetic transactions the adolescent participants constructed in response to the related activities that coincided with the Gothic unit texts are highlighted. Examining what aesthetic transactions the participants constructed in regards to the text and context of the unit aligns with the social constructivist nature of this study that calls for examining the subject under inquiry in all of its complexity (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007). This chapter is divided into two sections. The first portion examines the qualities surrounding the reading-related discussions and the aesthetic transactions the participants constructed as a result of these qualities. The second section considers the aesthetic transactions participants constructed in relation to the qualities of the reading-related activities.

Participant Construction of Aesthetic Transactions in Reading-Related Discussions of the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

“It Means We’re Really into the Learning:” Desire to Share Aesthetic Transactions

In any context, the most meaningful discussions are born out of a natural desire to communicate ideas with others (Connell, 2008; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003). The aesthetic transactions readers construct with texts are the first ingredient required for a high-quality text discussion; the more aesthetic transactions they construct, the more likely they will want to share and communicate them in a discussion (Rosenblatt, 1995). Regardless of the strategies instructors utilize to promote meaningful reading discussions, they are likely to be forced and shallow if the texts do not hold aesthetic transactional potential for readers (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). As the previous chapter illustrates, all of the participants constructed myriad of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts. Naturally, readers wanted to share these transactions, or feelings, sensations, attitudes, ideas, and/or images with fellow readers (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). This desire set the stage for the student-centered, in-depth conversations that occurred throughout the unit. Thus, it is pertinent for teachers to use texts that tap into student interests.

As Matt candidly reflected in his post-unit interview, “It’s easy to discuss something you have a lot to say about.” Likewise, Ray stated in his post-unit interview that the often lengthy conversations that took place during the unit illustrated that everyone had many ideas to share as a result of the aesthetic transactions they constructed with the Gothic texts: “It means we’re really into the learning.” This reader-text dynamic, in conjunction with the pedagogical strategies Mrs. Carson utilized, resulted in discussions that the participants recounted as pleasurable and meaningful. Ray reflected on the unique discussion dynamic of the Gothic unit in his post-unit interview:

Everybody was so into the [Gothic] texts that everyone was contributing all of their different experiences, stories, and everything that enriched this class. It was just a different experience because everybody was so much more into it [the texts] than they usually are.

As Ray noted, the aesthetic transactions students constructed with the texts served as the basis for the engaging discussions (Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994).

Mrs. Carson, in her post-unit interview, also reflected that the distinctive aspect of the experience resided in the fact that Gothic texts were already “in their lives” in ways the participants immediately recognized. Despite lacking an overt awareness of it, all of the participants were knowledgeable and familiar with the Gothic genre prior to unit commencement because they engaged with these ‘texts’ in their leisure reading and viewing practices. Thus, the unit provided ample opportunities for participants to draw connections between their in and out-of-school literacy practices (Gee, 2008/2011). Additionally, Mrs. Carson reflected that the students enjoyed the opportunity to share this prior knowledge of the genre with the class. This enjoyment of sharing background knowledge aligns with the literature on adolescent reading engagement insisting that when students are knowledgeable about academic content, they are more likely to be engaged in the material (Brophy, 2008; Guthrie, 2004/2008).

During their interviews, Ray, Anna, Victor, and Matt specifically discussed how already knowing about the genre gave them greater confidence to voice their initial ideas in the classroom. Anna stated in her mid-unit interview, “I already knew a lot about it [Gothic texts] because I’ve read a lot of the [Gothic] books and seen the movies. So, I could talk more in depth about it [the texts] than I usually do.” Kurt, in his mid-unit interview, noted that even the more quiet students, like himself, “have a reason to talk now” because of a desire to share what they already knew about these texts.

As Mrs. Carson notes in her post-unit interview, she did not have to “do anything” to get the students to talk about these texts:

The inertia I battled with the textbook in the beginning of the year is the opposite of this experience. There’s this momentum where the kids almost cannot contain themselves. They are very excited about what one another have to bring to it. They feel empowered by their knowledge [of the Gothic].

Likewise, all eight participants discussed how their high level of relatedness to the Gothic genre contributed to their desire to further reflect on this alignment in text discussions.

Emily stated in her post-unit interview, “We got to put a lot of ourselves and what we know into our talks.” Likewise, Matt, in his post-unit interview, reflected, “We all had a lot to say! We all connected to this unit in some way.” Thus, the participants affirmed how the use of culturally relevant texts that aligned their various Discourses set the stage for their desire to share the various meanings they derived from these texts (Gee, 2005/2008).

Mrs. Carson and I initially underestimated students’ desire to share, enhance, and construct additional aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts in discussions. We originally allotted three months for the unit; instead, it lasted almost twice as long due to class discussions. For example, we initially budgeted two days for the introductory lesson using the popular culture texts *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *Hunger Games* series as a way to acquaint students with the Gothic genre. In actuality, this lesson lasted a week because of the students’ desire to share their wealth of knowledge on these texts. Throughout the unit, Mrs. Carson afforded additional time for these impromptu, student-centered discussions, which gave students the opportunity to fully engage in the aesthetic experience of the unit texts.

In her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson reflected, “The kids just had so much to say, so much to share about these texts. I never want to stop them off!” In both of their post-unit interviews, Diana and Emily explicitly reflected on appreciating the time devoted to discussions during the unit. Diana noted, “Mrs. Carson really allowed everyone to go off in different directions. She wouldn’t stop you if you were branching off.” For Emily, there was a direct correlation between the aesthetic transactions she constructed with the unit texts and time allotted for discussions: “The reason I enjoyed it [the unit] so much is because of the time we spent on discussions. I don’t think I would’ve liked it or gotten as much out of it if it was rushed.” This sentiment aligns with the literature that dialogue strengthens the aesthetic transactional bonds between readers and texts (Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt 1994/1995).

Additionally, these Gothic conversations frequently spilled over into other portions of the participants’ day, such as at home, during after school activities, other classes, and the lunchroom. As Mrs. Carson articulated in her post-unit interview, “They’re really learning from one another and the learning is not stopping at the classroom door. It’s eagerly embraced! It [the discussions] aren’t extra credit, it’s no credit! It’s just happening because they’re excited about it!” Coincidentally, Mrs. Carson had lunch duty with the study participants where she frequently overheard them discussing Gothic texts and continuing in-class discussions. In fact, during her post-unit interview, she discussed how she often engaged in these conversations: “I wander from lunch table to lunch table and talk about Gothic things with the students.” During her post-unit interview, Anna joked that she got in trouble because the science teacher caught her talking about the Gothic genre during class. Eliza told me how she showed Gothic

anime to friends in her anime club. During lunch, Emily told Mrs. Carson that a movie she saw over the weekend, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, has Gothic elements, which she shared with me during her mid-unit interview. In the hall, Diana mentioned to me that Barnes and Nobles bookstores display a lot of Gothic books for young adults. Ray told the class that he was searching the Internet for Gothic sound effects to add to movie he was creating at home.

These were a few of the numerous examples that showcase how conversations where students shared their aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts transcended the boundaries of the reading classroom. All in all, this initial enthusiasm set the stage for the meaningful, student-centered discussions that took place throughout the unit where students enhanced their aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts and also created new ones through dialogue with one another. Mrs. Carson capitalized on this zeal by implementing pedagogical techniques that encouraged further construction of aesthetic transactions in reading-related discussions.

“One of My Favorite Moments in *Harry Potter* is when the Minister Tries to Hide Muggle Identity:” Teacher Modeling of Aesthetic Transactions in Discussions

Throughout the course of the Gothic studies reading unit, Mrs. Carson modeled the many aesthetic transactions she constructed with the Gothic unit texts. This pedagogical technique acted as a catalyst for students enhancing their individual aesthetic transactions by engaging in further reflection with Mrs. Carson and fellow peers; additionally, it acted as a catalyst for students to construct additional aesthetic transactions collectively as a group that they may not have formed on their own (Pike, 2003). Mrs. Carson loved to tell stories; she modeled numerous aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection between Gothic texts and her own life. While discussing the eerie

nature of the deserted streets in the Gothic short story, “The Midnight Mass of the Dead,” Mrs. Carson talked about how she once went into an old building and, like the main character in the story, became scared, but kept exploring anyway. Subsequently, Matt chimed in, “I was scared when I was in the woods camping with my dad.” Ray remarked, “Some of the older architecture that I’ve seen in Europe’s pretty creepy.” While reading about the history of vampires in the nonfiction historical account *The Secret History of Vampires*, Mrs. Carson told the students that she used to work in a park. One night she came across a baby bat and had to call animal control and the other workers “freaked out,” but she thought the bat was cute. After this story, some of the students began talking about whether or not they were afraid of bats, as well as other animals that are frequently in Gothic texts.

These were two of the many occasions where Gothic texts sparked the aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection for Mrs. Carson that she shared with her students. In both of these examples, students piggybacked off of Mrs. Carson’s stories by sharing their own. In their post-unit interviews, Ray and Anna reflected that Mrs. Carson’s story sharing caused them to think of their own stories of connection. Thus, Mrs. Carson’s modeling of her aesthetic transactions acted as a catalyst for the participants to form new aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection with the Gothic unit texts.

Mrs. Carson also frequently shared her feelings and sentiments regarding particular moments in Gothic texts, which is another type of aesthetic transaction that she modeled. During the introductory lesson, Mrs. Carson discussed how one of her favorite moments in the *Harry Potter* series is when the minister is trying to hide ‘Muggle’ (non-wizard) identity because she found it humorous. A number of students laughed after this

observation, and muttered things like, “Oh yeah!” or “That’s right!” Victor chimed in, “I like when Harry uses the Invisibility Cloak to make himself invisible from the teachers!” Matt shared that he enjoyed the scenes where Harry battles various enemies. Mrs. Carson’s sharing of her aesthetic transaction of a moment of textual pleasure with a popular culture Gothic text created a space where participants also felt comfortable sharing their own moments of pleasure, which deepened the aesthetic transactional experience of these texts (Dugan, 1997).

Mrs. Carson also shared her moments of pleasure associated with the traditional Gothic unit texts. While reading aloud “The Tell Tale Heart,” Mrs. Carson said, “Isn’t it so cool how this story is told from the point of view of a guy not all there?” [Pointed to her head and rolled her eyes, many students laughed]. In their post-unit interviews, Emily, Victor, Ray, and Matt discussed how unreliable/mentally unstable narrators were an enjoyable characteristic of Gothic texts. Specifically, Emily reflected, “After Mrs. Carson brought that up, I thought about how I liked it. It’s cool to have a story told from a different point of view, someone kind of not all there.” Mrs. Carson’s sharing of this aesthetic transaction acted as a catalyst for Emily to recognize her shared affinity for this particular Gothic text trait (Connell, 2008; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003).

Throughout the unit, Mrs. Carson also modeled her aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection between the unit texts and the Gothic as it permeates popular culture. While discussing *The Hunger Games*, Mrs. Carson told the students that one of the scenes reminded her of another contemporary, popular culture Gothic text, *Gone*, that she recommended to the students. After sharing this aesthetic transaction, a variety of students chimed in additional current Gothic popular culture book recommendations.

Specifically, Ray recommended a nonfiction zombie survival guide he enjoyed reading. After this discussion, I observed two students reading *Gone*, and one student reading the zombie survival guide during free reading time in ELA class. These observations suggest that the discussion impacted the leisure reading choices of some of the students.

Following the Superbowl, Mrs. Carson told the class, “I don’t know about you, but I noticed some Gothic qualities in some of the Superbowl commercials.” A discussion of these qualities followed this comment. While reading *Down a Dark Hall*, Mrs. Carson shared an Internet site detailing how Stephanie Meyer, author of the *Twilight* series, is going to produce a movie version of *Down a Dark Hall*. Students immediately began to speculate what movie stars might play the various roles.

These are only a few of the numerous impromptu discussions that Mrs. Carson initiated where she modeled her aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts, specifically in connecting the unit texts with other ‘texts’ outside the unit and the classroom context. As a result, the participants came to realize how widespread the genre is, an idea that represents another aesthetic transaction. Specifically, Ray noted in his post-unit interview, “Those talks [of popular culture connections] made me think about how Gothic is everywhere.” Diana reflected in her mid-unit interview, “It’s cool to be talking in class about something that’s really out there [in the world] now.” In fact, all eight participants discussed how popular the Gothic genre is, particularly with adolescents, by the unit’s conclusion. It seems likely that Mrs. Carson’s modeling of her aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection between the unit texts and other Gothic popular culture ‘texts’ contributed to the students’ view on this topic.

Mrs. Carson also modeled her aesthetic transactions of meaningfully connecting Gothic fiction and real life events. Consider the following excerpt from my field notes that occurred while the students were reading *Down a Dark Hall*, featuring characters isolated from society without cell phones or Internet connection. Coincidentally, this discussion took place on one of the initial days school resumed after a two week hiatus due to Hurricane Sandy:

Mrs. Carson: What Gothic elements have you noticed so far?

Student: Solitude...isolation.

Ray: Yeah, no Internet.

Mrs. Carson: Right. Remember what it was like during Sandy? [Hurricane Sandy] Remember the isolation? That's how these kids [characters in the story] feel.

Emily: Yeah, I thought I would die without social networking!

Mrs. Carson: So, you can feel for Kit.

Emily: Definitely.

[Other students nod].

In this excerpt, Mrs. Carson modeled the aesthetic transaction of meaningfully connecting a character's state of being in a Gothic story to circumstances surrounding a real life current event. As a result of sharing this transaction, Mrs. Carson facilitated Emily's realization that she shared Kit's feelings regarding isolation on the days immediately following the hurricane. Thus, the discussion aided Emily in constructing a new aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection with a Gothic text, which she might not have forged without engaging in this discussion.

In another conversation, the class was discussing the Gothic text quality of characters in a state of powerlessness that rebel against corruption. Mrs. Carson brought up another current event connection:

Mrs. Carson: The idea of being powerless, yet triumphing despite it. You guys heard what happened in Boston yesterday? [Referring to the Boston Marathon bombings].

[Almost all of the students nod].

Ray: It's so sad!

Matt: My dad was supposed to be in that race, but he tore his Achilles.

Mrs. Carson: Woah. That's crazy! But you know, despite all the sadness, you hear about people charging in amidst the chaos and going in while everyone is going out and being 'that guy.' Is that Gothic?

Student: I don't think so, that's about heroism, which is light and the Gothic is kind of dark.

Emily: I disagree, Gothic can be dark, but isn't always dark, there's hope-it's just...Gothic. Everything is Gothic now!

This vignette illustrates the aesthetic transactions the participants constructed as a result of Mrs. Carson modeling her own. Ray contributed an emotional reaction and Matt shared a personal connection. Mrs. Carson then used the original aesthetic transaction to shift to another question-one that is more philosophical in asking, "Is that Gothic?" This inquiry resulted in a philosophical debate where students questioned the nature of the Gothic and, in the case of Emily, its presence throughout real life, resulting in students' constructing additional aesthetic transactions as a result of this discussion. As Victor noted of these discussions in his post-unit interview, "It was fun. I learned a lot about my classmates, like the Gothic stuff they had in their lives."

As a result of Mrs. Carson modeling her aesthetic transactions, the students deepened their initial aesthetic transactions, as well as constructed new ones, with the Gothic unit texts. Posing deep questions that require students to think intensely and about a topic in which there is no right or wrong answer, such as "What is Gothic?" is another hallmark of aesthetic reading (Eisner, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2005). In her mid-unit interview, Diana noted that Mrs. Carson was "really good at evoking thought. She started some really good discussions and debates during the unit." Mrs. Carson aided students in their construction of philosophical ideas in response to the Gothic texts by posing deep

questions for them to discuss. By doing this, she created an environment in which dialogue and aesthetic transactions with texts were inextricably linked.

“All the Discussions Really Had Something; They Felt So Philosophical:” Instructor Facilitation of Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts

Perhaps the single most important pedagogical technique in encouraging students’ aesthetic transactions with texts in the academic setting lies with teacher questioning. Rosenblatt (2005) discussed how teachers often unknowingly hurry students away from their ‘lived through experience,’ or initial aesthetic transactions with a text, by asking questions that overemphasize the efferent reading domain. Under this dynamic, students attempt to search for the ‘right’ answer to satisfy the teacher (Rosenblatt, 2005). Such efforts take students away from any initial aesthetic experiences they may have constructed (Rosenblatt, 2005). Additionally, such questions compel the students to think about what the teacher wants to hear and does not encourage dialogue amongst readers (Rosenblatt, 2005). This relationship limits the potential for discussion to enhance individuals’ initial aesthetic text transactions or aid in their construction of new ones (Connell, 2001; Dugan, 1997; Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008, Pike, 2003).

As an earlier section of this study explores, the Gothic, as a literary genre, is fraught with ambiguity and frequently poses more questions than answers (McGillis, 2008). As a result, Gothic texts encourage reader reflection on profound issues. Mrs. Carson reflected on this genre quality by noting, “With the Gothic, there’s often this mystery, this great ‘What if?’ There’s often this feeling of wow, there might not be a right or wrong answer to this.” Mrs. Carson capitalized on this quality by consistently using the scenarios in Gothic texts as vehicles for posing philosophical questions to the class. All eight participants recounted appreciating this discussion dynamic in their post-

unit interviews. Diana shared how Mrs. Carson's questions made her think deeply about the topics the Gothic texts raise. Kurt reflected in his post-unit interview, "All the discussions really had something; they felt so philosophical." Mrs. Carson encouraged students' construction of aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts; she utilized questions that encouraged thoughtful reader reflection and dialogue. Specifically, her questions acted as springboards for students to enhance initial and/or form new aesthetic transactions with the unit texts in the following domains: points of meaningful connection with texts, questioning the paranormal, issues surrounding spirituality, and questions of morality (good versus evil).

Mrs. Carson encouraged student construction of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection with the Gothic unit texts; she facilitated some of the parallels the participants drew between themselves and story characters. The following vignette occurred after the class concluded the short story, "Cat in Glass," and unanimously agreed that the main character lacks agency:

Mrs. Carson: A lot of characters in Gothic texts feel powerless. Can you think of any other examples?

Victor: Harry Potter lives with the Dursleys and doesn't have much influence.

Mrs. Carson: Yeah, Harry is about 11 at that time.

Emily: I didn't realize he was that young.

Mrs. Carson: Yeah, he's a little younger than you guys. How much power do you guys have?

[Many students murmur, 'None'].

Emily: None at all!

Matt: Teens don't have any power.

Emily: Katniss [in *Hunger Games*] tries to act tough and have control, but inside, she's crumbling.

Mrs. Carson: Interesting. [To the class] Do we ever do this?

[Murmurs of 'yes' throughout the classroom and nodding of heads].

Emily: Girls always say I'm fine, but they don't mean it.

Student A: Harry feels like a freak because of his scar. He doesn't feel normal.

Mrs. Carson: Yup, that's another characteristic of characters in the Gothic. What do you think about that?

Emily: I don't think there's a normal, it's just a state of mind.
 Student B: Normal is boring.

This excerpt highlights an occasion where through repeated open-ended questioning, Mrs. Carson encouraged students' realization of similarities between themselves and Gothic fictional characters; it also opened up a forum where students discussed and reflected on greater issues at large such as complexities surrounding normality, which is of particular concern in the adolescent years (Berger, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1994, Trites, 2001).

As Mrs. Carson reflected in her post-unit interview: "Issues related to the human condition, particularly for adolescents, came up a lot in our talks." Eliza, Emily, and Ray detailed enjoying these discussions where they enhanced and formed new aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts that resulted in personally meaningful knowledge. In her post-unit interview, Emily noted, "In the teenage years, we're still finding ourselves. So, it's good to talk about that." Mrs. Carson echoed this belief in her post-unit interview:

Gothic texts promote questions such as what does this say about people? What does this say about us? These middle schoolers are going through so many changes. I think these questions help them. You're talking about a character initially, so you're analyzing someone else for a minute, which feels safer. But, in turn, it might help them think more critically about themselves.

Emily, in particular, found this type of reflection or aesthetic transaction in conjunction with the Gothic texts, immensely helpful, as she expressed in her post-unit interview:

For me, I think this [the Gothic unit] was not so much a reading unit, but a soul searching unit. The stories and talks made me think about myself. Now I'm asking questions like, where am I right now? Where do I want to be? Am I working to my best potential?

Thus, Emily discussed how the combination of Gothic text + related talk capitalizing on the aesthetic reading experience led her in constructing aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts in a means that promoted meaningful self-reflection.

Questioning aspects of the paranormal and ideals surrounding spirituality comprise another category of aesthetic transactions the students constructed in conjunction with the Gothic texts and questions Mrs. Carson posed in related discussions. Ray, Matt, and Eliza discussed enjoying these conversations in their post-unit interviews. One such moment occurred after the students finish reading the short story, “The Ghostly Little Girl” featuring a girl who drowns and comes back as a ghost.

Mrs. Carson: This story makes you think about spirits. Do ghosts exist? Do spirits linger on Earth after death? What do you guys think?

Matt: After my Uncle died, my Aunt lit a candle and you could kind of feel it [Uncle’s presence]; it was nice.

Ray: My granddad past away and my mom was in the basement where there was no wind and one of the basement windows popped out.

Mrs. Carson: Wow! These stories are almost like family legends!

Diana: Yeah, I definitely believe in the possibility of ghosts.

Mrs. Carson: How about the rest of you?

[Many students nod their heads].

Matt: Yeah. My Uncle’s a cop and I trust him. He talks about a house he had to go into once that was haunted.

This vignette illustrates how Mrs. Carson’s open-ended questioning regarding the existence of the afterlife spurred some participants to recount moments of meaningful connection where they felt the presence of the dead, as well as consider it as a philosophical issue. Ray reflected in his post-unit interview, “Since I was little, I really liked thinking about this stuff [spirituality]. It [the conversation] made me think about, “What is the purpose of all of this? Of life?” As a result, Ray appreciated the opportunity to consider these issues within the context of reading-related discussions on the Gothic texts.

In addition to the fictional texts, the participants read a non-fiction interview where Lois Duncan (author of *Down a Dark Hall*) discussed a study that scientists were conducting on paranormal occurrences, such as ESP. Mrs. Carson used the text as a springboard to have students reflect on the legitimacy of this topic:

Mrs. Carson: How many of you believe in the possibility of the paranormal, like ESP or psychics' ability to predict the future?

[Some hands go up].

Mrs. Carson: Duncan says that scientists are working on these issues right now.

Emily: Is it legitimate?

Mrs. Carson: The study's legitimate.

Ray: The fact that it's scientists makes it more legit. People are gonna believe it.

Emily: I'm gonna do some research [on ESP] and get back to you guys.

Mrs. Carson: Are we more willing to trust someone like a scientist, more than a psychic?

Ray: I don't believe in psychics. [Using a mocking voice meant to imitate a psychic] "Someone in your family with a name that begins with a letter from A to Z died." [Students laugh].

Emily: I believe in it.

Student: Sometimes I have seizures and there's this weird energy that I feel.

Anna: Whenever I think about my Aunt who died of brain cancer, I get these weird sensations.

Mrs. Carson: So, we're these knowledgeable, intellectual people, yet we're at least willing to consider the possibility that this stuff exists?

[Many students nod their heads].

Through personally meaningful questioning, Mrs. Carson initiated a discussion where students constructed aesthetic transactions around the idea of the paranormal as raised in a unit text. This excerpt highlights students thinking critically about the issue and considering their own perspectives in relation to their classmates and to scientific inquiries into the topic. These aesthetic transactions, constructed collectively, illustrate how open dialogue encouraged participants in further developing their "lived through" or aesthetic experience of a text (Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

This line of questioning also opened up a space where some students felt comfortable sharing moments of personal connection (seizures and anxiety related to a

family member's death) illustrating that there was a level of trust in that students were comfortable sharing such personal connections with the class at large. In their post-unit interviews, Eliza and Ray both recalled this discussion as being enjoyable. Eliza stated, "It was really cool how people have weird experiences. I really liked that ESP discussion." Ray reflected, "With that ESP talk, we really went pretty in-depth, could you have it? Is it real? And people brought up interesting ideas."

"Interesting ideas" were also constructed around issues of morality, specifically what constitutes 'evil,' as it occurs in Gothic texts. Mrs. Carson encouraged participant construction of aesthetic transactions in regard to this topic as it manifests in the Gothic unit text through the questions she posed. The first time the issue came up was during a discussion on Madame Durrett, the villain or 'monster' in *Down a Dark Hall*. Durrett runs a boarding school where students are being used without their knowledge to channel famous dead artists. The students go into a trance-like state where the artists use their bodies to produce additional artistic masterpieces. Durrett profits off this phenomenon:

Mrs. Carson: What do we think of Madame [Durrett]? Is she a villain? She claims that she's creating great art for people to enjoy. What's wrong with that?

Student A: All villains say "I'm doing this for the good of humanity."

Mrs. Carson: That's true! A lot of times they think they're heroes.

Ray: Villains always think they have a better idea than everyone else.

Diana: I don't really know if it's that bad. It's just art.

Mrs. Carson: Are you bad if you do bad things for the right reasons? Do you think Madame's really making the art for others to enjoy? [Pauses]. How many of you think Madame is a villain?

[Many hands go up. Mrs. Carson then re-reads the scene where Madame justifies her actions].

Mrs. Carson: Is this the talk of someone who's evil?

Matt: No, she's great at manipulating. She's obviously hiding what she's doing [to the girls].

Emily: Yeah, there's a right way and a wrong way. She didn't give the girls a choice.

Ray: It's not like the girls are getting any of the money.

Diana: If Madame donated the money, it would be different.

Mrs. Carson: What about the parents? Is it wrong that they don't know?
 Student B: If the parents knew, she'd get in trouble with the law.
 Mrs. Carson: So, neither the parents or students have any choice or power.
 Matt: She's also making a lot of money off them.
 Mrs. Carson: So profiting off of someone else. Would that make her a villain?
 [Everyone in the class yells, 'Yes!'].

As Matt, Ray, Kurt, and Diana later recalled during their mid-unit interviews, this conversation surrounding issues of morality, particularly right vs. wrong and good vs. evil where students, alongside Mrs. Carson, collectively constructed aesthetic transactions with *Down a Dark Hall* was enlightening.

Matt, specifically in reflecting on this discussion in his mid-unit interview, shared:

Our discussion on *Down a Dark Hall* and good and the bad [characters], who can be trusted, and who can't-I like it because we could all put our opinions on it. It was like a courtroom where we're the jury and you give your decision. You get to figure out who's guilty, who's not guilty, who's good, and who's bad.

Matt used the analogy of a juror in a courtroom to describe the class's discussion on this philosophical issue as raised by the text and Mrs. Carson's open-ended questions. The result was participant co-construction of aesthetic transactions with one another, in this case, ideals surrounding morality.

Perhaps no situation articulates how discussions have the potential to enhance the overall aesthetic transactional experience of a text as some participants' evolved reaction to the classic novel, *Frankenstein* after a class discussion. Following the conclusion of this novel, which ends with the monster killing his creator (Dr. Frankenstein) because Dr. Frankenstein repeatedly shuns and rejects him, Mrs. Carson led the students into another thought-provoking discussion surrounding morality:

Mrs. Carson: Who's the monster here?
 Student A: He doesn't have a name, but the monster.

Student B: The creator. It's unnatural to create a human being from body parts.

Student C: I don't think either of them is evil. Neither of them wants to be bad. Society's evil because they judge him [the monster].

Mrs. Carson: Think about how you would feel if your parents shunned you?

Emily: I'd be scarred for life.

Student D: It's so sad. The rejection makes him [the monster] bad.

Mrs. Carson: Does Frankenstein have any responsibility?

Matt: Yeah, he created him.

Emily: (Shaking her head) I'm looking for a way to defend this guy [Dr. Frankenstein].

Mrs. Carson: Who do you guys feel sorrier for?

[Many students murmur, 'the monster'].

Emily: It's not his [the monster's] fault. No one was there to teach him right from wrong.

Mrs. Carson: The monster's often depicted as evil in modern day pictures and stuff. What do you guys think about how Shelley originally portrays him?

Student D: I always assumed it was the monster that was bad.

Mrs. Carson: How many of you thought that?

[Many hands go up].

Mrs. Carson: How many of your perceptions changed?

[Many hands go up].

Participants Anna, Victor, and Kurt detailed during interviews how they initially did not enjoy or understand this story. In her post-unit interview Anna reflected: At first I really didn't like *Frankenstein*. I wasn't intrigued by it. I thought it was boring." These students experienced tensions in regards to constructing aesthetic transactions with this text.

However, all three detail how, as a result of the above discussion, they were able to construct aesthetic transactions with this story. Anna specifically remarked on this shift in her post-unit interview:

I liked it [*Frankenstein*] more after our conversation. Everyone thought the monster was the bad guy and no one thought the creator was responsible. My classmates said a lot of good things. Someone brought up the idea of society being cruel, and not only Frankenstein, which I didn't think about.

Mrs. Carson was also aware of this shift in the students' ability to construct aesthetic transactions with this story following this discussion: "I think *Frankenstein* was a story that the kids didn't immediately see as interesting because they saw the monster as a flat,

stupid character with no room for reader interpretation. I think interest picked up when we complicated that image.” In alignment with this understanding, Kurt noted the following ideas in his post-unit interview:

Everyone thought the monster was just this green thing with electrodes around his neck going around saying, ‘Uggghhh!’ like a zombie. But, we found out that he’s actually articulate and philosophical. He wants to help humankind, but they treat him like a monster.

Through discussion, Kurt recognized how the monster exists in a liminal space and the challenges it poses for him in repeated failed attempts to fit in. Recognition of this liminality caused Kurt to feel sorry for this particular character.

As a result of this discussion, the overall aesthetic experience of *Frankenstein* improved for some of the participants. Discussion acted as a catalyst for some of the participants to construct aesthetic transactions collectively with a unit text that they were unable to construct on their own. This evolution showcases how meaningful discussion that capitalizes on the aesthetic experience of a text can lead students to construct aesthetic transactions with a text that initially holds lower aesthetic transactional potential (Connell, 2001; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003). This change demonstrates that pedagogical practices hold the potential to influence students’ aesthetic experience of texts and their construction of aesthetic transactions.

Mrs. Carson is not able to facilitate such a discussion surrounding another classic text that students experienced difficulty in terms of constructing aesthetic transactions. Consider the following excerpt from my field notes after Mrs. Carson finished reading aloud “The Yellow Wallpaper”:

After Mrs. Carson reads the final sentence, the class is silent. Mrs. Carson asks, “So, what do we think about this piece? No one offers a remark or comment. Some of the students glance at one another. Does anyone have any questions?”

One student raises his hand and asks what is wrong with the narrator. Mrs. Carson smiles and responds, “Good question! Yeah, that’s definitely a little confusing to figure out. We know the narrator just had a baby and sometimes women have some trouble after they have a baby because being a new mom can be hard. And, she’s stuck in that room!” Mrs. Carson pauses for a moment or two. None of the students raise additional questions or comments. Mrs. Carson then says, “What do we think about that ending? Creepy, right?” A few students murmur comments, like “Yeah.” And one student says, “Yeah, it’s weird.” None of the students raise their hands or share any additional comments or questions. At this point there is only two minutes left in the ELA period. Mrs. Carson tells them that the period’s over and the students should begin packing up.

This field notes excerpt illustrates Mrs. Carson’s attempts at soliciting students’ aesthetic transactions with this unit text in order to engage them in a discussion. Akin to *Frankenstein*, she asked numerous open-ended questions that invited students to share their feelings, ideas, questions, and comments with this text. However, unlike the *Frankenstein* discussion, these questions were greeted mainly with student silence, or few word answers.

The class ended and Mrs. Carson did not attempt to initiate discussion on this unit text the following day. When I asked her to elaborate on this decision in her post-unit interview, she responded, “I could just tell it [the story] wasn’t working for them. You could see they were having a really hard time getting the issues. It just fell flat for them. The other pieces have worked so well...I just didn’t see the point.” As an instructor, Mrs. Carson made the strategic decision to be flexible and did not push a particular text that she felt was not “working” for the students. As illustrated in chapter four of this study, Mrs. Carson believed that the main issues present in this Gothic text were far-removed from the students developmentally. Participants echoed these sentiments in their post-unit interviews. This gap prevented the majority of participants (with the exception of Ray) from aesthetically transacting with this text. Unlike the conversation surrounding

Frankenstein, Mrs. Carson was unable to assist the majority of participants in constructing aesthetic transactions with “The Yellow Wallpaper” in a related discussion.

Mrs. Carson’s decision to abandon further discussion on this text was supported in the design-based nature of the study. Mrs. Carson was able to exercise agency in making these spur of the moment decisions. Aesthetic transactions in the academic setting are always a complex result of text + context; thus, it is impossible to know if she had asked additional, or different aesthetic questions, or prompted students to consider the topic of depression on a wider scale, if such pedagogical practices would have resulted in students’ construction of aesthetic transactions with this text collectively as a class. It is possible that Mrs. Carson was quicker to abandon the issue because post-partum depression is a more taboo and potentially uncomfortable topic for teachers to discuss with adolescent students than a topic such as societal evil (as manifests in *Frankenstein*). What is evident is that neither the text nor related context surrounding this particular short story contributed to students’ construction of aesthetic transactions.

The contrasts between the *Frankenstein* and “The Yellow Wallpaper” discussions, particularly the tension surrounding the lack of student discussion in relation to “The Yellow Wallpaper” reinforces the importance of academic texts containing potential aesthetic transactional links back to students (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). Whether they are contemporary or canonical, academic text choices must, in some way, mirror adolescents’ interests, concerns, and preoccupations as they exist at this particular developmental phase in order for students to construct aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast and/or meaningful connection (Atwell, 2006; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Rosenblatt, 1994). The classic, Gothic text *Frankenstein* contains issues that are developmentally

appropriate for adolescents that hold the potential for meaningful connection, such as good versus evil, corruption of authority and society, and a character who is not normal having trouble fitting in and finding acceptance. Initially, the students were unable to construct aesthetic transactions with this classic text. However, following the discussion, many of them were able to construct aesthetic transactions with the assistance of Mrs. Carson and their fellow peers.

In contrast, the issues present in “The Yellow Wallpaper” are not fantastic in affording imaginative contrast, nor do they offer the potential for the majority of participants to meaningfully connect, given that the main conflict (post-partum depression) is an issue far removed from adolescents’ current developmental experiences. Mrs. Carson was unable to assist the students in constructing aesthetic transactions with this particular unit text within the context of a reading-related discussion. This data supports the notion that the more moments of potential alignment a text holds with a reader, the easier it is for an instructor to capitalize on these moments within the classroom context (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Despite this tension, as a whole Mrs. Carson successfully initiated discussions that encouraged participant construction of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts by celebrating text complexities, such as philosophical issues, as they manifest in the various texts; thus, ‘Truth’ behind issues that these text raise became relative and personal for each reader (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001). In relation to self-discovery of ‘Truths,’ Mrs. Carson also frequently sat back and let the students direct the discussions. This dynamic occurred most frequently in students’ meaningful connection of the unit

texts to other Gothic ‘texts’ from their leisure reading practices, which the next section highlights.

**“In Our Conversations, We Include Every Aspect Like Movies, T.V. Shows...:”
Facilitating Connections between Leisure and Academic Gothic ‘Texts’**

In order for the secondary Discourse of academic literacy within the classroom context to develop meaningfully, it must take into account students’ out-of-school literacies; this involves acknowledging the wide range of multimodal ‘texts’ such as music, videogames, movies, T.V. shows, etc. that comprise students’ leisure reading (Guthrie, 2008; Vasudevan, 2007). This fusion increases the relevance of academic reading as students make meaningful connections or allegiances and alliances between their various Discourses in relation to reading practices (Gee, 2005/2008; Gibson, 2010; Lenters, 2006). Forming these connections also denotes an aesthetic transactional experience (Rosenblatt, 1994). All eight participants formed a wealth of meaningful connections between the Gothic unit texts and popular culture ‘texts’ they engaged in outside of the classroom. These connections occurred due to the high prevalence of the genre in students’ out-of-school literacy experiences and Mrs. Carson’s further facilitation of these aesthetic transactions during in-class discussions.

All of the participants discussed appreciating the opportunity to share, enhance, and construct these moments of meaningful connectivity between their in and out-of-school literacy practices as they pertain to the Gothic genre. As Ray reflected in his mid-unit interview:

It’s really good to have these talks because everyone knows about something different. Some people bring up a [Gothic] T.V. show, movie, or video game. So, everyone has a chance to share and then we can pick out the Gothic attributes. It’s good to have those student-initiated discussions.

Ray detailed how student-initiated discussions provided the class with opportunities to share and construct additional aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts (Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2033; Rosenblatt, 1994). Mrs. Carson facilitated this environment by allowing students to lead some of the discussions and in demonstrating respect and interest for students' out-of-school literacy/popular culture connections (Gee 2005/2008; Guthrie, 2008; Knoester, 2009; Vasudevan, 2007).

During interviews, Emily, Diana, Matt, and Ray specifically remarked on Mrs. Carson's willingness to allow students to direct conversations where they shared with one another the aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection they constructed between the Gothic unit texts and popular culture 'texts' from their leisure practices. Emily noted in her post-unit interview, "She [Mrs. Carson] let our pop culture discussions go the way we wanted it to go. It wasn't predetermined." Mrs. Carson reflected that it was "easy" to assume a less authoritative role within the Gothic unit: "They are constantly like, 'Oo, I want to share!' They're on the edge of their seats. It's never a quiet room. People's hands are always up. That doesn't always happen." Consider the following student-led conversational vignette that occurred after Mrs. Carson finished reading the "Tell-Tale Heart," and the class's unanimous acknowledgement that it had a "creepy vibe" to it:

Anna: You can picture the scary music that would go along with this [story]!

Student A: I think it's creepier when people combine happy music with something gory, say if like *Friday the 13th* had happy music. That's would be really scary!

Ray: Yeah, because you don't expect it.

Anna: Oooh! The music in *Halloween* is so creepy!

Ray: Which one? The newest one?

Anna: Yeah.

Student B: Music can definitely make things more scary.

Student C: The music changes and adds to the effect, like in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*.

[Conversation about "creepy" Gothic 'texts' continues independent of Mrs. Carson].

This excerpt illustrates the variety of popular culture aesthetic transactions the participants constructed where a conversation about the mood of an academic Gothic text was connected to the mood of Gothic pop culture movies. These meaningful connections occurred in an organic, student-directed discussion that Mrs. Carson did not interrupt (Connell, 2001; Pike, 2003).

Not only did Mrs. Carson allow such conversations to take place within the classroom context, she also demonstrated respect and interest for these aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection in her discussion commentaries. Consider the following conversation that occurred after Mrs. Carson's acknowledgement that the Gothic short story they were about to read ("Lavender") is considered an urban legend:

Ray: "Oh! Like *Slenderman*."

Mrs. Carson: Who's "*Slenderman*?"

Ray: It's an urban legend videogame where someone's in the woods preying on people. It's really creepy and fun to play in the dark.

Student A: Yeah, no one accepts Slender, so he wreaks havoc on society.

Mrs. Carson: Oooh! You guys might want to jot down some of these ideas in your journals! This [Gothic] theme comes up later!

This vignette illustrates Mrs. Carson's inquiry about a 'text' that resided in Ray's out-of-school literacy experiences that she was unfamiliar with. Additionally, she gave this aesthetic transactional moment of meaningful connection merit by suggesting that students write down these ideas for possible later use. In reflecting on this discussion in his post-unit interview, Ray shared that Mrs. Carson showed "she's really open-minded to whatever we like to share. It just helps us work better." Ray believed that such openness increased the rapport between teacher and student. This dynamic nurtured participants' construction of aesthetic transactions with the academic texts because Mrs. Carson demonstrated respect and interest in students' out-of-school literacy practices as

they emerged through moments of participant connectivity during the Gothic unit; this assured students that their out-of-school literacy identities were respected within the classroom (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2005/2011; Marsh, 2005; Rosenblatt 1995/2005; Wohllwend, 2012).

Another illustrative moment of Mrs. Carson's support of students constructing aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection between the Gothic unit texts to popular culture, out-of-school 'texts' occurred after the class read excerpts of the Gothic informational text, *The Secret History of Vampires*:

Student A: *30 Days of Night* is my favorite vampire movie.

Ray: "Ooooh!" [Indicating to a picture] It's on my [Gothic] journal!

Mrs. Carson: So who triumphs [referring to the film]?

Ray: The vampire kind of. It's like in *Twilight*. The main guy becomes a vampire, but he's not bad like Dracula.

Student B: (Laughs). Yeah, now vampires are good guys!

[Students continue to discuss other movies containing vampires].

This excerpt illustrates an aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection a student made between Gothic academic and leisure 'texts.' Mrs. Carson facilitated students' construction of additional aesthetic transactions through thoughtful inquiry regarding this connection, or specifically in this case, students reflecting on how the vampire image evolved over time.

A final example illustrating this discussion dynamic occurred after the class reads the Gothic short story, "The Ghostly Little Girl," featuring a poor character that ultimately drowns on a fishing boat with her father. She comes back as a ghost and haunts the shack she lived in:

Mrs. Carson: Ghost or not, she deserved a better life. Her friends cared and risked a lot to try to help her.

Anna: Like *The Walking Dead* [T.V. show]! This guy risks his life to save a girl.

Ray: Oooh, I remember that!
 Matt: Wasn't that the first episode?
 Anna: Yeah.
 Mrs. Carson: Interesting!
 Matt: Yeah, it's in *The Following* [T.V. show] too.
 Ray: Love that show!
 Anna: Me too.
 Mrs. Carson: So, we see this [theme] a lot.

This excerpt illuminates another moment where Mrs. Carson respected and encouraged students' aesthetic transactions connecting an academic text to a Gothic T.V. show.

Likewise, Victor, who was quiet in class, reflected on these discussions in his post-unit interview:

Our conversations included everything! We talked about the [unit] books, but not all the time. We included every aspect [of the Gothic] like movies, videogames, poems...people came up with a lot of different ideas. They just shared a lot about themselves. I learned about what most kids like to watch and read. I never knew about that.

This commentary reveals that even though Victor did not frequently verbalize his thoughts in class, the conversations still acted as a catalyst for his realization that like him, many of his peers in Mrs. Carson's class shared in the enjoyment of the Gothic genre. Listening to students forging aesthetic transactions where they meaningfully connect Gothic genre across their various literacy practices not only aided Victor in understanding how widespread the genre is, but also, how interest in the genre was shared amongst his peers. This realization aligns with the literature discussing how sharing of aesthetic text transactions increases classroom relatedness and rapport (Connell, 2003; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003).

This connectivity amongst peers (as realized through these discussions) was also acknowledged by Eliza, Matt, Emily, Diana, and Ray in their post-unit interviews. Matt reflected, "I had no idea about my friends [what they like]. Now, I know that a lot of

them also are watching *The Walking Dead* and we can talk about it.” This realization was particularly powerful for Eliza, who in her preliminary unit interview believed she was “weird” due to her love of mystery and horror characteristic of the Gothic genre.

However, in her post-unit interview, Eliza noted:

I realized I didn't know people [in class] all that well. I had no idea Anna liked *The Walking Dead*. So, now we talk about it once in a while, and I don't know, maybe we could be friends? I was really surprised that everyone really liked this stuff. People tell me that I don't seem like the type of person who would normally go home and watch this stuff. So, I guess it's just that everyone's different in their own home.

Eliza realized that she shared a particular viewing interest with a lesser known peer as a result of these discussions. Consequently, she believed the two could become friends because of this connectivity. Moreover, Eliza saw that her enjoyment of the Gothic genre is shared amongst her peers, making her realize that her affinity for it was not as unusual as she initially suspects. This realization led her to understand that she cannot assume to know what people enjoy based on their public personas. Thus, these discussions acted as a catalyst for Eliza to construct myriad aesthetic transactions that enlarged her self and world views (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Mrs. Carson further reflected on these conversations where students aligned their in and out-of-school literacy practices by forming aesthetic transactions connecting the Gothic across their various experiences:

They link [Gothic] pieces over time, over genre, over media. It doesn't matter. They use it all. They're coming into class and talking about what they are seeing on T.V., things they've read independently, and how this Gothic thing relates to that. They are having so much fun with it! It's not perceived as 'work.' They're applying it [Gothic] to everything. They're actively using literacy skills in their own lives whether they're thinking about the Gothic in relation to critical viewing of movies and T.V. shows, or in conversations with friends. It's exciting!

As a result of discussions that capitalize on the students' aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts, students enhanced and constructed additional aesthetic transactions within the context of the Gothic unit that resulted in a meaningful and gratifying learning environment. All of the participants detailed how this discussion dynamic contrasted with the typical dynamic of reading discussions in the classroom context during interviews.

“In this Unit, It’s Like a Bunch of Artists Collaborating:” Participant Contrasting Aesthetic Nature of the Gothic Unit Discussions to Typical Reading Discussions

All eight participants discussed how in their past academic reading experiences, their aesthetic transactions were not typically prioritized in related-reading discussions. Specifically, Eliza, in her post-unit interview, detailed how more typical instructor reactions within the context of students relaying associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas include teachers responding with comments “like, ‘let’s stay on track, or ‘great, but we have to move on to the next topic.” Eliza’s comment revealed her belief that her aesthetic transactions with reading texts were not typically viewed as a productive use of classroom time. This apprehension aligns with the literature detailing how teachers often feel there is not enough time to encourage student expression of aesthetic transactional experiences in related text discussions due to curricular demands (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1995/2005).

This dynamic discourages student enhancement and construction of additional aesthetic transactional experiences in reading-related classroom discussions (Eisner, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2005). In fact, many of the participants discussed how little discussion of any sort typically plays a role in the reading classroom. In reflecting on past reading experiences, Matt stated in his post-unit interview, “We usually just read, answer questions, take a test, and move onto the next thing.” Akin to this statement, Victor also

noted in his post-unit interview: “We really don’t talk usually, or have big discussions on what we read. We do questions and maybe have like a two minute discussion and then that’s it and it’s done. It’s more about getting things done than getting into a book.” The discourse of both participants’ reflections suggests an almost mechanical reading response process that does not prioritize students expressing their initial aesthetic transactional experiences with texts or aid in the construction of new ones.

Additionally, the Gothic unit capitalized on students’ out-of-school literacy experiences in utilizing a genre that is prevalent in their leisure reading. It also incorporated popular culture texts alongside traditional texts; thus, the unit connected with students’ social practices as conducted outside of the classroom (Gee, 2008). Mrs. Carson afforded students the opportunity to connect the Gothic unit texts to other ‘texts’ that resided in their out-of-school literacy practices (such as movies and Internet videos) in reading-related discussions. Mrs. Carson discussed how these unit qualities altered the typical classroom dynamic: “With the Gothic [unit] I can talk about what’s ‘out there’ in reference to the Gothic as a peer and fellow reader rather than a teacher because we’re using stuff in the classroom that’s ‘out there’ right now.”

This relationship blurred the boundaries between teachers and students in encouraging active participation of the entire class. Correspondingly, all eight participants discussed how the student-centered discussion dynamic categorizing the Gothic unit was unique in the classroom context. Emily noted: “In this unit, we got to talk to each other a lot about the Gothic stuff in our lives. That doesn’t usually happen.” Emily’s sentiment aligns with the literature detailing how students’ out-of-school literacy

experiences are not readily capitalized upon in the reading classroom (Dyson, 1997; Hagood et al., 2010; Vasudevan, 2007; Williams, 2007).

Moreover, Eliza believed that not only are such aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection between in and out-of-school literacy practices not usually encouraged within the classroom context, such comments often resulted in student penalization: “If stuff like *Slenderman* was brought up in any other class, they [the teachers] would be like, ‘Lunch detention for you!’” she shared in her post-unit interview. This reflection aligns with the literature stating that inclusion of students’ out-of-school literacies are often devalued, or even dismissed by teachers (Arthur, 2005; Dyson, 1997; Gibson, 2010; Hopper, 2006; Vasudevan, 2007).

As a whole, all the participants detailed pleasure in the reading-related discussions of the Gothic unit and the aesthetic transactions they constructed as a result of them. Ray eloquently summed up the nature of the Gothic unit discussions in his post-unit interview:

Usually in reading the teacher asks questions like ‘Can you give us some detail about the piece we just read?’ I’m just forced to say something. Whereas, with the Gothic, it’s like a bunch of artists collaborating on a piece. There’s a real sense of community in the classroom.

This comment reveals a number of points. Ray detailed how teacher questioning was typically frequently efferent in nature, which aligns with the literature discussing overemphasis on the efferent reading spectrum in the classroom (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005; Vasudevan, 2010). This dynamic made the reading experience feel impersonal and forced, which contrasted the fluid and organic nature of the discussions that took place in the Gothic unit. Ray also noted that such aesthetic transactional discussions encouraged the feeling of a classroom “community,” aligning

with the literature suggesting that discussions capitalizing on the aesthetic transactional reading experience aid in the building of classroom rapport, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter (Connell, 2003; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003).

Finally, Ray drew a distinction between the typical dynamic of the reading classroom within the context of his past experiences where the conversational ‘ball’ passed from student to teacher, and the Gothic unit experience where the power lines were equalized in the fact that everyone was “artists.” Coincidentally, the artist analogy was also used by Rosenblatt in her assertion of the ideal relationship between readers and texts where aesthetic activity is at its peak because readers are actively co-creating meaning with the text and one another (Rosenblatt, 1995). Students acting as ‘artists’ where they creatively showcased their aesthetic transactional text experiences also occurred in the corresponding unit activities. The following section explores the aesthetic transactions that the participants constructed in response to the Gothic unit popular culture and traditional texts in the unit’s related activities.

Participant Construction of Aesthetic Transactions in Reading-Related Activities of the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

Akin to discussions, the qualities defining reading-related activities during and after a reading experience also influenced readers’ constructions of aesthetic transactions within the classroom context (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2005). Utilizing and releasing the imagination are key components of the reader experiencing aesthetic text transactions (Connell, 2000/2001; Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Takolander, 2000; Vasudevan, 2010). As with the discussions, the reading-related activities of the Gothic unit were designed to capitalize upon individuals’ imaginative capacities; thus, they aimed to assist students in enhancing their initial aesthetic

transactions and aid in their construction of new ones (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2005).

As the literature review section of this study details, activities aligning with the aesthetic reading spectrum share similar qualities. Reading activities that promote creative thinking and expression (where complex and personal interpretation and exploration of a text are prioritized over a task requiring a specific answer) nurture aesthetic reading experiences and the construction of aesthetic transactions (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Rosenblatt, 2005). One of the Gothic unit assignments was a student-produced poem. Students selected a Gothic theme/trait to explore in poetic form. This activity promoted the construction of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts as it encouraged creative thinking and personal expression.

Secondly, assignments that capitalize on the aesthetic reading spectrum are open to students selecting a medium for representation (Eisner, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2005). For instance, following the reading of the popular culture Gothic novel, *Down a Dark Hall*, students were asked to create a tangible product of their novel interpretation; they had the option of choosing any means to portray this representation. As a result, students utilized a variety of mediums including, but not limited to, posters, films, anime, and music soundtracks. This degree of choice gave students the opportunity to express and further construct their aesthetic transactions with this Gothic novel in a form that aligned their in and out-of-school literacy practices and reflected their multiple literacies (Bean, 2002; Gee, 2005/2008; Marsh, 2005; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wohlwend, 2013). Such activity allowed the students to create meaningful bridges between their various Discourses (Gee, 2008/2011).

Finally, Mrs. Carson allowed collaboration amongst the students. Whether it was sharing and ascertaining feedback from a peer on their Gothic stories, sharing an entry from their Gothic journals to the class, or working with peers on a movie trailer depicting the ending of *Down a Dark Hall*, students frequently worked together to complete the unit activities. This dynamic, where students gained ideas from working with one another, aided students in the construction of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts (Connell, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003).

As a result of attempts to capitalize on the aesthetic experience of the Gothic unit texts in related-reading activities, Mrs. Carson reflected that all eight participants produced “high-quality” products where they went “above and beyond what was expected.” This evaluation aligns with the literature suggesting that tasks nurturing the aesthetic experience are personally gratifying and fulfilling for individuals in a means that they find pleasure putting forth effort (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001). In her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson noted, “All of the ideas [for the projects] came from them, and neither I or the unit stood in the way.” The following section showcases some of participants’ work that was produced in response to the unit activities. Specifically, I explore the products in efforts to understand what aesthetic transactions the participants constructed in response to the Gothic studies reading unit as manifested in these works.

“Girls Aren’t Ugly, Society Is: “Anna’s Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifest in the Reading-Related Activities

Early in the Gothic unit, Anna unabashedly announced to the class that she loved the Gothic because of blood: “In my opinion, there has to be blood and death for it [a story] to be Gothic.” Anna found pleasure in the horror, violence, and gore that are sometimes characteristic of Gothic texts. She further explored this affinity, or aesthetic

transaction, in related unit assignments, particularly in her Gothic short story, “Jealousy Can Kill.” Mrs. Carson invited students to compose original Gothic short stories after the students had some exposure to this and other Gothic traits through reading and discussing of *The Hunger Games*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Twilight* series. Below is an excerpt from Anna’s story, which features a jealous villain (Rose) who returns from the dead in an attempt to kill her sister (Scarlett):

Scarlett heard a high-pitched scream. It was coming from the hospital, she ran to it. She spotted a clipboard sitting on the front desk. There was blood all over the papers. “Jealousy can kill” was written all over the walls...with blood. Scarlett knew it was her sister. One problem stood in her way: How do you kill someone who is already dead? Scarlett suddenly sees Rose. “What do you want?” Scarlett screams in terror. “Your life,” Rose yells with a wicked laugh and chilled smile.

This excerpt reveals Anna’s desire to further explore her pleasure in the Gothic trait of horror, violence, and gore by acting not only as a consumer, but producer of this quality in her own writing. The open-ended and creative nature of the assignment gave Anna this opportunity. This assignment afforded Anna the freedom to creatively express and produce an aspect of the genre that she enjoyed as a reader.

Additionally, the final unit assignment of composing an original Gothic-themed poem provided Anna with a means to enhance her previous aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts. She did this with the two Gothic text traits that she discussed the strongest affinity for during an earlier interview because of meaningful connection: Concern with normalcy and characters in a state of powerlessness. Consider the following excerpt from her poem entitled, “Reflection of a Monster.” Anna composed this piece at the conclusion of the unit in response to Mrs. Carson assigning the students the task of writing an original Gothic poem:

Society has judged everyone.
 But girls aren't ugly.
 Society is.
 The world is full of hopelessness,
 Society has judged everyone,
 The "cool" girls invite you in,
 Then they stab you in the back,
 Everyone has been judged.

During her mid-unit interview, Anna discussed how she constructed aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection to two Gothic traits as they manifest in practically every unit text: concerns with normalcy and feeling 'monstrous.' She reflected that these traits resonate with "teen girls" because they "are under constant pressure to be perfect. You need to look a certain way, be a certain way." The above excerpt illustrates Anna's further exploration of this theme in terms of how girls are constantly being judged by those around them and the "hopelessness" of it. However, Anna's poem suggests that the true "ugliness" or real 'monster' is society for placing judgment on girls.

Interestingly, Anna composed this poem after the class's philosophical discussion on the real monster in *Frankenstein*, which is highlighted in the discussion portion of this chapter. During this conversation, the discussion focused on the idea, or collective aesthetic transaction, of society at large as the real villain for rejecting the monster. The fact that this theme resurfaced in Anna's poem suggests that she transferred this aesthetic transaction from the class discussion into her own creative work and forged a real life connection. Thus, Anna enhanced and deepened this aesthetic transaction through continued and creative reflection on it in a unit activity. Upon reflecting on the nature of the assignments in the Gothic unit in her post-unit interview, she observed, "The normal [reading] assignment is to write an essay. Here, I got to mix like creativity in with my thoughts, which is better." Thus, Anna detailed how capitalizing on her creativity allowed

her a means of expressing her aesthetic transactions with reading texts in a way that was not typically offered within the classroom context.

Taken together, these feelings, thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and images all constitute the aesthetic transactions Anna constructed with some of the qualities of the Gothic genre. Such aesthetic transactions manifested in the tangible products she created through the Gothic unit's related activities. The activities created a space for Anna to deepen her aesthetic transactional bonds with the Gothic texts as she moved from a consumer to a producer of the Gothic.

“Virginia, I’m So Sorry for Leaving You Like this. Although, I Haven’t Left on my Own Accord:” Diana’s Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifest in the Reading-Related Activities

Like Anna, Diana used the reading-related activities of the Gothic unit to enhance the aesthetic transactions she constructed with the Gothic unit texts. In her mid and post-unit interviews, Diana discussed a meaningful connection between Gothic texts and some of her own experiences. For instance, a common Gothic trait is characters living in a state of powerlessness under corrupt authority. Diana meaningfully connected with this trait in describing the anxieties she experienced due to the real life circumstances of her beloved extended family members living under a corrupt government in Iran. Akin to Anna, Diana used the reading-related activities to repeatedly explore and construct this particular aesthetic transaction.

In the beginning of the unit, Mrs. Carson distributed journals where she instructed students to record their ongoing thoughts and feelings regarding the Gothic texts. Open-response journaling encourages the development of aesthetic transactions; it provides a venue for readers to record and reflect on their various feelings, associations, attitudes,

and ideas (Dugan, 1997). Diana's journal entries illustrated her aesthetic transactions with the Gothic trait of characters in a state of powerlessness under corrupt authority. While reading *Down a Dark Hall* (featuring teachers who corruptly wield their authority) Diana documented her frustration and anger towards these individuals in statements such as "How is Madame able to get away with this?!" "I'm worried about what Madame is going to do to Kit!" and "I REALLY HATE MADAME DURRETT AND PROFESSOR FARLEY RIGHT NOW!" The journal was a venue for Diana to vent her negative emotions towards these villainous characters in writing. In fact, Diana enjoyed journaling so much during the unit that she expressed regret that there were not more journal assignments throughout the unit. Such a sentiment and request for additional 'work' suggested that the task was personally meaningful and fulfilling for Diana (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001). It is likely that in venting her frustration and anger towards corrupt fictional characters in positions of power, Diana also vicariously vented emotions towards real life corrupt authority figures that negatively impacted her extended family (Cross, 2008; Jones, 2002).

Diana also constructed aesthetic transactions with this trait in her Gothic short story composition about a girl (Virginia) whose father is taken by evil beings who are trying to control society. Below is an excerpt from the introduction of Diana's story:

I went inside and everything looked normal. I looked around with a hopeful smile breaking across my face. It soon disappeared when I saw the folded sheet of paper. In my father's scrawl it said 'Virginia.' My hands shaking, I opened it and began to read. 'My dearest Virginia. I am sorry for leaving you like this. Although, I haven't left on my own accord. Virginia, they're coming! Find him [another character, Hunter] and all will become clear. I love you so. You can't imagine how much being away from you, Lucy, and your mother hurts me. But, I must do what I must do.'

The theme of Diana's story is the father's anguish over being separated from his family due to corrupt beings, or 'monsters' that threaten to take control of society. As Diana reflected in her post-unit interview, "it [the assignment] was really open. I was able to use any [Gothic] traits I wanted." Akin to Anna, the aesthetic qualities of the unit activities provided a means for Diana to construct aesthetic transactions with a Gothic text trait she found personally meaningful in moving from a consumer to a producer of this trait.

Consequently, during her post-unit interview, Diana discussed how the short story assignment was her "favorite by far" of the unit. In fact, she found so much pleasure in composing this piece that she immediately began working on a "prequel" or backstory during leisure time after the school assignment ended. This voluntary activity was a second illustration of Diana's desire to construct aesthetic transactions in association with the Gothic unit beyond what the curriculum demanded. This aspiration illustrates how intrinsically meaningful assignments may not be viewed as 'work' in the traditional sense of the word in that students voluntarily pursue them outside of the classroom (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Guthrie, 2008). All in all, these assignments created a space for Diana to continuously re-construct an aesthetic transaction with a Gothic trait that held personal significance.

"I Love Reading and Watching Anime. Being Able to Create it for a School Project Is Very Cool:" Eliza's Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifest in the Reading-Related Activities

In her pre-unit interview, Eliza discussed how she is a "horror fan" and "loves anime" (animated cartoons originating from Japan that are typically computer generated or hand drawn). Within the context of the Gothic unit related activities, Eliza was afforded multiple opportunities to merge these two usually out-of-school literacies

(horror and anime) in constructing aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity back to the Gothic unit texts. Such opportunities afforded Eliza the opportunity to construct allegiances and alliances between her various Discourses (Gee, 2008/2011). Eliza repeatedly constructed this particular aesthetic transaction within the context of the unit activities. The first instance of this aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection occurred in an early journal entry. About mid-way through the unit experience, after the students read the Gothic short stories “The Tell Tale Heart” and “Cat in Glass” both containing horror and gore, Mrs. Carson asked students to record any thoughts they had on the Gothic genre so far. Eliza’s entry consisted of the following:

Gothic Anime

Death Note

Another

Deadman Wonderland

Darker than Black

Soul Eater

Shiki

The list continued to reveal Eliza’s recordings of various Gothic-inspired anime. When I questioned Eliza about this list in her mid-unit interview, she reflected that like Anna, she “was immediately drawn to it [the Gothic] because it has horror and gore.” This journal entry reveals Eliza’s realization that the Gothic genre was also prevalent in the anime she enjoyed outside of school. The open-ended and free-form qualities defining the journal prompt gave Eliza the opportunity to engage in this aesthetic transaction as she recorded the various Gothic anime that she was familiar with. Thus, this academic assignment encouraged Eliza to explore this aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection of the Gothic to various ‘texts’ that resided in her out-of-school literacy experiences (Gee, 2005/2008; Knoester, 2009; Vasudevan, 2007).

Additionally, during the reading of “The Tell-Tale Heart,” Mrs. Carson presented the students with a list of Gothic traits and asked the students to identify one or two they believed were present in this short story. Although this task was open-ended in the fact that students chose the traits and story evidence to discuss, it was one of the more traditional, straightforward written assignments of the unit. Nevertheless, this assignment compelled Eliza to reflect on the Gothic qualities of anime she was familiar with. During her post-unit interview, Eliza discussed: “I was watching anime at home and I began thinking about that sheet and the qualities the anime had.” She used this handout to “test” how many Gothic traits the anime contained: “I took the chart out while I was watching the anime. I was listing things that were on it. I made copies of it [the handout] to keep at home. I’m gonna do it [the activity] again for fun.” Like Diana, Eliza found personal gratification in the Gothic texts and related activities. She also voluntarily devoted leisure time in enhancing and further constructing her aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts.

A final example of Eliza enhancing and constructing new aesthetic transactions of connecting the Gothic genre to an out-of-school literacy practice (anime) occurred when she and fellow friends in Mrs. Carson’s class produced original anime in response to the *Down a Dark Hall* final project. In this assignment, students worked with peers of their choice and selected a medium in which to portray their novel interpretations to the class. Eliza and her peers decided to produce anime to collaboratively create visual interpretations of *Down a Dark Hall*.

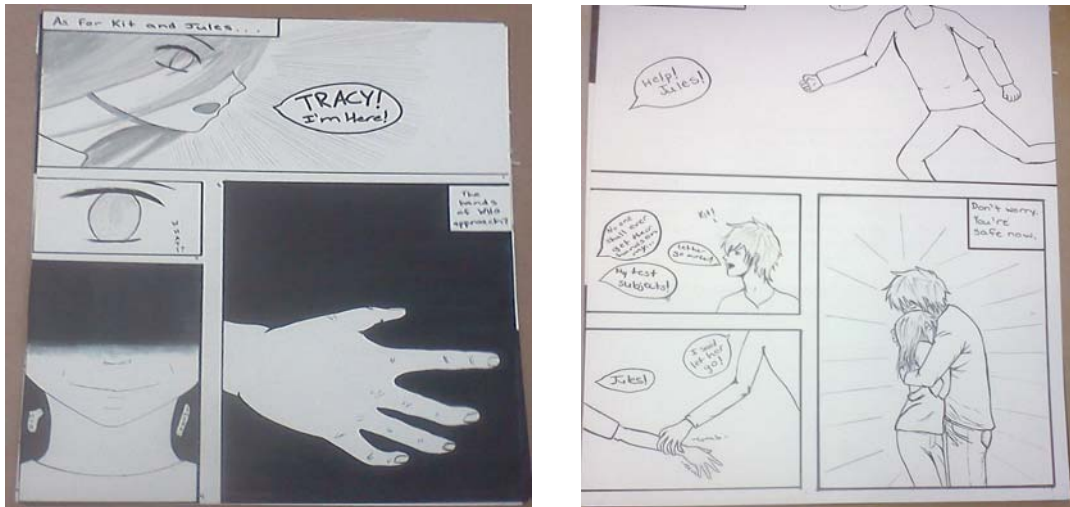


Illustration 2 Eliza's anime of *Down a Dark Hall*

This assignment afforded Eliza the opportunity to collaboratively enhance and develop her aesthetic transactions with this Gothic text, specifically in her visualizations of the novel's ending. As Eliza reflected in her post-unit interview:

I could relate the projects to what I like because I really love reading and watching anime at home. Being able to create it with friends for our school project is very cool. A lot of times [in reading class] you have to stick to a strict writing format, so it's hard to express yourself.

This reflection illustrates Eliza's appreciation in being able to enhance this aesthetic transaction and align her various Discourses in relation to reading practices, as well as the opportunity to accurately express the aesthetic transactions she constructed with a particular Gothic text (Gee, 2005/2008). Eliza also detailed pleasure in collectively depicting these images, illustrating how collaboration strengthens aesthetic transactional bonds as students piggyback off one another's ideas (Connell, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994). These examples illustrate how the open-ended, creative, and collaborative nature of these assignments provided Eliza with the opportunity to construct aesthetic transactions with Gothic unit texts. Through the unit's activities, she continuously wove meaningful connections across multiple mediums and across her

various literacy practices in a means that was personally meaningful and significant (Gee, 2011).

“Turn Around, Just Kidding, I’ll Scare You:” Emily’s Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifest in the Reading-Related Activities

Prior to the Gothic unit implementation, Emily (both during class and in her pre-unit interview) expressed her distaste for anything “scary” or “disturbing.” Her feelings surrounding these qualities and the Gothic genre in general underwent transformation throughout the unit experience. In fact, she arguably authored one of the scariest and most disturbing pieces of all the participants. Emily composed this piece near the conclusion of the Gothic unit in response to Mrs. Carson’s open-ended assignment where she asked the students to reflect on a Gothic trait in their journals. Emily created a poem from the point of view of someone mentally unstable. Below is an excerpt from this piece:

Turn around
Just kidding, I’ll scare you.
Stop yelling!
It’s late, people don’t want to hear
Your screams.
Find the phone and dial 911.
I don’t care, it’s disconnected anyway.
Your cell phone goes off.
It gives you just enough light to
See my face.

When I asked Emily to discuss this composition in her post-unit interview, she explained that she did it “for fun to explore writing from a different point of view.” We collectively laughed at the understatement of the word, “different” in light of the fact that the poem is narrated by an individual about to kill someone. Emily explained how she came up with the idea after the class read the Gothic short story, “Cat in Glass,” which is told from the

point of view of a mentally unstable narrator who unintentionally harms her granddaughter. Emily reflected, “It [the story] made me realize that you can write from any point of view, even someone crazy. I think it brought out some of my creative aspects, which I like a lot.”

Emily’s realization of and affinity for the trait of unreliable narration from someone who is not ‘normal’ and ‘monstrous,’ acted as a catalyst for her to compose a creative piece of writing where she moved from the aesthetic transaction of enjoying this Gothic text quality as a reader to producing it as a writer. The open-ended and free-form qualities of the activity afforded her the agency to engage in this aesthetic transaction. Analogous to the other participants, the initial aesthetic transaction of an affinity for a particular Gothic trait as discovered in reading texts was enhanced and further constructed through her actively utilizing the trait in creative expression. For Emily, these aesthetic transactions were particularly powerful, as the unit texts and activities aided her in tapping into an interest she did not know she had.

These aesthetic transactions became more meaningful as Emily moved from discovering an affinity for the Gothic text trait of characters that are not ‘normal’ to acknowledgement that she possessed this quality. In her post-unit interview, she shared, “It [the Gothic unit] made me realize I’m kinda messed up [laughs]. But, it’s a good thing, because I don’t think I wanted to see it before, and now I’m more open to it. I’m more honest with myself.” Through related-reading activities that aided in Emily’s ongoing reflection, her aesthetic transaction evolved from recognition and an affinity for a trait to acknowledgement of a meaningful, personal connection to the trait. This evolution aligns with the research suggesting that aesthetic transactions can result in

personally meaningful knowledge where people learn about themselves (Rosenblatt, 1994)

Interestingly, attempting to put up a façade and ignoring the truth about oneself are themes reflected in Emily's composition that she created in response to the Gothic poem assignment near the conclusion of the unit:

Those emotions we feel.
Pretending to not see what is clearly there.
We all know that life isn't fair.
But mostly everyone blows it off and doesn't care.
But the mirrors are everywhere.
And we pretend to not be aware.

Akin to the other participants, this excerpt showcases the evolution of Emily's aesthetic transactions with the Gothic genre; the aesthetic qualities of the reading-related activities provided a space for her to further reflect on the traits of the genre that were personally meaningful. As a result, Emily deepened and constructed additional aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts.

“We Could Relate Songs to the Story”: Victor's Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifested in the Reading-Related Activities

Akin to Diana, one of the traits of the Gothic genre that resonated the most with Victor was characters in a state of powerlessness. This aesthetic transaction with the text was due to his personal connectivity with this trait as expressed in his post-unit interview: “Us kids, we have little control over anything.” Relatedly, one of Victor's favorite series (both before and after the unit experience) was *The Hunger Games*, which explores this trait in conjunction with corruption of authority. Akin to the other participants, Victor used the Gothic poem assignment to enhance his initial aesthetic transaction with characters in a state of powerlessness as it manifests in one of his favorite series. In his

poem, he creatively explored the evil of the Capitol for using the lives of children as entertainment as present in *The Hunger Games*. Below is the poem's conclusion:

The Capitol's people
 Have an enjoyable time
 They have no sympathy
 Towards the children
 These people don't care
 Don't care if twenty-three kids die
 They bet
 Bet on these children
 The Capitol just wants
 A spectacular show

Victor used the open-ended, creative nature defining the poetry assignment to create a powerful commentary on the evilness of the Capitol in using people's lives as sport for "a spectacular show." Analogous to the other creative work, this product illustrates how Victor enhanced his aesthetic transaction with a Gothic trait through creatively producing his own Gothic commentary in poetic form.

Like Eliza, Victor appreciated the opportunity to express his aesthetic transactions with the unit texts through a medium other than writing. With Victor, this medium was music. He played the violin since he is a small child. Akin to some of the other participants, Victor discussed how the most common reading-related assignments in his past academic experiences consisted of efferent writing tasks: "Most of the time, we take notes, write summaries, or answer comprehension questions. It's too much writing!" Contrastingly, Victor used the *Down a Dark Hall* project as a means to incorporate his musical interests into an academic assignment. Thus, he aesthetically transacted with *Down a Dark Hall* in merging his in and out-of-school literacies through an assignment where non-traditional 'texts,' such as music, could be utilized (Gee, 2011; Guthrie, 2008; Vasudevan, 2007). Akin to Eliza, this aesthetic transaction, or association between music

and an academic text encouraged meaningful alignment between Victor's Discourses in relation to reading practices (Gee, 2005/2008).

Victor and his peers (including study participant, Kurt) created a soundtrack to accompany *Down a Dark Hall*. They selected songs to represent their interpretation and response to various plot stages. An excerpt from my field notes during their class presentation of this project is below:

The boys go to the front of the classroom to present their project. Victor carries a CD in hand which he places in the classroom's CD player. Kurt says, "So, we created a soundtrack [for *Down a Dark Hall*]. We're gonna play a little bit of each song for you guys and then explain it. The first song's from Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony," goes along with chapter 11. Student A says, "The second song is happy from the first movement of Vivaldi [composer], cause the girls [characters in the book] seem happy when they first meet." The next song to play is Justin Bieber's "Boyfriend." Many of the students start singing along. Victor smiles and says "This would go with the scene when Jules first sees Kit." [Class laughs and Mrs. Carson says, "Ooooh!"] Kurt says, "The next one's from *Pokémon* and would play when the when the spirits escape [throws hands in the air] because it promotes a feeling of isolation." [Group continues to present their project].

This excerpt reveals a number of points. It illustrates how Victor and Kurt constructed aesthetic transactions of comprehending and interpreting a Gothic text via a creative mixing of various songs for a number of plot events. As Victor reflected in his post-unit interview, he found this project fun because he "could relate songs to the story." Victor expressed his pleasure in being able to connect his love and knowledge of music to an academic assignment (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Marsh, 2005; Wohlwend, 2013).

Akin to Eliza, Victor discussed appreciating the collaborative nature of this assignment in his post-unit interview "it was fun to get song ideas. Like, Kurt had the idea of using *Pokémon*." Thus, the collaborative nature of the assignment aided in Victor gaining creative ideas (new aesthetic transactions) regarding the novel and musical connections from his peers. Working with peers enhanced Victor's aesthetic transactional experience

surrounding *Down a Dark Hall*, which aligns with the literature suggesting that collective interpretation strengthens a text's aesthetic transactional potential (Connell, 2003; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994).

Additionally, Victor discussed how the use of the Justin Bieber song was his idea. He thought that the connection was “funny” and so does the class, as evident in their laughter. Victor used the assignment and a popular culture icon (Justin Bieber) to parody the ‘impossible romance’ that develops between the characters, Jules and Kit, in *Down a Dark Hall*. In regards to this particular assignment, he reflected in his post-unit interview, “We actually made comedy, so it [story event] was even funnier.” Victor constructed this aesthetic transaction in an open-ended and creative assignment where he moves from consuming to producing a humorous moment in connecting a popular culture icon and song to a specific moment in a popular culture Gothic text. As a result of this aesthetic transaction, the original textual moment became more pleasurable for Victor. This evolution aligns with the literature suggesting that activities promoting the aesthetic reading experience enhance readers’ aesthetic transactional experiences (Rosenblatt, 2005).

Finally, as revealed in the soundtrack choices, the group literally ‘mixed’ both classic (Beethoven) and popular culture (Bieber) songs within their novel soundtrack, which mirrored the fusion of popular culture and traditional texts that defined the overall Gothic unit experience. This fusion was representative of the aspect of the unit that Victor detailed appreciating in his post-unit interview: “The fact that we used old and new Gothic stuff that was really cool.” Thus, Victor capitalized on an aspect of the unit he found pleasurable in a related assignment.

“Let’s Play Children!” Kurt’s Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifest in the Reading-Related Activities

Like Victor, Kurt was musically inclined and played the trumpet. Akin to Eliza and Victor, selecting a means in which to portray an interpretation of *Down a Dark Hall* gave Kurt the agency to work with a nontraditional medium (music) in representing a textual interpretation (Gee 2011; Marsh, 2005; Vasudevan, 2007; Wohlwend, 2013). Near the end of their presentation, Kurt told the class, “I came up with idea of using Pokémon music. I loved it as a kid!” Akin to Eliza and Victor, Kurt creatively forged an aesthetic transaction of meaningful connectivity between a school text (*Down a Dark Hall*) and an out-of-school literacy experience (the Nintendo videogame, Pokémon) within the context of an in-school assignment (Eisner, 2002; Gee, 2011; Guthrie, 2008; Marsh, 2005; Wohlwend, 2013). In his final unit interview, Kurt stated “it was fun to talk about Pokémon in a school project.” This sentiment aligns with the literature stating the pleasure students feel when their out-of-school literacies are respected in school (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2011; Guthrie, 2008; Marsh, 2005; Vasudevan, 2007; Wohlwend, 2012).

Analysis of Kurt’s compositions also reveal how he constructed aesthetic transactions with the Gothic traits of dark humor and fantastic elements as they occur in some of the unit texts; both of these are qualities Kurt discussed enjoying in his mid and post-unit interviews. Before breaking for the winter holiday, the students read the Gothic short story, “The Midnight Mass of the Dead,” which is about a woman who attends an ‘evil’ Christmas Eve Mass for deceased parishioners. There is a moment of dark humor in this text as the zombie-like ghosts reach to grab ahold of the terrified main character as she flees the church. Following this story, Mrs. Carson invited the students to creatively

spin an innocent winter motif (such as attending church on Christmas Eve) into one that was Gothic in a drawing, song, poem, or some other choice medium. This assignment capitalized on aesthetic reading experiences as students were able to choose the mode of representation, it was open-ended in terms of the topic/theme the students explored, and it relied on students' imaginations (Brophy, 2008; Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994).

In response to this assignment, Kurt created a Haiku poem and illustration:



Illustration 3 Kurt's Gothic take on a winter motif

The words and pictures showcase how Kurt took an innocent winter icon (the snowman) and creatively spun it into a fantastic Gothic monster evident in both the words (abominable) and visual depiction (snowman's sharp teeth and menacing eyebrows).

However, the illustration also contains humor, portrayed in the faces and word bubbles of the children, as well as the onomatopoeia "shuffle, shuffle" under the snowman. When I asked Kurt to elaborate on this assignment during his mid-unit interview, he stated, "I like the fantasy and humor in 'Midnight Mass of the Dead,' so, I made a snowman that was scary and funny." Corresponding to the other participants, Kurt enhanced an initial

aesthetic transaction in moving from a consumer of this pleasure to producing these Gothic qualities in a unit-related assignment using both traditional (written text) and non-traditional (picture) mediums.

“How I Had to Kill my Best Friend: “Matt’s Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifest in the Reading-Related Activities

During his pre-unit interview, Matt discussed “I definitely like writing. I like reading [texts] that give me writing ideas.” During his mid-unit interview, after exposure to the Gothic genre through engaging in a variety of popular culture and traditional texts, Matt discussed how engaging with these pieces gave him a newfound perspective for the many things that can make a piece of writing ‘scary.’ Matt explored this aesthetic transaction that he constructed with the Gothic texts in his mid-unit interview and how he transferred it to his own writing: “I’ve written scary stories before for other school assignments and for fun. Reading these [Gothic] books has helped me write in different ways and in different voices.”

When I asked Matt to elaborate on what he means by “different,” he stated:

Like the suspense part, the [Gothic] stories show different ways to do that. Like, in “The Midnight Mass of the Dead,” [one of the short story fictional unit texts] it ends with the creepy scene where the lady’s [main character’s] coat is ripped up. Also, the part where you have to add elements besides blood and gore to really make something scary, you have to add other types of drama sometimes. I’ve always wanted to do that. Like, writing from the point of view of someone kinda struggling, that’s one way.

Matt discussed how reading Gothic texts helped him understand the complexity behind what makes a piece of writing scary and suspenseful. As a writer, Matt appreciated exploring this complexity or aesthetic transaction as a reader of the various unit texts. Like the other participants, he enjoyed the opportunity to further construct this aesthetic transaction, delving into the complexity behind fear and what constitutes something scary

beyond just relying on using horror and gore as he claimed he did in the past. Akin to Emily, Matt appreciated how the Gothic genre often features main characters that are mentally unstable for one reason or another; he also used the reading-related assignments to construct this aesthetic transaction within the context of his compositions in order to increase the story's drama and suspense.

The first line of Matt's Gothic short story illustrates his production of some of these Gothic qualities within this related short story assignment. Matt's story begins with the suspenseful, dramatic line: "Kids, let me tell you a story about how I had to kill my best friend." This line immediately produces suspense and contains dramatic irony in the fact that the narrator is forced to kill someone he loves. The fact that the narrator experienced this traumatic event suggests that this may not be a completely stable or reliable narrator. Thus, even within the first line of this story, there is evidence of Matt (akin to the other participants) taking the traits of the Gothic genre he came to appreciate as a reader through engaging with the unit texts and transferring these traits into his own writing as a producer of these traits. The first chapter of the piece ends on a very similar thought-provoking and dramatic note: "Now kids, I will never get over this pain [of having to kill his best friend]. You can't just shoot it away with the point of a trigger; you just make room for that pain." Though this piece contains elements of violence and gore that Matt discussed are common features in his past creative writing assignments, exploration of what constitutes fear, sadness, death, and destruction aided him in moving his writing beyond producing pieces that simply contain violence and gore to composing pieces with added layers of complexity.

Additionally, Matt's short story revealed a Gothic trope that he had a particular affinity for: Zombies. During an early unit lesson, Matt constructed an aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection between his favorite zombie T.V. show (The Walking Dead) and the Gothic genre. After reflecting how a vampire is common Gothic character, as it manifests in the popular culture series, *Twilight*, in one of the early days of the unit, Matt shared with the class, "Zombies are definitely Gothic. I love anything about zombies and zombie apocalypses! I'm ready if one comes [puts his hand up in a fist. The class laughs]. My favorite T.V. show's *The Walking Dead* [about a zombie apocalypse]." Within the context of this comment, Matt illustrated how he constructed an aesthetic transaction of meaningful connection between the Gothic unit and the fantastic monsters that comprise the unit texts and a favorite T.V. show featuring another common Gothic creature that he watched during leisure time.

Consequently, Matt enhanced this aesthetic transaction within the context of the short story assignment which afforded him the openness and creativity to further engage in this aesthetic transaction by merging a favorite Gothic trope from an out-of-school literacy experience within the context of an academic assignment (Gee, 2011). Indeed, his favorite T.V. show served as a model and inspiration for Matt's story, which also features a zombie apocalypse. In the spirit of the popular culture lessons discussed in the literature review of this study, Matt merged his love of a popular culture Gothic text [a T.V. show] within the context of a school assignment (e.g. Dyson, 1997; Wohlwend, 2012).

In his short story, the narrator is forced to kill his best friend, Michael, because he has been bitten by a zombie:

I see Michael's grey jacket, it wasn't grey anymore, it was dark thick red. My heart literally stopped at the sight of Michael's long blonde hair on the ground along with his body and bloody neck in the small of the sunlight. He was bit. His eyes opened, they were grey and lifeless he let out a groan then grabbed me. I grabbed my pistol.

On reflecting again on this assignment in his post-unit interview, Matt noted "I love how we got to do our own thing with the Gothic short story. That we could just use our imagination. It is so much better than, 'Here, write down about the chapter.'" Matt shared his appreciation for reading-related activities that capitalized on his imaginative capacities, likewise, encouraging his construction of aesthetic transactions (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2005; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). As Matt detailed in his mid-unit interview, the anguish with which he described the thoughts of the narrator adds a layer of complexity to this piece in that it is not just blood and gore, but as Matt described "has drama" as well. Akin to the other participants, Matt appreciated the opportunity to showcase his aesthetic transactions within the context of a reading-related assignment, as opposed to being forced out of the aesthetic domain of reading with an activity such as chapter summaries.

Additionally, Matt's poem, "What are/: Monsters" which is included in its entirety in the beginning of this study, illustrates Matt's further reflection on the complexity behind what produces fear, in this case, the many faces of the "monster." Monsters manifest in various forms throughout the Gothic unit texts: vampires, corrupt authority figures, man-made creations, and within the minds of the many unstable characters. Matt's poem illustrates his aesthetic transaction with the complexity, or idea behind what makes a "monster." He wrote, "There's a different one for all," whether it be "bully," "fictional figure," or "demons inside." Matt's poem is a

tangible representation of an aesthetic transaction that he continuously reconstructed in multiple assignments—the complexity behind what produces fear within Gothic texts.

“I Was Really Able to Get Creative with my Camera:” Ray’s Aesthetic Transactions with the Gothic Unit Texts as Manifest in the Reading-Related Activities

One of the main reasons Ray detailed enjoying the Gothic genre was because of the “atmospheric” qualities that define the settings of Gothic texts. He stated in his mid-unit interview, “The settings are shrouded in mystery. It gives the stories a suspenseful edge, which I like.” Indeed, the settings that define Gothic texts almost become characters unto themselves as they feel alive with nervous energy and anticipation (Jackson et al., 2008). Ray was also an avid movie consumer and producer. He hoped to someday work in film production. In his pre-unit interview, Ray discussed his love of both popular culture and less mainstream artistic films. He was an avid classic and contemporary film consumer.

Within the context of the Gothic studies unit, Ray used multiple activities to merge and explore his love of the Gothic genre, specifically, the “atmospheric” qualities of Gothic story settings, and film production. Following the opening unit lessons, (reflecting on the Gothic qualities shared in the popular culture text series *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Hunger Games*) Ray verbalized how the Gothic permeates popular culture, particularly in the film form, “You really see it [the Gothic] everywhere in a lot of movies,” he announced to the class after these opening lessons. Ray furthered this aesthetic transaction (connecting the Gothic genre to popular culture visual texts) on the cover of his Gothic journal. Upon receiving their black and white marble journals following the introductory unit lessons, Mrs. Carson instructed the students to decorate their journals with both written and visual images they felt represented the Gothic genre.

This assignment capitalized on the students' aesthetic transactional experiences, as it encouraged them to explore their initial personal interpretations of what constitutes 'Gothic.' This reading-related assignment validated their individual interpretations of the genre (Rosenblatt, 1994). Additionally, students had the agency to utilize both written and visual mediums in their journal decorations. The following is an excerpt from my field notes during Ray's journal presentation¹:

Ray walks up to the front of the classroom with his journal in hand. He holds it in front of him as he points to the various visual images on his cover. "Hey peoples. So, this is my journal cover. This is a pic from *Thirty Days of Night*, a really cool movie. This pic [pointing to a black and white image on his cover] is from an early *Frankenstein* movie. Over here's [a picture] of Kristen Stewart from *Twilight*, and this [pointing to another illustration] is from *Silent Hill*" [another film].

This excerpt reveals how Ray used this assignment to enhance his initial aesthetic transaction of recognizing the Gothic as it manifests in various traditional and contemporary films. Akin to Victor and Kurt's music soundtrack, this project reveals Ray's aesthetic transaction of creatively mixing both popular culture Gothic films and icons (*Twilight* and actress Kristen Stewart) with traditional and historical films (a classic film version of *Frankenstein*). He also utilized an out-of-school literacy interest (movies) within the context of an academic assignment (Guthrie, 2008; Vasudevan, 2007). In doing so, he bridged his various Discourses and enhanced his aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts (Gee, 2008/2011).

This particular aesthetic transaction of connecting the Gothic as a genre to film manifested in written form in subsequent journal entry following Mrs. Carson's invitation for students to jot down their thoughts about the genre thus far:

¹ Unfortunately, due to heavy use, all of Ray's decorations on his journal cover fell off by the time I collected the participants' journals at the unit's conclusion. Consequently, I rely on my field notes during his journal presentation as opposed to an actual visual image of his journal.

The Ring
 Saw (cheap thrills)
 Pop outs
 Sound Bible

This excerpt from Ray's list in his Gothic journal reveals how he used this open-ended, free-form assignment to further his aesthetic transaction of connecting the Gothic to film (Dugan, 1997). However, the excerpt also discloses how this aesthetic transaction evolved. The list illustrates how Ray organized Gothic films into further sub-categories. He placed *Saw* into the "cheap thrills" category of Gothic movies. The list also contains special effects (pop outs) and an Internet site used to obtain various sound effects (Sound Bible). These reflections show how Ray moved from thinking about the Gothic as a consumer to considering tools that would aid him as a Gothic film producer. Akin to the other participants, continued reflection on the Gothic genre in reading-related activities in a means that was personally significant results in Ray enhancing and deepening his initial aesthetic transactions with the unit texts.

The evolution of Ray's aesthetic transactions surrounding meaningful connections between the Gothic settings he was exposed to in the unit texts, popular culture and traditional Gothic movies, and Gothic film techniques, culminated in Ray's final project for *Down a Dark Hall* where he and fellow peers created a "teaser trailer" depicting their story interpretation.² Ray directed his classmates (the actors in the film) and produced the video. The trailer (one minute and twenty-two seconds in duration) is entirely black and white, which Ray thought added to the "atmospheric nature of the trailer," as he explained to the class. Before he played the video, he explained, "I use a lot of somber

² There are many identifying features of the students in this video including their faces and names. In order to protect the identity of the participants, I use visuals obtained from Google images that are similar in nature to some of the images that are in Ray's film in lieu of the actual media footage

music and images that are sometimes blurry at first. I was trying to make it [the film] almost poetic.” Thus, in his presentation, Ray distinguishes the setting (mood and tone) of his film as “poetic.” This explanative also reveals Ray’s strategic choices as a filmmaker (accompanying music and distorted black and white images) to create a visual setting that he felt was representative of the written text.

The film commences with a black and white image of a hand rapidly playing piano keys, representing the novel’s main character, Kit’s, possession by a famous dead pianist. It then moves to an initially distorted image that eventually zooms out to reveal a bloody hand frantically writing on a piece of paper, representing how another character in the novel is possessed by a famous writer. A final significant motif of the film is a black and white visual of birds on bare tree branches, which Ray described to the class as he saw “the setting of Blackwood [the school in *Down a Dark Hall*].”

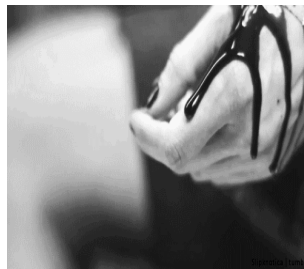


Illustration 4 Visuals similar to those in Ray's film (obtained from Google images)

The movie ends with an eerie cliffhanger: “Will Kit and her friends escape the horrors that Blackwood holds?” This film is a visual representation of Ray’s aesthetic transaction with a specific text in the Gothic unit as it illustrates his interpretation of the novel, particularly, in the setting that defines it. However, the film is also the culmination of earlier aesthetic transactions where Ray meaningfully connected the Gothic genre to various movies and movie-making techniques. Its eerie black and white atmosphere makes it reminiscent of classic horror and Gothic films like *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and

Night of the Living Dead. Ray appears to have internalized the aesthetic qualities of this genre of moviemaking in becoming a producer of his own Gothic film.

The open-ended nature defining the reading-related assignments of the Gothic unit allowed Ray to continuously return and refine an aesthetic transaction, which eventually yielded a product Mrs. Carson described as “the most high-quality assignment I’ve seen in a long time. It rivals the quality of professional films.” Mrs. Carson was particularly surprised by the time and effort Ray invested in this particular assignment: “He’s a very smart, but usually looks for ways to get around doing work ,” she reflected in her post-unit interview. In fact, like Diana and Eliza, Ray continued work on this film, once the official school assignment ends. In response to Ray sharing this information during class, Mrs. Carson later reflected in her post-unit interview, “Our lazy kid is opting to do more work because he’s inspired!”

Ray elaborated on why the activity was personally relevant and meaningful in his post-unit interview:

Ray: The *Down a Dark Hall* project was great.

Me: How so?

Ray: You don’t have to do a certain thing. You could use whatever medium you wanted. You could make a trailer, you could make a poster, or whatever. I think that’s why everyone really enjoyed it because they can choose. I was able to get really creative with my camera and editing software. Whenever I can do that, I’ll enjoy what I’m doing. Just like the anime people, [referring to Eliza’s group], that was their passion and they were able to do it for school, so it was fun for them.

Me: Is using film and editing techniques something you’ve gotten to use before, in school projects?

Ray: Not really. Never for reading.

Me: Never for reading?

Ray: Nope, I’ve never been able to do that before. It’s usually like ‘pick out the facts and write them down’ or something like that. With this, I really got to show what I was thinking with a book I really enjoyed.

This interview transcript excerpt reveals how to Ray, the project transcended “work” in becoming a personally meaningful endeavor where he was able to use a choice medium in which to explore his aesthetic transaction (interpretation of *Down a Dark Hall*). As Ray reflected, utilizing an untraditional medium, in which he aligned an in-school assignment with an out-of-school ‘passion,’ on a text he finds particularly pleasurable was intrinsically meaningful; therefore, he did not view it as “work.” This sentiment aligns with the literature suggesting that personally meaningful activity capitalizing on the aesthetic experience of a text is frequently not perceived as “work” in the traditional sense by students, despite the fact that these aesthetic tasks are often more work and time-consuming than more straightforward, traditional assignments (Eisner, 2002; Greene 2001).

Unfortunately Ray asserted that such opportunities were not typically possible in the reading classroom, which aligns with the literature asserting how students’ out-of-school literacy experiences are often not valued or capitalized upon within the classroom context (Gee, 2008; Gibson, 2010; Hull & Schwartz, 2001; Vasudevan, 2007). In fact, in Ray’s view, the usual reading assignments were more or less the same efferent task of passively picking out “facts” and recording them, which Ray discussed as an obstacle in preventing him from expressing his aesthetic transactions (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). Thus, it is possible that what appeared to be “laziness” by Mrs. Carson might more accurately be described as “resistance” towards assignments that in Ray’s view, lacked connectivity, relevance, and importance because they failed to capitalize on his “lived through” or aesthetic experience of the text, where he furthered his aesthetic text

transactions in a means that was personally significant and meaningful (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Collectively, this chapter illustrates what aesthetic transactions the participants constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit within the context of the reading-related discussions and activities. The data illustrates how pedagogical practices that capitalize on the aesthetic transactional reading experience can enhance readers' initial aesthetic transactions and act as a catalyst for the formation of new ones. The participants constructed myriad aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts. A natural desire to share and communicate these aesthetic transactions served as the basis for the student-centered conversations that take place throughout the unit. Mrs. Carson willingly took a step back and allowed students' aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts to serve as the starting point for these discussions (Connell, 2001; Dugan, 1997; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). This positioning, in tandem with pedagogical techniques that supported students' construction of aesthetic transactions, resulted in discussions where students enhanced their initial aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts. These discussions also acted as a catalyst for students to construct additional aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts that they might not have formed independent of these talks, such as the aesthetic transactions participants collectively constructed with *Frankenstein*.

Thus, students constructed aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts both individually and collectively throughout the unit experience. The sharing of the 'lived through' experience (aesthetic transactions) of reading these Gothic texts, including participants sharing the myriad connections between their in and out-of-school literacy

practices, also afforded many instances for the class to collectively get to know one another on a personal basis. Such sharing also helped participants recognize their shared affinity for this particular genre (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). It also provided students with ample opportunities to create allegiances and alliances between their various Discourses (Gee, 2008/2011). These understandings shaped the dynamic that defined Mrs. Carson's reading classroom as discussed in the next chapter.

Additionally, the reading-related activities gave all of the participants the opportunity to construct aesthetic transactions with the unit texts. The qualities defining the activities promoted exploration and further reflection on the aesthetic transactional experience of these texts. Akin to the discussions, the activities gave the participants the opportunity to merge out-of-school literacy practices (in relation to the Gothic unit texts) within the classroom context (Gee, 2011). As a result, all eight participants used the unit activities to construct aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts that held personal significance and meaning. Participants frequently used the various unit activities to re-construct and revisit aesthetic transactions of personal significance, such as Ray's continuous reflection on the Gothic and connections to film and film production throughout multiple reading-related assignments. All of the participants moved from consumers to producers of the Gothic in ways that were personally meaningful and aligned their in and out-of-school literacies (Gee 2005/2008). These products are tangible representations of some of the aesthetic transactions the participants constructed with the texts in the Gothic studies reading unit. These findings support the notion that pedagogical practices surrounding academic reading experiences hold the potential to

significantly influence students' construction of aesthetic transactions (Dickson & Costigan, 2011, Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

Taken together and across the various texts, discussions, and related activities that comprised the reading unit, all eight participants constructed numerous aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with the texts in the Gothic studies reading unit in ways that meaningfully aligned their in and out-of-school literacy practices (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995; Gee, 2005/2008).



Illustration 5 The two main types of aesthetic transactions participants constructed during the Gothic unit

Both types of aesthetic transactions resulted in all eight participants gleaning meaningful knowledge that enlarged their self and world views. These repeated aesthetic transactions influenced the evolution of participants' Discourses, which the subsequent findings chapter details.

Chapter 6: Participant Discourse Evolvment during the Gothic Reading Unit

Introduction

This study's primary research inquiry focused on what aesthetic transactions adolescent students constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit, which the previous findings chapters detail. Both Gee (2008) and Rosenblatt (1994/1995) argued that meaningful academic reading endeavors, such as those that occur when individuals construct aesthetic transactions with academic texts, (including connections students make across their in and out-of-school literacy practices) yield learning experiences that enrich students' lives as a whole. Rosenblatt (1994/1995) insisted that such transformative experiences (that result when the aesthetic transactional experience of a text is capitalized upon within the classroom context) enlarge students' self and world views in ways that make them not only better readers, but better people.

Likewise, Gee (2008) called for transformative academic literacy endeavors that result when students form allegiances and alliances between their various Discourses in relation to literacy practices. Gee (2008) defined 'Discourse' as follows:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting, as well as using various tools, technologies, or props that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network,' to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role,' or to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctly recognizable fashion. (p. 161)

Akin to Rosenblatt (1994/1995), Gee (2008) also insisted on literacy endeavors that educate students beyond literacy skills. He too argued that the teacher's job is to focus students' attention in using culturally relevant materials that encourage meaningful growth of their Discourses (Gee, 2008). Gee (2008) stated: "Humans at their best are always open to rethinking, to imagining newer and better, more just and more beautiful

words and worlds” (p. 114). In alignment with these ideal academic literacy aims discussed by both Rosenblatt (1994/1995) and Gee (2008) that result from relevant and meaningful academic reading endeavors, a secondary inquiry of this study sought to understand what, if any, participant Discourses evolved during the Gothic studies reading unit, as well as what, if any, Discourses remained unchanged by the unit’s conclusion.

As the previous two chapters illustrated, all eight study participants constructed numerous aesthetic transactions (including the formation of many allegiances and alliances between their in and out-of-school literacy experiences) throughout the course of the Gothic studies reading unit. According to Gee, (2005/2008/2011) meaningful academic work that promotes connectivity amongst students’ various Discourses can result in the growth of these Discourses. Correspondingly, the aesthetic transactions that the participants constructed during the Gothic studies reading unit resulted in transformative experiences that shaped their Discourses. This evolution occurred when newfound knowledge (gained through aesthetic transactions) influenced the development of participants’ self and world views in ways that resulted in meaningful changes to their Discourses. As such, I was interested in understanding what Discourse(s) participants signaled underwent evolution during the reading unit, as well as which one(s) they detailed remained unchanged at the conclusion of the Gothic studies reading unit.

The social constructivism framework I used for this study demanded a complex consideration of the events that informed the research questions. This framework supports exploring the data for evidence suggesting Discourse evolvment, as well as data highlighting resistance to change (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998). In line with case study design, the participants’ responses were carefully considered both

individually and across cases (Creswell, 2007). In order to analyze participant Discourse involvement in response to the Gothic studies reading unit, I relied on discourse analysis, in paying attention to what the participants said across the various data collection methods (Gee, 2008/2011). Specifically, I employed Gee's (2011) discourse analysis tool number 27: "The Big 'D' Discourse tool, which he described as follows:

For any communication, ask how the person is using language, as well as ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, dressing, and using various objects, tools, and technologies in certain sorts of environments to enact a specific socially recognizable identity and engage in one or more socially recognizable activities. Even if all you have for the data is language, ask what Discourse is the language a part of, that is, what kind of person (what identity) this speaker or writer is seeking to enact or be recognized as. What sort of actions, interactions, values, beliefs, and objects, tools, technologies, and environments are associated with this sort of language within a particular Discourse? (p. 201)

Thus, within the context of this study, I examined the data for moments where participants signaled changes to their various Discourses in terms of changes to beliefs, values, actions, etc., as well as the acclimation of literacy 'tools,' as a result of the Gothic unit experience.

As Gee (2008) noted, all individuals are members of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our multiple identities. Within this study context, I paid attention to the ways the Gothic unit impacted students' primary Discourses. An individual's primary Discourse is the first one they acquire and influences the development of subsequent Discourses. However, primary Discourses can evolve over time as a result of other Discourses (Gee, 2008). Thus, I paid attention to participants' signaling of change to their core values, habits, or beliefs that comprised their primary Discourse as a result of their experience within the context of their secondary Discourse of being students in Mrs. Carson's reading class and participation in the Gothic unit.

In this chapter, I also examined the data for moments where participants signaled evolution to their secondary Discourse of being “members,” or in this case, students, in Mrs. Carson’s reading class, as a result of their participation in the Gothic studies reading unit. Mrs. Carson’s reading class, and the students’ identities as literacy students within this community, was a secondary Discourse that all of the participants were members of. Likewise, all eight participants discussed how this secondary Discourse underwent meaningful evolution as a result of the Gothic unit experience. The aim of the Gothic studies reading unit was to promote allegiances and alliances between students’ in and out-of-school literacy practices in order to encourage meaningful evolution and development of their Discourses (Gee, 2008). This chapter highlights these places of evolution, as well as an area resistant to change.

Chapter Overview

Data analysis revealed the two overarching areas where participant Discourse evolution occurred during and after the Gothic studies reading unit. The first domain highlights the changes that being a member of the secondary Discourse of Mrs. Carson’s reading class (and engaging in the Gothic studies reading unit) facilitated to participants’ primary Discourses. This included core self and life understandings influencing participants’ ‘everyday selves’ that they detailed gleaned as a result of the Gothic studies reading unit (Gee, 2008). The second portion of this chapter examines participants’ signaling of meaningful evolution to their secondary Discourse of being a student in Mrs. Carson’s reading class as a result of the Gothic unit experience. This includes the “tools” participants acquired that aided in their success as members of this academic Discourse (Gee, 2008). Additionally, all eight participants detailed how the unit increased the

rapport amongst all the members of this Discourse, which highlights another evolution. Within this domain, I also highlight tensions to secondary Discourse evolution as discussed by some of the participants in relation to the unit failing to influence their overall view on academic reading.

Participants' Primary Discourse Evolution Due to Experiencing the Gothic Studies Reading unit in the Secondary Discourse of Mrs. Carson's Reading Class

The first section of this chapter highlights how the Gothic studies reading unit, as experienced by the participants in being members of the secondary Discourse of Mrs. Carson's reading class, caused meaningful evolution to some of their core values, beliefs, and ideals that comprised their primary Discourses. These changes include self and life understandings the participants detailed garnering as a result of the unit experience.

"Why Not Just be your Old, Weird Self?" Participants' Shifting Personal Beliefs and Values on 'Normalcy' in Response to the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

As an earlier chapter of the study details, it is common for Gothic texts to feature characters that are monstrous, flawed, and/or not 'normal' in some way (Hogle, 1999; Jones, 2002; McGillis, 2008; Wellington, 2008). This state of (not) normalcy often sets characters apart and/or in opposition of others (Blackford, 2011/2012). As a result, these liminal characters exist on societal outskirts. Yet, as an earlier section also details, these characters frequently succeed and thrive despite these obstacles (Coats, 2008). As a whole, Gothic texts break boundaries defining 'normalcy' (Jackson et al., 2008). Likewise, as discussed in chapter four, adolescence is also a period of liminality, where individuals exist on the threshold of adulthood. Due to abrupt and numerous biological and psychological changes adolescents may often not feel 'normal' or, they may even feel 'monstrous' (Berger, 2000; McGillis, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994). This parallel between

the Gothic genre and adolescence as a developmental stage afforded all of the participants various moments of meaningful connection as evident in the previous chapters.

Consequently, by the unit's conclusion, four participants, (Eliza, Emily, Anna, and Matt) discussed how their repeated aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity with the liminal Gothic characters that are not 'normal' caused a fundamental shift to their perspectives, values, and beliefs surrounding the concept of 'normalcy' in ways that were developmentally meaningful. These changes positively impacted this aspect of these participants' primary Discourses (Gee, 2008). Akin to Wellington's (2008) study that documented how a Gothic unit in a college setting liberated older adolescent students from conventions surrounding normalcy, these participants detailed similar newfound personal freedom. This development aligns with the research suggesting that meaningful and relevant literacy experiences arising from the use of culturally relevant materials can positively influence individuals' various Discourses (Gee, 2005/2008).

During their post-unit interviews, Eliza, Matt, and Anna discussed how Gothic texts helped them realize that no one is 'normal.' In reflecting on normalcy, Eliza noted, "It [the unit] made me think what's normal? Nothing's normal anyway." Eliza detailed obtaining newfound understanding on normalcy in discussing how the unit problematized the concept for her (Wellington, 2008). This shift in personal values and beliefs signaled evolution to Eliza's primary Discourse as a result of learning experiences within the secondary Discourse of Mrs. Carson's reading class and participation in the Gothic reading unit.

Anna also discussed similar evolution to her primary Discourse. In her post-unit interview, upon reflecting on what, if anything, she learned from the Gothic unit experience, Anna stated:

The whole having main characters that are flawed and not normal and have problems is a great trait. A lot of Gothic pieces have that. They are all not normal and it's better to see characters overcome and transform. That's a really great piece [trait] because it makes you realize that no one's perfect, so it makes you realize it's [normalcy] not a big deal.

This excerpt reveals that Anna's continuous construction of meaningful aesthetic transactions with the Gothic trait of characters that are not normal afforded her the eventual realization that 'normal' is a relative term. More importantly, in Anna's recognition that everyone was unique and not 'normal' in some way, made her (like Eliza) disvalue the concept of normalcy. This shift in her core values and beliefs illustrate how repeated aesthetic transactions with this Gothic text trait within the context of this secondary Discourse altered the way she views herself (Gee 2005/2008). This shift signaled a positive change to her primary Discourse as a result of her experience within a secondary Discourse.

Relatedly, during their post-unit interviews, Emily and Matt discussed how repeatedly constructing aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity with characters of Gothic texts that are not normal caused them to not only accept, but celebrate their own self-professed 'not normalcy' by the unit's conclusion. In his post-unit interview, upon reflecting on what he learned from the Gothic reading unit, Matt responded, "One thing it [the Gothic unit] showed me is just, that being normal's overrated." When I asked Matt to elaborate on this affirmation, he responded, "I don't know I feel like it's boring. Why not just be your old, weird self?" These sentiments illustrate how through repeated

aesthetic transactions with this trait as it manifests in the various unit texts, Matt's personal value surrounding the concept of normalcy shifted. He affirmed how the unit taught him that it is better to be your "old, weird self." During her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson discussed how she too noticed some students' shifting perspectives, values, beliefs, and ideas on the concept of normalcy. She stated, "If anything, the Gothic says, 'You are allowed to be unique. You are allowed to be different and that's okay!' I think this [trait] really spoke to them." Mrs. Carson's sentiment aligns with the literature noting how the Gothic genre, in celebration of (not) normalcy, can result in such liberating experiences for adolescent readers (Wellington, 2008; Wisker, 2007).

For Emily, this shift to her primary Discourse was particularly dramatic. Emily initially asserted in her pre-unit interview that she valued the status of being popular and enjoyed reading books that have those models. However, during her mid-unit interview, when I solicited Emily's general feelings about the Gothic texts, she responded, "It's interesting...so many Gothic texts are from the point of view of someone who doesn't fit in. Like, in the *Twilight* series, Bella's an outcast and then there's a popular crowd. I think a lot of people today need that kind of guide." This reflection showcases Emily moving away from the texts featuring characters that were her models, to reflecting on texts where individuals are not considered part of the "in crowd." She detailed how "people" can use that kind of model, or "guide." This statement suggested a shift in Emily's core values and beliefs surrounding the value of normalcy as it relates to 'popularity.' This reflection suggests that Emily began to place less value on this status as a result of her aesthetic transactions with the many (not) 'normal' characters in Gothic texts.

This shift in core values and beliefs within the context of Emily's primary Discourse came full circle by the unit's conclusion. Early in the unit lessons, when Mrs. Carson solicited the class's reaction to the Gothic unit, Emily raised her hand and shared, "I don't get it. I don't have anything in common with it." Upon later reflection of that statement in her post-unit interview, Emily confessed: "I shut it [the Gothic] out because I thought it was weird and outcast-ish. I didn't want to be involved with that." However, Emily unabashedly announced, "Everything's Gothic. I'm Gothic!" to the entire class during one of the final days of the unit upon Mrs. Carson asking the class what they learned from this experience.

During her post-unit interview, when I asked Emily to reflect on this dramatic revelation (as well as the courage I assumed it took for her to make such a public admission) she responded:

I think I was attracted to like the bubbly girl genre because I wanted to know about older, popular girls and how to get there. Now I feel like, 'Oh, I don't need to be that.' That's what kind of surprised me about the Gothic genre. I kind of found more characters that portrayed my kind of feelings and stuff. I'm kind of messed up like them...and a lot of times I'm not happy. Before this unit, I think I was like pretending, I was trying to be something I'm not. Now, I'm like 'Who cares? I'm Gothic.' This [unit] has described my situation so much better than other units have. These people [Gothic characters] did it, why can't I. It's like, who cares anymore? I need to step up my game; I need to be in a sense like that hero to myself. I need to be that person.

At the end of Emily's impassioned speech, neither one of us said anything for quite some time. Admittedly, before the advent of this study, I found Rosenblatt (1994/1994) and Gee's (2005/2011) research on how literacy can meaningfully change people's lives inspiring; however, I was relatively skeptical as to its real life applicability. However, Emily's admission showed me that meaningful reading endeavors can and do act as a catalyst for revolutionary changes that profoundly shape students' lives. Emily came to

recognize and publicly celebrate her newly discovered ‘Gothicness’ through her repeated aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity with Gothic characters that are (not) normal as manifest in the unit texts (Wellington, 2008). She took this newfound self-understanding one step further in her recognition that in order to be truly happy, she needed to be her own Gothic hero. Emily realized that she held the power to slay her personal ‘monsters.’ This reflection illustrates Emily’s primary Discourse undergoing dramatic developmental changes as a result of engaging with the Gothic studies reading unit within the context of her secondary Discourse.

Such a transformation that occurs through repeated aesthetic transactional experiences is the type of ideal reading experience that Rosenblatt (1994/1995) insisted is critical for adolescents during this developmental stage because they are figuring out who they are. Thus, Emily gleaned meaningful text knowledge, but even more importantly, self-knowledge where she not only acknowledged her personal ‘monsters,’ she appreciated herself more for them. These aesthetic transactions that occurred within the context of this secondary Discourse caused meaningful evolution to some of the participants’ primary Discourses in regards to the concept of ‘normalcy’ as it applied to their everyday lives (Gee, 2008).

I Feel Like I Kind of Get Why People do Weird Things Sometimes. I Understand It More Now: Participants’ Shifting Beliefs and Values Surrounding Life Understandings in Response to the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

During their post-unit interviews, Victor, Kurt, Renzo, and Emily reflected on how experiencing aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with Gothic texts featuring characters that are not normal and suffer from more severe mental instabilities broadened their outlook and world views that comprise their primary Discourses

(Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). They discussed how reading texts featuring these characters gave them a better understanding for people who suffer from mental issues in real life that they did not necessarily have personal experience with. This shift marked another positive evolution to these participants' core values and beliefs about others within the context of their primary Discourse as a result of this unit experience in their secondary Discourse of Mrs. Carson's reading class (Gee 2005/2008).

As Emily noted in her post-unit interview, exploring the characteristic of mental instability "really showed me a lot, it broadened my horizons to different types of people." She reflected that she constantly saw similar issues of mental instability in her peers. Specifically, Emily discussed how some of them engaged in self-injury due to anxiety and depression: "A lot of kids I know are self-harming, like cutting, not eating, and things like that. It's really sad and it [Gothic texts] kind of touched on that...like, why people do things like that." Akin to this statement, Victor, during his post-unit interview, reflected, "I feel like now, I kinda get why people do weird things sometimes. I understand it more now from reading these Gothic stories." Kurt also offered a similar admission during his post-unit interview, "I used to just think of these people [in Gothic texts] as, mad people, [laughs] like, totally weird. But, I learned a lot about different people through this [unit experience]."

Such statements suggest that repeated aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast within the context of participants' secondary Discourse as students in Mrs. Carson's reading class (and participation in the Gothic unit) caused shifts to some participants' beliefs surrounding those with mental issues and challenges in a means that made them more understanding of people (Wellington, 2008; Wisker, 2007). These

statements signaled positive evolution to an aspect of participants' primary Discourses as a result of their experiences within the secondary Discourse of Mrs. Carson's reading class. Upon reflecting on this change, Mrs. Carson, during her post-interview, noted: "The Gothic [unit] had them [the students] digging for truth? What does this say about people? What does this say about humanity? About the human experience? It's really helpful, especially for middle school students, where, a lot of times, it's all about them." This statement revealed Mrs. Carson's belief that it can be challenging for adolescents to vicariously 'step into the shoes' of people in different situations. Such sentiments align with adolescent developmental research (Berger, 2000). Developmentally, adolescents are just beginning to understand human complexities. This understanding comes at a time where they are keenly focused on the many changes they are personally experiencing. This phenomenon can lead to adolescents being insularly focused, making understanding of others in different circumstances challenging (Berger, 2000).

However, Mrs. Carson believed that students' participation in the Gothic studies reading unit aided them in becoming more understanding individuals, which aligns with academic reading endeavors that hold positive moral implications for making students not only better readers, but better people (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994). Likewise, during his post-unit interview, Ray also discussed how the Gothic unit taught him about people in ways that acted as a catalyst for evolution to his primary Discourse in terms of how he valued and viewed others:

There's so so much I learned [in the Gothic studies reading unit]! It's really like cultural capital, that's what my parents would call it. My head's almost exploding with it right now [laughs]! I got it from so many nooks and crannies in this unit, just learning about diverse people, like all the different characters and my classmates. I definitely got a lot of cultural capital.

This quotation reveals Ray's insistence that the Gothic unit increased his "cultural capital" in being exposed to diverse individuals and situations. Thus, repeated aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with the Gothic text quality of complicating notions surrounding normalcy and texts featuring characters with mental instability acted as a catalyst to meaningful change in these participants' beliefs and attitudes surrounding others.

This change represents evolution to these participants' primary Discourses as a result of the Gothic unit experience within the context of their secondary Discourse as students in Mrs. Carson's reading class. Taken together, these participants discussed how they had increased understanding for those around them, which align with the ideal aims of education that both Rosenblatt (1994/1995) and Gee (2005/2008) insisted result from meaningful and relevant academic reading endeavors. These experiences constitute learning that holds moral implications that increase individuals' humanity (Gee 2005/2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995; Wellington, 2008).

Upon further reflection on these valuable insights in her post-unit interview, Emily also discussed how such knowledge, gained through meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with the Gothic trait of featuring liminal characters that are not normal in some way, not only helped her, but she felt would help adolescents at large:

This Gothic stuff, it's really stuff we [adolescents] all experience. I wish teachers would talk about this kind of [Gothic] stuff more, instead of those stupid assemblies about bullying. The last one was such a joke. There were three people, and one pretended to be a bully and then they talked about it. It's stupid. Maybe if there weren't rules and regulations for teachers, like, 'Oh you can't talk about that,' those feelings everyone knows are there, but no one can talk about. Maybe it [school] would be a better place if we could actually read and talk about the stuff we talked about with this Gothic unit in class.

This interview excerpt reveals a number of points. First, Emily was all too aware that there are typically restrictions on the topics that can be discussed within the classroom context. This silencing and ignoring of ‘taboo’ topics was something that Mrs. Carson also discussed. For instance, following the tragic school shootings in Newton in December 2012, Mrs. Carson expressed dismay to me that she was told by administration that she could not discuss this topic with the students. Akin to this sentiment, Emily illustrated awareness that the classroom was not typically a space where sensitive issues (such as those that arose regarding the concept of normalcy as manifested in Gothic texts) can be discussed. Moreover, she had harsh critiques for what she felt are the ineffective ways that Hillside tried to address understanding and support for individual diversity, such as assemblies about bullying. Emily asserted that such attempts failed to alter adolescents’ primary Discourses in terms of evolution to their values and beliefs about individual differences.

Emily believed that the Gothic studies reading unit could have similar transformative influences in other classroom contexts. When I asked her to elaborate on this idea, the following conversation results:

Emily: There’s a lot of stuff we just can’t say in school, if you bring up the nerd, or the popular girl, or the outcast, teachers just stay away from that. They just say that like stupid phrase [in a sarcastic mimicking voice] ‘Everyone is different.’

Me: So you are saying that teachers are aware of these stereotypes...

Emily: Yeah, they know they exist, but they just ignore them by saying things like ‘Everyone’s different. Everyone’s equal.’ But, with the Gothic [unit], we actually got to really read and talk about some of these issues in class.

Me: So, usually these topics are like ignored?

Emily: Yeah, a lot of teachers they just ignore what’s going on.

Me: So, how do you think the Gothic unit helps with this kind of thing?

Emily: I mean, it helped us relate to a lot of people because we read about different kinds of people. I think if teachers talked about this kind of stuff and took it away from the whole health thing and building self-confidence thing. I think school would be a better place if they didn’t reject this kind of thing.

Honestly, I can see this unit working in a lot of places, like different classroom situations. I think it would help a lot of people.

This reflection showcases Emily's belief that the reading classroom can and should be a place where reading endeavors act as a catalyst for moral development, where texts and related pedagogical practices educate and better people as individuals in the ways that Gee (2008) and Rosenblatt (1994/1995) called for. Emily maintained that the literary works offered the opportunity to explore some of the complexities and varieties of life experiences. For her, the Gothic unit opened the doors to some of the 'monsters' that she felt everyone knew existed, but ignored, or repressed. In confronting these 'monsters,' Emily believed that she became a better person. She maintained that such positive evolution could occur to students' primary Discourse at large through the catalyst of engaging with Gothic texts if the unit experience occurred in other adolescent classroom settings. Taken together, repeated aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with the concept of normalcy caused evolution to some participants' values and beliefs regarding their personal differences and diversity at large.

Additionally, all eight participants discussed evolution to their secondary Discourse as "members" or students in Mrs. Carson's reading class as a result of the Gothic studies reading unit. Participants signaled the various literacy "tools" that the unit aided them in acquiring, how the unit positively influenced the rapport of the class as a whole, and finally, how the unit acted as a catalyst to alter some participants' beliefs, values, and ideas about academic reading within the classroom context. Contrastingly, some participants discussed how the Gothic unit failed to alter their views regarding the Discourse of academic reading as it existed within classroom contexts and reasons for this resistance.

Participants' Secondary Discourse Evolution Due to Experiencing the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

Reading These Gothic Books Have Helped me Write in Different Ways: Participants Acquire Literacy “Tools” within the Context of their Secondary Discourse as Literacy Students in Mrs. Carson’s Reading Class

In Gee’s (2008) view, any Discourse is mastered primarily through acquisition, which he defines under his “acquisition principle:”

Literacy is a product of acquisition, not learning, that is, it requires exposure to models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings, and (overt) teaching is not liable to be very successful-it may even get in the way...For anything close to acquisition to occur, classrooms must constitute active apprenticeships in ‘academic’ social practices, and, in most cases, must connect with these social practices as they are also carried on outside the classroom. (pp. 177, 180)

Thus, Gee (2008) argued that literacy is acquired in exposure to models in natural ways that hold meaning and relevance for students. As explored in the previous chapters, the Gothic studies reading unit contained culturally relevant materials that merged participants’ in and out-of-school literacy practices. This academic unit connected with participants’ literacy practices as conducted “socially” outside the classroom (Gee, 2008). As previously illustrated, the participants constructed aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with these texts throughout the unit. These aesthetic transactions resulted in participants gleaning meaningful knowledge through related discussions and activities that they, individually and collectively, shaped and designed. Thus, participants were “active apprentices” within this unit experience (Gee, 2008).

The combination of text + context of the Gothic studies reading unit provided an environment for the acquisition of literacy. The students were “apprentices” or, as offered by Ray in the previous chapter, “artists” that actively personalized the ways in which they experienced and learned within the context of the unit (Gee, 2008). Consequently, in their

post-unit interviews, all eight participants signaled that they acquired various literacy “tools” within the context of their secondary Discourse of being students in Mrs. Carson’s reading class and participation in the Gothic reading unit (Gee, 2008).

All eight participants discussed how engaging in the Gothic studies reading unit helped them acquire full understanding and appreciation for the Gothic as a literary genre. For example, as Eliza noted in her post-unit interview, “Before, [the unit] it was just like, Gothic equals vampires. But, now I realize it’s so much more than that! It’s like a mish-mash of mystery, suspense, horror, and romance.” Matt, Kurt, and Anna also detailed rather pigeon-hole views of the genre prior to this experience. In fact, Kurt joked in his post-unit interview how he did not even equate the genre to reading: “I thought it [Gothic] just referred to architecture, so now I know about a genre I didn’t even know existed!” Thus, Kurt detailed how knowledge on the Gothic as a literary genre is a newfound “tool” he acquired within the context of this secondary Discourse (Gee, 2008). Diana discussed this concept in even greater detail during her post-unit interview:

I’ve learned first and foremost that Gothic traits are very widespread. They can encompass many things. They can encompass darker things like death and destruction, but there’s also a flip side. Like heroism is a big part. So, it can be light and dark.

This quotation shows how like Eliza, through constructing numerous aesthetic transactions throughout the unit, Diana acquired a complex understanding of a literary genre in terms of what it can encompass and how it permeates literature at large. Thus, understanding the complexity of this particular genre was a reading “tool” the participants signaled acquiring as a result of participating in this unit.

All eight participants also discussed how acquiring an understanding of the Gothic as a literary genre, and the many traits it encompasses, improved their reading

comprehension. Diana, Kurt, Anna, Eliza, and Emily discussed how the unit helped them learn to pay better attention to textual detail because they were able to, as Kurt notes, “pick out Gothic elements in a lot of different books. Like, I just read *The Ranger’s Apprentice* and I realized as I was reading that I was thinking about the Gothic traits that are in that book. So it’s [the unit] definitely helped me with reading.” Anna reflected, “I realize even books that aren’t ‘Gothic’ can have some of the traits, so it’s just something I think about now. I see Gothic things in a lot of books now.” Through repeatedly constructing aesthetic transactions with the traits of the Gothic genre as they manifest in the unit texts, these participants expressed how they acquired a ‘Gothic’ lens for the reading of texts in general and how this “tool” aided them in analysis (Gee, 2008).

Emily and Diana also discussed how the Gothic studies reading unit aided them in becoming more detail-oriented readers, which indicates another reading “tool” participants signaled acquiring as a result of the Gothic unit (Gee, 2008). As Emily noted:

It’s [the unit] helped me in analyzing when I read, like picking it apart, because of all the predictions and everything. I feel like as soon as I see something that stands out, I’ll think ‘Oh, I’ll remember that because I’m sure that’s going to lead to something in the end.’

Diana echoed a similar sentiment in her post-unit interview:

This unit’s helped me pay more attention to detail when I read. Because, like with the Gothic, things are sometimes brought up that don’t seem important, but then they become important. So, now I’m looking for connections.

Thus, these participants discussed the helpfulness of predicting in terms of reading comprehension. Using this kind of transaction as a result of the mysterious elements of the Gothic genre aided them in acquiring a reading “tool” of paying attention to textual detail that transferred over to their general reading.

Finally, Matt and Ray discussed how the Gothic studies reading unit acted as a catalyst for evolution to their secondary Discourse as students in Mrs. Carson's class by giving them new literacy "tools" that aided in their creative producing of short stories and film. In his post-unit interview, Matt reflected, "Reading these Gothic stories from different voices written in different ways. It's given me stuff to try out in my writing." This quote reveals how the newfound knowledge Matt acquired as a result of the many aesthetic transactions he constructed with the Gothic texts aided him in the acquisition of new "tools" that he transferred to his creative writing. Likewise, Ray noted,

It's [the Gothic unit] helped me in writing, filming, editing, drawing even. I pay a lot more attention to setting up a mood. It's just opened my mind up to new traits in literature that I can use in my stories and movies, especially like what makes a captivating setting.

Ray detailed how acquisition of literacy "tools" through participation in the Gothic unit within his secondary Discourse as a student in Mrs. Carson's class spilled over into his multiple literacies both in and outside of school (Gee, 2008). These newfound tools made him not only a more savvy reader, but also a more creative producer.

As Mrs. Carson noted in her post-unit interview, "They linked the Gothic across everything-books, movies, videos, current events, themselves, and each other. They are the experts of the Gothic. This unit is *theirs*." Mrs. Carson described that the myriad aesthetic transactions the students constructed throughout the Gothic unit across various texts, situations, and amongst each other; this activity gave them ownership of the academic material. Like Mrs. Carson's emphasis on students' ownership of the unit, Emily also expressed possession of Gothic knowledge on the final day of the unit. "We own this," she insisted in response to another student sharing that he really understood

the genre as a result of the unit experience. Ownership of literacy knowledge comes from students being active apprentices amidst culturally relevant materials (Gee, 2008).

Moreover, it is significant that Emily's discourse contained the collective "we" in discussing the class's ownership of the Gothic as a literary genre at large. Emily continuously witnessed the class's active apprenticeship in the Gothic genre through the students sharing their aesthetic transactions with the unit texts in related-reading discussions and activities. Over time, this sharing increased the class's rapport where, within the context of this secondary Discourse, the students became a community of readers vested in their individual and collective aesthetic transactions with the Gothic genre. This dynamic was evidence of another positive evolution to participants' secondary Discourse as students in Mrs. Carson's reading class as a result of their participation in the Gothic studies reading unit.

"The Sense of Community in the Classroom. That's What I'll Remember:" The Development of a 'Gothic Club' within Mrs. Carson's Reading Class

In order for academic reading to meaningfully shape individuals' Discourses, teachers must view it as public act; under this dynamic reading becomes a collective endeavor and a socially shared experience (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009). This phenomenon occurs when teachers use culturally relevant materials and allow students to use these materials as active apprentices within the classroom (Gee, 2008). Within the context of this study, this positioning includes sharing of what the reading experience is for each individual, or the aesthetic transactions students construct with texts. As discussed in the previous chapter, participants naturally wanted to communicate their aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts. Mrs. Carson capitalized on this natural enthusiasm that arose from using these culturally relevant materials by encouraging

dialogue surrounding these aesthetic transactions. This sharing enhanced participants' previous aesthetic transactions, and also acted as a catalyst for them to collectively construct new ones (Connell, 2008; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003).

Additionally, students got to know one another through the reading-related discussions and activities that capitalized on the aesthetic transactional experiences of the texts. The activities incorporated participants' many out-of-school literacies, so the class got to know one another beyond their 'reading student' personas (Bean, 2002/2003; Gee, 2011). The class learned of Anna's love of blood and gore, Eliza's passion for anime, Victor and Kurt's musical inclinations, Michael's affinity for zombies, Mrs. Carson's real life 'Gothic' experiences, and Ray's love of classic and contemporary film. These are only a few of the many understandings this class realized about its constituents as a result of their participation in the Gothic studies reading unit.

Under this ideal text + context combination, reading became a personally meaningful and liberating endeavor where students not only learned about themselves, but one another because they were continuously sharing their "lived through" or aesthetic transactional text experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). This participation afforded the members of this Discourse the opportunity to interpret a work collectively and to get to know one another on a personal basis; both opportunities increased classroom relatedness and rapport (Connell 2001/2003; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). As a result of this dynamic, all of the participants detailed how their secondary Discourse of being 'members' or students of Mrs. Carson's reading class underwent evolution. Their collective experience of the Gothic unit positively altered the classroom dynamic and level of rapport amongst all the members of this Discourse. As Ray noted in his post-unit

interview, regarding what he believes was the most enjoyable and memorable aspect of the unit, was the “sense of community in the classroom. That’s what I’ll remember the most.” Likewise, as noted by Mrs. Carson in her post-unit interview, “It’s [the class] become this like underground Gothic club. We’ve become our own little subculture within the school.”

There was evidence that this ‘Gothic club’ or growing Gothic identity of this secondary Discourse was developing early in the unit experience as evident in my observations of the class’s collective behaviors, actions, and interactions. Gee (2008) noted that Discourses are recognizable by the shared activities, language, and behaviors, which only the members themselves fully understand and appreciate. During the third week of the unit, before Mrs. Carson began reading aloud short stories featuring ghosts, Ray raised his hand and asked Mrs. Carson, “Can I turn off the lights?” presumably, to add to the ‘Gothic’ atmosphere of the classroom. Mrs. Carson smiled and agreed. For the remainder of the unit, Ray automatically got up and turned off the classroom lights each time Mrs. Carson read something aloud. This act became an unquestionably recognizable ritual by members of this Discourse (Gee, 2008).

Another ritual developed when Mrs. Carson asked the students to share their newly decorated Gothic journals (featuring words and pictures the students chose that they felt was representative of the genre) in the second week of the unit. After Mrs. Carson selected the first person to share, she told that student, “Pick your next victim.” The class laughed at this statement. This Gothic discourse, in regards to it being the student’s job to select the next person (victim), became another repeated ritual each time students took turns to share something they created during the unit. These rituals, unique

to this particular Discourse, aided in the class's building of rapport. These actions and interactions became collective, shared, and enjoyable performances within this Discourse in relation to the Gothic studies reading unit (Gee, 2008).

Insider jokes also surfaced and were repeated amongst the members of this Discourse, which increased rapport (Gee, 2008). For example, after reading a chapter of *Down a Dark Hall* that ends with a scary cliffhanger, Mrs. Carson was quiet for a moment and then loudly uttered, "Duh, duh, duhmmm!" in utilizing onomatopoeia reflecting the scariness of the chapter ending. The students laughed in response. This sound effect became an insider joke within this Discourse. Subsequently, each time the class collectively came across another scary cliffhanger, someone, or multiple people uttered, "Duh, duh, duhmmm!" and everyone laughed. As insiders within this 'Gothic club' the students understood what this sound effect referred to in ways that outsiders to this Discourse would not (Gee, 2008). As Ray noted regarding some of the Gothic insider jokes within this Discourse in his mid-unit interview, "Sometimes people [from other classes] come into our class to take a test or use our computer, and you can tell they have no idea what we're talking about!" Ray affirmed his membership to this Discourse and drew a distinction between insider and outsider knowledge (Gee, 2008).

The class also collectively developed unique sayings that were repeated throughout the Gothic unit. For example, while reading "Cat in Glass," (which the class read following "The Yellow Wallpaper"), Mrs. Carson made the joke that this narrator was going "all yellow wallpaper too!" She made this statement in reference to the narrator of "Cat in Glass" being mentally unstable like the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper." The class laughed, and after that, the expression "going all yellow

wallpaper” was repeated by both Mrs. Carson and some of the students throughout the remainder of the unit in reference to someone going crazy. As Mrs. Carson reflected in her post-unit interview:

When I say, ‘go all yellow wallpaper,’ they know what I’m talking about! They laugh because even though they didn’t like it [the story]. They suffered through it and can laugh about it now. So, it was still a collective experience even though it wasn’t a necessarily enjoyable one.

Mrs. Carson asserted that the shared experience of reading a text (even one she believed was not necessarily enjoyed) added to the collective experience of the members of this Discourse in ways that built rapport (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Relatedly, during post-unit interviews, three participants (Anna, Matt, and Victor) explicitly discussed times where their collective growing Gothic identity within the context of their secondary Discourse of Mrs. Carson’s class was something that outsiders did not understand. Anna relayed a particular example:

We [Anna and another classmate from Mrs. Carson’s class] were talking about the Gothic genre in science class and all these people started trying to chirping in and then we looked at each other like, ‘They have no idea what we’re talking about. They really don’t get this [the Gothic] like we do.’

This affirmation illustrates Anna’s belief that outsiders to this developing ‘Gothic community’ did not understand the Discourse’s inherent values, beliefs, and ideas. As members of this Discourse, Anna signaled how she and a fellow classmate were insiders to knowledge that people on the outside of this Discourse did not understand (Gee, 2008).

Akin to this belief, Mrs. Carson reflected in her post-unit interview, “They [the students] feel empowered by this Gothic knowledge. It’s part of a much bigger phenomenon, but we’re the only ones who realize it. It’s like that light bulb went on.”

Mrs. Carson discussed how the students felt empowered by their knowledge of something

that was a phenomenon amongst their peers (enjoyment of the Gothic genre), but was only being explicitly discussed and studied within this particular Discourse. Such positioning furthered the bonds amongst the members of this Discourse.

A similar sentiment is discussed by Victor in his post unit interview:

Victor: I sometimes try to tell other people about this [the Gothic unit], like how much fun it is, you know, what we're doing and they say, 'It's probably not fun.'

Me: Really?

Victor: Yeah, they think we're all just making it up. They don't believe us. They're doing the usual boring school stuff.

Me: So, you're saying that they don't believe you when you say that you're having fun in reading class?

Victor: No, they don't. It's because of their own class. They don't do these fun things. So, they don't get it, how ELA [English Language Arts] can be fun.

This interview excerpt reveals Victor's belief that outsiders did not believe his assertion that his ELA class was enjoyable because their own secondary Discourse experiences within the context of their reading classes were not enjoyable. Victor asserted that his peers did not believe him because "They're doing the usual boring school stuff." Thus, Victor believed that the values, beliefs, and attitudes that comprised his peers' secondary Discourses within their ELA classes rendered them unable to understand how another class Discourse could have such a different dynamic.

During her mid-unit interview, Mrs. Carson also discussed how the class was collectively taking on the identity of a "Gothic club," which she believed positively set their Discourse apart from other ELA Discourses at Hillside:

Mrs. Carson: They [the students] have their own little insider jokes about the Gothic genre now. I mean at one lunch table is Emily and Anna. I've definitely heard them tell the other girls at their table things like, "You're not as cool as us. You're not doing this [the Gothic unit]."

Me: That's interesting.

Mrs. Carson: Yes, it's like they're vying, or I don't know, they just feel fortunate to be in this class, to be a part of this. This is the hot place to be and the hot topic. It's kind of cool to see this as our little underground culture. The same kind

of thing happened at Ray and Matt's lunch table. They pull me over to talk about this [Gothic] stuff. It's like they're proud that we have our own little Gothic club going on.

This excerpt reveals Mrs. Carson expressing how the students asserted their membership to what she felt was an exclusive Discourse (Gee, 2008). As a result of the many aesthetic transactions the participants constructed individually and collectively throughout the Gothic studies reading unit, Mrs. Carson believed her class became a "hot" place to be because of the high level of student engagement.

As a result of the students being active apprentices with these culturally relevant materials (Gothic texts), the participants explicitly discussed how the rapport amongst all the members of this Discourse improved as a result of the Gothic studies reading unit (Gee, 2008). As Mrs. Carson noted, "There's a real sense of belonging." Specifically, participants detailed how they became closer to Mrs. Carson, as well as one another. These changes signaled additional positive evolutions within the context of this secondary Discourse during the Gothic studies reading unit.

All eight participants detailed how active apprenticing in the Gothic studies reading unit, in sharing and collectively constructing aesthetic transactions with culturally relevant materials (including the connections students made across their various literacy practices) with Mrs. Carson and vice versa, improved the teacher-student relationship. This evolution aligns with the research indicating how the sharing of aesthetic transactions with texts can increase teacher/student rapport (Connell, 2001; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994). As Rosenblatt (1994) noted, when teachers are open and receptive to students' aesthetic transactions with texts, such receptiveness builds trust. Students witnessed their teacher prioritizing their individual experiences of literature. This

prioritization showed students that these expressions ‘counted’ as legitimate responses to literature within the classroom context (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005).

For example, Eliza discussed this evolution in her relationship with Mrs. Carson during her mid-unit interview as a result of Mrs. Carson sharing the aesthetic transactions she constructed with the Gothic unit texts:

She [Mrs. Carson] shared a lot of personal stuff in this unit. So, I sort of feel like I know her a bit better because now it feels like you are talking with someone in your age group. Like we talked about the spiritual experiences we had and she shared one too. So, it’s easy to connect with her, it’s not like when you are talking to an adult or something. It’s like you are talking to one of your friends.

Eliza discussed how Mrs. Carson modeling and sharing her own aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts blurred the typical boundaries defining ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). They acted as a catalyst for Eliza seeing her teacher as a trusted confidant. Thus, aesthetic transactions became a meaningful way for Mrs. Carson to bridge the teacher-student gap.

Moreover, the Gothic studies reading unit fused contemporary and classic texts. Throughout the unit, students were encouraged to share their aesthetic transactions of meaningfully connecting the unit texts to ‘texts’ in their leisure reading practices (Gee, 2008/2011). Mrs. Carson also shared her aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity between the Gothic official ‘texts’ and the genre as it existed outside of the classroom as highlighted in previous chapters. This creation of allegiances and alliances between participants’ various Discourses positively influenced the dynamic of Mrs. Carson’s reading class. Throughout the Gothic studies reading unit, students continuously saw how Mrs. Carson respected their out-of-school literacy identities, which increased

rapport (Dyson, 2007; Gee, 2008; Guthrie, 2008; Knoester, 2009; Marsh, 2005; Vasudevan, 2007; Wohlwend, 2013).

As Eliza noted, “Mrs. Carson actually knows what we’re reading. She actually reads some of what we read, which is really interesting.” The repetition of the word ‘actually’ in Eliza’s discourse describing Mrs. Carson’s understanding of what the students were reading outside of the classroom and sharing in this experience, suggests that Eliza felt such a dynamic was unique. Ray offered a similar reflection in his mid-unit interview: “She’s [Mrs. Carson] has shown that she’s open-minded to whatever we like to share. It just helps us work better, like a teacher to student.” Ray explicitly described how Mrs. Carson, in affording participants the opportunity to share and collectively construct aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity between the official unit texts and the Gothic as it resides in students’ out-of-school literacy practices, caused positive developments to the student-teacher dynamic within this Discourse (Gee, 2008).

Not surprisingly, collective sharing and constructing of aesthetic transactions also strengthened the bonds between the students in Mrs. Carson’s reading class (Connell, 2003; Dugan, 1997; Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). All eight participants discussed how their relationships with their classmates, or fellow ‘members’ within this secondary Discourse, underwent meaningful evolution as a result of their active apprenticeship with culturally relevant materials within the Gothic studies reading unit (Gee, 2008). Participants got to know one another beyond their ‘student’ personas in sharing and collectively constructing their myriad aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts. This sharing and collective building of Gothic knowledge caused the students

to realize their collective affinity and connection as a whole to the Gothic genre, which also increased rapport.

As Victor stated in his post-unit interview, “They [the class] shared a lot of stories, so we know a lot about them. Like, they read these Gothic stories; they watch these types of stories. They’re interested in this.” Victor described how the aesthetic transactional potential of the Gothic texts acted as a catalyst for students desiring to share these moments of meaningful connectivity as illustrated in chapter five (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). In the collective sharing and constructing of these moments, the class came to learn about one another, particularly their shared affinity and meaningful connections with the Gothic genre. Kurt, in his post-unit interview, relayed, “We could relate to the books and each other more with this [Gothic] stuff because a lot of the elements we experience in our own lives.” Kurt affirmed that the many parallels between the Gothic as a literary genre and adolescence as a developmental stage provided the class the opportunities to not only relate to texts, but to one another (Connell, 2001; Pike, 2003).

Matt echoed a similar revelation as a result of participants sharing how they meaningfully connect the Gothic genre between their in and out-of-school literacy practices. He stated in his post-unit interview, “I had no idea about my friends. So many of my friends were watching *The Walking Dead* and the other Gothic stuff we’re into. Now, we can all talk about it.” Diana and Eliza both expressed surprise that so many people had an affinity for the genre. Eliza specifically stated that she did not realize a peer in Mrs. Carson’s class (Anna) shared her love for zombies. During her post-unit interview, Eliza reflected: “I saw some of the movies she does, and I think we could get to be friends maybe? I actually realize now a lot of my classmates are into this stuff, and

I'm like, 'Wow, I never knew that.'" As Ray stated, "I've gotten to know everybody in this class better. Everyone shared their different experiences, opinions, and ideas about Gothic literature, so you got to know people on a different level."

Thus, Ray and Eliza explicitly detailed how witnessing their peers' aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts allowed them to get to know fellow classmates better, which increased rapport. This data reveals how utilizing students' out-of-school literacy practices within the classroom context not only increases students' engagement with academic texts; it also serves to increase classroom rapport. This evolution aligns with the literature stating the myriad benefits of utilizing students' out-of-school literacies within the classroom context (Gee, 2011; Guthrie, 2008; Marsh, 2005; Vasudevan, 2007; Wohlgend, 2013).

Emily discussed how getting to know her fellow classmates in Mrs. Carson's class beyond their academic personas constituted a particularly meaningful experience. In her post-unit interview, Emily stated, "They [administration] like to always put all the G&T [Gifted and Talented] kids in the same ELA and math classes. This reading class hasn't really changed since fifth grade." Emily asserted how the makeup of students in Mrs. Carson's ELA class had been relatively stable over the past couple of years. Mrs. Carson also confirmed this fact regarding the homogeneous grouping of the honors classes at Hillside for ELA and mathematics. However, despite having multiple classes with each other, all eight participants detailed how participation in the Gothic studies reading unit marked the first time they really got to know one another as Ray put it, "on a different level," as a result of their sharing and collectively constructing aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts.

Specifically, Emily noted in her post-unit interview:

Seeing how everyone responded to it [Gothic literature], it kind of like put another face underneath the mask. I feel like I'm more in touch with my peers. It broke down barriers I have with a lot of people.

Diana offered a similar sentiment; she stated in her post-unit interview, "I realized how special everyone in class is. I got to know some really cool things about my classmates."

Thus, Emily and Diana asserted how witnessing their peer's aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts helped them see their classmates' more authentic selves. Such a change in the dynamic that comprised this secondary Discourse reflected a positive evolution following the experience of the Gothic studies reading unit.

When I asked Emily to elaborate on what she meant in regards to the unit helping to "break down the barriers" she had with her classmates, she shared what she felt was the typical dynamic of 'G&T' classes, or previous secondary Discourses that she and fellow classmates were a part of:

Typically in G&T classes, everybody's kind of competing with one another. We all have our own little competitions and everything. But, I think with this unit, a lot of people got more sensitive because a lot of these [Gothic] topics are very touchy. I felt like these are the kids I've had competitions with forever. But, this [unit experience] kind of helped us see people's other sides.

Emily discussed how through the class's collective sharing and constructing of aesthetic transactions, or 'lived through experiences' with the texts comprising the Gothic studies reading unit, the dynamic that comprised the group of students positively changed.

Indeed, I witnessed such evolution myself. Over the course of the unit, I observed students sharing various 'sensitive' meaningful connections they constructed with the Gothic unit texts that I did not witness prior to this unit experience in pre-unit observations. From students' sharing of spiritual encounters they had with beloved

deceased family members, how they had various medical issues, such as seizures or anxiety disorders that made them ‘different,’ or how they were proudly Gothic, participants voluntarily contributed personal aspects of themselves in the sharing of these aesthetic transactions. This behavior suggested that students were building mutual trust and respect for one another, which they confirmed during interviews.

Mrs. Carson also discussed this evolution beginning in her mid-unit interview:

I see these kids building a sense of comradery and teaming that you wouldn’t necessarily see that I didn’t see before this [unit]. It’s like this class bonding thing where people were really treating each other with a lot of respect.

Like Emily, Mrs. Carson also discussed how the Gothic studies reading unit altered what was the competitive dynamic within the classroom to one that was a community of readers in her post-unit interview:

Through the texts and what they did with them, it [the unit] really became a shared experience about what they were getting out of it-both individually and as a group. So, it almost put their egos to sleep. They became more concerned about uncovering a truth together rather than being the one true vessel of truth.

Mrs. Carson reflected how the students’ position as active apprentices within this reading unit altered the classroom dynamic. Over time, such positioning caused the participants to realize and value the subjective aesthetic wisdom that they derived individually and collectively from texts.

These sentiments align with literature on the aims of aesthetic education, as it emphasizes the complexity of knowledge, rather than finding one ‘right’ answer (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001). As Ray noted, “It was really just everyone chiming in and helping each other out. That’s my ideal classroom. I think now we understand that we have a lot more in common, that we can work well together as a class.” This meaningful evolution within participants’ secondary Discourse as students in Mrs. Carson’s reading class

illustrates the power of reading endeavors to act as a unifying force in ways that have significant social implications, as well as lasting influence on individuals' Discourses (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Unfortunately, as noted by all of the participants, such academic literacy endeavors that meaningfully connect students' various Discourses, subsequently causing meaningful growth of these Discourses, was not a common phenomenon in Hillside Middle School. This criticism aligns with the research noting the frequent disconnect between students in and out-of-school literacy practices within the classroom context (Gee, 2008; Gibson, 2010; Guthrie, 2008; Knoester, 2009; Vasudevan, 2007). This disconnect often prevents academic literacy endeavors from having meaningful impact on students' various Discourses; it makes for superficial or passive learning with little long-term impact (Gee, 2005/2008/2011). Collectively, all of the participants expressed harsh critiques towards the values, beliefs, and attitudes they felt were perpetuated by their past reading classes, or previous secondary Discourses. Over time, many of the participants' views, values, and beliefs surrounding academic reading, as it was carried out in various Discourses, became fixed (Gee, 2008).

As a result of this phenomenon, some of the participants signaled evolution to their attitudes, beliefs, values, etc., surrounding academic reading as a result of the Gothic studies reading unit. However, other participants expressed how the unit failed to alter their attitudes, beliefs, values, etc., comprising their views on academic reading because they knew that the experience was temporary. Moreover, some of the participants expressed how the Gothic studies reading unit, in revealing what academic reading could be, further highlighted the negative aspects of past school reading experiences, as well as

their outlook on future academic reading endeavors as they felt they would be carried out in their future ELA Discourses at Hillside.

“I’m Not Even Sure I Thought School Reading Could be Fun:” Evolution and Tension to Evolution of Participants’ Outlook on Future Secondary ELA Discourses

All eight participants conveyed negative feelings, values, and beliefs regarding their past ELA Discourses at Hillside Middle School. Anna, Diana, Kurt, Ray, and Victor explicitly discussed how the Gothic unit marked the first time school reading was “fun.” In her mid-unit interview, Anna stated, “With this [unit] we have fun while we learn. That’s the first time we’ve had that.” Similarly, Ray reflected in his post-unit interview: “I’m not even sure if I ever thought school reading could be fun, but it can. It can be very fun.” Such sentiments suggested that the pleasure, derived from attaining personally relevant knowledge through the construction of aesthetic transactions with texts, was rare in the academic setting. This view was so deeply embedded that it did not even occur to Ray that academic reading experiences could, in fact, be pleasurable (Greene, 2001; Eisner, 2002; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

Consequently, Diana, in her mid-unit interview, reflected a ‘get through it and get it over with attitude’ regarding her values and beliefs surrounding ‘school reading’ as she experienced it in previous reading class Discourses at Hillside:

School reading was more of a time like to waste time, to get it over with and go home and have fun. School reading was never ‘Oh this is really cool. This book is really cool; I can’t wait to read more.’ The work was just for school and then the summer comes and you don’t care about it, and you read what you want to.

This reflection showcases Diana devaluing the academic texts that comprised the curriculum in her past reading classes. Thus, these previous Discourses failed in getting Diana’s ‘buy-in’ as to the relevance and/or importance of the material. Diana’s glaring

distinction between obligatory school reading and desired summer reading suggests that previous instructors did not utilize ‘cool’ reading materials as defined by her standards that promoted alignment between her various Discourses; as such, she developed an attitude of resistance towards academic reading (Gee, 2008).

Akin to this statement, Eliza, in her post-unit interview, also shared that past ELA Discourses involved “being forced to read stuff you don’t want to.” Unlike participants’ position as active apprentices with culturally relevant materials within the context of the Gothic unit, Eliza’s reflection suggests passivity and lack of agency. Such feelings align with adolescent reading research stating a mismatch between what students want to read and what they are actually reading in the classroom (Brophy, 2008; Guthrie, 2004; Ivey & Broadus, 2001; Lenters, 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007). Mrs. Carson echoed this sentiment in her mid-unit interview, “This experience has really made me think about how the reading program here is kind of...well...sterile. It’s missing that connection with something meaningful to the students.” Mrs. Carson discussed how Hillside’s reading program failed to prioritize students’ construction of aesthetic transactions (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

In her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson became even more impassioned upon reflecting on students’ negative attitudes with regard to academic reading:

It’s easy to place blame on outside things with these kids. But, you know what? This unit reminded me that it’s not that they’re so overwhelmed with life and other things or ‘too cool’ to love a good read. We have to give them a good read. We don’t have an excuse. We should be able to get them a good read.

Mrs. Carson’s statement illustrates her belief that instructors often blame adolescents’ negative attitudes towards academic reading on external factors they cannot control, such as students having too many life distractions and/or the poor attitude being representative

of the developmental stage. When I asked Mrs. Carson to elaborate on what she meant by a ‘good read,’ she replied: “One that is meaningful for the kids.” This statement illustrates Mrs. Carson’s belief that texts holding aesthetic transactional potential for the adolescent reader are the types of ‘reads’ that should be offered in the classroom.

The Gothic unit contained many traditional and canonical texts. However, the majority of texts were chosen for the aesthetic transactional potential they hold for adolescent readers. Moreover, the fusion of contemporary and classic Gothic texts and the use of popular culture Gothic texts as a way to introduce the unit, allowed students the opportunity to construct aesthetic transactions with the vast majority of the unit texts, both contemporary and classic. Thus, as Mrs. Carson stated in her post-unit interview, “This experience has really shown me that there’s no reason why the [academic] texts always have to be canonical.” Mrs. Carson echoed adolescent reading research call for text variety in order for students to see the relevance of the more dated academic reading material; such hybridity also encourages students to meaningfully connect their in and out-of-school literacy experiences (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2008; Gibson, 2010; Lenters, 2006; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wilson & Casey, 2007).

Aside from devaluing the texts, all of the participants also discussed how reading-related activities in previous ELA Discourses did not promote their construction of aesthetic transactions, which aligns with adolescent reading research (Hagood et al., 2010; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995; Vasudevan, 2007; Williams, 2007). Emily, in her post-unit interview bluntly stated, “It [reading] is usually the worst part of the day. In other class, it’s just a bunch of useless questions. It’s really about whose answers you’re gonna copy in the end.” This statement, reflecting

Emily disvaluing the learning experience comprising past ELA Discourses, was a shocking contrast to the depths of literacy, self, and world knowledge I witnessed her attain throughout the Gothic unit.

Emily's disvaluing and disbelieving in the merit of typical reading-related activities of her past Discourses suggest that they failed to encourage an aesthetic reading approach, where subjective understandings were prioritized over right/wrong answers.

Matt echoed a similar mechanical and indifferent attitude towards his past reading Discourses:

You read this, you take a test on it, and you're done. Then, you just forget about it. A lot of my friends and I agree we just usually do it [reading and related tasks] to get a good grade so we can go on to the next thing. It's usually, you learn something, take a test, get a good grade, and forget it.

Within this candid reflection, Matt detailed purely extrinsic reasons behind engaging in previous reading and related tasks within the classroom context. The fact that this knowledge is soon forgotten suggests that it failed to connect with Matt's sense of self and his 'lived through' or aesthetic transactional experiences with texts (Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005).

Mrs. Carson echoed this sentiment in describing students' typical passive position within the context of the reading curriculum at Hillside in her post-unit interview:

Nowadays, reading has become so skill-based. It [Hillside's reading curriculum] is so much about finding the one right answer. I feel like we're living in an era of checklists. Did you do every common core standard? Did you teach from this list [of texts]? Did you use all the new textbooks that were purchased and all the ancillary materials? Did you teach all the skills? They're [the students] so trained to look for one right answer and everything else is wrong. My job's to train you to pick the right answer. I'm going to train you to leap through the hoop.

The repeated use of the word, ‘train’ in Mrs. Carson’s discourse suggests that she felt obligated to perpetuate a learning environment which failed to promote student construction of aesthetic transactions.

As a result of the interactions, values, and beliefs comprising participants’ previous Discourses, only three participants (Diana, Eliza, and Kurt) discussed how the Gothic studies reading unit altered their perception of academic reading within the context of their current Discourse. For example, Kurt, in his post-unit interview, stated, “This [Gothic unit] has definitely changed school reading. It’s given me a different perspective [on it]. Like, now I’m really looking forward to reading class.” However, the other five participants (Emily, Anna, Ray, Matt, and Victor) discussed how their values and beliefs regarding academic reading remained unchanged at the conclusion of the Gothic studies reading unit. Moreover, three participants (Emily, Eliza, and Victor) explicitly discussed how the experience of the Gothic studies reading unit further highlighted their past reading experiences and made their outlook on future academic reading experiences more grim, which was an unexpected tension that arose as a result of this unit implementation.

When I solicited information as to why the Gothic studies reading unit failed to alter the majority of participants’ beliefs, attitudes, and values surrounding academic reading, the participants discussed knowing that this experience was fleeting and marked the exception rather than the rule in regards to reading curriculum at Hillside: “It’s just for now,” Anna stated in her post-unit interview, “I know it’s going to go back to the other way.” Likewise, Emily stated:

This was a fun way to get away from everything else. But, it doesn’t change my disliking reading. It’s also just a little late now because I’ve already had many

years of the other reading. Also, the older kids tell us how bad it is, like, it's just the textbooks and that's it. It's like, 'We're reading this story, okay, whatever, get over it. Do the questions to be done and it's not going to connect to me, whatever.' Maybe if this kind of thing had taken place when I was younger, I would've liked reading more. Maybe I would've looked forward to reading class, dig more into it, being able to connect more.

Thus, Emily reflected that although she enjoyed the Gothic studies reading unit because she was able to construct myriad aesthetic transactions in ways that meaningfully influenced her various Discourses, she insisted she experienced too many years of disliking academic reading for a singular unit to change that perspective. Thus, Emily and the other four participants' negative views on academic reading remained fixed despite their enjoyment of this experience. Sadly, Emily noted that perhaps if such reading experiences comprised her earlier Discourses, her outlook would have been different. This begs the disturbing question: For how many other readers does Emily's story ring true?

Equally as distressing is the fact that three participant explicitly stated how partaking in this Gothic studies reading unit, and seeing as Victor described it in his post-unit interview, "a new way of reading and learning," would make going back to business as usual all the more difficult. As Victor reflected, "I never thought it [school reading] was great, but now, I just think it's really bad. It's going to be really hard to go back to the old stuff." Mrs. Carson also discussed this unforeseen tension in her post-unit interview:

All the sudden, they're going from the what if, the beyond, the other. And then, you're going back to business as usual: the anthology, the comprehension questions, ABC. ABC doesn't measure up. They're probably going to feel shortchanged. I feel bad about that.

Eliza also expressed a negative outlook on her academic experiences in her future Discourse (reading class at Hillside as an eighth grader): “It’s just going to seem really, really boring now. It’s like we had this fun unit where it was about our interests and stuff like that. Next year, it’s going to be back to the classic novels.” The aim of this unit implementation was to encourage students’ construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts. However, it did not occur to me how this experience could hold negative implications for future reading endeavors in opening up students’ minds to new ways of learning, only to then be forced to return to business as usual.

At the end of his post-unit interview, I asked Ray what he would say to people in charge of making curriculum decisions for the ELA classrooms at Hillside after participating in the Gothic studies reading unit if he was given that opportunity. Below is Ray’s response to that question:

I’d tell them to look at what we like to read, or ask us what types of things we’re reading and bring that into school like we did. Let the students express themselves with different mediums and their different interests as much as possible ‘cause that gets them more into the literature. They should just introduce diverse genres as large, free-form units like we did with this Gothic thing that isn’t extremely structured and more free-form, very interesting units, and let students really drive the discussions, like we did. Really, just let students’ interests take over and let them bring in whatever they want to class and just basically do everything that we did for this Gothic unit.

In this reflection, Ray expressed his appreciation for how students’ interests naturally took over within the context of this unit. This appeal to student interests maximized what participants “took” from literature because the Gothic studies reading unit started and ended with personally meaningful reading tasks for these adolescent readers.

The Gothic studies reading unit started with materials that hold aesthetic transactional potential back to adolescent readers. Individually and collectively,

participants constructed myriad aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast and meaningful connection with the popular culture and traditional Gothic texts, including the connection of the Gothic across their in and out-of-school literacy practices. The reading-related discussions and activities capitalized on the aesthetic transactional experience of these texts. This unit characteristic made it possible for participants to enhance their initial aesthetic transactions, as well as collectively form new ones. From the first unit lessons that utilized popular culture Gothic texts, which positioned the students as the experts due to their prior knowledge of these texts, to the closing unit lessons, where the students produced their own Gothic poems, students were apprentices actively analyzing, interpreting, manipulating, questioning, and producing within the context of this secondary Discourse. The study data suggests this shared experience made the participants better not only better readers, but better people. These transformations illustrate how meaningful academic reading endeavors do act as a catalyst for revolutionary change.

Below is an excerpt from my dissertation journal following my interview with Ray, who was the final participant for whom I conducted a post-unit interview:

As I pack up my interview materials, I thank Ray for being a study participant and for teaching me so much throughout our talks. He thanks me in return, looks me in the eye, smiles broadly, and tells me how it's great because now that the study is done, I can tell everyone how well it went and things will change. This statement causes me to pause in my tracks. I return eye contact, smile, (though I'm sure not as broadly), and promise to tell 'everyone' what I learned. He tells me goodbye, places his hood over his head and walks out of the conference room. As I push open the double doors to the main entrance at Hillside Middle School and blink as the bright May sunlight hits my face, I feel heaviness in my heart. Despite Ray's mature and 'cool' attitude he typically exhibits, this moment reminds me that even though he is on the cusp of adulthood, in this moment, Ray is still beautifully a child, in his optimism that everything can immediately change. It should be that simple, but I know that it is not. In fact, I know that there are curricular decisions set in motion at Hillside that are going to take the

experience of literature even further away from the students. As I drive away from the school, I silently renew my promise to all of the participants, that, at the very least, their story, as it unfolded during this experience, will be told.

This moment marked the end of the official story of the eight participants of this study and the aesthetic transactions they constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit. The goal of this unit, from the text choices through the related pedagogical practices, was to nurture students' construction of aesthetic transactions in order for academic reading to be a transformative experience that not only broadened students' minds, but also their hearts as envisioned by both Rosenblatt (1994/1995/2005) and Gee (2008).

The Gothic studies reading unit centered on the students' experiences of culturally relevant literature where they were positioned as active apprentices within the unit context with regard to the related discussions and activities (Gee, 2008). Collectively, these factors acted as a catalyst for meaningful evolution to participants' various Discourses (Gee, 2008). Whether it was using literature and related discussions as a vehicle for dealing with the loss of a loved one, understanding a world event, or realizing that their individual uniqueness was something to be celebrated rather than shunned, the participants used Gothic literature, as well as one another, to face their various 'monsters.' As a result, these 'monsters' became less frightening because the participants now had 'tools' to overcome them: their newfound knowledge and one another (Gee, 2008). Some even turned out to not be monsters after all, but rather, newly celebrated facets that make the participants the unique individuals they are.

These types of reading experiences should be rule, rather than the exception for all of the students at Hillside Middle School. However, not only did the participants

discuss how rare such experiences are, curriculum changes that were set to commence the following September, 2013, in administrative response to the Common Core State Standards Initiative for reading, positioned students even further away from aesthetic reading within the classroom context. Presumably, these changes made it even more challenging for students to construct aesthetic transactions with academic texts that result in meaningful alignment and subsequent evolution to their various Discourses. These curriculum changes are discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Introduction

Contextualizing the Study Origins and Rationale

The inspiration for this study emerged during a course I took in my English Master's program on the Gothic literary genre in the fall of 2004. While spending a semester absorbed in various texts, I began to see how Gothic texts appeared to hold potential parallels to adolescence as a developmental stage, particularly in the position of liminality held by both the characters in Gothic texts and adolescents existing on the threshold of childhood and adulthood. Contrastingly, during my five years as a middle school reading teacher, I slowly became aware that many of the academic texts comprising Hillside Middle School's reading curriculum did not frequently prioritize students' preoccupations, concerns, and interests; as a result, my students frequently perceived the curriculum to be dry, outdated, and irrelevant to their lives, which is also noted as a common problem in adolescent reading research (e.g. Gibson, 2010; Hopper, 2006; Lenters, 2006; Rosenblatt, 2005).

Additionally, I noticed how traditional and canonical texts dominated Hillside's curriculum; the incorporation of contemporary works, such as popular culture texts residing in students' out-of-school literacy practices, was not readily encouraged, which aligns with literacy research (Dyson, 1997; Hagood, et al., 2010; Vasudevan, 2007; Williams, 2007). Finally, related pedagogical practices, corresponding with the various pieces in the literature anthologies, frequently directed students' attention to efferent knowledge derived solely from the text, as opposed to aesthetic knowledge that they co-construct with texts (Greene, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Eisner, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1995/2005).

Due to these dynamics, as a middle school reading teacher, I often found it challenging to assist students in deriving the same meaning and pleasure they were gleaning from their out-of-school literacy practices with academic texts; this is a problem frequently discussed in adolescent literacy research (e.g. Gibson, 2010; Hull & Schwartz, 2001; Hagood et al., 2010; Hruby et al., 2008; Mahiri, 2001). For my students, there was a divide between the ‘school reading’ of the classroom and ‘fun reading’ they did at home (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009; Marsh, 2005; Vasudevan, 2007; Wohlwend, 2012). As a result of these challenges, I began to look outside the confines of Hillside’s specified curriculum for ways to prioritize students’ aesthetic transactions with texts within the classroom context (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

Around Halloween of my final year of teaching middle school reading, I impromptu pulled some short stories that I read in my Gothic literature course, as well as some new ones that I found on the Internet, to read with my seventh grade students. There were no pre-determined pedagogical practices to accompany this spur of the moment decision. We simply read pieces collectively as a class and discussed them. Despite the brief period of time this unit occupied (less than a week), on an end of the year survey I asked the students to complete, many of them indicated that this experience was the most enjoyable aspect of reading during their seventh grade year. This knowledge added to my frustration that current curricular practices were failing to meet my students’ needs as readers and as individuals in the ways I felt they should. Frequent discussion with other middle school reading teachers (both at Hillside and other school districts in New Jersey) affirmed to me that I was not alone in this angst. This frustration ultimately led me to move from a teacher to a researcher, in making the decision to study

adolescent reading research in a PhD program. I wanted to learn more about how to make the academic reading experience, as it exists for adolescents within the classroom context, more relevant and meaningful. This study gave me a means to conduct this line of inquiry.

Contextualizing Study Design, Theories, and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore what aesthetic transactions adolescent students constructed in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit. Specifically, I sought to understand what kinds of aesthetic transactions occurred during the unit, as well as what tensions arose in the development of aesthetic transactions. Efforts to examine disconfirming evidence were conducted in order to examine this issue in all its complexity (Leftstein & Snell, 2002). This study provided me with an opportunity to systematically design an implementation aimed at assisting a classroom teacher in addressing a specific problem. In this case, the problem is adolescents' difficulty in constructing aesthetic transactions with academic texts (Connell, 2001; Dugan, 1996; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). I applied the design study implementation in a setting where I knew this problem existed because I experienced it firsthand as an instructor (Kelly, 2003; Lamberg & Middleton, 2009).

Studying this problem within a singular 'case,' or classroom context afforded me the opportunity to deeply engage with the research inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). The qualitative nature of this research hinged on how participants responded to this implementation. Thus, I relied on what participants' 'said' in regards to the Gothic studies reading unit across the various data collection measures under the social constructivist assumption that meaningful information arises from focusing on the nature

of reality, as it exists, for participants (Burr, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Oldfather, 2002). To frame this inquiry, I relied on Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) aesthetic transactional theory of reading, as well as general research on aesthetic education (e.g. Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Greene, 2001; Eisner, 2002; Vasudevan, 2010) in order to understand the types of literacy, self, and world understandings the students gleaned from the unit. I selected the Gothic, as a literary genre, due to its prevalence in adolescents' leisure reading practices and the success of it in my previous teaching experiences (Coats, 2008; Jackson, et al., 2008; Hogle, 1999; McGillis, 2008).

Within the unit, I purposefully incorporated popular culture and contemporary texts alongside traditional, canonical texts. This fusion aligns with the literature noting that diversity in reading curriculum, particularly the incorporation of texts residing in students' leisure reading practices, encourages connectivity and relevance within the academic context and 'school reading' amongst adolescent readers; additionally, the research notes how such hybridity encourages the students to see the relevance of the more traditional/canonical texts (Hagood et al., 2010; Lenters, 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wilson & Casey, 2007). These unit components further encouraged students' construction of aesthetic transactions with texts (Rosenblatt, 2005).

Within the academic setting, students' constructions of aesthetic transactions are always influenced by the related context, or pedagogical practices surrounding the reading experience (Dugan, 1997; Greene, 2001; Marsh, 2002; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 2005). When aesthetic transactions are encouraged in the qualities that comprise discussions and activities, students deepen their initial aesthetic text transactions (Connell, 2003; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 2005). Additionally, these dynamics acted as a

catalyst for students to construct additional aesthetic transactions, which extended and capitalized on the meaning derived from reading experiences (Connell, 2003; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 2005). The students' ability to construct aesthetic transactions was maximized when their lived through experiences were prioritized in both text choices and the related context surrounding those choices (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

When students constructed aesthetic transactions with texts both individually and collectively, they derived meaningful literacy, self, and world knowledge; these understandings warranted transformative changes to the participants academically and personally (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). Under this assumption, a second theory that framed this research was Gee's (2008) Discourse theory. Participants engaged with culturally relevant materials throughout the course of the unit, as important aspects of the Gothic genre are prevalent in the students' leisure reading practices (Gee, 2008; McGillis, 2008). These materials included popular culture texts, which further encouraged students in connecting their in and out-of-school literacy practices (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2008).

Additionally, related pedagogical practices, capitalizing on students' aesthetic transactions with texts, positioned them as 'apprentices' as they were actively manipulating, questioning, interpreting, and creating within this Gothic unit experience (Gee, 2008). Collectively, this dynamic, which capitalized on students' construction of aesthetic transactions in the text + context, encouraged connectivity between the participants' various Discourses (Gee, 2005). As Gee (2008) noted, academic literacy endeavors that connect individuals' various Discourses can result in the development of these Discourses. Thus, a secondary inquiry of this study examined what student

Discourse(s) evolved during the Gothic studies reading unit, as well as what student Discourse(s) remained unchanged at the unit's conclusion.

Contextualizing Research and Methodology

Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) aesthetic transactional theory of reading and Gee's (2008) Discourse theory comprised the two main theories governing this study. However, numerous other domains within adolescent reading research also informed this inquiry as highlighted in the literature review portion of this study. These areas included (a) present educational policy and students' aesthetic transactional reading experiences, (b) adolescent reading engagement (c) potential aesthetic transactional moments and pedagogical practices that encourage students' construction of aesthetic transactions (d) adolescent out-of-school literacies-popular culture texts, and (e) the aesthetic transactional potential between Gothic texts and adolescent readers.

The Gothic studies unit implementation lasted approximately six months. During that time frame, data was collected in the form of pre, during, and post-unit interviews with all of the participants, observations, participant classroom conversations independent of the teacher, and unit artifacts (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2011). I positioned myself as a participant-observer within the study context (Finders, 1997). Thematic and discourse analysis were the methods I used to analyze the data in light of the research questions (Gee, 2011; Boyartiz, 1998; Ruona, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Analysis was ongoing during and post-data collection (Creswell, 2009). In regards to thematic coding, I used a combination deductive and inductive approach; I went into the study with some ideas for types of aesthetic transactions that I suspected I would see. However, my thematic analysis tool constantly evolved as themes emerged during data

collection (Ruona, 2005). Gee's (2011) guidelines for analyzing discourse provided me with tools for analyzing what participants 'said' in regards to the research questions across the various data types. Gee's (2011) discourse analysis tool for analyzing big 'D' Discourses helped me to specifically analyze the data for moments where participants signaled a change to one of their Discourses. The data was triangulated across methods and participants (Creswell, 2009). Numerous tools were put into place throughout the study to maintain rigor and minimize bias (Creswell, 2009). The findings were reported under the themes that emerged in light of the research questions using a combination of emic and etic discourse (Gee, 2011; Ruona, 2005).

The following chapter sections summarize the findings discussed in the previous three chapters in table form. These tables are followed by a discussion of the significance of this information in light of the research questions. I then discuss how Hillside Middle School's interpretation of the Common Core State Standards for reading, and subsequent curriculum changes commencing in September, 2013 are in direct contrast with the findings of this research. Finally, I present the implications this study holds for classroom practice and future research, as well as the limitations of the present inquiry.

Summation of the Findings and Discussion of Significance

Aesthetic Transactions Participants Constructed during the Gothic Reading Unit

The primary research question guiding this study was: What aesthetic transactions do adolescent students construct in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit? Secondary research questions under this inquiry included examining what kinds of aesthetic transactions occurred during the unit, as well as what tension(s) arose in the development of aesthetic transactions during the reading unit? The

first sets of tables summarize the aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and contrast the participants constructed with the Gothic traits of the unit text.

Table 2: Summary of Aesthetic Transactions of Meaningful Connection Participants Constructed in Response to the Gothic Traits of the Unit Texts

Gothic text quality	Meaningful connection	Example
Dark, creepy mood & tone	Parallel to real life	"Real life doesn't always have a happy ending"-Anna
Physical isolation	Recollection similar event (personal)	"When I go camping with my dad, a lot of spooky things happen in the woods"-Matt
'Impossible' romance	Recognition similar circumstance (general)	"Teenagers feel a lot of this [romantic] stuff"-Eliza
Death & destruction	Recollection similar circumstance (personal)	"My grandfather died over the summer"-Matt
Death & destruction	Recognition similar state-of-being (global)	"Bad things happen, all the time everywhere, and it's scary"-Diana
Characters in a state of powerlessness	Recognition similar state-of-being (personal)	"We all want our voices to be heard"-Anna
Characters in a state of powerlessness	Recognition similar state-of-being (general)	"Teens don't have a lot of power"-Matt
Characters in a state of powerlessness	Recognition similar state-of-being (global)	"People [in Iran] live in fear of doing something wrong"-Diana
Corrupt authority	Recognition similar state-of-being (global)	"He [President of Iran] threatens stuff. It's really sad"-Diana
Exposure inner psyche	Recollection similar circumstance (personal)	"Mental instability, I experienced that when I went to a piano competition"-Kurt
Exposure inner psyche	Recognition similar state-of-being (personal)	"I have all those feelings bottled up inside, but I don't want to tell anybody"-Emily
Characters in liminal position as 'not normal'	Recognition similar state-of-being (global)	"Teenagers might feel like they don't fit in"-Eliza
Characters in liminal position as 'not normal'	Recognition similar state-of-being (personal)	"I'm just like them, I can overcome too"-Anna
Supernatural elements	Questioning real-life existence (global)	"It's never been proven that there are no ghosts"-Diana
Supernatural elements	Recognition similar circumstance (personal)	"It's like he's [grandfather] in the room with you"-Matt

Table 3: Summary of Aesthetic Transactions of Imaginative Contrast Participants Constructed in Response to the Gothic Traits of the Unit Texts

Gothic text quality	Imaginative contrast	Example
Physical isolation	Increases suspense & acts as catalyst for vicarious transport	"You feel like you're with them, out there in the wilderness"-Ray
Mysterious elements	Predicting future events	"It's fun to predict...especially in a Gothic book. There are so many possibilities"-Kurt
Dark humor	Parody or satirizing character/event	"A guy walks into McDonalds...and he's next?"-Ray (parodying "Tell Tale Heart")
'Impossible' romance	Preparation for a potential future event	"I haven't been on a date yet, but it gave me an idea"-Eliza
Death & destruction	Pleasure in vicariously experiencing violence/gore	"I don't support violence, but I find it cool to read" Victor
Death & destruction	Gratitude for difference text holds to real life	"I think about how good I have it"-Emily
Characters in liminal position of 'not normal'	Understanding of peer experiences	"I'm getting a better understanding of the people beside me"-Emily
Characters in liminal position of 'not normal'	Understanding of people in general	"You get a much better idea about what people are going through"-Kurt
Corrupt authority & rebellion	Appreciation & understanding for others' experiences & heroic acts	"Kit's so brave. I could not have done that"-Victor
Corrupt authority & rebellion	Preparation for potential future event	"It'll [characters stand up to authority] help prepare me, I'll know what to do"-Emily
Fantastic elements	Vicariously experiencing 'other worlds'	"This [event] doesn't happen in real life ,which makes it interesting"-Victor

Discussion and Significance

Liminality in adolescence and the Gothic genre. I purposefully selected the Gothic genre for this particular design unit implementation because I witnessed its prevalence in the leisure reading practices of adolescents (Jackson et al., 2008). Research suggests that adolescents' leisure reading habits contain clues to texts selections that may result in meaningful learning experiences within the classroom context (e.g. Brophy, 2008; Guthrie, 2004; Pitcher et al., 2007). This study aligns with such research, which is

evident in the myriad aesthetic transactions the participants constructed with the Gothic texts within the academic setting. These findings support research noting that the use of culturally relevant materials that connect students' social and academic practices, results in meaningful alignment and subsequent development of students' various Discourses (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009).

The findings of this study supported my initial belief that the prevalence of the Gothic genre in adolescents' leisure reading practices is, at least in part, due to the parallels between the Gothic as a literary genre and adolescence as a developmental stage. In particular, the findings illustrate that the liminal position shared by the characters in Gothic texts (that stand alone and exist in societal borderlands) holds meaningful parallels to adolescents existing on the liminal threshold between child and adulthood, and all of the 'monsters' or internal and external conflicts, preoccupations, and concerns such a position entails. This suspicion was confirmed in the wealth of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity the participants constructed with the traits of the Gothic genre as they manifest in the unit texts.

Specifically, two Gothic qualities that particularly reflect the liminal position of the characters: concerns with 'normalcy'/existence as 'other,' and feelings of powerlessness due to this positioning, were two traits with which all of the participants constructed aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity (either in using discourse of 'teens' in a general sense, such as in the case of Anna, or explicit personal identification, such as used by Emily). These aesthetic transactions align with aesthetic reading research noting that personal identification results in readers gleaning self-understandings that have positive developmental implications (e.g. Rosenblatt, 1994; Strum & Michael,

2009). Given my previous research and past teaching experiences, I was not surprised that the findings illustrated participants constructing aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection with these liminal traits of the Gothic genre, as all of the participants were dealing with the flux and stressors associated with growing up (Berger, 2000).

However, what I had not anticipated as fully were the many aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast participants constructed with these and other traits of the Gothic genre throughout the unit experience. For example, participants not only constructed aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity in personally entertaining feelings and anxieties surrounding not being normal, they also constructed aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with this Gothic text trait. These aesthetic transactions occurred when participants recognized these attributes in peers or people in general who manifested different anxieties and behaviors due to their (not) normal or ‘monstrous’ feelings. These aesthetic transactions resulted in participants gleaning social understandings where they attained a better understanding of people, including their adolescent peers and the ‘monsters’ they grappled with. A vivid example of this understanding was Emily’s admission that her aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts helped her understand why some of her peers engaged in self-harm. These aesthetic transactions align with the research noting that such meanings can broaden readers’ knowledge and understanding of others; likewise, these changes also acted as a catalyst for meaningful Discourse evolution in altering participants’ beliefs and values surrounding their perception of others (e.g. Gee, 2008; Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Additionally, the findings reveal that many of the participants constructed aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with the traits of the Gothic genre in their reflections of how vicariously experiencing situations through the texts prepared them for potential obstacles, or ‘monsters’ that they had not yet experienced, but might encounter in the future. An example of this aesthetic transaction was Eliza’s admission that reading about the obstacles and anxieties associated with desire and attraction, or impossible romance, would prepare her for when she dated in the future. These moments allowed readers to vicariously ‘try on’ and experience different and future selves, which also aligns with the aim of aesthetic transactional reading research (e.g. Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

Collectively, participants constructed many aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with Gothic texts that helped them grapple with and better understand aspects of real life in regards to the ‘monsters’ their peers experienced, the ones they faced, and the ones they might face in the future. However, as evident in the findings, all of the participants also aesthetically transacted with the dark fantasy characteristic of the Gothic genre that is not representative of real life. For example, Victor discussed how he liked the imaginary worlds that comprise the settings of some Gothic texts because of the contrast these fantastic worlds hold to real life. Through these aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with Gothic fantastical moments, readers attended a boarding school where they channel energy from dead artists (*Down a Dark Hall*), fell in love with a vampire (*Twilight*), or conversed face to face with a ghost (“Lavender”). Such moments released participants’ imaginations in allowing them to revel in fantastic ‘monsters.’ These aesthetic transactions afforded some participants

temporary reprieve or escapism from the day to day ‘monsters’ they grappled with in real life, such as preparing for a big test, which aligns with aesthetic research noting the benefits of vicarious transport (Cai, 2008; Dugan, 1997; Howard, 2013; Lewis, 2000; Takolander, 2009; Rosenblatt, 1994).

The developmental benefits of adolescents constructing aesthetic transactions with the dark fantasy of the Gothic genre. Moments of transportation through aesthetic transactions with imaginary scenarios aligns with the aims of aesthetic reading in releasing and capitalizing on individuals’ imaginative capacities (e.g. Connell, 2000/2001; Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1994; Vasudevan, 2007/2010). All eight participants constructed aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with the Gothic texts that resulted in transportation (Takolander, 2009). Research suggests that such flights of fantasy are often neglected in schools because they are erroneously viewed as ‘frill’ and not ‘serious’ reading despite the positive developmental implications they hold for adolescents (Jackson et al., 2008; Jones, 2002). This study aligns with and extends upon this research by showcasing how participants’ construction of aesthetic transactions of meaningful contrast with the dark fantasy characteristic of Gothic texts gave the participants therapeutic relief. Literature acted as a means of temporary escape from day to day pressures while also expanding the imaginative capacities of the participants. The findings suggest the merit of incorporating a balance of fantastic and realistic texts within adolescent reading curriculums.

Additionally, all of the participants directly (such as Eliza stating that she likes reading about violence or gore) or indirectly (Diana stating that she likes the combative scenes in *The Hunger Games*) expressed pleasure in moments where they vicariously

engaged in the death and destruction, or more violent aspects that are characteristic of Gothic texts. Through these aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast, participants were able to battle malicious wizards (*Harry Potter*), fight their peers in order to survive (*The Hunger Games*), and destroy a demonic glass statue (“Cat in Glass”). However, the participants also expressed how such topics were not frequently explored within the academic classroom context, which aligns with adolescent reading research (Coats, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008; Jones, 2002).

The participants’ aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with this particular Gothic trait suggest that not only are such moments pleasurable for adolescent readers, they also serve healthy developmental purposes. As Kurt noted in an interview, reading such scenes made him “feel calmer somehow.” While this statement may initially appear puzzling (fictional violence as a calming influence), it aligns with Jones’s (2002) research on the developmental benefits of adolescents vicariously engaging in fictional violence. In his research exploring the developmental benefits of young adults engaging in fantastical and fictional violence, Jones (2002) insisted that such combative scenes provide a healthy means for adolescents to deal with their repressed anger against restrictive or disempowering situations and people. Unlike the characters in the *Harry Potter* series who battle each other with wands, adolescents are not free to physically battle, fight, or act out in real life without repercussion. Experiencing such moments through the construction of aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast helps adolescents vicariously release these emotions in a healthy way; in doing so, they gain better control over these inner ‘monsters’ because they are no longer repressed (Jones, 2002).

The findings of this study align with Jones's (2002) research. Analysis of the data suggest that adolescents engaging in fictional violence through construction of aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with Gothic texts might paradoxically serve to reduce readers' inner anger/rage as opposed to promoting it. This finding is significant because it contrasts the belief and approach of many school districts in avoiding such topics because of the erroneous fear that exploration of fictional violence will promote such behavior (Jones, 2002). As Jones (2002) explored, such fear is largely due to sensationalism surrounding adolescent violence, as it has occurred in tragic events, such as the Columbine shootings. However, in his research of these events, Jones (2002) found that although many of the youngsters that commit these atrocious crimes discuss an affinity for violent literacies, (such as those that manifest in video games) that this affinity is not necessarily in direct correlation to these heinous acts as media often suggests.

Jones (2002) argued that the behavior of a few disturbed individuals is a result of much more complex problems; consequently, he insisted that the vast majority of young men and women can vicariously engage in developmentally appropriate levels of fictional violence without acting out such events. Indeed, none of the participants had a history of violent tendencies or behaviors despite their affinity for it in fictional literacies, such as books, T.V. shows, videogames, and movies. As highlighted earlier in this study, Victor simply, but insightfully remarked how just because he read about a woman ripping off wallpaper did not mean he was actually going to mimic this behavior. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that educators need not shy away from including texts with these features in the classroom context, as they can potentially hold positive developmental implications for adolescent readers.

However, this finding comes with caveats that are beyond the scope of this current study. Educators need the support of administration and parents in order to explore such topics within the classroom context. Additionally, as is the case with the literature comprising this unit, texts would need to be screened for developmental appropriateness in ensuring that the level of violence in academic text would constitute positive reading and learning experiences. Both of these topics, as they relate to adolescent readers' construction of aesthetic transactions within the reading classroom, warrant fruitful areas for future research.

Complexity and range of participants' aesthetic transactions with the Gothic genre. The findings reveal the myriad aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast all eight participants constructed with the traits of the Gothic genre as manifest in the unit texts. A meaningful lesson I took from this study is a full appreciation for the complexity and range of aesthetic transactions participants can construct with culturally relevant texts. Cai (2008) and Lewis (2000) discussed how aesthetic transactions are often oversimplified as identifying with a storyline or character. While I was aware that there are a variety of aesthetic transactional possibilities, I embarked on this research with a more insular view of aesthetic transactions in initially giving more consideration to the points of potential connection, rather than points of potential contrast. This research gave me a new appreciation for the wide range and complexity of aesthetic transactions that adolescent readers are capable of constructing with texts that they find meaningful and connect to their social practices as conducted outside of the classroom (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009; Rosenblatt, 1994).

This study aligns with the research noting that texts containing the potential for personal identification in some capacity, as well as imaginative transportation, encourage adolescent readers' construction of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast (e.g. Cai, 2008; Lewis, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1995; Strum & Michael, 2009; Takolander, 2009; Vasudevan, 2010). However, a limitation of the studies is that students' voices and perspectives are absent. Moreover, the current research focuses on the outcomes of these experiences, rather than tangible means educators can use to encourage them. This research adds to this conversation in illustrating the types of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast these study participants constructed with traits of a particular genre within the reading classroom.

Relatedly, research notes the prevalence and popularity of the Gothic genre with adolescent readers; however, missing from the research are particulars for why this might be the case, as well as how this information can be utilized to improve classroom practice (Coats, 2008; Hogle, 1999; Jackson et al., 2008). This study helps to fill this gap by illustrating reasons why adolescents constructed aesthetic transactions with the Gothic genre. Additionally, the findings showcase how utilizing it within the classroom context resulted in meaningful and transformative literacy endeavors that aligned and aided in the development of students' various Discourses (Gee, 2008).

Despite their individual backgrounds, differences, and goals, all of the participants constructed aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with the Gothic texts. This finding suggests that there are essential threads of commonality that span adolescents' concerns, preoccupations, and interests and that the Gothic genre explores some of these topics. Additionally, the findings of this study reveal

topics that adolescents may construct aesthetic transactions with on a larger scale, such as concerns with normalcy and feelings of powerlessness. These issues are prevalent across many literary genres. Such findings have significant implications for classrooms. In the United States, a common pedagogical method is to have an entire class participate in reading the same text; this dynamic makes it challenging for teachers to select texts that will result in meaningful reading experiences for a classroom full of individuals (Rosenblatt, 2005). This study yields potential text qualities and issues that may nurture adolescent readers' construction during collective text readings in the classroom.

The importance of a diverse reading curriculum. Underneath the umbrella concept of instructors selecting texts that promote adolescents' construction of aesthetic transactions involves incorporating texts residing in their out-of-school reading practices; this study aligns with this research (e.g. Guthrie, 2008; Gee, 2008; Lenters, 2006; Neilsen, 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007). The Gothic studies reading unit commenced with excerpts of Gothic popular culture texts residing in adolescent readers' leisure reading practices and included incorporation of a popular culture novel, as well as a few contemporary/lesser known pieces. The findings reveal that this aspect of the Gothic studies reading unit encouraged all of the participants in constructing aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity between their in and out-of-school reading practices (Gee, 2008/2011; Knoester, 2009).

All of the participants affirmed appreciation for the opportunity to read current texts residing in popular culture within the reading classroom. As Diana noted in an interview, it allowed them to bring those two "cultures" (leisure and school reading) together, which meaningfully aligned their various Discourses (Gee, 2008). The fact that

the unit began with ‘culturally relevant’ texts that the participants were familiar with gave them excitement and confidence in the texts that followed; these texts served as a ‘bridge’ between familiar and new information (Gee, 2008; Guthrie, 2004; Rowsell & Casey, 2009). As noted by some of the participants, beginning the unit with the vampire motif as it manifests in the popular culture text *Twilight*, allowed for greater understanding of the vampire motif as it manifests in a more dated, classic text (*Dracula*). This textual fusion also showed the participants that their out-of-school literacy identities were respected within the academic setting. Such understanding is critical, as meaningful development of students’ secondary Discourses as reading students is less likely to occur if they feel that their out-of-school reading identities are not respected within the classroom (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2008/2011; Knoester, 2009; Marsh, 2005; Vasudevan, 2007; Wohlwend, 2012).

The findings of this study reveal that all of the students constructed meaningful aesthetic transactions that enriched them academically, socially, and personally with both the classic and popular culture/contemporary texts of the Gothic studies reading unit. This outcome supports the research noting that there is no inherent benefit in restricting adolescents’ reading curricula to solely classic, canonical texts (Gibson, 2010; Hopper, 2006; Lenters, 2006). The findings reveal that all of the participants benefited from the incorporation of what Rosenblatt (2005) deemed, ‘moderns amongst masterpieces’ in regards to hybrid and diversified curriculums. In fact, the study highlights that a lack of text diversification hinders adolescent readers’ construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts in that all of the participants during interviews negatively discussed how Hillside’s reading curriculums typically lacked such variation, which aligns with

adolescent reading research (Gibson, 2010; Hagood et al., 2010; Hopper, 2006; Lenters, 2006). This notion manifested most vividly with Emily.

One of the tensions that arose in the development of aesthetic transactions during the unit was Emily's self-professed inability to construct aesthetic transactions with any of the classic texts of the Gothic studies reading unit. This tension highlights the negative implications of reading curriculums lacking diversity on readers' ability to construct aesthetic transactions with academic texts. Emily's negative view of the reading curriculum that comprised past reading units aligns with the research that adolescents often find academic text selections dry, outdated, boring, and irrelevant (Guthrie, 2008; Lenters, 2006; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Rosenblatt, 2001). She developed a resistance towards and distaste for 'school reading' as it was carried out in various secondary Discourses (reading classrooms). This distaste and resistance towards school reading was in direct correspondence to classic, canonical texts because these texts occupied the vast majority of Hillside's reading curriculum. Over time, this resistance towards academic reading became fixed, which, may at least partly explain Emily's inability to construct aesthetic transactions with any classic texts, including the ones in the Gothic unit. Her admission that this unit, in its inclusion of popular culture texts, marked the first time in which school reading matters to her personally, is significant.

Emily's position holds implications as it may shed light on the reasons behind other adolescent readers' resistance of academic texts that they feel are devoid of connectivity or relevance to their own experiences, concerns, preoccupations, and interests (Guthrie, 2004/2008; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rosenblatt, 1994). The findings of this study suggest that using more current text alongside

traditional ones (such as the use of *Twilight* and *Dracula*) can help students see the relevance of the dated texts; this dynamic may help students construct aesthetic transactions with texts that may, at a first glance, appear to hold little relevance to their current experiences, preoccupations, and interests (Gibson, 2010; Lenters, 2006; Rosenblatt, 2005; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wilson & Casey, 2007). Emily's situation is a jeremiad to the importance of incorporating texts residing in adolescent readers' out-of-school reading practices within the classroom setting as means of showing students' that their out-of-school reading identities are respected in school (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009).

Tensions to participant construction of aesthetic transactions. This study aligns with adolescent reading research noting that the content of academic text, in affording readers' construction of aesthetic transactions, is critical (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). This notion is illustrated in the tension that arose in the vast majority of participants' inability to construct aesthetic transactions with a text in the Gothic studies reading unit, the classic short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper." As previously discussed, the content of this particular Gothic text did not offer the majority of participants the opportunity to construct aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection or imaginative contrast; the central story focus is on a realistic conflict beyond participants' current experiences (a woman's struggle with post-partum depression and an overbearing husband).

As a result of this dynamic, seven out of the eight participants were unable to construct aesthetic transactions individually, and/or collectively with this text. This tension reinforces the notion that content, for adolescent readers, matters a great deal (e.g.

Guthrie, 2004; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). This particular tension that manifested in this study suggests that regardless of a text's status amongst adult readers, if the text's content fails to promote adolescent readers' construction of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and/or imaginative contrast, that readers are able to garner individually or collectively as a group, they will likely glean little more than superficial understandings and meanings from the text.

Contrastingly, the summary tables reinforce how with the majority of the Gothic studies unit texts, all of the participants constructed numerous aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast. All of the participants discussed how they had a natural desire to share and further reflect on these feelings, associations, ideas, visualizations, etc. (Rosenblatt, 1994). This desire, as it arose from the use of culturally relevant materials that aligned the participants' various Discourses, set the stage for students' construction of aesthetic transactions within the Gothic unit's related discussions and activities (Gee, 2008).

Table 4: Qualities of Related Discussions that Promoted Students' Construction of Aesthetic Transactions during the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

Quality	Example
Teacher modeling aesthetic transactions	Mrs. Carson shares a favorite moment from <i>Harry Potter</i> when minister attempts to hide 'Muggle' identity
Teacher soliciting aesthetic responses through open-ended questioning	"This story makes you think about spirits. Do ghost exist? What do you guys think?"
Free form and student-centered	Ray: Oh! Like [the story] <i>Slenderman</i> Mrs. Carson: Who's <i>Slenderman</i> ? Ray: It's an urban legend videogame... [Students continue talking about this topic independent of Mrs. Carson]

Table 5: Qualities of Related Activities that Promoted Students' Construction of Aesthetic Transactions during the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

Quality	Example
Creative thinking & expression	Victor's poem on the corruption of the Capitol in <i>The Hunger Games</i>
Student agency in selecting medium of representation	Eliza producing anime in depicting her interpretation of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i>
Collaboration	Ray, Matt, and other peers' collective work on the movie trailer for <i>Down a Dark Hall</i>

Discussion and Significance

The Gothic studies reading unit's pedagogical practices were designed to promote students' construction of aesthetic transactions inherent in the qualities that define these practices in alignment with aesthetic educational research (e.g. Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 2005). Students' constructions of aesthetic transactions within the classroom context were maximized due to the text and related context working in tandem to support students' gleaning of these understandings (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). Within the context of the unit's related activities that gave participants the agency to gear discussions and tasks to their ongoing aesthetic transactions, students were positioned as 'active apprentices' with culturally relevant texts; this positioning afforded all of the students numerous opportunities to enhance and construct new aesthetic transactions in ways that aligned their various Discourses (Gee, 2008).

Participants' construction of aesthetic transactions through discussion. The findings of this study illustrate a number of qualities inherent in the reading-related discussions of the Gothic studies reading unit that encouraged participants' construction of aesthetic transactions. Discussions capitalizing on aesthetic transactional text experiences enhanced participants' individual aesthetic transactions in allowing them a place to further reflect on them. This dynamic aligns with the research noting how

discussion strengthens the transactional bonds between text and readers (Connell, 2003; Pike, 2003). This study also illustrates how discussions acted as a catalyst for all of the participants; they constructed numerous aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts collectively. This finding supports the research on the social dimension of aesthetic transactions within the classroom context and its importance in terms of encouraging adolescents' aesthetic transactions with texts (Connell, 2001/2008; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/2005). However, this research also extends on this conversation by specifically illustrating how qualities emphasizing aesthetic reading contributed to participants' construction of aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts. The many conversational vignettes illustrate how culturally relevant texts and conversations stressing the aesthetic domain work collectively encouraged students' construction of aesthetic transactions.

One of the qualities that promoted participants' construction of aesthetic transactions was Mrs. Carson's modeling of her aesthetic transactions (Dugan, 1997). She exercised this pedagogical technique throughout the Gothic studies reading unit. This study highlights that when teachers model their aesthetic transactions with culturally relevant texts, (such as Mrs. Carson sharing a favorite scene in *Harry Potter*, that acted as a catalyst for students recollection and sharing of theirs) participants are indirectly encouraged to deepen their existing aesthetic transactions and construct new ones. Additionally, Mrs. Carson's modeling of aesthetic transactions frequently acted as a catalyst for participants to experience new aesthetic transactions. An example of this phenomenon occurred after Mrs. Carson shared that she enjoyed the Gothic quality of characters that are not normal, (as it manifests in a variety of unit texts) which caused

some participants to realize that they too shared in this affinity. Through modeling, Mrs. Carson illuminated the many aesthetic transactional possibilities in terms of the various feelings, ideas, associations, stories, etc., that she shared throughout the unit; this enriched participants' understanding of the range of aesthetic transactional possibilities. This knowledge contributed to the numerous aesthetic transactions the participants constructed with these texts.

Additionally, aesthetic transactions denote individuals' 'lived through' text experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). As a result of Mrs. Carson sharing these experiences, students got to know her as a fellow reader and individual; this, in turn, increased rapport (Rosenblatt, 2005). As noted by many of the participants, Mrs. Carson's modeling of her aesthetic transactions helped them to get to know her better as a person. As this study illustrates, this evolved dynamic had a circular effect: Heightened rapport increased the probability that students felt comfortable sharing their aesthetic transactions, which encouraged them to enhance and construct additional ones collectively in conversations (Connell, 2003; Pike, 2003).

Furthermore, when an instructor models his or her aesthetic transactions with a text, it shows students that such responses are important and 'count' as valid and appropriate in the academic setting; thus, Mrs. Carson's modeling of aesthetic transactions opened up a space for students to share theirs as well (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1995/2005). These findings, in relation to students' construction of aesthetic transactions in the academic setting are significant. Aesthetic transactional reading research discusses the benefit of teacher modeling in terms of aiding students in their construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts; yet, studies to date do not

explicitly point out the numerous benefits that arise when teachers utilize this pedagogical technique alongside culturally relevant texts as highlighted in this particular study (Connell, 2008; Dugan, 1997; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

Relatedly, this research also reveals pertinent information with regard to teacher questioning and the encouragement of students' construction of aesthetic transactions (Rosenblatt, 2005). As is evident in the previous chapters, rarely did Mrs. Carson pose a question that required a straightforward, efferent answer. Instead, she geared the questions towards aesthetic knowledge that students co-constructed with Gothic texts, by soliciting information on their various feelings, associations, and ideas (Rosenblatt, 2005). Mrs. Carson intuitively picked up on some of the Gothic traits that participants constructed aesthetic transactions with, such as characters in a state of powerlessness, questions surrounding the supernatural, and good versus evil. In each scenario, her aesthetic questions served as springboards for participants' sharing and constructing new aesthetic transactions on these various 'monsters' in ways that increased their academic, personal, and social understandings (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/2005). Within the context of these discussions, all of the participants were positioned as active apprentices where they commiserated about their own powerlessness in society, questioned the existence of ghosts and other aspects of the paranormal, and philosophically debated what constitutes immoral actions (Gee, 2008).

These findings reinforce the critical importance of instructor questioning with regard to promoting students' construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts as noted in previous aesthetic educational research (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 2005). In fact, this study highlights that teacher

questioning emphasizing aesthetic knowledge on topics that adolescents find meaningful can actually improve the overall aesthetic experience of a text and students' resulting transactions. This evolution manifests in some of the participants' altered response to the classic text, *Frankenstein*. As previously discussed, many of the participants had difficulty initially constructing aesthetic transactions with this dated and challenging text. However, Mrs. Carson adeptly navigated the discussion surrounding this text in subtly highlighting Gothic text qualities that manifest in *Frankenstein* that she believed would resonate with her students.

In this case, such solicitation included questions on right versus wrong in terms of who the true villain of the story is, as well as reflection on the monster's keen, yet unrealized goal of societal acceptance as a liminal character. During subsequent interviews, a number of students reflected on this conversation and how following this discussion, they were able to form aesthetic transactions with this particular text collectively. This finding is significant because it suggests that teacher pedagogy can increase students' aesthetic experience and resulting transactions with a text even if the text initially poses challenges to student construction of aesthetic transactions. Such transactions with difficult texts can occur when a teacher guides students through finding links back to readers' current preoccupations and interests.

However, this study also shows that as vital as pedagogical practices are in assisting students' construction of aesthetic transactions during discussions, equally as important is instructor willingness to take a step back, and whenever possible, allow the conversations to be organic and student-driven with minimal teacher influence. These qualities align with aesthetic educational research (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner,

2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1995/2005). One of the greatest lessons I took away from this study is that when students are engaged with culturally relevant materials that connect to their social practices as conducted outside of the classroom, less structure on the part of the teacher encourages students' construction of aesthetic transactions during reading-related discussions.

Mrs. Carson's willingness to take a step back and allow time for these impromptu student-led discussions resulted in powerful classroom moments that transcended anything I could have predicted. Some of these moments include when students shared feeling the spiritual presence of deceased loved ones, and the many occasions where they connected the Gothic unit texts to their out-of-school literacies, such as movies, video games, and T.V. shows. This agency positioned the students as active apprentices within the context of the unit, or as noted by Ray, resulted in a classroom dynamic where the students became "artists" actively "collaborating" or constructing their aesthetic transactions with the assistance of one another (Gee 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005).

As explicitly noted by Emily and Ray during interviews, over time, the participants came to value the aesthetic knowledge they constructed collectively with the Gothic unit texts. All eight participants discussed appreciating the opportunity to unearth meaning surrounding Gothic texts and the various monsters they manifest collectively. These sentiments align with the research noting the social benefits that students derive from aesthetic educational endeavors (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt 1994/1995/2005). Previous research in aesthetic reading notes how discussions centering on participants' aesthetic transactions strengthen classroom rapport (Connell, 2003; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994). However, this study extends on this conversation by illustrating

how this evolution occurs as a result of the text + context working in tandem to support students' construction of aesthetic transactions in the academic setting.

Participants' construction of aesthetic transactions through related activities.

Akin to the discussions comprising the reading unit, the related activities were also designed to promote students' construction of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts in conjunction with aesthetic educational research in relation to reading (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). The qualities of the related activities positioned the students as active apprentices amidst culturally relevant materials that connected their in and out-of-school literacy practices (Gee, 2008). As a result of this dynamic, all eight participants made use of the unit activities to further enhance and construct aesthetic transactions of personal significance that yielded intrinsically meaningful and high-quality products (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001).

As evident in Appendices I & J, which showcase the Gothic studies reading unit lesson plans and resources, comprehension questions, particularly those that are efferent in nature, played a very small role within unit context. Admittedly, prior to unit implementation, Mrs. Carson and I were nervous about this level of freedom and lack of structure denoting the related activities. We both worried that students would not derive sufficient meaning from the texts without the inclusion of traditional written response questions. However, aesthetic reading research notes that instructor overreliance on comprehension questions, particularly those that are efferent in nature, can pose obstacles to students' construction of aesthetic transactions (Connell, 2001; Dugan, 1997; Eisner, 2002; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 2005). As a result of these understandings, I utilized

minimal questioning with the design of the Gothic reading-related activities. The questions that were included were primarily aesthetic in nature. This measure was enacted to encourage students' construction of aesthetic transactions in soliciting information in light of students' thoughts, feelings, visualizations, associations, etc. with the Gothic texts (Rosenblatt, 2005).

As evident in the study findings, all eight participants created numerous products illustrating their myriad aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts. A lesson I took away from this study is that when students are engaged with culturally relevant materials that connect their in and out-of-school literacy practices, as with discussion, there is no need to heavily structure reading-related tasks (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). Participants were positioned as active apprentices where they utilized the activities to further explore, enhance, and construct new aesthetic transactions in ways that aligned their various Discourses (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005). This finding is significant as reading comprehension questions, particularly those that are efferent in nature, are one of the most common pedagogical techniques utilized by adolescent reading teachers (Eisner, 2002; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1995/2005). Indeed, I could not help but recall how as a teacher, I, often out of "misguided zeal" utilized comprehension questions in efforts to focus my adolescent students' attention to information in the text I felt was important for them to obtain, rather than the information that they thought was relevant (Rosenblatt, 2005). The findings of this study suggest that when the text and related context work in tandem to support students' construction of aesthetic transactions, what manifests is products of high quality because the learning material holds meaning and relevance to the students (Gee, 2008; Guthrie, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005).

This study highlights qualities of reading-related activities that support students' construction of aesthetic transactions with culturally relevant texts. With regard to more traditional written assignments, this research reveals that giving students license to select their topic and explore it in a creative compositional task, (such as in the Gothic short story and poem assignments) encourages students' construction of aesthetic transactions, which aligns with adolescent reading research (Guthrie, 2008; Haselhuhn et al., 2009; Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Rosenblatt, 2005). These compositions were tangible representations of the participants' aesthetic transactions. Matt explored his out-of-school connection with zombies as they manifested in one of his favorite T.V. shows, *The Walking Dead*, within the context of the in-school Gothic short story assignment in creating a fictional piece about a zombie apocalypse. Emily utilized a creative and open-ended reading related assignment to construct aesthetic transactions with a Gothic text quality she came to have an affinity for: stories told from the point of view of liminal/not 'normal' characters. She composed a poem from the point of view of someone about to commit murder in a similar tradition to the short story, "The Tell Tale Heart." Following the reading of *Frankenstein* and a related discussion as to the evil inherent in society for its judgment of individuals, Anna produced a poem featuring a powerful commentary on society and its judgment, particularly of females.

These are only three of the many examples that illustrate how the creative and open-ended nature of the reading-related written assignments of the Gothic unit gave all of the participants the agency to further explore their aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts and its many 'monsters' in moving from consumers to producers of

these qualities. The activities afforded the participants the opportunity to engage and grapple with aesthetic transactions that held personal significance.

Additionally, the findings of this study reveal how allowing students the opportunity to utilize their multiple literacies and merge their in and out-of-school literacy practices within the context of reading assignments encouraged their construction of aesthetic transactions with texts. Within the context of this study, this involved letting students choose the medium in which to express and further construct their aesthetic transactions with the Gothic unit texts. Eliza meaningfully aligned two of her secondary Discourses (her membership in a 4-H anime club and role of student in Mrs. Carson's reading class) within the context of a Gothic unit reading-related assignment in creating anime representing some of her aesthetic transactions with the popular culture Gothic text, *Down a Dark Hall*. The other participants produced music soundtracks (Diana, Kurt and Victor) and video teaser trailers (Matt, Anna, Emily, Ray) that aligned their in and out-of-school literacy practices (Gee, 2008). All of the participants produced these products with peers where they gleaned ideas from one another. Thus, the study also highlights how collaborative efforts aid in participants' constructing of collective aesthetic transactions, which aligns with adolescent reading research (Connell, 2001; Guthrie, 2008; Pike, 2003).

Overall, the findings align with research noting the importance and benefit of academic reading tasks incorporating adolescents' out-of-school literacies (Bean, 2002; Dyson, 1997; Guthrie, 2008; Lenters, 2006; Marsh, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007; Rosenblatt, 2005; Rowsell & Casey, 2009; Wohlwend, 2013). Students' construction of aesthetic transactions were prioritized in the text and related context. As a result, this research highlights how many of the tasks of the Gothic studies reading unit became intrinsically

meaningful to the participants in ways that they voluntarily devoted time and effort in creating these products. In fact, many of the participants chose to continue working on these tasks after the official assignment ended. These qualities align with the research on how aesthetic tasks can become intrinsically meaningful in ways that they are not viewed as ‘work’ in the traditional sense because they connect back to the student as an individual (Dickson & Costigan, 2011; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001).

In sum, as a result of the text and context working in tandem to promote readers’ construction of aesthetic transactions, all of the participants were positioned as active apprentices throughout the course of the unit where they became not only savvy consumers, but also producers of the Gothic genre (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005; Gee, 2008). As a result of this positioning, the participants’ aesthetic transactions altered the original Gothic studies reading unit in exciting and meaningful ways that neither Mrs. Carson nor I could have anticipated. The illustrations below show the contrast between the original unit texts and the actual unit (in light of what is read, discussed, and created) as influenced by participants’ aesthetic transactions with the original Gothic unit texts.

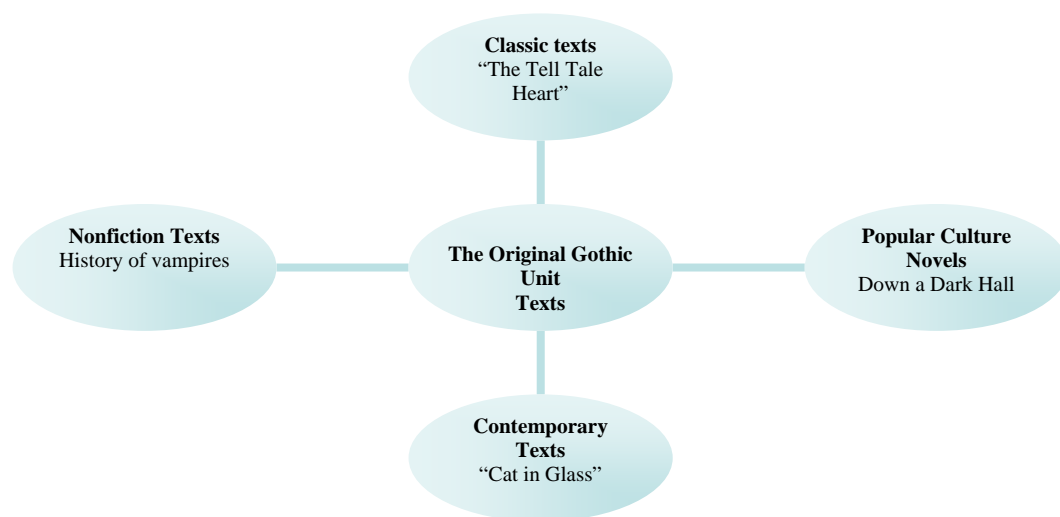


Illustration 6 The original Gothic unit texts



Figure 7 The actual Gothic unit as constructed by students' aesthetic transactions with the original unit texts

The second table reveals the numerous aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection the participants constructed between the original unit texts and the Gothic as it permeates popular culture, as well as historical and current events. The findings of this study reveal that the domino effect of including pop culture 'texts' within the context of the original unit is that it acted as a catalyst for all eight participants' construction of aesthetic transactions of meaningful connectivity between the unit texts and the Gothic as

it permeates other aspects of popular culture. These understandings encouraged students in connecting the reading unit to their social practices as conducted outside of school (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009). Collectively, the findings illustrate the importance of utilizing students' out-of-school literacies, such as popular culture texts, within academic curriculums (Harper & Bean, 2006; Hagood et al., 2010; Mahiri, 2001; Neilsen, 2006). Such diversification of curriculum validates students' literacy practices as conducted socially outside the classroom as legitimate within the classroom; this alignment set the stage for academic reading resulting in the subsequent development of student Discourses (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009).

A limitation of the current research on adolescents' construction of aesthetic transactions within the classroom context is that although research notes some of the qualities of reading-related activities that encourage aesthetic transactions, studies contextualizing such experiences within the classroom are scarce (Connell, 2008; Pike, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). This study adds to this conversation by illustrating how the participants used the related activities of the Gothic studies reading unit to explore, enhance, and construct aesthetic transactions that were personally significant to them in conjunction with the Gothic unit texts. I was personally struck by how much the participants transformed and enhanced the unit through their various aesthetic transactions. As Emily noted, on one of the final days of the unit, the Gothic became "theirs" collectively as a group. This ownership of academic material was a result of participants' ongoing apprenticeship with culturally relevant materials. As a result of these unit dynamics, all eight participants gleaned academic, social, and personal understandings as a result of the Gothic unit experience.

Participant Discourse Evolution during the Gothic Studies Reading Unit

Secondary inquiries that guided this study involved examining what student Discourse(s) evolved during the reading unit, as well as what student Discourse(s) remained unchanged at the unit's conclusion. This inquiry was conducted under the belief that reading endeavors encouraging students' construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts have positive academic, personal, and social implications in making people not only better readers, but better people (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994). The findings in regards to these secondary inquiries are summarized in the tables below. A discussion of the significance of this information in light of this inquiry follows.

Table 6 Participant Primary Discourse Evolutions during the Gothic Studies Unit

Type of Evolution	Example
Shift in beliefs & values surrounding 'normalcy' (global)	"I feel like now, I kinda get why people do weird things sometimes"-Victor
Shift in beliefs & values surrounding 'normalcy' (personal)	"Before this unit, I was trying to be someone I'm not. Now, I'm like 'Who cares?' I'm Gothic."-Emily

Table 7 Participant Secondary Discourse Evolutions during the Gothic Studies Unit

Type of Evolution	Example
Acquisition of new literacy 'tools' within the Discourse of Mrs. Carson's reading class	"Reading these Gothic books have helped me write in different ways and different voices"-Matt
Mrs. Carson's reading class transformed into a 'Gothic club' and members became a community of readers	Increased rapport with instructor: "Mrs. Carson actually knows what we're reading! She actually reads some of what we read!"-Eliza Insider knowledge: "They [outsiders] don't get this like we do"-Anna Increased rapport with peers: "I've gotten to know everybody in this class better"-Ray

Discussion and Significance

Evolution to participants' primary Discourses. This study highlights how the Gothic studies reading unit acted as a catalyst in the development of aspects of participants'

primary Discourses. In particular, participants' individual and collective aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection and imaginative contrast with the texts caused fundamental shifts to participants' core beliefs, values, and ideals surrounding the concept of 'normalcy,' either in terms of what it meant to them personally, how it influenced the ways in which they viewed others, or both. Normalcy or concern with not fitting in is a common topic of concern and focus for adolescents (Berger, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1994). The Gothic, as a literary genre, pushes on the boundaries of 'normalcy' in featuring liminal characters that are for one reason or another often outside what society deems 'normal' (Coats, 2008; Hogle 1999; Jackson et al., 2008; Jones, 2002; McGillis, 2008; Wellington, 2008). This link between the Gothic as a literary genre and adolescence as a developmental stage caused all eight participants to construct many aesthetic transactions of meaningful connection with this Gothic trait both individually and collectively.

Over time, these aesthetic transactions warranted four participants (Eliza, Emily, Anna, and Matt) explicitly discussing during interviews their evolved perceptions surrounding normalcy. In the case of Eliza, her ideas surrounding normalcy shifted as she came to realize that 'normal' as a concept, does not really exist. Anna realized that, normalcy, as a concept was not as important as she previously thought—thus, she learned to value it less. Emily manifested the most dramatic shift in beliefs, values, and ideals surrounding normalcy. In the beginning of the study, she discussed enjoying books about popular girls, indicating the way she viewed and prioritized 'normalcy' as it related to her. By the unit's conclusion, Emily celebrated her 'not' normalcy in announcing "I'm Gothic!" to the class on one of the final days of the unit. Thus, Emily experienced

evolution to her core sense of self in learning to be proud about the things that made her unique and disvaluing trying to fit into a particular societal mold. These shifts influencing participants' core beliefs, values, and ideas about the self as a result of the Gothic studies reading unit and their resulting transactions resulted in participants gleaning understandings that enriched them personally. Through their experience of the Gothic studies reading unit, these participants acknowledged that their personal differences or individual 'monsters' were not so bad after all, in some cases, they were even celebrated.

These core beliefs, values, and ideals surrounding 'normalcy' (or lack thereof) as it manifests in various characters in the Gothic texts also compelled some participants to consider the plight of a range of not 'normal'/liminal characters. The participants constructed aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast with these characters. They got to know a young woman who channels the energy of dead artists (*Down a Dark Hall*), consider a recollection from someone deemed mentally unstable and delusional, ("Cat in Glass"), and witness two quintessential Gothic monsters' unresolved plights for love (*Dracula* and *Frankenstein*). As a result of the text and context working to promote the participants' construction of aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast, participants Victor, Renzo, Kurt, and Emily indicated an altered view of their beliefs, ideals, and values surrounding normalcy in terms of the way they viewed others during interviews. Examples of this evolution included Victor's reflection that he came to understand why people do things that appear 'crazy,' and Emily's admission that she now understood why some of her peers engaged in self-harm.

Collectively, these evolutions to participants' primary Discourses, specifically, their personal beliefs, values, and ideas surrounding 'normalcy' illustrate and align with

the research noting that meaningful academic reading endeavors can and do have transformative influences on individuals in ways that not only make them better readers, but better individuals (Connell, 2001/2008; Gee, 2008; Jones, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1994; Wellington, 2008). However, this study extends on this conversation by merging the theories of Gee (2008) and Rosenblatt (1994/1995) in illustrating how adolescents' aesthetic transactions with texts resulted in evolution to this particular aspect of many participants' primary Discourses-learning to inherently value individual differences and celebrate (not) normalcy.

In reflecting on changes to her primary Discourse in the ways in which she viewed, and valued (or learned not to value) 'normalcy,' Emily, in her post-unit interview, communicated a belief that adolescents at large could benefit from this type of unit experience. She believed that Hillside Middle School's attempts to address such concepts in isolated assemblies about topics such as bullying, failed to alter adolescents' perceptions, values, beliefs, and ideas on normalcy in ways that had positive personal and social implications. It seems that using elements of the Gothic within the reading classroom as a means of promoting not only academic, but moral education whereby reading could have transformative effects on adolescents' primary Discourses or core sense of self on a larger scale as envisioned by Gee (2008) and Rosenblatt (1994/1995/2005). However, a discussion of such implications is beyond the scope of this study and reveals a fruitful area for future research. What this study does illustrate is that as students or 'members' of Mrs. Carson's reading class, all eight participants discussed obtaining literacy tools, as well as the sense of community within the classroom as a result of the Gothic unit experience. These changes signaled evolution to

the participants' secondary Discourse as students in Mrs. Carson's reading class, as discussed in the next section.

Evolution to participants' secondary Discourses. In acting as apprentices with culturally relevant texts over an extended period of time, all eight participants recounted literacy skills that they acquired as a result of the Gothic studies reading unit (Gee, 2008). Collectively, the participants indicated how they came to have a full understanding for the range and complexity of the Gothic literary genre, and its pervasiveness in popular culture. Five participants (Diana, Kurt, Anna, Eliza, and Emily) discussed acquiring skills that made them better readers, such as paying attention to textual detail. Two participants (Matt and Ray) detailed how participation in the Gothic studies reading helped them to improve their various literacy skills.

As evidenced throughout the data, all of the participants acquired a range of literacy 'tools' that made them more savvy readers, writers, and artists, which aligns with the research noting that individuals glean knowledge from a secondary Discourse when it connects to their social practices (Gee, 2005/2008; Knoester, 2009). This finding is significant as it illustrates that the participants' aesthetic experience of literature need not be sacrificed in order for them to attain more reading skills and meaningfully comprehend a wide range of texts. Additionally, the study illustrates that all of the participants acquired these skills through engagement with traditional, canonical texts, as well as popular culture and contemporary texts. This finding aligns with the research calling for diversified curriculums within the adolescent reading classroom (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gee, 2008, Hagood et al., 2010).

Due to Discourse alignment, all of the participants willingly and enthusiastically ‘take on the new role’ within their secondary Discourse as newly designated Gothic experts who were privy to knowledge that outsiders did not understand (Gee, 2008). This dynamic, as well as other factors resulting from participants’ constructions of aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts caused evolution to all participants’ secondary Discourse as students or ‘members’ of Mrs. Carson’s reading class. Prior to the Gothic unit implementation, I anticipated that students’ construction of aesthetic transactions would result in them more deeply engaging with texts. What I was not prepared for was how much sharing and collectively constructing aesthetic transactions would result in participants more deeply engaging with one another.

All eight participants discussed having increased relatedness and understanding of their fellow classmates and teacher as a result of the Gothic unit experience, which aligns with the research noting the positive social implications of aesthetic reading of texts (Connell, 2001/2003; Howard, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1994). As a result of all the participants of this Discourse sharing aspects of themselves (through communicating and collectively building their aesthetic transactions) they got to know one another beyond the traditional roles of ‘teacher’ and ‘student.’ Emily explicitly discussed this evolution in noting that the makeup of this ELA class had remained the same for a number of years; however, she communicated that the Gothic studies reading unit marked the first time she truly got to know her classmates on a personal level. This increase in rapport allowed for the members of this Discourse to serve as social capital for one another—they learned to value the aesthetic knowledge they constructed collectively. This contrasts what Emily

described as the old dynamic comprising this group of individuals in previous Discourses as attaining reading knowledge as being a more isolated and competitive endeavor.

Additionally, all eight participants came to realize their shared affinity for the Gothic genre in ways that gave them a point of commonality that resulted in greater rapport. As Mrs. Carson communicated, this secondary Discourse took on the collective identity of a “Gothic club.” Members partook in insider jokes, engaged in transformative experiences and gleaned understandings that they felt only the members of that Discourse could appreciate and understand (Gee, 2008). These changes resulted in this Discourse becoming a community of learners invested in their collective uncovering of Gothic meaning throughout fictional worlds, popular culture, and real life. Within the context of the related unit activities, they supported one another in their individual and collective producing of the Gothic genre.

Prior to conducting this study, I was inspired by the positive personal and social implications discussed by both Rosenblatt (1994) and Gee (2008) that arise from ideal literacy environments where the students are at the center of academic reading and writing endeavors. However, I found the idea of reading acting as a conduit for such change a bit fanciful in admittedly doubting its ‘real life’ applicability. Yet, over the course of this six month design unit implementation, I continuously witnessed how individuals engaged in the shared experience of aesthetically transacting with culturally relevant texts did indeed result in revolutionary changes that enriched all of the participants individually and collectively (Gee, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995). The experience was so much more than students reading and interpreting texts. The participants’ aesthetic transactions with the Gothic texts acted as a catalyst for personal,

social, and global understandings that resulted in evolution to their Discourses. Thus, this study extends on both Rosenblatt's aesthetic transactional theory of reading and Gee's (2008) Discourse theory by contextualizing the aesthetic transactions participants constructed with a particular genre, and tracking the progression of how these aesthetic transactions acted as a catalyst for meaningful evolution to participants' various Discourses.

However, what remained unchanged for the majority of participants was their negative perception about 'academic reading' as it was carried out in past Discourses and how they believed it would be carried out in future secondary Discourses. Many of the participants detailed an almost begrudging and unquestioning acceptance that school reading tasks were devoid of meaning as simply being the way the school system 'works.' This finding is significant as it highlights many participants' fixed views, values, and beliefs as a result of their experiences in past Discourses. Participants indicated that these Discourses failed to connect what they were reading in school to their various social practices (Gee, 2008; Knoester, 2009).

In fact, a number of participants communicated that they never even thought school reading could be a personally meaningful experience prior to the Gothic studies reading unit implementation. This newfound perspective yields an unexpected tension. Through this experience, the participants saw a glimpse of what academic reading could be when their aesthetic transactions with texts were nurtured in curriculum choices and pedagogical practices that aligned and extended on their various Discourses. As Mrs. Carson reflected, these newfound understandings might potentially make returning to 'business as usual' all the more difficult for these participants. Unfortunately,

implementing transformative literacy practices that prioritize students' construction of aesthetic transactions likely became more challenging for Mrs. Carson and the other reading teachers at Hillside Middle School following this research. This further challenge to students' construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts was due to administrative interpretation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative for reading. It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to examine students' construction of aesthetic transactions outside the Gothic studies reading unit implementation. However, administrative decisions with regard to the CCSS and amendments to the reading curriculum came about while I was conducting this study. The decision held stark contrast to the findings of this research; additionally, it is quite possible that Hillside Middle School is not alone in this interpretation of the reading CCSS. For these reasons, I felt this topic warrants some attention in this discussion.

Hillside's Interpretation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative

Prior to September 2013, Hillside Middle School's reading curriculum was comprised of a literature anthology, (individual teachers selected the pieces they wanted to teach from this text), as well as two or three class novels, which the teachers of each grade level mutually voted upon every year. As discussed in an earlier section of this study, the vast majority of the pieces were historical and/or realistic fiction. However, classroom teachers exercised some agency in selecting what pieces to teach out of the anthology, as well as influenced what novels were selected. There was also some, as Mrs. Carson noted in her pre-unit interview, "wiggle room," in bringing in pieces outside of the curriculum. Mrs. Carson made use of this freedom. In her pre-unit interview, she discussed enjoying the autonomy to occasionally weave in popular culture text excerpts

with her middle school students: “Last year, we read a couple snippets of *The Hunger Games*. The kids loved that we were talking about it! The fact that we were all reading it made it a fun experience!” Mrs. Carson discussed the merit of incorporating what students are reading outside of the classroom within school; she reflected, “I wish, you know, it was something that was encouraged more.” As a reflective and passionate teacher, Mrs. Carson intuitively understood that her students appreciated the incorporation of their leisure reading within reading class. Hillside’s reading curriculum provided her with some (although she felt it was minimal) flexibility and agency in making these decisions.

However, in December, 2012, about mid-way through the Gothic unit implementation, Hillside Middle School’s administration announced the decision that in efforts to adhere to the CCSS, commencing in September, 2013, the middle school’s reading curriculum would be comprised of and restricted to the pieces on text exemplar list found in Appendix B in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (www.commoncore.org). As discussed earlier in this study, this list lacks diversification as it contains very little fantasy and contemporary works. Additionally, there is no mention within the CCSS or the text exemplar list of the merit of incorporating students’ out-of-school literacy practices, such as popular culture texts, within the curriculum. Following this list on the CCSS website is the caution that it should serve as a guide and that actual curricular decisions are to be left up to the discretion of individual districts (www.commoncore.org). Yet, in their effort to align their curriculum and pedagogy under the CCSS, Hillside Middle School’s administration made the decision to utilize this list in fully governing the reading curriculum despite this caveat. Under this CCSS

interpretation, reading teachers cannot select pieces within the official curriculum, nor can they pull in other pieces from outside of the curriculum. This decision holds direct contrast to the findings of this study in terms of promoting students' construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts in ways that encourage Discourse alignment and development.

I was in Mrs. Carson's classroom the day that this administrative decision was passed down to teachers. Ironically, the news came on a day that the students were reading the popular culture Gothic text, *Down a Dark Hall* and discussing how much they enjoyed this text as they packed up to leave. As students walked out of the classroom, I overheard one student remark to his peer, "Finally! We're reading something new!" Below is an excerpt from my researcher's journal that I composed following the end of this observation:

Once the students leave the classroom, Mrs. Carson tears up as she brings me up to date on the new curriculum changes set to commence the following September. She feels this administrative decision will keep her from teaching the way she wants to. She says she does not know if she can stay in teaching long-term given the direction she feels education is moving and what she calls, "The disenfranchisement of teachers in the profession and lack of caring about what the students need." She shares that she would love to reuse some of the Gothic texts of this study, like the popular culture novel, *Down a Dark Hall* because as she says, "The kids got so much out of it." But, she believes due to these new curriculum restraints she will not be able to. I am at a loss for words in terms of how to comfort her. In fact, I cannot help but feel that Mrs. Carson's participation in this unit implementation will make adhering to this administrative decision all the more difficult, as she has seen first-hand how this decision contradicts what we have witnessed so far during this study. This unexpected tension, as a result of Mrs. Carson's willingness and dedication to act as my teacher participant and try something new in regards to this implementation, and the stark contrast this administrative decision holds to what she has witnessed in this study, makes me feel heavy at heart.

During Mrs. Carson's post-unit interview, we discussed this administrative decision, and the tension it holds to the findings of this study in greater detail.

Mrs. Carson acknowledged the merits of exposing students to more traditional and canonical texts, and how reading curriculums should comprise these texts in order to, as she stated, “Expose students to some of these great pieces of literature that they probably wouldn’t read on their own.” However, Mrs. Carson felt these texts should be used in addition to, rather than at the expense of popular culture, and other texts residing in her students’ out-of-school literacy practices:

I always suspected it, but after this [Gothic unit experience] I *know* it. There’s no reason why the texts always have to be canonical! Look at all they learned in this [Gothic] unit! I think the emphasis is now so wholly on the texts of the canon, by the canon, and for the canon, rather than of the students, by the students, and for the students!

Within this reflection, Mrs. Carson expressed the belief that Hillside’s interpretation of the CCSS was not prioritizing the needs and interests of her students at their particular and unique time and phase of development in ways that encouraged their construction of aesthetic transactions and subsequent Discourse alignment and development. She mourned the loss to exercise agency in making text selections with her students in mind and bemoaned the lack of diversity inherent in the texts that comprised the curriculum commencing in September, 2013.

Additionally, in her post-unit interview, Mrs. Carson discussed how during a common core workshop she attended with fellow Hillside Middle School reading teachers, “The speakers were saying how to adhere to the [CCSS] standards, it’s really important for us to focus students’ attention to what’s in the text. They weren’t emphasizing exploring what the texts mean to the students at all.” Mrs. Carson’s belief that the CCSS workshop overemphasizes efferent knowledge derived solely in the text came as little surprise; the rhetoric of the standards with the CCSS initiative prioritizes

effluent reading (www.corestandards.org). As a result of this emphasis, Mrs. Carson felt that she and her colleagues would feel pressure to focus pedagogical practices on effluent knowledge derived in the text at the expense of aesthetic understandings.

This administrative decision, which failed to prioritize students' construction of aesthetic transactions in both the text choices and the related context in a means that promoted student Discourse alignment and subsequent development, starkly contrasted with the findings of this study. In her post-unit interview Mrs. Carson utilized discourse suggestive of Gee's (2008) acquisition principle in describing how she felt students naturally and enthusiastically "accrued" skills (as outlined on the CCSS for seventh grade reading) during the Gothic studies reading unit without sacrificing the aesthetic reading domain. In fact, Mrs. Carson felt that the students gleaned these understandings as a result of the prioritization of aesthetic transactions in the text and context of the unit:

Students naturally accrued the skills [during the Gothic studies reading unit] on the CCSS poster anyway! Look, [Directs my attention to the CCSS poster for reading in the back of the classroom. Mrs. Carson has a student highlight a standard once she feels the class collectively masters it] the whole poster's covered in yellow! We didn't have to rely on the exemplar texts to do it! We used pop culture and new stuff that they [the students] love! We didn't have to do boring comprehension question after boring comprehension question and text analysis after text analysis! They've [the students] done so much in this unit. So much writing, so much discussion, so much analyzing, so much comparing, so much probing the depths, and they do it with joy and enthusiasm!

Within this reflection, Mrs. Carson echoed Gee's (2008) belief that in utilizing 'culturally relevant texts' connecting students' Discourses, and giving students the freedom to act as apprentices in understanding these texts, the students naturally acquired literacy skills. Gee (2008) discussed being apprenticed in relationship to talking about texts "in certain ways" (p. 44). With regard to this study, participants were apprenticed into different ways of reading through exploration of the aesthetic transactions they constructed with

culturally relevant texts (Gee, 2008). The texts and related context connected with their social practices; thus, these tasks were inherently meaningful and relevant to the students and allowed them to organically acquire literacy skills (Gee, 2008/2011).

Mrs. Carson's affirmation of the many ideas, associations, feelings, etc., that she believed the students gleaned as a result of this Gothic unit implementation also echoed Rosenblatt's (1994/1995/2005) assertion that students' construction of aesthetic transactions are the starting place of a literacy experience and the construction of meaning. These understandings afford the participants meaningful Discourse alignment and subsequent development (Gee, 2008). It was disturbing to both Mrs. Carson and me that trends at Hillside Middle School further removed the experience of academic reading from the students. Another equally disturbing question plagues my mind: Is Hillside Middle School alone in these curriculum and pedagogical decisions amidst the CCSS?

Implications for Classroom Practice and Future Research

This study was one small step in understanding the complexity behind cultivating adolescent readers' construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts within the current educational climate. Particularly, during this critical time of transition, in the advent of adopting national Common Core State Standards for reading, additional research is needed to understand the nature of aesthetic transactions as they pertain to adolescent readers in the academic context. The CCSS for reading call for adolescents to "read deeply" and achieve complexity in text comprehension; however, it is unclear (based on the actual rhetoric of the reading standards as well as the text exemplar list) where students' aesthetic transactions in text choices and the related context currently play a role (www.corestandards.org). In order for students to comprehend texts and 'read

deeply' in the means the CCSS outline, students' aesthetic transactions with texts during and after reading events must be prioritized; these experiences are the catalyst for deep textual understanding that the reading CCSS demand.

This study documented a means of nurturing adolescent readers' aesthetic transactions with academic texts in examining participants' construction of aesthetic transactions in response to a particular genre. However, it is important to note that this study explored only one of the many possibilities for ways to nurture adolescent readers' aesthetic transactions in the reading classroom. Additional design research studies, in seeking other solutions for prioritizing students' aesthetic transactions with academic texts that simultaneously work towards students achieving the CCSS, are critical. Such research would provide educators with tangible means to support students' construction of aesthetic transactions in addition to, rather than at the expense of, adhering to the expectations as outlined in the CCSS initiative.

This study revealed the myriad aesthetic transactions participants constructed with the traits of Gothic texts, such as the feelings, thoughts, associations etc., they formed with the fantastic elements and dark humor of the genre. These qualities can be found in other literary genres, such as fantasy and comedy. Studies in these and other genres that reside in adolescents' leisure reading practices might yield additional ways to encourage students' construction of aesthetic transactions within the reading classroom.

Additionally, the Gothic studies reading unit implementation of this study was limited in that it utilized only written texts within the reading curriculum. Other literacies, such as anime, comics, video games, blogs, art, music, videos, etc., warrant fruitful areas for future research in terms of understanding additional ways to bring adolescents' out-of-

school literacies into the academic setting in ways that encourage students' construction of aesthetic transactions and Discourse alignment and subsequent development. Other design research studies could involve researchers creating additional implementations utilizing a diverse range of 'texts'. On a smaller scale, classroom teachers could investigate their students' out-of-school literacy practices for clues as to the types of texts that may result in meaningful academic reading experiences if they are incorporated into the classroom.

Additional unit approaches that could potentially encourage adolescent students' construction of aesthetic transactions with academic texts could also include centering a reading unit on a provocative theme, such as issues surrounding the concept of normalcy, as it manifests in a variety of different texts and across many genres. As the findings of this study suggest, the participants constructed a variety of meaningful aesthetic transactions surrounding this question as it manifests in Gothic texts. Such an inquiry across a variety of genres would involve utilizing a 'Gothic' lens of 'reading' texts in general that might encourage students' construction of aesthetic transactions and subsequent alignment and development of their various Discourses. Studies exploring students' construction of aesthetic transactions in regards to this and other provocative questions would yield additional pertinent information on this topic. Relatedly, individual classroom teachers could solicit their students in a discussion of potential issues, topics, concerns, and preoccupations they would like to explore across a range of genres.

This study also highlights pedagogical practices that encouraged participants' construction of aesthetic transactions. The unit related discussions and activities, as described in this study, could be implemented in conjunction with a variety of texts. For

example, a reading teacher could model his/her own aesthetic transactions with a text, showcasing the various possibilities for aesthetically transacting as well as communicating that such responses are valued. When a teacher models the aesthetic transactional process, he or she is helping students acquire a classroom Discourse in which reading “in this way” is valued (Gee, 2008, p. 44). Then, teachers could allow the students the time and agency to take reading-related discussions into unexpected directions that result when they express, enhance, and form new aesthetic transactions socially as a group. This encouraging of aesthetic transactions also includes careful consideration of questions posed to the class in that they pass Rosenblatt’s (2005) ‘acid test’ for encouraging aesthetic responses that readers co-construct with texts, rather than efferent knowledge derived solely in the text.

Additionally, instructors could encourage students to tangibly express their aesthetic transactions with the text in a choice medium with the support of their peers, as these participants of this study did in the project coinciding with the novel, *Down a Dark Hall*. Such opportunities may afford adolescents the opportunity to move from consuming to producing their aesthetic transactions in ways that constitute intrinsically meaningful activity that is not viewed as ‘work’ by the students in the traditional sense of the word because they find the tasks meaningful. Design research studies, exploring these and other pedagogical techniques that may support adolescents’ construction of aesthetic transactions and encourage alignment and development of their various Discourses, would contribute additional pertinent information on this topic.

In sum, individuals on the ground-level (administration and educators) need explicit support in addressing the challenge of adhering to the CCSS for reading while

simultaneously prioritizing students' construction of aesthetic transactions with texts. This concept is particularly important since such aesthetic reading goals are not overtly prioritized within the CCSS initiative, but stand as a crucial component to students achieving the goals that the CCSS demands (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005). Teachers must be educated and supported so that they feel empowered to meet these unique challenges in the advent of the CCSS. Design research actively positions teachers as participants in inquiries where they are directly supported by the researcher(s) as they collectively work together to address a prevalent problem and achieve a common goal (Burr, 2003).

Furthermore, additional studies are also needed that prioritize the voices for who this research matters the most: the students. These studies could include wide-scale student surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups aimed at using a broad range of student perspectives to understand adolescent readers' construction of aesthetic transactions, and tensions to creating these meanings, within the classroom context. Such research could be conducted using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches. As evidenced in this research, adolescents can teach us a great deal about the ways in which their aesthetic transactions can be nurtured in the academic setting. Additional research utilizing their voices as a way to inform text choices and pedagogical practices are needed. On a smaller scale, classroom teachers could solicit their students' perspectives on what texts they would like incorporated within their reading classroom, as well as the types of activities they would enjoy, through the use of surveys, polls, questionnaires, or discussions. Such activities, on the part of reading teachers, would ensure that students' voices are heard

and that their beliefs about what ‘counts’ in regards to meaningful academic reading practices are incorporated.

Study Limitations

This study is limited in that it only considered a small number of participants, within the confines of one classroom, under the direction of a singular teacher; therefore, limiting generalizability of the research findings. Additionally, the participants were homogenous as they were all honors English-Language Arts students. They also came from similar socio-economic backgrounds. As a result, students’ voices from a diverse range of academic abilities and various socioeconomic backgrounds are absent. More focused classroom studies are necessary to obtain more diversification in response to the inquiries posed in this research.

Future studies, where researchers would partner with other teachers to implement a Gothic studies reading unit across various reading classroom contexts, would yield cross-case studies. These studies would allow for comparable analysis in order to obtain more complex and collective information in regards to the research inquiry. Such understandings would provide a better illustration of the complex relationship between the Gothic as a literary genre, text choices, and related pedagogical practices as carried out by various teachers, in relation to adolescents’ construction of aesthetic transactions and subsequent Discourse alignment and development within the reading classroom. Studies in a variety of classroom contexts with additional participants might also potentially yield additional tensions to adolescent students’ construction of aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts, as well as tension to Discourse development that did not arise in this current study.

The primary research inquiry of this study examined what aesthetic transactions the participants constructed with Gothic texts within the context of the Gothic studies reading unit as a whole. Thus, within this qualitative study, my primary research inquiry examined what aesthetic transactions participants constructed with Gothic texts within the entire unit experience. Participants' aesthetic transactions were prioritized in text choices and related pedagogical practices under the assumption that such dual prioritization results in the most meaningful academic reading endeavors where instructors can maximize students' construction of aesthetic transactions in the classroom setting (Rosenblatt, 1994/1995/2005).

The study illustrated that the participants constructed myriad aesthetic transactions as a result of the text + context working in tandem to promote such experiences. It was beyond the scope of this study to understand how much of the aesthetic transactions students constructed were in direct relation to the Gothic text choices and/or the pedagogical practices as carried out by a particular classroom teacher. Additional studies could potentially isolate these variables. Such research would yield additional information with regard to these specific components as they merge together within the academic context in relation to adolescent readers.

Additionally, I had a relationship with Hillside Middle School as a teacher, and Mrs. Carson as a mentor/friend prior to study commencement. The rapport I developed and maintained with Hillside Middle School were advantages to this site given that the nature of this research involved going into a district and significantly altering the curriculum. However, my past experiences within this context contained potential threats to interpretation with regard to bias. I implemented a variety of practices, such as daily

reflections in my researchers' journal and staying close to the data, to minimize these effects (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). However, as with the nature of any qualitative research, it is impossible to all-together eliminate bias in data interpretation, particularly when the researcher has prior experience in the study setting (Patton, 2002).

Final Remarks

In closing the official story of the participants of this study, I cannot help but recall Ray's haunting final remark at the end of his post-unit interview: "Now, things will change." The "change" that Ray, the other study participants, and, I suspect, adolescents at large desire, is for their reading experiences in school to resonate with them in ways that expand their academic, personal, and social understandings. In the United States, we are at a critical crossroads in the advent of implementing national Common Core State Standards. Despite the many variables to attend to with regards to these standards, coupled with anxiety on the part of states, districts, administrators, and instructors to find practical means to attain these goals, we cannot afford to overlook and neglect the nature of the people we are educating. The students, as they exist at a unique time and phase in their development, must be at the center of all academic reading endeavors.

This study illustrates that reading teachers do not need to sacrifice students' construction of aesthetic transactions with texts in order for them to attain reading skills, such as those listed in the reading CCSS. In fact, the findings suggested that the participants' construction of aesthetic transactional experiences *helped* them read more deeply and derive myriad textual meanings and interpretations that aided in their skill development, as Rosenblatt (1994) first discussed two decades ago. Thus, this study illustrates that the CCSS can be more readily achieved when curriculum and pedagogical

practices prioritize adolescents' aesthetic transactions with texts. The experiences of the participants of this study show that aesthetic transactions and skill attainment can work in tandem to warrant deep textual meaning and comprehension that aids students in becoming savvy readers capable of successfully navigating a wide range of texts as envisioned in the reading CCSS.

Thus, adolescent readers' aesthetic transactions with academic texts must be prioritized on the national level in terms of standards guiding instruction, down to the microcosm of each individual classroom teacher, and at every level in between. Adolescent readers have unique needs as they liminally sit on the threshold between childhood and adulthood. As a result, they are often plagued by many 'monsters,' real and imagined. I witnessed first-hand how meaningful academic reading endeavors can and do have transformative effects that make adolescents better readers and individuals. The many aesthetic transactions of imaginative contrast and meaningful connection the participants constructed during the Gothic unit results in transformations that enriched all eight participants academically, socially, and personally. These young men and women wanted academic reading experiences that enriched their minds and their hearts in the way that Rosenblatt (1994/1995) and Gee (2008) envisioned. Educating them solely for skill attainment is not enough; they deserve more.

Collectively, the participants' experiences during the Gothic studies reading unit gave them the tools to face their many 'monsters' head on, or as Matt stated in his poem composition, (highlighted in the beginning of this study), "But, WE [my emphasis] shall hit them, oh right back!" The reading classroom became the students' arena for this battle, their weapons, their newfound knowledge and one another. All of the participants

took something away from this experience that made them more skilled readers, better members of society and more at peace in their own skin. As a result, all of these young men and women emerged from this battle, victorious.

Appendix A: Pilot Data

Preliminary data was gathered in May and June 2012 in the form of a pre-unit implementation interview with the teacher-participant and observations in an eighth grade classroom where the introductory unit lesson was utilized (see lesson plans in appendix F), and document analysis of student responses to this lesson. Mrs. Carson read excerpts of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games* that illustrated Gothic traits; students had to guess what book the excerpts came from. The students got into cooperative groups to discuss common themes amongst one of the three books, as well as reflect on reasons for the popularity of the genre. I was able to observe their discussions, as well as examine the worksheets they produced during this initial lesson. The following section (utilizing emic language from the participants) details the preliminary themes that surfaced in regards to students' responses to popular culture Gothic texts utilized in reading lessons.

Students' Responses to Popular Culture Texts in the Reading Classroom

"Fun, Not 'Work'"

When Mrs. Carson announces that she is going to read excerpts from some popular novels and passes out handouts containing the three mystery passages, the students whisper to one another their initial guesses; in fact, Mrs. Carson has to remind many of the students not to look ahead to future excerpts, but to wait for her (Observation, 6/5/2012). All fourteen students present in the classroom have their eyes on the handouts and are heard whispering their guesses to one another (Observation, 6/5/2012). After going through the excerpts, one of the students asks, "This is fun, can we do more?" (Observation, 6/5/2012). At the end of the double period (and the introductory lesson) one student says to the other, "It's the bell already?" (Observation, 6/5/2012). In the post-

lesson discussion, Mrs. Carson remarks how focused the students are throughout the lesson. She comments that it is hard to get the students to stay on task at the end of the school year; she is surprised that she does not need to remind any of the students to remain on task (Observation, 6/5/2012). All of this suggests that the students are engaged in the lesson material (Lenters, 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007).

Mrs. Carson further explores students' reactions when she brings popular culture texts into the reading classroom: "I know if I mention *Harry Potter* in-class, everyone will have something to say" (Interview, 5/8/2012). When further probed as to why this was the case, she responds that because the students care about the text, or at the very least, know something of the them through the movies, fan websites, and discussions, talking about it is not "work, it was fun" (Interview, 5/8/12). Interestingly, given the nature of the discussion on *Harry Potter* as Mrs. Carson outlines during the interview, the students completed important comprehension tasks such as supporting their points of view with evidence, debating with peers, and even satirizing the way certain scenes were depicted in the movies; these are advanced reading skills that students must master in accordance with the CCCS (www.corestandards.org). However, this discussion is not viewed as 'work' because of the level of enjoyment and engagement students display. As Mrs. Carson notes:

They had their hands in the air and were passionate about it! They didn't mind pulling out examples from the text to support their reasoning. Even the kids that hadn't read it [*Harry Potter*] but had learned enough from movie clips or talk with friends became part of this literacy discussion (Interview, 5/8/2012).

Such transactions with popular culture texts are also evident during the observation. In their cooperative groups, students continuously make connections between texts. For example, one boy notes that a commonality between all three of the Gothic popular

culture texts is that “All of them [the main characters] confront death willingly to save what really matters to them,” which details a sophisticated observation (Observation, 6/5/2012).

In bringing these texts into the classroom, the students make meaningful connections between their literacy practices both in and outside of school, which makes the learning more relevant (Gee, 2005/2008; Lenters, 2006; Pitcher et al., 2007; Tatum, 2006; Wilson & Casey, 2007). In fact, Mrs. Carson remarks how after the discussion, kids who had not read *Harry Potter* for leisure reading were talking about how they wanted to read it. The discussion encourages students to voluntarily participate in reading endeavors. Furthermore, in discussing books that Matter to the students, Mrs. Carson shows them that what they value is respected (Bean & Moni, 2003; Gibson, 2010; Hagood et al., 2010). This fusion of leisure and academic reading practices also cultivates an environment where the students have the opportunity to teach one another.

“Hey, Twi-Girl, Can You Help Us?”

Once students begin the cooperative group work on the introductory Gothic unit lesson, they spontaneously and frequently ask one another to clarify or elucidate aspects of the books (Observation, 6/5/12). Interestingly, the students already know which students will be able to help them, evident when a boy shouts to a girl in another group, “Hey, Twi [*Twilight*] girl, can you help us?” The girl smiles and walks over to assist the boys in that group (Observation, 6/5/12). Such previous knowledge suggests that adolescents pay close attention to what their peers are interested in, including their leisure book choices (Berger, 2000). Moreover, the students appear to take enjoyment in helping one another and situating themselves as the knowledgeable ‘expert.’ This gives them the

opportunity to learn from one another. Peers as the ‘expert other’ is a critical component to a sociocultural approach to education, particularly in cultivating meaningful zones of proximal development for optimal student learning to occur (Vygotsky, 1997).

An environment that encourages such collaboration amongst learners also cultivates a Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘Community of practice’ dynamic where individuals with shared interests have the opportunity to learn from one another, encouraging greater engagement. Such discussions are the ‘social fabric’ of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As noted by Mrs. Carson, this is particularly true for adolescents:

Reading for them is not a solitary, but rather a community thing. People talk about the characters, events, and ask the ‘whys’ and the ‘hows,’ or the difficult questions. There’s a dialogue that goes on. And, being able to effectively weigh information and be in a [reading] dialogue is really what it’s all about (Interview, 5/8/12).

As Mrs. Carson explains, such conversations arise when the students care about the texts. The students are able to form connections with one another based on shared experiences with them (Hagood et al., 2010). For example, in discussing the *Hunger Games* series, one girl asks another, “Were you crying?” She nods and the girl smiles and says, “Me too!” (Observation, 6/5/12). Such dialogue also suggests that these texts personally resonate personally with the students. The next section explores why the Gothic genre in particular resonates with adolescents, and the result of text experiences that are personally meaningful to readers.

Adolescents and the Appeal of Gothic Texts

“They Like the Edginess”

As noted by McGillis (2008), the Gothic genre contains plots that are full of suspense and contain action. In their responses analyzing the popularity of the genre,

many male students remark that they enjoy Gothic texts because of these characteristics, which aligns with Ivey & Broadduss' (2001) and Wilson & Casey's (2007) analysis on the types of stories adolescents enjoy. Additionally, a number of both male and female students write that they find the "romance" of these Gothic texts interesting. As Blackford (2011) and Berger (2000) discuss, issues sounding sexuality and attraction become a new and often confusing terrain for adolescents to navigate. As such, adolescents are interested in texts that depict characters grappling with these issues (Ashcraft, 2009). Such conversations are not often a part of discussions in the adolescent reading classroom (Ashcraft, 2009). The Gothic genre offers a means for students to explore attraction by vicariously living these moments through characters in the texts and therefore, exploring societal conventions surrounding it through engagement in text transactions (Blackford, 2011; Rosenblatt, 1994/1995).

Mrs. Carson further discusses the "edginess" of Gothic texts and how teens are drawn to that: "They like morbid-ness. I think because it exists, but it's not something the students expect we'll talk about in reading class. You don't normally talk about death and destruction [in reading class], but they like that stuff! They like the unexplained, the things people don't readily talk about" (Interview, 5/8/12). Mrs. Carson also notes that students like seeing the choices and challenges that the genre affords: "They [adolescents] like to see the choices and challenges the characters face and the bad stuff of life because they get all that too" (Interview, 5/8/12). Such moments of connectivity between reader and text are evidence of personal response to texts (Rosenblatt 1994/1995). As such, Mrs. Carson feels that reading about individuals in similar circumstances is empowering to adolescents: "There's so many bad things in the world they cannot control. In a book, you

can put it down and say, 'It's just a book.' You are the master of turning the page. You can set it down and come back to it. You can own it" (Interview, 5/8/12). Due to the shared experiences between characters in Gothic texts and adolescents, students are engage in transactional reading moments that make the reading experience meaningful.

"It's Right There, Were They Were At. It Hit Them in the Gut"

The previous quote depicts students' reaction to a Gothic poem, "The Highwayman," that Mrs. Carson had previously taught the students (Interview, 5/8/12). In the spirit of Gee's (2005/2008) and Rosenblatt's (1994/1995) affirmations that learning must meaningfully relate to students, Mrs. Carson discusses how Gothic texts are "right there" where adolescents are developmentally, which makes them particularly appealing. For example, a phenomenon typical of the adolescent experience is the distancing oneself from adult relations, particularly parents. As Mrs. Carson notes, many Gothic texts feature young people in isolation from adults:

For example, Harry Potter is on his own. He has his friends, but in the end, he's still isolated. I think a lot of my students feel isolated. It's nice to introduce them to Gothic texts with heroes they can identify with. The classic canon often neglects this theme. They have enough reality, they want to escape that. But, in escaping that, these kids enjoy stories about strong kids making choices in defense of their loved ones and beliefs. It makes them feel empowered and that's exciting for them (Interview, 5/8/12).

Such connections between Gothic texts and adolescents' experiences are also noted by the students during the observation. The students discuss that although *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* contain fantastical elements, both texts feature kids that deal with typical adolescent experiences, such as the stress of going to school and falling in love (Observation, 6/5/12). However, the students also detail how they enjoy the fantasy aspects of the genre that do not occur in real life. As one student notes on her worksheet,

The Gothic genre is popular with teens because “People can escape the real world into fantasy, but also learn about things that do happen in world, and in some cases, how to handle these situations.” Akin to this, another student notes, “Although Gothic stories are supernatural, they connect to everyday life. I enjoy thinking of being a part of the story.” Such a balance of reality with fantasy that the genre affords particularly appeals to this age group. It allows escapism through the imaginative elements, but is still grounded enough that the students vicariously experience the texts through meaningful transactional experiences (McGillis, 2008).

Mrs. Carson adeptly sums up the appeal of the genre to her students:

When they get into the Gothic genre, all of the sudden they are transported into a parallel world despite the fantastic elements. And, there are monsters, whether real or imagined. And, there are demons, whether real or imagined. And, sometimes, they feel they are the monster or demon. But, [in Gothic texts] love is still love, hate is still hate. It's an odyssey and there are always monsters whether real or imagined. Regardless, the books take the kids on their own odyssey (Interview, 5/8/12).

All in all, preliminary data collection and analysis suggest that students are engaging in meaningful transactional experiences with the Gothic popular culture texts in the reading classroom. This study will afford me the opportunity to further explore the students' responses to Gothic texts that they less familiar with, using the commonly-known Gothic popular culture texts as a bridge to lesser known texts that also comprise the genre as a whole. It will also give me the opportunity to explore tensions or conflicts in regards to students' personal responses to texts, when a genre that is prevalent in students' out-of-school literacy experiences is brought into the academic setting.

Appendix B: Student Participant Pre-Screening Survey

Name: _____

Potential Participation in Research Study Student Questionnaire

Please circle the answer to the question that best and honestly describes how you feel.

1. In general, how do you feel about being interviewed by the researcher?
 - a. Comfortable
 - b. Sort of comfortable
 - c. Sort of uncomfortable
 - d. Very uncomfortable
2. How do you feel about talking honestly, freely, and in detail about your thoughts on reading with the researcher during an interview (in a private and confidential setting)?
 - a. Comfortable
 - b. Sort of comfortable
 - c. Sort of uncomfortable
 - d. Very uncomfortable
3. How do you feel about being audio recorded (assuming the researcher is the only one listening to the tapes)?
 - a. Comfortable
 - b. Sort of comfortable
 - c. Sort of uncomfortable
 - d. Very uncomfortable

4. How do you feel about the researcher listening in on your conversations in reading class (assuming that it has nothing to do with how you are evaluated as a student)?

- a. Comfortable
- b. Sort of comfortable
- c. Sort of uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

5. How do you feel about the researcher reading your written responses to reading activities and questions (assuming it has nothing to do with how you are evaluated as a student)?

- a. Comfortable
- b. Sort of comfortable
- c. Sort of uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

6. How do you feel about the researcher coming back after the reading unit is over to ask you additional follow-up questions?

- a. Comfortable
- b. Sort of comfortable
- c. Sort of uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

7. How do you feel about the researcher knowing general information about you (Name, age, gender, mailing address, and ethnicity)?

- a. Comfortable
- b. Sort of comfortable

- c. Sort of uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

Part II.

Please answer the following questions honestly. Your answers DO NOT influence whether or not you are selected as a study participant. They only help me better get to know the general thoughts of the class as a whole on reading.

1. Circle the number that best corresponds with how much you enjoy reading (in general)
(Pull out my teeth instead!) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (My favorite activity!)
2. What genres/topics/types of things do you enjoy reading?
3. What is your favorite (or a favorite, or least painful) book you've read in the past year (either in school or out of school)? Note: If you cannot remember the title, just describe it below.
4. Why is this book your favorite?

Appendix C: Observation Protocol

*Adapted from *Community College Resource Center English Classroom Observation*

Protocol, 2012; Creswell, 2007

(Note: Pseudonyms utilized for all study participants for jottings/field notes)

Foci of observations:

Student aesthetic transactional experiences with Gothic texts

Tension/conflict/lack of aesthetic transactional experiences with Gothic texts

Evidence of classroom Discourse evolution during/post unit

Tension to Discourse evolvement during/post unit

Date of Observation: _____

Where the lesson takes place: _____

Start time of lesson:_____ End time of lesson: _____

Number of students present (out of 22 in the class): _____

Student participants present: _____

Student participants absent: _____

Researcher position in the classroom and rationale for location:_____

Gothic texts utilized during lesson:_____

Lesson Summary:

Description of Classroom Setting (particularly note deviations from previous observations):

Lesson Materials:

Unit artifacts collected today:_____

Running record: Jottings completed during observation (attach additional sheets as necessary)

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Appendix D: Data Analysis Protocol

*Data analysis protocol aligned with Ruona (2005) stages in successfully analyzing qualitative data

*This protocol and analytic tool were used for all documents in this study including field notes, classroom conversation transcripts, interview transcripts, and unit artifacts

Data Analysis Protocol
1. Prepare data by transforming collected data into a Word document
2. Check document for any errors
3. Save document in a corresponding folder on my computer desktop and USB drive
4. Read each document multiple times: Mark document up with notes/questions/underlining key words/phrases
5. Pull back from the data to reflect in journal and memos
6. After examining initial documents, utilize early thematic analysis (Ruona, 2005) and Gee's (2011) Big 'D' Discourse analysis tool create a preliminary coding system representing preliminary themes using Boyatzis's (1998) components for thematic code development. Create a separate Word document for each piece of data and title it 'Preliminary Analysis.' Save the documents in a separate folder on my computer desktop and USB drive
7. Continue to reflect on data in memo and codes
8. Finish data collection and conduct member checks to verify initial findings
9. Upload all documents to ATLAS ti qualitative software program
10. Code and the data using the code manager of ATLAS ti
11. Reflect on coding in memos. Seek feedback on codes from committee and peer readers.
12. Revise coding system (expanding, condensing, adding, and deleting codes as needed based on what the data yields, further reflection, and additional research)
13. With each revision, recode the data
14. Based on the preliminary themes present in initial data, revise theme list based on Ruona's (2005) significance criteria
15. Explore how the codes 'speak' to each other in the development of themes as derived from the codes: Relationship? Questions? Paradoxes? Irregularities?
16. Organize and condense the data into significant themes in regards to the answers to the research questions that will be detailed in the findings section
17. Explore how the themes are connected to one another, my ideas, prior research, need for further study, limitations of this particular study, and lessons learned in the discussion section

Appendix E: Thematic Analysis Tool

Inductive and deductive codes derived from the following sources:

- Research on aesthetic reading
- Research on Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading
- Adolescent developmental theory
- Research on Gee's Discourse theory
- Analysis of Gothic genre
- My own experiences as a middle school reading teacher
- Analysis of participant experiences in this study

Master Code List

Category 1: Aesthetic Transactions: Gothic traditional and popular culture 'text'

qualities that participants aesthetically transact with during the unit (T after code denotes tension)

- | | |
|--|----|
| • Dark Humor | DH |
| • Impossible Romance | IR |
| • Fusion of fantasy and realism | FF |
| • Setting that categorizes the genre | SG |
| • Superstition/Ghosts/Afterlife/Paranormal | SU |
| • Deals in philosophical issues/human anxieties | DP |
| • Main characters faces internal hardships | MH |
| • Main character not 'normal' and spiritually isolated | MN |
| • Main character overcomes hardships/faults | MO |
| • Characters in a state of powerlessness who rebel | CP |

- Corruption and/or evil authority CE
- Inner psyche revealed IP
- Destruction/death/violence DD
- Participant indicates interest/relatedness to Gothic qualities in general GG

Category 2: Aesthetic Transactions: Affective reactions participants illustrate during the Gothic unit experience (T after code denotes tension)

Affective reaction/Emotional statement

- Overall text AT
- Overall unit AU
- Overall use of popular culture texts AP

Category 3: Qualities of classroom discussions that nurture participants' initial aesthetic transactions (T after code denotes tension)

- Teacher models her aesthetic transaction(s) with traditional/pop culture 'texts' TM
- Teacher encourages aesthetic transactions by probing for deep questions TD
- Teacher creating time and space for student aesthetic transactions TS
- Teacher respectful of student aesthetic transactions with all 'texts' TR
- Discussion evidence of transaction: Students wanting to share TT
- Student participant affective response to transactional value of discussion(s) TP
- Discussions increasing aesthetic transactional potential: *Frankenstein* TF

Category 4: Qualities of reading-related activities that encourage development of participants' initial aesthetic transactions (T after code denotes tension)

- Connection to students/interests AI
- Ability to utilize alternative medium AM

- Collaboration AO
- Creativity AC
- Students voluntarily doing more or additional ‘work’ AA
- Overall participant affective response to activity(ies) AO
- Too much writing limits aesthetic transactional potential AW
- Activity decreasing aesthetic transactional potential: “The Tell Tale Heart” AD

Category 5: Participants’ Primary Discourse Evolution via a Secondary Discourse (Mrs. C’s Reading Classroom) (T after code denotes tension or no change)

- Life understanding(s) gained during/after unit PL
- Self-understanding(s) gained during/after unit PS
- Evolution in leisure ‘reading’ patterns during/after unit PR

Category 6: Participants’ Evolved Perceptions of their Secondary Discourse (Mrs. C’s Reading Classroom) (T after code denotes tension or no change)

- Reading skills/knowledge participants gained during/after unit SS
- Dynamic/rapport of Mrs. C’s classroom during/after unit SG
- Altered view of academic reading during/after unit SR

Category 7: Crossover from Participants’ Secondary Discourse (Mrs. C’s Reading Classroom) to another Secondary Discourse (T after code denotes tension or no change)

- Mrs. C’s classroom & Activity/Club crossover during unit SA

Category 8: Students’ Experiences of the Gothic Unit Compared to Past Academic Reading Experiences (Secondary Discourse of Mrs. C’s Classroom vs. Past School Reading Discourses)

- Aesthetic transactions encouraged via discussions in reading class PT

- Aesthetic transactions encouraged in text-related assignments PA
- Reading in service of the NJASK/PARCC standardized test preparation PN
- Aesthetic transactional potential of previous academic reading texts PE
- Overall views of past Discourse classroom experiences in reading PO

Category 9: CCSS Interpretation at Hillside: Tension to Aesthetic Transactions/Merging

Students' Primary and Secondary Discourses: Participants' Reactions to CCSS's List of 'Exemplar texts' as sole academic reading curriculum commencing September, 2013

- Overall affective reaction of participants to implementation CO
- Lack of teacher/student agency in text selection CA
- Student transactional experiences with texts not prioritized CS
- Lack of text diversity CT
- Participant arguing against view of special texts needed CV
- Participant speculation as to future reading classroom experiences CF

Appendix F: Consent Forms

Parental Consent for Student Participation

Your child is invited to potentially participate in a research study, “The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside their Heads: Adolescents’ Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts,” which is being conducted by Ms. Jennifer Del Nero, a PhD student in the Language and Literacy Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to study students and teacher responses to a reading unit using student leisure reading experiences in the classroom.

Your child’s participation in this study will involve 3 one hour long individual interviews during the school day on the school site, at a mutually agreed upon time between the classroom teacher and the researcher. During the interview, the researcher will ask the interviewee his/her thoughts/feelings surrounding reading, specifically, in relation to the reading unit that Mrs. Carson will be teaching. A brief follow-up interview with the student participants will be used so that the children can review and agree/disagree with the findings. Additionally, with your child’s permission, the researcher may look at some of the assignments your child completes during the unit time frame.

With you and your child’s permission, I will audiotape (sound record) the interview sessions, so that I may return to the data at a later time for review. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used during all phases of data collection. Your child’s identity will be confidential. I will be the only person who has knowledge of your child’s identity.

Please note that I will keep this information secure; I will be the only individual with access to this information. All data will be stored in either a lock box in my home or on my personal computer files. I will be the only person who has access to either area of data storage.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants) at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated.

All study data will be kept for three years following the completion of the study, at which time computer files will be permanently deleted and hard copies will be shredded and properly disposed of.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study, as personal responses to a reading and to a specific reading unit is not an overly sensitive topic.

It is the researcher's hope that your child will enjoy sharing his/her thoughts surrounding reading activities, as it provides an excellent opportunity for their voices and opinions to be heard. As a former middle school teacher, I recognize the importance role students' thoughts and feelings in regards to classroom activities. The goal of the research is to open up conversations about what adolescents find motivating about reading to improve the classroom experience. However, should your child not wish to answer question(s), he or she has the right to do so.

Your child will not receive any financial compensation for participating in the study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to

participate, and you may withdraw your child from participating at any time during the study activities without any penalty to your child.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me at any time.

Jennifer Del Nero
4 Brandywine Road
Skillman, NJ 08558
609-707-3481
jennifer.delnero@gse.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about the rights of a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect those who participate). Please contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

If you agree to permit your child to participate in this study, please fill out the information below and read the permission form to audiotape.

Name of Child (Print) _____

Parent/Legal Guardian (Print) _____

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature _____ Date: _____

AUDIOTAPE PERMISSION FORM

You have agreed to allow your child to participate in a research study entitled: “The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside Their Heads: Adolescents’ Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts in the Reading Classroom” conducted by Ms. Jennifer Del Nero. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audio (sound) record your child as part of that research study.

The recording(s) will be used for data analysis and review by the researcher only. No one else will have access to the audio recordings. A pseudonym (fake name) for your child will be utilized on the audio recordings as an additional protective measure. There will not be any identifying information about your child on the recordings. The recording(s) will be stored in a lock box in the researcher’s home and on her personal computer. No one else will have access to the hard or digital copies of the audio tapes. Upon the completion of the study, the records will be kept up to three years, at which time hard copies will be shredded and properly disposed of and electronic copies permanently deleted.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record your child as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Name of Child (Print) _____

Parent/Legal Guardian (Print) _____

Parent/Legal Guardian’s Signature _____ Date _____

Consent Form: Teacher-Participant

You are invited to act as the teacher-participant in a research study “The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside Their Heads: Adolescents’ Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts in the Reading Classroom,” which is being conducted by Ms. Jennifer Del Nero, a PhD student in the Language and Literacy Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to study students and teacher responses to a reading unit using student leisure reading experiences in the classroom.

Your participation in this study will involve the researcher observing your classes during unit implementation, audiotaping student classroom conversations regarding texts, interviewing your students three times for 40 minute segments, collecting unit artifacts for analysis, and three one hour long interviews with you at a mutually agreed upon time. A brief follow-up interview with you will follow in order for you to verify the accuracy of preliminary themes.

With your permission, I will audiotape (sound record) the interview sessions, so that I may return to the data at a later time for review. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used during all phases of data collection. Your identity will be confidential. I will be the only person who has knowledge of your identity on the audiotapes.

Please note that I will keep this information secure; I will be the only individual with access to this information. All data will be stored in either a lock box in my home or on my personal computer files. I will be the only person who has access to either area of data storage.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants) at Rutgers University are the

only parties that will be allowed to see the data. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated.

All study data will be kept for three years following the completion of the study, at which time computer files will be permanently deleted and hard copies will be shredded and properly disposed of.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study, as personal responses to a reading and to a specific reading unit is not an overly sensitive topic.

It is the researcher's hope that you will enjoy sharing your thoughts in regards to student reading activities. As a former middle school teacher, I recognize the importance role students' thoughts and feelings in regards to classroom activities. However, should you not wish to answer any question(s) you have the right to refrain from answering.

You will not receive any financial compensation for participating in the study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to not to participate, and you may withdraw from participating at any time during the study activities without any penalty.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me at any time.

Jennifer Del Nero
4 Brandywine Road
Skillman, NJ 08558
609-707-3481
jennifer.delnero@gse.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about the rights of a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect those who participate). Please contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

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Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

If you agree to participate in this study, please fill out the information below and read the permission form to audiotape.

TEACHER-PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

AUDIOTAPE PERMISSION FORM

You have agreed to participate in a research study entitled: “The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside Their Heads: Adolescents’ Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts in the Reading Classroom” conducted by Ms. Jennifer Del Nero. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audio (sound) record you as part of that research study.

The recording(s) will be used for data analysis and review by the researcher only. No one else will have access to the audio recordings. A pseudonym (fake name) will be utilized on the audio recordings as an additional protective measure. There will not be any identifying information about you on the recordings.

The recording(s) will be stored in a lock box in the researcher’s home and on her personal computer. No one else will have access to the hard or digital copies of the audio tapes. Upon the completion of the study, the records will be kept up to three years, at which time hard copies will be shredded and properly disposed of and electronic copies permanently deleted.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Teacher-participant_____ Date_____

AUDIOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to allow your child to participate in a research study entitled, “The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside Their Heads: Adolescents’ Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts in the Reading Classroom” conducted by Ms. Jennifer Del Nero. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape (sound record) your child during reading classroom activities where your child is engaged in conversations about texts with other study participants as a part of this research study.

The purpose of this audiotaping is for the researcher to accurately record and understand your child’s response to in-class reading activities. You do not have to agree allow your child to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recordings will include your child’s voice during classroom conversations. No identifying information will be included in these recordings.

The recordings will be safely stored in the privacy of the researcher’s home. I will be the only person accessing the audiotapes. You will not be compensated for use of these recordings.

Ms. Jennifer Del Nero and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All recordings will be kept for approximately three years, upon which all the data will be permanently deleted.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record your child as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix G: Assent for Participation in Research Activities

Investigator: Ms. Jennifer Del Nero

Rutgers University

Study Title: “The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside Their Heads: Adolescents’

Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts in the Reading Classroom

This assent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the researcher or your parent or teacher to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand before signing this document.

1. Ms. Jennifer Del Nero is inviting you to take part in her research study. Why is this study being done?

I want to study students’ thoughts on reading activities, especially in relation to a new reading unit that Mrs. Carson will be teaching you. Approximately ten students will be a part of this study. Though the whole class will be participating in the unit, so even if you are not selected as a participant, you will still be involved in the unit!

2. What will happen if I am selected?

- Your teacher will tell me her opinion about how she thinks you view reading activities in the classroom (your level of motivation or interest in reading).
- I will be coming to visit your reading classroom over the next few months to see what you are doing in your reading class.
- I will audiotape (sound record) your classroom conversations with other student participants during in-class reading activities.

- You will participate in 3-one hour long interviews with me on three separate dates during the school day, at school, in a private setting. During the interview I will ask you about your general feelings surrounding reading activities, especially related to the new reading unit Mrs. Carson will be teaching you. With your permission shown below, I will audiotape (sound record) the session. After I have looked over my interview notes, I will ask to meet with you briefly one final time so that you can give me your thoughts on my notes (tell whether you agree or disagree).
- With your permission, I may ask to see some of the work you complete during the reading unit.

3. What does it cost and how much does it pay?

You won't need to pay anything to take part in this study. Also, no payment will be given to participate.

4. There are very few risks in taking part in this research, but the following things could happen:

This is a low-risk study. All answers given during the individual interviews will remain confidential (I will be the only one who hears your answers and your answers will not be shared with anyone else). I will use a fake name for you while taking notes and during my write-up of the study. All of my information will be stored in a safe place in my home. Though it probably will not happen, you could be upset or embarrassed by a few of the questions. If this should occur, remember that you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to.

5. Are there any benefits that you or others will get out of being in this study?

You may enjoy talking about your feelings surrounding reading. The knowledge gained through this study may allow me to develop ideas that may make your reading class even more enjoyable.

It's completely up to you! Both you and your parents have to agree to allow you to take part in this study. If you choose to not take part in this study, I will honor that choice.

No one will get angry or upset with you if you don't want to do this. If you agree to take part in it and then you change your mind later, that's OK too. It's always your choice! 6.

CONFIDENTIALITY: I will do everything I can to protect the confidentiality of your records. If I write articles about this research, they will never say your name or anything that could give away who you are. I will do a good job at keeping all our records secret by following the rules made for researchers.

Do you have any questions? If you have any questions or worries about this study, or if any problems come up, you may contact Ms. Jennifer Del Nero at: (email address)

jennifer.delnero@gse.rutgers.edu (phone number) 609-707-3481

(address) 4 Brandywine Road, Skillman, NJ 08558

You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Lesley M. Morrow, (mailing address) The Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, 10 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, (email) lesley.morrow@gse.rutgers.edu, (phone number) 908-322-7555.

You may also ask questions or talk about any worries to the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect those who participate).

Please contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Your parent or guardian will also be asked if they wish for you to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Please sign below if you assent (that means you agree) to participate in this study.

Name: (Please print)_____

Signature:_____

AUDIOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study called: “The Monsters Under the Bed and Inside Their Heads: Adolescents’ Aesthetic Transactions with Gothic Texts in the Reading Classroom” conducted by **Ms. Jennifer Del Nero**. I am asking for your permission (approval) to allow me to audio record (sound) you during small group work in the classroom with other study participants and during the individual interviews. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the study.

The recording(s) will only be used by the researcher in the privacy of her home when she wants to reflect back on what you said during the interview/focus group sessions. I will use a fake name (pseudonym) to identify you on the recording. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the recording.

The recording(s) will be stored in a lock box in my home. I will be the only person who has access to the recordings. Once the write-up of the study is complete, the audio recordings will be permanently erased.

By participating in this study/these procedures, you agree to be a study subject and you grant me permission to record you as described above during participation in this study. I will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Name (Please print): _____

Signature: _____

Investigator’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix H: Interview Protocols

Primary Research Question:

1. What aesthetic transactions do adolescent students construct in response to popular culture and traditional texts in a Gothic studies reading unit?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. What kinds of aesthetic transactions occur during the unit?
2. What tension(s) arise in the development of aesthetic transactions during the unit?
3. What student Discourse(s) evolve during the unit?
4. What student Discourse(s) remain unchanged at the conclusion of the unit?

*Note: The words ‘personal response’ are used in lieu of aesthetic transactions because of my fear that the latter jargon might intimidate participants and reflects my desire to more user-friendly terminology. However, in order to ensure that participants consider the full range of possibilities in regards to aesthetically transacting with texts, prior to each interview, the participants are offered the definition of personal response as the associations, feelings, sensations, attitudes, ideas, and images that come about in association with the Gothic texts, or Rosenblatt’s (1994/1995/2005) definition of aesthetic transactions. Additionally, I share with the participants the range of possible aesthetic transactions as explored in the study’s literature review in order to highlight the range of possibilities for participants’ consideration.

**Note, the following statement is read to all participants prior to each interview:

Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you today! My hope is that through this interview, I will learn about your views surrounding reading. I really want to hear your story surrounding your response to these questions. So, you will notice that

the questions are very open-ended and broad, so feel free to respond to them in any way that you would like. The questions I will be asking are general questions, so please feel free to go into detail and elaborate as much as you would like to on each. I am not looking for anything specific, but rather, your honest and open feelings/opinions, so rest assured, there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interview just so that I don't misinterpret anything that you say. I will be the only person listening to the audiotape. Do I have your permission to tape? (Wait for confirmation from interview participant).

As we go through the interview, please do not hesitate to ask me to reword or clarify any of the questions. Additionally, feel free to take some time to mentally collect your thoughts before answering, there is no rush.

You are free to end the interview at any point if you wish not to continue. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Teacher-participant Pre-Unit Implementation Interview Protocol

1. Let's pretend that I am a student teacher that's interested in teaching middle school reading, and I want to find out from you, a veteran with that age group, information on the teaching of middle school reading in general. What are some things you would share with me?
 - a. Could you expand on x comment?
 - b. Why do you think x is important in relation to middle school reading?
 - c. In your opinion, what do reading teachers, specifically of middle school students, need to keep in mind?

2. Now, we are going to get a bit more specific. I would like to discuss middle school students' personal responses, or ways in which middle school students personally connect (If needed, expand on what this means in terms of providing some specificity, such as personal connection to: characters, themes, traits, problems, and/or events) to texts in reading class. Can you talk to me a little about this?
 - a. How do you know when students are personally responding with texts in reading class?
 - b. Example(s)?
 - c. How do you know when students are not personally responding to texts in the reading classroom?
 - d. Example(s)?
3. What, if any, connection do you think exists between your students' ability to personally respond to a text and their ability to comprehend a text?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
 - b. Specific examples?
4. In terms of the content of texts, what do you think helps students to personally respond with texts?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
 - b. Can you provide an example?
5. In terms of the content of texts, what do you think keeps students from personally responding with texts?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?

- b. Can you provide an example?
6. In terms of text selection within the seventh grade reading curriculum, how much control do you have over specific text selections?
- a. What text choices, if any, do you control?
 - b. What text choices, if any, do you not control?
 - c. How do you feel about this level of control?
7. (Assuming teacher has some control over text selection) What factors do you consider when selecting texts for your students to read in-class?
- a. Can you expand on x comment?
8. Currently, what role, if any, do students' outside (leisure reading interests) play in the assigned text choices in reading class?
- a. Can you expand on x comment?
 - b. Examples?
 - c. Why do you think it plays this role?
 - d. Do you agree with this role? Why/why not?
9. There are some that would say that students' leisure reading interests should play a bigger role in the text selection in middle school reading curriculum. How would you respond to this statement?
- a. Can you be more detailed about x comment?
 - b. (If agrees), why do you think students' outside roles should play a larger role?
 - c. (If agrees), why do you think it doesn't play a large enough role?
 - d. (If agree), how if at all, do you think it influences the way that students

respond to academic reading?

10. You are about to teach a unit on Gothic literature using popular culture and traditional academic texts (*Note: Teacher has an understanding of what constitutes Gothic texts, and the difference between academic and popular culture based on her experience as a reading teacher*). What are your thoughts on using these assigned texts in the classroom?

- a. Previous experience (if any) with teaching Gothic texts with middle school students?
- b. Example(s) of how students responded to these texts?
- c. Why do you think the student(s) responded in x way to these texts?
- d. What are your thoughts on using the Gothic popular culture texts in your seventh grade reading classroom? (Probe in terms of positive/negative potential consequences)
- e. What are your thoughts on using on using more traditional Gothic texts in your seventh grade reading classroom? (Probe in terms of positive/negative potential consequences)
- f. What, if anything, do you think will be unique about using these texts as compared to other reading units?

11. Overall, how do you think your seventh graders will respond to these texts?

- a. Can you expand on x comment?
- b. Difference amongst students?
- c. Potential positive experiences?
- d. Potential negative experiences/tensions/conflicts?

Student Participant Pre-Unit Implementation Interview Protocol

1. I would like to start by getting to know you a little bit? What are some things you could tell me about yourself? (i.e. favorite food, after school activities, what you see yourself doing as an adult, etc.).
2. I'm going to be spending some time in your English Language Arts class over the next few months. I'm trying to understand from a student's perspective what the class is like. Can you start off by telling me a little bit about the class?
 - a. Routines?
 - b. Activities?
 - c. General feelings about class?
3. In general, how would you describe yourself as a reader?
 - a. Overall, what if anything, do you like about reading? Why?
 - b. Overall, what if anything, do you dislike about reading? Why?
4. Now, we are going to talk about some of the things you have read in Mrs. Carson's class so far this year. Could you describe for me some of the things you have read?
 - a. Title(s)?
 - b. Genre(s)?
 - c. General plot/summary of piece(s)?
5. How would you describe some of your feelings about (*mention some of the pieces as given from above*) x text?
 - a. Why did you select that describing word (s)?
 - b. What was interesting about the text(s)?

- c. What was not interesting about the text(s)?
6. What kinds of things do you read outside of school?
- a. Examples?
 - b. Why do you choose to read x?
7. Sometimes, when people read something, they might personally respond in some way to what they are reading (*if needed, provide students with some general examples*). Has this ever happened to you while you are reading?
(*If student answers 'no' then move onto the next question*)
(*If student answers 'yes' then ask the following sub questions*):
- a. Walk me through a time this happened.
 - b. What were you reading? Describe it for me.
 - c. Was this a school or personal reading?
 - d. What did you think about while reading x?
 - e. Why do you think you had a personal response to x?
 - f. What feelings did you have while reading x? Why?
 - g. Overall, did you enjoy reading this text? Why? Or Why Not?
8. Sometimes when people read something, they find they do not personally respond to it. Has this ever happened to you?
(*If student answers 'no' then move onto the next question*)
(*If student answers 'yes' then ask these follow-up questions*)
- a. Walk me through a time this happened.
 - b. What were you reading? Describe it for me.
 - c. Was this a school or personal reading?

- d. What were you thinking while reading x?
- e. What feelings did you have while reading x?
- f. Why do you think you did not have a personal response to reading x?
- g. Overall, did you enjoy reading this text? Why? Or Why Not?

9. *(If student answered 'yes' to both previous questions 5 and 6)*

Is the reading experience different when you can personally respond to what you are reading in some way?

(If the student answers 'no' move to the next question)

(If the student answers 'yes' ask the following sub questions)

- a. How is the experience different?
- b. Why do you think the experience is different?
- c. Does having a personal response to something you read help you to remember it better? Why/why not? Can you provide an example?

10. Some people would argue that the types of books kids like to read outside of school should be used more in the reading classroom. How would you respond to this?

- a. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Teacher-participant Mid-Unit Implementation Interview Protocol

1. Recently, you've been teaching a unit on the Gothic genre. Walk me through what this experience has been like for you so far.
 - a. Could you expand on x comment?
 - b. How, if at all, is the experience different from teaching other texts?
 - c. How, if at all, is the experience similar to teaching other texts?
 - d. What if at all, surprised you thus far in regards to the experience?
2. Let's talk specifically about the opening lessons of this unit where you used current popular culture Gothic texts such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*. Describe for me your thoughts and reactions to using these popular culture texts as a way to introduce the Gothic genre unit.
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
 - b. Responses of the students in general?
 - c. Specific student illustrative examples?
 - d. How, if at all, is it similar to the ways in which you've introduced texts of the past?
 - e. Overall, how did you feel about beginning a reading unit in this manner?
 - f. Would you introduce a reading unit in this manner again? Why/why not?
3. Popular culture Gothic 'texts' have come up a great deal in discussions (i.e. videogames, YouTube videos, movies, and TV). How do you feel about this?
 - a. You often allow these impromptu discussions to be student generated? Why?
 - b. Educational purpose?
 - c. Classroom dynamic influences?

4. How do you feel the students are responding to the overall themes and traits of Gothic texts?
 - a. What are your thoughts about student connectivity in regards to Gothic themes/traits?
 - b. Do you think the students connected to any trait(s) and theme(s) of the genre?
 - c. Similarities amongst students?
 - d. Differences amongst students?
 - e. (Ask if teacher indicates some connectivity) How, if at all, do you think this relates to students' personally responding to texts? Can you provide a specific example?
5. Anything else that you would like to add or share about the unit experience thus far?

Student Participant During-Unit Implementation Interview Protocol

1. Recently, you have been reading Gothic texts in Mrs. Carson's reading class
(Specifically mention some of the texts the students have been reading as a way to refresh their memories: Down a Dark Hall, Lavender, The Ghostly Little Girl, The Midnight Mass of the Dead, and The Woman in the Snow). Talk to me about what this experience has been like for you so far for you.
 - a. Could you expand on x comment?
 - b. How, if at all, is the experience different from past reading experiences in school?
 - c. How, if at all, is the experience similar to other reading experiences in school?
 - d. What, if anything, has been surprising to you about the unit thus far?
2. Mrs. Carson introduced the Gothic reading unit using *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*. Can you share what this experience was like for you?
 - a. How was this experience in comparison to how Mrs. Carson usually introduces units? Similarities? Differences?
 - b. Initial impressions of 'Gothic?' Have they changed? Why/why not?
 - c. What was your reaction to this introduction?
 - d. Can you expand on x comment?
 - e. Did the introduction influence your feelings about the other Gothic texts you would be reading? If so, how?

3. I've often noticed in-class, that there's a lot of discussion about other Gothic examples, such as videogames, YouTube videos, movies, TV shows, etc. Talk to me a little about your feelings about these discussions.
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
4. When you began reading the Gothic texts, you discussed with your teacher and classmates how the Gothic as a group of texts, shares common themes and traits. How do you feel about reading texts with these themes and traits?
 - a. Which one(s) (if any) are interesting to you? Why?
 - b. Which one(s) (if any) don't interest you? Why?
5. Overall, if a friend outside Mrs. Carson's reading class asked for you to describe the experience of reading these Gothic texts in Mrs. Carson's reading class, what would you say?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
 - b. What feelings/thoughts do you have about it?
 - c. Specific example?
6. If you had the opportunity to change anything about the Gothic unit so far, what would you change?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
7. What, if anything, have you learned through this unit so far?
 - a. Reading knowledge or skills?
 - b. About yourself (personally and as a reader)?
 - c. About your classmates?
 - d. About Mrs. Carson?

- e. Why do you think you learned x things?
8. Think about the dynamic of the classroom before you began this unit. Do you feel it is different? If so, describe.
- a. Can you explain x comment?
9. Beyond the actual Gothic texts, let's talk a bit about the activities you've done in relation to the unit. [I.e. journal responses, class discussions, note sheets, Gothic short story assignment, etc.].
- a. What, if any, activities encouraged your personal response to the texts?
 - b. What, if any, activities discouraged your personal response to the texts?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to add about the experience of this unit so far?

Teacher-participant Post-Unit Implementation Interview Protocol

1. You just finished teaching a unit on Gothic texts in your seventh grade reading classroom. Walk me through what this experience was like for you.
 - a. Could you expand on x comment?
 - b. How, if at all, is the experience different from teaching other texts in other reading units?
 - c. How, if at all, is the experience similar to teaching other texts in other reading units?
2. In terms of the actual unit texts, how do you think the students responded to them?
 - a. Overall reception?
 - b. Similarities amongst students?
 - c. Difference amongst students?
 - d. Specific responses of students?
 - e. Positive implications?
3. How do you feel students responded to the overall themes and traits of the Gothic texts?
 - a. How do you feel about student connectivity in regards to Gothic themes and traits?
 - b. Do you think the students connected to trait(s) and theme(s) of the genre? If so, how? If not, why not? Similarities amongst students? Differences amongst students?
 - c. If yes, why do you think this genre resonates with students at this age level? Examples? Student Illustrations?

- d. Tensions/conflicts/negative implications?
4. This unit included the use of traditional texts paired with popular culture texts, as well as ‘texts’ in the wider sense (video games, movie clips, etc.). What are your feelings/thoughts on this?
- a. Examples?
 - b. Influence (if any) on students’ reception to the more classic/dated texts?
 - c. Difference between response to “Tell Tale Heart” and “The Yellow Wallpaper?”
5. Now, let’s talk a bit about the related activities utilized with the texts in this unit. What are your thoughts on these activities?
- a. Overall thoughts on activities?
 - b. Which one(s) encouraged students’ engagement and response to the texts?
 - c. Which ones(s) did not encourage students’ engagement and response to the texts?
6. Now, let’s zero in on one particular activity: Discussion. These occurred frequently throughout the unit. Your thoughts on the discussions?
- a. Examples?
 - b. Student-generated discussions?
 - c. How, if at all, do you feel such discussions contribute to students’ overall reactions to a text?
 - d. Many individuals argue not time for student discussions, and feel they lose control when students take over. What would you say to them?

7. How would you feel about teaching this unit again to another class?
 - a. Positive feelings?
 - b. Negative feelings/dilemmas/issues?
 - c. Things you would keep?
 - d. Things you would discard?
8. Think about the classroom dynamic prior to the start of this unit. In what ways, (if any) do you think this unit impacted the classroom as a whole?
 - a. Rapport amongst students?
 - b. Rapport between students and you?
9. Think about students' views of reading prior to this unit. In what ways (if any) do you think this unit impacted students' views on reading?
 - a. School reading?
 - b. Academic reading?
 - c. Purposes for reading? (Reading for connectivity/exploration/celebration of 'grey areas,' not arriving at one right answer)
 - d. Transfer?
10. In our past interviews, we discussed the tension between this unit and the expectations of school reading in the current educational climate. As we conclude, what are your thoughts on this?
 - a. CCSS
 - b. Reading choices
 - c. Student input
 - d. Popular culture/contemporary texts

- e. Capitalizing on student motivations
 - f. Classroom community
 - g. Uncovering vs covering
 - h. Time factor
11. Overall, what, if anything, do you feel like you learned as a result of this unit?
- a. About yourself?
 - b. About teaching?
 - c. About your students?
 - d. Ideas that will continue outside this unit?
12. Overall, what, if anything, do you think the students learned as a result of these texts?
- a. Can you expand on x comment?
 - b. Transfer skills/thoughts/ideas as a result of this unit?
13. The aim of this study was to explore student transactions in relation to Gothic texts, tensions to transactions, and how, if at all the unit made a lasting impact on all participants. Given this, is there anything else you would like to add about this experience?

Student Participant Post-Unit Implementation Interview Protocol

(Request that students bring their Gothic journals to the interview)

You have just finished a unit on Gothic texts in Mrs. Carson's reading class (*If necessary, repeat some or all of the texts to the participants*). Describe for me what this experience was like for you? You may even want to glance back at your Gothic journal.

- a. Could you expand on x comment?
 - b. How, if at all, is the experience different from past reading experiences in school?
 - c. What did you think of the mix of popular culture and traditional texts?
 - d. Describe the most memorable moment of the unit for you. Walk me through it as if I wasn't there. Why was it memorable?
 - e. What, if anything, do you think you will remember about this experience some time from now? Why?
2. The second half of the unit focused a bit more on traditional texts (*If necessary, repeat some or all of the texts to the participants*). Describe the experience of reading these texts.
 - a. Which texts did you enjoy? Why?
 - b. Which texts did you not enjoy? Why?
 - c. Comparison to traditional texts and units you've read in school?
 - d. Do you feel that the fusion of popular culture texts gave you a better understanding/appreciation/tolerance for the classic texts? Why? Why not?

3. When you began reading the Gothic texts, you discussed with your teacher and classmates how the Gothic as a genre or group of texts, shares common themes and traits. What, if any traits, 'speaks to you'? Why?
4. Reflect on the activities of this unit (Note sheets, decorating journal, journal responses, Down a Dark Hall project, Gothic valentine, poetry writing, etc.) What did you think about the activities?
 - a. Which ones helped to increase your enjoyment with the unit texts? Why?
 - b. Which ones did not help to increase your enjoyment with the unit texts? Why?
5. Let's zero in on one particular activity, discussions. Much class time was spent discussing the text, sharing ideas, building on ideas, changing ideas, bringing up other texts, bringing up life issues, sharing reactions, etc. What are your thoughts on this?
 - a. Enjoyable? Why or why not?
 - b. Help you learn? Why or why not?
 - c. Help to enhance your enjoyment of a text? Why or why not?
 - d. Is this typically an activity in reading? Why or why not? Should it be?
6. Looking back, if you had the opportunity to change anything about the unit, what would you change?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
7. Reflecting back on your views about reading, in general, before the beginning of this unit. How, if at all, has the experience of this Gothic unit changed your views?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?

8. Reflect back on your views about school reading prior to this unit. How, if at all, has the experience of this Gothic unit changed these views?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
9. Think about classroom dynamics and the level of rapport prior to this unit. How, if at all, has the experience of this Gothic unit changed the dynamic of the classroom?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
 - b. Why do think x changes occurred?
 - c. Have you gotten to know Mrs. C better? Why/why not?
 - d. Have you gotten to know your classmates better? Why not?
 - e. Mrs. C has described the class as having a club/secret that no one else knows or understands. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
10. Overall, what, if anything, did you learn as a result of the experience of this Gothic unit?
 - a. Can you expand on x comment?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about this experience?

Appendix I: Reading Unit Lesson Plans: Exploring the Gothic Genre

Design principles for authentic and meaningful adolescent reading instruction

1. Reading education should nurture students' aesthetic transactions with texts before, during, and after academic reading experiences.
2. Reading education should celebrate, capitalize, and extend on students' out-of-school literacy experiences within the classroom.
3. Reading education should nurture engagement and motivation through teachers explicitly aiding students in forming connections between texts and their interests and experiences.
4. Reading education should support students in constructing healthy collective and individual identities.
5. Reading education should further the development of students' various Discourses.
6. Reading education should, (alongside the development of lower level reading skills), nurture advanced reading competencies such as text discussion, analysis, comparison/contexts, applicability to real life, exposure to 'grey' areas of texts, and evaluation.
7. Reading education should offer students variety within exploration of a genre (short story, poetry, nonfiction, etc.), teaching methods, and means of assessment, as well as opportunities for choice.
8. Reading education should backload, rather than frontload, standards and objectives by naturally infusing skill instruction into daily classroom tasks.

Essential unit questions

- What are the complexities/shades of grey around the worlds ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’ and ‘good vs. evil’?
- What are essential qualities that all human beings long for?
- How does having a lot of power and/or lacking power influence characters’ identities, actions, feelings, and thoughts?

Hillside Township Public Schools

Grade Level: 7

Subject/Topic Areas: ELA Reading Workshop: Studies in the Gothic Genre, Part I

Teacher: A. Carson **Time Frame:** 40 days **School:** Hillside Middle School

Common Core Standards: R.L. 7.1, R.L. 7.2, R.L. 7.3, R.L. 7.4, R.L. 7.5, R.L. 7.7, R.I. 7.1, R.I. 7.2, R.I. 7.3, R.I. 7.5, R.I. 7.6, W 7.1, W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c, W 7. 1d, W7.1e, W7.2a, W7.2b, W7.2c, W7.2d, W7.2e, W7.2f, W7.4, W7.7, W 7.8, W7.9, W7.10, SL7.1a, SL7.1b, SL7.1c, SL7.1d, SL7.6, L7.1, L7.3,

Description of Unit: The first section of this three part unit on Gothic literary studies will introduce the students to general themes of the genre, as well as the unit’s essential questions by using popular culture Gothic texts as a way to frame and preview lesser known, more traditionally based academic texts. This will be followed by a variety of readings of the genre as well as related discussions and activities. Part II of this unit (contemporary novel study) will break up part I. Students will return to party I following the completion of the novel.

Differentiation Guide: The abbreviations and color-coding utilized in the unit that follows are:

MA: More Accessible (highest level of guidance and support may be further customized by individual IEPs or 504 plans)

ML: Mid-Level (moderate guidance and support combined with moderate challenges)

MC: More Complex (minimal guidance and support combined with more independence and challenges)

MI: Most Independent (advanced proficient and gifted and talented level with higher level thinking and advanced challenges)

What essential questions will guide this unit and focus teaching and learning?

- What are the complexities around the ideas of ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’ and ‘good’ vs. ‘evil’?
- What are essential things that all human beings long for?
- How does power (or lack of power) influence characters’ identities, actions, feelings and thoughts?

Knowledge-Students will know	Skills-Students will be able to
1. Traits and themes related to Gothic texts	A. Identify traits and themes of Gothic texts
2. Active reading strategies that aid comprehension	B. Utilize active reading strategies while reading fiction and nonfiction
3. Academic and text based vocabulary words and definitions	C. Use context clues to decode meaning and utilize vocabulary words correctly
4. Strategies for successfully responding to written prompts emphasizing personal response	D. Demonstrate personal response techniques supported by textual detail
5. Comprehension strategies for viewing and media literacy	E. Demonstrate listening, speaking, and viewing media literacy comprehension
6. Comprehension strategies demonstrated via class discussions	F. Demonstrate text understanding, listening and speaking

Stage 2-Evaluation

Assessment Instrument	Diagnostic Date	Formative Date	Summative Date	Standards and CPI numbers
Diagnostic journaling response to prompts				RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.3, RL 7.7, RL 7.9, W 7.1, W 7.2, W 7.3, W 7.4, W 7.9, W 7.10
Discussions regarding reading topics				SL 7.1 a, b, c, d SL 7.2, SL 7.3, SL 7.4

Gothic short story assignment				RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.3, RL 7.5, W 7.1, W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c, W 7.1d, W 7.1e, W 7.2b, W 7.2c, W 7.2d, W 7.2e, W 7.2f, W7.3c, w 7.3e, W7.4, W7.6, W 7.7
Gothic Haiku assignment				RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.3, RL 7.5, W 7.1, W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c, W 7.1d, W 7.1e, W 7.2b, W 7.2c, W 7.2d, W 7.2e, W 7.2f, W7.3c, w 7.3e, W7.4, W7.6, W 7.7
Gothic Valentine assignment				RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.3, RL 7.5, W 7.1, W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c, W 7.1d, W 7.1e, W 7.2b, W 7.2c, W 7.2d, W 7.2e, W

				7.2f, W7.3c, w 7.3e, W7.4, W7.6, W 7.7
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Stage 3-Daily Lesson Plans

<p>Days 1 & 2</p> <p>Objectives: Understand the characteristics and themes of Gothic literature</p> <p>Introduction to essential questions guiding the Gothic unit</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Post word 'Gothic' on board. In journals, students respond to what they think the word means</p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>Read excerpt from three popular culture Gothic texts, students guess what texts are</p> <p>Texts used to introduce the genre traits and unit essential questions</p> <p>Discussion</p>	<p>Days 3-5</p> <p>Objectives: Explore connections amongst popular culture Gothic texts</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students get into cooperative groups to discuss the Gothic themes and traits of one popular culture Gothic novel they are already familiar with</p> <p>Students share the results of their group work with the class</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Cooperative group work packet</p> <p>Materials: Introductory packets</p>	<p>Days 6-7</p> <p>Objectives: Demonstrate understanding of the Gothic genre and traits through a creative project</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students recall common traits of Gothic texts and essential questions that the unit address</p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>Distribute and discuss journal decorating project guidelines</p> <p>Students present their projects</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Student projects</p> <p>Materials: Journals Project description handout</p> <p>Homework: Decorate journal and be ready to present it to the class</p>	<p>Days 8-10</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend the Gothic short story, 'The Woman in the Snow'</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud the short story Student-driven discussion on the short story including reaction, Gothic themes/traits, connections to other 'texts'</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Discussion</p> <p>Materials: <i>The Language of Literature</i> Grade 7 anthologies</p>	<p>Days 9-11</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend two versions of a Gothic story, "Lavender" and "The Girl in the Lavender Dress"</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads 1st version aloud Student driven discussion Teacher reads 2nd version aloud Student driven discussion Journal reflective response on the short stories</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Journal responses Discussion</p> <p>Materials: <i>Short and Shivery</i> short story</p>
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<p>Day 12</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend the Gothic short story, “The Ghostly Little Girl”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud the short story Student-driven discussion on the short story including reaction, Gothic themes/traits, connections to other ‘texts’</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Discussion</p> <p>Materials: <i>Short and Shivery</i> collection of short stories</p>	<p>Day 13-17</p> <p>Objectives: Creative application of knowledge learned about the Gothic genre via prewriting, drafting, publishing, and sharing of an original Gothic short story</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher discusses aim of project and answers student questions Students given class time to brainstorm, research on the computer, collaborate with peers, and draft their short stories</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Gothic short stories</p> <p>Materials: Short story rubric Computers Journals</p> <p>Homework: Continue work on short stories</p>	<p>Days 18-21</p> <p>Objectives: Present excerpt of Gothic short story Critically evaluate and respond to peers’ short stories</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Materials: Students take turns reading aloud excerpts from their Gothic short stories Class responds to the work of their peers</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Presentation of stories Responses to others stories</p>	<p>Day 22</p> <p>Objectives: Create a Gothic holiday haiku</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher presents some model haikus Students brainstorm, collaborate, draft, illustrate, and share their Gothic holiday haikus</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Holiday haikus</p> <p>Materials: Computer paper Markers/crayons, colored pencils</p>	<p>-BREAK IN PART I-SEE PART II LESSON PLANS</p> <p>Day 57</p> <p>Objectives: Complete an anticipatory pre-reading activity of a newspaper article in relation to the classic Gothic short story, “The Tell Tale Heart”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures Teacher discusses with the students what they already know about Edgar Allen Poe Students individually read aloud “A Mysterious Grave Visitor” Student driven response to the newspaper article</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment Student discussion</p> <p>Materials <i>The Language of Literature</i> Grade 7</p>
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<p>Day 58</p> <p>Objective: Introduction and brainstorming session of “A Gothic Valentine” creative project</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher discusses with the students a project where they will create a ‘Gothic’ valentine that they will present to the class Students begin individually working on their valentines</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Student independent work</p> <p>Materials: Student journals</p> <p>Homework: Complete Gothic valentine assignment</p>	<p>Day 59</p> <p>Objective: Students present their Gothic valentines to the class</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students take turns presenting their valentines and responding to their peers’ presentations</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Gothic valentines</p> <p>Materials: Valentines</p>	<p>Days 60 & 61</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend the classic Gothic short story, “The Tell Tale Heart”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud “The Tell Tale Heart” Student driven discussion following the short story Teacher distributes question packet on the story from a unit resource book Students begin independently working on the question packet.</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Discussion</p> <p>Materials: <i>The Language of Literature</i> Grade 7 anthology Question packets</p> <p>Homework: Work on the packet</p>	<p>Day 62</p> <p>Objective: View a media version of “The Tell Tale Heart” from the internet</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students view the video version and write down their response to the interpretation in their journals Students share their responses to the media version</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Student responses</p> <p>Materials: SMART board/Internet Journals</p> <p>Homework: Tell Tale Heart question packet due tomorrow</p>	<p>Days 63 & 64</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend the classic Gothic short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud the short story while students respond to the story in their journals Student driven discussion at the end of the short story</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Discussion</p> <p>Materials: Paper copies of the short story</p>
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<p>Day 65</p> <p>Objective: Watch the BBC media version of the conclusion of “The Yellow Wallpaper”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students view media version of the short story Student driven discussion about the media version</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Student discussion</p> <p>Materials: SMART board Internet</p>	<p>Day 66</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend the contemporary Gothic short story, “Cat in Glass”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud the short story Student-driven discussion following the story</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Student discussion</p> <p>Materials: Paper copies of the short story</p>	<p>Day 67</p> <p>Objective: Complete comprehension questions related to “The Yellow Wallpaper” and “Cat in Glass”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher distributes question sheet Students complete and discuss the questions in their cooperative groups</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Questions</p> <p>Materials: Question sheet</p>	<p>Day 68</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend and discuss background information on the history of vampires in preparation for reading excerpts of <i>Dracula</i></p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher initiates a discussion on what students know about vampires as well as vampire ‘texts’ they have come across Teacher distributes and reads aloud photocopied informational text excerpts from <i>The History of Vampires</i> Students driven class discussion about the readings</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Student discussions</p> <p>Materials: Photocopied excerpts from <i>The Secret History of Vampires</i></p>	<p>Days 69-70</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend excerpts of <i>Dracula</i></p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud excerpts Student-driven discussion following the story</p> <p>Lesson</p> <p>Assessment: Student discussion</p> <p>Materials: Paper copies of <i>Dracula</i> excerpts</p>
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<p>Day 71</p> <p>Objective: Watch trailer clips of Dracula movies through the ages from 1920 (silent film version) up to most recent version (<i>Twilight</i>) and comprehend how the image of Dracula changes over time and reasons for why this is the case</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students view media trailers of various movies with Dracula/vampires. For each clip, students record how Dracula is depicted and their reaction Discuss reactions/responses to the clips</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Student chart in journals</p> <p>Materials: SMART board Internet Journals</p>	<p>Day 73</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend the informational text “Man Made Monsters” and Mary Shelley’s forward in preparation for reading <i>Frankenstein</i> excerpts</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud the two nonfiction pieces. Student-driven discussion of the two excerpts</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Student discussion</p> <p>Materials: <i>The Language of Literature</i> Grade 7 textbooks</p>	<p>Days 74-75</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend excerpts of Mary Shelley’s <i>Frankenstein</i></p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud the excerpts while students note any of their responses in their Gothic journals Student-driven discussion about the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Journal responses and student-driven discussion</p> <p>Materials: Excerpts of <i>Frankenstein</i> Journals</p>	<p>Day 76</p> <p>Objective: Watch trailer clips of Frankenstein movies through the ages from 1920 (silent film version) up to most recent version (1994) and comprehend how the image of Frankenstein changes over time and reasons for why this is the case</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students view media trailers of various movies. For each clip, students record how Frankenstein is depicted and their reaction Discuss reactions/responses to the clips</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Student chart in journals</p> <p>Materials: SMART board Internet Journals</p>	<p>Day 77</p> <p>Objective: Comprehend two poems with Gothic themes/traits, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” and “Quietness”</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher passes out both poems and reads them aloud once Students read poems alone and mark them up and note their responses and how the poems fit the genre in their journals Student-driven discussion about their reactions, ways in which the poems fit the genre</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Journal responses Discussion</p> <p>Materials: Journals Copies of poems</p>
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<p>Day 78</p> <p>Objective: Students begin composing their own Gothic themed poem based on a topic of their choosing</p> <p>Procedures and Activities: Teacher explains the assignment and reminds students that they can use the poems already read as models Students given time to brainstorm, talk with peers, and draft their poem ideas in their Gothic journals</p> <p>Assessment: Student work on their poems</p> <p>Materials: Journals</p> <p>Homework: Continue working on the poem at home</p>	<p>Days 79-80</p> <p>Objective: Reflect on the experience of the Gothic unit individually, with peers, and as a whole class</p> <p>Procedures and Activities: Teacher tells students we have reached the conclusion of the Gothic unit to individually free write their reaction to the unit in their journals Volunteers share responses Teacher passes out reflection questions Students take time to work on reflection questions individually in their journals Students get into cooperative groups to discuss their responses Students reconvene as a class to discuss the questions and final reflection/thoughts</p> <p>Assessment: Students verbal/written responses</p> <p>Homework: Finish Gothic poem for tomorrow</p>	<p>Day 81</p> <p>Objective: Share Gothic poem with the class</p> <p>Procedures and Activities: Volunteers take turns presenting their Gothic poems to the class Students react and comment on poems</p> <p>Assessment: Gothic poems</p> <p>Materials: Gothic poems</p> <p>_END OF UNIT_</p>		
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Hillside Township Public Schools**Grade Level: 7**

Subject/Topic Areas: ELA Reading Workshop: Studies in the Gothic Genre, Part II: Contemporary Popular Culture Novel Study *Down a Dark Hall*

Teacher: A. Carson **Time Frame:** 40 days **School:** Hillside Middle School

Common Core Standards: R.L. 7.1, R.L. 7.2, R.L. 7.3, R.L. 7.4, R.L. 7.5, R.L. 7.7, R.I. 7.1, R.I. 7.2, R.I. 7.3, R.I. 7.5, R.I. 7.6, W 7.1, W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c, W 7.1d, W7.1e, W7.2a, W7.2b, W7.2c, W7.2d, W7.2e, W7.2f, W7.4, W7.7, W 7.8, W7.9, W7.10, SL7.1a, SL7.1b, SL7.1c, SL7.1d, SL7.6,

Description of Unit: This second phase of the Gothic studies unit will explore a contemporary popular culture novel, *Down a Dark Hall*, where students will comprehend, discuss, and interpret the book, as well as position it amidst the unit's essential questions and traits.

Differentiation Guide: The abbreviations and color-coding utilized in the unit that follows are:

MA: More Accessible (highest level of guidance and support may be further customized by individual IEPs or 504 plans)

ML: Mid-Level (moderate guidance and support combined with moderate challenges)

MC: More Complex (minimal guidance and support combined with more independence and challenges)

MI: Most Independent (advanced proficient and gifted and talented level with higher level thinking and advanced challenges)

What essential questions will guide this unit and focus teaching and learning?

- What are the complexities around the ideas of 'right' vs. 'wrong' and 'good' vs. 'evil'?
- What are essential things that all human beings long for?
- How does power (or lack of power) influence characters' identities, actions, feelings and thoughts?

Knowledge-Students will know	Skills-Students will be able to
7. Traits and themes related to Gothic texts as present in <i>Down a Dark Hall</i>	G. Identify traits and themes of the Gothic genre in <i>Down a Dark Hall</i>
8. Active reading strategies that aid comprehension	H. Utilize active reading strategies while reading fiction and nonfiction
9. Academic and text based	I. Use context clues to decode

vocabulary words and definitions	meaning and utilize vocabulary words correctly
10. Strategies for successfully responding to written prompts emphasizing personal response in relation to the novel study	J. Demonstrate personal response techniques supported by textual detail in relation to the novel study
11. Comprehension strategies for verbal response in-class discussions	K. Demonstrate comprehension of texts via class discussions

Stage 2-Evaluation

Assessment Instrument	Diagnostic Date	Formative Date	Summative Date	Stand ard and CPI
Diagnostic journaling response to novel -related prompts				RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.3, RL 7.7, RL 7.9, W 7.1, W 7.2, W 7.3, W 7.4, W 7.9, W 7.10
Diagnostic graphic organizer chapter responses				RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.4, RL 7.5, W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c

Formative creative interpretation of the story via a medium a choice in collaboration with class peers				RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.3, RL 7.5, W 7.1, W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c, W 7.1d, W 7.1e, W 7.2b, W 7.2c, W 7.2d, W 7.2e, W 7.2f, W7.3c, w 7.3e, W7.4, W7.6, W 7.7
Creative illustration exercise and contest				RL 7.2, RL 7.3, SL 7.2., W 7.1a, W 7.1b, W 7.1c
Discussion on reading-related topics and				SL 7.1 a, b, c, d

questions with peers				SL 7.2, SL 7.3, SL 7.4
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Stage 3-Daily Lesson Plans

<p>Days 23-25</p> <p>Objectives: Complete pre reading activities that build excitement and anticipation for reading</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher distributes novel to each student Students jigsaw pre-reading activities: Half of the classroom examines/discusses the cover as well as prior knowledge on Lois Duncan, other half of the classroom reads and responds to the brief bio on Lois Duncan in the back of the book After meeting with peers who completed like tasks, students 'jigsaw' to discuss what they learned with other peers</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Journal responses to one of the two activities</p> <p>Materials: DDH Gothic journals</p>	<p>Days 26 & 27</p> <p>Objectives: Continue pre reading activities that build excitement and anticipation for reading</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students take turns reading the Q/A section where Lois Duncan describes the process of writing this novel. Students then predict what they think this novel will be about in their Gothic journals Discussion of predictions/reactions to Lois Duncan Interview</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Predictions in journals</p> <p>Materials: DDH Gothic journals</p>	<p>Day 28& 29</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 1 in terms of establishing information on: characters, problem, setting, technique of personification, as well as initial reactions and predictions</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads the chapter aloud while students follow along and complete novel note sheets Student driven discussion</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Novel notes chapter 1 Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Novel notes chapter 1</p>
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<p>Day 30</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 31</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter three of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 33</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter four of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>
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<p>Day 34</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapters five and six of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 35</p> <p>Objectives: Introduction to creative setting assignment for <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> Comprehend chapter seven of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher passes out rubric for <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> setting assignment and answers any student questions Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets Rubric for setting assignment</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed Work on setting assignment</p>	<p>Day 36</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter eight of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed Complete setting assignment</p>
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<p>Day 37</p> <p>Objectives: Introduction to creative setting assignment for <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> Comprehend chapter nine of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher passes out rubric for <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> setting assignment and answers any student questions Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 38</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapters 10 and 11 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 39</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 12 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>
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<p>Day 40</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 13 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 41</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 14 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 42</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 15 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>
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<p>Day 43</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 16 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 44</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 17 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Day 45</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 18 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>
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<p>Day 46</p> <p>Objectives: Comprehend chapter 19 of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> with an emphasis on students' aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher reads aloud chapter two of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> while students follow along and complete chapter note sheets. Option to write responses to the text in their journals Student driven discussion of their various aesthetic transactions with the text</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Note sheets Journals Discussion</p> <p>Materials: DDH books Note sheets</p> <p>Homework: Finish chapter and note sheet if needed</p>	<p>Days 47 & 48</p> <p>Objectives Discuss, reflect, and share responses to the ending of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> and reactions and evaluations of the novel as a whole</p> <p>Activities and Procedures Students individually journal their thoughts regarding the conclusion of the novel and overall response Student driven discussion of what they wrote in their journals</p> <p>Lesson Assessment Journals Discussion</p>	<p>Day 49 & 50</p> <p>Objectives Analyze <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> in light of Gothic traits present and the way the novel addresses the unit essential questions</p> <p>Activities and Procedures Teacher distributes and discusses <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> ending reflection worksheet Students work in cooperative groups to complete the worksheets Students share their responses to the worksheet</p> <p>Lesson Assessment Reflection sheet Discussion</p>
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<p>Day 51</p> <p>Objectives: Students are introduced to the multimedia final project for <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> and begin to brainstorm ideas with their chosen group members</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Teacher distributes guidelines/project sheet for <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> final project and addresses any student questions and concerns Students select their group members Students begin to brainstorm their initial ideas</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Student discussions</p> <p>Materials: Journals Guidelines for the project</p> <p>Homework Work on the project</p>	<p>Days 52, 53, & 54</p> <p>Objectives: Students engage in cooperative work with peers on the <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> final project</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students work with one another on brainstorming, planning, researching, and writing out aspects of their final projects</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Student discussions</p> <p>Materials: Journals Guidelines for the project</p> <p>Homework Work on the project</p>	<p>Days 55& 56</p> <p>Objectives: Students present their final projects to the class and respond and evaluate their peers' projects</p> <p>Activities and Procedures: Students take turns sharing their multimedia interpretations of <i>Down a Dark Hall</i> Students respond to their peers' projects</p> <p>Lesson Assessment: Student projects</p> <p>Materials: SMART Board Student projects</p>
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Appendix J: Unit Resources

Introduction to the Gothic Unit Group Work Packet

Directions: Read and reflect on the following questions and note down your thoughts and ideas.

What does the word ‘gothic’ mean to you?

What topics do you think might be covered in a ‘gothic’ story?

Gothic Popular Culture Text Samples:

Directions: Listen to the excerpts taken from popular novels with Gothic traits. Try to guess what the novel is and write you guess on the line above the excerpt.

Sample A: (*from Twilight*)_____

Facing my pallid reflection in the mirror, I was forced to admit that I was lying to myself. It wasn’t just physically that I would never fit in. And if I couldn’t find a niche in a school with three thousand people, what were my chances here?

I didn’t relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was that I didn’t relate well to people, period. Even my mother, who I was closer to than anyone else on the planet, was never in harmony with me, never on exactly the same page. Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes as the rest of the world was seeing through theirs. Maybe there was a glitch in my brain. But the cause didn’t Matter. All that Mattered was the effect. And tomorrow would be just the beginning.

I didn’t sleep well that night, even after I was done crying. The constant wooshing of rain and wind across the roof wouldn’t fade into the background. I pulled the faded old quilt over my head, and later added the pillow, too. But I couldn’t fall asleep until after midnight, when the rain finally settled into a quieter drizzle.

Thick fog was all I could see out my window in the morning, and I could feel the claustrophobia creeping up on me. You could never see the sky here; it was like a cage.

Sample B: (from *Harry Potter*)_____

“Can you smell something?”

[He] sniffed and a foul stench reached his nostrils, a mixture of old socks and the kind of public toilet no one seems to clean.

And then they heard it—a low grunting, and the shuffling footfalls of gigantic feet. [He] pointed—at the end of a passage to the left, something huge was moving toward them. They shrank into the shadows and watched as it emerged into a patch of moonlight.

It was a horrible sight. Twelve feet tall, its skin was a dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, horny feet. The smell coming from it was incredible. It was holding a huge wooden club, which dragged along the floor because its arms were so long.

The troll stopped next to the doorway and peered inside. It wagged its long ears, making up its tiny mind, then slouched slowly into the room.

“The key’s in the lock,”... “We could lock it in.”

“Good idea,”...

They edged toward the open door, mouths dry, praying the troll wasn’t about to come out of it. With one great leap, [he] managed to grab the key, slam the door, and lock it.

“Yes!”

Flushed with their victory, they started to run back up the passage, but as they reached the corner they heard something that made their hearts stop—a high, petrified scream—and it was coming from the chamber they’d just chained up.

Sample C: (from *Hunger Games*)_____

I stared at the loaves in disbelief. They were fine, perfect really, except for the burned areas. Did he mean for me to have them? He must have. Because there they were at my feet. Before anyone could witness what had happened I shoved the loaves up under my shirt, wrapped the hunting jacket tightly about me, and walked swiftly away. The heat of the bread burned into my skin, but I clutched it tighter, clinging to life.

By the time I reached home, the loaves had cooled somewhat, but the insides were still warm. When I dropped them on the table, [her] hands reached to tear off a chunk, but I made her sit, forced my mother to join us at the table and poured warm tea. I scraped off the black stuff and sliced the bread. We ate the entire loaf, slice by slice. It was good hearty bread, filled with raisins and nuts.

I put my clothes to dry by the fire, crawled into bed, and fell into a dreamless sleep. It didn’t occur to me until the next morning that the boy might have burned the bread on purpose. Might have dropped the loaves into the flames, knowing it meant being punished, and then delivered them to me. But I dismissed this. It must have been an accident. Why would he have done it? He didn’t even know me. Still, just throwing me the bread was an enormous kindness that would have surely resulted in a beating if discovered. I couldn’t explain his actions.

We ate slices of bread for breakfast and headed to school. It was as if spring had come overnight. Warm sweet air. Fluffy clouds. At school, I passed the boy in the hall,

his cheek had swelled up and his eye had blackened. He was with his friends and didn't acknowledge me in any way. But as I collected [my sister] and started for home in the afternoon, I found him staring at me from across the school yard. Our eyes met for only a second, then he turned his head away. I dropped my gaze, embarrassed, and that's when I saw it. The first dandelion of the year. A bell went off in my head. I thought of the hours spent in the woods with my father and I knew how we were going to survive.

Traits of the Gothic Genre in Literature

Gothic texts deal in mystery, suspense, horror, fear, and the bizarre. Gothic texts feature circumstances where people confront the ‘other’ of society and/or themselves.

Using the text samples provided and your knowledge of the whole novels from which they were taken, consider the following:

- What qualities do the texts share? Use the above definition of Gothic literature to help you.
- What evidence can you find in the texts to support your claims?

Notes:

Complete the charts with your findings

Shared quality

Text 1 Evidence	Text 2 Evidence	Text 3 Evidence

Shared quality

Text 1 Evidence	Text 2 Evidence	Text 3 Evidence

Shared quality

Text 1 Evidence	Text 2 Evidence	Text 3 Evidence

Gothic stories often explore the following questions:

- What are the complexities/shades of gray around the issues of ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’ and ‘good’ vs. ‘evil’?
- What are essential qualities that all humans long for?
- How does having a lot of power and/or lacking power influence character’s identities, actions, feelings and thoughts.

Pick one of the three texts and discuss how it address the issues in the above questions.

Record your answers below.

Text chosen: _____



Studies in the Gothic Genre: Decorating of Journal Cover Guidelines

Objective: Using a medium or combination of mediums (pictures, magazine clippings, computer, etc.) and a combination of words/phrases and pictures, decorate your journal for the Gothic literature unit with pictures and symbols that represent the genre (Hint: look at the traits of the Gothic genre).

Guidelines:

1. Decorate the front and back of your journal
2. Make sure you attach the images well so that they will not fall off (clear tape, contact paper, glue, etc.)
3. There needs to be at least 10 items in total
4. There needs to be a balance of words and pictures
5. Images/words need to be school-appropriate
6. Be prepared to present your cover to the class

Brainstorm your ideas below:

Down a Dark Hall

Chapter: _____

Date: _____

Characters: What is revealed and/or developed?	Setting Quote: Time/Place/Mood
Major Plot Events	Vivid Imagery/Figurative Language/Sensory Details

Down a Dark Hall Setting Illustration Assignment and Contest

Like many gothic stories, setting is an essential element to the story in terms of setting up time/place/mood, etc. essentially, settings of gothic texts are often ‘lifelike’ and characters unto themselves, which adds to the spookiness/feelings of uncertainty. The setting of the boarding school in ‘down a dark hall’ is an important element and ‘character’ of the story. Your objective is to visually depict the setting as you see it.

Objective: using computer images, collaging, experimentation with textures, crayons/markers, or some combination, create a visual interpretation (on standard size paper) of either the outside of the school or one of the rooms inside (such as Kit’s bedroom). Your illustration can, but does not have to include characters. The class will judge the ‘best’ illustration not based on artistic ability, but rather, your creativity and attention to detail in terms of your depiction. Your illustration must include the setting elements of:

1. Time
2. Place
3. Mood
4. Representative of textual details in the book



Traits of the Gothic Genre: Down a Dark Hall



Name: _____ Date: _____ Chapters _____

Directions: Using this checklist, fill in the circles corresponding to the traits that you feel are present in this novel thus far. In the space underneath, provide a brief piece of evidence of this trait (either direct quote or brief summary). For the traits you feel there is no evidence of, leave them blank. You can also add additional traits that you have come up with to this list!

- Unveiling of 'facades' or masks people wear:

- Characters in a state of powerlessness:

- Corruption of authority figures (parents, teachers, government, etc.):

- Isolation (physical and/or psychological) from family (especially parents) so that main characters are on their own/must fend for themselves:

- Main character develops independence through facing a series of tests/trials where characters learn about him/herself:

- Confrontation with unknown and/or repressed feelings:

- Physical and/or spiritual isolation:
- Bizarre characteristics/traits:
- Haunted houses or establishments:
- Restless and/or trapped spirits/ghosts/beings/people:
- Secret keeping:
- Mental instability/insanity:
- Romance:
- Main character as 'different'/outcast/not 'normal':
- Death/destruction:
- Rebellion against rules and traditions of society:
- Other 'Gothic' characteristic:

Project Description:
(Include detailed information about what the finished project will look like. Each project will have three parts: 1.) a media component, 2.) a written component, and 3.) a presentation of the first two to the class.
Note: Be creative and school appropriate.

Name of group member:	Specific responsibilities and contributions to the project

When and where will you work on completing this project outside of designated class time? How will you keep in touch so that all group members are informed and can actively participate?

What essential questions about the gothic unit will you seek to respond to with this project? How will the project provide a response or answer to these questions?

How does your project respond to and interpret various aspects of the novel?

Characters	Setting and mood
Plot events	Gothic traits and elements

Cooperative Group Work: Gothic Short Stories

Please discuss and take notes on the following questions in your Gothic journals.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” & “Cat in Glass”

1. Note the major plot events of the story.
2. What clues lead the reader to believe that the narrator is unreliable? Note the details.
3. What do you think actually happened? How is your perception similar and/or different to what the narrator claims? Note your details and your reasoning.
4. What Gothic elements are present in these pieces? Provide a brief example of each element from at least one of the stories.
5. What essential unit questions do the stories address? Provide details from each story.
6. If you were a doctor, what would you diagnose the narrators with? How would you treat them?
7. What is your reaction/evaluation of these short stories? Did you prefer one over the other? Why/why not?

Ending Reflection: The Gothic Unit

As we conclude a unit we've been studying since October, take some time to reflect on...

1. What do you have to say about this overall experience? How was it similar/different from past school reading units? What worked and did not work for you? Why?
2. This unit was a fusion of popular culture and traditional texts, whereas typical school reading units focus on traditional texts? How do you feel about that mix?
3. Explain your thoughts.
4. Is it important that school reading holds a link to students' interests? Why or why not?
5. Do you think that schools should prioritize student interest in text selections more than they do? Why or why not?

Part II

The Gothic genre was selected as research suggests that it holds appeal to teens. Would you agree or disagree with this? Why? (Might be useful to look back at unit essential questions, traits of the genre, as well as common themes explored by the genre). What qualities appeal/don't appeal to you? Why?

Appendix K: List of Unit Texts

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- Shelley, M. (1818). *Frankenstein*. New York: Simon & Brown.
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