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Students' Perceived and Actual Use of Strategies for Reading and Writing

By

Monica Sujung Yoo

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree of

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in

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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by

Monica Sujung Yoo

## Abstract

### Students' Perceived and Actual Use of Strategies for Reading and Writing

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

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This dissertation examines students' perceived and actual use of strategies for reading and writing, through both qualitative and quantitative lenses. It compares and investigates what students say they do and what they actually do when they read and write about what they have read. A single quantitative tool, a survey about reading and writing strategy use, was administered to 75 students in grade 9 English classes. A range of qualitative tools and analyses were employed with four focal students: (a) reader and writer identity interviews, and (b) a series of reading-writing tasks for each of three different genres—the literary narrative, persuasive article, and history text. In each genre, the reading-writing task set consisted of a reading think aloud protocol on one text, writing in response to the text and a prompt, and participating in a writing retrospective interview. The study draws upon cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives, applying genre theory to the literature on strategies for reading, writing, and reading-to-write in order to frame the ways in which context, identity, and audience affect how students think about and use strategies for reading and writing.

Reading and writing in different genres entail affordances and constraints that affect students' perceptions and enactments of strategies. Furthermore, students' identities, including their background experiences and motivations, affect their decisions to prioritize some strategies over others. Students think differently about strategies for the two interrelated processes: reading and writing about reading. Students perceive that writing about a text is a more strategic process than reading alone; but this perception does not necessarily translate into a greater sense of student ownership and authority over their writing. The public nature of writing in comparison to the more private nature of reading leads students to prioritize strategies for addressing an audience over strategies that demonstrate their understanding of content when they write about what they read.

Students perceived that the most useful strategies for reading were ones that related either to invoking or to building background knowledge. The genre of the text also influenced the strategies that the focal students claimed to enact. Students related that strategy use acted as a motivating factor by making texts more interesting and accessible. They described how the genre, context, and purpose for reading, affected *which* strategy they opted to adopt in order to best fit the reading situation.

Students' enactments of reading strategies were full of complexity, and single strategies were hardly ever used in isolation. Strategies intersected and overlapped as students employed them together during the process of reading and making inferences, which aided in the construction of their situation models (Kintsch, 1998). At times, certain strategies played a more central role than others. Although the focal students tended to use many of the same stock strategies such as visualizing, rereading to clarify one's comprehension or understand new vocabulary, paraphrasing, summarizing, and questioning, *how, why, and in what manner* they used the strategies was highly specific and tended to be almost idiosyncratic to the individual's background as a reader and his or her purposes and aims for reading. Genre especially influenced the strategies that students actually used. The focal students' knowledge and impressions about how to read a genre impacted which strategies were privileged and how they were used. Although students used similar strategies across genres, how these strategies were used differed based on the utility of the strategy *in* each genre. Students' knowledge about how to read and approach a genre helped them choose the best strategies for aiding their comprehension.

Comparing students' perceptions about reading to their perceptions about writing about what they have read, students reported that they were likely to use more strategies for writing about reading than for reading alone. As students described themselves as writers, they revealed that their perceptions about audience and genre requirements influenced the strategies they used when they wrote. Students' interpretations of the purpose for writing and their ideas about what a piece of writing in a specific genre should look like influenced the strategies that they thought were most useful in that genre.

The findings regarding students' actual use of strategies for writing about reading indicated that the disciplinary subject matter and genre of each of the readings impacted how students responded to the texts and prompts. Students' actual use of strategies revealed their overarching concerns about audience, genre, and what it means to write in school. These concerns echoed the findings related to students' perceptions about writing. Furthermore, how students approached writing their responses to each of the texts they read for the study (i.e. the literary narrative, persuasive article, and history text) depended on their identities, which influenced students' interest and motivation for writing about what personally mattered. Regardless of genre, what tended to stand out for students *during* reading somehow made its way into students' written responses.

Students' perceptions and enactments of strategies differ across genres, purposes, and contexts. Implications from this study suggest that strategies for reading and writing need to be taught and learned in relation to disciplinary and genre-specific ways of thinking.

For:

My parents  
*Hong and Sun Ae Yoo*

and

My grandmother  
*Junghi Won Yoo*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

- Monica: Tell me about yourself as a reader Tyrone, what is your story as a reader?
- Tyrone: Uh, I used to read a lot but when I was little I used to love reading. I guess when I got older I just stopped liking it as much.
- Monica: When did things start changing for you?
- Tyrone: Around when I was 12.

--

- Monica: So tell me about yourself as a writer. Someone who writes. What is your story as a writer?
- Tyrone: Uh, I really don't know, cuz I don't write a lot.
- Monica: You don't write a lot.
- Tyrone: Nn-nn
- Monica: Well, how have you changed as a writer over the years?
- Tyrone: I've changed cuz like when I was little I used to write a lot.

--

These excerpts from my reader and writer interviews with Tyrone, a ninth grade focal student in this study, reveal that students can experience a decrease in their motivation to read and write as they transition from elementary to secondary school. Tyrone's change in attitude during early adolescence parallels the shift that takes place in reading and writing demands as students leave the self-contained elementary classroom and begin to experience literacy in separate content area classes. At the secondary level, the focus is no longer on "learning to read," as in the early elementary grades, but on "reading to learn." The demands for "reading to learn" and for demonstrating this learning only continue to increase, as students get older. Secondary students are often required to prove what they've learned from a text through what they write; and students who struggle with these increasing literacy demands often lose their motivation to read, write, and engage in school.

In the last ten years, a number of reports and position statements have highlighted the importance of explicitly teaching reading and writing strategies to students at the secondary level (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham & Perin, 2007; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Claims in these reports assert that teaching reading and writing strategies can improve students' literacy, which, in turn, could expand students' life opportunities in the real world. The most recent of these reports by Graham and Hebert (2010) shows, through meta-analysis on the empirical research on writing about reading, that writing about texts can improve students' reading comprehension.

The studies cited in these national reports indicate that being taught strategies for reading and strategies for writing can improve students' literacy (see Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007). These studies tend to focus on specific researcher-created interventions rather than on what students typically might bring on their own to the writing about reading task in school. The underlying premise of these interventions is that students, for the most part, do not necessarily have the strategies that they need to successfully negotiate reading and writing tasks

on their own. Yet there have been mixed results in the literature about the impact of teaching strategies on the performance of students on standardized measures (Duffy et al., 1987; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Paris, Cross, & Lipson, 1984; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). In addition, several studies that incorporate qualitative methods to examine students' use of strategies have revealed that students may or may not take up certain strategies for ongoing use because of their personal beliefs, goals and motivations (Dole, et al., 1996; Hall, 2007, 2009).

In order to better understand why students may choose to use some strategies over others, I examine students' perceptions about strategy use and their actual use of strategies when they read and write about what they have read. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, along with think aloud protocols, my dissertation investigates how both perceived and actual strategies for reading and for writing about a text are shaped by different genres. It is informed by research in the areas of reading comprehension, writing process, writing about reading, and strategy use, as well as socio-cultural theories of genre. In this chapter, I will review the literature and discuss the purpose of the study. I will also explain why it is important to consider how genre affects students' perceptions and actual enactments of strategy use. I will end the chapter by demonstrating how my research questions flow naturally from the body of work that comes before this study.

## **Understanding Reading, Writing, and Writing about Texts**

### **The Reading Process**

In order to make sense of how students take up reading and writing strategies when they write about texts, it is important to have an understanding of the constituent reading and writing processes, which both shape and are shaped by students' use of strategies and metacognition. The Construction-Integration Model of Text Comprehension describes the process of reading comprehension as the interaction of the *text base* and the *situation model* (Kintsch, 1998). According to Kintsch, a reader develops a text base from propositions, or idea units, explicitly stated in the text. In addition to creating a text base, a reader must construct a situation model, or mental representation that integrates the reader's background knowledge and goals with the reader's current iteration of the text, i.e., the text base (Kintsch, 1998). Constructing a situation model is essential for deep comprehension since it enables the reader to find a place in memory where new understandings can be stored and later retrieved for future applications (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005).

When a reader runs across a word that belongs to different schemas (e.g. "grade" as in a good grade versus a steep grade) within a proposition, the reader selects the best available schema through a process of construction and integration. In the Construction-Integration (CI) model proposed by Kintsch, the reader generates several possibilities for the meaning of a sentence by tapping into different schemas that might exist in relation to a particular word. While students read, they are constantly integrating their prior knowledge with their newfound text base in order to construct a situation model that is continuously in flux, changing and adapting according to new information derived from the text.

### **The Writing Process**

When students write about what they have read, they incorporate their reading into their writing; and conversely, their writing conveys evidence about the quality of their reading. In order to understand how this happens, it is necessary to understand the components of the writing

process. Hayes and Flower's (1980) model of writing takes into account the task environment, which includes the topic and audience, the long-term memory related to the writer's prior knowledge, which is related to both process and content, and the writing process. Hayes and Flower break down the writing process into three main components: planning, translating, and reviewing, which are managed by a "monitor," which serves a metacognitive function to assist the student in how and when to coordinate and enact different parts of the writing process. According to their model, planning is divided into three parts: generating, organizing, and goal setting. Hayes and Flower explain that generating involves retrieving relevant information and from long-term memory. The process of generating stimulates an associative chain of other memories and is closely related to the schema and prior knowledge activation discussed as part of Kintsch's construction-integration model of reading. Once possible ideas for writing have been generated, they must be *organized* by means of categories and classifications. During planning, experiences with other texts inform our criteria for making evaluations that are used to *set goals*.

The second major process discussed by Hayes and Flower (1980) is described as *translating*, which entails the transformation of propositions representing memories—i.e. prior knowledge and schema—into the form of sentences. The third set of processes in this model consists of *reviewing*, which is made up of the sub-processes *reading* and *editing*, both of which are informed by past experiences related to reading and writing other texts. Editing, according to Hayes and Flower, can be done at any time to fix errors and standard language conventions or to remove or clarify ambiguities in meaning. Yet, editing in the process of reviewing is a bit more specific as its purpose is the “systematic examination and improvement of the text” (p. 18). During reviewing, the writer also *reads* to evaluate the text in order to check if it will be understood and accepted by the reader. At any time, however, one sub-process could interrupt and/or incorporate another one. For example, planning could be interrupted by translating, or reviewing may lead to a revision of one's goals. While cognitive models of reading and writing may not explicitly describe the influence of the social context, sub-processes such as goal setting and drawing upon background knowledge inherently draw upon students' prior experiences with texts, which take place in the social world. Furthermore, there is a transactional, social component that relates to being an audience when one is positioned as a reader and to anticipating a response from an audience when one is positioned as a writer.

### **Transforming Text through Reading-to-Write**

When a student reads and writes about a text, she not only invokes reading and writing processes, but also processes specific to writing about texts. Spivey (1997) uses a constructivist metaphor to describe the act of reading-to-write. The meaning of a text is constructed by the individual in a social context and is crafted into a newly written text, which conveys that meaning. She asserts that composing a text for a particular discourse community transforms a read text into a new one with a purpose and audience in mind. In addition, Spivey claims that these transformations are likely to be based on the reader-writer's discernment of (a) "textual relevance" determined by the hierarchical macrostructure cues given by a text's original author; (b) "intertextual relevance" established by the repetition of information across multiple texts in the case of composing from several sources; and (c) "rhetorical relevance" related to the reader-writer's anticipation of what information will be well received by their audience. Using this criterion for relevance, Spivey (1997) notes that the individual organizes, selects, and generates material and ideas during the transformative process.

In contrast to Hayes and Flower's (1980) concept of organization, Spivey's use of the term is specific to writing about a text rather than the writing process in general. She describes organization as taking information from a read text, and reordering, recombining, and reorganizing it when students read-to-write. According to Spivey perspective, material is selected during organization from a source text based on a relevance criterion that is textual, intertextual, and rhetorical in nature. Spivey's notion of generating, on the other hand, is similar to the representation given in Hayes and Flower's (1980) model and relates to the way schema, experience, texts, and prior knowledge combine with propositions derived from a read text to produce information that will be used in a new text. Furthermore, the material represented in this new intertext or compositional amalgam, which is based on ideas and information from other texts, either consists of material that has been "replicated" or paraphrased from an original text or material that has been "added" through the process of generation (Spivey, 1997, p. 203).

When a student writes about a text, writing has the potential to shape thinking and deepen one's comprehension of a reading (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Langer & Applebee, 1987). The act of writing about a text often requires that students reexamine and reassess their former understandings in order to articulate connections between ideas from a source text to an audience. As students plan, structure, craft, revise and edit their compositions, they are constantly reworking and refining their thoughts about the source text in order to convey these ideas in a written form.

### **Drawing upon Strategies**

Generally speaking, a strategy entails conscious behavior that facilitates the performance of a task. Although strategies can become automatic and executed without awareness, they remain controllable, even after being automatized (Pressley, Goodchild, Fleet, Zajchowski, & Evans, 1989). What differentiates a strategy from a more automatic "skill" is that strategies involve "deliberate control, goal-directedness, and awareness" (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Several researchers (Baker & Brown, 1984; Garner, 1987; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991) argue, with substantial research support, that readers who struggle with comprehension can learn to change their reading behaviors by combining metacognition with strategies to (a) develop an awareness of the self as a learner, (b) understand the demands of the reading situation, (c) self-regulate one's behavior and direct one's cognitive resources towards a reading task, and (d) self-implement compensatory activities in order to remediate problem-solving reading difficulties. These same metacognitive components for improving reading comprehension also apply to the writing process, especially since writing is typically "self-planned, self-initiated, and self-sustained" (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997, p. 73).

### **Strategies for Reading**

While cognitive strategies could include actions intended to help control behavior, emotions, motivation, communication, attention, and comprehension (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986), strategies for reading narrow down to include only the range of behaviors that allow a reader to engage with and comprehend text (Paris, et al., 1991). Examples of reading strategies include rereading, writing notes in the margins, making connections to one's life, visualizing, etc.

During the mid to late 1970s, research on reading strategies was scarce. Most of the research on strategies addressed students' use of study skills (Anderson & Armbruster, 1984).

Applying early theories and research on strategy instruction to reading, Olshavsky (1976-1977) used a think aloud protocol to examine the strategies tenth grade students employed as they attempted to make sense of text as they read. Olshavsky discovered that although good readers and less proficient readers know the same strategies, good readers, overall, use strategies more often and apply a wider variety of strategies during their reading. She concluded that more frequent use of strategies by good readers related to their ability to accurately relay information from the text to the interviewer. Good readers also had a tendency to be more active and more prolific in their use of strategies. By noting how the use of reading strategies differed between good readers and their struggling reader counterparts, Olshavsky's study raised an important question that became the focus of reading strategy instruction research in the 1980s: Could students be taught and encouraged to learn and apply a variety of reading strategies to different texts?

Between the time of Olshavsky's study in the late 1970s and the studies of the 1980s, a shift took place between trying to understand the strategies used by good and struggling readers to teaching students how to become good readers by utilizing and implementing strategies taught directly by the teacher or researcher. In their review of reading comprehension studies, Wilkinson and Son (2010) characterize three waves of strategy instruction and conceptualize the development of a fourth wave, which goes beyond the strategy instruction to include dialogic approaches to comprehension. The first wave of studies largely took place between the 1970s and early 1980s and focused on the teaching of single strategies. Examples of strategies that were examined by researchers during this wave include: drawing on background knowledge, creating questions, summarizing, visualizing, and applying story grammar. Wilkinson and Son (2010) also note that researchers have continued to develop intervention studies that focus on single strategies, especially for students who would be considered struggling readers, as well as students who are designated as English Language Learners. The second wave of strategy studies, mostly conducted in the 1980s, embraced the use of multiple strategies. An example of such a study from this wave is one on reciprocal teaching by Palincsar and Brown (1984), in which students are taught to summarize, question, predict, and clarify. Studies of this era also focused on the importance of using direct instruction in order to explicitly teach strategies (Duffy et al., 1987). The third wave, which took place largely in the 1990s, consisted of a transactional approach to strategy instruction, in which "transactions" between readers and texts and between student and teacher participants focused on joint constructions of meaning. Wilkinson and Son specifically use the "transactional strategies instruction" (TSI) approach to characterize this wave (Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996; Pressley et al., 1992). As in many other strategy instruction studies, students learning transactional strategies were taught how to predict, generate questions and interpretations, incorporate background knowledge, visualize, summarize, and attend to the most important information (Brown, et al., 1996). Differences between the TSI approach and previous studies on strategy instruction took into account the need for strategy instruction practices to be long-term and ongoing; included teachers in the program's design; and provided flexibility, allowing strategy instruction to take place through direct explanation, modeling, and coaching, as well as through what arose naturally from the reading situation when students interacted with each other, the text, and the teacher. While time, educator-input, inclusion of background knowledge, and flexibility in regards to the self-selection of strategies most likely affected student performance, Pressley et al. (1992) added that student motivation must also be integrated into transactional strategy instruction in order for students to become good strategy users.

The fourth and most current wave of studies is comprised of dialogic approaches to comprehension. It includes but goes beyond the teaching and learning of strategies. The four dialogic approaches discussed by Wilkinson and Son include content-rich instruction, discussion, argumentation, and intertextuality. What characterizes these approaches is their openness to inviting tension and struggle between multiple voices during the comprehension process. Two strategy studies under this fourth wave are the Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) program (see Guthrie et al., 1996) and Reading Apprenticeship (see Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999).

A conscientious merger promoting motivation and reading comprehension instruction underlies the Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) program, a unique reading/language arts-science program, collaboratively designed by researchers in conjunction with teachers, that emphasizes real-world science observation, collaborative learning, strategy instruction, and literacy skills (Guthrie et al., 1996). Similar to other strategy instruction programs that emphasize collaborative learning and scaffolding, CORI includes elements of teacher modeling, group practice, and guided feedback (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Brown, et al., 1996). Additionally built into the CORI program are specific features that are meant to be intrinsically motivating such as opportunities for creating research questions and goals based on one's own topic interests and sharing their findings with other classmates through a variety of project formats such as a written report, a class-authored book, or informational stories (Guthrie et al., 1996).

Reading Apprenticeship model for Academic Literacy by the Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI) employs a framework that explores both the cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of literacy (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Schoenbach, et al., 1999). The authors of the program acknowledge that teaching students to read and write well is fundamental to helping students gain access to the dominant modes of discourse which operate as gatekeepers to opportunities for social and economic mobility (Greenleaf, et al., 2001). Taking on a mentor rather than an authoritarian role in a Reading Apprenticeship, the classroom teacher helps her students become more proficient readers by modeling and making explicit internal reading processes and strategies. Tenets of the Strategic Literacy Initiative's Reading Apprenticeship framework include social, personal, cognitive and knowledge-building elements, which are interconnected by a focus on the "metacognitive conversation", which is designed with the intention that students will "analyze and assess the impact" of their thinking upon reading.

The characterization of Wilkinson and Son's fourth wave is borne out of questions regarding the effectiveness of strategy instruction in the three previous waves. Wilkinson and Son question whether it is the strategies themselves that create greater comprehension or if it is the attention to and dialogue about texts that leads to such improvements. In addition, several important studies on the teaching and learning of multiple strategies indicated mixed results (Duffy et al., 1987; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Paris, et al., 1984). Rosenshine and Meister (1994), in their meta-analysis of reciprocal teaching studies, including the one conducted by Palincsar and Brown (1984), noted that discrepancies between researcher-made comprehension measures such as those examining daily achievement growth drew into question whether or not the results of reciprocal teaching had significant effects on standardized reading comprehension measures. Wilkinson and Son also express additional concerns regarding the sustainability of teaching strategies and the danger that teaching strategies could become too mechanical, with teachers emphasizing strategies as end products rather than the means for developing reading comprehension. These questions imply that strategy instruction is simply not enough. The

dialogic turn in studies related to comprehension emphasizes the social and interactive nature of reading.

### **Strategies for Writing**

During the 1980s, attention in the research on writing shifted from focusing on teaching discrete writing skills to supporting students as they engaged in the writing process (see Sperling & Freedman, 2001). Hillocks (1986) found, in a meta-analysis of experimental studies on the writing process, that not all approaches to teaching the process writing are equally beneficial to students. He evaluated four approaches for teaching writing: (a) a presentational mode, which consists of clear and specific objectives often explained through lectures, use of models, and teacher feedback, (b) a natural process mode, which places emphasis on general objectives, writing for peers as an audience, and opportunities for revision, (c) an environmental mode, which includes clear and specific objectives and opportunities for students to problem solve in small groups with peers and the teacher during writing, and (d) an individualized mode, which involves teacher support during programmed instruction and/or one-on-one writing conferences. Of these four approaches, the environmental mode (which was also the subject of Hillocks' own studies) was found to be the most successful. Hillock's meta-analysis helped to establish that problem-solving approaches with clear objectives for addressing specific parts of the writing process could be effective for improving student writing. The main tenets of the environmental mode, such as the specific objectives and problem solving emphasis, are also found in writing strategy instruction.

In order to limit this section and to create parallels to the research on reading strategy instruction, I will discuss two programs of research that specifically use the term strategy and focus on metacognition. Since the late 1980s, growing attention has been paid to explicitly teaching cognitive strategies for writing to address the needs of students with learning disabilities (Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, & Stevens, 1991; Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005; Wong, 1997). Although this body of research on cognitive strategy instruction for writing is comprised of interventions aimed at learning disabled students, it has shown that the same strategies and instructional approaches are effective for students without learning disabilities as well (Englert, et al., 1991; Graham, et al., 2005).

Research on teaching writing strategies to learning-disabled students follows the premise that learning-disabled students have not developed the same awareness or abilities as skilled and experienced writers, who are able to anticipate their audience's expectations and use metacognition as they move recursively between various writing sub-processes (Englert, Raphael, Fear, & Anderson, 1988). Strategic instruction in writing especially focuses on behaviors that assist writers when they engage in planning, revising, and editing (see Graham, 2006). As with reading strategies, writing strategies can take on a variety of forms. For example, they could include asking one's self questions about the purpose and audience for a piece of writing. Furthermore, writing strategies are typically taught in the classroom as part of instructional approaches, such as brainstorming, working with peers to give and receive feedback on each other's writing, or enacting genre-specific heuristics (Wong, 1997).

Building on reading research on metacognition (Paris, Lipson, & Wixon, 1983) and the combined use of strategies, teacher modeling, and dialogue (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), the Cognitive Strategies Instruction for Writing (CSIW) program intentionally teaches students to be metacognitive about purpose, audience, form, and content during the writing process (Englert et al., 1991; Englert, 1992). The first part of CSIW focuses on dialogue and the joint construction

of meaning through class discussion focusing on the analysis of sample essays and the creation of a co-constructed text authored by students and their peers under the guidance of the teacher. In this teacher-guided part of the intervention, students and their teacher discuss the purpose for writing, concerns regarding the audience's expectations, and how to use vocabulary and organization to signal the text type or genre.

After engaging in whole group activities, students engage in independent writing and later work together in peer feedback groups once they have finished their drafts. Throughout the CSIW cycle, students are provided with various researcher-designed "think sheets" with prompts and cues that are intended to promote students' utilization of different writing strategies. Both learning disabled and non-learning disabled students who have participated in CSIW have made gains in overall writing quality, organization, and awareness of audience on both CSIW-taught writing genres (e.g. explanation and compare/contrast papers) and transfer writing tasks, as well as improvements in terms of their metacognitive abilities (Englert et al., 1991).

Similar to the combined use of strategies, teacher modeling, and dialogue found in CSIW, Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), an intervention developed to assist learning disabled and struggling writers, also involves opportunities for guided and independent practice as students learn to use strategies (Graham & Harris, 1993; Graham & Harris, 1996). The six instructional stages to SRSD include: pre-skill development, which includes the assessment and building of background knowledge in relation to the target strategy; initial conferencing on instructional goals and discussion about the strategy; modeling of the strategy through the teacher's think aloud process and student feedback or input about the modeling; memorization of the strategy—often through the use of mnemonic devices; collaborative practice, in which students practice the strategy and self-instructions under teacher guidance; and independent performance through which students demonstrate that they can use the strategy independently.

Over the last twenty years, Graham and his colleagues have applied this instructional sequence, with positive results, to a number of different strategies for writing. Just to mention a few, these strategies have included structuring and generating content for stories (Graham & Harris, 1989, Graham, et al., 2005); brainstorming words to improve the vocabulary and quality of stories (Harris & Graham, 1985); revising with the help of peer feedback (MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991); and planning and generating content for different genres (e.g. stories versus persuasive papers) (Graham, et al., 2005).

Although the instructional approaches in CSIW and SRSD encourage dialogue between students, their peers, and the teacher, the approaches are heavily dependent on the modeling and guided practice facilitated by the teacher. Furthermore, the effects of explicit writing strategy instruction on subsequent writing and strategy-related tasks are often short-lived after the intervention has ended (Graham, 1990; Sawyer, Graham, & Harris, 1992). As in the case with reading strategy instruction, the time and intensiveness necessary for explicit writing strategy instruction calls into question the sustainability of students' independent strategy use over the long haul.

### **Considering Individual Motivation**

Dole, et al. (1996) note that quantitative outcome measures from the research on strategies do not capture the highly individual, almost idiosyncratic, ways in which students respond to strategy instruction. These researchers document that while increases to the mean score showed that students in their study who were exposed to strategy instruction improved, not all students responded to strategy instruction in the same way. Using a qualitative case study

approach alongside their quantitative measures, they found that two focal students responded to strategy instruction in opposite ways. One student responded positively—feeling as though the explicit instruction in strategies gave her new tools for approaching text. The other student, who viewed herself as a capable and competent reader, found that strategy instruction was redundant, tedious, and extraneous since she felt her own personal approaches to texts were more effective.

Using a case study approach, Hall (2007, 2009) similarly found that struggling students often deliberately choose not to enact strategies for reading because of their identity-related goals and motivations. She discovered that students often seek to maintain the appearance of being competent readers, even if behaviors to protect this identity jeopardized their opportunities to learn the material. The students in Hall's case studies described how they intentionally chose not to use comprehension strategies taught by the teacher because the actual use of these strategies in a classroom setting could signal to peers and the teacher that they struggled with reading and comprehension. Although the students recognized that strategies could be helpful for improving their comprehension, they did not want to be singled out as being "slow" or incompetent. In addition, the students' motivations to protect their identities were often misunderstood by their teachers who made assumptions about the students as "poor" readers and learners (Hall, 2009). While students may have been taught explicitly how to use strategies, their personal goals to protect their identities differed from the teacher's goals for student learning.

### **Strategies for Reading-to-Write or Writing from Sources**

Some scholars have tried to bridge the relationship between the strategies for reading and the strategies for writing by looking at how reading and writing activate and draw upon similar kinds of knowledge: (a) metaknowledge about one's motivations and cognition; (b) domain knowledge about content; (c) knowledge about general text attributes, such as syntax, text organization and structure; and (d) procedural knowledge related to using text to access and generate new knowledge (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Flower et al., Langer, 1986; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Olson & Land, 2007; Tierney & Pearson, 1983). The body of literature on reading-to-write or writing from sources does not explicitly discuss how students utilize reading and writing strategies per se, but it sheds light on students' more global strategic behaviors when they engage in tasks that draw upon the combination of both processes.

Looking across studies related to writing from multiple sources (Flower, et al., 1990; Many, Fyfe, Lewis, & Mitchell, 1996; Spivey & King, 1989), it is clear that a student's task impressions, or ideas about the requirements or parameters of a task, affect subsequent searching, planning, and decision-making while writing. Students' understandings of what is rhetorically relevant within a particular context, awareness of instantiating the appropriate genres, and knowledge of a specific audience affect how they form task impressions and shape their writing both in terms of content and structure. When Many, et al. (1996) examined how students integrated a variety of source information into their writing, they found that various task impressions, such as "(a) research as accumulation of information, (b) research as transferring information, and (c) research as transforming information" (p.18), led to different kinds of reading, research, and writing patterns. In this study, students' task impressions largely determined how information from different texts would be incorporated and represented in students' written products.

In a study examining ability and developmental differences of sixth, eighth, and tenth graders, Spivey and King (1989) found that accomplished readers, in comparison to struggling readers, wrote better organized and more elaborate reports. Although developmental differences

in this study could account for students' recognition and inclusion of "intertextually important" information or content that was similar across the three reference source passages, which comprised the required reading for the assignment, students' age and grade level did not have a significant impact on how students structured their compositions. Spivey and King suggest that cognitive factors related to comprehension, such as sensitivity to text structure, may be related to students' abilities to synthesize and write about texts. These studies reveal that student perceptions of the overall task will affect how students attend to reading and writing and that student ability levels in reading often impact the quality of writing.

Flower, et al. (1990), in a set of interrelated studies, examined university students' processes of reading-to-write as indicated by students' responses to a compilation of topic-related short texts--each a sentence or brief paragraph in length--by means of a tape recorded self-directed think aloud, written composition, and interview. Similar to the findings in studies on composing from multiple sources, the researchers who collaborated in this project learned that students' task impressions guided approaches to reading and writing. In addition, they discovered that students' original goals and intentions for writing, which were formulated upon initial task impressions, often changed as students progressed through the reading-to-write task. As students altered their goals and intentions due to the influence of a variety of social and cognitive factors, they often shifted their thinking about how to incorporate purpose, form, and content into their writing and came to revise the nature of the task itself. Some of the social factors discussed in the studies by Flower, et al. (1990) included students reading of the rhetorical situation and context for writing, familiarity with conventions that indicate belonging to an academic discourse community, and issues related to time and how writing fit into students' lives. Cognitive factors in this project were broken down into several processes such as monitoring, structuring, elaborating and planning and strategies such as "gist and list and comment," "skim and respond," "dig out an organizing idea," "divide [ideas] into camps," etc. (see Flower, et al., 1990).

Investigating how university students in Flower, et al.'s project drew upon cognitive resources while reading-to-write, Stein (1990) sought to understand how students moved from reading to writing, incorporated prior knowledge, utilized strategies, and "balanced creativity with contextual constraints." Stein found that students handled their decision-making and strategic choices in ways that were different from one another. While some students could easily and successfully complete the task by building meaningful representations of the source texts, marshalling prior knowledge to aid rather than distract them from understanding and focusing on the texts and task, being metacognitive about when, why, and how they would incorporate strategies related to monitoring, structuring, elaborating, and planning, and being aware of task demand, others either struggled or did not complete the given assignment when they had difficulty with one or more of these components.

The studies on reading-to-write or writing from sources emphasize how individual differences related to students' developmental levels, goals, and motivations ultimately end up affecting both the process and product when students write about what they read. They differ somewhat from the strategy studies that look separately at the reading process and writing process because they are less driven by interventions created by the researcher and more prone to imitating typical assignments students are given in school. Furthermore, these studies have mostly been exploratory in nature. The researchers of these studies seek to understand the process of reading-to-write and writing from sources from the students' perspectives in order to

gain knowledge about common processes as well as individual differences involved in the development of these practices.

In contrast to the exploratory character of most of the work in the section on reading-to-write or writing from sources, Olson and Land (2007) conducted research on an intervention that aimed to improve the academic literacy of English Language Learners (ELLs) in secondary school. The intervention introduced students' to the use of an integrative reading-writing strategies "toolkit." Some examples of the strategies taught as part of the "toolkit" included planning and goal setting, revising meaning, tapping prior knowledge, making predictions, summarizing, asking questions, and analyzing author's craft. Teachers in the experimental condition first taught strategies through modeling a guided reading that stopped at points to demonstrate and explain how different strategies could be used. In addition, students were given a list of sentence starters to help them develop the language for talking about strategies. An example sentence starter for revising meaning was: "I'm getting a different picture here because..." (Olson & Land, 2007, p. 280). Students were also taught to identify and color code plot summary, supporting detail, and commentary in their analytical essays. Color coding the essays helped the students to actually see what made their papers weak or strong, which provided information about how they could revise their work.

Students who participated in the intervention were more likely than control group students to score higher on the study's writing measures and on standardized Language Arts measures and to be placed into a higher-level composition course at the local community college (based on the college's placement test) once they had graduated from high school. Despite these findings, not all of the students in the intervention performed well on these measures. This suggests that other factors, such as students' identities or language abilities, may have affected the results.

Olson and Land supplemented their statistical analysis with several examples of positive student experiences in using strategies, but they did not provide any negative examples even though not all students in the experimental group benefited from the intervention. By contrast, Hall's (2007, 2009) research, focused on less successful students—those who were "silent" in the classroom and deliberately chose not to use strategies for reading because of their identity-related motivations. Likewise, it is possible that students in Olson and Land's study, who may not have used the intervention strategies, might not have been vocal about their participation due to identity-related issues.

### **The Intertextual Interface: Where Strategies meet Genres**

Both reading and writing are intertextual acts in which previous experiences with texts influence how one makes meaning. Kristeva (1986), building upon the work of Bakhtin, first introduced the term intertextuality, explaining that the "literary word" is an "*intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning)" (p. 36). By this, Kristeva focuses on the dialogic nature of words within a literary text. According to Bakhtin (1981), words are in constant interaction with their environment; and there is no word that can be construed as happening in isolation. Bakhtin states that each word contains a layering of social, historical, and physiological episodes experienced by the one uttering the word and the one who receives it. These layers help to determine how the word is sent into the world and received. Because words are always interacting with meanings and messages derived from previous episodes, they are never neutral, never devoid of contact with other words and their meanings, and never freed of the "baggage" they carry with them. Transferring this dialogic interaction to texts, Kristeva

coined the term intertextuality to refer to the connections between "texts" or signs that communicate meaning. Thus the act of reading is always intertextual, as it embodies the individual's experience as mediated through a system of signs in which the meanings derived from one text meet those from another. While intertextuality within a source text sometimes is explicitly integrated into a text by the author, it is often the reader who brings to bear her own intertextual links, which allow her to render the text meaningful on her own terms (i.e. in relation to her unique intertextual space and connections) (Hartman, 1995). Writing is also intertextual in nature since the process always invokes previous experiences with texts, both read and written by the author.

Transforming a text while reading-to-write is a visible intertextual act as one must draw upon actual texts present (i.e. books and other sources), rather than texts that are only from one's experience. What is taken up from a source text is often evident in a written response through words and phrases that resemble topics and ideas from the original source. How an individual invokes intertextuality and decides on what to replicate or add in the creation of a written "patchwork" intertext (Hartman, 1992) is tied closely to her impressions of the writing task and the rhetorical situation.

It is often at the intertextual interfaces between the "known" background knowledge from previously read texts (including previously read information in the current text) and experiences and the "unknown" new text either being read or formed that strategies come into play as scaffolding mechanisms, which enable reading comprehension or written composition. I use the term interface here because it emphasizes the interaction that takes place when texts from one's background knowledge intersect with the text that is being read or written. At the interface, texts collide, genres rub up against one another, and new meanings are constructed or reconstructed. For example, as a student summarizes, the source text is transformed into a new text that is created by the student. The process entails paring down the read text, transforming words, phrases, and ideas extracted from the genre of the source text, and manipulating language to form a new text in the genre of a summary.

### **Invoking Genres**

Moving away from prior conceptualizations of genre as fixed or static text types or forms, more recent notions of genre include considerations about how texts reflect context, community, and readers' and writers' roles (see Johns, 2002). These considerations are common to the theoretical approaches of three different traditions: Australian/Sydney School, English for Specific Purposes, and North American/New Rhetoric studies (Hyon, 1996; Johns, 2002). Yet how these considerations are enacted varies based on the purposes underlying the approach of each tradition.

The Australian/Sydney School tradition is grounded in Halliday's (1978) systemic functional linguistics framework, which describes how register is made up of the *field* or the social action, *tenor* or the social or discourse roles and relationships, and *mode* or the symbolic organization. Applying this framework to genre, Australian researchers have focused on how linguistic forms are used to achieve functions within social contexts. Kress (1993) argues that genres encapsulate relations of power realized between participants and the wider social structures that surround the communicative act. In order to address the inequities within the larger society, Australian researchers have developed pedagogical applications to help

disadvantaged and minority elementary and secondary students acquire the genres necessary to succeed in school (see Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

The English for Specific Purposes tradition addresses the teaching and learning of non-native speakers—most often adults—who are learning to become part of a disciplinary or professional community within a very specific context (e.g. graduate school or the workplace). Swales (1990) defines genre as a class of communicative events that is rooted in a shared set of communicative purposes. Although genres may vary in their prototypicality, there are constraints to content and form that limit what is deemed acceptable by members of the discourse community who are versed in the genre. Researchers from an ESP tradition tend to emphasize that it is important to teach genres through an analysis of the formal characteristics of the genre, which also can include grammar and vocabulary (see Hyon, 1996; Johns, 2002; Swales, 1990).

In comparison to the two other approaches, the North American/New Rhetoric tradition does not delineate pedagogical applications with recommendations for explicit teaching (Freedman, 1993). Instead, it focuses more on the relationships between participants and how genre is used to accomplish a goal or action for the individual (Miller, 1984). In the North American/New Rhetoric studies tradition, Miller defines genre as a rhetorical action that happens under a recurrent social situation. Over time and repetition, rhetors have become aware that a kind of utterance is effective under a particular type of social circumstance, and that this utterance shares patterns and expectations with other similar utterances that have taken place under similar conditions (Bakhtin, 1986; Bazerman, 1997). When students enact a genre, they invariably consider what precedes and follows it in this communicative chain, in order to participate as members of a community. Bakhtin (1986) explains that genres, spoken or written, are stable types of utterances with predictable thematic, compositional, and stylistic components that arise out of the demands and conditions of communication integral to a sphere of activity. According to Bakhtin, an utterance is a unit of communication that has an author and addressee. It is bounded and determined by a change of speakers since the beginning of an utterance is always "preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others (or, although it may be silent, others' active responsive understanding, or, finally, a responsive action based on this understanding)" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 71). Thus every utterance is linked in a chain to other utterances, expressed or implied.

Miller (1984) further states that one's enactment of a genre and one's motives for this action will depend on how one interprets or defines the situation. While genres are responses to recurrent rhetorical situations, how genres are instantiated will depend on local conditions and social contexts, which shape how the genre functions as a response and precursor to other utterances. As an utterance in a string of utterances, a written response to a text is a rejoinder to preceding utterances, such as the teacher's directions, the writing prompt, the author's text, and the previous discussions of the topic. In addition to being a rejoinder, a student's response serves as a precursor to forthcoming utterances that contain replies to it.

Building on Bakhtin and Kristeva's work, Briggs and Bauman (1992) begin with the assertion that genres are inherently intertextual. They state that genres invoke historical, social, and political associations and explain that "a genre thus creates indexical connections that extend far beyond the present setting...thereby linking a particular act to other times, places, and persons" (Briggs & Bauman, 1992, p. 147). For example, proverbs and fairy tales may bring up traditional past associations while email will likely be correlated with what is contemporary and modern. In terms of social and political connections, genres are often closely related to groups

as defined by gender, class, and status. Their attention to how individuals enact social and political alignments through their use of genres is similar to the New Rhetoric perspective that genres are responses to recurrent rhetorical situations.

Briggs and Bauman further emphasize that the intertextuality of genres implicates an intertextual gap. As genres are conditioned by the local context, they do not always fit precisely within the bounds of generic prototype. This is especially true in when students enact a hybrid genre and/or learn a new one (Kamberelis, 1999). Enactments of genre include a calibration of the intertextual gap, in which the author moves closer to or further from the prototype, minimizing or maximizing the gap. When an author knows a genre well, she can exploit this gap by choosing to position herself closer to one genre or another. By adopting patterns belonging to one type of genre or another, the author signals her affinity with other people, places, times, and utterances (Briggs & Bauman, 1992).

### **How Students Process and Respond to Different Genres**

In addition to how readers and writers take up and use genres purposefully, Bruner (1986) states that “something in the actual text ‘triggers’ an interpretation of genre” and that readers and writers often possess internal understandings of genre based on their experiences. Several studies examine how students’ understand and process different genres when they read or write. These studies highlight how each genre entails distinct approaches and considerations for reading and writing.

Kamberelis (1999) investigated how kindergarten, first, and second grade students made sense of and wrote in three different genres: the narrative, science report, and poetry. Students in the study did not receive any explicit instruction in genre designed by the researcher. Any exposure to these genres had been through what was taught by the students’ teachers through normal classroom instruction. Kamberelis identified how students used textual features, such as lexical density, temporal and logical connectives, and text cohesion; register features, such as diction, syntax, formulaic phrases, and literary devices; and structural features, such as story grammar; descriptions, classifications, and comparisons; and line, stanza, rhythm or meter. He found that students had substantial working knowledge of the narrative genre, but less developed ideas about what constituted the informational report and poetry genres. Students often produced hybrid pieces, consisting of some of the target genre elements typically mixed with segments from narrative or media-related/popular culture genres, when they wrote either informational reports or poetry. Furthermore, developmental differences could account for why the second grade students were able to produce more sophisticated science reports and poems than the kindergarteners.

In a study on how four fourth grade students processed texts as they read in either narrative or expository genres, Kucan and Beck (1996) examined how students enacted the following strategies: paraphrasing, questioning, elaborating (e.g. offering comments, opinions, or creating connections), hypothesizing, and monitoring. As in the study by Kamberelis (1999), there was no explicit instruction given in relation to genre or strategies. Students in the study read and engaged in think aloud protocols for five narrative and five expository texts in a variety of subgenres (e.g. fairytale and fantasy narratives and biography, explanation, and description). After completing a think aloud for each text, students were asked to orally summarize the contents of the text. While the researchers did not closely consider genre nuances related to form, function, or rhetorical action, they explained the simple purposes of the two kinds of texts—noting that narrative texts are intended to tell a story and expository texts are meant to

inform. They found that students tended to hypothesize more when reading narrative texts and to elaborate more when reading expository texts. While reading narratives, the students made speculations about characters or events that took place in the texts. In comparison, the students made more connections to prior knowledge and information that they had learned outside of the immediate texts as they read the expository pieces. Students' oral summaries of the narrative texts revealed that they could relay a greater percentage of the important ideas in comparison to their oral summaries of the expository texts.

Beck and Jeffrey (2009) explored how tenth and eleventh grade students understood and responded to required writing assignments in History and English. In this study, statewide assessments influenced how teachers and students thought about writing in these content areas. Due to the high stakes nature of the assessments, the teachers in this study integrated lessons that focused on the skills they felt students would need to pass the writing portion of the exams. The lessons were part of the teachers' normal instruction and were not intentionally designed for the study. In order to capture how students thought about and attended to writing that students were doing in History and English, the researchers interviewed students about major pieces of writing that they had done for their classes. The main genres that were discussed during the interviews included Document-Based Question (DBQ) essays, Thematic Essays about History, literary analysis essays, and informational reports. Beck and Jeffrey found that students were more likely to view the literary analysis essay as writing that allowed them to include their opinions in comparison to the DBQs, in which they felt that they had to limit themselves to the facts. Eleventh grade students characterized the literary analysis essays as more difficult than history essays because they entailed more interpretation. The interviews also revealed how the students had internalized messages about what entailed good writing in school, which often curtailed students' creativity and expression.

These studies show how students are aware of the distinct demands entailed in reading and writing in different genres. Beck and Jeffrey (2009) describe how writing in both History and English requires a subjective stance through which the writer interprets the text that is read in order to write about it. They define subjectivity as the "employment of one's values and beliefs, as well as experience-based knowledge that a reader enlists to support these beliefs" (Beck & Jeffrey, 2009, p. 235), and draw upon Dillon and Moje's (1998) view that individuals occupy subject positions as actors in a given social context. Beck and Jeffrey discuss how the students in their study alluded to their subjective stances when discussing writing in both content areas, but describe how students had difficulty actually *including* a subjective stance when they wrote about history. This notion of subjectivity can be applied to other genres as well and could explain why students in the other two studies tended to favor and have an easier time reading or writing narrative in comparison to other genres.

### **This Dissertation Study**

My dissertation study builds upon and extends several of these strands of scholarship by examining how students use strategies across reading and writing when they write about texts in different genres. I consider how students' understandings of genre impact both the reading and writing process during this type of reading-to-write activity. Furthermore, I explore the tensions that students face in terms of reconciling personal goals for writing with their enactments of genre. Although I refer to the genres in my study by their text types—literary narrative, history, and persuasive article—my analysis of genre goes beyond this classification. I take into account

the socio-cultural context, including the background experiences of the students, their ideas and interpretations about the reading and writing tasks, the forms of the read and written texts, and the goals or actions that the texts accomplish for the students. In order to understand why students may take up certain strategies over others, I investigated how students' perceived use of strategies compares to what they actually do when they read and write about different genres of text.

### **Research Questions**

My research questions for this study can be divided into questions that examine students' perceived and actual use of strategies for reading and their perceived and actual use of strategies for writing about reading. Although these questions do not directly inquire about genres, this exploration is implied since the strategies take place in relation to the genres that students read and write.

**Perceived and actual use of strategies for reading.** Questions relevant to this topic are:

- What is the perceived utility of students' reading strategies? What strategies do students think they personally bring to the reading situation and what do students say about why they might choose to use certain strategies?
- What are the strategies that students personally bring to the reading situation and how do those differ from their perceptions about their strategy use?

**Perceived and actual use of strategies for writing about reading.** Pertinent questions include:

- What is the perceived utility, and efficacy of students' strategies when writing about reading? What strategies do students think they personally bring to the writing situation when they write about what they read and what do students say about why they might choose to use certain strategies? And how might that compare to what they say about strategies for other types of writing?
- What are the strategies that students use when they write about what they have read; and how do those differ from their perceptions about their strategy use? What evidence of reading comprehension is revealed in students' writing and what they say about this writing?

### **Outline of Chapters**

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters, including this chapter, which introduces the literature review and study. Chapter Two describes the methods for the dissertation and provides an overview of the interrelated themes and overlapping analysis in Chapters Three through Six. Chapter Three and Four respectively introduce students' perceived strategies for reading and perceived strategies for writing about reading. Chapter Five investigates students' actual use of strategies for reading and compares these strategies to their perceived use of reading strategies. Chapter Six is structured similarly to Chapter Five in that it explores how students actually write about what they read and compares these strategies to their perceived use of strategies for writing about reading. Chapter Seven synthesizes the overall findings for the study and discusses implications for future research on the teaching and learning of strategies for reading and strategies for writing about texts.

## Chapter 2: Methods

### Setting: Magellan High School

Magellan High School<sup>1</sup> is located in Los Alamitos, a working class suburb that is adjacent to the hub of freeways that connect the Silicon Valley, the urban metropolis of San Francisco, the gentle hills of the eastern suburbs that now accommodate the overflow of Bay Area residents, and the bridges that yoke the East Bay to the Peninsula. Los Alamitos is a relatively affordable community given its prime location. With residents of different ethnicities from mostly middle and working class backgrounds, Magellan High School's demographic breakdown is: Latino 50.5%; African-American 21%; Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander 17.2%; White 10.3%; American Indian or Alaska Native 0.2%; and multiple or no response 0.8%. Furthermore, 46.6% of all students at Magellan receive free or reduced lunch. To serve its diverse learners and their interests and needs, the school offers a variety of programs, including an informational college and career center, a peer tutoring program, an after school study center, a student mentorship program called Link Crew, and a ninth grade advocacy program that provides counseling, tutoring, and services for struggling ninth grade students. The school also has recently added a digital arts academy, which, as a school within a school, expands students' opportunities to learn about technologies related to the digital arts.

At Magellan, the year is divided into a "4x4 block" schedule, which means that students take four double-period blocks each term of the school year. Each term comprises half of the school year and is divided into two semesters. In one term, students fulfill requirements for two semester's or one year's worth of work in a given subject area. Freshmen at Magellan are required to take Math and English for two terms or the whole school year. Theoretically speaking, the freshmen are exposed to double the number of instructional hours in English and Math during that year. During the first term of freshman English, there is a greater focus on reading nonfiction literature and using a variety of strategies for reading and writing. During the second term, the English class centers on reading narrative literature and builds on the strategies that students have learned in their first term. Since the groundwork for the teaching and learning of reading and writing strategies takes place during the first term, I observed classes intensively and collected the bulk of my data over the course of two semesters. Interviews with individual focal students continued in the second term, with limited classroom observations during this time.

### Rationale for Choosing Magellan High School

I chose to study students' strategic practices for reading and writing at Magellan because the school had established a reputation for having created a strong literacy program that incorporated teaching cognitive strategies for reading and writing. I had worked with several teachers and students to conduct a pilot study, regarding students' use of reading strategies, three years prior to the start of my dissertation research. The purpose of that study was to examine the interaction between the strategies that were being taught and the strategies that students brought from elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> All names mentioned in this study, including the city, school, and people, are pseudonyms.

In the year that I did my pilot study, the curricular structure of the ninth-grade Academic Literacy in English classes at Magellan was based on the Reading Apprenticeship model for Academic Literacy put forth by the Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI) (see Schoenbach et al., 2001). A few of the crucial metacognitive reading strategies promoted by SLI and used at Magellan High included:

- working with the components of Reciprocal Teaching [which consisted of summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting strategies (Palincsar & Brown, 1984)];
- “chunking” a text into smaller parts in order to analyze and to understand each portion before moving to the next; engaging in think aloud protocols in which thought processes are voiced aloud as one reads;
- “talking to the text” where students wrote notes and questions about their reading in the side margins as they read; and
- writing metacognitive reading logs/journals in which students described their thoughts while reading.

Having witnessed, in my pilot study, how students often used, transformed, and appropriated the “officially taught” strategies to blend in with “personal” strategies, I decided to return to the same site to further understand how students understood the utility of strategies for reading and writing and to learn about how these perceptions mapped onto and perhaps even shaped what students actually did when they read and wrote in an environment that highly encouraged the use of strategies.

Upon returning to Magellan, I found that the English department was in transition—putting less emphasis on teaching reading strategies and replacing it with a focus on helping students improve their writing. The ninth graders at Magellan still were required to take two terms of English, but what had formerly been known as Academic Literacy in English had changed its emphasis. Several of the teachers informed me that the feeder middle schools in the district had begun to teach the same reading strategies, and thus they felt it was repetitive to teach them again at the ninth grade level. At this point, many of the teachers at the middle school level had also been through the training through SLI and also had adopted facets of the Reading Apprenticeship program. The teachers I spoke to claimed that students already knew how to use strategies, such as Reciprocal Teaching, and did not need as much instruction in them anymore. Although the ninth-grade teachers were still teaching some reading strategies, their focus was on helping students with “close reading” (making claims about literary interpretation and developing arguments to support the claims) and coming up with critical questions through the use of different kinds of question filters that could promote a Socratic Seminar style discussion.

In addition, the teachers in the English department were focusing more on scaffolding writing by explicitly discussing how to structure and organize an essay. During the years between my pilot study and this one, I had returned to Magellan to work with teachers and students. In this time, I had observed a variety of writing strategies taught by several of the school's teachers. For example, I witnessed how students were taught to identify the speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, and subject in a strategy called “S.O.A.P.S.” Students first identified S.O.A.P.S. rhetorical features in the writing of a professional author. Next, they discussed the importance of them and evaluated how the author used language to convey their message. Last, they applied these categories when they planned and executed their own writing. It was common for students to be given graphic organizers to brainstorm and jot down ideas before beginning an essay. Furthermore, teachers in the Magellan English department

commonly held one-on-one writing conferences with students; in these conferences, they went over and suggested strategies that would be suited for meeting an individual's writing needs.

My observations also revealed that the English department had adopted some components of Jane Schaffer's (1995) writing program. Their adherence, however, to the formulaic aspects did not appear to be as rigid as prescribed by the actual Jane Schaffer curriculum, in which there was a real "formula": a typical body paragraph begins with a topic sentence, a sentence containing "concrete detail," two sentences with analysis or commentary, another sentence with concrete detail, a following set of two sentences with analysis or commentary, and a concluding sentence. Instead, what I observed was the use of note-taking sheets in which the teacher asked the students to choose quotations or concrete details from the text and to accompany these quotations with their own analysis. Graphic organizers seemed to mimic some of Jane Schaffer's writing materials and contained spaces for topic sentences, quotations, and analytical commentary. Based on my observations, it seemed that attention to writing at Magellan often placed an emphasis on students' understandings of form and structure. While critics might feel that this is limiting to student expression, several of the teachers at the school believed that providing students with instruction that focused students attention on how to structure writing actually opened up possibilities for greater academic participation.

What was and is still notable about the teaching of writing at Magellan is that the teachers in the English department have been devoted to fostering students' independence as learners. This means that even with a heavily scaffolded, almost formulaic, approach to writing, the teachers' aims have been to have students eventually internalize expectations for including both analysis and textual evidence in their literary analysis essays.

Despite changes that took place between the pilot and the current study, I thought the greater focus on writing, along with the teaching of questioning and close reading strategies, would provide me with an opportunity to examine how students thought about and used both reading and writing strategies. Furthermore, with the change in the curriculum, students were being given more assignments that involved *both* reading and writing together, rather than assignments that kept these two processes separate. I thought such an environment could affect the way in which students saw the interconnections or disconnections between the two processes.

### **Ms. Klein's Classroom**

I chose to conduct my dissertation research in Ms. Christie Klein's classroom, because of her ongoing focus on strategy instruction. I had met Ms. Klein three years prior to the beginning of this study. At the time, I was conducting a pilot study. I had chosen to collaborate with Ms. Klein then because I was specifically looking to work with a teacher who was very explicit in her teaching of reading strategies. Ms. Klein viewed teacher-initiated reading strategies taught in her class as "tools" that would help students later when they read texts on their own. Her wish was for students to practice and internalize the teacher-initiated strategies so that the strategies would someday become automatic skills within the students' personal reading strategy repertoire. Ms. Klein did not want students to think that teacher-initiated strategies were "just something that you do when you're in Academic Literacy class" and pointed out that she often spoke to students about how reading strategies could be useful to them in other contexts.

I returned to Magellan several years later to conduct research in Ms. Klein's classroom again, because I had gone back to her classroom several times during intervening years to do some informal observations and knew that her commitment to teaching strategies was still strong. At the time of this study, she was in her fourth year of teaching and had become the chair

of the English department. Because she was the department chair, I felt that she would probably have a strong hand in shaping the English curriculum. Thus I would be walking into a classroom in which reading and writing strategies would be privileged.

## Participants

### Focal Students

After observing in the classroom for four weeks, I initially selected six focal students to represent a range of ways of approaching reading and writing texts. The six focal students were uniquely different from one another but also seemed to represent the use of patterns for reading and writing that were typical of the entire range in the class. I took into consideration how these students were performing in class and attempted to include a mix of achievement levels as evidenced by class grades, students' previous STAR test scores, and the teacher's informal assessments. As Magellan is a school with a high proportion of minority students, I aimed to represent the ethnic diversity of the classroom as well. This meant that I had to consider the fact that many of the students at the school either were or had been at one point designated as English Language Learners (ELLs). After collecting my data, I realized that including English Language Learners would complicate the study because I would have to consider how a lack of fluency in English would affect students' ability to read, comprehend, and write about a text. In order to mitigate possible reading and writing differences due to language-related issues in my analysis and findings, I decided to include only students who were either native English speakers or who had been reclassified as fluent English proficient (FEP) speakers at least a year or more before the study took place. Thus data on Jose, a participant originally in the group of 6, was not included in my analysis and findings. Karynn, a native English speaking female Asian American student who had been an eager early participant, only completed one of the three reading-think aloud-writing-retrospective task combinations. The data on Karynn was dropped from the study because of its incompleteness. In the end, this study focused on four native English or fluent English proficient students who completed all of the interviews, reading-think aloud-writing-retrospective combination tasks, and surveys. Although I do not provide a separate section devoted to each student, each focal student's perspectives and unique strategic patterns for reading and writing are traced carefully, along with other data, across the chapters.

**Ashley.** I noticed Ashley during my first few visits to the classroom. Although she initially seemed to be shy around her classmates, she was a vocal participant who raised her hand frequently to answer the teacher's questions. I also noticed that she was one of the few White students in the class. When I asked Ashley to characterize herself as a reader, she revealed that she felt she was a slow reader until fifth grade because she didn't like reading until then. She explained that this changed when she began to find books that she liked. In turn, reading books that were interesting to her increased her ability to read more fluently. She stated, "Yeah, I changed because like, my fluency's a lot better, and I'm like confident enough to read out loud." Ashley often volunteered when the teacher would ask if anyone would like to read out loud in class. Ms. Klein considered Ashley to be one of her top students. Although Ashley was a good student, she did not always enjoy writing. When I asked her to tell me about herself as a writer, she explained that she liked free writing but did not like structured writing, especially when the teacher explicitly gave instructions about form, expected content, and organization.

**Irene.** Regardless of which table group Irene was assigned when the teacher changed students' seats, Irene always got along with everyone. She was friendly, easy-going, and tended to work well with others. In class, she often struck up conversations in rudimentary Spanish with other Latino students in order to show her kinship towards them. This was one way that she bonded with others of the same heritage. Although Irene spoke fluent Spanish as a Mexican-American, she could not write or spell words in the language. When she attempted to write notes in Spanish to her friends in class, she asked others to help her with spelling and grammar. While she had been designated as an English Language Learner in early elementary school, she had been reclassified as Fluent English Proficient for some time well before high school.

When I interviewed Irene and ask her to tell me about her history as a reader, she first described herself as someone who did not like to read. However, she immediately clarified this, and stated that she "barely started reading good books." She had gone through a transformation as reader in a way that was similar to Ashley's experience. Irene relayed that she had recently gotten into reading books by Mexican-American authors and that she did not always understand the words when the authors briefly code-switched into Spanish. Yet her motivation to relate to her heritage kept her interested in reading. She expressed that she felt she was growing as a reader and a writer. She stated that, over the years, her writing had improved with the assistance of her teachers who helped her learn from her mistakes.

**Hector.** Hector initially seemed somewhat suspicious, yet very curious and interested about my presence in his class. He would often ask me about my role, even after my initial introduction and my collection of permission forms from the entire class. Once he decided for certain that it was indeed true that I was there to study how students used strategies as they read and wrote rather than to evaluate him and his peers, he became at ease and was quite friendly, often joking with me when I was at his table group. Although Hector had a quiet reserve about him, he especially enjoyed teasing the female students in class and was often seen talking to members of the opposite sex on a regular basis. When he sat at the same table group as Irene, he would often talk to her in Spanish about another female that he liked. While he had a very light complexion, he also shared the same Mexican-American heritage as many of his other Latino classmates.

When I asked him to describe his experience as a reader, he explained that he enjoyed picture books as a child and found that his fluency and "lexile" (the level of books he could read independently) grew as he began reading books that were more challenging. He noted that he had a setback in seventh grade when he had some trouble reading, but he was able to gain motivation and fluency when he was pulled out from class to work individually with a different teacher. While Hector was considered a pretty good student according to Ms. Klein, he often did what was required but did not go beyond that. When I asked him to tell me about himself as a writer, he stated that he first learned to write by learning letters and then sentences. He explained that his writing had improved over the years because his skills had increased in grammar, spelling, and vocabulary.

**Tyrone.** Tyrone transferred into Ms. Klein's class about three weeks after the first semester had already started. After the first few weeks of school, some school-wide schedule changes took place in order to even out the number of students assigned to each of the ninth grade English teachers. Tyrone's schedule may have changed due to this redistribution. His demeanor caught my attention because it seemed like he often purposely avoided being noticed

by the teacher. While he was one of the three African American males in the class, I made a mental note that he did not seem to resemble the other two in appearance or manner. The other two African American males were tall, lanky, and had a kind of swagger to their walks. Tyrone, in contrast, was much shorter and tended to make himself even smaller by slouching and sinking down in his seat. When Tyrone talked to classmates around him, he often spoke in low tones, so that his conversation could not easily be detected. At times, however, he would become animated and his voice would go up when he was engaging in playful banter with others. Ms. Klein felt that Tyrone was an interesting case because he did not seem to be living up to his potential as a student. She felt he was more capable than he led others to believe.

Both she and his former English teacher felt that “something else,” that neither of them could quite put their fingers on, might be affecting his motivation. When I asked him to tell me about himself as a reader, he revealed that he “loved reading” when he was little but that this changed for him when he was about twelve. He also related a similar trajectory about his experience as a writer. He explained that he enjoyed writing stories as a child before he reached age ten, especially because he liked sharing his writing with his mother. When I questioned him about what changed for him as a writer, he shrugged his shoulders and claimed that he just “didn’t feel like writing no more.” Unlike the other focal students who felt as though their reading and writing had improved from childhood to adolescence, Tyrone felt that his abilities to read and write had declined.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Classroom Observations**

In order to gain insight on who the focal students were and what they were like as readers, writers, and strategy users inside the classroom, I observed students, audio-recorded class sessions and conversations, and took field notes over a period of nineteen weeks. On average, I was in the students’ first term English Language Arts classroom three times a week during their 90-minute class period. During January, I increased the number of observations from three to at least four times a week. The purpose of these observations was to gain an understanding of students’ perceptions and enactments of reading and writing strategies as they were being taught in the classroom. My intentions were to use these observations as sources that I could triangulate with other types of data, such as the surveys, interviews, reading think aloud protocols, and writing retrospective interviews.

Students in this class were seated in table groups with four to six students at a table. During my observations, I often sat with a table group for at least a half an hour at a time. Some days, I would sit with one table group the whole period; on other days, I would sit with several different groups. Although I predominantly sat at the table groups where the focal students were, I did not want to appear as though I was studying only those students and also spent time sitting at other table groups as well. While students worked on different classroom assignments, I often asked them questions about how they came up with their ideas about a text and why they might have responded to a text or prompt in the ways that they did during discussion, reading strategy enactment, and written responses. From observations and informal questioning, I began to discern students’ approaches to and strategies for both reading and writing texts.

In addition to observing students, I observed the teacher and took field notes that focused on the teacher’s instructions and assignments. I especially paid close attention to how she communicated her expectations about the enactment of reading and writing strategies. I also

took into account the reminders she incorporated to prompt the students in regard to how they were to approach reading and writing strategies and assignments. Along with all of my observations, I made it a point to collect all of the handouts and assignments that were distributed on days that I was in the classroom. If, by chance, I missed a day on which a major assignment was distributed, I collected the assignment and conferred with Ms. Klein about it when I returned.

### **Reader and Writer Identity Interviews**

The purpose of the reader and writer identity interviews was to understand each focal student's perceptions about himself or herself as a reader, writer, and strategy user. I conducted two one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with each focal student. In one, I asked them to tell me about themselves and their experiences as readers; and in the other, I asked students to do the same and relate their histories about themselves as writers. These interviews were intended to capture the students' intellectual histories as readers and writers. I also used the interviews to learn more about how students' experiences and social networks might affect their reading and writing strategies, as well as how they positioned themselves as literate beings in and out of school (Finders, 1996; Moje, 2000; Schultz, 2002).

In the reader and writer identity interviews, I asked students to discuss their experiences as readers and writers by means of telling their autobiographical literacy narratives. It is through narratives that we construct our identities and determine a sense of who we are (Ochs & Capps, 1996). In order to gain insight into how each student defined himself or herself as a reader and to discover why each student adopted particular personal reading and writing strategies, I asked focal students to tell their stories as readers and writers, including how they learned to read and write and how they had honed their reading and writing skills over time. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to ask students to describe and comment on the personal and teacher-initiated reading and writing strategies that they had used or encountered over the years as literate persons. In these interviews, I also asked students about the personal repertoire of reading and writing strategies that they used when carrying out written school assignments and out-of-school literacy activities. I learned about how people and circumstances in students' lives have affected the types of reading and writing strategies that focal students have appropriated.

At times during the reader and writer history and experience interviews, I explicitly asked students about their use of reading and writing about reading strategies. Yet this was not always a fruitful approach, especially because some of the students did not see their reading behaviors as being strategic, although the students claimed that these behaviors were directed at solving issues related to their difficulties with comprehension. They did not tend to label them in their own minds as "strategies." Thus, I found other ways of asking focal students indirectly about strategies by questioning them about what "helped" them when they read or what they did when they struggled with reading. When they would talk about what they found to be difficult about reading particular kinds of texts, a discussion about what strategies they found helpful would emerge.

As I conducted these interviews, I realized that the focal students did not necessarily bring up all of the strategies that either were a part of their personal strategy repertoire and/or had been taught in their program. The interviews were not designed to elicit a specific response about each and every strategy they might regularly use, such as summarizing, visualizing, or questioning. Students' comments regarding strategic reading behaviors surfaced mostly in

relation to specific kinds of difficulties that they remembered encountering, as they retold their histories as readers and writers. Despite this potential shortcoming, the interviews were important because they provided me with an opportunity to get at these narratives in order to understand what strategies students had found to be valuable in the past, and, where appropriate, to compare them to the strategies students were finding to be useful in the present.

### **Student Surveys**

As a ballast to the somewhat idiosyncratic character of the interview protocol, which was ideally suited to telling each student's unique strategy story, I developed two surveys, one for reading and another for writing about what they read. Both surveys were aimed at assessing students' perceptions about their strategy use. The purpose of giving the surveys was to gain an understanding of how the broad array of students at Magellan, as well as my four focal students, typically viewed their use of strategies for reading and writing about what they read. The two surveys were distributed to three classes of freshmen English at Magellan. In addition to distributing the survey to three English classes, the surveys were administered to each focal student one on one outside of class. The purpose of administering the surveys individually in this manner was to build in extra response time for follow up questions based on particular survey items. In total, seventy-five students completed the two surveys, including the four focal students. This larger sample also acted as a point of comparison to see whether each focal student's surveys mirrored the perceptions of the typical Magellan freshman.

The "What I do when I read" survey (see Appendix A) includes a list of eighteen strategies for reading that had been derived from the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory published by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). Students were asked to rate their perceived use of strategies for reading from one to four, with one for "I **never or almost never** do this" and four for "I **always or almost always** do this." An example item from the reading survey is "I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text" (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002).

The "Writing about what I've read" survey is comprised of nineteen items, which include parallel survey items for writing about what they read, as well as a few items related to the writing process in general (see Appendix B). An example of a parallel item on this second survey is "I summarize what I've just read, either on paper or in my head, in order to reflect on important information from the reading." Examples of nonparallel items that relate more specifically to the writing process include the following: "I pay attention to the directions in the essay's prompt in order to help me figure out what to write" and "I try to stick to the rules and formats I've learned about writing paragraphs and essays and apply them to my writing."

**Survey follow-up interviews.** After the focal students had completed their surveys, I conducted a follow-up interview based on their responses. For both surveys, I reviewed which strategies students perceived they used the most, and asked them to comment on two to four of these items. I then asked them to tell me why they responded as they did to five questions that I had chosen to probe in depth from each survey. I chose these eleven total questions by considering what teachers typically ask their students to do when they read and write about reading (see Appendix C). For the second survey, I selected four items from the "Writing about what I've read" survey to parallel four of the items that I had selected from the "What I do when I read" survey. I also chose two items—one about paying attention to the prompt and the other about anticipating an audience—that applied more specifically to the writing process.

## Reading-Writing Tasks

In order to examine how students enacted reading and writing strategies, I asked students to read and respond to a series of tasks that mimicked a typical school assignment in which they had to read and then write about a text. This combination of reading-writing tasks was intended to capture what students actually *did*, including the strategies that they enacted, when they read a text and wrote about it. I combined several methodologies for each task set for two reasons: to capture the entire process of reading a text and writing it and to create a means for triangulating several related data sources during the process of analysis.

**Choice of texts for the reading-writing task sets.** I administered three separate reading-writing task sets one-on-one to each focal student on different days over the course of the school year. Each task set administration focused on reading in a particular genre. The first was a literary narrative, the second was a history text, and the third was a persuasive article. After a practice reading think aloud protocol using Gary Soto's short story "No Guitar Blues", the students engaged in their first task set using an excerpt from Richard Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*. In the second task set, they read and responded to a history text about Reconstruction. In the third session, they read and responded to a persuasive article from the *New York Times*. All task set sessions lasted at least an hour. The initial session took a bit more time because I modeled a few minutes of think aloud and allowed the students to practice thinking aloud on the sample excerpt from "No Guitar Blues". The sessions were recorded and later transcribed.

I deliberately chose texts that would be considered challenging because I hoped that such texts would allow me to witness how students enacted strategies to grapple with a text that they found to be difficult. Each text contained some challenging words or concepts. Yet they were considered to be "on grade level" texts, especially if teachers were available to provide some scaffolding. Both the first and second texts were chosen in consultation with ninth-grade teachers. The *Black Boy* excerpt by Richard Wright was one that is commonly found in ninth grade anthologies. The second text, a passage on Reconstruction from *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, was adapted by a school literacy consultant and recommended to me by a ninth grade social studies teacher. The third text, an article from the *New York Times* entitled "I'm not lying, I'm telling a future truth. Really." was chosen to resemble the type of article that students had been reading as part of a unit on expository texts.

**Description of the tasks.** Each reading-writing task set was comprised of several inter-related tasks: a reading think aloud protocol, a prompt-based written response, and a writing-retrospective interview. Students first read an assigned passage while engaging in a think aloud, which was intended to capture students' on-line thinking regarding how they make sense of the text (see Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). If a student paused for more than a fifteen-second interval, I asked the student what he or she was thinking. This gave the student enough time to read a substantial chunk of text and process it, while not allowing for too much time to pass before he or she was too far removed from their immediate thoughts about the text. I used reading think aloud protocols since they would allow me to trace students' strategic decision making processes and the sequence of their thoughts as they read. The think aloud protocols provided me with a means to examine how students drew upon strategies *during* the actual reading process in ways that other quantitative or qualitative measures, such as the study's

surveys and interviews, could not (Ericsson & Simon, 1993, 1998; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Smagorinsky, 1994, 1998).

After the reading think aloud protocol, students were given a writing prompt that was similar to the type of writing assignment they might receive in school. Writing prompts for each of the task sets were modeled after typical writing prompts that would be given to ninth grade students. The first was adapted from a textbook anthology, the second was a modified version of a question on a school worksheet, and the third replicated the form and wording of a frequently used type of prompt that ninth grade students at Magellan were given after reading an expository article (see Appendix E).

Once the students had received and read the prompt, I asked them to describe what they were thinking and what they planned to do in their writing. The focus of these questions was on how students processed the prompt, created an impression of the writing task, and attended to initial planning. Next, students were given blank binder paper in order to respond to the prompt in a paragraph or short essay. After they had finished writing a response, students were allowed to reread it and make any changes or additions that they wished. During the literary narrative and history text task sets, students wrote their responses silently without voicing their thoughts. In the persuasive article task set, however, students were asked to engage in a writing think aloud and to tell me what they were thinking as they wrote. There was a slight change in procedure for this last task set with the addition of the writing think aloud protocol.

Prior to the start of the study, I had debated whether or not I would use writing think aloud protocols or writing retrospective interviews to capture how students used strategies for writing about reading. When I had attempted to use writing think aloud protocols in a previous pilot study, I found that the think aloud process itself distracted students from their writing. However, I was aware of the literature on think aloud protocols that stated the protocols captured students' on-line thinking immediately before there could be much of a lapse in short-term memory (Ericsson & Simon, 1993, 1998). For the present study, I ultimately decided to use writing-retrospective interviews across all three genres (i.e. the literary narrative, history text, and persuasive article) task sets, because I wanted the students' experience with writing a response to be as similar to a school-based writing task as possible. I aimed to minimize the distractions from writing that a think aloud protocol might produce. Yet, as I collected my data, I wondered if I might have missed an opportunity to gather more detailed information about student strategy use. Just to be on the safe side, I administered a writing think aloud in addition to all of the other reading-writing tasks during the persuasive article task set.

Because my research questions about students' writing about reading were quite broad (see Chapter 1), the think aloud protocol may have provided some but not significant additional information about students' strategy use and decision-making during writing. For example, the students often described what they were just about to write immediately before putting the words on paper as they thought aloud, but this did not allow me to understand *how* or *why* they wrote what they did. In the following excerpt, Irene thinks aloud about what she is writing as she finishes her persuasive article response.

- Irene: Um, I'm thinking how, because I have a second reason, so I'm just thinking how I'm going to put it down here.
- Monica: What are you thinking?
- Irene: So I just wrote down that "my second, my second reason by supporting this claim is by actually saying that if you're going to

- lie, don't, don't lie that much by exaggerating, and also tell the truth to come clean."
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: Um, well, "to tell the truth to come clean, and not twisting the truth. So those two claims..."
- Monica: What are you thinking?
- Irene: I'm just thinking like, I'm going to write a concluding sentence to finish the thought.

Much of what Irene revealed in her think aloud could also be found in her actual writing, and the think aloud did not provide much additional information about her thought process. Her actual thoughts regarding *how* or *why* she would write certain words were not voiced in her think aloud protocol. Instead, she stated verbatim what she wrote. A possibility for why she may not have voiced her actual thinking regarding what led her to choose a "second reason" could be that, even with think aloud protocols, students do not necessarily report all of their thoughts. Furthermore, Irene, as ninth-grade student, is still developing as a writer, and may not be completely aware of how she constructs her responses.

However, one portion of the students' writing think aloud protocols, in particular, did shed light on students' strategic choices. This portion had to do with students' planning before they started writing. Since none of the students wrote notes or brainstormed on paper as they transitioned from the prompt to their written response, the think aloud protocol illuminated the students' planning process. It must also be acknowledged that because the writing think aloud protocol changed the nature of the written response task for the third text, I confounded the written response with the additional protocol task, thus limiting my ability to compare responses across the three genres.

The last task of each set consisted of a writing retrospective interview, in which students retrospectively described what they were thinking as they wrote each sentence of their written response. I made it a point to probe about how students decided to incorporate parts of the reading into their writing. The writing retrospective allowed me to understand how students decided on which ideas from the reading would be represented in their writing. I used this information to gather how students made strategic decisions. Although some may consider the writing think aloud as a more authentic method for capturing what students *actually* do and think as they write, the retrospective interview exposed another facet: *why* they chose to do what they did (Greene & Higgins, 1994). Thus the writing retrospective tended to reveal the students' perceptions about the usefulness of what they did while they were writing. It could be argued that this method provided a medium for capturing both perceptions and actions.

### **Supplemental Data: Teacher Interviews**

In addition to student interviews, I conducted one initial and one follow-up interview with the teacher Ms. Klein. The teacher interviews allowed me to gain a better understanding of the strategies that students were exposed to in the classroom. I asked Ms. Klein about her definitions, views, and opinions regarding reading and writing strategies implemented in the classroom. The initial interview took place at the beginning of the term. The intent of this interview was to learn what reading and writing strategies the teacher planned to teach and what goals for learning the teacher envisioned for these strategies. The second interview captured the teacher's opinions about how she viewed students' uptake of the teacher-initiated strategies and

whether or not she felt that these strategies had been successfully taught. In this interview, I also asked the teacher to review what strategies were taught throughout the term and to comment on whether or not the goals for teaching the strategies were met.

During the second interview, I also asked Ms. Klein about her perspective about the focal students' reading and writing behaviors. These questions about specific students took place towards the end of the second interview, after the teacher has commented more generally on her implementation of reading and writing strategies in a whole class setting. In addition to my interviews with her, I regularly gathered supplemental data on Ms. Klein's views of the focal students through informal conversations before or after class. As it turned out, I did not analyze the teacher interviews for this study, choosing to focus instead exclusively on student data. However, these interviews still provided me with background information about the students as strategy users in this particular class.

### **Data Analysis**

I used a constant comparative analysis approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to conceptualize the relationships between different sources of data and to determine larger patterns of strategy use as they related to the genres read by the students. Each chapter of this dissertation draws on different sets of data and modes of analyses in order to answer the study's research questions.

### **Chapter 3**

In Chapter 3, I investigate students' perceptions about their use of strategies for reading. This chapter includes the results from data analysis conducted on 75 reading surveys, focal student survey follow-up interviews, and focal student reader and writer identity interviews. I identified which strategies that the sample of 75 students perceived they used the most by computing means and standard deviations. Using 2.50 as the midpoint for separating mean responses into two camps, high or low likelihood to use a strategy, I interpreted scores above 2.50 as representing an average mean for tending to use a strategy. After computing the statistical results for each of the survey items, I then compared the means and standard deviations from the survey data set to the results from individual focal student surveys in order to analyze whether the results from the focal students reflected the results that typified the average Magellan student.

In order to make these comparisons, I also coded the data from the focal students' reader identity interviews. I developed several kinds of codes to get at students' perceptions about their reading strategy use. One type of code referenced the specific reading strategies from the surveys. These codes were versions of the survey questions that had been pared down to represent a strategy. For example, the survey item "I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text," was coded as summarize. Using both survey and interview data, I was able to confirm or disconfirm whether students' reported use of strategies were similar across sources. The interview data also provided me with details regarding *how* students perceived the use of these strategies in relation to specific contexts and their past literacy experiences.

A second type of code was developed to capture other strategies that students mentioned that were not necessarily represented in the surveys. These codes took into account strategies that students may have learned on their own, and included strategies that may have not been

explicitly taught or labeled as strategies by their past and present teachers. For example, several students mentioned that reading out loud was a strategy that they found to be useful. Hence “reading out loud” became a code in this second set. This set of codes gave me insight into students’ use of personal or idiosyncratic strategies.

A third type of code allowed me to code for factors related to how students where, when, and how students used strategies. These codes took into account situations, contexts, and people who influenced the students’ use of strategies. Coding for these factors gave me insight into how social interactions and contexts shaped students’ strategy use and reading comprehension.

As I used these codes, another coding category emerged for genre. When students discussed their use of strategies, they often associated the use of certain strategies with particular genres—not all strategies were equally valued in all genres. The intersection between strategy, genre, and socio-cultural factor codes led me to understand how purpose, context, and genre shape students’ perceptions about their use of strategies.

## **Chapter 4**

In Chapter 4, I explore students’ perceptions about strategies for writing and writing about reading. The analysis for Chapter 4 was very similar to the analysis I did in Chapter 3. However, I applied the analytic techniques to data from 75 students’ “Writing about what I’ve read” surveys, focal student follow-up interviews to this survey, and focal student reader and writer identity interviews. Again, I computed means and standard deviations to identify strategies that students perceived to use the most, using 2.50 as the midpoint for separating responses into two camps, high or low likelihood to use a strategy. Comparing the results from the “Writing about what I” read surveys and the “What I do when I read” surveys, I was able to contrast how students’ perceptions about strategy use differed between the two processes: reading and writing about reading. I also compared the results from the survey data set to the results from individual focal student surveys in order to analyze whether the responses given by the focal students reflected the results that typified the average Magellan student.

Just as I had coded for students’ perceptions about strategies for reading using codes derived from the “What I do when I read” survey, I created codes from the “Writing about what I’ve read” survey to label students’ strategy perceptions for writing about reading. I also coded for any idiosyncratic or personal strategies. Codes for socio-cultural factors such as situations, contexts, and people played an even larger role in the analysis for this chapter than it did in Chapter 3, as students frequently discussed writing in relation to writing for an audience under specific circumstances. As students talked about writing in these interviews, they often spoke about strategies in relation to genres that entailed writing about texts, as well as other genres for writing in general. The intersection of strategy, genre, and socio-cultural factor codes, especially in relation to audience, led me to understand that students’ perceptions about strategies for writing in general, as well as writing about reading, are shaped by expectations surrounding genre requirements and concerns about audience.

Through my analysis, two dominant types of response emerged: an initiation, reply/response, and evaluation (IRE) response and a dialogic response. These response types describe how students viewed the purposes of different kinds of writing. IRE was originally developed by Mehan (1979) in order to explain the typical pattern of teacher-centered classroom discourse, in which a teacher initiates a question, a student replies with a “one-turn” answer, and the teacher provides evaluative feedback. I decided to use IRE as a model to explain how students viewed a particular kind of school writing. In this writing, there is a teacher initiation

via her directions and the prompt, a student response through writing, and teacher evaluation in the form of a grade. Just as in IRE discourse (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979), students viewed this kind of writing as a “one-turn” deposit of ideas, written in order to receive an evaluation from the teacher.

In contrast, the dialogic response is one in which writing is a vehicle for dialoging about ideas. This response type invokes Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) theory that any utterance, written or oral, is a response to or an anticipation of utterances that either come before or happen after it. Although students know that they also can be evaluated as they write in this way, their concerns about writing focus on expression and communication, rather than on evaluation. In the dialogic response, students use writing as a vehicle to discuss ideas in ways that are relevant and authentic to the students’ interests and concerns. Students believe that there is an authentic purpose for communicating with an audience who is interested in learning from and/or being entertained by the writing. They tend to write for themselves, as much as they write for others.

## Chapter 5

Chapter 5 transitions from student’s perceived use of strategies for reading and writing to what students *actually do* when they read. In this chapter, I analyze the strategies that students actually use and explore whether these strategies are the same or different as the ones that they perceive to use frequently while reading. I coded focal students’ reading think aloud protocols for the literary narrative, history text, and persuasive article. Instead of starting with strategy codes derived from the student surveys, I initially coded for strategies generally, aiming to capture what students were doing and whether any strategies were particular and idiosyncratic to the individual. I began with codes that emerged from the protocols first because I did not want the survey codes to affect my initial observations of the data. Then I coded using the codes derived from the survey.

After coding the data from the think aloud protocols for strategy use, I compared this data to the data from the previous chapter in order to see if there was overlap between how the focal students answered the survey questions and responded during the identity interviews. In particular, I looked across students’ think aloud protocols, reader identity interviews, and survey follow-up interviews for data that drew upon the same codes. Once I pinpointed similarly coded data segments in each of the data sources (i.e. reader identity interviews, survey follow-up interviews, and think aloud protocols), I determined whether or not the students took up the strategies in the ways that they perceived when they *actually* engaged in reading, as revealed through the think aloud protocols.

In addition to strategy use, I analyzed how students made sense of the text. I compared each student’s think aloud protocol with the actual text read by the student to determine what the student comprehended. I identified phrases or parts that might indicate student’s building of a text base and situation model (Kintsch, 1998). I coded for where they referenced the text base by looking at words that explicitly referenced the text or were close paraphrases of segments of the text. I coded for the situation model by noting phrases that revealed inferences, opinions or judgments, or intrusions, both accurate and inaccurate, from students’ prior knowledge. By using the categories, situation model and text base, from Kintsch’s construction-integration model, I began to understand how students’ comprehension developed over the course of reading a text.

Since I was chiefly examining how students made sense of text and used strategies when they struggled, I also coded for what I will term “moments of uncertainty.” These moments

included students' miscues, hedges, passage and word rereading, and other instances of confusion. They were important because such moments revealed how students solved comprehension difficulties and used a variety of strategies in conjunction with one another. The moments of uncertainty also allowed me to compare how different students used strategies. By examining how students resolved comprehension difficulties in each of the three genres (i.e. the literary narrative, history text, and persuasive article) during these moments, I discovered larger patterns that showed similarities between the students' approaches to each genre, as well as nuances within these patterns that made each student's strategy use unique.

## **Chapter 6**

The last analytic chapter explores what students actually do when they write about what they read. I examine the strategies that students use when they write about what they have read and compare these actual strategy enactments to the strategies that students perceive they use (see Chapter 4). I also investigate what evidence of reading comprehension is revealed in students' writing and what they say about this writing. In addition to comparing perceived and actual strategies as I had done for reading in Chapter 5, this chapter explores how students represent their reading comprehension and understanding of genre when they write about what they have read. The chapter includes data and analyses from Chapters 4 and 5, and adds assigned writing prompts, student writing, and interviews regarding this writing.

As I had done in Chapter 4, I coded the three writing retrospective interviews and single writing think aloud using the strategy categories from the survey "Writing about What I've Read." I also developed codes from the findings in Chapter 5, in which genre-specific patterns emerged. For example, after finding that students paid more attention to theme during their reading of the literary narrative, I used "theme" as a code. Other codes such as "chronology" and "facts" emerged in Chapter 5 for students' reading of the history text and these became codes in Chapter 6.

While coding the three writing retrospective interviews and single think aloud protocol led me to insights on student strategy use, it was not sufficient for analyzing the relationship between reading and writing. In order to examine this relationship more closely, I conducted a comparative analysis across several sources, including the original prompts, written responses to each of the three prompts and texts, writing retrospective interviews, reading think aloud protocols, and reader identity interviews. I first identified the requirements of each prompt, taking into consideration how the prompts were meant to mimic the kinds of school assignments that students could have been given at Magellan. Next, I analyzed how closely the students' writing adhered to each of the prompt's requirements. More importantly, I noted when the students deviated from the prompt and explored what led to these deviations by doing a side-by-side comparison of the students' reading think aloud protocols, writing retrospective interviews, and written responses. Conducting a comparative analysis of these three data sources allowed me to determine whether a failure to write a coherent essay was or was not related to a lack of initial comprehension of the text.

In particular, the writing retrospective interviews gave me an opportunity to uncover what students had been thinking as they wrote their responses. These interviews revealed students' intentions behind writing what they did by disclosing how the students processed the text, prompt, their opinions, and connections between ideas. While the students' written responses were unable to capture the depth of the students' thinking, the writing retrospective interviews aided in uncovering the complexity of these thoughts. In conjunction with my

analysis of students' writing retrospective interviews, I analyzed the reading think aloud protocols to understand why students may have adhered to or deviated from the prompts. Since each student's written responses alluded to specific examples from a corresponding text, I located the students' reading of these parts in their reading think aloud protocols. By locating these parts, I was able to identify how and why particular parts from the students' reading made its way into their writing. Where this allusion to reading was not as obvious in the students' writing, I was able to locate vestiges of thought that carried over from reading to writing by looking for words or phrases that were the same or synonymous. My analysis of where convergences occurred between students' written responses and what they said in their think aloud protocols and writing retrospectives led me to discover larger patterns revealing how students approached writing in different genres. This comparative analysis also lent itself to identifying how strategies from reading crossed over into students' writing. Looking back at the coded think aloud protocol transcripts used in Chapter 5, I identified which strategies were actually employed by the students. I then analyzed both the writing retrospective interviews and written responses to determine whether or not these strategies tended to come up as patterns to see if there was a relationship between the reading strategies and the students' writing.

The analysis and findings in each successive analytic chapter build upon the findings from at least one previous analytic chapter. Using this organizational approach to the dissertation I was able to trace how students' perceptions related to their actual use of strategies, capture the relationship between students' reading strategies and their writing, and gain insight into how genre affected the strategies and approaches that students took for both reading and writing.

### Chapter 3: Students' Perceptions about Reading Strategy Use

In this chapter, I examine students' perceptions about their strategy use for reading. In order to answer the research questions regarding these perceptions, I analyze the strategies that students report to use on their own while reading. The analysis in this chapter begins with an examination of data collected from seventy-five student surveys. The purpose of using this data set is to identify which strategies the average student at Magellan perceives he or she uses most often. From the survey data, I identified the "popular" strategies that students deemed to be the most salient and useful. While these data led me to patterns of perceived reading strategy use amongst students, they did not uncover the nuances related to why students may feel these particular strategies have high utility and efficacy. Therefore, I compared findings from the larger survey data set with focal students' survey responses and follow up interviews in order to uncover why students may perceive certain strategies to be more useful than others.

The "news" from this analysis is that students' perceptions about the utility and efficacy of different reading strategies are highly context dependent. While some reading strategies such as rereading and visualizing are applied to most situations and are perceived by students as having high utility, the instantiation of other kinds of strategies may be more dependent on the individual's perceived utility within a context and the availability of other strategies, which may be considered as more familiar or useful to the student. Purpose, context, and genre make a difference in the reading strategies that students perceive they use.

#### Strategies that Students Perceive They Use

In order to discover the strategies that students think they use on a regular basis, I asked three English classes at Magellan to complete the survey. As reported in Table 1, the mean scores for students' perceptions about the reading strategies they use ranged from 1.50 to 3.01 and mean scores for students' perceptions about the writing about reading strategies spanned from 2.14 to 3.27. The range of mean scores suggests that students may have been more comfortable choosing answers that were in the middle, such as two "I do this **only occasionally or once in a while**," and three "I **usually** do this." Note that even these two seemingly neutral choices imply a tendency to either use or not use a strategy.

Table 1  
*Results from Reading Strategies Survey: What I do when I Read*

Strategy	Mean	SD
1. I have a purpose in mind when I read.	2.46	0.10
2. I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	1.50	0.08
3. I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	2.79	0.14
4. I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it.	2.66	0.08
5. I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	2.05	0.09
6. I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	2.18	0.04
7. I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	1.77	0.13
8. I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read.	1.77	0.29
9. I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	2.21	0.10

10. I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	3.01	0.15
11. I use typographical aids like boldface and italics to identify key information.	1.95	0.16
12. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	1.93	0.11
13. I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	2.11	0.15
14. I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	2.40	0.15
15. When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding.	2.97	0.22
16. I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	2.15	0.20
17. I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	2.25	0.23
18. I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	2.68	0.16

The eighteen items representing eighteen different strategies for reading, five received an average rating that was higher than 2.5. Among these five items, picturing or visualizing was the most popular strategy. The mean response for this item was 3.01, the highest average score on the seventy-five surveys regarding students' perceptions about what they do when they read. Students also responded that they were fairly likely to reread a text when they encountered difficulties (mean = 2.97), followed by thinking about what they know in order to help them understand a reading (mean = 2.79), guessing the meaning of unknown words and phrases (mean = 2.68), and previewing the text (mean = 2.66). The four focal students also, on average, rated the top four of these five strategies the highest. In place of previewing the text, they rated two strategies—checking one's understanding when encountering conflicting information and paraphrasing to understand what was read—as being the next to be most likely used.

The common theme among the strategies that were popular with the total sample size was that these strategies all drew upon building background knowledge in order to understand the text at hand. When students visualize, they draw on experiences and images that they are familiar with and apply them to what they read. Rereading entails returning to a text to often clarify one's understanding and to adjust one's situation model if necessary. Thinking about what one knows relies solely upon drawing on one's background knowledge and experience. Guessing the meaning of unknown words and phrases entails substituting words and ideas in place of the unknown word in order to figure out its definition. To do this, the student draws upon what she already know and places it in the context of the passage that she is reading. Although previewing the text could be said to relate to predicting what is to come in the text ahead, it also serves to create or invoke a base of background knowledge, since previewing may lead students to construct a preliminary situation model (see literature review in Chapter 1) from which the rest of their reading follows.

Students were least likely to take notes while reading (mean = 1.49). Other low-rated strategies (receiving an average score below 2) included underlining or circling information in order to remember it (mean=1.77), using reference materials such as dictionaries to aid with understanding (mean = 1.77), using typographical aids such as boldface or italics to identify important information (mean = 1.95), and critically analyzing or evaluating information in the text (mean = 1.93). For these less popular choices, the common theme was that students would have to take an extra step beyond simply reading the text while enacting background knowledge. In addition, most of these could be considered as study skills or strategies, rather than strategies for reading alone. Taking notes and underlining or circling information entails physically responding to the text in some way. Likewise, using reference materials involves having to access an outside source, which requires some, although minimal, physical exertion in order to look up information. Although using typographical aids like boldface or italics and critically

analyzing or evaluating texts does not require working with materials outside of the text, there is some evidence from the focal students that they might not have fully understood these two questions. For example, one focal student, Irene stated that she did not know what either of these prompts meant, and therefore responded to them with a one. While the other three focal students did not have trouble comprehending these two items, students from the larger survey sample neither indicated that they did not understand the item nor asked questions about them.

### **Context and Genre Affect Students' Perceptions about Reading Strategies**

The student surveys reflect the fact that not all strategies are equally valued. Data based on focal student interviews, including follow up survey responses and interviews about students' reading histories, highlight why certain strategies might be perceived as being more salient than others. A major reason why strategies are not enacted equally is that strategies are applied within a given context. I define context to mean both the larger cultural, world, and situational context, which I will refer to as the socio-cultural context, and the text itself. The latter definition of text as context considers how what is being read in the immediate present (i.e. a word, sentence, paragraph, or chapter) is situated within a larger text, which acts as a context for the passage being read. Ashley, a focal student, captured the notion that strategies are chosen and employed based on a "problem" that one faces while reading. Moreover, this problem is situated within a textual and socio-cultural context in which the individual must make strategic adjustments to meet the reading challenges presented by the text and circumstances.

Oh, it's just like a strategy, that you can even like- you can even like make up your own reading strategy. It's just a strategy to help you either- like if your problem's understanding texts, to make you remember texts, like if your problem's fluency, like slowing down's a reading strategy.... Um well, if comprehending's the problem, then probably highlighting or underlining main ideas and then, yeah, slowing down for people that- without fluency helps you like stay consistent.

(A: R.ID.IN)

Ashley understood that strategy use will vary depending on the situation and text. She inherently recognized what is stated in the strategies literature about adept readers who understand that strategies are not uniform tools and that strategies need to be applied in a flexible manner depending on the text type, the text structure, and the author's intentionality. In Ashley's description, she also separated comprehension from fluency and distinguished the need for different types of strategies based on both the reader's ability and the text itself. While the other students did not define when strategies were used quite as clearly as Ashley did, they discussed the situational nature of using strategies for reading.

### **Some Strategies Tend to be More Automatic**

During the post-survey, as well as the reader and writer identity interviews, it became clear that certain strategies were more automatic than others. In addition, it was equally as clear that regardless of whether the strategies were applied more or less automatically, they were enacted within various textual and socio-cultural contexts. Three of the four focal students, Ashley, Irene, and Hector responded to the question, "I try to picture or visualize information to

help remember what I read,” with a four, “I always or almost always do this.” The other student, Tyrone, rated this item with a three, “I usually do this.” These responses from the focal students mirrored the results from the overall survey data set in which visualizing received the highest mean score of 3.00.

When I asked the students to explain why they rated visualizing as a strategy that they either “usually” or “always or almost always” do, Hector described his visualizing as happening almost instantaneously, without much effort, “I just start reading and I picture the character, like when they talk or something, like if they went to school, I could picture them walking to school and all that stuff.” (H: R.SV.IN) Similarly, Ashley explained, “Because I always, like every time I read, I always picture it in my head. And I normally relate it to something that I’ve seen, like a movie. Or like the characters from something or normal people that I’ve seen before.” (A: R.SV.IN) Tyrone replied, “Like I—most of the time, I’ll try to do that. But I don’t do it to help me remember what I read, I just do it just to like while I’m reading, make it seem like a movie in my head...cause I love watching movies so if I’m reading something, I try to make it seem like I’m watching a movie instead of reading it in a book.” (T: R.SV.IN) And Irene expressed, “I love doing that.” (I: W.SV.IN) No other strategy discussed by the students was framed so positively. To the students, visualizing was perceived to be automatic and enjoyable. They described visualizing as being a means for making the text come alive. It was a strategy that functioned as a source of motivation that helped the focal students get into and engage with a text. In the case of Tyrone, visualizing even helped him forget that he was actually engaging in the act of reading.

**Making a movie in your head.** Yet when visualizing, the process could be more or less automatic, depending on the type of reading the student is doing. While Ashley and Tyrone characterized their tendencies to visualize or not visualize according to narrative or expository texts, Hector and Irene discussed motivation and interest as factors that encouraged them to visualize while reading. Furthermore, Hector and Irene portrayed the text, and not themselves, as carriers of motivation and interest. They saw the textual context as influencing whether or not they chose to visualize. In this excerpt from the survey follow up response, Ashley related how visualizing what is read in Language Arts is different from visualizing what is read in Science and Health:

- Ashley: So like, when I’m trying to picture a character, I normally, unless it’s like a movie where I’ve seen a character that I can relate it to, like *Of Mice and Men*, I knew what Lenny looked like, from the movie, so I could picture him, but I think of someone with the same personality or an actor or an actress I like. And then, for the setting, I normally, it’s usually like a place I’ve been before, or a place I’ve seen. I don’t know, I just, I’ve always done that.
- Monica: What about when you’re reading something that’s not fiction? Like maybe when you’re reading something related to science or health? Do you feel like you do that too?
- Ashley: Yeah, I like, even with science I like can picture the little molecule thingies and stuff like that, because I’ve seen models before.
- Monica: Oh. Are there ever times when you feel like it’s difficult to visualize something?

- Ashley: Um, it's hard to picture like, especially in the health book, when it's teaching you about like the inside of your body and like all that stuff. So that's hard to picture.
- Monica: What do you do in those instances?
- Ashley: Normally if there's not a picture, then I just kinda, I don't really try, I mean like, normally it gives you good description, like, an egg-shaped blah blah, so like you can picture that. But sometimes I don't like those, because then I picture my spleen like an egg, you know, so I get like a bad image. So I like when there's pictures.  
(A: R.SV.IN)

Although my question may have suggested that differences exist between reading fiction and expository nonfiction, Ashley went beyond merely noting that visualizing while reading these two types of texts was not the same. She delineated specific discrepancies related to how she visualized while reading the two text types. She explained that it is more difficult to visualize in Health because she does not have either firsthand or background knowledge from having seen pictures or real objects that will allow her to visualize certain matter, such as those that are part of the internal body. In contrast, her imagination and impressions, based on people and places that she has either seen in person or in movies, help her to construct mental representations of characters and settings when she reads fiction and literature.

Tyrone also utilized the comparison of seeing a movie in his head to describe what took place when he visualized. The movies in his head included fading in and fading out like shots from a movie camera; this added to his anticipation, an emotional component, which kept him interested in what he read. Like Ashley, Tyrone associated visualizing with reading narratives or texts with a sequence of actions where something "happens."

- Tyrone: Uhh ...I love watching movies so if I'm reading something, I try to make it seem like I'm watching a movie instead of reading it in a book.
- Monica: Uh huh, and do you feel that helps you?
- Tyrone: I-I don't know. It depends. Like sometimes it does. Sometimes it doesn't.
- Monica: Can you give me an example of when it might?
- Tyrone: Like if I'm reading something and I don't know like what's going to happen. I try to make it seem like it's in a movie. You know how the screen goes black when it changes to something else? I try to make it seem like that...  
(T: R.SV.IN)

At other times, however, Tyrone found it both more difficult and less relevant to visualize. He noted that the usefulness of visualizing really depended on the content and type of text.

- Monica: What about when you're –what about other times? Are there times when you don't really try to make it seem like a movie? Like what kinds of readings?
- Tyrone: Hmm, probably like articles and stuff. I don't really do that cause you can't make a movie out of a article.
- Monica: Why not?
- Tyrone: I don't know. It's just too hard and it gets complicated so I choose not to.
- Monica: What do you mean it's too hard or it gets complicated?
- Tyrone: Cause if you try to make a movie out of an article, i-it might be telling- like the article I read earlier- it's talking about- um- what was- what was that called again? Uh-uh, exaggeration. I can't make a movie out of exaggeration.  
(T: R.SV.IN)

For Tyrone, it did not make sense to visualize when reading non-fiction articles with topics that had to do with facts and concepts. The article that he was referring to was one which all of the focal students read about the psychological benefits of exaggerations about future performance (see discussion of *New York Times* article in Chapters 4 and 5). While the article contained several sample scenarios that mentioned the names of sports and political celebrities, as well as quotations from researchers and evidence from a study with real participants, Tyrone still felt as though he could not make a movie out of the article or topic without a narrative plotline holding parts of the text together.

**Putting yourself there.** While Ashley and Tyrone used the movie analogy to impart what it was like to visualize, Hector and Irene described visualizing as a way of transporting one's self into the world of the text and characters by putting one's self there in the shoes of another. When I asked Hector why he rated this item with a four, he replied, "Cause I actually do it, like I'm reading and I try to picture it, like if I was there or something" (H: R.SV.IN) Irene, in discussing her history as a reader, stated that as she read *Always Running* by Luis Rodriguez, she "just pictured stuff about the book, like it was actually happening" (I: R.ID.IN) Being there with the text's characters meant having a clear picture of the setting, as well as the character's emotions:

Well, when I read, I actually pick books that are either from real life, biographies, or stories that I could actually like visualize. It makes it more fun, 'cause it's like, say, oh this is happening, because there's this book that I read that was taking place in San Jose, and I actually pictured it and like, there's this one place where my cousins live, so I actually pictured it in front of her house, and around her street. It was kind of fun.  
(I: R.SV.IN)

She added that reading about a location where she had actually been was highly motivating. It made the reading "more fun," especially because she could picture herself in San Jose as the characters were experiencing the setting through the text. In addition to vicariously experiencing

a setting to be there with the characters, Hector thought that visualizing allowed him to understand the character's emotions: "Like if they're arguing or something, I try to picture their emotional feelings and all that stuff, their—how they're arguing. (H: R.SV.IN)

For Hector and Irene, visualizing provided a way to vicariously live through the characters' experiences, which in turn motivated them to read. If they perceived the text to be uninteresting, they tended not to visualize; and this led them to discontinue reading. Hector explained, "When I don't feel the book is interesting or something. I don't, like if it's not interesting, I don't visualize, and then I just move to another book." (H: R.SV.IN)

Irene found that when she could not visualize in order to focus her attention and interest on what was taking place in the text, there was no point in reading. For Irene, persisting in such a case becomes irritating.

- Irene:           When it's boring I don't feel like reading and I don't feel like picturing. What's the point? It's boring.
- Monica:         And in your mind, what's a boring reading?
- Irene:           Oh, when people are talking about, like, when it's fun, when they're like arguing and when they're like messing around. But it's boring when like, they're saying like, why, they're giving so many explanations about why this and why that.
- Monica:         And why do you say that?
- Irene:           I don't know. It's just, it happened to me once, it was getting on my last nerves...  
(I: R.SV.IN)

While visualizing was a fairly automatic process and strategy for the focal students, the content of the text and students' background knowledge affected the degree to which visualization was enacted. When the focal students could bring rich experiences to the text, they were more likely to build robust images of settings, characters, plot, events, specific objects, etc. These images, in turn, increased both their interest and willingness to persist in the act of reading. Thus, visualization was a motivator for the focal students, especially when it tapped into strong background knowledge.

In addition, the data from these interviews suggest that the text has an influence on the strategy. Texts contain affordances provided by the genre, author's style, and level of detail in the descriptions that either support or hinder students' visualization. When students' background knowledge mingles with a text that provides the right amount of support for building strong images, students will be more likely to visualize. There is a symbiotic relationship in which the text influences the strategy; and, in turn, the strategy has an effect on the student's reading behavior and affect. Although the literature on reading strategies acknowledges that strategy enactment and the choice of strategies depends on the text at hand, it mostly examines how strategies may impact one's reading. This study contends that the text affects the strategy as much as the strategy has bearing on the reading of the text. Even strategies, such as visualizing, which are fairly automatic, are affected by text and content.

### **Rereading**

All four focal students rated the item "When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding" with a 4, "I always or almost always do this." It was the only item on the

survey that all focal students answered with the highest rating. This item also received the second highest mean score of 2.97 amongst responses given by the three classes of students who took the survey. The focal students answered the item with a rating that was higher than but still consistent with the trend in the larger data set.

Each of the focal students claimed that he or she reread to aid their understanding or comprehension. During my interviews with each of them, nuances about why and when they reread revealed that not all rereading was done with the same intentions. In the survey follow-up interviews with the focal students, each one disclosed different purposes for rereading. Yet upon closer examination, each of the purposes noted related to the goal of establishing a comprehensible situation model (Kintsch, 1998) during the moment the student was struggling with the text.

Ashley recognized that starting to read a new text may require extra focus. When I asked her if there were times that she did more rereading, she responded, “I normally reread a lot at the beginning of the book, like to get myself going. But that’s with all types of books. There’s no specific type.” (A: R.SV.IN) Rereading assisted her as she began the text. This makes a lot of sense because readers develop a text base and create a more expansive representation of the text’s meaning through a situation model—a mental model that integrates the text base with prior knowledge and goals for reading (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005). Pulling from their background knowledge about texts, their experiences, and the world, readers constantly create and assess hypotheses and predictions while confirming and disconfirming these possibilities with the text base. At the beginning of a text, the grounds for understanding may constantly be shifting until the reader has established a fairly comprehensive situation model. Therefore the purpose of rereading at the beginning of a text is related closely to building one’s initial situation model.

At other times, when she was further along in the text, Ashley reread in order to check how well her current understanding meshed with information she had previously encountered in the text. This was especially true when she had not read closely and later found that she had overlooked or missed key information. She explained, “Sometimes I’ll think it’s just one of those sentences that you can pass by and don’t question it, but then later on in the book I get to it, and I’m like, ‘oh, I remember reading that.’” So sometimes I do go back and like look at two parts of a book to see if they relate.” (A: R.SV.IN) This process of going back and rereading connects to revising a previous situation model in order to form a new one. In this scenario, Ashley may have formed a situation model without a key piece of information, but when she recognized that the glossed over information was important, she found that she must go back and reread in order to revise what she thought was taking place in the text and to integrate it into her situation model.

Tyrone also mentioned returning to a passage to reread it after skipping over the information upon a first pass. His explanation, however, was somewhat different from Ashley’s. While Ashley described this passage glossing as a kind of passive reading in which she believed that she could mentally tune out while she read, Tyrone skimmed or avoided paying close attention to such a passage because he was unable to comprehend it initially: “If I can’t figure it out at all, I’ll skip it and then come back to it later. But like I’ll reread it and see if reading it a second time will help me understand it better” (T: R.SV.IN) He would read ahead to see if upcoming information could shed light on something that was initially puzzling. Then he would go back to reread what had been puzzling in the earlier section. This strategy would allow him to see if there was an upcoming section that could clarify his comprehension and shed light on what he did not understand previously. In this way, he used future text to build upon his

situation model and returned to the text he skipped in order to further fill in any gaps he may have had in his understanding.

Tyrone, Hector, and Irene also emphasized that they reread to figure out unknown vocabulary. Tyrone noted, “Oh like if it’s a word that I now is like a big word. I might reread it over with the definition.” (T: R.SV.IN) In this kind of rereading, he substituted a definition in for the unknown word to see if the definition he chose was one that would fit with the content of the sentence. As Hector described how he guessed the meaning of unknown words, he explained, “I try to reread the sentence and see what they’re talking about and maybe I could make a good guess.” (H: R.SV.IN) Hector used the context surrounding the word to clue him into a guess about its definition. Irene utilized the same rereading strategy in conjunction with context clues in order to figure out slang from another time period.

- Irene: Like when I’m reading the book, like I actually reread so I could understand it. In this book that I’m reading right now, ‘cause it’s about this one girl that, she don’t know how to talk real good, so she writes, like the street, um and I understand it, but it’s like a 1970s book, so I don’t really understand. Like she goes, she would write some weird words that I don’t even understand.
- Monica: So you reread those parts?
- Irene: Yeah.  
(I: R.SV.IN)

Figuring out the meaning of a word by rereading parts in the passage that precede and follow it is a common strategy related to using context clues. Other instances of rereading, especially when one knows the words already, depend on where a student is in the text and how he or she is constructing his or her understanding as he or she reads. In the case of Ashley, rereading at the beginning of the text was important to lay the foundation for her comprehension of the rest of the reading. In contrast, Tyrone felt that it was okay to skip ahead and read future text in order to figure out what was taking place in the text that he was presently grappling to understand. For both students, the end goal was to comprehend a passage, but their course of rereading and their rationale for why and how they used rereading was quite different. Rereading in order to figure out vocabulary, however, may be a more similar process for the students because students are often taught from a young age to use context clues.

### **Purposes for Paraphrasing and Summarizing**

Prior to the survey administration, I initially anticipated that students might consider paraphrasing and summarizing to be highly similar or at least interrelated strategies. However, I found that the focal students viewed these two strategies as having different kinds of purposes. Paraphrasing was considered to be personally useful to the focal students, whereas summarizing was associated with school-based assignments and less relevant to them when they were reading on their own. The contrast between how the focal students viewed paraphrasing and summarizing serves to highlight how some strategies may be associated with a particular social context, such as school, more than others.

**Paraphrasing viewed as a personally useful strategy.** All four focal students rated paraphrasing as a three, meaning that they thought they “usually” used it. In the overall survey

results, paraphrasing received a mean score of 2.21, indicating that the students at Magellan, on average, thought they had a low likelihood of using this strategy. This difference in scores could indicate that there was some discrepancy between how the focal students and the rest of the students viewed the utility of this strategy.

In follow-up interviews to this item, the focal students explained that paraphrasing was helpful for understanding the text when the language was unfamiliar or difficult or for recalling the gist of the text at a later time. Ashley gave an example:

Ashley: Oh, um, like, I do do it in my head, like, I'll read something and then I'll be like, "Oh, she means...", like, if I'm reading, especially *Romeo and Juliet*, since the language is so like, funky, like, I do paraphrase in my own words but in my head. I don't like, write down a quote and then like paraphrase it. I just, I like, change it in my mind. And then if I read silently, then I try to read it in like modern English.  
(A: R.SV.IN)

During the time that I conducted these follow-up survey interviews, the focal students were reading *Romeo and Juliet* in their English classes. Ashley's statement revealed how students might combine a school text with paraphrasing on their own. While the text itself could be considered required reading for school and a particular teacher's class, the paraphrasing took place in their "head" silently, on their own, without prompting from the teacher. Hector also alluded to this play in relation to paraphrasing and conveyed that it was necessary for him to use the strategy in order to get through the text. "With uh, like the book *Romeo and Juliet*, it's like a different kind of English, and they use words that are kind a weird, so I like kind a paraphrase it." (H: R.SV.IN) When the language of the text was different for the focal students, they used their own words, as a means of translation, to make it familiar. Irene further confirmed this idea through her statement about reading a book with words in Spanish:

Irene: Oh I picked three because um, when I didn't understand some words, like the Eastside Dreams, there were some Spanish words that I didn't understand, so I just, sometimes just remembered, "oh my mom told me this one time," so, I actually remember about phrases that my mom told me, so I was like, "oh this is what it means." So I actually put it back in the book. So yeah.

Monica: Okay, and um, do you ever do that with things that you already understand? Like words that you understand? Do you ever, um, like, restate ideas in your own words in your head in order for you to better understand something even if you know the words?

Irene: Um yeah.

Monica: Yeah? Can you tell me more about that?

Irene: I sometimes do that when it's like, it's a really long one, but I really understand it. But just shortening it up.

Monica: Ahh. And how does that help you?

Irene: It helps me by, just understanding it better and remembering it faster. (I: R.SV.IN)

Irene related that she used paraphrasing, not only to translate text into words that were more understandable, but also for another purpose: remembering the reading. By paraphrasing, she found a way to instill it in her memory, so she could access the passage “faster” when she needed to remember it. Using one’s own words makes the text more memorable for the student. Tyrone explains that act of paraphrasing helps him remember what the passage is about. When I ask him to describe what takes place in his mind, he replies: “Just reme—try to remember what it was. Like try to remember what I’m—not what I’m trying to restate but the stuff I’m trying to put in my own words.... I try to remember what I’m putting in there.” (T: R.SV.IN) It is through this process that the student makes the words theirs, coming from themselves and not just the text.

**Summarizing viewed as a school-related strategy.** While summarizing also requires students to transform the text through their own words, it involves additional steps that include hierarchically ordering information in relation to the key ideas in the text. This strategy is considered to be quite useful for improving comprehension according to several research studies in the literature (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Taylor & Beach, 1984). The focal students perceived summarizing as an activity that was important in school, but not one that was personally valuable when they read on their own. It received an average rating of two from the focal students. Ashley shared that she chose a one, meaning that she felt that she “never or almost never” used this strategy. She explained, “I just kinda remember it [the text]. I think about it, but I don’t summarize it unless it’s required.” When I ask her if there were times when she would summarize more than others, she added, “Um if it’s required and I know I hafta really know the book well, ‘cause I’m going to get tested on it, or I have to do a project on it. Then I like, every time I’m done reading, I really make sure that I have paid attention and I know what’s going on.” (A: R.SV.IN) For Ashley, summarizing was related to doing well in school. It was necessary to summarize when she had to do it for an assignment, study for tests or prepare her projects. She associated it specifically with required school assignments, and not with reading per se. At times, she also incorporated this strategy into her studying, especially when she knew she would be tested on a book.

Other focal students, likewise, had similar comments regarding summarizing for assignments. Hector rated his perceived use of the strategy with a three, suggesting that he “usually” summarized. Yet in his comments, he revealed that he usually summarized, but only for school. He described, “Like I only do that when like our teacher makes us do it, like when we have to summarize it in a SSR log or something. I do it, but like in my house, I don’t. I don’t write a page and summarize it, yeah.” (H: R.SV.IN) Whereas Ashley viewed summarizing as a strategy that could be related to studying and compiling projects, Hector’s notions about the utility of summarizing were even narrower. He associated summarizing with only reading-related writing assignments, listing the SSR log and a written one-page summary. When I asked him to consider when he summarized in his head, he claimed, “In school, because you’re thinking of what you’re gong to write, and the you write it down.... Yeah, I summarize it in my head and then write it down.” (H: R.SV.IN) Even when he summarized it in his head, it was an intermediary step for the purpose of writing a summary in school. Since summary as an assignment is a fairly common school activity, Hector felt that it was a strategy he used on a regular basis.

Irene was the only one of the focal students who tended to view summarizing as having some utility outside of preparing school assignments. Like Hector, Irene rated this item a three, meaning that she thought that she “usually” used the strategy. She connected summarizing to

school assignments in the same way that Hector and Ashley did, by stating, “I have to do it, because Ms. May, she gives us our SSR logs, so we have to summarize what we read that day.” She later added, “We have to be writing about our maps and summarizing.” (I: R.SV.IN) Although she associated summarizing with writing up SSR logs and resource maps, she also found that summarizing was useful outside of these assignments. She explained, “Like when I have homework to do at home, like just to read, but I don’t gotta summarize it, sometimes I do, so I can just remember.” (I: R.SV.IN) Irene admitted that she would summarize even when it was not required. She found that there was utility for summarizing beyond assignments for school.

In order to better understand the students’ ratings for this particular strategy and their views about summarizing, it was necessary to consider how their identities as readers fit with the school context. While all three students summarized in school, their perceptions about the utility of this strategy differed from one another’s. Irene perceived the utility of summarizing beyond school assignments, while Hector and Ashley did not. Although Ashley had a broader conception of how summarizing could be applied to different kinds of school assignments beyond what the teacher instructed, Hector connected it only to specific assignments with directions that required him to specifically write a summary. Yet Ashley felt that she “never or almost never” summarized and Hector found that he “usually” did this. An explanation for this discrepancy could be that Ashley’s idea of herself as a reader was broader than seeing herself as a reader in relation to school, whereas Hector’s view of himself as a reader was tied mostly to school reading. When I asked the students how they had changed as readers during the reader identity interviews, Ashley talked about increasing her fluency over the years and finding more books to read for fun. Hector, on the other hand explained that he felt he had improved as a reader because his “lexile” had grown. As Irene saw herself as a kind of teacher in her family, she tended to view the application of this strategy as a tool that could be a useful memory device both in and out of school. Since Irene frequently helped her brother, sister, and father with their “school” work, it was possible that she may have suggested this strategy to them as a memory device. When she prepared her father’s cement class lessons, she often wrote summaries for him, so that the information would be easier to access. Through this process, she may have learned that summarizing aids one’s memory and serves to create a more accessible version of a longer text.

## **Questioning**

In contrast to the strategies that had received average marks by both the larger sample and the focal student population that indicated that they were likely to be used, questioning received a mean score of 2.15 by all the students who answered the survey. The focal students had varying opinions about the usefulness of this strategy; but for all of them, the utility of questioning depended on the context. Ashley and Tyrone rated it as a 2.00, indicating that they occasionally formulated questions. Hector and Irene rated it as a 3.00, indicating that they usually formulated questions. I discuss how two focal students, Ashley and Irene, perceived the utility of questioning in order to use their cases to highlight how the type of text and the students’ background experiences may lead a student to prefer a particular strategy over others.

Ashley felt that there were two kinds of questioning: one that related to critically analyzing and evaluating a text and another that applied to figuring out what was taking place in a text. When I asked her to define what it meant to “critically analyze and evaluate” a text—a strategy which she rated as a 1 on the survey—she shared, “Critically analyzing it, like

questioning it, and like, figuring out if it's true or false." According to her definition, not all texts lent themselves to such kinds of questioning, since some texts could not be evaluated based on what is true or false. She claimed:

Because like I don't really question books. Like if, like especially if it's a fictional story and I want to question something, it's fiction, so I mean I can't question anything, but like if I was reading, like um like a textbook, like information, then I guess I would once in a while. So it's not like I never do it. I use it use more like the "almost" part of the number one." (A: R.SV.IN)

Typically, readers of nonfiction may apply a standard of verifiability to a text, in order to see if the information presented holds up to a set of historical truths and scientific facts. A similar kind of scrutiny could be applied to fiction and could be measured in terms of what is credible or reliable, based on the reader's background knowledge of what is presented by the author. Both kinds of texts potentially could be questioned for what is, as Ashley stated, "true or false."

Yet Ashley felt that she *could* question a nonfiction text but not a fictional one. This could be because she viewed questioning in relation to her interaction with only the author-created, insular world of the text. In her mind, fiction was considered a fixed reality that was limited to the schema that the author explicitly presented. Therefore, when using questioning as a strategy, Ashley may not have felt she could apply it to examining larger issues and themes, or the author's intent, in ways that went beyond the text. She reasoned, "Like if I'm reading a fiction book that an author wrote, you can't really question their text because it's their imagination. It's how they made it." (A: R.SV.IN) Ashley regarded fiction as a creative work that originated in the author's imagination, but not as a kind of text that had to do with the *real* world. She discounted the actuality that authors oftentimes drew upon their experiences and knowledge about culture and society.

Despite this point of view regarding the difference between the real and imaginative world created by the author, she read books that reflected the experiences of other girls her age. Ashley did not necessarily choose books that were completely out of her realm of experience. In Ashley's interview about herself as a reader, she disclosed, "I normally read like romance novels. Or like my favorite author's like E. Lockheart. She writes a lot of like uh fiction about made up girl—like teenage girl characters and their lives." (A: R.ID.IN) She preferred fiction in which the characters were most like herself and her friends. Although there was the likelihood that the fictional reality may be similar to her actual life, she chose not to question it. She accorded both the author and text authority that was impervious, despite the fact that she, as an adolescent girl, could be considered the same kind, if not more of an expert than an adult author, in the drama of teenage life.

By contrast, Ashley felt "licensed," even motivated, to ask critical questions of nonfiction. I asked her to describe the times during which she was more likely to question a text in a critical manner and she explained, "Like if I'm reading something that's supposed to be like, non-fiction. Like something 'bout like a war or history." In comparison to an event in fiction, history, according to Ashley, "really happened." She clarified, "Because if it's something that really happened and it's something that's really bizarre that I like can't believe then I'm going to analyze it, and be like 'Whoa, did that really happen?' Can I trust the text that I'm reading?" (A: R.SV.IN) Ashley's viewpoint was somewhat unique in that students often feel as though non-fiction cannot be questioned, since it is factual and typically written by a subject matter

expert. Ashley admitted that she applied the standard of verifiability when reading nonfiction by researching and consulting other sources. When she conducted her activist research project on Harvey Milk, she found a discrepancy amongst sources and had to discern which information was the truth. Ashley relayed:

Yeah like we had to do um, when we did that thing on Harvey Milk, some of the books I picked or not even books, like websites I went to, some of the stuff was outrageously not possible. And so those things I researched more into and then figured out they were just myths. (A: W.SV.IN).

Through this process, she found that not every source was a valid one and that it was important to compare the claims in one text with that of another. While she could go through this kind of vetting process in order to determine the credibility or reliability of a scenario or narrator in a work of fiction by comparing the text to possible scenarios that would be similar in real life, she seemed to assume that the authority rested within the author and could not be found elsewhere—even if a reader had had experiences that were similar to those of the characters. In Ashley’s mind, the text type affected whether the medium could be questioned about what counted as truth.

Ashley also described a different kind of questioning, one in which she hoped to find answers in the text itself. When I asked her how she rated the item: “I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.” She delineated:

‘Cause I do I sometimes, like if I sense that something’s foreshadowing, that something else is going to happen about the same topic later on, then I question it, but if I think it’s just like a filler sentence, like just something that’s put in there that’s not really important to the big idea, then I don’t question it. (A: R.SV.IN)

Ashley used questioning along with making predictions based on her hunches. In the process of doing so, she also made decisions about which information was important and may be related to the macrostructural “big idea.” Her questions seemed to be based strategically on what fit with her understandings of the macrostructure. In this way, her questioning was used to build her situation model of the big picture.

Irene, on the other hand, used questions in order to satisfy her interest, curiosity, and comprehension needs. It was not the text type or the answerability of a question that drove this strategic behavior, but her own interests. While she liked to ask questions about “what, who, and why” that could be answered later in the text, she found that it was worthwhile to create questions that would satisfy her own intellectual curiosity—even if the answers lied beyond the text. Irene referred to having to create questions for an assignment on different question types that the students were assigned in relation to *The House on Mango Street*:

Well, these were to make um questions about the story like: Why does Cathy have so many cats? Like Cathy the queen of cats. In that vignette, no they didn’t explain why she had so many cats and why she was you know.... You know, because like they don’t explain why she had so many cats. It just said she had this type of cat, big cats, furry cats, and they don’t say why she’s a cats—cat lady.

When I queried her further about *why* she chose to ask this question in her assignment, she explained:

Well, because maybe a lot of people are confused and want to know. And then they could—well, we don't have that much more to go in the story but we could find out why she's the queen of cats.  
(I: A.CHT.IN)

Although Irene claimed that Cathy's nickname and ownership of many cats was a topic that a lot of people could be confused about, it was a topic that *she* was curious about and that she would like to understand.

Irene's role as a literacy mentor in her family may also have affected how and why she created questions in ways that could influence and shape one's reading of a text. She shared that when she assisted her father with his cement class lesson planning, she sometimes created "questions for them." (I: R.ID.IN) In addition, she helped her brother and sister with their school work. Although this next example reveals how Irene assisted her brother with his writing, it also demonstrates how she may use questioning with family members in order to help them think outside of their "typical box."

Irene: When I was ah helping my little sis- my little brother do his little- this thing about his life. It was hard because he don't like- all he does is like sit down and watch T.V. It was hard because like we didn't have so much uh we didn't have so much about him and it had to be a three-paragraph--a three-paragraph essay and I was helping him and it was hard for me because they needed to have somebody older to help him and it was me.

Monica: So what did you do to help him, what did you do, how did you help him?

Irene: I told him "What do you do in school? What do you do when you go sleep over somebody's house? What do you do at parties?" you know and then like because he doesn't do nothing. And then we got like, we did some, we did go over it but we-it was hard but we did do it.  
(I: W.ID.IN)

Her various experiences with creating questions in order to help others in her family with their literacy activities likely affected how she perceived the role of questioning when she used this strategy on her own. Perhaps, this could also be why she invoked the plural form of "we" when she discussed the question about Cathy, queen of cats in her assignment for *The House on Mango Street*. It may be that she thought about herself as a questioner in relation to others and the questions that could help them.

## Conclusion

As indicated in the larger scale survey data and confirmed by the focal student interview and survey data, students perceived that the most useful strategies for reading were ones that related to either invoking or building background knowledge. The type of text influenced the strategies that the focal students claimed to enact. For example, all of the focal students discussed how fiction lent itself to visualizing. Tyrone revealed that a narrative allows him to make a “movie in his head,” whereas movies can’t be easily made from nonfiction topics presented in articles. Ashley explained that it is more difficult to visualize in subject areas, such as Health or Science, because she may have limited background knowledge. She contrasted this with using her experiences and other images from movies and the media to fill in what is in her imagination when she reads fiction. Ashley also differentiated how she is able to create questions in order to critically analyze and evaluate nonfiction since she could compare different sources to validate what counts as the truth. In her mind, critical questions could not be applied to fiction, since the author, as the sole authority, created an insular world based on his or her imagination.

Student approaches to building a situation model led the focal students to invoke certain strategies such as rereading in order to clarify one’s understanding at different points in the text. While all four reread for clarification purposes, Ashley professed that she did more rereading at the start of a text. She also added that she reread when the current part of the text she was reading referred back to a previous point in the text. Tyrone claimed that he would often skip a part of the text, and then read ahead in order to see if his confusion could be resolved later. Hector and Irene described how they reread when they stumbled over unfamiliar vocabulary. At these various points in the text, the students felt that they needed to reread in order to strengthen, revise, or continue building their situation models.

Strategies could also act as motivators for the students. Irene and Hector explained that visualizing helped them get into a text and stimulated their interest as they read. They both claimed that visualizing allowed them to enter the character’s world, as if they were there when the events took place in the text. For Irene, asking questions could also be considered a motivator, since her questions, such as the one about “Cathy, queen of cats,” genuinely piqued her curiosity. Furthermore, certain contexts could provide the motivation for enacting strategies. All four of the focal students described summarizing as a school-based strategy that assisted them in the process of completing school-based assignments. Yet despite finding it to be a valuable strategy in school, three of the focal students felt that it had little to no utility outside of school. Irene was the only student who felt that there was value to summarizing beyond school assignments. This may have been different for Irene because she plays a strong role as a literacy mentor in her family and has used summarizing as a tool she can use to distill and teach her father information that he can share with his cement workers. Through such out-of-school literacy activities, she may have discovered that there is some personal utility to summarizing. In contrast to the low perceived utility of summarizing, paraphrasing was considered to be quite useful to the students. They saw paraphrasing as having a different kind of purpose: it could help them get through a text. The four focal students found that paraphrasing or putting text into their own words, could help them (a) translate a difficult passage in order to make it more accessible and (b) remember the gist later when they wanted to recall part of the text. For the focal students, paraphrasing was considered to be more personally relevant and useful than summarizing.

Although the focal students tended to use many of the same stock strategies such as visualizing, rereading to clarify one's comprehension or understand new vocabulary, paraphrasing, summarizing, and questioning, *how, why, and in what manner* they used the strategies was highly specific and tended to be almost idiosyncratic to the individual's background as a reader and his or her purposes and aims for reading. Furthermore, the text, context, purpose for reading, and personal approaches to text affected *which* strategy that focal students opted to adopt in order to best fit the reading situation.

## Chapter 4: Students' Perceptions About Writing Strategies

In Chapter 3, I addressed how students invoked particular strategies for reading based on the context, text and purpose. This present chapter will examine how students think about strategies for writing by exploring students' perceptions about the strategies they use for writing. Findings from the larger scale survey data in which students (n=75) reported how likely they were to use a variety of strategies when they wrote about what they read and the focal student data from the survey-follow up and writer identity interviews revealed that (a) the students viewed writing as a more strategic process than reading and (b) writing strategy use depends on audience expectations and genre requirements. It is important to note that the data analysis and findings from the surveys focus on writing about reading, and the rest of the chapter reports on what students say about writing in general, especially since their conversations with me went beyond how they thought about writing about reading.

### Writing is a More Strategic Process than Reading

Items about strategies for writing about reading were created as parallels that would bear a family resemblance to the items on the reading survey that was appropriated from the work of Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). The difference in goals for reading and goals for writing about reading change the nature of a strategy. For instance, rereading because one does not understand a passage is different from rereading in order to review an idea that one would like to convey in her writing. Both kinds of rereading ask the student to reconsider information, but they are in pursuit of very different goals. Some examples of parallel items on the survey include: I have a purpose in mind when I read. I have a purpose in mind when I write; I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text. I ask myself questions about what I've just read, either before or as I write in order to increase my ability to write about what I've read (see Appendix A and B). The summary data presented in Table 2.1 show that, on average, students rated twelve of the nineteen strategies on this set of surveys higher than 2.50, indicating that they were likely to use these strategies for writing on a regular basis and more than occasionally or just once in a while.

Table 2.1

*Results from Writing Strategies Survey: Writing about what I've read*

Strategy	Mean	SD
1. I have a purpose in mind when I write.	2.93	0.13
2. I think or brainstorm about everything I know about the topic in general in order to help me figure out what to write.	2.64	0.05
3. I think or brainstorm about what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	2.72	0.15
4. I make notes about what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	2.21	0.04
5. I pay attention to the directions in the essay's prompt in order to help me figure out what to write.	3.27	0.10
6. I summarize what I've just read, either on paper or in my head, in order to reflect on important information from the reading.	2.53	0.12
7. I skim what I've just read to find the parts that fit with my writing purpose.	2.64	0.05

8. I underline or circle information in what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	2.20	0.03
11. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	2.24	0.10
12. I reread parts of the text that were difficult, either before or as I write, in order to increase my ability to write about what I've just read.	2.92	0.10
13. I ask myself questions about what I've just read, either before or as I write, in order to increase my ability to write about what I've read.	2.28	0.12
14. While writing, I imagine the reaction that readers of my writing might have.	2.29	0.18
15. I try to stick to the rules and formats I've learned about writing paragraphs and essays and apply them to my writing.	2.80	0.03
16. I try to keep in mind the grammar and punctuation rules that I've learned and apply them to my writing.	2.84	0.12
17. I try to incorporate new vocabulary words, either from class or what I've just read, into my writing.	2.66	0.08
18. I usually write several drafts when I'm writing a paragraph or an essay.	2.19	0.12
19. I divide up ideas from the text I've just read into camps or sides, either before or as I write, in order to figure out what information will support the points I am trying to make.	2.34	0.06

More than half of the strategies on this survey were perceived by students as being used on a regular basis as compared to less than a third of the strategies on the reading only survey. This contrast between reading and writing about reading strategies from the two surveys highlighted that students perceived that they are more likely to use strategies for writing about reading than they are for reading alone (the overall mean score for all writing about reading strategies was 2.59 and the overall mean score for all reading strategies was 2.27). Writing, unlike reading, is a process that may be more inherently strategic since there may be a conscious consideration of whom the writing is for and the goals that the writer anticipates he or she will accomplish through composing the text (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

### **Perceptions about Audience and Genre Influence Students' Writing Strategies**

Since students rated more than half of the strategies as ones that they were likely to use regularly, I concentrated my analysis on strategies that received scores of 2.80 or higher. In examining the strategies that students rated highly, I found that students said they were most likely to use strategies that took into consideration audience and genre expectations for writing. Students also reported that they often used strategies to orient or reorient their understandings as they turned to the text to reach their writing goals. Table 3 aligns these common writing considerations with the survey-related strategies that students perceived as being most likely to be put into practice.

Table 2.2

*How writing considerations relate to students' perceived use of strategies*

Considerations	Survey-related strategies
Audience & Genre Expectations	Keep in mind a purpose Adhere to the prompt Remember grammar and punctuation Stick to rules and formats
Orient/reorient to text to address goal	Reread Visualize

Students felt that they usually paid attention to the directions in an essay's prompt (mean = 3.27) and had a purpose in mind when they wrote (mean = 2.93). These two items were closely related, as the purpose for writing and a prompt tended to go hand in hand. The purpose will often relate to a larger goal, such as writing to get a good grade in school or writing a story for pleasure, and the prompt often shapes how one might attend to that goal by providing a topic or set of directions. The students' purpose for writing and adherence to the prompt were closely related to how each student envisioned and related to his or her audience.

Rereading parts of the source text before or during writing in order to increase one's ability to write about what one has read (mean = 2.92) and visualizing what was read (mean = 2.88) also were rated as being likely to be enacted by the students. The mean score representing the responses to these two items were consistent with the high ratings given on the reading survey. This indicated that once students had established a purpose and goal for writing and had analyzed the prompt, they were likely to begin building background knowledge about their writing topic. Both rereading and visualization assisted the student in this process as they attended to developing a working situation model for their writing (Kintsch, 1998). Furthermore, visualizing and rereading were particular strategies that related to how the student oriented and/or reoriented herself to the reading as she wrote.

Lastly, the survey results revealed that students felt it was important to keep in mind grammar and punctuation rules (mean = 2.84) and stick to the rules and formats that they had learned about writing paragraphs and essays (mean = 2.80), which signified their desire to adhere to expectations for what constitutes good writing in school. These responses indicated students' awareness of using particular forms for writing in certain genres. When students discussed their ideas about rules and forms for writing in their interviews, they often spoke of them in relation to types of writing, such as freewriting or journaling, persuasive essays, compare-contrast essays, and reports or school projects.

No items on the writing survey received a mean score of lower than two, which revealed that, on average, the students at Magellan at least occasionally or once in a while attend to all of the strategies mentioned in the survey. Out of all of the items, students were least likely to write several drafts (mean = 2.19), underline or circle information in what they had just read (mean = 2.20), make notes about what they've just read (mean = 2.21), critically analyze and evaluate what they just read (mean = 2.24), and ask themselves questions about the reading (mean = 2.28). Based on the items that received low ratings, it seemed that students were reluctant to take a step back from both their reading and writing in order to reflect on the content of the source

text and their creation. Several of these items involved an intermediary step between the reading process and writing process that calls for selection, evaluation, analysis, and reflection.

While the writing surveys indicated which strategies were perceived to be the most and least useful to the group of students, the interviews with the focal students provided a more nuanced picture of how students saw themselves as users of some of these writing strategies. The interviews further emphasized that audience was, by far, the most salient and critical consideration for the students.

Thinking through how one will address an audience is fundamentally strategic because it requires one to make deliberate choices about diction, style, organization, structure, and the like. Data from the writer identity and follow-up survey interviews revealed that the focal students felt that audience considerations influenced all other writing-related decisions, including how they would orient or reorient their attention towards a reading and how they would attend to both the audience's and their own expectations for writing in different genres. There was limited talk about how they either applied visualizing or rereading strategies to orient or reorient their attention to the text as they went from reading it to writing about it. Only one student, Ashley, mentioned visualizing, although it was rated quite highly in the surveys. Of all the strategies, visualizing seemed to be the most automatic and students may feel that it is something that they take for granted. As for rereading the text, students said that they did this when reviewing and finding specific information that would help them address the writing topic or prompt and when trying to understand information that they did not fully understand during their initial reading of the text.

### **Responding to an Audience**

I focus my analysis in this part of the chapter on students' perceptions about how audience shapes genre expectations and strategies for writing. The focal students differentiated how they thought about writing by distinguishing how they saw two possible response types for sharing ideas through writing for an audience.

One type of response was viewed as an initiation, reply/response, and evaluation (IRE) cycle (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979). Mehan originally formulated IRE to explain the typical teacher-centered pattern of classroom discussion. However, I found that IRE served as a useful model for explaining students' understandings of a particular kind of school writing. In this writing, there is a teacher initiation via her directions and the prompt, a student response through writing, and teacher evaluation in the form of comments and/or a teacher assigned grade. IRE for writing is similar to the kinds of classroom discourse in which discussion is often one-way and the teacher holds the authority while students respond with "one-turn" answers rather than a dialogue (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979). Likewise, students tend to view IRE writing as a "one-turn" deposit of ideas that ends in a closed conversation and the receipt of a grade from a teacher, with no real opportunities for dialogue regarding ideas. I chose IRE as a way to explain this type of response because I found that students in my study often discussed having to write a certain way in order to receive a positive evaluation from the teacher. I also wanted to break away from dichotomizing writing as having in or out of school purposes and felt that IRE could explain *why* students found certain genres of writing to be restrictive. It was not the genre or the fact that an assignment was given in school that was problematic, but how students saw the purpose for writing and the role of the audience.

The other type of response, which I will call dialogic, was perceived as a space for dialogic exchange. I use the term dialogic to invoke Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) idea that any

utterance, written or oral, is a response to or an anticipation of utterances that either come before or happen after it. In this type of response, students believe that there is an authentic purpose for communicating with an audience who is interested in learning from or being entertained by the writing. The students could potentially expect a response from an audience that is not in the form of an evaluation (i.e. a grade). Some examples of this type of writing could include stories to be shared with peers; poems, which evoke emotionally catharsis, written for either the self or others; and persuasive essays intended to convince others of an opinion. Although students know that they also can be evaluated, their concerns about writing focus on communicating a message rather than on being worried about an evaluation. When students write dialogically, they respond to the ideas in the text in a way that is genuine in keeping with their thoughts and opinions. In other words, students write for themselves, as much as they write for others.

The two response types are not pre-defined by genres or assignments, but rather by how the individual perceives the function of writing within a particular context. All four focal students in this study described how they saw and positioned writing in relation to these two types. What is most notable about my findings about these types is that different students can have dissimilar interpretations of the same writing assignment; one student may view the given assignment as IRE writing while another can experience it as being dialogic. Each student also described how different writing genres could be typified according to these two response categories.

**Writing has only one purpose: Tyrone.** After finishing the survey, Tyrone related, “Me and writing don’t mix.” It was almost as if he viewed writing as a person he did not get along with, indicating his resistance to engaging in the process. When I asked him to elaborate on what he meant by this, he explained, “I like reading better than writing. I mean I can write. Like I can make a story, but I wouldn’t like it [writing one].” Of the four focal students, Tyrone had the most negative view about writing—one that had little to do with using writing as a means for communication and expression.

- Tyrone: The purpose is because I have to. That's it.  
Monica: Are all the purposes for writing the same? Are the reasons for writing the same?  
Tyrone: Yep...I never write on my own. I may, well it's like probably every three years. I might write something but it's not gonna be long. It's probably just something to myself. And then I'll throw it away.  
Monica: So what do you mean the purpose is because you have to. You said it's because you have to?  
Tyrone: I only really write if somebody makes me write. Like for an essay. And class or like a final or umm Miss-for my English teacher or someone like that.  
Monica: And are those purposes always the same?  
Tyrone: Yep.  
Monica: And what's that? What would that be?  
Tyrone: It's for a grade and I have no choice. (T: W.SV.IN)

As a ninth grade student, Tyrone saw little value in writing outside of turning in an assignment to the teacher in order to receive a grade. Tyrone viewed the salience of evaluation in a strong but

matter of fact way, with an acceptance that writing was inevitably part of being a student. He noted that he wrote on his own once every three years, but that it was a pointless endeavor, as evidenced by his comment that he threw the writing away. Tyrone described writing as being unpleasant and like a chore. It was a task that he engaged in when “somebody made” him write. He found that he had “no choice” in the matter if he wanted to pass his classes.

Tyrone’s views about writing in school corresponded with how he felt about adhering to writing prompts. When I asked him to describe what he chose for survey question number five, “I pay attention to the directions in the essay’s prompt in order to help me figure out what to write,” he explained, “Uhh I chose four because. Why did I choose four? Oh, because if I don't pay attention to how I'm supposed to write it, I'll fail.” As I asked him to tell me more about this, he clarified, “Like if I’m writing an essay, I can’t write it in the way I want to because it’s what the teacher asked for.” (T: W.SV.IN) Instead of viewing the prompt as a guide, he saw it as a constraint, which prohibited him from writing about what was important to him in a way that he wanted. He felt as though this writing was not for himself but for the teacher.

Even when Tyrone differentiated between writing types, he emphasized that the purposes still remained the same.

- Monica: And umm what kinds of things do you pay attention to [in the prompt]? Can you tell me a little bit about what you usually do?
- Tyrone: Just like what the teacher wants it like a letter or something or an essay. Or notes. I write however they want it written. Cause I don't wanna. I don't want my grade to drop. (T: W.SV.IN)

Regardless of whether the assignment contained more room for freedom expression such as writing a letter or writing notes in class, Tyrone had the impression that the mode of expression and genre did not matter. Tyrone felt that there was only *one* narrow purpose for all genres in school: writing to receive a grade.

Although Tyrone had declared, “Me and writing don’t mix,” he described a very different picture of himself as a writer prior to secondary school. As indicated in the excerpts from his reader and writer identity interviews at the beginning of this dissertation, Tyrone seemed to undergo a change in attitude towards reading and writing, as he got older. When I asked him to tell me a little about his history as a writer, he initially said that he did not write much and that he did not know. With some probing, however, he revealed that he enjoyed writing quite a bit when, as a child, he used to share stories with his mother.

- Monica: Well, how have you changed as a writer over the years?
- Tyrone: I've changed cuz like when I was little I used to write a lot. That's pretty much it.
- Monica: What do you mean you used to write a lot when you were little?
- Tyrone: Like, I used to write stories and stuff for my mom. I don't do any writing unless I have to now.
- Monica: Did your mom ask you to write these stories?
- Tyrone: Nn-nn, I was just little and I liked it.
- Monica: What kind of stories did you write? Do you remember?
- Tyrone: Little stories like about a king and some other stuff. I can't remember.

Monica: Did she like them?  
Tyrone: Yeah. She'd always read them back to me.  
Monica: She did?  
Tyrone: Mmhm  
Monica: How old were you when you used to do this kind of thing?  
Tyrone: Like maybe seven, eight.  
Monica: And is this something your teacher encouraged you to do at school?  
Tyrone: No. It's just something I did in my free time. (T: W.ID.IN)

In his childhood, Tyrone wrote “a lot” and “liked it.” Tyrone’s story became a medium through which mother and child could strengthen their bond. For Tyrone, the story writing took on an element of “play” and was an activity that he looked forward to with anticipation because he hoped his mother would enjoy the stories as much as he did. Story writing was a vehicle for him to dialogue with his mother. While he chose to write on his own during his free time as a child, he only writes when he “has to” now that he is in high school. For Tyrone, the shift was from writing to enjoy a story with his mother to writing to be evaluated by his teacher. The story writing with his mother was very different from the IRE writing that he was doing now as a high school student. When I asked Tyrone about when he began to feel differently about writing, he estimated that this happened when he was about ten, which is when he would have been in fourth or fifth grade.

Monica: Tell me about when things started to change for you. You were saying when you were little you used to write a lot. And when did things start changing for you?  
Tyrone: Um, like around ten. That's probably when it started changing. When I started to stop writing.  
Monica: What do you think brought around those changes for you?  
Tyrone: I don't know. I just remembered one time I didn't feel like writing no more. I didn't really have any other reason. (T: W.ID.IN)

Tyrone seemed to be unable to articulate what brought about the negative changes in his attitude towards writing. Yet it was not surprising that he mentioned age ten as a time in which this shift occurred, since it is in upper elementary school that students are increasingly exposed to a greater number of expository and a decreasing quantity of narrative texts. Likewise, the expectations and demands for writing increase as students move into secondary school and write more expository paragraphs and essays about the content of their reading. In addition, more emphasis is placed on student grades and test scores—evaluations that have high stakes consequences related to graduating from high school.

**Rules and expertise determine what and how you write: Hector.** Although Hector had a broader view of high school writing than Tyrone did, he was very concerned about following the “rules”—especially when he wrote essays. Hector stated, “I can sometimes picture the teacher reading it [the essay] or something...trying to like correct, correct it or something.” (H: W.SV.IN) His comments about picturing the teacher correcting his writing aligned with the only four that he rated on the survey: “I try to stick to the rules and formats I’ve learned about

writing paragraphs and essays and apply them to my writing.” Although he was interested in pleasing the teacher, Hector was less concerned about being graded than Tyrone was. At the time that I interviewed the students, Hector was doing fairly well in school while Tyrone was in danger of failing several classes. Hector spoke about the teacher “correcting” his work, but not about his grades. He felt that the teacher’s evaluation was for identifying what he did right or wrong, but did not explicitly associate such evaluation with failing or advancing to the next grade level. When I inquired about the advice Hector would give to another student who was struggling on a writing assignment, he replied, “I’d tell them to-to remember what, what like the teacher says about how to write and all that stuff.” (H: W.ID.IN) Rather than advising the student about putting ideas to paper, his comments suggested that following requirements and considering the teacher’s expectations were what mattered the most. Hector seemed to view the teacher as an authority figure who was much like a parent; and his advice echoed the idea of following rules set by a parent. He felt it was important to follow the “rules” in order to receive the teacher’s approval.

For Hector, writing prompts allowed him to figure out what the teacher expected, as well as to find the text type that would best suit the requirements. When I asked Hector to describe why he chose a three for item number five, he explained that paying attention to the prompt told the writer what to do and took the place of the teacher’s words.

- Hector: Um, cause like in order to write an essay you have to pay attention to what like the prompt is telling you to do.
- Monica: And what kinds of things do you usually pay attention to when you look at the prompt?
- Hector: Like um like, like yesterday. Like, I thought of the compare and contrast...cause it said do you think it's all right to twist the truth or not, and why, so I kinda figured that was like a comparing and contrast essay. (H: W.SV.IN)

Hector would take a prompt and translate it into a text type that he could put into a particular format. Figuring out the text type gave him a means for identifying what “rules” for writing to follow. As part of the study, I had given Hector an article to read from the *New York Times* on the psychological benefits of exaggeration. After reading the text, he was required to write a response based on a prompt. As previously mentioned in the Methods chapter, this prompt was part of a series of reading-writing tasks that I had created to gather data on how students engaged in school-like assignments that contained both reading and writing. The prompt included the written directions (see Appendix E):

In your writing, discuss the author’s claims in this article. Then, using logical reasons and examples, explain whether or not you believe it’s okay to twist the truth.

Although the prompt did not specifically call for a comparison between twisting and not twisting the truth, Hector interpreted this to mean that the prompt was asking him to compare and contrast the plusses and minuses of such behavior:

Well it said that it asked if you, uh, like if you thought that it was okay... uh, to twist the

truth...so then I kinda thought it meant like do you agree or disagree so then I, I thought of the, the compare and contrast essay that we learned how to do. So then I just found, uh, one claim and then another claim and then I just compared them and then at the end I just, uh, gave my opinion of agree or disagree. (H: W.SV.IN)

As he described how he attended to writing a response to the prompt on twisting the truth, Hector did not give details about the presentation of ideas through the content of his writing, but focused on the format. He was more concerned about sticking to the format, rather than figuring out how to grapple with ideas from a complex text. He was interested in following the “rules” or the format for writing the essay, which included identifying “once claim and then another,” comparing them, and giving an opinion at the end which stated whether he agreed or disagreed.

In contrast to essay writing, Hector described how he wrote a story in order to entertain his peers. While the essay was an assignment that was to be evaluated for following “rule” following and correctness, Hector felt the short story was to be enjoyed by his peers and the teacher. As he wrote his story, he imagined the reaction of his audience.

Hector: Yeah. Like cause sometimes when I'm writing, like, uh, like three weeks ago we had to do a like a story, of a scientific story, a make up story, and um so I...I did it, remember I was telling you that I made like a sort of alien story?

Monica: Yeah.

Hector: So, I uh, I uh while I was typing it I was like imagining like some students reading it or something and then, I don't know (chuckle) having fun or something. (H: W.SV.IN)

Unlike the essay, the short story was meant to be fun. When I asked Hector to tell me more about his story, he had no problem going into detail. In contrast to his response about writing in relation to prompts and translating them into text types and accompanying formats, he discussed actual ideas and content in depth as he described his thoughts about the prompt for writing the science fiction assignment.

Hector: I was already thinking like in my mind when the paper was due... I wanted, I was thinking like if she had any alien stuff [as an option for the assignment].

Monica: Oh really?

Hector: Yeah so then when she gave it to me and then I thought aliens and that was my choice

Monica: And why did you pick aliens?

Hector: I don't know

Monica: Have you seen [uh

Hector: [[Movies] with aliens?! Like *War of The Worlds*, *Independence Day*, stuff like that

Monica: So you've seen movies with aliens?

Hector: Yeah, they're kinda cool

Monica: And um, why do you feel like you picked aliens over a different topic?

Hector: I think it was the easiest one.

Monica: What are you writing about? You said aliens, what's your story about?

Hector: I'm gonna write about a kid that--he he thinks aliens exist and the earth is like polluted with trash and is and is and the earth reached it limit, it it can't hold anymore. So then um, the earth starts dying, like the water uh gets polluted, uh the animals start dying and then the kid where he lives there's like a weird cave. And he goes in there and he finds like a like a triangular object and it's gold and it's silver and all that stuff and then he shows it to his friend. And he, they both go to that cave again and try to open it because you can like open it and then they try to open it and then this light like a really bright light starts like out of nowhere out of the triangle, starts spinning and starts like making noises and then they go and they start running away to spread out and then they outside and then um, one of them sees like a flying disc, you know, it's flying and then it lands. And then they start talking to them and yeah and then after that, I'm gonna put that the uh the aliens arrive, a bunch of UFOs and they want to like, they announce it to everybody that they come in peace and they try to come to help out but then like

Monica: Wait, they come with bees?

Hector: They come in peace.

Monica: Oh, they come in peace.

Hector: Yeah and they want to help out and then but some people don't believe them and they start killing them and so then they go and they leave the earth and then then after a while the people start realizing that the earth is dying more. (H: A.CHT.IN)

While Hector often gave short and succinct answers during my interviews with him, he spoke in detail about his alien science fiction story. Even when he wrote this story, he still was interested in following some basic rules—he would only write about aliens if the topic was an option approved by the teacher. However, as he spoke about his science fiction story, Hector did not necessarily discuss either form or structure as he did when he spoke about writing essays. He portrayed himself as a very different kind of writer and student—someone who was confident, engaged, excited, and motivated about his work. When I asked him to elaborate on how he viewed writing science fiction in comparison to other kinds of writing, he claimed, “I think it's more like free, sorta free write, and whatever comes to your mind. And the other ones you have to write like from the quotes, commentary and all that.”

He also related that when he told his teacher about the idea for his story, she asked him if he had seen the movie *The Fifth Element*. Although he had not, Hector was eager to hear her describe the movie's plot. Hector considered himself as more of an expert in alien movie plotlines and scenarios than in academic essays. He and his teacher were both consumers of popular culture, and, therefore, part of a similar discourse community in this regard. Hector was no longer positioned as the complete novice or learner, as in the case when he was writing an academic essay. Although the teacher still gave advice, Hector viewed her differently in this situation compared to when he wrote academic essays. In the case of alien movie

connoisseurship, he and the teacher were equally positioned as experts. Thus Hector interpreted her sharing of information as a dialogic two-way exchange which allowed him generate ideas for his alien story, rather than only as a set of directives that he needed to follow in order to incorporate her “rules.” His positioning as an alien movie expert and his comfort writing a narrative, which he considered to be more “free” than an academic essay, may have led him to focus more on content rather than on form and structure. His goal in writing science fiction was no longer only about pleasing the teacher in order to fulfill the basic requirements for an assignment but about writing a great story that would be engaging for himself, his peers, and the teacher. This shift in purpose had much to do with being a part of a discourse community in which he was positioned as an expert on the topic.

**Writing authentically: Ashley.** Unlike the other focal students, Ashley did not voice the same concerns about being evaluated or following the rules when writing in school. It is important to note that she was the most academically successful focal student and had the highest GPA. Her identity as a good student likely affected how she viewed the purposes for writing. Ashley always considered writing as a vehicle for communicating ideas, regardless of the prompt. Unlike Tyrone and Hector who felt the specificity of a prompt often limited them from being able to write in a way that was “free,” Ashley did not voice the same perspective. However, she noted that one genre of writing in particular—“rubric” writing—was quite restrictive. In her opinion, this writing was solely for demonstrating writing skills to the teacher and not for communicative purposes.

She related that when she wrote using the teacher’s “rubric,” she felt she was merely plugging words into the sentences without incorporating her voice or ideas.

- Ashley: Okay. For now we have to write a lot of short paragraphs about things that I think are unnecessary like um a paragraph comparing two poems. I mean it's writing but it's not really writing it's just kind of copying down a rubric and putting in words here and there.
- Monica: What do you mean by copying down a rubric?
- Ashley: Because she gave us a really like detailed way that she wanted it to be. And I feel when I do that I feel like I'm just taking her paragraph and trying to turn it into my own but not really doing it.
- Monica: Can you explain to me what rubric is?
- Ashley: Well I think it's called a rubric. It's like she put sentence one and then everything that needs to be in sentence one. And then sentence two. Details like that. (A: W.ID.IN)

What Ashley called a rubric was more or less a pre-set formula for writing a specific kind of paragraph. While a rubric is typically what teachers use as an evaluation tool, Ashley conflated the formula with the rubric for grading her writing. She felt as though her writing was going to be judged by how well she included all of the required elements in each of her sentences. To Ashley, “it’s not really writing” because writing should reveal evidence that the writer has created a work that contains traces of the individual’s ideas and voice that turns it into one’s “own.”

In the kind of formulaic writing that Ashley labeled as “rubric” writing, the student does not have to be as strategic in planning format, structure, or even basic content in comparison to

when no such pre-set formula is given. Many of the strategic choices that students would have to make while writing, such as the organization of ideas, formulating a thesis, deciding the sentence structure, etc., are being prescribed by a formula they are being asked to follow by their teachers. As noted by Ashley, “rubric” or formulaic writing leads students to perceive that certain kinds of writing in school do not contain room for an individual voice or ideas. Part of one’s ownership over a piece of writing includes *how* and to what degree the student feels he or she has personal choice or control over the strategies that are used in writing. Although such strategic choices are difficult, writing authentically means that writers must struggle with questions about form, structure, and the presentation of ideas, in order to figure out how they will convey a message to their targeted audience.

Ashley did not see “rubric” writing as real writing because it went against her views that writing was meant to be a communicative activity. Ashley described how she grew to enjoy writing and see it as a vehicle for authentic expression. As a young child, she wrote according to what she thought was expected of her in school but did not feel that she enjoyed the process until she reached the fourth grade. She began to change her point of view when her fourth grade teacher told her to write her thoughts down as if she were talking to a friend. Through journal writing Ashley learned that writing in school could take on different forms with different purposes and audiences.

- Ashley: I remember I always used to start a sentence with "the"...
- Monica: When was that?
- Ashley: Like 2nd grade.
- Monica: And when did the things start to change?
- Ashley: Probably like 4th grade as we started writing in journals.
- Monica: You started writing journals in 4th grade? And how did that help?
- Ashley: Um because she told us like act as the journal's a friend. Not just like the piece of paper like I normally thought of it.
- Monica: So how did you normally think about it before that?
- Ashley: I thought it would be like she'd be judging every sentence and it had to be like properly put together.
- Monica: And over the years what has helped you the most with your writing?
- Ashley: Uh, just journal work. I like it. I know lots of people don't like it because it's lots of writing. But I think it...it is the only time you get to actually get to write who you are. (A: W.ID.IN)

Ashley found in journaling an opportunity to free herself from writing to meet the expectations of her teacher. She began to see it as a vehicle to write *about and for* herself. Journal writing also became a means for Ashley to experiment with voice and sentence structure. She noted that she always had started her sentences with “the” and claimed that she began to try new sentence constructions once she felt she had a space to write that would not be judged sentence by sentence by the teacher. Through journal writing, she discovered a way to write about who she is, to be herself, and to not worry about fitting ideas into a “rubric” where the structure of the sentence mimics an example given by the teacher. Using a journal helped her to understand how writing can be a powerful tool for exploring and expressing ideas.

Even when Ashley wrote essays for school, she was most concerned about writing in a way that would express her ideas in a compelling manner. Her concern differed from Tyrone's feeling that he had no choice in the matter while writing and from Hector's emphasis on adhering to what he felt was required.

- Ashley: Because I always think like, is my teacher gonna think what I'm writing is powerful, or like, can, if I'm doing an interpretive essay, will my essay change someone's mind? Is my essay good enough to have someone see my side of things?
- Monica: And are there times when you might do this more than others?
- Ashley: If I'm doing an interpretive [essay], if I'm doing a compare and contrast essay you don't really think about it cause that's your opinion, you're not persuading someone, interpretive, but like you're persuading someone to get, to like to agree with you, then you care about what the reader thinks.
- Monica: And do you usually have certain readers in mind?
- Ashley: Like my teacher, my mom.
- Monica: And usually, like, in your mind, are there certain things that you feel like you try to do in order to imagine that or are there certain things that go through your mind?
- Ashley: Just like what I would think if I was reading, I try to put myself in their position, like if they never read the article and if they didn't know what I was talking about, is my, is what I'm saying, is my opinion strong enough for them to believe? (A: W.SV.IN)

Ashley was interested in how her content was aligned with the writing type that was issued through a school prompt. For Ashley, the purpose of writing was related closely to its genre, which embodied certain goals for communicating ideas. While Hector translated the prompt into a genre-associated text type, he did not necessarily understand that these forms had different goals. He tended to see the goals being related to satisfying the teacher's requirements. Ashley, however, noted genre differences between text types such as interpretive and compare-contrast essays. In her mind, an interpretive essay contained the inherent goal of persuading someone to understand and see the author's point of view. The compare and contrast essay, on the other hand, did not have the same function. According to Ashley, it was an essay in which one presented their opinions about two interrelated topics without the intent to persuade. Her interpretation of these two types of essays revealed that she understood that the writing type and format was still oriented towards the goal of influencing the audience's stance towards the understanding of a topic. In addition, she put herself in the place of the reader, taking on a stance in which she attempted to be objective about what she had written. She tried to imagine how the reader would perceive the strength and quality of her argument. Would it be "strong enough for them to believe?"

Although Ashley, like the other students, was to some extent interested in the teacher's evaluation, her focus was less about the grade and her potential and more about how the teacher would perceive the content and the power of her written words. This did not mean that Ashley had an entirely divergent point of view from the other focal students about the expectations or

restrictiveness of *some* kinds of school writing, but that she found that different kinds of writing in school presented different kinds of challenges for maintaining one's voice.

**Internalizing standards and genres: Irene.** Tyrone's purpose for writing in school was to write for the teacher in order to receive a passing grade, Hector's was to follow the rules, Ashley's was to communicate ideas powerfully, and Irene's was to meet her teacher's and her own standards for writing. In addition, Irene saw all writing as being part of an ongoing learning process.

Irene commented that when she wrote essays in school she pictured a more removed audience that had little in common with her. When I asked her to describe this audience, she said that she thought of it as being made of "old people."

- Irene: I think old people in a gallery are going to read them [the essays].  
Monica: What do you mean?  
Irene: Old people, like random old people. Like old, like wrinkly and old.  
Monica: Ha ha (laughs). So that's what you imagine?  
Irene: Yeah.  
Monica: Like you kind of think about that in your mind and that's how you read it yourself? You read it like an old person?  
Irene: Yeah. (I: W.SV.IN)

With old people in mind, Irene tailored her language, writing, and vision to what she thought the audience would expect. Describing her writing as an object that could be critiqued, just like artwork in a gallery, Irene felt that her writing ought to be able to withstand criticism or evaluation from people—"like old people"—who are not like her. In other words, the writing needed to be strong enough to stand on its own without her having to explain the piece in person to an audience. Irene felt as though her writing needed to measure up to a particular standard that she had internalized based on her years as a writer in school. Perhaps, this was why a gallery of old people was fitting—in her mind, they seemed to function as a panel of critics. Irene tended to invoke her past experiences and the words of former teachers as she wrote. She explained, "Yeah, um well I ask I have asked them [teachers] um, 'Is this a good like essay or introduction to do?' And they were like 'Yes.' And that's how I learned that I was doing good. That's what helped me. I could save it and that could help me another time I do an introduction." Keeping in mind her teachers' past evaluations and her former written pieces as models, Irene learned to critique her own work.

She related that it currently was unusual for her to receive a bad grade on an essay, because she was aware of the standards for writing based on her past experiences. However, she admitted that she received bad grades for writing once in a while: "And one time I did a horrible essay and I got a 53." (I: W.SV.IN) In the case of this anomalous bad essay, she explained, "I knew it was bad because like I read it, I was like this is lame. And I compared it to a good one and I was like this is good." She felt that she was aware of how teachers graded writing; and she knew how to determine what constituted a bad or good essay. She used her internalized standards based on past experiences to figure out what was good and acceptable. Comparing what she wrote in the present to what she had written in the past, she claimed that she self-evaluated all of her writing before she turned it in to the teacher. She was very much her own critic and had internalized what was expected of her in school. While Hector and Tyrone limited

their discussions about writing in school to writing for a particular teacher, Irene's view went beyond trying to please an individual teacher and included meeting an internal standard that had been set through her writing experiences with multiple teachers over many years. Irene viewed herself as a literacy mentor in her family and she used teachers' evaluations in order to "teach" herself how to improve as a writer. Unlike others who saw certain kinds of essay writing as having a "one turn" lifespan, Irene did not view any writing this way. Regardless of the evaluation she received, all writing became part of an ongoing learning experience from which she figured out how to make writing improvements in the future.

In contrast to Tyrone, who found that the use of a prompt was restrictive and confining in a way that only allowed him to write for the teacher, Irene found that prompts were helpful tools. She explained, "It helps me by knowing what to write and like it tells me, put reasons, I have to put reasons. Put claims, I have to put claims, and I know what to put in it so I could get a good grade." (I: W.SV.IN) While she noted that the directions in a prompt spell out the teacher's expectations, she did not find these expectations to be at odds with using content to communicate a message through her writing. She stated, "It's important to pay attention to the directions to help you and I usually do this like, like so I can have more like more ideas." Rather than being restrictive, the prompt was seen by Irene as an aid that helped her build upon her ideas and explore them in writing. She saw that addressing a prompt could be an opportunity to learn more and could allow her to expand on what she thought about a topic. She differed from Tyrone who saw the prompt only as a directive from the teacher and from Hector who thought that it was there to help one find the best format and text type for addressing the topic at hand. She recognized that a prompt provided helpful guidelines for form while simultaneously shaping how students might explore ideas through their written content.

Irene also described how she felt writing provided opportunities for learning. She had written a report on asthma last year because she wanted to know more about how the illness affected her life.

- Monica: And how did you come up with that [report] topic?  
Irene: Because I have asthma.  
Monica: Oh?  
Irene: So I wanted to study a little bit about it.  
Monica: Oh I see and what else did you do to write it? Do you remember?  
What helped you to write this piece?  
Irene: Well, actually, me and my two of my friends picked this topic and we were helping each other. Like when like um I didn't get this part, she helped me. And she took me to this web site that could help me a lot and so yeah that's how I got most of the things.  
(I: W.ID.IN)

This report provided her with the opportunity to work with friends—each of whom wrote a report about the same topic. The process of writing the report involved quite a bit of dialogue for Irene. Although she claimed that this report was a hard project, she also talked about it with a great amount of pride:

Well it was hard to me, it was hard me getting through it because like um it was hard because I had never. It was the biggest project I have ever

done. And it was so hard. It was a good experience that I had then so I could be better in high school. (I: W.ID.IN)

The experience of writing the report was also a learning process for Irene. Through the process of writing, she learned to internalize the report genre. She taught herself the characteristics of the genre, as she wrote with her friends, and talked about using the experience to help her understand how to do “better in high school.” She felt a sense of ownership over the topic and the process. She also used writing about reading as an opportunity to learn about a concept or topic. When she shared experiences about what she had read with friends, writing took on a motivating social dimension.

### **Audience and Genre Expectations: The Case of Poetry**

For the focal students, adhering to audience and accompanying genre expectations determined whether they saw writing fitting into either an IRE or dialogic type. How students viewed writing as one or the other of these types was reflected especially in the ways that students discussed poetry writing at Magellan. Writing poetry in school was not necessarily viewed as being a more positive experience than writing essays. Three of the four focal students, Hector, Ashley, and Irene shared their views, reflecting that the topic and form of required poetry were often pre-determined by the teacher’s assignment. While Hector and Ashley felt constrained by the expectation to make their poetry sound “poetic,” Irene viewed poetry as a vehicle for expressing the true “meaning” of a topic. Hector and Ashley felt that using the example given by the teacher was their primary concern when they wrote poetry in school. Their comments about writing poetry echoed some of the sentiments that they expressed about writing according to a formula or “rubric.” School writing—whether poetry or an essay—when structured by a formula, amounted to more or less the same genre: writing for the teacher in order to receive an evaluative grade. In contrast to Hector and Ashley, Irene felt as though she could focus on what it meant to be herself through her writing poetry. She did not believe she needed to follow a prescribed form. This could be because Irene’s identity as a writer of poetry extended into her life outside of school. What allowed her to see past the expectations that poetry should sound a certain way was her belief that the poetry could allow one to express emotions in ways that other genres could not. Based on her experience of using poetry to work through personal issues in her life, her view of poetry’s purpose transcended the notion that a poem written in school was merely a school assignment.

Hector and Ashley individually characterized poetry as difficult school writing. They referenced this genre when I asked them individually to tell me a time about a time that they found writing in school to be difficult.

- Hector: We had to do like a poem, it was kinda hard, uh the poem was based on on your life and all that and all all of those things.  
Monica: Uh huh. And what was hard about it?  
Hector: Uh, like making it sound like it was a poem, a poem. That's what. Rhyming it and all that. (H: W.ID.IN)

Neither the teacher nor the assignment required any rhyming in the poem. It was an option that students could include as a poetic device. Yet Hector held his own belief and expectation about

the genre—that poetry *should* rhyme. This could have resulted from his experiences reading poetry in school, as well as what he felt was interesting and enjoyable as a reader of the genre. Likewise, Ashley also felt as though poetry needed to sound a certain way.

- Monica: Tell me about a time when you had to write something for school but felt it was difficult to write.
- Ashley: When we had to write a poem a couple of months ago. We had to pick a scene that kind of fit the story, *The House on Mango Street*. But I didn't think I fit into that—any of those categories so I kind of had to—it was not as strong as I thought it would be.
- Monica: And why was it hard?
- Ashley: Because I didn't know exactly kind of how I wanted to word it to make it sound like poetry. Like if I just had to write a paragraph about an experience I had relating to Esperanza, it would have been way easier than making it sound poetic. (A: W.ID.IN)

In addition to expectations that students may have about the genre, the difficulty in writing a required poem in school has to do with the topic choice. Writing about one's self can be quite personal and it may be tough for some students to fit this into a poetic form. Furthermore, when the poetry assignment relates to linking one's experience to a piece of literature, some students may not be able to find such real life connections. Limitations to such a poetry assignment left Ashley feeling doubtful about fulfilling the requirements to the best of her ability. Through her hesitation, "so I kind of had to," she implied that she might have made up an experience in order to fit it into the assignment. She was disappointed in her final poem and explained that if she had written it in prose, it would have been easier and most likely more rewarding. She would have been able to write more freely without worrying about whether or not the words sounded like poetry.

Although the teacher gave the students one night to complete the poem and may have perceived this to be an easy assignment, Ashley found that she could not write the kind of quality poem that she expected from herself, given the short time span for the poetry homework.

- Ashley: But I didn't like my poem (hehe)
- Monica: Why do you say that?
- Ashley: I didn't think I had enough time to do it because we only had one night for homework. But like I wanted to revise it more.  
(A: W.ID.IN)

Of the four focal students, Ashley was the most conscientious student. She regularly participated vocally in class, turned assignments in on time, and was diligent about completing her work. She was not someone who complained or missed due dates. Her comments, in this case, revealed that there might have been a discrepancy between the teacher and students' impressions on how difficult it would be for students to write meaningful poems.

- Monica: And what did you do in order to help yourself write it?
- Ashley: Um I just kind of like-I looked up the example. And I tried to fit my words kind of into the same flow.

- Monica: Did you use any strategies to write this?  
Ashley: No, I pretty much just like I read a stanza from the example and then turned it into my own words. (A: W.ID.IN)

Despite Ashley's resistance and frustration towards the assignment, she still completed it with relative ease by following the example given in class by the teacher. This scenario related to writing poetry was reminiscent of what she said about following a rubric. Her main strategy was to craft her poem to resemble the model as much as possible, defeating the purpose of writing poetry, a more creative and open-ended form of writing for expressing ideas. Using a formula laid out by the teacher may allow students to finish assignments while adhering to the requirements, yet it might not contain room for student ownership or satisfaction over the completed product.

While Hector found the poem to be a difficult assignment, he expressed a nonchalant attitude towards completing the assignment and his description on how he completed the poem was not much different than how he spoke about writing essays.

- Monica: And um what did you do to write it?  
Hector: I, I used some examples that the teacher gave us on how to write it.  
Monica: Like what?  
Hector: Like she gave us like uh an example poem. And it just gave me an idea based on that poem.  
Monica: Uh huh. And um what made you, what, uh, how did you get through it?  
Hector: I got through it first I like did like a brainstorm, and then I put topics, and then after that I just uh looked at the other paper.  
(H: W.ID.IN)

In the case of writing a compare and contrast essay, he had asserted that he would find "one claim and then another claim," compare them, and finally give an "opinion of agree or disagree." Similarly, when writing a poem, he noted that he would come up with a few topics and fit them into a format that mimicked the teacher's example.

Although all of the focal students had been exposed to the same examples for writing autobiographical poems that reflected some of the themes from *The House on Mango Street*, Irene did not feel restricted by the genre or assignment in the same ways that Hector and Ashley did. Hector and Ashley both viewed the poetry assignments to be difficult and challenging, yet they spoke about completing them with relative ease. They both claimed that they read the example and that this model led them to, as Ashley noted, "fit words into the same kind of flow." It was almost as if the model magically lent itself to a form that students could follow. Yet despite having a form to follow, they still struggled with figuring out how they could make their poem rhyme or "sound poetic." Their genre expectations for what made a good poem left them feeling as though they were inadequate as writers of poetry. Since they felt that they had difficulty meeting *these* genre expectations for poetry in general, they felt as though they needed to fulfill *another* type of genre expectation: writing for the teacher on a school assignment.

Irene, however, did not hold the same genre expectations for poetry. She did not fixate on the idea that poetry needed to sound a certain way. Instead, she viewed poetry as an outlet for expressing emotions through writing that could be potentially cathartic for the writer and reader.

This perspective about poetry was evident in how she spoke about using the medium to cope with her parents' separation.

- Monica: Tell about a time when you got into writing something in school—like you really got into it?
- Irene: Um, actually doing poems
- Monica: Ahh, can you tell me a little bit about that?
- Irene: Well poems are-I like poems because they are a meaning of something.
- Monica: They're what?
- Irene: They're a meaning. Like let's say I'm writing about something. And then like a poem is better than a story.
- Monica: Why do you say that?
- Irene: Because like I wrote about my parents, because I have been having problems. So umm that helped me almost-not get over it, but just like think about [it]. I wrote in the poem that I wish that my parents were back together when they're not but--and I wrote thank God they are like seeing each other and being friends.
- Monica: Oh.
- Irene: And I'm just like I'm better off like that than them fighting. And I'm better off reading that poem when I am sad. (I: W.ID.IN)

Unlike Hector and Ashley who characterized poetry as difficult writing in school that they did not enjoy, Irene found that poetry was school writing she could “get into.” It allowed her to get at the “meaning of something” and, therefore, was more powerful to her than other kinds of writing. Through reading and writing poems, she found solace and escape when her life was tough. Reading a saved poem that she had written previously could provide her with a reference point for reflecting on a situation and time in her life. While she was having rough time accepting her parents' separation, she knew that it would be better for her to read a poem. She would rather reflect on her desire for their reunion than listen to them argue in person if they had stayed together. Poetry was her way of holding a dialogue with herself about private feelings during a family crisis. Through her poetry, she could provide encouragement to herself and help herself feel hopeful during difficult times.

On another occasion when I asked Irene to tell me more about when she got into writing something for school, she also mentioned poetry. This time, she elaborated on the autobiographical poem assignment that students wrote in relation to the themes from *The House on Mango Street*. Although it was the same assignment that Hector and Ashley had referenced, her perspective about writing the poem was vastly different from theirs.

- Monica: What about school? Is there anything you are really into writing for school?
- Irene: That poem that we did, the biography poem that we did.
- Monica: Mm, and what made you get into that?
- Irene: Because it was about me and I love writing about me.
- Monica: And what kind of strategies did you use to write that poem?

- Irene: Mm. [pause] I just-nothing. It was just all about me. Like it was easy cuz I did it once so I just like—it wasn't hard. I didn't use no strategies...
- Monica: And if you were going to give advice to someone else who is writing—who is a writing a poem, what would you say to them?
- Irene: Well, just like put all your thoughts into it. Like like write everything you are thinking like about the poem and it will come out like just how you want it to. I used to like put in some words and it didn't make sense. And then I just wrote what I what was thinking and it made so much sense to me. (I: W.ID.IN)

Irene enjoyed writing the poem because she felt that it was about her. This perspective contrasts with what Hector and Ashley described. For those two students, poetry did not provide room to insert much of their identity, because they were concerned foremost with meeting either their genre expectations for poetry in general or writing in school. Their strategies related to fitting their poems into a mold. Irene, on the other hand, did not feel as though she needed to do this. Her idea was that poetry should be a vehicle for expressing who you are and how you feel. As long as the poem spoke the truth and made sense to her, Irene felt as though she had met her *own* genre expectations, which superseded any unstated but implicit requirement to write in a particular form in order to please the teacher. Thus her main strategy was to write from the heart about what she felt and who she was.

### Conclusion

Meaning making during writing, because it involves communicating with an audience (real or imagined), is always public in nature. The writer anticipates the reactions of an audience, whether it's the self or others. During reading, unless one engages in a discussion or shares their thoughts about a text through writing, meaning making is largely private and its process is not necessarily revealed. It is mostly internal in the reader's mind. The private nature of reading and the public nature of writing therefore may help to explain why reading strategies may be so different from writing ones. It may also explain why students perceived writing to be a more strategic than the reading.

Yet how a student views an audience determines how she will view strategies for writing. In the cases of writing authentically in a dialogic fashion, there are elements of play, honesty, and freedom of expression without the pressure of evaluated for a letter grade. Even when the assignment may be given in school, the students' views about the purposes for the assignment shape how they decide how to convey their message. It is the student's perception of the genre and not the genre or assignment itself that determines how the student will attend to her writing. In the excerpts about poetry, Irene tended to describe how the medium allowed her to dialogue with herself and get to the "meaning of something" more than a story. Hector and Ashley, however, did not view poetry in a similar light. They viewed poetry as IRE writing—or writing for the teacher in order to receive an evaluative grade. For Hector, writing science fiction provided him an outlet to play with ideas and write freely in order to share this writing with peers. For Ashley, journal writing afforded her this kind of writing freedom and she was able to use it as a way to dialogue with herself, much in the way that Irene used poetry. Since Tyrone saw all school writing, regardless of genre, as being part of an IRE cycle of writing for the

teacher to receive an evaluative grade, he was only able to find freedom of expression in his writing outside of school.

The genre perceptions that students hold, in turn, affect the ways in which students think about writing for an audience. This anticipation of how an audience will receive one's writing then leads to strategizing about how one will utilize form and shape content. The salience of addressing an audience in the larger scale survey data and the focal students' surveys and interviews reveals that writing always has to take into account the presentation of self—especially because it makes one's thinking public since the written form always has the potential to be read by another. In many ways, this limits the writer from having the freedom to flexibly use strategies however they want. The writer's strategies always stem, first and foremost, from reaching a particular audience.

## Chapter 5: What Students Actually Do when They Read

This chapter examines how the focal students approached reading when they were asked to read in response to texts that could be given as school assignments. In it, I compare students' actual use of reading strategies to their perceptions about strategy use. The chapter provides a complement to Chapter 3, which reports on the strategies that students perceive to use, by investigating the focal students' actual use of strategies when they are asked to "think aloud" while reading three different types of nonfiction texts: a literary narrative, a persuasive article, and an expository historical excerpt that could be considered a hybrid genre that includes both narrative and expository elements. In short, this chapter investigates whether the focal students *really* do what they say and think they do.

In Chapter 3, I found that, although the survey and interviews asked the focal students to discuss individual or discrete strategies (e.g. summarizing, questioning, visualizing, etc.) in general, the students' responses during the interviews revealed that they viewed the utility of these strategies differently, depending on the genre and social context<sup>2</sup> in which the strategies were enacted. To capture *how* the focal students actually utilized strategies in a variety of genres, this chapter is organized by the three kinds of think aloud texts, which each represent a different genre. At the end of the chapter, I also return briefly to key findings from Chapter 3 in order to discuss how the strategies that students actually use compare to what they perceive they use.

While I originally intended to trace the reported strategies in Chapter 3 and to map them onto students' think aloud protocols, I found that the strategies that students used in their think aloud protocols could not be parceled easily into discrete entities. The think aloud protocols revealed that, like the reading process itself, enacting strategies was full of complexity, and single strategies were hardly ever used in isolation. Instead, multiple strategies intersected and overlapped as they were employed together in order to assist the students in the process of reading and making inferences, which aided in the construction of their situation models (Kintsch, 1998). At times, certain strategies played a more central role than others. Which strategies became main versus sub-strategies for each focal student depended on the genre, the specific comprehension difficulties experienced, the inferences made, and the student's approach to reading.

### Reading the Literary Narrative

Of the three kinds of think aloud texts, the literary narrative was the least difficult for the focal students to read. Based on their think aloud protocols, it was evident that the focal students recognized that the literary narrative would have a plot or storyline which got resolved, understood the importance of character and its development, and used prior knowledge to fit the events of the story into a theme. Even when the focal students faced comprehension difficulties while reading the literary narrative, their familiarity with the genre led them to get beyond these

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<sup>2</sup> While students mentioned how they viewed and used strategies in different social contexts in Chapter 3, the think aloud methodology used for this chapter's data collection controlled the context in which strategies were used. Therefore, I was unable to explore how students actually enacted strategies in various social contexts. In future studies, it would be beneficial to examine how context could affect students' use of strategies.

difficulties and to continue focusing on the development of plot, character, and theme in order to develop their situation models. Furthermore, the students were aware that reading narrative privileged an aesthetic stance in which the reader's response to the text was personal and tied directly to his or her experiences with other texts and with life. The students' creation of inferences and use of strategies was guided by knowing how to read the genre. Yet how they created inferences and used strategies to create a situation model differed from student to student.

In order to show the commonalities, as well as the range of students' think aloud protocols, I have taken passages from Richard Wright's narrative, *Black Boy*, and have juxtaposed them with what students said about the text. The student's reading of Wright's words has been included in some instances to make it easier to figure out where the student was "located" in the text at a particular moment. Wright's text is presented in italics in order to differentiate the actual text from the student's words. In places where the student misreads a word as it occurred in the text, the actual word from Wright's text is placed in brackets and italicized.

### **Hypothesizing Reveals the Use of Additional Strategies and Inferences**

The selection that the focal students read from *Black Boy* contained no mention of a father or father figure until the point in the text in which the mother, in response to Wright's hunger and complaints, asked, "Where's your father?" While this question was somewhat ambiguous because there had been no prior mention of the father, there were clues in the text that Wright's hunger likely related to his father's absence. The father's absence plays an important role in the plot because it relates to the central problem of poverty that drives the characters' actions and reactions and forms the basic backdrop for Wright's "coming of age." Examining how the focal students made sense of this part shed light on how they used strategies and inferences to create their situation model of the narrative. It also revealed individual students' patterns for reading and approaching the text. All four of the focal students created more than one hypothesis about what had taken place with the father. The foci of the students' hypotheses and the process of constructing them, however, varied.

In this section of text, Wright expressed frustrations to his mother about being hungry and not having any food in the house. The first mention of Wright's father comes at the end of this part.

*"But I'm hungry. I want to eat."*

*"You'll have to wait."*

*"But I want to eat now."*

*"But there's nothing to eat," she told me.*

*"Why?"*

*"Just because there's none," she explained.*

*"But I want to eat," I said, beginning to cry.*

*"You'll just have to wait," she said again.*

*"But why?"*

*"For God to send some food."*

*"When is He going to send it?"*

*"I don't know."*

*"But I'm hungry!"*

*She was ironing and she paused and looked at me with tears in her eyes.*

*“Where’s your father?” she asked me (Wright, 1945, p. 22).*

In order to make sense of the question posed by Wright’s mother at the end of this passage, the focal students had to make inferences based on what was in the text and their background knowledge. All of the students understood that the question pointed to the father’s absence at the present time. Yet only some of them made the connection between the father’s absence and the mother’s emotional state, which held clues about what could have taken place between the couple.

After Hector finished reading this portion of the text, I asked him what he was thinking and he replied with his impressions and understanding about what was taking place. He relied largely on his situation model but did not necessarily back his inferences with facts from the text.

Hector: Uh, they, they are probably a poor family and that’s why they don’t have any food. And his father is at work and he hasn’t come back or something.

Monica: What is your mind doing now?

Hector: Um, thinking, uh like she says *“For God to send me some food.”* That’s that makes me think when like when we’re gonna go eat. Like my family when we eat we pray for the, we pray to God for the food that he gave us...

*I stared in bewild bewilderment. Yes, it was true that my father had not come home to sleep for many days now and I could make as much noise as I wanted. Though I had not known why he was absent, I had been glad that he was not there to shout his restrictions at me. But it had never occurred to me that his absence would mean that there would be no food.*

*“I don’t know,” I said.*

*“Who brings food into the house?” my mother asked me.*

*“Papa,” I said. “He always bought food.”*

*“Well, your father ain’t [isn’t] here now,” she said.*

*“Where is he?”*

*“I don’t know,” she said.*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Hector: Uh, maybe they’re thinking wrong and the the dad is working harder or something. That’s why he hasn’t showed up.

Based on Wright’s hunger and the mother’s comments that there was no food, Hector was able to gather that the family was poor. He then hypothesized and inferred that Wright’s “father is at work and he hasn’t come back or something.” There was no indication in the text that Wright’s father was working to support the family, yet Hector drew upon his understanding of a traditional societal norm that men are providers for their families and must work hard to put food on the table. He used his personal knowledge of the world to create this inference and scenario. As he continued to think aloud, Hector mentioned that his own family prayed to God to thank him for the food that they ate. While he made a personal connection, Hector did not bring this connection back to the text. He missed the point that the mother did not know when Wright would have his next meal again and that she felt as though the provision of food was out of her

hands and, therefore, up to God. He also overlooked Wright's mother's tears before she asked about the whereabouts of the father.

Although the text in this section explicitly mentioned that the father had been absent for *many days*, Hector continued to keep the same situation model, holding onto the idea that the father was probably working even harder to support the family—positing that “maybe they’re [Wright and his mother are] thinking wrong.” While Hector had some inkling that the father’s absence was irresponsible, he did not revise his situation model to fit it with new information. Instead he privileged his existing situation model over what was revealed in the text and continued to insist that hard work was the reason for the father’s absence. He only began to revise this notion after he read that Wright’s mother was going to find a job.

- Hector:           *“But I’m hungry,” I whimpered, stomping my feet.  
“Well you’ll have to wait until I get a job and buy food,” she said.  
As the days slid past the image of my father became associated  
with my pangs of hunger, and whenever, I felt hunger I thought of  
him with a deep biological bitterness.*
- Monica:           What are you thinking?
- Hector:           Uh, maybe his, maybe his parents got separated or something.

At this point, Hector created a new hypothesis based on his inferences. Still uncertain about what happened to the father, he was unable to completely discard the notion that the father could be working hard. However, he was willing to speculate that “maybe” the parents were separated or no longer living together since the mother had to find a job. As new information contradicted his current situation model, he constructed two possible scenarios related to the father’s absence. He would hold onto both of these possibilities until further evidence in the text disproved one of the scenarios. Until the plot proves otherwise, the aesthetic nature of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) a literary narrative makes it possible for one to create and hold onto interpretations and hypotheses about characters and their motivations. Holding onto multiple options is also consistent with Kintsch’s construction-integration model, which explains how a reader might figure out the meaning of an ambiguous word that has either an anaphoric relationship to another word or multiple meanings. According to Kintsch (1998), the reader *constructs* several possible meanings for the word and sorts them out as the reader encounters the context surround the word. The process of sorting out possible meanings is referred to as the *integration* component of the model, in which each meaning is assessed by the reader through a constraint satisfaction process that selects the most appropriate meaning and suppresses others due based on what fits best with the context. Hector’s sorting of several hypotheses related to his construction and integration of a plausible scenario, which would provide the setting or backdrop for the plot and went beyond comprehending an individual word in context. Furthermore, he still had to apply the “constraint satisfaction” rule to figure out what happened to the father and thus invoke the construction-integration process.

The other focal students also speculated about Wright’s father’s whereabouts and the reason for his absence. However, unlike Hector, who tended to focus on the big picture and forego his attention to detail, these students used the text as a way to anchor their inferences and to get into the shoes of the characters. After reading how the mother stated that Wright’s father was not present and that she did not know where he was, Tyrone used the details presented by Wright to make inferences about the characters’ actions.

Tyrone: Like, uh, I guess his dad and his mom uh are separated...well, either that or he's just trying to get away from the family for a while, but I think they're separated 'cause um cause she was crying up here. Well, it says she had tears in her eyes, but I'm not really sure.

Noting the tears in the mother's eyes, Tyrone related the mother's emotional state to the father's absence. While Tyrone also hypothesized, as Hector did, about what might have happened to the father, Tyrone's inferences focused on the mother's distress which led him to think of two possibilities: the father and mother either were separated or the father had temporarily left the family. As he clarified his thinking about what was taking place, Tyrone reasoned that the scenario involved more than a temporary absence since the mother was crying. Furthermore, he attributed the father's absence to the father's choices and not to mother's actions. Although Tyrone talked little about his personal life, he had revealed to me at one point that his parents were separated and that he had an older half brother who helped him out with his school work from time to time. It was possible that Tyrone's parents' separation and the brief mention of Wright's mother's tears were enough to trigger memories of his personal experience and help him empathize with the mother in this situation.

While the two male students' hypotheses drew upon their prior knowledge based on their world views and experiences, Hector's hypotheses tended to privilege his knowledge *over* what was stated in the text. This could be seen in Hector's connection to praying during before a meal and his idea that the father could be working hard take care of the family. Tyrone's hypotheses, on the other hand, incorporated prior knowledge *only* when it was supported by details in the text. Although both boys were incorporating their experiences "aesthetically" into their readings, Hector had actually overlooked rather than fully considered what was in the text when he created his interpretations.

Similar to Tyrone, Ashley also used details from the text and her prior knowledge to create and substantiate hypotheses about the text. While the two male focal students' hypotheses about character tended to further the overall plot, Ashley used her hypotheses to create rich portraits about what was taking place with characters in the moment, as well as develop her understanding of the plot.

Ashley's hypothesizing about what happened to the father began at an earlier point in reading the text than it did for the two male focal students. In addition, her segments of think aloud noticeably were longer and more developed than those of the other focal students. This portion of her think aloud showed how she drew upon two kinds of prior knowledge: one that was based on her life experience and another that came from her previous understanding of what had taken place earlier in the text.

Ashley: *"But I want to eat now."*  
*"But there's nothing to eat," she told me.*  
*"Why?"* So, now I'm thinking, a- definitely it's more clear [than before] that she doesn't have food. She can't get him food. There's like no way to get food. *"Just because there's none," she explained.* So I'm guessing maybe there's no father.  
*"But I want to eat," I said, beginning to cry.*

*“You’ll just have to wait,” she said again.*

*“But why?”* Um...I- she’s just brushing him off.

Um, *“For God to send some food”*...Oh, okay, so now she’s definitely like saying that- almost not gonna come, because I mean its never- god’s never like beamed down food before, at least I don’t think (laugh).

*“When is He going to send it?”*

*“I don’t know.”*

*“But I’m hungry.”* So like maybe he’s really young, ‘cuz he doesn’t really understand that that’s definitely not gonna happen. She was ig- *she was ignoring [ironing] and she paused*...wait, oh, *she was ironing and she paused and looked at me with tears in her eyes.* Okay, so she’s- so now, she’s like kinda at the breaking point. She kinda has to- I think she’s gonna explain to him like...what- like why she doesn’t have enough money or isn’t able to buy food. I’m thinking- if um...if there even- well now I know they’re not homeless because she’s ironing, but I’m wondering like, if they’re living like in the projects like we’re learning about, like if um, they don’t have any money because she’s not able to work or, you know, I don’t know...

Ashley constantly connected what she was reading in the present to what she had read previously in the text. This was her way of confirming and/or adjusting her situation model as she read. When Wright’s mother told him that there was nothing to eat, Ashley compared this information to what she had read in an earlier, stating that it was even “more clear” now that the mother has not been able to provide food for the family. This information strengthened her previous situation model. She then built upon this knowledge and inferred that “there’s no father” since the mother was assuming the role of being a provider for the family. As she continued to read and think aloud, she commented that Wright’s mother was “brushing him off” when the mother stated that Wright would just have to wait. Such a comment contained glimpses as to how Ashley was building a situation model about the mother’s character. She noted that Wright could have been very young at the time of this exchange since he did not understand why they did not have any food in the house and that God could not just magically send it to the family at any time. Although Ashley initially miscued when she got to the word *ironing* and mistook it for “ignoring,” her replacement made sense given her previous notion that the mother had previously brushed off Wright’s question. Yet she adjusted her situation model about the mother’s character when she found out that the mother had *tears in her eyes*.

At this juncture, she recognized that the mother had been suffering emotionally and “was at a breaking point.” After this revision of her situation model, she created a new hypothesis that the mother would explain why she was not able to buy food for the family. She continued speculating about the family’s financial situation and revisited a former hypothesis in which she had wondered if the family might have been homeless. This hypothesis was one that she had created at the very beginning of reading the total selection. Using the clue that the mother had been ironing, she discarded this possibility and wondered if the family might be living “in the projects,” connecting the scenario in this text to another text that she had been reading currently in English class. During reading, Ashley constantly checked and revised her situation model and

adjusted former hypotheses and inferences to create interpretations that were in line with the author's words.

Irene combined her hypotheses with summaries that restated, or, more accurately, paraphrased in her own words, what she had just read. I label these restatements as summaries because she was not simply retelling the story. Instead these mini-summaries organized what she deemed to be the most salient information in the text. They also became her "jumping off" point for further interpretation about the characters and their situation.

Irene:           *"But I want to eat," I said begging and crying [beginning to cry].*  
                  *"You'll just have to wait," she said again.*  
                  *"But why?"*  
                  *"For God to send some food?[/]" (Irene reads this as a question)*  
                  *"When is he going to send it?"*  
                  *"I don't know."*  
                  *"But I'm hungry!"* So what I could tell from right there is that they don't have a lot of food in their house cuz she's saying he's really hungry and she's saying we'll wait for when God sends some food, and that's like they don't have any food.  
                  *She was ironing and she paused and looked at me with tears in her eyes.*  
                  *"Where's your father?" she asked me.* Oh right there. So, I think I don't know if his father, (cough) like is, is not home, either he isn't home, has been gone for days or also he's not with them no more, like he left them.

Like Ashley's miscues, Irene's miscues during this part of her think aloud revealed her empathy for Wright and her acknowledgement of his frustration over the situation. She miscued when she read *"beginning to cry"* as *"begging and crying,"* which also fit the context, given the fact that Wright was very hungry and had not eaten in days. When she reached the mother's explanation that they must wait *"for God to send some food,"* she read this like a question, which seemed to emphasize the mother's uncertainty, worry, and doubt about when the mother would be able to provide food for her children. As Irene thought aloud, she explained that there was not much food in the house and then summarized what was taking place in the passage: Wright was hungry and the mother said that they must wait for God to send food. While she initially noted that "they don't have a lot of food," her summarized restatements about what was taking place in the text led her to the conclusion that "they don't have any food." As she continued, she stopped and thought aloud after the question, *"Where's your father?"* Instead of restating the text in summary form, she marked what she thought was important by stating "Oh right there." She then hypothesized a few possibilities about the father's whereabouts: the father is temporarily not home, the father has been gone for a few days, or the father could have left the family.

Like Ashley and Tyrone, she based her hypotheses on textual evidence. However, these hypotheses were not necessarily built from inferences about the finer details, such as the mother's tears or the fact that the mother was unable to provide food for the family, which implied that another parental figure (i.e. the father) was typically the provider. Picking up on these details and using inferences allowed Ashley and Tyrone to reach their hypotheses earlier than Hector and Irene. Although all four of the students were aware of how to read the narrative

and created hypotheses that later led them to understand Wright's change of position in the family due to his father's absence, Ashley and Tyrone had more nuanced understandings of the internal states of the characters, especially because their inferences about the father's absence also included inferences about *how* the other characters were being emotionally affected by it.

### Using Theme to Support Plot and Character Development

Students also built upon their situation models through using theme as a lens to interpret the events and actions in the story. As the focal students continued reading, all of them understood that the father was no longer living with the family and would not be returning anytime soon. Ashley and Hector explicitly connected the father's absence to a larger "coming of age" theme. Using their knowledge about the father's absence, Hector and Ashley were able to infer that Wright's position in the family was also changing as his mother began to ask him to take on the responsibility of going to the store to buy groceries.

Ashley: *She took me to the corner store and showed me the way. I was proud; I felt like a grown up. Oh, so he's kinda taking in the fatherly role, maybe he's the oldest. Or maybe he's the only boy.*

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Hector: *One evening my mother told me that uhhh thereafter I would have to do the shopping for food. She took me to the corner store to show me the way. I was proud; I felt like a grownup. The next afternoon I looped the basket over my arm and I went down the pavement toward the store. When I reached the corner, a gang of boys grabbed me, knocked me down, snatched the basket, took the money, and sent me running home in in panic. That evening I told my mother what had happened, but she made no comment; she sat down at at once, wrote another note, gave me more money, and sent me out to the grocery again. I crept down the steps and saw the same gang of boys playing down the street. I ran back into the house.*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Hector: Uh, since he has no father no more he has to be the man of the house. And he has to do, uh, the groceries and help out his mother.

Monica: And why do you say that?

Hector: Uh, because she gave him money to buy food at the store. But then he got beat up by, by these boys.

Ashley and Hector viewed grocery shopping as a new responsibility that represented a turning point for Wright and connected the moment to the larger theme of Wright's transformation from boy into man. They recognized, that without a father in the house, Wright would be expected to take on the role of the head male in the family. With this "coming of age" theme to guide their reading and comprehension, Ashley and Hector integrated the theme into their understanding of the plot and Wright's relationship to his mother.

The “coming of age” theme helped them to understand Wright’s mother’s motivations for insisting that he get the groceries despite the threat of being beaten up again by the gang of boys. Hector interpreted, “His mom is trying to uh teach him to stand up for himself no matter what. Cuz he’s gonna grow up to be a man someday and he has to learn how to fight.” Hector used this lens to interpret the remainder of the excerpt. Ashley also understood the mother’s motivations, but disagreed with her method, feeling that giving Wright a stick to defend himself against the boys would only encourage more violence. “Okay, she’s definitely like trying to teach him self-defense, but I don’t think that’s the best way to do it, ‘cuz giving someone a heavy stick...that might injure another boy, you know.”

In contrast to Hector and Ashley, Tyrone and Irene did not associate the mother’s actions with Wright’s “coming of age.” Yet Tyrone likewise connected these actions to a larger theme: having the courage to stand up to one’s fears in the face of daunting challenges. This could be considered a variation of the “coming of age” theme, since an individual often must face his or her fear as he or she makes the transition from childhood to adulthood. However, Tyrone’s focus on this theme had less to do with this transition and more to do with confronting his fears in the moment.

Tyrone: *“You just stay right there [where]”—oh, “you just stay right where you are,” she said in a deadly tone. “I’m gonna teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself.”* So, like, I guess she doesn’t want him to come in the house until he learns to not be scared of anybody. Um, where am I? Oh. *She went into the house and I waited, terrified, wondering what she was a-- what she was about. Presently, she returned with more money and another note; she also had a long heavy stick. “Take this money this note and this stick,” she said. “Go to the store and buy those groceries. If those boys bother you, then fight.”* I was baffled. *My mother was telling me to fight, a thing that she had never done before.* So I guess he was surprised because his mother had never told him that he had to fight before. I guess his mother normally fought his battles for him

Monica: What makes you say that?

Tyrone: ‘Cause he said, it says he was baffled when she told him that he had to fight. Says she never told him that before. So, I guess like, um, that’s the first time. Uhh, (talking in the background) oh. *“But I’m scared,” I said. “Don’t you come into this house until you’ve gotten those groceries,” she said.* So, I guess until he learns to fight for himself and get the groceries, he can’t come into the house.

For these three students, the theme explained why the mother was acting in ways that might not be considered by society as typically maternal. Although the students might not have agreed with the mother’s methods for helping Wright face his fears (as revealed in Ashley’s comment that this was not the “best way” to teach Wright a lesson), they still understood the mother’s perspective that it was necessary for Wright to confront his tormentors and his fear.

Irene was the only focal student who did not use a theme to guide her understanding of the text. Instead, she created two possible inferences related to the mother's intentions.

Irene: *I started up the steps, seeking shelter of the house. 'Don't you come in here,' my mother warned me. I froze in my tracks and stared at her. 'But they're coming after me,' I said. 'You just stay right where you are,' she said in a deadly tone. 'I'm going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself.'*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Irene: Well maybe her either her his mom knew that they were gonna beat him and told the gang. She's that bad and mean. Or maybe she's, she's, she's gonna teach him how to fight and stand up for himself... because she's like tonight I'm gonna- I'm gonna teach you how to fight for yourself and stand up. So- *She went to house and I waited, terrified, wondering what she was about.* (breathes loudly) *Presently she returned with no more money, and another note; she also had a long heavy stick. 'Take this money, this note, and this stick,'* So I think that she's going to tell him, she's gonna tell the kid that, to either- if they do something to him like use the stick to hit them.

Unlike the other focal students, who used the theme to guide their understanding here, Irene drew upon an approach which she used earlier and created more than one hypotheses to help explain the mother's actions: either the mom knew the gang would beat him up and sent him out because she was "that bad and mean" or she was "gonna teach him how to fight and stand up for himself." While her second interpretation was consistent with the "overcoming fear" theme, it does not constitute a "theme" because it was an isolated, not recurrent, idea that influenced the processing of additional text. As Irene continued to read, Irene aligned her situation model with the hypothesis that the mother was "bad and mean."

Irene: *'Go to the store and buy some [those] groceries. If those boy boys bother you, then fight.'* I was baffled. *My mother was telling me to fight, a thing that she would never done that I had she had never done before. 'But I'm scared,' I said. 'Don't you come into the [this] house til [until] you've gotten those groceries,' she said. 'They'll beat me, they'll beat me,' I said. 'Then stay in the streets. Don't come back here!'* That's, I think that's messed up of his mom, when she sees that the gang is beating him up, she's telling him to go back down over there to, to get groceries. *I ran up the steps and tried to force my way past her into the house. A stinging slap came into [on] my jaw. I stood on the sidewalk, crying. 'Please, let me wait until tomorrow,' I begged. 'No,' she said, '[Go now!] If you come back into the house without those groceries, I'll whip you!'* Well, I think his mom is aggressive and like really mean to him because she slapped him and wouldn't let him in without the groceries.

Although she recognized that the mother wanted Wright to “fight for himself,” Irene focused on the situation model that viewed the mother as an “aggressive” woman, who was not a sympathetic woman—especially because she allowed her child to get beaten up by a gang of boys. While Hector and Tyrone, the two male focal students, saw Wright’s mother’s demand as a necessary step towards helping Wright “learn” how to stand up for himself, Irene thought that the mother’s directive was “messed up” and unwarranted. If she had connected the mother’s actions to a larger theme, however, she may have been able to view the mother in another light.

### **Summary**

Understanding that literary narratives often contain universal themes structured the way that the students approached the text. It also gave them insight into the character’s motivations and the plot. Three of the four focal students invoked common literary themes to shape their readings of the text, while the fourth, Irene, focused on generating and evaluating hypotheses. The structure of this literary narrative contained a familiar linear short story format with the following basic elements: exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution. Regardless of whether students read the story through a thematic lens or one that privileged creating and assessing hypotheses, their strategies for building a situation model did not interfere with their understanding of the story as a whole. They were still able to identify the main elements of the story even if they made different inferences along the way.

### **Reading the Persuasive Article**

The pseudo-persuasive article “*I’m not lying, I’m telling a future truth really*” from the New York Times by Benedict Carey was the most difficult of the selected think aloud texts for the focal students. I call this a pseudo-persuasive article because it blends informative and persuasive elements in order to both inform and persuade the reader that some forms of lying or exaggeration could be considered positive and beneficial from a psychological standpoint. Elements of the persuasive genre such as the use of claims and counterclaims appear in the article, but the author never explicitly takes a stance on whether or not he agrees or disagrees that it is good to exaggerate about one’s accomplishments. Instead, the author employs rhetorical questions and devices at the beginning and end of the article to question when exaggeration or a lie might go too far. The vocabulary (e.g. “embroiderers,” “dissembling,” “inflammatory,” “transgression,” etc.) was challenging and the author’s use of examples at the beginning and end of the article, which were intended to engage, entertain, and “hook” the reader, were written in a tone and style that stood in contrast to the rest of the article. The focal students’ think aloud protocols revealed that notwithstanding the challenging vocabulary and change in style, they were able to still “get” several of the key points made by the author. Although all four of the students understood several key points, only Ashley was able to comprehend the gist of the article as a whole.

### **Looking for the Narrative**

All four of the focal students, at one point or another, superimposed the idea that reading the article was like reading a narrative. After reading the title “*I’m not lying, I’m telling a future truth really*,” Irene, Tyrone, and Ashley predicted that the story could be about a person who was perceived to be a liar but was actually telling the truth.

Irene: That it's gonna be like, a story that this kid is lying—is not lying, but is telling the truth...he's going to find out something about the future, or something.

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Tyrone: Uh. It's the story about somebody. Everybody thinks he's- or he or she is lying. But...they don't think they want people to think that I guess.

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Ashley: Um I'm thinking that maybe it's about a person who thinks they can tell the future, and like no one believes them and thinks that they're totally wrong.

The title may have sounded to the students like a line of dialogue in which someone was speaking. Using the title and details presented in the text, Ashley commented that the article likely would center around one person because the title was written in first person:

Okay, I have a guess I think of what this is going to be about because I think it's about one specific person because of the title, "I'm not lying," so I think it's talking about how, at the beginning they're going to talk about how they found that's it's possible to tell when someone's lying, and then like they'll meet someone or something who thinks they can't lie, like a lie detector doesn't beat them.

The title may have led the students to expect a narrative, especially because the use of first person was reminiscent of how a character might narrate a story. While the students predicted what the text would be about and used the narrative genre as a frame, neither of these strategies led them towards comprehending the text. The first paragraph and its following sentences confused the focal students, leading Hector and Irene, for example, to believe that the article would be a story with "real" characters and plot. In the opening paragraph, the author presented several unrealistic larger-than-life scenarios as examples to illustrate how people sometimes exaggerate so greatly that their stories become entirely unbelievable. The author most likely intended to use these examples to capture the reader's attention.

*Some tales are so tall that they trip over their own improbable feats, narrative cracks and melodrama. That one-on-one playground victory over Kobe Bryant back in the day; the 34 hours in labor without painkillers; the former girlfriend or boyfriend who spoke eight languages and was a secret agent besides (Carey, 2008).*

Each of these scenarios could easily fuel the students' imagination for a fantastic—fantasy rather than reality based—story. The author's reference to the tall tale further may have led some of the students to expect that the article would contain a narrative. This led Hector and Irene to extrapolate a story, complete with "characters":

Hector: Uh, I know it has something to do with teens, 'cause they're talking about grade point average, girlfriend and boyfriend, all that, all that stuff.

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Irene: Well before the little paragraph didn't give me much detail, but, if you want... either about couples or something.

Monica: Why do you say that?

Irene: Because it said, "the former girlfriend or boyfriend who spoke eight languages."

Both Hector and Irene drew upon their background knowledge as well as *some* details from the text. Yet they relied on what was "overpotent" (Thorndike, 1917) for them rather than how the details from an example scenario fit in with the rest of the exaggerated scenarios given by the author in the first paragraph. If the article were a story, Hector and Irene, as ninth graders, likely would have been able to relate and connect to characters that were teens and couples.

Tyrone and Ashley, however, realized that the article was structured differently from a narrative. Although Ashley had projected possible storylines, she recognized that the article could be organized in another manner:

Oh okay, that was a weird, that's a weird first paragraph. It's a lot of different um ideas in one little thing, like without explaining them. So hopefully I'll get it 'cause I'm lost right now.

She recognized that the author was presenting "ideas" through the use of example scenarios. Although Ashley did not understand the author's point yet, she realized that the article could be organized around ideas, as much as it could be centered on the experience of individuals. Tyrone also recognized that the author was mentioning several different scenarios but he was not completely sure about how they all related.

Tyrone: I still have no clue 'cause it's still a whole bunch of different things. They went from tall tales to melodrama to one-on-one basketball. And 34 hours without painkillers and a boyfriend or girlfriend. Uh. I don't get this. Yeah, *uh-huh, really. Is it closing time yet? Yet in milder-in milder doses, self-serving exaggeration can be nearly impossible to detect, experts say, and there are several explanations.*

Monica: What're you thinking now?

Tyrone: I'm thinking the story is about like lying and exaggeration and stuff.

He remarked that the article was a story about "lying and exaggeration and stuff." Unlike Hector and Irene who thought about the subject of the article like characters in a story, Tyrone strategically used structural clues by taking into account the text that preceded the examples—which, in this case, was the title—and the text that immediately followed them to help him figure

out the topic. As they continued to read, Tyrone and Ashley eventually discarded the use of a narrative frame to hold parts of the article together.

Hector and Irene, on the other hand, continued to view the article as a story. Towards reading the middle of the text, Hector noted, “I’m trying to think. I don’t get this story.” Irene also referred to the article as a story as she addressed the writing prompt that followed, “Mmm, I’m thinking that... I’m going to put in a claim from the story to this [the prompt].” They expected that the information in the article would be presented as a series of causally linked states or actions.

Irene: Well, it’s confusing ‘cause I don’t really understand what’s going on, ‘cause first it starts about grade point averages and then about truth twisting. And then about the lying or keeping the secret, so it’s kinda confusing.

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Hector: Ahh, I don’t know what the story was about... ‘cause they’re talking about, first they talk about something, and then they talk about another thing, and then, and then they go to senators and all that.

The two of them had hoped that any confusion would become resolved in the text in the same way that ambiguity in a story is typically clarified as one nears the story’s climax and resolution. Hector’s comment referring to an example about a senator given by the author at the end of the article reveals how he felt that the conclusion did not aid his comprehension and only served to confuse him further. Having the expectation that the parts of the selection would be linked in a causal chain may have led Hector and Irene, at crucial points in the text, to miss the author’s signals and cues about the organization of the essay, which was more a compare and contrast or claim-counterclaim structure. By contrast, Ashley and Tyrone’s understanding that the organization of the text centered on the development of “ideas” about a topic may have made them more attuned to recognizing key transitions and links between different parts.

### **Recognizing Cues and Cohesion Despite Difficult Vocabulary**

Although the article was not structured like a narrative, the students who read it as if it were a narrative were still able to access important ideas. Yet their comprehension of these key ideas was not enough to guarantee their comprehension of the article as a whole. In other words, they were unable to build a complete and coherent model of meaning for the text, even though they did have flashes of understanding based on particular details in the reading. Only Ashley was able to put the different ideas together in order to understand the author’s argument.

Even more surprising, all four of the focal students clearly struggled with key vocabulary as they read the text, but these struggles did not necessarily keep them from understanding essential points. While the text contained challenging words, the author repeated and elaborated the ideas through the use of examples, explanations, and quotations to emphasize main points, as illustrated in the three segments of the passage below. I have underlined specific words in order to emphasize the students’ difficulties with key vocabulary.

*Psychologists have studied deception from all sides and have found that it usually puts a psychological or physical strain on the person doing the dissembling. People with guilty knowledge — of a detail from a crime scene, for example — tend to show signs of stress, as measured by heart and skin sensors, under pointed questioning.*

*Trying to hold onto an inflammatory secret is mentally exhausting, studies have found, and the act of suppressing the information can cause thoughts of it to flood the consciousness. When telling outright lies, people tend to look and sound tenser than usual.*

*“Specifically, people are especially more tense when lying, compared to telling the truth, when they are highly motivated to get away with their lies and when they are lying about a transgression,” said Bella DePaulo, a visiting professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara (Carey, 2008).*

In the first sentence of the first paragraph of this passage, students had difficulty with several of the key words (e.g. “deception,” “psychological,” and “dissembling”). They all thought aloud after this sentence either because they freely chose to or I asked them to do so. Hector pondered, “I think they’re talking about people that are psychological or something like that.” He neither understood nor knew how to use the word “psychological,” and even may have confused it with another word that sounded like it, such as psychic. Tyrone, noting that he was trying to figure out what the passage meant, attempted to use context clues as he conjectured, “*Doing the dissembling...I guess they’re talking about the people that’s listening to it [what subjects said in the studies].*” Irene also clearly did not understand the first part and her jumbled explanation revealed her confusion:

Well that the um, psycho-psychologists um study like different things and, and they put everything in like this um, psycho-psychological um, like, like this, I think um the strain on like some person who doesn’t have the ability to do stuff.

Since the vocabulary was problematic, Irene’s strategy was to substitute generic all-encompassing words, such as “everything” and “stuff,” in place of words she did not understand while still trying to paraphrase the sentence. She attempted to paraphrase by translating the words into everyday speech. Ashley, who did not struggle with the vocabulary in the first part, explained, “I knew all those words, but I don’t understand the sentence. So the, they’re studying lying from all sides, um, and it puts a mental or physical strain on the people doing it. I think.” She paraphrased the sentence, substituting familiar words for the more difficult ones. Yet unlike Irene who used generic words, Ashley’s word choices were specific enough to show that she understood the definitions fairly well. Her additional comment, “I think,” revealed a hedge that despite her knowledge of the words, she still was not sure she fully understood what she has read.

The first sentence in the second paragraph, with words such as “inflammatory,” “suppressing,” and “consciousness,” likewise was difficult for the focal students. In addition, the syntax of the sentence was quite complex because it was a complex-compound sentence that began with a gerund phrase: “*Trying to hold onto an inflammatory secret is mentally exhausting,*

*studies have found, and the act of suppressing the information can cause thoughts of it to flood the consciousness.”*

Students’ think aloud protocols from this paragraph revealed how the students attempted to dissect and keep track of sentence parts in order to figure out its meaning.

Ashley:           So they figured out that like keeping a secret when you’re on the spot is really hard. So they’re probably like pressuring people to tell the truth.

Although it is difficult to know whether or not Ashley understood all of the words, she was able to capture the gist of the sentence. She also made an inference about “pressuring people to tell the truth,” which could be tied to the example mentioned at the end of the first paragraph in which the author referred to people with “guilty knowledge” who had been questioned about a crime scene.

Tyrone similarly linked his comprehension of the latter half of the first paragraph to what was taking place at the beginning of the second one.

Tyrone:           Like um. They start sounding different, like they’re tense I guess. It says it floods their consciousness. So I guess that they can’t stop thinking about it [the secret] or something.

He mentioned that those who withheld the truth sounded different and were tense. He then repeated a phrase from the second paragraph and followed that up by an inference that people who withheld the truth would not be able to stop thinking about their secret. Their integration of ideas across paragraphs revealed that they understood that withholding “guilty knowledge” and keeping a secret could both be construed as forms of lying.

Hector and Irene, on the other hand, struggled with the words and did not attempt to cross paragraphs in their first exploration of clarifying what was taking place in the text. Instead, they directed their attention to local level processing and could not get beyond their focus on unknown words.

Hector:           Uh, uh, people feel exhausting or something.

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Irene:           Well I didn’t understand. I’m going to read it again. *Trying to hold onto an inflammatory secret is mentally exhausting*, so like, they can, like, keeping, like, remembering a secret, like, it can be exhausting for your brain, or for you. *Studies have found, and the act of suppressing the information can*—Oh, so you actually remember all of these things, it um, suppressing, and you get cons-cons, yeah, that word, you know.

Hector referred to “exhausting” as a word that stood out for him, but he was unable to demonstrate that he understood the word or sentence. Irene was able to paraphrase part of the sentence, but struggled with the remainder of it. As with her earlier attempt in which she

attempted to describe what psychologists found in the study referenced by the article, Irene's attempt here represented her struggle to act as if she understood substantial words such as "suppressing." Yet her inability either to define the word or to connect it to the passage revealed her confusion and lack of comprehension.

Despite the focal students' struggles with vocabulary, they were able to demonstrate flashes of understanding of the key idea in the passage. Over the three paragraphs, the text contained local coherence through words related to the topic of lying in ways that could have created a basis for the students' comprehension. Also, the quotation by Bella DePaulo reiterated the discomfort that people experience when they tell a lie. Although some but not all of the focal students understood the words "deception" or "dissembling," all of them comprehended the phrases "guilty knowledge" and "crime scene" in the first sentence. These words could be associated with "secret," "lies," and "lying," which followed in the second and third paragraphs. In order to describe the emotional status of people who withheld the truth, the author used the words, "stress," "tenser," and "tense," respectively over the first, second, and third paragraph. Such cohesion through the repetition of an idea conveyed through an example, an explanation, and a quotation, provided enough textual support to assist the students in their comprehension, regardless of whether or not they understood all the vocabulary. In addition, the sentences with these particular words could relate to the students' own experiences telling lies. Thus, even Hector and Irene, who struggled the most with vocabulary, were still able to draw sound and valid conclusions at the end of the passage through their paraphrasing after reading the quotation by Bella DePaulo.

Hector: Um, I think that the article is about people who lie, people that get stressed out or [some]thing, um, and a little paragraph said that people that lie feel comfortable for getting away with their lies.

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Irene: Well... I agree with what Bella DePaulo said, because it's true, about the, how people get tense when they're lying or they're motivated to get away...

After reading the quotation, Hector summarized the passage and extended his understanding of it to his comprehension of the article as a whole. He understood that people feel stressed when they tell a lie. He also paraphrased the last part of the quotation, replacing "motivated" with "comfortable," and explained that after people have lied they are comfortable with getting away with it. Irene displayed her comprehension by agreeing with the quotation and relating her response to her previous knowledge about how people tend to feel when they lie.

Hector and Irene were able to gather that the act of lying caused the deceiver to feel stress and tension. However, they did not recognize that the article was meant to persuade the reader that certain forms of exaggeration can be psychologically beneficial and that such exaggeration was different from telling outright lies. It was difficult to tell if Hector and Irene were able to separate lying from exaggeration. While they might have understood that lying itself was harmful to both the deceiver and the deceived, they did not recognize how this part fit as a counterclaim to the author's point about exaggeration. Ashley and Tyrone, on the other hand, were able to pick up on key words within the text that signaled the direction of the author's

argument. In addition, these two students also seemed to understand that lying and exaggeration were not the same and that these forms of stretching the truth could be viewed differently if put on a continuum.

### Understanding How to Read the Genre

In order to understand the article and the idea that exaggeration about one's accomplishments was not the same as telling outright lies, the focal students needed to recognize how the example about students who exaggerated their grades contrasted with the previous section about withholding guilty knowledge.

*But a study published in February in the journal Emotion found that exactly the opposite was true for students who exaggerated their grades. The researchers had 62 Northeastern University students fill out a computerized form asking, among other things, for cumulative grade point average. The students were then interviewed while hooked up to an array of sensitive electrodes measuring nervous system activation. The scripted interview covered academic history, goals and grades.*

*The researchers then pulled the students' records, with permission, and found that almost half had exaggerated their average by as much as six-tenths of a point. Yet the electrode readings showed that oddly enough, the exaggerators became significantly more relaxed while discussing their grades (Carey, 2008).*

While all four focal students caught onto the fact that the college students in the study inflated their grade point averages, only some of the focal students noted that this example was being used to build the author's point that this type of exaggeration was not perceived to be the same as a lie that was used to cover up the truth. Hector noticed that the author was signaling a contrast through the example. Yet he was unable to link how the contrast was used to build an argument.

- Hector: *But a study published in February in the journal Emotion found that exactly the opposite was true for students who exaggerated their grades.*
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Hector: I think they're going to compare the other people to the students. *The researchers had 62 Northeastern University students filled out a computer-computerized form asking, among other things, for cumuli-cumuleective [cumulative] grade point average.*
- Monica: What's going through your mind now?
- Hector: Um, how he, they're talking about the students, how some feel, how some feel, how some exaggerate about their grades or stuff like that.

It was likely that Hector picked up on the author's signal through the word "but" and thought this example was a contrast to previous ones. Although Hector explained that he thought the author meant to "compare the other people to the students," he did not discuss this comparison in terms of how the students differed from the previous example of "other people" who lied to cover up the truth. He began to describe "how some [students] feel" but then changed this to "how some

exaggerate.” It was unclear as to whether or not he fully understood the term “exaggerate.” Later when he summarized, “Um, the researchers found something on the students—that they exaggerate too much,” it was difficult to tell whether or not he comprehended the word, especially because he did not explicitly connect exaggeration to lying, which was crucial for comprehending the author’s contrasting examples.

Throughout the text, Hector could not quite figure out how to read the genre. In reading the narrative, he had used the theme as an anchor point for filtering the rest of the text. In reading the article, he attempted to use the *structure* of the genre as a way to anchor his reading. He initially thought the article was going to be structured as a narrative and when he revised this idea, thinking that the article was now to be read as an informative compare and contrast piece, he still insisted that the comparison was about groups of people. As he continued to read, he began to plug additional information into a “comparison” slot. When he read that the researchers found “*a robust effect, the sort of readings you see when people are engaged in a positive social encounter,*” Hector stated, “They’re comparing now, people that are engaged or something.” Here, he misunderstood the use of the word, but also, because he was “lost” in the reading, he did not try to connect the researchers’ findings back to either lying or exaggeration. He still seemed to be under the impression that groups of people were being compared. It was no wonder that he found the article to be confusing.

Tyrone also noticed the contrast between the previous example and the one about students’ grade exaggerations.

Tyrone: Um. Uh. *But a study published in February in the journal Emotion found that exactly the opposite was true for students who exaggerated their grades. The researchers had 62 Northeastern University students fill out a computerized form asking, among other things, for -uh cumt-cumulative or grade point average.*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Tyrone: ...Average. Uh. That she was wrong. Bella. That girl Bella was wrong about what she said because studies found the exact opposite. Um. *The students were* Oh. *The students were then interviewed while hooked up to an array of sensitive electrode-electrods- measuring nervous system acti-ah-activation. The scripted interview covered academic history, goals and grades.*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Tyrone: They were put—they had to do tests to see if it was true or not.

Unlike Hector, Tyrone recognized earlier that there was a connection between lying and exaggeration, when he noted that the article was going to be about “lying and exaggeration and stuff.” He seemed to understand that the contrast would be based on the nature of the lying and exaggeration. As Tyrone continued to read, however, his motivation and attention seemed to wane, and he began to have shorter and shorter responses at the points when he thought out loud. He also became distracted, made random noises, and noted at one point, “I have no idea what I’m thinking right now.” Yet he still was able to gather: “when people are exaggerating, they were more calm than others.” He seemed to understand that those who exaggerated were calmer than those who told outright lies.

In her think aloud, Irene did not make a note of how this section on grade inflation contrasted with the previous examples of lying as the other students did. Although she demonstrated her understanding of the students' exaggeration through an example of her own and recognized that the students' exaggerations were not distinguished as lies by the lie detection equipment, she was unable to differentiate how and why the exaggeration differed from a lie.

- Irene: So, like, let's say, well I'm thinking that if some kid gets an F they exaggerate and they say that they've been doing good, or that they deserve a B, or something like that. *The researchers had 62 Northeastern University students fill out a, out a computerized form asking, among other things, for cum-cum-cumulative (mispronounced cumulative) grade point average.*
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: So maybe the researchers are, they wanted to see how the Northeastern University students thought about, like, the grade point average. *The students were then, then interviewed while hooked up to an array (mispronounced array) of sensitive electrodes measuring nervous system activation.*
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: So maybe um, they were hooked up to the, this one machine that um, well I'm not sure but for me it sounds like the lying detection machine, where, so you can tell the truth. *The scripted interview covered academic history, goals and grades.*
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: That, the um, the interviewer actually worked to help people with their um, academic history, goals and grades. *The researchers then pulled the students' records, with permission, and found that almost half had exaggerated their average by as much as six-tenths of a point. Well I'm guessing that in the, the interview people actually did like exaggerate, like they could put this point, and they exaggerated this much or this less as a point. So. Yet the electrode readings showed that oddly enough, the exaggerators became significantly more relaxed while discussing their grades. Yet the electrode readings showed that oddly enough, the exaggerators became significantly more relaxed while discussing their grades. So maybe they, um, felt more comfortable discussing the grades after taking the inter, the little interview, the electrode interview.*

Instead, Irene made an inference about the nature of the interview, which led her away from understanding what took place for the students. Her idea that the interviewer "actually worked to help people with their um, academic history, goals and grades," came from her background knowledge. It is possible that my role as both an interviewer and observer in her classroom could have led her to believe that the interviewer's intentions in the mentioned study were to assist students with their academic work. During many of my observations, I often ended up talking to students about their interpretation and understanding of various reading and writing assignments. She could have viewed my "chats" with students as being helpful and may have

transferred ideas about my role as an interviewer to what she was reading about the students referenced in the article. Therefore, I could see where she might have developed the notion that the interviewers were assisting the students in the study.

Irene also guessed that during the interview, people exaggerated, but she did not elaborate on how this related to other parts of the text. As she continued to read and think aloud, she created her own narrative surrounding this interview in order to explain why students became more relaxed as they discussed their grades. According to Irene, the students may have “felt more comfortable discussing their grades after” the interview. As a narrative this would make sense: the students first worked with an interviewer who helped them reach their goals and grades; later, this would result in higher grades, which would make the discussion about grades “more comfortable.” Irene’s misunderstanding of this section could be attributed to her lack of awareness of the author’s intention to distinguish exaggeration from lying, interference from her background knowledge, and her creation of a narrative around her inferences (based on her experiences with me) about the interview.

Ashley was the only focal student to recognize how the example about the college students’ grade inflation was different from the telling of lies.

Ashley: *The researchers had 62 North, northwest, northeastern University students fill out the computerized form asking, among other things, for cum-cum-ulative-cum-ulative (mispronounced cumulative) grade point average. The researchers had 62 Northeastern students fill out a computerized, fill out a computerized form asking among other things for cumulative grade point average. So I don’t know if they’re asking, if they’re saying that they had kids fill out a form asking questions about like how they did in school, I don’t really know what it’s asking, but it’s saying that most students lied about their grade point average, I think. That’s what I got out of it. The students were then interviewed while hooked up to an a-hooked up to an array of sensitive electrodes, electroids, measuring, electrodes, measuring nervous system activation. Oh so they hooked them up to a lie detector, um, The scripted interview covered academic history, goals and grades. So it’s, they hooked them up to a lie detector, um, and they talked to them about like how they’ve been doing in school, how they want to do in school, and how they’re currently doing in school.*

Ashley read, reread, paraphrased, clarified, summarized, monitored her comprehension, and made inferences. She began by associating lying with exaggerating and speculated that people were lying about their grades, while, at the same time, making an inference that these lies entailed conveying the achievement of good grades. After reading about how students reported data on their grade point averages, Ashley made another inference that the computerized form contained questions about school performance. She then linked this form to students’ grade inflation through a bridging inference (connecting students’ responses on the form to what they had reported about their grades) and summarizing statement, in which she stated, “I don’t; know what it’s [the form] is asking, but it’s saying that most students lied about their grade point average, I think. That’s what I got out of it.” Ashley’s use of a bridging inference was

reminiscent of how she connected previously read segments of text to what she was reading in the present when she read the literary narrative.

As she read about how students' grade inflation was not detected as a lie, she made an inference and hypothesis that this result from the test revealed that students did not feel the same way about exaggerating as they did about lying.

Ashley: *The researchers then pulled the students' records, with permission, and found that almost half of, half had exaggerated their average by as much as six-tenths of a point. So like, most of the kids, if they had like a 3.5, most of them said that they had like a 3.8. They like exaggerated a little bit to make themselves sound good. But I guess the lie detector didn't detect it, 'cause maybe, 'cause it's saying a lie detector test, like, can tell if you're nervous, maybe they're not nervous because they think those are like the grades that they should have. Um, Yet the, yet the (omits electrode) readings showed that oddly enough, the exaggerations (instead of exaggerators) became significantly more relaxed while discussing their grades. Yeah so, maybe the reason why they're so relaxed is because like, they think, like, personally they have a 3.8, like their knowledge is 3.8 material even if the grades on paper don't say that.*

She inferred that exaggeration was different from lying because the students did not experience stress or tension as they exaggerated. Ashley further hypothesized that the students did not perceive their exaggerations to be lies since they viewed their knowledge potential as being higher than what was recorded in their actual grade point averages. She compared this to the other situations in which people were "nervous" when they lied and reasoned that the students' relaxed state made this scenario different from the other examples in which lies were told. As she continued to read and think aloud, Ashley found that her hypothesis aligned with the text.

Ashley: *The researchers videotaped the interviews, and in-dep-endent, and independent (mispronounced independent), um observes rated how students looked and behaved. "The ones who exaggerated the most appeared the most calm and confident" on the ratings, Dr. Mendes said.*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Ashley: So like the people who said "I have high, I have good grades," even though they might have not, were like the most relaxed, but I still think it's 'cause, like they think they're good enough to have those grades. *The grade inflation was less, was less an attempt to deceive, the grade inflation was less an attempt to deceive, so like, it's saying that they're not trying to lie, they're not attempting to like mislead anybody.*

As she thought aloud, Ashley reiterated her original hypothesis and confirmed that it still stayed true to the author's intended message. Clarifying that students were not intending "to deceive"

by their inflated grade reports, she initially conflated exaggeration with a lie, but then explained that this sort of lie was not meant to “mislead anybody” like other lies might.

### **Summary**

While all of the focal students were able to identify some of the key points mentioned in the article, only Ashley was able to connect these points across different paragraphs of the text. Irene and Hector tended to focus on words and ideas at the local level and had difficulty making connections because they did not recognize how exaggeration and lying were similar, missed the author’s claim-counterclaim structure of the argument, and were unable to create a comprehensive and coherent situation model for the article as a whole. These two students also were taken “off track” by making connections to their background knowledge. In contrast to these three students, Tyrone had difficulty understanding the article because he lost motivation and interest in reading the text about half way through it. Tyrone became distracted, as evidenced by his random sound effects, and lost concentration, as noted by his statement: “I have no idea what I’m thinking right now.” Although he was able to recognize the contrast between feeling guilty about lying and the findings from the study on students’ exaggerating about their grades, his diminished attention seemed to make it difficult for him to connect the author’s main points across different paragraphs. He tended to lose his place in the reading and when he found himself, he was only able to respond to details at the local level. His recall and summarization of local level details had less to do with getting “stuck” there like Hector and Irene, and more to do with fleeting spurts of attention mixed with lack of motivation for reading the remainder of the text.

### **Reading the History Text**

The focal students found the historical excerpt about Reconstruction to be challenging because of their lack of background knowledge specifically about the era, the hybrid nature of the genre, and the vocabulary. Although the excerpt was subtitled: “Presidential Reconstruction under Lincoln,” the text referenced Andrew Johnson and Abraham Lincoln without explicitly mentioning their relation to one another or when each man held the presidency. The text primarily detailed how the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction affected the African American population, but it also included information regarding how the white population was affected by these major historical events. Moreover, the informative expository writing was interspersed with quotations from real people who had lived during that time period, making parts of the reading seem more like narrative, rather than expository text. These contrasts within the text may have further contributed to its difficulty.

Compared to the students’ reading of the literary narrative and the persuasive article, approaches to the historical text seemed to vary more widely across individual students. All of the students frequently used summarizing, clarifying, and monitoring as they read the text. Yet the effect of this combination of strategies was quite different from student to student and varied depending on the specific problems they encountered in different sections of the text. These strategies, most of which were decidedly “local” in their orientation, seemed to take precedence over the distinctly “global” hypothesizing that all of the focal students used when they were reading the literary narrative, and, to a lesser extent, the persuasive piece. Their reluctance to hypothesize and speculate about causes and effects beyond the facts could be related to their perceptions about the genre of the history text.

### **“The Past is the Past”: History as a Set of Immutable Facts**

The focal students conveyed the impression that history was about unchangeable facts about the past. These ideas were reflected in the female focal students’ responses during the reader and writer history and follow up interviews. I draw upon these data in particular because they provide genre-related explanations for the focal students’ approaches and strategies when they read the historical text. For example, Ashley commented about reading and writing about non-fiction, including history: “I normally don’t think about why, why the person’s writing it. Like if it’s saying that these people researched it, then they did research it. Like I’m not going to question that this really happened.” As long as the facts seemed credible and reliable, Ashley did not feel a need to evaluate a source’s validity. She further compared reading a history textbook to reading a biography.

Ashley: Um, so like if I read something in a textbook that sounds like it totally couldn’t have happened...then I, I’d like second guess what I’m reading. But I guess like there’s nothing really like that in the school history books, so I can pretty much trust [them], but like, I’ve read like biographies about people, and then like, some of the stuff’s really weird, like really out there, so like, sometimes I question if it’s reliable.

In Ashley’s opinion, “school history books” differed from reading other types of historical non-fiction sources, such as biographies, in which information could be questionable. By contrast, Ashley felt as though she could “trust” history books, because they presented an accurate accounting of what happened. For Ashley, the “truth” was inherent within the text, as long as it was believable and did not seem “weird.”

Irene viewed history as a stagnant set of facts that happened in the past. After reading and thinking aloud about each of the three texts, I followed up with the focal students about their reading experience. In the follow up questions related to the historical piece, Irene revealed that she did not like reading about history because it was solely about the past.

Irene: It’s just that the other ones were—this one was interesting, but the other ones were uh even more [interesting]. This was like this was like social studies, and so I’m not a big expert... I’m not a big fan of social studies so that’s why it’s hard.

Monica: Why do you say this: you’re not a big fan of social studies?

Irene: Cuz like I don’t—who wants to learn about the past? Well this [reading on Reconstruction] is interesting, but who wants to, the past is the past, you know?

One of the reasons that she felt that she was “not a big fan” of social studies or history was that she was not an “expert” in the subject matter. With her statement that “the past is the past,” she implied that the past had little relevance to the present and future because it had already happened and could not be changed.

These ideas about the immutable past as a set of facts were tied to how students thought about reading history. While the male focal students did not freely offer their opinions about reading in this genre, their think aloud protocols also revealed that they were likewise unwilling to take speculative “risks” that could lead them away from the facts. This could also explain why the focal students’ strategies tended to be more local than global.

### **Using Generic Placeholders in order to Play it Safe**

All four of the focal students had difficulties getting “into” the text and used monitoring and summarizing to assist their comprehension as they read the first paragraph.

Hector: *Presidential Reconstruction under Lincoln (section # 1)*  
*As the guns of war fell silent, Americans faced the daunting challenge of rebuilding the war ravaged South and bringing the reeble [rebel] states back into the union. The former Con, con, confederac war [Confederacy] was a scene of widespread devastation. Most of war had been fought on reeble [rebel] ground. And wherever the gra-, the great arm, armies had marched and met, towns had been leveled, cities bombed and burned, and farms farm made wasteland. Union general Carl Carl uhh Schurz? ...is that how you say his name? reported to President Andrew Johnson that the southern countryside “looked for many miles like a broad black streak of ruin and desolation – the fences all gone: lonesome smoke stacks, surrounded by dark heaps of ashes and cinders, making [marking] the spots where human habitations had stood; the fields along the road wildly overgrown by weeds, with here and there a sickly patch of cotton cultivated by Negro Squat Squatters.*

Monica: So what are you thinking?

Hector: Um, I don’t know it’s probably a war or something. And there’s a very, there’s a lot of cities bombed and something there’s something about a President. Yeah.

Monica: Why do you say that?

Hector: Uh cuz it seems like it, like they mention a President and then they say like towns that got destroyed and everything. Like, like the whole state or something.

When I asked Hector to think aloud, he first stated that he did not know what was taking place in the passage, but then attempted to elaborate through a very general summary. He chose words or phrases that were salient to him, such as “war,” “cities bombed and burned,” and “a President,” but did not try to connect them in any way. However, his choice of words revealed that he was trying to grasp the basic concepts presented in the text and that he was beginning to develop a preliminary picture of what was taking place.

When I asked him to describe why he picked these words he noted that some towns “got destroyed and everything. Like, like the whole state or something.” He made inferences that “towns” or a “whole state” suffered from the war and probably derived these ideas from the phrase “*looked for many miles like a broad black streak of ruin and desolation – the fences all*

*gone: lonesome smoke stacks, surrounded by dark heaps of ashes and cinders*”—a literary-like description within this expository text. Hector’s choice of the word “something” revealed that he was unsure of what was taking place in the text. His hesitance and repeated use of “something” indicated that he, like so many teens and even adults, was using the word as a placeholder for parts of the text he did not comprehend. He may have been reluctant to generate a speculation that might be “wrong.” Furthermore, he did not try to connect the pieces of the text. Although Hector had used the word “something” fairly often during the think aloud protocols for the literary narrative and the persuasive article, his use of the word stood out here due to his frequent repetition of it within a short response span. While his use of “something” in the other texts conveyed uncertainty, the word did not act as saliently as a placeholder as it did in his reading of this historical text.

### **If it already Happened, There is No Room for Speculation**

As Ashley began reading the text, she monitored and thought aloud, admitting when she was unfamiliar with the vocabulary. Like Hector, she tended to focus on words that she knew well in order to begin building a situation model.

Ashley: *“As the guns of war fell silent Americans faced the daunting challenge of rebuilding the war revaged [ravaged] south- re-vaged south and bringing the rebel states back into the union”*. I have no clue what that was. Okay, *The guns of the war felt silent*, okay I know what that means- *“Americans faced the daurtring, the daunting, daunting.* I’m not sure what the means *daunting challenge of rebuilding the war revaged South and bringing the rebel states back into the union.”* Um I’m not sure, I think it means like rebuilding the buildings that fell in the war. I’m guessing.

She created an inference from the word “rebuilding” and guessed that actual buildings themselves would be rebuilt. As she continued to read, she noted vocabulary she did not understand, such as “ravaged” and “Confederacy.” She then commented that she knew the Confederacy had been “devastated.”

Ashley: I don’t know who the former Confederency. Confed-eracy. Confederacy, yeah, I don’t know what that is. But um (*hehe*) they are devastated (*hehe*) I don’t know who they are though. *“Most of war had been fought on rebel ground.”* Okay, I don’t know what rebel grounds are. They said that earlier but I don’t remember where. Um, oh, rebel states, rebel grounds. Oh, “and burned the farms” Oh! I’m sorry. *“And wherever the great armies have marched and many towns had been leveled, cities bombed and burned, and farms made wasteland”*. Okay, so yeah, it’s talking about how all the city is torn up after the war. *“Union general Carl Schookerz [Schurz] reported to President Andrew Johnson that the southern countryside looked for many miles like a bored [broad] black sheet [streak] of ruin and desolation”* Um desolation, it sounds like “translation” but I don’t know if it’s

related. Um and so I guess President Lincoln is not president because it says former president Andrew Johnson. Um “*The fences all gone land some [lonesome] smoke stacks-- lonesome smoke stacks, surrounded by dark heaps of ashes and cinders, marking the spots where human habitations had stood- habitations*” I ‘m not sure if that’s how you pronounce it but it means houses or where they were. “*the fields along the road wildy over grown by weeds, with oh with here and there a sickly patch of cotton cult-i-vated [cultivated] by Negro squatters*”.

Monica:

So what are you thinking now?

Ashley:

Um I know a squatter is like when people don’t have a certain house and they go from place to place. And then “negro” (*hehe*) they are African American. Um cotton, I know cotton was a big part of history- something about cotton plants and slaves but I am not sure. And like the picture in my head is really dark and kind of scary-like abandoned.

Initially, she thought aloud about vocabulary that she did or did not understand, monitoring her comprehension or lack thereof along the way. Then she summarized what took place, stating, “Okay, so yeah, it’s talking about how all the city is torn up after the war.” Continuing to monitor her comprehension, she recognized a discrepancy between the subtitle about Lincoln and noted the reference to Johnson: “Um and so I guess President Lincoln is not president because it says former President Andrew Johnson.” Her inference about who was president during this time period linked what she was reading in the present to what she had previously read earlier in the text. This approach to going back and forth between parts of the text was characteristic of how she read and thought aloud on all three of the texts for this study. Attempting to clarify and break down parts of the reading into comprehensible parts, she defined somewhat challenging words that stood out to her, including, “habitations,” “squatter,” and “Negro.” She also pointed out that “cotton was a big part of history” and acknowledged that it related to slavery somehow. Despite her clarification of these different parts of the sentence, she did not bring these pieces together in order to make sense of the sentence as a whole.

Although Ashley employed a variety of strategies as she began reading this text, she did not hypothesize (i.e. make predictions or draw conclusions) as she had done at the beginning of the literary narrative and persuasive article. For both Hector and Ashley, this lack of hypothesizing could have related to the difference in genre, as well as the challenging vocabulary, which led them to first start with the words that they knew and to build a situation model around what was familiar. Ashley seemed more hesitant to define words in this text than when she read in other genres. Her reluctance to take risks in defining vocabulary may also be linked to the notion that history needs to be read accurately in order not to distort the factual truth. Similar to Hector and Ashley, Irene and Tyrone attempted to draw upon word meanings that were familiar to them. While Irene and Tyrone thought they knew and understood particular words such as “Reconstruction” and “bureau,” their think aloud protocols revealed that they misread and misinterpreted the meanings, leading them to misunderstand what was taking place in the text.

## Drawing on the Background Knowledge You Have When You Don't Have the Knowledge You Need

Irene, like Ashley, revealed when she was having difficulty with the vocabulary; and, like Hector, she used big familiar ideas such as “war” to anchor her reading. For Irene, one of these big ideas was provided by the title, which she used to guide her understanding. After reading the title and subtitle, I asked all of the focal students to tell me what they were thinking. Hector stated, “Like we’re gonna uh redo something—reconstruct something.” Tyrone mentioned, “It’s about constructing something,” and “It has to do with presidents.” Ashley commented, “Well, I am thinking like construction, like construction working, reconstruction, like building something.” And Irene said, “That it’s like, that they’re gonna construct, do construction all over again or something.” Then she added, “Because it’s reconstruction and construction would be to construct something and re means either they are gonna redo it again.” While all of the students had similar responses about constructing or redoing some kind of construction, only Irene kept coming back to this idea of how people were trying to “construct all over again” as she read other parts of the text. She also associated her idea of “reconstruction” with making plans.

Irene: *The emancipation of four million slaves oh wait I already read that. Without slaves, once-wealthy whites sudden suddenly find found themselves having to cook, clean and care for themselves. Poor whites worried about competing with former slaves for jobs. Most planters were in a t-state of shock- Without slaves many did not see how they could survive. A worried Georgia planter confessed that "I never learned a trade, I never learned a trade. There is nothing else that I know anything about, except managing a planation [plantation]."*  
So I’m guessing that he don’t know um how to trade stuff. Like how they used to trade like something like rocks for this or like that, but he did know how to do plans. So I’m guess he might have a plan to re- to construct something. Reconstruction...

Irene’s comments illustrated how she misunderstood the meaning of trade as an occupation and read it to mean an exchange. She also did not seem to be familiar with the word “plantation” as she miscued and read it as “planation,” a word she created on the spot. To someone who did not know Irene, her attempt to clarify what was taking place in the text would not have made any sense. However, she had told me about her father’s position, in landscape and construction, pouring cement. I also was familiar with the fact that Irene often assisted her father and created “plans” for him when he taught other workers about preparing and laying cement. Therefore, her ideas about trading rocks and plants and making plans “to construct something” made sense, given her personal background knowledge.

This example of Irene’s use of the title represented how she used the schema that she knew when she did not have the correct schema to fully comprehend what was in the text. Although she had background knowledge about construction, it did not fit with the text content and interfered with her creation of a more accurate situation model. Her use of the title when reading the historical text differed from Ashley’s reference to the title when reading the persuasive article. Ashley used the title *to confirm* that she was on the “right track” while reading, comparing how students who exaggerated their grades could also feel like they are

telling a “future truth.” In contrast, Irene referred to the title in order *to interpret and monitor* her understanding of the rest of the text, even though it was wrong, and used it as a lens to figure out what was taking place. Her use of the title was much more like students’ use of a theme when they were reading the literary narrative.

Similar to Irene, Tyrone drew upon background knowledge that he had, even if he used it inappropriately.

Tyrone: *In March of 1865, Congress established the Burru, yeah Burru [Bureau] of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, more commonly known as the Freedmen’s Borough [Bureau].*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Tyrone: I guess they found some land that the freedmen can have and named it after them. *As the war drew to a close, hundreds of Borough, I think it’s Borough. I am not sure, though.*

Tyrone misread “Bureau” as /borough/, yet his miscue did not entirely interfere with his understanding the rest of the passage. Since “Bureau” was not defined by any context clues, and because the text had previously referred to how the freed slaves were initially given land near the southern coastline but had it unjustly confiscated, Tyrone’s miscue of “Bureau” for “borough” still fit with the context. As he thought aloud, it was evident that he connected “borough” or town with the designated “land the freedmen can have.”

Tyrone: *hundreds of Borough agents fanned across the South to deal with the deal with the intemidate, deal with the intemidate, ooh the intemidate needs I think of the former slaves and im impoverished whites.... In the next five years, the Freedmen’s Borough handed put more than 21 million rations to hungry Southerners, with one ration consisting of enough corn meal, flour, and sugar to feed a person for a week. The Borough established hospitals and provided medical care to the needy of both races. In some areas whites received more aid than blacks, leading one reporter to observe that ooh to observe that “stranger might stranger might have concluded hold on there’s too many that’s. Stranger might have concluded that it was the white race that was going to provide unable, hold on that was going to prove unable to take care of itself instead of the emancipated slaves.”*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Tyrone: The slaves were able to take care of themselves more than the whites could.

Tyrone seemed to overlook the fact that “*whites received more aid than blacks*” and that the quotation by the reporter may have been somewhat ironic and meant to emphasize the racism that was still taking place. It is possible, however, that his miscue of “bureau” as /borough/ could have led him to believe that once the African Americans had settled in the borough, they may have been self-sufficient enough to take care of themselves. Yet it was difficult to know if

Tyrone was aware that the African Americans were receiving aid from the federal government in order to supply foodstuffs and treat the community's medical needs.

Irene and Tyrone assumed that they understood the vocabulary and made inferences based on their misunderstandings. However, the definitions that they employed led them to create plausible but misguided situation models. In Irene's case, her misunderstanding of trade and misreading of the word "plantation" for /planation/, which she associated with making plans, along with her ongoing misinterpretation of Reconstruction, reinforced her flawed ideas that this passage was centered around rebuilding and creating new physical structures. Together, these misunderstandings affected her comprehension of the entire passage and may have been the source of some confusion. In Tyrone's case, supplanting /borough/ for "Bureau" was less problematic. While this particular misreading led him to assume that the African Americans were living together in a designated borough, which was relatively self-sufficient, it did not skew his comprehension of the entire text in the way that Irene's misunderstanding did.

### **Using the Present to Understand the Past**

All four focal students recognized that the African Americans were not given equal rights after being freed from the bonds of slavery. Having been in the American school system since the primary grades, the students already would have some background knowledge about the history of race relations in the United States—especially since they would have received some exposure to American history in the fifth and eighth grades. The students' background knowledge shaped their understandings and points of view regarding the need for social justice for the African Americans during Reconstruction. These connections to background knowledge did not involve the same type of hypothesizing that students used when reading the literary narrative and persuasive article. When students hypothesized (i.e. made predictions and drew conclusions) as they read the literary narrative and the persuasive article, they did not have knowledge prior to reading the text about the plot's outcome or the author's argument. In the case of the history text, the students were familiar with the post-slavery outcome and the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Although they did not necessarily know details about Reconstruction, they had an understanding of race relations based on the current world, which provides ample evidence that discrimination still exists. In the literary narrative and persuasive article, projections for the outcome of the plot or argument were less clear and the hypotheses students made were more dependent on the text itself. The arc of history allowed students to make connections that were less along the lines of hypotheses and more along the lines of confirming what students already knew about the plight of the African Americans. As they read, they most likely also brought their knowledge of the present day into their assessments of what constituted equal rights.

Connections to background knowledge about race were evident in the way that Hector and Ashley responded to the quotations by real people from the Reconstruction era and the comments made by Tyrone and Irene regarding the racist treatment received by the African Americans.

Hector:        *Uh, Thus we would address you not as reebles [rebels] and enemies, but as friends and fellow countrymen, who desire to dwell dwell among you in peace, and whose destinies are interwoven and linked with those of the whole American people... We ask for no special privileges... We simply ask that we should be*

*recognized as men ... that the same laws which govern govern white men shall govern black men; that schools be established for the education of colored children as well as white ... We trust the day is is not too distant when ... we shall real realize the great truth that " all men are endowed, [endowed] by their Cr-Creator with certain inelible [inalienable] rights" and that although complexions may differ, a "man's a man for a that."*

Monica: So what are you thinking?

Hector: Um, I think like he's saying that every everybody should be treated the same way, whether they're black or white. And they should go to they they should have the same education.

As Hector summarized, paraphrased, and reacted to the quotation, he revealed his ideas about social justice. Although Hector prefaced his response by stating, "I think like he's saying..." his summary and paraphrase of this section of text contained an opinion that the African Americans "should be treated the same way" and "have the same education." The African American quoted in the text only stated that he or she wanted to be recognized equally under "the law" and to have schools "established for the education of colored children as well as white." This quotation did not go so far as to demand equal treatment outside of being recognized by the law or that education received should be the "same." Hector's point of view subtly slipped into his paraphrasing to reveal his opinion about the necessity for equal treatment of all people, regardless of race.

Ashley clarified, summarized, and connected details in the text to what she had read previously in a former paragraph. In this process, she also created interpretations that demonstrated her empathy for the African Americans.

Ashley: *A freedman on the Islands dic-dictated dictated dictated a letter to a former teacher now in Philadelphia: My Dear Young Misses: Please My Dear Young Misses, Please Misses, tell President Lincoln that we want land, this very land that is rich with the sweat of our face [faces] and the blood of our back [backs].*" So it's like a slave writing to- I don't know who young misses is- I'm guessing it's someone that like has connections to the president if they're asking her to talk to the president. *"We could have been buying land, but they make the lots too big and none of us can afford them."* So I guess it would make sense if they make the land smaller and cheaper, than more people would buy. *"Lincoln said himself that we should stake out claims to abandoned lands, that we should hold onto demand plant them and that and that he personally will see to it that we each get ten or twenty acres."* Okay. So, I am guessing that 2000 acres is a lot if they are asking for only 10 acres. *"We're too glad to hear this—wait, we're too glad to hear this and so we stake out claims. But before the planting season come [came] came our lots were sold by the government to rich white men. Where's Lincoln now?"* So it's like a complaint letter to um to young misses asking to pass it on to

Lincoln. Practically, they think that if they'd worked hard to keep them, to keep the land nice than why should the white men be able to buy it?

She interpreted the letter by the freedman as one intended to voice a complaint. Her comments related to the price and the size of the land that freedmen revealed that she understood that the freedmen were undergoing financial hardships, could not afford to buy land, and were asking for relatively small plots. These inferences led her to make the interpretation that the land was unjustly and prematurely taken from them before they had a chance to claim it. In her mind, the African Americans had worked hard, cared for the land, and deserved to keep it.

Irene and Tyrone also used what they knew about race relations in order to make inferences about the discrimination that the African Americans faced during Reconstruction. There were a number of instances in the text that referenced how African Americans did not receive fair treatment after the Civil War and Tyrone and Irene attributed this discrimination to racism. Tyrone tried to understand why the African Americans were "forced off" from land that officially had been designated for them.

Tyrone: *Four days later Sherman issued "Special Field Order N. 15," designating the entire southern coastland [coastline] 30 miles inland for exclusive Negro settlement. Freedmen could settle there, taking no more than 40 acres per family. By June 1865, forty thousand freedmen [had] moved onto farms oh onto new farms in this area. But President Andrew Johnson in August of 1865, restored this land to the Confederate owners, and the freedmen were forced off, and oh some at bayonet bayonet or something like that point. Um, trying to figure out why they were forced off. I am thinking this President might have been racist.*

Monica: Why do you say that?

Tyrone: Because he restored the land to Confederate owners I guess. Well I don't really know if he's rac, if I would consider him racist. Maybe he just wanted, yeah I think he's racist...

Unable to come up with a reason for why the African Americans were removed forcibly from the land they had been given, Tyrone attributed President Johnson's decision for their removal to racism. Since the text itself does not provide details regarding why the president "restored this land to the Confederate owners," Tyrone used his background knowledge regarding race relations in the United States to fill in gaps. It is possible that the author may have left these gaps intentionally with the assumption that readers would draw the appropriate inferences about race relations during the time period.

Irene drew similar conclusions about the unequal treatment of blacks and whites. When the text did not provide information as to why whites may have received more medical aid than blacks during Reconstruction, she made an inference that this unequal treatment was due to racism.

Irene: *The Burial [Bureau] established hospitals and provided medical care to the needy of both races. In some areas whites received*

*more aid than blacks...* So I guess this was really racist at that time or it was before [Martin] Luther King, *leading one reporter to observe that 'stranger might have concluded that it was the white race that was going to provide [prove] unable to take care of itself instead of the emancipated slaves.*

Monica: What's going through your mind now?

Irene: Well that they were really racist back then. That either way that if the blacks and the whites were staying in the same place the whites were still treated even more with uh medical care.

Trying to understand the racism of that era, she observed, "So I guess this was really racist at that time or it was before [Martin] Luther King." Through this comment, she implicitly compared unequal medical treatment prior to the advent of the Civil Rights era to the treatment African Americans might receive today. When I asked her what was going through her mind, she reiterated, "Well that they were really racist back then," implying that the state of race relations was much better today.

### Summary

While the focal students had background knowledge related to understanding race relations in the United States, they did not take the same kind of speculative "risks" during their reading as they did when reading the literary narrative and persuasive article. Instead, they tended to stick to what they felt they knew. Students' ideas about history as the immutable past or a set of facts that could not be altered may have affected their willingness to create hypotheses or draw other inferences about causes and effects that went beyond what was mentioned in the text. Hector avoided taking speculative risks by using the placeholder, "something," when he came across vocabulary and concepts that were unfamiliar. Ashley was reluctant to make connections across sentences, especially when she did not know the meaning of the words. While her lack of vocabulary knowledge may have caused her hesitance, it is important to note that in her reading of the literary narrative and persuasive article, her comparable unfamiliarity with certain terms did not keep her from trying to make guesses about words or make connections across different sections.

Although Irene and Tyrone mispronounced and/or misused several vocabulary words, they operated under the assumption that they were using the words correctly and applied *their* definitions. They ended up engaging in sincere, but misguided attempts to clarify words. They thought that their definitions were helping them understand the text, when, in fact, the definitions led them further astray from the author's intended meanings. These inaccurate conceptions led Irene and Tyrone to tap into the wrong schema; but once there, the students used it to shape subsequent understandings. As they read the text, Irene and Tyrone also relied on their background knowledge about race relations in the United States to help them summarize and make inferences about the social injustice that the African Americans faced.

Since the text did not explicitly comment on the racism of the period, the students had to draw these conclusions for themselves based on their background knowledge. Furthermore, when they connected what was in the history text with their background knowledge, it did not happen in conjunction with hypothesizing in the same way that it did when they read the literary narrative and persuasive article. The students' hypotheses in those two genres included the use of background knowledge to speculate about viable predictive scenarios or draw possible

conclusions. Instead, for the history text, students brought their background knowledge to clarify, summarize, or make inferences about what was taking place in the text. Any conclusions that the students drew based on their background knowledge were not speculative, but rather confirmatory in nature. Since students were familiar with the current state of race relations in the United States, they could compare their knowledge to what was took place during Reconstruction. Thus, they were not hypothesizing, as much as they were commenting on the discrimination of that era.

### **Comparing Perceptions to What Students Actually Do When They Read**

In Chapter 3, I asked the students to elaborate on the use of particular strategies. Focal students' think aloud protocols in the present chapter confirm that perceptions about their most frequently used strategies are mostly true. As reported on their surveys and revealed in their think aloud protocols, students *actually do* reread a text when they encounter difficulties, think about what they know in order to help them understand a reading, guess the meaning of unknown words and phrases, check their understanding when encountering conflicting information, and paraphrase texts to better understand them.

The one exception and most notable discrepancy between what students say they do and what they actually do was with the visualization strategy. According to the surveys and interview data, the focal students perceived that they used visualization more often than other strategies, especially when reading fiction. Yet the think aloud protocol data that examined what students *actually did* when they read, did not confirm this perception. Only Ashley explicitly described how she pictured Wright's fear, his encounter with the bullies and his confrontation with his mother, as well as the setting of the history text on Reconstruction. There was little evidence, however, that the others likewise visualized characters and settings in a similar fashion.

It is possible that visualizing is more automatic than other strategies and therefore not consciously invoked when students encounter difficulties with text. Perhaps, it is a skill, rather than strategy (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008), that students use, whether or not they are having problems with reading. In Chapter 3, students also claimed that visualizing helped them to empathize with a character and feel as if they were "right there." As students enacted strategies during the reading and think aloud process, it was evident that they still attempted to empathize with "characters"—just not through visualization.

The focal students tended to underestimate their use of several strategies when asked about their perceptions. While the focal students claimed, in Chapter 3, that they perceived to use paraphrasing with some frequency, they also stated that they did not really summarize unless they had to do so for a school assignment. However, the data in *this* chapter revealed that they commonly used paraphrasing and summarizing hand in hand. As indicated in their think aloud protocols, students summarized frequently by hierarchically choosing to notice and order information based on what they thought was most important. This summarizing often included the use of paraphrasing since students typically rephrased the text in their own words, as they took note of what seemed most salient to them in the reading. Although the think aloud protocols showed that students paraphrased more than they summarized, the think aloud protocols also revealed that they used summarizing more often than the survey data would predict. Another strategy that the focal students did not think they used often was questioning. While they did not explicitly raise questions in their think aloud protocols, many of their

hypotheses that functioned as predictions contained implicit questions regarding the outcome of the plot, scenario, or argument. Whenever students invoked several possible conclusions, they also raised questions regarding what would happen.

### Conclusion

While findings from the focal students' reader history and survey follow up interviews in Chapter 3 touched upon how purpose, context, and genre make a difference in the strategies that students perceive to use, this chapter highlighted how genre especially influenced the strategies that students actually used. The focal students' knowledge and impressions about how to read a genre impacted which strategies were privileged and how they were used. Although students used similar strategies across genres, how these strategies were used differed based on the utility of the strategy *in* each genre. When students read the literary narrative, they tended to take more speculative "risks," frequently hypothesizing about the plot and the characters' motivations. They tended to be aware that a literary narrative could be read aesthetically instead of efferently (Rosenblatt, 1978), that the plot would have a resolution that would clarify particular ambiguities, and that applying a universal theme could help inform them about characters' motivations and the direction of the plot. Knowing these parameters about reading literary narratives gave students clues about how to connect their background knowledge to the text.

In contrast to their experience reading the literary narrative, in which knowledge about how to read the genre was familiar, the focal students struggled with reading the persuasive article because they did not know how to read the genre. Much of their difficulty stemmed from being unable to recognize and follow the structure of the author's argument. Students' attempts to read the persuasive article like a narrative only confused the students further, as they were unable to follow how the author was connecting ideas across paragraphs. Ashley, the only student to comprehend the author's message, did not struggle as much as the others partly because she was able to recognize, rather quickly, that the article was centered around ideas rather than people's experiences. She seemed to understand that the experiences mentioned in the text were secondary to the larger ideas about lying and exaggeration. She also made hypotheses in the form of drawing conclusions about *why* the students may have chosen to exaggerate about their grades in order to figure out why the students' exaggerations did not surface as lies by the lie detection tests. Hector and Irene, however, never fully understood the article because they kept getting stuck on local level details within sentences and paragraphs and were never able to use the main ideas to traverse across and make connections between larger sections of text.

The focal students' ideas about the genre of the history text kept them from taking the same kinds of speculative "risks" that they employed when reading the literary narrative and persuasive article. Students were unwilling to create multiple scenarios or draw several different conclusions when they were unsure about what was taking place in the text. This could be attributed to their perspective that history was a set of immutable facts that could not be changed. Therefore, they may have felt that history had to be read as "exactly" as possible. Rather than utilize their background knowledge to create new possible hypotheses, they employed it to confirm their present understanding of history.

## Chapter 6: What Students Actually Do when They Write about What They Have Read

When students write about what they have read, they take into account how they will position themselves in relation to the text they are reading and the text that they are writing. This chapter investigates what students actually do when they write about what they have read. It considers the strategies that students use when they write about what they have read and compares these to the strategies that students perceive they use (see Chapter 4). The chapter also explores how reading comprehension is revealed in students' writing and what they say about this writing.

This chapter complements Chapter 4, which examined how students' perceptions about meeting writing requirements for different genres and audiences affected their thoughts about strategy use for writing about reading, as well as other kinds of writing. Just as Chapter 5 complemented Chapter 3 by comparing what students actually did when they read to students' perceptions about their reading strategy use (see Chapter 3), this chapter compares what students actually do when they write to what they say when asked about their perceptions about writing strategies (see Chapter 4). More specifically, the analysis in this chapter focuses on the type of school writing students are asked to do in response to an assigned text and prompt, with the teacher as the anticipated audience. Each of the focal students responded to prompts for three texts in different genres—the literary narrative, the persuasive article, and the historical excerpt—that they had read and thought aloud about earlier (see Chapter 5).

The research questions related to this chapter permit two natural comparisons. The first is between what students *actually* do when they write and the on-line strategies that students use during reading (see Chapter 5). This comparison analyzes similarities in approaches and strategies *across* both reading and writing. And the second is the between students' enactments of strategies as they write and their perceptions of the strategies they use (see Chapter 4). Just as in the comparison of students' enactment of reading strategies in Chapter 5 and their perceptions of strategy use in Chapter 3, I investigate if students actually do what they say they do. To examine what focal students *actually did* when they wrote about what they read, and to gain an understanding of how and why they may have written as they did, I analyzed focal students' think aloud protocols, written responses, and writing retrospective interviews for each of the texts. In my analyses across these sources, three major chapter findings emerged. One was that the disciplinary subject matter and genre of each of the readings impacted how students responded to the texts and prompts. The second was that the strategies that students used reflected overarching concerns about audience, genre, and what it means to write in school. The third was that, regardless of genre, what tended to prominently stand out for students *during* reading somehow made its way into students' writing. The rest of this chapter will unpack these findings through the use of compelling examples and more nuanced analyses.

### Responding to the Literary Narrative

By using comparative analysis across focal students' think aloud protocols, written responses, and writing retrospective interviews, I found that students' understandings of how to read the literary narrative within the disciplinary tradition of English influenced how they interpreted the prompt and wrote their responses in this genre. Although students were not asked to respond to the literary narrative in a reader response fashion, they tended to voice personal

opinions and connections, moral stances, and thematic interpretations in their writing about *Black Boy* by Richard Wright. The prompt for this piece stated:

Paragraph Assignment  
Instructions

Pretend that this is an important assignment that will be graded by your English teacher:

Richard Wright's mother gives him a stick and some instructions. Why? What purpose does this serve?

The prompt was modeled after a textbook question found in a ninth grade literature anthology. The original short answer question was revised in order to elicit a longer response—at least a paragraph. The prompt first referred to an incident that took place in the text and implied that students needed to interpret the mother's motives in order to answer the question "Why?" It implied that the students needed to consider the mother's point of view, even though her point of view remained unstated because the actual text was written from Wright's boyhood perspective. In addition, students were asked to examine the purpose of her actions. Again, there was a level of interpretation required, with the depth of that interpretation being left for the student to decide. The prompt did not ask students for a personal connection, opinion, thematic connection, or a moral stance. However, all four students included these components and went "beyond" the prompt in their written responses.

**Strategies for Reading Narrative Make their Way into Writing**

Students' use of the pronouns "I," "me," "my," and "you" reflected the personal and aesthetic nature of responding to a literary narrative in writing. Ashley, for example, referenced "I," "me," or "my" (underlined for emphasis in this dissertation) fourteen times in ten sentences in her response to Wright's text. Ashley wrote:

Richard Wright's mother wants him to defend himself. When she gave him the stick, I think she knew that he couldn't beat up the boys alone. His mother wants him to feel safe and feel he can protect himself./ When I read this part of the story I was wondering if Richard was going to go through with the orders. I know if my mother told me to do that I would probably think she was joking. Another thing I pictured while I was reading the text was Richard's neves.(sp) I pictured him shaking with the heavy stick and trying to decide what to do. His mother was trying to teach him how to defend himself but I think she came about it the wrong way./ This relates to the story Im reading in my English 9 class "Our America". Both stories have different aspects on violence. In "Our America" they think violence is ruining the community, but in the section of "Black Boy" I just read it showed me how people think violence is a way of life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> All spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors in the written response transcripts have been left intact to represent the students' actual writing.

Her writing can be parsed into three sections, each of which accomplishes a slightly different objective. The slash marks (/) in the transcript of her text mark these sections. Ashley began by addressing the purpose behind the mother's actions. Her introductory sentence combined an interpretative summary about the mother's intentions with the prompt. From the description in the text that the same gang of boys had beaten up Wright on two occasions prior to the receipt of the stick, Ashley inferred that Wright's mother believed that he could not defend himself without a weapon. Her use of the phrase "I think" reflected her understanding that this was her point of view and not a definitive perspective put forth by Wright or his mother as a main character. In this portion of her writing, she expressed the view that Wright's mother wanted her son to feel a sense of protection and security.

Ashley satisfied the demands of the prompt in her first three sentences. From a strict task interpretation perspective, she could have stopped there. That she did not suggests another motive—or at least another cultural practice. In the fourth sentence, Ashley begins a second section in which she deviated from the prompt and transitioned to focus on Wright's experience and emotional state once he received the stick. Ashley's next five sentences, beginning with her wondering about whether or not Wright would "go through with the orders," connected to her earlier think aloud protocol. In this second section, she takes her audience through how she processed the text. Her writing maps onto her reading think aloud protocol in which she interprets the mother's motives.

In her reading think aloud, Ashley pictured Wright sitting outside of the house, confused about what to do. Ashley was the only focal student who explicitly referred to her use of visualization consistently throughout her think aloud protocol during her reading of Wright's literary narrative.

*I clutched the stick, crying, trying to reason. I picture him really confused like not knowing what to do, whether he should like sit on the stairs till the boys go away, or go. If I were beaten at home, there was absolutely nothing that I could do about it; but if I were beaten in the streets I had a chance to fight and defend myself. I guess that's true because I mean, he wouldn't hit his mother back, but he can fight the other boys. I walked slowly down the sidewalk, coming closer to the gang of boys, holding the stick tightly. So, um, like, now seems like his nerves are gone, as if he's holding it tightly, like he knows what he has to do. I was so full of fear that I could scarcely-y [scarcely]- I could scarcely breathe. Oh, so he's still full of fear, but um, like scarcely breathe, he's like almost panicking, like a panic attack.<sup>4</sup>*

As Ashley read, she agreed with Wright's logic: he could fight the other boys but could not hit his mother. She empathized with Wright and put herself in his shoes as he approached the gang of boys, stating: "like his nerves are gone," "he knows what he has to do," and "Oh, so he's still full of fear, but um, like scarcely breathe, he's like almost panicking, like a panic attack." Similar personal reactions to this part of the text were echoed in the second section of her written response:

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<sup>4</sup> As in Chapter 5, which centered on findings from data on students' reading think aloud protocols, Ashley's reading of Wright's text is in *italics* and Ashley's think aloud is in regular font. I continue to use this convention throughout the dissertation to differentiate the author's words from the students' words.

...When I read this part of the story I was wondering if Richard was going to go through with the orders. I know if my mother told me to do that I would probably think she was joking. Another thing I pictured while I was reading the text was Richard's nerves.(sp) I pictured him shaking with the heavy stick and trying to decide what to do.

Later, when I asked Ashley during the writing retrospective interview to describe her thought process as she wrote this section, she conveyed her inability to shake the image of Wright as a scared and confused boy.

- Monica: So tell me about the part in the middle. Tell me about that a little bit.
- Ashley: Um, another thing I pictured was Richard's nerves.
- Monica: Uh huh.
- Ashley: Okay, um, 'cuz like, when I was reading it, I pictured...the little boy really uh like really undecided.
- Monica: So why did you decide to include that in your writing?
- Ashley: Because like the whole time I was reading that section of the book, that's all that I could think about. Like that was like the main thing I was picturing in my head, was him like deciding what to do.

The prompt did not ask students to discuss their reactions to the text, their reading process, or their thoughts about how Wright was feeling. Ashley, however, said that she included it in her writing because she could picture Wright making this difficult decision. She explained that this image of Wright as a conflicted little boy was "all" she "could think about" during her reading of that section and, not surprisingly, it surfaced again as she wrote. In both her reading of and writing about Wright's literary narrative, Ashley was attuned to the emotional response that the piece evoked in her. Furthermore, she used this emotional response to guide decisions about how to write a response to the literary narrative.

As evidenced in her think aloud protocol and written response, Ashley had difficulty reconciling the mother's actions with her idea of a loving parental figure. Ashley initially gave a favorable interpretation mother's perspective to answer the prompt in her writing: "When she gave him the stick, I think she knew that he couldn't beat up the boys alone. His mother wants him to feel safe and feel he can protect himself." After transitioning into Wright's perspective, however, she changed her tone and moral stance about the mother's actions, writing, "His mother was trying to teach him how to defend himself but I think she came about it the wrong way." The shift in her writing reflected the conflicted feelings that she expressed about the mother's actions in her earlier reading think aloud protocol. Ashley revealed that she understood why the mother wanted Wright to be able to stand up for himself.

*"I'm going to teach you this night, to stand up, and fight for yourself."* Oh, so maybe she's not hiding from him, she just wants him- she thinks that if he's going to take over the fatherly role, he has to get over his fear of having to like fight someone. 'Cuz I guess where they live, that's like, nothing big...

Ashley connected the mother's actions with Wright's transition from boyhood to manhood and his new role as the man of the household now that his father had abandoned the family. She also

noted that fighting could be a way of life in this neighborhood. Yet as Ashley continued to read and think aloud, she began to disagree with the mother's directive.

*Presently, she returned with more money and another note. She also had a long, heavy stick. Oh, that's kinda scary, like I picture that kinda like, almost evil looking like handing your son a stick to go beat up some boys. "Take this money, this note, and this stick," she said. Go to the store and buy those groceries. If those boys bother you, then fight back. Okay, she's definitely like, trying to teach him self-defense, but I don't think that's the best way to do it, 'cuz giving someone a heavy stick...that might injure another boy, you know. I was baffled, my mother was telling me to fight...a thing that she had never done before. So I think, maybe now she's almost desperate, just 'cuz the father situation. "But I'm scared," I said. "Don't you come into this house until you've gotten those groceries." That seems kinda mean to me. I mean, if I was a mother, I wouldn't want my—my son to get beat up, but I don't know.*

Ashley described the total image of the mother-son exchange as "evil looking" during the handover of the stick. Although Ashley attempted to empathize with the mother, stating "maybe now she's almost desperate, just 'cuz the father situation," she could not find the mother's actions to be acceptable. She reasoned, "That seems kind a mean to me," envisioning what she would do as a mother herself and concluded, "I mean, if I was a mother, I wouldn't want my—my son to get beat up, but I don't know."

Ashley's writing again tended to affirm the thoughts that she already had while reading the text. Although she began by addressing the prompt, she ended up moving away from it in sections 2 and 3. In fact, she deviated so far from the prompt in the third section of her writing that she equally discussed both Wright's narrative and another text "Our America." Yet despite straying from the prompt, Ashley did not necessarily stray far from the expectations she held about how to respond to literature. During her reader history interview, she described a common homework assignment that she received in her English Language Arts class:

And...oh, for homework a lot of times we have to do um, we pick a quote an' then we write how we feel about the quote, like what the quote portrayed, and that helps because like, it's relating you to the text by writing.

In these typical homework assignments, there was an emphasis on making an emotional connection with literature. The students were often asked to discuss their feelings about a text and tie these feelings to a larger meaning. It is no wonder that students made thematic and global connections, included their opinions, and took on moral stances when they responded to this particular text.

### **Invoking a Theme and Drawing upon Other Strategies**

The writing and writing retrospective data from the other students were not as rich and extensive as Ashley's. Nonetheless, similar patterns and findings emerged from an analysis of their responses. Here is Tyrone's response to Richard Wright's *Black Boy* excerpt and the same writing prompt that was given to each of the focal students:

I feel she gave him the stick to use to fight the boys off and learn to protect himself. I think it was to teach him a lesson about fighting back. I guess she gave him the stick because he was to afraid to fight back using his own two hands. It was a good lesson because it should teach you not to be scared.

Like Ashley, Tyrone relied on the first person “I”—three times in his four-sentence paragraph. He also emphasized his opinion by incorporating phrases such as “I feel” and “I think” and a tentative interpretation with the words, “I guess.” In his last sentence, Tyrone used “you” to emphasize the universal message that people should not be afraid to stand up for themselves. The use of these pronouns and words that expressed opinion and interpretation, echoed the findings from Ashley’s writing data that writing a response to a literary narrative tended to be highly personal. During his writing retrospective interview, I asked Tyrone to tell me more about what he was thinking when he wrote the last sentence and he explained that using the stick helped Wright to learn a valuable life lesson.

Tyrone: I was just thinking about—Well, it did help him not to be scared so I thought of it like that, like maybe that’s the reason that she did it. She just wanted him to learn that you’re not—you shouldn’t be scared of everything.

Monica: And I noticed that you didn’t put it was a good lesson to teach you not to be scared instead of the boy. Why did you put “you” down?

Tyrone: Well, because I don’t think that she’s the only person that’s done that. I think that other people have actually really done that to try to teach their children that they need to be able to protect themselves.

Tyrone’s entire paragraph centers on the idea that Wright is learning to stand up for himself. His last sentence was meant to convey that the larger theme—learning to stand up to one’s fears and fight—extended beyond the story to include the experiences of others. This use of a theme also was prevalent in Tyrone’s reading and think aloud (see Chapter 5). In his writing retrospective interview, Tyrone noted that the stick gave Wright the courage not to be scared and that the mother wanted Wright to learn that he didn’t need to be afraid of “everything.” Tyrone related that this scenario was not unique to Wright’s experience and that other people have also given their children means of protection in situations that might require them to stand up for themselves. Like Ashley, Tyrone tied themes to the actions of others outside of Wright’s literary narrative and connected the message of the work to other texts and life.

Hector also touched briefly on a theme as he ended his paragraph with this last sentence: “She does that to make him into a man, now that his father is not with them anymore.” Hector, too, had noted earlier in his reading and think aloud protocol that Wright was “gonna grow up to be a man someday” and had “to learn how to fight” (see Chapter 5).

Three of the four focal students ended their paragraphs with comments on a theme, although the prompt did not ask them to include one. Chapter 5 shows how Hector, Tyrone, and Ashley drew upon themes *during* reading to give them a lens to access and interpret the text, as well as establish and confirm their situation models. Since thematic connections were a large part of their meaning making, it seemed natural that they would invoke a theme to discuss the purpose behind the mother’s motives for giving Richard the stick.

Using a theme is one way “into” a text while reading literature, while probing and examining character development is another. These often go hand in hand, but sometimes an individual may focus on one more than the other. Unlike the others who used a theme to understand plot and character, Irene’s reading and writing was set apart by her examination of character without an exploration of a larger theme. Irene wrote:

What I think the purpose is for Richard Wright’s mother to give him the stick is so he can learn how to stand up for him self. Also because the guys were going to beat him up again Richard needed to learn how to fight. With that stick and Richard fighting would make him feel even more nervous going down the street. Maybe Richard had never fought in his life. Also maybe he never imagined this happening but at the same time he could of been young, but his mom told him to do it so he can learn. Richard might not known what to do when the guys came up to him. But after all Richard pulled it off and beat the guys skulls.

Her writing revealed two primary foci: her attempt to answer the prompt and an effort to understand character by unpacking Wright’s possible motivations and state of mind. Her first two sentences addressed the purpose behind why Wright was given the stick. Despite the syntax-related errors in her writing, which could result from Irene’s previous background as an English language learner, she was still able to express that Wright’s mother was giving him the stick so that he could not only defend, but also “stand up” for himself. According to Irene, Wright especially “needed” to learn this lesson so that he would not get beaten up again.

Just as Ashley had answered the prompt in the first few sentences, Irene addressed it in her first two. To some, but not the same degree as Ashley, Irene referenced how she had thought about the text earlier during her reading think aloud. In her first two sentences, Irene used writing to confirm one of her two earlier hypotheses. This resolution of a previous hypothesis is noteworthy because her interpretation here differs from the original interpretation she had made about the mother in her reading think aloud. I return to the example from Chapter 5, in which Irene wondered about the mother’s motives for sending Wright out to confront the gang of boys, showing that she was initially unsure about the mother’s intentions.

Irene: *I started up the steps, seeking shelter of the house. ‘Don’t you come in here,’ my mother warned me. I froze in my tracks and stared at her. ‘But they’re coming after me,’ I said. ‘You just stay right where you are,’ she said in a deadly tone. ‘I’m going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself.’*

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Irene: Well maybe her either her his mom knew that they were gonna beat him and told the gang. She’s that bad and mean. Or maybe she’s, she’s, she’s gonna teach him how to fight and stand up for himself... because she’s like tonight I’m gonna- I’m gonna teach you how to fight for yourself and stand up. So- *She went to house and I waited, terrified, wondering what she was about.* (breathes loudly) *Presently she returned with no more money, and another note; she also had a long heavy stick. ‘Take this money, this note,*

*and this stick,* ' So I think that she's going to tell him, she's gonna tell the kid that, to either- if they do something to him like use the stick to hit them.

Towards the end of the reading think aloud, Irene chose the view that Wright's mother was an "aggressive" woman who was "that bad and that mean" (see Chapter 5). Yet in the first and second sentences of her writing, it was clear that she had changed her mind. Irene now recognized that it was not his mother's cruelty, but her intention to teach Wright how to "stand up for himself" and "learn how to fight." Irene's written response here reflects how writing can provide an opportunity to clarify, revise, and build upon one's thinking.

Similar to what I had found in Ashley's writing, Irene's focus also began to change in the four sentences that followed the first two sentences in which she attempted to answer the prompt. In these next sentences, Irene imagined how Wright might feel about encountering the gang of boys even if he had the stick.

...With that stick and Richard fighting would make him feel even more nervous going down the street. Maybe Richard had never fought in his life. Also maybe he never imagined this happening but at the same time he could of been young, but his mom told him to do it so he can learn. Richard might not know what to do when the guys came up to him.

The interspersing of hypothesizing and summarizing that characterized Irene's earlier reading think aloud (see Chapter 5) was also evident in her writing. Irene hypothesized why Wright might be "nervous," while using words such as "maybe" and "might" to signal that she was speculating about Wright's possible life experiences. Her hypothesizing here hearkened back to her think aloud in which she created multiple hypotheses and then narrowed them down as she developed her situation model about the characters and their actions (see Chapter 5). Just as "picturing"—a reading strategy—was embedded into Ashley's writing, hypothesizing—another reading strategy—found its way into Irene's response. In her writing, Irene initially made an interpretation about the mother's motives for giving Wright the stick in the first two sentences. She then used her hypotheses to explore this interpretation further in order to understand why Wright was nervous and hesitant about standing up for himself. Irene wondered if Wright's apprehension resulted from inexperience with fighting, his youth, or a lack of awareness about how to handle such a situation.

In the last sentence of her paragraph, Irene implied that Wright had overcome his nervousness: "But after all Richard pulled it off and beat the guys skulls." This interpretive summary combined an interpretation—Wright "pulled it off"—with a more factual text-based summary—he "beat the guys skulls." Despite Wright's nervousness, he confronted the boys and achieved a violent victory once he had the stick in hand. Irene's interpretive summary at the end seemed to suggest that even if Wright was a young and inexperienced fighter who had never been in such a situation, he was able to surmount his inadequacies and still "pull it off." Irene, the only focal student who did not draw upon a theme during the reading think aloud, was also the only focal student who did not suggest a theme at the end of her written response. Instead, she ended with an interpretive recounting of what took place at the end of the excerpt. She focused on Richard's victory over the gang of boys rather than on a larger message that went beyond what was literally taking place in the text.

## Summary

The focal students operated under the notion that the reader's personal response to the text was more important than sticking to the prompt. All of the focal students went beyond the prompt to include their opinions and a moral stance. Even in Irene's interpretive summary statement at the end of her paragraph, the phrase "pull it off" implied that Wright had successfully accomplished his mission and was able to "stand up for himself"—if this meant he had to "beat the guys skulls" to be victorious, so be it. Given Ashley's description of a typical homework assignment in Ms. Klein's Language Arts class in which students wrote about their feelings, thoughts, and personal connections in relation to a text and the focal students' reading think aloud protocols and written responses about Wright's literary narrative, it was no surprise that students responded to the text in such a personal way.

In addition, the students' writing contained traces of reading strategies and approaches that were prevalent in their reading think aloud protocols in response to Wright's literary narrative. Such traces were especially evident in Ashley and Irene's responses. Both of the female students actually invoked the same language they used in their reading think aloud protocols to describe how they "pictured" or to show how they hypothesized. Even though the male students did not necessarily appropriate the language from their think aloud protocols in their writing, both drew upon themes to focus their writing. Their use of a theme to guide their writing was similar to how they used a theme to steer their interpretation and understanding of character as they thought aloud during their earlier reading.

## Responding to the History Text

When responding to the historical excerpt on Reconstruction, the focal students took a completely different approach to their writing than they had taken for the literary narrative. They were inclined to report on facts and organize information chronologically, as it appeared in the text. These tendencies are consistent with students' beliefs about history as a set of immutable facts that are less open to interpretation than the events and references in the literary narrative and persuasive article (see Chapter 5). Their writing about the historical excerpt stood in contrast to their responses to Wright's literary narrative, in which they used first person pronouns, interpreted and evaluated characters' motives and actions, and made connections to larger themes. The focal students' written responses and writing retrospective interviews about the historical excerpt revealed that they were concerned about getting the facts straight and summarizing or retelling the information correctly. Although their reading think aloud protocols and writing retrospective interviews revealed that students made interpretations and evaluations along the way *during* reading (see Chapter 5), these insights were not as apparent in their written responses as they were in the think aloud protocols.

Here is the prompt that the focal students were given:

Reconstruction Paragraph Assignment  
Instructions

Pretend that this is an important assignment that will be graded by your teacher.

How did Reconstruction under Lincoln affect the lives of African Americans in the South? What things gave freedmen hope of a better future and what difficulties did they still face? Write an organized and detailed paragraph.

The prompt was adapted from questions and a graphic organizer assignment that were supplied by the same ninth grade social studies teacher who had provided the adapted text on Reconstruction. The first question required students to include an interpretation and/or evaluation about the effects of Reconstruction on the African American freedmen. The second was a follow up question that asked the students to discuss the effects in terms of “hopes” and “difficulties.” The historical excerpt itself never explicitly mentioned the words “hopes” or “difficulties.” Thus in order to address the prompt fully, the students had to go beyond the facts to make their own interpretations about what might influence a hope or a difficulty. They essentially had to create situation models to fit these concepts and use the facts within these models as sources of support or evidence. The students had to extrapolate what newfound freedoms may have given the freedmen hope after their emancipation and what hardships or iniquities might have constituted difficulties for the freedmen. These extrapolations involved imagining the historical landscape from the freedmen’s point of view.

While the original text on Reconstruction was skewed somewhat towards identifying and portraying the difficulties that the freedmen faced, it still included several examples that could have been construed as opportunities that might instill hope in the freedmen. For example, the text explained that schools and colleges for African Americans were established during Reconstruction. This information could have been interpreted as the creation of infrastructure that could open up opportunities for a brighter future. The text also stated, “For the first time in their lives the freedmen, a term that applied to both men and women, had the right to marry, travel, educate their children, and demand money for their labor” (Zinn, 2003). From some of these examples, the students could have extrapolated ways in which the freedmen would have been able to envision a better future.

The prompt implied that the students’ written response should also include a discussion of what may have given the freedmen hope as well as what may have been construed as difficulties. Each focal student, however, chose to emphasize difficulties and hopes in varying degrees. Ashley’s writing highlighted the freedmen’s difficulties. Irene’s writing, on the other hand, focused on the newfound freedoms that brought the freedmen hope. Hector attempted to balance his approach and alternated between writing about hopes and difficulties. Tyrone deviated from the prompt almost completely and used the assigned writing as an opportunity to deepen his understanding about Reconstruction by integrating various topics from the text into his writing. Unlike the others who conscientiously tried to follow the prompt, Tyrone allowed his personal goals for writing and learning to direct his choice of content, focus, and organization. Despite differences in their organizational approaches, the students privileged the presentation of facts over providing explanations and/or interpretations. Irene and Tyrone occasionally broke away from this pattern of privileging facts. Irene, at times, attempted to gauge the emotional state of the freedmen; and Tyrone began to evaluate the choices made by Lincoln and Johnson at the end of his response. However, when they moved away from the facts to include their interpretations, they signaled hesitation, via word choice or other markers, to indicate that they did not feel comfortable making strong claims or evaluations.

### Focusing on the Facts: Ashley and Hector

Ashley focused on the difficulties that the freedmen faced and chose not to acknowledge opportunities that could have brought them hope. She wrote:

Reconstruction under Lincoln affected the lives of African Americans in many ways. After they were freedmen life was harder than they expected. They had difficulties buying land. Each A.A. was allowed 2,000 acres out of 16,000 but buying so much land seemed to be real hard. They asked to buy only 10 to 20 acres but the farmer land owners wouldn't allow it. After the war the land was all sold to white and black men and as time went by the white men learned that the labor the slaves had been doing was more difficult than they thought. The freedmen had hope for a better future now that they weren't slaves but realized that even though they are free they have bigger responsibilities.

Ashley began with a topic sentence that was general enough to address both the "hopes" and "difficulties" from the prompt. In her writing retrospective interview, she described how her second sentence transitioned into discussing the freedmen's hardships:

- Ashley: *After they were freedmen, life was harder than they expected.*  
Monica: Can you tell me about how, why you thought of that, or what was going through your mind?  
Ashley: Because they um, like they uh celebrated being free until they realized that they had to buy land and own houses. It was like more responsibilities.

She explained that after celebrating their freedom, the freedmen concerned themselves with buying land. Ashley associated having land with owning a home and more responsibilities, especially because the freedmen did not have to provide housing for themselves when they had been slaves. She moved on to the difficulty of buying land and the factual details, including the number of acres freedmen were allowed to obtain.

Comparing what she said in her earlier reading think aloud for this piece to her written response and writing retrospective interview, her attention to these specific details about the allotted acres revealed how Ashley unsuccessfully tried to work through a comprehension difficulty (i.e. the number of acres) and carried this misunderstanding into her response. Thinking that she had come to the correct rather than incorrect conclusion about the allotted acreage, she made it a point to write about the limited resources that the freedmen possessed, as well as the injunction that the government imposed on the freedmen.

In Ashley's reading think aloud, the section in the text about the number of acres that freedmen were allowed to purchase presented some comprehension difficulties for her:

Um *But only a few blacks could afford to buy this. In the South Carolina Sea Island, out of 16,000 16,000 but only a f—oh, sorry, 16, 000 arckers-acres of up for sale in March of 1863, freedmen who pooled their money were able to buy 2,000 acres, the rest being bought by northern investors and speculators.*” Um I don't know who the speculators are. I know investor-invest is like to put money into something. Um I don't “*In the South Carolina Sea Island,*” Oh, okay, I get it,

I get it. So out of 16,000 acres they were giving each freedman who pulled their money 2000. So I guess obviously there weren't that many people who can get it because that's only if they divide it by 2000 its only going to be like 8 different parts of land. And I don't know how much an acre is so (*hehe*) like I know what it is. It is like the amount of space but I don't know how much.

As she thought aloud, Ashley tried to figure out how the land was apportioned and sold to the freedmen. In this process, she misunderstood how much land the freedman could afford. She thought that each freedman was able to “pull” enough money together to buy 2000 acres, and missed how *all* the freedmen in the area “pooled” money together as a group for this total amount. Therefore, she had the impression that the land was to be parceled into eight different pieces and given only to a few people. She admitted that she did not know what amount of land constituted an acre; and this lack of background knowledge most likely affected her misunderstanding. Yet she mistakenly felt as though she had worked through this comprehension difficulty regarding how the acres had been divided. It was almost as though she wanted her audience (i.e. her teacher) to know that she had puzzled her way through this difficult problem (even though she was actually incorrect).

She compared new information with her previous understanding about acreage allotment as she continued to read and think aloud about a freedman who had written a letter to a “Young Misses” who knew Lincoln:

*“We could have been buying land, but they make the lots too big and none of us can afford them.”* So I guess it would make sense if they make the land smaller and cheaper, than more people would buy. *“Lincoln said himself that we should stake out claims to abandoned lands, that we should hold onto demand plant them and that and that he personally will see to it that we each get ten or twenty acres.”* Okay. So, I am guessing that 2000 acres is a lot if they are asking for only 10 acres. *“We're too glad to hear this—wait, we're too glad to hear this and so we stake out claims. But before the planting season come [came] came our lots were sold by the government to rich white men. Where's Lincoln now?”* So it's like a complaint letter to um to young misses asking to pass it on to Lincoln. Practically, they think that if they'd worked hard to keep them, to keep the land nice than why should the white men be able to buy it?

Ashley was able to figure out that 2000 acres was quite a bit. While the freedman quoted in the text claimed that Lincoln had given his word that the freedmen in the area would each get ten or twenty acres, Ashley inferred incorrectly that this amount of land was what the freedmen requested. She recognized that the letter was a complaint about how the land was unjustly taken away from the impoverished freedmen who had “worked hard” to tend the land. Yet she did not frame this action as an injustice, but merely as a difficulty, although she questioned “why the white men should be able to buy it.” When writing about the historical excerpt she did not go beyond the prompt as she had done with Wright's literary narrative. Her response to the narrative went as far as to express her opinion that “his [Wright's] mother was trying to teach him how to defend himself but I think she came about it the wrong way.” Such evaluations in which she expressed her judgment and moral stance did not surface in her writing about the historical excerpt.

In her writing retrospective interview for her response to the history text, Ashley explained that she had written about the acreage allotment because it was prominent in her memory. What she got “stuck on” in her reading had made its way into her writing. These facts about the acres were part of a comprehension “puzzle” that she felt she had solved. In order to differentiate her written words from what she said about them, her writing is in *italics* and what she said about the sentence is in regular font.

- Ashley: *They had difficulties buying land. Um, each African American was allowed 2,000 acres out of 16,000 but buying so much land seemed to be real hard. (train whistle continues)*
- Monica: Could you tell me a little bit about what was going through your mind?
- Ashley: Um, ‘cause I—that was like the part I remembered about the acres. They, um, they wanted to buy less land but the former landowners were only selling it in pieces of 2,000 acres.
- Monica: I noticed at that point you were, um, erasing some stuff and I think I kind of asked you a question then.
- Ashley: Oh yeah.
- Monica: Can you tell me a little bit about what was going through your mind?
- Ashley: Um, at first I put with was only allowed—but then it sounded like they wanted more instead of less. Then I erased *only* and just put *allowed 2,000 acres*.
- Monica: So what do you mean they—it sounded like they wanted more instead of less?
- Ashley: Cause if I put each African Americans was only allowed 2,000 acres it would sound like they wanted more but they want less.

She specifically wanted to express that while a freedman was allowed 2000 acres, each freedman really wanted less and not more than what he was allotted. Even though she had misconstrued the details of the acreage allotments, she did recognize the “big idea” that the freedmen were not asking for much.

In her next sentence, she wrote, “They asked to buy only 10 to 20 acers but the farmer land owners wouldn’t allow it.” Instead of commenting on this or highlighting that the African Americans only asked for what they felt they needed, she moved on to a very general summary about what happened to the land: “After the war the land was all sold to white and black men and as time went by the white men learned that the labor the slaves had been doing was more difficult then they thought.” In her writing retrospective interview, she explained that there was more equality between whites and African Americans because of the change in land ownership status for the African Americans:

Eventually all the land was sold. And so, like, the community—not the communities but the, um, farming or the, like, fields and crops were owned by black and white men. They weren’t as segregated. And um—and that’s when you hear, um, one of the rich white men says that they didn’t realize how much work had gone into keeping the, um, fields nice.

These ideas about desegregation through land ownership did not come through in her writing, although they influenced her thought process. Her written response made it seem as though she deviated from the prompt to discuss how white men also faced difficulties after Reconstruction. Her writing retrospective interview, however, revealed that her actual emphasis was really on how the new land ownership for the African Americans fostered equality between the races. She did not, however, characterize land ownership as something that might bring the freedmen hope.

In the last sentence of her written response, Ashley wrote, “The freedmen had hope for a better future now that they weren’t slaves but relized that even though they are free they have bigger responsibilities.” Ashley did not mention or link any specific opportunities from the text to the freedmen’s hopes. The only positive benefit that she identified for the freedmen was in her last sentence in which she acknowledged that they “weren’t slaves” any longer. When I asked her to tell me more about why she wrote the last sentence, she claimed:

Because originally “the more difficult than they thought” was gonna be my closing but then I reread the prompt and I remembered he said what hopes they had. In her last sentence, she finally recognized that the freedmen might have felt some hope during Reconstruction. And I didn’t say anything about hopes so I had to add something.

Ashley went back to the prompt and felt that she needed to comment on what might have given the freedmen hope. While she was unable to identify anything concrete, she wrote that their freedom could have given them hope. The second half of her sentence implied that despite any hope that the freedmen might have, this hope would be overshadowed by “bigger responsibilities,” which entailed difficulties. Although she did not find any hopes to discuss, she felt compelled to write something since the prompt asked the students to address what might have given the freedmen hope about a better future. She did not feel she could break away from the prompt and its confines, even if she did not have much to say about the freedmen’s hopes.

When I asked Ashley to compare the process of writing about the historical excerpt and Wright’s literary narrative, she explained that making personal connections made it much easier for her to write about a text.

Ashley: Like, this one [the response to Wright] the—I wrote it more personally. Like, I remember I referred to myself, like if my mom told me to beat someone with a bat, but this one I couldn’t refer to myself ‘cause I’ve never had to buy land or I’ve never been a slave, you know?

Monica: Mmhm. Anything else you would say about—

Ashley: Mmm. This one [Wright’s narrative] I can build a picture in my mind about what was going on which made it easier to be more detailed and in this one [history excerpt] I wasn’t alive in the 1600—or the 1800s. So, I didn’t know if, like, farms looked the same.

Monica: Now in this one [Wright’s narrative], though, I don’t know if you’ve experienced (laughs) the same thing though.

Ashley: I haven't but I mean it's something I can relate. Like, like, I would never be an African American slave. Like, I can't really—like, this is more—it's from a point of view where it's more personal where it's, like, his emotions instead of straight facts.

Ashley claimed that the aesthetic experience of “living through” (Rosenblatt, 1978) Wright’s experience led her to write with more “details.” While she could empathize with Wright and put herself in his shoes, she felt that she could not “live through” the experience of being a freedman. She acknowledged that, as a white female, she could never experience or understand anything close to what it was like to be a former African American slave. Although the history text quoted the actual words of real freedmen, who expressed their outrage and desire for equality in a way that appealed to the reader’s emotions, Ashley felt that the text mostly contained “straight facts.” It is difficult to know how students had developed this impression about history as an accumulation of facts that was not open to interpretation. At the time of the study, the students were not enrolled in a History class since there were no ninth grade social studies electives or requirements at Magellan.

Similar to Ashley, Hector had the notion that he should use his writing to report on the facts. He summarized the possible difficulties and hopes chronologically and included facts in his written response:

The article Reconstruction is about how President Lincoln set the slaves free. They were called freedmen that included man and women. The obstacles they had were that they needed jobs to survive lands to farm and the same education white people had. Some privielages that they got were to be free and travel. The freedmen had some difficulties but at the end President Lincoln made 4,300 schools for freedmen and established the first black colleges.

During his writing retrospective interview, he explained that he began with how Lincoln had set the slaves free and the African Americans’ change in status from being slaves to freedmen:

Hector: Like President Lincoln set the slaves free. And yeah that’s how I started.

Monica: Why did you decide to start it that way?

Hector: Um because I kinda went like what the text did. They started out with how he set them up free and then they went on and on. Yeah that’s how I started.

Monica: After, let’s see... So, what were you thinking as you wrote the next sentence? You put down they were called freedmen.

Hector: Yeah, after they were free they were called freedmen. That included men and women.

He used the clarification from the text that freedmen “included men and women.” The second sentence and its placement in the paragraph marked the identity transformation that the freedmen underwent before grappling with obstacles and experiencing privileges during Reconstruction. He claimed that he “kinda went like what the text did” and used the same topical organization in

combination with answering the prompt. As he wrote, Hector attempted to balance his discussion on the “obstacles” and “privileges,” or possible influences that would present the freedmen with difficulties and hopes, by alternating between these two binaries. By asking him what made it easy and difficult to write his response, I was able to find out more about the strategies he used to structure his writing:

Monica: How was, was it hard to write this?  
Hector: No, it was easy.  
Monica: What made it easy?  
Hector: Uh because the questions kinda gave me a better idea of what to write.  
Monica: Uh huh, was there anything difficult about writing it?  
Hector: No.  
Monica: Or what was the hardest part about writing it?  
Hector: Um, I think the hardest part was just to put it all together. Yeah.  
Monica: And what helped you do that?  
Hector: Like all, put it, what happened first and like what happened second, what happened the last.

Within the sentences that discussed either difficulties or hopes, he made an effort to present the information on each topic in a chronological fashion that corresponded with the original text. His written response and writing retrospective interview show that his concerns were mostly about summarizing the information from the text in a way that the reader could easily follow. He was conscientious about sticking to the prompt and even noted that he stopped to reread the prompt as he wrote. Yet he did not really discuss the ways in which these difficulties and hopes “affected the African Americans,” as the first part of the prompt suggested.

### **Using One’s Own Agenda to Direct Writing: Tyrone**

Although Tyrone did not specifically label what would bring the freedmen hope and what would present them with difficulties, he still touched upon these topics indirectly. Tyrone stated, “I don’t like writing like everybody else.” He explained how he “just wanted to write it different” from the way his classmates did and chose not to present the information as a chronological summary. Instead, Tyrone presented facts alongside commentary and set up distinctions to highlight job prospects and opportunities for African Americans before and after slavery, the economic hardships experienced by whites of different social classes, and the decisions of Lincoln and Johnson:

When Americans were freed some would choose to stick with their jobs because it was what they were doing their whole lives and they didn’t know anything else, but this time they were getting paid. Some freedmen just wanted to travel. The rest went in search of loved ones.

After slavery ended poor whites had competition for jobs and for buying property. Some of the rich people had to face the fact that they didn’t have anyone to cook, clean, or do anything else for them.

President Lincoln helped African Americans with buying land. President Andrew Johnson was the one who got them kicked off the land for confedate owners to

live on (I'm not sure if he was racist or not). President Lincoln did pretty much all he could to help the former slaves. I still think President Andrew Johnson was against it.

Tyrone began by calling the freedmen “Americans” and did not separate them from the whites, equalizing their status though his diction. He noted that in the aftermath of slavery, these Americans could now “choose” to stay in a job versus hold a position because they “didn’t know anything else” and didn’t have other options. In addition, he commented that the change in status meant that this group of Americans would now be paid. They also would have the freedom to travel or search for loved ones—options that were not available to them in the past. By associating choice with freedom and knowledge, he grouped these new options together as positive changes for the freedmen.

Although some of his word choices at the beginning of his response showed that Tyrone empathized with the plight of the African Americans, his writing retrospective interview suggested that the historical excerpt elicited stronger emotions from him than was revealed in his prose. He most likely softened his diction and tone in order to keep himself from fully expressing his feelings. Unlike Ashley, who felt that she could not connect to the text or put herself in the shoes of an African American freedman, Tyrone’s strong reactions in his writing retrospective interview indicated that he *did* make personal connections and could easily put himself in a freedman’s shoes.

In his writing retrospective interview, Tyrone stated that if he had lived as a slave during that era, he would not have stayed, even if he had been paid.

Tyrone: *...some would choose to stick to there jobs because it was what they were doing their whole lives and they didn't know how to do anything else but this time they were getting paid.*

Monica: So what was going through your mind while you were writing that?

Tyrone: At least they were getting paid

Monica: And why did you decide to start with that part?

Tyrone: Ah ‘cuz if it was me I probably wouldn’t have stayed in the same place I would have tried to learn to do something else.

By noting “but at least they were getting paid,” he implied that this was the only tangible benefit the freedmen received for staying with their former owners. He justified some freedmen’s choice by writing that they probably stayed because it “was what they were doing their whole lives and they didn’t know anything else.” In other words, the freedmen’s limited life experience as former slaves continued to hold them back because they may have wanted to stick to what was familiar since they did not have any knowledge about other opportunities. Applying his 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective to the situation, Tyrone claimed that he would have “tried to learn to do something else.” In his opinion, neither the familiarity of the work nor the pay would have been enough for him to continue working for a former slave owner. The combination of his written response and his writing retrospective interview revealed that Tyrone recognized the tension the freedmen may have felt between two opposing choices: staying in a place where the surroundings, relationships, and work were familiar or leaving to do something new in order to depart from where they had been enslaved. While he could empathize and understand some

freedmen's choice to stay, he did not approve of it and stated that if he had been a freedman, he would have acted otherwise.

In the second paragraph, Tyrone moved away from the prompt to discuss how the change in status for the African Americans created difficulties for the whites, both poor and rich alike. He contrasted the experiences of the two classes, noting that the poor whites now had to face greater "competition for jobs and buying property," whereas the rich whites had to become more self-sufficient because they could no longer rely on slaves to help them around the household. He used an implicit "past and present" comparison by emphasizing what was taking place *during* Reconstruction and intimating that it differed from what had taken place *prior* to Reconstruction. He acknowledged that "competition" might make it difficult for the poor whites to maintain their economic status. In addition, he stated that the rich whites now had to "face the fact" or reality that the African Americans would be doing menial jobs for them any longer. Stating that the rich whites would have to "face the fact," Tyrone suggested that the whites had to change their mindsets, ideas, and actions because of the freedmen's change in status.

During his earlier think aloud, Tyrone explained that, prior to Reconstruction, the former slave owners either could not or did not want to do the work of the slaves.

Tyrone: *Without slaves, once- wealthy I don't know whites suddenly found themselves having to cook, clean, and care for themselves. Poor whites worried about competing with former slaves for jobs. Most planters were in a state of shock. Without slaves many did not see how they could survive. A worried Georgia planter confessed "I never learned a trade... there's nothing else that I know anything about, except managing a plantation."*

Monica: What's going through your mind now?

Tyrone: Uh, since slavery was ended most of the people that owned slaves didn't know how to do, well a lot of them didn't know how to do the stuff that they had the slaves doing. And others were just too lazy to do it for themselves.

In his think aloud, Tyrone revealed that he thought the whites had chosen to remain both ignorant about how to do the work of the African Americans and lazy about doing it themselves. In his writing retrospective interview, Tyrone further commented on this viewpoint and emphasized that any difficulties faced by the former slave was self-created.

Monica: And then you put *some of the rich white people had to face the fact that they didn't have anyone to cook, clean or do anything else for them*. Can you tell me what was going through your mind as you wrote that?

Tyrone: Cuz while they had slaves they were kinda lazy. They didn't do anything. They just told the slave what do it. Now they had to do it all on their own.

Monica: Why did you decide to put that in there? What was going through your mind?

Tyrone: Cuz I don't feel sorry for them.

Monica: Oh, cuz you don't feel sorry for them.

Tyrone: Yeah, it's their fault for being lazy.

His writing retrospective interview revealed that his perspective had not changed in the interim between reading and writing, but rather that he chose not to include his as much opinionated language about the whites in his written response. Tyrone still felt that the former slave owners were “lazy” and did not want to work. Therefore, he felt that these former slave owners did not deserve any of his sympathy because they had created their own hardships by not doing “anything” prior to Reconstruction.

In the last paragraph of his written response, Tyrone identified Lincoln as someone who “helped” the African Americans and Johnson as someone who impeded their progress by returning the land designated to the freedmen under Lincoln back to the former Confederate landowners. When I asked him to tell me why he decided to focus on this topic, he explained, “Cuz that’s stuff I didn’t know.” This was new knowledge for him; and Tyrone wanted to share it with his audience since it could be information that they also did not know. His goal in this paragraph went beyond answering the prompt or writing to please a teacher or me. He wanted to use the paragraph to extend and share his learning. During his writing retrospective interview, Tyrone explained that he intended for his audience to understand how these two presidents and their actions embodied contrasting points of view.

- Tyrone: Yeah I wanted to but ‘em both in there. Cuz-  
Monica: You wanted to them both in there.  
Tyrone: Since they were both against each [other] pretty much. Cuz it seems like President Andrew Johnson did everything exactly- I mean everything exactly opposite of what President Lincoln wanted to do.  
Monica: Why did you think that?  
Tyrone: Cuz President Lincoln was the one that them put on the same land that Andrew Jackson- I mean Andrew Johnson wanted them off of.  
Tyrone: And it says it somewhere in here [the actual text].  
Monica: Why did you decide to include that?  
Tyrone: Cuz I thought some people might wanna know about that.

After differentiating the presidents, Tyrone speculated in parentheses, using the first person pronoun “I,” that Johnson could have been “racist.” This change in pronoun use seemed to indicate that Tyrone felt that the actions of Johnson were much more “personal” and that they warranted a stronger opinion. When I asked Tyrone about what he wrote in the parentheses, he expressed that he wanted to seem neutral and not show bias against Johnson, especially since he was somewhat uncertain about Johnson’s motives.

- Monica: And then what about that last part, you put a bunch of stuff in parenthesis. *“I’m not sure if...”*  
Tyrone: *if he was racist or not.*  
Monica: Ah huh, why did you put that in?  
Tyrone: Cuz I don’t know if he is or not.  
Monica: Uh huh. And you had mentioned that before, why did you decide to include it right there? (pointing to the text in parentheses)  
Tyrone: Cuz I’m not gonna make any judgment on something if I’m not sure about it. So I just wanted people to know that.

While Tyrone viewed Johnson's actions as discriminatory, he hesitated about outright calling him "racist" and used parentheses instead, because he did not want to label Johnson without further proof. Yet Tyrone still wanted his audience to contemplate that racism led Johnson to confiscate the African Americans' land. To Tyrone, there was no other explanation for why Johnson would order the land to be returned to the former Confederate owners. Earlier in his think aloud, Tyrone attempted to give Johnson the benefit of the doubt.

Tyrone: *Four days later Sherman issued "Special Field Order N. 15," designating the entire southern coastland [coastline] 30 miles inland for exclusive Negro settlement. Freedmen could settle there, taking no more than 40 acres per family. By June 1865, forty thousand freedmen [had] moved onto farms oh onto new farms in this area. But President Andrew Johnson in August of 1865, restored this land to the Confederate owners, and the freedmen were forced off, and oh some at bayonet bayonet or something like that point. Um, trying to figure out why they were forced off. I am thinking this President might have been racist.*

Monica: Why do you say that?

Tyrone: Because he restored the land to Confederate owners I guess. Well I don't really know if he's race, if I would consider him racist. Maybe he just wanted, yeah I think he's racist. I don't know. That's it, I can't really think of it [another reason] right now.

Tyrone did not want to jump to conclusions about why Johnson would have "forced off" the freedmen. But as Tyrone tried to reason through Johnson's possible motives, he could not determine other grounds for this decision aside from "racism." In the last part of his writing retrospective interview, Tyrone expressed that, despite the passing of time, he took Johnson's decision to remove the African Americans from the land very personally.

Monica: Well what was the hardest part about writing this?

Tyrone: Um. Probably thinking about what President Andrew Johnson did.

Monica: And why do you say that?

Tyrone: Cuz of uh what he did, what he did wasn't really good. Well it wasn't good to me. It was mean.

Monica: So why was that diff-difficult to then write about?

Tyrone: I don't know but I mean I did have to write about it. He kinda made me mad.

When I asked Tyrone about what he found difficult about writing a response to the history excerpt, he spoke about his emotional reaction to the content and not about what he found difficult during the process of writing. Tyrone's statement that "it wasn't good to me," could be interpreted in two ways: he didn't agree with Johnson's actions and the decision affected him personally, as an African American, in a way that was not "good." Tyrone further stressed that he did not have a choice and that he "did have to write about it." Johnson's actions made him

mad and he wished to convey that. Despite the anger that Tyrone felt towards Johnson, he felt that he needed more proof of racism from the text in order to discuss the topic.

Like Ashley, Tyrone decided to play it safe and stick as much to the facts as possible when writing about the history text. And even when Tyrone had the facts to support an interpretation, he tried to keep his language as neutral as possible. Although his response to the history excerpt was more than twice as long as his response to the literary narrative and a comparison of his writing retrospective interviews on the two pieces revealed stronger reactions to the historical text, he was more forthcoming about his actual opinion in his response to the literary narrative. As he wrote about the literary narrative, he conveyed a view that Wright was somewhat of a coward because he was “too afraid to fight back using his own two hands.” In the last sentence of his response to the literary narrative, he commented that Wright’s experience was a “good lesson” not only for Wright, but also for others because it should “teach you not to be scared.” The language that he used in his response to the literary narrative contained his opinion and moral judgment about the appropriateness about the mother’s actions and Wright’s handling of the situation. Such commentary was limited in his actual writing about the history text. He implied his viewpoints regarding his disappointment in the African Americans who stayed with their former slave owners during Reconstruction, his lack of sympathy for the “lazy” whites who now had to work for themselves, and his anger towards Johnson, whom he considered to be a “racist,” but he stayed away from using strong language to convey his opinions.

### **Making Tentative Interpretations: Irene**

In a way, Irene’s written response revealed that she attempted to address the entirety of the prompt more than the other focal students did. Hector and Ashley mostly attended to the second question and Tyrone seemed to disregard the prompt altogether. Irene, however, addressed elements of the first question to a greater degree than Hector and Ashley. She went beyond listing what could constitute difficulties and hopes for the freedmen to discussing how such factors might “affect” the freedmen’s emotional state and influence their feeling of hope.

The Reconstruction under Lincoln affected the African Americans in the south by I think them not having food or just getting fed for a week. Also, that they were reconstructing new schools & colleges maybe they are happy about that. Another thing that might have affected them would be that the agents didn’t want to see the freedmen as “employers” [employees] anymore and they wanted them to be aware of their new rights and responsibilities as “free laborers”. Well, the freedmen had more hope when they were going to get new schools & colleges. Also they had hope when they were gonna be known as free laborers. And the difficulties that they still face are that they had to still deal with wars. And the blacks had to face that the whites get more medical aids.

Irene remarked that “maybe they [the freedmen] are happy about” the new schools and colleges that were built for them. She also explicated that “agents” from the Freedmen’s Bureau “wanted” freedmen to receive and become “aware” of their rights as “free laborers” who were no longer enslaved “employees.” The logic embedded in her writing was that a positive emotional atmosphere—shaped by the freedmen’s happiness affiliated with obtaining new educational institutions and by the good will of supportive white bureau agents—could foster hope. She

followed the two sentences that mentioned these emotions with the claims that new schools and colleges and the freedmen's newfound status as "free laborers" gave them hope. The mention of emotions was subtle, but the evidence of it suggested that she wanted to weave the freedmen's perspective into her writing. Even though the writing retrospective interviews and think aloud protocols of the other three students revealed that they, too, empathized with the freedmen, their written responses did not go as far as to incorporate interpretations about the freedmen's outlook and emotions in the way that Irene had.

Despite her inclusion of how aspects of Reconstruction, such as the building of educational institutions and the assistance and support from bureau agents, may have affected the freedmen's emotional state, and, therefore, their lives and outlooks, she did not identify as many difficulties and hopes as some of the other focal students. This is most likely because she focused her response largely on just a few paragraphs of the history text rather than on the text as a whole. When I asked her to tell me what was hard or difficult about writing this piece, she explained that the "question" was difficult and that she used a strategy based on key words.

- Irene: Like, the question was the hard one. It's always um based on a question that was hard.
- Monica: What was um- what was hard about this question? Can you tell me?
- Irene: It was just the like- I didn't know- I didn't know how to expect to write it in. It was like how did the Reconstruction—thinking that I didn't know how to write it.
- Monica: Wait, um, what do you mean by that?
- Irene: I didn't know how to find the answer to that 'cuz there wasn't too much information on that, so I just looked up the Reconstruction that's all.

She specifically "looked up" Reconstruction and African Americans because they were in the prompt and noted that she went back to the text and paid special attention to the first two and last two paragraphs because they either contained these words or were in the paragraph next to the one with the word.

- Irene: And I was looking for African Americans, and I was thinking oh, this has African Americans, this is mos- this paragraph is the one tha's mostly about African Americans.

She treated the process of addressing the prompt almost like a "right there" question answer relationship (Raphael, 1986), by only focusing on parts of the text that contained the words or were close in proximity to the words from the prompt. This approach precluded her from recognizing other difficulties faced by the freedmen, such as running across limitations to land ownership, and opportunities that could bring hope, such as the freedom to marry and travel, which had been identified by the other focal students.

In contrast to her written response to the literary narrative, Irene was more hesitant about including her point of view in her piece about the history text. Her use of "I think" in the first sentence of each of these pieces revealed two different writing voices: one that was invested and competent, and another that was tentative and uncertain. In her response to the literary narrative,

“I think” was used as a way to declare her opinion when she wrote: “What I think the purpose is for Richard Wright’s mother to give him the stick is so he can learn how to stand up for himself.” Here she was much more assertive about stating a definitive perspective. In her response to the history text, she used “I think” to voice uncertainty when she wrote: “The Reconstruction under Lincoln affected the African Americans in the south by I think them not having food or just getting fed for a week.” Although “not having food or just getting fed for a week,” obviously would affect the lives of the African Americans, she used “I think” as a hedge.

Her tentative use of language in the response to the history text seems related to her lack of confidence about comprehending the text. After she had read and thought aloud about the history text, I explained that she was going to receive a prompt in order to write about the reading. She then shared her concerns about writing: “Well that, like that it’s gonna be hard because I didn’t understand really the story. And the questions might be in the parts that I really didn’t understand.” During her writing retrospective interview, she admitted that even when she found parts in the text that she wanted to use in her writing, her mind “was just going around places. It didn’t know what to write.” In the same interview, she also compared how writing in response to the history text was more difficult, stating, “I feel that I stopped more this time than last time. Last time it was easy. I understand the-the story more, but this one was harder.”

Confidence about her level of comprehension affected the word choices she used as she wrote. Yet an examination of these word choices revealed that she grew more confident about her writing, especially as she discussed what might present them with difficulties at the end of her response. The first part of her response contained words such as “I think,” “maybe,” “might had,” and “well”, which revealed a reluctance to commit to the views that she expressed. The last part of her response repeated use of the verb phrase “had to” (plus another verb, such as face or deal), and revealed a conviction that the difficulties the freedmen faced were inevitable and less fraught with uncertainty than the hopes.

## **Summary**

Three points emerge from these analyses. First, students’ reactions, opinions, and moral stances related to their reading of the history text (as witnessed in their think aloud protocols) did not necessarily come through in their writing about it. In their writing, they tended to downplay interpretations or evaluations that held an emotional charge. Second, how they wrote about history differed from how they wrote about literature; their response to literature pieces tended toward an aesthetic stance while their responses about history were more factual, more efferent in stance (Rosenblatt, 1978).

In contrast, there was a mismatch between students’ processing of the history text and their writing about it. In their writing retrospective interviews, they tended to have strong opinions about the unjust treatment that the freedmen received. However, as students wrote about the history text, they tended to soften their language and use markers to indicate hedging when they discussed their opinions or attempted to make an interpretation or evaluation. Although the data indicated that this mismatch could possibly result from differences between students, contradictions in the data revealed that the explanation for the mismatch must go beyond the individual cases to something about the genre. For example, Ashley stated that it was difficult to write about the piece and that she could not find much to write about because she could not connect to the piece or “live through” the experience. On the other hand, Tyrone clearly seemed to be “living through” the piece, as he made evaluations and judgments in his think aloud and writing retrospective interview, which revealed great empathy for the freedmen.

Yet in both of these cases, the students softened the presentation of their perspectives when they went from reading to writing the piece. Irene claimed that she was not confident about her comprehension of the text and this could have been the explanation for why she used language that voiced uncertainty in her writing. However, a closer examination of her writing revealed that her hedges occurred when she was making inferences about the emotional state of the text's characters. Once she began to list the factual aspects of the difficulties the freedmen faced and the circumstances that might bring them hope, her language became less tentative and had more conviction. These nuances in the data reveal that while confidence about comprehension and connecting to the text could be related to why students might choose to soften their claims, there must be an additional reason for the mismatch between how students make sense of the text in their reading and do not entirely illustrate this understanding in their writing.

Students' understanding of history as a set of immutable facts may have influenced how they read history (see Chapter 5) and wrote about it. Although the students willingly shared their opinions about the content of the historical text, and even alluded to how these opinions helped shape their writing in their writing retrospective interviews, they did not feel as though they had the authority to write these opinions into their responses. Hector and Ashley drew upon numerical figures in the text, such as the number of acres allotted to the freedmen or the number of educational institutions that were established for the freedmen, in order to show that they understood the importance of these facts. However, neither of them ventured to mention an opinion that could be questioned by their audience. Irene and Tyrone, however, made interpretations that revealed their attempts to view Reconstruction through the freedmen's points of view. While their writing indicated that they were hesitant to voice their opinions in these interpretations, traces of their opinions on the treatment of the freedmen still came through in their responses.

### **Responding to the Persuasive Article**

Students' written responses to the persuasive article, "I'm not lying, I'm telling a future truth. Really." by Benedict Carey in the *New York Times*, revealed that the students attempted to stick as closely to the author's words as possible, by quoting, paraphrasing, or in some cases, plagiarizing the text. They struggled more with the organization and presentation of ideas in this written response more than they did in the others.

In addition to analyzing students' writing, I examined students' reading think aloud protocols, writing retrospective interviews, and writing think aloud protocols. Incorporating the writing think aloud represented a departure from the two earlier task sets; recall that for both literature and history, the students were asked to do a writing retrospective interview about their piece after they had finished writing it. For the persuasive article task set, I added a supplementary data source—a writing think aloud during the composing process. I added this task because I had noticed, in the first two writing retrospective interviews, that students often commented more on content than on process. More specifically, I wanted to explore whether or not a writing think aloud might uncover more about the students' writing process and how they went back and forth between a text that they had read and the composition of their written response. While this additional data source revealed a bit more about the process, it did not do so in a way that would significantly affect my overall findings about how the focal students wrote in the different genres. The data, however, did provide some additional information about how the focal students attended to the prompt, created a task impression, and went back to the

original text as they wrote about the persuasive article. Because it enriched, rather than detracted from, the data set for the responses to the persuasive article, I include the writing think aloud in my analysis of how students thought about and attended to their written response about this piece.

Students seemed to have more difficulty with their written response partly because of the persuasive article prompt, which stated:

Writing Assignment  
Instructions

Pretend that this is an important assignment that will be graded by your English teacher. In your writing, discuss the author's claims in this article. Then, using logical reasons and examples, explain whether or not you believe it's okay to twist the truth.

The prompt was intended to mimic the English Placement Test (EPT) style essay prompt that Magellan's English department had adopted in order to help students prepare for the English Placement Test that students would take upon being accepted into the California State University (CSU) system. The typical EPT essay prompt includes a short reading about a paragraph in length—oftentimes a quotation from someone famous—and directions for writing an essay that addresses the author's argument or message. Students are then asked to agree or disagree with the author's position or analysis and support a position by discussing the passage and providing reasons and examples from their store of knowledge and experience (cite or footnote website). In addition to using sample prompts published for the EPT, the teachers at Magellan combined the use of such a prompt with having students read a longer expository piece of writing, usually a current events or special interest article which contained an argument or position.

Over the course of the semester in their English class, the focal students had worked on several EPT-style essays in response to articles that were one to two pages in length. In addition, students were given essay-planning organizers in order to brainstorm and identify key quotations to support an author's claims. Therefore, the focal students were acquainted with this particular essay genre when I gave them the prompt for the persuasive article. Since Ms. Klein had introduced and emphasized the term "author's claim(s)" in relation to the EPT-style essay and other assignments, I adopted the same term in the prompt for this particular persuasive article from the *New York Times*. Students had to identify the author's claims, use reasons and examples, and take a stand on the topic of twisting the truth. The prompt did not explicitly ask students to connect their reasons, examples, and stand on truth twisting back to the text, but it implied that the reasons and examples should relate to the student's position and how that position related to the author's claims.

As in all of the EPT prompts, the students were required to discuss the text, the author's message, and their personal opinion. What was complicated about this task was that it asked students to combine elements of personal and expository writing in order to make an argument. The student, by taking a stand and either supporting or refuting the author's position, entered into a space where the dialogic exchange between student and author is made public through writing. Furthermore, this space also positions the student as a kind of authority, in which her own examples and references are to hold as much weight as much as the author's in the written response. For these multiple reasons, writing in this particular genre was understandably demanding, especially for the ninth-grade focal students.

In addition to the difficulty of the prompt, students found reading the persuasive article to be highly problematic, because of their unfamiliarity and confusion over the nature of the genre (see Chapter 5). Only one of the four focal students, Ashley, approached it as a persuasive piece. Like the prompt, the article also combined elements of exposition and a more narrative-like personal style of writing. The author's argument was embedded in his use of very different and disconnected examples at the beginning and end of the article. Although the author used these examples for rhetorical effect, they also contained his stance towards exaggerating or twisting the truth. In order to fully understand the article, the students had to connect these examples to the research that the author explained and presented in the bulk of the article. The disconnectedness of the examples from the rest of the article made comprehension difficult for the focal students (see Chapter 5). Although they were able to understand bits and pieces of the article (e.g. specific claims or examples), most of them did not comprehend the article as a whole. They, quite literally, could not find a framework that would allow them to make the separate pieces, each of which made sense on its own terms, cohere with one another. Together, the prompt and the text could explain why students had difficulty organizing and presenting ideas in their writing.

All of the focal students addressed, answered, and went beyond the prompt when they responded to the literary narrative. Three of the focal students explicitly addressed, but did not explore the interpretive possibilities entailed in the prompt when they responded to the history text. Two of the focal students, Ashley and Hector, used the order and wording of the prompt as a blueprint for organizing their essays when they responded to the persuasive article. Only Ashley understood the prompt and text well enough to write a coherent response. The diminishing number of focal students who were able to comprehend and effectively address the prompts in their writing reflected the increasing difficulty that students had with reading and writing in each successive genre.

Just as directed by the prompt for the persuasive article, Ashley and Hector first attempted to address the author's claims and then attended to incorporating their stance towards twisting the truth, along with their reasons and examples to justify their positions. Tyrone indirectly answered the prompt to the persuasive article by addressing the topic of exaggeration or truth twisting. Tyrone's *modus operandi*, in this case, was similar to how he disregarded the prompt when he responded to the history text. In his writing about the persuasive article, Tyrone did not allude to the author or explicitly mention personal beliefs or opinions about twisting the truth. Instead, he took main points from different parts of the article and assembled them into a paragraph. In comparison to the other three students, Irene seemed to have the most difficulty organizing her response. She interwove her opinions, real life examples, the author's examples, and quotations without differentiating when she was describing and commenting on the author's words and when she was focusing on her own experiences.

### **The Prompt as a Guide, with and without Comprehension: Ashley and Hector**

Of all the focal students, Ashley was the only one who fully comprehended the gist of the article, as well as the author's point about the psychological benefits of exaggeration (see Chapter 5). Yet she had difficulties with figuring out an appropriate claim and how to incorporate her opinion. As she began to write the title of the article and the author, she thought through what it meant to identify the author's claims:

Ashley: Um, I'm trying to figure out what it means by "claims." Like, if it's asking me, if it means, like what the author's trying to say or what the researchers figured out. Like if I'm supposed to figure out if the author or whoever wrote this agrees with, the researcher, agrees with the kids it's okay for them to lie.

(8 sec. silence)

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Ashley: I'm just, I'm still writing the title.

(17 sec. silence)

Ashley: I'm kind of confused. It's saying what the author claims, but I don't really know if the author agrees or disagrees with, like, what side they're on, if they're, because if I say the author claims that students lie about their grades that's not right because it's the psychologists that claim that, not the author.

Monica: So what are you thinking?

Ashley: So I'm trying to figure out like what the author's claim is.

(8 sec. silence)

Monica: What are you thinking now?

Ashley: Mm, I remember that, like, when we write essays, we normally restate the claim in the last paragraph. So I'm going to read the last paragraph, see if it answers it.  
In this sentence it's saying that lies add up. But then...okay, I think I know, I think the author's saying like even lying about things that you can change isn't right, so I think the author disagrees that the students should be lying. I think.

In her deliberation, she was careful about differentiating between what the author reported (the psychologists' claims) and what the author claimed. She also took into account an organizational strategy for writing—using the last paragraph to reemphasize important points—in order to help her find the author's claim in the persuasive article. Ashley was able to use a strategy for writing and apply it to her reading in order to figure out the author's claim by reflecting on how the last paragraph fit with the rest of the article. Even though she had correctly identified the author's main claim, she did not feel that she had enough evidence to use it. Instead, she focused on what she understood: the claim made by the researchers and noted by the author. Once she established the claim that the "students lie for motivation to do better," she was able to write the rest of her response without such elaborate deliberations. She wrote:

In the article "I'm Not Lying, I'm Telling a Future Truth. Really." The author claims that students lie for motivation to do better. Psychologists have studied students and about how they tend to exaggerate their performances in school. Students told higher gpas than when they have when hooked up to a lie detector and were not caught. They were able to stay calm even when exaggerating alot. Although they lied about their gpa's the students were able to bring up their grades. I think telling someone you have good grades motivates you to prove yourself. The students thought/knew they had the potential to get the good grades. In my opinion it is ok to exaggerate about your grades if you can live up

to what you say. If you do lie about your grades and don't live up to your exaggeration people will not trust you anymore and may not believe you.

During the writing retrospective interview, Ashley returned to discussing how it was difficult to figure out the author's claim. She summed up her earlier deliberation process as she discussed what made the piece challenging to write. In essence, her writing retrospective confirmed what she described in her writing think aloud.

Ashley: Um, it was, it was easy to like summarize what was going on in my opinion, but it was hard to figure out what the author's claim was. Like that might not be the author's claim. Because no way I could just say "my claim is that...", so like the author might, I might have misinter, misinterpreted his idea.

Monica: And why do you say that?

Ashley: Because, like it makes sense that he thinks that it's right because he doesn't really say that students should be punished, or shouldn't do that. But he also never says that, like, he never gave examples of when it was good for someone.

Monica: Uh huh. And um, so you decided just to put, "In the article, 'I'm not lying, I'm just telling a future truth,' the author claims that students lie for motivation to do better." So why did you pick that?

Ashley: Because that's pretty much like, what all around all the people in the, like all the people they mention, like all the doctors and stuff, they're all saying that that's why the kids lied about their grades, for motivation.

Ashley brought to light a valid point that the author's claim was not entirely clear. The author's claim had to be deduced through the examples at the beginning and end of the article and the connection between these examples and the rest of the text. Her difficulty with finding a claim that would be appropriate had more to do with the prompt than her skills for analyzing the article. Lacking an obvious "author's claim," Ashley felt that she needed to write something that would represent the next best option: what the psychologists and researchers claimed. Using the claim that "students lie for motivation to do better," Ashley shaped her response.

In addition to having difficulty with the claim, she stated that she felt bound to pick one side over the other when giving her opinion.

Monica: And so what was difficult about writing this? You said a little bit...

Ashley: Um, just like figuring out the claim and then um, like, stating what I think, 'cause I know what I think, because I know what I think but sometimes I just, I don't know how to write it down onto paper.

Monica: And why was that hard for you?

Ashley: Because like, I know like, the way that I think about it, I think both sides is like okay, but if I wrote that in a paragraph, you kind of have to pick what side you believe in stronger. Because it's not a strong paragraph if you're agreeing with two sides.

Monica: And why do you say that?  
Ashley: Because, like you can't write an essay, or like if I had to do an essay on this [for credit], I couldn't write about thinking it's wrong and right.

She had the belief that "it's not a strong paragraph if you're agreeing with two sides." Instead of writing that exaggeration or stretching the truth may be okay in some cases but not in others, she chose to only discuss briefly at the end of her response in terms of grades, a topic from the article. Her concerns about responding to the persuasive article were mostly in terms of representing the author's claim and choosing a side about whether or not she felt it was okay to exaggerate or twist the truth. As in her response to the history text, she felt bound by the prompt. Ashley was more concerned about answering the prompt correctly than about incorporating complex ideas into her response in a way that could potentially challenge the prompt.

Like Ashley, Hector also followed the order of the directions in the prompt to structure his writing. While these two focal students used a similar overarching organizational structure for their writing, their comprehension of both the persuasive article text led to two very different pieces. While Ashley's writing focused on one claim with examples to support that claim, Hector's writing contained several claims:

The Author Benedict Carey, talks about how people sometimes feel comfortable when they lie. How they can get away with things just by lying. Carey also talks about how students exaggerate. Some researchers did some interviews with students and videotape them. The students who exaggerated the most appeared to be more confident and calm. He wrote about people with guilty knowledge tend to look and sound tenser than usual when telling lies.

I don't agree that is okay to twist the truth because some people get away with things just by lying. They also feel guilty and tend to look and sound tenser. That's why people who exaggerate are most likely to look more confident and calm. Twisting the truth's not because people are just hearting themselves by lying and later feeling guilty. When others feel confident and calm when they exaggerate but know that they're not lying.

Some of Hector's claims were correct and others were incorrect. These claims had resulted from how he had comprehended some, but not all, of the persuasive article (see Chapter 5). The first claim was that there are people who "feel comfortable when they lie" and use this to "get away with things." The second was that there are people who exaggerate who appear "more confident and calm" because they "know that they're not lying." And the third was that guilt from lying causes people to "look and sound tenser." In his identification of these supposed claims, Hector often used the same descriptive words as the author, such as "confident," "calm," and "look and sound tenser." The first and second claims were from his misguided comprehension of the article and not claims that were from the article itself. In both his reading and writing, Hector was unable to connect how his claims, correct or incorrect, fit together. Hector also did not comprehend that exaggeration could be construed as a mild form of lying in some situations. Part of the reason for his misguided comprehension resulted from his impression that the author was comparing and contrasting points about those who lie and those who do not

(see Chapter 5). The misconceptions that Hector held about the author's organizational structure and intended message misinformed and negatively influenced his writing.

In his writing retrospective interview, Hector stated that he used a compare and contrast format to structure how he discussed the article:

Like uh, like, I did a comparing thingy, so I just, then I knew that maybe this was, uh, um, telling like there were people that were lying, and, I kinda get the title now, like not lying, I'm telling a future truth, so like, maybe it's comparing a person who's lying and a person who's telling the truth.

His use of a compare and contrast structure could explain why his writing alternated between discussing those who lied and those who exaggerated. Since he assumed these behaviors were dichotomous, he associated exaggerating with telling the truth. He failed to consider that the author was presenting these behaviors along a continuum, in which exaggeration was a mild form of lying. Incorrectly reading a text, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of a text's structure and organization can affect how one chooses to (mis)represent information and (mis)shape a response.

### **Following an Intuitive Hunch: Tyrone and Irene**

Tyrone's response to the persuasive article showed that Tyrone did not care much about following the prompt. As in his writing about the history text, he seemed to disregard the prompt altogether. There was no indication of him referencing this prompt in his writing think aloud either.

Monica: What are you thinking?  
Tyrone: Huh? Uh. just thinking about something to write.  
(8 sec. silence)  
Tyrone: All right. In the article,...they...talk...a lot about exaggeration.  
Monica: What are you thinking?  
Tyrone: They talk a lot about exaggeration. Well, that's what the article is about, but...(pauses) There's more stuff in this article than I've ever heard. Probably not even going to remember half the stuff in this article.  
Monica: You have it here.  
Tyrone: No, I mean like, like tomorrow, never remember it again. (clears throat) hmm.  
Monica: What are you thinking?  
Tyrone: Some exaggeration is good for you, and some is not.

Without thinking through the prompt or reviewing how he might approach it, Tyrone directly began to summarize his version of the article's main topic. His comments about most likely not remembering the article "tomorrow" or "never," along with his distractibility and lack of focus while reading (see Chapter 5), indicated that he did not seem particularly interested or invested in reading or responding to the piece.

Tyrone's approach to the task contrasted with the other students' approaches, as revealed in the initial comments of their writing think aloud protocols. Ashley spoke at length about

trying to figure out the author's claim. Hector commented, "[I'm] rereading the instructions, just to make sure I know what I'm going to do." He also explained, "I'm going to go over [the article] and see what I can get." With this in mind, Hector deliberately went back to the article after receiving the prompt in order to "look for claims." Irene, who did not deliberate much about how to answer the entire prompt, still took up the last part of it, stating, "I'm thinking like, start out with, like, if I believe it's okay to twist the truth."

Tyrone still did not reference the prompt as he continued to write and go back to the reading. When I asked him to describe how he approached the writing task during his writing retrospective interview, Tyrone explained that he sought to take parts from the article that intuitively seemed important:

- Tyrone: I just, like...like, just scanned over it—the stuff in the article—to remind me what things that would be good to write.
- Monica: Did you look for anything in particular?
- Tyrone: Not really. Just anything that sounded okay.
- Monica: So how did you pick out the things that sounded okay to you?
- Tyrone: Like, just read it. Read it over.
- Monica: How did you actually decide which—which one sounded better than others? Which things?
- Tyrone: Well, it really didn't matter to me. But, I mean, some stuff, it just seemed more important. I don't even know if I put all the important stuff there.
- Monica: Go ahead and reread this back to me, and then
- Tyrone: It's all out of order
- Monica: It's—what do you mean?
- Tyrone: (chuckles) Like, I went from this side...I got stuff from these paragraphs over here then got some more stuff over here.

His lack of interest, as evidenced in his comment that "it didn't really matter," was evident in his writing:

In the article "I'm Not Lying, I'm Telling a Future Truth. Really." they talk a lot about exaggeration. Some exaggeration is good for you and some is not. There are different types of exaggeration. Sometimes exaggeration can be hard to detect. Guilty people tend to show more signs of stress. Some fibs can be signs of the opposite of frustration. Holding on to inflammatory secrets is mentally exhausting. That's why lying can be so easy.

In three of his eight sentences, Tyrone appropriated whole phrases from the article and did not use quotation marks. The disconnected statements, which were "out of order," in his response to the persuasive article revealed a different writer, with an ambivalent stance towards writing, than the Tyrone who wrote the response to the history text. Although Tyrone did not heed the prompt when he wrote about the history text, his writing consisted of original words and was organized intentionally according to a compare/contrast logic that juxtaposed the experience of Reconstruction for the African Americans and for the whites, as well as the choices made by Lincoln and those made by Johnson.

Unlike Tyrone, Irene attempted to address all parts of the prompt, while staying true to her thoughts and opinions. Irene's written response and interview data provide a stark contrast to the data set on Ashley for this particular piece of writing. While Ashley wrote a coherently organized piece, she made deliberate choices to leave out what she thought was the author's claim, as well as her split opinion about exaggerating the truth. Irene, on the other hand, included several opinions and personal examples, but had difficulty organizing her response to the persuasive article. The organization of her writing came to her as she wrote about whatever surfaced in her mind. The main idea-support organization structure of her response varied while alternating between her opinion, real life examples, claims, and examples from the text:

Do you think its ok to twist the truth? Well let me tell you that I think is not good to twist the truth, because then you get confused and once you tell one person you could go ahead and ell another one but the truth is going to end up been a totally different supposed truth. In the story that I read the author had some claim that I agreed on and it is "specifically, people are especially more tense when lying, compared to telling the truth, when they are highly motivated to get away with their lies and when they are lying about a transgression". I agree with this claim because when I'm lying I get really tense and also really scare and nervous that I have to twist the truth. And also because I had a time when I told my parents a twisted truth and my brother knew about it so I was in a problem when my brother told the truth to my parents. That's one reason I think twisting the truth is not ok because then it all comes up with the real truth. My second claim is that in the story researches interviewed students while they were hooked up to an array of sensitive electrodes measuring nervous system activations, the interview covered academic history goals and grades. But the researchers then took student's records with permission and found that almost half had exaggerated by as much as six-tenths of a point. I strongly agree with this claim and my reason for that is because why lie if either way they are going to find out if they were lying or not. My second reason of supporting this claim is by actually saying that if your gonna lie don't lie that much by exaggerating and also tell the truth to come clean and not twisting the truth. Those two claims have reasons why you shouldn't twist the truth at all and tell the truth, without twisting it. But to learn how to tell the truth. So thats what I think twisting the truth is not ok for some reasons.

Even as she talked through the prompt prior to writing, Irene had difficulty figuring out how to deconstruct and analyze it in parts:

Um, I'm thinking that I have to, like, actually write like an essay and write about how, yeah, it's like an essay, like writing my claims, and then my readings for those claims, and finding things to support those claims, and um, using examples and reasons why, um, if I believe it's okay to twist the truth.

Unlike Ashley and Hector, who felt it would be helpful to first start with the text and the author's claim(s) from the text, and attend to these first, Irene seemed to think that she needed to address all parts of the prompt at once. As Irene began writing, she thought aloud:

- Irene: I'm trying to think how I'm going to start it, and how my main sentence is going to start off being.
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: Um, well, I'm writing like a question, to start off my thing. My assignment work. And I put "Do you think it's okay to twist the truth?" And I'm going to just put it for a question for me, and I'm going to answer that question.
- (13 sec. silence)
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: Well I'm thinking that, how um, why I think um, twisting the truth isn't, uh, 'cause I wrote "Do you think it's okay to twist the truth?" And now I said, "Well let me tell you that I think it's not good to twist the truth." And I'm thinking, I know it's not good to twist the truth, but I'm thinking why my reasons are, and what way I could write my reasons.
- (19 sec. silence)
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: Well this relates to my conflict management class, and um, after you say the truth, you twist it around, and it's going to end up being different every time you try to tell other people if you keep telling them and telling them.
- (23 sec. silence)
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: I'm just writing down why I don't think it's okay to twist the truth.

Both her writing and her think aloud indicated that Irene felt it was important to privilege her opinion in the response. Irene's opinion began to direct her response and the way in which she incorporated the text and the author's claims into her writing. Instead of beginning with the author's claims, Irene had to find or manipulate a claim to fit *her* opinion. After writing her question and personal example about how the truth can become distorted, she explained that she wanted to return to the prompt and the article:

- Irene: Mm, I'm thinking that how I'm going to put in a claim from the story to this. (whispers her rereading of prompt) "In your writing, discuss the author's claims in this article. Then, using logical reasons and examples, explain whether or not you believe it's okay to twist the truth."
- Monica: What are you thinking now?
- Irene: Well, I'm going to write a sentence and I'm going to like go back and find some reasons why it's not okay to twist the truth.

Irene attempted to use the text to support her opinion, and found that the points in the text did not always correspond with her experience. Irene felt that her writing was bound by her opinion in a way that was similar to how Ashley felt bound by the prompt and the text.

After Irene chooses to cite the claim that "people are especially more tense when lying, compared to telling the truth, when they are highly motivated to get away with their lies and

when they are lying about a transgression,” she provides examples from her family life to support this perspective. Her quoted claim from the text was taken out of context and was left unsupported by actual examples from the article. While this quotation from the article represented one of the points of view about lying, it did not represent the author’s main claim that some kinds of exaggeration, which border on lying, could be considered as psychologically beneficial. Instead, she transitioned to writing about herself and incorporated her personal life experience with her brother and parents to justify the claim.

The second claim made by Irene was actually not a claim, but rather a factual detail from the article. She wrote (response reprinted here):

My second claim is that in the story researches interviewed students while they were hooked up to an array of sensitive electrodes measuring nervous system activations, the interview covered academic history goals and grades....

Like Tyrone, Irene appropriated the text as she described what the research on the student participants. Her actual claim, in this instance, is the reason that she provides later: “why lie if either way they are going to find out if they were lying or not.” Again, she utilized the text out of context and distorted the actual point conveyed by the author. The entire example about students’ exaggerating about their grades was intended to show that even though the students had lied, their exaggeration was not detected as a lie, because students felt that the exaggerated grades had the possibility of becoming true in the future.

## **Summary**

In comparison to their responses to the literary narrative and history text, students tended to incorporate a more of the author’s words into their responses as they wrote about the persuasive article. While the prompt asked them to identify the author’s claims, it did not give them the license to “lift” or appropriate whole sections of text (some would call it plagiarism) as some of the students did. While students felt that they needed to discuss the “facts” in their response to the history text, they did not seem to be as inclined to replicate the exact phrases used by the author. Aside from the directions in the prompt that asked students to identify the author’s claims, it is possible that they felt that they were now being conferred the “authority” to discuss the author’s claims on par with their personal opinions. Yet not all of the students may have felt that they could assume this level of “authority” since they did not fully comprehend the article. Only Ashley, who understood the article as a whole did not use the author’s exact words, either through the use of quotations, instances of individual word use, or outright plagiarism.

Ashley was also the only student who was able to write a coherent response that evidenced her comprehension of the article. The rest of the students’ writing revealed that they had difficulty comprehending the piece. For Hector, Tyrone, and Irene, misguided comprehension may have contributed to the lack of organization in their responses. While Hector, like Ashley, used the prompt as a guide to organize his writing, his misinterpretation about the author’s use of a compare-contrast structure led him to attempt an imitation of this structure in his writing. Yet his compare-contrast logic was not transparent in his writing. I was privy to the information regarding his organizational strategy only because he had discussed it in his think aloud and writing retrospective interview.

Irene and Tyrone wrote more intuitively without being as deliberate as Ashley and Hector about structuring their writing according to the directions in the prompt. Irene attempted to

address the prompt as much as possible by including all of its components, even though she did not write her response according to the order of the prompt's directions. Instead, Irene used her opinion and experience to guide and direct her writing. Irene's choice of "claims" (they were really examples given by the author) from the text often did not quite fit with her opinion or experience. In these instances, she used them out of context in a way that was not representative of the author's intended meaning. In contrast to the others, Tyrone chose not to intentionally take up any part of either the history text or the persuasive article prompts. With both of these genres, he used his intuition as a guide. His response to the history text was based on his personal interest and learning, whereas his response to the persuasive article relied on what he thought "sounded okay" and "seemed more important." While his interest may have driven him to create a thoughtfully organized response with original thinking when he wrote the response to the history text, his lack of interest in the persuasive article and the writing task could explain the plagiarism and lack of organization found in this last response.

### **Comparing Perceptions to What Students Actually Do When They Write About A Text**

In Chapter 4, I examined students' perceptions about the strategies they use when they write and found that students perceived writing to be a much more strategic process than reading. The strategies that students were more likely to use, as reported in data sets from both the focal student and larger sample (n=75) (see Chapter 4), included: paying attention to the directions in an essay's prompt, having a purpose in mind when writing, visualizing about what was read, and sticking to the rules and formats that they had learned along the way about writing paragraphs and essays. In addition, the focal students reported that they were likely to brainstorm about the text they had read, skim the text for ideas that fit with the purpose of their writing, and paraphrase or restate ideas from the text in their own words as they wrote.

The data presented earlier in this chapter show how most of these perceptions about student strategy use are in accord with what students actually do when they write about what they have read. One exception was that there was not much evidence that students used visualization as they approached and attended to their writing. Only Ashley briefly alluded the use of visualization in relation to *both* reading and writing about the literary narrative (see Chapter 5). As stated in Chapter 5, the reason for this could be that the process of visualization is fairly automatic, and, therefore, is not enacted as a deliberate strategy. Another discrepancy was that Tyrone did not follow any of the prompts although he had reported in his survey that he "always" followed the prompt. His resistance and/or lack of motivation to follow the prompt indicated that he could have other goals for writing than to do well on the assignment.

### **Conclusion**

Given my original research questions pertaining to students' enactments of strategies for writing about reading, it is noteworthy that students actually used the strategies that they perceived themselves to use. However, the real news in this chapter is that their enactments of these strategies differed quite a bit depending on the genre that they had read and the genre in which they were asked to write. Based on the analysis in this chapter, the key element in determining how students employ strategies in their writing is how they make sense of three important factors: (a) the comprehension of a text and its genre, (b) the interpretation of the

writing prompt and its genre, and (c) the purpose for and interest in the writing. These further seem to influence how students attend to other strategies in their writing.

Students' ideas about the genres that they read—the literary narrative, history text, and persuasive article—affected the strategies that they used to write responses to these genres. For example, when students skimmed the history text to find and choose examples to support their ideas, they tended to look for prominent factual information when they wrote about their responses. They tended to look for specific details (e.g. Ashley and Hector who incorporated numerical figures) in order to report on the facts. This importance placed on facts aligned with students' beliefs about history as the immutable past, which could not be subject to change and was outside of their area of expertise since they had not lived it. Even Tyrone's hesitation about claiming Johnson was racist seems to support this point. While their think aloud protocols and writing retrospective interviews revealed that students had strong opinions and moral stances about the treatment of African Americans during Reconstruction, they felt hesitant to write these opinions and stances. The hesitance on their parts, then led them to limit how they answered the prompt. Students wrote about how certain changes during Reconstruction either led to difficulties or promoted hope amongst the African Americans, but they did not necessarily write about how these changes may have affected the African Americans in terms of emotional states, livelihoods, outlooks, chances of achieving equality, etc.—topics that they discussed with emotionally charged reactions during their writing retrospective interviews. The students' writing about the history text contrasted with their writing about the literary narrative, which was abundant with personal opinions and moral stances. In the case of the literary narrative, these opinions and moral stances also led some students to go “beyond” the prompt in order to convey a larger thematic message.

The difficulty of reading and comprehending the persuasive article genre and the prompt's influence over student's understanding of the writing task genre generated very different written products from each student. By following the prompt, Ashley and Hector attempted to use a given format. Ashley, the only student who fully comprehended the article, wrote the only coherently organized response, which followed the order of directions given in the prompt. As she spoke about her response in her writing retrospective interview, she felt bound by particular “rules,” such as only taking one side of an argument in order to write well. Although Hector also attempted to use the order of directions given in the prompt, his lack of comprehension and misguided understanding about the organization of the article led him to create a compare-contrast organizational structure which was not communicated to his audience. Because he felt he was following a compare-contrast format, he tended to write in a disjointed way, alternating between discussing what he *believed* to be two opposites: lying and exaggeration. Irene and Tyrone used a more intuitive approach, and both seemed to disregard the rules and formats for writing an essay or paragraph. Coupled with their lack of text comprehension, Tyrone's ambivalence towards writing this response and Irene's tendency to structure her writing around her opinions and experiences led to writing that was difficult to read and follow.

Tyrone's intuitive approach to write about what he felt “seemed more important” when he responded to the persuasive piece contrasted with his intuitive approach to the history text, in which he showed interest and investment in his writing. His response to the history text was thoughtfully organized around juxtapositions showing how Reconstruction shaped different outcomes for the African Americans and Whites and led to opposite choices made by Presidents Lincoln and Johnson. In this task set, Tyrone's interest in learning more about Reconstruction

created a strong purpose for writing: to solidify, sort, and present the information that he had learned. Interest, in the case of his history text response, and disinterest, in the case of his persuasive article response, led him to ignore the prompt and use purpose (or lack thereof) to guide his writing.

To emphasize the major point that emerges from an examination of all the twelve responses (three responses from each of the four students), strategy use is shaped primarily by how students make sense of the text, task, and purpose.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Over the last decade, national reports have led to a greater awareness about the need to teach explicit strategies for reading and writing (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham & Perin, 2007; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Attention to this need has been evident in teacher credential programs, in which classes for content area literacy have become part of the required curriculum. The underlying assumption of such classes is that there are universal reading and writing strategies that can be integrated into all of the content areas. Yet this dissertation challenges notions that strategies for reading and writing can be taught according to a “one size fits all” philosophy and that strategies can be taught as a set of “generic” procedures. Instead, it suggests that teaching strategies for reading and writing must be taught within the context of specific “genres.”

This dissertation study focused on students’ perceptions and actual use of strategies for reading and for writing about reading. It revealed that students’ identities and their understandings of genre shape how students think about and implement strategies during the reading-writing process. In the study, I found that reading and writing in different genres entail affordances and constraints that affect students’ perceptions and enactments of strategies. In addition, I found that students’ identities, including their background experiences and motivations, affect their decisions to prioritize some strategies over others. My study also revealed how students think differently about strategies for the two interrelated processes: reading and writing about reading. Students perceive that writing about a text is a more strategic process than reading alone; but this perception does not necessarily translate into a greater sense of student ownership and authority over their writing. The public nature of writing in comparison to the more private nature of reading leads students to prioritize strategies for addressing an audience over strategies that demonstrate their understanding of content when they write about what they read.

### **Perceptions about Reading Strategies Are Shaped by Genres**

#### **Reading Strategies Perceived to be the Most Useful Across Genres**

Using data from the “What I do when I read” survey (see Appendix A) to capture students’ perceptions about their use of reading strategies, I identified the “most popular” strategies reported by a sample of 75 students (see Chapter 3). Popular strategies included, in order, picturing or visualizing, rereading, thinking about what students already know, guessing the meaning of unknown words and phrases, and previewing the text. What was common among these strategies was that they all related to evoking or building background knowledge. In order to understand why students may have gravitated towards privileging some strategies over others, I analyzed what four focal students said in their survey follow up and reader identity interviews. This analysis led me to conclude that genres—including the purposes they entail and the contexts in which they take place—affect students’ perceptions about the utility of various strategies.

#### **Genres Carry Affordances and Constraints for Reading**

As stable types of utterances with predictable thematic, compositional, and stylistic elements, genres are easily recognizable by members of a community who have the same understandings about the purposes and functions of the genre (Bakhtin, 1986; Swales, 1990). It

is no wonder then that, with repeated exposure and experience, students at an early age are able to identify characteristics of genre in what they read and reproduce these characteristics when they write (Kamberelis, 1999). As students develop as readers and writers and become more familiar with different genres, they begin to understand the affordances and constraints of each one. For example, a student cannot expect she can read a fictional text and an expository science text in the same way. If she did, she would likely miss the author's point and the purpose of the text.

In my study, students perceived that each genre, because of its particular set of affordances and constraints, lent itself to the use of specific strategies. Visualization was the most salient example of a strategy that students perceived to be relevant and helpful in some, but not in all, genres. Ashley and Tyrone both compared visualization while reading fiction and literary narratives to creating a movie in their heads. As in a movie, the unfolding of a sequence of events and an overall plotline seemed to help them keep their momentum and attention going as they read fiction and literary narratives.

In contrast, Ashley and Tyrone explained how the content in expository genres, such as a health textbook or a newspaper article, could be visualized, but they also recognized this strategy did not aid them in the process. Visualizing, in these cases, actually distracted them from concentrating on the text at hand. Ashley described how visualizing a spleen while reading the health textbook's description of it as being "egg-shaped" left her with a "bad image" that took away from her focus on the text. Tyrone explained that trying to visualize while reading an expository article such as the *New York Times* article on the psychological benefits of exaggeration was "too hard" and "complicated" because there was no plotline and sequence of events to hold the article together as a whole. Although a student could visualize the scenarios described in the article, the student would have to compare these scenarios and differentiate how each one fit into the author's argument. Tyrone's claim that it would be too "complicated" speaks to the difficulty of keeping track of an argument while creating and then juggling vivid scenarios in one's mind. Thus the structure and content of expository texts, because of their focus on an argument or explanation, do not lend themselves to visualization.

**Individual understandings of genre affect perceptions about strategy use.** Bruner (1986) states that when an individual encounters a genre, there is "also a question about the interpretive processes that are loosed by the text in the reader's mind" (p. 7). When the individual either reads or writes, the text brings to the fore her preconceived notions about genres. She interprets and filters what is entailed in that genre through a subjective stance, which is informed by her background experiences and beliefs (Beck & Jeffrey, 2009). While there are common patterns in students' ideas about what constitutes a particular genre, there are also individual differences. In this study, focal students viewed reading, its purposes and functions, through their personal understandings of genre.

Ashley's understandings about how to read nonfiction, such as history texts and biographies, and fiction related to her views about authors' orientations towards the portrayal of real life events and occurrences in these genres. Due to these beliefs about author's orientations, Ashley viewed the use of questioning differently based on whether she perceived the text to contain factual or fictional content. In both genres, she felt as though she could ask questions about what was taking place within the text. However, she held different perspectives about asking critical questions that could go beyond what was written in the text. For example, she felt that she could question nonfiction texts in terms of their verifiability: Does it seem like the

author is presenting the truth? Are there other versions of the truth that are not represented in the text that can be found elsewhere? If the author was reputable and seemed to have all of the facts straight, as in the case of school textbook versus internet source (e.g. blog or website) authorship, then the facts in the text really could not be questioned. However, she believed she could not ask the same kinds of questions about the verifiability of fiction and compare it to the real world because it represented an imaginative author-created world that was not real. Yet much of what a reader takes from fiction relies on making connections between the imaginative world of the text and the real world. Given Ashley's view of what questions are appropriate for fiction, one would conjecture that such self-imposed limitations to questioning in this genre would constrain her from exploring interpretive possibilities.

In contrast to Ashley, Irene did not feel as though asking questions depended on the genre of the text. She used questioning as a strategy to satisfy her interest, curiosity, and comprehension needs. Her questions about fiction often went beyond just what was in the text. She explained that after she had read *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, she asked, "Why does Cathy have so many cats?" (see Chapter 3). Her curiosity led her to ask a question about the character's motivations, an important aspect of analyzing literature. Irene's use of questions in order to help herself through a text also related to her identity as a literacy mentor in her family. Irene related how she created questions for her father from informational "texts" on preparing and pouring cement. As someone who taught others to work with cement, Irene's father often created lessons to teach information to those he supervised. Irene's role as a literacy mentor allowed her to internalize the use of questions as tools for learning, regardless of the genre.

***Strategy, genre, and context.*** In the case of some strategies, such as summarizing, the context and "genre affiliation" of the strategy determined the students' perceptions about its utility. The focal students regarded summarizing as an intermediary step that was related to accomplishing some kind of school "assignment" genre—usually the writing of summaries, notes, or logs, or preparation for a test or project. Hector and Ashley claimed that they only summarized in order to complete such assignments, but they did not associate summarizing with larger learning or comprehension goals. They explained that they never summarized on their own when reading for fun at home. Irene, on the other hand, stated that she summarized in order to remember information, even when it did not relate to preparing for a school assignment. Again, her role as a literacy mentor in her family may have influenced her view that summarizing was a powerful strategy that strengthened learning and memory. The students' perceptions about the utility of summarizing related to how they saw the strategy functioning within two contexts: school and home.

## **Actual Use of Reading Strategies**

### **Comparing Perceptions to Actual Enactments of Strategies**

In order to examine how students actually enacted strategies as they read and wrote about texts, I conducted a set of reading-writing tasks in three different genres: the literary narrative, persuasive article, and history text. For each reading-writing set of tasks, students read the text, thought aloud about it, wrote a text-related response by addressing a school-like writing prompt, and participated in a writing retrospective interview. Visualization, the strategy that students claimed to use most frequently, was seldom actually used. Only Ashley made explicit references

across sources to picturing, seeing, or having an image in her mind as she read. This could be attributed to the likelihood that the students employed visualizing as an automatic “skill” rather than as a deliberate strategy (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Two strategies that students employed frequently across all three genres were rereading and invoking background knowledge. Rereading was especially common when students had difficulty with decoding, comprehension, or keeping track of what was taking place in the text. Students guessed the meanings of unknown words, but the frequency of this strategy varied from student to student. In other words, some students stopped to figure out vocabulary at almost every unfamiliar word, while others did not speculate about word meanings and only slowed down to decode them when necessary. While students reported that they were likely to preview the text, I found that they did not necessarily enact this strategy but often employed a similar but slightly different one: predicting through creating hypotheses—especially as they read the literary narrative.

Two strategies, summarizing and questioning, were not perceived by students as having high utility during reading, but these strategies actually were quite prevalent as students read and thought aloud. Students often summarized in all three genres in order to reduce text passages into memorable and manageable “bits” of information that were hierarchically organized. Students’ association of this strategy with specific kinds of assignments for school may have clouded students’ perceptions about the actual utility of this strategy, causing them not to realize that they, in fact, used the strategy regularly on their own. Students tended to enact questions through other strategies such as hypothesizing or clarifying. Yet students’ perceptions about what constituted a question may have led them to believe that questions must be asked in a particular form (i.e. a question with a question mark), rather than in the manner of a more general wondering, such as a prediction that later becomes resolved or “answered” as students continue to read the text.

Students’ could clearly discuss their perceptions of individual strategies—their talk about individual strategies presented their understanding of that single strategy and how the students’ envisioned its use. However, single strategies were not as easy to distinguish and disentangle during students’ enactments of them. This may have been an artifact of the nature of the different tasks. Data on students’ perceptions were gathered through surveys and interviews. By contrast, data related to students’ actual use of strategies were obtained through think aloud protocols. Thus the survey and interview data portrayed a level of precision and clarity that the “on-line” strategy use portrayed in the think aloud protocols may not have. The method of data collection for students’ perceptions about their use of strategies may have created an illusion of clarity—the questions and probes made it easy for students to describe their perceptions. However, their actual strategy use was much more complicated than they portrayed in their talk. As students read in each of the three genres (the literary narrative, persuasive article, and history text), they enacted multiple strategies together, as individual strategies intersected and overlapped.

**Reading the literary narrative.** Findings from the data on students’ reading and think aloud protocols in three different genres indicated that their use of strategies and approaches to texts varied by genre and by student. Students tended to hypothesize more when they read the literary narrative, in comparison to how they used strategies in the other two genres (i.e. the persuasive article and history text). They hypothesized by creating scenarios that either predicted or explained what was taking place in the plot or for a character in the excerpt from Richard Wright’s narrative *Black Boy*. The aesthetic nature of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978), which

privileges students' personal connections to the text, especially when reading literature, may have influenced the students' tendencies to use this strategy. Within their hypotheses, students often incorporated other strategies, such as drawing on background knowledge, making personal connections, or summarizing the text. How each student developed his or her hypotheses varied. All four focal students drew upon their prior knowledge and the text—yet the balance of prior knowledge and inferences related to characters and events in the text differed from student to student. Hector's hypotheses privileged his background knowledge—often based on his life experiences—*over* what was stated in the text. Tyrone and Ashley integrated their background knowledge, both from their personal experience and what they knew about the world, and used it in their hypotheses when it was supported by actual details in the text. Irene created hypotheses that stemmed directly from ongoing mini-summaries that she fashioned from the text. Like Ashley and Tyrone, Irene supported her hypotheses with textual details. She also generated multiple ongoing hypotheses about characters and the plot, which she would evaluate, elaborate, or discard in order to build her situation model of the text.

In addition, students used universal themes as an approach to reading the genre. Ashley and Hector invoked a “coming of age” theme, while Tyrone drew a related theme: learning to face one's fears in order to overcome personal challenges. Irene was the only student who did not use a theme to organize her ideas about the plot. Using a theme provided Ashley, Hector, and Tyrone with a device to organize their ongoing interpretation and understanding of the literary narrative. The use of a theme was specific to the students' reading of the literary narrative and their use of strategies, such as hypothesizing and summarizing, often related to developing interpretations around the theme.

**Reading the history text.** In comparison to their reading of the literary narrative and the persuasive article, students took fewer speculative “risks” when reading the history text and tended not to create as many hypotheses. Instead, the strategies that students relied on the most as they read the text excerpt on Reconstruction included clarifying, which largely drew upon their background knowledge, summarizing, and monitoring. Rather than speculate and hypothesize about the decisions made by those who had lived in the past and events that had shaped the nation during Reconstruction, students drew upon their background knowledge—even if it was inaccurate—in order to clarify what they did not initially comprehend. At times, the students used their background knowledge to clarify vocabulary. Yet this often led them to go “beyond” the text without going back into it. Irene, for example, drew upon her association with her father's cement working background and defined Reconstruction with having to do with the field of construction. This incorrect schema led her to believe that people made plans and traded rocks and other goods in order to reconstruct the landscape and buildings of the war-torn South.

Students also used their background knowledge about the history of race relations in the United States to understand the hardships faced by the African Americans during Reconstruction. Irene was surprised to find that the African Americans and whites did not have access to the same kind of medical care and implied that this could not happen in America after the time of “[Martin] Luther King.” The students' views about the injustices towards the African Americans, based on a contemporary standpoint of how far the country has come in the treatment of people of color, made it difficult for the students to recognize that Reconstruction also benefited the African Americans in numerous ways.

**Reading the persuasive article.** The focal students seemed to have the most difficulty with this particular genre. Halfway through the article, Tyrone lost motivation and seemed to give up trying when he was not able to keep track of the connections between ideas. Although the students used strategies such as drawing on background knowledge, making hypotheses, paraphrasing, questioning, and clarifying, only Ashley was able to comprehend the main points in the article and identify the author's message by connecting key ideas across different paragraphs of the text. She recognized early in her reading that the article was focused on the exploration of ideas related to the topic of lying rather than on the experiences of people, as in the case of a narrative. She later was able to tie the topic to the author's use of a claim-counterclaim argument structure in order to obtain the author's message that exaggeration, a less pernicious version of lying, can be psychologically beneficial. Irene and Hector, on the other hand, recognized some local level ideas, but they did not make connections across parts of the text because they did not recognize that the article was held together by a larger claim-counterclaim argument. Several times, both of them made references to expectations for the text to read like a narrative.

Students' use of strategies did not aid them in their comprehension when they missed the structural clues that the article contained an argument. At times, students got lost in their tangentially related thoughts that resulted from the use of their strategies, which actually derailed them from keeping track of the main idea. Thus strategies are only helpful when they are in service of reading a genre, and its affordances and constraints, correctly.

### **Perceptions of Writing Strategy Use Relate to Audience and Genre**

#### **Writing Is Perceived to be a More Strategic Process than Reading**

Based on my findings from seventy-five student surveys, students perceived writing to be a more strategic process than reading. Students rated twelve out of nineteen strategies listed in the "Writing about what I've read" survey (see Appendix B) as strategies that they were likely to use on a regular basis. Furthermore, the overall mean for students' perceptions about their use of writing about reading strategies revealed that students felt that they were, in general, likely to use the strategies. In contrast they only rated five out of eighteen strategies listed in the "What I do when I read" survey (Appendix A) as strategies that they were likely to use regularly. The overall mean for students' perceptions about their use of strategies for reading suggested that students perceived that they were not likely to use these strategies on a regular basis.

The six items that students rated the highest on the "Writing about what I've read" survey indicated that students were most concerned about considering their audience and genre expectations for writing, as well as how they oriented or reoriented their understandings as they turned to the text to reach their writing goals. Items related to addressing the audience and fulfilling the writing expectations embedded in a genre included: paying attention to the essay's prompt, having a purpose in mind during writing, keeping in mind grammar and punctuation rules, and adhering to rules and formats for writing paragraphs and essays. Items that indicated students' orientation or reorientation of understanding towards the text consisted of the following two strategies: visualizing what was read and rereading text before or during writing.

#### **Perceptions about Genre Requirements Influence Writing Strategies**

Just as in reading, students' perceptions about the affordances and constraints of a genre influenced how they viewed the utility of different strategies. As the students discussed their

strategies and identities as writers, they went beyond talking about genres that only related to writing about what they read. During the writer identity and survey follow up interviews, they listed various genres: expository (i.e. essays and reports), poetry, narrative (i.e. journals and stories).

As the students discussed different genres, they described how they viewed the requirements of writing in these genres. I use the example of writing in the genre of poetry here because it provides a window into how students' perceptions about a genre—rather than the genre itself—can create affordances and constraints. When students mentioned their experiences with poetry in their writer identity interviews (see Chapter 4), some of the students commented on how they felt that poetry needed to “sound poetic.” To Hector, this meant that poetry ought to rhyme; and to Ashley, this meant that words needed to “flow” like example given by the teacher. According to Ashley and Hector, the genre kept them from expressing themselves as freely and as fully as they would have liked. Ashley explained that paragraph writing allowed her to write more freely and more honestly than when she was assigned poetry writing. Because she felt unsure about how to fulfill the genre requirements, Ashley stated that she copied the stanza structure and style of the example poem and inserted her own words. Hector also expressed that he brainstormed examples, came up with a few topics, and then fit them into a format that mimicked the teacher's example.

During the poetry unit in their English class, Hector and Ashley described that their dominant strategy consisted of replicating the teacher's model poems using their own words. In contrast to Hector and Ashley's views about poetry, Irene saw poetry as a genre that got at the “meaning of something” because it allowed her to express emotions in an artistic way. Irene's understanding of the genre led her to make very different choices about how she attended to poetry writing. Instead of using a model to create a poem, Irene stated that she would write what she genuinely “was thinking” at the time, with the objective of writing from the heart about what she felt and who she was.

### **Perceptions about the Audience**

In my findings about students' perceptions regarding strategies for reading, each of the students focused first on using strategies to create meaning for one's self before sharing this meaning with others. When discussing their perceptions about reading strategies, students explained how visualizing helped them get “into”, as well as “through” a text. They spoke about how questioning might pique their curiosity or help them figure out if facts and sources are verifiable. Even when students described summarizing, a strategy that they affiliated with school assignments, they discussed how they first summarized in their heads to create preliminary meaning before molding their summary into the assignment. My findings on students' perceptions about strategies for writing and writing about reading, however, revealed that students considered making meaning for themselves to aid their comprehension to be a secondary concern to that of conveying meaning to an audience. Students always privileged the audience—unless the audience was one and the same as the self (i.e. journal writing or poetry)—over themselves when it came to writing. My findings indicated that addressing an audience laid the foundation for other strategic decisions that students made about their writing.

As students discussed how they viewed audience in relation to writing, they differentiated two possibilities for sharing ideas through writing for an audience. One was through the use of writing as a space for a dialogic exchange in which students could potentially expect a response from an audience that was not in the form of an evaluation (i.e. a grade). In these cases, there

was generally an authentic purpose for writing to an audience who would be genuinely interested to learn from or be entertained by the writing. Examples of genres that students viewed as opening up these dialogic spaces included letter writing to the next group of incoming students, short stories that were to be shared with peers, poems, and journals. I included personal journals and poems because both Ashley and Irene described how they wrote in these genres to express who they were in order to learn from their experiences and their ideas. Irene related how she sometimes reread her own poems to help her get through an emotional experience. She used poems as a way to “talk” to and support herself during times of hardship. In students’ talk about how they approached these genres, they described the content of their ideas rather than the forms and structures they used in their writing.

The other way that students viewed the sharing of ideas through their writing was through a process of initiation, response, and evaluation (IRE) that took place in the writing assignment cycle (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979). In this kind of writing there is a teacher initiation via her directions and the prompt, a student response through writing, and teacher evaluation in the form of a teacher assigned grade. This IRE pattern for writing is similar to that of certain kinds of classroom discourse in which discussion is often one-way, and the teacher holds the authority while students respond with “one-turn” answers rather than as part of a dialogue (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979). Likewise, students tend to view IRE patterned writing as being a “one-turn” deposit of ideas that ends in a closed conversation and the receipt of a grade from a teacher, with no real opportunities for dialogue regarding the ideas. Tyrone viewed all writing in school as having an IRE pattern. He explained that he always attempted to write, even while writing notes, according to the expectations of the teacher, so that his grade would not drop. Hector described how he would imagine the teacher reading and correcting his work. Irene explained that the prompt helped her know what to write. She said that if the prompt asked her to “put reasons,” she put reasons; if it told her to “put claims,” she put claims, all so that she “could get a good grade.” Ashley also noted that she disliked required “rubric” or formulaic writing in which she felt she was plugging words into pre-determined sentence structures without incorporating her voice or ideas. In these cases of school writing, the students did not feel that they had much freedom to write about their ideas in ways that were unsanctioned by the teacher, and their concerns were about making sure the form of their writing appropriately addressed the prompt and matched the teacher’s examples.

Yet not all school writing was viewed by the students as being subject to an IRE pattern. For example, Irene described how she had written a report on asthma last year. Since she had chosen a topic of personal interest (she has asthma) and also worked on the report with several friends who wrote their reports about the same topic, she found herself sharing sources and information with others. The process of writing the report involved quite a bit of dialogue for Irene. Although she discussed this report as a hard project, she also talked about it with pride, explaining that she learned a lot about the topic and how the illness affected her own health. She did not view the report as the kind of work in which she merely answered the prompt and wrote for the teacher. She felt a sense of ownership over the writing. Ashley described how the point of persuasive writing was to convince her teacher about her own argument. She did not feel as if creating an argument in this case was only to satisfy the school-based writing assignment, but rather that it was also to present a strong case for her opinion. For both of these assignments, other students may not have taken on the same point of view as Ashley and Irene; and they could have easily seen these assignments as being a part of the IRE pattern.

How a student perceives the possibilities for dialogue and the exchange of ideas through writing affects how that student understands the requirements of a genre. In turn, this perspective impacts the strategies that students choose when they write. It is not the genres themselves that either limit or provide the students with freedom in their writing, but how the students view the genre in relation to opportunities to engage in dialogue and to express themselves. The earlier examples of students' perceptions about poetry illustrate how any genre can be perceived to be either IRE-patterned or open-ended and dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981), depending on an individual's experience and perspective.

### **Actual Use of Strategies for Writing about Reading**

#### **Comparing Perceptions to Actual Enactments when Students Write about Texts**

Several findings emerged in relation to students' actual use of strategies for writing about reading. The strategies that students perceived to use were, for the most part, the strategies they actually used when wrote about texts. The one exception was visualizing. As in the findings from students' perceptions and enactments of strategies for reading, students may not have discussed visualizing during their retrospective interviews because it tends to be an automatic skill rather than a deliberate strategy (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). As students wrote about what they read, their strategies differed quite a bit depending on the genre that they had read and the genre in which they were asked to write. Based on my analysis of students' think aloud protocols, written responses, and writing retrospective interviews, I found that (a) the genre of each reading impacted how students responded to the texts and prompts, (b) the strategies that students used reflected overarching concerns about audience and genre, and (c) regardless of genre, what tended to prominently stand out for students *during* reading somehow made its way into students' writing.

**Responding to the literary narrative.** When students wrote about the literary narrative from Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, their responses were personal and aesthetic in nature (Rosenblatt, 1978). They went beyond answering the prompt to include their opinions and moral stances that were tied to larger thematic issues. Students' writing in this genre contained traces of reading strategies and approaches that they used during their reading and think aloud protocols. For example, both Ashley and Irene invoked the language of hypothesizing. Although Hector and Tyrone did not necessarily appropriate the language from their think-aloud protocols, it was obvious that they drew on themes that emerged during their reading in order to give their writing direction. Ashley's description of a typical homework assignment in Ms. Klein's English class, in which students wrote about their feelings, thoughts, and personal connections to the text, hinted at why students may have responded to the prompt in the ways that they did. Writing a response to literature seemed to be a genre that students already knew. They were less concerned about sticking to the prompt or organizing their writing with a certain form or structure in mind when they wrote about literature than when they wrote in the other two genres. The students seemed to view their writing about the literary narrative as a way to express their opinions and to make public their internal "dialogue" with the text.

**Responding to the history text.** In contrast to students' responses to the literary narrative, in which they readily included their opinions and moral stances, students were hesitant to add such inclusions to their writing about the history text. Students were inclined to report on

facts and organize information chronologically as they responded to a prompt that asked them to explain how Reconstruction under Lincoln affected the lives of the former African American slaves in the South. Ashley and Irene felt that because they did not live through the experience, they could not be “experts” about the subject matter. Hector and Ashley drew upon numerical figures in the text, such as the number of acres allotted to the freedmen or the number of educational institutions that were established for the freedmen, in order to show that they understood the importance of these facts. This approach seemed to relate to students’ ideas that history is made of immutable facts that are distant from the students’ lives.

In his writing retrospective interview, Tyrone, the only African American student in the study, voiced frustration and anger towards Johnson, Lincoln’s successor, who confiscated land that had been awarded to the African Americans and returned it to the whites. He also chose to deviate from the prompt and write his response with a different organizational structure than the other students. Tyrone organized his response according to a compare-contrast structure that portrayed the situation as different for the African Americans and the whites, and their treatment as different by Lincoln and by Johnson. He conveyed that he used his writing to extend and share his learning with an audience. Tyrone explained that he intended for his audience to understand how these two presidents and their actions embodied contrasting points of view. Tyrone’s response to the history text reveals how his subjective stance towards the topic matter influenced his goals for writing in response to the text. These goals then shaped how he viewed his audience, personal learning, and use of organizational strategies. While Tyrone had formerly stated in his writer identity interview that all writing was for the teacher, his writing about the history text revealed that he also had personal learning goals, which he incorporated into his writing. Students’ orientations to genres also depend on their identities, which can influence students’ interest and motivation for writing about what personally matters.

**Responding to the persuasive article.** In their responses to the persuasive article, the students attempted to stick as closely to the author’s words as possible, by quoting, paraphrasing, or in some cases, plagiarizing sections of the text. They struggled with both the organization and presentation of ideas in this piece of writing more than they did in the other pieces. For Hector, Tyrone, and Irene, misguided comprehension contributed to the seeming lack of organization in their responses. Only Ashley who comprehended the article as a whole was able to write a coherent response. Although the three other students struggled, they still employed strategies and approaches as supports for their writing.

The prompt asked students to identify the author’s claims and then to use logical reasons and examples (either of their own or from the text) to support whether or not they believed it was okay to twist the truth. Hector, having misread the original text as a compare-contrast piece, rather than a persuasive article attempted to use a compare-contrast structure for his response. Yet his use of a compare-contrast structure clashed with the demands of the prompt, which made his writing and organization confusing to follow. Irene made efforts to address the prompt and included several opinions and personal examples, but had difficulty organizing her response to the persuasive article. Her organizational strategy was to write whatever came to mind and to mix her examples with the author’s. She seemed to prioritize what she knew based on her life experience and personal examples, which led her to manipulate the author’s words to fit with her opinion. What she quoted from the text was taken out of context and was left unsupported by actual examples from the article. Unlike the other students, Tyrone made no attempt to address the prompt and explained that he used parts from the article that seemed important. His writing

revealed that he mostly copied exact phrases from different parts of the text. Tyrone's approach to persuasive writing stood in stark contrast to his approach to writing about the historical text.

The disparate writing responses of all four students indicated that when students do not know how to read a genre and cannot comprehend a text, they also have difficulties writing about the text. Although students attempted to use a variety of strategies for writing, only the student who "got" both the genre and the original text was successful at organizing and presenting ideas coherently.

### **Limitations to the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. The first is that the findings regarding the complexity of strategy use suggest that further quantitative analysis (i.e. factor or component analysis) could reveal degrees of relatedness among students' perceived use of various strategies. At the time I collected my data, I did not recognize that students' strategies intermingled and overlapped in such a complicated way. Instead, I assumed that strategies were often enacted individually or in recognizably discrete bits in the way they are often presented in strategy intervention studies. Groupings from further quantitative analysis may be helpful in the comparison of how students think about using multiple strategies together when they read, think aloud, and write about a text (see Chapters 5 & 6).

A second limitation is that I explored students' actual use of strategies in only one context: the one-on-one researcher administered task, which mimicked the reading-writing assignment a student might be given in an English or history class. While I was able to ascertain some student perceptions about reading and writing in contexts inside and outside of school through my analysis and findings from the interview data, I was unable to draw any conclusions about how students enacted strategies under different contexts. In order to compare their self-reported perceptions about reading and writing in various situations to what they actually do, it would be worthwhile to create tasks that could take place in a variety of settings under a number of different circumstances. Thus, I have left a further look at different tasks for future research.

A third limitation relates to the limited number of reading-writing samples that I collected. I could have asked students to do more reading and writing over more texts and tasks to gain a richer portrait of each student's strategy use detailing their reading and writing. Adding more texts in the same genres could aid in confirming or disconfirming the patterns that I observed regarding students' use of strategies within each genre. Also including more genres in other content areas such as math or science could shed light on how students used strategies in additional disciplines.

### **Implications for Practice**

It is important to consider how genres, their forms and functions, affect the teaching and learning of strategies. The findings from this study point to a need to rethink how reading and writing strategies are currently taught and conceptualized. Not all strategies are useful in all genres. For example, visualization can aid a student's comprehension when reading fiction and literary narratives, but it could hinder a student during the reading of certain kinds of expository texts (e.g. the health textbook and persuasive article).

Enactments of the same strategies look different across students. Each student has her own interpretation of how to use the strategy in the context of a specific genre. Thus, not all

enactments are equal. At times, a strategy can help a student connect to or make meaning out of a text, but this meaning could be “incorrect.” Hence, a student’s misapplication of a strategy can lead a student down a “false” path. Students’ perceptions about the functions of a genre and its affordances can lead students to privilege some strategies over others. However, not all students are familiar with all genres. Students can misinterpret how best to approach and read a genre. In this study, some students did not correctly identify certain genres and their entailments (i.e. the persuasive article). This misinterpretation can lead to the use of inappropriate strategies for a genre.

Teachers can assist students in developing awareness around how strategy use is aligned with genre. They could foster such awareness in the following ways:

- Have students discuss their preexisting ideas about various genres within a discipline.
- Reveal how they, as content area “experts”, think and approach texts when reading and writing in the discipline.
- Provide a variety of texts that expose students to the thinking and writing of professionals, academics, and others in the field.
- Hold discussions about how the form and function of a genre work in tandem to express the author’s message.
- Clarify students’ misconceptions about genre.
- Ask students about the strategies they already use in a genre and discussing how students can build upon those strategies.
- Explore, with students, what certain strategies can “buy” the student in different genres.
- Ask students about what strategies work best for them in various contexts and genres.

Learning to think in a discipline and in a genre can help students choose strategies that best fit the goals and purposes of a reading or writing task. Exploring how strategies function within genres could inform the deliberate problem-solving choices students make when they enact these strategies on their own. Furthermore, teachers may want to consider how students’ identities and motivations related to their previous experiences with genres in different contexts and affect their decisions to use certain strategies.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study suggests that simply teaching explicit strategies, without paying attention to students’ identities and their understandings of genre, is not enough to help students become adept at using particular strategies. Students often have their personal set of motivations that may lead them to use some strategies over others. They also have various ideas about how each genre possesses its unique set of affordances and constraints.

While this study explored students’ perceptions and enactments of strategies for reading and writing about reading, it does not do so in relation to students’ direct experiences in the classroom. Future research could take into account how students internalize or do not internalize actual strategies that are being explicitly taught and implicitly communicated by their content area teachers. Furthermore, this research could also take into account teachers’ perceptions about the utility of strategies in the genres they teach. Possible questions for such research might include: Do teachers’ perceptions match students’ perceptions? What strategies do students actually use in these contexts? Are they the ones that the teachers are teaching? How do the teachers evaluate and understand students’ actual use of strategies?

In addition, this research could investigate how students interpret and internalize messages that content area teachers convey both explicitly and implicitly about the genres within the content area. Relevant questions could be: What do teachers in different content areas emphasize about how to read and write in various content-related genres? What are students' understandings of these genres based on what the teachers convey? How do teachers discuss or do not discuss the strategies that are useful for the genres taught in their content area? What strategies do students seem to privilege in the different content areas? How do those strategies relate or not relate to the strategies that teachers are trying to teach in specific genres? This line of research would explore whether or not students and teachers tend to have the same understandings about which strategies are considered the most valuable for the genres taught in school.

Another line research could include a focus on English Language Learners. One of the original focal students, Jose, who had initially been selected to be a participant in this study, was an English Language Learner whose reading and writing about reading was markedly affected by his lack of fluency in English. I eventually chose not to include Jose's case, because the language-related issues in his reading and writing about reading were not comparable to those of other students who were either native English or reclassified fluent English proficient (FEP) speakers. English Language Learners are a significant student population within the United States and it would be helpful for educators to learn more about how this population perceives and enacts strategies for reading and writing about reading—across their varied languages. This population often struggles to meet grade-level demands for reading and writing in English in mainstream content area classrooms. Thus it is necessary to understand how this population understands and uses strategies as they read and write about texts in different genres. Some important questions to consider would include: Are English Language Learners' perceptions and enactments of strategies for reading and writing about reading similar to or different from those of native English speakers? How do English Language Learners make sense of genres, including their affordances and constraints? What strategies do English Language Learners associate with different genres? Are the patterns of genre understanding and strategy use similar across English Language Learners and native English speakers? Across the learners' native language and English? How does language proficiency affect the instantiation of different strategies across various genres and languages?

Future approaches to the teaching of strategies should take into account how students' understandings of genre affect their perceptions and enactments of strategies. It would also be valuable to learn more about how teachers view the use of strategies in relation to the genres they teach. Further research regarding how both native English speaking and English Language Learning student populations and their teachers understand the intersection between genre and strategies could shed light on how teachers could help students of various language proficiencies develop greater awareness about the strategies that are the most effective for specific genres within the different content areas.

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## Appendix A

### WHAT I DO WHEN I READ

Thank you for your help today. I'm going to give you a list of statements that represent what people might do when they read. I'd like you to think about what you do and rate on a scale of one to four how much you engage in each of these reading behaviors.

There are no right or wrong answers. There may be some people who engage in many of these behaviors and other people who don't do any of them. You may find that you might do some but not all of these things. Just be honest. I would like to know what you think you do when you read.

- 1 means "I **never or almost never** do this"  
2 means "I do this **only occasionally or once in a while**"  
3 means "I **usually** do this"  
4 means "I **always or almost** always do this"

#### When I *read* a text...

1.	I have a purpose in mind when I read.	1	2	3	4
2.	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4
3.	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4
4.	I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it.	1	2	3	4
5.	I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	1	2	3	4
6.	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	1	2	3	4
7.	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	1	2	3	4
8.	I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4
9.	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	1	2	3	4
10.	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	1	2	3	4
11.	I use typographical aids like boldface and italics to identify key information.	1	2	3	4
12.	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	1	2	3	4
13.	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	1	2	3	4
14.	I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	1	2	3	4
15.	When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding.	1	2	3	4
16.	I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	1	2	3	4
17.	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	1	2	3	4
18.	I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	1	2	3	4

(adapted from Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002)

## Appendix B

### WRITING ABOUT WHAT I'VE READ

Thank you for your help today. In school, you are often asked to write about something that you have read. I'm going to give you a list of statements that represent what people might do when they write about an article, book, or story. I'd like you to think about what you do and rate on a scale of one to four how much you engage in each of these behaviors related to this kind of writing.

There are no right or wrong answers. There may be some people who engage in many of these behaviors and other people who don't do any of them. You may find that you might do some but not all of these things. Just be honest. I would like to know what you think you do when you write about something you've read.

1 means "I **never or almost never** do this"  
 2 means "I do this **only occasionally or once in a while**"  
 3 means "I **usually** do this"  
 4 means "I **always or almost always** do this"

#### When I WRITE about what I've read...

1. I have a purpose in mind when I write.	1	2	3	4
2. I think or brainstorm about everything I know about the topic in general in order to help me figure out what to write.	1	2	3	4
3. I think or brainstorm about what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	1	2	3	4
4. I make notes about what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	1	2	3	4
5. I pay attention to the directions in the essay's prompt in order to help me figure out what to write.	1	2	3	4
6. I summarize what I've just read, either on paper or in my head, in order to reflect on important information from the reading.	1	2	3	4
7. I skim what I've just read to find the parts that fit with my writing purpose.	1	2	3	4
8. I underline or circle information in what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	1	2	3	4
9. I paraphrase or restate ideas in my own words as I write about what I've read.	1	2	3	4
10. I try to picture or visualize what I've just read about in order to help me figure out what to write.	1	2	3	4
11. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in what I've just read in order to help me figure out what to write.	1	2	3	4
12. I reread parts of the text that were difficult, either before or as I write, in order to increase my ability to write about what I've just read.	1	2	3	4
13. I ask myself questions about what I've just read, either before or as I write, in order to increase my ability to write about what I've read.	1	2	3	4
14. While writing, I imagine the reaction that readers of my writing might have.	1	2	3	4
15. I try to stick to the rules and formats I've learned about writing paragraphs and essays and apply them to my writing.	1	2	3	4
16. I try to keep in mind the grammar and punctuation rules that I've learned and apply them to my writing.	1	2	3	4
17. I try to incorporate new vocabulary words, either from class or what I've just read, into my writing.	1	2	3	4
18. I usually write several drafts when I'm writing a paragraph or an essay.	1	2	3	4
19. I divide up ideas from the text I've just read into camps or sides, either before or as I write, in order to figure out what information will support the points I am trying to make.	1	2	3	4

## Appendix C

### Survey Follow-up Interview Questions for Focal Students (Semi-structured interview prompts)

#### “What I do When I Read” Survey Follow Up Interview

Thank you for filling out the survey. Now I’m going to ask you to tell me a bit about your responses.

1. You chose several 4s (or 3s), out of these reading-related behaviors, what do you feel you do the most as you read? Tell me more about that. Why do you say that?
2. You chose several 1s (or 2s), out of these reading-related behaviors, what do you feel you do the least? Tell me more about that. Why do you say that?

Now, I’d like to ask you more about particular items.

(Ask if students did discuss the items already. If they have discussed the item, probe further)

3. What did you circle for number five? Why? How about number nine? Tell me why you circled that number.

In your mind, what is the difference between summarizing and paraphrasing? Do you do one more than the other?

Tell me about how you summarize or paraphrase while you read. What do you do? What does your mind do? Can you give me an example?

When are you most likely to summarize or paraphrase while you read? When are you least likely to summarize or paraphrase while you read? (Probe: Do certain kinds of texts or types of reading lead you to summarize or paraphrase more? Less? Or do you do the same amount of summarizing or paraphrasing no matter what type of reading you are doing?)

4. What did you circle for number ten? Why? Tell me about how you visualize or don’t visualize while you read. What does your mind do when you visualize? (Or if you don’t visualize, what do you tend to do instead? What does your mind do?) Can you give me an example?

When are you most likely to visualize while you read? When are you least likely to visualize when you read? (Probe: Do certain kinds of texts or types of reading lead you to visualize more? Less? Or do you do the same amount of visualizing no matter what type of reading you are doing?)

5. What did you circle for number twelve? Why? In your opinion, what does it mean to “critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text”? Why do you say that? Tell me about how you might critically analyze and evaluate information presented in a text. What does your mind do? (What tends to come to mind?) Can you give me an example of what might run through your head when you critically analyze or evaluate information in a text?

6. What did you circle for sixteen? Why? Tell me about how you might ask yourself questions about a text. (Probe: What kinds of questions do you tend to ask?) (OR if the student scores low on this: Why don’t you ask yourself questions about a text? What do you do instead? Tell me about that. What tends

to go through your mind when you do this?) What tends to go through your mind when you ask yourself questions about a text? Can you give me an example?

When are you most likely to ask yourself questions while you read? When are you least likely to ask yourself questions while you read? (Probe: Do certain kinds of texts or types of reading lead you to ask more questions? Fewer questions? Or do you ask the same amount of questions no matter what type of reading you are doing?)

7. What did you circle for eighteen? Why? Tell me about how you try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases when you read. (OR if the student scores low: Why don't you try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases when you read? What do you do instead? Tell me about that. What tends to go through your mind when you do this?) What tends to go through your mind when you try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases as you read? Can you give me an example?

When are you most likely to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases when you read? Other than when words are hard, are there other factors that influence whether or not you guess a word's meaning? When are you least likely to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases when you read?

*Ask about other numbers if there is time.*

#### **“Writing about What I’ve Read” Survey Follow Up Interview**

Follow the protocol for the Reading Survey Follow Up Interview, and substitute questions for writing about reading.

The questions for the writing about reading survey should be similar.

1. You chose several 4s (or 3s), out of these writing about reading behaviors, what do you feel you do the most as you read? Tell me more about that. Why do you say that?
2. You chose several 1s (or 2s), out of these writing about reading behaviors, what do you feel you do the least? Tell me more about that. Why do you say that?

If students do not discuss the following items, **5, 7, 9, 11, 14, and 17**, from the “Writing about What I’ve Read Survey” probe further. Use reading survey follow up questions above as a guide.

## Appendix D

### Reading-Writing Task Set Sample

#### **Student Think Aloud Protocol: Narrative Text (with additional practice think aloud session)**

"Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a graduate student from U.C. Berkeley. Thanks for helping me out. Today, I'm going to ask you to read a text and tell me what you are thinking about it. You may have done something like this before with some of your teachers. After you have finished the reading, I am also going to ask you to write about it and tell me what you are thinking as you write."

#### ***Practice***

Use Gary Soto's "The No-Guitar Blues" as a practice sample.

Before we start the actual reading, we're going to do some thinking out loud with another short story. I will start by reading the title and some of my own thinking aloud. I will then ask you to read, stop at each number, and tell me what you are thinking at the moment.

Read the title and model thinking aloud.

Read title: The No-Guitar Blues.

Model think aloud behaviors up to #s 1 & 2

Ask student to read up to 3 out loud  
Ask student what he/she is thinking.

"What are you thinking now? Why?"

Ask student to silently read up to 4 . Ask student what he/she is thinking.  
"What is your mind doing now? Why? What are the reasons why you think that?"

Ask student to silently read up to 5. Ask student what he/she is thinking.  
Follow up with: "Why? Why do you say that?"

Do same with 6. Ask student to silently read...

***Think aloud for the actual text***

**Excerpt from "Black Boy" by Richard Wright**

Go ahead and read the title page. "What are you thinking?"

Today, you are going to read a part of "Black Boy" by Richard Wright. We will begin right here. Read until you get to a circled number. Look up when you are there.

Prompts to use with the think aloud:

"What are you thinking now?"

"What did your mind do? What are you thinking?"

Other follow-up options: "Why do you say that?" "What makes you say that?"

***Prompts for after the student has read and completed the story:***

1. What did you think about the story?

2. What made the story easy for you to read? What did you do when you read the easy parts? What did your mind do? Why?"

3. What made the story difficult to read? What did you do when you read the difficult parts? What did your mind do? Why?"

***Prompt for student writing***

"Okay, now I'm going to ask you to write a well-developed paragraph in response to the story. I'm also going to ask you to tell me about your thoughts after you've received the prompt and before you begin writing."

"Pretend that this is an important assignment for your English class that will be graded by your teacher. How would you write this? What are you thinking?"

Here is the writing prompt (see the instructions below given to the student):

Read the question out loud to the student:

Richard Wright's mother gives him a stick and some instructions. Why? What purpose does this serve?

After the question has been read, tell the student:

"As you begin thinking and writing, please tell me what you are thinking. What are you thinking now?"

***ASSIGNMENT:***

Paragraph Assignment  
Instructions

Pretend that this is an important essay assignment that will be graded by your English teacher:

Richard Wright's mother gives him a stick and some instructions. Why? What purpose does this serve?

***Prompt for the writing retrospective interview:***

"Feel free to go ahead and reread the piece you've just written. If you'd like to add or change anything, you can do so now." (Give student time to add or revise)

1. What were you thinking when you first started to write this piece? (Remember to follow up on the question based on what the student says)

2. After the student responds, the interviewer will ask the student to reread and go through each paragraph. Some prompts to guide this paragraph-by-paragraph process:

- What were you thinking as you wrote this section?

- What led you to write about this idea here? (Point to a part in the student's writing)

- How did you decide to select this (point to a part in the student's writing) from the reading instead of another idea, theme or aspect from the reading?

- Go ahead and skim the original text you read (hand student the reading), what parts stood out for you? Did you incorporate these parts into your writing? Why? Why not? Describe how these parts ended up becoming part of your writing? What were you thinking?

## Appendix E

### Writing Prompts

A writing prompt was administered after the reading think aloud protocol of each reading-writing task set.

#### Genre of Text Read: Literary Narrative

Response to Excerpt from *Black Boy* by Richard Wright

##### **Assignment:**

Paragraph Assignment  
Instructions

Pretend that this is an important essay assignment that will be graded by your English teacher:

Richard Wright's mother gives him a stick and some instructions. Why? What purpose does this serve?

#### Genre of Text Read: Persuasive Article

Response to "I'm not Lying, I'm Telling a Future Truth. Really." by Benedict Carey

##### **Writing Assignment**

Instructions

Pretend that this is an important assignment that will be graded by your English teacher.

In your writing, discuss the author's claims in this article. Then, using logical reasons and examples, explain whether or not you believe it's okay to twist the truth.

#### Genre of Text Read: History Text

Response to an excerpt on Reconstruction adapted from *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* by Howard Zinn

##### **Reconstruction**

##### **Paragraph Assignment**

Instructions

Pretend that this is an important assignment that will be graded by your teacher.

How did Reconstruction under Lincoln affect the lives of African Americans in the South? What things gave freedmen hope of a better future and what difficulties did they still face? Write an organized and detailed paragraph.