

Sorry to Burst Your Bubble: Examining the Viewpoint of “The Other” in Literature so as to  
Broaden Students’ Cultural Perspectives

The College of New Jersey

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## INTRODUCTION

My research project concerns an issue that I feel very passionately about. My school is situated in a town of privilege and conservative values. Additionally, there is little racial or socio-economic diversity. All too often I find that my students do not question or even see a reason to question the fairness of the world around them, as life has always worked in their favor. In order to better social justice education in our district I decided to focus my research on the ways in which I can broaden the cultural perspectives of my students. In a very basic sense, I wanted students to begin seeing the world from the perspective of "the other".

In exploring this topic I sought to encompass the many different perspectives that “the other” can mean, such as the perspectives of those of a different gender, race, and socio-economic status. In doing this, I hoped to be able to help students think outside of themselves, so they not only have a better understanding of the world around them, but also become better contributors to the world because of an increased ability to empathize with others.

In order to begin researching this I needed to discover what my students' preconceptions regarding race, gender, and socioeconomic status were/are and try to discern where any stereotypes originated. I went about this by conducting surveys of students and staff, and by holding a focus group with some of my students from a previous class, as they had a basic introduction to this topic last year. Once this information was obtained I looked to answer how I could best address and help students question their pre-conceived notions and potentially alter their one-sided and/or uninformed perspectives.

Due to the nature of the curriculum for the freshman honors English class, I decided to complete my research in this particular setting. The curriculum during the research period focused around a reading of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. This novel has a strong thematic focus on issues with race, gender, and socio-economic status. It was during the teaching of this novel last fall that I first began to see a real need for greater cultural education. We were about to begin *To Kill a Mockingbird* so I introduced the book with a discussion on prejudice. This discussion made me realize just how much larger societal issues impact my classroom. 85% of the population at the high school where I teach is white and the entirety of the population is upper middle class or upper class. Needless to say, to most of the students in my class, prejudice is more of an abstract concept than a reality. To facilitate the discussion, I asked students to respond to a few statements with either “true” or “false”. To my surprise, an overwhelming majority of the class responded “true” to the statement, “Some racial groups are more violent than others.” As we discussed and I tried to explain that it was inaccurate to assign that kind of generalization to an entire ethnicity, I was met with a surprising amount of defensiveness. Multiple students referenced statistics they had heard about and forcefully asserted that statistics are facts, so one cannot dispute them. I momentarily found myself at a loss for words but quickly realized if I did not take the time to show them the innate prejudice in the sentiments they were expressing, I would be failing as their teacher. I carefully chose my words and took control of the discussion; taking time to explain how even statistics can be misleading and how a history of racial bias in our country has created an environment where stereotypes, such as we were discussing, exist. Ultimately it made for an important segue into the themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, albeit through an unexpected route. This experience was the beginning of a year full of learning in regards to the social justice education, or lack of

education, my students had received up to this point in their lives. Later on in the year I fielded questions such as, "How many civilized towns are there in Africa?" and had to respond to statements like, "Not to be racist, but generally there is more domestic violence in African-American and Hispanic families." Over the course of last year and the duration of my action research I have come to realize that investigating this issue, as it exists at my school, is an absolute necessity. It also reinforced to me the necessity of teaching novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and having very real discussions about the issues therein that still persist today.

The vast majority of the students at my school are really good kids who are willing to learn and do well. Coming from a lifestyle of privilege they are often afforded more educational opportunities and thus are often academically ahead of their peers in neighboring districts. However, the sheltering, or "bubble" as it is often called, of the town does prevent them from seeing and learning about the social injustice issues that still plague our country. As their teacher I felt, and still feel, a responsibility to make them aware of these issues and teach them how to think outside of themselves. I feel I must help them open their eyes even if it means I have to “burst the bubble”.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to develop a beneficial unit plan for my students I felt the need to research other character and tolerance education practices and programs. Below are summaries and analyses of various articles relating to my research.

### **Summary and Analysis of "REACH Beyond Intolerance: A Framework for Teaching Empathy and Responsibility"**

This article was promoting a character education program called REACH Beyond Intolerance. It was developed to "promote cultural pluralism, reduce the fears of students who are different, and promote a better quality of life for all students." (Hollingsworth, 2003, p. 140). The program emphasizes empathy and wants students to understand that someone being different or believing differently does not make that person bad (Hollingsworth, 2003, p. 141). REACH stands for a set of values that the authors of the program believe should be taught to students in order to foster more effective social justice education in schools and, subsequently, more tolerant and empathetic students. The article goes on to explain what each letter stands for and various strategies for incorporating those values into the classroom and/or school community.

The “R” in REACH stands for "responsibility" which the program defines as involving self-discipline and accountability to others. According to the Hollingsworth, "by responding positively to the needs of their classmates and then transferring that learning to respond to others in society" (Hollingsworth, 2003, p. 142). “E” stands for "empathy" which is a main tenet of the entire program. Schools who implement REACH want to ensure that students understand how it feels to be treated unfairly and thus would actively seek to prevent others from feeling that way (Hollingsworth, 2003, p. 144). “A” stands for "attitude," in the way that students maintain a "mindset that includes equality, fairness, willingness to make a positive difference in an individual's life, and a sense of hope. It also includes having respect for oneself and others. Respect includes the acceptance and appreciation of one's differences as well as similarities." (Hollingsworth, 2003p. 145). The “C” stands for "cultural knowledge" and that includes knowledge of one's own culture as well as knowledge of other cultures, especially those present in the school community. According to REACH this is necessary in order for students to overcome stereotypes and prejudice. Lastly, “H” stands for "hold your ground" this is meant to

be reinforced after the first four values are taught. The idea is that once one has information or beliefs about something, one should not allow oneself to be swayed by peers or others who are more forceful. Rather, one should confidently assert his/her opinions or beliefs. This program was established with the understanding that it could be easily applied to teachers' lessons and be very relatable for all students.

This article did not raise any questions, it just pointed out the important pieces of the REACH Beyond Tolerance program and provided strategies and ideas for how to best implement it. There were many positive ideas listed in the article and the program itself stresses important values that I think every school should seek to teach. However, the article's main weakness, in my opinion, was the fact that it did not discuss results. The article's conclusion asserted that a positive impact would be felt by all who chose to use this program, yet it did not have any proof as to if other schools or communities had experienced a positive change after implementing it. I think I will definitely be able to use some of the suggested activities and the values of REACH are certainly important so I will be looking to this article to help me in implementing my own plan for research.

### **Summary and Analysis of "Teaching Tolerance of Diverse Beliefs"**

This article discussed the findings of a study that was conducted with 9th graders in Minnesota during a 4-week unit on political tolerance. Though this article focused specifically on civics classes and the students' political tolerance both before and after the unit, much of what was said was helpful and applicable to the study I intend to do. The article asserted that political tolerance is gauged by looking at someone's personal beliefs (specifically by identifying a group or groups that the person dislikes, the example given was the Nazis) and then asking that person if civil liberties (like freedom of speech) should be extended to them (Avery, 1997, p. 33). All of

the 9th graders took a pretest and then 23 students (the most and least tolerant) were chosen for interviews over the course of the study. The article went on to explain the results of the pretest. The researchers found that "political tolerance involves [to a large degree] conflict resolution" (Avery, 1997, p. 32) and many of the interviews indicated that people are not naturally tolerant of others; rather, tolerance is a learned behavior. This article then went on to outline the curriculum and discussed the fact that many civics teachers (and the like) are hesitant to bring actual issues of civics into the classroom because it would involve conflict and, thus, would be risky. Because both teachers and students fear that risk, civics classes tend to focus on government structures, laws, and other equally dry topics.

The findings of the study showed that many students supported the concept of ideas like freedom of speech but only in concept because many stated that they would not allow Nazis to speak in a public forum. I saw a connection between this idea and the fact that many of my students would not consider themselves subscribers to racist stereotypes. They believe in the concept of equality, and yet they do not hold equal opinions of others. The study also found that after 4 weeks of focusing on these issues the students did show increased levels of tolerance; understanding that they needed to show more open-mindedness. Interestingly, the study found that students who had high self-esteem saw the best results (Avery, 1997, p. 36). I find this fascinating because it relates back to the REACH article, potentially proving those ideas to be correct; that if you believe more strongly in your assertions and hold your ground you are less likely to be swayed by those around you.

### **Summary and Analysis of "Reducing the Effects of Racism in Schools"**

This article discussed important elements in the process of reducing racism and its effects in schools. It began by stating that the first step, the most difficult for many people, is

acknowledging that racism is still a problem in today's society. It points out that racism can thrive while people live in denial about its existence (p. 14). The article went on to say that once this issue is addressed it can open the door to addressing many other issues that are related to racism such as "teen violence, safe schools, gang behavior, drop out and suspension rates...poor achievement among students of color, inequality in school funding, and the needs of children living in poverty." (Parks, 1999, p. 14-15).

As supported by the article, it is important to take the right steps in addressing a large scale issue such as racism. Many schools seek to address it but simply throw a multicultural education program at the problem. Without proper implementation it is doomed to be an ineffective endeavor. On page 17 the article outlined the five necessary components of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture (Parks, 1999, pg. 17).

I found this article to be very helpful as I am looking to accomplish many of the same goals the article discusses. While mine is not a school-wide endeavor, I believe that the approaches outlined by this article will help me in making my efforts more effective.

### **Summary and Analysis of "What Promotes Racial & Ethnic Tolerance?"**

This brief, but informative, article discussed the research related to implementing effective multicultural education in schools. According to the article there has been some contradictory research in that some findings show students are more tolerant now than ever before, whereas others show the opposite. However, research consistently finds that the "more tolerant people perceive less threat from other groups and express a higher level of support for democratic norms" (Holloway, 2003, p. 85). This idea is supported by the information in the article "Teaching Tolerance for Diverse Beliefs". Some findings from this article which I found



to be the most interesting and helpful included something stated on page 85: the schools that experienced the most success in breaking down racial barriers and improving tolerance were those that supported opportunities for interethnic friendships amongst both students and parents. I find this to be very helpful because I had toyed with the idea of having my students participate in some sort of a pen-pal program as part of my research. This study supports doing that as fostering those types of relationships can be very beneficial. The last important piece from this article was the emphasis placed on better preparing pre-service teachers to incorporate this type of education into their work. According to multiple studies, the vast majority of pre-service teachers only took multicultural education to heart if it was emphasized in their own educational program (Holloway, 2003, p. 87).

### **Summary and Analysis of "Mix it Up!"**

Much like the previous article, this one offered suggestions for how to better teach, specifically racial, tolerance in schools. The information was compiled by the Teaching Tolerance Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center and they recommend that schools focus on four different areas (Holladay, 2008, p. 21-22). The first step should be the use of an anti-racist curriculum and they go on to specify that programs with a focus on anti-racism and anti-bias are overwhelmingly more successful in reducing prejudice than just teaching about diverse groups. The second step is to increase character education and, according to the article it should be on a deeper level than most programs/schools pursue it. The third step is by promoting cross-group communication and contact. This is supporting by the social contact theory which states that when one has contact with someone of a different group, prejudices against that group tend to dissipate. The final step is to strive for school equality by strengthening the school community and avoiding academic policies like tracking.

As I am reading these articles it is helpful to see that they all have various threads in common and many of my ideas for how to approach this issue are supported by their suggestions and findings (such as implementing a pen-pal program). It would have been helpful if the article mentioned additional, concrete ways to implement these ideas in the classroom.

After reading the aforementioned articles and reading some additional resources regarding this topic, I have come to realize that there is still a need for a study which will truly outline the growth of the students throughout the course of the research. While I did not intend my study to be quantitative in nature, the resources I have found do not go into as much depth about the students' progress, if at all. Many of the articles focused solely on steps or procedures for how to better social awareness and social justice education, and did not discuss how those steps had been utilized and to what degree they were effective.

Additionally, many articles mentioned that teachers tend to shy away from this issue due to the need to get through content, teach to boost test scores, etc. I can appreciate the struggle of not having enough time, which is why I wanted to incorporate this focus into something I am already going to be teaching, the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It lends itself well to examining the “the other” and I was curious to see how the novel affects students' approach to learning about tolerance, and vice-versa because in implementing my plan, I did not have the ability to provide in-person exposure to different cultures and perspectives, as many of the articles suggested.

Article Title	Important Info as it Applies to Research Project	Additional Q's
<p><b>"REACH Beyond Intolerance"</b></p>	<p>character education program called REACH Beyond Intolerance</p> <p>REACH = set of values to teach students</p> <p>“R” = "responsibility" (involving self-discipline and accountability)</p> <p>“E” = "empathy" (students understand how it feels to be treated unfairly, actively preventing others from feeling that way)</p> <p>“A” = "attitude," (mindset of equality, fairness, willingness to make a positive difference, and hope)</p> <p>“C” = "cultural knowledge" (of one's own culture and others present in school community)</p> <p>“H” = "hold your ground" (do not allow oneself to be swayed, confidently assert opinions or beliefs)</p> <p>article provided strategies and ideas for how to best implement it.</p>	<p>How effective was implementation in real examples?</p>
<p><b>"Teaching Tolerance of Diverse Beliefs"</b></p>	<p>findings of a study conducted with Minnesota 9th graders over 4-week political tolerance unit</p> <p>23 students (the most and least tolerant) chosen for interviews</p> <p>The researchers found that "political tolerance involves [to a large degree] conflict resolution"</p> <p>interviews indicated that tolerance is a learned behavior</p> <p>findings showed that many students supported ideas like freedom of speech but only in concept (**connection** my students believe in the concept of equality, and yet they do not hold equal opinions of others)</p> <p>at conclusion, students showed increased levels of tolerance and researchers found that students with more self-esteem were less likely to have their opinions swayed by others (**connection to REACH article)</p>	<p>Were socio-political ideals discussed?</p> <p>Did they play a role in the unit and/or in students' formation of opinions?</p>

<p><b>"Reducing the Effects of Racism in Schools"</b></p>	<p>Article discussed important elements in the process of reducing racism and its effects in schools</p> <p>Step 1: acknowledging that racism is still a problem in today's society</p> <p>Many schools seek to address it by throwing a multicultural education program at the problem... doomed to be ineffective without proper implementation</p> <p>5 necessary components of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture</p> <p><b>**Connection**</b> outline of approach to implementation aligns with what I intend to do in my classroom</p>	<p>How effective was implementation in real examples?</p>
<p><b>"What Promotes Racial &amp; Ethnic Tolerance?"</b></p>	<p>Article discussed the research related to implementing effective multicultural education in schools</p> <p>research consistently finds that the "more tolerant people perceive less threat from other groups and express a higher level of support for democratic norms" (<b>**Connection to "Teaching Tolerance" article</b>)</p> <p>the schools that experienced the most success in breaking down racial barriers and improving tolerance supported opportunities for interethnic friendships amongst students and parents</p> <p>Needs to be an emphasis placed on better preparing pre-service teachers to incorporate this type of education. (According to multiple studies, the vast majority of pre-service teachers only took multicultural education to heart if it was emphasized in their own educational program)</p>	<p>Can concrete differentiations be made between programs "ineffectively implemented" and "effectively implemented"?</p> <p>What are the "game changing" factors?</p>
<p><b>"Mix it Up!"</b></p>	<p>Article offered suggestions for how to better teach tolerance (specifically racial) in schools</p> <p>Step 1: use of an anti-racist curriculum</p> <p>Step 2: increase character education at a deeper level than most programs/schools pursue it</p> <p>Step 3: promote cross-group communication and contact (supported by Social Contact Theory - contact with someone of a different group tends to dissipate prejudices)</p> <p>Step 4: strive for school equality (strengthen school community and avoiding academic policies like tracking)</p>	<p>What are some concrete examples of how one can implement the aforementioned practices?</p>

## METHODOLOGY

In exploring this topic I wanted to encompass the many different perspectives that “the other” can mean, such as the perspectives of those of a different gender, race, and socio-economic status. In doing this, I hoped to be able to help students think outside of themselves, so they not only have a better understanding of the world around them, but also so they can become better contributors to the world because of an increased ability to empathize with others. That being said, the main question I focused on was: “What happens when I make ‘The Perspective of “The Other”’ the lens through which my class studies literature?” Sub-questions to this included: “How do 9th grade honors students in my school perceive those of differing race, gender, and/or socio-economic status?” and, “Where do these stereotypes and/or preconceived ideas stem from?” The nature of the questioning made this an endeavor to research my grade and subject, as well as my classroom because it affected the nature of the teaching and the educational approach that happens in the classroom. This research is considered grounded theory because it analyzes the impact of something new.

Due to the nature of the curriculum for the freshman honors English class, I chose this particular class as the setting for my research. The curriculum during the research period focused around a reading of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (see Appendix 6). This novel has a strong thematic focus on issues with race, gender, and socio-economic status. 85% of the population at the high school where I teach is white and the entirety of the population is upper middle class or upper class. Needless to say, to most of the students in my class, prejudice is more of an abstract concept than a reality. The vast majority of the students at my school are really good kids who are willing to learn and do well. Coming from a lifestyle of privilege they are often afforded more educational opportunities and thus are often academically

ahead of their peers in neighboring districts. However, the sheltering, or "bubble" as it is often called, of the town does prevent them from seeing and learning about the social injustice issues which still plague our country. As their teacher I felt, and still feel, a responsibility to make them aware of these issues and teach them how to think outside of themselves.

The first data I collected was done via survey. I surveyed the staff at my school about their perceptions regarding student opinion on those of different race, gender and socioeconomic status. I also surveyed the students in my class about their thoughts on those three topics. This helped me identify any preconceived ideas or stereotypes that needed to be addressed. As an additional part of this initial data collection I held a focus group discussion with three students from last year's class. I asked them to reflect on the current cultural perspectives of their school and their personal growth over the course of the previous year. I also prompted them to discuss what else can be done to enhance the experience of the curriculum as it relates to broadening cultural perspectives.

Throughout the course of the unit I built in ten separate opportunities for students to reflect and question in their journals (see Appendix 7). The initial journal prompt functioned as a supplement to the student surveys and provided the students with an introduction to the upcoming unit in the form of an anticipatory set. Lastly, I took notes of my own observations during class discussions and activities.

During the course of the unit I designed many lessons with the goal of having students consider social issues as they existed in both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and in our society today. When the class read about Scout's miraculous ability to dissipate an angry mob, we discussed mob mentality and various social experiments and what they revealed about human nature. Students were asked to apply this knowledge to both their own experiences and to society at

large. As it became applicable during the course of the novel the class held mini-case studies for each issue: race, gender, and socio-economic status. These mini-case studies related a current issue to *To Kill a Mockingbird* and required students to think beyond the idealized world that most of them have been raised in. At any point when these issues were discussed, students were required to reflect with a journal entry. For example, our class spent a lot of time discussing various social injustices and how they exist in the media and can be identified in simple examples of everyday life (i.e. “flesh” colored items like band-aids which are almost exclusively targeted toward the white population). This, along with many other class discussions, was followed by a journal entry. Some of our most interesting class discussions were fed by students’ “wonder question” journal entries where they were given free-rein to explore a topic or idea that had made an impact on them.

After implementing the aforementioned activities and projects to help students broaden their cultural perspectives I assigned them a final project in which they were instructed to create a product to help teach tolerance to children. The students’ work on these projects was the culminating opportunity for them to demonstrate growth and evolution of thought. By examining these projects and the journaling done throughout the course of the unit I was able to identify whether or not, and in what way(s), students thought critically about the issues of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Not only is all of this information important in determining the success of making “perspective” the academic focus, but it also helps me in informing my plans for the rest of the year. The vast majority of the freshman curriculum is equally well-suited for this focus so, while the research for my thesis does not continue beyond teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it has informed the rest of the year’s instruction.

In terms of data analysis, I began (at the start of the unit) by compiling the information collected via staff and student surveys and the focus group with last year’s students. This was done at initial implementation so as to better inform my instruction throughout the course of the unit. As the unit progressed I informally read along with corresponding journal entries so as to track the development of the students and see how they responded to the class material. Once the unit was over and the Teaching Tolerance projects had been presented and turned in, I examined them in conjunction with each student’s growth as demonstrated through their journals. I looked for things that seemed important, interesting, and/or unexpected. I also sought to determine connecting threads and commonalities between students’ personal growth and discoveries. This provided a thorough look into each student’s journey throughout the course of the research period.

This study has greatly informed my teaching. In an age when so much emphasis is put on testing and charting growth in a quantitative way, conducting this research has helped me keep the important things in perspective. The reason I became a teacher was to help students become well-informed, positive contributors to society. By making this the focus of my teaching, it has helped me maintain *my* perspective on what truly matters. In better understanding my students and exactly how to help them succeed, I can become a better, more effective teacher.

## FINDINGS

The nature of this study ultimately focused on exposing the students to information and dialogue on three different topics: race, gender, and socio-economic status. As such, the findings are organized by these topics. Within each subset the data is organized chronologically, to



reflect the initial surveying and then the progression of thought on each subject over the course of the unit.

### RACE

Helping students to understand the larger issues of racial tension in our county was something I knew would be a necessity. Racially insensitive comments from former students in previous years were the inspiration for this research project. At the onset of the school year I anonymously surveyed faculty at my school (see Appendix 1) to determine if other staff members had similar experiences to mine. I also was curious to see what other social issues they felt needed to be addressed amongst the students at our school. Although the survey was completed anonymously, each staff member was given the option to write down their name and availability for follow-up conversation if they wanted to. 39 staff members responded to the survey and in looking at faculty perceptions of racist/prejudiced attitudes amongst students there was a healthy mix of opinions on whether such attitudes existed or not (see Appendix 2). There was a consistency, however, among staff members who chose to elaborate on the survey and/or followed up with me. Many of those individuals were either teachers of humanities (Social Studies or English) or guidance counselors. Common threads within their comments included the idea that students’ stereotypes and prejudices stem from an incredibly sheltered life with little to no exposure to diversity and the fact that students believe in tolerance in concept but seemingly not in practice.

Teachers, even those who disagreed with the idea that students had racial biases, expressed their belief that the students of this district are very sheltered. For example, one faculty member who disagreed with the statement asserted, “I think because there is not a lot of diversity in this school that students may be unaware of other cultures/races. They do not

necessarily display racism, however.” Still other faculty members wrote: “Prejudice is a problem because of the lack of diversity the students grew up with. However, I don’t see them being malicious; they just seem to live in a ‘bubble’ so-to-speak.” and, “Yes, they are so sheltered and have no idea, for the most part, what diversity is. They definitely have different prejudices.”

The idea that this sheltered and protected upbringing was a major cause of racial bias was a common theme among those who responded to the survey. Even more interesting, however, was the observation that many students thought of themselves as tolerant and open-minded, yet perpetuated stereotypes and prejudice. Yet another staff member maintained, “When prompted [students] can say the right things, but they really don’t see the problem.” Based on some staff responses it seemed that other faculty had experienced similar conversations to the ones that prompted me to complete this research project. “[Students] believe in tolerance but make stereotypes that are basically racist [yet] they don’t think it is racist.” Other staff members wrote, “What is bizarre about the racism I notice is that the students seem unaware of their own biases.” and “With the lack of diversity the students are not exposed to heterogeneous environments. Comments about other people are poorly worded and spoken with no knowledge of the offensive nature. Racial and social slurs are thrown around with abandon.”

Faculty input was incredibly helpful in determining what issues needed to be addressed with students throughout the course of my unit. In order to more fully develop a picture of the status quo I also held a focus group with three students who were in my freshman honors class last school year. Similarly to the faculty who responded to my survey, they were able to express their perceptions of student beliefs at present. Additionally, because they had read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and other novels, such as Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* with me last year, we had

spent a lot of time discussing these issues and I wanted to find out what they found helpful, eye-opening, etc.

As with the faculty opinion, the students in the focus group expressed the belief that racial stereotypes come from a lack of knowledge and diversity in the school and community setting. Interestingly enough, a student in the focus group used the same terminology as one of the faculty responders when she called their town a “bubble town” indicating that students are sheltered and generally not exposed to difference of any kind. All three participants expressed the feeling that lack of diversity would become an issue for them and their classmates once they ventured out of the “bubble” and into a college and/or real world setting.

During the course of the focus group the conversation shifted to social media and its impact on students’ perceptions about race and diversity. All three participants cited viral videos and the like as contributors to prejudiced mindsets because these videos often highlight and make fun of racial stereotypes and are then shared and viewed by people around the world. “Because the content is presented as a joke,” the focus group said, “people forget or don’t understand how hurtful those portrayals can be.”

After surveying faculty and former students to begin constructing a picture of the status quo, it was time to survey my current students and determine their individual mindsets in terms of race, gender, and socio-economic status. I initially set about doing this through my Anticipatory Set at the start of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Students were asked to complete a survey (see Appendix 3) and much of the class period was spent in discussion of these topics. Race is the primary focus of statements 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8 on the student survey. Responses were mixed but in general students were in agreement that racism is a current reality in our society. On statements meant to identify students’ personal opinions there were, again, mixed responses (see

Appendix 4). However, in line with what I had experienced in previous years, there were some students who openly expressed opinions of racial superiority and others who *spoke* of an idealistic belief in equality but *demonstrated* either a different belief or simply a lack of understanding on the subject. These opinions were further explained when I had students journal on the topics addressed in the survey. One student, for example, elaborated on the fact that she had marked “strongly agree” for the statement “some races are more violent and commit more violent crimes than others.” She wrote in her journal: “I agree with the statement because factually it is correct. Statistically some races are just more violent. This is usually because of cultural mindset and we can say that we are all equal and that no one is superior or inferior but it does not change the facts.”

I implemented journaling into the unit because I felt it important to provide students the opportunity for reflection throughout. The journals turned out to be one of the best sources of data. Reading them was incredibly helpful in assessing how students progressed over the course of the unit. After each activity designed to help students broaden their cultural perspectives, students were given a journal prompt to help them further flush out their thinking on the topic. One classroom activity which extended into homework was a Social Injustice Search which was introduced through a mini-case study on current events such as Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin. In class we discussed these cases, made connections to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and discussed the larger, overarching idea of social injustice and how it can happen on both large and small scales. I shared some examples of small social injustices like the idea of things (band-aids, crayons, etc.) being “flesh colored” but pointing out that, despite the fact there are many different colors of flesh, these items are typically designed for white people. After this lesson I challenged them to find 2-3 examples of small social injustices (they were not limited to look solely for

racial injustices) with the hope that they would become aware of things they had never noticed before. Some of their journal responses related to racial social injustices are below:

*“People usually assume that foreigners are less educated. This is not right because there are knowledgeable students who have moved from different countries and who can do well in school. Others’ assumption that most foreigners are not capable of doing exceptional work would be an injustice.”*

*“One small social injustice that I noticed was the other day when I was in the store I noticed in the makeup aisle, a lot of the shades that make up come in did not have darker shades...When I looked for most of the darkest shades they were...definitely too light for a black person’s skin. I had never thought about this before.”*

*“One very big social injustice in today’s society is how in children’s books, it is more common that pictures that contain human characters are depicted as white. When I was younger, I never noticed this until I read a book called ‘The Snowy Day’ by Ezra Jack Keats. This picture book is one of the few that has a black boy as the main character.”*

*“When I walked into Victoria Secret recently I noticed there were many fair ‘nude’ tones but barely any dark nude tones...Also my sister pointed out that whenever watching a movie, there are fewer numbers of different races.”*

As we were reading about how the odds were stacked against Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I included a lesson on White Privilege. Based on journal responses and class discussion it is apparent that this lesson resonated the most with my students. To begin this lesson I had students complete a checklist (see Appendix 5) found in “White Privilege and Male

Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies” by Peggy McIntosh which basically outlines the various privileges that one innately has when one is born white. Afterwards, I introduced the idea of white privilege and had them read and annotate the entire McIntosh article. The class discussed the article and shared things that surprised or interested them. Afterwards we watched Jon Stewart’s October 15, 2014 interview with Bill O’Reilly to further discuss the idea of white privilege and the predominant arguments surrounding it. In the interview, Stewart and O’Reilly argue over whether or not white privilege exists in the United States, with O’Reilly taking the firm stance that it does not.

In the middle of watching the interview, I paused it to address a look of confusion from one of my students. When I asked her if she needed something clarified she responded, “No, I just think he needs to chill out. My dad watches Bill O’Reilly all the time, so I watch it all the time. This guy needs to chill out.” Assuming, from her explanation, that she meant Jon Stewart should “chill out,” I asked if that was her feeling. She replied, “No, I’d never really thought to question him before but Bill O’Reilly definitely needs to chill out.” After the lesson students were prompted to journal about the day’s lesson. Based on their responses, included below, this lesson proved to be eye-opening for many of them.

*“Something that resonated with me from today’s lesson was when we discussed how people of certain cultures/races are given credit for their race. We discussed a character in a movie that was the only black girl in her class and how the teacher asked her to give the ‘black perspective’. It is wrong to single someone out because of their race and make them the spokesperson for it because there are few in a certain area. In our school a white kid wouldn’t be asked for the ‘white perspective’.”*

*“When Bill O’Reilly refused to admit that white privilege is true it kind of shocked me. Yes, whites generally keep the idea on the down-low, but I always thought that whites knew it was there and ignored it...I checked off 25/26 of [the white privilege indicators] whereas someone who is black probably would not be able to check off even 5. In today’s lesson it became apparent to me that white privilege is more prevalent than I believed.”*

*“I completely agree with the article about privilege. I’ve been familiar with how women are disadvantaged in terms of treatment and wages, but I never considered looking from the bottom up.”*

*“Today was the first time I heard about the phrase ‘white privilege’. I did not really think that race had a big impact on job decisions, medical decisions, and things of that nature.”*

*“What resonated with me the most was the checklist. I checked 25/26 of them. With this I am now 100% sure that white privilege does exist...We should all have equal opportunities but I think it’s going to take a while for this to happen.”*

*“I never really realized that white privilege was such a big deal.”*

In a lesson given towards the end of the unit students were asked to journal about “Wonder Questions”. These questions could have been about anything sparked by something covered in class, even if we had not explicitly discussed it. Students chose to write about a number of different topics, and the discussion that followed the sharing of their Wonder Questions was truly fascinating. It was clear that many students relished the opportunity to wonder and speculate about the world around them in an environment where they were safe to do so. Some of their Wonder Questions relating to race are listed below:

*“I am wondering why some minorities have their own culture and history months but others do not. We should be learning about all different cultures, not just a few. There are many other minorities that do not have their own month. Also, shouldn’t we be thinking and learning about other cultures all year around, not just on specific months?”*

*“I was wondering why there have only been white presidents besides Barack Obama. All of our presidents have been white males but America is supposedly one of the most diverse countries.”*

*“I’ve often entertained the idea of being an ‘Asian’ student. Am I an A+ student? No!...I believe that stereotypes are a major influence on people. Most people review what they think a person could be. When people think of stereotypes, it changes their perspective of what a person is.”*

*“Do black people of other races have the same ‘white default’ that white people do? And how does it feel to be a part of a minority group in the US?”*

As a conclusion to this unit, students completed a project called Teaching Tolerance to Children. Because *To Kill a Mockingbird* provides a child’s perspective of the issues of race, gender, and socio-economic status, and because many students asserted their belief that biases are developed as children, the project gave them an opportunity to think about shaping a positive and tolerant point of view among the nation’s future. Students were instructed to research any issue of intolerance that they felt passionately about; it did not have to be something discussed in class. After researching the issue they had to develop a product to help teach children about that issue. The class chose a variety of topics including tolerance of differences in race, religion,



sexual orientation, gender, physical appearance, and physical/mental ability. Products included children’s books, poems, songs, videos, and games.

As a follow up to the Teaching Tolerance project students were asked to complete a final journal reflection about what resonated with them the most from the unit. Some of their responses indicate a clear progression of thought from the start of the unit whereas some seem to require more exposure to certain topics in order to move beyond their misconceptions.

*“The thing that resonated with me the most is how prevalent racial intolerance still is today. I knew it was still a problem but I did not realize how big of a problem it is. Recently things have happened that show how racism is still very prevalent in America... Because people judge by race, lives are lost.”*

*“I think that minorities (black, Hispanic) have lower standards to achieve because of the way society views them. This is an injustice because as a result they are less motivated and more doubtful of themselves.”*

*“Something that resonated with me is how people believe that there are white privileges. They think white people have more opportunities than other races, but that’s not necessarily true. Anybody can get great opportunities, but it depends on how hard you work to get there.”*

In examining how students responded to my efforts to broaden their cultural perspectives in terms of race it is evident that each of them was open to new ideas and ways of thinking. While some might stand firm with their assertions, all were *open* to the process of learning more and benefitted in some way from more exposure to the topic. By pairing discussions of the Tom Robinson trial and the prejudices of the people of Maycomb in *To Kill a Mockingbird* with current examples where the same issues and beliefs come into play, students were able to see

both the relevance of what they were reading and connect humanity with the headlines in the paper; something not easily done in a town where these issues of racial tension and inequality are completely foreign.

### GENDER

In choosing which social issues to focus on throughout this process, race was an obvious one to include not only because of its importance to the novel but also because of my past experiences with students who were unaware of the racial tensions and inequities still plaguing our country. Gender, however, is also very important in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The narrator, Scout, is constantly besieged by judgment from community members and even her family because she defies typical gender roles. The dialogue about gender roles and inequality is ongoing in our country and it is definitely something the students of my classroom can understand and relate to.

The faculty survey included a question about whether or not teachers perceived gender bias and stereotyping to be existent at the school. The majority of teachers disagreed that it exists at such an extreme level but many who wrote comments, and again this tended to be teachers of subjects in the humanities, indicated that it happens in a more understated way. “There is male vs. female bias. There is a huge difference in how male students interact with their classmates and teachers.” In contrast to what was expressed about student beliefs on race, faculty perceptions of this issue came more from watching social interaction and less from classroom discussion. “There is an over abundance of machismo and posturing for the boys and selective subjugation by the girls. Social roles are very distinct.” In examining my own personal viewpoint, I would have to agree that gender biases are by no means as widespread as racial and socio-economic biases within the school community, yet they do exist.

The anticipatory survey yielded very interesting results from the students. When asked if certain jobs/activities were better suited for men and others better suited for women,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the class indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed. One student even went so far as to verbally clarify by saying, “It’s true. For example, women make better leaders. They just do.” Yet, when asked if gender bias is a current societal reality, all but one student either agreed or strongly agreed, and just over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the class wrote that they believed men and women are not treated equally. This discrepancy provided a foundation for an important discussion on generalizations and how making them often creates bias. The previously quoted student, for example, came to realize that her comment was sexist even though she was voicing an opinion that is different from the typical sexist comments one hears. The class discussion helped them to realize that, by generalizing that some jobs/activities were better suited for one sex, they were actually creating notions of gender inequality because all people were lumped into either one category or another. Once they had that realization, they were able to apply that same logic to generalizations of any nature (racial, religious, etc.).

For the mini-case study regarding gender, students were given various articles to read which explored issues of gender roles and stereotypes perpetuated by traditional notions and current events like the Ray Rice domestic abuse scandal. These articles, and their connections to the novel, provided a foundation for class discussion on the issues. After the class discussions, students were prompted to reflect in their journals. Additionally, when students were challenged to find examples of social injustices, several of them chose to discuss an example that related to gender. Several journal excerpts are listed below:

*“I see at school [that it] is expected for girls to be less involved in sports than boys and girls are more involved in arts and literature than science and*

*math, which is more expected of boys. I wish that gender roles did not affect the activity, class, and job choices of both girls and boys.”*

*“Girls in society may feel pressured to act very feminine to not be considered a ‘tomboy’. If girls enjoy watching sports they might not want to wear sports jerseys to school because of how people classify gender roles. Boys may feel pressured to act very masculine and like sports. If a boy doesn’t like sports he may just wear sports jerseys any way to fit in.”*

*“An issue of intolerance I feel very aware of is between genders. Women are not even a minority, so why are odds biased against them? I feel that this issue should be addressed because I am part of the affected group. What actually makes men better than women? How is it possible for one gender to even be considered ‘better’ than the other?”*

*“Girls in general are taught to be the opposite of boys, frail, beautiful, out of the way. Boys are taught to be as macho as possible at all times. Both of these stereotypes impact people negatively. Life with these pressures can be very stressful, especially for teens. If people stopped caring so much about these ridiculous rules we’ve made for ourselves, everyone would be much happier.”*

Many students chose topics relating to gender for their project on Teaching Tolerance to Children. Based on the projects and many of the journal responses most students in the class seemed to feel most passionate about this issue. This is likely due to the fact that it is an issue which touches their lives, whereas many of them are not affected by racial and socio-economic bias on a daily basis. Something that did become evident, however, was that their passion for this issue allowed them the ability to keep an open mind when studying other issues and, in some

instances, created an open door for considerations they had not made before. Upon final reflection of the unit, many students wrote about gender.

*“The topic which resonated with me the most from this unit was gender roles and inequality. This is because it is the topic I encounter most in everyday life. I am more aware about this topic as it appears in everyday life now. Previously I was ignorant to a male advantage but not to a female disadvantage. This has been an eye-opening experience.”*

*“My mom and aunts were raised by my grandmother and their gender role ideas are very different from my dad’s, who was raised by my very old fashioned grandparents...What I think is a lot different from what my father thinks. So, slowly yet surely, these misconstrued ideas about gender roles and stereotyping are fading and equality is starting to shine through.”*

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Socio-Economic status plays an important role in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Not only does it have a clear connection to the racial biases of the time, but there are also moments in the text when Scout is confronted with stereotypes based on social class and learns to see beyond them. This is a very relevant topic within my school’s community as well because so much of the population is considered upper class. The median household income is roughly \$134,000. When walking the school hallways it is commonplace to see expensive cell phones and tablets, designer sneakers, handbags, book bags, and clothing. In the faculty survey just under 60% of those who responded indicated that they believe socio-economic bias to be a problem amongst students. This statement on the survey elicited, by far, the most written responses; some of which are included below:

*“They think poor people are lazy.”*

*“The clothes, the attitude, the cars, the cost of their intended college... They have no personal opinion/idea about value or work ethic. They are given cars and gas money by their parents. Those that do not are shunned or openly mocked.”*

*“Students are generally unaware of the differences between statuses outside of their own community – they don’t know the terms of poverty.”*

*“I teach about poverty in my junior Social Studies class. When I show video clips, etc. students feel genuinely bad for a little while but the next day they are back to talking about how they ‘need’ this or that designer item. Just yesterday one of my students was complaining about how she wanted the new Michael Kors purse but her mom got her a Longchamp purse instead (also a designer brand).”*

The participants in the focus group indicated that students’ prejudices against people of a lower class come from their lack of exposure to different classes. However, the focus group members all agreed that they do not see negative attitudes towards “poor people” within the community. Rather, they see a pressure to appear as part of the elite upper class by obtaining status symbols such as designer clothing, purses, etc. Each participant also voiced their opinion that any person, regardless of the class he/she is born into, has the opportunity to advance in socio-economic status; a notion that was echoed by more than half of my current students in their anticipatory surveys.

In regards to socio-economic status on the anticipatory surveys the students were asked to respond to two statements. Statement #13 instructed students to agree or disagree with the idea

that someone who is homeless and/or poor has the power to change their situation. As previously stated, more than half of the class agreed with that statement. Statement #14 instructed students to agree or disagree with the notion that someone is homeless and/or poor as a direct result of bad decisions they made. Half of the class either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The follow-up discussion and journaling to the anticipatory set did yield some change in attitude on the part of the students, especially when they were reminded about the dangers of generalizing. One student wrote: “Some homeless people are in that financial state because they made bad decisions. For example someone could be a drug addict or alcoholic and not be able to find a job. But many homeless people are not in the financial state from bad decisions. They may have been born into a poor family and not have as many chances as others. They may not be able to go to college and therefore not get a steady job.”

In continuing to talk about social class and status students were given multiple articles on poverty to read and the class watched a video clip from the movie *The Freedom Writers*. The articles were chosen because they had some element which I believed my students could relate to. For example, one article discussed school anxiety experienced on the part of those students who were returning without new clothes. The movie clip was similar in nature but also important because it put a face to the idea of homelessness; a high school boy who had become homeless, through no fault of his, and was scared and nervous about returning to school with a stigma. As they began to journal about these topics, a thought progression became very clear as students started to explore where these stereotypes might have originated.

*“In children’s books certain images are associated with certain things. For example poor people are often depicted in rags or bad people wear black colored clothing. These images influence children...If parents make an*

*association between a certain race and a negative trait, children will come to make that same association.”*

*“In order to be successful you need money, but if you don’t have money you can’t get the jobs to get the money.”*

*“Why do people care about status? To feel better about themselves?”*

Ultimately many of the students came to the issue with a more open-minded approach after being given the opportunity to think further on the topic and ask some Wonder Questions.

*“Another social injustice is how famous people often break the law and get little or no jail time compared to the average person...This is not how the justice system should work, people should be treated the same regardless of their status in society.”*

*“Based on your social class you will have stereotypes placed on you whether you like or want them...Sadly this is the way our society works. I think all people should get a fair chance to make a good impression.”*

*“I’ve reached the realization that if someone born rich becomes poor, they would (if their wealth was regained) have a better appreciation for lower classes. Everything is based on perspective and gaining a new one.”*

While students certainly broadened their thinking on this issue, their progress in this category was not as significant as it was when we studied race and gender. As was noted by other teachers who responded to my survey, the idea of varying social classes and the lifestyles that accompany each are far removed from the students in this community. None of my students chose this topic for their Teaching Tolerance to Children project and very few sought to find social structures that were unjust towards those of lower social classes. This was not a result of



being unfeeling towards people less advantaged, but rather that the plight of the poverty-stricken is not even on their radar.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study indicate, in regards to race and socioeconomic status, students raised in such a homogeneous community have a significant lack of knowledge of these issues and they often do not even realize or acknowledge it. However, they are acutely aware of the differences and do truly perceive non-whites and lower class citizens as “others”. They are careful to avoid being seen as prejudiced and yet their lack of knowledge often causes them to perpetuate beliefs that are considered prejudiced. Upon making the perspective of “the other” the lens through which we studied *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there was a distinct shift in attitude. Students’ attitudes became more relaxed as they understood that it was acceptable, and often necessary, to discuss these issues if our society wants to make positive change. This led to beneficial class discussions and a more open-minded approach on the part of the students, which in turn helped shift and change some of their preconceived notions about race and socioeconomic status.

In looking at the implications of the gender focus, there was a different outcome because the students’ stances on these types of issues are much different. As previously stated, many students already felt passionately about gender equality and by providing them with more information on this topic their convictions were strengthened. However, there were some instances in which students were able to question societal gender norms they had never thought of before, such as the gender roles placed on young people in our society.

These findings indicate that there needs to be a greater focus on these issues whenever applicable because it will increase student awareness, if nothing else. Additionally, by studying class material in conjunction with these issues, both the curriculum and the current world issues become more relatable. As a teacher who has taught this particular novel for the past five years, I found the benefits to be numerous in terms of my own perspective. By looking at current events, the material remains fresh and relevant. By changing the way in which we studied the text I was able to re-focus on what is truly important in education. So often teachers' attentions are distracted by curriculum timelines, clerical deadlines, and standardized test preparation. This unit made me hone in on my students' academic and personal growth, as well as my own, over the course of the unit.

## LIMITATIONS

In implementing this research project there were unfortunate limitations which hindered my ideas from going as I had originally planned them. The biggest hurdle to overcome was time. In doing this unit again I would seek to allot more time for each mini-case study so that discussions could be drawn out and students would have more time to make connections between the case studies and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I also found an abundance of classroom resources and only used some of them because there was simply not enough time to get to everything. It would have been to the students' benefit if we had the ability to more fully explore each topic.

Part of my original plan was to have the students participate in a service project. I would have preferred to take a field trip to a soup kitchen or food bank and have them volunteer their time. Afterwards we could have discussed and/or done journaling as a means of reflection. The goal was to provide the students with exposure to a scenario very foreign to most of them. Due

to the focus on instructional time within the district, prompted by the implementation of the PARCC exam, school field trips are no longer permitted. This new policy prevented me from being able to follow-through on this part of my plan.

The no-field-trip policy also prevented me from including a portion of the Teaching Tolerance to Children that I had originally planned on doing. My initial thought was to have my students visit one of the district’s elementary schools and share their books, stories, games, etc. with an elementary school class. This would have added a greater significance to their projects by allowing them to actually implement the real-world tolerance education product they had designed.

## SUBJECTIVITY

The topic of this research project is something very personal to me. Just like the students, I come to the table with my own beliefs. Those beliefs have been shaped from many different experiences and influences but most applicably they were shaped by previous classes of students who shared the sentiments which originally made me want to research this issue. In shaping my questions I sought to address preconceptions that existed with former students, believing it likely that my current students held the same preconceptions. Throughout this process I learned, to my pleasant surprise, that students had a greater willingness to be open-minded than I anticipated. However, had I implemented the research plan mid-year, I would have been better able to tailor my instruction to the individual needs of my students.

## EMERGING QUESTIONS

After implementing this new approach to teaching a novel I am planning on continuing in the same manner for the rest of the curriculum. I believe that a focus on current issues with the goal of broadening cultural perspectives is of the utmost importance for our students. In looking back at this particular unit, I do have additional questions to resolve before teaching it again next year. The first is in regards to the discussions on socio-economic status. I feel as if my approach, though eye-opening for some of the students, did not leave a lasting impression on them and did not truly help them understand the plight of people in this country who are considered part of lower class.

As a potential solution to this question I would like to have the students complete a service project where they are in direct contact with people who are struggling financially. Though my initial request, to volunteer at a local food bank or soup kitchen, was denied because of the new no-field-trip policy, I would like to find a way to make a service project possible in the future.

I had also envisioned the possibility of a pen-pal program to increase student awareness of the outside world through communication with other students. However, I had trouble determining the best way to go about doing this. In the future I would like to seek assistance in making something like this happen in the most effective way possible.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

What I learned from this study will inform the rest of my teaching in all course offerings, not just the freshman honors class. I have seen that the benefits of incorporating current issues are two-fold. In one instance you make the curriculum more accessible for the students. They

see the ways in which the texts are relevant. In another instance, the current event at hand becomes humanized when it is connected to a character or situation in a novel. Though the character may be fictional and the issue foreign to the student, being able to make that connection can turn something foreign into something more familiar.

As one of the focus group’s participants said, “Time and life experiences are the best teachers of acceptance and there is not too much that can be done only in schools because classroom discussion isn’t enough... it needs to be real.” In seeking to use what I learned from this study again I will make more of an effort to give students those real experiences.

## CONCLUSION

In reflecting upon all that I have learned throughout the course of this research I feel a lot more equipped to help my students examine the world in different ways. It is also important to note that, on the whole, the students in this community are great kids! They are caring and driven and, for the most part, willing to learn. Anyone who has had children can certainly empathize with the desire to live in a community where the children are sheltered and safe. However, living in “the bubble” comes with its negatives too. By not having exposure to diversity of race and class, students come to view those who are not white and wealthy as “the other”. As stated by one of my colleagues, “I think the prejudice is about differences – not just in race but in religion or disabilities – most kids know it is politically incorrect to exhibit racism/sexism but do not see that behavior towards other differences is also a problem.” Parents and teachers have a responsibility to present students with a look at these issues and opportunity to have open dialogue about them. Another of my colleagues shared her belief that “students need direct instruction on how to be respectful, for example, ‘this is an example of gender

bias...this is not a politically correct term and here's why.” Another faculty member wrote, “Character Education should be a part of every discipline and course. It should be constant and part of general classroom management.”

Teachers and students should not be afraid to talk about these things. Fear exists because no one wants to be labeled a racist or label someone a racist. When I sought to complete this research project, I did my best to create a judgment-free environment that was conducive to exploration and discussion. In my experience of incorporating these topics into a unit of study students seemed to feel relieved at being given the opportunity to discuss these issues and to ask questions. By pairing the topics with the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we were able to discuss these universal themes in more depth. According to the members of the focus group, analyzing the issues in the context of novels was helpful; “Universal themes were shown through the novels so we can understand not only that culture, but also our own connection to those cultures.” Furthermore, as any English teacher can certify, reading novels is transportive. In a town where exposure to diversity is non-existent the novel is a very important way to provide that. I was happy to hear this belief reinforced during the focus group; “Learning through the novels provided an exposure we would not have gotten otherwise.”

This research project did not completely shift every student's way of thinking. It would be unrealistic to imagine that it would. Happily, what it did do was provide my students with experiences and revelations that were new and different to them. My goal was to help these students on the path to social awareness and, at least in some small way, I have done that.

*“My convictions have strengthened because of reading To Kill a Mockingbird. It has illustrated the seriousness of this situation. It made me*

*realize the power of the majority, even when the decision or stereotype of the majority is incorrect or unfair.”*

*“I do feel like I am more aware now to things I honestly never even took a second look at. This unit helped me realize many things related to gender and race.”*

*“Throughout the unit, social injustices and gender roles really made me think...and frustrated me. With some things, since it doesn't affect me I never put much thought into it but it really opened my eyes...I just never realized how much people judge each other and how much society follows these rules.”*

I believe this study could be incredibly helpful to other educators in similar districts who are looking to broaden students' cultural perspectives. My findings indicate that simple, but consistent adjustments can make a difference in how students view and think about the world around them. To quote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.” The philosophy that by gaining knowledge of what was out there my students could begin to look at the world with a broader cultural perspective and with understanding was the basis for my research.

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