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Give 'em Something To Talk About: Questioning The Questions In
Scholastic Literature Circle Editions

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Jacqueline P. LaRose

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Ph.D. degree in Teacher Education

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# GIVE 'EM SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT: QUESTIONING THE QUESTIONS IN SCHOLASTIC LITERATURE CIRCLE EDITIONS

By

Jacqueline P. LaRose

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education

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# ABSTRACT

## GIVE 'EM SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT: QUESTIONING THE QUESTIONS IN SCHOLASTIC LITERATURE CIRCLE EDITIONS

By

Jacqueline P. LaRose

With a focus on how readers interpret and respond to text, and a belief in the sociocultural nature of learning, many teachers use literature discussion groups in their classrooms. The world's biggest publisher and distributor of books for children, Scholastic, Inc., has apparently recognized the growth in literature discussion groups, both in and outside of classrooms. To address this trend, Scholastic publishes intermediate-level trade books in special Literature Circle editions of children's and young adult literature that include discussion questions and activities in the back matter of the books themselves. According to Scholastic, the questions are designed to help readers "get more out of the experience of reading" the particular book.

This dissertation focuses on the implications this practice holds, especially with regard to what is thereby implied about literature, reading, and discussion of literature. Using textual analysis, the entire collection of books published as Literature Circle Editions was analyzed for patterns related to characteristics such as genre, gender of author and main characters, award-winning status, and theme, in order to consider possible implications related to what counts as literature worthy of discussion. Drawing on reader response and critical theories, textual analysis of the questions included in the back matter of Scholastic Literature Circle Editions was conducted to explore

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assumptions about what counts in the reading of, and what counts in the discussion of the literature.

Examining the literature and the questions included in the Literature Circle Editions collection revealed what is present and what is absent in the use of these books and questions. In terms of what literature is here, there is a mix of old and new titles, a third of which are Newbery Medal or Honor books. There are only three genres represented – fantasy, historical fiction, and contemporary realistic fiction, which account for over half of the collection. Prominent themes include focus on family relationships, growing up, and courage when dealing with prejudice or death. There is a balance of books featuring male or female protagonists, but more books are written by females than males. Data related to the race or ethnicity of protagonists and authors is inconclusive, but further study is warranted in this area as indicative of the diversity in this collection.

In terms of what questions are here, there are more questions that elicit lower-level than higher-level thinking. Other types of questions that are present are those which lead readers toward particular expected responses, have the potential to spoil the book if read before the whole book is read, invite imaginative response from the reader, are centered heavily on the text, or do not even require readers to have read the book.

There are several characteristics not present in these editions and questions. These include: attention to the readers' context, the teacher's voice, authentic questions, connections across questions, affective response questions, intertextual response questions, genre questions, critical response questions, writers' craft questions, attention to diversity, and an expanded target audience.

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2007

Dedicated with deep love and gratitude to my parents, Charles and Gloria LaRose,
to my sisters, Michele, Diane, Cathy, Tammy, and Wendy, and to my husband, Gene. I am incredibly lucky to have all of you in my life.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In his children's novel, *Sour Land*, William H. Armstrong wrote, "There's [sic] a few people in the world who can feed both their souls and heads at the same time. They're the few that end up with educated hearts."[1] I have many people to thank for my educated heart.

I must begin by thanking the members of my committee: Janine Certo, Mary Juzwik, Lynn Paine, and Cheryl Rosaen. They have given me the benefit of their intelligence and talent, but perhaps even more than that, they have given me their support and encouragement. Their confidence in me gave me courage and fortitude. And then there's Laura. The final member of my committee, my chair and advisor, Laura Apol, who has taught me so much about literature and writing, and how to let the sharks' teeth go, and how to appreciate a good lap cat. I thank Laura for her intelligence and humor, and for the many, many hours we have spent in work and friendship.

I also thank Laura for bringing together a group of friends and colleagues whom I will always treasure. The Children's Literature Team has been there for me every step of the way, and I will not forget that. It has been a true pleasure and honor to work with such an auspicious group.

To my Thursday Night Study Group, I am grateful for the reminders of where my priorities should lie. In our travels near and far, I learned much from you that will not leave me.

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[1] Armstrong, William H. (1971). *Sour land*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

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I would be remiss if I did not thank my personal trainer. Butch, your leadership and guidance, grounded in humility rather than hubris, have been inspirational.

I am incredibly fortunate to have the type of family and friends who love and support me unconditionally. These are people whom I know I can call day or night. It's no small thing to know that there are people in your life who will show up at your door with a hug, a listening ear, as much money as you need, or even just a great chicken pot pie. Incredibly, I have many such people in my life. To my sisters, especially, I thank you for all you've done to help me through these many years of change. I love you.

I came to Michigan for a PhD, but I am staying in Michigan for so much more. To become Dr. LaRose is a great thing, but to become Mrs. Alloway is a marvel to me. I am truly the lucky one. Gene, I love you.

I close with love and gratitude to my parents. For someone who never seems to be at a loss for words, I am struggling to find the right ones to express my feelings about what my parents have given me, and will always give me. All I can say is this. Dad, I will always know where you are if I need you. Mama, I know you are always proud of me.

List

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables........ xii

Chapter One
  Introduction........ 1
    History of Reading Instruction........ 3
      Early Basal Reading Programs........ 4
      Literature-based Basal Reading Programs........ 5
      Whole Language........ 8
      Use of Trade Books in Literature-based Instruction........ 8
      Balanced Literacy Instruction........ 10
    The Origins of My Study........ 11
    Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions........ 13
    My Research Questions........ 16
    Methodology Employed........ 16
    Limitations of This Study........ 18
    Dissertation Overview........ 19

Chapter Two
  Participating in Literature Discussion Groups........ 21
    Building Meaning Through Reading Independently........ 21
    Building Meaning Through Reading in a Discussion Group........ 22
      Importance of Discussion........ 23
      Overview of Literature Discussion Groups........ 24
      Characteristics of Literature Discussion Groups........ 26
      The Role of the Teacher........ 30
      The Role of the Student........ 35
      Benefits of Literature Discussion Groups........ 38
        A holistic approach to literacy........ 38
        A sociocultural, constructivist view of teaching and learning 38
        Enthusiasm through engagement........ 40
        A springboard to critical response........ 41
        Satisfaction of educational goals........ 43
      Role of Questions........ 44
      Scholastic's Role in Literature Discussion Groups........ 47

Chapter Three
  Scholastic, Inc.-- A Publishing Powerhouse........ 49
    Scholastic's Mission........ 50
    History in the Educational Market........ 51
    Introducing the Scholastic Book Clubs........ 52

Chap

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- Scholastic Literature Circle Editions 54
    - The History 56
    - Selecting the Books 58
    - Writing the Questions 62
    - Marketing the Books 66
    - Intended Use of Literature Circle Editions 69

Chapter Four

- Analysis of the Literature Circle Editions Collection 73
    - What Types of Books Were Included? 76
        - Copyright Date 76
        - Genre 78
        - Newbery Medal or Honor 79
        - Main Character 80
        - Theme 82
    - Who Wrote These Books? 83

Chapter Five

- Analysis of the Literature Circle Editions' Questions 86
    - Content of the Questions 96
        - Correlation with Bloom's Taxonomy 96
            - Knowledge 101
            - Comprehension 102
            - Application 103
            - Analysis 104
            - Synthesis 105
            - Evaluation 105
        - Questions That Lead 106
        - Questions That Spoil 107
        - Prompts to Explain or Support Responses 108
    - Structure of the Questions 110
        - Sequence 110
        - Connections Across Questions 112

Chapter Six

- Discussion 116
    - Revisiting Literature Discussion Groups 117
    - Scholastic's Role 118
    - Analysis of the Literature Circle Editions 120
        - What Is Here: The Literature 120
        - What Is Here: The Framework 121
        - What Is Here: The Questions 122
            - Lower-level thinking questions 122
            - Higher-level thinking questions 123
            - Leading questions 123

Spoiler questions........................................................ 124
Imaginative response questions.................................... 125
Text-removed questions............................................... 126
Text-centered questions.............................................. 127
What is Not Here............................................................ 129
Attention to the readers' context................................. 129
The teacher's voice..................................................... 130
Authentic questions..................................................... 131
Connections across questions..................................... 131
Affective response questions....................................... 132
Intertextual response questions.................................... 132
Genre questions........................................................... 133
Critical response questions........................................... 133
Writers' craft questions................................................ 138
Attention to diversity.................................................. 141
An expanded target audience....................................... 143
Acknowledgment of the social..................................... 144
What Counts as Literature Worthy of Discussion?............................ 145
What Counts in Reading?................................................................ 149
What Counts in Discussing Literature?............................................ 151
Conclusion....................................................................................... 154

Chapter Seven

Final Thoughts and Next Steps.......................................................... 159
Implications for Teachers.................................................................. 160
Implications for Students and Other Readers...................................... 162
Implications for Teacher Educators.................................................... 167
Suggestions for Scholastic.................................................................. 170
Suggestions for Further Research....................................................... 176
Use of Literature Circle Editions.................................................... 176
Literature Circle Edition Activities................................................. 177
Teacher's Guides........................................................................... 177
Similar Products............................................................................ 177
Diversity of the Collection............................................................. 178
Conclusion........................................................................................ 178

Appendices

Appendix A – Scholastic's Literature Circle Collection.............................. 181
Appendix B – Sample Questions........................................................... 184
Appendix C – Plot Summaries for Sample Literature Circle Editions............. 185
Appendix D – Data Collection Sheet Template......................................... 189
Appendix E – Completed Data Collection Sheet........................................ 191
Appendix F – Correlation to Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.......................... 193

References........................................................................... 198

T

T

T

Ta

Ta

Ta

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Original Copyright Dates........................................................ 77

Table 4.2 Genre............................................................................. 78

Table 4.3 Newbery Medal or Honor Winners.......................................... 80

Table 4.4 Race/ethnicity of Authors and Main Characters........................ 82

Table 4.5 Main Themes..................................................................... 83

Table 5.1 Frequency of Agreement..................................................... 98

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Dep
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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Literature has long held a place in classrooms in the United States, but its prominence and uses have varied, especially with regard to its role in reading instruction. Depending on the goals of education and beliefs about the nature of literacy in any given time period, literature has been central to reading instruction or has hovered on the periphery. There has often been a dichotomy between the material students read for instructional purposes and the material students read for enjoyment of literature. Students' desks may very well hold "reading books" – those used during the structured reading class period, and "books for reading" – those used during free or independent reading time. Literature-based basal readers have attempted to blend the two by pulling children's trade literature into the reading program. Sometimes the literature is included in supplemental leveled readers. At the kindergarten and first grade levels, children may encounter Big Book versions of literature that are used in particular ways as prescribed by the basal reading program. Often children's trade book literature, in a modified form or in its entirety, is included in the student anthology that forms the core of the basal reading program beginning in grade one or two. This literature is still clearly textbook material, however, since the stories are broken up by comprehension questions and activities. When literature is included in a textbook in this way, students have come to expect that this is literature for schoolwork, literature to study, literature to teach them something about reading.

In the last decade, a new phenomenon has occurred. In addition to literature being pulled into basal readers (a practice that has been in place for at least two decades), discussion questions are being published to accompany trade book literature. Sometimes these questions are published in a separate booklet or pamphlet, directed toward readers participating in book discussion groups. For many years, novel guides have been published to directly support the use of children's literature in classrooms. For example, Scholastic, Inc. has published several Literature Guides, including one for the popular children's novel, *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1977). This 16-page guide includes an author biography, a summary of the book, and a description of all of the characters. The bulk of the guide is comprised of discussion questions and cross-curricular activities (1999) and is apparently marketed toward teachers, as are most of the guides published. Certainly there is a proliferation of such novel guides on the Web. For example, a Google search (conducted on August 12, 2007) for a "*Bridge to Terabithia* novel guide" resulted in 285,000 hits. Many of these guides include complete lesson plans in addition to discussion questions with suggested answers. If teachers want materials to support the use of literature in their classrooms, there are plenty of ways such resources may be obtained, but these have traditionally been published apart from the literature itself.

This dissertation focuses on the implications of a trade book publisher including literature discussion questions in the back of the trade books themselves. These special editions contain the complete novels, and are, in every other aspect, just like the editions published without discussion questions. The difference lies in the 2-3 pages of back matter that follow the text. Because of printing logistics, there are sometimes blank pages following the text in novels, but these editions include literature discussion questions and activities on these pages. I became curious about the implications this practice holds, especially with regard to what is thereby implied about literature, reading, and discussion of literature.

In order to better understand the significance of the inclusion of publisher-created questions in the back matter of children's trade literature, I will begin by presenting a brief history of reading instructional materials in the United States, including a discussion of how children's literature has been used in classrooms. With this context in place, I will describe the study that is the subject of this dissertation, including discussion of the study's origins, identification of the research questions, a description of the methodology employed, and limitations to this study. This will set the stage for a more pointed exploration of how a major publishing company, Scholastic, Inc., is positioning literature, reading, and readers through its publication of Literature Circle Editions – special editions of children's novels with discussion questions included in the back matter of the books.

## *History of Reading Instruction*

The history of reading instruction in the United States to some extent has always been connected to contemporary beliefs about the purposes of education, the nature of children, the nature of literacy, and political and economic goals.  For example, from the time of first colonization to the time of American independence, reading materials emphasized religious instruction and morals, since the goal of literacy education was to enable people to read the Bible and be productive members of society. Children, viewed as miniature adults who needed to learn the religious beliefs of adult society (Venezky, 1987), learned to read by studying the alphabet, learning to recognize simple syllables, and then moving directly into reading Bible passages and moral tracts.

After the American Revolution, the power of religious leaders waned as the country expanded in terms of geography, population, and religious diversity. Morality continued to be emphasized in reading texts through the first half of the nineteenth century, but it was coupled with patriotic selections that reflected the growth in nationalism. Beliefs about children at this time were also changing. Instead of emphasizing a fear of God, there was emphasis on "developing a positive moral character and entrepreneurial spirit" (Shannon, 2007, p. 5). It was during this time that word-centered methods largely replaced the alphabetic and spelling methods that had heretofore been used to introduce reading. By the end of the nineteenth century, analytic phonics was a feature of reading texts, as well as more and more repetition of controlled vocabulary in reading selections (Venezky, 1987).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the focus was on preparing students to be good citizens, with reading selections written expressly to promote an intelligent citizenry. It was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that professional textbooks on teaching reading appeared, and these contained a call for the use of literature as the country, struggling to accommodate waves of immigrants, became concerned with cultural development. Teachers used classic literature, nursery rhymes, and folktales in reading instruction. This advocacy for the use of literature in reading instruction faded as increased research on the reading process led publishers to focus more on reading materials that promoted learning to read and less on materials that promoted the beliefs about the purpose of education. Thus began the era of scientific research in reading that led to a division of the fields of children's literature and reading education, and led to the publication, and subsequent domination, of basal reading programs in reading instruction (Martinez & McGee, 2000).

### *Early Basal Reading Programs*

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A major development in reading materials emerged in the 1920s when the first teachers' guidebooks were routinely published to accompany reading textbooks. Until that time, there were usually only minimal directions to teachers included in the students' books. It was assumed that teachers' judgment and experience enabled them to interpret and present lessons (Shannon, 2007). New scientific research on reading removed this right and responsibility from the teachers' purview in an attempt to standardize reading instruction based on scientific knowledge. According to Shannon, "The production of the teachers' guidebook was the beginning of basal reading materials as known today – teachers' manual, textbook, supplementary materials, and tests" (2007, p. 33).

By the time I entered kindergarten in 1969, basal reading programs had been the dominant reading materials in elementary classrooms for over twenty years (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). I, like so many others, spent hours with Sally, Dick, and Jane. Stories with controlled vocabulary, written specifically for the basal readers, were at the core of these programs. The emphasis was on gaining meaning from whole words, and decoding skills were taught after a certain number of sight words had been learned. By the mid-1970s, this vocabulary was less tightly controlled, and phonics instruction occurred earlier in the program, reflecting a significant shift from emphasis on sight vocabulary to learning decoding skills (Stahl, 1998). Reading was still largely viewed as a process of decoding, and attention to comprehension was of secondary importance.

### *Literature-based Basal Reading Programs*

In the 1980s, the pendulum swung again, and an emphasis on building comprehension skills emerged as the use of connected text for reading instruction moved from the use of basal readers containing only text composed specifically for instructional pur

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purposes (i.e., having controlled vocabulary) to basal readers containing "real" literature adapted from trade books. At first, "real" literature was included in basals that still contained stories written specifically for the program. Much of the children's literature was rewritten for inclusion in the basal, either to make the literature conform to the publishers' criteria for vocabulary and skill work, or to fit "publishers' standards of acceptability for content, language, and values" (Goodman, 1988). This "basalization" of literature, as Goodman calls it, has continued to characterize literature-based basal reading programs, although the degree of adaptation has decreased (Martinez & McGee, 2000; Reutzel & Larsen, 1995).

In a piece provocatively titled "Using a Howitzer to Kill a Butterfly: Teaching Literature with Basals", Noll and Goodman (1995) reported Jane Yolen's outrage at the treatment of one of her stories in a basal reader. When she saw the detailed and extensive questions and activities the publisher had included to accompany one of her stories, Yolen questioned the necessity of providing teachers and students with this much "help." She asserted that so much scripting of instructions for the teacher left "little room for individualization and little room for the marvelously unexpected" (p. 247). Noll and Goodman noted, "Authors are rarely aware of the didactic treatment that controls the experience children have with their work in basals. Publishers do not have to show authors of children's literature the instructional web in which their stories are suspended" (1995, p. 244). The instructional web can be very complex indeed. In looking at how the same story, Gary Soto's "The Marble Champ" (first published in *Baseball in April and Other Stories* (1990)) was treated in the fifth-grade level of two different basal reading series published by Scott Foresman (Afflerbach *et al.*, 2004) and Macmillan/McGraw-

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Hill (Flood *et al.*, 2005), it was obvious that while trade literature has been pulled into basals, it is also pulled apart in those basals. As with just about any piece of literature in any basal reader, there are numerous activities, worksheets, and other suggested means of working with this story provided in the teacher's manuals. While the story itself occupies only twelve pages in the Scott Foresman anthology, there are 41 pages in the teacher's manual devoted to its use. Macmillan devotes 42 pages.

If you asked a student in a class using one of these series, "What is reading?" they might understandably reply, "Answering questions." There is no shortage of questions connected to "The Marble Champ." Scott Foresman provides nearly 30 questions for teachers to ask before, during, and after reading, and Macmillan isn't far behind. During the reading of the story, it is suggested that teachers interrupt students to ask no fewer than 13 questions. While Scott Foresman does ask some fairly rich comprehension questions related to character motivation and what themes might be inferred from the story, most of the questions are straight recall questions, clearly geared toward assessing understanding of plot and sequence. Such questions are common in basal reading programs that are explicitly designed to build reading comprehension skill.

A criticism of literature-based basal reading programs focuses on mixed messages sent to teachers in the teachers' guides during the early 1990s, as basal methodologies tried to accommodate literature-based philosophies (Nastase & Corbett, 1998). Basal publishers were attempting to engage readers with trade book literature selections, but the approach to the literature was still one of dissection. It is difficult to appreciate a good story when you don't actually get the full story – perhaps the original illustrations have been replaced, elements of the story have been altered to fit publishers' needs, or you

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only get to read one chapter from a much longer work. According to Reutzel and Larsen (1995), "Teaching children to appreciate good books requires just that – good books, not basalized version anthologies" (p. 505). With the inclusion of children's literature in basal reading programs however, some teachers have felt that this is a viable replacement for trade books (Altieri, 1998), and a step closer to the philosophy espoused by proponents of the Whole Language movement.

### *Whole Language*

During the Whole Language movement which became popular in the late 1980s, there was a push to abandon use of basal reading programs altogether (or to use "whole language basals" that contained unadapted literature in anthologies) and begin using children's literature and students' own writing for reading instruction (Czubaj, 1997; Xue & Meisels, 2004). Whereas the literature-based basals of the 1980s focused on building comprehension skills, whole language programs emphasized building motivation and engagement in reading (Stahl, 1998). While literature-based classrooms and whole language classrooms both taught reading and writing skills in context, not in a prescribed sequence, and without reliance on a teacher's script, these pedagogical approaches differed in that whole language classrooms offered students choice over their reading. In some literature-based programs, the teacher retained control over decisions about what books would be read, and sometimes used novel guides prepared by publishers (Thelen, 1995).

### *Use of Trade Books in Literature-based Instruction*

With the advent of Reading Workshop and the adoption of a literature-based curriculum, many teachers began using literature directly from trade books for reading

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instruction (Palardy, 1997). By 1990, children's literature trade books were being used even by the 80% of teachers still mainly using basal reading programs (Johnston *et al.*, 1998). One argument in support of the movement toward using children's literature in literacy instruction is that it increases student motivation to read and boosts higher-order thinking skills (Palardy, 1997). A literature-based program also gives the teacher some autonomy in selecting that literature. The teacher must make decisions about selecting materials and providing contexts for reading and discussing literature, instead of following a prescribed program where those decisions have been made by the publisher. The success of the use of children's literature rests on the expertise of the teacher (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). Teachers who move from using basals to using trade books may bring with them the practices they learned when teaching with a basal reading program, including using questions to see if students read the story in a particular way. They may also go to the opposite extreme and neglect to keep the text as the center of discussion in their effort to encourage and accept free responses from student readers (K. Smith, 1990). These teachers need help finding balance between assessing reading comprehension and using literature to help students practice reading strategies and develop understanding as they read. One increasingly popular way of using literature to help readers develop understanding is through the incorporation of literature discussion groups. This instructional strategy involves students in reading a common text that they discuss in small groups, reflecting a socioconstructivist view of reading in which meaning is built by the sharing of multiple readers' interpretations. If teachers are encouraged to use literature discussion groups in their classrooms, simply handing teachers trade books may not be enough to help them successfully employ this new meth

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methodology. The role of the teacher in literature discussion will be explored more thoroughly in chapter two.

### *Balanced Literacy Instruction*

In many places, the mainstay of an elementary reading program was, and still is, a basal reading program, now commonly referred to as a core reading program. Especially in this era of accountability connected to No Child Left Behind legislation, schools are tied to using "scientifically-based" reading programs. The promotional materials for core reading programs are full of graphs and charts intended to supply the necessary validation for their success in improving reading achievement for all students, based, of course, on the latest scientific reading research. Some programs are highly scripted, meaning that the teacher is told exactly what to say in every lesson. There is little room for a teacher's professional judgment when using these scripted programs. Other programs are unscripted, meaning that the teacher is just provided with activities and examples of how they might be used. It is assumed that the teacher will use professional judgment in making pedagogical decisions based on knowledge of the teaching context and the learners when using unscripted programs. Land and Moustafa (2005) contend that there is a "new form of scripted instruction, not one where the teacher's words are scripted verbatim, but one in which what, when, and how teachers teach is controlled by people outside the classroom, not amenable to classroom teachers' judgment based on their knowledge of their students" (p. 65). Regardless of whether a program is scripted or unscripted, many reading programs now attempt to provide a balance of attention to decoding, comprehension and motivation. In attempting to balance literacy instruction, teachers and school districts are also responding to research which shows that a

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combination of literature-based instruction and traditional basal reading instruction is more effective than the sole use of traditional instruction (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). A national survey of elementary school teachers found that that 56% of the respondents supplemented their dominant use of basal instruction with the use of trade books, and 27% supplemented their dominant use of trade books with basal instruction (Baumann *et al.*, 1998). Teachers are working hard to find room for literature in their classrooms, but for many reasons, this is not easy.

### *The Origins of My Study*

I was led to this research by readers. As a teacher educator, I have taught courses in reading and responding to children's literature to hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students. At my university, an introductory course in children's literature is a requirement for all undergraduates who intend to pursue elementary teaching certification. A major component of the course involves students in participating in literature discussion groups in which the students read a piece of children's literature and meet for discussion. By actually participating in this literary experience, it is believed that these prospective teachers will be more willing and better prepared to engage their own students in such an experience. One of the responsibilities of each group's facilitator (a rotating role throughout the semester) is to bring questions and prompts to the group to initiate conversation and get conversation moving again if it stalls during the session. It is expected that these questions and prompts will be used only as a springboard, that all students will have authentic questions that they bring to the group, and other questions will arise naturally during the course of the discussion. It is not expected (or accepted) that the facilitator will be the only person to ask questions, or that the group will simply respond to each of the facilitator's questions, waiting for the next question on the list.

It was during one of the sessions in which students were discussing *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2001) that I first noticed a shift in the discussions of some groups. There was not the customary rise and fall of voices, overlapping talk, and laughter. As I approached one group, I heard a student say, "My book has questions in the back. Doesn't yours?" Sure enough, several students had a Scholastic edition of the novel with discussion questions in the back matter of the book, and the direction, "Use the questions and activities to get more out of the experience of reading *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan," I asked my students how they felt about these questions. Some students said that they felt it would make the job of facilitation easier, but there were other students who vehemently opposed the idea. They believed it was important to generate their own questions that reflected what they really felt was important or puzzling in the book. The questions posed by Scholastic did not match their own questions. Listening to them talk about these questions, I began to think about the implications of these questions regarding the roles of readers and teachers in literature discussion in terms of what counts in reading and what counts in discussing literature. I wondered why these questions had been included in trade books that my students had unwittingly ordered from a Scholastic book club. I became concerned as I wondered about what would happen to my students, and subsequently, to their future students, if the responsibility for questioning the text was removed from their authority. Hade (1994) suggests, "deskilled students, unsure of their own authority, often grow up to become deskilled teachers" (p. 33). This was not what

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what I wanted for the readers in my classes. I decided to focus my research on these particular children's trade books, Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions.

### *Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions*

Teachers often do need assistance in learning how to choose quality literature that reflects diversity in themes as well as reading levels, and they need financial support to ensure that classroom libraries are continually replenished and expanded (Palardy, 1997; Johnston, Allington, Guice, & Brooks, 1998). For assistance in choosing literature (and affording it!), classroom teachers have often turned to Scholastic as a company they trust to guide them toward good literature at affordable prices. In its catalogues and on its website, Scholastic provides groupings of books by categories such as grade level, reading level, or theme, making it easy for teachers to buy books they feel are appropriate.

Scholastic has a significant impact on the materials used by students and teachers in their classrooms. Through in-school book fairs and take-home book club order forms, Scholastic reaches out to parents and families of readers in nearly every school in the United States (Hade, 2001). The corporation has always seemed to have a dual purpose: to provide materials for educational use by teachers and students in schools, and to provide quality children's literature at reasonable prices to encourage reading at both home and school. To serve these separate but related purposes, Scholastic has produced products that are clearly designed to meet one goal or the other. For example, in providing materials for educational use, the corporation publishes a line of "Theory and Practice" books, many of them written by teachers, through the Scholastic Professional Books division. These books seek to assist teachers in incorporating sound instructional practices based on the latest educational theories. Through the Scholastic website, teachers can readily access lesson plans, rubrics, graphic organizers, suggestions for classroom management techniques, and numerous other tools to help make a teacher's professional life a bit easier. Magazines such as *Instructor* and *Early Childhood Today* bring similar support materials into teachers' mailboxes. Tom Snyder Productions, a Scholastic company, provides students and teachers with a myriad assortment of educational software. The list of educational materials published by Scholastic is very long indeed. Through multiple modes of delivery, Scholastic provides professional development and materials that teachers can readily implement in their classrooms.

In addition to professional development materials, Scholastic distributes millions of children's books every year. In 2006, the company distributed approximately 400 million children's books in the United States ("Scholastic children's book publishing and distribution"). Many of these books were originally published by other companies, with Scholastic having purchased the right to publish their own editions of these titles, often in paperback format that is more affordable than the original editions. Parent/teacher organizations sponsor Scholastic Book Fairs, and student "take home" folders often contain the latest book club order forms. These forms allow children and parents to order children's books targeted for particular ages or grade-level groups, beginning with Honeybee (aimed at toddlers to four-year-old children) and moving through Firefly (preK), Seesaw (grades K-1), Lucky (grades 2-3), Arrow (grades 4-6) and Tab (grades 7-12). There is even Club Leo, focusing on bilingual books as well as Spanish and English editions of books for preK-grade 8. On the section of the website directed at parents, Scholastic says, "Scholastic Clubs are the best way to get high-quality, low-priced books and software. Your children — no matter what their tastes, interests, and abilities — will find books that they are eager to read and software they'll enjoy again and again" ("Scholastic book clubs"). Teachers are told, "Scholastic Book Clubs is the best way to get FREE books, software and resources for your classroom while providing your students with the opportunity to get the best children's books at outstanding values!" ("Scholastic book clubs customer service"). The more products ordered through the book clubs, the more bonus points teachers accumulate that they can use to obtain books or other products for their classrooms. Teachers quickly learn that this is a fast and economical way to build a classroom library, and many teachers send these book club order forms home each month. In this way, children's literature has a good chance of getting into classrooms and homes, building enthusiasm for reading and affirming the value of owning books.

The fairly new product line of Scholastic Literature Circle Editions seems to blur or blend Scholastic's roles as provider of instructional materials and promoter of quality children's literature. These editions of intermediate children's novels look identical to traditional paperback editions of these books, except for a couple of pages in the back matter of the book that contain 13-15 questions keyed to Bloom's taxonomy that fall under the heading, "Literature Circle Questions." These are followed by a few activities, and sometimes a list of other works by the author. Scholastic has apparently recognized the growth in literature discussion groups, both inside and outside of classrooms. This publisher seems to be responding to the needs of teachers who want to use trade book literature for reading instruction, but also feel they need support - in the form of questions and activities - for using that literature.

### *My Research Questions*

This study will examine the questions included in Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions, but it will not address how teachers and readers are actually using these trade books. Instead, this study focuses on the implied assumptions about literature, reading, and literature discussion that are inherent in these editions and the discussion questions included within them. If literature discussion groups use Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions, what might be assumed about what counts as literature worthy of discussion? What might be assumed about what counts in reading? What might be assumed about what counts in discussion of the literature? After close analysis, some conclusions will be drawn regarding the potential impact of Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions on readers and teachers, and the use of literature discussion groups as well as implications for teacher education programs.

### *Methodology Employed*

Although I began with questions about assumptions in mind, these questions arose after my initial encounter with the Literature Circle Editions. To better understand the nature of this product line, I decided to do a close, textual analysis of the literature discussion questions included in the back matter of these editions. More detailed description of methodology will be provided in chapter five.

This study drew from multiple data sources. Scholastic's website was accessed for information about the company's history, its mission, and the Literature Circle Editions as a group. For example, to consider possible implications related to what counts as literature worthy of discussion, the website's list of titles for all of the books published as Literature Circle Editions was analyzed for patterns related to characteristics such as genre, gender of author and main characters, award-winning status, and theme.

To learn more about the history, production and marketing of the Literature Circle Editions, I conducted unstructured and open-ended interviews with Scholastic employees who are – or have been – directly involved with this product. These interviews were transcribed, and relevant information from them has been included to provide context and support for my conclusions.

A representative sample of twelve Literature Circle Editions was at the core of my data collection. Each of these books was read and the questions analyzed to address my research questions about implied assumptions regarding what counts in reading and what counts in discussion of literature. PDF documents of the Literature Circle Editions' questions for every book in the group are available online, and these were accessed as part of this study in order to compare them with the questions as printed in the back matter of the books.

The questions in the back matter of the twelve books in my sample were analyzed in particular ways related to the content and the structure of the questions. Scholastic has designated a specific level of Bloom's taxonomy for each question. I made my own determinations of levels and compared my alignment with Scholastic's. I also noted observations across questions in terms of other aspects of content. Specifically, I noted questions that lead readers toward particular expected or "correct" understandings, questions that have the potential to spoil the book if readers see them before reading the book, and questions that include prompts to readers to explain or support their responses. I also recorded questions that I, having just finished reading each book, would ask in a discussion group. These were questions based on my role as a reader intending to build my understanding through collaboration with a discussion group, not as a teacher intending to assess others' comprehension of the book.

Regarding the structure of the questions, I analyzed the sequence of questions to determine whether or not they followed a particular order. I also looked for evidence of connections across questions. Once again, my decisions to focus on content and structure in these ways emerged as I read through the questions repeatedly, and considered what the research literature suggests are important qualities in effective literature discussion groups.

### *Limitations of This Study*

Due to the nature of this study, it had some limitations. I necessarily relied on my own substantial experience in reading and analyzing children's literature to assist me in making some of my decisions (e.g., determining book themes). The nature of interpretation is such that my assessment of which questions are likely to provoke rich discussion may be different than another researcher's assessment, but I have tried to provide rationale for my decisions.

For this study, I examined the collection of Literature Circle Editions for certain characteristics, and analyzed the questions included in a representative sample. I did not study how these books and questions are actually being used by teachers and students in classrooms, or by readers outside of classrooms. In my discussion, therefore, I have tried to be explicit about what assumptions might be made *if* the questions are used as presented by Scholastic. In the final chapter, I will discuss further research possibilities to explore how these editions are actually being used.

### *Dissertation Overview*

This dissertation serves as a means of pulling research from children's literature together with research from education as it examines one way in which children's literature is being incorporated into classrooms, through the use of literature discussion groups. The next chapter will focus on the act of reading, exploring what happens when individuals read and what happens when individuals come together as discussants in a community of readers. I will describe literature discussion groups both in and out of a school context, and spend time discussing the benefits of using literature discussion groups in school, the roles of the teacher and students, and the importance of questioning within those groups.

Chapter 3 will move into the world of Scholastic, exploring its general history before delving into the history of the Literature Circle Editions. Drawing heavily on interview data, I will relate what I have discovered about the process and rationale behind the selection of books for this line, the process of composing the questions, the marketing of this line, and the intended and anticipated use of these books in classrooms.

The analysis of the Literature Circle Editions as a collection will form the bulk of chapter 4. This chapter will address the question of what the list implies is literature worthy of discussion. I will describe how I collected and analyzed this data, before using chapter 5 to zoom in to look at the particular questions in my twelve-book sample of Literature Circle Editions. Chapter 5's discussion of the question analysis will revolve around my research questions related to Scholastic's implied assumptions about what counts in reading and what counts in discussing literature. I will discuss how I looked at the content and structure of Scholastic's questions, using examples from the books' questions as appropriate to illustrate what I found.

Chapter 6 will contain the conclusions I have drawn, serving to consolidate my findings into a cohesive discussion about how Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions may impact teachers' and students' views and uses of children's literature in discussion groups.

This dissertation will conclude with chapter 7, in which I will discuss the limitations and possible implications of this study for students, teachers, and teacher educators, as well as implications for Scholastic. I will offer suggestions related to these editions, and propose future research that will continue this important exploration.

# Chapter 2: Participating in Literature Discussion Groups

This chapter focuses on the reading experience, beginning with consideration of what happens when an individual reads, and moving to consideration of what happens when readers come together to discuss their readings of a common text in what will be referred to in this study as "literature discussion groups." (Although Scholastic uses the term "literature circles" in reference to the books which are under study here, I have opted to use the more generic term "literature discussion groups" in order to avoid confusion with Harvey Daniels' "literature circles"(Daniels, 2002) which represent a specific model of literature discussion groups.) The benefits of using literature discussion groups will be considered, as well as the roles of the teacher, the student, and the questions that start discussion and keep it moving forward. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to Scholastic's role in literature discussion groups.

## *Building Meaning Through Reading Independently*

Encounters with literature are dialogic in nature, even from the first encounter of a reader with a particular text. The reader enters into dialogue with the text, joining a "conversation" in which the author's work may be seen as a response to contributions from other writers in this neverending conversation, and to which the reader now offers his or her response through interpretation (Bakhtin, 1981). The reader's response, or interpretation, is influenced not only by the author's words, but by that reader's previous experiences with life and other literary texts. This work of interpretation, this "stepping into the text" and "moving through the text" (Langer, 1995), begins as individual, intramental work. According to Iser (1978), the act of reading involves understandings that are constantly in flux as the reader moves through the text, making accommodations for new information presented by the author. Iser describes the reader's understandings as horizons (both backward and forward), that constantly shift. The backward horizon, constructed from what the reader has previously read and experienced, affects what the reader is currently reading and alters predictions about what will happen next, thereby shifting the forward horizon. At the same time, new information gleaned from reading as the reader moves through the text alters the memory/perception of previous experiences, thereby shifting the backward horizon. Langer describes this as a process of readers building envisionments, and she has suggested that readers are constantly transforming their envisionments of the text. This is not a cumulative process, but a process of altering understandings as new information and experience is assimilated. The theories of Iser and Langer suggest that the meaning of a text does not reside solely in the text, but is constructed by the reader in connection with the text. These theories also suggest that readers' understandings are neither uniform nor stagnant; there are multiple meanings in literature, since readers bring multiple, shifting perspectives to the text based on having different experiences, both from life and previous literary encounters.

### *Building Meaning Through Reading in a Discussion Group*

Encounters with literature are also dialogic in a more overt, concrete way when readers talk about text together. In the words of Vygotsky, this moves the work from the intramental plane to the intermental plane (Brock & Gavelek, 1998; McMahon *et al.*, 1997; Wells, 1999) as readers share their interpretations with others, and through this sharing, continue to revise their thinking. The forms and benefits of this type of sharing, as enacted through the work of literature discussion groups, will be examined in more detail in the sections below.

### *Importance of Discussion*

Applebee (1996) believes that knowledge comes from participation in "ongoing conversations about things that matter, conversations that are themselves embedded within larger traditions of discourse that we have come to value" (p. 3). When educators subscribe to this belief in "knowledge-in-action" they recognize that "the development of curriculum becomes the development of culturally significant domains for conversation, and instruction becomes a matter of helping students learn to participate in conversations within those domains" (p. 3). Literature study can serve as one such domain for conversation, initiating students into authentic discourse around literature as it truly functions within our culture. In an examination of scientific strategies for improving reading achievement, Allington (2005) cites several studies that he claims provide evidence that "having students discuss what they read – as opposed to interrogating them about what was read – promotes growth in understanding" (p. 223). Cazden (2001) contends that curriculum standards which place more emphasis on processes than on products ask teachers to "add nontraditional discussions that serve better to stimulate and support 'higher-order thinking' across the curriculum" (p. 5). For example, the state of Michigan has identified four standards for effective teaching and learning: increasing students' higher-order thinking, deep knowledge, substantive conversation, and connections beyond the classroom (Michigan). In addition to changing curriculum standards, Cazden notes that the changing economy necessitates a change in job skills, with one of the most important being the "ability to work in groups with persons from various backgrounds" (p. 5). Gee (2001) describes the importance of interactive participation in learning "social languages" that are connected to particular social activities and particular identities. Learning the social language of book discussion teaches students how people make sense of literature and builds affiliation with the cultural group known as readers. It appears that literature discussion groups can have immediate and long-term benefits for students in helping them build understanding, meet the standards, identify as readers, and ultimately find good jobs. The next section will explore literature discussion groups in depth, focusing on the characteristics of such groups, the role of the teacher, the role of questions, and the ultimate benefits of using literature discussion groups.

### *Overview of Literature Discussion Groups*

Literature discussion groups are not just used in classrooms, for educational purposes. Book groups have been known to exist in the United States since the seventeenth century (Hartley, 2001), focusing on religious texts until after the Civil War when secular women's book clubs became popular (Sandra & Spayde, 2001). A resurgence of book groups was sparked by Oprah Winfrey's incorporation of a book club into her daytime television show in 1996. Today, there are an estimated 500,000 book groups in this country (Hartely, 2001; Sandra & Spayde, 2001). Libraries organize reading groups for children and adults. Reading groups meet in community centers and bookstore cafes. On a recent trip to a large independent bookstore, I took note of the prominent display of books being read by local community-based adult reading groups. Publishers such as Doubleday, HarperCollins, and Vintage Books make pamphlets available for reading groups. These "reading group guides" or "reading group companions" include discussion questions related to specific novels. Book publishers often provide free discussion guides and teacher's editions for some children's books, since these may encourage schools to buy multiple copies of the book for reading groups (Hade, 2001). It appears that literature discussion is a potentially profitable trend for publishers and booksellers, as well as being a popular instructional strategy for teachers.

With a focus on how readers interpret and respond to text, and a belief in the sociocultural nature of learning, many teachers use literature discussion groups in their classrooms. This strategy is sometimes referred to by the term "literature circles"(Daniels, 2002), "Book Club" (McMahon et al., 1997), or "grand conversations" (Eeds & Peterson, 1997). Regardless of the name, these discussion groups share several characteristics. Small groups of students come together to discuss a common text, or a set of related texts, with the goal of building knowledge from multiple perspectives to enrich individual understanding through dialogue. Groups often meet periodically throughout the reading of a long work, such as a chapter book, but the frequency of meeting varies. This is an opportunity for purposeful talk, for exploratory talk in which "ideas are only half-formed and ... can be revised based on what other people say and do" (Purves et al., 1995, p. 92). Exploratory talk is used to build knowledge, not to report on what is already known and immutable (Wells, 1999). The students usually have some degree of choice over the texts discussed and the method for doing so, although they may have assigned roles, such as recorder or facilitator, and the teacher may provide guiding questions to jumpstart conversation.

Students learn what is considered the appropriate discourse for each subject based on their teachers' behavior. Teachers' behavior is often based on how they have been trained to think about their subject. Thus, students will learn what is appropriate and desirable to discuss, and how it is appropriate and desirable to be discussed, based on their teachers' leads (Applebee, 1996). Noe and Johnson (1999) describe the importance of teachers first knowing their goals for using literature discussion groups. They see two distinct goals that "have opposite implications for literature circles" (p. 42). The first goal is to teach comprehension skills, and therefore the teacher will be looking for answers to more factual or literal questions in the discussion. The second goal is to have students engage in "genuine conversations," and therefore the teacher will be guiding students in learning how to construct personal interpretations. The first goal is often the focus of teachers who are new to using literature circles, and the result is that the groups look very much like traditional reading groups in which teachers take the dominant role in asking structured questions with predetermined responses in mind. Noe and Johnson found that this focus can lead to boredom and a sense of dull routine. Instead, they suggest that students and teachers collaboratively discuss reasons for holding literature discussions. They cite the results when one fifth-grade teacher asked her students why they talk about books. These students saw benefits beyond improving reading comprehension, including learning more about themselves, other people and the world. This sounds more like the second goal identified by Noe and Johnson, in which students are guided toward participation in genuine conversations. Such genuine conversations may appear when readers of any age gather to discuss books they've read, whether these groups meet in school or out of school.

### *Characteristics of Literature Discussion Groups*

A novel by Karen Joy Fowler (2004) tells the story of a group of adults who come together every month to discuss a different Jane Austen book. Although *The Jane Austen Book Club* is a piece of fiction, its portrayal of how this group discusses literature suggests several characteristics of how people talk about the books they read in common. These include:

- Passages are read aloud from the book to support arguments, and also just for the pleasure of hearing the words
- Questions are prepared ahead of time by the readers themselves
- Discussion does not move in a straight line, chronologically through the book
- There is talk about the author, her life experiences, possible motivations, etc.
- Opinions are shared, including the expression of like or dislike for the book
- Connections are made with readers' lives
- Literature is used to help readers "figure out" their own lives
- Comparisons are drawn across texts
- Varying perspectives of group members are accepted and recognized as being informed by experiences and context

These characteristics from a fictional account reflect what happens in real-life book groups as well. Rachel Jacobsohn, founder and director of the Association of Book Group Readers and Leaders, collected information from book group members around the United States, hoping to find out what really happens in these groups. For example, she asked readers, "What aspects of a book do you usually discuss at a meeting?" (Jacobsohn, 1994, p. 122). Responses indicated that, among other things, readers talk about: characters' actions, social implications, symbolism, author's purpose, credibility, readers' emotional response, personal reference, literary merit, the work's similarity to other readings, and literary elements. These characteristics of reading groups echo those of the Jane Austen Book Club, and move between the book and the real-life context of the readers. Discussions are begun by a designated leader who may decide that the book needs some sort of introduction, or may decide to simply ask an open-ended question to get readers' initial reactions to the book (Ellington & Freimiller, 2002; Jacobsohn, 1994). Having one or two open-ended questions prepared provides a way in to the discussion. Ellington and Freimiller suggest that some of the best discussions result from readers asking questions about things that they don't understand in the book. The discussion builds from there.

While Jacobsohn's work was focused on adult reading groups, children and young adults participate in very similar ways in such groups both in and outside of school. Carol Gilles (1990) studied seventh-grade learning disabled students participating in literature discussion groups using trade book literature. She found that discussions included talk about the book (e.g., discussion of literary elements, including author's style); talk about the reading process (i.e., metacognition); talk about making connections (e.g., between texts, as well as between the text and the readers' lives); and talk about the group process and social issues (i.e., how the group functions). Hanssen (1990) acknowledges that these are common features in student literature discussion groups. In addition, she noted, "One area that is always addressed deals with comprehension. The participants often begin either by retelling the story to make sure they all understood or by asking questions to clarify their particular points of confusion or uncertainty" (p. 207). It is important to note that Hanssen says that these questions are intended to clarify "*their particular* [italics added] points of confusion or uncertainty." This implies that the questions originate authentically, from the readers themselves as opposed to an outside source. Hanssen notes one final important characteristic:

> No matter what the content of the talk in literature circles, a common characteristic is that it does not occur in any predictable order. Sequence is an important concept in basal readers, but it is not useful in literature discussion. Natural conversations about books do not start at the beginning of the book and move to the end; they begin with what the participants find most interesting and meander through other parts of the book and other issues (p. 208).

According to Christoph and Nystrand (2001), who studied discussion as a resource for teaching literature in a 9th-grade English class, discussion is a "place for developing and changing ideas" (p. 260). Readers share their interpretations and often revise them based on what they hear others say as the discussion progresses. Readers engage in critical thinking as they discuss issues related to literary elements, writer's craft, or how they relate personally to the text (Noe & Johnson, 1999). Almasi, O'Flahaven, and Arya (2001) studied fourth-grade peer discussion groups. Their analysis led them to develop nine characteristics of proficient discussions:

- Students refer to text
- Students respond to one another
- Students relate to personal experience
- Students ask questions
- Students monitor group process
- Students extend comments by adding on or asking questions
- Students critically evaluate the text and author
- Teacher scaffolds interaction (p. 105).

In addition, the authors found that members of more proficient discussions revisited old topics and made connections between topics. This led to more coherence within discussions, a feature that led the authors to determine these were proficient discussions, as such coherence was considered "key to constructing meaningful interpretations of text" (p. 117).

It is interesting and important to note that the characteristics of proficient literature discussion groups determined by Almasi and her colleagues focus on the activity of the students. This is understandable, given that the study examined peer-led discussion groups. While student-led groups may be most desirable, they do not happen without teacher guidance, at least initially. This brings me to consider the role of the teacher.

### *The Role of the Teacher*

Michael Smith (1996) studied adult book clubs and concluded that as much as teachers might try to create literature discussions that operate similarly to adult book clubs, the discourse of the classroom, in which not all participants are willing discussants or equal holders of power, precludes this from happening. Whitmore (1997) contends, "It is up to the teacher to expect a high level of intellectual engagement from all students and to organize classrooms that share power with students" (p. 123). In a study of story discussion in primary grade classrooms, McIntyre (2007) concluded that students can be taught ways of participating in authentic discussions similar to those of adult book groups, but this requires scaffolding from the teacher. There is evidence that supports McIntyre's findings. Children as young as kindergarten participate in literature groups in which members point out things they like in the text and illustrations, ask questions about confusing sections, and discuss character motivation and plot details (Sheppard, 1990). In a study of second-grade literature discussion groups, students continued discussing books in a range of ways even after the teacher left the group (Frank *et al.*, 2001).

Literature discussion groups are often student-led, but the teacher does not abdicate all responsibility for their conduct. Students need guidance, at least initially, to ensure that the time together is well spent. In a study of fourth-graders' participation in literature discussion groups, Long and Gove (2003/2004) found that the students' discussion did not move past retellings of the text until the teacher intervened. When this happened, and the teacher supplied an open-ended, text-based question, the discussion was enlivened and began to move toward incorporating critical responses. Bond (2001) studied her fifth-graders' participation in student-led discussion groups, but only after months of modeling participant roles and ways of discussing did she allow her students to take full control of the groups.

This dialogic approach to instruction, in which the teacher cedes some authority to students participating in discussions, highlights the role of multiple voices in constructing understanding while at the same time somewhat blurring the boundaries between the teacher and the students (Nystrand et al., 1997). Teachers may well experience the "doubleness" that caused teachers so much conflict in a study conducted by Marshall et al. (1995). These teachers expressed the desire to allow students to take more of an active role in leading discussions, but they also felt that, as teachers, they needed to control discussions to guide students toward a predetermined interpretation. These teachers still viewed themselves as the primary keepers and transmitters of knowledge in the classroom. "Teachers have often made themselves indispensable as the source of information in classrooms and so closed off the process of children coming to value each other" (Short, 1990, p. 41). During literature discussion, students and teachers are negotiating identities, and teachers may cement their identity as "inquisitors and evaluators by taking the rights, privileges, and obligations associated with such roles" (Almasi, 1995, p. 318). There is a tension between giving students freedom and establishing authority as the teacher. Teachers may well be afraid of not having enough knowledge and skill to recognize "teachable moments" and to know how to guide students without a predetermined plan (Eeds & Peterson, 1991). Rosenblatt urges teachers to be honest with students and not pretend to have all of the answers. She maintains, "Admitting his [the teacher's] uncertainties and perplexities will stimulate the students to join him in the common task of seeking the knowledge that may clarify these problems" (1995, p. 124). This is easier said than done, necessitating a strong sense of self-confidence and trust in the learning community.

Descriptions of the teacher's role range from being a "nudger of minds" (Appleman, 2000, p. 121) to being a facilitator whose functions are "supportive, organizational, and managerial" (Daniels, 2002, p. 24). Judith Langer claims "the teacher is never merely a facilitator, but a professional and an expert – knowing the discipline and also the students" (1995, p. 81). It's most likely that, depending on the context, the teacher fills each of these roles and more. If we agree with Louise Rosenblatt's consideration of literature as exploration, the teacher serves as the guide. According to Purves et al., "The guide does not replace the explorer, but is absolutely necessary to a successful exploration" (1995, p. 77). Guides do a lot of organizing and managing, but they are also on the journey to nudge people down the right path, or to give very explicit instructions (e.g., "Do not approach the alligator!") at which time we explorers are very grateful that they are the experts.

Students need to learn what to discuss and how to discuss. Sloan clearly states "The process of discussion must be taught; children cannot be expected to come to class with mastery of this difficult but profitable technique" (2003, p. 151), and so the teacher's role as guide is critical. Teachers need to show students how to do the facilitation job themselves. For example, Alvermann, Dillon & O'Brien (1987) are in favor of teachers asking questions at a variety of levels, but they caution, "teachers who pose multilevel questions need to instruct students in how to discuss them" (p. 64). Teacher-researcher, Rachel McCormack (1997), modeled and provided guided practice for eight weeks in her second graders' literature discussion groups. She demonstrated the types of questions she might want them to discuss; she demonstrated group processes such as negotiating turntaking, initiating topics, seeking clarification, and elaborating; and she asked students to self-assess their group's progress. After this, when students were first left on their own in their groups, discussions were unsophisticated, with topics rarely sustained or revisited; however, after several sessions, the discussions became more conversational, with topics being sustained for more in-depth discussion. The structure became more cooperative within the group, and students showed more connections between ideas supplied by all members.

Students need to be provided with the tools to make discussions work effectively, and teachers provide these through direct instruction and through modeling. In a study of teacher-student interactions in a third grade classroom, Maloch (2002) noted how the teacher based her interventions in response to the difficulties students exhibited during their interactions. Students struggled with accepting initial responsibility for group discussions, even after the teacher explicitly defined the task and the teacher and student roles. Therefore, the teacher knew she needed to continue to intervene from time to time to assist students in developing expertise in the how and what of discussion. As students mastered certain skills and strategies, the teacher continued shifting her intervention focus, a scaffolding technique that proved successful for her students.

As the students' skills improve, the teacher's role becomes more focused on encouraging, monitoring, and facilitating, still providing direct instruction and explicit modeling when needed (Nystrand et al., 1997). The teacher must be adept at recognizing student growth and continuing to move readers forward, and this requires the teacher to be able and willing to play multiple roles. The idea of "sharing perspective versus questioning" is proposed by Karen Smith (1990). As a classroom teacher, Smith has tried hard to shift her role in literature discussion groups to model how to talk about literature, not how to ask questions. For example, instead of asking questions about a character, Smith shares part of her interpretation of the character, modeling how she uses excerpts from the text to support her interpretation. She believes that this is a more authentic discussion technique, one that more closely resembles what happens in adult book groups. This type of modeling is important for helping students learn how to discuss a book, but in order for such sharing of character interpretation to take place, something must prompt it. Perhaps there is a tacitly understood question, "What are the characters like?", but for inexperienced literature discussants, this may not be clear. There is a delicate balance the teacher must maintain in the struggle to model sufficiently without taking over group discussions and making them too much like traditional teacher-directed lessons, just conducted in a circle around "real" literature. Teachers must provide support without taking too much control away from the students (Hanssen, 1990). Teachers find it hard to release control over the discussion's direction. For example, they need to learn to be quiet and not rush to fill gaps in discussion. This isn't easy, because they're used to jumping in if no one else is responding. Cole (2003) claims "until the teacher allows the class autonomy, they will remain unable to do it without her. She either contributes to codependency, or she suffers through the confusion that leads to their group independency" (p. 54).

The role of the teacher in literature discussion groups must be flexible enough to shift in response to multiple students' needs. Teachers need to provide modeling and direct instruction, especially at the beginning of using literature discussion groups. They must teach students their role. The next section describes the intricacies of that role.

### *The Role of the Student*

Children do more than construct meaning of text when engaged in literary discussion. They construct themselves through their actions and through their responses to the reactions of the other group participants. They construct their identities as they learn to interact with their peers. As they interact, they adopt discourse patterns that encourage them to see themselves as active participants in the class since they have some control over the flow and content of the discussion. This contrasts with the identity of "passive agent" that students construct when the teacher has the most control, as in the most dominant form of classroom discourse commonly referred to as I-R-E – teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation (McMahon et al., 1997). When considering how discussion groups incorporate the social construction of self, text meaning, and discourse patterns, the student can be seen as "an independent thinker who is strongly influenced by group membership and history" (Langer, 1995, p. 38).

Teachers must be aware that if students have control over the management of discussion, some students may not be as willing to participate or as able to participate since some students may monopolize the conversation (Chinn *et al.*, 2001). In a study of fifth-graders' perceptions of their experiences in literature discussion groups (Evans, 2002), students reported that their participation was influenced by the presence of a "bossy" group member, which they clearly distinguished from a group leader. Field notes revealed that group make-up was very important for the functioning of the group. For example, sometimes it was beneficial to have friends working in the same group, but sometimes when friends were together they could not effectively engage in discussion of the text. It is apparent that students' social status with peers may have a deleterious effect on their experience in a literature discussion group (Cazden, 2001; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). Preconceived notions about literacy competence and peer status affect social interactions in literature discussion groups from the onset. Students who are insecure about their own literacy competence may be hesitant to participate. If others in the group perceive them as less competent, their contributions may be ignored. Sometimes high-ability students feel more able to speak their mind when the teacher is present, finding it easier to disagree with the teacher than with their peers (Cazden, 2001). There are also students who, although very competent in literacy, may have other restricting factors. Students "who can perform the literacy behaviors required in an event but are rejected by their peers, often have their ideas discounted or rejected because they lack the social skills necessary to navigate positively within these social events" (Matthews & Kesner, 2003, p. 228). Therefore, the teacher must not just model the cognitive skills required for successful participation in discussion, but must model the social skills as well, being very aware of how student status may make this experience especially stressful for some students.

Encouragement comes from a study conducted by Berry and Englert (2005), in which they found that primary grade students with learning and language disabilities assumed more power and authority as they became actively involved in constructing conversation during literature discussion. The authors note that this would not have happened without the teacher's scaffolding, but they claim "book discussions should be considered as a vehicle for reinventing the roles of learners with disabilities in inclusion contexts" (p. 53). Students in literature discussion groups can "view themselves as resources for information rather than merely objects of instruction" (Leal, 1993, p. 118). In essence, the teacher plays a crucial role in developing not just students' understanding of literature, but students' understanding of themselves and their peers. In the words of Deborah Appleman, the teacher can become a "catalyst for literacy, a facilitator of change to learners who might be wildly divergent in their skills, aptitudes, experiences, and motivations" (2000, p. 119), but the teacher must also be ready to intervene when students behave in ways that marginalize or silence their peers (Evans, 2002).

It is apparent that successful utilization of literature discussion groups is not always easy for either teachers or students, but there is strong rationale for making the effort to employ their use.

### *Benefits of Literature Discussion Groups*

There are several benefits to using literature discussion groups for literature study with readers of all ages. Students need to be actively engaged in reading experiences that help them see other purposes than just reading and discussing in ways that satisfy the teacher (Chuska, 1995; Short, 1990; Spiegel, 2005). The following sections will describe what we have come to know about the benefits of using literature discussion groups in K-12 classrooms.

*A holistic approach to literacy.* Literature discussion groups support a holistic approach to literacy, in which skill in reading, listening, speaking, and writing develop together functionally – not as isolated skills, but as tools to enhance students' understanding of text (Bisesi *et al.*, 1998; Langer, 1995; Sloan, 2003). Students read independently, and often write responses to help them clarify and articulate their thinking. During literature discussion, students have a ready-made reason to hone skill in speaking and listening as they engage in dialogue around text. They learn to introduce ideas, clarify the comments of others, and balance talk in the group in the process of refining their understanding of what they've read. McMahon and Raphael found that Book Club has the potential to "provide students with multiple experiences manipulating signs and symbols associated with language" (1997, p. 23), skills that are part of appropriating culture.

*A sociocultural, constructivist view of teaching and learning.* The use of literature discussion groups aligns with a sociocultural, constructivist view of teaching and learning, in which meaning is constructed by a group of people engaged in an activity situated in, affected by, and in turn, affecting a particular cultural context. Wolf and

Heath claim "...meaning is not taught but created. This creation of meaning comes through social combinations and interactions: adults and children, children alone with memories and reconsiderations of past situations, and children negotiating desires, role relationships, and social meanings in the immediate moment" (1992, p. 122). As children discuss literature together, they engage in negotiation of their desires, they learn how to relate to each other as they enact various roles, and they construct meaning socially. Scholars and educators have applied Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of intellectual development to better understand reader response and this social construction of meaning. This theory recognizes the existence of "an unavoidable tension between the social and individual in a person's response to text" (Brock & Gavelek, 1998, p. 74), while acknowledging a reciprocity in the relationship. Wells provides this explanation:

> Simply put, all higher mental functions are dependent on semiotic artifacts and practices that are first encountered intermentally in purposeful joint activities, in which more expert members of the culture both demonstrate their use and assist the learner in mastering them. Through participation in which his or her performance is assisted, the learner gradually masters the practices in which these artifacts are used so that they also become a resource for intramental activity (1999, p. 136).

This passage notes the role of "more expert members of the culture." If discussion groups are heterogeneously constructed, this may be a "more expert" peer. Wells also suggests "in tackling a difficult task as a group, although no member has expertise beyond his or her peers, the group as a whole, by working at the problem together, is able to construct a solution that none could have achieved alone" (1999, p. 324). In this manner, as the group members share initial, individual interpretations, they assist each other in constructing deeper understandings. These socioculturally-constructed understandings, and the thinking processes used to construct them, are appropriated by individuals for use in revising their envisionments of the current text and preparing for future literary encounters. After going through the processes of appropriation and transformation of thinking, students make their new ways of thinking public through continued discussion, at which time their thinking may be "incorporated as part of the conventions of the language communities within which they participate" (Brock & Gavelek, 1998, p. 81). This cycle of appropriation, transformation, publication, and conventionalization is known as the Vygotsky Space, a model for conceptualizing the tension between the public and private dimensions of interaction with text, and the social and individual dimensions of meaning-making. Differences in social, cultural, and life experiences affect students' social encounters within this space (Brock & Gavelek, 1998; Raphael & Goatley, 1997), but those same differences contribute to the richness of the discussion around literature.

*Enthusiasm through engagement.* The use of literature discussion groups promotes enthusiasm for reading through engagement with powerful literature (Spiegel, 2005). This practice has been shown to motivate students to read, as students connect with literature and are challenged to think about that literature, and life, in different ways. Nystrand claims, "Only authentic discourse can engage students" (1997, p. 72). He argues that this type of discourse is not found in classrooms where students perform traditional recitations, responding to teachers' questions with "safe" answers, designed to give the teachers what students assume they want to hear. Instead, Nystrand claims that conflict fuels response. The structure of literature discussion groups, wherein heterogeneous groups of students are encouraged to share multiple perspectives and to challenge each other's thinking, lends itself to this sort of cognitive conflict and promotes students' active engagement (Anzul, 1993; Langer, 1995; McMahon et al., 1997). In a study of peer-led and teacher-led literature discussions with fourth graders, Almasi (1995) looked at how group members resolved conflicts within their interpretations of text. She found that more alternate interpretations arose in peer-led groups than in teacher-led groups. Almasi claims "the ability to recognize conflict within one's interpretation may not only be an essential element in creating conceptual change but may also be essential for substantive engagement where students are committed to resolving their own conflicts" (p. 339).

*A springboard to critical response.* Literature discussion groups serve as a springboard to critical response that not only prompts readers to move out of the text and look at its construction as an object of study (Au & Raphael, 1998), thinking about how the literature affects and is affected by the context in which it is produced and received, but to extend this way of "looking" beyond the study of literature. As members of discussion groups present their individual responses to the literature, questions may very well arise that challenge assumptions in the text, implicit messages, and issues of power that may not have been apparent to all readers when reading alone. In looking more critically at the text itself, readers may think more critically about the world in which that text was written and read.

Much of the research on reader response draws on theory proposed by Louise Rosenblatt (1995), in which reading is seen as a transaction between the reader and the text, with meaning created from what each element (the reader and the text) brings to the transaction. Rosenblatt emphasized the aesthetic response to literature, in which the focus is on living through the emotional experience of connecting with the text, as opposed to the efferent response, in which the focus is on taking information from the text. Some scholars (Lewis, 2000; Sloan, 2003) have noted how others have misinterpreted Rosenblatt's work by equating aesthetic response with personal response, and ignoring her attention to critical response. The following passage from Rosenblatt's classic text, *Literature as Exploration* (1995), reveals her recognition of the value of critical response:

> During group discussions the students, in a spirit of friendly challenge, can lead one another to work out the implications of the positions they have taken. They may discover that they are making assertions based on fundamentally contradictory concepts.... They will see how they have been dominated by ideas only because they have heard them repeated again and again. They will develop a more critical, questioning attitude and will see the need of a more reasoned foundation for their thoughts and judgments, a more consistent system of values....Here the teacher of literature may legitimately see it as his function to point to the existence of helpful bodies of knowledge. He will have made a valuable contribution if the student leaves his experience of the literary work eager to learn what the psychologist, the sociologist, and the historian have to offer him (p. 114).

This is a time when teachers can encourage students not only to use lenses supplied from the perspectives of psychology, sociology, or history, but to use knowledge of literary elements and other aspects of writers' craft to understand how the text's construction impacts their understanding. They can discern implicit as well as explicit messages, and recognize how issues of power related to race and other defining cultural factors affect the text and the meaning made of that text. Such knowledge helps students to question their interpretations, fostering the learning of critical thinking skills associated with analysis and argumentation. They learn to see multiple sides to an issue, and they learn how to either defend or modify their own interpretations of meaning based on the reading and discussing of texts, with the definition of "texts" not restricted to literature, but encompassing other texts encountered in daily life (e.g., film, advertisements). Groups have the opportunity to discuss why a text may have been written or read in a particular way, and this may lead to discussion of ways to "read" other texts in the world, such as other forms of media.

*Satisfaction of educational goals.* The use of literature discussion groups satisfies two goals of education: transmitting and reproducing cultural mores and nurturing individual creativity (Wells, 1999). The study of literature in discussion groups provides a vehicle for reproducing cultural discourse patterns and critically examining the beliefs and values of a culture as transmitted through its literature. There is a balance between "the transfer of the conventional knowledge of our society with the development of learners who are able to evaluate critically and construct new knowledge as well as to recognize how that knowledge is culturally and socially bound" (Raphael & Goatley, 1997, p. 34). Students are assimilated into the meaning-making processes of the classroom culture, and learn socioculturally appropriate patterns of discourse for the broader culture of the education community. At the same time, students are nurtured as individuals with unique ideas, experiences, and contributions. They operate as individuals, and also as members of a group.

Almasi and Gambrell (1997) suggest that participating in literature discussion groups may help students become more successful at monitoring their own comprehension. Following a study of fourth-grade peer-led discussion groups, the authors noted these important points:

- Providing opportunities for students to ponder confusing aspects of text or to challenge the text improves their reading comprehension.
- Providing opportunities for students to interact with one another and to challenge others' ideas during discussions supports higher-level thinking.
- Providing opportunities for students to explore issues that are personally relevant enhances motivation.
- Limiting the amount of teacher talk and teacher questions results in increased opportunities for students to develop discussion skills (p. 151).

### *Role of Questions*

The importance of questioning, in terms of what the questions address and who poses them, is a pivotal issue in the scholarly and practical literature surrounding the use of discussion groups. Questions reveal what we understand, what we value, and what continues to puzzle or intrigue us – not just in literature, but in life itself.

In a study of students in first through fifth grade in high-poverty classrooms, "the most consistent finding...was that higher-level questioning was related to student literacy

growth" (Taylor *et al.*, 2003, p. 21). Questions are seen as a central way of developing understanding, acknowledging that good readers ask questions to "consider uncertainties and explore possibilities" (Langer, 1995, p. 59). In a study of a high school English class, Cazden (2001) found that "one important teacher strategy was to value good questions about literary interpretations more than right answers" (p. 148). Questioning is considered "important cognitive work" as the level of thinking required by students' questions demonstrates the level of their understanding. It is important that questions are generated by the students, as this will help students more firmly commit to the reading since they are required to take the active role of posing questions rather than the passive role of receiving questions. If students only answer questions posed by the teacher, the discussion will not be very authentic (Noe & Johnson, 1999). According to Short (1990), "when teachers control the questions asked in literature discussions, they often close off the questions and issues important to students" (p. 40).

In his study of first- and second-graders, Sipe concluded that children are intrigued by "textual, interpretive, gap-filling questions, if those questions are generated by them in a supportive environment, and in the context of the story" (1998, p. 51). This finding affirms conclusions drawn by Metsala, Commeyras and Sumner (1996) following their study of second-graders' literature discussion questions. These students "became excited and took more responsibility for their learning. They generated many questions, helped one another clarify questions, listened carefully to their peers, engaged in critical thinking, and appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their own questions" (p. 264). The majority of questions asked by students in this study were "why" questions. Such questions prompt more discussion, often leading to more questions and still more discussion, fulfilling the two crucial elements involved in successful questioning: authenticity and uptake (Nystrand *et al.*, 1997).

When questions are authentic, they have no prespecified answers. While students' questions are almost always authentic (unless they're role-playing teachers), questions asked by teachers are often questions that serve as tests to determine whether or not students read the book (Galda, 1988; Nystrand et al., 1997). Test questions do not lead to uptake, in which answers or suggested answers to questions are incorporated into subsequent questions. A study of high school students using teacher-generated questions as a guide for their discussions showed that the group members would agree on an acceptable answer to a question and immediately move on to answer the next question without forming connections or elaborating responses (Marshall *et al.*, 1995). By supplying the groups with questions, the teacher denies group members any true authority in determining the flow of the discussion. If they had not been given questions, it may be that the conversation would have been richer as students' own questions and interpretations emerged. When fifth-grade students were asked about their experiences in literature discussion groups, they did say "it was helpful to have some type of specific structure or task assignment given to them before they started their discussion" (Evans, 2002, p. 57). This does not mean that the teacher must supply the questions. The fifth-graders reported that one of the assignments they were given was to write questions about their reading in preparation for a discussion. Students said that this proved to be a fruitful assignment. As one student reported, "We had something to talk about. We decided that we're going to write questions every time from now on" (p. 5).

This section has explored the role of questions generated by teachers and students in literature discussion groups. The next section introduces another supplier of questions for such groups – Scholastic, Inc.

### *Scholastic's Role in Literature Discussion Groups*

Recognizing the rise in popularity of literature discussion groups, in 2001, Scholastic began publishing intermediate-level trade books in special Literature Circle Editions that include discussion questions (aligned with Bloom's taxonomy) and activities in the back matter of the books themselves. While this may not seem unusual or particularly problematic, these editions are not just marketed toward teachers using trade literature in classrooms. Students may unknowingly purchase them for personal, out-of-school reading as well. Each month, Scholastic profiles two or three different Literature Circle Edition titles in the teacher brochure for the Arrow Book Club. Teachers may buy multiple copies of these editions, but students may also order these copies independently through their student brochure. There is no identifying mark in the student brochure to alert students to the fact that they are ordering a Literature Circle Edition. With teachers intentionally buying these editions, and students unintentionally buying them as well, Scholastic Literature Circle Editions are making their way into the hands of teachers, students, and parents.

This chapter has illustrated the benefits of using literature discussion groups, noting the importance of scaffolding by the teacher, and the need for skillful use of questioning. The value of authentic questions, questions generated by readers themselves, has the support of scholars and teacher-researchers. This study explores the role of publisher-generated questions for use by literature discussion groups, specifically those questions included by Scholastic in its Literature Circle Editions. To begin this exploration, the next chapter will delve into the world of Scholastic, Inc., and the history behind these special editions.

# Chapter 3: Scholastic, Inc. – A Publishing Powerhouse

Enter practically any K-12 classroom or library in the United States and scan the books on the shelves. It is very likely that many of the books you see will have been published by Scholastic, Inc. Look at the shelves behind the teacher's desk. It is very likely that you will find instructional materials published by Scholastic. As the world's self-proclaimed largest publisher and distributor of children's books ("About scholastic") the name "Scholastic" is known around the globe. This company has offices in sixteen countries, from Argentina, to India, to Australia, and has its titles published in more than 40 languages. For more than 85 years, Scholastic has worked to fulfill its mission of helping children everywhere read and learn. Even from its beginning days, the company has recommended extensive out-of-school reading for students (Lippert, 1979). While many people may best know this company as the U.S. publisher of the Harry Potter books, there are many other reasons to know Scholastic as a purveyor of goods for education as well as entertainment. According to its website, "the Company is the largest operator of school-based book clubs and school-based book fairs in the U.S., and is a leading publisher of children's books sold through the trade channel, as well as the leading distributor of children's books through direct-to-home continuity programs, in the U.S., for children ages five and younger" ("About scholastic"). Various divisions are responsible for the creation and publication of children's books, teacher materials, educational technology products, classroom magazines, as well as television and film media. Products are distributed through venues such as school-based book clubs and book fairs, libraries, retail stores, and the Scholastic website. This is a mammoth

operation, which began with a company that struggled for its first fifteen years before showing any financial profit (Lippert, 1979, p. 98).

### *Scholastic's Mission*

The mission is a worthy and ambitious one, one that educators and parents must certainly embrace: "to help children around the world learn to read and love to learn" ("About scholastic divisions"). Its many divisions work to help achieve that goal both at home and at school. On its website, Scholastic has published a more detailed credo in which it describes its dedication in this way:

> Scholastic produces educational materials to assist and inspire students:
>
> * To cultivate their minds to utmost capacity
>
> * To become familiar with our cultural heritage
>
> * To strive for excellence in creative expression in all fields of learning, literature, and art
>
> * To seek effective ways to live a satisfying life
>
> * To enlarge students' concern for and understanding of today's world
>
> * To help build a society free of prejudice and hate, and dedicated to the highest quality of life in community and nation
>
> We strive to present the clearest explanation of current affairs and contemporary thought, and to encourage literary appreciation and expression consistent with the understanding and interests of young people at all levels of learning ("About scholastic credo").

This certainly implies that Scholastic is interested in nurturing the whole learner, recognizing the diversity of each learner, and striving to create a more accepting global society.

### *History in the Educational Market*

In 1920, M.R. "Robbie" Robinson began publishing *The Western Pennsylvania Scholastic*, a magazine designed to provide stories of interest for readers in Pennsylvania high school classrooms. This 4-page magazine (which became an 8-page magazine after the very first issue) quickly led to a 24-page biweekly national magazine. By 1937, Robinson was publishing two magazines, *Coach* and *Junior Scholastic*, both of which are still in print, and Scholastic was on the road to becoming a major publisher. Today, the company publishes 33 different magazines for grades pre-K-12 around the world.

From a foundation built on magazines, Robinson went on to diversify Scholastic's publications, always keeping the focus on teachers, students, and their parents. It was obvious from the beginning that Robinson had a deep respect for teachers and their work. Since the company's first year in existence, it has had an advisory board. Robinson acknowledged that he had much to learn from teachers that would help him better understand the education system (Lippert, 1979). His first official advisory board meeting in 1923 included teachers and principals, as well as the president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and in 1948, the company successfully convinced then U.S. Commissioner of Education John Studebaker to leave that position in order to join Scholastic as its Vice-President and Chairman of the Editorial Board for Scholastic Magazines. One of the reasons for his decision, according to Studebaker, was that he was impressed by, and looked forward to working with, the educators who served on Scholastic's advisory boards (Lippert, 1979).

Today, Scholastic is certainly a major player in the world of children's publishing, but it has a unique quality that sets it apart from the other major players. While all the rest are multimedia corporations in which children's book publishing is but one small part of the business, Scholastic is a publicly held company that is still, in many respects, a family-run business with Richard Robinson, son of Scholastic's founder, at the helm as Chairman, President, and CEO. Richard "Dick" Robinson has ensured that many of Scholastic's traditions continue. For example, he hosts a dinner honoring teachers at the annual NCTE conference, a tradition his father began in 1932. Attention to teachers has always been an important part of the Scholastic mode of operations. Today there are advisory board meetings each year at Scholastic corporate headquarters in New York City, as well as classroom visits by Scholastic staff members, phone and email consultations with teachers, and gatherings at conferences, all designed to ensure that Scholastic is in tune with what's happening with teachers and students in classrooms around the country.

### *Introducing the Scholastic Book Clubs*

In chapter two, I introduced the term "Book Club" as one model of literature discussion groups. The term means something quite different when referring to Scholastic Book Clubs. These book clubs, described in chapter one of this dissertation, enable students, parents, and teachers to order literature at reasonable prices from Scholastic, and they have been providing this opportunity for almost sixty years.

In 1948, TAB (Teen Age Book Club) arrived in schools around the country. In keeping with its practice of consulting K-12 teachers, Scholastic included high school teachers on the selection and review committee for this book club (Lippert, 1979). The books the committee chose for sale in this book club drew from the classics (e.g., *The Scarlet Letter, Anna Karenina*), as well as modern fiction, westerns, and mystery stories, reflecting a mix of recreational and school reading titles. Scholastic was now in the book club business, a way of providing teachers, students, and parents with affordable, quality literature that could be ordered and distributed through the classroom. The following year witnessed the introduction of Junior TAB, and by 1966, Arrow, Lucky, and See-Saw had become Scholastic staples, serving students in virtually every age group from pre-K through high school. All of the book clubs established editorial boards of teachers, librarians, and other professional educators (Lippert, p. 454). The mix of educational and recreational reading material continues to be included in the current book club offerings. Popular books such as Barbara Park's Junie B. Jones series (Park, 1992) may be advertised alongside a pack of simple readers designed to teach vowel sounds. There's also much more than books available through the book clubs these days. Items include activity kits, software, stuffed animals, games and other toys. Through the teacher order form, teachers may order curriculum aides and instructional materials.

The procedure for participating in these book clubs is very simple: Teachers distribute book club flyers to their students, who may take them home and make selections with their parents of books they'd like to purchase. After returning the payment and order form to the teacher, students can then await with eager anticipation the day when they walk into their classroom and see that big Scholastic box on the teacher's desk, indicating the books have arrived. Today, more than one million teachers participate in Scholastic Book Clubs, made even easier through the ability to place orders online through Scholastic's website. According to a Scholastic publication celebrating the history of Scholastic ("85 years helping children around the world to read and learn", 2005), "Book Clubs fulfill Scholastic's mission to get children excited about books and reading in two very basic ways: by encouraging young people to read for pleasure and by making it easy for them to get their hands on what they most want to read" (p. 5). It appears to be working very well. This same publication reported that in 2005 alone, Scholastic "distributed more than 350 million children's books through its school-based Book Clubs, Book Fairs, and direct-to-home continuity programs" (p. 7).

### *Scholastic Literature Circle Editions*

The Literature Circle Editions described in chapter one are only available for purchase through the Scholastic Book Clubs or at Scholastic Book Fairs, as opposed to other Scholastic paperback editions (published by the trade book division) that are available for purchase at bookstores. Given the overwhelming number of schools availing themselves of these opportunities to purchase books, it is safe to assume that many of these editions are finding their way into readers' hands. To learn more about the history of these editions, their creation and marketing, I went to Scholastic headquarters in New York City on March 15, 2007 to interview people who have been, or currently are, responsible for the editing, production, and marketing of this line in the school-based book clubs segment of the Children's Book Publishing and Distribution Division. Gaining access to these different, but related, perspectives provided an opportunity for me to more clearly understand not only how these Literature Circle Editions are put together, but what Scholastic perceives as their intended use.

As a teacher who has spent many years as a Scholastic customer, I have always found its employees to be extremely helpful. I am apparently not the first person to think so. In a 1941 survey done by a management-consultant firm hired by Scholastic, it was noted that the company had "a high reputation among educators" (Lippert, 1979, p. 140).

In my mind, that reputation is still deserved. I know that I can call the customer service number, for example, and as soon as I explain that I ordered a copy of *Stuart Little* (White, 1945) that somehow didn't arrive, I will promptly receive an apology for the company's error and assurance that the book will be shipped to me right away. Sure enough, several days later, there will be that familiar red and white box waiting for me. My visit to Scholastic headquarters to conduct my interviews for this research continued to affirm my belief in Scholastic's dedication to their customers. Through email and by phone, I had arranged to meet with one employee, with the possibility of meeting with two others if it seemed necessary. I had been slated to have a one-hour interview, but I didn't leave the building until five hours had flown by. I was able to interview all three of the key employees with whom I'd hoped to speak, and was granted access to the company's library, where a helpful librarian assisted me in locating Jack Lippert's history of Scholastic, a book that proved invaluable in providing more background information about the company. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed, using pseudonyms for Scholastic's employees: Michele, from production and editing; Diane, from marketing; and Cathy, from editing. When necessary, I emailed these participants to verify information or gain further clarification. Specifically, my interview questions included:

- When were the Literature Circle Editions first developed, and why were they developed?
- What is the process for creating these specific editions? (Selection of books, development of questions, etc.)
- How are these editions marketed?

- By whom, and how, are these editions intended to be used?

Most of the information discussed in the remainder of this chapter has been gathered from transcripts of interviews done at Scholastic headquarters on March 15, 2007, a sunny day in SoHo, New York City. The following sections will describe what I gleaned from these interviews, pulling quotes from transcriptions as relevant.

The people here walk the walk and talk the talk. In fact, they also walk on the talk. Woven into the carpet is the Scholastic mission statement. These are serious people, dedicated to helping teachers as best they can. As I spoke with people about the Literature Circle Editions, I was repeatedly struck by how often the word "teacher" came up in the discussion. I heard things like, "What else can we do for the teacher? That's what it comes down to." The focus is definitely on what can be done to help teachers. Direct attention in these conversations was very rarely on the child readers, despite the fact that these questions are designed to help readers "get more out of the experience" of reading the particular books by using the questions; these readers were being addressed indirectly, in that the teachers are presumably the Scholastic customers who put these editions in the readers' hands. It should be remembered, however, that readers may buy these books inadvertently and their reading may be affected by the questions in particular ways of which the teacher has no knowledge.

### *The History*

By the end of the twentieth century, the use of literature-based basals for reading instruction was offset by many teachers' use of trade literature for reading instruction. Harvey Daniels had popularized his literature circles model (2002), and McMahon and Raphael's Book Club model (1997) was also gaining exposure. Scholars in reading education were making a case for literature-based instruction at all levels (Raphael & Au, 1998), and people in-the-know anticipated the publication of Lucy Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Reading* (2001), which makes the case for the use of "reading clubs" in which students read trade literature and meet together to share discussion around their responses to that literature. It has already been noted that Scholastic remains connected with teachers to stay abreast of what is happening in K-12 classrooms, so it should be no surprise that the company was well aware of how teachers were using literature in their classrooms through such groups. A member of the editing staff, Michele (all names are pseudonyms), had also worked on support materials for teachers (e.g., literature study guides) through another company and had connections at Teachers College. She was tangentially involved in the Whole Language movement, and when she came to Scholastic she thought about what more could be done to support teachers. Michele knew that "literature circle questions were out there" and she also knew that teachers were using their book club bonus points to buy a lot of Scholastic Book Club books, especially the very cheapest selections which they would often buy in multiple copies. When teacher guides were published to go along with these books, they didn't reach a lot of these same buyers. Michele started to put pieces together. She saw publishers starting to print questions for readers in the back of adult books. She also knew that, because of printing specifications, there were always a couple of extra pages in Scholastic's novels. The idea arose to use those extra pages to include discussion questions and activities for student readers that would correspond with the novel. After all, why leave those pages blank if you could do something else for teachers and kids, something that wouldn't cost you any more money in printing costs? As Michele said, "Adults are doing it; let's do it for the kids....My whole thing with teachers is that you make it as easy as possible, give them a little bit of a tool, and that's what we can afford to do. So we just did it." In fall 2001, the first Scholastic Literature Circle Editions appeared in the Arrow Book Club, targeted at grades 4-6. According to Michele, Scholastic was the first major publisher to publish such editions of children's books, although Random House followed not long after with publication of its Readers Circle Editions, marketed directly at teens.

### *Selecting the Books*

Not every Scholastic trade book is published as a Literature Circle Edition. There are pragmatic reasons for the choices of which books will be published in these editions, as well as a desire – in Michele's words – to "try to get a book that teachers care about." Once again, thinking about the teacher plays into the decision-making process, but Scholastic is first and foremost a "numbers-run business." The company is very aware of what books teachers buy with both cash and book club bonus points. They also face constraints based on what books they publish themselves and the books for which they have licensed the rights to publish editions for the Book Club and Book Fair divisions. To those of us outside the publishing industry, this can be a complicated and confusing process to understand.

The trade book division of Scholastic publishes certain titles itself, most notably, the Harry Potter series. If a book is an original Scholastic publication, it is usually no problem for the Book Club division to publish it as a Literature Circle Edition (although there are currently no plans to do this for the Potter series, interestingly enough). There are also books for which Scholastic licenses the rights from other publishers, such as Harcourt or Random House. If Scholastic holds the license to do a Scholastic edition of the book for its Book Clubs or fairs, this is also a viable title for a Literature Circle Edition. It is not a guarantee, however, because the contract for the license may stipulate that the book is not published by Scholastic in this format. For example, because Random House publishes its own "Readers Circle" editions, they will not allow Scholastic to make Literature Circle Editions of those titles even if Scholastic holds a license to publish them in paperback editions.

In looking at the overall list of possible titles, the Arrow Book Club (aimed at grades 4-6) editor and manager – with some input from others in marketing and product development – tries to pick books that are good curriculum tie-ins, something that she can envision a teacher using in the classroom. For example, according to Cathy from editing, "a lot" of historical fiction books are picked because of the obvious ties to history curriculum. They also pick a lot of "moral dilemma" kind of books that will "spark student discussion." When a fifth-grade teacher opens his pack of Arrow Book Club order forms in any given month, he can look at the teacher brochure and clearly see what Literature Circle Editions are being sold that month. Every month there are four titles offered as Literature Circle Editions in sets of six copies for teacher purchase. Two of the titles are new, and two are backlist titles, although near the end of the school year, it becomes all backlist titles since Scholastic doesn't license any new titles for the spring book clubs. With cash or book club bonus points, the teacher can order multi-packs of these titles. Originally, these packs contained five copies of the book. Since teachers often have five students in a discussion group, teachers had to buy another copy so that they would have one for their own use. In response to teacher feedback, the company added one more copy to the pack. With four different titles each month, the teacher has plenty of opportunity to continue building his classroom library and accumulating more books for literature group discussions.

Input from marketing looks at how diversified the offerings are in terms of things like appeal to a particular gender or correlation to a specific reading level. When asked about diverse or multicultural literature, Michele noted the difficulty associated with this literature since it "has more issues in it because they try to be real." While she loves literature by authors such as Sharon Draper, books that "hit so many kids" because of the issues they tackle, Michele lamented the difficulty this presents for Scholastic. As she said, "Some of the best literature has… those issues that are really a problem for most teachers." To its credit, Scholastic does buy such books, but they are usually sold through the Tab Book Club, marketed toward older, adolescent readers. If potentially controversial literature is included in the Arrow Book Club, there is a "signal to the teacher" provided in the form of a written note in the advertisement. In fact, there has been such a resurgence of young adult literature that Scholastic has found there are fewer and fewer books being written that are primarily aimed at fourth, fifth and sixth grades, the levels at which Arrow books, and subsequently, Literature Circle Editions, are aimed. The problem is compounded when so many of the books are potentially troublesome for use in classrooms. As Michele said, "It's really a problem, because you can't make the teacher uncomfortable…. You have to respect the diversity of the country, and everybody has different backgrounds…. It's always a concern of ours." Michele also told me "a lot of time teachers cannot read…. They can't read all the books themselves…. They'll just trust us to – as much as possible – not to have a word in there" that might be objectionable. To respect that trust, Scholastic staff members gather every Tuesday and

Wednesday mornings to go through stacks of books they've read, noting "every single swear word, if there's kissing, if there's alcohol, if there's cigarettes in the book," etc. While the book may still make it into the book club flyers, it will be listed with a warning that there is mature content included.

Looking for potential curriculum tie-ins and avoiding potential controversy are important considerations for Scholastic when selecting books for Literature Circle Editions. There is also the very practical consideration born from Scholastic's main concern, making money. The company has found that if a set of six copies of a Literature Circle Edition costs more than $14.95, it doesn't sell as well. If the pack sells for $4.95, it doesn't seem to matter what the title is. Teachers will buy it. Diane, a marketing employee who has a long history with the Literature Circle Editions, assumes that a teacher thinks, "If they're [Scholastic] saying it's a literature circle book, I can figure out a way to make it a literature circle book." This, once again, implies that teachers do not know the literature, or at least, they need Scholastic to tell them that a particular title would be good for literature group discussion. As Diane said, "They trust us." Scholastic does its best to keep that trust. They look at state lists and try to include books and authors that teachers already know, people like Andrew Clements and Sharon Creech. Michele believes there is an "A-list" of authors such as Creech, Avi, and Lois Lowry, and that their work should be represented as well as work by the "new generation," citing Kate DiCamillo as an example member of the latter group. According to Michele, "It's very important for teachers to get the best people out there. There aren't that many left." In fact, Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* (Creech, 1994) was one of the first books ever done in a Literature Circle Edition. Diane summed up this way, "We initiated the program with very classic, classroom-feeling books, and only later did we start the idea of us choosing new books, almost as a marketing tool, like let's bring this new book into the forefront by saying it's a Literature Circle Edition, letting the teacher know she can use it in her classroom. The first couple of years were strictly books that the teachers trust anyway. They know they're perennials, and we're just kind of helping them with questions in the back."

### *Writing the Questions*

Once a book has been selected to be a Literature Circle Edition, a question writer is chosen to compose the questions. An assistant to the Arrow senior editor selects which writer will compose questions for a particular title simply by rotating through the list and determining availability of the writer. While people have to apply to be on the teacher advisory board for Scholastic, there is no application procedure to be a question writer. According to Cathy, these writers are all "people that we know, teachers that we're in close contact with, or writers that we work with on other things that fit the bill for this type of writing." Originally, there were only a couple of writers to choose from. These writers were former classroom teachers who were then writing professional books, and since they were known to Scholastic personnel, they were asked to write these questions. Scholastic currently has five writers who compose questions for the Literature Circle Editions. Two of the writers are teachers, two are book editors, and one is a children's author with former job experience in publishing. It is interesting to consider how those writers with more education experience think about the literature and the questions, since they can likely envision "real" students participating in discussion around the novel. One might expect that those writers with more publishing experience may approach the book and the questions from a more literary perspective, thinking more about the content of the text than the context of the reading. An author of children's books may have a very different vision of the book's audience, and very different ideas about ways of talking about the book, than a teacher who is well-versed in the language of – and pressure of accountability to – educational testing. Without knowing which writer wrote the questions for which books, it is not possible to do more than suggest that this comparison of question writers would be interesting and potentially revealing.

In the beginning, question writers were asked to compose 10-15 questions that reflected a balance of attention to the levels of Bloom's taxonomy, and the key noting which questions fit which level of the taxonomy was provided at the end of the page. This key is still included in every edition. Bloom's taxonomy is a hierarchical classification system comprised of six levels that describe a move from lower-level thinking to higher-level thinking. These levels reflect understanding in terms of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Drawing from various sources (Anderson *et al.*, 2001; Bloom *et al.*, 1956; Fisher & Frey, 2004; Hunkins, 1976), the levels of the taxonomy may be described as follows:

- Knowledge: Students recall facts, define terms, demonstrate understanding of basic concepts, etc.
- Comprehension: Students organize, interpret, and compare pieces of information.
- Application: Students solve new problems by applying acquired information in a different way to a new situation.
- Analysis: Students break information into components to identify causes or motives, recognize relationships, see hidden meanings, and make generalizations.

- Synthesis: Students produce something or propose alternative solutions to a problem by compiling information in a new or novel way.
- Evaluation: Students make judgments about information, and present and defend opinions.

Bloom's taxonomy was selected as a framework for the Literature Circle Editions out of the belief that it would provide some sort of rationale for teachers. As Michele said, "I think that's just one that everybody agrees is such a classic kind of thing. Nobody can argue against Bloom.... Most people know Bloom that have been through professional education." Bloom's taxonomy is indeed a staple on syllabi for many educational foundations courses in teacher education programs. When referring to Bloom's taxonomy, we are actually referring to a framework of objectives related to the cognitive domain which were originally intended to help standardize classification of student learning outcomes in order to facilitate exchange of test items across college and university examiners (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy has since become a frequently employed means of describing questions used in classroom instruction and assessment. It is interesting that this framework has its foundation in assessment, something which seems at odds with the philosophy of literature discussion groups which includes a dedication to building understanding through collaborative discussion and questioning, rather than assessing understanding after the completion of a book's reading.

When asked what guidelines were provided to the writers, Scholastic personnel said that writers were told to use Bloom's and were provided with a website and some photocopied information – a sort of "cheat sheet" – about the taxonomy; however, even

Diane admitted, “Bloom’s taxonomy is difficult...especially those last couple of questions like when you get to synthesis. They can be difficult.” Since the company believes that the writers are very familiar with the taxonomy already, question writers are referred to one webpage for help with relevant vocabulary. For each level of the taxonomy, this page provides a table that lists “useful verbs”, “sample question stems” and “potential activities and products” ("Applying bloom's taxonomy"). These sample questions and activities are not specifically connected to literature study. This page is part of the website of Joan Dalton, an Australian educational consultant and project development specialist, whose site is intended to “encourage teachers to move towards a pedagogy that embraces problem-based learning in an information rich environment – the Internet.”

Once the writer finishes composing the questions, they are returned to Scholastic for in-house editing. This process has apparently changed over the years. In the beginning, an editor would look them over carefully to make sure the questions made sense and that the language wasn’t too hard. It was important that the questions be readable by a fifth or sixth grader, and it appeared that some of the writers were writing “college questions.” An editor would work to simplify the language, rewriting them when she felt it was necessary to get the voice right, or more closely approximate the level. She wanted to be sure the questions were direct and clear. She also looked at the sequence of questions, making sure, as Michele stated, “it started from easier to hard as you got into the book.” The editing process is a bit different now. The question writer submits the questions to the Arrow manager’s assistant. Someone who has read the book is found to look over the questions, but this is not necessarily the Arrow senior editor, since it’s acknowledged that she cannot read all the books. She does look at them all at a final round with a production person before the book goes to print.

After the questions have been edited, they are sent to the book's author, the author's agent, and the book's original publisher for approval. The process of sending the questions to the author was instituted in the beginning because the idea of literature discussion questions was still relatively new to authors. Sharon Creech, one of the first authors to have a book done as a Literature Circle Edition, requested that Scholastic send her the questions for her comments. Even though authors are more accustomed to having discussion questions written for their novels today, they still have final approval of the questions for the Literature Circle Editions. If they do not like the questions, Scholastic must change them. There are even situations in which authors have questions on their websites that they want Scholastic to use. In such cases, the Scholastic question writers adapt the authors' questions to fit Bloom's taxonomy for the Literature Circle Editions. Once the questions have been approved by the author, the Literature Circle Edition is ready to be printed. Throughout this whole process, it is possible that neither a teacher nor anyone who has ever seen children participate in a literature discussion group will have seen these questions.

### *Marketing the Books*

The decision to create Literature Circle Editions specifically for the intermediate level fiction marketed through the Arrow Book Club was based on the belief that this is where most literature circles are likely to be used in classrooms. Diane, a marketing employee, said that her observations in classrooms had shown her that "Lucky" reading groups (those in second or third grades) happen differently. According to Diane

> … on the 2nd grade level, the reading groups are more like, 'Let's all sit here and read parts of the book together, like around the circle,' and we would have to change what the questions are like, because the questions in a second-grade book would be like, 'What color shirt was Robert wearing?" or there would be a lot less… They couldn't follow Bloom's Taxonomy, first of all. Because we have a difficult time making it easy enough for Arrow, let alone for Lucky, so I think it would be a whole different procedure. But I'm not opposed to it. We've just never… it just has never lent itself to 'Oh, we should do this in Lucky now.' Lucky's a lot of series. You know, how many questions can you come up with about a Magic Tree House (Osborne, 1992) book? … It's different from novels. They're not novels yet.

At this point, Literature Circle Editions are aimed at grades 4-6, although there are no restrictions that prohibit teachers at other grade levels from distributing the Arrow Book Club order forms to their students or from buying books from that club themselves. An important difference lies in whether or not these editions are purchased intentionally. The fifth-grade teacher who opens his Arrow Book Club teacher brochure can clearly see what books are available as Literature Circle Editions. When the fifth-grade student opens her Arrow Book Club student brochure, she sees numerous books for sale, but none of them are identified as Literature Circle Editions. It's only when she receives the books she's ordered that she might open one and discover questions in the back. These editions are not clearly labeled as such in the student brochure. Diane said that they used to be identified in the student brochure, but after two years Scholastic removed this identification because the company wasn't sure if the language of Literature Circle

Editions was "resonating" with children. It was determined that "for a kid it's kind of not a selling point really to say 'buy this book because there are questions in the back for your comprehension.'" For one year, the company tried changing the name to Book Chat Edition, and they included a small icon in the order form to indicate such an edition for sale. After talking to the teacher advisory panel, Scholastic decided that the term "literature circle" was most familiar and was the best representation of their product. They also determined that teachers didn't feel it was important to include any identifying notation in the student brochure. Since that time, other marketing initiatives, such as marking when a book is an Accelerated Reader title or noting the reading level of a book, have also "trumped" the notation of a book as a Literature Circle Edition. The most recent Literature Circle Edition books do have an icon on the spine that notes them as such an edition, but there is no plan to resume noting this in the student order brochure.

In addition to the Arrow Book Club, Literature Circle editions are sold through Scholastic Book Fairs, although they are not advertised there either. If customers want to find them at these fairs, they literally have to look in the back of the books to see if questions have been included, unless they find recent titles with the marking on the book's spine. These editions are not sold in bookstores, since the editions sold in that market are published through the Scholastic Trade Book division. This division does publish a similar line of special editions called AfterWords (aptly named, as this line was developed after the Literature Circle Editions were already being published), that is bigger than the Literature Circle Editions' program and more closely compares to Random House's Reader's Circle Editions. These editions contain expanded supplementary material that varies from title to title, but may include an author interview, background information about the book, and less structured discussion questions. As Cathy pointed out, the AfterWords Editions serve mainly to provide added value to the book rather than as something to be used in a very specific, targeted way. This obviously reflects the intended audience based on the context in which they may be purchased. Literature Circle Editions are directly connected to the school market, whereas AfterWords Editions are in the general retail market.

### *Intended Use of Literature Circle Editions*

Clearly, Scholastic believes that Literature Circle Editions are a useful tool for teachers. The people with whom I spoke told me how they envisioned their potential use, and how they supposed teachers were actually using them. Diane clearly stated the intention of Scholastic is that these editions will be used for "reading circles," but there were various possibilities proposed in terms of how teachers might actually be using them. Diane said, "I've heard teachers say they're using them differently, but from a marketing standpoint, I'm not ready to market them in those ways. The most general, mainstream way to market them is for your book groups." Cathy from editing reported that Scholastic has heard from teachers who say they will buy a class set of one title to read aloud or have students read independently, and then "do" the questions together. In many ways, this sounds very much like what teachers and students do with basal reading anthologies. Perhaps the materials have changed, but the instructional practice is the same.

Michele recognized that it's not possible to know how people will use the materials you provide. She discussed how she could imagine teachers who conduct a "very authoritarian classroom" giving students the book and telling them to answer the questions for homework. She also suggested that teachers might have students work in groups to ask themselves the questions. It was interesting that Michele, not a teacher herself, said that if she was using these, she would have a student be the group leader and "try to make it more of a self-management thing" in which the group used the questions as "guidelines." Once again thinking about the teacher, she reiterated "it gives the teacher at least something so they don't have to go home and write their own questions." Michele did demonstrate awareness that there are more progressive ways of working with students and literature besides using scripted questions. She referred to a teacher who had literature discussion groups that were "amazing, because they do a different kind of thing. They basically have kids put stickies in here when they see things or read things out loud.... There's all these techniques that are much more about getting the kids into the book in a very different way." In contrast, she referred to the questions in the Literature Circle Editions as being for "those teachers who are sort of middle-of the road....This is a very traditional way of getting them in.... A lot of teachers are getting away from book reports. You know this is another way – pick two questions and answer them – just to get the kids to read the book." Michele's description of what teachers might do with literature reflects a difference in the locus of responsibility for determining what is important to highlight in the text. The first method, which Michele described as "amazing," requires students to choose important focal points throughout the reading of a book. The second method, which she described as "very traditional," reduces students' authority in determining the important focal points by restricting them to the questions provided by Scholastic.

There is no professional development support for using the Literature Circle Editions, although Diane noted that in Scholastic's professional resources division, there is a guide to running literature circles in the classroom available for teachers. The company has engaged in "conversation about tieing" such a guide to the packs of Literature Circle Editions, but because these editions and the professional development books are published by two separate divisions, they haven't made such a connection yet. Although Scholastic does not provide teachers with direct instruction about how best to use their questions in the Literature Circle Editions, they do provide teachers with an online "teacher's guide" for each title. In addition to being able to download the questions for each book, a teacher can go to the Literature Circle page from the Arrow Book Club webpage, and download a "teacher's guide" for each book that contains "suggested responses" to the questions. Cathy said that this was provided after teachers told Scholastic "we need suggested answers on the website." Michele added, "Some of them have no answers – it's really your feelings, but some have specific answers" so she agreed that giving the teachers some "sample answers" would help out busy teachers who might need a "frame of reference." In fact, Diane said, "They can't read all the books, and so we post answers on-line now....That came directly from teacher feedback saying 'I don't know some of these answers so I'm having a hard time guiding this discussion.'" The question writers, therefore, are contracted not only to write approximately 15 questions for the book; they also write suggested responses. It is conceivable that a teacher might lead a discussion group for a book that she has never read, since she is responsible for neither creating questions nor composing responses for the book.

I would very much like to know how teachers and students are actually using Literature Circle Editions. According to Michele, there has been no research done on how teachers and students are using them in their classrooms, but Cathy said, "We hear overwhelmingly from our advisory board that they love them and that they use them....They look for the new ones [titles] that they don't have." Scholastic is encouraged by teacher reports of loving these editions, but it is not clear what teachers are doing with all of these six-packs of editions that they're collecting. That is a next logical step in this line of research, but is beyond the scope of this study. The focus of this study is to examine the Literature Circle Editions themselves in order to consider what they afford readers and teachers. The next chapter will begin that examination by looking at the list of books published as Literature Circle Editions. Looking at the whole collection in targeted ways will allow for exploration of what inferences may be drawn regarding what counts as literature worthy of discussion.

# Chapter 4: Analysis of the Literature Circle Editions Collection

Choosing new titles as well as titles from its backlist, Scholastic has steadily built its collection of Literature Circle Editions. When this study was begun, there were 61 titles listed on the Arrow Literature Circle Editions website ("Arrow book club literature circles"). I wanted to get a sense of what this collection of books reflected. The following questions guided my beginning investigation:

- What types of books are included?
- Who wrote these books?
- Are there common characteristics or repeated patterns?

My main question was: What might be inferred as what counts as literature worthy of discussion in literature discussion groups? By looking closely at the list, I hoped to gain a better understanding of what Scholastic considered important or appropriate literature for discussion. Granted, I had learned from my interview day at Scholastic Headquarters that one consideration for books selected involved the cost. Teachers would buy the books that were most affordable. Connected to the cost factor was the possible constraint imposed by the original publishers, such as Random House, who might not agree to let Scholastic publish its own Literature Circle Edition, especially if that original publisher had a similar edition in the works. Despite these factors, looking at the list would still provide some indication of the literature deemed worthy of these special editions, and what teachers and students – very likely unaware of the aforementioned publishing constraints – might infer from looking at the titles selected for this collection.

In addition to cost and certain publishing constraints, Scholastic employees had discussed other factors that figure into the decision of which books will become

Literature Circle Editions. For example, I was told that they try to have a diverse representation of books in terms of appeal to males and females. To see how well they were meeting this goal, I looked at the gender representation of authors and main characters. This is not to suggest that only books from male authors will appeal to males, and only females will enjoy books from female authors; however, these authors can also serve as positive role models to demonstrate that both males and females can be proficient writers. Regarding the gender of the main characters in these novels, there has been research to indicate that boys strongly prefer books with male protagonists because they can more readily identify with male characters (Lingo, 2007). The number of books featuring male protagonists would therefore indicate potential appeal to male readers.

Scholastic employees also stated their intention to select books that had curriculum tie-ins and attention to moral issues that might spark discussion. By looking at genres and themes, I hoped to see patterns that might lead to conclusions about whether this goal of Scholastic was also being met. For example, historical fiction books would suggest tie-ins to social studies curriculum. Books with themes revolving around social issues, focusing on characters' beliefs and behaviors, would suggest attention to moral issues with potential for sparking discussion.

Since Scholastic claims to be responsive to what literature teachers want, as indicated by market data about what books teachers actually buy, as well as by feedback from the teacher advisory board, looking at the list of titles might also provide insight into what types of books teachers consider important for discussion. It is crucial to remember, however, that Scholastic is responding to how teachers make choices from the books that the company has already made available to them. In his discussion of the current pressure for teachers to use highly scripted phonics programs, Meyer (2005) asserts that companies who publish these programs are the ones who ultimately define reading, own and distribute professional knowledge, own children's needs, own curriculum, and own the power over whether to provide culturally responsive teaching. Meyer makes these strong claims based on research in which teachers and children are made nearly invisible as scripted programs severely reduce the decision-making of both teachers and students. In a similar manner, it is possible that Scholastic is defining literature and literature discussion by producing and distributing these Literature Circle Editions. Certainly this is not a highly scripted program, but if teachers truly trust Scholastic to the degree that sales and Scholastic employees' comments would suggest, the potential is there for Scholastic to have serious sway over what teachers view as literature and appropriate content for discussion. By inferring what teachers want from the choices Scholastic has put in front of them, Scholastic is still ultimately holding the most control. We might liken this to a family suppertime scenario: Every child in a family might choose carrots for a vegetable if Mom only gives them the choice between carrots and broccoli. This doesn't mean that those kids might not hunger for peas. Teachers can only buy what is offered to them.

To examine what these offerings consisted of, I studied the list of 61 books on the Arrow Literature Circle Editions website. For each title, the following information was entered into a table for analysis: title, author, copyright, genre, Newbery Medal or Honor winner (yes or no), gender of the author, gender of the main character(s), and dominant theme(s). To view the complete table, see appendix A. Some of this information is very straightforward (e.g., copyright, author gender). Determining something like dominant theme(s) is more open to interpretation. Having spent over twenty years as a literacy educator, and having spent the last five years as a doctoral student and university instructor of children's literature, I have read most of the books on the list, and am accustomed to considering and interpreting theme. I used my expertise to designate the main theme or themes for each book. I also consulted reviews when needed. The race or ethnicity of the author and the main character(s) were also recorded when known, but because it was not possible to conclusively determine this for every book, this data was not included in the main table. The race and ethnicity information that could be verified is reflected in table 4.4. Future research that directly focuses on the diversity in this collection, as reflected by such information about the authors and main characters, is an intriguing possibility. Once the data was collected in the main table (see appendix A), it was analyzed for patterns or trends with my guiding questions as a frame.

### *What Types of Books Were Included?*

For each type of information collected (e.g., copyright date, genre, etc.) I will discuss why I deemed it important to collect that particular information, and what my examination revealed.

#### *Copyright Date*

Scholastic employees told me that they began by including books that teachers consider classics, books teachers already "trust." Since the term "classics" is difficult to define, I will consider these books "old favorites" that teachers have come to trust. Now Scholastic publishes a mix of books from their backlist as well as new titles. This prompted me to look at the original copyright dates to get a better sense of the actual mix. As table 4.1 shows, original copyright dates for these titles ranged from 1941-2005, an impressive range at first glance; however, 46 (75%) of the titles were published between 2000 and 2005. Since Scholastic began publishing Literature Circle Editions in 2001, this indicates that the number of books that could be considered "old favorites" is rather small, given that it is not likely that a book published since the turn of the 21st century would already be commonly regarded as an old favorite that teachers have long trusted. Indeed, four of the five earliest published books, *Indian Captive* (Lenski, 1941), *Sounder* (Armstrong, 1969), *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972), and *The Westing Game* (Raskin, 1978) may have earned Scholastic's regard as teacher favorites by virtue of each book's status as a Newbery Medal or Honor winner. Now that teachers have shown support for Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions, the company uses the line, according to Scholastic employee Diane, "almost as a marketing tool, like let's bring this new book into the forefront by saying it's a Literature Circle Edition, letting the teacher know she can use it in her classroom." If teachers trust Scholastic, this is a viable means for getting new publications into readers' hands.

Table 4.1 Original Copyright Dates

| **Year(s)** | **Number of Books** |
|---|---|
| 1941 | 1 |
| 1969 | 1 |
| 1972 | 2 |
| 1978 | 1 |
| 1986 | 1 |
| 1988 | 1 |
| 1990-1999 | 8 |
| 2000-2005 | 46 (75% of whole collection) |

### *Genre*

Part of Scholastic's credo is "to encourage literary appreciation." I wanted to see to which genres this dedication extended, in terms of Literature Circle Editions. Each book in the collection was from one of only three genres: contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, or fantasy. (It should be noted that two of the books were novels written in verse. Since the plots of both represent contemporary realistic fiction, they were counted within that genre.) Over half of the books (56%) were contemporary realistic fiction, and a third (33%) were historical fiction. The remaining seven (11%) were fantasy (see table 4.2). This reflects the information provided by Scholastic employees, who said that they choose a lot of historical fiction or books with "moral dilemmas," certainly a source of conflict in many pieces of contemporary realistic fiction. Scholastic employees stated that they looked for books with curriculum tie-ins, so it is curious that there were no biographies on the list when I began this study. Accessing the website again on April 7, 2007, I discovered that Joseph Bruchac's *Pocahontas* (Bruchac, 2003) has been added to the list. Technically, this is considered a piece of biographical fiction, since it is a fictionalized account of an individual's life (Galda & Cullinan, 2006), but it is a beginning. I will continue to watch the list for the addition of more biographies, since surely these might contain the benefits of historical fiction and the "moral dilemmas" that reportedly guide Scholastic's choices for Literature Circle Editions.

Table 4.2 Genre

| **Genre** | **Number of books** | **Percentage of whole list** |
|---|---|---|
| Contemporary Realistic Fiction | 34 | 56% |
| Historical Fiction | 20 | 33% |
| Fantasy | 7 | 11% |

### *Newbery Medal or Honor*

Table 4.3 displays statistics related to the inclusion of Newbery winners in the Literature Circle Editions collection. From the whole list, 20 (33%) had won the Newbery Medal or Honor. Half of these award-winning books had been published before 2000. In fact, of the 15 titles published before 2000, 10 (67%) were Newbery winners. It seems logical that Newbery winners would make a strong showing in this collection. Presumably, these books are of the highest quality, since they have been judged as such by a knowledgeable group of experts, a committee comprised of invited and nominated members of the American Library Association. In fact, it is somewhat surprising that, of the Literature Circle Edition titles, *only* two-thirds of the books published before 2000 were Newbery winners. In looking at the early titles that were not Newbery winners, none of them are considered "classics" in the field; rather, they are popular, light fiction that can be ordered very inexpensively from Scholastic, such as *Chocolate Fever* (R. K. Smith & Fiammenghi, 1972).

Table 4.3 Newbery Medal or Honor Winners

| **Title** | **Author** | **Copyright** |
|---|---|---|
| Indian Captive | Lenski | 1941 |
| Sounder | Armstrong | 1969 |
| Bridge to Terabithia | Paterson | 1972 |
| The Westing Game | Raskins | 1978 |
| The Whipping Boy | Fleischman | 1986 |
| Shiloh | Naylor | 1991 |
| Missing May | Rylant | 1992 |
| Walk Two Moons | Creech | 1994 |
| Ella Enchanted | Levine | 1997 |
| A Long Way from Chicago | Peck | 1998 |
| Because of Winn-Dixie | DiCamillo | 2000 |
| Hope Was Here | Bauer | 2000 |
| The Wanderer | Creech | 2000 |
| A Year Down Yonder | Peck | 2000 |
| Crispin: The Cross of Lead | Avi | 2002 |
| Surviving the Applewhites | Tolan | 2002 |
| The Tale of Despereaux | DiCamillo | 2003 |
| Olive's Ocean | Henkes | 2003 |
| Al Capone Does My Shirts | Choldenko | 2004 |
| Princess Academy | Hale | 2005 |

### *Main character*

I wanted to identify the gender of the main character or characters in each book, as well as the race or ethnicity of these characters. My rationale for collecting this information was twofold. First, the gender of the protagonist might indicate whether the book might hold more appeal for males or females, since Lingo (2007) found that male readers preferred books with male protagonists, and Scholastic employees had mentioned attention to balancing books in the list to appeal to each gender. Second, Scholastic's credo includes as a goal, "to help build a society free of prejudice and hate." This worthy goal of eliminating prejudice and hate necessitates that readers encounter diverse characters in literature to help reduce the ignorance that often results in prejudice. By looking at the race or ethnicity of the main characters in the Literature Circle Editions, I would have a better sense of how much diversity was being presented to students.

The gender of the main characters was fairly well-balanced: 31 females (51%), 26 males (43%), and four books (6%) in which a male and a female character shared equal status as protagonists. It would be interesting to examine how gender is enacted through these characters. For example, six of the nine books with school issues as a major theme featured male protagonists. It would be potentially revealing to see how those male protagonists are portrayed as students. Such exploration is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but suggests further research.

While it was fairly easy to identify the gender of each book's main character(s), it was not always possible to readily identify the race or ethnicity of those characters. Without doing a fine-grained analysis, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions, but an initial exploration has revealed that at least 24 of the main characters are European American. Future study of the main characters would be appropriate, including attention to other identifiers related to religion, sexual orientation, ability, age, socioeconomic status, etc. Since one aim of children's literature is to provide a mirror in which children can see themselves in books, as well as a window, through which children can see how others live (Galda and Cullinan, 2006), diversity in a literature collection is an important component.

Table 4.4 Race/ethnicity of Authors and Main Characters

| Race/Ethnicity | Author (Out of 42 authors) | Main Character (Out of 61 books) |
|---|---|---|
| African American | 1 | 3 |
| Australian | | 1 |
| European American | | 24 |
| Latina/Latino | 1 | 2 |
| Native American | 1 | 3 |
| Unknown | 39 | 28 |

### *Theme*

As noted earlier, prevalent themes were identified based on my familiarity with the texts, as well as information gleaned from book jackets and online reviews. Looking at themes provided information about the range of issues and experiences presented to students, as well as indicating assumptions Scholastic has made about appropriate curriculum tie-ins and appealing books for readers. In accordance with the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978), in which categories of focus emerge during data collection, the codes for themes developed after an initial pass through the list revealed patterns. Table 4.5 contains the list of codes I designated for themes and the number of books that reflected each. Because some books had more than one theme that seemed especially pertinent, the book was counted for each theme noted. As a result, the total exceeds the total of the books in the collection (61). Strong trends showed emphasis on themes related to family relationships, growing up, and courage when dealing with issues of prejudice or death. This seems fitting, in terms of the "moral dilemma" type of books that Scholastic apparently is interested in publishing. It is also fitting for the ages of the target audience. Children who are in their last years of elementary school or beginning years of middle or junior high school struggle with their shifting identities as they move between family and peer group. They become more aware of larger societal and cultural issues, and can certainly use role models – even fictional role models – who are struggling with the same issues.

Table 4.5 Main Themes

| **Theme** | **Books That Reflect This Theme** |
|---|---|
| Family | 26 |
| Prejudice | 5 |
| Disability | 5 |
| Survival | 9 |
| Growing up | 6 |
| Death | 9 |
| Sports | 3 |
| Courage | 10 |
| School | 9 |
| Reading/Writing | 3 |
| Gender | 3 |
| Slavery | 1 |
| Race | 1 |

### *Who Wrote These Books?*

To learn more about the diversity represented in this collection, I noted the gender of each author, and attempted to ascertain the race or ethnicity of each author. As with the main characters, it was rarely possible to positively determine race or ethnicity, so that will only be discussed briefly here. Only three authors' race or ethnicity could be clearly identified, since I was very cautious about making assumptions based on information other than that in which the authors self-identify as belonging to a particular race or ethnicity. In the scholarship surrounding children's literature, current debates about cultural authenticity connected to whether authors are "insiders" or "outsiders" (Harris, 1994; Shannon, 1994) suggests that the ways in which authors identify as members of particular cultural groups will continue to be an important consideration for teachers who are attempting to diversify their classroom literature collections.

In all, the list reflected a more limited range of authors than 61 titles would suggest, given the propensity for the same authors' works to be represented. 18 (29%) of the books were written by one of these four authors: Avi, Sharon Creech, Kate DiCamillo, or Richard Peck. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Sharon Creech was one of the first authors to be approached about having her work published as a Literature Circle Edition. Since the publication of *Walk Two Moons* (2001) in this format, Scholastic has subsequently published Literature Circle Editions of six more of her books, making her the most-represented author on the list. The fact that nearly a third of the books were written by one of only four different authors, two of whom are female and two of whom are male, proposes an imbalance of author representation but a balance of genders not reflective of the list as a whole. Because some authors have multiple books on the list, there are not 61 authors represented. 42 different authors have books in the collection. 27 (64%) of the authors are female, as compared to 15 (36%) males. Implications of this imbalance, as well as inferences drawn from analysis of the rest of the data collected about the entire Literature Circle Edition collection will be discussed in chapter six.

While the discussion above addresses the collection as a whole, it is time to shift focus, to actually open the books and look at the questions Scholastic is suggesting be used to discuss this literature. The next chapter will describe my approach to the analysis of these questions, seeking answers to my research questions regarding what Scholastic

Literature Circle Editions imply about what counts in reading and what counts in discussing literature.

# Chapter 5: Analysis of the Literature Circle Editions' Questions

Looking at the entire list of Literature Circle Editions in a focused, structured way gave me a broad view of the material, but I wanted a deep view as well. I wanted to see exactly what the questions contained, to infer how they work to position readers in relation to texts in particular ways. In looking at the questions, I considered the implications about what counts in reading and discussing literature that are suggested by the content and structure of Scholastic's questions. I am investigating how readers are being asked to think and talk about literature, as prompted by these questions.

Although each book also contains some activities (following the questions) that readers might use in addition to the questions to "get more out of the experience" of reading the books, because it is unclear if the activities are to be done independently or as part of a group and since my focus is on literature discussion groups, in this study I only examined the questions themselves. Further research should analyze the activities to explore how they also work to position readers in various ways, suggesting a variety of modes of response to literature.

This chapter will describe my process for analyzing the questions included in the back matter of a sample of texts from Scholastic's collection of Literature Circle Editions. I will discuss how I selected my sample, and the procedure I used for examining each book's questions. Regarding what I found as I collected this information, sample questions from the books themselves will serve as examples to support the discussion.

To choose a representative sample of texts for question analysis, I accessed the list of Literature Circle Editions from the Scholastic website ("Arrow book club literature circles") and selected every fifth title from the list of 61 books, thereby giving me a sample of 20% of the entire collection to study in detail. This sample size was manageable and provided enough material from which patterns emerged. Note that the Scholastic Literature Circle Edition list has since expanded, but at the time I accessed it to choose my sample, there were only 61 titles on the list. After selecting every fifth title, the resultant twelve books included in this study were: *The Art of Keeping Cool* (Lisle, 2000, 2001), *Bridge to Terabithia (Paterson, 1977, 2001), Each Little Bird That Sings* (Wiles, 2005, 2006), *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* (Creech, 2003, 2004), *Indian Captive* (Lenski, 1941, 2004), *A Long Way From Chicago* (Peck, 1998, 2004), *Never Mind!: A Twin Novel* (Avi & Vail, 2004, 2005), *Princess Academy* (Hale, 2005, 2006), *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001, 2002b), *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002, 2003), *The Wanderer* (Creech, 2000, 2001), and *The Young Man and the Sea* (Philbrick, 2004, 2005). It is interesting that the genre breakdown in this sample is representative of the list overall. Of the twelve titles, 58% are contemporary realistic fiction, as compared to 56% of the list of 61; 33% are historical fiction, the exact same percentage as on the total list; and 8% of the twelve are fantasy, as compared to 11% of the whole list.

For each title, the "questions" PDF was downloaded from the Arrow Literature Circle Editions website. This file contains the questions and activities from the back matter of the book. Once again, for this study, I only concerned myself with the questions. The activities are rich fodder for future study. (Refer to appendix B) For ease of study, I printed each PDF document for my initial scan of the questions. After noting some grammatical errors in these documents, I compared the questions on each PDF document with the questions as printed in the back matter of each novel. The majority of questions were the same in the PDF as in the book. Where differences occurred, they were mainly errors in writing mechanics (e.g., capitalization errors, minor structural errors) that appeared in the PDF but were corrected in the printed book. While it is certainly most important that the printed book be error-free, it is also important that the PDF documents be error-free, since these are readily accessible to anyone on the Web. It is very possible that teachers will choose to download and distribute these files to students. Documents with errors, however minor, are not desirable writing models for students, and while it is true that most of the errors are of a mechanical nature which may be readily apparent and corrected by teachers and/or students, other errors are less obvious and may therefore be more serious as they may be left uncorrected.

Vocabulary is what makes question #5 from *Indian Captive* (Lenski, 1941) so disturbing in the PDF, although it has been corrected in the back matter of the book. As written in the PDF, the question asks, "Earth Woman, who lives alone in her tent, becomes an important person in Molly's life. What is Earth Woman like, and how does she help Molly?" While exploring the character of Earth Woman is an important question, the statement that Earth Woman lives in her "tent" contains an egregious error. Earth Woman is a Seneca Indian living in the mid-1700s. She lives in a lodge, not a tent. Author Lois Lenski's text clearly identifies this home as a lodge, and the use of the word "tent" in the question is an affront to Lenski's attempts to be historically and culturally accurate, and an affront to the culture of the Seneca. As stated earlier, this error has fortunately been removed from the question as printed in the book. The amended question reads, "Earth Woman becomes an important person in Molly's life. Who is Earth Woman? How does she help Molly?"

Another major difference between the PDF questions and the printed book questions occurred for *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972). For those readers who are unfamiliar with the book – and having seen the movie does not count – here is a brief synopsis (Synopses of all 12 books in the sample can be found in appendix C.): *Bridge to Terabithia* focuses on the evolving friendship between fifth graders Jess and Leslie, a boy and girl who become fast friends despite surface-level differences related to family, gender, and outlook on life. They create an imaginary kingdom, Terabithia, that becomes their secret refuge. After a tragic accident, Jess struggles with the loss of Leslie while using the strength and wisdom he received from her to continue growing up. Insiders know that Katherine Paterson was inspired to write this book by the real-life tragedy in which her young son lost his best friend, Lisa, to an unexpected death. Apparently, Scholastic's question writer also knew this "back story" because in the PDF posted on the website, questions sometimes referred to "Leslie" (the character's name in the book) and sometimes to "Lisa" (the real-life girl upon whom Leslie's character was modeled). This significant error does not appear in the printed questions in the back-matter of the book itself; however, it is very likely that teachers may have downloaded the PDF from the website and this name change could be a stumbling block for discussion. In fact, it should be – since we certainly expect our readers to at least recognize the main characters' names. A less significant error is the variation in the other protagonist's name from question to question. Sometimes he is referred to as "Jess"; other times, his name is written as "Jesse." Undoubtedly, this is an example of poor editing. This is not exactly the kind of modeling we would want for our students. Luckily, when I checked each of the PDF documents again on May 9, 2007, the *Bridge to Terabithia* document had been corrected. Lisa had become Leslie, and Jess was always Jess. I was pleased to see these corrections, but the errors in every other PDF – including the reference to Earth Woman's "tent" in the *Indian Captive* document – remained uncorrected.

Once I had selected my sample of 12 books, I read each one. (Once again, refer to appendix C for plot synopses of all of the books.) After I finished reading a book, I turned to the questions in the back and read through them. In considering how to look at the set of questions for each book, I returned to my original research questions related to how the questions in the back matter of Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions position readers to respond to literature. What are the implied assumptions about which aspects of literature are important to question and how meaning should be constructed through discussion? I kept these overarching questions in mind, and using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), in which categories of focus emerge as the researcher moves through the data collection process, I looked for key aspects of questions that recurred as I moved through my data (i.e., the questions in each book). These key aspects formed the frame of focus with which I proceeded to develop specific ways of looking at the questions. I chose to look at both the content and the structure of the questions posed for individual books. I looked at how readers are asked to think about the book (i.e., What counts in reading?), and how readers are asked to talk about the book (i.e., What counts in discussing?). I constructed a data collection sheet for each of the 12 books in my sample, which I completed immediately after I finished reading each book. The template for this data sheet can be seen in appendix D. To view a completed data sheet, see appendix E.

The first entry I made on each data sheet was a record of questions that I formed as a reader having just finished reading the book. These were authentic questions – those to which I had no clear answer, and which I truly wanted to discuss with others. Recording these questions before doing structured analysis of Scholastic's own questions allowed me to be as genuine as possible in my response to the text. After reading Scholastic's questions for the same book, I was able to compare how I was thinking about the book with how Scholastic was asking me to think about the book.

On my data sheet, I also made general notes about things like when questions directed readers toward particular sections of the book, or when quotes from the book were included in the questions themselves. I noted when the author was brought into the conversation through a question, thereby acknowledging the writer's craft, something that has been shown to be important to readers in discussion (Noe & Johnson, 1999). In thinking about what research has shown to be markers of effective literature discussion groups, I looked at questions that encouraged the sharing of an affective or personal response (Jacobsohn, 1994), questions that encouraged readers to make connections with other texts (Gilles, 1990; Jacobsohn, 1994), and questions that encouraged readers to think about critical issues of power related to common social constructs such as race, gender, or class (Long & Gove, 2003/2004; Au & Raphael, 1998) . My general notes section also allowed me to note when questions seemed to be outliers of a sort, unique in their approach to the text or the discussion. For example, some questions seemed to prompt discussion that would be only tangentially related to the book. Question #11 for *Each Little Bird That Sings* (Wiles, 2005) is such a question. It asks, "When the Snowberger family finds Great-great-aunt Florentine in the vegetable garden, they all work together to make sure that the arrangements are completed correctly. Imagine that you find one of your family members dead in the garden. What do you predict your response (and the response of your family) will be?" Notwithstanding the alarm such a question might raise in young readers – especially since the probability of finding a dead family member is heightened by the shift to the verb "will" instead of "would" in relation to predicting your reaction – this question may very well lead readers away from the book. It isn't even necessary to have read Wiles' book to participate with some relish in this discussion. All of these general notes were part of my inductive approach to collecting and analyzing the data. The categories for my data emerged as I progressed through the reading of the questions for each book in the sample, based on patterns I observed in the questions.

The data collection sheet also allowed me to record my observations about the questions' content and structure in more focused ways. I looked at the content of the questions in several ways. I looked at the correlation with the levels of Bloom's taxonomy, comparing my classification according to Bloom's with the level assigned to each question by Scholastic's question writers. I wanted to see if Scholastic was addressing the range of thinking as indicated by the attempted balance of questions across levels of the taxonomy. I especially wanted to see how many questions focused on the higher levels of thinking, such as synthesis and evaluation, since questions that encourage "a critical, a creative, or an evaluative stance are some of the more interesting" (Cole, 2003, p. 42), and higher-level questions are related to student literacy growth (Taylor et al., 2003).

In addition, I looked at questions that asked readers to explain or support their responses, questions that had the potential to lead readers toward particular understandings, and questions that would spoil the book if readers read them prior to reading the body of the text. The decision to look at prompts for explanation or support, and to look at leading or spoiler questions was made through inductive analysis, in which the categories for my observations emerged based on the nature of the data – in this case, the Literature Circle Editions questions. I also considered what the research literature about discussion and the reading process suggests are important components of questions in literature discussion groups. For example, I noticed that some questions used language such as "explain" or "what evidence can you find…" which suggested that the responses would be extended and the text would remain at the center of the discussion. Reference to the text has been shown to be an important component of proficient discussions (Almasi, O'Flahaven, & Arya, 2001), with prompts to elaborate creating depth in effective discussions (Spiegel, 2005). Questions that lead are said to "confine students' thinking" (Chuska, 1995, p. 57), limiting students' interpretations as the question suggests there is a "correct" interpretation that readers should reach. Intuitively, questions that spoil by revealing plot points prior to the reading of the book will reduce the readers' motivation to engage with the text as it will affect how they build their envisionments (Langer, 1995). If we accept Iser's (1978) notion that moving through a book constantly changes the reader's backward horizon (understanding of what has already been read) and forward horizon (anticipation of what has yet to be read), these horizons will be warped in ways not anticipated by the author if the reader has already read questions that reveal parts of the book prematurely.

Thinking about what the research on literature discussion groups has concluded about discussions prompted me to look at the structure of the questions in two ways. I looked at the sequence of the questions and I looked for connecting questions. I wanted to see if the questions followed the chapter sequence of the book, something not commonly found in authentic literature discussion (Hanssen, 1990). I also looked for evidence of connections across questions, indicating the coherence associated with more proficient literature discussions (Almasi, O'Flahaven, & Arya, 2001).

Although there were certainly variations across texts, there were some definite patterns or trends made visible by the data collection tables for each of the twelve Literature Circle Editions closely analyzed. This is especially striking, given that not every book's questions were written by the same person, and that question writers were provided with very loose guidelines (i.e., "write fifteen questions that align with Bloom's taxonomy"). Given that question writers have disparate personal and professional backgrounds, it is likely that they would hold different interpretations of the taxonomy and different ideas about what would constitute effective discussion questions. Since Bloom's taxonomy had been selected as a frame with which it is presumed teachers are familiar, and this taxonomy would ostensibly provide questions at a range of cognitive levels, I wanted to evaluate the questions myself to see how closely my own interpretation of the questions in relation to the taxonomy's levels matched that of Scholastic's question writers. I also enlisted two additional raters to evaluate question levels as a means of assessing the reliability of using Bloom's taxonomy.

Specific observations related to aspects of content and structure will be discussed in the following sections. To facilitate this discussion, I will use questions from three of the Literature Circle Editions as examples. Although appendix C contains synopses of each of the 12 books in this study's sample, for ease of reference, I will include the synopses for the 3 texts whose questions are used as examples here, *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972), *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998), and *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001).

*Bridge to Terabithia*, by Katherine Paterson. This novel focuses on the evolving friendship between fifth graders Jess and Leslie, a boy and girl who become fast friends despite surface-level differences related to family, gender, and outlook on life. They create an imaginary kingdom, Terabithia, that becomes their secret refuge. After a tragic accident, Jess struggles with the loss of Leslie while using the strength and wisdom he received from her to continue growing up.

*A Long Way from Chicago*, by Richard Peck. Spanning a series of summers from 1929-1942, this novel traces the humorous and eye-opening experiences of Joey and his sister, Mary Alice, during their annual visits to their grandmother's house in a small, rural community. Grandma Dowdel is a larger-than-life character who guides her grandchildren through several adventures that reveal the eccentricities of small-town living.

*The Secret School*, by Avi. Fourteen-year-old Ida Bidson is determined to get a high school education, an ambitious goal for a girl in 1925 rural Colorado. Her dream is threatened when the teacher at Ida's one-room school suddenly leaves, and the school board decides to close the school before Ida has a chance to take the exit exams that will allow her entrance to high school in the next school year. With the cooperation of her fellow students, the school continues to function as a "secret school" with Ida serving as teacher.

## *Content of the Questions*

### *Correlation with Bloom's Taxonomy*

I first focused on the content of the questions by using Bloom's taxonomy, since Scholastic used this as a standard frame. I recorded which level of the taxonomy was supposedly represented for each question (this information is provided by Scholastic in a key following the list of questions), and noted whether or not I agreed with Scholastic's designations. If I disagreed, I noted what level of the taxonomy I thought the question actually represented. As the "Bloom's Type" column on the sample completed data sheet in appendix E demonstrates, I sometimes struggled with making this determination, and therefore made notes in this column to show my thinking about why I thought the Bloom's level as assigned by Scholastic was correct, or what other possible level(s) might be more accurate. To make these decisions about levels, I used the minimal information provided to the question writers by Scholastic, referring to the webpage described in chapter three. Although Scholastic's position holds that its question writers are sufficiently familiar with Bloom's taxonomy, and although I had certainly been well-versed in this taxonomy during my two decades studying and working as a teacher, I still felt the need to "brush up" a bit. In addition to using the webpage provided by Scholastic, I relied upon two different "cheat sheets" about Bloom's taxonomy that I found on the Internet. This was an imprecise method, but I was attempting to position myself in the same way that Scholastic positioned the question writers – assuming that my background as a teacher and a student of education had provided me with enough knowledge to "know Bloom's" well enough to make decisions about the questions' alignment with the taxonomy. Assuming that my background is indeed strong enough, and with my cheat sheets close at hand, I was still flummoxed at times when I tried to assign a level to particular questions. My struggle is not without substantiation from at least one other scholar. In a review of philosophical and educational issues surrounding Bloom's taxonomy, Edward Furst, one of the original authors of the taxonomy, noted the difficulty experienced by those who have tried to use the taxonomy in classifying questions in the classroom. According to Furst, "this is understandable because the scheme is aimed more at the outcomes of instruction than at the language moves a teacher might undertake to probe meanings, opinions, and preferences and otherwise to facilitate discussion" (1981, p. 445). Chapter six will provide detailed discussion of the results of this at-times-frustrating but ultimately rewarding job of analysis.

After I made my decisions about the levels of questions for each book in my sample, I enlisted the aid of two other raters to establish interrater reliability (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). For two of the books in my sample, *Bridge to Terabithia* and *A Long Way from Chicago*, each of the raters read the books and followed the same procedure I had used to assess Scholastic's assignment of Bloom's levels. To assist them in making these decisions regarding levels, I provided each rater with the same materials about Bloom's taxonomy that I had used to refresh my memory: the webpage from Scholastic, and the two "cheat sheets" I had pulled from the Web. One of the raters is a retired elementary school teacher (rater #1) and the other is a practicing fifth-grade teacher (rater #2); therefore, both of them have had extensive experience with Bloom's taxonomy. After each completed their ratings, I compared their results with mine. For *Bridge to*

*Terabithia*, rater #1 agreed with me 80% of the time; rater #2 agreed with me only 73% of the time. The percentages were even lower for *A Long Way from Chicago*, for which rater #1 agreed with me 64% of the time, and rater #2 agreed with me 60% of the time. When discrepancies occurred, I spoke with the raters to better understand their rationale for selecting a level with which I disagreed, but I did not change my originally designated levels even if I could see how their understanding and past experiences with children using the taxonomy provided reasonable support for their Bloom's level designations. The low percentages of agreement and the nature of the subsequent conversations suggest that it is indeed difficult to use Bloom's taxonomy to definitively identify specific levels for questions.[1]

To compile my final decisions about the level for each question, I entered this information in a master table, presented here in appendix F. Comparing my results with Scholastic's enabled me to calculate the frequency of agreement between us for each level. This information can be found in table 5.1. As might have been anticipated, the highest percentage of agreement (97%) was for the knowledge questions. There was only one case in which I disagreed with Scholastic's classification of a question for this level. This was also the level for which there were the most questions, 36. The lowest percentage of agreement was found for questions Scholastic had designated as application questions. In this case, we agreed 45% of the time, for 13 out of 29 questions.

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[1] Initially, this seemed like establishing interrater reliability for Bloom's levels would be an important part of this study. I include it here to demonstrate how complicated and unclear the use of this taxonomy is when raters who have taught for many years, and are very familiar with Bloom's taxonomy, cannot agree on question levels.

Table 5.1 Frequency of Agreement

| Level of Bloom's | Total # of Questions (Scholastic) | Total # of Questions (LaRose) | # of cases of agreement | # of cases of disagreement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge | 36 | 39 | 35 (97%) | 1 (3%) |
| Comprehension | 28 | 38 | 25 (89%) | 3 (11%) |
| Application | 29 | 13 | 13 (45%) | 16 (55%) |
| Analysis | 28 | 44 | 25 (89%) | 3 (11%) |
| Synthesis | 22 | 13 | 12 (55%) | 10 (45%) |
| Evaluation | 29 | 25 | 22 (76%) | 7 (24%) |
| Totals | 172 | 172 | 132 (77%) | 40 (23%) |

As a reminder, as described in chapter three, Bloom's taxonomy is a hierarchical classification system comprised of six levels that describe a move from lower-level thinking to higher-level thinking. Drawing from various sources (Bloom, 1956; Hunkins, 1976; Fisher & Frey, 2004; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), these levels may be described as follows:

- Knowledge: Students recall facts, define terms, demonstrate understanding of basic concepts, etc.
- Comprehension: Students organize, interpret, and compare pieces of information.
- Application: Students solve new problems by applying acquired information in a different way to a new situation.
- Analysis: Students break information into components to identify causes or motives, recognize relationships, see hidden meanings, and make generalizations.
- Synthesis: Students produce something or propose alternative solutions to a problem by compiling information in a new or novel way.
- Evaluation: Students make judgments about information, and present and defend opinions.

To provide a balance of lower- and higher-level thinking questions, Scholastic asks question writers to spread their questions across the levels. For example, for ***Bridge to Terabithia*** (Paterson, 1972), the question writer claimed to have composed three knowledge questions, three comprehension questions, two application questions, three analysis questions, two synthesis questions, and two evaluation questions, resulting in a total of 15 questions. There was a similar breakdown across levels of Bloom's taxonomy for the other books' questions. In total, out of the 172 questions in the twelve-book sample, Scholastic indicated that 36 were knowledge questions, 28 were comprehension questions, 29 were application questions, 28 were analysis questions, 22 were synthesis questions, and 29 were evaluation questions. Apparently, Scholastic believes that there is a fairly even distribution of questions across levels, covering the range of cognitive levels. The following sections will provide the frequency of agreement between my designation of Bloom's level and Scholastic's designation for each level of the taxonomy for the books sampled. Table 5.1 presents this information, as well as the total number of questions that I assigned at each level. In the next sections I will also provide examples of questions that reflect my agreement or disagreement with Scholastic at each level, explaining my rationale for why I believe a question does or does not match Scholastic's assigned level. Whether I agreed or disagreed with Scholastic's classification on the taxonomy did not automatically correspond with whether I thought the question was "good" or not, "good" referring to questions that seem likely to promote discussion that will enhance readers' understandings of the literature; therefore, within these examples, there will be some questions I believe are good, and some that I believe are not as good.

*Knowledge*. Scholastic identified 36 knowledge questions, more than were composed for any other level in the taxonomy. I agreed with them 97% of the time – on all but one question, in fact. Questions at this level are fairly easy to assess, since they ask readers to recall particular, discrete pieces of information from the text. For example, question #2 for *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) asks, "How did Ida change her appearance to transform into the teacher? What other changes does she make to step into her new role?" This question can be answered directly from the text, so Scholastic and I agree that it is a knowledge question. It is also a good question in that it focuses readers' attention on Ida and the fact that she must make changes to become the teacher in her own eyes and the eyes of her students. It is possible that this question could lead to discussion of stereotypes related to teachers. Readers might discuss why Ida believes that she must make particular changes, for example. In this way, a question that appears to touch only on surface aspects of the book may actually lead to a question encouraging critical response (Cole, 2003).

As noted above, there was only one knowledge level question for which I disagreed with this designation, as did the other two raters. Question #2 for *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) asks, "Is it true that Grandma Dowdel doesn't 'give two hoots about the town'? Why or why not?" This question requires readers to interpret various actions performed, and statements made, by Grandma in order to craft a response; therefore, this is more aligned with the comprehension level of the taxonomy. The addition of "Why or why not?" enhances this question in that it pushes readers back to the text to provide support for their answers, a characteristic of proficient discussions

(Almasi, O'Flahaven, & Arya, 2001). The possibility for varied interpretations is implicit and is explicitly welcomed by the addition of this final piece of the question.

*Comprehension.* These questions ask readers to delve a bit deeper in their interpretation of the text, often comparing and contrasting pieces of information. There were 28 comprehension questions, according to Scholastic, and I agreed with them on 25 questions, making the percentage of agreement 89%. In my disagreement on other levels, however, I determined there were 13 additional questions that would have more accurately been identified as comprehension questions. With the total number of comprehension questions more likely at 38, the combined number of knowledge and comprehension questions accounted for 44% of the questions for the Literature Circle Editions.

As an example of a comprehension question, question #5 for *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) asks, "How do Joey and Mary Alice change during *The Day of Judgment*? What do they believe at the beginning of the chapter? What do they believe by the end?" Because this question asks readers to compare the characters' beliefs at the beginning and end of a specific chapter, it is a comprehension question.

The three questions for which I disagreed with Scholastic's designation at the comprehension level were all questions I regarded as knowledge questions. An example of one of these, question #4 from *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) asks, "Why do the children decide they have to keep the school a secret?" For someone who has not read the book, this might sound like it is asking readers to interpret the characters' actions. That is not the case. The text clearly explains -- more accurately, it has the children themselves explain -- why the school must be kept a secret. This is therefore a recall question. It is not a bad question, however, because it does address an important aspect of the text: if the school was not kept a secret, the plot would have fallen apart.

*Application.* Questions at this level of Bloom's taxonomy involve applying information to produce some result or solve a problem, or using information in a new situation. Scholastic's question writers had limited success with creating questions for this level. In fact, this was the level at which I most disagreed with their designation of level, implying that the hoped-for balance has not been achieved. While Scholastic identified 29 application questions, I only saw 13. There were two such questions for *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972). Question #7 asks, "Why do you think kids often make fun of others who are different? Do the students at your school have the same tendency as the students in Jess and Leslie's school do?" In this case, readers are asked to apply what they understand about the book characters' situation to their own school experiences. The other application question for this novel, question #8, also asks readers to apply their understanding to an imagined situation. It asks, "Imagine that Leslie is a student in your class. How do you think you would respond to her? Would you want to be her friend? Do you think she would be accepted by your classmates? Explain." These appear to be fair approximations of application questions, although question #8 is the better question in that it does require readers to explain their responses, hopefully prompting readers to delve back into the book for adequate support in applying what they know about Leslie to their own school experience. Question #7 may not even require students to refer back to the text at all, They may rightly assume that students in Jess and Leslie's school "make fun of others who are different," since that is how the question begins.

For other books, the questions did not fairly approximate the level of application. The writer of questions for *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) struggled with application questions. For example, question #8 instructs readers to "Compare Herbert's attitude towards Ida at the beginning and at the end of the book. What evidence can you find that his feelings have changed?" This question, involving comparison, is more accurately associated with analysis, the next level in Bloom's taxonomy.

*Analysis.* Scholastic assigned this level to 28 questions, and I agreed with this designation for 25 of these questions, resulting in an 89% agreement level. In looking at all 172 questions, however, I determined that there are really 44 questions that fit the analysis level of the taxonomy. This is almost twice as many as what Scholastic assigned. Questions at this level are certainly conducive to literature discussion, in that they ask readers to make inferences based on close examination of the text to find patterns and hidden meanings. Readers look carefully at how events are created, how characters compare and contrast with each other, and what motivates those characters.

For example, question #11 from *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972) is one of many analysis questions that focus on characters. The question reads, "At the end of the story, Jess uses wood planks to build a solid bridge to Terabithia. Why do you think he does this? Why does he decide to share Terabithia with May Belle? What does this show us about how he is changing?" Questions about character development were common across the twelve-book sample, and reflect what happens in authentic, real-world literature discussion (Jacobsohn, 1994). The problem with this question for Paterson's book is that if a reader peruses the questions before reading the book, this one is a spoiler. Knowing that Jess will eventually share Terabithia with his younger sister, May Belle, will likely influence the way in which readers view these siblings' relationship throughout the book.

*Synthesis.* This was the level at which I had the second-lowest percentage of agreement with Scholastic, agreeing with its designation 55% of the time. Scholastic identified 22 questions at this level, but I concluded that only 12 of the 22 matched this level. As with the application level, I only saw approximately half as many questions as Scholastic at this higher level. One of the questions for which we agreed was question #11 for *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001). This question asks readers to consider, "How would the story be different if Ida's parents believed that girls didn't need an education? What if they had told her she couldn't go to high school next year?" Readers must use what they know about Ida to propose an alternative plot, given new information about Ida's parents. Hopefully, this question would prompt discussion of the time period in which the story is set, and how a book's setting affects characters' beliefs and attitudes.

*Evaluation.* Questions at this highest level of Bloom's taxonomy ask readers to judge information and present opinions. This is what they are asked to do in question #13 for *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) when asked, "Who is the better role model for the kids: O.B. Dickerson or Grandma Dowdel? Why? What is a role model supposed to provide?" Although this question is a solid evaluation question according to both me and Scholastic, the next question is not. Question #14 from Peck's book directs readers to "Look at young Weidenbach's song at the end of the book. What is its message? Is it the same message of the book?" This is predominantly an analysis question, asking readers to compare the relationship between the song (actually, a recitation) and the book's message. It is not an evaluation question, as Scholastic has designated it.

In all, Scholastic and I agreed 77% of the time on the levels of Bloom's taxonomy designated for all of the questions in the books for my sample. We agreed most at the levels of knowledge, comprehension, and analysis. The implications of this will be discussed in the next chapter. Right now, I turn to discussion of other ways in which I looked at the content of the questions, including questions that lead, questions that spoil, and questions that ask readers to explain or support their responses.

### *Questions that Lead*

In considering how readers are asked to think about the book, I also recognized that there might be questions that don't ask as much as they tell. In other words, I wanted to look at questions that might "spoil" the book if the reader read the question before finishing the book (such questions that "spoil" will be discussed in the next section), or questions that lead the reader toward particular correct or expected understandings or emotional responses. Examining the wording of the questions was very important in this exploration. For example, question #13 for *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) asks, "Who do you think learns more in the Secret School? Ida or her students? What extra lessons did she learn from becoming the teacher?" Asking about Ida's *extra* lessons immediately after the question about who learned more implies that the correct response is that Ida learned more. Question #7 for *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) also leads readers by asking, "When do you think Joe stops thinking of Grandma Dowdel as a bad influence? Why? Does Mary Alice have different ideas about Grandma Dowdel? Why?" There are actually two ways in which this is a leading question. The first part of the question tells the reader that Joe *does* stop thinking of his grandma as a bad influence, because it only asks *when* the reader thinks he does this, and why. The second part, asking readers if Mary Alice has different ideas does not, at first glance, appear to be leading; however, following this question with "why?" suggests that the reader is supposed to understand that Mary Alice *does* have different ideas about Grandma Dowdel, thereby rendering the previous question superfluous. The "why" questions embedded in #7 are potentially confusing, in fact. Readers may interpret these questions as asking why they (the readers) have responded in the way that they have, not as asking why the characters think in the ways indicated. For example, it is unclear if readers are supposed to discuss why Joe stops thinking of Grandma Dowdel as a bad influence at a particular time, or why they (the readers) chose that particular time as when they thought Joe changed his thinking. One interpretation of the "why" questions focuses on the characters; one focuses on the readers.

### *Questions that Spoil*

If I intend to read a novel, I do not want to know what is going to happen in the book before I even begin reading on page one. I want to experience the unfolding of the plot and the development of the characters by following the author's path through the text. I believe that most readers have the same desire. I wondered if there were Literature Circle Edition questions that would thwart that desire by spoiling the book if the reader chanced to read the questions prior to reading the novel. There were several such questions among the sample books, including three questions for *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972). Question #11 reads, "At the end of the story, Jess uses wood planks to build a solid bridge to Terabithia. Why do you think he does this? Why does he decide to share Terabithia with May Belle? What does this show us about how he is changing?" Two parts of this question are potential spoilers. The first tells the reader that Jess builds a bridge in the end. The second tells us that Jess decides to share Terabithia with May Belle. The secrecy around Terabithia is important to Jess throughout the book, so the revelation that he will share it with May Belle (with whom he is often in conflict) may well affect how readers think about this brother and sister relationship during the reading of the book if they read question #11 first. The suspense around maintaining Terabithia's secret location is removed in question #12, which begins, "After he learns that May Belle has discovered Terabithia, Jess feels that his 'life was as delicate as a dandelion.'" Readers are thus told that Terabithia does not remain a secret, perhaps reducing its magic and mystery in their minds. The most potentially damaging spoiler comes in question #13. This question begins, "When Jess is overwhelmed by his feelings after Leslie's death, who helps him cope with his loss?" The death of a major character, which serves as the climax of the book, is revealed by this question. Knowing that Leslie will die cannot help but affect readers' meaning-making as they read the novel. Instead, readers might be asked to consider how Jess has changed by the end of the novel, and which characters have helped him change.

### *Prompts to Explain or Support Responses*

Depth is added to the reading experience by asking readers to extend their responses to questions by explaining how they've reached their particular understandings or why they've responded in the way that they have. This also requires readers to keep their responses directly connected to the book, forcing them to provide logical support drawn from the text as well as perhaps drawing from their own literary and life experiences (Chuska, 1995; Hade, 1991). Looking for this depth, I noted which questions asked for readers to explain or support their responses. There were many such questions, including #8 from *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972) that asks, "Imagine that Leslie is a student in your class. How do you think she would be accepted by your classmates? Explain." Adding "explain" to this question helps to ensure that the response will be elaborated. Sometimes readers are explicitly directed to provide support from the text, as in question #11 for *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998), "Even though they never appear in the story, what do you think Joe and Mary Alice's parents are like? What clues can you find in the story to their personalities?" Different perspectives are also encouraged by prompts to readers to support their interpretations in questions such as #12 from *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001), "If you had the same choice as Ida, would you have become the teacher? If you were a student there, would you have voted to keep the school open? Why or why not?" By asking "why or why not" the question writer is welcoming responses that may potentially oppose each other.

So far, this chapter has described the content of the questions in my sample of Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions. Looking at the content of the questions enabled me to consider what Scholastic seems to believe "counts" in reading a book. Although the range of questions across levels of Bloom's taxonomy is not as balanced as Scholastic intends it to be, there are still questions at each level to provide students with a variety of ways to approach the text, implying that remembering factual information "counts," as does considering how to interpret information from the text. Unfortunately, there are questions that lead readers toward expected responses, implying that what "counts" is that readers reach a particular understanding, although there are not many such questions. There are also questions that have the potential to spoil the book for readers if the questions are read prior to finishing the book. This implies that the questions are to be used after the book has been read. Since there are questions that ask readers to supply explanations for their responses, often using support from the text, the implication is that it is important for the reader not to base responses solely on personal experience. The text matters directly in the meaning to be constructed.

The next section will describe the structure of the questions, which I examined in pursuit of answers to my question regarding what counts in discussion of the literature.

### *Structure of the Questions*

The data collection sheet was also used to focus observations related to the structure of the questions in terms of what kind of discussion was solicited. Structure was examined in terms of the sequence of the questions and the presence of connections across questions.

#### *Sequence*

Examining the sequence of questions was critical to making inferences regarding how Scholastic envisioned the literature circle discussion. Although the minimal directions do not specify that readers use the questions in order, it seems safe to assume that most readers will proceed from question 1 to question 15 in sequence. Because of the key provided, I knew that the questions build from the basic levels of Bloom's taxonomy (e.g., knowledge, comprehension) to the more complex levels (e.g., synthesis, evaluation). I wondered if the questions also followed the chapters in sequence. For example, I wondered if the questions at the beginning of the list were focused mainly on early chapters in the book, and if the last questions focused on the end of the book. If so, that would mean that the early chapters of the book were discussed at low levels, using knowledge and comprehension questions, with the more complex questions, requiring synthesis or evaluation, reserved for the final chapters. As mentioned in chapter three, Scholastic employees indicated that, originally, an editor reviewed the questions to ensure that they got harder as they moved through the book. This could send an erroneous message that books are simple at the beginning, and that more sophisticated thinking should be reserved for the later chapters, when the book becomes more complex. A potentially worse message might be inferred: readers are not capable of operating at the highest levels of Bloom's taxonomy until they have progressed through the lower levels. Educational philosophers have argued against this simplistic linear assumption, and the taxonomy's authors even acknowledged that "inversions occur and there is frequent overlap between and within categories" (Furst, 1981, p. 447).

I found that the questions in Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions do not generally follow the order of the chapters, although they may refer readers to a specific chapter or section of the book in the question. For example, question #12 for *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) directs readers to "Explain what Grandma Dowdel means by "apart from its historical value" on page 117." To answer this, readers need to focus on this particular section of the text, but the surrounding questions do not follow the order of the chapters. Only one book in my sample, *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002), had questions fairly closely aligned with the book's chapter progression, although several of the questions could engender richer responses if readers pulled information from different places in the book. For example, question #13 asks, "Do you think the Applewhites are good parents? According to you, what makes a good parent?" Readers' responses to this question could vary significantly, depending on which sections of the book are referenced. Therefore, while some questions do ask readers to look at particular sections or chapters in the book, other questions require readers to pull information from multiple sections or chapters. Question #10 for *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) asks, "What does Tom mean when he tells Ida 'don't go forgetting who you are. It'll make it harder for you. And your friends'? Does Ida 'forget' who she is?" Although this question contains a quote that may prompt readers to look at a specific portion of the text, in order to determine if Ida has forgotten who she is, they will have to look in multiple places in the text to formulate a response.

There are also questions that explicitly direct the reader to answer based on having read the entire book. Question #8 for *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) reads, "Compare Herbert's attitude towards Ida at the beginning and at the end of the book. What evidence can you find that his feelings have changed?" Obviously, readers need to have read the entire book before being able to adequately respond to this question, and they need to make connections across sections of the text.

*Connections across questions*

It was not just the sequence of questions that I examined. I also looked for connections across questions, thereby indicating a more textured view of reading and discussion. In authentic discussion, one question usually leads to another as conversation is woven. In their study of proficiency in student literature discussions, Almasi, O'Flahavan, and Arya (2001) concluded,

> Sustaining topics became a fundamental means by which successful groups created coherent discussions. More proficient discussions had a recursivity in which members continually revisited old topics and made linkages between topics to create intertopic coherence. Likewise, they embedded topics within

> one another to examine topics more fully and returned to original topics to create intratopic coherence (p. 117).

I wanted to see if Scholastic encouraged this behavior by building connections across questions, or if the questions suggested that understandings are discrete and disconnected – you finish one question and move on to the next, with none of the doubling back and extending that occurs in natural conversation. Of course, Scholastic's question writers might assume that readers will use one of their questions simply as a springboard for this kind of conversational maneuvering. After all, depending on how the question is initially answered, appropriate follow-up questions could vary significantly. Perhaps such connections are a tacit understanding between readers and question writers. Without seeing how literature discussion groups actually use Scholastic's questions, any conclusions about such coherence *within discussions* will be merely speculative.

Because Scholastic frequently grouped connecting questions or questions with multiple parts under one question number, there is evidence of an attempt to encourage connections. For example, question #2 for *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) asks, "How did Ida change her appearance to transform into the teacher? What other changes does she make to step into her new role?" Yes, these are two linked questions, but because they are incorporated into one question number, it is virtually guaranteed that they will be discussed in tandem. This was a common characteristic of the questions grouped under one question number. I wanted to see if there were connections across numbered questions that might more accurately reflect the recursive nature of literature discussion (Spiegel, 2005). Connections across numbered questions are uncommon in the Literature Circle Editions, although there is a deliberate attempt to keep the topic of Jess and

Leslie's developing friendship the focus of several questions for *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972). Questions #4-6 build on each other in a way that leaves little doubt that understanding the relationship between these two characters is the key to this book. In each question, I have added emphasis to highlight the intended progression of discussion about this relationship. Question #4 asks, "*In the beginning of the story*, why doesn't Jess have any friends? Why does he try to avoid Leslie when she first tries to be friendly with him?" Question #5 asks, "*During the first week of school*, Jess begins to change his mind about getting to know Leslie. Why do you think he changes his mind?" The final question in the series, question #6, asks, "*A couple of months later*, Jess comes to feel that 'Leslie was more than his friend. She was his other, more exciting self – his way to Terabithia and all the worlds beyond.' (46) In your own words, what does this mean?" Although these questions fall under separate question numbers, because they are in sequence it is likely that they will also be discussed in tandem. Question #15 serves as another connecting question, however, as it brings the topic of Jess and Leslie's relationship back to the group's focus. This question asks, "What do you like most about Jess and Leslie's friendship? Does their friendship seem realistic to you? What can we learn from this book about friendship?" I can envision the discussion returning to comments made when discussing questions 4-6 as readers now discuss the nature of the characters' friendship, but this attempt at returning focus to a prior topic was not the norm in the Scholastic Literature Editions sampled. If readers use the questions in the numbered sequence provided, most of the connections in the discussion will occur in an uninterrupted block of the discussion, since connected questions most often fall under the same question number.

My examination of the structure of the questions implied that literature discussion does not necessarily proceed in accordance with the chapter sequence in the book, but does proceed from literal to interpretive to evaluative levels of discussion, with the high percentage of questions at the knowledge and comprehension levels indicating that the literal level is most important. Another implication is that questions do not necessarily return to topics discussed earlier, but remain disconnected. Of course, this does assume that the questions will be answered in the order in which they have been listed by Scholastic in the books.

Having gathered data about the content and the structure of the questions in my sample of Scholastic Literature Circle Edition novels, I was able to begin formulating possible answers to my initial research questions regarding assumptions about literature, reading, and the discussion of literature. This discussion continues in the next chapter.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

Studying Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions has afforded me the opportunity to focus on one instance of an intersection between the world of children's literature and the world of reading instruction. Although these books are not explicitly identified as instructional materials, the fact that they are spotlighted in the teacher Arrow Book Club monthly brochure and are not marketed as Literature Circle Editions in the student order forms, coupled with the presence of "teachers guides" containing suggested responses to the questions for each book on the Scholastic website, implies that these books are intended to be used by teachers and students in classroom literature discussion groups. Interviews with Scholastic personnel confirmed that teachers are the main target for this product.

In thinking about these editions within the context of historical uses of basal reading programs and children's literature in reading instruction, I questioned the implications of these trade books having publisher-generated discussion questions inserted into the back of particular novels. My guiding research questions became: What are the implied assumptions about what counts as literature worthy of discussion? What are the implied assumptions about what counts in reading? What are the implied assumptions about what counts in literature discussion?

This chapter will bring all of the various pieces of this investigation together in order to form some tentative answers to my research questions. I will begin by revisiting the purposes and characteristics of literature discussion groups in general, and the goals of Scholastic in creating Literature Circle Editions against this backdrop. The bulk of this chapter will contain discussion of the results of my analysis. I will discuss what is present in these editions, and what is missing. Finally, I will summarize this work in response to my original research questions.

### *Revisiting Literature Discussion Groups*

Wolf and Heath (1992) believe "Being literate means being thoughtful, not 'right'"(p. 174). Literature discussion groups nurture such thoughtfulness. As described in chapter two, literature discussion groups provide readers the opportunity to share their interpretations of their reading, as well as being open to revising those interpretations or receiving new ones as they discuss a shared piece of literature. Adhering to the philosophy that reading is socially constructed, teachers use literature discussion groups to help readers build understanding, rather than solely to assess comprehension by asking questions for which there are expected "right" answers. These groups often meet periodically throughout the reading of a novel, as well as after the entire book has been read. Scholastic challenges these components of literature discussion groups in two ways: Many of the questions in the Literature Circle Editions work toward assessing comprehension with questions for which "right" answers are provided in a teacher's guide for each novel in the collection, and the nature of the questions implies that these are to be used by readers coming together only after the entire book has been read.

Literature discussions do not generally follow a particular sequence. Although a teacher may supply a question or prompt to get discussion started, students are expected to take ownership by asking their own text-based questions and bringing up topics from their reading that intrigue or confuse them (Hanssen, 1990). These questions range from literal questions, which are used to establish a common, baseline understanding of the facts of the book, to questions that require higher-level thinking, such as those which ask readers to present and defend opinions about specific aspects of the book. The recursive nature of discussion is demonstrated by the fact that questions often connect or build on each other, reflecting a level of coherence within and across topics throughout the discussion (Almasi et al., 2001).

Students need help learning what sorts of questions to ask and how to discuss them (Sloan, 2003; McCormack, 1997). Teachers serve as models for building skills in questioning and response techniques, as well as the social skills required for successful participation in groups. In chapter two, I reviewed research that illustrated the potential difficulty experienced by students and teachers in literature discussion groups. Students' social status in the class may affect their level of participation and success in such groups. Students who have low status may be ignored or feel inadequate about their ability to participate. Students who are especially assertive may be regarded as bossy by other group members who feel stifled (Chinn et al., 2001; Evans, 2002; Cazden, 2001; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001) . Teachers, especially those who are new to using literature discussion groups, also may experience difficulty. They may be reluctant to relinquish some of their authority to enable students control over the discussions (Marshall et al., 1995; Almasi, 1995). They may fear the emergence of potentially controversial topics, or simply feel inadequate to field unexpected questions. In essence, if teachers are accustomed to following a scripted reading program, they may not know what to do when the script is removed (Eeds & Peterson,1991). They may feel in need of serious help.

### *Scholastic's Role*

Scholastic's intention is to help busy teachers with their instruction. That is a worthy purpose. Acknowledging the presence of literature discussion groups in many classrooms, Scholastic decided to include discussion questions in the back of particular novels directed at the intermediate grade levels. The very fact that these editions are published has some implications for teachers and students. By publishing these editions, Scholastic is affirming the value of using "real" literature in classrooms. Since Scholastic advertises multipacks containing six copies of particular titles to teachers, and since they claim that teachers trust their judgment, they are sending the clear message that small group literature discussion is a valid pedagogical strategy. Providing these books at an affordable rate for teachers ensures that more of these multiple copies will actually enter classrooms than if teachers had to compile the sets themselves from books purchased at a bookstore.

While the goal of helping teachers is certainly admirable, it is important to remember that another goal for Scholastic, as a business, is to make money. If those few extra pages had not been available in the back of the paperback editions, Scholastic might not have begun inserting questions into these novels. Information from the interviews I conducted confirmed that the cost of the book is a determinant in whether or not that book will be published in a Literature Circle Edition, since marketing research has shown that teachers buy mostly the cheaper multipacks. This obviously impacts the titles that are published in these editions.

If these editions are truly beneficial for readers and their teachers, perhaps it does not matter how profitable the line is for Scholastic, as long as it remains profitable enough to ensure continued publication of new and existing Literature Circle Editions. The next section will present results from my analysis of the overall collection, as well as my analysis of the questions in my sample, which will suggest how these editions have the potential to meet the needs of literature discussion groups, and how they may not meet those needs.

### *Analysis of the Literature Circle Editions*

One way of organizing the results of my analysis is to think in terms of "what's here" and "what's not here" when looking at the collection of Literature Circle Editions as well as the actual questions included within my sample. What do these editions provide for the teachers and readers who choose to use them? What is missing?

#### *What is Here: The Literature*

Often when people think about "quality" literature they look to award winners. A third of this list represents Newbery Medal or Honor books. One might expect there to be more of these titles on the list; however, there are at least three possible reasons why this is not the case. Scholastic may not have the rights to publish more of the Newbery titles in these editions, since the original publisher may be publishing a similar edition. Scholastic also has indicated a commitment to balance between old, trusted titles and new titles. The company may also recognize that many books do not receive Newbery recognition but can still prompt rich discussion. For example, there has been criticism leveled at the Newbery Award for not representing literature that appeals to children. The winners are selected by adults, and sometimes it seems that adults' appraisal of award-winning literature does not match that of the audience for whom the literature is intended – children. Ujiie and Krashen (2006) conducted a study to determine if Newbery Award winners were indeed popular with children, based on book sales and library circulation records. They discovered that children's fiction bestseller lists contained very few award winners and the number of bestsellers checked out of the libraries far exceeded the number of award winners checked out. The authors concluded, "A possible implication of these results is that children don't know what is best for them; another is that Newbery and Caldecott judges have different standards than the real audience of children's and adolescent literature" (p. 35). To me, the latter implication is the more acceptable. Regardless of the underlying cause, Ujiie and Krashen's study does suggest that, when given a choice, children will not opt for award-winning literature.

Considering the fact that Scholastic is in the business of selling books to children, parents, and teachers, it makes sense that they would want to appeal to a wide range of readers. Titles such as *Never Mind!* (Avi & Vail, 2004) and *Chocolate Fever* (R. K. Smith & Fiammenghi, 1972) have not been considered award-worthy by adults, but they may very well be considered a "good read" by children. On the other hand, the award-winning *Indian Captive* (Lenski, 1941) may be a deadly read according to children, but teachers and parents may remember it fondly from their past, or value it based on the Newbery Honor seal displayed on the front. By publishing all of these books as Literature Circle Editions -- representing award winners as well as popular reads -- Scholastic is expanding the canon of literature appropriate for study beyond "the classics."

### *What is Here: The Framework*

The use of Bloom's taxonomy was a decision made to unify or standardize the questions in some way. Scholastic logically assumed that this taxonomy would be familiar, and thus comfortable, for teachers to use. This is not an erroneous assumption, as the taxonomy has been used as a guiding structure for decades. It should be remembered, however, that this taxonomy was developed for constructing assessment items, and has the tinge of assessment about it still (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). There is a possible message sent by using this taxonomy – these questions are to be used as a means of summative assessment to gauge students' understanding of a book after the reading has been completed. This is not the typical purpose of literature circles, however, since these are created to provide a venue in which readers can build understanding of a text by sharing their varied interpretations and questions, rather than having their understanding assessed through the use of comprehension questions. Having a "teacher's guide" of suggested responses to the questions available for teachers to download from the Arrow Book Club website reinforces the idea that these are assessment questions, not discussion questions for groups where the teacher acts as a guide, not an evaluator. As discussed in chapter two, when a teacher has predetermined responses to the questions asked in a literature discussion group, the goal of the discussion appears to be that of assessing comprehension, much in the same way that teachers use literature in traditional reading lessons (Noe & Johnson, 1999). This negates a primary purpose and benefit of using literature discussion groups, that of encouraging readers to engage in exploratory talk to build understanding (Wells, 1999).

### *What is Here: The Questions*

The questions themselves were at the heart of my analysis, and they can be categorized in several different ways.

*Lower-level thinking questions.* Scholastic, in choosing Bloom's taxonomy as a framework for these questions, has attempted to provide questions at a range of cognitive levels; however, according to my assigned levels of Bloom's taxonomy to the questions in my sample, approximately 45% of the questions are at the two lowest levels, knowledge and comprehension. Knowledge, or recall, questions have been shown to hold a valuable place in literature discussion (Cazden, 2001) in order to establish common understanding of basic facts about a book, but questions that require higher-level thinking skills are those which encourage the richest discussion and provide the most important learning for students (Taylor et al., 2003). A knowledge question such as question #1 for *The Art of Keeping Cool* (Lisle, 2000) neither invokes higher-level thinking skills nor serves to establish important facts that a group would need to have mastered in order to thoughtfully discuss this book. The question reads, "At the beginning of the story, Robert sees big navel guns being hauled through town on their way to Fort Brooks. What do those tools of war look and sound like?" If anything, this question has the potential to seriously derail conversation, turning it into a discussion of military equipment. This is a question that could fairly quickly steer discussion away from the book.

*Higher-level thinking questions.* There are definitely higher-level thinking questions included in these editions. If we consider the top half of the taxonomy, the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, Scholastic assigned 79 questions out of 172 to these levels and I assigned 82 questions to these levels. Scholastic believes that 46% of their questions meet the cognitive demands of these top levels, and I believe that 48% are at these levels. While there are higher-level thinking questions, there is an imbalance across levels. I identified many more questions at the analysis level and fewer at the synthesis and evaluation levels, the top levels of the taxonomy.

*Leading questions.* Some of Scholastic's questions lead readers toward "correct" or expected understandings. For example, question #11 for *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* (Creech, 2003) addresses the relationship between Bailey, who is blind, and Rosie, who is sighted. The question asks, "If Bailey suddenly was able to see, how do you think his and Rosie's friendship would change? Imagine what it would be like for them to attend the same high school." By asking readers *how* the friendship would change, there is the assumption that the friendship *would* change. A more interesting question might be created in first asking readers if they think the friendship would change at all. This is a subtle shift, however, and it's important not to underestimate readers by assuming that they would not push against the question as it stands by declaring that they can't discuss how the friendship would change because they don't think it would change.

Leading questions "confine students' thinking" (Chuska, 1995, p. 57) and transfer more power to the questions than to the students. It takes a strong student to veer from the direction in which the questioner apparently wants the student to move, especially if the questioner is a teacher or a major publishing company, both of whom already hold more power than the student simply by virtue of position. When teachers ask such leading questions, they control the direction of the discussion, thereby retaining their position as the primary knowledge keepers in the classroom (Marshall et al., 1995). Students are reminded that they should be reading and discussing the text in ways that will satisfy the teacher (Chuska, 1995; Short, 1990; Spiegel, 2005). This does not encourage the sharing of multiple interpretations that reflect the social constructivist nature of literature discussion groups (Brock & Gavelek, 1998; McMahon et al., 1997).

*Spoiler questions.* As an earlier example proved, the questions provided at the end of the book are meant to be used by readers after the book has been completely read. There are undoubtedly readers who, in perusing the book, might read through the questions before this point. Unfortunately, there are occasionally included what could be termed "spoiler" questions. As was noted in chapter five, these are questions that reveal aspects of the plot that should ideally be discovered by the reader along the way. Anyone who has read *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972) very likely recalls the trauma experienced when Leslie dies. After all, Paterson has carefully developed the friendship between Leslie and Jess, and much of the power of this novel comes from the empathy readers experience as they receive the news of Leslie's death when Jess receives this news, and the grief they suffer alongside this young boy. That experience is removed if the reader has read even the beginning of question #13, "When Jess is overwhelmed by his feelings after Leslie's death, who helps him cope with his loss?...." By having such questions in these editions, Scholastic is almost assuredly removing the likelihood that teachers will use these questions with literature discussion groups during the reading of the book. If teachers do want groups to meet for discussion before completing the whole book, it is certainly possible that they may provide alternative questions. If so, this dilutes the power of this "tool" Scholastic is intending to provide by putting responsibility for question construction back on teachers. If teachers don't feel they have the time or the ability to compose their own questions, perhaps they let students meet for a free-form discussion, or let students compose their own questions. If so, this removes the scaffolding role from Scholastic's questions. Of course, it's possible that teachers might direct students to only answer specific questions, attempting to avoid the "spoiler" questions. This does not seem practical, however, since surely the words "Leslie's death" would leap out at more astute readers and thereby defeat the teacher's intention.

*Imaginative response questions.* Sometimes these questions involved imaginative response, in which the reader makes direct connections between the text-world and the real world (Beach, 1998). The reader is asked to imagine participating in the book's world and/or interacting with the book's characters. Such a question is question #8 from *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972). This question reads, "Imagine that Leslie is a student in your class. How do you think you would respond to her? Would you want to be her friend? Do you think she would be accepted by your classmates? Explain." In this case, readers are asked to pull a character into their world. In other cases, readers are asked to project themselves into the world of the book, as in question #12 from *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001), "If you had the same choice as Ida, would you have become the teacher? If you were a student there, would you have voted to keep the school open? Why or why not?" These questions require readers to understand the characters and their motivations in order to respond. Such questions also keep the border between the world of the book and the world of the reader fluid, something for which Louise Rosenblatt would surely approve as a means of encouraging readers to "live through" the experience of the book (Rosenblatt, 1995).

*Text-removed questions.* There are even questions that do not require readers to have read the book at all. Question #6 from *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) directs readers to "List all the things (activities, money, tools, etc.) that were different in the 1930s from today. Then make a list of all the things that are the same." What readers are supposed to do with these lists upon completion is unspecified, although one would hope that this would lead to discussion of the setting in the book. Scholastic employee, Michele, did propose the possibility that teachers might assign these questions for homework. If this question were assigned in such a way, I can envision a very neat table comparing and contrasting the 1930s and 2007 without any attention to Peck's book at all. This is not to say that such a table might not be useful, as it might be a form of written response that could act as a springboard for group discussion, but the question as written does not provide direction for doing so.

*Text-centered questions.* At this point, I have noted that some questions lead away from the book, some do not require readers to have read the book at all, some might discourage readers from reading the book by spoiling it for them, and some suggest ways that readers "should" understand the book, but despite these potential pitfalls, the majority of Scholastic's questions engage the readers in ways that keep them focused on the text, either at a surface or a deep level, by addressing some aspect of the literary elements. Out of 172 questions, 163 are geared toward this type of textual response.

Some questions lead readers back into the book by referring readers to a specific quote from the text. Question #7 from *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002), for example, states, "On page 87, the author writes 'The Jake he knew, the Jake he had always been, was disappearing. And there was nothing – nobody – to put in his place.' What does that mean? How is Jake changing and why?" This is one of numerous questions that employ quotes from the book to keep readers' discussion grounded in the text.

With so many questions focusing on elements of the text, it is rather odd that less than a third of the questions ask readers to explain or support their responses with evidence from the text or their own experience. Providing such references has been noted as a characteristic of proficient literature discussions (Almasi, O'Flahaven, & Arya, 2001). Perhaps it is assumed that readers will automatically do this, but if readers aren't accustomed to doing so, and if facilitators do not direct them to do so, then responses may be truncated and supplied with the expectation that any response will be acceptable.

One example of a question that does ask for textual evidence is question #11 from *The Young Man and the Sea* (Philbrick, 2004) that reads, "Now that you have finished the book, think about Tyler's relationship with his father. Describe one way in which this relationship is different at the end of the book from the way it was at the beginning of the book. Who do you think has changed more? Be sure to use examples from the story in your answer." This example is significant in several ways. First, it makes explicit Scholastic's intention that these questions be used after the book has been read. Second, it tells readers to use textual evidence to support their response, thereby sending the message that in literature discussion, the discussion should keep the text at the center (Cole, 2003). Third, it is one of many, many questions that direct readers' attention to discussion of character. Such questions were the most common type of questions asked by Scholastic about all books in the sample. An overwhelming number of questions (116 out of 172) asked readers to look at characters in some way, including: comparing or contrasting characters; interpreting characters' actions, words, or emotions; judging characters' actions or attitudes; noting characters' development over the course of the book; interpreting characters' names; and considering how characters deal with family and issues of significant loss or death. Many questions asked readers to imagine interacting with the characters in some way, or to consider how they identify with the characters. This high total may be due to the fact that seven of the twelve books are contemporary realistic fiction, a genre that is driven by the strength of its character portrayals. In fact, there were only two books in the sample for which questions about characters did not account for more than half of the total questions for the book. *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972) had 13 out of 15 questions related to characters, more questions than any other book in the sample. These questions appeared at all levels of the taxonomy, and would likely promote good discussion; however, they may be limiting in that the intense focus on characters might limit attention to other important elements in the book.

### *What is Not Here*

In thinking about my observations from this analysis of Scholastic's Literature Editions, and considering what I have come to understand about literature discussion groups, I not only noted what was provided for teachers and students, but also what was missing for teachers and students.

*Attention to the readers' context.* One thing that is missing in the Literature Circle Editions is attention to the context of reception. Scholastic obviously cannot know the readers or the context in which these books will be read, therefore the questions must rely heavily on the text. That is the only facet of this reading transaction of which question writers can have a secure degree of knowledge. Yes, writers may have some generic understanding of a fourth-grade reader, especially if the question writer has been a classroom teacher; however, not all of the question writers have played that role, and none of them can anticipate the exact context in which the books will be read and discussed. This might be seen as one more way in which control has been moved from the local level, putting control over educational decisions in the hands of some Other far-removed from the classroom in which that decision is enacted. If question writers knew the particular context in which these editions were being used, they could be more sure of establishing relevance for the readers by connecting to their lives, be more certain of what issues were most important or most potentially controversial in that context, and even be more assured that the language of the questions is accessible to the particular readers.

*The teacher's voice.* Another thing that is not present is a sense of the right and responsibility of teachers to compose questions for particular readers in particular contexts. It is alarming to hear Scholastic employees say that teachers don't have time to read the books they'll use in discussion groups, so that is why they rely on Scholastic to ensure the books they use are not controversial. It is alarming to hear that teachers don't always know the answers to the discussion questions, which is why Scholastic began posting teacher's guides containing suggested responses to the questions in the Literature Circle Editions. If teachers are indeed ceding responsibility to Scholastic for reading and questioning the literature discussion books in their classroom, they are not going to be able to provide the type of scaffolding necessary for students to succeed in reading and discussing literature (Bond, 2001; Nystrand et al., 1997). By handing teachers discussion questions, Scholastic is assuming control of pedagogical decisions at the expense of context and at the risk of deskilling teachers. Granted, the teacher's voice is still present in making the decision of how to use the Literature Circle Editions, but by removing the teacher from the question-composing process, the valuable modeling of how to compose questions is removed (Bond, 2001; McCormack, 1997). If teachers don't engage in the metacognitive process of attending to their own questioning as readers, they cannot model this skill for students. Because teachers certainly know their readers better than any of Scholastic's question writers, they are also the natural choice for knowing what questions will be most engaging and helpful in building understanding for readers.

*Authentic questions.* Longer, more fulfilling discussions have been noted when readers bring their own questions to the conversation (Hanssen, 1990; Almasi, O'Flahaven, & Arya, 2001; Sipe, 1998) including the teachers as readers (Nystrand et al., 1997). One thing that isn't present in the Scholastic Literature Circle Editions is the fostering of a sense of ownership over discussion by the readers themselves, since the control of the discussion is somewhat ceded to Scholastic by virtue of these printed questions. The implication is that readers are not capable of composing, or would not choose to compose, their own questions -- at least, not the kinds of "good" questions that Scholastic has composed. This may be true when readers are first beginning to learn how to participate in literature discussion groups (Maloch, 2002; Berry & Englert, 2005) but the motivation to continue participation in such groups may very well be decreased or removed altogether if readers do not sense that their questions are valid, or if they see their participation as completing a sort of oral worksheet. Research has also shown that readers from preschool age through high school are quite capable of composing sophisticated questions about the literature they encounter (Cole, 2003; Metsala et al., 1996). If these students are not encouraged to bring their own, authentic questions to the discussion, the value shifts to focus more on answers than on questions, ignoring the fact that questioning is "important cognitive work" (Cazden, 2001).

*Connections across questions.* There are few instances of connections across questions. In literature discussion groups, readers often refer back to what was said earlier, making links between topics that lead to deeper understanding (Almasi et al., 2001). The work of meaning-making is collective and cumulative. There is a danger that students who use Scholastic's questions will treat each question as a separate element, working their way from one question to the next without making connections (Marshall et al., 1995).

*Affective response questions.* When I talk with others about books we've read, I simply want to ask, "Do you like this book? Why or why not?" and I anticipate some not-so-simple responses. Scholastic's questions address affective response in very particular ways, and very rarely. For example, question #15 for *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972) asks, "What do you like most about Jess and Leslie's friendship? Does their friendship seem realistic to you? What can we learn from this book about friendship?" The first part of the question gives readers the opportunity to express their feelings, but in a directed way. There is no welcoming invitation for the student who does not like Jess and Leslie's friendship to express an opinion. This question ends with what Louise Rosenblatt would call a focus on efferent response, in which the focus is on what can be learned from the book, not how you feel as you experience the book. If we want students to experience a more well-rounded, natural literature discussion, we need to make room for more expression of emotion. Stating your feelings about a book is a natural first response for readers of all ages, as is making connections with other texts (Jacobsohn, 1994).

*Intertextual response questions.* Readers often exchange ideas about connections they've made between the current reading and other texts they've read (Jacobsohn, 1994; Gilles, 1990), but this type of intertextual response is nowhere explicitly encouraged by Scholastic's questions. While readers are prompted to make connections between aspects of the book and their own lives, they are never asked to make connections across texts. Drawing these connections is part of entering the ongoing literary conversation to which these readers may now offer their perspectives (Bakhtin, 1981). It is a way to continue expanding and enriching understanding of not just the text under consideration, but the other texts readers have encountered or will encounter in the future. Perhaps questions that prompt intertextual or affective responses are absent from Scholastic Literature Circle Editions because the company provides teachers with suggested responses in a teacher's guide for each book, and there is very little way for question writers to anticipate the types of intertextual or affective responses that students will put forth.

*Genre questions.* It has already been noted that only three genres are represented in the Literature Circle Editions collection: contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, and fantasy. The questions in these editions do not directly discuss how genre affects the text, an important part of understanding how text is constructed in various and particular ways. There is a noticeable lack of questions that address the text as a social construction, written in a particular form by a particular person in a particular context. The first two standards in the English Language Arts standards developed by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English focus on the need for students to read broadly and deeply from a variety of genres, studying the characteristics of these genres in order to learn literary conventions ("Standards for the english language arts"). In order to meet these standards, students need to discuss genre in explicit ways.

*Critical response questions.* Since Scholastic question writers cannot know the readers' context, it is perhaps understandable why this next characteristic is almost completely missing: questions that encourage critical response. Such questions prompt readers to look at how issues of power are enacted and how messages are conveyed both implicitly and explicitly within the book. For example, such questions might address messages about gender, race, sexual orientation, or class that are conveyed through the text. Readers are asked to look closely at the text, but also to step back and look at how that text operates within the real world. Research has shown that students have the ability to discuss social justice issues in literature discussion groups (Moller, 2004/2005), so they are capable of working with critical response questions. Since participation in discussion groups also contributes to readers' building of cultural identity (Gee, 2001) and provides a space for individuals to develop and change ideas (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001), attention to critical response is both desirable and possible. Scholastic's credo states that it wants to "assist and inspire students to enlarge students' concern for and understanding of today's world" ("About scholastic credo"), and certainly one way of reaching this goal is to guide students to become critical readers of their world. In an interview, Scholastic employee Michele acknowledged that the company doesn't want to create trouble for teachers by possibly introducing controversial material or asking controversial questions. The result is, despite the claim that the books chosen are those that pose "moral dilemmas" that will spark student discussion, there are many missed opportunities for critically responding to issues in these books. It is disheartening to see that only nine questions – nine questions out of the 172 questions for the twelve-book sample – sought a critical response. *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972) had only one such question, an evaluation question that asks readers to consider the appropriateness of this book. The question states, "In the past, some people have suggested that this book is inappropriate for children because it describes death, a topic that some children might not be able to handle. In your opinion, is *Bridge to Terabithia* an appropriate book for kids your age? How might reading about Jess's loss help students who have to face their own loss someday?" In answering this question, it is likely that readers will discuss possible messages about death and grief, as well as assumptions about what children can "handle" in a book's content, which is why it can be considered a question geared toward critical response.

Some of the critical response questions may prompt good discussion around stereotypes, developing cultural awareness by using the literature as a catalyst, but there are only a few of these. This may be related to the racial or ethnic identity of the authors and main characters associated with these books (refer to table 4.4), but more research would need to be done with this particular focus. It is problematic, however, if the assumption is that the only literature appropriate for critical response is literature that features, or is written by, people representing cultural groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in children's literature. All literature may – or should – engender critical response. One question that might prompt discussion around stereotypes was written for *The Art of Keeping Cool* (Lisle, 2000), a piece of historical fiction set on the East coast of the United States during WWII. The question asks, "The townspeople suspect Abel of being a spy for the Germans, in part because he has a German accent and is a recluse. Do you think their reasons are justified? Why or why not?" This is the sort of question that Scholastic presumably is hoping for, when choosing books that focus on "moral dilemmas." It is also one of the more risky questions, one that requires skillful facilitation and not a question for which a teacher may look to Scholastic's on-line "teacher's guide" for the correct response. This question might also lead to discussion of how the historical context affects characters' attitudes and actions, as might be prompted by two other critical response questions, both exploring gender roles. In *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998), an award-winning piece of historical fiction, readers are asked, "Do you notice any different rules or expectations for men and women in Grandma Dowdel's town? Are there things men can do that women can't? Are there things that women can do that men can't? How do you think Grandma Dowdel would behave differently if she were a man?" In *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001), question #11 asks readers to consider, "How would the story be different if Ida's parents believed that girls didn't need an education? What if they had told her she couldn't go to high school next year?" While discussion of all of these critical response questions would benefit from acknowledging the setting of these historical fiction books, there is no prompt associated with any of the questions that suggests readers bring setting into the conversation, although surely it is the early 20th-century setting of *The Secret School* (Avi, 2001) that inspired the question writer to pose the question focusing on Ida's parents' attitudes toward educating girls. This question might puzzle readers who, if not considering setting, would not understand that high school education in the United States was not always compulsory, and not always recognized as important for girls especially. In the case of this book, it seems hard to imagine that setting will not enter into the conversation. Once again, it will be up to the teacher to seize this opportunity to infuse the discussion with talk of the historical fiction genre and how that affects critical reading of such books.

Every piece of historical fiction in the sample of Literature Circle Editions examined here contains at least one critical response question, with one notable exception. The exception is *Indian Captive* (Lenski, 1941), a 1941 book by Lois Lenski that tells the story of Mary Jemison, a white child captured by the Seneca in 1758. The book is rife with stereotypes, such as Mary's observation of the Seneca people, "With their bare bodies and red-painted faces the others all looked alike..." (p. 35), and her final realization, "It was true. She was an untamed savage, growing up like a wild beast in the forest" (p. 295). These perspectives were likely due to the time period in which Lenski was writing, a time in which "diversity" and "multiculturalism" were not yet terms in the general public's lexicon. While this may explain the stereotypical portrayals, it is disturbing that nowhere in Scholastic's questions for this book are readers supplied with questions that might prompt a more critical reading of the book against the backdrop of contemporary sensibilities with regard to multicultural literature. Out of the 172 questions in this study's sample, there is only one question that directly addresses the issue of race, and this is in a piece of contemporary realistic fiction, *Surviving the Applewhites* (Tolan, 2002). Readers of this book are asked, "What is 'color-blind casting'? Why is it important to Randolph Applewhite? How does it transform his theatrical production? What do you think the author is saying about appearances and the way we judge people by them?" Scholastic's credo includes the goal of assisting and inspiring students "to build a society free of prejudice and hate" ("About scholastic credo"). This will less likely be accomplished if opportunities for discussion of such issues are not capitalized upon.

When thinking about what questions I would ask of these books that Scholastic did not ask, I repeatedly raised questions around topics related to critical response. I wanted to talk with other readers about

- how gender roles are portrayed in both traditional and nontraditional ways in *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1972).
- the stereotypes of American Indians in *Indian Captive* (Lenski, 1941), how they might be connected to the time of its original publication and why this book is still in publication.
- how class differences are portrayed in *Princess Academy* (Hale, 2005), and how these intersect with messages about gender.
- implicit and explicit messages in *Each Little Bird That Sings* (Wiles, 2005) about what it means to "serve" others.
- who is brave in *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* (Creech, 2003), who has power, and what might readers infer about blindness from reading this book.

Granted, I am an adult reading this literature. Bond (2001) noted that fifth-graders in her study of student-led discussion groups rarely raised issues related to critical response, and she struggled with the teacher's responsibility for introducing such issues into discussion; however, the content of teachers' questions conveys to students what is important (Chuska, 1995; Applebee, 1996). If teachers do not ask questions that evoke critical response, they are not conveying the importance of such questions and conversations.

*Writers' craft questions.* Although many of my questions – and I had many more than the examples I've just listed – were related to critical response, I also had other questions that are valuable to consider. Where are more questions about how and why the authors have done what they've done? Research has shown that discussion of the author's hand in creating the text is a part of proficient literature discussion (Noe & Johnson, 1999; Almasi et al., 2001). Scholastic's questions do not encourage such discussion, yet there are definitely books included in this collection that would prompt such questions. How does Richard Peck use humor in *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) to establish tone? Is the comedy of errors in *Never Mind!* (Avi & Vail, 2004) plausible, or has the collaboration of two authors left plot inconsistencies? Where are passages that make you pause in puzzlement, amusement, fear, sadness, or just plain awe at the way the author has strung those words together? These questions bring the author into the discussion, something that happened rarely in Scholastic's questions. The question writer for *The Young Man and the Sea* (Philbrick, 2004) did include two questions that reference the author, and these serve as useful examples of how such reference may serve as a catalyst for rich discussion or may serve as a workbook-like exercise. Question #15 fulfills the first role, as it reads, "As Skiff is making his way to Jeffrey's Ledge, he is having a conversation with another character even though he is alone in the boat. To whom is he talking? Why do you think the author chose to write this dialogue?" This question references a complicated scene and focuses attention on an interesting and sophisticated choice on the part of the author. Question #6 also focuses on an author's choice, but in such a generic sense as to make the book itself fairly irrelevant. This question reads, "Authors often use personification to make objects in their stories seem human. In this story, the author frequently personifies the *Mary Rose*. Choose one passage from the text and explain how that passage is an example of personification." This focus on a literary device does not focus attention on building understanding of the text itself; the focus is on demonstrating understanding of the literary device of personification. In this case, the text has become a tool for learning something else. (On a side note, this occurred in another question for this particular book. Question #2 reads, "Describe a fact you learned about bluefin tuna in the story." It's not clear why this is important for understanding the book, and facts are typically reported or stated, not "described.")

An analysis question that focuses more literally on the construction of the book and also has the potential to evoke critical response comes from *Never Mind!* (Avi & Vail, 2004). Question #10 asks, "What are some differences between a book that's written from the point of view of one person and a book that's written from the point of view of two different people, such as *Never Mind!*? How does the dual point of view in *Never Mind!* affect the way you, the reader, experience the setting, action, events, and characters of the story?" This is a rare sort of question in that it asks readers to recognize and discuss the constructed nature of the text by focusing on point of view. In addition to helping readers better understand the novel, this discussion may also help readers who are aspiring writers, as they focus on writer's craft through this question. Because this book is told in the alternating voices of Meg and Edward, this question may very likely also lead to critical response through discussion of gender issues in the book, and the possible stereotyping implied in the portrayals of these characters (i.e., the boy who is unconcerned about grades; the girl who is obsessed with being popular). This question has great potential for promoting critical thinking in this area. As Evans (1997) notes, texts that provide readers with characters who either reinforce or contradict traditional gender roles may help readers challenge stereotypes through discussion, but only if they are guided to "read against the grain" (p. 170). Simply providing the text is not enough. A question focusing on point of view, such as this analysis question from Scholastic, may prompt discussion of gender in a productive way.

*Attention to diversity.* A crucial thing missing is more balanced attention to diverse, or multicultural, literature. Boutte (2002) makes the case for the use of such literature by noting, "Presenting primarily Eurocentric literature gives children only one perspective of the world, which may lead them to hold misconceptions about other cultures, and possibly result in prejudice and stereotypes" (p. 150). In her interview, Michele noted that such literature, while valued by Scholastic, is difficult to publish in these editions because it "has more issues in it because they try to be real," and Scholastic has noted its concern over bringing more "issues" into the classroom. At the same time, in its credo, Scholastic professes a commitment to respecting diversity when it states that the company is dedicated to enlarging "students' concern for and understanding of today's world" as well as inspiring students "to help build a society free of prejudice and hate" ("About scholastic credo"). It is hard to reconcile these two positions. Both seemingly are born out of the desire to respect teachers and students, since the first position could be interpreted as respect for the difficult nature of the teacher's job, and the second position is an explicit statement of respect for diversity. Respect seems to be subverted in both cases, however, since the first position could alternatively be interpreted as disrespecting the professional judgment of teachers by attempting to shield them from imagined controversy, and the second position is just that – a position statement. If students do not encounter diverse representations in the texts used by their literature discussion groups, there is the implication that such populations are not valued in literature worthy of close analysis and discussion. In addition to the lack of diverse literature, there is a lack of questions that address the literature in a way that encourages thinking multiculturally, wherein readers learn to look at all literature through the lens of diversity (Cai, 1998).

Scholastic is not alone in struggling with the problem of respecting its diverse audience in relation to discussion of critical issues. As a novice teacher, Karen Brown (2005) was afraid of criticism from parents, other teachers, or administrators if controversial issues arose during literature discussions. She was conscious of her diverse class community, and was unsure how to discuss social or personal issues with her students. Therefore, she recognized that she often held back from asking questions that might lead to more critical exploration of a topic, and she often stopped discussions prematurely when students raised such questions on their own. Reflecting on this tendency now that she has more teaching experience, Brown advises teachers to "just do it" (p. 247), but with the use of good judgment and sensitivity. Therefore, if Scholastic published more diverse literature – literature featuring main characters reflecting more diverse heritage than the 24 out of 61 books in the collection analyzed in this study with European American protagonists, and the 28 with characters of indeterminate cultural heritage – the company would support Brown's advice to not steer away from discussing issues that a diverse class community finds relevant. In her interview, Michele (a member of Scholastic's production staff) said, "You have to respect the diversity of the country, and everybody has different backgrounds.... It's always a concern of ours." If respecting diversity and acknowledging that "everybody has different backgrounds" is truly a guiding principle for the company, it is puzzling to see a lack of diversity represented in this collection.

*An expanded target audience.* Connected to the main market for these editions, the Arrow Book Club, I question the absence of these editions of books for younger readers, since it has been shown that younger readers can participate in such discussions (Metsala et al., 1996; McIntyre, 2007; Sheppard, 1990). Scholastic employee, Diane, asserted that literature groups function differently in the younger grades, and her impression of primary grade reading groups is understandable, given the fact that her experiences in schools are limited. In chapter three she was quoted as saying,

> … on the 2nd grade level, the reading groups are more like, 'Let's all sit here and read parts of the book together, like around the circle,' and we would have to change what the questions are like, because the questions in a second-grade book would be like, 'What color shirt was Robert wearing?" or there would be a lot less… They couldn't follow Bloom's taxonomy, first of all. Because we have a difficult time making it easy enough for Arrow, let alone for Lucky, so I think it would be a whole different procedure.

Although it's reminiscent of the round robin reading experiences of the 1960s and 1970s, there are many places where the reading instruction provided today reflects this type of structure (Taylor et al., 2003). What is disconcerting, however, is the assumption that students at this level "couldn't follow Bloom's taxonomy." Based on Diane's suggestion for an appropriate question in this situation – "What color shirt was Robert wearing?" – there is the implication that only the very basic levels of the taxonomy (i.e., knowledge and comprehension) are readily handled by young students. There is research evidence to refute this limitation. Sipe (1998) found that even first graders were capable of handling questions at a higher level, displaying ample ability in the critical thinking such questions demand. Diane's claim seems to reflect a limited knowledge of classroom context. It is hoped that teachers of second- or third-grade students would use literature discussion groups and might benefit from being encouraged to do so by Scholastic. One way of providing this encouragement might be through promoting Literature Circle Editions in the Lucky Book Club, which is aimed at grades 2-3. A suggestion for Scholastic would be to discuss this possibility with its advisory board.

*Acknowledgment of the social.* A final, crucial thing that is missing from Scholastic Literature Circles is acknowledgment of the social aspect of literature discussion groups. Nowhere do the questions address the fact that these are intended to be used collaboratively. By labeling these questions "Literature Circle Questions," Scholastic is implying that these will be used in group discussion, however the questions never ask or remind readers that they should attend to multiple perspectives from the other readers in the group. One of the purposes for using literature discussion groups is to provide a space in which individual readers come to deeper understanding of text based on the sharing of their individual interpretations. When readers share their understanding of the text, individual interpretations may be revised based on what they hear others say, as well as what they hear themselves say in the process of having to express understanding to others (Brock & Gavelek, 1998; Wells, 1999; Wolf & Heath, 1992). In proficient discussions, readers respond to one another and extend each other's comments (Almasi et al., 2001). Scholastic's questions frequently address the reader directly, by including "you" in the questions, but there is no indication that this is not directed at a single reader as opposed to the collective "you." If we accept Applebee's (1996) belief that knowledge comes from participation in conversations, we would expect questions to acknowledge the multiple voices in this conversation. As they are written now, Scholastic's questions may very well be used by individual readers in isolation.

This chapter's discussion has so far highlighted what is there and what is not there in Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions and their questions. In returning to the original questions driving this study regarding what assumptions are made about what counts as literature worthy of discussion, what counts in reading, and what counts in discussion, several possible conclusions may be drawn.

### *What Counts as Literature Worthy of Discussion?*

I have discussed how many of the decisions for which books will be published in Literature Circle Editions are made out of practicality. The company is constrained by licensing and publication rights. It also seeks the cheaper books, since it has been shown that teachers are more likely to buy those titles in multiple copies. Scholastic also has a sense of duty to include books written by tried-and-true authors (e.g., Sharon Creech, Andrew Clements) as well as newer authors (e.g., Kate DiCamillo, Shannon Hale), while at the same time not introducing potentially controversial topics into classrooms. The result is a list of titles that has some fair degree of homogeneity. In looking at the copyright dates, three-fourths of the books have been published since the new century began. This might imply that older children's literature is passé, and only newer literature is discussion-worthy. Readers may be deprived of the opportunity to experience many of the longstanding favorites in children's literature if teachers rely heavily on this collection for the material for their classes' literature discussion groups. It would be a shame if children missed the chance to talk with readers about books like *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952) or *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt, 1975), for example. As Gee has stressed, literature is one way of communicating culture. I believe that children will have a better understanding of culture if they read books written during many different eras in history. It is important that they are able to process such books with others, especially since a skilled facilitator will be able to place the books in context, guiding students to understand that the context in which a book is created directly and indirectly affects the text itself.

Looking at this list, one might infer that the literature most worthy of discussion is historical fiction or contemporary fiction written in the 21st century, especially if the books have been written by Sharon Creech, Richard Peck, Avi, or Kate DiCamillo. These four authors whose books are most heavily represented in the Scholastic Literature Circle Editions collection are all authors who have won both the Newbery Medal and the Newbery Honor. Avi's *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* (2002a) is on Scholastic's list. For this work, Avi won the Newbery Medal in 2003, and he won the Newbery Honor for two earlier books. Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* (Creech, 1994) won the Newbery Medal in 1995, and *The Wanderer* (Creech, 2000) won the Newbery Honor in 2001. Both of these books are in Scholastic Literature Circle Editions. Richard Peck and Kate DiCamillo have their Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor titles published in these editions. Perhaps that is why these authors' books make up nearly a third of the collection. Winning these awards and honors solidifies their legitimacy as authors of "quality" literature.

This collection of Literature Circle Editions pulls together award-winning literature, traditional favorites (e.g., *Sounder*), and contemporary, popular literature (e.g., *Chocolate Fever*), although these categories are by no means exclusive. Although the genres and themes are not terribly varied, they do seem appropriate for the target age group of readers. The most popular themes revolve around family relationships, growing up, and surviving in school, with 89% of the books representing the genres of contemporary realistic fiction and historical fiction. With a fair balance of gender in terms of main characters, the list is likely to appeal to readers of both genders. Regarding cultural diversity, the collection has not been analyzed (other than in a cursory way, as discussed in chapters four and six) to assess such representation, but it is encouraging to see two books by a Native American author, Joseph Bruchac, on the list. Since Scholastic products are so widely used, it will be important for future research to address this issue of diversity in the collection.

It is interesting to note that there have been 11 titles added to the collection between October 2006 and April 2007. Of these 11, two of them are books from Buckley and Ferguson's *Sisters Grimm* series (Buckley & Ferguson, 2005), two of them are from Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series (Riordan, 2005), and one of them is from Dan Gutman's *Baseball Card Adventure* series (Gutman, 1999), from which there was already one title on the list. This suggests that when Scholastic finds an author or series that is deemed popular by teachers and/or students, it will include multiple titles as Literature Circle Editions. Caution is advised here, since this may dilute the variety of reading experiences that students have, if they are reading and discussing books predominantly from this list. Recall the comment of Diane, a Scholastic employee, who said that one of the reasons Literature Circle Editions were not created for the Lucky Book Club audience concerns the nature of reading material at that age. "Lucky's a lot of series.... How many questions can you come up with about a *Magic Tree House* (1992) book?" I question to what extent the *Sisters Grimm* series, or either of the others represented on the Arrow Literature Circle Edition list, is more likely than the *Magic Tree House* (1992) series to promote a variety of questions. This apparently new trend to select series books for the Arrow Literature Circle Editions may increase the uniformity of reading experience.

Even if teachers decide to rely on the Literature Circle Editions for their text choices, they should realize that different kinds of books invite different kinds of talk, and they should keep their discussion goals in mind as they select particular books from the list. According to Martinez and Roser (1995), some books are more conducive to drawing readers into the story world, some books prompt more discussion of theme and character dilemmas, and some books have such distinct structures or language features that a focus on writer's craft is most natural. The main point is to provide readers with variety. It is possible to accomplish this with Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions, but only if teachers are familiar with the books. For example, *Princess Academy* (Hale, 2005) draws readers into the story world; *The Art of Keeping Cool* (Lisle, 2000) certainly encourages discussion of theme and character dilemmas; and *Never Mind!*'s (Avi & Vail, 2004) alternating point of view provides a natural focus on writer's craft. The questions for these books do include questions that would direct talk to these foci as well. It will be up to the teachers to ensure that their students engage with a variety of texts to provide these different experiences. If Scholastic begins to rely more heavily on adding books for particular series or from particular authors, it is even more imperative that teachers pick and choose carefully from these offerings which will become ever less varied.

There is a concern about bringing potentially troublesome issues into the classroom, born out of the sense of responsibility the company feels toward its teachers. This is a longstanding issue. As Lippert reported in his 1979 history of the company, "there were and continue to be complaints over titles offered, story incidents, or language used in dialogue" (p. 255). After conducting interviews with Scholastic employees for this study, I can safely say that this continues to be a consideration for the company, as the editing staff takes care to note "every single swear word, if there's kissing, if there's alcohol, if there's cigarettes." If readers use the Literature Circle Edition questions, regardless of potential controversies related to the text, the dearth of critical response questions will help to ensure they do not touch on controversial issues; however, by choosing books that addressed "social, ethical, and emotional issues," teacher Karen Brown (2005) found that her students focused on such issues in their discussions without her ever directing them to do so. Once again, the amount of freedom students are granted to deviate from the list of questions during their discussion will ultimately determine the likelihood that potentially controversial issues will arise.

### *What Counts in Reading?*

If the Scholastic questions are used as guidelines, the most important thing to focus on in reading involves attention to characters. As was noted earlier, 116 questions focused on characters in some way. There is research to suggest that a focus on character development and relationships is much more appealing to female readers (Sullivan, 2004). If that is the case, it is no wonder that boys think literacy practices are more associated with females than males, as results from a survey of middle school boys indicated (Lingo, 2007). This survey also revealed that boys prefer themes of action and adventure. The researcher had conducted all-boy book clubs with middle school students for five years and compiled a list of selections read by these clubs. Titles included such books as *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1987), *Hoot* (Hiaasen, 2002), and *Stormbreaker* (Horowitz, 2001). Out of 41 books on the list, only one, *The Young Man and the Sea* (Philbrick, 2004), is included in Scholastic's list of Literature Circle Editions. Lingo suggests that it is not surprising that boys associate literacy practices more with females, since there is a strong likelihood that boys' first reading teachers are their mothers and female primary teachers. I propose that the heavy emphasis on characters in the Literature Circle Editions questions, as well as the absence of many action and adventure books from the collection, may support Lingo's theory since the people I interviewed who are most closely associated with these editions are all female. It is unsettling to think that the implication of what counts in reading are the books and topics that most appeal to girls. This runs the risk of further disenfranchising boy readers in the classroom.

While connecting with characters appears to "count" in reading, whether or not readers can see themselves in these books does not seem to count as much if those readers are in the historically underrepresented cultural minority, as my initial analysis of the diversity of this collection suggests. With 24 main characters clearly of European American descent, and only nine characters clearly representing minority populations, there is a high probability that student readers from underrepresented cultural groups will not culturally identify with the characters in these books.

My analysis further suggests that what counts in reading is not a recognition and understanding of the constructed nature of the text. There are very few questions that ask readers to consider the author's role and how the context in which the book is written affects the text. For example, knowing that Katherine Paterson's inspiration for *Bridge to Terabithia* (1972) was a real tragedy that her son experienced as a child could prompt readers to explore how this knowledge influences their reading of the book. In addition to exploring authors' motives, exploring their technique can not only influence readers' metacognition regarding their reading process, but can also prompt metacognition of students' own writing process. Explicit attention to variations and patterns in authors' use of language, for example, provides students with viable models for their own writing. This sort of "thinking behind the text" is largely missing from Scholastic's questions.

### *What Counts in Discussing Literature?*

The very use of Bloom's taxonomy as a frame for these questions suggests two things that are at odds with literature discussion groups. First, the use of the taxonomy suggests that questions are to be used as a type of summative assessment. The fact that 45% of the questions are at the knowledge and comprehension levels of the taxonomy suggests that these are questions to assess students' understanding of the text as the teacher, or more accurately, as Scholastic, understands it. The implication that this assessment is summative rather than formative is affirmed by the fact that many of the questions ask readers to pull information from various parts of the book, or the questions explicitly direct readers to consider their responses in light of having finished reading the book. This does not support Wells' assertion that literature discussion groups are a place for building knowledge, not reporting on what is immutable (1999).

Second, the use of the taxonomy suggests that discussion should proceed from lower-level questions (i.e., those at the knowledge and comprehension levels) to higher-level questions (i.e., those at the synthesis and evaluation levels). In fact, Michele from

Scholastic said that questions were reviewed by an editor to ensure that "it started from easier to hard as you got into the book." This suggests that the questions are to be used, in order, during the reading of the book; however, the questions do not correspond with the sequence of events in the book. While it is apparent that these questions are intended to be used after the book has been read, it is not clear if they are intended to be answered in order, beginning with question #1 and progressing through to the final question in the list. As noted in chapter two, when students were handed teacher-generated questions to use in their discussion groups, members proceeded to answer the questions in order, without forming connections or elaborating responses (Marshall et al., 1995). It seems likely that the same thing would happen if students are handed Scholastic's questions. In fact, the message from Michele seems to confirm that this is the intention. In that case, the implicit message is that readers move from basic levels of understanding, as addressed by knowledge questions, to the highest levels of understanding, as addressed by evaluation questions. This is not a realistic representation of how readers build understanding and move through book discussions (Hanssen, 1990), although it has been established that readers may begin with factual questions to solidify foundational knowledge of the text. Lingo (2007) cautions, "As educators, we have this nagging urge to test students to see if they have really read the book, but that kind of inquisition will defeat struggling readers who have taken the risk to participate in a book club" (p. 27). How participants perceive themselves as readers and how others perceive them as readers affects and is affected by their participation in literature discussion groups (Evans, 2002; Matthews & Kesner, 2003). The sort of "test" questions that are found at the knowledge and comprehension levels narrow the range of possible responses and increase the risk that struggling readers will not be perceived as successful participants.

It has also been established that just as readers do not move through a discussion by moving through a book in chapter sequence (Hanssen, 1990), topics are not discussed in discrete segments. Discussions are recursive (Spiegel, 2005) and there is evidence of inter- and intratopic coherence (Almasi, O'Flahaven, & Arya, 2001). It is encouraging that Scholastic's questions do not generally correlate to a particular chapter sequence. If they did, it would be particularly disturbing since it would imply that only later chapters in a book are appropriate for questions at the highest levels of Bloom's taxonomy. It is somewhat discouraging to note the limited number of connections made across questions, as this does not model the type of coherence that Almasi describes as indicative of proficient discussion. If students are to make connections across questions, teachers will need to actively model this and encourage students to supply connecting questions themselves.

Discussion can be messy. It is not linear; topics are not discussed in discrete segments with no doubling back to tackle them again; and it is not realistic to expect that the more evaluative questions will necessarily arise at the end of the discussion, and only after the whole book has been read. It has been my experience, and the experience of others involved in the study of literature discussion groups (Hanssen, 1990; Sheppard, 1990; Noe & Johnson, 1999; Ellington & Freimiller, 2002), that when readers of any age get together, they jump in to discuss what they found most enjoyable, most upsetting, or most confusing about what they've read. This suggests another inference that might be made by looking at the questions. What counts in discussion is not how readers felt about the book. The affective, or emotional, response is not given recognition by Scholastic as an important feature of literature discussion.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has presented much to think about in terms of the implied assumptions about literature, reading and discussion. There are certainly some potential benefits to be gained from using Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions. Students may be exposed to classic, award-winning, and popular literature with an opportunity to discuss that literature with peers, if teachers choose to use these editions in discussion groups. Teachers have the opportunity to obtain affordable sets of these books for their classrooms, and they are provided with questions that do present attention to a range of thinking skills, although not the balanced range that Scholastic intends. For teachers who are hesitant to use literature discussion groups because of lack of time, lack of experience in composing questions, or fear of discussions moving in an undesirable direction, Scholastic's questions may provide a safe beginning. For teachers who are more experienced with literature discussion, these editions may be culled for questions that do draw on higher-level thinking, serving as models for students' own questions.

While the focus in this study has primarily relied on the assumption that these editions will be used mainly by teachers with students in school settings, it must be remembered that these editions are available through Scholastic Book Fairs as well as through the Arrow Book Club. For parents or community members who are interested in engaging groups of children in literature discussion, but who have limited understanding of how to facilitate such discussions, these Literature Circle Editions can provide a starting point for selecting literature and initiating discussions. By the very nature of their existence, these books send the message that literature discussion is valuable – that readers have something to gain by talking about books with others instead of just closing and reshelving the books after they've been read by isolated readers.

The appeal of a set of books and discussion questions lies in the trust that this a safe vehicle by which literature discussion may be conducted. The idea of safety leads me to discussion of potential drawbacks to using Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions. One drawback is that while Scholastic, with all good intentions, is trying to provide teachers with a tool they can trust, teachers may trust that tool too much. Since the books contain ready-made questions with suggested responses freely available on Scholastic's website, teachers may feel absolved from even having to read the books. If they have read the books, teachers may participate in discussion groups as curious readers themselves, not relying on Scholastic's questions, but instead asking authentic questions to model the importance of such questions in discussion (McIntyre, 2007; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). Galda and Beach (2001) describe how, as a result of teacher modeling of response strategies, students are better able to use knowledge of literary terms and genre elements to pose questions, make closer connections between life and text, critique the text, and generate deeper interpretations. If teachers have not read the books, their participation is limited to relying on Scholastic's questions. The opportunity for necessary teacher modeling of authentic questioning and responding in discussion is removed – which may still be the case even if teachers *have* read the books, but rely solely on Scholastic's questions. While the teacher may still model the social skills necessary for participation, the scaffolding that has been shown to be necessary for effective discussion will be missing. Scholastic, in trying to help the teacher, may be hurting the student reader who deserves the benefits of engaging in informed discussion with a fellow reader, his or her teacher, around a piece of commonly shared literature.

The Literature Circle Edition questions are constructed by people working individually, far-removed from the context of use. Question writers have disparate backgrounds and may therefore hold different interpretations of Bloom's taxonomy and the role of literature discussion groups in a classroom. It is interesting that Scholastic's group of question writers is a mix of teachers and writers with literature backgrounds. One has to wonder if these people look at literature the same way. It is very possible that the "literature people" serving as question writers have never worked with intermediate grade students in a classroom. It is also very possible that the former teachers who are writing questions have not been involved in literature discussion in a classroom in quite some time. This would seemingly make it difficult to decide what are appropriate questions for discussion. For example, some may believe they should be focusing purely on literary aspects of the book, and others may be thinking about the curriculum tie-in possibilities that guided Scholastic personnel to select this particular book for a Literature Circle Edition in the first place. While it is possible that the question writers may not have experience with teaching with literature discussion groups in classrooms, the same is true with the Scholastic editors who look at the questions at this level. These are young, smart people, but they may not have a strong literature background, and, according to Scholastic employee Michele, they "dip in and out of education" (personal communication, March 15, 2007) – they may not have experience or training in teaching. They may visit classrooms to observe what teachers are doing, and they may talk with teachers on a regular basis, but they most likely have not had the experience and responsibility of planning and implementing instruction with literature. It also seems logical to ask what qualifies the books' authors to review discussion questions about their books, especially questions designed to correlate to Bloom's taxonomy. Undoubtedly, there are some authors who have close relationships with their reading audiences in schools, and certainly they have a vested concern in the literary interpretation of their work, but they do not likely share the perspective of a teacher who may be thinking of literature discussion in different ways. In sum, if teachers are relying on Scholastic's Literature Circle Edition questions, they are using questions that have very possibly been constructed and reviewed by adults who have never observed or interacted with children in a literature discussion since they themselves were children.

The books in the collection and the accompanying questions are "safe" in that they are the work of popular and tried-and-true authors, and even when themes may suggest potentially controversial topics for discussion, the questions provided do not tend to encourage critical response. As Scholastic employees indicated, the intention of these editions is not to bring controversial issues into the classroom, which is reportedly why they have found it difficult to bring diverse literature into the collection. The lack of attention to diversity and critical response opportunities may seriously limit students' experience with sharing and receiving multiple perspectives, as well as limit the practice in presenting and defending arguments that is so important in building higher-level, critical thinking skills (Almasi & Gambrell, 1997; Cazden, 2001).

The purpose of this study, ultimately, is to match Scholastic's goal in doing something to help teachers. By looking closely at these Literature Circle Editions, I have attempted to bring attention to the importance of literature discussion and the implications of using publisher-generated questions as the basis of such discussion. The next, and final, chapter in this dissertation will focus on implications for teachers, readers, and teacher educators, as well as recommendations for Scholastic. I will also discuss suggestions for future research in the continuing effort to help teachers and readers have productive literature experiences.

# Chapter 7: Final Thoughts and Next Steps

Teacher educator E. Wendy Saul (1995) became frustrated when she asked her students, all prospective teachers, to compose questions they might ask of students around a particular piece of children's literature. She found that these questions were "mechanical and uncritical and uninspired" (p. 29). Many of the questions focused on factual or literal understanding of text. To help them think about these "questions from basal land" (p. 31), Saul asked her students to look at their questions and consider, "How is the answer to the question you ask informed by the text?" and "Why does that question interest you?" and "Is that the way you would speak to someone whose ideas you respect?" (p. 31). By considering literature questions in this way, teachers are pushed to keep questions facing the text, keep questions authentic, and keep questions sophisticated enough for the intended respondents. Teacher educators like Saul recognize the importance of constructing such questions, and recognize that students of all ages need assistance in learning how to do this type of question construction. As questions lie at the crux of acquiring and building new knowledge (Langer, 1995), it is appropriate that research efforts concentrate in this area. Obbink (1992) reminds us, "The questions we ask of literature (and the questions we expect students to ask as well) are not innocent: whether we intend them to or not, they arise from where we stand, they make visible and invisible, they define and refine our position" (p. 40). By the questions we ask, and don't ask, we move some things into the spotlight, and some things into the shadows. The questions teachers ask convey to students the teachers' positions toward literature and its place in our experience.

This dissertation has described the analysis of questions in Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions. The results of this analysis have certain implications for teachers, teacher educators, students, and other readers, as well as for Scholastic. This final chapter will discuss these implications, and offer suggestions for further research along this line.

### *Implications for Teachers*

It is not easy to facilitate literature discussions groups using trade books in classrooms and feel confident that standards are being met, when there are so many commercial programs available that use "scientifically research-based" claims for specific alignment with particular standards. It is important for teachers to be clear about their goals for using literature discussion, and to think carefully about the content and structure of these discussions (Noe & Johnson, 1999). Some teachers may struggle with creating their own questions, creating questions with their students, or allowing students to create their own questions. Teachers are more and more frequently being encouraged, or in some places required, to use basal (or core) reading programs which provide them not only the literature to read with students, but the accompanying questions as well. This has significant implications for preservice and beginning teachers who may not have been given the experience and the responsibility for guiding literature discussion without such a prop, something that is especially probable for those elementary school teachers who have concentrated their studies in an academic discipline in the sciences or social studies, having minimal instruction in language arts in their teacher preparation program. They may have learned to rely on basal reading programs for explicit instruction in how to discuss literature, not trusting their own expertise, and likely being justified in not doing so. By providing such teachers with literature discussion questions, Scholastic may indeed be facilitating the use of trade book literature in classrooms where teachers insecure in their ability to lead literature discussion might otherwise never encourage such discussion. This is a possible positive outcome; however, it must be remembered that the successful use of children's literature rests on the expertise of the teacher (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). The possible drawback associated with this is if teachers without expertise in facilitating literature discussion only see these questions as a means of assessing comprehension, or as the sole resource for student-led literature discussion. Without more guidance or suggestions for the use of these questions – beyond the direction "To get more out of the experience of reading [the particular Literature Circle Edition title], use these questions and activities" – teachers may simply use them in the same way that they use comprehension assessment questions that follow a basal reading selection. Thus, there is the possibility that literature is being basalized on its own turf. Hade (1994) described the evolution of this term, basalization, from its initial reference to the rewriting of children's literature for inclusion in basal readers, to its broader reference to the use of any basal-like activities in conjunction with children's literature. Smith (1990) describes this "basalizing" of literature as teachers transferring practices learned when teaching with a basal reading series to teaching using trade book literature. By analyzing the questions included in Literature Circle Editions, this study has explored the possibility that such basalization is being promoted by Scholastic.

As evidenced by numerous studies (McIntyre, 2007; Long & Gove, 2003/2004; Bond, 2001) students do need guidance in learning how to conduct literature discussion, including learning how to ask their own questions. Perhaps Scholastic's questions provide the necessary scaffolding for students if teachers are not willing or able to construct such scaffolding experiences themselves. The implication of this is that teachers may not see the necessity of considering their particular students or context when thinking about literature discussion. Teachers will also be unable to help students understand the process of composing questions if they are handed the end-product, the questions themselves. In this case, the focus is on the questions, not the questioning, a skill that is important for students to master (Cazden, 2001). If teachers rely on the Literature Circle Edition questions, students may be taught how to *answer* questions, but not how to *ask* questions.

It is important to remember also that one of the implications for teachers relying on the questions in these editions is that they may perceive themselves – or be perceived by others – as being incapable of composing appropriate and effective literature discussion questions for their students. This implies that the teacher is not a constructor of curriculum but a conduit for curriculum developed from afar. Teachers can either control this tool, or they can let it control them. If they abdicate control to Scholastic, by using these books and questions just as they are, teachers may be allowing themselves to be deskilled. It seems wise to question the choice of allowing publishers to direct curriculum and pedagogy in this way.

### *Implications for Students and Other Readers*

One implication for readers stems from analysis of the overall collection. The range of literature that students will read and discuss may be restricted by the Literature Circle Edition offerings provided by Scholastic, whose selection decisions are frequently determined based on a low cost and absence of possibly controversial topics. Scholastic employees reported that marketing statistics have shown that teachers will buy the multipacks of Literature Circle Edition books if they are priced at the lower end. The implication is that teachers are indeed trusting Scholastic to provide them with good books for literature study, since cost seems to be the primary guiding factor in what they purchase. Without detailed statistics about how many copies of each Literature Circle Edition title are purchased, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about this. What can be concluded more firmly is that readers who only discuss books from this collection in their literature discussion groups will have limited opportunity to explore diverse literature in these groups. Michele from Scholastic lamented the difficulty in publishing more diverse literature due to her perception that such literature often handles the difficult issues that the company tries to avoid in these editions, but her regret about this will not be information that teachers and students possess. Instead, by looking at the Literature Circle Editions, the implication is that literature by and about underrepresented cultures is either not appropriate for discussion, or is simply not being published at all.

Another implication for students is that unknown adults at Scholastic, in collusion with teachers, have authority over the content of a literature discussion and the way in which that discussion should proceed. These adults control the discussion by virtue of the questions that are posed. Peter Hunt (1996) suggests that reading children's literature is like reading a translation, since these are texts designed by adults for a child audience, and adult readers necessarily struggle with how they approach the text. It is not ultimately possible to read with the mind of a child, even if we could match the child we imagine as the intended reader with the child reader the author envisioned when creating the text (Galda *et al.*, 2000; McGillis, 2000; Nodelman, 2000). If that is true, it follows that it is not likely that adults will ask the same questions children will ask when reading. If literature discussions are intended to help children develop their understanding of the literature they read, I contend that children's questions hold equal – if not more – value than questions developed by adults, especially adults who have no idea who these children are. When students are more actively involved in constructing the discussion, even very young students become empowered and assume more authority over their own learning, seeing themselves as resources rather than mere receivers of information (Berry & Englert, 2005; Leal, 1993).

If the implication is that readers' questions are not the most crucial for discussion, I suggest that this will reduce student engagement. Nystrand (1997) suggests that if students are simply responding to teachers' questions, they are not truly involved in authentic discourse, which he claims is the only kind of discourse that engages students. If students are not engaged with the discussion of the reading material, their participation will very likely be significantly reduced. Their understanding of the book may even be hampered by questions that suggest students' initial interpretations are wrong. For example, when question #7 for *A Long Way from Chicago* (Peck, 1998) asks, "When do you think Joe stops thinking of Grandma Dowdel as a bad influence?" this may stymie the reader who thinks that Joe does *not* stop thinking of Grandma Dowdel as a bad influence, or the reader who thinks that Joe *never* thought Grandma Dowdel was a bad influence. Such a question may preclude these students from responding, and thereby cause them to lose the opportunity to present their case for their own interpretations. The very wording of the question has already told them that they are "wrong" and since this question has been printed in the book itself, it carries a weight that surpasses the weight of the students' seemingly at-odds interpretation, which they may think exists only in their individual minds. When students are thereby discouraged from sharing multiple perspectives, they are less likely to engage in the kind of cognitive conflict that continues to promote active involvement with the literature (Anzul, 1993; Langer, 1995, McMahon et al., 1997).

A reader participating in a literature discussion group that relies solely on Scholastic's questions may come to believe that not only are her questions irrelevant, but so is her personal reaction to the book. The lack of questions attending to affective response implies that the emotional response to a piece of literature has no place in discussion. It might be inferred that the purpose of reading has no connection to the emotions. There is a danger in removing the emotional component from literature study (Rosenblatt, 1995). Without questions that ask readers to consider how they feel about the book, there is no acknowledgment that our emotions influence our understanding.

While these questions ask readers to focus on what they think, not on what they feel, they are not often asked to think critically about the text. There is a telling lack of questions about issues related to race, for example. My interviews with Scholastic employees clearly revealed that this is intentional, as avoiding possible controversial issues for the teacher is one of the company's considerations. This is not information that most teachers and readers of these books will know, however, so the implication is that such questions are not appropriate to raise during discussion. Another, perhaps worse implication, is that there are no issues related to race (or ethnicity, religion, social class, etc.) in these books. This should not be assumed as a consequence of there being – as my initial investigation has suggested – a low number of books in the collection by and about underrepresented cultures. Issues of race – even confronting the lack of explicit attention to race – can enter into conversation about almost any book. Of course, critical response does not just focus on race. The low number of questions related to discussion of implicit and explicit messages related to many significant social issues implies that this literature exists outside of the culture(s) in which it is written and read.

This may well be the implication that encompasses all others: the context in which a book is written and read is irrelevant for how it should be discussed. The dearth of questions acknowledging the author's hand in the creation of the text, or the setting in which the book was written, implies that it is not terribly important to consider the constructed nature of text. As has been shown, if one uses Scholastic's questions as a guideline, discussions move from the literal levels of understanding to the evaluative level, with most emphasis on knowledge, comprehension, and analysis questions. Questions at these levels rely most heavily on the text. Questions at the levels of application, synthesis, and evaluation rely more on the reader and the context. Since Scholastic question writers do not have specific knowledge of the readers and contexts of use for the Literature Circle Editions, it is understandable that there are not more questions focused on these two components in the reading transaction. It must be remembered, however, that higher-level questioning has been found to be related to student literacy growth (Taylor et al., 2003). It is hoped that teachers would supplement Scholastic's questions with those of their *own* composition which address relevant contextual issues at the level deemed appropriate for their *own* students.

If teachers rely exclusively on Scholastic to provide the literature and the questions used to discuss that literature, the underlying implication is that neither teachers nor students will experience the more authentic process of selecting literature that they deem worthy of discussion, crafting questions that address the book in ways that are personally meaningful, and directing discussions as appropriate in their particular context. The Scholastic employees with whom I spoke all agreed that Literature Circle Editions are just one more tool for the busy teacher. Its effectiveness ultimately rests in the hands of the teachers who choose to use this tool in their classrooms. If this is a "tool" that teachers will encounter, it is also important that Scholastic Literature Circle Editions, and similar products, be examined in teacher preparation programs.

### *Implications for Teacher Educators*

I began this research through my role as a teacher educator, so it is only appropriate that I consider the implications of this research for teacher education.

In a study of teachers' facilitation of literature discussions in their elementary classrooms, it was found that despite the utilization of children's literature trade books, teachers were using questioning strategies reminiscent of the questioning used with basal reading programs (Scharer and Peters, 1996). Their implementation of this new style of reading instruction was guided by their beliefs about reading and reading instruction. We may change the materials used in reading instruction from basal readers to trade book literature, but without help, teachers may be unable or unwilling to change their teaching practice if new methodology is inconsistent with their beliefs (Mahony & Archwamety, 1996). For teachers to feel comfortable with changing their instruction, they need to have the desire, knowledge, sense of control, and support from others in order to make change. By including questions in the back of the trade books, Scholastic is not providing teachers with the knowledge of how to facilitate questioning in literature discussion groups, Scholastic is not providing teachers with a sense of control over the course of the discussion, and Scholastic is not providing support for a change of instruction. Scholastic is actually providing support for the continued use of basal-like questioning with "real" literature.

It is in teacher preparation programs that students begin to seriously study what teachers think and do in order to learn how to teach their own future students. As Saul's (1995) study indicated, preservice teachers have limited experience and understanding of ways to compose authentic questions for literature discussion. Preservice teachers enter teacher preparation programs with beliefs and assumptions about children, teaching, and learning, gleaned from years of experience as students themselves (Lortie, 1975). As a result, there may well be a disconnect between prior learning and beliefs, and what they are learning in their teacher preparation program. If students' previous experiences with literature study were in classrooms where the teacher led all discussion, or where the implication was that every text contained one true meaning that students were expected to uncover, students may now be unable to accept or understand the teacher/student roles and transactional approach to reading that are basic underlying principles of literature discussion groups. In a study conducted in a children's literature class, Apol et al.(2003) found that preservice teachers were resistant to critical response, instead focusing on personal response and craft activities that had little to do with the text. The authors concluded that these preservice teachers, having limited experience with children in schools, were making assumptions about children's interactions with literature based on memories of their own childhood experiences.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) claims that teacher educators must provide opportunities for preservice teachers to critically examine their entering beliefs in order to preclude the continuing influence of negative beliefs and erroneous assumptions on shaping ideas and practice. They must become aware of how preconceptions affect interpretations of text (Rosenblatt, 1995), and be shown models of good instructional practice, creating opportunities for preservice teachers to experience that teaching as learners. As Applebee (1996) notes, teachers' behavior guides students in understanding the appropriate discourse for each subject. This can be extrapolated to teacher educators and their own students, preservice teachers. If preservice teachers come to a children's literature or reading education course after years of experience that has led them to believe that reading in school means answering questions about a basal-reader story, it is not enough to expose them to new materials. If we truly want preservice teachers to teach students how to read and discuss authentic literature, they must undergo "deep changes in thinking, to a constructivist or sociocultural perspective" (Au & Raphael, 1998, p. 145). There is hope that such change is possible. In discussing the interactive relationship between beliefs and actions, Richardson states "Beliefs are thought to drive actions; however, experiences and reflection on action may lead to changes in and/or additions to beliefs" (Richardson, 1996, p. 104). Williams and Owens (1997) studied the use of literature discussion groups in undergraduate and graduate reading methods and children's literature classes. Their results listed benefits such as participants' increased appreciation for multiple perspectives on literature, appreciation for opportunities to engage in critical thinking, and stated intentions to apply experiences to their own classrooms.

Since Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions are texts that these future teachers are already encountering, it is imperative that teacher educators address the potential

benefits and limitations of this product, and not allow these books with their questions to mislead preservice teachers into believing that they are not responsible for considering readers and context in the reading transaction. They should not be misled into assuming that they have neither right nor responsibility for guiding students in learning how to formulate their own questions about a text. Teacher educators need to focus attention on educating teachers to become careful consumers of reading programs and materials such as Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions, and to know how to use those materials always in the manner most appropriate for their specific context, with their particular students. In this way, preservice teachers may explore Scholastic Literature Circle Editions in a manner similar to that used in this study. By critically evaluating the questions provided by Scholastic, and by studying the research associated with literature discussion groups, preservice teachers will learn to consistently recognize the constructed nature of all texts and will be empowered to evaluate the Literature Circle Editions and other such texts for their potential effects on readers and teachers.

### *Suggestions for Scholastic*

My own examination has led me to offer Scholastic some suggestions to increase the potential effectiveness of the Literature Circle Editions. Analyzing the data collected presented some interesting possibilities and has led me to offer some suggestions for ways in which Scholastic might consider continuing to build and refine this collection.

There is a limited range of genres represented in this collection. One suggestion for Scholastic would be to extend the list to move beyond the heavy reliance on contemporary realistic fiction and historical fiction titles, which combined account for 89% of the titles on the list. If one implication is that only contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction and fantasy are genres used for discussion, this perpetuates the lack of attention to nonfiction as material to be read for anything other than efferent purposes. Rosenblatt (1995) decried this false dichotomy between fiction and nonfiction, asserting that both may be read for aesthetic and efferent purposes. Also, if Scholastic is dedicated to its espoused goal of choosing literature with possible curricular tie-ins, the company would do well to include genres such as biography and nonfiction in this collection.

There are other ways in which this collection might be diversified. For example, respecting boys' reading preferences -- as reflected by the Lingo (2007) survey discussed in the previous chapter -- would suggest that more action and adventure books should be included. Scholastic might consider actively involving its advisory board in making suggestions for books to publish as Literature Circle Editions. The teachers on this board might even involve their students in making suggestions. Since the advisory board presumably represents a cross-section of classroom contexts, the odds of increasing the diversity of the collection improve, and key stakeholders (teachers and students) have their voices recognized.

It is also suggested that Scholastic consider possible alternative ways of framing the questions instead of continuing to use Bloom's taxonomy. The desire to achieve a balance of questions that address a range of thinking is commendable, but other frames might prove more adaptable and reliable. Consider Jacobsohn's (1994) means of describing questions' purposes for clarification, penetration, and assessment. Jacobsohn advocates the use of questions for clarification, penetration, and assessment. **Clarification** questions are used to ensure that readers have a collective, common understanding of the basic facts of the book. These questions ask for specific answers, thereby not inviting a wide range of responses. Cole (2003) notes that such literal questions often evoke uninteresting answers that don't promote much conversation; however, Cole does acknowledge that the context of a conversation may turn a seemingly surface-level question into a more potent question if readers explore inferences related to that question. **Penetration** questions are those which directly ask readers to delve deeper into the text. These are the "why" questions, and responses will often vary depending on the readers' interpretations. **Assessment** questions are not referring to assessment in the traditional "testing" sense with which we usually associate that word in education. These are questions that assess or appraise the meaning of a book. These questions involve evaluation, and such discussion of meaning will highlight the individuality of group members who bring their own multiple lenses to the reading. According to Jacobsohn, "*assessment* tends to illuminate the perceptions of each member, and probably takes up the majority of discussion time" (p. 68). This is understandable, since such questions encourage readers to bring their own experiences, values, and attitudes into the conversation. These are often some of the most interesting questions for discussion. Instead of the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy, levels that one of the taxonomy's creators even acknowledges overlap and invert (Furst, 1981), these are three types of questions serving different purposes, with no hierarchy involved. Instead of possible negative connotations associated with questions addressing different "levels" of thinking, these questions address different purposes for questioning. These purposes are associated with promoting discussion, not with assessing comprehension.

There are other possible frames for discussion that do not focus specifically on questioning. Modes of response may focus on different ways of looking at the text, such as I have suggested in my analysis of Scholastic's questions (Apol, Sakuma, Reynolds, & Rop, 2002). In addition to addressing **personal response**, readers may form a **textual response**, in which they focus on how genre and other elements of the text affect their understanding. They may form an **intertextual response**, in which they recognize how other texts in their repertoire affect their understanding of the current text. They may form a **critical response**, in which they consider how social issues play into the text, recognizing the power of implicit and explicit messages. Finally, readers may form an **artistic response**, in which they consider how they might be moved to focus on the text and their reactions to it through a form of artistic expression.

Regardless of what frame is used, more explicit guidelines should be provided to question writers in relation to how questions should be composed. To assume a familiarity with Bloom's taxonomy is a risky stance, especially since not all of the question writers have a background in teaching. As was shown by the results of my interrater reliability test, even people who do have a background in Bloom's taxonomy may interpret the levels quite differently.

I appreciate Scholastic's efforts. For teachers and other group facilitators who are unfamiliar with literature discussion and unsure how to begin, Scholastic's Literature Circle Editions can provide a starting point. There were certainly some interesting, complex questions in the sample questions for this study. Unfortunately, there were missed opportunities for other rich questions, especially those related to critical response. It is crucial that the power of questions not be underestimated. According to Obbink (1992), "The questions we ask of texts and the standards we bring to literature help determine both how we construct and how we are constructed by a text: whose voices we hear, which details we attend to, which perspectives we take as our own" (p. 41). If readers rely on Scholastic's questions, both readers and text now are being "constructed" by the publishing company.

It is true that students may use these questions simply as springboards. Applebee (1996) notes that changing the nature of the questions involves more than changing the form of the questions, since the power of questions may lie in how the questions fit in the "context of expectations" for discussion. Teachers may acknowledge the limitations of such questions and instruct students to use them as simply a means for establishing common baseline understanding among group members, with the expectation that they will generate their own, higher-level questions to extend the conversation. This context cannot be assumed by Scholastic, however, and this study is examining only what questions are provided to readers. Scholastic might take it upon itself to supply more questions that address critical response, thereby modeling that such questions are appropriate and important for discussion. This would also forestall the implication that teachers and students are incapable of facilitating and participating in discussions that involve critical readings and responses to literature. Without knowing the context in which these books are read and discussed, Scholastic may be excluding books and questions that might not be considered controversial, but rather might be considered relevant and natural for discussion in a particular context, by particular readers.

While I do think that Scholastic Literature Circle Edition questions can, when used selectively, be a good starting point for literature discussion groups, because they are so far removed from the context of use, they cannot be the only questions ever used in literature discussion. These questions potentially are used in too many varied contexts.

We must be cautious of treating children as a homogeneous group, and we must also be cautious of underestimating children, of seeing them as "strangers in our midst" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 81) with different ways of reading and responding to literature. We must be cautious of treating children not just as strangers, but as unskilled readers who are incapable of sustaining their own conversation, thereby requiring questions from us that appear to "talk down" to them. Children are capable of more than answering comprehension questions. Researchers have shown that children are very capable of incorporating literary criticism into their reading and discussion of literature (Anzul, 1993; Au & Raphael, 1998; Daniels, 2002; Lehr, 1993; Short, 1993). Even very young children make connections between literature and life, learning about human relationships and the rules of their culture in the process (Wolf & Heath, 1992). Adolescents have proven to know more than their teachers expected them to know about interpreting literature (Langer, 1995; Marshall *et al.*, 1995; Purves *et al.*, 1995), doing sophisticated literary criticism using lenses more readily recognized as being employed by adult readers and literary critics (Appleman, 2000; Soter, 1999). Children can engage in sophisticated interpretive work; however, this type of work with text does not occur naturally. As has been shown, it must be developed and nurtured by teachers. Scholastic might consider its part in this process, and provide suggestions in the Literature Circle Editions about how the questions might be used in concert with group participants' own questions. The company might push against the assumption that all questions will be answered by all students by explicitly reminding teachers of the option to allow students to choose from a wide range of questions that don't have "suggested responses" in a teacher's guide.

It is to be hoped that Scholastic will welcome the suggestions included here. I imagine that the founder, M.R. Robinson, would encourage his successors to do so, as he was known to welcome criticism leveled by colleagues if such criticism was intended to improve Scholastic's product (Lippert, 1979). These suggestions are offered with the best intentions, based on my research of the Literature Circle Editions and the questions included therein.

## *Suggestions for Further Research*

This study serves as a first step, a foundation from which numerous other research possibilities may spring. The following sections will propose some of the next steps for continuing and extending this research.

### *Use of Literature Circle Editions*

The natural next step would be to research how these Literature Circle Editions are being used in classrooms. It would seem sensible for Scholastic to encourage this research, as the findings should provide valuable information for how the company might better serve its customers with this product.

Since these editions are not restricted to school use only (although the venues for their purchase –the Arrow Book Club or the Scholastic Book Fairs – make teachers and students the primary target customers), research might also be conducted on how these editions are used by literature discussion groups that meet outside of schools. These might be groups facilitated by child readers, parents, librarians, or other adults involved in extracurricular activities with children. In contrast, looking at how the school context impacts the use of this product could prove quite interesting to reading researchers and educators, as well as Scholastic itself.

### *Literature Circle Edition Activities*

Researching the activities that follow the questions in the back matter of the books would provide further clues about what those outside, or on the periphery, of education consider appropriate literature-related activities for children. Too often, such activities become crafts (Apol *et al.*, 2003) that celebrate the book but do not enhance or extend readers' understanding. Researching Scholastic's suggested activities would surely reveal interesting assumptions about other kinds of reader responses to literature.

### *Teacher's Guides*

Further research should analyze the teacher's guides that are posted on Scholastic's website to accompany each question PDF for the Literature Circle Editions. A cursory examination of these teacher's guides showed me that it is acknowledged that students' responses to some questions may vary; however, there are "possible responses" provided for teachers which might confine how teachers think about students' responses in a way similar to how leading questions confine students' thinking about the books they read (Chuska, 1995).

### *Similar Products*

There are other literature discussion guides published for teachers and student readers. The Scholastic trade book division publishes the AfterWords editions that include bonus material in the back matter, including discussion questions that are less structured. Literature Circle Editions are directly connected to the school market, whereas AfterWords Editions are in the general retail market. Random House's Reader's Circle Editions are aimed at teen readers facilitating their own discussion groups. It would be interesting to compare the type of questions in each product line. These editions certainly warrant further research to see how they compare with similar editions published by Scholastic as well as other publishers.

### *Diversity of the Collection*

In this study, I have described my initial impression of the diversity represented by this collection with regard to culture and gender. A more fine-grained analysis would be helpful to educators who are committed to increasing the visibility of underrepresented groups in their classroom literature collections and to increasing gender equity in such collections. This analysis would also assist Scholastic in better achieving its self-professed goal of balancing its collection and, as stated in the company's credo, assisting and inspiring students "to become familiar with our cultural heritage" and "to help build a society free of prejudice and hate." If research showed Scholastic the strengths and weaknesses of this collection with regard to diversity, the company could work toward filling any apparent gaps.

## *Conclusion*

I have enjoyed numerous discussions with students of all ages around good books, conversations in which students asked thought-provoking questions, challenging me and each other, and continued talking beyond lunch and recess and the walk out to the buses. I have also endured painful discussions with students of all ages around good books, conversations in which students stayed silent, gave perfunctory responses to my own questions, and never returned to the discussion again. I suspected that the difference was often related to the questions raised about the literature. Over my years of teaching, I have learned that the success of a discussion often hinges on the quality of my initial question, and the questions students generate. I have spent time carefully guiding students in learning how to recognize and craft the questions that are important to them. This work requires that teachers feel encouraged to help students conduct literature discussions, that they feel confident in their ability to model and scaffold strategies necessary for the success of those discussions, and above all, that they have the time to devote to the use of literature discussion groups. Scholastic recognizes that encouragement, self-confidence, and time are things that not all teachers possess. To accommodate for these deficits, Scholastic publishes many products to help teachers. Literature Circle Editions may encourage teachers to use trade book literature and discussion groups in their classrooms since they can rely on Scholastic to choose the literature and provide the questions. With this support, this release from responsibility, teachers may feel more confident in their ability to use literature discussion groups. With the books selected, the questions composed, and even suggested responses provided, teachers may feel that Scholastic is indeed saving them time. I suggest that these possible benefits of encouragement, confidence, and time are only stop-gap solutions for the busy teacher. Literature discussion groups provide readers with a way to appreciate multiple perspectives while learning how to express and refine their own understandings of what text means. This work is affected by, and in turn, affects, the context in which it is shared. As students learn how to question text in a book, they build skill in questioning other “texts” in the world. None of this is easy, but it is worth the time and effort. The people best suited to guide students in this pursuit are teachers, working with particular students in particular contexts, not publishers who are working at a place far removed from the classroom. Teachers who choose to use Scholastic’s Literature Circle Editions as a starting point for literature discussion groups need to be selective in how they use this tool while not neglecting the specific readers in their charge.

# Appendix A
# Scholastic's Literature Circle Collection

| Title | Author | Copyright | Genre | Newbery | Author Gender | Gender of Main Character | Theme(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A Boy No More | Mazer | 2004 | HF | | M | M | Prejudice/Family |
| Absolutely Normal Chaos | Creech | 1990 | CRF | | F | F | Family/Death |
| Al Capone Does My Shirts | Choldenko | 2004 | HF | Yes | F | M | Disability/Family |
| Alone in the Ice World | Easley | S2005 | CRF/Adventure | | F | F | Survival |
| Art of Keeping Cool | Lisle | 2000 | HF | | F | M | Growing up |
| Babe & Me: A Baseball Card Adventure | Gutman | 2000 | HF | | M | M | Sports |
| Because of Winn-Dixie | DiCamillo | 2000 | CRF | Yes | F | F | Family/Death |
| Blizzard's Wake | Naylor | 2002 | HF | | F | F | Death/Survival |
| Boy Who Saved Baseball | Ritter | 2005 | CRF/Adventure | | M | M | Sports |
| Bridge to Terabithia | Paterson | 1972 | CRF | Yes | F | M | Courage/Death |
| Charlie's Raven | George | 2004 | CRF | | F | M | Death |
| Chocolate Fever | Smith | 1972 | Fantasy | | M | M | Courage/Prejudice |
| Christmas Rat | Avi | 2000 | Fantasy | | M | M | Courage |
| Crispin: The Cross of Lead | Avi | 2002 | HF | Yes | M | M | Courage/Prejudice |
| Each Little Bird That Sings | Wiles | 2005 | CRF | | F | F | Death |
| Ella Enchanted | Levine | 1997 | Fantasy | Yes | F | F | Growing Up |
| Esperanza Rising | Ryan | 2000 | HF | | F | F | Prejudice/Growing Up |
| Fever 1793 | Anderson | 2000 | HF | | F | F | Survival |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frindle | Clements | 1996 | CRF | | M | M | School |
| Granny Torrelli Makes Soup | Creech | 2003 | CRF | | F | F | Disability |
| The Great Good Thing | Townley | 2001 | Fantasy | | M | F | Reading/Story |
| Heartbeat | Creech | 2004 | CRF | | F | F | Family |
| Hitler's Daughter | French | 2003 | CRF | | F | M | Holocaust/Disability |
| Hope Was Here | Bauer | 2000 | CRF | Yes | F | F | Family |
| Indian Captive | Lenski | 1941 | HF | Yes | F | F | Survival |
| Journey to the River Sea | Ibbotson | 2001 | HF/Adventure | | F | F | Family/Survival |
| Just Ella | Haddix | 1999 | Fantasy | | F | F | Gender |
| Leon and the Spitting Image | Kurzweil | 2003 | Fantasy | | M | M | |
| Locomotion | Woodson | 2003 | CRF/Poetry | | F | M | Family/Death |
| Long Way from Chicago | Peck | 1998 | HF | Yes | M | M | Family |
| Love That Dog | Creech | 2001 | CRF/Poetry | | F | M | Writing/School |
| Loser | Spinelli | 2002 | CRF | | M | M | Family/School |
| Million Dollar Shot | Gutman | 2003 | CRF | | M | M | Sports |
| Missing May | Rylant | 1992 | CRF | Yes | F | F | Family/Death |
| Never Mind!: A Twin Novel | Avi, Vail | 2004 | CRF | | M/F | M/F | Family/School |
| Notes from a Liar and Her Dog | Choldenko | 2001 | CRF | | F | F | Family |
| Numbering All the Bones | Rinaldi | 2002 | HF | | F | F | Slavery |
| Olive's Ocean | Henkes | 2003 | CRF | Yes | M | F | Death/Growing Up |
| Pocahontas | Bruchac | 2003 | HF | | M | F/M | |
| Princess Academy | Hale | 2005 | Fantasy | Yes | F | F | Gender/Family/Courage |
| River Between Us | Peck | 2003 | HF | | M | F | Family/Race |
| Ruby Holler | Creech | 2002 | CRF | | F | M/F | Family |
| Sahara Special | Codell | 2003 | CRF | | F | F | School/Disability |
| The School Story | Clements | 2001 | CRF | | M | F | Writing/Books |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Secret School | Avi | 2001 | HF | | M | F | School/Gender |
| Shiloh | Naylor | 1991 | CRF | Yes | F | M | Courage |
| So B. It | Weeks | 2004 | CRF | | F | F | Disability |
| Sounder | Armstrong | 1969 | HF | Yes | M | M | Prejudice/Growing Up |
| Stargirl | Spinelli | 2000 | CRF | | M | F | Courage/Growing Up |
| Surviving the Applewhites | Tolan | 2002 | CRF | Yes | F | M/F | School/Family |
| Tale of Despereaux | DiCamillo | 2003 | Fantasy | Yes | F | M | Courage/Survival/Family |
| Teacher's Funeral | Peck | 2004 | HF | | M | M | School |
| Tiger Rising | DiCamillo | 2001 | CRF | | F | M | Family |
| Walk Two Moons | Creech | 1994 | CRF | Yes | F | F | Family/Death |
| Wanderer | Creech | 2000 | CRF | Yes | F | F | Family/Courage |
| Westing Game | Raskin | 1978 | CRF/Mystery | Yes | F | F | Family |
| Whipping Boy | Fleischman | 1986 | HF | Yes | M | M | Survival |
| Worth | LaFaye | 2004 | HF | | F | M | Family/Survival |
| Year Down Yonder | Peck | 2000 | HF | Yes | M | F | Family/Survival |
| The Young Man and the Sea | Philbrick | 2004 | CRF | | M | M | Family/Courage |
| Zebra Wall | Henkes | 1988 | CRF | | M | F | Family |

# Appendix B
## Sample Questions

Scholastic's website contains the PDF documents of the Literature Circle discussion questions for each of the Literature Circle Editions. You can download any or all of these files for free from the website at http://teacher.scholastic.com/clubs/litcircles_more.htm

## Appendix C
## Plot Summaries for Sample Literature Circle Editions

*The Art of Keeping Cool*, by Janet Taylor Lisle

While his father is off fighting with the Allied forces in WWII, thirteen-year-old Robert, his younger sister, and mother leave their farm to move in with his paternal grandparents on the Rhode Island coast. This coming-of-age novel follows Robert through a summer in which he witnesses the townspeople's suspicions of a German paiter living on their outskirts lead to tragedy, and Robert comes to better understand his own family as he learns the truth about his father's estrangement from his grandfather.

*Bridge to Terabithia*, by Katherine Paterson

This novel focuses on the evolving friendship between fifth graders Jess and Leslie, a boy and girl who become fast friends despite surface-level differences related to family, gender, and outlook on life. They create an imaginary kingdom, Terabithia, that becomes their secret refuge. After a tragic accident, Jess struggles with the loss of Leslie while using the strength and wisdom he received from her to continue growing up.

*Each Little Bird That Sings*, by Deborah Wiles

Comfort Snowberger, at age ten, has dealt with death for her entire life. Her family runs a funeral parlor in a small Mississippi town, and each family member is accustomed to doing his or her part to help whenever there is a death in the community. Comfort is shaken, however, by the sudden death of her Great-great-aunt Florentine, and her turmoil is heightened by the extreme reactions of her cousin, Peach, and her best friend, Declaration. At the climax of the story, an actual flood parallels the flood of emotion experienced by this stalwart protagonist.

*Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*, by Sharon Creech

Twelve-year-old Rosie has been best friends with her neighbor, Bailey, since early childhood. Things shift as Bailey, an independent blind boy, becomes angry with Rosie when she reveals that she has learned Braille. Rosie doesn't understand his reaction, nor does she understand his seemingly growing interest in another girl, Janine. This story of the pain of early adolescence unfolds over the soup pot, as Rosie shares her woes with her grandmother, who shares parallel tales from her own youth in response.

*Indian Captive,* by Lois Lenski

This novel is a fictional retelling of the experiences of Mary Jemison, a young settler captured and raised by the Seneca Indians during the French and Indian War. The story traces Mary's adjustment and acceptance as she comes to appreciate the ways of life of the Seneca, ultimately deciding to stay with them when she has the opportunity to leave.

*A Long Way from Chicago*, by Richard Peck

Spanning a series of summers from 1929-1942, this novel traces the humorous and eye-opening experiences of Joey and his sister, Mary Alice, during their annual visits to their grandmother's house in a small, rural community. Grandma Dowdel is a larger-than-life character who guides her grandchildren through several adventures that reveal the eccentricities of small-town living.

*Never Mind!: A Twin Novel*, by Avi and Rachel Vail

Told in the alternating voices of Edward and Meg, this contemporary realistic fiction novel focuses on the relationship between seventh-grade twins who turn out to be more alike than they think. This pair also discovers that they like each other more than they thought, as they work their way through a serious of farcical mishaps driven by Meg's desire to fit in with her peers and Edward's desire to undermine her efforts.

*Princess Academy*, by Shannon Hale

At age fourteen, Miri joins the other girls from her village on Mount Eskel when they are sent to a special academy to prepare them all to compete for the attention of the kingdom's prince. This fantasy novel presents girls who are resourceful and intelligent while struggling with family loyalties and the alluring potential of becoming a princess.

*The Secret School*, by Avi

Fourteen-year-old Ida Bidson is determined to get a high school education, an ambitious goal for a girl in 1925 rural Colorado. Her dream is threatened when the teacher at Ida's one-room school suddenly leaves, and the school board decides to close the school before Ida has a chance to take the exit exams that will allow her entrance to high school in the next school year. With the cooperation of her fellow students, the school continues to function as a "secret school" with Ida serving as teacher.

*Surviving the Applewhites*, by Stephanie Tolan

After being expelled from too many schools, thirteen-year-old Jake Semple is welcomed by the Applewhites to be homeschooled at their Creative Academy. Here, Jake learns about families and how he can find his place, something that one of the Applewhites is also struggling with. E.D. Applewhite is twelve, and she considers herself a misfit in this family of artistic, disorganized free spirits. This is a book about finding your own way while supporting, and being supported by, a loving family.

*The Wanderer*, by Sharon Creech

On a sea voyage across the Atlantic with her uncles and male cousins, thirteen-year-old Sophie makes a journey of self-discovery as she bravely battles the elements of nature and a repressed memory of an accident. Along the way, Sophie weaves tales of the grandfather they are sailing to visit, a grandfather whom she has never met since she was adopted only three years prior to this voyage.

*The Young Man and the Sea*, by Rodman Philbrick

Skiff Beaman is a boy with some weighty problems. He grieves for his dead mother while trying to follow her three rules: think smart, speak true, and never give up. His father appears to have given up, devoting no attention to Skiff while he mourns his wife. Skiff turns his own attention to the family fishing boat that needs many more repairs than his father can afford. In hope of raising the money himself, Skiff heads to sea in a small boat to catch a giant tuna with a harpoon his father made years ago. This survival tale demands Skiff to be strong physically, mentally, and emotionally.

## Appendix D
## Data Collection Sheet Template

Title of Book:
Author:

| Question # | Bloom's Type | Personal response? | Literary response? | Critical response? | Prompt to explain or support? ("Why?" ,"How?") |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | |
| 13 | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | |
| 15 | | | | | |

- Sequence of questions (Proceeding chapter by chapter?)

- Evidence of connecting questions (opportunity for uptake?)

- Do questions "spoil" the plot?

- Do questions "lead" readers toward particular "correct or expected" understandings or emotional responses?

- What questions would I ask that aren't asked here?

- General notes:

## Appendix E
## Completed Data Collection Sheet

Title of Book: *A Long Way from Chicago*
Author: Richard Peck

| Question # | Bloom's Type | Personal response? | Textual response? | Critical response? | Prompt to explain or support? ("Why?" ,"How?") |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Knowledge – recall | | Plot | | Why? |
| 2 | Knowledge – NO, Comprehension - interpret | | Character | | Why or why not? |
| 3 | Knowledge – recall | | Plot | | "Explain" DOESN'T MAKE SENSE (since this is recall) |
| 4 | Comprehension – begins with recall but asked to explain | | Character | | Why |
| 5 | Comprehension | | Character | | |
| 6 | Application - Knowledge? | | Setting | | |
| 7 | Application – NO, Analysis? | | Character, Plot | | Why |
| 8 | Analysis – infer? | | Plot, Character | | |
| 9 | Analysis – NO, Synthesis | | Character | Gender | |
| 10 | Analysis? Comprehension – interpret? | | Character | | |
| 11 | Synthesis – predict | | Character | | "What clues can you find in the story…" |
| 12 | Synthesis? Analysis – hidden meaning? | | Character? | | |
| 13 | Evaluation | | Character | | Why? |
| 14 | Evaluation | | Theme | Message? | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | N/A | | | | |

- Sequence of questions (Proceeding chapter by chapter?)
    - To be used after book is done (question #14 makes this explicit, although other questions might be used at different points during reading)
    - Some questions are pretty general (look at overall book) – e.g., #2, 6, 9, 11, 13

- Evidence of connecting questions (opportunity for uptake?)
    - *Several prompts to explain or provide support for responses
    - No evidence of connections across questions

- Do questions "spoil" the plot?
    - No!

- Do questions "lead" readers toward particular "correct or expected" understandings or emotional responses?
    - Question #7 tells that "Joe stops thinking of Grandma Dowdel as a bad influence"
    - Question #5 tells that Joey and Mary Alice change during a particular chapter

- What questions would I ask that aren't asked here?
    - Messages/stereotypes about age? Small towns?
    - Why is the book told from Joey's POV? How might the book be different if Peck used a different narrator?
    - Discuss use of colloquialisms; Peck's use of humor; tone

- General notes:
    - Question #6 asks reader to compare/contrast the book's setting with today BUT doesn't say why the reader should do this. How does it help readers understand the book better?
    - No attention to writers craft
    - Questions #5, 12 & 14 direct readers to specific parts of the book to frame responses
    - No attention to personal response (Rare in analysis of all 12 books in this study?)

# Appendix F
## Correlation to Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy

| Book Title | Question Number | Scholastic Code | LaRose Code | Agree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Art of Keeping Cool | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | Analysis | | X |
| | 7 | Application | Comprehension | | X |
| | 8 | Application | Analysis | | X |
| | 9 | Application | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | Evaluation | | X |
| | 12 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X, 1st part knowledge | |
| Bridge to Terabithia | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X, 2nd part comp | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 7 | Application | | X | |
| | 8 | Application | | X | |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 12 | Synthesis | Analysis | | X |
| | 13 | Synthesis | Comprehension | | X |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 15 | Evaluation | | X | |
| Each Little Bird That Sings | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | Comprehension | | X |
| | 7 | Application | | X | |
| | 8 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 9 | Analysis | Comprehension | | X |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 12 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X, part application? | |
| | 15 | Evaluation | | X | |
| Granny Torrelli Makes Soup | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X, 2nd part comp | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 7 | Application | Analysis | | X |
| | 8 | Application | Comprehension | | X |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 12 | Evaluation | Analysis | | X |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 14 | Evaluation | Analysis | | X |
| Indian Captive | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Comprehension | Knowledge | | X |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Comprehension | | | |
| | 7 | Application | | X, 1st part comp | |
| | 8 | Application | | X | |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 12 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X, 1st part analysis | |
| | 15 | Evaluation | | X | |
| A Long Way From Chicago | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | Comprehension | | X |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | Knowledge | | X |
| | 7 | Application | Analysis | | X |
| | 8 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X, 2nd part synthesis | |
| | 10 | Analysis | Comprehension | | X |
| | 11 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 12 | Synthesis | Comprehension | | X |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 14 | Evaluation | Analysis | | X |
| Never Mind! | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | | X | |
| | 7 | Application | | X | |
| | 8 | Application | Analysis | | X |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | | X, 2nd part analysis? | |
| | 12 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 13 | Evaluation | Analysis | | X |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 15 | Evaluation | Synthesis | | X |
| Princess Academy | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | Comprehension | | X |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 7 | Application | Comprehension | | X |
| | 8 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X, 1st part knowledge | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | Analysis | | X |
| | 12 | Synthesis | Analysis | | X |
| | 13 | Evaluation | Analysis | | X |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X, part analysis | |
| The Secret School | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | Knowledge | | X |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | Comprehension | | X |
| | 7 | Application | Analysis | | X, 1st part knowledge |
| | 8 | Application | Analysis | | X |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 12 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X | |
| Surviving the Applewhites | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | | X | |
| | 7 | Application | Analysis | | X |
| | 8 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | Comprehension | | X |
| | 12 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X | |
| The Wanderer | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 7 | Application | | X | |
| | 8 | Application | | X, 1st part comp | |
| | 9 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 12 | Synthesis | | X | |
| | 13 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X | |
| The Young Man and the Sea | 1 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 2 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 3 | Knowledge | | X | |
| | 4 | Comprehension | Knowledge | | X |
| | 5 | Comprehension | | X | |
| | 6 | Application | | X | |
| | 7 | Application | | X, 1st part knowledge | |
| | 8 | Application | Evaluation | | X |
| | 9 | Analysis | Comprehension | | X |
| | 10 | Analysis | | X | |
| | 11 | Synthesis | Analysis | | X |
| | 12 | Synthesis | Evaluation | | X, 1st part knowledge |
| | 13 | Synthesis | Analysis | | X |
| | 14 | Evaluation | | X | |
| | 15 | Evaluation | Analysis | | X |

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