ATTENDING TO WONDER: AN AFFECTIVE EXPLORATION OF THE PURPOSES FOR READING WITH YOUTH IN SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

By

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ABSTRACT

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Moving beyond purposes for reading as fixed outcomes, this dissertation project explores the possibilities of affect theory for decentering or weakening those purposes so they might be seen as one element among many interacting in the classroom space. Because these purposes become the expected outcomes of reading with youth in secondary English classrooms, they act as boundary-makers, including and excluding other possibilities for reading. Yet, beginning from theoretical assumptions about ordinary classroom interactions being full of lively, shifting potentials (e.g. Stewart, 2007), I consider the purposes of reading for literary analysis, reading for pleasure, and reading for social transformation as made in the intra-actions of objects, bodies, and histories. Drawing on creative nonfiction and techniques of rhythm, tone, and pacing, I include stories of reading with youth designed to provoke wonder about why we read and what reading together makes possible. Ultimately, this analysis begins from a place of slowing down to capture the affective nature of reading with youth in secondary English classrooms, the space between and beyond the purposes we set for reading. Although I attended to what happened in moments of reading with youth and their teacher during the 2017-2018 school year, this project is also speculative, suggesting what could be or could have been, all the ideas, impacts and intensities that made the youth, teacher, and me think about what happened in class or the ones that would have drifted away had it not been for this dissertation.

For Peter, Lilly, Henry, and Maggie, who taught me to wonder. And for all the educators, including the youth in Washington, DC, who insisted I do so.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Wonder is a passion that motivates the desire to keep looking; it keeps alive the possibility of freshness, and vitality of a living that can live as if for the first time. (Ahmed, 2014, p. 180)

Story 1. Introduction Story Series

I had finally boarded a small commuter jet after a long Grand Rapids winter day of cancelled meetings and excruciatingly slow progress writing this dissertation. I'm not sure why but when the flight attendant told us to look down and check to make sure that our carry-on bags were not touching our feet, I noticed my seatmate doing the same. Usually I avoid all conversation on planes. I stare at my phone or book as if glued to it. That's a focus I can rarely attain. But my body language was to no avail: Our eyes met as we looked down at our feet.

My neighbor Justin was on only his second flight of his life and in his own words "looked for conversation everywhere." Since he worked the overnight shift cleaning floors at a local state university, conversation could be hard to come by, he told me as we taxied for takeoff. At first our conversation focused on the weather, his trip to Phoenix, his move to a rural town outside of a midwestern city for his senior year of high school. He told me that when he went to school in the city, he had been the only white student in his class. When he moved, there was one Black student in his class, a boy he promptly introduced himself to and told they would be friends.

As the turbulent flight bounced toward Detroit, our conversation turned to his interest in film and business and his desire to make enough to quit his second job to take advantage of the free college tuition his job at the university offered. As we were landing, he told me that he was the kind of guy who saw joy everywhere, that he often told his coworkers that they needed to notice the little moments, otherwise "work wins, and we can't let work win." Now, given my interest in little moments and my frustrated efforts to write about those in schools in this dissertation, I began to share those frustrations with him. I told him that my focus was on those little moments, that it wasn't joy exactly, but wonder that I was interested in. I asked him if he liked school. His answer made an impression on me. He said, "I wasn't too good at it, but I loved learning. I loved hearing what my classmates had to say because half the time it wasn't even close to what I was thinking." He went on to say that he could get into some books and not others. The Twilight series, he loved those. He read them over and over until he saw the movie and thought, "That's not the adventure I imagined."

I begin here, with this unexpected story, because it is where I am—caught up in an effort to make sense of how small moments can shift perspectives. Now, this conversation didn't lead to my talking with the person on my next flight. It didn't shift my trajectory that much, but it did make me wonder. It made me ask myself how I might approach this writing with the sense of

wonder I have come to believe is vital to moving how we read with youth in high school English classrooms. So many of the theories and practices I learned about as a doctoral student began from a place of wonder. Over time, however, even the most significant shifts can become absorbed into the everyday. Culturally relevant pedagogy can become the use of one hip hop song to introduce a poetry unit or the reading of a novel about the horrors of oppression to teach students the elements of plot. Literature that is both "highly political and passionately aesthetic" (Morrison, 1987, xiii) becomes about finishing the text and assessing whether students have read or not. Multimodal composing becomes attached to a rubric focused on grammar and the number of pieces of evidence a student uses. Offering students choice in what they read becomes about every student in every classroom coming to love reading through mandatory reading requirements and accountability checks. In this dissertation, I argue that even within the everyday teaching and learning of English classrooms, there are moments of possibility, moments that, if we stop and attend to them, offer opportunities to wonder. There is Justin, who loved *Twilight,* even though everyone told him those books weren't for him, or there is my closest teaching friend Vanyua who spent 9th grade cutting school to go to the library but in 10th grade read Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* because her German teacher gave it to her. She told me that book saved her life. In 11th grade, she read *Beloved*. She told me that book changed her life.

I would like to make this a tidy story of reading with teachers and youth in a 10th grade English classroom in a racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse charter school in a suburb of a mid-sized Midwestern city. And on the surface, that's what the year I spent at Monument Lake High School looked like. I went into the college preparatory high school with a research goal aimed at shifting how students and teachers thought about the purposes of reading, but by the end of the year, little had changed. The truth is that our experiences were not tidy or

clear or easily patterned out into some claims about why we read together in schools or even why reading often doesn't get done in schools. After teaching English for a decade in a small charter middle and high school in northeast Washington, DC, spending another five years reading with undergraduate and graduate students at a large midwestern university, and reading on my own and with others for nearly 40 years, I am certain only that as I try to hold onto something meaningful to say about reading, my brain feels like a spinning top, uncertain where to land. Even the saying "literature is a window to culture" does not contain the breadth of significance contained within great stories. For everything I think to say, there is something else to add. And something else for which I just lack the words. So instead of being a tidy paper about the divergent purposes for which teachers and students read in schools and the conflicts that may arise in those, I am going to share stories that make me wonder about why we read and what reading together makes possible. There is nothing tidy about this wonder because to submit to wonder is to admit that I do not know, but it is in those feelings of wonder, that I "keep looking" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 180). In particular, I share these stories in an effort to slow down and capture fleeting images of how reading happens.

hooks (1994) said, "Learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility (p. 207). In *Teaching to Transgress,* hooks connected those possibilities to attending a Black school before integration as "sheer joy." She said of her first school experiences, "I loved being a student. I loved learning. School was the place of ecstasy-pleasure and danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure" (p. 3), but all that changed with integration. School shifted from a place of joy, transformation, and anti-racist struggle, she said, to a place of information-gathering and obedience. Indeed, as a teacher for more than a decade in a charter school serving Black youth, I participated in the making of a

system that too often prized compliance and sameness, a reification of school as we felt it should be. Instead of the affective possibilities of joy, pleasure, danger, and ecstasy hooks' shares, reading with youth often became about perceived objectivity and right answers on a flawed test. Yet, reading was never only that. Reading with youth always brought with it affective responses, impacts, and moments of uncertainty. And despite being faced over and over again with the challenges and constraints of teachers and youth reading together in schools, I remain convinced that these experiences are filled with ever-present potentials to which we can attend and act upon. I believe that finding ways to notice and attend to those potentials plays a necessary part in the larger project of humanizing literacy learning and crafting visions of a more just English education (e.g. Morrell, 2008; Paris, 2011; Kinloch, 2012; Kirkland, 2013).

Yet recognizing those potentials, within the ordinary, taken for granted ways reading happens in schools, requires looking anew at the everyday. It is that possibility of looking anew, which I believe wonder, as an affective response, offers. This is not wonder that makes us forget what schooling looks and feels like or what histories it brings with it, but rather it "is an encounter with an object that one does not recognise; or wonder works to transform the ordinary, which is already recognised, into the extraordinary" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 169). Wonder, then, allows us to see that which is usually caught up in the ordinary and unnoticed and to see reading worlds as made. Later, I will describe in detail how affect theories of the ordinary (Stewart, 2007; Berlant & Stewart, 2018) drive this attention to moments of reading in the classroom and beyond, but first I'd like to capture some semblance of the wonder that affects me when I think about reading in school. Of course, the concept of "wonder" suggests that something is occurring that is just beyond my ability to fully articulate it, something that no amount of critical analysis can capture. And so, I begin with a story series (Lather & Smithies, 1997) composed of reading

moments from my life that might appear only tangentially connected but are in reality essential to my inquiry. I choose to include these stories out of chronological order because that is how they inform—or "flash" into—my own teaching, learning, and wondering. I encourage my readers to suspend some of those ordinary concerns about when or how this might have happened and instead read of my experiences in line with their own. At the same time, I include the years these things happened as guideposts along the journey.

1
-2016-

I am supervising a student teaching intern at a competitive magnet school in the city where we live. The year began with Beowulf, a text I helped her analyze for planning purposes. Like so many busy teachers planning lessons, I googled "reasons to read Beowulf with students" and wrote down the google answer I liked best on a little slip of paper.

Today I have decided to support her with All Quiet on the Western Front in a different way. I am reading the novel. I am sitting in the college of education where I am a doctoral student with a sheaf of copy paper on which I printed a free pdf. I flip over the title page and begin reading. I watch the clock out of the corner of my eye; I have a meeting I need to get to. I keep reading. I read the whole thing while sitting in an orange chair in the middle of the busy first floor of the college. Tears are running down my face. I read the whole thing without ever getting up. "His face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad the end had come," I read of Paul's death, and I exhale. I sit with my hands in my lap and know something in the meaning of this text is beyond me. I am at a loss. I wonder, "What do 10th graders in Grand Rapids, MI, do with this text?"

The next day, I open my intern's dialogue journal, a google doc in which we talk to each other about the fleeting moments of her year when we can't be face-to-face. What do 10th graders do with this novel? On that day, they turned over their desks, crumpled paper into balls, and threw them at each other. Simulated trench warfare.

My intern says she wished they would have taken the post-bombardment journal writing more seriously, but all in all, it was a "really fun and engaging activity."

I think about the warfare in the novel, the teenage soldiers dying, the devastation in Syria today, the faces of the 15-year-olds in her class, and my feelings reading it, but I don't know what to say. She got the idea from her mentor teacher. I leave a comment, "Did anyone refuse to participate?"

2
-2013-

It's the fifth unit of the year, and my 10th graders and I are reading Night, Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir. Facing pressures from the charter board to raise state reading test scores by at least 10 percent or be closed, I am trying to figure out how to read this text and practice answering multiple choice test questions. I write three questions for our "Do Now" activity asking students to choose the best evidence to support a theme, explain why Wiesel uses a phrase like "God the accused," and to demonstrate comprehension by describing "selection." Then, I create a graphic organizer to analyze motifs in the text and email my co-teacher some questions:

> *We could leave the explanation of the motif for Wednesday because that is the "E" in RACER.*
>
> *Thinking for the open response- a motif that evokes the horror of Wiesel's experience in the Holocaust. Should we be more general? the horror of the Jewish people's suffering in the Holocaust? the dehumanization of the victims/perpetrators? Let me know what you think.*

Human suffering and test prep caught up in a tangled web as I try to sort out the purposes for reading in my class. I'm not questioning that entanglement in the moment. In the moment, I think that I've finally figured out how to read meaningfully and help my students do well on the test.

Davante seems to know why he's reading Night. Davante is brilliant and often sits in class doing none of the assigned work. Or like on the day of my teacher evaluation, gets up and walks around the class, looking here and there, as if to find something that catches his attention. All the while blowing bubbles out of the gum he's chewing.

Today, we are supposed to be filling out the motif graphic organizer, but Davante is still sitting on the bean bag. I had said students could use their independent reading time to catch up on their Night reading homework. Davante opened the book, leaned against the beanbag, and started reading. He didn't move. He didn't even acknowledge that the class had moved into the mini-lesson, or that the volume in the class was steadily increasing, or that I had said to move back to their desks. He was reading and kept on reading until he finished the book. I let him.

He never filled out the graphic organizer. Other students did. Rayshawn used her graphic organizer to write a "RACER" paragraph that made my throat catch and my eyes well up. How is that possible?

3
-1990-1994-1998-2004-2015-2016-

I am a child. I am under the covers reading in my room, a stack of books taken from the library. I'll make it through at least six books that day while my parents scream at each other about something. The stories of my childhood are stories of white kids with blond hair and blue eyes, kids with money, with drama that doesn't feel real. I am a child who identifies as white, but I

have brown skin and thick, curly, very dark hair. Other kids come up to me on the playground and ask me what I am. I am confused but I know this isn't a good question. I make things up. One time in 5th grade a girl with bright red hair and freckles asks me why I'm so dark. I make up a story about living in Puerto Rico and having spent years on the beach. I stumble over words, ramble for a lot longer than necessary to answer her question. Even then I know that answer doesn't make any sense, but I want to have light skin and blond hair. I wish I had blue eyes. I straighten my hair. I choose clothes that match my friends, but I always feel a little outside. I don't have a name for what I'm feeling.

I am an adult and am now a doctoral student taking critical race theory. It's the first place anyone has ever labeled me "white." My professor forgets me at first but then names all of us white students. She says we have to talk in class; we can't let students of color do all the talking. That recenters whiteness, she says. A new idea, a shift in orientation, but mostly I'm thinking about the fact that she said I was white—no hesitation.

When I present my racial autobiography to the class, a fellow doctoral student, a Black woman with whom I've talked quite a bit comes up to me and whispers, "I was so excited to hear you present. I thought you'd finally say what you are."

I read bell hooks' Writing beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice. And I give it a name: white supremacist beauty aesthetics. Things continue. The world goes on, but something in my orientation moves. I don't straighten my hair anymore, even when the ordinary pulls me. I am an adult. I read Daniel Jose Older's Shadowshaper, and his teenage heroine Sierra Santiago looks in the mirror and says to her reflection, "I am enough." I cry, and I think, "This is what reading culturally diverse literature is for." I share it with my pre-service teachers. Most of them don't like the book. "I don't see why we'd read this," they write. "It doesn't talk about issues. It's fantasy." This is in a class called Issues of Diversity in Children's and Adolescent Literature.

4
2013-2008-2018

Students are changing classes at Ingenuity High School in Washington, DC. A couple of boys are running down the hall, while teachers stand at their doors greeting students, reminding them to walk. I leave the library, a stack of materials for my 2nd hour, 10th grade English class in hand. As my thoughts turn to what I need to do to get the class started for the day, I notice Marquan isn't running.

He's walking down the hall with his head buried in Retaliation, a novel about a 17-year-old African American girl's brutal attack by a group of girls in her neighborhood and the chain of violence it sets off. The events take place on the southeast side of DC near where he and most of the students at Ingenuity live. The book moves from Marquan to Terron to Diamond to Curtis to Leonard to Henry, circulating through 10th graders across the school. All year, students ask me for another book like this one.

Five years earlier another book circulated. I had decided that I should up the rigor in my 8th grade class by requiring students to read two books at a time—one as a class and one in small

groups. It was the day before the projects on the small group books were to be presented, and Chantel told me she hadn't even started Hunger Games. Of course, I didn't admit to her that I hadn't started it either and didn't really want to read it. I don't know what I said in the moment, but the next day both of us had read the entire book. We were hooked. At least on Facebook, she often credits me with helping her become a reader.

This year she was profiled in our school's 20th anniversary program. She shared her version of the story. Only in it, she said I told her that if she didn't read, I'd tell the whole class. She'd feel embarrassed. Did I really do that? I don't think I should have done that.

5
-2014-

Jennifer is a sophomore in the culturally diverse literature course for preservice teachers I'm teaching. Most of the students are seniors, looking toward graduation. In a sense, Jennifer and I are a little alike. It's only my second time teaching this course, and I feel constant pressure to make it meaningful to everyone. I'm uncertain as to what I should do; Jennifer is uncertain about how she's doing in the course. She wants to get an A, but it's more than that. How she talks about oppression, racism, and society—I can tell she's had these conversations before. That isn't always the case in this course.

We are about halfway through the semester and have just read Openly Straight by Bill Konigsberg. Like I did every week, I had divided the class into small groups to talk about their response to the novel. As I turn toward Jennifer's group, I hear Maddie say, "My mom says hate the sin not the sinner." Jennifer pushes back, but Maddie says she isn't hearing her. She says it's not her saying that, but it's what her mom says. I head that direction, but about that time, Jennifer rushes past me crying.

I still don't know what I should have done, but I followed her into the bathroom. She apologizes to me. "I'm sorry," she says. "I read all of the articles, and I thought I could do this logically. But every time she said it, I thought about my moms." I tell her to take the time she needs.

6
-2012-

"Ashley, I really would have expected a teacher like you to do something more robust than that—main idea or something," Mrs. Powell tells me as I sit down to talk about my latest observation. Mrs. Powell is a 30-ish, Jamaican woman, who is serving as the turnaround principal consultants brought in to lead our school out of closure. She had come from the highest performing charter school in the city—100 percent of 7th grade African American students proficient in math.

The 10th grade students and I had been asking "Big questions" of newspaper article about virtual reality video games that day to begin an informational text unit. I thought the lesson had gone well—the students were asking questions, thinking about what else they might want to

know. I told her I had done main idea the following day but that I wanted something else first. She told me we didn't have time for that—big questions weren't on the test.

I was worried about the test, too. It kept me up at night, invading my dreams. But still, I said, "If they aren't curious, they'll never want to read." She said she didn't disagree, but we debated for nearly 45 minutes, leaving our questions unresolved, each of us holding to our perspective on my lesson.

After 10 years teaching at the school, I finally do what I had planned to do after my second year: I fill out my graduate school application that evening.

Purpose and Questions: The Echoes of These Stories

These stories and countless others echo through this dissertation as I endeavor to approach reading with youth in English classrooms from a place of wonder. These were small moments, not unlike countless others that I have been a part of throughout my teaching career, but they continue to resonate in me today, impacting how I think about reading. Each of these stories brings with it unresolved tensions in the field of English education. Do we read for joy and pleasure? Do we read to develop analytic skills? Do we read to critique the worlds in which we live? Do we read to do well on tests? Do we read to know the pain of our world or the pain of others? Do we read to transform the world? And how do we do any of those things within a classroom space that too often prizes single answers and the certain over what is uncertain or even unknowable? I might offer this dissertation as proof that any one answer to these questions diminishes the potential of reading with youth in the classroom at the same time as it elevates it beyond what it can do. In each of these stories, I have tried to highlight not just the reasons we might read with youth in classrooms and the tensions within those reasons but also the affects (i.e. felt intensities) that circulate through me and everyone else that came together in those moments. Reading in these stories and in the pages that follow is always about connections between people and objects and histories and futures. A teacher's plans and goals become something different in the moment they connect with the youth in the classroom, but they cannot

be separated from the conversations in teacher planning or the time the bell rings or the schools' mission statement or the ceaseless urgency for improved test scores or all the times she read books in English class or all the times the students have read texts in class or whether the students are hungry or angry or bored or tired or excited or delighted or whether she is those things.

It is to this interplay of histories and bodies and feelings and objects to which I turn in this dissertation to consider the ordinary, affective nature of reading in schools. The stories I included above are stories of teachers and youth and texts, but they are also stories of something more. Leander and Ehret (2019) wrote,

> We wish to acknowledge the surplus; we wish to tell out loud the secret that teachers seem to know—that most of what happens on our best days cannot be explained in rational frames. We are moved and our students are moved, and we cannot explain just how or why. (p. 2)

I would argue that this is true not just on our best days, but that like in the stories above, there is something moving in reading with youth all the time and attending to that movement requires more than just explanation: it requires feeling the moment, feeling what the interplay of objects and bodies and histories does to us. Anything less keeps that surplus, or something more, silenced for the sake of literacy learning. Instead of putting forward a particular goal for reading and critiquing the classroom within which I spent a year, I choose in this dissertation to attend to the ordinary moments in this classroom and how in those ordinary moments, the purposes for reading are made and remade and how they shape what is possible. In leaning into the surplus, I attend to not just what is but what could be or should be. Moreover, in looking anew, indeed

wondering, at these ordinary moments, I hope to consider the ever-present potentials present in the everyday. In particular, I bring two primary questions to my inquiry:

1. What purposes for reading are made possible in the ordinary moments of the classroom?
2. How might attending to those moments open up wonder as an affective possibility for reading with youth in English classrooms?

In this dissertation, then, I look not at grand stories of change or difference, but rather, at ordinary affects, or moments "when a list of incommensurate yet mapped elements throws itself together into something. Again. One time among many" (Stewart, 2007, p. 30). My discussion of these ordinary moments is intended to reveal something about how the purposes of reading with youth in classrooms become habitual, routine ways of thinking about how and why we read together in English *and* how other ways of thinking might be possible. As such, we can read the purposes for reading as shifting, changing, and becoming rather than as good or bad. Because they are not fixed but are produced in relation to all the other objects in the classroom, we can ask how they come to matter. Because affect theory is chiefly concerned with how we might be moved, I endeavor throughout this dissertation to describe in such a way that the interactions in this classroom feel moving. Ultimately, this is a dissertation about paying attention—attention to the ordinary, the mundane, perhaps even the boring, but to see those moments anew, to think and feel with the vibrancy, complexity, and contradictions of the life in those moments.

Purposes for Reading in Secondary English Classrooms

Before proceeding, I wish to situate my wonderings within current discussions of the purposes for reading with youth in secondary English classrooms. To do that, I must first contextualize what I mean by reading in secondary English classrooms. Here, I focus my work

specifically on reading of print-based texts, both literature and informational, within middle and high school English classrooms. I limit this work to print-based texts and meaning-making activities accompanying those texts because that was the focus of the reading of teachers and youth in my dissertation site. Moreover, I base my distinction between literature and informational texts on the Common Core Standards, in keeping with most standards-based approaches to English education in public schools today, rather than on any belief that they can be easily separated or that boundaries are not blurred. For my purposes, the reading youth and teachers do would generally be recognized as a combination of fiction and nonfiction with a literary bent, including but not limited to novels, dramas, short stories, and speeches. From time to time, that reading extended to include news articles or other short, current event-focused informational texts. Finally, I focus on classroom reading because this dissertation is concerned with reading done in and for English class. It includes both the sanctioned texts of the classroom and those texts that entered the classroom space with students. I keep to those boundaries because I am interested in the already becoming potentials within the classroom space. Still, I recognize that in my work any boundaries I fix to reading are always moving as in-school and out-of-school reading, thinking, and living interact within one particular classroom.

In most discussions of purposes of reading, purposes are assumed to be synonymous with goals or outcomes of reading. Within the field of English teaching and learning, questions about the multiple, competing purposes for that education are particularly complex (Macaluso, McKenzie, Vanderheide, & Macaluso, 2016). Although not specifically addressing reading, Luke (2004) suggested that notions of English are, in both content and purpose, tied to legacies of oppression and possibility. He wrote, "Our field [English] is utterly *troubled* by diversity—that of our students, of our own disciplinary and trans-disciplinary trainings, and of the very

historical dynamics of English as living cultural and social, political, and economic entity" (p. 87). Given its position, then, as both keeper of tradition in the literary canon and dominant standards for language *and* its role in challenging those very traditions, English as a site for teaching and learning in secondary classrooms is rife with conflict (Brass, 2014). These conflicts, Brass argued, have created a space in which neoliberal purposes focused on standardization and accountability could proliferate. Despite debate within the scholarly community around broader purposes for secondary English teaching and learning to be both humanizing and transformative (e.g. Kinloch, 2005; Kirkland, 2013; Morrell, 2008;), school curricula have increasingly turned toward standardized, technical aspects of English as the measurable outcomes of schooling.

It is within that broader conversation about the purposes for English education, that I situate the purposes for reading in this dissertation. Those debates around English teaching and learning echo throughout my conversations with teachers and youth about why we read. Even as much of the teaching agenda in the 10th grade English classroom within which I spent a year focused on narrowly defined outcomes aimed at literary and rhetorical analysis standards mastery, the teacher I worked with also wanted students to learn something about themselves and others and to think critically about the world around them. Because of the focus within that space, I confine my discussion of purposes for reading in scholarly literature to three areas: 1) reading to analyze literature; 2) independent reading for pleasure and personal satisfaction; and 3) reading for social transformation. At some level, I consider that arguments for independent reading for pleasure and personal satisfaction and reading for social transformation have become increasingly impassioned in response to concerns about the overly technical approaches to reading codified in standards like those of the Common Core and in the current social/political climate (Dutro & Haberl, 2018).

In this section, I consider each of these purposes separately before bringing them together to consider their relationships to each other and common assumptions about the nature of reading in schools that lie at the heart of all of these conversations.

Reading to Analyze Literature

I begin, here, with the most ordinary of purposes in secondary English teaching—reading and analyzing forms and techniques in literature. Associated with the rise of New Criticism in the mid-twentieth century, close, technical attention to literary works continues to be prevalent throughout secondary English teaching and learning (Applebee, 1993; Stotsky, 2010; Beach, et al., 2012). New criticism, as it has generally been taken up in secondary schools, is an approach to reading emphasizing textual authority and meaning contained within the text (Rejan, 2017). Youth in schools, then, pay particular attention to literary and rhetorical devices authors employ to create meaning, basing their interpretations on the elements present within the text. At once celebrated and maligned, supporters have suggested this kind of reading encourages responsible, close reading to come to valid interpretations, while detractors have argued that, as it has been taken up in K-12 schools most often through Common Core Standards or similar, it has become little more than a list of techniques that "negate the individual and unique insights that students, teachers, and even authors bring to a text" (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014, p. 7). Moreover, Beach, et al. (2012), suggested that the overemphasis on skills, form, and genre has minimized the recognition of reading as a social act, making it about individual mastery—an either I have it or I don't approach.

Within a frame of reading for literary analysis, teachers and youth read together in classrooms so that youth can become masters of particular analytic skills, which the teacher is assumed to have, and the student is assumed to need. In his extensive nationwide study of

literature teaching in public and private schools, Applebee (1993) found that literary analysis was the most common goal for high school English teachers and became increasingly prominent as teachers moved up grade levels. While that close attention to analysis could be in service of larger textual meanings, he cautioned then that it often became "an end in itself" (p. 125). While Applebee's study continues to be the most recent large-scale study of classroom literature teaching, nearly 20 years later, Beach, et al. (2012) raised the same caution about standards-based literature teaching. The authors suggested that standards could lead to a narrow technical focus on skills for a test, reducing complexity and omitting meaningful questions from the curriculum. This narrow focus also assumes particular ways of knowing and being, privileging those students, in the U.S. with white, middle class, heteronormative backgrounds (e.g. Paris, 2012).

Conversations about reading for literary and rhetorical analysis have come to be dominated by future-oriented discourses aimed at reading for college and career readiness. Codified with the release of the *Common Core State Standards*, the assumption contained within the lists of technical skills youth need for reading is that mastery of these skills will prepare youth for a not-yet-determined future. The authors wrote by way of introduction to the reading standards,

> The Common Core asks students to read stories and literature, as well as more complex texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas such as science and social studies. Students will be challenged and asked questions that push them to refer back to what they've read. This stresses critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life. (National Governs Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Here the focus, then, is on complexity, the future, and what an unnamed person will ask students to do. Although there may be great variety and even freedom for teachers to think within the standards to make pedagogical decisions, the purpose is to lead a student to be able to analyze texts in particular ways. And indeed, much of this resonates with my own experiences as a middle and high school teacher. Like my efforts to create a motif graphic organizer for *Night* so that the students in my class could write an analytic paragraph connecting that repetition of motif to the development of a theme in the memoir, it is not so much that these purposes are inherently flawed but that they can be narrow, limiting what might be possible for reading with youth in classrooms. Aukerman (2014), perhaps, summed it up best when she said in a presentation at the Literature Special Interest Group's business meeting at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, "It's not so much what's in the Common Core, it's what is left out. Why not read for delight? Or joy?"

Independent Reading for Pleasure and Personal Satisfaction

Desire for delight or love for reading brings me to another purpose for reading commonly advanced in English education: reading for pleasure. While not solely the purview of independent reading, I focus here on how providing youth with opportunities for choice and independent reading are intertwined with purposes for reading aimed at pleasure or personal satisfaction. Much of the scholarly work aimed at promoting choice and independent reading is aimed at least implicitly at the critiques of pedagogical approaches to literary analysis: whole class novels, difficulty levels misaligned to student skill level, and irrelevant or boring texts. Undergirding this purpose is what Applebee (1993) referred to as an emphasis on the child rather than the discipline of English. When teachers place the child at the center, he said, they choose books based on the potential for interest and appeal to students rather than because of skill

mastery. Building on this notion of the child at the center of reading, Wilhelm and Smith (2016) drew on Dewey to explore the potential for reading as pleasure and play to engage youth. Based on their surveys of 118 adolescents' pleasure reading, they suggested that allowing students to read what they want has the potential to engage students intellectually, playfully, and socially. In their full-length book exploring the same study, they built on Victor Nell's (1988, as cited in Wilhelm and Smith, 2014) concept of "ludic reading" to understand what it might mean to read for pleasure as the "blissful engagement avid readers enter when consuming books for pleasure" (p. 21). Wilhelm and Smith blended their own teaching experiences with youth surveys to suggest that providing choice and time to read might allow educators to harness its motivating power.

These scholars suggest that good readers, defined as those who both read on their own and score well on achievement tests, read texts they want to read. For example, Morgan and Fuchs (2007) argued that there is a relationship between reading motivation and skill and that children who are consistently asked to read texts with which they cannot be successful will simply stop reading. Allington (2014) suggested that voluntary, high-volume reading is a necessary part of reading achievement because students need experiences with texts they can read fluently and with a high degree of accuracy. Likewise, Krashen (2011) compiled 10 years of studies demonstrating the benefits of sustained silent reading for language development, writing, vocabulary, and comprehension. He also pointed to positive changes in attitude when students were given the opportunity for sustained silent reading.

Does a student like the book? Does a student connect with the text? Does a student feel challenged by the text? These are questions at the center of independent reading. It is, then, about cultivating a desire in students to read based on the belief that good readers want to read. Across

practitioner research and social media, author-English teachers like Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher, and Donalyn Miller have suggested that the right texts and the opportunity to choose those texts will mean every child leaves English classrooms with a love of reading and an appreciation for the pleasures it can bring. I was particularly struck by Gallagher's (2009) call on teachers to imagine a world in which high school graduates were uninterested in "books, pages, and words" (p. 5). He wrote it as if such an idea should be unimaginable to teachers and went on to suggest that teachers can and should mold students into lifelong readers. Thinking of my own teaching experience, I very much understand that desire for youth to love reading. Like the stories of Marquan with *Retaliation* or Chantel with *Hunger Games* in the beginning of this introduction, I found my own pleasure in helping foster attachments between students and books. I continue to discuss the nature of the purposes for independent reading as reading for pleasure in Chapter 5 of this inquiry, but for now, I suggest that these authors, both scholarly and practitioner, draw on their experiences in classrooms and research, as well as their own love for reading, to connect reading choice and time for independent reading to all youth becoming readers for pleasure and personal satisfaction.

Reading for Social Transformation

In a present where the President equates Mexican immigrants with rapists and murderers and declares a national emergency to fund a border wall, where Black men, women, and children continue to be murdered by police officers, and English teaching perpetuates systemic linguistic and racial violence against Black and Brown youth, critical English teaching and learning designed to interrogate and dismantle oppressive systems has taken on particular urgency (e.g. Ahmed, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Minor, 2018; Morrell, 2008). While research has named a variety of approaches to socially transformative English teaching and learning, teachers and scholars

often imbue the reading of literature with the power to make the world better because of its impacts on the reader (e.g. Alsup, 2013; Beers & Probst, 2018; Thomas, 2016). While these authors would not disavow reading for pleasure or reading for literary analysis, those purposes would be subordinate to ultimate goals of critiquing the raced, classed, and gendered structures of the world.

Practitioner author and teacher Sara K. Ahmed (2018) wrote in her book *Being the Change: Lessons and strategies to teach social comprehension*, that educators must "help children make sense of the news they bring to school and the curriculum the world keeps handing them" (p. xxv). To do this, she laid out plans for students and teachers to analyze themselves and think about others in ways that might lead to a more just world. Likewise, Minor (2018), who is Ahmed's friend and fellow tweeter, suggested in *We Got This* that "education should function to change outcomes for whole communities" (p. xv). Each of these authors grounded the urgency for their texts in the inequities, racism, and single stories that they see in schools and in the news today.

Moreover, in critical English teaching and learning, teachers have positioned youth as community change agents (Camangian, 2009). Morrell (2008), for example, drew on critical literacy traditions to recognize the need for students to "acquire the literacies they need to navigate the very schools they should critique and deconstruct" (p. 27). Morrell advocated for a kind of literacy praxis that allows youth to "understand how their own reading, writing, and speaking could be potentially empowering" (p. 106). While Morrell stressed the importance of acquiring individual literacy skills like those laid out in the Common Core Standards, he tied those skills to the ability to critically access "information about the world that would call into question many of the predominant beliefs in the country" (p. 189). Moreover, Morrell (2008)

called on practitioners to "draw upon the everyday language and literacy practices of adolescents to make connections with academic literacies and to work toward empowered identity development and social transformation" (p. 313). For example, one specific aspect of critical English education focuses on critical media literacy in which youth learn to deconstruct consumerist-oriented media narratives targeting them (Duncan-Andrade, 2004). In this way, critical purposes for English teaching and learning position that work within larger projects for social justice and transformation.

In addition, one more specific purpose for critical English teaching and learning that has developed in recent years is aimed at reimagining "ELA classrooms as revolutionary sites that disrupt racial injustice" (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 62). The January 2017 special issue of English Education called for educators to adopt a Critical Race English Education (CREE) framework that is explicit about "naming and dismantling white supremacy and anti-Black and anti-Brown racism" (Baker-Bell, Butler, & Johnson, 2017, p. 123). Scholars in this issue considered how English teaching perpetuates racial violence against Black and Brown youth through what is included and excluded in the classroom. Viewed through CREE, English teaching and learning must provide opportunities for Black and Brown youth to critique and dismantle racist narratives, fight racial oppression, and bring their multiple literacies and languages to the classroom.

For this dissertation, I am particularly interested in scholarship and teaching related to how reading literature with youth might lead to social transformation. For example, Beers & Probst (2017), known for their practitioner books supporting close reading and struggling readers, advocated for reading with both the head and the heart. Reading with the heart, they suggested, prompts students to consider how their worldviews might be changed through a particular text. Likewise, Christensen (2017) provided examples from her classroom of how she

used reading and writing to encourage students to challenge their social worlds and to critique common assumptions about the world. Taking a more explicitly critical stance, Appleman (2014) argued that high school teachers have a responsibility to help make the ideologies in literature visible to students through literary lenses, like feminism or Marxism.

Scholarly research literature echoes these practitioner texts. For example, Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) argued for a critical literature pedagogy designed to read with and against canonical literature in an effort to examine dominant ideologies including those tied to racism, sexism, and heteronormativity. Reading against texts, they argued, provides students with opportunities to question how and why their own beliefs, values, and assumptions are formed. Alsup (2013) called for literature instruction to support readers' ability to empathize, while Choo (2016), like Ahmed (2018), promoted reading that might cultivate a more open, generous view toward strangers. Finally, Thomas (2016) argued that a key function of teaching children's literature is "understanding how readers make sense of diversity, difference, and power" (p. 116). Taken together, practitioner and researcher voices make a strong call for English teaching, more generally, and reading, more specifically, to be oriented toward social change.

Thinking with These Purposes

Although these purposes suggest perhaps different texts as central to reading, different activities youth might do, and even different perspectives on the status of schools, reading, and the world as we experience it, I argue, in this dissertation, that they share a common view of reading as instrumental, as a means to a particular end. In the case of literary analysis, that end might be mastery of a skill or the understanding of some truth held in a text, while in reading for pleasure, it seems to be sustaining or motivating a student's positive attitude toward texts

themselves. At the same time, social transformation calls on reading to be used to disrupt or change the world. All of these, then, rest on the belief that a purpose is a fixed outcome. I do not mean by this that everyone who shares in that goal has the same imagined outcome but rather that these purposes are measures by which "reading" as a *thing* succeeds or fails. And that underlying all of these conversations about purposes for reading is an assumption that teachers can predict in advance where reading will take them and the youth with whom they work. Indeed, much of planning for reading in U.S. schools rests on this assumption (Boldt, Lewis & Leander, 2015). It is about this idea with which I think in this dissertation. Because I am not so interested in which of these purposes might be best for schools. Certainly, I think they all have a place in why and how we read with youth in classrooms and that the boundaries between them are not nearly as clear as I have fixed them here. Instead, in this dissertation, I imagine what could be gained from beginning from the assumption that we can't control outcomes of reading, that they aren't fixed points existing beyond the classroom and to which teachers orient all of their work. I instead operate from the perspective that our purposes are just one element among many that shape and are shaped by the complex interactions that make reading in classrooms.

Overview of Chapters

The stories of my own reading experiences with youth and for myself set the tone for much of what is to follow in this dissertation, as I wonder with ordinary potential-filled moments of reading to think about how those potentials might offer possibilities for reading beyond purposes as fixed outcomes. Keeping in mind the context of current conversations about purposes for reading with youth in schools, a conversation that often focuses on what might be the best end goal of reading, I explore the possibilities of affect theory for decentering or weakening those purposes so they might be seen as one element among many interacting in the

classroom space. I explore affect theory and what it might mean for purposes for reading with youth in classrooms throughout the chapters that follow.

I lay the groundwork for this exploration and analysis in Chapter 2, where I animate the elements of affect theory with which I have thought through this work. To do this, I will make an effort to orient the reader toward the vocabulary of affect theory and the assumptions that frame this study. I pay particular attention in this chapter to the notion of ordinary affects and the work of cultural anthropologist Kathleen Stewart. I will also situate this work within previous studies using affect theory to think with literacy learning.

In Chapter 3, I explore my research journey and how ordinary affects in particular and affect theory more broadly opened up new ways for me to think with my data. I combine stories and traditional qualitative descriptions to address my research methods, data collection, and data analysis. Throughout this chapter, I use stories to gesture toward interactions at the core of my work with affect theory.

I then bring ordinary affects into conversation with my data in Chapters 4-6. In each chapter, I focus on one particular purpose for reading and an additional theoretical frame to think with the movement of purposes, objects, and bodies within moments of ordinary reading. In Chapter 4, I bring Barad's (2012) theory of diffraction to the conversation to think about how purposes move as they come into contact with other elements in a reading assemblage to make visible potentials that arise even within an explicit aim of technical mastery. This chapter most closely attends to how purposes shape what is possible for reading.

Then, in Chapter 5, I consider independent reading for pleasure and personal satisfaction and the possibilities books bring with them to the classroom. Drawing on Ahmed's (2014) notion of objects of feeling, I use stories of independent reading to examine the particular emotional

attachments books hold in English classrooms. As the books become objects of hope, hate, or indifference, thinking with Ahmed suggests that they bring with them their own affective possibilities.

Finally, in chapter 6, I move to the purpose of reading for social transformation. In this chapter, I bring that purpose into conversation with another purpose of English classrooms—literature discussions that invite student ideas. In the moment I share, I make visible a clash in these two purposes for reading through one particular literature discussion of *Animal Farm* that did not meet Mrs. K's expectations. In order to think with this clash of purposes, I think with Berlant's concept of optimistic attachments and how those attachments contribute to the ordinary. In each of these chapters, reading with these theoretical insights provides me an opportunity to consider not just what happened in these ordinary moments but also what might be possible.

I conclude this inquiry into the purposes for reading and what might be possible in Chapter 7 where I focus on the speculative nature of affect theory. I offer connections between my inquiry and potentials for reading with youth in secondary English classrooms and research into that reading.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> What is the world making with our intentions and in spite of them?
>
> —Leander & Ehret, 2019

In the previous chapter, I set forth three primary purposes for reading with youth in English classrooms and suggested that those purposes largely exist in the literature as fixed outcomes by which reading as a thing is measured a success or failure. In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for rethinking purposes as moving and making with other objects in the classroom through the lens of affect theory. To do this, I will first explore affect theory as it builds from the work of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Then I will think with key concepts within affect-oriented literacy research and how those concepts have been taken up in response to dominant socio-cultural paradigms. Finally, I explore affect theories of the ordinary and the work of cultural anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, whose thinking and writing move my own.

To Affect and be Affected

I frame this inquiry through the lens of affect theory. It is important to note from the outset that as Gregg and Seigworth (2010) put forth, there is no capital "A" affect theory but many theories of affect that make up the field. Indeed as Seigworth (2016) reflected on the first WTF affect conference, he wrote of the widely varying perspectives and ideas in the presentations: "Ultimately, the point is not to dissolve tensions by imagining that affect study will somehow magically turn into some kind of overarching über-discipline (as if!) or, even more basically, into a single multi-discipline-straddling methodology—because it ain't happening. Ever." Because, he said, perhaps the most important role affect studies might play in disciplinarity is to encourage a sense of capaciousness, or its ability to hold more, to stretch

boundaries. Still, Gregg and Seigworth (2010) identified two dominant angles within theories of affect: 1) Silvan Tomkin's (1962) psychobiology of differential affects; and 2) Gilles Deleuze's (1988) ethology of bodily capacities. After identifying those two, they identified eight other potential ways into affect studies, but following the field of literacy studies (e.g. Leander & Boldt, 2013; Leander & Rowe, 2006), I situate my work within a deleuzoguattarian theory of affect, which locates affect in constantly forming relations of bodies and things. This means that I take the perspective that affect is not an emotion or personal feeling but the body's ability to move and be moved, or its capacity to enter into relations defined by movement and rest (Massumi, 2002). Massumi (2002) equated affect with intensity, which he defined as the forces that circulate in the body's felt experiences of coming into contact with other bodies, human and nonhuman. Affects, from this lens, are also preconscious and unqualified, "the first glimmer of a determinate experience" (p. 16). Because affect exists before conscious-naming, Massumi suggested it might be described as "one's sense of aliveness, of changeability" (p. 36). It is to that sense of aliveness and potential that I am drawn in my own work. Yet, understanding affect from a perspective of preconscious impacts and relations requires some attention to the assumptions on which the theories of affect that I think with rest. I explore three of those here: 1) Affect theory is nonrepresentational; 2) Affect is relational; and 3) Affect is not emotion.

Affect Theory is Nonrepresentational.

To understand affect theory as nonrepresentational is to embrace affect's unfolding in present moments of body-material interactions. That is to say, nonrepresentational theories read the world as a product of ongoing emergent creations that are not limited to fixed social structures or overly determined rationality. Instead, Fendler (2016) argued that nonrepresentational theory is grounded in a view of the world that asks, "What will happen

next?!—in the process of trying to solve puzzles of the universe" (p. 42). To better understand this orientation toward "next", or what might happen, it would be fruitful to consider that much of the interest in affect theory has come about as a response to a recognition of the limits of representational traditions in literacy research (e.g. Ehret, 2018; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Leander & Rowe, 2006). For example, Leander and Rowe (2006) suggested, "Representational logic is organized around principles of recognizing and identifying meanings, stabilizing the event and its focus, and repetitions of different sorts" (p. 434). The limitation of this focus, which makes up much of literacy research, they said, is that it is fixed on structural outcomes, single meanings, and identification. Much of literacy learning, Leander and Rowe argued, exceeds those boundaries. By contrast, affect theory's grounding in the nonrepresentational highlights "heterogeneous relationships...dynamic and unexpected movements...and becoming" (p. 435), all of which serve to emphasize difference and potential. Nonrepresentational approaches, Leander and Boldt (2013) proposed, complicate understandings of literacy activities as designed or projected toward a fixed point but as being lived. Likewise, Ehret (2018) suggested that nonrepresentational theory "opens to modes of being in the present" (p. 53) rather than taking a representational view that looks backward at what happened to identify underlying structures or meaning.

But what might it mean to approach purposes for reading from the present moment as affect theory puts forth? At some level, embracing the nonrepresentational in affect theory requires a rethinking of how purposes might act in the classroom. Purposes, at least when conceived of as fixed outcomes, orient toward hegemony, or the idea that all students in a class will have not just as similar experience but also the same result as long as they are guided there by a series of activities decided upon by a teacher. Even if youth are invited to participate in that

decision making, the orientation is toward singular messages and outcomes (e.g. Morrell, 2008). This is a decidedly rational understanding of teaching and learning. In their "Rereading 'A pedagogy of Multiliteracies': Bodies, Texts, and Emergences", Leander and Boldt (2013) highlighted this concern as they contend that the New London Group's effort to expand notions of literacy led them to replace surprise and possibility with rationality and control. Tying this to the New London Group's notion of design, they said, "We see the desire to achieve mastery over pedagogic practices that can promote change toward solutions to the inequities and alienations that are framed as being produced in and through literate practices and privileges in and out of school" (p. 34). In bringing this up, Leander and Boldt were not critiquing the expansion of literacies or the efforts to address inequities that the New London Group so importantly offered, but rather the "forward backward orientation" (p. 35) that lost sight of what is or could happen in the dynamic interactions of a particular moment of literacy learning. Taking a nonrepresentational approach, Smith (2017) said, "centers the experimental, happenstance, play, wonder, and surprise" in such a way that the affective, creative nature of literacy production is emphasized (p. 127). Similarly, in my inquiry, I want to consider how decentered or weak purposes for reading might open reading and meaning-making up to the possibilities of present moments.

Affect is Relational.

Of particular importance to thinking about affect theory's openness to possibilities is the concept of relationality. Leander and Ehret (2019) likened this relationality to "the social dance of life where movement produces movement" (p. 6). Building on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the assemblage, affect theory redefined relationship to be about the movements of affects among bodies, both human and nonhuman in such a way that those relations are not fixed but in

a continual state of emergence (Massumi, 2002). This emergence of relations in affect theory is, as Leander and Ehret (2019) described,

> A sense of time that is open and unpredictable, that is ripe with a sense of moving toward the next moment, actively unsettled. Affectively speaking, emergence describes a sense of unknowingness, a sense that next moments are not predetermined by previous ones. (p. 6)

In other words, emergence is the time of potentials when people and things come into contact in such a way that produces new movements. These moments of contact are what Deleuze and Guattari called the assemblage, or the forming of relationships (Leander & Boldt, 2013, 2017). An assemblage is dynamic, coming together again and again. As Massumi (2002) said, things, people, and ideas come into being in these assemblages rather than existing outside of those relations. Because being is constantly being remade in movement, it is not so much being as it is "always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 3). This constant forming and reforming of bodies in an assemblage assumes difference as the state of things, even if those differences are so small that they have the feeling of repetition or sameness. As such, there is always the possibility of something happening, something changing.

Yet, that change can happen only in the dynamic relations of objects, bodies, ideas, and elements circulating in a space. As Ehret (2018) argued, this is a quite different proposition from representational logic, which places humans at the center manipulating the environment. The relations in affect theory are posthuman, or as Wargo (2018) posited, a condition of connectivity among all objects, bodies, ideas, and affects—human and nonhuman. Instead of a view of relationships that says humans interact with and on the world, affect theory and other

posthumanist theories start from an assumption that all of the objects, bodies, ideas and elements in an assemblage have the ability to affect or be affected. Instead of an emphasis on human agency, then, the materials and ideas in a classroom also have their own agency with which they impact potentials. This agency is not contained within a person or object but only realized in the forming of relations.

Karen Barad's (2007, 2012) theory of agential realism grounds these relations in the concept of intra-action as a way of rethinking relations among human and nonhuman bodies as co-constituting in their entanglements, which she defined as ontological inseparability. That is to say, rather than distinguishing between a subject and object, agential realism, Barad (2007) wrote, "doesn't presume the separateness of any- 'thing,' let alone the alleged spatial, ontological, and epistemological distinction that sets humans apart" (p. 136). "Things" [including humans], for Barad, then exist only in their intra-actions. And it is only through specific intra-actions that boundaries take form, or matter comes to matter. Drawing on her background in theoretical particle physics, Barad (2012) suggested that is through these entanglements that agency is produced.

Literacy scholars, particularly in the fields of writing and multimodal composing, have taken up Barad's work to think with how bodies and materials act agentively to produce meaning (e.g. Ehret, Hollett, & Jocius, 2016; Lenters, 2016; Tanner, 2017; Wargo, 2017). For example, Hollett and Ehret (2016) suggested in their study of mobile technology that an intra-actional lens becomes student-iPad-App instead of, as in representational theories, student manipulating an iPad to accomplish an outcome. The App, they say, demonstrated its capacity to affect when it shut down and frustration bloomed. Momentarily stalled, a different assemblage formed. I might also offer an example from my own experience working with 5th graders to prepare for a state-

mandated writing test. As practice, the students were asked to complete an essay prompt about preparing for a hurricane. Being in south Florida, the space came to matter as students shared from their experiences in Hurricane Irma and wondered how any adults (their identified audience for their essay) would not know how to prepare for a hurricane. The space then had its own agency in the intra-actions of the assemblage, affecting the practice of writing. This is a different reading than one might get if one is focused on whether the students completed the prompt or even how students used background knowledge to complete the task. This focus on the intra-actions among bodies, materials, and spaces decenters human beings, recognizing the vibrancy of all matter (Ehret, Hollett, & Jocius, 2016).

Bringing this idea to my studies of purposes for reading, then, suggests that purposes, as both matter and mattering become in the intra-actions of the bodies and materials in the reading experience. At the same time, those purposes defined over time, as introduced "bodies," impact the becoming of the reading experience and cannot be separated from the specificity of intra-actions within the classroom. Just as purposes have the capacity to affect, they also have the capacity to be affected as they participate in materializing "reading," that is, determining what shape reading takes within the intra-action. Because these purposes become in the intra-actions of reading, they have the capacity to include or exclude possibilities. At the same time, they do not become alone but with other bodies and materials, all of which have the potential to affect within the forming relationship.

Affect is Distinct from Emotion.

One final assumption on which deleuzoguattarian theories of affect stand: Affect is not emotion. Fendler (2016) noted that although historically affect was synonymous with emotion, non-representational theory distinguishes it from emotion. As I said earlier, affect is a body's

preconscious capacity to move or be moved, which Massumi referred to as intensity. By contrast, Massumi (2002) said, an emotion is "the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity" (p. 28). That is to say, affect, once it is named as an emotion, ceases to be affect; it ceases to be preconscious. Leander and Ehret (2019) described the difference between affect and emotion like explaining why a joke is funny, with emotion analogous to the explanation and affect analogous to the feeling in the moment of the joke. At the moment of explanation, they argued, our bodies are moved out of the moment toward reflection. Massumi (2002) likened emotion to "owned" intensity, now subject to critique and representation by a subject. This is an important distinction because affect, from a nonrepresentational stance, is indeterminate and cannot be defined in the ways constructivist categories of emotion can (Leander and Ehret, 2019). At some level, then, emotions, in their backwards-looking frame, limit the potentials that affect moves us toward. Distinguishing between affect and emotion then furthers my effort to focus on the shifting, indeterminate qualities of intra-actions in the classroom. At the same time, the challenges of writing about sensations that cannot be named mean that I often rely on emotion words like frustration or delight to describe the sensations of intra-actions.

I appreciate affect theory's emphasis on the potential-filled nature of affect. At the same time, I also take up the work of Sarah Ahmed, who though labeled an affect theorist uses the term emotion in her work. In the afterword to *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2014) suggested she used the term emotion in her book because she saw herself in conversation with feminist theorists including Allison Jagger and Audre Lorde who used the term emotion and made an effort to join mind and body in feeling. For her, emotion is about the capacity to affect and be affected or as she termed it, "emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with

objects and others" (p. 208). Moreover, she considered the way objects and bodies press upon others, with some of those pressings becoming impressions that leave traces that impact an orientation toward something. These impressions, then, Ahmed argued, move objects and bodies in particular directions toward particular relations. These are not, however, overly determined directions but rather they unfold in the intensity of bodily responses. I will continue to explore Ahmed's work as I think with my data in Chapters 5 and 6, but I include it here because the relationship Ahmed posited between affect/emotion and orientation resonates with my interest in purpose. Ahmed (2010) wrote, "We may walk into the room and 'feel the atmosphere,' but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point. The pedagogic encounter is full of angles" (p. 37). In much the same way, I imagine our purposes orient us toward particular angles in the classroom, toward particular ways of doing things. At the same time, Ahmed added, "Situations are affective given the gap between impressions we have of others, and the impressions we make on others, all of which are lively" (p. 37). Ahmed's theory of emotion, then, is not the lifeless categorization Massumi (2002) and Leander and Ehret (2019) make emotion out to be. It is instead a way of thinking/feeling relations and the movement of orientations within those assemblages. This is particularly important for my conceptions of what could be, what might make it possible to rethink purposes and classroom relations in such a way to make room for the ways we are moved and move others.

Affect Theory in Literacy Teaching and Learning

In the first section of this chapter, I laid the groundwork for thinking with affect theory and my work reading with youth and teachers in a high school English classroom. Of particular importance to my thinking are the ideas that affect is nonrepresentational, relational, and

preconscious. Although in endeavoring to clarify those ideas, I have begun to introduce affect-oriented literacy research, I take the time now to further explore the field.

Overview of the Field

As Leander and Ehret (2019) suggested, affect-oriented literacy research is relatively early in its development. The field is small and much of the work has been focused more on explaining and justifying it in relation to socio-cultural theories of literacies than on developing an extensive theory of affect in literacy research (e.g. Ehret, 2018; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Smith, 2017). To map the field of affect-oriented literacy research, I read peer reviewed research-oriented articles published since 2013, only 25 articles, that I collected by skimming four prominent journals in the field of English and literacy education [*Journal of Literacy Research, Reading Research Quarterly, Research in the Teaching of English, English Education*]. I supplemented this initial search by referencing that list against the texts Leander and Ehret referenced in their 2019 edited volume *Affect in Literacy Learning and Teaching: Pedagogies, Politics and Coming to Know.* For each of the articles on both lists, I used Google Scholar to identify articles that cited those and used a posthuman affective theoretical frame for their work. I also included one article by Leander and Rowe from 2006 because of its importance in introducing a literacy audience to the potentials of affect theory and the work of Deleuze and Guattari in *Reading Research Quarterly*. Each of these texts put forward a vision of posthuman, affect-oriented literacy learning and research that emphasized movement, sensation, and the potentials of always-forming relations between bodies and materials. I limited my focus in this review to conceptual and empirical papers oriented toward a research audience because they provided the most complete picture of the theoretical underpinnings of affect theory as it has been taken up in literacy research. And though I do not contend that this is an exhaustive list of

studies drawing on affect theory in literacy, the ideas and concepts in the 25 articles and edited book became a refrain, providing me with a sense of where the field is. Across these articles, I identified two trends in affect-oriented literacy research: 1) Affect theory complicates socio-cultural theories of youth's composing practices; and 2) Affect theory can be a way to think beyond outcome-based literacy learning.

Affect Theory: Rethinking Youth's Composing Practices

The vast majority of studies drawing on posthuman affect theories identified its potential for rethinking youth's composing practices, particularly those involving technology or multi-sensory compositions (e.g. Ehret & Hollett, 2014; Ehret, Hollett, & Jocius, 2016; Escott & Pahl, 2017; Lenters, 2016; Smith, 2017; Wargo, 2018; Wohlwend, et al., 2017). In large part, the aims of these articles were to demonstrate the potential of affect theory to expand researchers and educators' understandings of the interactive nature of composing. Perhaps because of the dominance of sociocultural paradigms in literacy research and relatively small body of affect-oriented work, most of the articles that rethink youth's composing practices included some consideration of what sociocultural theories would be able to say about the practices detailed in the studies. They did this in two primary ways: 1) comparing and contrasting nonrepresentational, affect analyses and representational analyses; and 2) reading a set of data, usually one piece of writing or moment of composing, through both a sociocultural lens and an affect lens. For example, Ehret & Hollett (2014) attended to what they perceived as the lack of attention to the body in adolescents' digital composing practices in their study of five adolescents' composing of digital narratives on iPods. In it they first highlighted the limitations of social semiotics analyses, which, they said, position youth as rational designers of texts before moving to demonstrate that an affective analysis attending to affects and atmospheres made

visible the youth's body-centered rather than tech-centered practices. Moreover, Wargo (2018) wrote that he turned to posthumanist theories because his efforts at coding reduced his elementary grade students' writing to abstract patterns. He embraced sound and students' sonic compositions in his study to show how that attention to emergent listening produced new forms of embodied knowledge.

Both Ehret & Hollett (2014) and Wargo (2018) addressed the potential for affective analyses to open up ways to think about composing beyond sociocultural analysis of youth as designers and producers of an end product. They did not go so far as to analyze their data in multiple ways to demonstrate that potential. Smith (2017), however, conducted two analyses on the same data, using multiliteracies theory and nonrepresentational theory, to describe one high school writer's practices of writing a series of young adult gothic novels. Smith performed the dual analysis to emphasize the need for nonrepresentational analysis that makes visible the affective, embodied, and noncognitive aspects of writing. She made clear that her work is primarily a theoretical exploration of the potential of nonrepresentational analysis. Likewise, Wohlwend, et al. (2017) performed a dual analysis using mediated discourse theory as a sociocultural theory and agential realism as an affective, posthumanist theory to explore their usefulness in studying a preschool makerspace. In their article, they compared key tenets of each of the theories before analyzing video excerpts from two weeks of play in three preschool classrooms using both interaction and intra-action as frames. While they identified collaborative interactions using mediated discourse analysis of multimodality, they tracked the intra-actions of bodies and materials in "nonsense" play, which they said allowed them to notice what had seemed to be chaotic or meaningless in their sociocultural analysis.

Across these and other articles, researchers focused on composing/writing practices rather than speaking or reading components of literacy. Largely building on the work of Leander and Boldt (2013), they also, to varying extents, positioned their work as a response to sociocultural representational analyses and the flattening of those writing practices. Taken together, these articles make the case for the potential of affect theory and emphasis on intra-actions to gesture toward new understandings of literacy learning. At the same time, significant time is dedicated to making this case and speaking back to dominant paradigms in literacy research.

Affect Theory: Moving Beyond Outcome-based Literacy Learning

Of particular interest to me is the small body of work within affect theory research that explicitly focuses on its potential to move English and literacy beyond outcome-based notions of learning (e.g. Ehret, 2018; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Leander & Boldt, 2018; Leander & Ehret, 2019; Leander, et al., 2017; Leader & Rowe, 2006; Tanner, 2017). Even looking across these articles, the range of years from 2006-2019 stands out as it echoes my teaching experience from 2003-2014. In 2006, I was in my third year teaching at a low-performing charter school in Washington, DC, and No Child Left Behind was beginning to hold schools in my area accountable. Of course, it was nothing like the extent of the standards and accountability that would come to dominate both my school and my own teaching by the time I left in 2014. And while much of what I consider in this dissertation is a response to the overly outcome-oriented nature of teaching and learning that I saw evolve over my 11 years in the school, it is also in response to the lively surplus that still managed to sneak into my experiences with youth in my classroom. And so, the call for something other than or in addition to the measured outcomes of

literacy learning has its own affective resonances for me in my work here and in my wonderings about the potentials of English teaching and learning.

Because his work has been influential in the bringing of affect theory to literacy learning and teaching, I examine how Kevin Leander and his writing collaborators considered moving beyond outcome-based literacy learning in two important affect-oriented articles (Leander & Rowe, 2006; Leander & Boldt, 2013).

Leander and Rowe's (2006) article "Mapping literacy spaces in motion: A rhizomatic analysis of a classroom literacy performance" served as a pedagogical introduction to affect theory, complete with a glossary, for readers of *Reading Research Quarterly.* In this article, which focused on student presentations as the moment under study, Leander and Rowe argued that these rather traditional literacy performances are composed of moving, shifting relations and are often about creating differences, despite overly stabilized conventional interpretations of these performances. They drew on affect theory to emphasize that different outcomes are possible, even within traditional practices. Alluding to the need to think beyond outcome-based measures, they wrote, "It involves an affirmation of the production of difference in pedagogy, a valuing of multiplicities and their contingent movements that cannot be defined in rubrics" (p. 452). They seemed, in this article, to suggest that even within the confines of institutions oriented toward sameness, affect theory makes visible always emerging potentials.

Leander (2013) built on this work with colleague Gail Boldt in their article, "Rereading 'A pedagogy of multiliteracies' bodies, texts, and emergence," in which they critiqued the outcome-oriented, rational design of the New London Group's pedagogy of multiliteracies. Offering an affective consideration of the document in light of one youth's engagement with Japanese manga, Leander and Boldt followed "the emergence of activity, including the relations

among texts and bodies in activity and the affective intensities of these relations" (p. 34). Instead of a future-orientation, Leander and Boldt attuned to the in-the-moment unfolding of literacy practices, to that which affected and was affected. Leander and Boldt (2017, 2018) continue to develop their conception of learning as in the moment, as that which moves us in new directions in their ongoing collaborations around affect-oriented literacy learning.

Related to this work is the research of Christian Ehret, a former doctoral student of Leander and Rowe. In his work, he has considered the affective nature of multimodal composing and potentials methods of analysis (e.g. Ehret & Hollett, 2014; Ehret, Hollett, & Jocius, 2016). At this point, however, I would like to consider Ehret's (2018) article, "Moments of teaching and learning in a children's hospital: Affects, textures, and temporalities." In this work, Ehret drew on creative nonfiction to capture felt moments of affective intensities in his work with Cole, one youth at a children's hospital. Ehret wrote stories of moments when something forced him to think and live differently with the children he was there to tutor. This is particularly interesting because the emphasis in this article is not on the child but on the teacher as the learner. As he processed these stories through writing, he characterized these moments of affective intensity as "moments of being in something together, something exciting, dispiriting, infuriating, affect" (p. 53). The relational focus for Ehret, then, was the emphasis on something that felt like it mattered, or moved him. Although the outcome of his relationship with Cole was ostensibly about different writing tasks Cole needed to complete while he was in the hospital, Ehret found that the linear movement toward an outcome was not the learning that emerged in this relation. Instead it was the "moving, textured experience of becoming different" (p. 57). Becoming different, being moved—these are two ways affect-oriented literacy researchers suggest there are possibilities for learning beyond fixed outcomes. I close this section with Ehret's study because he, like me,

turned to Kathleen Stewart's work to attend to the textures and rhythms of his learning with Cole. Attuning to affects in the moment-to-moment unfolding of reading with youth in the ordinary teaching and learning of English classrooms is the project to which I move as I close this chapter thinking about what the work of Stewart might offer for rethinking purposes for reading.

Thinking with the Ordinary

The specific uniting thread of affect theory with which I think in this dissertation project is the concept of ordinary affects and the work of cultural anthropologist Kathleen Stewart. I build on the field of affect-oriented literacy research by situating my work within the domain of reading rather than writing and the movement of bodies and objects in a classroom As I set forth in the previous section, much of the work in affect theory in literacy research has been on writing and multimodal composing. In this dissertation I would like to add to that thinking with a view of reading with youth in classrooms as a lively, vibrant assemblage of objects, bodies, and texts rather than an act youth do to accomplish a specific, predetermined purpose. Throughout the chapters that follow, I attend to the ordinary, or the "taken-for-granted," of what happens in English classrooms. Reading my data with Stewart, I suggest that ordinary moments leave an impression, a gesture toward how reading comes to be in English classrooms. I also take this work up as an effort to explore the "and" that runs through affect studies. By that I mean that affect is about making room, attuning to what exceeds encounters. Seigworth (2016) wrote, "Non- is not anti- and that affect study does not—indeed, cannot—sustain its workings through negation or inversion or exclusion." In other words, taking up affect doesn't mean, as it could be read, that concepts like the social or intentionality or consciousness disappear, as if I or any writer has somehow arrived at purer, better form. That's not the point. The point is, as Stewart

(2017) wrote, to make an effort "to describe the iterations, durations, and modes of being taking place" (p. 197), or, in this dissertation, to think about what is going on in excess of the usual ways we might categorize reading in schools.

Ordinary Affects

I draw on Stewart's work to undo any tidy story of reading with teachers and youth in classrooms that this dissertation might have become. Instead, I look with wonder at the ordinary, everyday moments that made up reading in one particular year in a 10th grade classroom. It is with her concept of ordinary affects that I challenged myself to think beyond critiquing that classroom to see what was going on, to see the moving, shifting relations composing reading. Stewart (2007) provided an affective definition of the ordinary:

> The ordinary is a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life. Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of continual motion of relations, scenes, contingences, and emergences. They're the things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in public and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something. (p. 1-2)

The ordinary, then, is what we do every day: the places we go, the people we meet, the objects with which we intra-act. The ordinary, at least in Stewart's definition, is what composes a life, and that ordinary is characterized most by movement and intra-actions, all the assemblages that form. Because of its continual movement, Stewart said, "The ordinary is a moving target" (p.

93), which we try to trace through big stories, routines, or the hardened lines of race and class. Resisting structural critique, Stewart suggested these hardened, seemingly immoveable structures begin in the ordinary, in moments that seem the same, so much so that the differences do not register. These ordinary affects are not about meanings exactly but about

> the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible. The question they beg is...where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance. (p. 2-3)

The challenge in recognizing ordinary affects, however, is that they pass by unnoticed and potentials are left to drift because they become what happens. Too often, she said, "Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual" (p. 15). Stewart (2014) is concerned with power and inequity, but instead of focusing on representing larger, broader structures, she has attuned to the small, seemingly invisible affects of everyday life that might provide insights into how worlds are built—an effort at destabilization. Writing about the American road, she re-theorized it "as a diverse and diffuse field of co-constituting elements thrown together into an assemblage in and as events" (p. 549). An affective reading of the road, then, is to destabilize it, to create out of something seemingly immoveable, continual motion.

Crackling and Flashing Up: Potentials in the Ordinary

Of particular interest to me are those various surging affects that have the potential to disrupt or move the ordinary in a new direction, potentials, Stewart (2007) referred to as "crackling" or "flashing up" (p. 119). These surges, Stewart said, are vital forces within the ordinary that have the potential to grow and become "something that feels like something" (p. 2),

affects that spawn new trajectories or new habits of watching. For example, Stewart shared a story of sitting in a cafe in a small West Texas town when a biker couple walked in looking disheveled. Everyone stared at them, but as Stewart went to leave, they asked her to look for bike parts because they hit a deer on the way into town and lost their bike. This story, Stewart said, set off a chain reaction of questions, connections, recognitions, what Stewart called a "we" that charged "the social with lines of potential" (p. 11). This potential, this accident, necessitated a response from the inhabitants of the diner, even if that response was small and we cannot know what it could be, it shifted the ordinary. These surging affects in an event or moment, Stewart said, can lead somewhere because the ordinary becomes noticed again. In being noticed, new potentials open up. Attending to ordinary affects in reading with youth allows me to pay attention to breaks or cracks in routine, in which possibilities for knowing, relating, and attending to things are revealed.

I bring this spirit to the chapters that follow. In providing a series of encounters with reading in one 10th grade classroom, I endeavor to slow down and listen to what is being made of reading in this space. Rather than becoming the judge in this adventure, I try to capture a scene to see what it might suggest when defining reading as a particular thing in the English classroom (Berlant & Stewart, 2018). I try, as I will detail in Chapter 3, to create snapshots that describe the rhythm, tone, movements, and feelings in the always forming assemblages of reading and to gesture toward what affect theory might mean for talking about the purposes for reading in secondary English classrooms and the potentials that exist for transformation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PERSPECTIVES

At one level, this is a failed dissertation. After all, I set out with purposes of my own aimed at changing the way of doing English at Monument Lake High School. And the outcome both in experience and writing is nothing like I had imagined. Perhaps I should have expected this when, during my dissertation proposal defense, one of my professors asked, "What is this study about?" And I had little to say, so frustrated by then about what I perceived as my inability to direct my dissertation. Even when it wasn't working, I tried to stay the course, seeing my failure as an opportunity to critique the teacher and school within which I spent a year. But that was not the dissertation I wanted to write, and so it remained unwritten for many months. I could have abandoned the project altogether, but I could not abandon the time I spent with Mrs. K and the youth at Monument Lake. They mattered to me and so still did my questions about the possibilities of reading with youth in schools. I began to write stories to capture what I heard in conversations and observed in that classroom. As I composed these stories, I began to notice the movement and relationships, the liveliness and potentials in their classroom. And so, I turned to affect theory to think with my data. Ehret and Leander (2019) wrote that their interest in affect theory is not intended to replace other approaches, but rather "to ask what differences become available in this shift, in (new) ways of seeing and feeling the world opened up by affect theory" (p. 4). In this methods chapter, I explore my research journey and how affect theory opened up new ways for me to think with my experiences reading with youth and Mrs. K at Monument Lake. To do this, I share stories and descriptions in an effort to bring to life the intra-actions of objects and bodies that have made this project possible. As part of these stories and descriptions, I will address my research methods, data collection, and data analysis.

Ultimately, this inquiry is a kind of "slowed ethnographic practice attuned to the forms and forces unfolding in scenes and encounters" (Stewart, 2017, p. 192). That is to say, I have relied on ethnographic practices including observations and conversations to draw out ideas about how purposes for reading become in English classrooms. When I set out to do this work, I thought I would use practitioner inquiry (e.g. Cochran Smith and Lytle, 2011) and participatory action research (Morrell, 2008) to bring students and teachers together to change the purposes for reading in English class, but over the course of the year I spent at Monument Lake, I struggled to find those big moments that might serve as a catalyst for change. I was stuck and so I turned to what I had seen, what I had done, and what I had talked with teachers and youth about. This turn can't be separated from shifts in my theoretical frame. Barad (2012) described theories as "thinking companions with a chance for life" (p. 80). And indeed, Stewart's (2007) theories of ordinary affects provided me with a thinking companion for my time at Monument Lake; her stories of ordinary moments that felt "like something" (p. 2) drew my attention to the ordinary moments I spent with Mrs. K and the youth in her classroom. In describing affect-oriented ethnography, Stewart (2017) wrote, "Affect studies offers an ethnographic method of mattering that slows to gather into an account any number of things…. all the bodies, the lines of things on the move" (p. 196). With that attention, she said, "The actual became a multiplicity of precisely occurring possibilities in the forces that set in motion by one thing or another" (p. 195). Movements that matter, objects circulating and acting on each other—these ideas continue to shift how I think about relations between purposes and possibilities for reading. In this chapter, I explore how I attended to those possibilities for reading set in motion in Mrs. K's classroom.

As I said in Chapter 1, I ground this dissertation in the interplay of histories and bodies and feelings and objects that come together to make reading in the ordinary moments of the classroom. With this focus, two primary questions shaped my inquiry:

1. What purposes for reading are made possible in the ordinary moments of the classroom?
2. How might attending to those moments open up wonder as an affective possibility for reading with youth in English classrooms?

Given the emphasis on relations and movement in affect theory and in my dissertation, I endeavor to align the writing of this chapter with those theories. To do this, I experiment with vignettes to try to capture the body-material-space intra-actions in the classroom. After the vignettes that open each section, I include more traditional qualitative descriptions of the youth and teachers from Monument Lake and my methods of data collection and analysis.

Story 2. My Angle

I love being in Vanyua's social studies classroom so like most days when I find time to squeeze in observations, I make my way there. Vanyua is a 52-year-old African American woman who grew up five blocks from where we teach together. I am supposed to be her literacy coach although I feel like I learn more from her than she does from me. She would say the opposite, but wherever the truth may lie, we are friends who love talking about teaching and learning.

Today, I am in her history and film class, an elective assigned to 11th and 12th graders. Over the course of the year, the class has morphed into more of a study of social issues than film. Since the students didn't really choose the class, she said she had to find a way to teach them something. Maybe this would be interesting to them. It depends on the day as to how the youth describe the course.

They are watching <u>Hoodwinked</u> (2012), a documentary aimed at shifting narratives about African Americans in the U.S. I sit down with a group of students I have known since they were in my 7th grade English class. After we watch a segment focused on images of beauty and what I now know to be white supremacist beauty aesthetics, she asks the class to reflect on what they've seen. She asks them to connect their experiences to the documentary.

Most of us [me included] share something related to our appearance or our hair and how we feel less than. Vanyua says this makes her feel sad, sad that her students don't know their worth.

James, a 17-year-old senior who I had taught for two years in middle school, says, "They just want us to be white. In this school, we just need to act white and we'll be okay."

I am not sure if Jonathon remembers this moment or if Vanyua does. I don't remember ever talking about it with her. I don't even remember what she said to him. Yet, this is a small moment in that class that lingers, that impresses upon me even six years later. By this point, I had been teaching at Ingenuity High for 10 years, and we were in the midst of a school turnaround effort that required us to increase student scores to avoid closure. The new administrators who had been hired in the turnaround had instituted a number of "charter school" practices: guiding principles, strict discipline policies, significant rewards for good behavior. All of those things, they said, were designed to change academic outcomes. Hearing James make that comment, within the space of that video and that class, moved me. It moved me to question some of what we were doing in that school, how an emphasis on one way to be might reinforce racist ideologies. At that point, I had very little vocabulary for responding to that moment, but I still felt its intensity.

Teacher-Researcher Positionality

I was 23 years-old when I started teaching mostly by accident at Ingenuity, a small charter middle and high school in a historic African American community of Washington, DC cut off by the Anacostia River from the monuments and museums and seats of power most people know. I had been tutoring Stephon, a 15-year-old African American boy most people called "Smiley", when he told me I should be an English teacher at his school. Knowing I wasn't qualified, I sent a note to his principal suggesting I could start a Saturday writing program for interested students. The principal, Mrs. Williamson, called me a day later to ask if I wanted to be an English teacher there. They were just opening the middle school and were looking for teachers. I decided to go for an interview. I remember little of that day other than that I sat in her

office by myself while she attended to other school business, and I saw a discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a 10th grade English class. While the students talked about the novel, one boy walked around the classroom drinking blue juice and giving everyone a high five. The teacher, an older white man continued to facilitate the conversation. I remember a student standing up and sharing her own experience with assault, and I remember thinking maybe I shouldn't be there—an outsider in an intimate moment. But I also knew I wanted to be there, in a classroom discussing literature with students. A week or so passed and I hadn't heard anything from Mrs. Blount. When I reached out, she asked me when I could start, and did I want to teach summer school, too. Perhaps I should have been troubled by the ease with which I was asked to be a part of the school. But nine months out of college and bored in the government job my mom had been so proud I had gotten, I left it for teaching. I thought I could do for others what my teachers had done for me.

The reality was that I quickly became part of the problem, a young White teacher, who had done well in school by doing what was expected, thrown into a classroom with not even one day of preparation. The only experiences I had were my own and so I reproduced those experiences with my 94 African American students in 7th and 8th grades. I am not capable of capturing the intensity of that first-year teaching, but aside from the failed reading experiments, the fights, the general chaos that became in that year, the relations stand out. Perhaps because I knew so little about teaching and learning, I oriented toward the youth in my class, talking and feeling with them as we sorted out all the becomings in this space. I became, in those early years of teaching, someone who shifted with the students, with available materials, and with the small glimmers of potentials I saw in our work together. Even in the most difficult moments, the ones I can't possibly capture in words, I saw possibilities in the relations that became in that space.

Those possibilities continue to move me even now and are much of the reason affect theories feel right for my dissertation. Ehret and Leander (2019) suggested that affect theories offer a chance for literacy researchers to rediscover the "life" (p. 8) in the ways people engage with literacy. It is that liveliness in my own teaching, that I believe exists in all classrooms, even on the most boring of days, that I seek to capture in this dissertation. And perhaps even more, I want to suggest that we shouldn't fight that liveliness, we shouldn't try to control it in an effort to accomplish particular goals.

I also believe that attuning to that liveliness makes visible the ways teachers and youth often miss what matters in literacy learning—the ways our interactions reinforce normative ways of being that are often raced, classed, or gendered instead of moving us in new directions. To me, that's what Jonathon's comment called attention to at Ingenuity. I stayed at Ingenuity for 11 years, and over time, I became adept at systematic classroom teaching and management. The more concerned I became with classroom control and improved test scores, the more I sought as a teacher to quell the intensities that come with reading, writing, speaking, and listening in classrooms. Maintaining calm, organized teaching and learning oriented toward a particular purpose became the measure against which I judged English teaching and learning. That desire for calm often came from my own fears about being judged as not good enough; yet, that calm was always in contrast to the felt relations of being with students, talking about books and our lives, or learning from them about what reading might be for. Ehret and Leander (2019) called those intensities the "surplus" (p. 2), or those moments that seem like too much to hold in teaching and learning but that feel important. It is that surplus and those moments, often unexpected, that continue to resonate as I craft this dissertation. And they are the ones that I look for in reading with Mrs. K and the youth in their classroom.

Story 3. Ready for College. Ready for Life.

Monument Lake has a mission: Prepare students to succeed in college. Doing this, they suggest on their school website will help students excel at life. For English 10's part, the course should help students develop a "unique and comprehensive understanding of literature."

When I ask the students and teachers what's best about Monument Lake, they all say two things: 1) student diversity; and 2) rigorous academics. Evie sums it up as she was wont to do in our conversations: "It's a good, diverse school with very good education."

Miguel will tell you that his mom sent him to Monument Lake so he could go to college, even though he says he doesn't think the school offers anything for kids who don't want to go to college. Life is getting in the way for him. He says he has a "little learning disability" and he doesn't know if he can make it to college. His father was deported earlier in the year. He works more than 30 hours every week at a local country club, and he says he lost his religion. He says it very quietly and looks around every time, like he knows he shouldn't say it out loud. On a visit to a local fast food restaurant, he says he feels uncomfortable, being the only person with his dark brown Mexican skin. Isabella is there, too, but she is lighter-skinned, a biracial African American girl, and Miguel sees himself differently than he sees her. Every time I ask him why he reads books in school, he says it's to learn about other cultures. "It's important to know different things about other worlds." he says, even though he almost never says anything in class. When talk turns to student protests, he shouts out, "Most of those kids don't even care. They just do it to get out of class." Somewhere, along the way Miguel began to respond to questions about reading and English classes with a single word: "Egg." The teachers talk about how he won't do any work, even when he gets pulled out for English language support. "Reading and writing is hard for him," Mrs. K says.

Ordinary affects swirl under the surface of Mrs. K's classroom. In a world where the President equates Mexican immigrants with rapists and murderers and the government is shut down over an argument about a wall, the school continues its march forward to college. Only these debates are there. Alejandro lifts his head from his desk for a discussion about laws in Animal Farm and in the United States. "This is what I miss when I'm sleeping," he says. "This is fun." Evie assures him this doesn't happen every day. For her part, Evie says she always raises her hand at the beginning of a conversation so she can get her points. That way she doesn't miss her turn. Brianna says she only talks if she has something that means something to her to say.

Around the circle of 31 students, Joshua insists that Americans would say something if laws were changed. That they would notice what the animals in <u>Animal Farm</u> didn't. Alejandro isn't so sure that people would speak out. "When you're with a group of people and someone comes up with an idea, our brain is trained to listen to them," he argues. "Like with the school shooting that just happened, you know I bet some people thought they should jump out the window, but the teacher said get down, so they did." Joshua insists this is different. These are laws, and Americans will stand up to the government.

Alejandro adds, "What about undocumented people? They can't speak out. They don't want to be deported."

Immigration. School shootings. Black Lives Matter. The language of this time. The language of before but ordinary now. The language of the yet to be?

The texts don't talk about any of these things, but they are objects, participants in the classroom.

One afternoon two seniors bring in a Black Lives Matter banner they made and ask everyone to sign it. Mrs. K does. Ashanti gets up first. Joshua follows. One by one the students get up and sign it. Alex doesn't. Alex said earlier that it is Black people's responsibility to care about police brutality. No one in the class said anything back to him. Xavier said he thinks it's everyone's responsibility.

Before the seniors leave, they say the school won't let them hang the banner, but they made it anyway. Ashanti shares a story of being followed by the police. The other students shush him, and Isabella, who earlier had been talking about how angry she was while reading a story of police violence against women in Kenya, tells him that he shouldn't share stories like that in class. When he whispered the story to me, I'm the one who told him he should share it. He was the first to volunteer to talk to me in this project.

After Parkland, the students use it as an example for change. They debate the potential for change. They talk about being in a building with a shooter, the middle school student who brought an air gun to the school down the street, the laws that could change, whether to participate in a protest. Jesse suggests that maybe people like the Parkland shooter should be locked in their rooms so they can't hurt anyone. For his part, he's trying to suggest a change. Other students get angry. Brianna thinks that's a really bad idea and wonders how "he's gonna say that." He's often on the outside of the group in class, his ideas drifting out of the circle.

Over the course of the year, they learn about mood and tone and rhetorical appeals and author's purpose. They learn about participial phrases and Lenin and Stalin. They learn about the government of Rome, Caesar, the Senators, the Plebeians. They learn how to cite evidence from a text and when to be quiet and how to read silently. They learn to participate in discussions in class and how to get points for them. Joshua, who Mrs. K and the other students see as a leader in the class, says he likes to "finish my work as soon as I can then I just kinda sit there and mess around." He'd rather the class be "boring and simple rather than hard."

When I ask Miguel, Ashanti, Joshua, Evie, Isabella, Jesse, and Jacob what reading books has to do with their lives, they say "nothing." Isabella pauses and adds, "<u>The Glass Castle</u> and <u>Things Fall Apart</u> taught me to be grateful for what I have." Brianna says of a culminating Socratic Seminar across each of the novels they read, "The stuff we were talking about. It was in my heart." She references the conversation about student activists and school shootings, but then she says, "Until you go through these things, you don't know the trauma." She hasn't been through a school shooting, but her best friend was murdered by a maintenance person at the high school down the street.

They say they want Mrs. K to tell them how to get an A+. And if not that, when they talk with her, they want to hear her mortal fears. For Mrs. K's part, she says she has to do something different. "It seems like they miss the point," she said. "I don't want it to be the Mrs. K show, but maybe I

should direct them a little more." She's shaken when she asks them what they would like to talk about in English class, and they don't offer up ideas.

Research Context and Participants

In the story above, I emphasized the movement of bodies-materials-intensities through Monument Lake. I wrote this story frustrated by all the missed potentials and overlooked stories that circulated through Mrs. K's classroom and the school as a whole, while recognizing the impossibility of capturing all the differences in what happened each day. Rather than begin by describing the school's characteristics, I use the story to introduce readers to the often normative practices on the move at Monument Lake and to the possibilities for what it could be that always, already existed alongside sedimented ways of doing things. This movement is not something I could capture through the traditional qualitative descriptions I share in this section.

The primary focus of this study is one 10th grade English classroom at Monument Lake High School, a charter high school serving about 600 students in grades 9-12. Like the community in which it is situated, Monument Lake is racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse: 35.7% White, 29.3% Latino, and 24.6% African American, 5.5% Multiracial, and 4.8% Asian. About half of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch. These are not just numbers: in our first meeting, students proudly shared that it is the "second most diverse high school in the state" and when I met the English teachers before school started, they all said the best thing about the school was the diversity of the students. At the same time, the staff is almost entirely White, all of the English teachers and administrators with whom I interacted during the year were White. Alongside its diversity, the school prides itself on a rigorous, standards-based college preparatory program in which all students are required to take at least two Advanced Placement Courses. The school has been consistently ranked as one of the top five schools in the state and top in its region according to the *US News and World Report* annual rankings.

Because of my interest in the often-cited tensions between those purposes that invite students to share of their lives and experiences in secondary English teaching and learning and those that prepare students for college and careers, I wanted to conduct this dissertation at Monument Lake. Being able to think about these purposes and how they might conflict or live together in a school serving very diverse students seemed to be a site rich with possibilities. When I first spoke with the principal, she was excited about my interest in culturally sustaining pedagogy, something she identified as a struggle for the school. The principal connected me with the English Department chair in the spring of 2017, and I observed her class and several others from March-May of that year. She introduced me to the other seven English teachers in the building. I shared some of my research interests with them before inviting them to join me for lunch over the summer. During lunch, I asked them to share their questions, interests, and concerns about the upcoming school year to help me better understand the context of their work.

Story 4. Planning for Success

Every Tuesday afternoon from 3-4 p.m., the 10th grade teachers at Monument Lake meet to plan. This hour comes after teaching a full day, and because of the school schedule, the 10th grade teachers get no break on Tuesdays. Yet, every week they plan. I sit with them and take notes. Sometimes I ask questions or offer up something students said, especially when they're not sure what decision to make. But mostly they get to work. This is the only time all week they have to meet together, and Mr. J has a baby at home and has to leave at 4.

Mrs. K comes to these meetings in Mr. J's room with her laptop and her white curriculum binder. In the binder are all the standards. When I ask her what she would do if the school got rid of the standards, she says she would be creative. There's no room for creativity in the standards, she says. Mr. J agrees. He says, they can't really assess standards without a formal analysis essay. That doesn't leave time for much else. Mrs. K would also do more grammar if she didn't have to worry about the standards.

At the end of the Animal Farm unit, Mrs. K wants to do a project, and the teachers have saved a week for it. She says the students can put on a trial for the pigs and mete out their own form of justice. Mr. J says the kids don't know what justice is, and he doesn't see how the project will work. He says maybe they could do some spoken word poetry.

I tell them the kids want to write creatively, and they want to talk about issues in the world. When I met with the students, they told me they wanted choice, I say. "Choice could be good," Mr. J says. "We need to plan this Julius Caesar unit."

Suddenly the talk turns to Julius Caesar. Mr. J proposes a new idea: "Let's cut the project and take another week for Julius Caesar." Ms. E signs on quickly. Mrs. K is slower to agree but says she can be persuaded.

He persuades her. They set the dates for the final assessments of the year. "This will give them more rhetoric practice," Mrs. K says. "I don't want them to get to 11th grade without being able to do rhetoric."

10th Grade Teaching Team

After several conversations with the teachers and the English department chair, we came to the decision to focus on 10th grade English. I chose 10th grade for several reasons: 1) The teachers described the curriculum as "in process"; 2) The two primary 10th grade teachers were mid-career teachers; and 3) AP English does not begin until 11th grade which means that 10th grade is the last grade where students do not sort themselves based on perceived ability. Although the school does not officially track students, English often becomes a sorting mechanism for students as 11th grade AP English Language has a reputation for being one of the most difficult in a school that requires students to take at least two AP courses. This was important to me to avoid the racial, economic, and linguistic segregation that often results from tracking (e.g. Cipriano-Walter, 2015; Mickelson, 2015) and did at least anecdotally and in my observations at Monument Lake.

I begin with this story, taken from a planning session, to introduce the teachers and their interactions. I tried to capture the rhythms of decision-making that marked the 10th grade team's planning. Although the teachers' roles shifted with the tasks in front of them, the core team of Mrs. K, Mr. J, and Mrs. E brought their own approaches to teaching to the group. Mrs. S, the paraprofessional, and Ms. M, the English Language Learner Academic support specialist,

rounded out the group. I describe Mr. J and Mrs. E in more detail because even though they were not the focus of my work, they were always part of it because of the shared planning model Monument Lake used.

By the time of my study, Mr. J had been teaching at Monument Lake for five years and taught both 10th and 11th grades with Mrs. K. A 30-ish white man, Mr. J was the group cynic (or realist, as he would call himself), always ready with a sarcastic quip about why something might not work or how the students would choose to reject the current assignment. He was also the one Mrs. E and Mrs. K turned to when they couldn't quite get their words to match what they were thinking. He was often the one to keep the group on track, pulling up the google doc planning sheets, assigning tasks, and reminding Mrs. K and Mrs. E which assessments needed to be done. Mrs. K summed it up as she talked about the value in group planning: "You need someone to check you when you're crazy...Like this guy tells me I'm wrong about things sometimes, and sometimes I legit am. I need someone to say like, 'I didn't interpret this that way, and that's not the only way to look at it'." At least in planning, he favored more close reading practice or analysis activities to discussions or creative projects. At the same time, when I asked him about creative assessments, he said the standards precluded those and that the only summative assessments that counted were traditional analysis essays. He shook his head as he said it as if acknowledging the limitation but not knowing what else to do. There was another moment that stood out to me that perhaps showed a different side of Mr. K. In introducing Caesar's dreams during the *Julius Caesar* unit, he concocted his own portentous dream of his death, adding in all kinds of details and twists. He was so excited to share this with his students (and had for two years). The students loved it too, he said. A moment of fun within the ordinary.

Mrs. E was the youngest teacher in the group and had worked at Monument Lake as a co-teacher the previous year. She was part of the 10th grade team because she co-taught Mrs. K's A-Hour class. Monument Lake often had new teachers co-teach for a year as part of their preparation before taking on classes of their own. Mrs. E was teaching 9th and 12th grades and co-teaching 10th with Mrs. K. Although I rarely spent time in that class, I got to know Mrs. E through the teacher planning sessions. She always had a group of students in her class working on something after school and would let them stay in there even when she had to plan. She was also the one to create a tracking document for students' independent reading that year and always had recommended young adult novels by and about authors and characters of color highlighted in her classroom. Still, she could be the most critical of the students and often said jokingly that she would "show them." She usually sided with Mr. J in making planning decisions but was rarely the one to bring up the standards or skills students needed. This may have been in part because she was the co-teacher in 10th grade and had other content for which she was responsible.

Story 5. What Can I Do?

Mrs. K and I meet at a local soul food restaurant in July. I chose it because it's locally owned and operated, the food is delicious, and there is a fairly extensive vegan menu [Mrs. K is vegan]. I am excited to see her and talk about the past year and her upcoming plans.

I get there a few minutes before her, so I see her walk up. She is carrying a notebook and pen—kind of like the ones she used for independent reading conferences during the school year. It makes me smile. She is also by this point noticeably pregnant, having a baby in October. We had never talked about it, perhaps because she never brought it up and I never heard a student talk about it. Since I had been asked numerous times during my teaching if I was pregnant—when I wasn't, I am always super careful to avoid that mistake.

But now it is obvious and so we spend a few minutes chatting about her plans for her leave and getting the nursery ready. We talk about how October is a good time because then she can add Winter Break to her leave for an extra two weeks.

Then, talk somehow turns to her new role at the school. Even though she is still teaching 10th and 11th grades, she has taken on the lead role in curriculum. The school gave it to her, she

says, because they had told her she would be able to teach AP Literature, after they had taken away a hinted-at promotion to Curriculum Director. She loves curriculum. I'm not sure if it was the frustration or the restaurant or the year we'd spent together at that point (or all of those things and more), but I had never known any of this. To keep her, she says, they gave her this new role. They had to take away AP Lit to keep someone else. She's going to do it; she'll see how it goes, she says.

We talk about the meal again. She ordered the vegan platter and is particularly excited about the mashed potatoes. She says she'll come back with her husband. Something in that story shifts her back to her new role. She wants to do something different for new teacher orientation: Mr. K has decided to leave so they are going to hire a new English teacher. Even though she had been teaching for 8 years when she came to Monument Lake, she had to go to orientation. She said they didn't talk about curriculum at all. What stands out to her is the getting to know you game they played the first day. It was one of those diversity bingo games where each square has a different fact, and the people in the room have to find someone that fits that fact. On that day, one of the squares said, "Is a vegan." She was the only one in the room so through the whole exercise people kept yelling "Who's the vegan." A pained look fixed her face as she remembers that story from two years ago. It might be the most personal experience she has shared.

Talk turns to her upcoming planning, and she takes out her notebook. In the notebook, in neat, straight blue pen, she has written questions for our lunch. She asks me how she might connect what they are doing to the real world, and how she might invite students to share their ideas. She wants answers. I love that she brought a notebook with neatly written questions in it. I am not sure what to give her. I tell her the students don't think their ideas matter in English class, that they want to give her the answer she is looking for, and that they want an A+. How does something else matter in that space?

Mrs. K: The Focal Teacher

Although I participated in planning with all of the 10th grade teachers, Mrs. K, or Miss as her students called her, and I first developed a relationship, and from there I ended up focusing on her classroom. Although she had grown up in the community where she now taught, she had been away, teaching in Nevada and Oklahoma for 9 years, before coming to Monument Lake the year I began to visit. Even before I met her, the department chair had shared her amazement at Mrs. K's calm, organized classroom. "Mrs. K," she said, "never raises her voice." She was also, I would come to learn, considered highly capable and an example for other English teachers. Once, the department chair said, after Mrs. K said she was uncertain about assessment, "If *you* have questions, then the other teachers aren't even doing it." And indeed, after years of working

with new teachers both at Ingenuity and as student teaching interns in graduate school, I was struck first by how capable Mrs. K seemed to be. She always had everything planned, used every minute of class, and could call students to attention simply by walking to the front of the room. She almost never complained; it took two months before she told me that on Tuesdays when the 10th grade teachers planned, she had no break during the day.

Like me, she had fallen into teaching. As an English major at a highly respected state university, she wasn't sure what she was going to do with the major when they launched a pilot English-Education degree program. She recalled, "In my second year of college I was on a work study scholarship, and so my job was tutoring...and I was talking to my family about how much I enjoy going and tutoring...And my mom said, 'You're an English major, which is useless. You might as well get an education degree while you're doing it, so at least you can teach English!" She shared that she got her degree and then moved with her husband, who was in the military, to teach in other places before they returned to the area where she had grown up. She hadn't sought a job in the charter school she was in now, but it was the one she found. She said, "When I was doing my master's degree, I had to write a research paper about charter schools. And I went into it fully expecting to write about how terrible charter schools are, and how bad they are for kids, and, you know. But it turns out they're not."

The students think Mrs. K is "okay." She's not their favorite, but she's pretty "chill," Joshua said. Evie was just mad that she took away their eating privileges on the second day of school because someone left a mess. She felt like it, along with enforcing the school bathroom rules, was one example of how Mrs. K and the school treated the students like babies. Ashanti said that she is "so nice" and that all they have to do is get on her good side. He did this by keeping his head in the book even when he wasn't doing any work. He said that Mrs. K only gets

mad when students are "talking too much, getting up too much, not listening, and not doing work." Being a good student in Mrs. K's class, he said, is about being "more focused." But all of the students thought Isabella was her favorite because she stayed after school one day and talked about her life with Mrs. K. I am struck by this: what kept Mrs. K from being more than okay to the students. When I ask them what would be better, Jesse shared the story of his 2nd grade teacher. His 2nd grade teacher helped him work through his problems and really knew him. They said they wanted her to know them personally. Ashanti was the only one who said different: "We come to school to learn. It doesn't matter if the teacher knows you." There were two opportunities in Mrs. K's class to share the personal: vocabulary practice and whole class discussions. I say more about discussions later in the dissertation, but vocabulary is how I first found out that Mrs. K is vegan and makes lavender jelly from her garden. The students must have asked 20 questions about tofurkey and cauliflower steaks for dinner.

Mrs. K said she feels like the work she is doing is important: She wants students to value stories the way she does. When she and the teachers decided to add supplementary texts to the curriculum, she found poems and short stories that mattered to her. Little inflections of the personal into the curriculum in comments like "I love this poem" or "Listen to this part." During the previous summer she read a novel called *The Star Side of Bird Hill,* about a girl and her family who move from Brooklyn to Barbados. She wanted to add it to the curriculum because she thinks her students could relate to the challenges of different cultures meeting but said she can't ask because "it's brand new and we don't own any of it." She didn't want to ask the school for more money to buy books because it looks bad, she said. So she kept teaching what they had, making small changes here and there.

Much like her reputation with the department chair, Mrs. K was the calm, doing what needed to be done member of the planning team. She was always there, quietly offering her thoughts about the upcoming week's lesson plans. At the start of the *Julius Caesar* unit, for example, she was the one who pulled out the unit planning guide to come up with essential questions and goals for the unit, even though Mrs. E said, "We just do that because we have to." Mrs. K pushed back, "It helps us know where we're going and why we're doing what we're doing." She continued to fill it out while Mrs. E and Mr. J moved ahead to scheduling assessments. Although she often disagreed with the other teachers, she pushed back only when it came to keeping class discussions on the schedule and when she wanted to include a more creative project like in the story I shared of the *Animal Farm* unit. She often asked her fellow teachers why they were doing something and was frustrated when they didn't have a good answer. For example, near the end of the year, the teachers had to cut a speech unit because they ran out of time. In the most tensely felt moment I experienced in their teacher planning, they decided to have students write a reflective essay. Mrs. K argued against it for nearly 10 minutes, but eventually acquiesced saying, "I'll go along but I don't have to like it." She didn't like it, she said, because she knew that they were just doing it to check a box and that wasn't a good use of anyone's time.

Intra-Actions in the D-Hour Classroom

Because I was interested in teachers and students and their relationship to the purposes for reading, I knew I wanted to focus in on one of Mrs. K's classes. After talking about our shared interests in thinking about tensions in purposes for reading, she invited me to visit all of her 10th grade classes. During the month of September, I visited her A, B, and D hour classes three different times. Together we chose D Hour as our focal class. She wanted to focus on D

hour because she saw that class as including the widest range of skills. She also said she had students who had "checked out" of that class and she wanted to figure out how to engage them in the work. Finally, to use her words, she liked her D hour's "attitude, their spirit, their interest in taking a joke and finding something good in what we're doing." To illustrate that willingness to find fun in the work, she shared a story of her D hour's interest in an "Intro to Russian history" lesson she did:

> We talked about Russia for like 35 minutes. And a lot of it, they actually were super enthralled. We talked about how Vladimir Lenin is in a glass coffin, how you can go see his body. And they were like, 'What!' I had one kid who was like, 'Miss, this class went by so fast. Can we talk about history again tomorrow?' It's like that general curiosity."

And indeed, that story captures a certain feeling of fun or interest in the unexpected that D hour had, even more so than her other hours. Once the class had been selected, in October, I introduced myself to the students and shared details of my project and how students could choose to be involved in the process. I had two levels of participation: 1) member of the class for the observations; and 2) member of the ongoing focus group.

Youth Collaboration

When I asked for volunteers from the class for the group, some students were excited to participate. Ashanti came up to me at the end of class and said, "I want to work with you. I've got so much to tell you." Meanwhile, Jesse asked if he would have a say in the direction of the project. Others thought it would be interesting or fun to participate. Still, a couple of the students agreed to participate because our focus groups would be held during advisory time, a twice weekly "homeroom" class where students often worked on homework. Although 11 students initially volunteered for the group and came from time to time throughout the year, seven

students formed the core of that group: Brianna, Ashanti, Miguel, Joshua, Evie, Jesse, and Isabella. Other students who were particularly significant to the intra-actions in class appear throughout this dissertation even though they did not join the focus group or came only a few times. While I can't begin to capture the youth's complex experiences, I introduce those who participated in my focus group here so readers might begin to know them and connect them with the stories throughout this dissertation. I constructed these descriptions based on their words, my conversations with Mrs. K, and my own experiences with them.

Brianna. Brianna loved being in groups. She was not sure why, but she said she liked talking. That's why she started coming to our focus group. The first thing she told me is her full name and added that she loves it. Brianna said it with a certain pride in who she is—a young Black girl who wants to "be friends with everybody." Brianna said Mrs. K can't find a group to put her in where she won't talk.

But that's okay. Mrs. K thought she was a "really positive, upbeat girl. She's super social, she likes to talk to people, and people like to talk to her." I felt the same thing when she was in our group. She wanted to go to another school because she was angry at the administration. They allow students to create proposals for after school activities. Brianna proposed a cheerleading program, but it was rejected. She wanted to go to a school where she could cheer.

Sometimes Brianna was really quiet. She said it was all about her mood. When the class was talking together, she almost never raised her hand. She said that she doesn't like it when people talk just to talk, even though she could get discussion points. "I wanna speak if I'm actually meaning what I'm saying. I'm a very meaningful person," she said.

Ashanti. Ashanti said he sits in the front of every class because he talks a lot. He said he can't help it; he's friends with everybody. No matter who is next to him, he'll talk. He labeled

himself a distraction, but he also said that he comes to school to learn and to go to college. Often when other students complained about Mrs. K's rules or her seating chart, he admonished them, saying that they don't come to school to eat in class or talk to their friends.

In class, he said, "I'm Black" and often identified with the most traditionally masculine characters in the novels they read. Ashanti said he's not trying to get in any trouble and just wants to chill all day. I didn't see him do a lot of writing in class and he said he doesn't do reading homework, but I always saw him responding to in-class read alouds or Mrs. K's questions—usually to his neighbors in what Mrs. K might have called "side conversations."

Mrs. K thought basketball distracted him from his school work. She said he does really poorly in her class, and she wants him to try harder at writing. When I asked him what Mrs. K might be able to learn from him, he offered an emphatic, "Nothing. She's the expert." When the principal suspended his friend Xavier for marijuana, he thought it wasn't fair because Xavier never gets in trouble, and he should get another chance. The other boy with Xavier gets in trouble all the time, Ashanti said, so he thinks that consequence is reasonable.

Miguel. Miguel surprised Mrs. K when he described himself as the hardest working student in the school. She was surprised because he didn't finish any of his English assignments, but he said he was hard-working because he works more than 30 hours each week to earn money for his family. He described himself as an outsider at the school, who doesn't have real friends, though he had them in middle school. "People don't pay attention," he said. Mrs. K knew he had "really difficult stuff going on with his family. His father was deported to Mexico," she said. She knew he had a hard time making school his first priority, but she though he tried to do his best.

When I saw him in class, he mostly sat silently with headphones covering his ears, waiting. He loved the Beatles and looked forward all year to the final speech unit where he could

do an informative speech on them. That unit got cut for time, and even after the school year was out, he was disappointed he didn't get to talk about them. He spent a month reading a book about the Beatles in her class.

I noticed he was not getting any work done and tried to support him when I was in class. For his last essay, we came up with one skill he learned in English class. He wrote a paragraph about it. For the other paragraphs, he wrote the word "Egg." He never told me why that word. When I asked, he kind of shrugged his shoulders and gave me a half-smile.

Once, when the class was doing a Rome simulation before reading *Julius Caesar,* I saw a spark of something else in Miguel. He had been assigned to be a Plebian but walked out with the Senators to the hall. When I asked him about it, he said, "I wanted to be a senator."

Joshua. Joshua was a student around whom others orbited. And all throughout the year, I saw evidence that he was a nice person. Every time we met, we had donuts. Joshua might eat one, but sweets weren't really his thing, he said. Instead, he took 3 or 4 and passed them out to other students who weren't a part of our group. Mrs. K put him with students who were difficult to work with because he got along with everyone. And he took pride in it. He said he loves hearing what other people think, even when he completely disagrees with them.

Although he was one of the top students in the class and had signed up for AP language the following year, he mostly wanted to have fun in class. When I ask him to describe himself, aside from his height and 6-inch afro, he wrote one word, "Active." He said, "I'm always doing stuff. I'm always messing with Mrs. K. It's one of my favorite things to do. I like to finish my work as soon as I can then I just kinda sit there and mess around." And he did. He almost always finished his work. During independent reading, I watch him read a few pages of *Lord of the Flies* each day. After two months he finished it. He said English is easy for him and that he can

understand texts like *Julius Caesar* because of his parents, but he doesn't love it. He was okay with just getting it done.

Evie. Evie was frustrated that English class required her to read. She "just isn't a fan" she told me during our first meeting and thinks that English class might be better if they could do "some practice typing" instead. That would be helpful to her, unlike reading, which she thinks "isn't helping at all". All year, Evie felt tensions between her desire to be a good student and the need to read. And Mrs. K knew Evie wanted to be seen as a "top of the class student" but she also knew that she really struggled with independent reading. Not that she *couldn't* do it, she just didn't want to do it.

Evie, a white student who was perpetually wanting to go on a diet, wanted to be treated differently. She felt like she was always getting in trouble for things that shouldn't matter: PDA with her boyfriend, eating in class, wearing a shirt without a collar. Her favorite teacher was her Spanish teacher, who she said was young and fun and really knew her.

I'm not sure how it happened, but all year Evie sat with Alejandro. Evie, who does what she is supposed to because she wants to get a good grade, didn't know how to work with Alejandro. He was either totally absorbed in the work they were doing or asleep. Unlike Evie, he never pretended to do the work for the sake of being a good student. This brought out what Mrs. K describes as Evie's "mother hen" quality. She was always telling him where they were or what they needed to do. She was also always asking me to get Mrs. K to change her seat.

Jesse. The first day I met Jesse, he ate five Krispy Kreme glazed donuts. Only after he finished them did he tell me he's not supposed to eat sweets—they make him hyper, he said.

Jesse always seemed a little outside of the group in class. He sat in the back of the classroom and usually played video games on his school-issued laptop while the lesson moved

forward. Occasionally, he joined in—if it was a class discussion or a group activity. He loved vocabulary days the most, although they didn't do them that often after the beginning of the year, he said.

Mrs. K thought he was "super capable and he works hard when he wants to" which aligns pretty well to his description of himself: "lazy and a little hard-working." It depended on the day for Jesse. His older brother was in charge at home, and he said he does enough to avoid getting on his bad side. He didn't want to make him yell.

One thing I noticed about Jesse was he was willing to challenge the other kids in class, or maybe he just thought differently. In discussions, he would speak up for his opinion. Most of the time no one took him up on it. It was like if he had another minute to think through his point, he could take apart their argument, but because he stumbled over his words, his ideas drifted off.

Isabella. Isabella worked after school at Pizza Ranch, a local buffet style pizza restaurant. Then, she helped her mother, a local pastor, who was recovering from breast cancer. About halfway through the year, she found out she and her mom were moving to North Carolina over the summer. She was not sure she wanted to go, but she didn't really complain. After the move, she texted me to say she had met new people and that her classes were good.

Isabella, a tall, biracial girl with long curly dark hair, struck me from the beginning as very confident. Even though her advisory teacher forgot about our group, she made sure to come each week. She told the group that Mrs. K told her mom she was one of her best students, "very hard-working." Although she didn't talk about class much, she always had her homework and reading done.

Isabella had lots of ideas, but she said it's hard for her to get them out in class. "A lot of times I'm ready to say something, but I'm also like the type of person who will like not want to

interrupt with anyone," she said, "so I'm just like 'ah'. Until there's a time." One day, Joshua was leading the discussion, and she talked about how angry she was at the police violence against women in Kenya. She was leaning forward in her desk, talking loudly. He didn't know what to do so he moved to the next mostly unrelated comment from a student.

Methods of Data Collection

Perhaps this section should go first. All I have written of in this chapter is the product of a lifetime of data collection as well as the specific research I conducted in my time at Monument Lake. Taking a broad view of data collection, I think of my experiences, particularly those as a reader, student, and teacher, informing the data that I gathered in Mrs. K's classroom, or basing it further in affect studies, impacting what I attuned to (Ehret, 2018). The focus of this work, however, is the 9 months I spent at Monument Lake. During that time, I drew on ethnographic methods to better understand the purposes for reading with youth in secondary English classrooms (Heath & Street, 2008). I met with youth for bi-weekly conversations from December-June, observed Mrs. K's classroom at least once per week from October-June, participated in weekly teacher planning sessions, and interviewed Mrs. K three times. In addition, Mrs. K and I often whispered conversations before, during, and after class.

Before I move to describe the data collection in more detail, I should say that I encounter some tensions with the framing of this data collection. When I set out to do this project, I conceived of it as a practitioner inquiry (Campano, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011; Morell, 2008) in which Mrs. K, the youth, and I would collaboratively negotiate the purposes for reading in the classroom. I saw this research as situated within a transformative paradigm that drew on systematic, intentional inquiry to challenge educational inequities (Caraballo et al., 2017; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011). And while I still see this research as potentially transformative

and the dialogue between teachers and youth as necessary to improving teaching and learning, I found that our work together did not tell a linear or even cyclical story of change as so much practitioner inquiry does (e.g. Campano, 2007; Groenke, 2010; Morrell, 2008). Still, because of that initial focus on teachers and youth and how they come together to read in English classrooms, my data collection was broad and far-reaching, allowing me to bring a different lens to it.

Story 6. The Good Stuff

"You know what really made me mad? That he changed his name to Isaac," Isabella says leaning forward across the table. "I mean, changing his religion, I can get that. But his name. Oooo," she emphasizes.

It was July, and Isabella, Evie, Miguel and I had decided to meet for lunch at a fast food restaurant about a mile from the school. Like most of our conversations throughout the year, we meandered from my questions about English class to exclamations over the food in front of us (Oreo shakes, this day) to their plans for the afternoon or week ahead and back again.

Wanting to get some final reflections on their experience in 10th grade English, I had just asked them what they would remember most from reading the novel Things Fall Apart. After hearing a couple of comments related to "learning about other cultures," Isabella suddenly shifted the conversation toward her angry response to Nwoye's name change. Miguel and Evie joined in, with Miguel adding his own questions about religion to the conversation.

As a former high school English teacher interested in literature discussions, I wanted this conversation to continue. For me, this was what Miguel termed "the good stuff," young people talking about literature in ways that connected to and deepened their understanding of the world and themselves. Indeed, Miguel did not call it "the good stuff" until we realized my recorder had stopped halfway through the conversation and much of what was said after Isabella's initial question was lost but for a few scribbled notes I made. In his label, I felt, for a moment, we shared something that mattered.

Youth Focus Groups

I share this story before describing the focus groups to capture some semblance of the interactions in the space where I tried to respond to what the youth who volunteered to meet with me had to say. In this story, the intensity of Isabella's relation to *Things Fall Apart* emerged in response to my questions about the book. In that moment, she shifted the conversation from its

answers-as-expected nature to something different. This often happened—a question by me might send us down one path only to veer off based on another comment or a question from a passer-by or an assignment that happened to be due in another class. At the same time, what happened in that moment with Isabella, Evie, and Miguel is that I shut the conversation down because I felt like I was there to be a researcher into purposes for reading, not talk with youth about books. In that way, boundaries and exclusions became fixed, even if only momentarily. Beginning in December, I met bi-weekly with youth from Mrs. K's class ostensibly to talk about the purposes for reading in English. In the end, we talked about whatever the students wanted with questions about a discussion or the current reading added to the mix.

The size of the group ranged from three like the one in the story above to the usual seven to as many as 11. From the outset, I wanted these groups to feel different from the space of the English classroom. For that reason, we met during advisory [homeroom] in what they called the "student commons," which was an open area right near the entrance of the school with a couple of coffee tables and leather chairs. Nervous in the beginning that they wouldn't want to take time to talk with me, I brought Krispy Kreme Hot Donuts to the first meeting. From there, it became a tradition. One week, feeling guilty about the junk food, I brought granola bars and clementines. They ate them but were quick to tell me to go back to the Krispy Kremes. Over time our group became pretty relaxed. Some meetings we talked about things going on at home like Isabella's mother or the time Evie rescued a kitten she found in the cold. Other meetings we debated issues like immigration or school rules—usually based on discussions from class. And other times we talked about reading, their attitudes toward it and their perceptions of the purposes of the novels they read in Mrs. K's class. When the conversation turned toward something that happened in class or the novels they were reading, I audio-recorded them. Otherwise, when I left our

meetings, I went out to my car and recorded key moments and the details I remembered. I also noted any strong reactions I had to things they said. For example, when Evie told me typing practice would be better than reading in English class, I recorded the comment, but I also noted that I wanted to cry when she said it. And when Joshua said that he didn't talk to anyone at school for three weeks after the news of the "Muslim ban" came out, I wrote down that I was frustrated we never had those conversations in the classroom.

Story 7. Time

The clock is ticking. Six minutes until the bell rings. Mrs. K reads aloud from Chapter 7 of Things Fall Apart. Four minutes to the bell. Her voice remains calm and engaged, but time is running out. She doesn't quicken her pace. Three minutes to the bell. In the same calm voice, she reads, "He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down." The bell rings as the students hear that Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna, a boy who was like a son to him, to avoid looking weak. They file out of the class, their minds preparing for Chemistry, or Algebra 2, or Spanish, whatever is next on the agenda. Emily and Diamond stay behind for a minute. "It's so sad," they say to Mrs. K. Mrs. K nods and shakes her head.

Classroom Observations

Constructed from field notes, this story gestures toward the kinds of moments I observed from October 2017 to June 2018 in Mrs. K's class: the movement, the impacts of texts and objects and bodies, the felt responses to texts, and the ones that were missed. I initially saw these notes as a secondary data source, something to connect to Mrs. K's and the youths' purposes for reading and how they came to be enacted. Yet my classroom observations became particularly important to my analytic methods, as I will share in the next section. I observed the classroom using ethnographic methods (Heath & Street, 2008), including taking field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) and audio-recording the classroom conversations. I observed the class at least once per week with observations ranging from 55 to 95 minutes because Monument Lake used block scheduling Tuesday-Thursday and single hours on Monday and Friday. I often observed on Tuesdays because the students met at the end of the day for 95 minutes and then

Mrs. K met with the 10th grade teachers to plan. If the plans included a literature discussion or lesson tied directly to major themes in the primary texts, I would often observe a second or third time during the week. These lessons were the ones that most often connected students' lives with the texts in ways that were visible in the classroom. Although I began observing while students were reading *The Glass Castle*, I primarily observed three units in Mrs. K's class.

Table 1. Overview of 10th grade units

Unit	***Things Fall Apart***	***Animal Farm***	***Julius Caesar***
Timing	Nov-Jan (8 weeks)	Mid-Jan-Mid-March (8 weeks)	Mid- March-June (11 weeks)
Standards Focus	Tone and Character analysis	Rhetoric: purpose, audience, argument; Character analysis	Rhetorical appeals; mood analysis
Unit	*Things Fall Apart*	*Animal Farm*	*Julius Caesar*
Summative Discussion	Police Brutality	Power and Government	Social change and youth activism
Number of Observations	6	10	15

I typically began my observations seated in a chair near the front of the room next to Mrs. K's desk. Since each class began with 10-15 minutes of independent reading, I would begin as a nonparticipant observer, typing field notes of my observations. At each observation, I began by writing down how many students were in class and who might be absent. Then I copied the agenda Mrs. K posted on the board each day so that I would have quick reference for major activities in class (i.e. Independent reading, Vocab Review, Text Annotation). From my seat in the front, I noted who was reading what or who was not reading. I made note of anyone who was not in their typical seat or who was staring into space or who seemed particularly interested in their reading. If something stood out, I added my questions and perceptions in comments within the Word documents. Once Mrs. K shifted to her lessons for the day, I created a horizontal line

underneath my independent reading notes and noted the time. From there, I began audio-recording the lessons and noting what happened. Each day, Mrs. K began the lesson with "The goal for today is…." I typed exactly what she said for easy access later. I maintained the same method of adding comments to note my questions, reactions, and connections within and across lessons. Depending on what was happening, I might type what happened or the exact words said. If something particularly related to purposes for reading was said, I would note the time so I could easily find it in my audio-recordings. All through class, I attended to the students who physically moved out of their seats, shared personal experiences, or did something other than what Mrs. K said to do. During the class, I would often move around the room so I could better see what students were doing. If invited, I talked with members of the focus group during class about what they were doing or how they were feeling. I waited until I sat down to record those notes. If students were assigned to do group work, I would often move between groups jotting down what was happening and recording where possible.

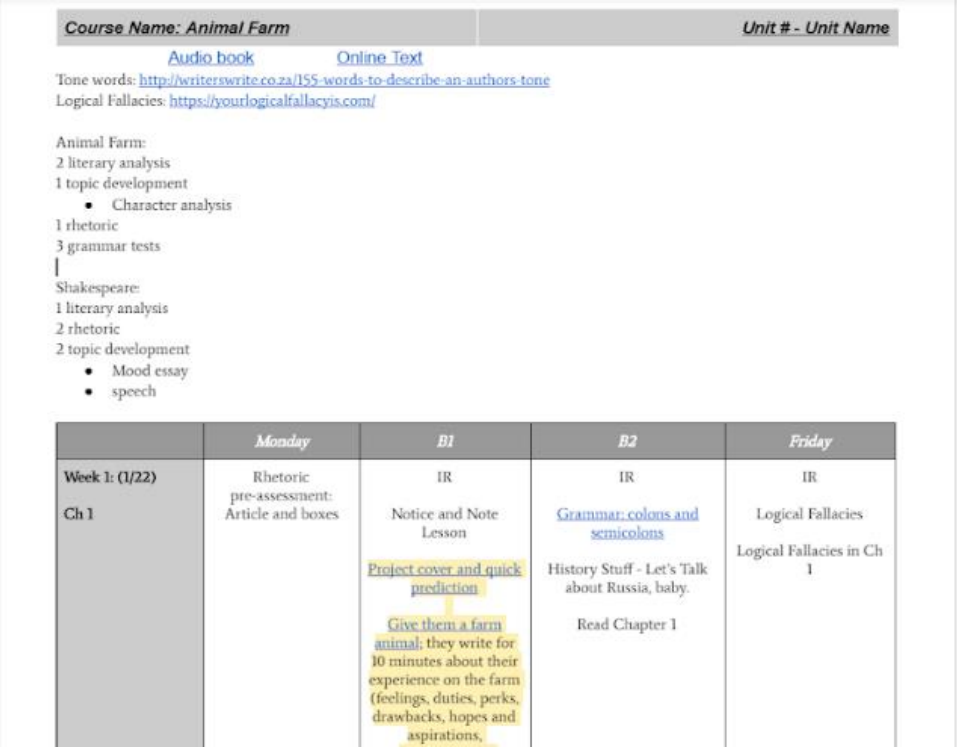
Teacher Planning Meetings

When I began this inquiry, I expected teacher planning to be a site where transformation might happen. I expected that Mrs. K and I would bring our insights from her students to the everyday decision-making of the weekly planning sessions. With this in mind, I attended Mrs. K's meetings with Mr. J and Mrs. E each Tuesday from January-June in Mr. K's classroom. Often while we talked about the plans for the week ahead, students sat in the back in what Monument Lake called "Tutoring". Students could stay after school for an hour each day to work with assigned teachers. English 10's tutoring days were Tuesday and Thursday. It mostly became a time for students to finish missing assessments, which meant there was very little "tutoring" because the teachers were not allowed to answer students' questions about assessments. With

students in the background, the teachers and I met near the front of the room—Mr. K at his desk and the rest of us at one of the pods of four desks beside him. Mr. K sat at his desk so he could project the google doc planning document and fill it in as they talked. Much like in the classroom observations, I participated when I felt there was space and time, asking questions and offering perspectives I had heard from students. It continues to surprise me how little I heard about students in the planning. Sometimes, I shared interesting ideas from youth I had heard in Mrs. K's class because I wanted to talk about them. Usually, that meant Mrs. K and I talked with each other about those experiences while Mr. J and Mrs. E continued working. Even as I became frustrated by our planning experience, I recognize that as an outsider I hadn't taught all day without a break before the meetings and also didn't have this one hour per week with colleagues to plan a week's worth of lessons for only one of my two courses I had to prepare.

To capture the purposes for reading that emerged in planning, I attended 20 1-hour planning sessions, during which I audio-recorded and typed field notes, much like what I did during classroom observations. Because I was teaching an undergraduate course in the fall, I began regularly attending planning sessions in January 2018 and continued through June. As the teachers planned, I identified the lessons in the upcoming week I would most want to see and made notes of questions I wanted to ask Mrs. K. I also wrote down the questions or ideas I wanted to share but chose not to share because of the focus on getting work done. Because Mrs. K was my focal teacher, I noted any moments in which she expressed a strong reaction to group planning decisions, either explicit through words or implicit through body language, unusual silence, or even the look on her face. I usually followed along with the planning on the unit planning google docs, an example of which is included here.

Figure 1. Sample lesson planning Google doc



Course Name: Animal Farm | **Unit # - Unit Name**

Audio book Online Text

Tone words: http://writerswrite.co.za/155-words-to-describe-an-authors-tone
Logical Fallacies: https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/

Animal Farm:
2 literary analysis
1 topic development
- Character analysis

1 rhetoric
3 grammar tests

Shakespeare:
1 literary analysis
2 rhetoric
2 topic development
- Mood essay
- speech

	Monday	B1	B2	Friday
Week 1: (1/22) Ch 1	Rhetoric pre-assessment: Article and boxes	IR Notice and Note Lesson Project cover and quick prediction Give them a farm animal; they write for 10 minutes about their experience on the farm (feelings, duties, perks, drawbacks, hopes and aspirations,	IR Grammar: colons and semicolons History Stuff - Let's Talk about Russia, baby. Read Chapter 1	IR Logical Fallacies Logical Fallacies in Ch 1

Interviews with Mrs. K

I had not originally planned to conduct formal interviews with Mrs. K, and I hesitate even now to call them interviews. They were more like long, somewhat planned conversations where Mrs. K and I talked about what we were thinking and feeling. Following Scheurich (1995), I recognize there is something indeterminate in these interactions, and that even in the neatly transcribed words between us affects and experiences circulated. The interplay between our feelings, fears, desires, attachments, and needs can't be captured or neatly categorized. Yet, our conversations, these formal interviews and whispered asides, altered our relationship. At some level, it was through these conversations that our relationship became. Our first interview came about because I had emailed Mrs. K to ask her some logistical questions for the upcoming *Animal Farm* unit and included a question about what she saw as the purpose of the unit. As a reply, she asked me to come talk to her, otherwise she would be "typing all day." That was in

January. We had two more formal conversations, one after the combined focus group in April and one lunch meeting in July. I audio-recorded the first two conversations and memoed immediately following to capture my reactions to our talks. Because the third meeting was a lunch and I did not want an audio-recorder to impact even more what was said, I chose not to record it. Instead, I made notes during and after our conversation. I summarize the major topics of our conversations in the table below.

Table 2. Overview of Interviews with Mrs. K

Interview	**Major Topics**	**Length**
1. Mrs. K's classroom at Monument Lake (Mr. J was also in the room and commented on some of the questions)	Background in teaching Purposes for reading in English Purposes for Animal Farm Role of standards and co-planning	52 minutes
2. Mrs. K's classroom (Mr. J was also in the room but did not comment)	Potential shifts in her teaching to prompt criticality Shame at *Animal Farm* discussion Differences between reading for analysis and reading for meaning	47 minutes
3. Soul food restaurant	Mrs. K's new role in curriculum planning Mrs. K's experiences as a new teacher at Monument Lake Questions about bringing students' ideas about reading into classroom	2 ½ hours

Combined Teacher-Youth Focus Group

In my initial conception of this dissertation project, I envisioned the ongoing conversations with youth and Mrs. K as part of a dialogic spiral (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014). These conversations would be not just between the youth and me or Mrs. K and me, but

ultimately, I hoped that these conversations would become between the youth and Mrs. K as they negotiated equitable, culturally sustaining purposes for reading. In my dissertation proposal (2018), I wrote, "Much of my work will focus on building relationships with teachers and youth in ways that offer space for sharing and collaboration among all of us" (p. 19). And while that remained true throughout the study, I found that rather than building connections between teachers and youth, I became a go-between, taking questions and ideas back and forth but not fostering any mutual curriculum work. In an effort to shift these relations, I worked with Mrs. K and the youth in my focus group to create a combined focus group. The focus of the conversation was supposed to be the final discussion of *Julius Caesar* and how the youth thought it might best go. Armed with cookies, chips, and carrots, I brought Mrs. K together with Brianna, Ashanti, Miguel, Joshua, Evie, Jesse, and Isabella to plan the upcoming discussion. From the beginning it was not quite what I had imagined. Mrs. K asked me to facilitate the conversation rather than her, so I did, talking with the students as I always did in our focus group. Aside from the specific focus on the *Julius Caesar* discussion, we talked about their feelings about the play, their perceptions of their role in discussions, and current events. They asked Mrs. K why they had to read *Julius Caesar*, and Evie asked whether she would change their seats or not. Near the end of the conversation, I asked the students what they might change about English class or how it might be more relevant to their lives. They said nothing—as had happened most times I asked them a direct question like that. The conversation lasted 37 minutes because the students had to leave for various afterschool activities. To include this conversation in my data collection, I audio-recorded and transcribed it. When they left, Mrs. K looked at me and said, "I have to do something different." At the same time, she said, "They didn't tell me what to do." I still thought

they told us a lot. In the next section, I share my analytic decisions that allowed me to think with the data I collected.

Story 8. The News

The students say they don't want to know. They used to want to know what was going on, but Joshua says "I enjoyed that stuff, not necessarily enjoyed, but around the time of the Muslim ban, I just stopped. I didn't talk to anyone, I was not okay for months when I heard it." As he says this, he puts his arms around his abdomen and looks down. He says it's too hard, that his mother is a realtor who works with lots of people from countries on the list who come to this corner of West Michigan. The students are sitting in their English classroom in a circle after school munching on Doritos. The first four students to the room finished off the Chewy Chips Ahoy in less than two minutes. Joshua takes a couple of bags—not for himself but to give to other people. He always does this when snacks are available.

Jesse, who is the only student to take a carrot, adds, "I don't really look at the news anymore. Since last year...the election...I just stopped because it was just bad, and I couldn't do it anymore. I don't know how anyone can like him." The other day, Mrs. K said the teachers don't talk about politics in class. Someone somewhere said that if they did, they'd have to show both sides of an argument in class. "I don't want to do that," she says. After they finished Things Fall Apart, they read articles and had a class discussion about police brutality around the world. "That's not political," she says. "Immigration is."

Ashanti has a news app on his phone, where the day's stories pour in 24/7. "I always get interested in real stuff," he says. "Like yesterday, right in the middle of class, I read a whole article about a volcano in Hawaii. I turned to Sanford, 'Look at what I just read'." Ashanti labels himself a distraction to others. Is he? "The volcano," he says, "it's been going for five days." He says he hates reading.

But Brianna, who is leaning against the back of Ashanti's chair, animates when she talks about everything she has read this year. She says, of the news of two teenagers getting hit by a car down the street from the school, "You don't really see the visual unless you're reading about it. It doesn't hit you until you realize this is actually stuff that happens in the real world. This could happen to anybody."

Methods of Analysis

The story above is an example of where I ended up in my analysis of the data I collected; yet, it is not where I started. I offer this story first so that readers might begin to "think and feel within the possibilities of the data and not 'over' them toward conclusion" (Leander and Boldt, 2013, p. 26). In that, I hope readers take the time to read, think, and feel the story before jumping toward what I have to say about it, or how I systematically constructed it from the field notes and

audio-recording of the combined teacher-student focus group. Even now, this story affects me just as previous affects helped me create it. Joshua's physical reaction to the news of the "Muslim ban," Mrs. K's conflicts over how to talk about it and other news in a time saturated with difficult news, and Ashanti's interest in the world around him suggest to me potentials for reading in secondary classrooms. At the same time, the interactions in this space highlight the affective nature of reading: The interactions of texts, objects, and bodies can delight, disgust, disorient, or dazzle just as those interactions can affirm, awe, or accuse. Turning toward stories has allowed me to attend to what comes up in reading with youth in the classroom space. In this section, I first discuss my efforts at traditional qualitative coding. Then, I describe my shift toward thinking with affect theory and the potential of creative nonfiction. Finally, I talk about how I thought with the insights of post structural theories in relation to the stories I created to demonstrate what matters in reading with youth in secondary English classrooms.

Qualitative Coding

As I said in the introduction to this chapter, I knew even as I collected data about the purposes of reading with youth in Mrs. K's classroom that the transformation of teaching and learning I hoped to see wasn't happening. That being said, I began my analysis by thinking about those purposes Mrs. K and the youth carried with them into reading. To do this, I engaged in two cycles of qualitative coding (Saldana, 2015) related to shared and conflicting purposes for reading across eight transcribed focus group conversations, Mrs. K's three interviews, the combined focus group, and Mrs. K's initial goal statements related to reading that she made at the beginning of each class.

Cycle One Coding. In the first cycle of coding, I read through the transcripts and created individual codes for conversation broadly related to purposes for reading. These codes related to

texts specifically but also to writing and talking about texts or how students might evaluate their reading. Because relationship had come up repeatedly in our conversations and in my memos about my experiences at Monument Lake, I included codes in this cycle regarding student-teacher, student-text, teacher-text relationships. For example, when reading the first focus group conversations with youth in December, I coded for students' attitudes toward reading. When talking about independent reading, Evie said, "It's held against me when I'm not interested in reading, and I just don't want to, and I hate that it counts against me because I don't like doing it." I coded this as *conflict in fulfilling teacher's expectations for reading* and as *not wanting to read.* I also coded it with *independent reading* because I wanted to be able to differentiate between independent reading and whole class assigned reading. In addition, when I coded Mrs. K's first interview and she said, "Brianna wanting to read, things like that keep me going," I coded that as *shared purposes for personal reading enjoyment.* Related to the news story I included above, I had codes like *wanting to read real stuff* or *not seeing news as reading* based on the conversation Mrs. K, the youth, and I had about texts students had found interesting during the year.

Cycle Two Coding. In the second cycle of coding, I organized codes into a matrix to get a better sense of the relationships in them. The matrix focused on shared and conflicting purposes for reading and included five columns: 1) Student reactions to purposes (e.g. "I hate it"; 2) Student identified purposes (e.g. "to finish books"; 3) Content-related to purposes (e.g. *Julius Caesar* or "real stuff"); 4) Teacher identified purposes (e.g. read for fun); and 5) Teacher reactions to purposes (e.g. "I'm like ashamed that happened"). I used the columns to match these reactions and contents to different purposes. For example, when I grouped purposes related to "talking about real stuff" in the columns under teacher and student identified purposes, I then

included in the outer columns the reactions from teachers and students. The five rows focused on purposes for independent reading, purposes for *Things Fall Apart, Animal Farm, Julius Caesar*, and "real stuff". I created this matrix because I thought it might help me see patterns in my data that would allow me to say something about the connections and disconnections in teachers' and youths' purposes for reading. I had planned to move from this matrix to thematic codes. I include an example here.

Table 3. Sample cycle 2 coding matrix

Student Reaction	Ashanti: *Sometimes **I don't read my book at all**…just stare at the board* Isabella: *You end up **getting lost in your thoughts*** Evie: ***I hate** that it counts against me because I don't like doing it*
Student Purpose	Isabella: *She showed us a graph, read for just 10 mins, **your scores will be higher*** Evie: *She told me it's part of **my moral focus** [grade] so I kinda have to* Brianna: *She wanted me to **start liking books***
Content	**Independent Reading**
Teacher Purpose	*Fill out that tracker, it's one of the best ways to **raise your moral focus (grade).*** *Because the goal of the program is that they **self-select their book*** *I hope to help them **find value in reading and books** and stories, and I hope that they **find some fun** in it.*
Teacher Reaction	*It's cool too because she has been **working her way up levels of difficulty**. Starting with Bluford High, and now reading pretty close to on grade level text.* *It is so frustrating to me too, **so many of our kids don't know how to pick a book*** *And it was so great to hear her today and be like **I'm gonna read over the summer**. I know I'm gonna read.*

Coding What I Knew. What I found after coding the data and creating this matrix was that it told me what I had known from the beginning of this inquiry: most of the time the teachers' and students' purposes for reading did not match and that reading at Monument Lake was largely focused on a college prep curriculum, which emphasized reading for form and technique. And even though Mrs. K had a wide variety of purposes for reading that she hoped to accomplish in her classroom, the emphasis for her and her students was on skills they could either master or not. I might have read these findings through the critique of neoliberalism in education (e.g. Apple, 2013; Taubman, 2010) or white supremacist notions of equity aimed at reinforcing the status quo (e.g. Berchini, 2017; Matias, 2016; Stovall, 2013). And I think there is a great deal of important, critical work to consider in that space. Yet I found that as I tried to read these scenes as an enactment of reading purposes or representative of some reading truth that I was simply providing what was already known (St. Pierre, 2017). As a teacher and researcher, I have always been convinced that there is something to be learned in thinking with the possible in classrooms, and I was stuck, unsure of what to do with my coded data. So I turned to stories. Initially, I wrote stories based on audio-recordings and field notes as a way into the patterns in my coded data. I thought the stories might be an interesting approach to introducing my findings. It turned out, however, that this would lead me to a new starting place for my inquiry.

A Storied Turn

I had set out in my project to think with teachers and youth about the "right" purpose for reading in secondary English. As I said in the beginning of this chapter, I failed, but it was only in failing that I came to see teaching and learning differently. At some level, then, I had to set aside my purposes to be able to see the interactions in Mrs. K's classroom differently. I was able to do this through writing stories. In those stories, I was finally able to capture something that

matters about reading with youth—the movement, the lively, unexpected interactions that somehow drift away as if they've never happened or take on life of their own in their intensities. Stewart (2018) wrote, "Writing, now, is like catching your breath. A time-out scanning the surface of what's going on for a place to begin. Words touch bodies and things, light on what might unfold" (p. 188). And indeed, for me, composing stories of my time reading with youth in Mrs. K's classroom became a way to pause, outside of expectations for the kind of research I might do, and think with the experiences about what mattered. Sometimes, as the stories show, too much is happening to possibly represent and so gesturing toward that complexity becomes the best method available.

Here-and-Now: Composing Stories with Affect Theory.

> Ordinary scenes can tempt the passerby with the promise of a story let out of the bag.
>
> —Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*

In her book *Ordinary Affects,* cultural anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2007) explored the rhythms and textures of daily life, moments caught "in the tension between drudgery and routine—the barely holding on—and the flash of an event" (p. 24). In snapshots of life, she gestured toward the feelings, or affects, that give life a quality of movement. I begin here, with her book, because I read it as I wrote a story of what I called "ordinary reading" in Mrs. K's classroom. That moment, that reading of this book, shifted my inquiry into something different. It was a moment for me: I read the book in one day feverishly making lists of all the stories I could write from my experience reading with Mrs. K and the youth in her class. And even though I will endeavor to explain in an appropriately academic fashion the process with which I analyzed my data, I can only hope to capture the creative process of reading and writing that my relationship with this book engaged. I have always been a writer who only wrote once she was confident she knew the claims she wanted to make and had it neatly organized into an outline.

This time, as I read *Ordinary Affects*, I began to write—unsure where I was heading. I had the book and a Word document open that entire day. When I connected something I read in the text with an experience in Mrs. K's class or in my own teaching experiences, I added it to the list as a potential story. When the hints of a story began to form in my mind, I wrote it down, trying to capture some semblance of feeling or interaction or question in the moment. By the time I finished, I had written 20 single-spaced pages of stories, some of which readers have already read in the introduction and this chapter and will continue to explore in the pages that follow.

But stories are not a dissertation, so I might describe my analytic method as thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, 2013). I turned to thinking with theory, affect theory in particular, as an analytic approach to understand how purposes formulate—or "become"—in reading with youth in English classrooms. Thinking with theory, then, in the intra-active reading of the stories and theories, allowed me to evaluate not just which purposes might be better than others but rather to think more openly—in a non-evaluative way—about how purposes move and make alongside bodies and materials in Mrs. K's classroom. Thinking with ordinary affects, in particular, and affect theory, more generally, allowed me to attend to the becoming nature of ordinary moments in the classroom, moments that would have been taken-for-granted or forgotten because they occur over and over again. In thinking with affect theory and its potential for literacy research, Ehret and Leander (2019) asked, "Where did life go?" (p. 15). They asked this in response to representational literacy research that they argued often removes the intense feelings that accompany moments of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Like my experience reading Stewart's (2007) *Ordinary Affects*, they suggested that these moments "felt like something" and that affect theory offers possibilities for bringing those feelings into literacy research. Moreover, in attending to affects, I do the work of finding "speculative possibility...in

rhythms interrupted, the shoot of an affect, trouble brewing in a posture" (Berlant & Stewart, 2018, p. 42).

In this work, I am trying to write into what could be. These stories, then, touch on what is possible rather than laying out what is as I draw attention to movement in what Stewart (2018) called "ordinary things" (p. 187). Each element in these stories throws together composed events that may harden into habits—business as usual, or land tentatively to offer a new trajectory, or drift away on a line of flight. With this in mind, I draw on creative nonfiction (Ehret, 2018, 2015; Gutkind, 2012; Stewart, 2014) to think with theories about the data I collected. Barone (2008) argued that creative nonfiction gestures toward truth while using literary techniques to encourage readers to think toward what is possible. Ehret (2018) added that these weakly linked pedagogical moments align well with non-representational education research like affect theory because they blend truth and speculation into something that only becomes in the writing.

There is a kind of uncertainty and unknowability in creative nonfiction. Ehret and D'Amico (2019) wrote these moments become because "the process of writing itself moved us, made us feel differently about writing and doing literacy research" (p. 149). While composing these stories, I first attended to how the stories moved me, how composing them altered my thinking and feeling toward purposes for reading as on the move. I attended to the affects in the classroom and to how the rhythm, tone, and pacing might evoke a response in those who read my work. In other words, I tried to write in such a way that might evoke feelings about the data and might even sense the becoming of reading in Mrs. K's classroom. Ehret and D'Amico (2019) described this kind of writing as "writing modest stories in search of something. Stories together reaching for something. Something moving. A quality of life" (p. 149). That "quality of life," which I see more as possibility than actuality—especially in response to structural inequities,

racism, and capitalism (Tuck and Yang, 2014)—are what I desire to make visible through my writing. Like Tuck and Yang, I approach this writing in an effort to suspend damage, to emphasize the possibilities emerging in the interactions I had so that I might point toward reading in classrooms as it could be.

But how did I construct these stories? As I read and wrote with affect theory, I drew on audio-recordings, transcripts of those recordings, the coding charts I had made, and field notes to capture the details and feelings of the events that existed in my memories. I tried to avoid overly linear movement through the narratives, instead bringing in parts of situations and events that gestured toward the complexity of ordinary moments in English class. Even in the stories that focus in on only one chronological moment, I try to capture movement through the different objects-bodies-materials interactions within the space. At some level, the stories are deliberately incomplete. In describing their efforts at writing stories, Berlant and Stewart (2018) claimed,

> You add something, delete something, substitute tenses; you rearrange clauses and phrases, remember another thing that happened that made this thing more of an event, and with each change the world offered to your readers shifts. Any attempt to delineate words even the smallest moment—a greeting in the street, the opening of a window, the startling sound the world slips in—necessarily leaves out more than it includes, which is nothing to despair about. (p. 60)

Following this, the stories I include in this dissertation are meant to expand how we think about purposes for reading with youth in English classroom, but in doing so, I can't leave behind the complexities of those moments of reading. I leave things unsaid because I can't account for everything, so instead, I make choices about what might best capture the feelings of the moment coming together. I wrote stories that never appear in this project; yet helped me think with the

purposes for reading. Readers have already encountered a number of stories in Chapter 1 and in this one, but I include a chart here so that they might get a sense of what I thought with to construct these stories.

Table 4. Constructing methods stories[1]

Story	**Focus**	**Data Sources**
My Angle	Teaching and learning in a charter school Conformity and white supremacy	Memories Relationship with Vanyua Imdb, *Hoodwinked* Critical Race Theory and Dr. Carter Andrews *Writing Beyond Race*, bell hooks
Ready for College. Ready for Life.	Affects, discourses, and intra-actions at Monument Lake	Monument Lake website Focus group recordings Teacher planning documents Classroom observations KIPP, YesPrep, and high-achieving charter schools Michael Apple's *Educating the Right Way*

[1] In creating this chart, I must credit Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart and their book *The Hundreds.* Rather than including traditional citations and references, they ended their vignettes with a list of things they thought with ranging from the hyper-academic to ordinary moments on the street.

Table 4. Constructing methods stories (cont'd)

Story	**Focus**	**Data Sources**
Planning for Success	Intra-actions in teacher planning	Memories of standards-based planning Backwards design Planning field notes and audio-recordings Asking focus group what kind of project they would want to do My frustration that the project was cut
Mrs. K	Mrs. K as a teacher-person	Field notes of final interview All the conversations we had about reading and teaching English Dialogic spirals and collaboration
The Good Stuff	Interactions in focus groups Possibilities for literature conversations	Audio-recording and field notes from focus group meeting Love for the young people I learned with at Monument Lake Oreo shakes Purposes as made and purposes as outcomes
Classroom Observations.	Intra-actions of time-teacher-students-text-affects in the classroom with *Things Fall Apart*	Field notes Reading *All Quiet on the Western Front* with a student teaching intern Potentials of reading; Missed potentials of reading Transactional reading

Table 4. Constructing methods stories (cont'd)

Story	**Focus**	**Data Sources**
The News	Reading the world in English classrooms	Audio-recordings of youth focus group and combined focus group Freire, reading the world Berlant and Stewart (2018) "writing a wrecked world" News overload and my own anxieties Turning off NPR

Thinking with Theories: Beyond the Stories. Reading with the insights of ordinary affects is the lens I have chosen to take toward what happened in my reading with youth and Mrs. K in this space because it makes visible for me a "multiplicity of...possibilities" (Stewart, 2017, p. 195) for how we might rethink purposes for reading in secondary English teaching and learning. In other words, it moves me away from looking toward the fixed outcomes of the things we do in English toward noticing and paying attention to the lively, shifting nature of the everyday. The ordinary, then, is the overarching concept with which I wrote and thought with the stories.

Jackson and Mazzei (2013) described thinking with specific concepts from theory as "plugging in" (p. 262). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, they described "plugging in" as a process of creation in which data, theories, previous work, and other literary machines are put into conversation with each other to form a new, always becoming assemblage. In this conversation, new ideas and meanings take shape. For my project, plugging the ordinary into the stories of reading and my experiences with Mrs. K and the youth created a new way of seeing purposes as on the move. When I put those stories in conversation with existing literature about

purposes in English education and my interviews with Mrs. K, I identified three primary ways of thinking about purposes: Reading for literary analysis, reading for pleasure, and reading for social transformation. I then looked across the stories I composed with the ordinary to identify an anchor story that I might "read" these purposes with. Each findings chapter is focused on one of these traditional purposes for reading and includes an anchor story that puts that purpose on the move in the ordinary reading with youth in Mrs. K's classroom. To further explore the movement of purposes as one element among many in the classroom, I draw on particular theories in each findings chapter to develop how reading takes shape and what it could be.

For example, in Chapter 4, I explore reading for literary analysis through one particular moment in Mrs. K's class. In this chapter, I bring in Barad's (2012) new materialist theory of diffraction to consider the bodies-materials entanglements that emerge when youth are told to analyze mood in a literary text. In this chapter, then, I pay particular attention to how all of the elements throw together in this moment to shape what is possible for reading. Then, in Chapter 5, I bring Ahmed's (2014) notion of objects of feeling to Mrs. K's and the youth's experiences of independent reading to make visible the particular emotional attachments that Mrs. K and the youth tied to books. Whether the books became objects of hope, hate, or indifference, Ahmed's attention to emotion suggests that those books brought with them their own affective possibilities. Finally, in Chapter 6, I examine the clash of purposes for reading through one particular literature discussion of *Animal Farm* that did not meet Mrs. K's expectations. Drawing on Berlant's (2011; 2018) concept of optimistic attachments and how those attachments contribute to the ordinary, I consider what happens when Mrs. K's attachment to reading for social change conflicts with her desire to value student ideas in literature discussions. In each of

these chapters, reading with these theoretical insights provides me an opportunity to consider not just what happened in these ordinary moments but also what might be possible.

Summary

In this chapter, I shared my journey of working with and learning from youth and Mrs. K over the course of the year at Monument Lake. To do this, I discussed the people, places, and objects that made this work possible, the data collection that archived our experiences, and the methods of analysis I used to say something about those experiences and their relationship to purposes for reading. In the next three chapters, I dive into stories of the ordinary created from the data to rethink conversations about why we read with youth in English classrooms.

CHAPTER 4

THE ORDINARY ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSROOM

> Writing and reading are not all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises require being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that imagination evokes.
>
> —Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

American novelist and literary critic Toni Morrison (1992) wrote these lines in the preface to her literary criticism *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination.* She wrote that this text, an inquiry into the construction and consequences of "literary blackness" and "literary whiteness," came out of her "delight" rather than "disappointment" in the possibilities for writers to create shared experiences of their worlds (p. 4). In writing through her analysis of American literature as always, even in its absence, responding to the presence of Blackness, she said she began to see how the literature she "revered" and "loathed behaved in its encounter with racial ideology" (p. 16). Even as she set out to do an ostensibly analytic project, she wrote that it did not begin from a place of criticism but from a place of thinking with literature that pulled her, the literature which made her feel moved. Her analysis started from her view as both reader and writer, as someone in awe of the potentials in literature—potentials that as she wrote were "complicit in the fabrication of racism" or "exploded and undermined it" (p. 16). I begin here with Morrison's description of literary exploration saturated in moments of feeling, questioning, and connecting because it feels alive; words like "revered," "loathed," and "exploded" point to the affective nature of reading and her felt experiences of reading and writing these texts. Her descriptions also evoke a sense of wonder, a feeling that she has been able to see the world as made. This is language and feeling far removed from common descriptions of or the purposes for literary analysis in high school English classrooms.

At first glance, that distance is, perhaps, true in the focal moment of this chapter. On the surface, this is a story of a moment of literary analysis in Mrs. K's classroom designed to support students in improving a particular skill. Mrs. K and her teaching team made what might be understood as good pedagogical decisions: culturally diverse texts written at different grade levels, a graphic organizer to scaffold analysis, and a clear, standards-based purpose for the task. But instead of looking at those as I might have from a sociocultural frame—as tools to move students toward a particular outcome within a particular context (e.g. Leander & Ehret, 2019), I think with Stewart's (2007) conception of the ordinary and Barad's (2012) theory of intra-action to consider the potentials that emerged when students were asked to demonstrate technical mastery of mood. Tasks like this in classrooms are often perceived as formulaic, reducing literature to a tool for students' mastery of declarative and procedural knowledge (e.g. Applebee, 1993; Beach et al., 2012; Macaluso, 2016). Yet, in the story that follows, I invite readers to consider something different: that asking students to analyze mood in a literary text is alive with the intra-actions of objects, bodies, texts, histories, and feelings in such a way that inspires wonder.

Story 9. In the Middle of Things

Brianna doesn't want to read the excerpt from <u>All American Boys</u> aloud to her group. Nevermind the fact that she has already read this text and at least three others that deal with racism and police brutality as part of her independent reading time. Even as she says she won't read, the other four students in the group look down. They don't want to read aloud either. Brianna suggests she can just tell them what happens. Finally, Katherine, the only white student in the group, begins reading.

Evie calls out, "Miss, are we supposed to be done annotating at the timer?"

Mrs. K responds, "Done reading, you can go ahead and annotate."

At this, Evie turns back to her group who has just finished an excerpt from Bryan Sedaris' <u>The Santaland Diaries</u> and says loudly and clearly to her group, "Okay, we have to figure out the author's mood."

In the 10th grade team planning the previous week, the teachers, including Mrs. K, had decided they wanted to provide students another opportunity to practice analyzing literary texts for mood and tone in preparation for their summative assessment—a literary analysis of mood in a scene from Julius Caesar. Today in class, Mrs. K has divided the students into five groups, each with a different text. Alongside the text, Mrs. K asks students to complete a graphic organizer, which asks them to identify a mood word describing the text and three pieces of evidence to support that mood.

"What?! He's a robot!" Ashanti says loudly from the group reading "Little Brother" by Bruce Holland Rogers. "No way," he says, shaking his head. Graphic organizer set to the side of the desk, Ashanti and his other group members spend the next forty-five minutes debating the potential for robots to change the world. They keep returning disbelievingly to the things the robots could do in the text. Loud exclamations. Laughter. Aned shaking her head at Ashanti and Jacob. Jacob asks, "What if we had robot teachers?" The debate continues.

Across the room, the "advanced group" has finished reading an excerpt from Their Eyes Were Watching God. They are not sure what the mood word should be, but when Bryan offers "It's kind of funny because they speak with such thick accents", Lilly says, "I don't think it's supposed to be funny, we're just finding it funny because no one talks like that anymore." This concludes the discussion of Hurston's use of African American Language in the novel. Lilly and Diamond continue looking for the right word for the passage, while Bryan takes "funny" to Mrs. K, who shakes her head no. She adds, "Mood is intentional with the author." Bryan replies, "Well, I didn't feel anything, then" and sets his paper aside and puts his head down. Lilly and Diamond finish the graphic organizer.

Next to them, Isabella reads an excerpt from The Joy Luck Club with her "medium" group. They finish the graphic organizer quickly and move into a conversation about Xavier, a well-liked African-American boy, who had just been given a long-term suspension for being caught on video with marijuana in school. Isabella reports that he has transferred to a large public high school in a neighboring district because he would have been suspended for 60 days, the rest of the school year. Emily asks if he will return the following year. When Isabella says probably not, Emily responds, "That makes me sad, I mean we weren't close, but it makes me sad." They debate Xavier's punishment until the bell rings.

In the other medium group, Evie has decided that the mood of Santaland Diaries should be "relatable" because she, as a young white teenage girl, can relate to the story of Sedaris' experience as a mall Santa and his observations about parents. Angel, a first-generation Mexican American boy, initially rejects the label saying it doesn't feel relatable to him and that he didn't "get" the story. Evie pauses for a moment and says, "Maybe it's not relatable for you, but I still think that's the answer" Conversation done, Evie completes the graphic organizer and shares her evidence with her classmates so they can add it to theirs. They sit mostly silent for the last few minutes of class.

Over in the corner of the room, the group has finished their excerpt from All-American Boys. Brianna, positioned as a leader in the group for her prior reading of the text, shares her angry response to reading the text. She doesn't want to use angry as the mood word, though, so she

calls Mrs. K over to her group. Mrs. K reminds them they have a list of mood words to reference and asks Darius how he felt about the scene, which tells the story of Rashad, a 16-year-old African American boy, being attacked and severely beaten by Paul Galuzzo, a white police officer. Darius responds, "Concerned. Well, I felt nothing. If I felt something, I would feel concerned." From there, Darius begins to talk with Brianna and the other members of the group. They go around the circle, each person sharing their response to the story. They consult an online thesaurus and finally settle on "provoked" as their mood word. Brianna finds one piece of evidence to support it, and the conversation continues. They talk about police brutality, both in the story and in the U.S. They respond to events in the excerpt. They never write any of it down. They are still talking when the bell rings.

Literary Analysis in Secondary English Classrooms

I had been visiting Mrs. K's classroom two to three times a week for nearly 8 months when she taught this lesson. Often, when I visited, she apologized to me for the lesson not being "interesting," as if to say that somehow the day-to-day of English class wasn't worth watching. Each time she apologized, I assured her that "No, it's always interesting to be in a classroom." Even as I said it, I, like Mrs. K, would be searching for some other event, something to make the classroom research-worthy. Yet, later, as I tried to write about the students and Mrs. K reading together in that particular classroom, I realized that those ordinary moments in her class, for which she often apologized, might reveal something about how the purposes for reading are made. That is, I wrote myself into the ordinary affects of Mrs. K's classroom. This story is perhaps confusing, beginning *in media res*, indeed not just in the middle of that class, but near the end of the year. But that is how things happen in classrooms, all at once and from multiple directions. Even though this lesson might seem at first glance to be fixed to one particular outcome tied into the skill of reading for mood in literary texts, I argue that examining this particular situation through the lens of the ordinary makes visible just how lively the intra-actions in this assemblage are.

Before proceeding, I want to situate this story and all that follows within a common understanding of literary analysis in secondary English classrooms. Often literary analysis in

classrooms is equated with students' ability to draw on their knowledge of forms and techniques authors use in literature to break apart a text in such a way that allows for sound literary interpretations. Lee (2007), for example, characterized it as literary reasoning and indicated that for complex literary reading, students need to be able to break down plot structures, character types, themes, and figurative language. She suggested the need for instruction that supports students in being able to do this, placing particular emphasis on how students' cultural knowledge might serve them in analyzing literature. "The point," of literary analysis, Lee wrote, "is not simply to label, but rather to understand what is happening and what can be expected to happen as the story unfolds" (p. 49). She pointed to this work as answering discipline specific problems of interpreting literature. In addition, Rabinowitz (1987) laid out a theory of narrative reading suggesting that readers might take on an authorial reading stance in which they seek to understand a text within the social expectations of a particular narrative genre. Authorial reading, he wrote, is grounded in a kind of distanced reading [although not objective] that starts from knowledge of literary conventions and how they might be used. This kind of reading within the expectations of genre and history, he said, is the first kind of reading with which a literary critic might engage. Moreover, in Vanderheide's (2018) study of students learning to write literary arguments, the teacher she worked with grounded her instruction in a New Critical approach to understanding how the literary text worked, to both make interpretations and appreciate the literary work. She found that the teacher in her study explicitly located her students' analytic work in attending to the particular devices the author used to accomplish a purpose rather than in personal response or evaluation.

The teacher in Vanderheide's study rooted her instruction in the goals of the Advanced Placement Literature classroom, one of which is to gain the kind of disciplinary-specific reading

and writing knowledge students needed to pass the standardized test at the end of the course. Similarly, the 10th grade English team at Monument Lake oriented their instruction toward literary and rhetorical analysis standards aimed at preparing students for the SAT and college-level English work. While the curriculum department at Mrs. K's school drafted standards, separate from the Common Core, this move was a largely political one, employed to reject federal intervention in local public education, while still affirming the focus on form and genre. Indeed, the focus of each of the four units in 10th grade was literary or rhetorical analysis of a whole class literary text, with skill-based work and a culminating essay forming the bulk of the day-to-day teaching and learning. The students with whom I talked often lamented a classroom culture that discouraged creative expression and instead pursued adherence to formalism. When I asked them what frustrated them most, Isabella offered, "You don't have to use that structure to have a really good story." To which Evie added, "But if we wouldn't have used her structure, it would have been wrong." Miguel, perhaps more exasperated, simply said "Flock the rubric." But as much as he and I might have wanted to "Flock the rubric," that is not what happened in Mrs. K's class, and my purpose here is not to critique the explicit purpose of reading for literary and rhetorical analysis. Instead, in this first findings chapter, I hope to go beyond the stated reading purposes described by either Mrs. K or the students and instead look at how those purposes shape and are shaped by what is possible.

Foregrounding the Background: Ordinary Affects

In this chapter, I focus on reading to analyze literature in part to clarify what it might mean to consider reading with youth in secondary English classrooms as ordinary, or as Ahmed (2014) wrote, that which is "taken for granted, as the background that we do not even notice, and which allows objects to stand out or stand apart" (p. 179). By foregrounding this background, I

want to closely examine the reading with youth in classroom assemblages that is composed/ing of "a list of ...elements," Stewart (2007) said, throwing "itself together into something. Again. One time among many" (p. 30). While this assemblage is constantly becoming, I follow Stewart (2014) in an effort to slow down and make legible those qualities that come together to compose a moment "that seems to matter" (p. 551). To do this, I had to write, to try to capture something of that which Berlant and Stewart (2018) told us affect theory allows us to see:

> All the extensions of ways of being touched, what it feels like to be carried along by something on the move, the widespread joking, the voicing...how things get started, how people try to bring things to an end, or why it matters that attention sometimes slows to a halt waiting for something to take shape. (p. 42)

Echoing Berlant and Stewart, I began from the assumption that within what might seem to be a static, immovable object of English classrooms—standards-based, technical reading teaching and learning, the ordinary is on the move, taking shape again and again. To explore what that might mean for how we read with youth, I first considered what it means to rethink the ordinariness of the opening story with Stewart's (2007) ordinary affects. I, then, framed the making of purpose in this lesson through the emergent relations of the text-graphic organizer-student-teacher intra-actions. Finally, I considered the potentials for reading made available through these intra-actions.

Thinking with Diffraction

Thinking with the insights of affect theory is the lens I chose to take toward what happened in the moment above and in all of my reading with youth in this space because it moves me away from looking toward the fixed outcomes of the things we do in English and toward noticing and paying attention to the lively, shifting nature of the everyday. To do this

work, I draw on Barad's (2012) notion of diffraction, which she described as "reading insights through one another" to experiment "with different patterns of relationality, opening things up, turning them over and over again, to see how the patterns shift" (p. 77). Barad argued that diffraction, a physics concept, allows for the study of difference as that which different intra-actions makes possible by enacting boundaries that include some things and exclude others. In the physical process of diffraction, waves change directions as they move around an obstacle or through an opening in their path. As waves encounter different obstacles, they bend differently depending on their length. That difference is of most concern to me in this dissertation. To borrow the language of physics, I am interested in what "bending" this particular reading experience through the lens of the ordinary might reveal for rethinking the purposes of reading in secondary English classrooms.

Building on Barad, Ehret, Hollet, and Jocius (2016) applied the concept of diffraction to new media making literacy research to develop what they call "intra-action analysis" (p. 349). They suggested that intra-action analysis allows them to consider the "constantly emerging phenomena of body-world-text-activity that extends beyond and exceeds texts and representation" (p. 352). For them, it was through this emergence that new media making took form and that agency was co-constituted rather than existing a priori within bodies. In their work, they looked at how new media making took form as "bodies-materials moved and made" (p. 352). I bring this intra-action analysis to my study of purposes for reading to examine how bodies-materials intra-act when Mrs. K told the youth in her class to analyze mood in a literary text. Within this chapter, I organize my analysis by (a) diffractively reading this experience through the lens of the ordinary to make visible patterns of difference in this intra-action, (b) describing the entanglements during the bodies-materials' enactments of this and other purposes

for reading within this moment, and (c) analyzing how purposes for reading emerged and took shape while bodies-materials moved. Interwoven through these analytic moves are insights from affect theory that allow me to read and think with my data to see how things shift and "flash" in this particular lesson.

Diffracting the Ordinary

The challenge for those of us caught up in the day-to-day comes in recognizing the ordinary affects because they often pass by unnoticed and potentials are left to drift because they become what happens. In the case of the opening story, then, the question becomes what forces are on the move in this assemblage. To make these forces visible, I separate them for analysis while acknowledging that they are not separate and that it's only in their relationship that the assemblage becomes. Each of these forces, or elements, brought different affects or intensities to the moment, or what Stewart called "a continual motion of relations...and emergences" (p. 1).

Purpose. The purpose Mrs. K offered students, "Analyze mood in a literary text" bounced around the classroom, taken up in different ways. Tied to all the times students in the class had previously been asked to analyze literary texts, it created expectations for what should happen in class that day. It acted, before the lesson even began, as a felt intensity for the teachers in their planning: They added a day of practice, chose particular texts, and divided students into low, medium, and high groups in what they saw as an effort to move students toward an outcome. At the same time, even then, it was not just the purpose that impacted the lesson plan. Mrs. K's experiences with students and the purpose in the past impacted decisions about who was with whom and with which text, who was low, medium, and high. Mrs. K and the other teachers matched students to text that they thought might challenge them or interest them or support their efforts to analyze mood. In lesson design, the purpose acted as an outcome for

students and Mrs. K—the way in which students *were supposed* to use their time. That purpose was also circulating when Mrs. K created the graphic organizer, a support to reach the goal. Yet, when Mrs. K turned the purpose over to the students, it bent in different directions depending on its resonances.

Graphic Organizer. Even still, once that graphic organizer was created it became a material object in the classroom space, registering with the force of its impact, resonating differently in relationships across the space. For instance, Evie took the graphic organizer and Mrs. K's directions and brought them to her group. In the becoming of her group, the graphic organizer became what she did, filling it out and orienting her group members to getting it done. At the same time, Isabella and her group took the graphic organizer and got it done so that they could do what they really wanted to do—talk about Xavier's suspension. In both of these groups, the graphic organizer acted as a focusing force, allowing them to meet what they saw as the expectations Mrs. K introduced into the classroom. Although Bryan's group took the graphic organizer into their space, it acted differently on him. The need to find an answer for the mood box in the graphic organizer chart intensified when he could not find the answer. He shut down, frustrated. The graphic organizer then had its own kind of agency, surfacing race and language and knowledge the group didn't have. The graphic organizer and Brianna entered into a different kind of relationship. She acted on it, making it an object of conversation even though it was left blank at the end of class. Finally, in Ashanti's group, the graphic organizer was discarded, a potential impact they didn't feel.

Texts. The texts also acted with an affective force in the space. Intensities built differently in relation to the texts: *All-American Boys*, "Little Brother", *The Joy Luck Club*, "Santaland Diaries", and *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* First, these multiple texts signaled a

break in the ordinary in Mrs. K's classroom; most days the students read one text as a class to practice their literary analysis skills. Different texts brought different possibilities into each group in the classroom, offering up opportunities for their own unique assemblages within the larger assemblage. Second, each text resonated with ideas and values of the teacher who chose them. Ms. E, primarily a 9th grade teacher, brought in *All-American Boys* and "Little Brother," texts written with perhaps different purposes and audiences than the others. In introducing young adult literature to the groups, they deemed "low", the teachers reinforced histories of the canon and what counted as "good" literature. This hierarchy of both student-text match and of cultural artifacts circulated in the classroom, even as students-text intra-actions made them something different. Indeed, the affects that built in relation to *All American Boys* and "Little Brother" became particularly interesting in light of those that emerged in relation to Mrs. K's contributions of *The Joy Luck Club* and "Santaland Diaries" to the medium groups. *The Joy Luck Club* and "Santaland Diaries" acted with little felt intensity in the hands of the students in those groups. Even as the intra-actions in those groups opened up potentials, the texts themselves drifted off, little more than a means to get the task completed. Meanwhile, Mr. J's offering of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to the advanced group acted as a source of frustration for Bryan and a source of confusion for Diamond and Lilly. Although they generally accomplished the purposes Mrs. K set out in class, on this day, the text acted as an obstacle, surfacing forces of race and language and their lack of awareness of these affects in the classroom.

Students. I did not begin with the students because an important aspect of diffraction is to decenter humans, to recognize that nonhuman materials and objects have agency in intra-actions (Ehret, Hollet, & Jocius, 2016). But, of course, the students, themselves, produced new possibilities for the purposes for reading in their intra-actions with other elements in the space.

Xavier, not even physically in the classroom, had his own kind of agency in relation to Isabella and Emily, who saw the purpose of reading as completing the task so that their real conversation could begin. At some level, Xavier, might be seen as acting on them in such a way that they got their work done quickly and efficiently, foregoing any deeper contemplation of the text or the graphic organizer. Evie's agency, too, emerged in relation to the other objects in the space as she used the graphic organizer, her personal experiences, and the text to validate her ideas and direct her groups' work. Evie's use of the word "relatable" impacted Angel, whose intra-actions with the text didn't align with hers. He questioned its potential relevance to him, but his critique drifted away, lost to Evie's position in the group. At the same time, Bryan's felt frustration in response to the other objects in the classroom excluded him from his group. He physically put his head down, the task incomplete and the text drifting. Different possibilities emerged as Brianna and Ashanti intra-acted with the texts, objects, and other students in their space. I discuss these possibilities and entanglements in greater detail in the next section, but for now, it is important to note how their attunement to the texts and other bodies in the classroom seemed to offer additional capacities to act.

Race. Although it would be impossible to address all of the innumerable materials intra-acting in this space in this lesson, I conclude this section with a consideration of how race circulated within the texts and bodies of the students and Mrs. K as this lesson became. Within this lesson, I think we can see some of the hardening of lines of race that Stewart (2007) wrote about in *Ordinary Affects*. First, in the texts assigned, race surfaced. For example, in identifying *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the most difficult text, the teachers revealed their own assumptions that a text written in African American language would likely be the most challenging for students, the most outside of what they typically read. When Bryan named the

mood in the text funny, Lilly and Diamond recognized that was not the answer, but they still acknowledged that it seemed funny to them. None of them, two white students and one Black student, had the familiarity with the language or the resources to draw on to think through Bryan's response to the text. And when Mrs. K, a white woman, rejected Bryan's characterization of the mood, she also rejected the opportunity to discuss why he might have responded "funny" to this excerpt. Indeed, Bryan's response and even his group members confusion created an opening to discuss histories of anti-Blackness and linguistic violence in the United States. Even though that was not the stated purpose of the lesson, introducing that text with the students offered a new way of thinking about the purpose of close reading and attention to form in the text. Instead, the response drifted away, leaving language ideologies and identities fully in place.

Difference also surfaced within this ordinary lesson in Evie's group. When Angel, a Mexican American youth, initially rejected the "relatable" label, Evie, a White American student, responded with, "Maybe it's not relatable for you, but I still think that's the answer." This question of relatability and difference complicated a seemingly straightforward task of analyzing mood in literature. At some level, Evie's response invited a consideration of irony. In labeling "Santaland Diaries" relatable, Evie suggested it met her expectations for a description of a mall elf's experience at Christmas. When Angel disagreed, he pointed to expectations that were not met—the basis of irony. Evie did not make this statement out of a recognition of the potential for culturally relevant pedagogy and its impact on reading experiences, but she raised questions about it. Perhaps the conversation did not go anywhere: it served to reinforce White ideologies and experiences as the norm for reading even in a classroom that brought together students from different racial and linguistic backgrounds. But reading these experiences now, in a moment

frozen in time, complicates what it might mean to read and analyze for mood in texts. That purpose, introduced early on in the class, bounced and bent in relation to the students, texts, and objects intra-acting in the reading experience.

Intra-acting in the Ordinary

In the previous section, I diffracted the ordinary to make visible some of the moving bodies and objects generating affective intensities within the space of Mrs. K's classroom. Now, I describe the specific entanglements during the bodies-materials' enactments of this and other purposes for reading within this moment. To do that, I begin with a consideration of Barad's (2007; 2012) notion of intra-action and how it has been taken up in the literacy classroom. Then, I focus in on three specific intra-actions of bodies and materials within the larger story—Brianna's, Ashanti's and Isabella's—to think about how those intra-actions shape and are shaped by the purpose of reading to analyze mood in literature. That is to say, I look closely at the purpose-graphic organizer-text-student-race-teacher intra-actions unfolding in dynamic particularity within this moment such that it could have happened precisely in this way only in these relations. In looking at the intra-actions in this classroom in this way, I am able to attune to the potentials that objects and bodies bring with them and how they are realized in moments when they come together. Rather than offering possibilities for doing literary analysis better or looking at the effectiveness of a particular tool or text, I attend to each intra-action as realizing potentials, as something coming to matter. I also look at how what matters is different in each particular intra-action.

As I said in my theoretical framing in Chapter 2, Barad's (2003; 2012) theory of intra-actions is a way of rethinking relations among human and nonhuman bodies as co-constituting in their entanglements. Unlike interactions which imply a constructivist gap between independently

existing human bodies and materials in which humans have agency to act, intra-actions assume that all matter works together in its entanglements to produce meaning (Ehret, Hollet, and Jocius, 2016). Agency, too, does not reside within a particular person or object but is produced in the relationship of objects and bodies. In the case of the particular story above, the material-discursive practices that emerged as students were told to read for mood in literature had the dual function of giving meaning to the purpose of reading in the classroom as well as participating in materializing "reading," that is, determining what shape the phenomenon took. For my purposes, I am interested in the intra-actions of purposes, objects, and bodies that came to define reading in this particular moment. To consider this, I examine how the human and non-human bodies in Brianna and Ashanti's stories affected each other.

Brianna and *All-American Boys*. In the novel *All-American Boys*, Rashad, a Black teenage boy, is wrongfully beaten by Paul Galuzzo, a white police officer. Paul's family friend Quinn, a white teenage boy, witnesses the scene, and in intertwined stories Rashad and Quinn contemplate the experience of anti-Black police violence. In the excerpt Brianna, Darius, and the other students in the group read, Rashad is beaten by Paul. This moment catalyzes the remaining events in the story, although aside from Brianna, no one in the group knew what would come in the novel. In fact, the intra-actions present in this scene began well before the lesson. Brianna's prior reading of the novel and three others about anti-Black police violence intra-acted with the class assignment to produce agency in Brianna. From the beginning, she was positioned differently from the others in relation to the text, using her prior experience reading this text and others to validate her ideas. The intensifying agency characterizing Brianna's participation in the group raises questions about why her knowledge of the text rather than knowledge other students' may have had from their own lived experiences was recognized as authoritative. The

focus on the text, as an objective tool to be analyzed in English class not just on this day but almost every day, perhaps contributed to Brianna's position in the group. These prior intra-actions illustrate an entanglement of agencies among bodies-texts: Brianna's knowledge, students' hesitation to read intensifying Brianna's knowing, the ability grouping excluding, the graphic organizer focusing.

Even when Katherine filled the gap in reading, Brianna's agency emerged most intensely. She intra-acted with the graphic organizer, picking it up and pointing to it, reminding the group members of the purpose Mrs. K had identified. She offered her own mood word "angry" but rejected it as "not good enough." At first, Darius's self-identified apathetic affect disrupted Brianna's movement in the group. He refused to engage until Mrs. K came over. His intra-action with Mrs. K and the text and Brianna's prior conversation shifted his involvement; he grudgingly identified a mood while rejecting the text's impact on him. This response could have shut down Brianna's agency, but the agency produced in this intra-action was more than human. Still unsatisfied with the mood words the group had come up with, Brianna introduced another object—the online thesaurus. She read aloud words directing the other students back to the graphic organizer as object. Intra-acting with these objects, she identified the word "provoked" as the mood. The word "provoked" entered the group's conversation with its own kind of agency, impacting the discussion. Ironically, once they identified the word provoked, they moved away from the graphic organizer and into a conversation of the real-world events behind the novel. They continued talking, analyzing mood serving only as a jumping off point for them to talk about their reactions to stories like Stephon Clark's, who had been shot for holding a cell phone in his hand. In this way, the bodies-materials intra-actions and entanglements shifted the purpose for reading from mood and evidence as outcome to mood and evidence as starting point

for conversation. In this example, then, reading for mood didn't focus students on a narrow outcome for reading aimed at demonstrating mastery of a particular literary term. Instead, it became a starting point for not just talking about their social worlds but also for practicing disciplinary skills. Their effort to find just the right word, Brianna's invitation to the other students to share their mood words, and even Darius's initial recognition of mood analysis as perhaps having nothing to do with him as a young Black man reading about anti-Black police violence were in part made possible by the analytic purpose Mrs. K offered. Often when talking about standards-based literature instruction, we focus on what it excludes, but in this particular intra-action, I think we see how the students in this group, in their intra-active becoming, acted on the purpose as an invitation to dialogue.

Ashanti's Delight. While the *All-American Boys* group expanded what counted as part of analyzing mood in the story, the "Little Brother" group demonstrated what it might mean to create new purposes within intra-actions. The group reading "Little Brother" began like all the other groups in the classroom that day: Based on Mrs. K's directions, they took turns reading aloud the story. As they read, I noticed that the students in the group made few annotations for mood but that they did have their graphic organizers out. Yet, this experience stood out not for its beginning but for its ending. For example, when Evie got to the end of the story, she asked Mrs. K what to do next. At that, Mrs. K's response alongside the graphic organizer produced its own agency in which Evie became the leader of the group. Ashanti's experience reading with "Little Brother", however, stood out as a felt moment in this story because at some level it disrupted the initial purposes Mrs. K and the other teachers had decided upon for the lesson. Although he had been given the story because it was supposed to be easily accessible for him and his other group members, that is not how the text acted on him. When he got to the end of

the story and shouted his surprise, in what I can only feel as delight, he interrupted the affective intensity of the graphic organizer and Mrs. K's purpose for reading. He also disrupted notions of "low" level groups, in which he as an African American boy had been placed, and the kind of technical readings associated with reading for literary analysis in schools.

Instead, text-Ashanti-Jacob intra-actions produced agency that allowed space for new ideas and new purposes for reading. Ashanti used his own affective response to the text to create space for his wonder and the wonder of others in his group. They laughed and joked with each other as they contemplated what to them seem like ever more outlandish ideas for the roles of robots in their lives. Ahned, at first hesitant to join in the conversation and recognizing that they needed to get to the graphic organizer, eventually laughed with Ashanti and Jacob's wonderings. At some level, the irony in the text, the not-knowing that the boy was a robot, created new possibilities for Ashanti and Jacob to act. In acting on his surprise, Ashanti created a new boundary for the kind of reading possible in this lesson. Although Mrs. K did ask the group to be quiet several times throughout the lesson, she could not dampen their ideas. Even reminders to complete the graphic organizer did not move them away from the wonder produced through the bodies-materials intra-action. In this example, the text is agentive in its ability to affect the bodies in this space precisely because it subverted Ashanti's expectations. Ashanti's and subsequently his entire group's response were unlike any other group in the class as their movements and intensities privileged wonder and created new relations to the text as content for that wonder.

Isabella's Conversation. As a researcher, I noticed little of the Isabella-text-graphic organizer-purpose intra-action; it had so little felt intensity in the classroom. In fact, I had to ask them which text they were reading because by the time I walked over there [not more than ten

minutes], they were done reading. Their work with the graphic organizer acted in much the way we might expect: Given a task by Mrs. K, they read the text, selected a mood word, found evidence, and completed the organizer. But when Isabella introduced Xavier into the assemblage, their conversation shifted. Xavier had already been drifting through the classroom, having been suspended just a week earlier. When I arrived in class the previous week, Mrs. K had told me about the suspension. She was visibly upset, shaking her head and saying, "Not Xavier". Xavier had become something of a leader in the class, facilitating discussions, injecting humor into conversations, and asking sometimes critical questions about race in the U.S. She felt his absence; I did, too. Even though he wasn't in my research focus group, he became a student I was drawn to in the everyday moments of the classroom. When she told me about his suspension, it raised all kind of questions for me about racial disparities in the school and what kinds of conversations this suspension might generate. It was made even more complex because another student in the class had been suspended alongside Xavier. She wasn't surprised about him; he had been sitting in the back of class not turning in work for nearly six months at that point. Both boys were Black; we didn't talk about that. While Xavier's story is part of a much larger, important conversation about discipline disparities in K-12 schools that often harm Black boys (e.g. Lopez, 2018; Monroe, 2005), here, I am thinking about how this particular example disrupted or shifted purposes for reading in Mrs. K's class.

Because of my own response to the suspension, I had wanted to talk to the students about it, so it was with my own questions that I listened to Isabella's conversation. When she told her group that Xavier had transferred to another public school and might not be coming back the following year, they were upset. Emily identified her feeling as sad; yet, even though she was upset about it, she didn't see any other actions on the part of the school. She wanted him to come

back the following year. Isabella thought he should have been given another chance because he hadn't been in trouble all year. I said earlier in this chapter that Xavier, who wasn't physically in the classroom, had his own kind of agency, introducing a conversation about discipline policies at Monument Lake. The intensities of the Mrs. K's purpose for reading, the graphic organizer, and even the expectations for the classroom faded away as the girls discussed Xavier's punishment. That was what they cared about; yet, it was never talked about in the classroom. Thinking with affective intensities in the classroom, Xavier's suspension seemed to matter to the Isabella and Emily, acting to diminish the supposed purpose of the day's lesson. It mattered to Mrs. K. It mattered to Ashanti, too: When I asked him about it in our next focus group meeting, he said he wanted Xavier to have another chance, that it wasn't fair. Yet, it drifted away, an opportunity to question discipline in the school, unremarked except in side conversations. Xavier's seat left open.

Becoming in the Ordinary: A Discussion

> What if the ground is not made of bedrock but rather oozing slime molds and other protean forms that lack determinate identities?
>
> —Barad, 2012

Perhaps Barad's question struck me because my apartment has been slowly overtaken by slime, oozing person-made creations that stick to me, my clothing, the dog's fur, the couch, and any other surface it intra-acts with—except, strangely enough, my daughter's hands. Somehow, the slime doesn't stick to her. When she's anxious or bored or excited or impatient (really any feeling at all), she has slime in her hands, bending it and molding it and being sure to tell everyone that it is neither a solid nor a liquid but a non-Newtonian fluid. Last year, much to my chagrin, she spent a year studying slime for an independent inquiry project at school. I was never fully on board until I came to her presentation in her 4th grade class. The assigned presentation

was fairly expected; I even thought I probably should have helped her with it. But in the question and answer time, I watched my little girl with her hands manipulating slime as she talked, intra-acting with the slime, her classmates, and all of the slime creations sitting in our house to share something in that space. She wasn't answering questions only because the teacher told her to or because I was in the audience or because she knew a lot about slime. In that entanglement of all of those reasons and objects and bodies, the purpose was shaped and reshaped to become something that felt like something to me.

Even now, as I write this, I am trying to capture the idea that those purposes for reading, which we often hold to in schools, exist as only one object in the ongoing intra-actions of the classrooms. That those purposes, far from being solid ground, shift and move along with the bodies-materials intra-actions in the classrooms. So rather than see the slime story as evidence that the Genius Hour inquiry project should be implemented in classrooms across the country as we are wont to do in education, I offer that it is much more complicated than that. That the implementation of the project was but one object in the intra-actions that made that question and answer session possible. As a teacher, I am sure I never saw purposes as something produced in the intra-actions in my classroom, certainly not in those words. For me and all of the teachers I taught with and coached, purposes for reading were a relatively straightforward enterprise: 1) Break down the standard; 2) Identify what students needed to know; 3) Write a purpose statement; and 4) Share it with students. Then depending on what my assessments told me, I could adjust as needed or move onto the next. In general, I was responsible for ensuring that my students met the purpose that I created—particularly when reading to analyze form and technique in literary texts. Yet, my discussion of the ordinary as "what's going on" (Massumi, 2011, p. 1) has been intended to reveal something about how those purposes I wrote on the board each day

for reading with youth in classrooms become habitual, routine ways of thinking about how and why we read together in English *and* how other ways of thinking might be possible.

Ultimately, I believe that closely analyzing how purposes for reading emerged and took shape while bodies-materials moved makes visible the endless potentialities within the ordinary in Mrs. K's classrooms. Within this space, ideas surfaced, and new relations formed. Some took on resonance in the space, while others drifted away serving only to sediment the ordinary ways of thinking about reading for literary analysis as something to be done. For example, Ashanti's response to the surprising ending of the short story challenges me to think about how the text intra-acted with his reading, his experience, and the other students in his group to reshape the purpose for reading, shifting it from analysis for analysis's sake to something akin to wonder. Ashanti, who often told me he didn't like to read and wasn't a reader, felt delight at the nature of the story and began thinking about his world differently in these intra-actions. He usually talked about his conversations during class as "distractions," but what if we, Ashanti included, could rethink reading in classrooms to see those "distractions" as potentials, reshaping how and why we read, at least in that moment. If we admit that texts-bodies intra-actions have the potential to reshape purposes and that those initial purposes are uncertain and shifting at best, how might we account for that in the classroom, particularly when what was graded was his incomplete graphic organizer?

Moreover, thinking with Bryan-text-graphic organizer-Mrs. K-frustration intra-actions raises questions about what it might mean to read for the purpose of analyzing mood in a literary text and how classrooms account for that complexity. While the classroom story fades away with Bryan's frustration, the moment might be read as a potential—a potential to question the histories of racism Bryan's reading intra-acted with. It might also raise questions about those histories the

three white teachers brought with them that lead them to label this text the most advanced. At that moment, Bryan's language failed him, and he couldn't complete the task despite a desire to do so. How might that affective response open up a different kind of attunement for teachers and students, an attunement that feels that frustration or misunderstanding as a moment to wonder about how the world is made? About why the "advanced group" can't find meaning in the text? And what forces orient them in that way toward the text? All of these questions might find a place within a classroom oriented toward literary analysis; yet, they require an opening up to the kinds of complex potentials literary analysis brings up.

Finally, Brianna's conversation with her classmates offers possibilities for reconsidering the "Zombie New Criticism" (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014) label so often applied to asking students to analyze form and technique in literary works. Far from shutting down conversation, Brianna and her classmates' intra-actions with the text, purpose, and graphic organizer served as a jumping off point for them to consider their responses to anti-Black police violence. The initial purpose then circulated within that group to be reshaped in the ongoing conversation about subjects that mattered to them. In this example, we might typically explain the resulting conversation a product of the text and topic, but viewing purposes as made in intra-actions allows me to think not just with the text but with the students, Brianna's previous readings of the text, and the explicit purpose. Asking the students to consider mood, an affective response to a text, moved them toward words like angry, concerned, and provoked. In that way, it served as a player in that conversation. This makes me wonder about how literary analysis intra-acts with other purposes for reading, making it and others richer. What if literary analysis becomes a starting point for inquiry rather than the outcome of reading with students in English classrooms?

And what happens when what matters to the youth in the classroom has nothing to do with the assigned reading or the assigned literary analysis task at hand? At some level, it is easy to imagine responding to Bryan, Ashanti, or Brianna. The affects produced in the text-graphic organizer-student-teacher intra-actions offer potentials for deepening literary analysis, enlivening reading with youth in ways that makes it possible to respond as Morrison (1992) wrote to the "world that imagination evokes" (p. xi). Responding to what mattered in those groups seems possible even within standards-based secondary English teaching and learning. Yet, Isabella's conversation highlights other potentials that arise when youth are given space to talk to each other. Isabella's conversation, and the felt intensity of Xavier's suspension, are more difficult but no less important to consider as potentials within the movement of ordinary teaching and learning. Rather than seeing that conversation as "off task," I wonder what it might mean to see that moment as an opportunity to respond to lived experience registering within the classroom. Their conversation offers a view of the young people in the classroom as people first, as people who care about each other and view each other as vital parts of the classroom assemblage. Instead of ignoring moments like this or keeping them outside of the sanctioned space of the classroom, thinking of the classroom as composing of intra-actions among objects and bodies points to the necessity of responding to disruptions in those relations. It might also offer opportunities for students to question how the world is made, to wonder about the decisions impacting them, and how those impacts are more complicated than they may have realized.

In this chapter, I am not suggesting that setting purposes for reading do not matter; in fact, I believe that they matter very much—that they move and make alongside bodies and materials in the secondary English classroom. Like my daughter's slime or Barad's (2012) slime molds, I want to suggest that purposes are both shaped by and shape classroom reading

experiences. They do not disappear when students do things other than what teachers tell them to do in the classroom, but they take on new forms, resisting static being. I argue purposes for reading become in the intra-actions in the classroom space. This is different from reading as on-task or off-task, as meeting purposes or not. I believe it offers a way to think about reading in the moment to moment, as a discursive-material practice. Barad (2012) suggested that this way of thinking about intra-action calls for a different responsibility. She said, "Responsibility is not about right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the Other. That is, what is at issue is respons-ability—the ability to respond" (p. 81). This isn't, then, a kind of chaotic, anything-goes way of thinking about reading. Instead, it's an acknowledgement that, even in the most ordinary of classroom moments, the decisions made and introduced into the classroom, the questions asked, the texts read, the students, the teacher, the experiences before and to come, and the histories of particular practices create boundaries on the possibilities for reading in the classroom. That is, I think, a weighty responsibility to recognize and one to which we should respond.

Responding with Wonder

Throughout this chapter and the chapters that follow, I have counted on wonder as my approach to "reading" moments I spent reading with youth and Mrs. K. In this particular chapter, I wondered about the purpose of reading to analyze literature in the classroom and how its enactment is far less certain than proponents and critics of standards-based literary reading instruction might suggest. Wonder served as an affective possibility for me as the researcher-writer to see the construction of reading in this moment as composed of shifting intra-actions among objects and bodies rather than as work students did to accomplish or not accomplish a particular goal for reading. It offered, as Ahmed (2014) suggested, a way for me to intra-act as if

for the first time with this experience and raised questions for me about how literary analysis becomes in English classrooms. This chapter also highlighted the possibilities for youth and teachers to engage with texts as opportunities for wonder, as invitations to respond to texts and each other, and as moments to be moved and to move others. Ultimately, I hope this chapter offers up wonder as not just a possibility for how we read with youth in classrooms, but as a necessity for seeing and responding to possibilities that emerge in re-imagining the teacher's purpose for reading as only one element among many in the classroom.

CHAPTER 5

STOPS AND STARTS IN INDEPENDENT READING

Story 10. The Black Bookshelves

*The black bookshelves stuffed full of young adult literature sit on the outer rings of the classroom, sites of possibility. Mrs. K sees that possibility, a concrete thing attached to the books waiting for a relationship with students. "I have a hope," she says. "This is a stretch, but I hope to help them find value in reading and books and stories, and I hope they find some fun in it." At the beginning of the year, the books are neatly arranged— realistic fiction, war stories, romance, nonfiction, Classics (*bonus points*). As the year proceeds, the books become jumbled and spill out of their neat rows. No longer straight up down, the pages are dog-eared, bookmarks stick out of them, and piles of books fall over onto each other. Remnants of books read, books discarded, books passed between youth, or offered from Mrs. K.*

These books neatly organized on bookshelves in Mrs. K's classroom bring up for me echoes of my own classroom, where each year I began with bookshelves stuffed full of as many young adult novels as I could find. I am not sure how many thousands of dollars I spent on books in the decade I spent teaching middle and high school English. Every time a student rejected a book or told me they didn't like to read, I would calmly reply that they just hadn't found the right story. Of course, sometimes we didn't find a story all year, or we found one, but then the next one flopped. Still, I, like Mrs. K and her fellow English teachers at Monument Lake and so many others, feel the possibilities in new stories read and shared. In *Cosmos Chapter 11: The Persistence of Memory*, astronomer Carl Sagan (1980) offered books as proof that humans are capable of working magic. The book, made of trees and imprinted with "dark, funny-looking squiggles," he said, "breaks the shackles of time," connecting people across words and worlds. Even though today those books might be found on computer screens or smart phones as often as they are on paper, the sentiment still resonates for me. It has also proven for me to suggest something of the intra-active potential of books, alive with their own kind of memories and intensities produced in relationship with readers and their worlds.

At the same time, talking about, observing, and participating in independent reading with youth and Mrs. K raised questions for me about how the purpose of reading for pleasure or personal satisfaction comes to be made in the ongoing book-student-teacher intra-actions in the classroom. I wondered how slowing down and seeing this purpose as emerging in relationships might complicate and enrich conversations about choice reading. Because reading with high school youth in English classrooms, even when they get to choose their own books, does not always feel like magic for them or for teachers. Reading can bring pleasure and joy. It can also be painful and call on readers to question the worlds they know. It can be frustrating and awesome and boring and wonderful, sometimes all at the same time. In the moments that follow, independent reading as a routine in Mrs. K's class brings with it affective possibilities, only some of them about pleasure. In this chapter, then, I focus on how the seemingly static routine of independent reading was always becoming as objects and bodies and texts were affected by and affected the purpose of reading for pleasure or personal satisfaction. In particular, I think with ordinary affects to look beyond the technical aspects of independent reading to make visible always present potentials in reading with youth. Then, I consider how teachers' and youth's felt relationships to books created particular expectations for reading in relation to the teacher's purpose of reading for pleasure. These expectations often shaped purposes for reading (or not).

Independent Reading in Secondary English Classrooms

On the surface, independent reading looked the same in Mrs. K's classroom most days. Sometimes, as I sat there jotting down what was happening, I felt like I could be somewhere else, doing something different. If I had to be late to observe, I knew that the first ten minutes would always be silent reading. I was as bored as I often felt they were. I would make notes of who was up and moving, who was staring at the wall, whose eyes were moving over their books. I would

mostly wait, anticipating the moment Mrs. K would ask students to close their books and fill out their reading trackers so that we could move to the other work of the day. At the same time, I felt in that waiting the potential for something to happen, some book to be read or some story to be shared.

As I did with literary analysis in the previous chapter, I want to situate the routine of independent, choice reading in Mrs. K's classroom within common understandings about the practice from practitioner-oriented literature. I chose to connect this work to practitioner writings because this is an ordinary practice, done in schools, out of shared beliefs about the possibilities of reading with youth (e.g. Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013; Miller, 2009, 20014). These popular writers suggest that the right texts and the opportunity to choose those texts will mean every child leaves English classrooms with a love of reading and an appreciation for the pleasures it can bring. In the introduction to *Book Love*: *Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers*, for example, Kittle (2013) reflected on her own high school reading experience: "I don't have a single memory of joy during high school English. Perhaps this book love was only for children. I almost believed it" (p. xiii). As part of this memory, she named canonical high school texts like *Macbeth, The Scarlet Letter*, and *Pride and Prejudice* and the "*dull, lifeless"* experience of reading in her high school classroom. Despite growing to love these texts in college, she found her students reacting the same way she had in high school when she took on the role of teacher. Unlike her, they did not have "book love" to sustain them through that boring reading. In her book, she argued that high school students, through the rigor of independent reading and the engagement and joy that come with guided choice, could become lifelong readers.

To add to this, Donalyn Miller (2009, 2014), the "Book Whisperer", offered strategies for engaging every reader in the English classroom based on her approach to providing student choice in her 6th grade classroom. Miller (2014) declared that teachers must develop pedagogical strategies to connect school-based reading with what she calls wild (or beyond the classroom) reading because that is how readers come to share in an "innate love of reading" (p. xiii). That desire to read, she said, is not something people are born with but rather something made over the course of reading lives. If we do not engage students in reading for pleasure, Miller (2014) said, "we renege on our responsibility to teach students how to become self-actualized readers" (p. xxi). Taken together, these authors, drawing on their experiences in classrooms, connected reading choice, time for independent reading, and the goal of becoming a lifelong reader as both possible and desired in English classrooms. They suggested that teachers, armed with pedagogical strategies and improved focus, can move students to love reading. This, they say, runs counter to English classrooms focused on narrow definitions of achievement and standardization.

Independent reading, then, is often positioned as distinct in both purpose and form from the standards-based instruction that dominates secondary English classrooms. At Monument Lake, it was similar—a time carved out of instruction for youth to choose books, free from most teacher intervention and aimed at fostering readers. My purpose here is not to decide whether youth should read for pleasure in secondary English classrooms, but rather to look at what might be possible within the day-to-day, taken-for-granted intra-actions in independent reading. In these intra-actions, books take on intensities in relationship to particular students. These intensities might reinforce students as distant from books or produce new assemblages in which students become, at least for a moment, readers.

Books on the Move: The Ordinary in Independent Reading

In this chapter, independent reading in Mrs. K's classroom becomes "what happened," a product of different elements repeatedly coming together in seemingly the same way over the course of the year. Independent reading, tied up in purposes of reading for pleasure, became accepted as part and parcel of doing, in this case, reading in English classrooms. Over the course of the year, independent reading became ordinary: Each day Mrs. K told students to read for 10-15 minutes, the students read or didn't read, and at the end of the time, Mrs. K told them to mark their place and record their pages on their tracker. While I hope the ordinariness of the scenes that follow will seem familiar to those who have spent time reading with youth in English classrooms, I am also trying to look at these scenes anew, to see them as what Stewart (2007) called a "contact zone for analysis" (p. 5), a zone that captures some of the intensities and attachments that produced independent reading in this particular classroom.

Yet thinking with ordinary affects about independent reading animated these scenes with difference and movement. In this view, then, independent reading was not a fixed repetition of the same interactions each day but was an assemblage that was always becoming in the relations of the objects and bodies moving in space. As such no matter how much the same it seemed each day, it had the potential to be different. Thinking with ordinary affects in the routine of independent reading in this classroom allowed me to see how Mrs. K's hopes, the books in the classroom, and the students' decisions to read existed in relationship to each other and how those relationships shaped purposes for reading. At the same time, attending to ordinary affects made visible the cracklings (Stewart, 2007), or potential new trajectories, that emerged in the assemblage.

Thinking with Objects of Feeling

To think more deeply about how the ordinary becomes that which is taken-for-granted, I bring Ahmed's (2014) notion of *objects of feeling*, which she related to the emotional attachments people tie to particular objects. Ahmed said that objects and bodies circulate and interact rather than emotions. As emotions become attached to those objects, they move with the objects. Over time, as these emotions become ordinary, taken-for-granted affects, or sensations, people equate those feelings with the objects themselves, as if the object holds the emotion. These emotions, once named, signal particular orientations toward objects and others. From the beginning, the books carried with them Mrs. K's hope and the hope of those who came before. They brought with them their own affective possibilities. In this case, Mrs. K's use of words like "hope" and "fun" in the opening story signaled an orientation toward books as holding positive potentials. Although Ahmed would say the books do not actually hold the possibilities or the emotions of hope and fun, they bring up for Mrs. K, because of past histories—both hers and others, feelings of hope and fun. Ahmed's concept of emotion adds to ordinary affects because it makes visible how over time particular affects pass by unnoticed in the routine of the ordinary. She wrote, "The ordinary is linked...to the absence of perception, rather than the absence of the body" (p. 180). In the case of independent reading, that absence of perception fixes the routine in place, accepting that it has to be the way it is. But diving into the emotional attachments within the routine opens up space to see how it is constructed and how it might be able to be something else. Attending to the ordinary and the objects of feeling within the ordinary makes space for shifts in orientation toward objects and shifts in relationships in an assemblage. Berlant and Stewart (2018) suggested, "Ordinaries...sometimes stage a high-intensity tableau of the way things are or could become" (p. 5). Here then, in the stories that follow, stories filled with stops

and starts, I hope that those shifts in Mrs. K's classroom provide opportunities to wonder about what the nature of reading for pleasure in high school could be. Within this chapter, I organize my analysis by (a) considering the embedded objects of feeling within the teachers' construction of independent reading, (b) closely attending to the potentials in the enactment of independent reading, and (c) analyzing how the emotions youth attached to independent reading and the objects and texts within it came to define the nature of reading for "pleasure" in this space.

Story 11. Sometimes, You Just Gotta Read Books

The English department teacher's at Monument Lake came together as a team to petition the principal to allow daily independent reading in all their classes.

We sit together over buffet pizza and cokes in August as they share their plans. When I ask them what they are most excited about, the biggest thing for the upcoming school year, they all say independent reading. Mrs. K adds that she is looking forward to rebuilding the 10th grade curriculum, but the conversation about independent reading takes over our lunch.

Mrs. E, a new 9th and 10th grade teacher, has created a tracker for students: they can log every page they read and taking it to another level, they can actually track grammar standards in their reading. They are just going to start with the page tracker, Mrs. E says quickly. When the students track their reading, they can earn points for their "moral focus" category of their grade. Moral focus is 10 percent of students' grades, and since the teachers aren't allowed to give homework for grades, they include it in the moral focus category.

They didn't want to do independent reading for the tracker, all of the teachers confirm. But they had to, otherwise the administrators said it was a waste of time. Doesn't improve reading scores, they said. The principal had already made them cut silent reading the year before, the teachers tell me at least twice.

Mrs. M, a 9th grade teacher, looks up at the ceiling of the restaurant as if searching for words. She says, "Sometimes kids just gotta read books, you know.

Constructing the Ordinary

In this scene, taken from my first "research" meeting with the teachers, I think about how affective intensities emerged as the teachers came together to share their decision to implement independent reading in the classroom. These intensities emerged in the singular moment of our conversation; yet Berlant (2012) argued, "A situation usually gets its shape from the way that it

resonates strongly with previous episodes" (p. 72). That is to say, moments become part of a series in which they look more and more like moments that have already occurred. Even as independent reading emerged in the teachers' individual and collective excitement for its potentiality, it engendered "attachments or systems of investment in the unfolding of things" (Stewart, 2007, p. 21). Those attachments and investments take form in the ordinary, repetition of the day-to-day.

In this story, for example, the teachers connected their attachment to the idea that the youth in their classrooms should read books with Monument Lake's larger investment in measuring students' learning. These attachments echo not just these teachers' attachments to reading books but also those of practitioners and academics who laud the potential for independent, choice reading to change children's reading lives (e.g. Kittle, 2013; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). At the same time, the teachers constructed independent reading within the bounds of those skeptics who suggest that without close monitoring, gains from independent reading are few (e.g. Pennington, 2011). First and foremost, the books and their potentials lie at the heart of independent reading for the teachers at Monument Lake. They are excited because they see providing students with the opportunity to choose books as an antidote to the skills-based work they do in most of their classes. For them, it was a way to get students reading books and perhaps even enjoying them. Even in their willingness to come together to advocate for the time (10 minutes per day), they demonstrated the hope they placed in the practice as something outside of what they described as a curriculum that lacked fun for youth.

Alongside their desire for kids to read books, however, was the principal's previous elimination of the program and her grudging agreement to allow it within an accountability structure. Mrs. E and her colleagues excitedly shared the tracker they created even as they

admitted it is was not the reason they wanted to do silent reading. At this point, that tracker brought its own vitality to Monument Lake's independent reading routine. It impacted silent reading as the practice became a thing to be tracked, as a measure of the success or failure of reading for pleasure as a fixed outcome. Even if the tracker at first ran counter to the more free-form independent readings the teachers had it mind, it became an object of feeling for the English teachers at Monument Lake. When Mrs. E pulled out her computer to show me the tracker, her excitement grew. What began as an object created to appease the principal with whom they disagreed became an object of pride for the teachers. Ahmed (2014) suggested that pride plays an affective role in judging whether subjects live up to ideals. In pride, there is, she said, an audience to which we "show" ourselves to be a particular way. She wrote, "It is the relation of having as being—of having ideas as a sign of being an ideal subject—that allows the "I" and the 'we' to be aligned" (p. 109). In the case of the independent reading tracker, the teachers' pride in the tracker helped them align their independent reading values with those of the principal. The teachers, the principal, and the tracker became a united "we" facing the students. That tracker was created for the principal but became a material participant in what independent reading was in Mrs. K's class.

Even more still, in their decisions to attach the completion of the tracker to the youth's moral focus grade, reading independently became a moral good for students. One of the core values at Monument Lake was moral focus, or students' responsibility and accountability for their actions. That moral focus was tied to students' grades and accounted for 10 percent of their class average. Because the school used standards-based grading, the moral focus component of students' grades had become a catch-all for their effort and seeming commitment to doing what was asked, whether that be homework, uniform guidelines, or, in this case, reading for pleasure

in English class. Mrs. K reinforced that decision when she told students to complete their trackers at the end of independent reading, often following up that directive with, "It's one of the best ways to raise your moral focus." For some students like Evie who saw English class as almost all about grades, that made reading something she had to do—not for pleasure but for the grade. For other students, it had less intensity. Jacob said he knew his moral focus was about a 2.5 (out of 4) and he was okay with that. Ashanti, too, expected his moral focus to hover between a 2 and a 2.5 so its intensity faded into the background of his decisions to read or not. Still, it circulated through the classroom, attaching itself to what it meant to be a "good" student and setting expectations for reading for pleasure as not just something to be measured but something moral. Throughout the year, the teachers' hope in books, their anxieties over whether the principal would continue to permit independent reading, and their attachments to the tracker impacted what it meant to read for pleasure in Mrs. K's classroom. At the same time, the students' intra-acted with the teachers, texts, and emotions in ways that new potentials emerged. Here, I share a story of independent reading in Mrs. K's classroom with particular attunement to those potentials.

Story 12. To Feel the Love or Not

Mrs. K wants her students to see the value of story, to be moved by what a story can teach. She says, "I want them to see how a story teaches us things so that we don't have to go through those things, like we can learn from these fictional characters and not have to go through all that pain ourselves." She wants it to be fun.

And sometimes it works. Myla can't lift her head from I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter. Her long, brown hair curtains her face as she leans far over the book, almost like she can't see the words, but maybe she just wants to be closer to them. She groans audibly when Mrs. K says, "Okay, come to the end of that paragraph you're reading. Open your laptop and fill out your tracker." Even still, Myla doesn't stop reading. Porter wanders by her desk. He likes her, always touches her, leans over her with his hands resting on her desk. They had a thing for a minute. It's over now, or at least that's what the kids whisper. He has been done reading since reading began that day. He takes her book, tells her reading's done. She takes it back, says a quick "Stop" because the book is pulling her, keeping her held in its spell. This is the "crackling" that

independent reading promises, a shift in the ordinary. Still, Myla surrenders with four pages left in the novel. She marks her spot and turns to face Mrs. K to get to the work of the day.

Something shifted for Brianna, too. More like a sustained surge than a crackle (Stewart, 2007). She didn't want to read, said the only reason she picked up a book was because Mrs. K wanted her to like books. Now she says, she knows she'll read this summer, at least if nothing gets in the way. For Mrs. K's part she notices Brianna's reading. At the beginning of the year, she physically took a book out of her hands. "She wasn't reading. It had nothing to do with the world she understands. So I gave her Bluford High." And since then...Dear Martin. All American Boys. The Hate U Give.

These are the stories in Brianna's 10th grade archive. Stories of police killings of young, Black boys. Of living as a young, Black person in the United States. American tragedies. Stories of pain. But more, too. Stories of possibilities, of relationships between people, of connections formed in the stories and in Brianna's reading life. Brianna carried The Hate U Give around the school, clutched tight to her chest for almost six weeks.

"Miss," Brianna says. "I've never read books like these, but now I've found books I like."

Mrs. K adds, "It's cool too because she has been working her way up levels of difficulty. And now she's reading pretty close to on grade level texts."

The English team at Monument Lake has built a lot of goals around independent reading this year. A lot for 10 minutes a day. Today, Mrs. K shares a story from a team meeting, "We were talking about how we support kids to find their own books. Because the goal of the program is that they self-select their book. But at the beginning of the year so many of our kids" she trails off. "It is so frustrating to me."

The students are frustrated, too, because the thing about "Book Love" is everyone isn't feeling the love. They're still feeling something, though. Everyday Jacob opens his book to the same spot. He stares at the book for a minute or two before his eyes drift upward. "I hate it," Jacob says one morning. Maybe it's the book he chose. For his part, Miguel comes into class with a book, opens it to some page in the middle, and stares. He usually has his headphones on. Mrs. K doesn't realize they are wireless and he's piping The Beatles into his ears as he "reads," he tells me. He glares sharply on those days she tells him to put the headphones away.

Porter spends most of his time at the bookshelf looking for a book, maybe the right one will find him. He settles on one for the day, a different one almost every time, walks over to the folding table next to Mrs. K's desk, and reclines on the floor underneath. He reads for a while, propped up on his elbow, looking around the room every few seconds. The next day, he chooses a different book. The same routine, again and again, only different each time.

On most days, independent reading time is silent, a slowing down after the bell rings. Whether they read or not, they sit silently—fingers lightly tapping the desk or knees, the only sounds are the rustling of bodies in desks, Mrs. K quietly asking students about their reading. She carries a little notebook around to meet with students, asking them to tell her about their books. She

always speaks softly, gently, with a smile on her face, even when the student tells her they haven't read a single word—not that they admit it.

Only this day, it's not quiet. The students are talking to each other. She tells them they should be silent, there are still 9 minutes of reading left. They are quiet for all of 30 seconds before the noise starts to build, a whisper here and there at first, a shifting toward others in the classroom, a louder conversation, an exchange, until suddenly almost everyone is talking. She comes to the front of the classroom, looks over the desks at the 31 teenagers in front of her, calls them to attention, "D Hour. It should be silent in here." Polite words but there's an underlying tone in her voice, a tension at the disruption. "She was maaadd," Ashanti recounts. "I saw her coming and I put my head in my book." As if his head in his book is what she was looking for. Most times, however, Ashanti says he'd rather stare at the wall than read. "I can get lost in my own thoughts that way," he says.

Not today. It's April, and Ashanti's head is buried in his book. Brianna gave him Sharon Draper's Forged by Fire, and he isn't looking anywhere else. He's turning the pages, responding audibly to what he's reading. His fingers grip the book tightly. Something catches his attention, and he turns to Donald and Brianna to tell them about it. He gestures toward the book, a smile on his face. He turns back to the book quickly. When Mrs. K tells them it's time for the tracker, he turns to Brianna to talk more. Brianna was the one who told him to read the book. He can't stop talking about it: "It's crazy," he says.

Evie stares at the wall, too. "It's part of my moral focus so I kinda have to read," she says, "but I'm not a big fan." For Evie, who wants to get good grades, this is a problem. "It's held against me when I'm not interested in reading, and I just don't want to, and I hate that it counts against me because I don't like doing it." Evie didn't finish a book all year. "It's not for me," she says. But then, 11th grade starts and her teacher hands her a book: Wildflowers. She read the whole novel in one day and is going to ask her teacher for the next in the trilogy. "I didn't expect it to happen," she says. A new relation opens, a "crackling".

But is it okay that they stared at the wall for 10 minutes every day, until they didn't?

Feeling Something: Bodies, Objects, and Emotions Moving through Independent Reading

Although at some level, ordinary independent reading became as much about the technical aspects of structure and accountability as it did about pleasure, attending to the ordinary affects within the routine reveals that the potentials of reading with youth in classrooms exist whether we attend to them or not. In the stories of independent reading in Mrs. K's class, objects, bodies, and texts were on the move, making and remaking the boundaries of the purpose of reading for pleasure.

Thinking with ordinary affects about these experiences, however, reveals that more was happening than avoiding reading or not, or reading for a grade or not. Even though the scene looked the same, it was different. We read the success and failure of independent reading in volume. It was supposed to be quiet, silent even, to make space for connections between individual students and their books. Yet, the classroom was never about one person and their books. For example, youth like Ashanti, Evie, Jacob, and Miguel found ways to appear to be reading, to pass the 10-15 minutes that were required of them. They quickly realized that "have to read" was not really enough to draw them into a book and out of their own thoughts. Ashanti's staring at the wall became Isabella's explanation for not reading. "It's more interesting to think about things," she said. Students refused to read, but in a quiet way, so Mrs. K shifted her body from person to person to hold them accountable through conversation and little notes written in a notebook. She reminded them to fill out the tracker at the end of each class, one more move to hold them accountable. As such, Ashanti constructed ordinary independent reading as "eyes in book," equating reading with measurable behaviors. When the volume changed, Mrs. K changed. She shifted her body, shifting her authority in that space as if to say their direction was fumbling, to remind them that they needed to track their pages and that their bodies should be oriented toward books and not toward each other. In that moment, the purpose for reading was made again as something to be measured, as silence, as eyes on books. The repetition of these movements and the decisions to read or not often served to reify particular norms of being in school such that reading for pleasure became a task to be completed.

Yet, as the story above demonstrated, students continued to shift through the classroom, moving their eyes to and from the books, taking the books of their neighbors, and getting out of their desks to visit the bookshelves, looking for that next opportunity—the something more

attending to the ordinary offers. As such, there were moments when different potentials opened, where "cracklings" (Stewart, 2007) moved independent reading beyond a task to be done. For Myla, new relations formed between her and *I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*. I could explain this as the choice of a culturally relevant text or the 10 minutes she had to read or the connection between those two things, but there was more. The way she dismissed Porter, even refused Mrs. K's request to stop at first, because the novel pulled her to it. Her hair and her proximity to the text closed off the space between her and the text as much as she could even though the classroom was still in motion, bodies were still circulating. The book moved from her to Porter and back because she and the novel connected, making reading something different from what is was before. Even though Mrs. K said on that day, just like every day, to fill out the tracker, she did not. In that moment, it was not what mattered to her. Still, other affects in the classroom paused her trajectory. She stopped with four pages to go because of time; she had to get on with the "real" work of the day.

I also saw and heard Brianna's orientation toward reading shift, too, as books became objects of connection for her—connections to the texts, connections to the world, connections to her life, connections to feelings. In these connections, Brianna began to build a textual archive, an archive that showed her something of her world. Ahmed (2014) wrote of her experiences in feminism that they brought joy, joy she felt as she "began to make different kinds of connections with others and realize that the world was alive and could take new shapes and forms" (p. 171). I wonder if Brianna, too, experienced joy as she began to see herself as a reader. She began to orient toward books as objects of joy, as objects of interest rather than as things that were not for her. At the same time, the books that brought her to this shift were painful. They were not happy stories of lives and worlds, but stories of the world as made racist, stories of tragedy. She often

called them “crazy” or not even appropriate for class. But this pain and joy mingled, creating new opportunities, new cracklings in what reading could be.

This orientation was a shift in Brianna, but it was also a shift in Mrs. K. She physically moved a book out of Brianna’s hands and replaced it with another. In that movement, something possible emerged. For Brianna this new relationship was about the books, about the stories Mrs. K hoped she would value. She almost never filled out the tracker, often missed independent reading time in class, but Mrs. K still recognized Brianna’s success in “liking books” and in quantitative measures. Brianna was progressing toward grade level reading, a goal that might have seemed at odds with pleasure reading. Both Mrs. K and Brianna liked that her reading was improving. Brianna talked about the changes on the standardized tests even as she shared the stories she had read.

Indexing the Past, Present, and Future Relationships with Books

In everyday reading, books became objects of hate, objects of desire, and objects of disinterest. These emotional attachments that teachers and youth attached to books during independent reading indexed past, present, and future expectations of their relationships with those books. For example, as the teachers at Monument Lake introduced independent reading, they attached joy and excitement not just to the books but to the tracker they created to monitor reading. Those books echoed with their own stated love of reading, memories of books they read, and books that could become “love” for students. But not only joy and excitement circulated through the classroom; frustration was also on the move. For Mrs. K, some of the possibilities faded away in the ordinary of the stops and starts of reading with youth in the classroom. In the ordinary, students picked up books and put them down again. They stared at the wall instead of at the books, even though staring at anything was not what Mrs. K really wanted. As her

frustration grew, she looked toward choice. “Maybe if they just make the right choice,” she thought. It worked for Brianna.

In these conversations with Mrs. K, emotions got attached to bodies in the classroom. Mrs. K attached joy to Brianna and each book she carried into the classroom. Brianna’s shift in her relationship to text was the kind of thing Mrs. K said, “keeps me going.” At the same time, Evie became an object of frustration. She became someone who did not read both for herself and for Mrs. K. Both Evie and Mrs. K labeled her as a good, hard-working student, except when it came to reading. Neither of them expected much of Evie’s relationship to texts, and Evie never saw the books read in English class whether assigned or chosen as anything but a task to be completed. Although the students who read all the time, sometimes two or three books a week didn’t make it into my story, they were there. Lilly, for example, who the students were often amazed by, read a couple of books a week even though she worked every day after school. Mrs. K, Evie, Ashanti, Brianna, Jacob—most of the students attached hope to them. They hoped, perhaps, at some level for everyone to read like that, themselves included, even as that hope mingled with doubt or rejection when they talked about their own reading lives.

The students and Mrs. K were feeling the books in the classroom space—just not always in the same ways and at the same times. Ashanti, who stared at the wall, entered a new relationship with Brianna and with *Forged by Fire* and with Mrs. K and with reading, at least for that class and in that moment. Ashanti’s body shifted toward the book, and the book as an object became anew. An “I have to do this, but I won’t” affect shifted to an “I’m in this” reading and sharing of the novel. At the same time, Jacob “hated” reading as an object, even though he sat in class with his book open most days, and Evie remained convinced books just were not for her. She remained continually frustrated that she felt books were not for her, but her teachers wanted

them to be. Even when she found a book she liked, the clearest emotion coming from her was disbelief, a sedimented trajectory interrupted. This attention to books and reading as objects of feeling offers insights into both how trajectories become sedimented in the rhythms of reading in English classrooms and how they might be interrupted in the ordinary intra-actions within those rhythms.

Story 13. Why are We Doing This?

"How do we know if our students are better readers?" Mrs. S, the English department chair, asks as she interrupts the 10th grade planning meeting one Tuesday afternoon in April. She apologizes for interrupting but says, "I appreciate it. This question, you know, even in AP, has been keeping me up at night."

Today's planning agenda is the 6th week of their Julius Caesar unit, but Mrs. S. wants to talk. "You know, I just don't know if they're better," she says. "I feel like that's kind of our main job. And even saying that out loud I have this really icky feeling, and I've got this pit in my stomach. But feeling this way, I mean that means we have to do better."

Mrs. K offers up the standards, "It would almost require standard 6[independent reading standard] to be a real thing, but in all honesty, I found it really difficult to assess." Mrs. K and Mr. J discuss their assessment, neither of them happy with what they've done. They offer to continue to think about this issue and how they might ask students to demonstrate their growth. "They could collect data and present it to us—volume, complexity, genre," he says.

Even as she says she'll create a list of categories they could assess, Mrs. K expresses her uncertainty. "The thing is, it doesn't move along a trajectory, some will decode, some will make sense, some will make connections, some won't get better," she says.

Assessment: A Discussion

A group of teachers sitting around after school discussing how to assess what their students know is an ordinary thing, particularly in a highly accountable, test-driven school culture like Monument Lake. Wanting students to be better readers is, at least based on practitioner and academic writing, an accepted goal for English educators to hold. Yet, close attention to the affective texture of this conversation revealed that in this ordinary moment, more was being felt among Mrs. S, Mrs. K, and Mr. J. There was Mrs. S's "icky feeling" that she couldn't name but kept her up at night. There was also Mrs. K's uncertainty about what

assessment of reading for pleasure might look like. Standard 6, the standard the curriculum department created to align with independent reading, became an object of certainty to which the teachers could return when they didn't have an answer for how to assess independent reading in their classrooms. Returning to Standard 6 and thinking about breaking it down only held so much of Mrs. K's feeling. She still questioned their ability to assess improvement, complicating the idea that all of the students would move in the same direction as part of independent reading. That complication registers, perhaps, the "something more" I tried to capture in the stories from her classroom.

Across my inquiry into the routines of independent reading in Mrs. K's classroom, I returned to Stewart's (2017) concept of ordinary affects. In drafting stories of the ordinary in this classroom, I thought with Stewart 2017 about "the world that affect proposed" (p. 195). In this world, things came together or were thrown together to become something recognizable. In the case of independent reading in Mrs. K's classroom, the impacts of objects and bodies in motion could be something to celebrate, to oppose, or even to resist. In a critical analysis, I might have celebrated Myla and Brianna's engagement with texts, opposed the use of a tracker as an artifact of neoliberalism, or resisted the teachers' commitments to assessment. At the same time, even in this context of standardization and inequity, there was always still more to what was happening in this space than a structural critique might have offered. Stewart (2017) wrote, "Affect added an affirmative critique that registers surprise at what and how things happen" (p. 194). For instance, Evie frequently said she hated reading, was bored by it, or that it just was not for her; yet her disbelief at finding a book she liked added to that narrative. She often spent independent reading not reading. Even though she wanted to be seen as a good student, she remained attached to books as objects of boredom and frustration. That boredom and frustration oriented her toward

Mrs. K who asked her to do things she didn't want to do and even to English class and the purposes for reading, something she did not see value in. At the same time, Brianna, whose experience might best fit the teachers' view of success in independent reading, never filled out the tracker the teachers designed to hold students accountable for reading. Mrs. K's forceful move to take a book out of Brianna's hands and replace it with another, alongside Brianna's desire to do what Mrs. K wanted (i.e. "like books"), shifted Brianna's relation to particular novels. When the teachers tried to come up with a means to assess the effectiveness of their independent reading responses, it was an affective need first. Mrs. S's "icky feeling" gave way to shared uncertainty about the best way to move forward.

Attending to ordinary affects made space for me to see the rhythms and shifts in the daily routine of ordinary reading. Stories of being Black in America made an impression on Brianna within the ordinary. By passing those stories to Ashanti, Brianna and *Forged by Fire* left a trace on Ashanti. In the attention to ordinary affects in independent reading, I gesture toward the always becoming purposes for reading in the classroom space. The purposes for reading in this class shaped and were shaped by affects. In an affective reading of independent reading, its purpose could be to read for fun, to read to love books, to read to improve grade levels, to read to get a good grade, to avoid reading all together, and to read for purposes that take new forms in the moment and open up the possible.

Responding with Wonder

An affective reading of this ordinary routine in Mrs. K's classroom provoked opportunities for wonder. I do not have an answer to the question of whether it is okay that students spent independent reading staring at the wall until some text or moment interrupted that staring. I expect that as teachers, in this standards-driven culture, it's difficult to imagine holding

a purpose that allows for seeming idleness or getting lost in thoughts, unrelated to the goal at hand, but I wonder if we might have to do that. If we might have to be okay imagining a world in which students do not feel the same "book love" that others do. Of course, that doesn't mean I think the role of teachers is passive acceptance. As the stories from Mrs. K's classroom showed, her actions and the actions of the students held possibilities for interrupting the ordinary and for shifting relations to texts among the people in the class. I also wonder about the possibilities for engaging teachers' and students' emotional attachments to texts, positive, negative, and indifferent, not as a means to accomplish the teacher's goal for reading for fun or pleasure, but to recognize those attachments as shaping the possibilities available in the classroom.

CHAPTER 6

"IT'S A TINY BOOK, BUT THERE'S A LOT HAPPENING!": EXPECTATIONS FOR LITERATURE DISCUSSIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

> Me: Given all this, what do you hope that they'll take away from *Animal Farm*?
>
> Mrs. K: So many things. I certainly want to help them with the standards. So I want them to understand a little bit more about literary analysis and about rhetoric.
>
> But on a much more real level to me, I want them to think about the dangers of conformity, and the ways that power twists itself to present itself in a good light…
>
> And I'm hoping that they can connect that to history, and maybe to our own lives. So like, "In Russia, we saw this play out this way. Is there anything in our current life or current society that might mirror that?"

Mrs. K and I had decided to meet in between parent-teacher conferences to talk about her purposes for teaching *Animal Farm*. Because of her busy schedule, I had originally emailed her to ask why she wanted to teach the novel. Her reply, "There's so much I want them to take away—both personally and academically. I couldn't possibly list all the reasons here. I'd be typing all day." I'd been with her in the classroom for about two months at this point so at that, we set up our first formal interview to talk about her teaching, her relationship with her students, what I was noticing in the classroom, and the upcoming *Animal Farm* unit. Probably because I came into this inquiry with questions about purposes for reading with youth in English classrooms, Mrs. K's response to my question about *Animal Farm* stuck with me throughout the study. She packed so many expectations for the potential of this "tiny book" into her response: a list of the reasons for English teaching and learning—standards and analysis, moral questions about power, historical understandings, and connections to our current world. Even more, however, I noticed how she oriented toward each of these goals. She was certain about learning

standards, real about the need to address issues of power, and hopeful about connecting to history and to the present day. When she spoke about what was real, she leaned in toward me and her voice on the recording is stronger. Her pitch shifted higher when she talked about her hopes. For Mrs. K, each of these purposes for reading *Animal Farm* gestured toward her attachments to the curriculum and to the possibilities that reading literature with youth offer. The funny thing is that when she told me they were reading *Animal Farm*, I was disappointed, but when I re-read the novel with the echoes of her hopes in my head, I, too, saw the possibilities.

In this final findings chapter, I think with Mrs. K and the youth in her classroom as they discuss their responses to *Animal Farm.* In particular, I think with theories of ordinary affects and emotional attachments to consider reading and discussing literature for social change as an optimistic attachment that has become a social good in secondary English classrooms. To do this, I first consider how reading and discussing for social transformation has come to be a good tied to literature discussions in Mrs. K's classroom. Then I focus in on one specific pedagogic encounter: a culminating, whole-class Socratic seminar devoted to issues of power in the novel and beyond, and how Mrs. K responds to that discussion. By using ordinary affects and attachments, I hope to move beyond simplistic views of Mrs. K's classroom as not meeting the goals she had for social change. Finally, I think with Mrs. K's responses within this unit to explore what potential for wonder might exist within her unmet expectations. Ultimately, I wonder throughout this chapter about how teachers might orient toward possibilities and potentials in reading with youth rather than toward fixed outcomes. To that end, I focus more exclusively in this chapter on Mrs. K and her intra-actions in classroom discussions and activities.

Discussions as Transformative, Equitable Practice in Secondary English Classrooms

Before I consider how literature discussions have come to be defined among English education scholars, I want to situate the stories in this chapter within Mrs. K's commitments. As I have said throughout this dissertation, most of the English teaching and learning in Mrs. K's classroom, like all of Monument Lake, focused on standards-based rhetorical and literary analysis with measurable outcomes tied to assessment. But at the end of each unit and as many times in-between as Mrs. K could convince her teaching team, she would plan discussions connected to broader issues in the world, particularly around racial, economic, political, and linguistic inequity. During the year, she and her students talked about poverty and parenting, police brutality, political oppression, and youth activism. Her students added their voices to debates about immigration and #MeToo, even though I never saw Mrs. K ask a direct question about those topics.

Anytime she had a discussion planned, she would text me, asking me if I was going to be there. Like her, I loved discussions and would often cancel meetings or other obligations to be there for them. Perhaps she knew that, and it is why she texted me at those times. In fact, to be at the discussion I focus on in this chapter, I had to pretend I was stuck in traffic and could not make it to another meeting. In addition, the only time I saw her speak out against her colleagues was when they wanted to cut discussions to add additional rhetorical or literary analysis practice. Even when she didn't like other decisions, she would usually go along, willing to let go of what she wanted to keep the peace and move planning forward. When it came to discussions, however, she advocated for them, offering to write the questions or create the handouts. She loved discussion, would forego other plans to allow her students to continue their conversations,

and even more importantly, attached those "real level" purposes for considering power and oppression and personal connections to classroom talk.

I believe this is important because while I never heard Mrs. K cite the researchers and practitioners I bring to this conversation, she often echoed their sentiments. English education and literacy researchers have placed considerable emphasis on the potential for discussion to allow students and teachers to negotiate meaning and bring multiple perspectives into conversations (e.g. Aukerman, 2013; Juzwik, et al, 2013). Moreover, scholars have suggested, student discussions offer the opportunity for students to bring the "text of their lives into school" as part of the process of co-constructing meaning in the interactions "between" the language of texts and the language of students (e.g. Fecho & Botzakis, 2007; Fecho, Coombs, & McCauley, 2012; Aukerman, 2013). Meanwhile, Kinloch (2005) included discussion and classroom exchange as part of democratic engagement in schools in which students share ideas and "come into a consciousness of differences" (p. 98). And Juzwik, et al (2013) stated explicitly that teaching students to talk with others about current issues, particularly those with different perspectives, is tied to equity in English classrooms (p. 4).

Indeed, Ahmed (2018) highlighted the importance of talk for social change in her practitioner text, suggesting that it is through talk about difficult topics based on the world and students' experiences in it that change can be possible, while Hess (2009) argued that teaching students how to talk about controversial topics is vital to a democratic community. Noddings and Brooks (2016) encouraged teachers to foster critical thinking by talking about controversial topics including authority, poverty, racism, and religion. To guide English teachers in how to do this, Juzwik et al. (2013) offered a number of what they called dialogic tools for student-led discussions, and the Teaching Channel highlighted discussion techniques used across the country

by highly successful teachers including National Teacher of the Year 2010 Sarah Brown Wessling. Meanwhile, accountable talk has been taken up by teachers and school districts across the country to teach students how to have a discussion with each other (e.g. Goldman, 2014; Resnick, Asterhan & Clarke, 2015; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Both the technical and aspirational work around discussions have suggested that it has become a "good" that should be included in the high school English classroom to provide opportunities for youth to discuss their lives, literature, and current issues facing society. Doing this, researcher and practitioner literature have suggested will promote a more just English classroom. But what happens when discussions invite students' ideas and those ideas don't meet a teacher's social justice aims? I invite readers to wonder with Mrs. K and me about what could have been or could be in this discussion of *Animal Farm.*

Story 14. Killer Mentality

> Only old Benjamin professed to remember every detail of his long life and to know that things never had been, nor ever could be much better or worse- hunger, hardship, and disappointment being, so he said, the unalterable law of life.
>
> —*Animal Farm*, George Orwell

Every novel unit in Mrs. K's class ends with a Socratic Seminar, or a student-driven whole-class discussion. The desks, like they are every time, are arranged in a circle with a few jammed together and others further apart. It's hard to fit all 31 chairs in a circle. Like every time, Mrs. K stands slightly to the outside of the circle, leans against a chair and reminds them how they earn points: Side conversations=points lost; Contributions to the circle=points gained. Each of the students holds a set of discussion preparation questions with answers filled in. If they weren't, they have to leave the class with Mrs. W, the parapro, to answer the questions. Keshawn lingers. He hasn't filled out any of the answers, but then he hasn't turned in an assignment in five weeks. Still, he talks to Ashanti. Mrs. K tells him again he has to go with Mrs. W.

Mrs. K had to fight for this discussion. The other 10th grade teachers wanted more time to review literary analysis methods for the test. Mrs. E asked, "Which is more important? Doing well on the assessment or talking about themes?" The question stopped all three of them. Silence bloomed. Mr. J said, "Thirty minutes, that's how much time I'll give the discussion. My students won't talk any longer than that." Mrs. K smiled, nodded her head.

The discussion in Mrs. K's class is now at the 47-minute mark, and the students are still talking. There won't be any methods review today, at least not the kind they planned. Mrs. K steps

toward the circle and leans in, using her body to shift the discussion. "We know Benjamin said throughout the entire book that no matter what, things are as they are. There's no changing it. What I'd like you guys to do is to discuss your opinion of this. Do you think this stuff is true? Do you agree with what Orwell presents?"

One question. A turn from the expected:

Xavier says, "I don't because you have the power to change it. It's all about your mindset and how you interpret things. If you work towards what you want to happen, only good things can come of it." Joshua takes it a step further, "Yeah, I agree with that because the pigs had their come up, so I mean you're not always going to just be underneath. They came out."

Jesse tries to disagree, to suggest that what happened to the other animals shows that things do remain the same, but he gets caught up in the fact that they're all still animals.

Xavier dismisses that reasoning. To cement his argument, he adds, "The pigs, they got in power because they saw that opportunity because the pigs were most likely wiser than everybody else so once they saw that opportunity, they already knew off the jump that they was bouta run it. That was that mindset. That killer mentality. Top dog."

In the focus group the next day, I ask Joshua about the discussion. As he munches on a Krispy Kreme donut, he smiles at me. "I enjoy that kind of thing. It throws a curveball at everyone else. Everyone is on their toes trying to think of something to say."

An Unmet Expectation

This story came at the end of the unit, but I include it here to frame the stories and analysis that follow. Although I provide initial thoughts about this moment as I introduce optimistic attachments, I return to it later in light of additional moments related to discussions of *Animal Farm.* Rather than analyze this conversation with long excerpts of student talk, I composed this story to evoke a response to the situation. Berlant (2011) wrote,

> A situation is a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life. It is a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event. (p. 5)

Indeed, I argue that the situation at the center of this chapter became an event for Mrs. K and me, even though in the moment, it felt like an interesting but fairly ordinary culminating literature discussion. Because it was interesting and I knew it had lasted longer than expected, I transcribed the discussion soon after it happened, prompting our frequent conversations about it. This situation, then, became an event, and one about which, when we met months later, she said, "Even though I don't know what a dissertation is supposed to be, I feel like you could write about this."

In large part, I argue that this situation became an event because it did not meet Mrs. K's expectation for literature to be socially transformative, at least in the way she defined the potential of *Animal Farm*. That is to say, she expected her students to critique conformity and the ways that power twists itself. When Xavier and Joshua offered up the pigs as a model for improving one's station in life, she felt she had failed. To think with the story above and additional conversations related to it, I focus on what I perceive to be Mrs. K's optimistic attachment (Berlant, 2011) to literature discussions oriented toward social change and how these attachments oriented her to notice and respond to particular potentials within what happened in the *Animal Farm* unit.

Literature discussions, focused outward to the world, were a particular instructional strategy Mrs. K turned toward to invite student ideas into the classroom and to deliver on a promise of shifting students' ordinary ways of interacting in the classroom and in the world. As such, they became an attachment in which Mrs. K could embed the promise of reading with youth in English classrooms for social change. Berlant (2011) argued,

> All attachment is optimistic, if we describe optimism as the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you

> cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project. (p. 1)

These attachments work, Berlant said, to "induce conventionality" (p. 2) in such a way that desires take shape in the predictability. In this case, the potential of the literature discussions layered the ordinary in such a way that Mrs. K invested in the teaching practice. "Potential," Stewart (2007) said, "is a thing immanent to fragments of sensory experience and dreams of presence. A layer, or layering to the ordinary, it engenders attachments or systems of investment in the unfolding of things" (p. 21). As those attachments or investments grow, Stewart suggested, hard lines of connection and disconnection form such that we begin not to notice them. In other words, they become ordinary. Often, Berlant (2011) wrote, we cannot let go of those attachments, even when they become damaging because they are fantasies that enable our expectations. Berlant calls our inability to let go of these attachments an impasse. In an impasse, people make adjustments to either continue living in the current state of things, or they adjust to move in another direction. Berlant is particularly focused on those situations in which we cannot let go of attachments or move in a new direction. Examining our attachments that make the ordinary seemingly immoveable might help us understand the making of purposes for reading in Mrs. K's classroom.

Moreover, because of Mrs. K's reaction to the final discussion of *Animal Farm*, I think specifically with Mrs. K's commitments as social goods tied to purposes for reading as fixed outcomes related to inviting student ideas and reading for social transformation. Ahmed (2010) defined a social good as an object to which people tie an expectation of happiness. She wrote, "Certain objects are attributed as the cause of happiness, which means they already circulate as social goods before we happen upon them…In other words, we anticipate that happiness will

follow proximity to this or that object" (p. 41). This anticipation, she argued, forms the basis of our expectations, and happiness, in particular, signals an expectation of outcome. While happiness might not be the exact emotion with which to think with Mrs. K's experiences of reading with youth, I believe Ahmed's concept of expectations oriented toward particular objects offers a way to think about how particular purposes for reading become normative narratives of success for teachers and youth. When those purposes to which teachers attach positive expectations are not met, teachers' response might be sadness, disappointment, or shame. They might also be seen as impasses, moments where potentials to disrupt typical ways of doing things might emerge. Indeed, Ahmed (2010) suggested that these "bad" feelings might actually provide the opportunity to create alternative imaginings of the way things could be. In other words, they might provoke wonder that disrupts the ordinary.

Story 15. Choosing Animal Farm

They used to teach The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie for the third unit of the year. Mrs. K and Mr. J decided they wanted something with "higher rigor and more literary merit."

Animal Farm was their selection.

They chose it because most of the copies were already available in the curriculum department, and because Mrs. K loves it. To do it, they had to use up their trust with the administration. We're a little on shaky ground, cause we had to buy additional copies of The Great Gatsby for 11th grade, and we didn't have enough of Animal Farm so we're looking bad."

It's okay because Mrs. K gets to teach both novels, but she says they can't change anything else for a while.

When I ask Evie why she thinks Mrs. K picked Animal Farm, she said, "She just picked from very popular different categories." And Miguel added, "It was another type of book we needed to read." For Ashanti and Joshua's part, they thought the history was "pretty cool."

Attaching to *Animal Farm*

Even before Mrs. K introduced the novel into the classroom, her expectations for what might be possible shaped her orientation toward purposes for reading. This story alongside Mrs.

K's stated goals for reading *Animal Farm* that opened this chapter make visible Mrs. K's expectations for what reading this novel with students might do. First, she and her colleagues replaced a text students had enjoyed because of the value they placed on *Animal Farm* as literature. Then as further evidence of that value, they asked the school to buy more copies, something Mrs. K said she could not do again that year or perhaps even the next because she might be judged as wasteful. But it was okay because as Mrs. K says, "It's a tiny book, but there's a lot happening." As she set out to read this text with students, she hoped that students might think about the dangers of conformity and the ways that power twists itself, a purpose for reading that oriented her toward social change. This was particularly important to her in light of the current U.S. political situation, something she and her colleagues often talked about in planning but could not bring openly into the classroom. Because of the heightened rhetoric around the U.S. political situation, someone in the administration had made the decision, Mrs. K said, that teachers had to try to present both sides of any issue if they wanted to talk about it. Since she did not want to do that, she tried to ask questions in such a way that students would be prompted to bring current issues into the classroom. By reading *Animal Farm,* she hoped that her students could take up the themes and messages in the novel in ways that might create space to interrogate Trump's presidency and promote activism. Following Ahmed, she anticipated, even before reading, particular desired outcomes. By contrast, her students did not necessarily exhibit those same affective attachments to the novel. For them it ranged from just another book to pretty cool; yet, they never expressed any possibilities for what the book might do in their lives or world. Their apathy only served to highlight Mrs. K's attachment to the novel.

Story 16. Something Beautiful

The students are loud today. It's not usually this loud. In fact, the English department chair told me at least three times on three different occasions that Mrs. K's class is always calm. The students are in groups all over the room, and Mrs. K has assigned each group an animal: sheep,

pigs, chickens, horses, dogs, cats. Alejandro wants to be the farmer. He asks Mrs. K if she is the farmer, but she assures him that she isn't. In anticipation of the Animal Farm unit, she asks them to imagine their relative happiness, as the animal they have been assigned, on a farm. Other than the chickens, it turns out most think they are right in the middle—not too happy, not too sad. A solid 5, the students give themselves. Mrs. K isn't so sure about this. She asks the pigs if they are okay with being slaughtered for bacon. The students say, "At least we get to lay around and play in the mud the rest of the time." And laugh, lots of laughing and joking. The dogs are a standout; that group gives themselves an 8. "We're the farmer's favorite," they say.

But they didn't do this just to imagine themselves as farm animals. Mrs. K is excited and has the students go back to their individual desks. She calls their attention just by standing in front of the classroom with no smile on her face. It's not loud anymore, but there's still a lightness in the classroom, as if traces of the earlier jokes remain.

The document projector flashes up six statements. "Universal truths," Mrs. K says. "You have to agree or disagree. Bonus if you can connect it to Animal Farm and what your animal compatriots would say. And raise your hand" They have to raise their hand because they aren't in a circle. Students are scattered all around the room and can't see each other when they are talking.

The statement: Educated people are less likely to be controlled than uneducated people.

Xavier is quick to raise his hand. "This is a statement I agree with and the example I would use is white people and black people because white people wouldn't allow blacks to become educated. Therefore, they stayed rich." He's not talking about Animal Farm anymore. A crackling, an unexpected response from a 15-year-old African American boy. Mrs. K is silent a second longer than usual. "So we see the power of education in history," she says. "That's a great point. Does anyone else wanna speak on this one?" Silence. Xavier is in the front of the room, in the corner of the class. No one can see his face. No one raises their hand.

Perhaps Mrs. K knows something else could happen. "I feel silly saying this because Xavier just made this eloquent historical point and I'm about to talk about pigs," she says to quiet laughter. "Remember when the pig group was like 'if I didn't know I was going to the slaughter, I'd love every moment of my life. I'd be happy,' I think that's an example of an education and a lack of education. If the pig knows he's getting fat to die, he's going to stop doing that." But would they stop?

The next day I ask Mrs. K about Xavier's response. "It was beautiful," she says.

An Impasse: A Moment Lost

As I continue to reflect on this situation in Mrs. K's classroom, I am struck by the extent to which it drifted off, a situation that prompted no perceptible shifts in the doing of English in Mrs. K's classroom. This moment suggests that embracing the unexpected, or orienting toward

potentials in the classroom, requires teachers to adapt their purposes, see them as flexible and intertwined rather than as fixed outcomes. This moment moved me then and continues to move me now because it was the most direct reference to racism and oppression that I heard a student make in Mrs. K's class. Even in explicit conversations about police brutality, for example, no student in the class addressed white supremacy or anti-Black policing in the whole group conversation. In this moment, Xavier took what had been a particularly light class session and oriented it toward historical racism and oppression in the United States. When he said, "White people and black people because white people wouldn't allow blacks to become educated. Therefore, they stayed rich," Xavier offered the potential for a conversation about racism, education, and its connections to capitalist wealth creation based in a racist society. Mrs. K's response indicated that she felt the moment differently from the other comments made during class, even pointing out that she felt "silly" perhaps embarrassed that she moved the conversation back to the farm animal game they had been playing instead of bringing Xavier's statement into the classroom conversation. Even the next day, she imbued Xavier's comment with particular affect, calling it beautiful.

In its emotional resonance and sense of potential, the scene is an impasse calling for a moment of adjustment. Although Mrs. K recognized Xavier's comment and its potential to disrupt the ordinary, the adjustment did not happen. Instead, she adjusted to name her feeling of silliness, almost as an apology to Xavier that she would continue forward in the class as it was, and shifted back to her plan, the one to which she was attached—using animals to engage students in general themes related to the novel. In her response at this moment of impasse, then, she acted to reinforce histories of silencing of Black youth seeking to make sense of historical oppression. In this case, then, I feel the negative consequences of an impasse and missed

potential. When that potential was silenced, it did not come back into the classroom. They never addressed the pigs' control of the farm using literacy or Xavier's connection between literacy and racial oppression in U.S. history. Past experiences in the class suggest that the students might have taken it up had it been offered. For example, when youth came in with a Black Lives Matter banner, most got up to sign it, Mrs. K included. And in a discussion aimed at police brutality, the youth displayed connections to the content and engaged in particularly animated talk when the substitute teacher introduced an incident that resulted in police handcuffing an 11-year-old Black girl in the adjacent city. Ashanti, himself, tried to introduce his own experiences with police into the conversation. This moment, then, held potential for historical and contemporary connections to issues of concern for the youth and to Mrs. K's broader purposes for reading *Animal Farm* connected to themes related to oppression and the need for change. Inasmuch as she asked students to identify with animals on a farm and then connected that identification to universal statements about control, she wanted them to see how oppression might happen, or might be constructed through actions people take in the world. Only she wanted them to see it, at that moment, through animals. Thus, when Xavier changed the stakes of the conversation, she did not adjust.

An Impasse Felt: Potential to Shift

I included the story above because despite the potential of Xavier's comment to prompt critical inquiry, it drifted off, a momentary impasse to which Mrs. K was able to adjust and keep moving toward the outcome she desired for the day. It did not have the same resonance as the first story I shared, one to which she returned again and again. At some level, thinking with optimistic attachments and purposes as social goods suggests that in the case of Xavier's comment in the farm animal anticipation guide, Mrs. K did not have any expectations of this

kind of critical moment, so she was not oriented toward it, and even though she recognized its potential, it served as only a momentary disruption. In the culminating discussion, however, Mrs. K had an expectation of a particular critical purpose that could be accomplished through inviting students' ideas. Thus, when it did not go in the direction she expected, the intensity of the moment carried with it more affective potential. I explore that potential here.

Story 17. Clash of Purposes

"Which is more important? Doing well on the assessment or talking about themes?"

A month later, I bring Mrs. K and the students in the focus group together. Joshua, Ashanti, Evie, Jesse, Miguel, Isabella, Porter, and Brianna come to Mrs. K's classroom after school for some snacks and conversation. We talk about all kinds of things: Shakespeare, Miguel's after school job, current events, how they think discussions should go. One by one the students file out of the classroom until around 4:00, it's just Mrs. K and me.

In this conversation, she is struck by the students' lack of questions for her—that they mostly respond to questions I asked. Since I have been hanging out with them for about 6 months at this point, I am not surprised.

"I thought they'd have a lot more questions," she says. "I feel like I have to do something different. Maybe I need to be a part of the discussions. I can model how to disagree or ask questions."

From there, talk turns to the Animal Farm discussion. "I'm ashamed that happened in my class," she says. "I thought it was so clear. We had talked about the dogs and the killing, and the silencing and the unfair ribbons. And all these things. And still what they got out of it is, the pigs changed their life circumstance and that's a good thing."

Mrs. K doesn't think it's a good thing. "I mean, they'd get a three for analysis [the highest score] because, I mean, you want kids to leave English with a set of skills. But I think that there's also value in learning lessons that a book is trying to teach you."

She tells me the same thing happened with her 11th graders during their Hamilton unit. They were discussing Hamilton's blackmail when a group of boys decided to defend Hamilton's adultery, suggesting that when a man has been aroused, he can't stop himself. Girls in the class tried to argue against that position, but the boys held to their opinion. That time she intervened and shut down the talk, told them it was unacceptable.

She feels like that was the right thing to do, but she's torn. "They're supposed to be able to talk about their ideas," she says. "I don't want it to be the Mrs. K show."

Intra-acting with Mrs. K's Shame

The word "ashamed" continued to echo as I crafted this chapter. Mrs. K didn't use disappointed or sad or confused but "ashamed", a word indicating not just disappointment but embarrassment, particularly because of one's actions. Moreover, the word ashamed with its connotation of embarrassment implied an audience. While I am not sure who Mrs. K felt her audience was, I cannot help but think that I, and all I represent with my doctoral student hat, was part of the audience for her shame. When she first told me she was ashamed, I moved to make her feel better, quickly pointing out all that she did well in the classroom and all that she juggles as a teacher. Yet, now thinking with Ahmed, I am drawn to the potential in a word like ashamed for imagining new ways of orienting toward possibilities.

When I listened to the conversation in class, much of what was said didn't register. Like most researchers interested in discussions in English classrooms, I noticed Xavier's skills at facilitation, being able to remember who agreed or didn't and follow up with them. I noticed that Mrs. K entered the discussion to push the students to consider other ideas or facets of the questions they had skipped over. I even wrote down that Joshua disagreed with Mrs. K's ideas and was willing to go back and forth with her before the conversation turned back toward the students. Because I had already put off one meeting to be in the conversation, I left as soon as the bell rang, texting Mrs. K, "That was so good...are you going to keep going tomorrow?" Then, because I thought the back and forth among students might generate an interesting discussion among students, I quickly emailed them and their advisory teachers to set up an impromptu focus group meeting. In that conversation, we talked about what the students found interesting and how they saw their participation in the discussion. While Joshua might have spoken more than most

students in the discussion, his attitude was shared among them. For them, discussion was fun. They liked hearing unexpected ideas and thinking about how they might respond.

It was not until several days later that I transcribed the students' discussion. As I listened, I was surprised by the particular moment Mrs. K named as a failure. At first, I noticed the extent to which Xavier forewent the formal academic language typical in Mrs. K's class to describe the "killer mentality" that allowed the pigs to seize their opportunity. In that sense, this is a moment that disrupted the ordinary of the classroom. It shifted the trajectory toward students' attachments. These attachments, at least in the voices of Joshua and Xavier, are expressed in language of the individual and meritocracy that have been central to what Berlant (2011) calls the fantasy of the good life. I was also struck by Jesse, who tried to voice an alternate imagining but could not penetrate Joshua and Xavier's version of the story. At some level, this is an ordinary impasse in classroom discussions: students with different ideas find it difficult to listen to and account for each other's ideas in their responses.

Yet, the more I listened to Joshua and Xavier talk about the pigs as an example of individual and group achievement, I became aware of how much their ideas were at odds with both Mrs. K's and my expectations for what this discussion of *Animal Farm* might do. We expected that the students would use their reading to critique oppressive systems and the corruption of those in power, but Joshua and Xavier did not and then most of the students in the class agreed with them. Because I was interested in Mrs. K's reaction, I shared the transcript with her and asked her what she thought about it. In whispered conversations, we talked about how we might respond and how we might understand what had happened in that moment in the classroom.

Those whispered conversations moved Mrs. K and me to question the tensions between inviting student ideas and making decisions about how to respond to those ideas, particularly when they don't align with a teacher's values. Thinking with affect theories, now, I can see how Mrs. K felt ashamed because she saw her purpose for literature discussions to act toward social change was not met. I argue that this particular purpose acted as a social good for Mrs. K, something that held a promise for happiness or satisfaction based on the outcome. When that outcome was not what she expected, she felt ashamed. Her shame also indicates her belief that she should have been able to lead students to her desired outcome. This purpose seemed different from others Mrs. K might have ascribed to the reading of novels with youth in English. I say this because her purposes for literary and rhetorical analysis were often, at least from her perspective, not met. When that happened, she never expressed shame. She simply said the students were bad at this skill or that and worked with her colleagues to come up with a new approach. Even more, students often did not even engage with these other purposes. They might write a half-hearted sentence on a graphic organizer or spend the entire hour finding one piece of evidence to support a claim.

In this moment, however, there was a sense of her failure attached to her students' analysis of *Animal Farm,* an analysis they enjoyed and based on their word choices felt in that moment. Mrs. K's reaction was layered. On the one hand, she expected, based on her grading rubric and her use of the Socratic Seminar, that a discussion with many student voices and an exchange of ideas would meet her purpose. In that sense, she expected to be satisfied with the experience, and likely anyone analyzing the discourse markers in the *Animal Farm* discussion would be pleased with the length and number of turns of student talk. But when that purpose for discussion came into contact with her purpose of reading for social change, they clashed. Both

inviting student voice and meaning making in discussion and teaching and learning for transformation act as social goods for Mrs. K; yet in this case, they didn't work together.

At the same time, this moment and all of the subsequent moments related to this particular discussion might be seen as an impasse, one to which Mrs. K felt the need to adjust. In our discussion, she said, "I have to do something different." Although she was uncertain about what that different action might be, she felt the disruption, an opportunity to interrupt the ordinary.

Affective Responses as Moments to Wonder: A Discussion

Across my inquiry into social justice-oriented literature discussions, I return to Berlant's concept of optimistic attachments and Ahmed's notion of objects of happiness to show how Mrs. K's expectations for what is possible shaped her purposes for reading. By looking at one particular unit in Mrs. K's class, I hoped to explore how embracing the unexpected required teachers and students to adjust their expectations and responses, even if the unexpected fit within stated purposes for reading. Finally, attending to Mrs. K's attachment to reading for social change as a social good made visible the shame she felt when the *Animal Farm* discussion did not meet her expectations. These experiences, taken together, show how purposes for reading are affirmed or changed through intra-actions in the classroom.

Ahmed (2010) wondered why we have so many expectations when those expectations might lead to disappointment. Yet, I think it might be particularly useful to think about Mrs. K's response in affective terms because it reveals potentials in Mrs. K's "bad" feelings. Ahmed (2010) suggested that we should think about the possibilities in those bad feelings. Too often, she said, we see those feelings as oriented toward the past, unable to move toward the future. That assumption that we need good feelings to progress, she says, is what makes injustice disappear.

In much the same way, I think, looking always to that which we mark as successful is what makes the ordinary in English classrooms pass by unnoticed. And so, I wonder how digging into Mrs. K's shame and into the attachments it made visible might offer potentials for thinking about how purposes come to be shared in a classroom.

In this example, purposes are being made, but not necessarily the purposes Mrs. K expects or wants. By choosing *Animal Farm*, she thought she was providing students with the opportunity to critique the corruption of power and the dangers of oppression. She attached those expectations to that book. At the same time, when Xavier offered up a critique of racial oppression during class, it was a break in the expected. That break folded back in on itself because Mrs. K and the other students in the class were oriented in a different direction. It wasn't the time for social critique. But then in the discussion, Xavier and Joshua's talk unexpectedly reinforced the very ideas Mrs. K hoped her students would critique and deconstruct. Later, Joshua told me that conversations like that are fun because he can keep people on his toes, almost like a game. His felt response to the discussion stood in stark contrast to the shame Mrs. K felt about that moment.

Responding with Wonder

In this chapter, I am interested in Mrs. K and her role as the teacher in inviting responses and being able to respond to them, even those that are unexpected or outside of whatever purpose for reading she entered the classroom with that day. I am left wondering how Mrs. K and teachers like her might embrace moments of shame or disappointment or other negative emotions that they likely try to overcome or move past and instead see them as opportunities to wonder. I wonder how leaning into those moments might make the ordinary visible in such a way that it can be interrupted. I am not suggesting that teachers should abandon their beliefs that

reading literature has the potential to change the world or that students should not be given opportunities to share and think with their ideas. I, like Mrs. K, still believe that both hold promise for a more equitable English education. Yet, I also believe that thinking with those purposes as out there, pre-existing the relationships in the classroom and formed by others to be attached to the classroom, limits their possibilities. As these stories from Mrs. K's classroom showed, these purposes are created in the moments of teaching and learning and being open to their becoming might allow more space for the unexpected.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

> She, too, sets off to do something for herself without knowing whether she can.... There are deadening frustrations but there's also a central, palpable pleasure in the state of trying. An impulse toward potentiality.
>
> —Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*

I have tried in this dissertation to gesture toward potentials in reading with youth in English classrooms. Although Kathleen Stewart's story above was an effort to capture some of the intensities of her mother getting up every day after a stroke to do things she used to be able to do, I think the hesitancy, the willingness to try, and the simultaneous feelings of frustration and pleasure capture some of what it might mean to rethink purposes for reading with youth. After all, seeing purposes as one element among many in the classroom asks teachers and researchers to expand their notions of purposes beyond pre-existing, fixed outcomes, guiding what happens when reading with youth in English classrooms. This can be a scary proposition, I think: Seeing purposes as one element in the making of a classroom assemblage makes it nearly impossible to standardize outcomes; even if as I would suggest, there is still room for standards, it requires a certain relinquishing of perceived control and an embracing of humility and uncertainty. That is what this work required of me. I became interested in purposes because I thought that aligning instruction around a particular "right" purpose would be the only way to create a vision for more just, equitable English classrooms. Yet, as I saw any kind of "right" purpose slip away in reading with youth in Mrs. K's classroom, I began to see potential for how decentered, weak purposes for reading, existing only in relation to the other objects, bodies, and histories in the classroom, might actually expand the possibilities for a more just kind of reading in English classrooms.

Returning to my introduction, thinking with affect theories and my experiences reading with youth in Mrs. K's classroom allowed me to "live as if for the first time" (Ahmed, 2014, p.

180) with my data as I considered the purposes of reading for literary analysis, reading for pleasure, and reading for social transformation. I might offer this inquiry as an evocation of the potential of wonder as an affective possibility, one that allowed me to "read" purposes as made in the ordinary intra-actions in the classroom. From theoretical assumptions about ordinary classroom interactions being full of lively, shifting potentials (e.g. Stewart, 2007), I drew on creative nonfiction and techniques of rhythm, tone and pacing to tell stories that might evoke a response in readers of this work. I hoped to begin this analysis from a place of feelings and resonances in such a way that it might do justice to the affective nature of reading with youth in secondary English classrooms, the space between and beyond the purposes we set for reading. Although I attended to what happened in moments of reading with youth and Mrs. K, the work is also speculative, suggesting what could be or could have been, all the ideas, impacts and intensities that made Mrs. K, the youth, and me think about what happened in class or the ones that would have drifted away had it not been for this dissertation project.

The purpose of this project was not to critique purposes as good or bad but to consider them as one element that moves and makes in relation to other elements in the classroom. Purposes become sedimented ways of doing and thinking about reading with youth in English classrooms. Because these purposes become the expected outcomes within the ordinary routines of reading, they act as boundary-makers, including and excluding other possibilities for reading. In classrooms, in particular, these purposes help create those boundaries as they interact with other objects-bodies-materials because they most often point toward what has value in that space. Yet, even within those boundaries, there is so much happening, caught up in the ordinary activity of the classroom. Looking within those boundaries, then, allowed me to consider how teachers might think and feel beyond purposes to take a broader view of what happens during reading.

Across three chapters of findings, I considered how purposes for reading are made in the English classroom and what possibilities for reading exist within that space.

Summary

Underlying this research is an assumption that the ordinary is not static but on the move, made up of innumerable intensities intra-acting to form assemblages that come to feel like the way things are. These assemblages, being formed again and again, are alive with potentials, potentials to reinforce the way things are or to shoot off in a different direction. This assumption is grounded in affect theory that speaks to ways of looking at the ordinary beyond representational critique to register "surprise at what and how things happen" (Stewart, 2017, p. 195). Building from this theory has allowed me to look anew at scenes of ordinary reading in the classroom to "listen from the middle" (Manning, 2019, p. 43) and to think beyond what is valued in the classroom space to what could be valued, to what could be noticed, heard, and felt in reading with youth. Doing this makes visible the potential for the purposes of reading to be seen, not just as existing outside the classroom handed down from others, but to imagine them as produced in the ongoing intra-actions in the classroom.

The previous chapters reveal to a certain degree how ordinary moments of reading with youth in English classrooms can be vibrant, complicated, and contradictory and how much of what happens exists beyond, because of, and in spite of the narrow purposes teachers often set for reading. In order to do this, all three findings chapters included stories I composed out of my responses to the data, to the affects-bodies-objects, which "flashed up" to me as important within the ordinary of Mrs. K's classroom. Chapter 4 began with a story of youth being told to read an excerpt of a story and analyze the mood by filling out a graphic organizer. Told from my position, literally in the middle of the classroom, the story was an effort to grasp all the different

ways reading happened in that moment as the youth-texts-ideas intra-acted to produce different potentials. These potentials implied limits of standardized, teacher-created purposes even as they demonstrated potentials left to linger, unnoticed and undervalued. Chapter 4 raised questions about what it might mean for teachers to recognize that they can't control the outcomes in the classroom but that they can be attuned to the potentials they help create. In Chapter 5, I turned to independent reading, another reading routine in the classroom to think about how books brought affective possibilities. As youth interacted with those books and Mrs. K, different affects circulated, making visible books as objects of feeling. The stories in this chapter helped make visible the rhythms and shifts in the routine of independent reading, even as they complicated feelings of "book love" as a purpose for reading with youth in English classrooms. Finally, in chapter 6, I explored a clash of purposes for reading through one particular literature discussion of *Animal Farm* that did not meet Mrs. K's or my expectations. Framing reading for social change and literature discussions that value students as optimistic attachments (Berlant, 2011), I considered Mrs. K's feelings of shame and failure as possibilities for disrupting the ordinary in the classroom. Taken together, these chapters helped to illustrate the ordinary moments of reading with youth in Mrs. K's classroom. At the same time as they revealed the relatively standardized, fixed outcomes that Mrs. K planned and the youth accepted as part and parcel of reading, they also gestured toward the liveliness of those moments. Even as students said they hated reading or dismissed Mrs. K's assignments or stared at the wall, they continued to intra-act with texts, Mrs. K, objects, and their classmates in ways that produced possibilities for reading. Leander and Ehret (2019) described affect-oriented research as a speculative proposition with the "potential to intensify future experiences of literacy teaching and learning as they unfold" (p. 22). This project, then, has been my attempt to capture some of those fleeting moments of

possibility in such a way that readers might think and feel more fully with their not-yet experiences of reading, teaching, and researching.

Returning to Wonder: Connections to Teaching and Research

As I come to the end of this project, I would like to be able to offer up concrete implications for what this research means for the purposes of reading with youth in English classrooms. But I am still wondering how letting go of purposes as fixed outcomes might open up teachers, researchers, and youth to different kinds of reading. Also seeing purposes as forming in the ordinary classrooms, we might consider whether within schools that so often put value on narrowly defined, standardized purposes, there is room to act on the potentials in the mundane. I wonder, too, how research that is more about feeling than knowing might matter to the future of classroom reading research and whether wonder and the unknown can find a place within a present whose demands for change feel so urgent. But I do think looking anew at ordinary moments in the classroom, to wonder about possibilities, has something to offer, even something potentially transformative. Indeed, I believe that embracing affect theory in teaching and learning calls for a radical rethinking of schooling, but that what it looks like is almost impossible to imagine. And so, I offer some connections I have made between this research, the reading and writing I have done, and my experiences teaching, learning, and reading with youth at Monument Lake and beyond. It is my hope these connections might provide openings for readers' own wonderings.

Being Moved: Connections to Teaching

In this section, I consider how thinking with affect theory to decenter purposes might open up possibilities for reading with youth in secondary English classrooms. As I think with purposes as intra-acting with all the objects, bodies, histories, and feelings in the classroom, I am

moved to reconsider what we as teachers value in reading with youth, how we plan for reading with youth, and how we might listen to and with youth as we read together.

Valuing Differently. As a high school English teacher and literacy coach and as an English methods teacher, I often taught backward design, working with teachers to carefully "unwrap" standards to identify all the skills and content students needed to access to master a reading task. Once the standards were unwrapped, I worked with teachers and preservice teachers to develop unit assessments and daily objectives tightly aligned to the standards. That alignment was a signal for me and for the administrators I worked with of direction, of movement toward a necessary goal. The more tightly aligned, the better, I would say. In my own classroom, I became very good at this, taking a strange delight in my ability to build reading skills step-by-step. And at least by standardized, tested measures, it worked: the better aligned my instruction, the higher the test scores. As someone who had been labeled a failure right alongside her students for low test scores, these achievements came to matter a great deal. Affect theory might say those feelings of success and failure marked me, shaping my teaching before I could name the emotions I attached to those sensations (e.g. Ahmed, 2014; Manning, 2019; Stewart, 2007).

Most of what I care about now I might say is a reaction to that narrowly-defined curriculum. Yet, much like my experiences at Ingenuity High, a standards-based, outcome-oriented curriculum aimed at mastery, shaped much of the formal teaching and learning at Monument Lake. Although Mrs. K named a number of purposes for reading, mastery of rhetoric and literary analysis standards took precedence in actions and curricular enactment, even if not in words spoken. For example, at the end of the day, Evie's completion of the graphic organizer in Moment 1 counted in the space of the classroom. Students who filled out the tracker for

independent reading earned more points for their moral focus grade than those who read but abandoned the tracker. And like Mrs. K said of the *Animal Farm* discussion, Xavier and Joshua would have received full credit for their analysis, even though their analysis ashamed Mrs. K. So much more was happening in the moments I shared, but how do teachers value what isn't counted? Do we want teachers to value what isn't counted or will that only lead to narrow definitions of those unexpected things?

I wonder what it would mean to value Ashanti's delight or Evie's hatred of reading or the countless other responses youth have to texts. Boldt (2019) wrote that in education, "there are traditions and practices in which who the people in the room are, the materials and the space, the rhythms and rituals, and the unpredictable things that happen—all those things hardly matter because what we are to become in that space is determined in advance and outside of the relationship" (p. 38). To me, this is a question of what is valued in the space. Attuning to the circulation of affects, objects, and bodies in Mrs. K's classroom has led me to wonder what kinds of values might open up practices to who the people are and what happens in the present. In my own work, both in this dissertation and as a teacher, wonder has been that affective possibility with which I attended to the unexpected or shifted my orientation beyond what it had been.

Story 18. Disruption

I am right in the midst of planning a new unit. My 10th grade class has just finished Elie Wiesel's Night, and in addition to moving forward with informational text analysis standards, I want to use Wiesel's Nobel Prize speech as a starting point for discussing what it means to value nonviolence. My students often question the limits of my nonviolence, usually with propositions like "What if you were walking down the street and someone punched you in the face?" Since I have always found that unlikely, it is easy to dismiss their challenges to my stance.

This time it isn't so easy.

I am sitting in front of my computer getting ready for lunch. Charles, a quick-witted, intelligent, Black boy with a charming dimple in his left cheek, is packing his bag to leave my classroom. For some reason he is the last one out of class, so I stop him. The other teachers have been

telling me he has been cutting class and missing assignments. I ask him what will make him change his behavior.

"The only thing that will stop me is a bullet," he says.

"Wait, what?" I stutter. I have no words. "That makes me really sad," I finally get out.

Charles shrugs his shoulder and walks out. His cousin and best friend, another student in my 10th grade class, had nearly died from a gunshot wound to the stomach six months earlier. He had missed the first three weeks of school because of it.

This moment between Charles and me lasted about two minutes but it continues to resonate even now, six years later. It challenged me then to shift my purposes for reading with youth—the texts I had included in the next unit became not about how the youth in my class might promote nonviolence but rather about how they might draw on texts and their experiences to think about whether violence is justified. They worked this question out together with me, melding the texts, their lives, and our rhetorical analyses, into ideas about the nature of violence. In that moment, who the students were, the textures and the rhythms of their lives, who I was, and the practices in the classroom seemed to matter differently.

The potential for things to matter differently in reading with youth in classrooms is the wonder that I believe attuning to affect theory offers. Attuning to that liveliness makes visible the ways teachers and youth often miss what matters in literacy learning—the ways our interactions reinforce normative ways of being that are often raced, classed, or gendered instead of moving us in new directions. In an article about the interconnected literacies of Black boys, Kirkland (2011) challenged teachers to rethink English achievement asking for standards that "honor the echoes of American youth, while also fostering rigor and social readiness...that help to heal the socially wounded, while also expanding youths' social horizons" (p. 378). That call is multifaceted, demanding a multiplicity of purposes that no narrowly-defined set of standards could reach. Reading Kirkland's call with affect theories inspires a different kind of mattering, a mattering of

the children in the classroom, their experiences, the texts of their lives, and the texts of the classroom. What matters, and how it might matter, I am uncertain, but attending to the possibilities that wonder offers as a way to orient toward youth and the potentials in classroom intra-actions is a uniting thread through all of the connections that follow.

Planning for Potentials. When I came into this dissertation, I thought the major space for transformation would be teacher planning. I thought that would be the space in which Mrs. K and I would work with the other 10th grade teachers to orient reading toward youth's lives and worlds. That did not happen as I have made clear throughout this dissertation. Too often, planning followed a kind of linear teach-assess formulation that left little room for discussions of what could be or what might exist beyond the teacher-planned activities. In fact, I was often surprised at the extent to which students did not make it into the conversation at all, other than an offhand "they can't do rhetoric" or "they won't do this." I often brought up things students had said in class or unexpected moments just because I wanted to talk them through with someone. Those conversations had always been such a vital part of my own planning, or even just my enjoyment of teaching and learning. Those conversations I introduced often shifted the relationship between Mrs. K and me from one of researcher-teacher-work-to-do to researcher-teacher-delighted when a student said something particularly insightful or funny or teacher-researcher-friend-woman when a student made a disparaging comment about feminists or teacher-researcher-collaborator-confused when most of the students said they thought it would be reasonable for her to be fired for drawing a mustache on Trump's poster if her boss said it wasn't allowed. Beyond that, those comments generally drifted off, lines of flight, lost to the impact of needing to get work done and only an hour to do it.

I think about those connected moments now in the context of what this affective analysis might mean for planning to read with youth in English classrooms, and I wonder how those connected moments might provoke planning for potentials rather than outcomes. I am hesitant to write this as I think about my own experience in classrooms with youth who had often been ignored and not taught in the classroom: intelligent, curious 10th graders who had never learned to decode words or write more than three sentences about their response to a text. I am hesitant because I don't want the idea of planning for potentials to inspire a *laissez-faire* attitude or imply that students' learning the skills to read doesn't matter. Instead, I ground this idea of planning for potentials in Barad's (2012) notion of responsibility that I introduced at the end of Chapter 4. She introduced this idea of responsibility grounded in the invitation to the other to respond in her essay "Nature's Queer Performativity." For Barad (2011), "responsibility entails providing opportunities for the organism to respond" (p. 136). Although Barad was considering amoebas and atoms and other "critters," I am chiefly concerned with the humans—teachers and students, in the classroom and what planning as "creating opportunities to respond" might look like.

Story 19. Inviting Response

I am nearing the end of my first year of graduate school, and my colleague Allison and I have decided we are going to do a practitioner research project into what reading as inquiry with a whole-class novel might mean in an 11th grade classroom. Really, I wanted to go back to teaching, felt pulled back to the classroom and the students I had worked with for so long, and so had been planting the seed with Allison. It didn't take much convincing.

We show up with <u>One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest</u> and tell the twenty Black youth in the classroom that their ideas matter and that their lives matter to the meaning in the text. We tell them we don't want to direct their learning. Three days in, we ask the students to write a one-page personal reflection on the text. They revolt. Danae wants to know why they have to write. "The words are in the air," she says. Steven jumps in, saying. "Usually we read books, and it ain't books like this...Like we don't read books like this about cuckoo's nest. We read books that have a purpose. To me, this don't have a purpose. This ain't teaching me nothing." Terron quickly follows, adding, "With <u>A Lesson Before Dying</u>, we were talking about human dignity. This book doesn't have anything to do with us."

Allison and I want to quit. We think of Tovani (2005) who says purpose is everything. Maybe we should tell them the purpose for reading the text—human dignity might not be far off. Instead, we backtrack; we take this potential, find twelve quotes about potential purposes for reading, and ask students to respond to them. "What might reading be beyond understanding the words on the page?" we ask them.

When Allison and I planned this unit, we were largely free from the constraints of teaching and learning in schools today. We were covering one my friend's classes while she was on maternity leave, taught only one 90-minute class per day, and met after class for at least an hour each day to plan. No one was observing us, and even if they were, they weren't paying us so I know that the kind of approach we took to this class is not feasible in schools as they are today. Because our approach of creating space for students to respond without overly informed direction from us took an unbelievable amount of time to plan. Creating conditions and circumstances within which something could happen was very difficult, and we constantly battled our inclinations to control interpretations or to make sure students got what we thought mattered in the text.

Yet, from this experience, my thinking with Barad's theory of responsibility, and my time with Mrs. K and the youth at Monument Lake, I have some ideas about what planning for potentials could be. First, it requires a rejection of deficit views of youth, particularly those who have traditionally been marginalized in classrooms—youth of color and youth from low income families. Planning and entering a classroom space from a position of potentials requires teachers to operate from an asset-frame that invites students into a learning relationship in the classroom (e.g. Baldridge, 2014; Kinloch, 2012). It recognizes not only the youth's capacity to be affected but also to affect the trajectory of reading and responding in the classroom.

This kind of planning also suggests the complexity of reading with youth for teachers. Decentering a fixed outcome in favor of potentials suggests that teachers must consider their

decisions differently. Alongside their standards-based purpose, they have to acknowledge the numerous elements in the classroom including the questions asked, the texts read, the students, the teacher, the experiences before and to come, and the histories of particular practices that create different potentials for response in their intra-active becoming. It embraces emerging moments and makes space for the unexpected even in the regular routines of the classrooms. This then is not a kind of deskilled teaching made up only of mechanistic approaches to pedagogy (Taubman, 2013) but rather suggests that creativity and improvisation are at the core of their work (Boldt, Lewis, & Leander, 2015).

It is important for teachers and teacher educators to consider the kinds of texts, reading activities, and classroom environments that might invite and value potential responses. Based on my experiences at Monument Lake, the youth often remained silent rather than risking a wrong answer. For example, Ashanti often had physical, visible reactions to the texts in English class or to his classmates' comments, but he rarely offered insights to the class. Instead he whispered to his neighbor or muttered a response that almost no one heard; he saw his responses as distractions because they were side conversations, or they did not fit the expected responses. When Mrs. K and I talked about how she might do this in her classroom, I was hesitant to offer concrete ideas—underneath these ideas is an openness to the unexpected responses that seems so out of place in most English classrooms today. But we did talk about how she as the teacher might create space for different kinds of responses—emotional, interested, analytic, confused, angered, and how she might share some of her own, modeling for students that analysis can begin from their thinking and feeling rather than some perceived outside way to think and feel. I imagine that even though it feels risky, it could begin with small steps like two or three reflection

questions that ask students to share something in the text they felt a strong reaction to or something that struck them as beautiful or horrifying or both.

Listening from the Middle. Attuning to what might matter differently in the classroom and planning for potentials rather than predetermined outcomes begins, I think, to open space for possibilities to flourish. That flourishing has the potential to challenge the status quo or snap it firmly back into place. Unmoored from the belief that we can know where reading might take us, affect theory calls teachers to embrace unknowing, to wonder about what could be. But it also requires a radical orientation to the present moment—to listening and responding to the potentials within the body-material intra-actions that the classroom assemblage might give flight to. Manning (2019) urged teachers to "Learn to listen from the middle of the many conversations. Connect in the rhythm. Think of it as a soundscape" (p. 43). I am compelled by her concept of the soundscape, those many voices that I tried to capture in the stories I wrote from Mrs. K's class. Because of my position as a researcher, I was called to listen, and I knew I could hear the most from the physical middle of the room—all the different ways of intra-acting in that space, the multiple responses to texts, the histories the texts called forth. I could hear that in the moment. In other words, I attended to what Boldt (2019) called the "here and now-ness" (p. 39) in teaching and learning. Connecting the here and now with listening from the middle helps me think about how teachers might respond to those thinking and feeling ideas that emerge in the intra-actions between texts and readers in the classroom.

Yet as a researcher, I did not, at least at that time, see my place as responding, and while I might wonder about the ethics of hearing those voices and responding only later, in writing or in brief focus group meetings, I did not feel the responsibility the way I imagine teachers might and that I did as a teacher. I wish that I could create a list of all the potentials that could arise in the

present and how a teacher might respond, but the truth is, I can only gesture toward what it might mean to listen in the present—attuned to the circulating affects, the unexpected impacts, students' ways of knowing and being and the potential disconnects from the teacher's ways, and the in-between relations that call forth responses that teachers and youth either include or exclude to create boundaries on the classroom assemblage. Listening from the middle, as an affective response, is not so much about an individual doing things but about learning to live in the relationship, in the between that resonates among the people in the classroom. When, as I discussed in Chapter 6, Xavier said that the pigs in *Animal Farm* demonstrate the ability of people to change their stations in life and Mrs. K felt ashamed, that might be an opportunity for a different kind of response. In that different kind of response, Mrs. K might ask Xavier to think about where that idea came from and why there might be other ways to respond to the text and the question. Mrs. K might share her shame with her students or with her planning team and talk about how Xavier's response might be connected with the context of Monument Lake that promotes meritocracy and personal choices determining outcomes without limitations. In other words, these responses might launch new inquiries, even creating opportunities for critical questions about how the world is made.

Story 20. What Could Be

I have thus far avoiding fictionalizing my narratives, but I'm not sure any other way out of this. I have to imagine what could be, and so I turn to Ashanti. Before I go further, I confess, I was drawn to Ashanti from the beginning. There was something irresistible in his delight—his delight at "Little Brother," in his consuming of the news, in his responses to new information shared by Mrs. K or other students. So little of that delight was counted in that classroom.

What if classrooms began from a place of delight? Or anger? Or frustration? Or joy? Or love? What if relations in that space were such that delight could find pathways through and across the space? If delight wasn't blocked by normative ways of reading in school, of standardized outcomes focused on mood that blocked out any changes in students' moods or the atmosphere of the group?

I might imagine an opening for Ashanti to call Angel and Evie over to share what happened, pass the text to them, generate a conversation about a world with robot teachers or robot little brothers or robot selves. In that imagining, Mrs. K joins in. She shares an episode of Clarence (2014), a cartoon about a 4th grade boy, who is stunned to find his teacher at a restaurant one evening. He had always thought she was a robot, who parked herself at school charging her robot batteries in the classroom after hours.

This imagining might turn into a conversation about human beings' place in the world or it might jump off into other cartoons and what they have to say about teachers. Or it might not. It might move in an entirely different direction. That's the risk and possibility reading with affect offers. Throughout my dissertation, I have shown that potentials for new directions often arise. The question, now becomes, what might responding to these potentials do to enliven reading with youth in classrooms? Might this be a way to create space for youth and teachers to create together classrooms as places in which they can read for "real, playful, and somethings very complex purposes" (Kirkland, 2013, p. 7)?

Being Attuned: Connections to Research

Although much of what I said about teaching in relation to this inquiry might apply with little stretch to research, I also think there is something to be learned from my research journey. Nearing the end, I am left wondering about the kinds of methods of data collection, analysis, and reporting that affect theory might bring to classroom-based reading research. In particular, I wonder what role speculative narratives might offer and what different work that might require of readers. I also wonder what place "unknowing" has in research aimed at social transformation.

Writing into what could be.

> Ordinary affects is an experiment not a judgement.
>
> —Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*

I would have liked to write this entire dissertation in stories, but I didn't know how. Instead, I wrote stories that seemed to me to approach affective intensities, that seemed to bring

to life the "field of potential" (Massumi, 2002, p. 76) that reading with Mrs. K and the youth at Monument Lake offered. The stories helped me make visible those forces that acted to harden narrow outcomes for reading in classrooms alongside those cracklings that threatened to disturb normative ways of being with books in that space. In the stories, I could gesture toward what might be. Yet, the more that I tried to share what I thought and felt as I was writing the stories, the more I found that the certainty I was trying to avoid crept into my writing. And so, I wonder what it would mean for researchers to embrace stories, incomplete and hesitant stories, as a means to consider the classroom.

I recognize the stories required more overt work on the part of the reader. They asked the reader to think and feel rather than being told what to think and feel. Yet, I believe there might be something wonderful in things left unsaid, in using the stories to describe rather than to exemplify. Stewart (2007), who has been my guide through all these stories, wrote of the scenes she composed in *Ordinary Affects*:

> Each scene is a tangent that performs the sensation that something is happening—something that needs attending to. From the perspective of ordinary affects, thought is patchy and material. It does not find magical closure or even seek it, perhaps only because it's too busy just trying to imagine what's going on. (p. 5)

It is difficult for me to imagine reading research in mainstream literacy research journals that remains speculative, that does more than nod to the inability to know all that is going on in a moment. Like I did throughout this dissertation, much of the affect theory work published in prominent journals like *Research in the Teaching of English* or *Journal of Literacy Research* conforms to the expectations for writing and telling that the journals have long held. As Zapata and Van Horn (2017) wrote, "We chose to write linearly about something that happens

simultaneously in order to reach the broadest audience possible. While this approach is not without its tensions, we rely on familiar schematic cues for our readers....and exhaustive uses of examples and explanations to convey the rigor of our research" (p. 292). Others have done the same (e.g. Ehret, Hollet, & Jocius, 2016; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Smith, 2017). This is not so much a critique of their work, without which it would likely have been impossible for me to do this dissertation, but rather a wondering about what else might be possible in thinking and writing with affect theory.

I am drawn to stories because I value accessibility in writing. Reading, thinking, and writing with affect theory challenged me to a look differently at a world I thought I knew, and that is a gift. Yet reading, thinking, and writing with affect theory also confounded me, adding a whole new list of vocabulary and meanings to how the world might work. I am open enough to believe that is beautiful. At the same time, I have read and written sentences that seemed to say nothing, so lost in different vocabulary they were. I am not so sure those sentences and that vocabulary get at the ineffable they gesture toward in the way that stories can. For me, working with teachers and youth in schools I am convinced that affect theory's emphasis on the rhythms, textures, and shifting trajectories of learning have much to offer schools, who are so often weighed down by institutional demands and narrow definitions of achievement. Yet, for that to happen, I am interested in the possibilities of writing that engages teacher and researchers in joint conversation about the limits of certainty and the affective possibilities of reading. Reading with youth in classrooms is an affective, speculative proposition, full of intensities coming from what might be or what teachers and youth hope to be. Yet, too often, research written for teachers is about strategies that might work or ideas that might accomplish a specific purpose—far removed

from the affective nature of the relationships and work at play. This project has made me want something different.

Weakening Purposes for Research. Finally, I close this dissertation project with a return to my own failure that is at the core of this work. Even as I have written about the potential for decentered, weak purposes for reading with youth in schools, I am struck by an awareness that my own research journey mirrored that call. I came with a particular purpose aimed at transforming reading into something more culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) and equitable (e.g. Morrell, 2008) for the racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse youth at Monument Lake, and I failed at any sort of meaningful transformation, at least one whose impacts could be seen immediately. I initially made suggestions like adding *13th*, a documentary about the criminal justice system, to the curriculum, and I often shared with the teachers changes the youth suggested, like more creative assignments or choice. I lamented the lack of change to the curriculum and the teachers' seeming unwillingness to dialogue with youth about possibilities for change in the English classroom. At the same time, I felt like I had been punched in the gut when I asked youth what might be more relevant to them in English class: Evie suggested typing practice, while Joshua and Ashanti offered cursive writing. I didn't know what to say.

It wasn't that issues of today's world were absent from our conversations. One focus group conversation turned toward immigration and their mostly unified concerns that it should be easier to be in the United States. After Mrs. K shut down a conversation about LGBTQ identities because of the feelings it generated—heads down and angry faces, we spent our next meeting talking about their backgrounds and how they thought about gay marriage and their religious identities. In class, we had multiple conversations about the Parkland shootings and

potential gun control. And while literature discussions were often aimed at social transformation or at least at a consideration of injustice, those moments were largely separate from the everyday reading in Mrs. K's classroom. These were the kinds of conversations I wanted to happen every day, what I imagined reading might be for. And I saw it as my purpose to make it happen.

I failed, but in the process of that failure, I have been able to create something new, a different way of thinking about what happened as Mrs. K and the youth read texts in their classroom at Monument Lake. To see that something new, I, like the teachers who I suggest might embrace affects and potentials in the classroom, had to set aside my purpose to orient my perceptions in a different direction. Purposes are, perhaps, as much orientations toward outcomes as they are the outcomes themselves, and as such, they create boundaries around what people, and in this case, researchers can see. But I am interested now in how sometimes weakening those purposes with which we as researchers go in might open up a broader view of what can be seen in classrooms. Ehret and Leander (2019) wrote, "Affect theorists... work the conjunction 'and'" (p. 5). The potential of "and" suggests a space within which researchers might become attuned to what is happening beyond the purposes for which they enter a research site. It holds, for me, the possibilities of seeing something new, something we don't already know. At the same time, the conjunction "and" offers an opportunity for both critical praxis aimed at transformation and at the something more that often eludes literacy researchers.

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