

Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts,
Praxis Strand, Vol. 8 No. 1, Spring/Summer 2021, pp. 15-47
Ubiquity: <http://ed-ubiquity.gsu.edu/wordpress/>
ISSN: 2379-3007

**Developing Critical Social Justice Literacy by Reading Young Adult Literature:
Reflections and Implications on Future Classroom Practice**

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Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts, Praxis Strand, Vol. 8 No. 1,
Spring/Summer 2021

Abstract

Drawing on the work of Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo's book, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, this article looks at how teacher candidates can support critical social justice literacy in classroom spaces by explicitly looking at instances of injustice in young adult literature. The article provides avenues to facilitate secondary students' understandings of *prejudice*, *discrimination*, and *oppression* through YAL. This article provides teacher candidates and practicing teachers with sample YAL texts, reflections, and question sets that support the use of critical social justice literacy practices in classrooms.

Keywords: Young adult literature, social justice, teacher education, literacy, English education

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**Developing Critical Social Justice Literacy by Reading Young Adult Literature:
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Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) define critical social justice literacy as understanding the social, political, and historical forces that shape our current inequitable realities *and* the ability to act on that knowledge for change. Their work draws on examples from the United States and Canada to illustrate the development of critical social justice literacy. The development of critical social justice literacy is not static. Rather, it is a continual unlearning of dominant narratives that create the current inequitable landscape. All individuals have been socialized into certain beliefs that require challenging and shifting. As Richard Milner (2010) reminds: Individuals start “where they are” but cannot remain unmoved (p. ix). For some, unlearning dominant narratives may begin in secondary school while others may not encounter such ideas until college or beyond. It is our hope that secondary classrooms can be fertile ground for establishing critical social justice literacy. But where and how can secondary teachers begin this work?

We believe teaching some foundational ideas from Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo’s book, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, is a good start for our mostly white teacher candidates. Although the book offers several important concepts, we drew on three as the focus for this article. Secondary students need the language and understanding of concepts such as *prejudice*, *discrimination*, and *oppression* if they are to name injustices and work towards a more just future. Young adult literature is a powerful curricular tool for students to develop their understanding of such concepts. Just as young adult literature can be used to address concepts central to postcolonial theory (Malo-Juvera 2017), young adult literature can be used to better understand concepts essential to social justice

education. To facilitate this understanding, the two teacher educator authors enlisted four teacher candidates to read and analyze young adult titles using the concepts of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression with the aim of preparing teacher candidates to use young adult literature as a vehicle to discuss the concepts.

This article will illustrate how secondary ELA teachers and literacy specialists working with adolescents can teach key concepts relating to social justice education through young adult literature. The suggestions draw from the experiences of both the teacher educators and the teacher candidates. We offer a list of specific titles we have used to teach concepts from Sensoy and DiAngelo's book. Following Malo-Juvera's (2017) guide, we opted for these texts because they represent experiences from minoritized groups written by members of those groups. Some of the books we suggest contain instances of injustices within school settings. We believe it is important for students to not limit their understanding of injustices to politics and the past. Rather, students should come to understand how the institutions where they spend their youth are often sites of reproduction for injustices. The setting of another book takes place in the fictional future. We wanted to select young adult titles from a variety of genres to illustrate that realism is not a prerequisite to teach about real injustices. At the heart of this work is the belief that young adult literature is a "key resource for youth to participate in current national discourse" on a host of socio-political issues (Durand, 2019, p. 89). Our beliefs manifest in practice below.

Positionality

Naming our own positionalities is an act that situates ourselves as a "knower in relationship to what is known" to understand the "political, social, and historical dimensions of knowledge" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 29). Our own experiences and social positionings shape the way we construct knowledge and structure our classrooms. We want to outline our

own introductions to the concepts we address in this article and discuss how our own identities as educators inform the purpose of this work.

Cody and Kathleen (teacher educator authors) were first introduced to Sensoy and DiAngelo's book, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* in a critical pedagogy course during their PhD programs. While the book is written for college audiences, the concepts and ideas presented in the book are accessible for high school students, if properly scaffolded. Cody and Kathleen's own experiences as former high school English teachers and current university-based teacher educators speaks to the versatility of Sensoy and DiAngelo's book. Cody used concepts from the book in their own high school English class during a young adult literature unit. Subsequently, Kathleen has used the text in a critical literacy course for teacher candidates.

Katia, Alex, Reed, and Heather are former students of either Cody, Kathleen, or both. They read key parts of *Is Everyone Really Equal?* when they agreed to work on this project. They were either currently enrolled in graduate programs or recently completed graduate programs from the college at which Cody and Kathleen taught. Katia, Alex, Reed, and Heather were selected based on their expressed interest in including young adult literature in their own classroom spaces. Additionally, these authors are all avid readers and eager to employ social justice practices in their current and future classrooms, particularly when it comes to addressing texts with students. Further detail about the authors' identities is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Author Identities

Author	Position	Identities
Henry “Cody” Miller	Assistant professor	White cisgender able-bodied queer male. Former secondary ELA teacher and current English teacher educator.
Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko	Assistant professor	White cisgender able-bodied female. Former secondary ELA teacher and current literacy teacher educator.
Katia Nasra	Master’s degree student, current at the time of writing	Lebanese-American, able-bodied individual. Future secondary ELA teacher. Current K-12 substitute teacher.
Alex Mulroy	Master’s degree student, current at the time of writing	White cisgender able-bodied male. Future secondary ELA teacher and current direct support professional for people with developmental disabilities.
Reed Sanchez	Master’s degree student, current at the time of writing	Hispanic cisgender able-bodied female. Current elementary literacy specialist sub.
Heather Mufford	Master’s degree student and practicing teacher, current at the time of writing	White cisgender able-bodied female. Current elementary special education teacher.

Steps and Examples for Classroom Practice

The work the teacher educators did with the teacher candidates in this piece begins with the work Cody did as a high school English teacher. We suggest that teachers using Sensory and DiAngelo’s (2017) concepts to guide students’ textual analysis, first explicitly teaching students the definitions of terms using the provided definitions in Sensoy and DiAngelo’s book. Cody asked his secondary students first define the terms in their own words before connecting those ideas to their own lives. Then, Cody asked his high school English students to apply the concepts

to young adult literature. From Cody's own experiences, we offer the following steps and examples for classroom practice.

First, teachers could ask students to offer their own definitions of the terms in their own words. Second, students may generate examples of each term from their own histories. Students can select examples from history, popular culture, or current events. For example, in Cody's former ninth-grade class, many students understandably used the Trump administration's attack on transgender Americans and Muslim Americans as examples of oppression. In Cody's class, students also offered examples of cultural appropriation from pop music artists as examples of oppression and power imbalances. This activity's purpose is twofold: One, it allows students to apply a new concept to texts they have familiarity and comfort with; Two, it shows students the relevancy of the concepts by linking the concepts to texts they consume in their daily lives outside of school. Once students have offered their own definitions and generated examples, students may engage in text analysis with an eye towards addressing how the concepts emerge in young adult literature. These concepts can be applied to any young adult title and it is our hope that English teachers have classroom libraries that are abundant in young adult literature for students to select and read in class.

As noted earlier, these examples are drawn from Cody's time as a high school English teacher. The curricular examples and classroom teaching practices Cody developed while teaching high school English inform how he approaches supporting teacher candidates in developing critical social justice literacy. For this particular article, we draw on examples from four titles to demonstrate the possibilities for applying social justice concepts to young adult literature. Specifically, we work to demonstrate how four popular young adult titles can be positioned in English curriculum to surface the concepts of prejudice, discrimination, and

oppression. The examples we illuminate are specific to the four titles we examine, but the approach can be transferred to other types of texts.

The Young Adult Literature Titles

Cody and Kathleen encouraged students to select titles they would like to see in their own future classroom libraries. In the section below, teacher candidates explain why they selected each of the novels that they did by providing a rationale for each text. Practicing adolescent teachers can draw on these rationales to support the use of these texts in their own classroom spaces. These rationales are followed by a chart that contains summaries of each novel.

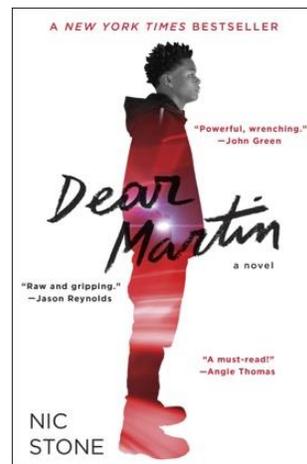


Figure 1. Book cover for *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017).

Katia selected *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017) because Justyce's story allows students to see themselves not just in the protagonist, but also in his friends, and his classmates. The narrative calls attention to the racist structures that still shape our political and legal system, as well as the microaggressions born from privilege that some people might not normally notice. The novel's language is approachable for students of multiple reading levels and the length is not intimidating to students. Stone weaves in multiple writing structures throughout her narrative. For example, student readers will encounter diary entries that Justyce writes to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., conversations between Justyce and his classmates written in the style of a script, and

news articles that could be compared to real life articles dealing with similar topics. This book offers a multitude of opportunities for students to engage in analysis, connection, and conversation.



Figure 2. Book cover for *Want* (Pon, 2017).

Alex selected *Want* by Cindy Pon (2017) because in his experience, young people often enjoy dystopian science fiction novels. Whether it's *The Hunger Games* series or *The Divergent* trilogy, many students are willing to pick up these novels because the settings, characters, and stories are intriguing and exciting. Once they begin reading and reflecting, however, many students take an interest in the way these stories function as metaphors for real-world issues. Cindy Pon's *Want* is no different. With an interesting and easy-to-follow story, as well as a strong focus on social justice concepts, this is a novel that any educator should be proud to teach in their classroom.

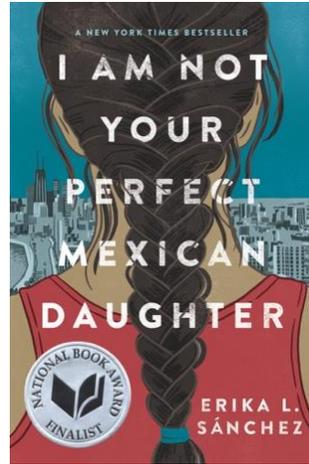


Figure 3. Book cover for *Perfect Mexican Daughter* (Sánchez, 2017).

Reed selected *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (Sánchez, 2017) because as a Latina student, she was never given the opportunity to read about or connect to a main character that looked like her or went through the same expectations that she did. She noted that after 16 years, she finally found a YA book that she could connect to and say, “Hey, this is how my Mexican family is too. I am not alone.” Growing up in New York, she noted that she was not exposed to accurate values or able to make connections to her Hispanic cultural identity, and she always felt left out. Reed notes that *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* can allow those outside of Hispanic cultures, including students and teachers, to understand the various deep and serious cultural values, as well as how those values shape the emotions and actions of individuals.

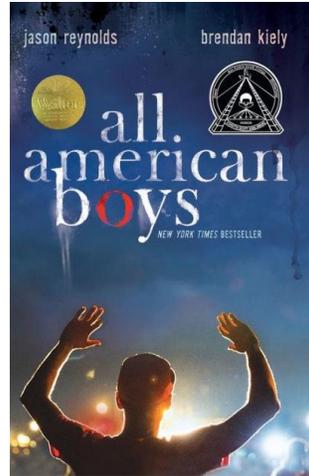


Figure 4. Book cover for *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015).

Heather selected *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015) because she felt it is an excellent novel to read with young adult readers. Told from dual perspectives, teens will likely find a piece of themselves within the characters of these books. The book may also resonate with teens who are already invested in social justice issues. Perhaps even more importantly, the book may provoke conversations for those teens who think racism is something only from the past.

Table 2

Summaries of Young Adult Titles Selected

Title	Summary
<i>Dear Martin</i> by Nic Stone (2017)	Justyce McAllister is a 17-year-old Black high school student living in Oak Ridge, Atlanta. One night he finds himself wrongfully put in handcuffs. Justyce gets good grades in school, has never been in trouble, and thinks of himself as a generally good person. In an attempt to understand how to handle the trauma he went through, Justyce begins writing diary entries in the form of letters to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which leads Justyce to more questions, rather than peace. He spends the next year wrestling with the unfairness of what happened and how it has opened his eyes to the way society treats other people who look like him, and how we treat each other.
<i>Want</i> by Cindy Pon (2017)	Cindy Pon's <i>Want</i> is set in a dystopian, near-future version of Taipei, one in which the city is horribly polluted. The air is full of smog, disease is prevalent, and the food is rotten and dangerous to consume. For the <i>mei</i> , Taipei's poor and desperate second-class citizens, these are the realities of life in this incredibly inhospitable environment. Meanwhile, the <i>you</i> have a very different experience. With bank accounts containing seemingly infinite amounts of money, the <i>you</i> lead lives of extravagance and waste while remaining insulated from the harsh environment by high tech suits and helmets. They party frequently, work rarely, and never want for anything. This story follows a <i>mei</i> boy named Zhou as he and his friends attempt to infiltrate and destroy Jin Corporation, the entity responsible for creating the protective suits and polluting the city. Unfortunately, Zhou quickly learns that polluting the city may be the least of Jin Corporations crimes against humanity.
<i>I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i> by Erika L. Sanchez (2017)	Mexican daughters are expected to return home immediately after school. Mexican daughters should cook tortillas and beans every day with their mothers. Mexican daughters are meant to serve their families. Mexican daughters should never want to leave their families, let alone go away for college. However, Julia is not your perfect Mexican daughter; in fact she's the complete opposite. Julia despises cooking, never wants to go home, and can't wait to move away from her parents. Her sister Olga was the perfect daughter, but after a tragic accident, Julia finds herself alone with her parents. Julia's mother starts to channel her expectations and depression about Olga towards Julia, and Julia finds herself falling down a deep hole. Not long after Olga's death, Julia begins to suspect that Olga was hiding something from her and her parents. As Julia juggles her first love, her mother's never-ending expectations, her father's silence, getting into college, and her own pain, Julia is determined to uncover the truth

about Olga.

All American Boys
by Jason Reynolds
and Brenden Kiely
(2015)

All American Boys takes place over the span of one week. In alternating chapters, each day is recounted from the point of view of the two main characters Rashad and Quinn. Rashad is a young Black man, an artist, a member of ROTC, and the son of a former police officer. Quinn is a young white boy whose dream is to be noticed by a basketball scout and granted a scholarship for college. While the two boys do not cross paths until the end of the book, their narratives intersect in a powerful way. The novel centers on an incident involving police brutality in which Rashad is beaten by a police officer for appearing to steal from a local store. Quinn witnesses the beating and recognizes the police officer as his best friend's older brother.

Prejudice

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) define prejudice as “learned prejudgment toward social others and refers to *internal* thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and assumptions based on the groups to which they belong” (p. 51). Prejudice is learned, whether intentionally or not, through cultural norms and institutions. We all have prejudices regardless of whether we admit and challenge them or not. Understanding the nature of prejudice allows us to better name and work against our own prejudices and implicit biases, which are vital in working to make socially just classrooms and societies (Cohn-Vargas, 2015). We can begin to understand how to examine and tackle prejudice by identifying it within literary texts.

Table 3 outlines examples of prejudice from the selected young adult titles. Additionally, the table includes questions that could be posed to students to deepen their understanding of the concept. These examples are not exhaustive and we encourage teachers to have their students identify other examples of the concepts from the books.

Table 3

Examples and Questions for Prejudice

Book	Example	Questions to Pose
<i>Dear Martin</i> (Stone, 2017)	<p>“I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on,” (p.11).</p> <p>“All I know is that no matter what college I end up at, when I see a minority, I’m gonna wonder if they’re qualified to be there,” (p. 64)</p>	<p>Why is the image of Justyce wearing a hood seen as suspicious?</p> <p>What prejudice of Jared’s is revealed when he says “qualified”?</p>
<i>Want</i> (Pon, 2017)	<p>“I had expected <i>you</i> girls to be scentless at best or to smell clinical at worst, like some specimen kept too long in a jar” (p. 11).</p> <p>“...a hero struggling to support his own family by selling more and more of his own blood. Now, that wasn’t even a possibility for most <i>meis</i>—especially the poorest among us. Their blood was considered too dirty, tainted” (p. 167).</p> <p>I was surprised that these <i>yous</i> cared enough to donate money for a <i>mei</i> cause (p. 146).</p>	<p>What does this suggest about the way Zhou feels about the <i>you</i>?</p> <p>According to this excerpt, how does prejudice led to discrimination and/or oppression toward the <i>mei</i>?</p> <p>Why do you think Zhou was surprised by this?</p>
<i>I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i> (Sánchez, 2017)	<p>“How do you explain to someone that you’re poor?” (p. 188).</p> <p>“I thought our neighborhood was bad, but if I had to live in the suburbs, I think I’d just lie down and die.” (p. 106).</p>	<p>How does this prejudice create a strain on the relationship between the two characters?</p> <p>How does prejudice get enacted based on location and geography?</p>
<i>All American Boys</i> (Reynolds &	<p>The man from the counter at Jerry’s grocery store nod’s suspiciously and steps out from behind the counter when Rashad walks in. (p. 17).</p>	<p>What assumptions is the man making about Rashad based on his identity?</p>

Kiely, 2015)	Rashad is explaining the incident to his parents in the hospital. He describes his dad's reaction: "he had on that you aren't telling me everything look. It was clear to him, I had to have done something wrong to bring this on." (p. 49).	How are the father's internal beliefs affecting the father's reaction?
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Our article focuses on the four titles above. However, the concepts we address can be applied to any young adult title. Therefore, some broad questions about prejudice that could be asked of any title include: How do characters think and feel about characters who have different identities than their own? What assumptions do characters make about each other? Where do these assumptions stem from? How do the characters' backgrounds inform how they view people who are different than themselves?

Discrimination

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) define discrimination as "action based on prejudices toward social others," arguing that "How we *think* about groups of people determines how we *act* toward them" (p. 54). Discrimination is acting upon one's prejudices; it is the external manifestation of internal prejudices. Addressing discrimination is paramount considering today's socio-political reality. Instances of discrimination based on race, religion, and immigration status have risen since the campaign of Donald Trump (Costello, 2016). Subsequently, schools in districts that voted for Donald Trump have seen an increase in discrimination acts against students of color and students who are immigrants or whose families immigrated to the United States (Huang & Cornell, 2019). Even as such discrimination in schools rose, the protections for minoritized students were weakened by the United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, who spent her first year in office working to rollback protections for transgender students, students of color, and students who were sexually assaulted (Nilsen & Sitrin, 2017). Providing

students with the language to name discrimination through literature is one way to challenge discrimination on a school and classroom-based level. Table 3 offers teachers examples of the language they can use to address discrimination in texts in their classes.

Table 4 documents examples of discrimination from the young adult titles. These examples are meant to be a guide for teachers but not a definitive list. Our hope is that teachers can use these examples and questions as starting points for classroom conversations.

Table 4

Examples and Questions for Discrimination

Book	Example	Questions to Pose
<i>Dear Martin</i> (Stone, 2017)	“There are still people in that office who refuse to look me in the eye, fellas. They’ll show cursory respect for the sake of keeping their jobs, but a good majority of my subordinates resent having to answer to a black man,” (p. 113)	What specific behavior could Mr. Rivers be referring to when he says, “my subordinates resent having to answer to a black man”?
<i>Want</i> (Pon, 2017)	“You walk around the city, man?” Joseph asked, his tone dripping with distaste. “Those <i>mei</i> can be dangerous.” (p. 147)	Does this quote demonstrate discrimination from Joseph? Why or why not?
	“You mean the holding pen?” I spoke to the concrete floor. “Where they were letting sick <i>meis</i> die?” “Who the fuck cares?” Da Ge drawled. ... “You’re dispensing meds. Undernet says that whatever you’re doing is working.” He cracked his knuckles. “That some of those wretches are actually recovering.” (p. 281)	How does Da Ge’s prejudice toward the <i>mei</i> evolve into real-world discriminatory actions?
	But I did choose her. I didn’t explain that this choice would wedge a divide between me and my friends longer	Who and how are Zhou’s friends discriminating against in this instance?

	than just one night. I knew that Lingyi and Iris would see it as a betrayal, as embracing the <i>yous</i> . (p. 300)	
<i>I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i> (Sánchez, 2017)	“What kind of woman are you going to be if you can’t even make a tortilla?” (p. 33).	How do family members enact discrimination upon each other?
	“With a cactus on her forehead, and she can barely speak Spanish. This country is ruining your children, sister.” (p. 84).	Julia appears to face discrimination within her family, why do you believe her family continues to place these stereotypes onto her?
	“Can you imagine introducing him to my father? Gay <i>and</i> black?” (p. 321).	How does race and sexuality shape how people enact discrimination upon each other?
<i>All American Boys</i> (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015)	The man at the counter and the cop accuse Rashad of stealing chips. Rashad is pummeled to the ground by the officer, without being given the chance to explain. (p. 20-23)	How does prejudice influence discriminatory and violent acts?
	“But he could have been [killed]! For a bag of chips that he was gonna pay for! For having brown skin and wearing his jeans a certain way. And guess what, Dad, that ROTC uniform was right there in that bag. The bag was open so that cop probably saw it. But did it matter?” (p. 53).	Why is it important that they mentioned the ROTC uniform? What does it symbolize or represent?
	Carlos: “At least three times they’ve made me get out of the car while they tore it apart looking for drugs or guns or whatever they thought I had.” (p. 201)	Why do you think the authors included this? What does this say about the scope of discrimination?

As noted earlier, we hope that our curricular suggestions are applied to a variety of young adult titles. To that end, we offer the following questions to have students think about discrimination in any title: How does a character’s thinking about a group of people inform the

harm they may inflict on that group of people? What forms of discrimination manifest in the text, and how do they manifest? How do other characters react to discrimination? In which settings does discrimination occur, and how does the setting inform the discriminatory action?

Oppression

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) define oppression as a “set of policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, and explanations (discourses), which function to systematically exploit one social group to the benefit of another social group” (p. 61). Oppression requires thinking systemically about power and how access or denial of power shapes the daily realities of individuals based on their group membership. Addressing oppression requires moving beyond thinking of individual actions to focus instead on broader social, historical, and political contexts. Discussing oppression with prejudice and discrimination is especially important. While discussing implicit bias is important goal of our own classes, legal scholar Kathryn Russell-Brown (2018) points out that conversations about implicit bias can and have been used to avoid discussing racist systems and ideologies.

Table 5 highlights examples of oppression from the four young adult titles. We encourage teachers to consider the ways oppression permeates and manifest in the daily lives of characters when teaching young adult titles. The suggestions we have included will hopefully serve as a launching point, leading students to consider the ways institutions are set up to uplift some groups at the expense of others.

Table 5

Examples and Questions for Oppression

Book	Example	Questions to Pose
<i>Dear Martin</i> (Stone, 2017)	“You and Manny, who are equal in pretty much every way apart from race, could commit the same crime, but it’s almost guaranteed that he would receive a harsher punishment than you,” (p. 28)	What identities shape how individuals are treated by the law and legal system?
	“It took me years longer than average to secure my position because I was continuously overlooked for promotions. I worked much harder than many of my Caucasian colleagues but rarely received a fraction of the recognition,” (p. 112-113)	How are employment and professional spaces sites of oppression for individuals who work within them?
	“[A] Georgia jury found former Atlanta police officer Garrett Tison guilty... he was accused of shooting two teenage boys after an argument over the volume of music,” (p. 193).	What is the difference between the court of public opinion and an actual courtroom verdict?
<i>Want</i> (Pon, 2017)	“Zhou, Jin <i>released</i> this flu strain—you may have caught it.” (p. 192)	In this chapter, it is revealed that Jin engineered and released a super flu on the <i>mei</i> population. How is this act a form of oppression?
	This was what it meant to be <i>you</i> , to <i>have</i> . To be genetically cultivated as a perfect human specimen before birth—vaccinated and fortified, calibrated and optimized. To have an endless database of information instantly retrievable within a second of thinking the query and displayed in helmet. To have the best air, food, and water, ensuring the longest possible life spans as the world went to rot around them. Me, I’m like the other 95 percent of the <i>meis</i> in this country— <i>without</i> . We want and are	According to this excerpt, what policies, practices, traditions, and/or norms are being used to oppress the <i>mei</i> ? Would this type of oppression be possible without these institutional and societal power structures in place?

	left wanting. I'd be lucky if I lived to forty. I'm almost halfway there. (p. 3)	
	After meeting with Dr. Nataraj, Lingyi had managed to hack into a Taichung legislator's account, finding a message between him and a "Mr. Wu." Since then, she had extracted five more similar exchanges with other legislators Dr. Nataraj had tried to meet. All with the same veiled threats, all with a hint of large bribes if they obeyed. Still, we weren't any closer to discovering who was behind Mr. Wu's work. And now Arun's mom was dead. (p. 42)	Why was Dr. Nataraj murdered? What does this murder suggest about the way powerful people handle dissent in Taipei? How does this contribute to the continued oppression of the <i>mei</i> ?
<i>I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i> (Sánchez, 2017)	"How could you? Do you have any idea what my life is like? To be scrutinized all the fucking time?" (p. 204).	How does oppression impact individuals in their daily lives?
	"I'm tired of being broke. I'm tired of feeling like the rest of the world always gets to decide what I can do. I can't keep going like this anymore. What is the point of living if I can't ever get what I want?" (p. 210).	How has Julia been denied freedom throughout her life? Who denied her freedom and why?
	Even if he makes it alive, this place is not the promised land for everyone." (p. 280).	What does this mean about the United States?
<i>All American Boys</i> (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015)	Quinn recalls the image of the police officer pummeling Rashad to the ground with a look of rage on his face. (p. 40).	How does being a police officer give this man the right to treat Rashad in this way?
	"I had seen this happen so many times... people getting beaten, and sometimes killed, by the cops, and then there's all this fuss about it, only to build up a big heartbreak when nothing happens. The cops get off. And everybody cries and waits for the next dead kid, to do it all over again." (p. 59).	How does this expand to something beyond prejudice or discrimination? Think about the way Rashad is talking about these big issues.

<p>Quinn being addressed by English: “White boy like you can just walk away whenever you want. Everyone just sees you as Mr. All-American boy, and you can just keep walking, thinking about other things. Just keep on living, like this shit don’t even exist” (p. 176)</p>	<p>How does race shape the idea of who is an American and who is deserving of justice?</p>
<p>“All we want is to feel like we can be who we are without being accused of being something else.” (p. 199)</p>	<p>How do individuals navigate oppressive systems to survive their daily lives?</p>

Building from the four titles selected for this article, we offer the following questions for classroom discussion about oppression that could be used of any young adult title: How do systems and institutions sort people into categories in the text? Who determines what is considered “normal” in the text? How are characters punished for not fitting into the definition of “normal”? How is power tied to historical realities in the text? How do characters uphold systems of oppression in the text? How do characters challenge systems of oppression in the text?

Critical Considerations and Limitations

When we set about writing this article, the teacher candidate authors were excited to share some of the novels that they found to be the most exciting to teach and examine with adolescent readers. It is worth noting that each of these young adult novels were written by authors of color and center characters of color and their experiences. We stress that authors of color and narratives about people of color do not get selected solely to address the concepts we’ve outlined in this article. We encourage teachers to consider their positions, identities, and power dynamics as well as those of their students when selecting and teaching texts.

Text selection made without critical considerations can replicate oppressive forces. For instance, McKinney (2020) notes that books like *Dear Martin* and *All American Boys* when taught in isolation or taught with only Black-authored books that address oppression can replicate harm for Black students. Additionally, teaching only Black-authored texts as ways to raise awareness among non-Black students can result in performative activism in which non-Black students “managed activism by bearing witness to the events of the book, but then don’t follow up with seeking change in the real world” (para. 12). Speaking specifically of the way Black-authored young adult titles can be positioned in ways that “commodify Black pain,” McKinney (2020) asserts that classroom libraries need young adult titles that are not just “issue” books to “provide an opportunity for Black readers to have a moment for themselves, to take a breath, readjust, and simply exist, and for non-Black readers to see us as fully human” (para. 13). This point is especially important for us as non-Black teacher educators and teacher candidates.

We also want to add that young adult literature written by and centering people with dominant identities can also be used to teach the three concepts outlined in this article. For instance, Schieble (2012) has outlined how young adult literature centering white characters can be positioned to address whiteness. We believe there is value in approaching all types of texts using these concepts. For instance, we never want English curriculum that only considers the concerns of racial injustices when reading about people of color as we run “the risk of reinforcing deficit-based stereotypes and stoking the flames of white saviorism as they internalize the inferiority of people of color and their superiority” (Reid, 2020, para. 14). We work with teacher candidates to interrupt beliefs that social justice curriculum and teaching is only for books written by and about people from marginalized backgrounds.

Simultaneously, we emphasize that educators' inclusion of young adult literature does not rest on inclusion merely for the sake of teaching about prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. The texts we have outlined can be used to teach these concepts, but their value extends beyond these particular concepts. We want English teachers to have classroom libraries and curriculums that center authors, peoples, and experiences that have been historically marginalized and neglected in secondary curriculum. Shamari Reid (2020) outlines the importance of balancing the need to "address the very real challenges our students [of color] face due to their undeserved oppression" while being "mindful that this is not the only story we tell to and about them" (para. 14). We emphasize that the inclusion of young adult literature is based on honoring the joy, resistance, and community that marginalized communities have enacted in a world ravished with prejudice, discrimination, and oppression.

Finally, we want to stress that Sensoy and DiAngelo's book and the concepts it entails are merely a starting point for the important work of social justice education for our mostly white teacher candidates. Critiques of this work, especially the second author's popular *White Fragility* (Jackson, 2019), are vital in our own growth and learning. Our teacher candidate demographics reflect the demographics of education students nationally: overwhelmingly white (Will, 2020). The ideas in *Is Everyone Really Equal?* (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) are a starting point for many of our white teacher candidates. Additionally, books such as *Letting Go of Literary Whiteness* (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019), *The Anti Racist Teacher: Reading Instruction Workbook* (Germán, 2020), and *Teaching Culturally Sustaining and Inclusive Young Adult Literature: Critical Perspectives and Conversations* (Rodríguez, 2018) play crucial roles building on and expanding knowledge with our teacher candidates. Again, we stress Richard Milner (2010)'s idea to ourselves and our students: start where you are but don't stay there.

Other Curricular Suggestions and Considerations

We have outlined how four texts can be taught to support students in developing a thorough understanding of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. Teachers can select other young adult titles to address these concepts. Similarly, teachers can select other ideas from Sensoy and DiAngelo's book to incorporate into their curriculum. Concepts from Sensoy and DiAngelo's work can be examined through canonical texts as well. For instance, heteronormativity and hegemony can be used during a unit on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* or *Taming of the Shrew* while concepts relating to colonialism can be applied to classic texts like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Aligned with the visions of critical canonical and literature pedagogy (Borhseim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014; Dyches, 2018), an approach that uses canonical literature to teach social justice concepts would provide a way to imagine canonical curriculum as a way to challenge curricular injustices. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) call such challenging and reimagining of canonical texts "transformative academic knowledge" (p. 31), which is foundational in developing critical social justice literacy.

Students should also be encouraged to analyze popular culture and texts from their own lives using the concepts outlined. Pop culture has been conceptualized as a site for the development of critical stances in English classrooms (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Morrell, 2002, 2005), which is important since Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) note that popular culture "plays an important role in normalizing" oppressive ideologies (p. 33). Drawing on the work of Storm and Rainey (2018), teachers can invite students to introduce texts from their own lives to the class through discussion and analyze the texts using concepts established in class. The curricular opportunities expand greatly when students are invited to be co-constructors of curriculum with teachers. For instance, what might the show *Pose* teach us about the

intersections of oppressive systems based on racism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia? How can studying selfies and social media filters inform our understanding of white supremacy and sexism? What might TV shows that depict middle and high school tell us about oppression within school systems? These questions are a sampling that can be addressed when students are invited to share texts from their own lives with their peers using the social justice concepts outlined in Sensoy and DiAngelo's work.

Teacher Candidates as English Education and Literacy Scholars

Two major goals drove Cody and Kathleen, the teacher educators, to recruit teacher candidates in writing this article. First, Cody and Kathleen wanted teacher candidates to prepare a curriculum that positioned young adult literature as a site to develop critical social justice literacy with their future secondary students. Second, and equally important, Cody and Kathleen wanted teacher candidates to be introduced to writing for scholarly purposes. Teacher candidates can be advocates in sharing their classroom-generated knowledge within the broader field of English and literacy education. In this section of the article, the four teacher candidates share their recommendations for other teacher candidates interested in engaging in scholarship and adding to the field of education.

Each of the teacher candidates drew on their experiences using critical justice literacy concepts and applying them to text in order to understand how theory can be translated to practice. Additionally, they author their ideas about how other teacher candidates can engage in scholarship to add their voices to the field. In the following section, the four teacher candidates write about how they conceptualize important topics in their curriculum, how they use relevant research to guide their practice, and how they draw on these experiences and share them with other teachers to broaden all of our understandings.

Katia wrote that as they read through Stone's book, they tried to picture themselves teaching lessons to go with it that would actively engage their students and serve as a form of assessment. For the parts of their book that are in scripted format, they pictured themselves asking students to choose roles and read the conversation out loud as if they were actually having it themselves. Students could engage in a research project using the faux news articles, where they try to find stories that employ the same persuasive techniques. Students could write their own letters to Dr. King with their own questions about their own experiences. Katia notes that the experience helped them think about having students read *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017) to give them real perspective about social injustice, what it looks like, and possibly how to respond to it.

Katia noted that by sharing ideas about teaching with other teachers, they expanded their understanding of social justice practices and inclusivity for her future students. As a teacher, Katia hopes to leap at any opportunity they can to expand the perspectives represented in their future classroom, and they believed learning from other social justice-oriented teachers is an excellent way to do that.

Alex wrote that while preparing this curriculum, it occurred to him that teachers are in a unique position to effect change in the world. Whether educators use this power positively, negatively, or whether they elect to use it at all, is up to them. It seems apparent to him that since he will be working with future generations, he is inherently tasked with the responsibility of using this power to bring about positive social change. In this instance, he felt he was able to practice doing just that by incorporating scholarly work on social justice into his curriculum design. This is something that he found empowering and that he would like to continue doing throughout his teaching career. However, he noted that his responsibility did not end with him

sharing this information with his students. Instead, he feels it is important for him to pass what he has learned on to other educators and future educators.

Alex came to believe that this exponential growth—teachers sharing these concepts with other teachers who can then share them with more teachers still—will allow for a broader change in the field of English education. As such, his message to other teacher candidates is that they can teach social justice in the classroom, and they can do so with young adult literature that is entertaining and enjoyable for students. While doing this may require extra research and planning at times, it is incredibly gratifying and empowering.

Reed wrote that she believed that teachers are never done learning. She noted that the classroom environment, demographics, curriculum, and research in education changes over time and teachers should be the ones pushing and encouraging each other to learn. Specifically, she argues that *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (Sánchez, 2017) is a book that teachers should read because the messages weaved throughout the pages inform and empower those who can relate to the main character as well as serve as an eye opener for those who have preconceived stereotypes due to societal norms. She believes that sharing one's work and what one has learned with other teachers is important because work, articles, and research are meant to be shared and to empower those who are marginalized and to inform those in power. Finally, she noted that we live in a world of injustice, and by sharing our work we teach others how to identify injustices and provide ways to empower.

Heather wrote that as she read the novel, she was searching for pieces that would fit with each of the three categories related to social justice. She realized that focusing on these issues would create a curriculum focused not only on the writing and literature pieces, but also on inspiring change within the lives of students. She wrote that the use of the tables naming the

aspects of social justice would be an excellent artifact to give to teachers and explain the process of incorporating those ideas into the literature being read. She also realized that it is necessary to explicitly explain each of the three categories of social justice issues, as they are complex and are often accompanied by common misconceptions.

Conclusion

English teachers can use literature as a pathway to support students in understanding and naming injustices in their own lives and the broader socio-political world around them. Providing students with key concepts relating to social justice education supports students in developing critical social justice literacy. For some students, that development will be made available to them in their secondary ELA classes. For others, that development will come during their teacher education courses. Unfortunately, some students complete their K-12 and higher education experiences without ever engaging in conversations and curriculum that nurture critical social justice literacy. Our hope is that crafting curriculum for teacher candidates to develop critical social justice literacy *and* consider how they'll enact it in their own classrooms will result in a different reality in classrooms.

Additionally, we hope this article encourages other teacher educators to write and publish with teacher candidates in their programs. The reflections from the teacher candidates indicate that writing for publication supports teacher candidates in disseminating their learnings from teacher education courses to a broader range of educators. Furthermore, having teachers write for publication with their teacher educators has a twofold yield: First, teacher candidates deepen their understanding of teacher education coursework content, which related to critical social justice literacy in this article; second, teacher candidates come to see how the theoretical and

abstract can manifest in the concrete classroom reality by writing about their own future classrooms.

Critical social justice literacy, as conceptualized by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), is concerned with using the knowledge of how we created injustices to end said injustices. By connecting concepts related to critical social justice literacy to teaching young adult literature with teacher candidates, we hope to offer a model of how teacher educators can work with teacher candidates in challenging injustices through English language arts curriculum. Teaching concepts relating to social justice education supports teacher candidates and their future students in naming the harmful realities that exist in our world while also offering the tools to alter that reality.

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