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Cultural Contexts: Learning Outside Classroom Walls

© Lisa York

Georgia State University

Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Lisa York.

Contact: lyork2@student.gsu.edu

Abstract: Although reading about another culture in a book can, as Emily Dickinson (1999) once wrote, serve as that "Frigate…To take us Lands away," the need for immersion in a physical space that differs from what we regularly know proves paramount for personal growth. This retrospective praxis piece weaves in journal excerpts written during a secondary ELA teacher's travels and reflects on how these experiences shaped the development of her criticality and curriculum design. The work addresses the importance of experiencing places and cultures that may prove unfamiliar and may influence one's growth and development as an educator. It also examines how traveling with critical literacy lenses influenced the way the author experienced a place.

Key Words: cultural context, immersion, Indigenous education, journaling, reflection, travel as a teacher, critical literacy

Reading, Road-Tripping, and Developing Criticality

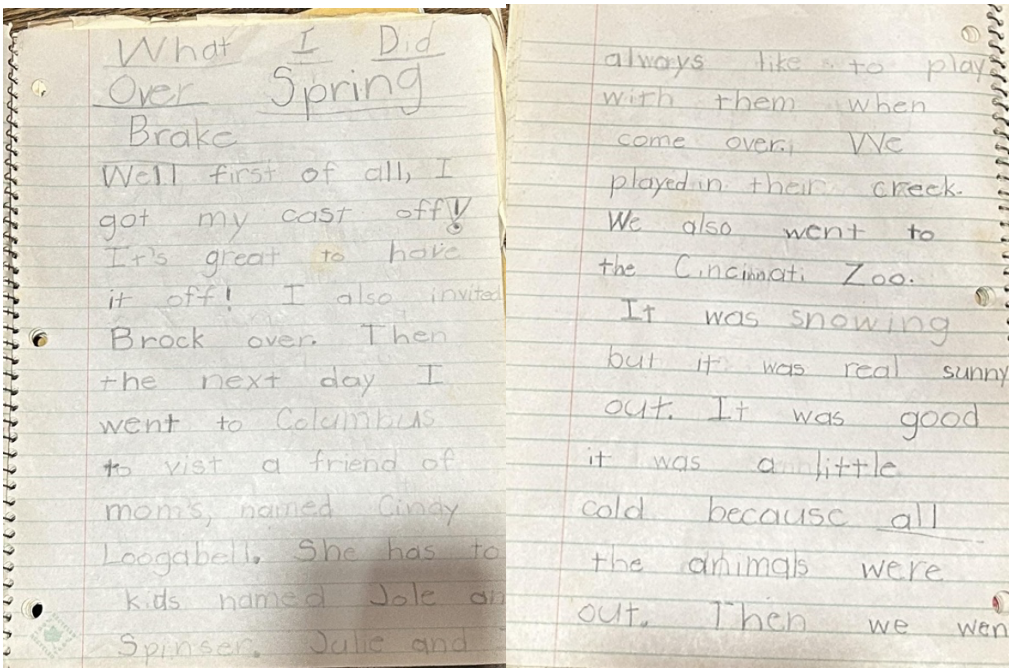
I was always a curious child, interested in lives and stories outside my own. Reading books gave me glimpses into the multitudinous lives and experiences found in our world's multicultural mosaic. Books framed new windows (Bishop, 1990), and as I looked through these windows, I felt inspired to seek further understanding. In second grade, I asked Santa for a sewing box with thread and needle, hoping to learn what it might feel like to sew a button on clothes for a stuffed bear like Lisa did in *Corduroy* (Freeman, 1968). In third grade, when we rode our bikes past a farm, my twin sister held her nose while I breathed in the tang of manure, imagining what it would be like to live on a farm with the Zuckermans and Wilbur of *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952). In fourth grade, my friend and I made a "kingdom" in the woods, hoping to replicate the hideaway Leslie and Jesse made in *Bridge to Terabithia* (Paterson, 1977), but without the tragic ending. Stories made me curious enough to imagine and explore new experiences. As I look back at the books I consumed in my youth, though, they often presented lives differing from my own but with characters who looked and sounded like me (white, able-bodied, middle-class, U.S. born citizen, English speaker). Such were the stories schools and libraries in Midwest Ohio mostly seemed to offer in the 1980s and 1990s. My collegiate and adult life has involved looking for stories beyond the ones I was given in childhood and adolescence.

Besides pursuing books that offer new lenses, I have also spent significant time in both childhood and adulthood pursuing *places* that provide new insights. In childhood, I had not yet encountered the work of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, but if I had, perhaps I would have recognized that, similar to how literature provides "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" (Bishop, 1990), travel can also offer new perspectives and ways of understanding our world. Growing up

in the Midwest heartland, my family was geographically positioned for convenient travel north, south, east, and west of us. My childhood summers frequently included road trips and camping at state or national parks. Summer travel became a core part of my identity early on in life as my parents, twin sister, and I stuffed our 1986 Chevy Nova with our camping gear and ourselves. In addition to putting up our four-person backpacking tent, my sister and I also put up a tiny tent that held a couple of stuffed animals, our books, and our journals. Since childhood, I have used journaling during my travels as a way to reflect on my experiences (see Figure 1). Of course, I hope my entries have developed a little since second grade.

Figure 1

Second Grade Childhood Journal Entry, 1992



As I aged and grew in my criticality, I used my journaling to help me consider how my subjectivities shaped my experiences. For example, I recognized the privileging of the English language in places never even colonized by the British, such as Norway. I questioned the near-celebrity status my whiteness created in places like India, where strangers wanted to come up

and take my picture. And I acknowledged the access I had to many places that others did not, access that resulted from my whiteness, my able-bodiedness, my citizenship rights (which allowed me to cross state and national borders), my economic and educational opportunities, and the global privileging of my spoken language, English. Developing such criticality around traveling has translated into my curriculum development as an educator, and I find myself agreeing with what Milner (2003) argues: "Reflection around race in cultural contexts should become central in reflection, expanding teachers' general reflection to more directive reflection" (p. 173). Such reflections around race and cultural context are important for all teachers (Tatum, 2001) but especially important for white teachers like me, since many school districts and some teacher education programs continue to adopt curricula primarily designed by and for white, middle-class, female, and monolingual populations (Chavez-Moreno et al., 2022), privileging white identities and narratives. Critical reflection helps me resist a passive acceptance of curricula that center on whiteness, helping me to embrace other ways of knowing.

I recognize that I have benefited from the privileging of whiteness, middle-class and monolingual values, both as a student and as a teacher. However, I also recognize the harm of receiving limited exposure to diverse educators and diverse literature during my elementary and secondary schooling, the harm of histories erased and cultures unknown. And I recognize the need to encounter not only students but also educators who come from different countries, celebrate distinctive heritages, practice varied religions, speak multiple languages, and understand economic hardships. Such exposure can help to mitigate ethnocentrism and build bridges of cultural understanding. I have an interest in possibly working as a teacher educator, and my travels and teaching and reflexive practices -- especially concerning race and place -- have helped me consider the kinds of classrooms and teachers our students have a right to

experience. Students need to see themselves and the broader world represented. By implementing culturally responsive practices, classrooms "can become spaces where [students] can examine their lives and the world, and view themselves as welcomed and an integral part of the learning process" (Sealey-Ruiz, 2022, p. 24). As a traveler and a teacher, I hope to continue reflecting on how to create spaces of belonging that promote lifelong learning.

My Student Teaching Cultural Immersion: How Place Shaped My Pedagogy

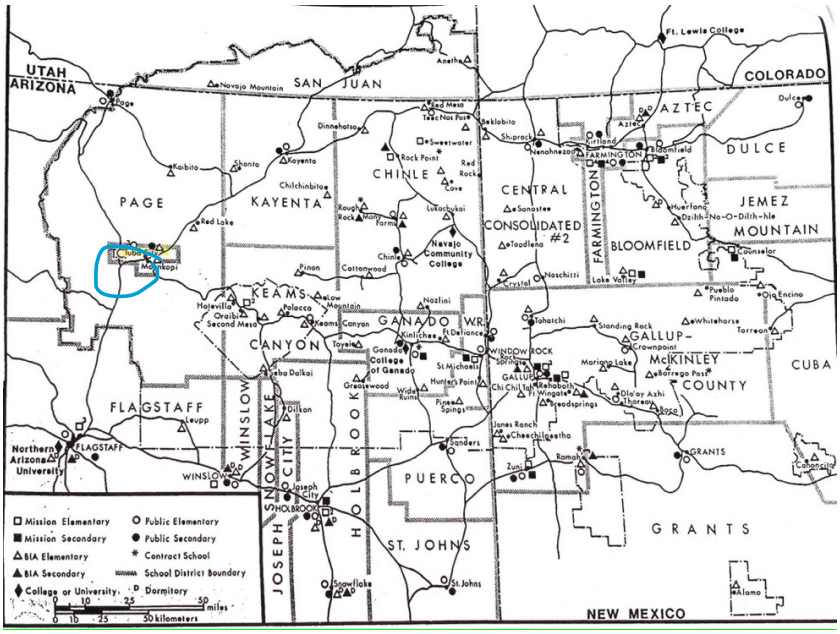
The school on the Navajo Nation where I student taught was considered a boarding school because about twenty percent of the students stayed in dorms connected to the school, either due to a lack of transportation or because their home environment did not have amenities such as running water. At the time, I did not know the extensive traumatic history of Indigenous boarding schools in this country, so I did not fully consider how damaging the title of "boarding school" might be for students, their families, their elders, and their communities. I enjoyed working with the students after school: conducting study hall, serving dinner, and participating in sports and dorm activities. My enjoyment of being fully immersed in my teaching community somewhat blinded me from questioning what it was like for these students to stay away from their families for such extended periods. Although I asked a few students what they missed about home, I did not take much time beyond these snippets of conversation to understand what it was like being removed from their home lives for semesters at a time.

The school itself had a population of about 500 students in grades 9-12, with 96% identifying as Diné (Navajo word meaning "The People" and the preferred terminology when referring to themselves) and 4% of the students identifying as Hopi. Within the entire vicinity of where I taught, there was only one two-story house, and it looked entirely out of place, since most homes were trailers, and some were even hogans, the traditional homes of some Indigenous

elders. Tuba City (see blue circled area in Figure 2) was considered a more "developed" part of the reservation because it had two fast food restaurants (Taco Bell and Sonic) and a Basha's Market grocery store within its borders. The closest Walmart was a little over an hour's drive away. I have included a map of the Navajo Nation in Figure 2 to provide further visual context of the area. Most of the teachers at the school were Diné, but a handful of teachers were white, as were the two other student teachers and me. Several students told me that their grandparents feared they would lose their cultural heritage and connection by attending a school with *biligáana* (white) teachers. Historical precedent had established that schools were places of cultural erasure, not cultural empowerment.

Figure 2

Navajo Nation Map I Received Prior to Student Teaching



My experiences on the reservation set me on a journey of contemplating how educators can work to counteract the negative narratives around schooling and strive to become cultural pedagogues (Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022) who center holistic, equitable instruction that is rooted in a responsibility to the community we serve, while also embedding culturally responsive

practices and developing strong relationships with students. During my five months on the reservation, I learned extensively from my students and colleagues about the traditions of the Diné. Sometimes my learning was related to language (biligáana = white person), sometimes identity (such as clan names like Tódich'ii'nii, or Bitter Water Clan), sometimes ceremonies. Importantly, I recognized that my students had just as much, if not more, to teach me than I had to teach them. This lesson has remained with me today, as I continue to value the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Hogg, 2011) that students bring with them into the classroom. In order to process such lessons, I had to take time for reflection.

I intentionally made time for reflection during my student teaching on the reservation. Almost every night, I wrote in my journal. I was engaging in autoethnographic research (Adams et al., 2015) without even realizing this was my metacognitive process. In one of my journal entries from student teaching, I wrote about attending an evening of a nine-day Yébîchai ceremony with a colleague who invited me because he believed it was important for me to have a stronger understanding of the practices of the ancestors (Journal 1).

Journal 1 Navajo Nation, Arizona: November 12, 2005

> *We arrived at the hogan, which seemed to be literally in the middle of nowhere. There was a small fire going outside and a chill in the air, which dissipated once we stepped into the hogan. D and I entered while everyone was chanting -- I definitely felt out of place as the white girl in the middle of an important Navajo ceremony. All the women were on the right side and the men were on the left. The leaders of the chanting and a drummer were in the middle. I sat down on a blanket next to an elder who chanted beautifully beside me. All around me was chanting. I was surrounded by the sounds echoing in my ears and chest. The drumming seemed like the beating of my own heart, subtle and rhythmic as if it was tapped out on a woven basket wrapped in cloth.*

While I felt like an interloper because of stepping into such a sacred space and not being a member of the community, I also felt humbled to be invited into such a space. The Yébîchai ceremony was a sacred festival of healing and restoration. As I look back on my participation

now, I see how it influenced me to embrace Indigenous epistemologies, to consider the importance of healing practices, and to honor histories and traditions. By embracing such traditions, I also work to reject much of the standardization that so many school systems push. One of the ways that I resist standardized practices is by modeling critical literacies in the classroom, literacies that empower students with "institutionally marginalized identities to fully understand their positions within historically-created power hierarchy in order to take meaningful action against oppression" while also equipping "students holding historically dominant identities with the knowledge and skills to be allies and accomplices in the ongoing fight for justice" (Williams, 2022, p. 324).

Sometimes, critical literacy looks like naming an injustice and deconstructing how it came to exist through an element of design that might include written language or visual representations. As I prepared to leave the reservation and pack up and drive back across the country from Arizona to Ohio in my grandmother's 1995 Chevy Lumina, I paused to write a poem that attempted such an act of critical literacy. I wrote the poem as a response to my reflections and experiences within the space of the reservation. In the poem, I hoped to capture the resilient spirit of the Diné people, a spirit that thrived through ceremony, art, and dance despite systemic attempts to wipe out the entire culture and people:

Navajo Nation Elegy

Stripped naked, raw red dust
tainted with blood tears
of displacement and disease --
You tied my tongue & traditions
with the backlash of the BIA.*
Cries in the canyons echo with
sounds of sweat lodges & hogans
that hold a seat on Mother Earth's lap
Euphoria resides in
the wrapped-up warmth of

woven rugs, peyote in hand,
Returned to dreams of the
Diné.

*Bureau of Indian Affairs

Journals of a Traveling Teacher: Curricularizing Cultural Experiences

My daily journaling habits since student teaching have never been so robust, except during times of travel. One of the most essential items I pack whenever I travel somewhere I will be for more than five days is a journal, and I find time each day to reflect upon the experiences I have had in the places where I have been. These reflections often turn into seed ideas for lessons and assignments to incorporate into my classroom. Here, I will reflect upon the ways my travels to Norway and journaling about my experiences influenced my curriculum development.

When my twin sister and I were in eighth grade, our parents hosted an exchange student from Norway for a year. She became a member of our family, and thus, even after returning to Norway, she came back to the States to visit a couple of times. When she did, she insisted that we should visit her and her family in Norway. It took time to save up for the trip, but fifteen years after her initial stay with us, we finally made it to the postcard-picturesque town where she lived, tucked into verdant green woods with sparkling fjord waters below. My family visited hers in Stord, Norway, for a week and a half, immersed in rich learning experiences, ranging from the encounter with mythological trolls on a storybook trail to the geographic exploration of a glacier to the historical inspection of a centuries-old Viking burial mound. While I was familiar with the lore of Vikings and had seen cartoons of them fighting in my *Where's Waldo?* book, I did not have any substantive exposure to Viking identity before I visited Norway. Journal 2, below, is one of my excerpts reflecting on what I witnessed at a local museum:

Journal 2 Stord, Norway: June 25, 2013

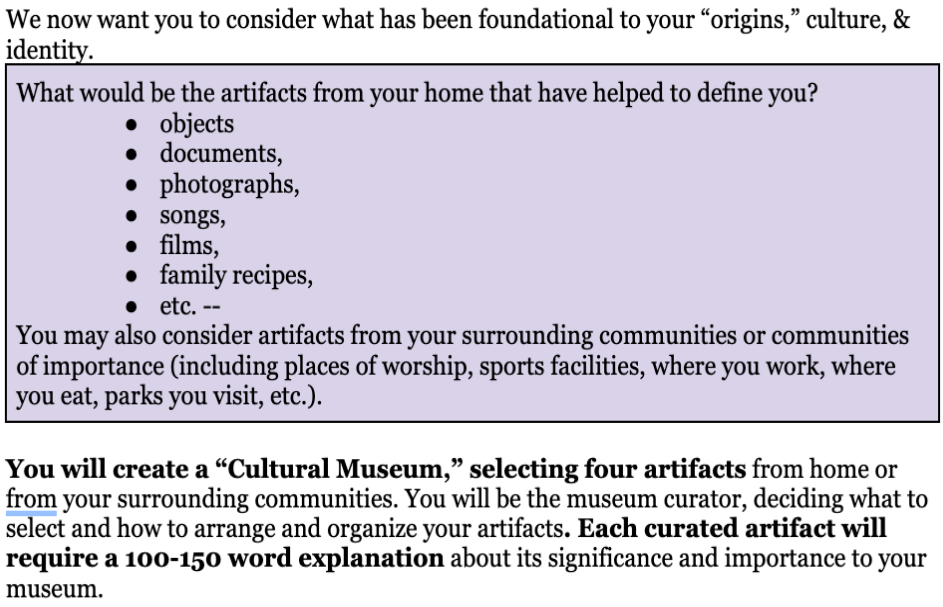
We took a short hike to the Sunnhordland Museum -- a good choice! A young woman

guided us through the old, old buildings up on a hill, which were a significant part of the museum. The oldest of the little wooden homes was from the 13th century and had been relocated to Stord. It was very dark inside with only one place for light -- the hole in the center of the ceiling where smoke from the fire in the center of the room escaped. There were seal skins on the benches and white painted designs on the wall (done in a Viking tradition). We also saw an old schoolhouse, an old store, a giant loom that displayed an antiquated form of weaving, and a collection of 100 items that represent Norwegian culture, from a traditional wedding crown to an ice skate from the Olympics, a blending of old and new.

After visiting the museum, we chatted about the experience with our former exchange student, who was also a teacher (just like my mom, sister, and me). She mentioned how she wished she had showcased more of her Norwegian culture, heritage, and history while a student in the United States. When I returned home and began thinking of units and lessons for the next school year, I remembered this conversation and the impact the local Stord museum made upon me while I visited Norway. I also reflected on how I did not do enough to invite students' home spaces into school spaces. I thought about how our Norwegian exchange student could have been positioned as an expert, someone who could teach her classmates about her community and culture back home, yet she did not have the opportunity to do so while in the States. I wondered how I could do a better job positioning students as experts in my classroom. Thus, my travels and reflections in Norway helped me to come up with the idea to have students create a "Cultural Museum" (see Figure 3), an assignment that I have continued to refine over the years. For this assignment, students select four to five objects from their home, surrounding communities, or communities of importance (including places of worship, sports facilities where they worked, parks, etc.) that help to showcase their identity.

Figure 3

Cultural Museum Assignment



We now want you to consider what has been foundational to your "origins," culture, & identity.

What would be the artifacts from your home that have helped to define you?

- objects
- documents,
- photographs,
- songs,
- films,
- family recipes,
- etc. --

You may also consider artifacts from your surrounding communities or communities of importance (including places of worship, sports facilities, where you work, where you eat, parks you visit, etc.).

You will create a "Cultural Museum," selecting four artifacts from home or from your surrounding communities. You will be the museum curator, deciding what to select and how to arrange and organize your artifacts**. Each curated artifact will require a 100-150 word explanation** about its significance and importance to your museum.

They "curate" representational objects from these places and provide gallery captions about why these objects are important to them. In other words, they learn to read their worlds, rooted in the Freirean notion that "the world, as a text, can be read from a critical literacy perspective" and that "issues and topics that capture learner's interests, based on their experiences, or artifacts with which they engage in the material world" can all "be used as text to build a curriculum that has significance in [students'] lives" (Vazquez et al., 2019, p. 301). Freire (2000) famously provided the basis for reading the surrounding world as a text, and in doing so, he helped to invite the world outside of classroom walls into school learning environments. By developing the cultural museum assignment, I was hoping to do the same. How would the visual choices students made and the accompanying explanations frame the ways they saw themselves? How would this framing affect the way *I* saw them? Their classmates saw them? "How texts are *designed* and how this affects the positions they offer the reader are fundamental to

understanding the relationship between language, image, text, and power" (Janks et al., 2014, p. 12). By designing their museums, I wanted students to contemplate their identities and their relationships to their world and each other. I see this kind of contemplation as a way to develop new perspectives and engage in another form of critical literacy that helps to resist standardization.

Inviting (Home)places into the Curriculum: Inspired by India

Amidst schooling policies that demand standardization and inflict "spirit murder" (Love, 2019), amidst policies "tied to the stratification of labor, normalization of unequal resources, assimilation, cultural genocide, cultural erasure, and White supremacy" (Philip et al., 2019, p. 258), educators are looking for ways to resist. I believe that one way to reclaim public schools as places of possibility, places that empower students and teachers to "transform systems and hierarchies of power" (Philip et al., 2019, p. 259), is to tap into voices and places found in students' surrounding communities. Place-based education (PBE) gained popularity in the 1990s "in an effort to thwart the rising tide of neoliberal ideologies and educational reforms that decentered cultural connection, community, and environmental stewardship" (Yemini et al., 2023, p. 1). As scripted curricula and restrictive legislation continue to shape the field of education today, the power of place may allow for more humanizing educational practices. PBE acknowledges place as more than a physical location, as something that "goes beyond geography to provide politically, socially, and ethically engaged perspectives on teaching and learning" (Yemini et al., 2023, p. 2). I think about how the places I have been and the people I have encountered have shaped and influenced my perspectives.

One of the most profound and consequential places I have ever visited that provided new perspectives was India. For three weeks during the summer of 2018, I had the honor and

privilege of being invited to India as a guest of my former student Celeste and her mother (who used to live in India) and uncle (who still lives in India). As a result of traveling with them, I received a much richer experience, one that went beyond tourist visits to the Taj Mahal and Golden Temple. While we did visit these places, we also got to visit Pune, the hometown where Celeste's extended family still lived. Here, we hung out with Celeste's cousins, visited her mom's childhood home, and perused old photo albums with her grandmother. In this way, I got to experience the everyday, shifting me from the position of tourist to someone invited into homeplaces. As I look back at my experience in India, these stories and experiences of getting to know Celeste's family proved some of the most memorable. They also helped to shape the family heritage research project that I now conduct with my 10th-grade World Literature students (see Figure 4). Students' sources for their research derive from material such as family interviews, oral histories, news-clippings, photo albums, and even cookbooks. My time in India helped to plant this idea, and my doctoral studies, especially my qualitative research classes, helped to germinate it, as I learned to recognize materials such as photo albums as valid data sources. Previously, I had a narrower view of what constituted as a "reliable" research source, prioritizing "academic" journals and "reputable" news articles, since my earlier education established these as accredited sources. As I learned to ask questions related to power, positionality, and perspective, I began to see that myriad sources, from cookbooks to personal interviews, offer possibilities for research. Rather than gatekeeping sources, then, I worked to invite varied voices and mediums.

Figure 4

Family Heritage Research

Family Research Purpose: This assignment will allow you to learn more about your ancestry, as well as practice your writing, interviewing, and researching skills. You will also practice framing the information (collected in your interviews and from other sources) in a historical context.

Audience: Your audience should be someone outside your family, such as your classmates and me, who are not aware of your family heritage. You will be attempting to explain who your family is, where they have come from, and where they are at present.

Steps:

1. Choose what part of your heritage you would like to study: All of us have many different stories in our past, so you will have to decide what story you would like to focus on for this assignment. You could tell the immigration story of one of your ancestors and how it still affects you today. You could talk about the origins of your religion and how it has changed your family and your life. You could talk about the significant accomplishment of a past family member and how it has changed your life. If you don't have access to family members to interview, you may pick a broader topic. For example, if you identify as a female, you could research the history of women's rights or women in the workplace.

2. **Decide a time frame for your research:** All of our families go back thousands of years, but that is too much time to cover for this project! How far back in time do you need to go to find out relevant information about your family? Yaa Gyasi takes us through 8 generations in her novel *Homegoing*, but everyone's story is different, and you will have to choose your own time frame.

3. **Locate your resources:** Ideally, you should interview one to three people for this project (minimum of one interview required!). Brainstorm who might have access to the knowledge that you seek. Besides your interviewees, figure out what videos, news clippings, audio files, scrapbooks, and other materials you could research to provide the larger historical context for your family narrative. For example, if you choose to discuss how your family immigrated to this country in 1984, you may need to find out what was going on in their home country, as well as in the US, so you can more deeply understand their situation.

4. **Write an interview script:** All interviews need a focus or line of inquiry. The people you speak to may have nothing to say—or have much too much to say—and having a semi-structured outline will help you get the information you need. Write a script with 8-10 open-ended questions that you would like to ask your interviewee. (We will write a few as a class to give you some ideas.) As the interview progresses, you may think of new questions or discard others, and this is a perfectly normal part of the process. Please RECORD your interview (either as an audio file or video file).

5. **Research:** After your interviews, it is time to place your information into a historical context. Hopefully, you have already found some useful resources, but maybe your interview inspired you to take a different direction. Focus on filling out the information around the story from your interviewee, like the major historical events and the social climate of the time. This will add depth to your story.

6. **Choose your paper's format:** The parameters of this paper are largely dependent upon the type of information you have gathered. Maybe you would like to narrate the story in your own voice and describe how you gathered the information as well as what you found (autoethnography). Maybe you would like to do a series of creative poems from the viewpoint of your ancestor, a photojournal, diary entries, etc.. You must decide how to best present your information. You *will* need to have in-text citations throughout, however.

Another way my travels to Pune, India, influenced my curriculum development was my experience at Aga Khan Palace, an important part of the Indian freedom movement, where

Gandhi and others were imprisoned, and where some of Gandhi's ashes still rest (see Figure 5). Perhaps one of the most memorable experiences from our visit to Aga Khan came from talking to our guide (Journal 3).

Figure 5

Photograph from Aga Kahn Palace – Gandhi's Ashes

Journal 3 Pune, India: July 11, 2018

> *Our guide was a 22-year-old college student who lived in Pune all his life. When he asked us a little about ourselves, I saw that his shirt said "Atlanta" in the corner, and I told him we were from there. He was excited to hear that we were from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s city and shared some of the knowledge that he knew about Dr. King and Atlanta. He was very excited to know that I'd visited Dr. King's childhood home and said, "It is my dream someday to travel there and see the place of such a great man." And to think: here is someone on the other side of the world who wants to visit Atlanta because of its significance to Dr. King, and I have students living in metro-Atlanta who have never been to the King Center or King's childhood home or Ebenezer Baptist Church or Sweet Auburn Ave. or Morehouse College…Wow.*

The conversation with our guide reignited in me the importance of inviting students into spaces outside classroom walls to engage with places and get to know these places and their histories.

After all, “it is important to remember that not all texts in the world are printed texts…Cities are texts,” too (Janks et al., 2014, p. 101). Following my visit to India, I decided to teach Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy* (2015) that upcoming school year, knowing that he and the Equal Justice Initiative had recently created the Legacy Museum and National Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, just under a three-hour drive from the school where I taught. With my colleagues who were also teaching students in 12th grade English language arts, we organized an optional field trip with close to forty participants, including students and their families (ranging from grandparents to younger siblings), who caravanned to Montgomery to visit both sites. The impact of this trip was profound (since that initial trip, I have taken several more trips to Montgomery, always resulting in something poignant and powerful): the looming marble white courthouse; the museum location that includes a warehouse where enslaved people were once held captive; the ghost town streets of Montgomery; the gleaming statue of Rosa Parks near the bus stop; the footprints along the crosswalk near Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to signify the march from Selma; the haunting row after row after row of jars filled with soil from lynching sites; the bearing witness. One cannot visit these spaces without experiencing some kind of visceral reaction.

As a means of reflecting upon their experience, students had the option to construct a project-based learning (PBL) response by creating a photojournal about their time in Montgomery (see Figure 6). Through their construction of this PBL, they engaged critical literacy practices as they reflected on justice, mercy, trauma, and the power of place, demonstrating their ability to “think in ways of understanding power, privilege, and oppression, particularly for populations who have been historically marginalized” (Muhammad, 2018, p. 138). They had the opportunity to question: what would be possible if these historically

marginalized populations were not "dismissed as inconsequential, relegated to the *Other* category" (Tinker Sachs & Bhatnagar, 2022, p. 5), but instead consistently represented within the curriculum and given space to shine?

Figure 6

PBL Optional Project

A Lens on Justice: Field Trip to Montgomery & the Memorial/Museum for Peace & Justice (February 1st)

Your collection of photos should examine aspects of justice, mercy, trauma, victim/perpetrator, and the criminal justice system based on your reading of *Just Mercy* and your experience at The National Museum & Memorial for Peace and Justice. Each photo will require a three-four sentence caption. The caption should discuss the significance and symbolism of the image and SHOULD NOT merely tell what the image is. You may present this project digitally/electronically or through a hard copy format. We encourage you to take lots and lots of photos and then sift through them, edit them, and select the best. You will need to select between 8-12 photos for your project. You will also need to write a ¾ to one-page typed, single-spaced reflection about your experience inside the museum, reflecting upon what visuals and information most impacted you and WHY. We strongly encourage you to take notes while inside to help with this process (as you will not be allowed to take pictures inside the museum).

This project is not a scrapbook, or a series of "yearbook photos" of you and your friends. Approach your subject material striving to dig deeper and create meaning from what you're seeing. You are not just documenting your experience; you are also commenting on it. There is nothing wrong with having some photos of you or your friends at the museum/in Montgomery that prove important to the themes you want to address. If your Photojournal starts to look like a wayward Instagram, though, you're in trouble. Try to seek out original subjects for your photos and explore your subject matter in new and meaningful ways. How does your experience in Montgomery and at the memorial change and shape your view of justice, mercy, trauma, prisoners, and the prison system? How can you capture your experience here through images?

Conclusion

Not every student will have the opportunity to travel as extensively as I have throughout my youth and teaching career. However, by broadening the 'classroom' beyond the confines of school walls, educators can help to create "a less stigmatizing and more democratic and liberatory education" (Çelebi, 2022, p. 259). I believe it is important to ask questions that help us to sharpen our critical lenses: Whose voices do we include in the curriculum and whose do we leave out? How often do we invite students' multiliteracies and heritage languages into the

classroom? What are we teaching students about what *counts* as research, and what are we marginalizing? How often are we inviting community members and families to be part of classroom conversations? When do we look for learning opportunities outside classroom walls? Whether we choose to journal, keep a blog, create a photojournal, record audio messages, or engage with another medium of our choice, we have numerous possibilities that can help us to engage in this line of questioning and reflection.

As educators develop their reflexive practices while moving throughout their local and global contexts, perhaps they can also think more deeply about how to bring what is outside classroom walls inside for students to explore. One idea is to form partnerships across varied spaces. For example, Hackett et al. (2022) write about ASCEND, a cross-institutional experiential learning coalition formed with university professors, public school teachers, and a community organizer in Atlanta. Of the thirteen participants in the ASCEND case study, eleven "explicitly noted how learning about Atlanta helped them think more critically about historic and current local inequitable systems," and that integrating experiential learning "heightened their critical consciousness" (p. 19). This suggests that the design and implementation of the ASCEND coalition impacted the development of critical consciousness in teaching practices. The case study also suggests a need to contextualize curriculum so that standardization does not contribute to the "placeless nature" that often occurs with the overemphasis on state testing (p. 21).

Further research is needed to examine how place-based pedagogies can be connected, specifically, to ELA curriculum. Researchers could take inspiration from Indigenous ways of knowing and being, particularly by considering storytelling as a methodology (Carwile, 2021). Researchers and educators who may not have access to place-based experiential learning via

field trips could consider other means of engaging with localized communities, from inviting in guest speakers to using digital technologies and literacies to "visit" places that have been curated online, such as The Atlanta History Center's assemblage of "a collection of fifty pieces that represent the themes [of the city] identified by the public" (Atlanta in 50 objects: Exhibitions). Due, in part, to statewide standardization, surrounding communities are too-often overlooked as rich resources in education. However, within this wider world, we find power and possibility, a borderless text discoverable through our travels, our reflections, and our teachings.

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Author Bio: Lisa York is in her nineteenth year of teaching high school ELA. She is also a PhD student in Georgia State University's Teaching and Learning (Language & Literacy) program. Drawing inspiration from culturally sustaining pedagogies, her areas of interest include critical literacies, decolonized curricula, place-based pedagogies, and supporting and retaining diverse teachers.