
Developing Symbolic Interpretation through Literary Argumentation

Project READI Technical Report #15

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Abstract

An ongoing challenge in English Language Arts classes is to create learning environments within the traditional school structure that provide opportunities for adolescents to learn the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in literary analysis. This paper reports an illustrative design-based research case study of the development and initial implementation of a five-week instructional module on literary interpretation and evidence-based argumentation for 9th grade students. The design of this module was specifically focused on literary interpretation that relied on the rhetorical device of symbolism in stories with a coming-of-age theme. Documentation included videotaping and field notes of each day of module instruction and an essay pre/post assessment. The results focus on the pre/post essays and whole-class discussions sampled from the beginning, middle, and end of the implementation. Comparisons of performance on the pre and post essays indicated improvements in some dimensions of literary argument, the classroom discussions provided evidence that the instructional design promoted use of text-based evidence to support claims and reasoning that connected evidence to claims. Consistent with design-based research methodology, the discussion analyzes the strengths and areas that needed revision in a second iteration of the design of the module.

Keywords: Evidence-based argumentation, literary interpretation, classroom discussion, design-based research

Developing Symbolic Interpretation through Literary Argumentation

One aspect of reading comprehension that has received little research attention is the analysis and interpretation of canonical literary texts (Rapp, Komeda, & Hinze, 2011). Yet data indicate that few students successfully interpret texts (National Association of Educational Progress, 2009a, 2009b) and that teachers, despite their best intentions, have a difficult time helping students develop interpretive strategies for literary understanding (Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995). Langer (2010) contends that literary interpretation is an opportunity to explore possibilities and other perspectives; that making sense of literature involves a constant interaction between reader and text, similar to Rosenblatt's concept of transaction (Rosenblatt, 1978). Unlike reading to gather known declarative knowledge, literature invites the reader to experience the world through the perspective of others and explore how these experiences do and do not relate to one's own known and imagined worlds (Langer, 2010; Lee, 2011; Vipond & Hunt, 1984). When classroom instruction takes an inquiry perspective on literature it makes accessible to adolescents the tentative rather than absolute nature of literary interpretation and affords the exploration of ideas, emotions, experiences, and the re-thinking of one's own perspectives (Applebee, Burroughs, & Stevens, 2000; Olshavsky, 1976). Inquiry-based literature instruction contrasts with typical literature instruction where the emphasis is on teachers focusing on surface level features of the text and not supporting procedural knowledge about how to tackle problems of interpretation. This often involves a high dependence on simple Initiate – Respond - Evaluate sequences (Cazden, 2001; Lemke, 1990; Mehan, 1979) that do not engage students in dialogic reasoning (Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast, 1997).

Certainly there is a place in literature classrooms for learning about the interpretations of others (Appleman 2000). This can involve complex problem solving focused on the reasoning

processes of literary critics such as might be found in high school advanced placement exams. However, for students to become truly engaged in literary analysis and interpretation as a pathway for life long reading, especially of canonical literary texts, they need to be making sense of literature from their own perspectives. They need to juxtapose the perspectives in the texts they are reading with their own experiences (Lee, 2007). Perspectives in the text are conveyed through many elements of literature, including the events and sequences of events, the characters, the dilemmas, the solutions, the emotions conveyed in the narrative, and how language and structure are used to convey these elements (Hillocks, & Ludlow, 1984; Rabinowitz, 1987; Scholes, 1985). In developing a generative repertoire through which to examine literature students should develop interpretive lenses (e.g., feminist, Black Aesthetic, Marxist, etc.); study aspects of setting, character, and plot (e.g. rising action, climax); and study how literary devices (e.g., symbolism, irony) function – all as bases for asserting claims about elements such as authorial intent, theme, characterization, and problems of point of view in order to explore social or moral issues that reflect the human condition.

The challenge we take up in this paper concerns how to create teaching and learning environments within the traditional school structure that provide opportunities for adolescent students, roughly ages 10 – 18, to learn the knowledge and skills that underlie the performances of successful students engaged in literary analysis. We used an iterative, design-based research process to address this challenge (Brown, 1992; Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004; Design-Based Research Collective, 2003; diSessa & Cobb, 2004). In this paper our purpose is to present an illustrative case study of the (1) development and implementation of an instructional design that takes into account the specific knowledge and skills that enable literary interpretation among adolescents; (2) assessment of the impact of implementation through whole-class discussion and

individually produced essays. We discuss how the implementation and assessment information contributed to re-design for a second iteration of the instructional design.

Overview

As a starting point for the development of an instructional design, we derived an initial set of design principles from relevant literature on learning, comprehension, literary interpretation, and prior efforts to create literary inquiry classrooms (e.g., Langer, 2010; Lee, 2001,2007). Then, consistent with design-based research, we implemented it in classrooms, using micro-ethnographic methods to carefully document teaching and learning processes and artifacts (materials, tasks, student work). Once the module had concluded, we analyzed the process and artifact data to assess impacts on students' literary interpretation skills and used that information to revise the instructional design. The present report is based on the first iteration of the design and begins with a description of the general instructional model and the general architecture for literary analysis and interpretation. This architecture was instantiated in a specific "symbolism and coming of age" module that was implemented in two, ninth grade English Language Arts classrooms.¹ Data analyses focus on two key "artifacts:" pre/post essays and video-taped whole - class discussions sampled from the beginning, middle, and end of the implementations. Classroom discussions are a specific form of social interactions in classrooms that can reveal how students learn and what they learn (Bakhtin, 1981; Cazden 2001; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Nystrand et al, 1997).

The Design of Instruction for Literary Analysis and Interpretation

General Instructional Model.

¹ Other instantiations were implemented in an 8th grade middle school classroom, in another 9th grade, and in a 12th grade classroom.

Contemporary cognitive, social, developmental, and instructional research on how people learn indicates the importance of providing learners with opportunities to actively engage in knowledge building and developmentally-appropriate disciplinary practices in contexts that provide social and material supports (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Donovan & Bransford, 2005; Pashler et al., 2007; Rogoff, 2003; Spencer et al., 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Active engagement means that students do the intellectual work – the reading, the puzzling through, the questioning that constitutes knowledge building -- rather than being the recipients of the products of someone else’s intellectual work (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). Students are apprenticed into these practices through interactions with “more knowledgeable others” who serve as instructional models, externalizing and making visible the thinking, reasoning, reading, and discourse processes and practices that comprise the intellectual work in that discipline (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lee, 2006).

Modeling is accompanied by guided and structured activities where students can try out the ways of thinking that were modeled and get feedback on their efforts through interactions with others, including their peers. Classroom discussions, both in small groups and of the whole class, play a key role in externalizing thinking, exploring multiple perspectives, defending and challenging ideas, and generally engaging in an intellectual dialogic that some have dubbed “arguing to learn” (Cazden, 2001; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Nussbaum, 2005; Nystrand et al., 1997; Resnick, Michaels, & O’Connor, 2010; Schoenbach et al., 2012; Wells & Arauz, 2006). Over time and successive opportunities to engage in tasks that call upon this type of intellectual effort, supports and scaffolds are reduced and the student moves toward more independent agency. However, with complex intellectual skills this cycle is implemented iteratively: As new

skills and knowledge are introduced or as previously introduced skills and knowledge are deepened through use in more complex problem contexts, the sequence from modeling to independent performance is revisited.

Instructional Design for Literary Analysis and Interpretation

To realize the general instructional model in literary analysis required a clear understanding of the knowledge and skills needed to engage in mature forms of literary analysis so that appropriate instructional goals could be set. We therefore undertook a review of prior empirical work on expert literary analysts' interpretive processes (Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Zeitz, 1994), analyses of literary sensemaking from literary criticism (Rabinowitz, 1987; Scholes, 1985), the Cultural Modeling Framework (Lee 2007) and other research on pedagogical implications of teaching literary analyses in middle and high school (Hillocks & Ludlow, 1985; Langer, 2010, 2011; Smagorinsky & Gevinson, 1989; Smith & Hillocks, 1988).²

Briefly, literary analysis invites multiple points of view on interpretation of a literary work but requires complex skills for supporting and warranting these interpretive claims that call on knowledge of the human condition, and literary and rhetorical communication practices, including types of texts, plot structures, character types, and rhetorical devices (Applebee et al., 2000; Lee, 2011; Olshavsky, 1976; Rabinowitz, 1987; Smith & Hillocks, 1988). The skills include being able to support claims by drawing from both the text in question and from knowledge of other texts, personal beliefs, belief systems (social, political, philosophical, or religious), or literary theories that articulate particular propositions about the nature of texts (Appleman, 2000; Schoenbach et al., 2012). Thus, fundamental to teaching literary analysis are

² This effort parallels similar endeavors in history and science under the auspices of Project READI, a multi-institution, interdisciplinary collaboration whose goal is the research and development of interventions that promote disciplinary argumentation (Goldman, 2009).

argumentation processes (oral and written) that make interpretive strategies and criteria explicit (Lee, 2007).

Literary argumentation processes depend on close attention to the text and thus invoke basic processes of reading comprehension. We adopted a widely accepted cognitive discourse processing approach to thinking about basic comprehension processes and the representations readers construct of text (cf. Goldman, 2004; Kintsch, 1988, 1998; van den Broek, 1996; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). This class of models asserts that comprehension results in different “levels” of representation of a text, most commonly described as surface code, textbase, and situation model (Kintsch, 1994). *Surface code* captures the specific words, syntax, and prosody of the text. The *textbase* refers to the semantic meaning of the text. The *situation model* draws from prior knowledge to construct the world of the story, i.e. the settings, people, plot events, and causal links. However, to account for literary interpretation, we assume that additional “levels” of representation need to be postulated. Literary text is *point-driven*, meaning that when we read literature, we attempt to construct a mental model representative of the author’s possible intentions or messages in crafting the literary work (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Vipond & Hunt, 1984).

It is crucial to understand that the epistemologies underlying literary interpretation mean that the reader, depending on the interpretive lens through which he/she reads, may reject what he/she reads as the intent of the author. To understand a hypothesized point, the reader must go beyond the traditional boundaries of situation models of stories, and consider more general messages about the human experience that the author might be trying to convey. Doing so relies on close attention to how authors “craft” the story through their choices about types of characters and plot structures. Additionally, rhetorical devices communicated through specific words,

repetitions, parallelisms, and juxtapositions convey mood, intent, and point of view. These plot structures, character types, and rhetorical devices may be used to convey broad pragmatic functions like symbolism, satire, or irony (Lee, 2007; Rabinowitz, 1987).

Both the basic processes of reading as well as those needed for literary argumentation are amenable to oral and collaborative meaning construction as well as to individual and print-based production and thus provide rich contexts for building oral language and content knowledge (Anderson, Chinn, Wagoner, & Nguyen, 1998; Billings, 1999; Goldman & Bloome, 2005). In efforts to transform high school literature study, classroom discussion has been a centerpiece of instructional activities (Langer, 2010, 2011; Lee, 2005, 2007). Discussions create opportunities for students to try out their ideas and reflect on the knowledge and processes they use to understand basic story events, recognize literary devices, and create interpretations of complex literary works. Conversations of this type are described as dialogic and supportive of exploration of ideas central to the developing understandings of readers and writers (Alvermann et al., 1996; Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995) and to individual reasoning (Cazden, 2001; Commeyras, 1994; Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, & Anderson, 1995).

The rich, interpretive, dialogic classroom discussions that were observed in both Langer's (2010) and Lee's (2005, 2007) work and that have also been observed in students as young as six (Lipman, 1975), require appropriate instructional conditions. These "conditions" include accessible content and appropriate instructional scaffolds such as questioning routines and rhetorical frames (Anderson et al., 1998; Banks, 1987; Beck, McKeown, Worthy, Sandora, & Kucan, 1996; Chamberlain, 1993; Goatley, Brock & Raphael, 1995; Langer, 2010; Lee, 2007; Lipman, 1975; Raphael, Gavelek, & Daniels, 1998; Reznitskaya et al. 2008).

With this background in mind, the Literature Design team of Project READI developed an architecture for designing instructional modules for literary analysis and interpretation. The architecture constitutes a theory of what it takes to support students in developing competence with literary analysis. The architecture includes four major components.

1. Core constructs of the discipline of literature and literary analysis. This knowledge and skills are cast as six learning objectives, as follows.³
 - a. Engage in close reading of literary texts to construct interpretation(s) of human experience based on types of plots, characters, and use of language and rhetorical devices. Close reading encompasses meta-comprehension and self-regulation of the process.
 - b. Synthesize within and across literary texts, patterns, and anomalies in order to construct generalizations about theme, characterization, and the functions of structural and language choices made by authors.
 - c. Construct claim-evidence relations using data from the text(s), from the reader's own experiences, from other texts, and from literary constructs and critical traditions. Explain the logic of how evidence supports claims.
 - d. Establish criteria for judging interpretations with respect to themes for connecting use of language to theme. Warrant using key concepts (moral, philosophical context; historical context; traditions of critical theory; intertextuality).
 - e. Develop structural and thematic interpretations that are derived from more general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures. Such

³ Project READI has done parallel analyses of history and science.

knowledge may have been constructed outside the modules in this progression, or can be introduced within the modules.

- f. Epistemology: Demonstrate understanding that texts are open dialogues between readers and texts; literary works embody authors' interpretations of some aspect of the human condition; authors make specific choices about language, images, symbols; patterns in language provide clues to messages/interpretations of literary works.
2. Tasks that are meaningful for disciplinary practice and whose completion requires analysis of text, synthesis within and across texts, comparison and contrast, and connections to understandings and experiences of the human condition as reflected in other texts or personal knowledge.
3. Text materials that provide access to use of language and rhetorical devices (e.g., figurative use of language), experience with a variety of plot and character types and genres, and exposure to important life themes (e.g., coming of age, survival, facing fears). Texts include multiple media and forms in which information is presented, including traditional print genre, graphic novels, cartoons, videos, whether available electronically or physically. Text materials support comprehension at multiple levels, including sequenced sets of text that increase in linguistic and conceptual complexity over the time course of instruction (a module, a semester, an academic year). For a given module, a set of texts is selected to support a particular interpretive problem in literature (e.g., symbolism, irony, satire).
4. Instructional routines and supports provide students with experiences to both scaffold and socialize them into developing and using the core knowledge, strategies and

dispositions that characterize literary reasoning. These include annotation and talking to text routines for engaging in close reading (Schoenbach et al., 2012); gateway activities to activate prior knowledge of content and criteria for evaluating thematic issues (Hillocks, 1986; Smith, 1991); cultural data sets to help students make explicit interpretive processes they use in everyday life that are relevant to literary analysis (Lee, 1995, 2007); reflection on sensemaking processes (Lee, 2001); and timely and informative feedback on student thinking and work products. Classroom discussion plays a central role in these routines both in terms of models of academic and disciplinary discourse and venues for making thinking visible. In addition, templates support thinking by providing models for constructing interpretations and make explicit language structures for comprehension, interpretation, and argument-writing processes (character and plot maps, worksheets for tracking potential symbols, sentence starters). Many of these routines and templates are realized in variable classroom participation structures ranging from individual to pairs to small groups to whole class. These groupings make space in the classroom for students to talk with others and hear what others have to say, providing opportunities for socially constructed comprehension, interpretation, and awareness of sources of difficulty in making sense of text (Lee, 2001). These conversations thus serve as a way to make public the classroom community's efforts to make sense of text, and establish norms of persistence in the face of difficulty.

We concretize this architecture by describing the specific 9th grade module that was designed and implemented in the present study.

Design of an Instructional Intervention for Ninth Grade: Symbolism and Coming of Age⁴

The ninth grade literature module is one example of how we instantiated the general architecture of the literature intervention. We use the term “module” to refer to an instructional sequence similar to a unit that targets specific instantiations of the pedagogical strategies for supporting the development of the knowledge and skills referred to in the learning objectives discussed above. In this case the module deals with one interpretive problem, symbolism, and one life theme, coming of age. Symbolism is a common rhetorical device used by authors to invite readers to make interpretations beyond the literal. The ability to detect when something is intended to be figurative rather than literal is a powerful skill in literary reasoning. When readers are able to detect and reconstruct potential interpretations of symbols, they are able to access a wide range of literary texts (Lee, 2007). Likewise, coming of age is an archetypal theme in many literary works. It captures crucial experiences that characterize the transition from adolescence toward the maturity of adulthood. Because adolescence is such an important period of physical, psychological, cognitive and emotional transitions, examining rich literary texts that provide opportunities for youth to reflect critically about their own coming of age experiences can be empowering (Lee, 2007).

The symbolism/coming of age module was the first attempt to engage the students in this ninth grade class in literary analysis and we recognized that we had to target a subset of the six learning objectives for literary analysis and interpretation as the goals of this module, intended to extend over 16 lessons. Specifically, the intervention module focused on close reading of literary texts to identify that which might be symbolic and explain the processes by which they were identified; provide evidence for claims about the meaning and importance of particular symbols;

⁴ The design of the module was a collaborative effort of the Literature Design Team of Project READI and consisted of university based researchers and classroom-based teachers. Specifically, the team consisted of the authors of the present paper along with Sarah Levine, Jenny Gustavson, Rick Coppola, and MariAnne George.

form generalizations about the patterns of salient details within texts to form generalizations about the coming of age life theme. The module included multiple occasions on which students were to engage in oral arguments through small-group and whole-class discussions as well as individual writing assignments focused on claims about symbolic meanings and the evidence for these claims.

Tasks

Tasks included in this module were organized in a sequence that was designed to first focus on identifying what was symbolic in texts and the rules or heuristics suggesting a non-literal interpretation. A second focus was on interpreting and evaluating identified symbolic language using evidence from the text and everyday knowledge of the world and human intentionality. Identified targets for symbolic meaning were compared to determine which were most supported and important to overall themes in the text. The third task built on the second and addressed possible thematic abstractions that readers could make about what the texts conveyed about the characters in the story and more broadly about the world beyond the text. Early in the module the focus was on identification; in the middle of the module, identification was reviewed and practiced but interpretation was the focus; in the last segment of the module students reviewed and practiced identification and interpretation but the instructional focus was on the message(s) of the story.

Materials: Text Selection and Sequence

Two primary considerations went into the construction of the text set used for this module: The demographics of the school population and the complexity of the texts. We wanted texts that dealt with content relevant to coming of age challenges that could be closely connected to the experiences of students in this school. Because the school has a majority Hispanic

population that is increasing through the arrival of new immigrants, we intentionally chose texts that emphasize cultural, immigrant, and assimilation issues and experiences, in particular, experiences related to being torn between two ways of life - between assimilating and trying to stay connected to one's own heritage and values. As well, the text set in this module included characters who wrestled with making sense of oppressive conditions not of their making and who experienced supports (sometimes internal psychological beliefs, sometimes external supports from others) that enabled them to be resilient and to learn lessons about an adult world that they would soon enter.

The sequence of texts increased in conceptual and linguistic complexity over the course of the module. Complexity was indexed by traditional quantitative indices but more importantly by in depth analyses of the concepts and experiences conveyed in the texts relative to the students' experiences and what students were being asked to do with them. The initial texts were relatively short (200 words) and the experiences of the characters more similar to those of the students. Subsequent texts dealt with more distal experiences and were longer. In this text sequence, the added length increased the complexity of symbol identification, interpretation, and evaluation over the earlier stories, in part because there *was* more text to think about. For example, the text sequence began with an excerpt from *When I Was Puerto Rican* (Santiago, 1993), a semi-autobiographical story about 13 year old Esmeralda who experiences many difficult times including the separation of her parents and having to get used to living in New York after moving from Puerto Rico. In New York, Esmeralda experiences the difficulties of racism and learning a new language. The last text in the sequence, the chapter "Two Kinds" from *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, 1989) is told from the perspective of an adult from an Asian culture thinking back on a particular episode in her childhood that had great impact in her life. The

complete set of texts, in sequence, was the following: 1) Excerpt from *When I Was Puerto Rican* (Santiago, 1993); 2) Vignette “Four Skinny Trees” from *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1991); 3) the poem “A Song in the Front Yard” (Brooks, 1963); 4) the chapter “Two Kinds” from *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, 1989). (See Appendix B for readability levels for each text, including Lexile ratings and Flesch Kincaid.)

Instructional Supports

Instructional supports were designed to activate prior experiences and build background knowledge, make thinking processes explicit, model and scaffold the intellectual work of close reading, especially noticing symbols, interpreting them, inferring themes, and presenting evidence for the interpretations and themes.

Activating prior experiences and building background knowledge. The module design includes instructional activities that are designed to help students access information and ways of processing information that are already part of their cognitive repertoires, and to build background knowledge that they may not have. Cultural modeling (Lee, 2007) is the instructional approach used to activate knowledge of processes for identifying and reasoning through interpretive problems, such as the symbolism focus of this module. Gateway activities (Hillocks, 1986; Smith, 1991) were designed to elicit criteria for making judgments about themes students would meet in the texts (e.g. coming of age). In addition, expository and multi-media texts were used to build background knowledge of the settings.

The Cultural Modeling Framework is based on empirical research documenting that outside of school youth engage in language production and reasoning processes that are similar to those required for deep literary reasoning (Lee, 1995, 2007). The framework calls for the use of cultural data sets that include language samples from everyday contexts, including pop culture

that embody the same interpretive problem as canonical texts students are going to read in school. They may be song lyrics, movie clips, advertisements, or jokes that students routinely process outside of school. In other words, cultural data sets provide models from students' everyday lives of the interpretive problems that are needed to reason about a range of problems posed by canonical literatures. In the case of the module used in the present study, cultural data sets were used at the beginning of the module to make explicit the strategies used in identifying and making sense of targets that are symbolic. A PowerPoint containing pictures of everyday symbols (e.g., dove, wedding rings) anchored discussion of how students knew the pictured objects were symbols. Over time the goal was to help students distinguish between symbols as signs (e.g. the red octagon as the sign meaning stop) and symbols as archetypal and targets where the meaning needed to be constructed rather than assumed. The lyrics of two popular songs were used to elicit from students what they identified as symbolic in the songs and the processes they were using to identify them. The familiarity of the objects and text forms makes the processes more accessible to students. Having made these processes explicit they can then apply them to canonical texts (Lee, 2005, 2007). Cultural data sets invite an important type of metacognitive instructional conversation in that students talk about how they use strategies for detecting and making sense of symbols.

Gateway activities help students articulate what they already know as well as build background knowledge about particular topics, themes or character types that are featured in a literary work. Gateway activities also prepare students for establishing criteria for making judgments about themes and character types (Hillocks, 1986; Smagorinsky et al, 1987; Smith, 1989). Gateway activities for a specific text depend on careful analysis of the knowledge assumed by the author and what is needed to construct hypotheses about potential meanings in a

text. Conceptual complexity of a text increases when readers lack the knowledge the author presumes the reader brings. Not all texts require *building* background knowledge but frequently it is useful to use gateway activities as an opportunity for students to make explicit what they know and to build criteria to infer themes. In the 9th grade symbolism/coming of age module all the literary texts highlighted how tensions arise when allegiances to differing cultural norms come into conflict. We used one gateway activity prior to the first literary text to introduce these types of tensions. Excerpts from a book of oral histories of recent immigrants, titled “An Immigrant Class: Oral Histories from Chicago’s Newest Immigrants” (Libman, 2004) were used to interrogate issues of immigration and dilemmas of assimilation that students were then able to bring to the analysis of the literary texts that followed.

We used a second gateway activity to build background knowledge necessary for the last literary text of the module. “Two Kinds” is about tensions between Asian and Asian American traditions and the gateway activities were intended to help students gain some understanding of tensions between traditional Chinese beliefs and practices and encounters among Chinese American immigrants. Student first explored the meanings of Asian proverbs related to filial respect and obedience and then students viewed a video of an extreme style of parenting (Amy Chua/Tiger Mom, "Didn't Expect this Level of Intensity!" ABCNews, 1/26/2011) and connected this practice to traditional hierarchies in Asian cultures. These two activities provided students a better understanding of why the narrator and her mom were at odds with each other.

Socializing and scaffolding close reading and symbolic interpretation. Instructional supports for close reading helped provide students with strategies and approaches for accessing the text content. Supports included annotating and answering questions related to basic levels of understanding (plot and characters), making inferences, and moving to author generalizations

(paying attention to the broader messages of stories) (Hillocks & Ludlow, 1984). To build skills related to text-based discussions and analysis, we used modeling such as making “visible” our thought process of how we traced the plot of a story, identified and connected symbols and characters, and used this information in formulating evidence for claims about characters in the stories and possible messages of the story. Modeling was followed by individual and small group work in which students used the approaches that had been modeled, typically with the support of worksheets that structured the process that had been modeled. Table 1 shows the headers of three of the worksheets used to support identification of symbols (Sample 1), use of evidence from the text to interpret identified symbols (Sample 2), and use of symbolic interpretations to make claims about particular characters and their worlds (Sample 3) (Lee, 2007, pp.54, 56). Character maps and plot structure worksheets were also used with the more complex texts.

Table 1

Varied groupings and participation structures were also used (pairs, presentation teams) to reinforce persistence in close reading tasks for noticing symbols, interpreting them, inferring themes, and presenting evidence for interpretations and themes. By providing opportunities to show competency in groups, students were encouraged to build on their contributions to a group and to later try the work on their own. Also, to prepare for whole class discussions, students often worked in pairs to go over their symbols and interpretations. This was intended to help students clarify meanings and connections they were making as well as surface what did not make sense to them. Both what did and did not make sense were shared with the larger group.

Appendix A provides the sequence and combinations of tasks, texts, instructional supports and targeted literary knowledge and skills. Figure 1 provides the objectives and related texts used over the 21 days of the module. Instruction began with a gateway activity for

argumentation taken from Hillocks (2011). These particular gateway activities are short mystery scenarios that help students make claims about what happened in a pictured scene, look for evidence to support their claims, and write warrants or reasoning that connect claims to evidence. The gateway activity on the immigrant experience then activated and built prior knowledge relevant to challenges of immigrant status and the coming of age theme. Symbolism was introduced on the fourth and fifth day using a cultural data set consisting of two songs. Emphasis was on identifying that which was symbolic and on making explicit how we know an image, person, event, or idea has more than a literal meaning. The scaffold worksheet for identifying symbols (Sample 1 in Table 1) was introduced on Day 5. On Day 6 and for the next 4 days, students worked with the first literary text *When I was Puerto Rican* (Santiago, 1993). They then engaged in close reading, annotating for basic and interpretive understanding as well as identifying that which was potentially symbolic and constructing a basic argument about one symbol and its possible meaning. Days 11 and 12 consisted of practice in identifying and interpreting symbols in the vignette “Four Skinny Trees” (Cisneros, 1991) using the symbol identification worksheet (Sample 2 in Table 1). The prompt for “what the symbol means” (column 4 in Sample 2) referred to the words in the text and associations but did not circumscribe the meaning further. On days 13 and 14 they continued identification and interpretation but moved to a poem, “A Song in the Front Yard” (Brooks, 1963). The next five days of the module were devoted to the story “Two Kinds,” a chapter from *The Joy Luck Club* (Tan, 1989), with the gateway activity designed to build knowledge about Asian culture preceding the introduction of the text. With “Two Kinds” the instructional emphasis on symbolism moved to explicitly using interpretations of symbols to understand story characters and their worlds, supported by the third symbolism scaffold (Sample 3 in Table 1). The last two

days of the module were devoted to writing an argument in which students made claims and used evidence from the text to compare and contrast the symbols, interpretations, and messages about the characters and their worlds in *When I was Puerto Rican* and “Two Kinds.” For this writing, students used an argument template that heavily scaffolded the first paragraph to present a synthesis argument on how the symbols in each story help readers to understand the characters and their worlds. The second through fourth paragraphs of the template provided less support with each successive paragraph. The first paragraph was written as a whole class; students then went on to complete their essays individually.

Figure 1

Methods

Implementation of the Ninth-Grade Symbolism/Coming of Age Module

The ninth-grade symbolism/coming of age module was implemented in two sections of Ms. Larson’s (all names are pseudonyms) 9th grade classes, located in Douglass High School. Douglass is a large suburban school in a Midwestern state with approximately 2300 students. The racial and ethnic makeup of the school is roughly 50% white, 33% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 4% Black. The 9th grade classes in which the intervention was carried out reflect recent influxes of Hispanic students to the area. In both sections, Hispanic students comprised over 90% of class. The two sections of ninth grade students were part of an integrated program for freshmen in reading, English, mathematics, and social science that, according to the school’s website, “provides small group instruction, intensive tutorial help, and a focus on study strategies, counseling, support, and systematic parental contact.” The students who are part of the program are identified in eighth grade through high school placement data, including reading scores below 30th percentile, and counselor recommendation. Section 1 (3rd period) comprised

14 students, nine boys and five girls, and Section 2 (4th period) 13 students, nine boys and four girls.

Ms. Larson implemented the module in the 4th period section and the first author of this paper, a former high school English teacher with seven years of experience in a large public school system, taught the 3rd period section. Throughout the module implementation, Ms. Larson and the first author observed each other's instruction and debriefed and planned together so that implementation across the two sections was consistent. The intervention took place over five weeks, typically four days per week for 45 minutes a day per section.

Data Sources

Consistent with a micro-ethnographic study, a researcher and observer were present each day of the instruction. They took field notes and videotaped whole class instruction each day as well as students' presentations to the whole class. As well, small group work was audio recorded and copies of all of the students' written work throughout the module were collected. Module implementation was preceded by an interpretive essay task and the task was re-administered at the conclusion of the module. The field notes, videotapes, and pre and post assessments constitute the data sources for this paper.

Pre/post Interpretive Essay Assessment

For the pre- and post-assessment, students read two stories that were not part of the implementation of the module and wrote an essay in response to the following prompt.

You have read two stories: [story title by author] and [story title by author]. In both stories, the main characters experience something that has a great impact on them.

One way the authors show that impact is through the symbols the authors create in their stories. Symbols are words or phrases in stories that stand for more

than what they seem to be. These words or phrases could be images, actions, objects, or characters (what they do, how they think, how they look, their names).

Write an essay that compares and contrasts how the symbols in each story help you understand the characters and their worlds.

Students were told to first read the stories and then keeping the texts present, they wrote their essay. The pre- and the posttests were each conducted over two class periods of 45 minutes each on two consecutive days. The pretest was administered the week prior to beginning the module implementation and the posttest was given on two consecutive days within 1 to 3 days of completing the implementation of the module.

Two story sets were developed so that students would write on a different set of stories at pre- than at posttest. Story set was counterbalanced, with half the students in each section receiving Set A at pre and B at post and the other half Set B at pre and A at post. Text set A consisted of “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros (1984) - 1266 words - and a shortened version of “The Butterfly” by John Hanley (1961) - 991 words. Text Set B consisted of “The Flowers” by Alice Walker (1988) - 566 words - and an excerpt from “We Were the Mulvaney’s” by Joyce Carol Oates (1996) - 629 words. The following process was used to select stories and create story sets for use in the pre/post assessment. Coming of age was a dominant theme. There was a presence in the story of prominent symbolism that was critical to understanding the coming of age theme. Complexity was appropriate to adolescents from grade 6 to 12 (ages 12 – 18).⁵ Complexity judgments were based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Quantitative indices in the form of word counts, Lexile ratings, Flesch Reading Ease, and Flesh Kincaid Grade Levels for each text are provided in tables in Appendix B. The Lexile Ratings indicate reading levels from 610L to 1080L, which are at or below levels typical for Grade 9

⁵ These story sets and this task were also administered to the other literature classes participating in the Project READI development and implementation of these modules and were used in a larger data collection effort to establish stories pairs that were roughly equivalent in difficulty.

(www.lexile.com). The Flesch Kincaid Grade Levels range from 3.43 for “The Butterfly” to 6.85 for “Mulvaney’s.”

As discussed earlier, quantitative indices of readability do not capture the conceptual complexity of a literary work, so we used both in-depth text analysis of the demands of symbolic and thematic interpretation along with quantitative indices in selecting stories for use in the pre/post assessment (Goldman & Lee, in press). All four texts share a coming of age theme and offer thematic abstractions that can be drawn from text intended to convey symbolic import. The texts in Set A, “Eleven” and the “The Butterfly,” highlight a sense of oppression experienced by the main character and brought on by someone in a position of power. In “Eleven,” for example, the main character is forced by her teacher to wear an ugly sweater that is not hers. “The Flowers” and “We Were the Mulvaney’s” represent a growing awareness of death and loss of childhood innocence. We anticipated that canonical interpretations of these texts would be highly challenging for 9th grade students, particularly at the pre-test. Absolute levels of performance were of less interest than changes in performance from pre to post test, especially with respect to what such patterns indicated about the effectiveness of the module as a whole and with respect to the various learning objectives.

Coding of the Pre/Post Assessment

Essays were evaluated on eight dimensions that captured important elements of literary argumentation. For each dimension, rubrics were developed by the Project READI literature team to capture differences in the quality of responses. These differences defined an ordered set of score points for each dimension that reflected the sophistication of the response with respect to argumentation and literary interpretation skills. The rubrics and definitions of the score points were developed iteratively using a subset of the essays collected from the students in this

implementation as well as from a broader sample of essays collected from students in classrooms ranging from sixth through twelfth grades in conjunction with the larger Project READI research and development agenda (cf. Lee, Briner, Levine, et al., in preparation). In developing the system of rubrics the essays were coded to “blind” information that identified grade level and whether the essay was written prior to or after implementation of a READI module on symbolism and coming of age.

The eight dimensions and the details of the rubrics used for scoring are provided in Appendix C and summarized here.

Claims are assertions made about the characters, their worlds, or what the symbols in the texts “meant.” The ordering of the score point categories reflects increases in the number of claims, their accuracy, their connection to one another, and whether they included nested or counter-claims.

Function of claims refers to how the claim was used in the essay. A claim could simply summarize what happened in the story (i.e., recap a sequence of story events), describe the character or world of the text, or examine how the language of the text explained the character or the world of the text.

Evidence refers to the use of information from the text to support a claim(s) (e.g., “I think flowers are a symbol because they change like the feelings of the main character change during the story” where the underlined portion of the sentence is the evidence.). The rubric score points range from no accurate evidence provided to increasing amounts of accurate evidence.

Reasoning indicates whether warrants are provided explicitly or implicitly and how many and whether they appealed to cultural or literary norms. Warrants are principles or “rules” that relate evidence to claims (e.g., “When people are angry, they generally lash out at others”).

Symbolism captures identification, interpretation, and type of interpretation in terms of whether the interpretation was local to the text or went beyond the immediate world of the text. Interpretation that is local to the text might be “The flowers represent Myop’s loss of carefree attitude through the stark realization of death.” Interpretation that is beyond the immediate world of the text might be “The flowers represent how understanding the cruel realities of life can lead to loss of childhood innocence.”

Coming of age addresses whether the essay included discussion of the development of the character or characters in terms of some criteria of coming of age and whether the essay connected what the character learned or how the character changed to the symbolism in the text. In these text sets, stories were paired because the coming of age theme was communicated through symbolic language. Statements about coming of age had to go beyond simply identifying a trait of a character (e.g. “Myop seems innocent”); they had to discuss some kind of development or realization related to criteria for what constitutes a coming of age experience (e.g. “Myop seems innocent at first, but then loses that innocence when...”).

Organization of ideas differentiated among no evidence, some, or clear organization of the ideas in the essay.

Finally, the dimension *Synthesis* addressed whether the essay compared or contrasted the two stories, and, if so, whether the connection was at a surface level (e.g., Characters in both stories lived on a farm) or explicitly compared or contrasted symbols using evidence from each text.

Once the definitions of the dimensions and score points were stabilized, the first two authors scored all of the essays in these two 9th grade sections and reached 88% agreement on score point assignments. A third reviewer (a member of the READI literature design team) then

scored six of the essays selected at random. That reviewer reached 84% agreement on the scores for the six essays. Any conflicts in scoring were resolved through discussion. (See Appendix D for sample scoring of an essay.) Note that with the exception of the Synthesis dimension each story in a pair received a score on each dimension.

Analysis of Classroom Videos

The pre/post essay assessment provided a means of examining changes in individual student's knowledge and skills in crafting a literary argument. We were also interested in whether and how literary argument changed in oral discussion. Analyses of the classroom discussions occurred in three phases: thematic content analysis of the field notes; segmentation into instructional episodes; in-depth analyses of videos of a purposeful sample of lessons.

Thematic content analysis. The primary purpose of this first phase was to ascertain if, as suggested our informal observations, field notes provided evidence that there had been changes in student participation and quality of argumentation and literary interpretation over the course of the module. The first two authors engaged in repeated readings and re-readings and thematic summarization of the field notes and analytic memos for the two sections. They independently wrote descriptions of what each "saw" in the discourse and classroom discussions, paying close attention to differences noted in the early, mid, and end-of-module discussions. The thematic content analysis was guided by prior work on characteristics of classroom discussion and literary talk that have been found to support sense making and meaning construction in which students deepen their own reasoning with evidence and learn how to build or critique the reasoning of others (Chinn & Anderson, 1998; Lee, 2001; Resnick, Michaels, & O'Connor, 2010; Wolf, Crosson, & Resnick, 2005). Features of discussions that provide evidence of this generally include use of newly acquired knowledge (Mercer, Wegerif, & Dawes, 1999), building and

interacting with each other's comments (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Wells & Arauz, 2006), and questioning the text, theme or peer's claims (Chinn & Anderson, 1998; Wells, 2007). Features specific to literary analysis include rules of notice for rhetorical devices, multiple interpretations of a literary work, and evaluation of evidence and reasoning for interpretive claims (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Hillocks, 2011; Langer, 2010; Lee, 2007; Rabinowitz, 1987).

The summaries suggested the presence of changes indicating more involvement in interpretive argumentation by more of the students. In particular, the summaries provided indications of differences in interpretive moves students were using, the interpretations advanced, and whether there were competing interpretations or diffusion of ideas regarding symbolic meaning over the course of the module. These themes were evident in both sections. Based on this first phase of analysis we proceeded to more in depth analyses of the videos for one of the sections, Section 1.

Segmentation of instructional episodes. All twenty-one lessons of the module as implemented in section 1 were segmented using the field notes. Segments were based on episodes of instruction. Episodes were defined as classroom activity during the instructional period that centered on a particular goal or topic (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2004). For example, most instructional days had two to three episodes; these episodes were generally 1) a review or instruction of skills related to objectives of the module, 2) group, small group, or individual work with support handouts, and 3) sharing out either through small group presentations or whole-class discussions. Each segment was then coded for instructional objectives (interpretive problem, theme, argumentation), materials (text type, text purpose, and scaffolds), and classroom activities (participation structures, teacher activities, and student

activities). The first two authors established reliability on segmenting and coding of the lessons. The second author segmented and coded all lessons and the first author did the same for 20% of the lessons. Cohen's Kappa was 100% on number of episodes occurring in the instructional day and 98% for the labeling of instructional objectives, materials, and classroom activities for each episode.

Intentional sample of lessons. The segmenting was used to select specific instructional episodes for deeper analysis related to oral argumentation and literary interpretation. To more precisely document this, we adopted an intentional sampling strategy and selected lessons that occurred at the beginning, middle, or end of the module. Specifically, we sampled classroom discussions that focused on symbol identification and/or interpretation early, midway, and close to the end of the module (indicated in Figure 1 in bold). Discussions were then analyzed for identification of literary arguments specific to identification of symbols (instructional focus of beginning lesson), evidence and reasoning for why a word or phrase in the story was symbolic, including structural features of text (instructional focus of middle lesson), and interpretation of the symbol in terms of explicitly tying symbols to the character or story world (instructional focus of the end of the module). The three selected lessons were transcribed, and the class discussions that were about symbolic interpretation of texts were analyzed for student participation and the nature of the arguments.

Results of the Module Implementation

We first report patterns of change on the pre and post essay assessment for both sections of students to determine the degree to which the implementation of the module supported improvements in the learning objectives related to literary argumentation, symbolism, and

thematic interpretation. We then report on the analyses of the beginning, middle, and end of the module classroom discussions for Section 1 (3rd period).

Pre/Post Essay Assessments

Analyses of the rubric scores on each dimension at pre and post module intervention were computed for the combined sample of students in both sections (N = 22). Preliminary analyses compared the dimension scores given to each story in the pre- or posttest set (except for Synthesis). In only 10% of the cases were there any differences in the scores on the two stories within a set. In those cases, we used the higher of the two scores. Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests were calculated for each dimension on the rubric, as is appropriate with non-parametric data of this type.

Significant improvement in rubric score points from pre- to posttest occurred for three of the dimensions: *Claims* ($z = 2.04, p = .041$), *Functions of Claims* ($z = 2.11, p = .035$), and *Symbolism* ($z = 3.26, p = .001$). The frequency distributions are shown in Figure 2a, b, and c. The students who improved on *Claims* tended to move from one or two unconnected claims to making claims that were connected. No essay received a score of four, which would include nested claims or counterclaims. Increases for *Function of Claims* reflected more students making claims specifically referring to the character or the world of the text. The modal score moved from score point 0 to 1. No essay received a 2, which would have indicated an examination of how the language of the text functioned to explain a character's internal state and/or social world of the text. Students showed the greatest gains in *Symbolism* with more students being able to either identify or both identify and interpret symbols on the post-test. On the pre-test, all of the students received a score of 0, making no attempt to attribute symbolic significance. On the post-

test, the majority of students who improved received a score of 1, indicating that they identified a symbol in the text.

Figure 2a

Figure 2b

Figure 2c

The scores for *Evidence*, *Reasoning*, *Coming of Age*, and *Synthesis* did not change significantly from pre-test to post-test. For *Evidence*, about 70% of the students gave some evidence on both pre- and posttest. For *Reasoning*, about 60% of the students demonstrated implicit reasoning in their arguments on both pre- and posttest. One student used explicit reasoning on the posttest. *Coming of Age* scores started at zero and remained at zero for every student. About half of the students used some level of *Synthesis* on both the pre- and posttests. Finally, *Organization of Ideas* showed some improvement but it was not statistically significant, ($z = 1.93, p = .053$). Frequency distributions of scores for the dimensions that did not change significantly from pre- to posttest are provided in Appendix E.

Table 2 provides one 3rd period student's (PJ) essays as illustrative of pre- and post module essays, along with the scoring of them. Changes in PJ's essays from pre - to post-module reflect the trends in the sample as a whole for *Claims* and *Function of Claims*. On the pre-module assessment, PJ provided one claim in the first sentence. Post module, PJ provided multiple connected claims: identifying a symbol, interpreting the symbol, and explaining the interpretation. With regard to *Function of Claims*, the pre-module essay did not indicate what the larger message of the story might be. However, in the post essay, the last sentence provides an interpretation of the larger message of the story. The essay did not explicitly address how the author used language to convey that message, so it did not warrant a score of *two*. Changes on

Symbolism were substantial. There was no identification of symbols in the pre-essay but in the post essay, PJ identified a symbol (numbers) and attempted an abstract interpretation of the symbol that went beyond the immediate world of the text, a score point of 3. PJ's essay at post was among the few that achieved this score on symbolism.

Table 2

In the sample as a whole, *Evidence* and *Reasoning* score distributions were similar at pre- and posttest. PJ's two essays provided some textual *evidence* to support the main claim, citing sections of the story in each case. There was only an implicit connection between the segments of the story that were included in the essays and the claim statement (Pre: "Like it said..."; Post: "When she says...") and the *reasoning* score was a 1 in both cases. The essays were similarly structured and received a score of 1 on *organization* for both essays. There was no mention of the coming of age theme and no synthesis in either essay so both of these scores were 0.

The essay assessments show some evidence of impact of the module on students' literary interpretation skills, with changes in symbolism the most striking. But these gains were largely in terms of identifying and interpreting symbols in the context of the story world. Relatively few students interpreted symbols in ways that moved beyond the world of the text. Function of Claims is also central to literary reasoning and it too reflected positive change from pre - to post - module. However, students were still focused on the text events and did not make claims about how the authors used language to convey their messages. Of the dimensions that reflect changes in argument construction (Claims, Evidence, and Reasoning), only claims showed any changes from pre to post module. We return to a discussion of the implications of the trends in the essays following the results of the analyses of the classroom discussions.

Classroom Discussions

We analyzed the structure and content of three classroom discussions as described above, for purposes of examining changes in literary argumentation over the course of the module. Classroom discussions are potentially at the “opposite end” of performance based on an individual working alone in the written language mode: multiple students contribute ideas; teachers, and sometimes peers, facilitate the discussion; and meaning is constructed in the “here and now” allowing for clarification and elaboration in the moment.

As mentioned earlier, the initial thematic content analysis did suggest that literary argumentation changed in response to the three instructional foci over the course of the module: identification of symbols, evidence from the text that supports the symbolic claim, and symbolic interpretation as a vehicle for understanding author’s message. The in-depth analyses of the three discussions examined whether there were changes in who participated and how much and in the structure of the discussions in terms of the literary reasoning in which students were engaging.

Frequency and distribution of talk. Table 3 summarizes frequency and distribution of talk during lessons that occurred at the beginning, middle and end of the module in one section – 3rd period with 14 students enrolled in this section. Initials indicate individual students. For convenience we have included the instructional focus and texts for each of these lessons.

Table 3

The analysis of student participation in the classroom discussion indicates that both the number of different students and the number of contributions made by students increased over the course of the module. There was greater variability in how much particular students said, reflected in number of words per student: in the beginning student contributions to the discussion are sparse; in the middle of the module, discussion is dominated by two students, CJ and YR, in particular; and by the end of the module, discussion is distributed more evenly across ten

students. Thus, the trend over the course of the module is one of increased student participation and contributions to the substance of the discussions. These trends occurred even as the texts, topics and foci of the lesson became more complex across the span of the module. However, it should also be noted that most of the time, students' contributions were directed toward the teacher, indicating that the discussions were largely teacher mediated. However, and as will be expanded further in the next sections, discussions were mainly analytic, focusing on character dilemmas and interpreting larger messages through symbols.

Content of the discussions. Qualitative analyses of the discourse during whole class discussions indicated that in addition to more students being involved and increases in amount of student talk, there were clear shifts in what students were talking about, with control over the topic shifting from teacher to students.

Beginning of module discussion. This particular lesson was an introduction to symbolism (Day 4 in Figure 1). The instructional focus was on discussing a variety of symbols that are present in our everyday culture and making explicit how we know they are symbols. The first part of this lesson used a powerpoint presentation of a variety of objects including flags, team emblems, a rose, and the Statue of Liberty. To some extent, the teacher tried to provide a context that would change the meaning of particular symbols in the powerpoint. For example, in showing the image of a rose, there was a conversation about why someone would rather be given red roses than yellow, and why someone would be so thrilled to receive red roses instead of dandelions.

The second part of the lesson applied the same process – symbol identification and discussion of how we know something is a symbol – to song lyrics. The lyrics were from Cindi Lauper's song "True Colors" In the song, the title and chorus lines repeat the words "true

colors,” realizing two rules of notice – repetition and titles (Rabinowitz, 1987). The song, although originally a hit in the 1980’s had been re-popularized through the television program *Glee*.

This lesson was the first in which students were asked to analyze a text to identify targets that could be symbolic and to explain the basis of their identification – with respect to features of the text or prior experience. In conjunction with this task, students had been given the worksheet scaffold shown in Table 1, Sample 1. This worksheet was intended to help students record their thinking about what symbols they were identifying and what they thought they meant.

Associations (column 2 in the worksheet) was intended as a bridge between literal meaning and figurative meaning of the symbol in the context of the song. For example, if they indicated that True Colors was a symbol, by making associations with the word “colors” and recognizing that the title could not literally refer to the person’s actual skin, students would provide a range of symbolic interpretations. Discussion led by the teacher was focused on getting the students to articulate what they were identifying as symbols and why they thought these were indeed symbols. In the following segment of the classroom discourse, lack of clarity about the task and about criteria for symbolic meaning emerges. Prior to this segment, students had twice viewed a video of *Glee* in which the cast sang “True Colors.” Students had the worksheets during these viewings and a typed copy of the song lyrics.

- 1.1 T: In this song, there is a pretty obvious symbol. What do you guys think?
- 1.2 GN: happiness
- 1.3 T: what does happiness stand for? Because it's not necessarily an object, right? It's something that if we think about an object it might mean happiness. AM, what do you think?

- 1.4 AM: Object?
- 1.5 T: A thing, as symbol.
- 1.6 AM: I was thinking of "But I see your true colors."
- 1.7 T: True colors
- 1.8 AM: Looking at someone being themselves.
- 1.9 T: So he gave us a symbol and a possible meaning. Why do you think I said it's pretty obvious?
- 1.10 AM: said it like 10 times
- 1.11 T: what else?
- 1.12 YR: isn't it the rainbow?
- 1.13 T: Definitely, it might be a rainbow. Why did I say it's an obvious one?
- 1.14 CJ: It's the object.
- 1.15 AM: it's the title.

Beginning the conversation by asking about obvious symbols was meant to serve as support for student explanations that would get at the “rules of notice” (Rabinowitz, 1987). In the case of this song, repetition of the phrase “true colors” and its prominent position in the title were “obvious” cues to consider the title as a possible symbol, at least to the teacher (line 1.1). However, the student responses clearly indicated that this was not so obvious to them (lines 1.2, 1.4). Realizing this, the teacher attempted to provide further definition of what she was asking them to do as well as what she had in mind as a symbol (lines 1.3, 1.5, 1.9). She also continued to attempt to focus the discussion on rules of notice when in line 1.9 she asked them why she said it’s an obvious one. AM complied with the answer the T was expecting – repetition (line 1.10) and prominent placement in the title (line 1.15). From this point, the rest of the lesson was

focused on figuring out why some images may be obvious symbols and helping students think through their choices of what might be symbolic.

In this segment, students struggled to make sense of the lyrics, the worksheet and what was being asked of them (identify titles and repetition as clues to symbols and get at how we know something is symbolic) as seen in lines 1.2, 1.4, 1.12, and 1.14. For example, although the question in line 1.1 was intended to elicit an obvious symbol in order to get to one rule of notice (titles as clues to symbols), what came back was an affective response (line 1.2), or perhaps a jump to interpretation of the overall meaning of the song. In attempting to redirect the conversation, the teacher appears to have added to the confusion (line 1.3) with the statement that they should be looking for an object (reinstating the idea from the previous power point and discussion about symbols as objects) but this seemed to have created more confusion than help. After several questions that signaled continued confusion, one student (AM) was able to identify the title as a possible symbol (line 1.15) and pointed out that it was repeated “like 10 times” (line 1.10) Throughout the discussion, it became clear that students did not have any way of knowing how to determine what might qualify as a symbol, even in song lyrics, albeit a song not as familiar as we had assumed it would be when designing the module. Additional time spent on the song lyrics for “True Colors” continued to indicate that students were having difficulty identifying symbols, let alone their interpretations. Reflecting afterward on this song as a cultural data set suggested two problematic aspects of selecting it. First, the students were not particularly familiar with the song, contrary to the assumptions of the classroom teacher and the university researchers who had selected it together. Second, the phrase “true colors” is an idiomatic phrase that may have made it more difficult for students to see it as having symbolic meaning. We return to these points in the overall discussion.

What also stands out in this segment is that the teacher was driving the conversation, The students were not putting forth their own claims about possible symbols in the song. Rather, the teacher ended up advancing some heuristics that often help draw attention to symbols – repetition and titles. By the end of the lesson, the discussion produced a more structured approach to identifying symbols. In particular, some parameters around what did and did not qualify as a symbol were established. For example, when students on their own tried picking out a symbol in the song and interpreting it, one student indicated that “sad eyes,” represented “sad eyes.” This led to a discussion to determine whether “sad eyes” was a symbol and whether it was acceptable to determine that it represented “sad eyes.” Through the discussion, two students made it clear that a symbol cannot simply “represent itself” and that a symbol in a text must have a different meaning.

Following this early discussion, instruction the next day was adapted (using lyrics from a second song) to practice paying attention to titles and repetition and to helping students provide reasons (drawing from their background knowledge and from the text) for their considerations of aspects of texts as symbolic. From the songs, the focus moved to the first literary text (Day 6), an excerpt for the book *When I was Puerto Rican* (Santiago, 1993). The focus of instruction was on the teacher modeling and then students practicing close reading and annotating in order to get at multiple aspects of the story (see Figure 1). For example, students practiced following the story plot, noting changes in character (this is connected to the coming of age theme), and identifying and interpreting symbols. Students also practiced relating the title to the theme, noting how events that are important to the character may be symbolic and presenting their understanding of several of these aspects to the whole class as part of small groups. This work occurred over 5 days of instruction.

Middle of module discussion. This discussion occurred on Day 11 and continued into Day 12. There are clear differences between this discussion and the beginning discussion in that this middle of the module lesson provided evidence that students were beginning to defend their claims along with evaluating claims made by others. The focal text was a vignette by Sandra Cisneros titled “Four Skinny Trees.” On Day 11, students were instructed to read the vignette silently, annotating anything unusual and that might be symbolic. The practices of annotating and noting symbols that help us get at themes and broader understanding of literary texts built on the work done in the intervening days between the beginning and middle lessons. Students had a choice to write a claim about a challenge the narrator was facing or a claim about a symbol that helped them get at meaning. After students wrote a sentence at the bottom of the vignette based on their choice of task, they shared their annotations and sentence with a partner. In pairs, they constructed an argument, providing evidence and reasoning for their claim.

Following the pair work, students shared their arguments in whole class discussion. Two competing claims about the interpretation of “four skinny trees” emerged in the discussion. One claim was that the trees represented people; another that the trees represented the narrator’s feelings. Discussion of these claims had just begun when class ended. For homework, students were given a symbolism worksheet, a revised version of the one used in the early discussions (See Sample 2 in Table 1). This worksheet made more explicit the use of textual evidence to support interpretations. Students were asked to identify three possible symbols in the vignette and complete the worksheet for them as homework.

The following day, the class began with review of the homework worksheet using the symbol most students had written in the first column: four skinny trees. Student thinking was made visible on a “class” worksheet that was on a screen at the front of the classroom. After

establishing that the four skinny trees met the criteria for what might be important (titles and repetition), the discussion moved to the second column in the worksheet “What the text says” where a couple of students volunteered quotes they had written down. The third column had students make connections with the symbol: Students volunteered associations such as “small,” “weak,” and “really bad support; if there is a tornado or something, they will fall.” Once the class moved to the interpretation column of the worksheet, the two interpretations that had been made at the end of the class the previous day were brought up again by the same students: 1) Four skinny trees symbolize the narrator’s feelings (CJ); and 2) Four skinny trees symbolize four unpopular friends (YR) (See Table 4 below). These two students dominated the discussion in terms of number of turns and words spoken (see Table 3).

Table 4

Although unanticipated, these two competing interpretations provided an opportunity for practice in interpretive reasoning: the remainder of the class discussion focused on students arguing about which interpretive claim was more compelling, providing textual evidence and support for their claims. Figures 3a and 3b indicate the two competing interpretations along with the evidence and support provided. We have included implicit warrants in the charts to indicate the logic of the argument (Lee, 2001, 2007).

Figure 3a

Figure 3b

Figure 3a depicts YR’s claim and evidence. During the discussion, RX agreed with YR’s claim and supported it by using textual evidence that corroborated YR’s evidence. In both, the logic of the argument was that if the four skinny trees are described by the narrator in ways that parallel the way the narrator feels, then the two must be connected. In contrast, CJ’s first piece of

evidence indicating that because the four trees are described as weak and small they represent four unpopular friends (Figure 3b) cannot be logically inferred or connected to the claim in part because nowhere in the text are other characters or “friends” present.

During discussion, AM supported CJ’s claim that the symbol represented four unpopular friends through a quote and explanation, “‘They are the only ones who understand me.’ Trees can’t understand you so it has to be like people, you don’t talk about your feelings like that.” Here, AM attempted to make sense of the human quality assigned to the four trees: the ability to understand. However, the complexity of the vignette and the symbolism is precisely this unexpected attribution of human qualities to trees and the unusual way, according to AM, that the narrator personifies the trees. In this sense, the trees as imagery invite an emotional response, one closely connected to the narrator. AM’s use of evidence was important in that it showed his attempt to pay attention to the way language is used in the text. CJ then offered up another piece of evidence for his interpretation that includes the symbol of tulips drooping in a glass. This piece of evidence is less clear and no warrant is possible. CJ’s and AM’s attempts speak to the complexity of rhetorical moves in literary texts. Neither of CJ’s evidence statements can be connected to the claim. Towards the end of class, YR provided a counter argument to the suggestion that the trees might represent four unpopular friends, highlighting the problems with CJ’s claim.

‘Yeah, I was going to say that it says, “Four who do not belong here but are here.” It even says that the city planted them so we can’t find students, like people [inaudible]; it kind of gives it away that they are talking about trees because it says that, ‘Four raggedy excuses planted by the city.’

YR seemed to be trying to make sense of why it was more likely that the four skinny trees represented the narrator's feelings, rather than four unpopular friends. Her statement, "we can't find students, like people," attempts to get at the lack of textual evidence that the image represents four unpopular friends. In other words, the connection between the symbol and meaning seems illogical or cannot be inferred from the text because nowhere in the vignette are other characters mentioned.

The soundness of YR's argument stems from her drawing a parallel between the narrator's internal state and the description of the trees, a parallelism that suggests they are related. In literary texts, symbols are often used to provide further insight about the character and their world. And since there are no other characters present in the short vignette, it stands to reason that the condition of the trees must be related to that of the narrator.

Overall, the two competing claims in this lesson indicate a more sophisticated understanding of literary reasoning than in the early discussion. The group discussion included claims, explanations that linked interpretive positions with evidence, and responses to opposing perspectives (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001, see also p. 387, Lee, 2001). The sense from this discussion is that students were now more confident in identifying symbols and the focus shifted to convincing others about warrantable interpretations using textual evidence. In this lesson, the discussion advanced to a complex argument involving multiple speakers making competing claims and providing the evidence to back them up and "best" the competing speakers. However, still largely implicit was the reasoning that linked the evidence to the claim and the message of the story to the world outside the story.

During the eight instructional days between the middle lesson and the end-of-module discussion, students worked with a poem and then read and annotated "Two Kinds," described in

the next section. They continued to practice symbolic interpretation and writing arguments. It was only at the end of the module that symbolic interpretation and the connections to larger messages of the text were explored.

End of module discussion. The literary text used at the end of the unit was the chapter “Two Kinds” from Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club*. This text affords a window into the complexity and tension between parent and child expectations. It points to challenges and tensions for adolescents as they attempt to forge their own identities in the context of familial and cultural norms. In “Two Kinds,” the narrator is a Chinese-American girl, Jing-mei, who struggles over her identity with her Chinese immigrant mother, who believes “that you could be anything you wanted to be in America.” In particular, the mother attempts to mold Jing-mei, into a musical prodigy. Out of the six pages of the text, the first five and a half pages (told through flashback) deal with the hope, disillusionment (both mother’s and narrator’s) and Jing-mei’s eventual outright rejection of trying to become a prodigy. It is only after her mother’s death that the narrator realizes that what her mother really wanted for her was a better life and for her to try her best. Looking back over the music that she formerly shunned, the narrator discovers something that she hadn’t noticed before. The song on the left-hand side of the page called “Pleading Child” and the one on the right, “Perfectly Contented” are two halves of the same song.

The instructional focus of this lesson was on connecting interpretations of symbols to insights these might convey about authors’ messages about characters, their worlds, and the world at large. This was the first time in the module that students were asked to explicitly connect understanding of a symbol to insights about “life’s lessons.” Through this activity, connections among symbolic meaning and larger propositions about human nature can be made. To support students in moving to wider propositions, the worksheet scaffold was again modified

(see Sample 3 in Table 2). The modification included a column where students connected the symbol to what it told them about the character and her world. However, in addition to this new aspect of literary interpretation, identification and interpretation based on evidence in the text were also the most complex of the module due to the length of the text and the distance of the cultural content from students' lived experiences.

This text also offered more complex interpretive challenges in terms of the range of potential symbolic meanings and targets. In particular, many of the symbols were related to the transition of Jing-mei's and her mother's relationship and of Jing-mei's identity. Taking this into consideration, the teacher spent time modeling how to trace the image of the piano—a much repeated symbol—throughout the text in order to get at the multiple notions of what it could represent and how students might approach the worksheet. Students were given time to make a list of elements of the text with potential symbolic meanings. Volunteers then made suggestions regarding which of these to discuss and develop interpretations for through class discussion and construction of a class worksheet (Sample 3 in Table 1).

- 3.1 T: As others are writing, look back at your list for another possible symbol that we are all going to attack. Suggestions?
- 3.2 CJ: Talent show
- 3.3 T: Another suggestion? Look at your list.
- 3.4 AM: title of music she played.
- 3.5 GN: Prodigy
- 3.6 T: Pleading child, perfectly contented; the title of the piece. GN said maybe the word prodigy. It comes up a lot, we might definitely make a symbol out of that and justify it and find evidence. Other ones?

- 3.7 AM: [reading] the moment when she felt ashamed
- 3.8 T: so the moment when she [mother] felt ashamed.
- 3.9 PX: The two songs
- 3.10 T: okay, which is what AM said. Anybody else have another one? Did any of you write Two Kinds, the title?
- 3.11 YR: yes

This segment indicates students' continued expertise in identifying symbols, especially when we consider where they began four weeks prior. Four different students identified an event (talent show), a concept (prodigy) and the title of the music piece as symbolic. The symbols identified by students are central to the story's theme and impact the narrator in some important way. The students decided by voting to use the title of the music piece, "Pleading Child-Perfectly Contented," as a symbol to discuss as a class and to interpret using the worksheet. Before moving to possible interpretations of the symbol, the teacher gave students a few minutes to write down their individual interpretations in the second column of the worksheet.

What is important to note in this worksheet are the differences between it and the second worksheet. In the previous version of the worksheet (Sample 2 in Table 1), students worked through the individual steps to fill in the columns: *What the text says* and *Associations I can make* in order to interpret. In worksheet 3 these steps are assumed: students are expected to go through those steps almost automatically, without necessarily writing anything down. Column 2 in this third worksheet, asks them what connections they make to the symbol and what the symbol means. Students' responses when asked what they have written in that column indicated that they were able to do this.

- 3.12 T: ...TA, do you have anything?

3.13 TA: I said that two halves equal one.

3.14 T: And that's the bottom, right [referring to the bottom half of the box used for interpreting the symbol]. Okay, he's jumping to two halves equals one. But how do you know that?

3.15 TA: uhm

3.16 T: Help him out GN, what do you have?

3.17 GN: childhood and later growing up in life.

This segment indicates a combination of skills students are developing along with the particular affordances of this text. The symbol students selected by its very nature entails two contrasting meanings. Here, the symbol (the music piece title that the narrator believed was two different songs until the end of the story, as an adult) parallels a development of the character. Specifically, the first part of the title can be connected to the narrator's childhood, when she was an obedient child hoping that her mother would accept her as she was. The narrator, realizing that she could never be a child prodigy, tries to make her mother stop trying to make her one. "Perfectly Contented," the second part of the title, relates to the narrator as a grown up, when, as an adult, she is able to finally realize that her mother never gave up believing that she could do anything she wanted and that her mother only wanted her to try her best.

Although students' interpretations were not fully elaborated, they were able to determine that the title of the song highlights two aspects ("two halves equals one") and reflect the narrator's life ("childhood and later growing up in life"). The next part of the discussion addressed the task of determining what the symbol tells the reader about the character. The teacher gave the students time to write their ideas down and share them with their partners. This type of question is asking students to expand upon their claim. The claims thus far had been to

give an interpretation of a symbol that is relevant to the events in the story. In this lesson, students were asked to think about how their interpretations provided further understanding of the narrator.

3.18 T: All right, let's talk about this. So, what type of person is she?

3.19 CJ: she is growing up and is more mature

3.20 T: Okay, more mature, but how do we make sense of the fact that we said, it's two halves equals one, two things connected?

3.21 CJ: Cause she actually plays the piano again, so it's not like someone who wasn't mature and throw away a piano and she didn't care. But she actually sees the piano as a sign of forgiveness.

3.22 T: So she's moving right; character has moved now from immature to mature?

3.23 CJ: yeah.

3.24 T: Do you see what CJ did? He realized that if we are talking about two halves, there has to be two aspects. What other two aspects might we talk about in terms of Jing-mei? CM says she doesn't want to be bossed around but there's another half to that. She doesn't want to be bossed around, but yet what else does she want to do?

3.25 FM: be accepted for who she is

3.26 T: Yep. Doesn't want to be bossed around but she wants to be accepted.

The segment above is reminiscent of the early discussion; there is a sense of struggle as students practice this new skill for the first time. Here, students tried to make sense of what was being asked and how to think through the music piece title and their interpretations in order to indicate what the symbols told them about the narrator. For example, although the question in

line 3.20 was intended to elicit clarification about what two halves might indicate about the narrator (based on the interpretation “two halves equals one” proposed by JA, line 3.13, earlier in the discussion), what came back was evidence for the narrator’s maturity and further interpretation of the piano (line 3.21). In attempting to focus on the parallel between the two titles and the two highlighted identities of the narrator, the teacher provided the idea that the narrator had transitioned from immature to mature (line 3.22). The teacher, in line 3.24, states, “CM says she doesn't want to be bossed around but there's another half to that. She doesn't want to be bossed around, but yet what else does she want to do?” Here, the teacher provided necessary clarity in considering dual aspects in order for students to draw on the parallelism among the title of the piece, their interpretations, and the narrator’s life. FM (line 3.25) provides an interpretation that fits the understanding of the story and symbolic meaning of the title of the music piece.

Overall, what students were able to do across early, mid, end of the unit discussions was consistent with what the pre to post changes in the essays indicated. That is, students were increasingly able to identify symbols and use evidence to support their claims. However, having had more time to practice applying their interpretations of symbols to larger ideas of stories would have most likely improved their skills in the types of claims they were able to make and in ability to provide warrants for their claims.

Discussion

The instructional design of this module was intended to engage students in literary interpretation that relied on the rhetorical device of symbolism in stories that instantiated a coming-of-age theme. In the design process the READI literature team moved from a general instructional model to a specific model for literary analysis and interpretation based on prior

work on the characteristics of interpretive processes for literature and the knowledge needed to engage in these processes. The results of the pre/post tests and the analyses of the whole-class classroom discussions indicated that the initial iteration of the instructional design achieved some success with respect to symbolic interpretation and argument. Students' scores on the pre- and post-tests showed that they were better able to make connected claims that directly addressed the essay prompt using symbolism from the texts. However, most students continued to provide evidence without explaining the reasoning that connected evidence to particular claims. There was also little evidence in the written essays at posttest of the coming of age theme or of forms of synthesis (e.g., comparison and contrast) beyond surface connections (e.g., characters in both stories lived on a farm).

The classroom discussions but not the pre/post essays, provided evidence that the instructional design promoted more use of evidence based in the texts to support claims and reasoning that connected particular evidence to particular claims. As well, there were increases in the extent and type of participation over the course of the module. The arguments became more complex in terms of the types of claims made (identification of symbols, interpretation of symbols, or role of symbols in conveying themes in stories), the existence of multiple or competing claims, the quality of evidence and reasoning, and the movement toward making public multiple interpretive ideas that could be debated. The classroom discussions also suggested that newly developed interpretive skills are fragile. That is, in the third discussion when the interpretive task involved detecting and comparing symbols that were developed across longer spans of text, students struggled to make clear the reasoning and evidence behind the claims they were making even though the mid-module discussion suggested facility with entertaining multiple interpretations. During the end-of-module discussion, the teacher needed to

“step back in” relative to the mid-module discussion to provide more scaffolding of the argumentation process. With that support, students persisted in their efforts to articulate their thinking about the symbols and patterns over the course of the story that were connecting to the coming of age theme. The classroom discussion findings are consistent with previous reports of the value of classroom discussions for engaging students and revealing learning processes (e.g., Cazden, 2001; Chinn et al., 2001; Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long, 2003).

The analyses of the whole class discussions that occurred over the course of the implementation revealed important differences between the competencies with literary argumentation that were evident in the public, oral discussions as compared to the individual essays. One example of this was in the use of evidence. In the post-test, essays we noted that students often derived evidence from a localized part of text, not taking into consideration the evidence in other parts of the text nor patterns of change that would be evident over the course of the story. In contrast, during the end-of-module discussion of “Two Kinds,” students showed evidence of grappling with what the piano signified at the beginning of the story, namely the shared excitement and willingness of Jing-mei to become the prodigy that her mom wanted. But the class discussion also revealed an emerging recognition of a change in what the piano came to signify by the end of the story, namely Jing-mei’s evolving maturity and understanding of what her mother had expected of her. It is only in tracing the image of the piano throughout the story that one can arrive at this interpretation. This type of literary reasoning was within the reach of students through supported whole class discussion but was apparently not something that they could yet take up on their own or in writing.

More generally, performance changes between the pre - and post-module essays as well as the changes illustrated in the literary argument qualities of the class discussions over the

course of the module focused our reflective analyses of the instructional design for purposes of revising it. These analyses revealed three areas that needed revision: explicit warranting of claim-evidence relations, written argument, and thematic interpretation. We honed in on these three objectives for revision of the module. These revisions in the second iteration module were targeted at the skills and practices that were most challenging to students given the focus and allocation of time in the first iteration module design. We examined the implementation documentation to determine what opportunities had been provided for students to generate explicit warrants for their arguments, construct written arguments, and develop criteria for recognizing when stories were dealing with coming of age themes.

Explicit warranting of claim-evidence relations. A primary goal of including cultural data sets in the design of the modules is to provide opportunities for students to focus on their processes of connecting claims to evidence and on the criteria they use to justify these connections when the content and genre is part of popular culture and familiar to them. Making these reasoning processes explicit is particularly important for helping students distinguish between why they noticed something that might have symbolic meaning in a story (identifying elements with potential symbolic meaning) and interpreting symbolic meanings. Making this reasoning explicit in the context of cultural data sets provides a model of reasoning that students then have available when engaged with canonical texts that are less familiar to them.

Analyses of the discussions that took place using cultural data sets revealed several shortcomings, including the specific songs that were selected and the relatively brief focus on them. First, the song lyrics used as cultural data sets were problematic for several reasons and they did not serve the intended objective of getting at symbolic meaning and developing heuristics for what readers pay attention to when interpreting texts. For example, the song “True

Colors” uses the idiomatic phrase “true colors” commonly understood to mean show your real self. Thus, it may not have seemed symbolic to students, leading to the confusion evident in the beginning-of-the-module lesson. The second song, *Bag Lady* by Erika Badu, was difficult for students to relate to due to the literal and symbolic content. The song lyrics indicate a message that “extra baggage” or emotional weight can hold you back. Literally, the song is advising a “bag lady” to stop carrying so many bags around because they weigh her down and take up too much space. The module design did not provide activities that would have helped students understand the content and thereby access reasoning to support arguing that a literal interpretation is not sufficient. In other words, the literal meaning of the song was a challenge for students in and of itself.

One plausible explanation for the absence of more explicit reasoning in both oral and written arguments is that insufficient cultural data sets were used in the instruction and the strategies and heuristics that should have been cultivated through them simply were not. Whether it was the specific songs that were selected or simply that more opportunities to explore interpretive reasoning in familiar milieu were needed is unclear. Regardless, our overall, “take away” from the initial implementation was that more emphasis on cultural data sets is required to provide opportunities for developing skills in explicitly connecting claims to evidence, in this case, with regard to distinctions between noticing and interpreting symbolic meanings.

Opportunities to construct written argument. The analysis of the instructional foci for each day (see Figure 1 and Appendix A) indicated that students had had only one opportunity to write a long essay about symbols in two texts and this had occurred at the very end of the module and students used a writing template. Prior to this writing task they had only written single paragraphs in response to highly directive prompts about single texts. Thus, with so little

emphasis on making claims that compared and contrasted stories on symbolic and thematic dimensions it was not surprising that the essays evidenced little of these processes.

Criteria for coming of age theme. Analyses of the foci of the classroom discussions revealed that we had not devoted any time to explicitly developing and helping students build criteria for determining whether a story had a coming of age theme. Criteria for coming of age were introduced incidentally in the context of the few instances where students worked on tasks related to coming of age, and this work was highly scaffolded. For example, after the vignette from the mid-module discussion, students read and discussed the poem “A Song in the Front Yard” by Gwendolyn Brooks. Using the poem, students went through a writing activity where the teacher provided the claim, “Though I agree that the poem ‘A Song in the Front Yard’ by Gwendolyn Brooks illustrates a coming of age theme, I still maintain that the narrator’s views of the world are immature.” Students derived evidence of the character’s immaturity by focusing on the dichotomy of views between the narrator (an immature view) and her mother (a mature view). Students then individually constructed an argument paragraph for homework based on the claim and evidence. However, there was no emphasis on a critical aspect of coming of age themes – change over time in a characters perspective on events, people, or world views.

In addition to these three aspects of the module design, the reflections of the two 9th-grade teachers who implemented this module revealed a number of challenges associated with teaching in ways that support students in taking on the intellectual work of literary interpretation. Specifically, although an explicit goal of the module was for students to engage in close reading of texts and construct meaning with social support (first through discussion with a peer) and later through whole-class discussion, the 3rd period section teacher often did the reading “for the students,” skipping the peer discussion when it was clear that students had not read assigned

material before class. Fortunately, due to the design-based research process involving frequent review with other members of the design team of the field notes and samples of video, the teacher was able to notice and change this practice by the middle of the module and put in place more effective processes for engaging students in reading the text and constructing meaning. Interestingly, when this was discussed in the larger literature design-team, other teachers realized some of their practices had the same result. For example, a middle-school teacher reported “rewarding” students for reading the text by playing audio recordings of the text prior to discussing it. The high school teachers indicated that they often read to the students to insure that the students had the basics so they could “get to the good stuff – the interpretation.” The ongoing reflection process of the design teams surfaced these practices, allowing teachers to make changes that increased the need for students to engage with the texts.

A second challenge was shifting the dynamics of classroom discourse away from a teacher-directed instruction, following an I-R-E pattern, to one in which students were initiating more of the ideas and moving them forward. In the present study, the beginning module discussion was clearly an I-R-E sequence; by the middle of the module, there was more student initiation of the ideas. Interestingly, when students struggled to clarify their thinking, as occurred in the end- of- module discussion, the teacher took up a more central role in moving the conversation forward than she had during the mid-module lesson. Upon reflection, the teacher noted the difficulty of balancing modeling interpretive thinking, scaffolding students as they took on interpretive thinking, and turning over the sense-making to students. Indeed, she noted that she continued to mediate the discussion more than she had intended. Moving forward, planning for implementation includes more explicit focus on establishing classroom practices and modes of discourse that create space for students to build on each other’s ideas and interpretations.

Likewise, our analyses are examining ways in which teachers facilitate and mediate interactions and discussions that move student thinking forward and encourage increased student ownership of intellectual work (Chapin & O'Connor, 2004; Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008).

Implications for Redesign of the Module

The reflections on the implementation of the first iteration of the module revealed that there were several features of the architecture that required revision.

Cultural data sets. More time has been allocated to the use of cultural data sets for making explicit the metacognitive processes that help students arrive at symbolic meaning as well as more time for making explicit the logic connecting claims to evidence. For example, in the iteration described here, we spent approximately four and a half days on the song lyrics that served as cultural data sets and on connecting claims to evidence. In the redesigned iterations, 10 days of instruction are allocated to using cultural data sets for symbolic meaning and for connecting claims to evidence.

Furthermore we realized that we needed to use more varied contexts and make students aware of the fact that symbols take on varied meanings according to the context. For example, an American flag can take on a symbolic meaning that is constructed by virtue of the context that surrounds its use – e.g. a flag being carried by veterans during a veteran's day march versus a flag being held by protesters of the Iraq war, in which case its symbolic import can be quite different. This nuance is important because the targets that may be symbolic in texts take on their significance from the context constructed by the author.

Gateway activities. The redesign of the module (iteration two) includes explicit gateway activities that are designed to construct criteria for recognizing coming of age themes. These activities use relatively short texts that focus mainly on how a young character handles a

situation. Students then judge whether the action or response to the situation indicates the character's coming of age and begin building criteria as evidence for their claims. Individual work is followed by work in small groups and culminates in whole class discussion and construction of a chart for the classroom that indicates the criteria for recognizing coming of age themes.

Written argumentation. The need to devote more time to developing written argumentation has produced both changes to the module and the creation of a short module focused specifically on argumentation. The argumentation module follows the approach Hillocks presents in his recent book *Teaching Argument Writing, Grades 6-12: Supporting Claims with Relevant Evidence and Clear Reasoning* (Hillocks, 2011). The sequence of activities, the materials, and the writing assignments recommended by Hillocks are adapted so that the “mini” module can be completed within a week. Thus, the instructional design now includes a sequence: argumentation mini – module followed by the symbolism and coming of age module. We have designed more opportunities to develop arguments within the symbolism and coming of age module that increase in the complexity of the arguments to be constructed in writing as well as scaffolds that support the work. These templates take the form of sentence starters for each part of an argument and are faded over successive assignments.

Of necessity, the inclusion of both the criteria development and the written argumentation have extended the instructional time required to fully implement these instructional designs. However, the reality is that learning interpretive processes takes time. Instructional modules must be designed to provide students enough opportunities and supports to practice, come to understand, and apply these processes using a wide variety of texts, ideally that increase in complexity over the course of a module. And they need opportunities to discuss their

interpretations with their peers and take on the intellectual work of interpretation. Our experiences with the first iteration of the instructional design speak loudly to the point that short-cutting the instructional process short-circuits the learning process and in the end short-changes the students.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Overview of the 9th Grade Symbolism/Coming of Age Module

Days	Purpose/Texts	Student Activities ⁶
Days 1-2	Cultural data set: Introduction to argumentation using Hillocks' scenarios Slip or Trip and Case of the Dead Musician	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class and groups: Found evidence and made warrants • Individual: Wrote an argument paragraph
Day 3	Gateway activity: Focus on short excerpts from book on immigrants in Chicago.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class: Read aloud • In groups: Answered discussion questions
Days 4-5	Cultural data set: Introduction to symbolism using a power point presentation and lyrics from True Colors & Bag Lady	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class: Watched videos • Whole class: Discussed symbolism in the songs using worksheet (Sample 1 in Table 2).
Days 6-10	Main literary text: Read and interpret excerpt from When I was Puerto Rican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class and individual: Close reading and annotating • Whole class, groups, and individual: Filled in character map and follow the plot
Days 11-12	Main literary text: Read and interpret vignette Four Skinny Trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class: Discussed interpretation of "four skinny trees" using worksheet (Sample 2 in Table 2) • Individual: Wrote argument about symbol with reminders from teacher about need for claim, evidence and warrant
Days 13-14	Main literary text: Read and interpret poem A Song in the Front Yard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class: Discussed symbolism in poem • Individual: Wrote paragraph about coming of age
Day 15	Gateway activity: Focus on Asian proverbs and Tiger Mom video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class: Discussed proverbs • Whole class: Watched video
Days 16-19	Main literary text: Read and interpret story Two Kinds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class and individual: Close reading and annotating • Groups: Presented sections of text

⁶ Whole class discussions were part of class activities every day except Days 10 and 17.

Days 20-21 Main literary texts: Write about
When I Was Puerto Rican and Two
Kinds

- Whole class and individual: Filled out symbolism worksheet (Sample 3 in Table 2)
- Whole class, groups, and individual: Wrote long essay about the symbols in two texts and what they say about the world using a writing template

Appendix B

Table B1

Readability Levels for Pre/Post-test Texts

Measure	The Butterfly	Eleven	We Were the Mulvaneys	Flowers
Word Count	991	1,266	629	566
Flesch Reading Ease	88.5	80.8	77.09	80.99
Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	3.43	6.76	6.85	5.76
Lexile Rating	610L	1030L	1080L	1070L

Table B2

Readability Levels for Module Texts

Measure	A song in the Front Yard	Four Skinny Trees	When I Was Puerto Rican	Two Kinds
Word Count	164	198	3372	4618
Flesch Reading Ease	100	89.24	82.12	81.26
Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	1.13	3.54	5.14	5.20
Lexile Rating	730L	690L	≈810L	≈910L

Appendix C. Pre/Post Essay Scoring Rubric

Note that the score points for each dimension have different upper ranges. Furthermore, when there were qualitative differences between responses that were judged to be similar in terms of developing competency with literary interpretation arguments, they were assigned the same whole number score point but a different decimal value (e.g., 0 and 0.5 or 1 and 1.1).

Table C1

Claims	
0	description or summary, restates the question
0.5	claim/s provided, but not accurate in terms of being supportable by the stories
1	at least one accurate claim provided
2	more than one accurate claim provided
3	more than one accurate claim provided; claims support or are connected to one another
4	more than one accurate claim provided; claims support or are connected to one another and include nested claims or counterclaims
Function of Claims	
0	summarizes the story or stories; or re-states the question without further description of character, social world, or effects of language
1	describes the internal state of a character or characters; or describes the social world of the text or texts
2	examines how the language of the text functions to explain a character’s internal state (i.e. how the language helps the reader to understand the character or characters) and/or social world of the text
Evidence	
0	no evidence provided (either because student did not support claims with evidence or because student had no claims)
0.5	only inaccurate evidence provided (inaccurate = evidence contradicts the events of texts or reveals a misreading of the text)
1	one piece of accurate evidence provided in attempt to support at least one claim (that is, evidence does not contradict events of text, is not a misreading of literal text); may

	include personal or real world knowledge, but is also text-based
2	more than one piece of accurate evidence provided in attempt to support claim/s; may include personal or real world knowledge, but is also text-based
3	more than one piece of accurate, related evidence provided; of that evidence, at least two pieces are connected in that they support the same claim
4	comprehensive evidence that identifies and weighs competing textual evidence (i.e., counterclaims)
Reasoning	
0	no discussion of why evidence supports the claims
1	At least one implicit warrant. Claims and evidence could be logically connected through an appeal to cultural or literary norms but connection is implicit.
2	In at least one instance, claims and evidence are explicitly warranted, and the warrant uses some appeal to cultural norms. May include implicit warrants as well.
2.1	In at least one instance, claims and evidence are explicitly warranted, and the warrant uses some appeal to literary norms. May include implicit warrants as well.
Symbolism	
0	makes no attempt to attribute symbolic significance; student does not identify a target in the text that is symbolic; includes statements or claims about meta-functions of images
1	identifies a symbol (e.g. the sweater in “Eleven”) but does not discuss its effects
1.1	identifies a symbol and discusses effects not supported by the text
2	identifies at least one target in the text that is symbolic; student constructs an abstract proposition in interpreting the target (i.e. image, event, object, state of mind, action, etc.) in the text or texts; the interpretation remains local to the text
3	identifies a target in the text that is symbolic; student constructs an abstract proposition in interpreting the target that includes but also goes beyond the immediate world of the text
Coming of Age	
0	no discussion of the development or evolution of the character or characters in terms of some criteria for coming of age
1	discusses the development or evolution of the character or characters in terms of some

	criteria of coming of age
2	discusses the development or evolution of the character or characters in terms of some criteria of coming of age and connects what the character has learned or how the character has changed to the symbolism in the text
Organization of Ideas	
0	response has no clear organization
1	response has some organizational framework (e.g., response first talks about text A and then text B, or moves chronologically through text/s)
2	well organized; connections among either paragraphs or sections of paragraphs are made explicit (e.g. with phrases like “also,” “but,” “in contrast,” etc.)
Synthesis	
0	no connection between stories; stories are analyzed or discussed separately
1	surface connection
2.1	explicitly compares or contrasts claims about characters or social worlds across stories
2.2	explicitly compares or contrasts claims about symbols across stories. Supporting evidence may not be in place.
3.1	explicitly compares or contrasts claims (or claims plus evidence) along with evidence or reasoning about the comparison/contrast
3.2	explicitly compares or contrasts symbols with evidence or reasoning about the comparison/contrast

Appendix D. Sample Student Essay

Text set: “The Flowers” and “We Were the Mulvaney’s”

In the story “the Flowers” by Alice Walker the main character worlds is like the fantasy world. By this I mean like in one part she said that their was days that had never been as beautiful as those. A symbol in this story were the flowers. I think that in this story the flowers were a really big part of the story because almost every 4 lines or so they were talking about them. From my point of view the flowers represented more than just flowers. It also represented stuff like her and her personality. In the other story “We were the Mulvaney’s” the symbol in this story was how they were Mulvaney’s. By this it means that that’s who they were and that’s something that represents them. After all in general people use different kind of langauge to express themselves. I really liked this story the symbols were out there and easy to be found I didn’t really enjoy the second story but it was okay not amazing but okay.

“Flowers”

Claims: Score of 2 for the two accurate claims provided: “A symbol in this story were the flowers.” and “From my point of view the flowers represented more than just flowers. It also represented stuff like her and her personality.”

Function of Claims: Score of 1 based on the attempt to connect the flowers as a symbol to the girl’s personality.

Evidence: Score of 2 based on the evidence to support the first claim that the flowers are a symbol: “I think that in this story the flowers were a really big part of the story because almost every 4 lines or so they were talking about them.”

Reasoning: Score of 1.1. The first claim and evidence can be connected with an implicit warrant based on the heuristics emphasized in the unit: When something is repeated in a story, it may have symbolic significance.

Symbolism: Score of 1.1 based the idea of the symbol representing the girl and her personality; this is not supported by the text.

Coming of Age: Score of 0 because there was no mention of coming of age.

Organization of Ideas: Score of 1. Work had some organizational framework, but not in essay format.

“We Were the Mulvaney’s”

Claims: Score of 2 based on two accurate claims provided: “In the other story ‘We were the Mulvaney’s’ the symbol in this story was how they were Mulvaney’s.” and “After all in general people use different kind of langauge to express themselves.”

Function of Claims: Score of 1 based on the attempt to talk about the character and his family.

Evidence: Score of 0, No evidence provided.

Reasoning: Score of 0. No reasoning provided because there was no evidence provided, i.e., nothing to tie to the claim.

Symbolism: Score of 1 based on the title identified as a symbol.

Coming of Age: Score of 0 because there was no mention of coming of age.

Organization of Ideas: Score of 1. Work had some organizational framework, but not in essay format.

Table D1
Scoring of Sample Student Essay

	Claims	Function of Claims	Evidence	Reasoning	Symbolism	Coming of Age	Idea Organization
“Flowers”	2	1	2	1.1	1.1	0	1
“We Were the Mulvaneys”	2	1	0	0	1	0	1

Appendix E

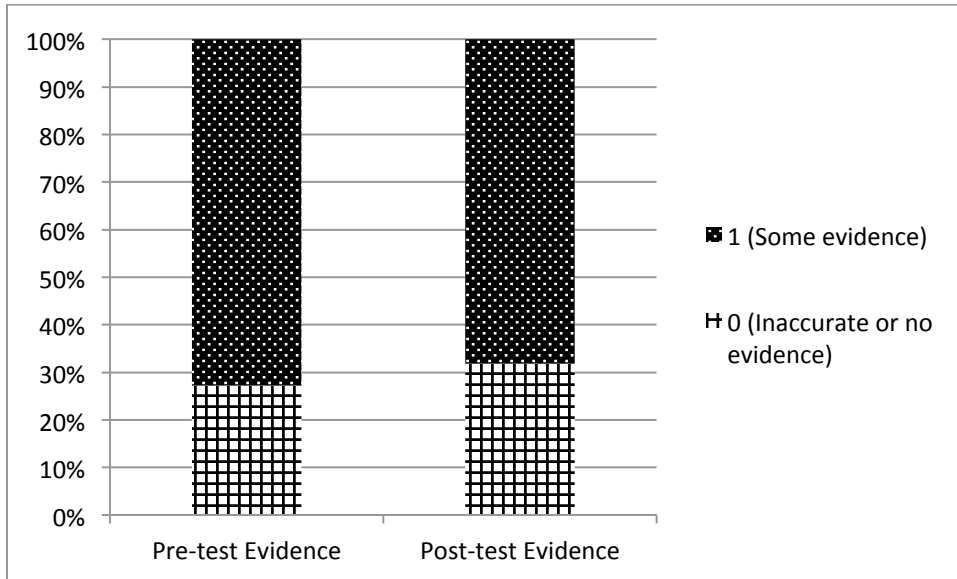


Figure E1. Pre- and posttest scores for Evidence⁷

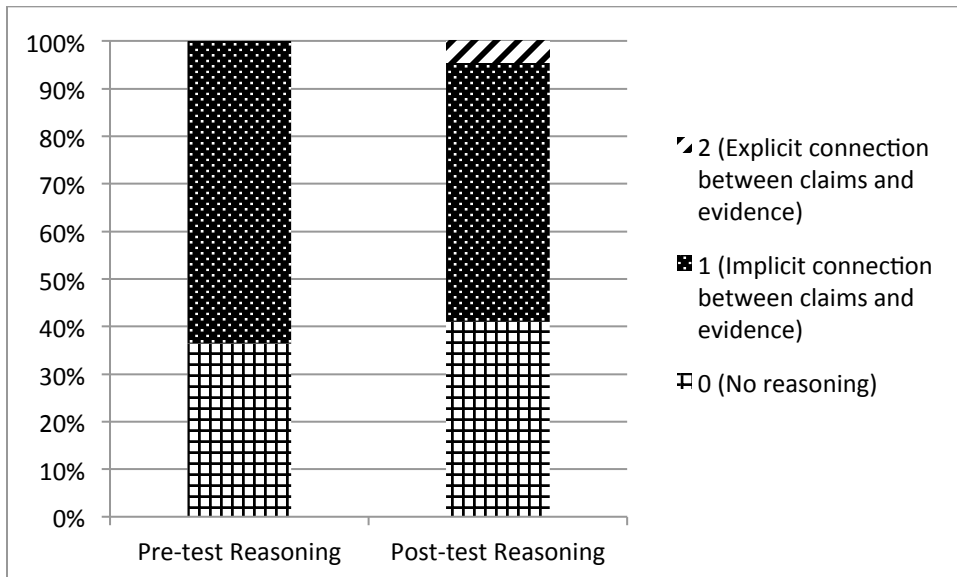


Figure E2. Pre- and posttest scores for Reasoning

⁷ Scores that did not occur on either the pre- or post-tests were not included in the graphs (e.g. no essay received a 4 on *Claims*). Also, *Evidence* scores were collapsed into two categories with students either having some evidence (1) or no evidence (0). The scores that were considered at the same level were also collapsed (e.g. in *Symbolism* the 1 and 1.1 were collapsed and in *Reasoning* the 2 and 2.1 were collapsed).

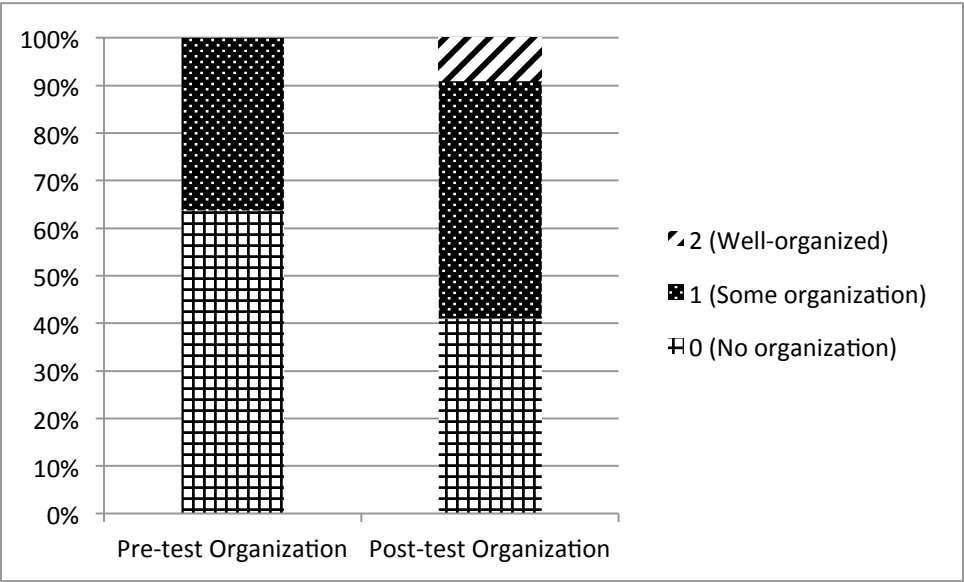


Figure E3. Pre- and posttest scores for Organization of Ideas

Table 1

Samples of Three Worksheets Used to Scaffold Symbol Identification and Interpretation^a

Sample 1		
Introduction to Symbolism		
Symbol in Text	Associations I can make with the image, event, character, action, object, name, or place	What does the symbol represent?

Sample 2			
Interpreting Symbolism			
What I think is symbolic: Image, event, character, action, object, name, places	What the text says (page #)	Associations I can make with the image, event, character, action, object, name, or place	What do the words in the text and the associations I make lead me to think about what the symbol means?

Sample 3			
Interpreting Symbolism—Two Kinds			
What I think is symbolic (image, event, character, action, object, name, or place)	Thinking of the words in the text and the connections I make with the symbol, what does the symbol mean?	What does the symbol emphasize about Jing-mei as a person? What does it say about the type of person she is?	What does the symbol reveal about Jing-mei's experiences? What does it tell us about the world she lives in?

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^a Only the headers for each column and one row are shown for each sample. The students received each of these on an 8.5 x 11 in. sheet of paper.

Table 2

PJ's Pre and Post Module Essays

Pre Module Essay	Analysis of Pre Essay
<p><i>In the article “The Flowers” the author describes images in the story so you can paint them in your mind. Like in this paragraph “Myop carried a short, knobby stick. She struck out a random chickens she liked and worked out the beat of a song on the fence around the pigpen. She felt light and good in the warm sun. She was ten and existed for her but her song, the stick clutched in her dark brown hand.” In this paragraph you can picture a ten year old girl carrying a short knobby stick.</i></p>	<p>Claim: 1. One accurate: <i>“the author describes images in the story so you can paint them in your mind.</i></p> <p>Function of Claims: 0. None provided</p> <p>Symbolism: 0. Describes images but not symbols.</p> <p>Evidence: 1. Includes segment from the story (<i>“Myop....brown hand.”</i>) to support the claim that the author describes images you can picture.</p> <p>Reasoning: 1. <i>“Like in this paragraph...”</i> allows implicit connection between claim and evidence.</p> <p>Organization: 1. Claim – example – conclusion = restates claim.</p> <p>Coming of Age and Synthesis: 0 on each.</p>
Post Module Essay	Analysis of Post Essay
<p><i>In the story “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros she uses numbers as symbols. When she says “Some days you might need to sit on your mama’s lap because you’re scared & that’s the part of you that’s five.” And “You’re all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you’re three.” & “You might say something stupid & that’s the part of you that’s still ten.”</i></p> <p><i>Sandra Cisneros uses the number as symbols no matter what age are you your still going to feel like your 2, 4, 6, 8 , & 10. One day your going to be all grown up & one day your going to feel like your 3 because you might start crying about something. No matter what age your in your still going to feel like your a little kid.</i></p>	<p>Claims: 3. Multiple connected claims: <i>“she uses numbers as symbols.” “Sandra Cisneros uses the number as symbols no matter what age are you your still going to feel like your 2, 4, 6, 8 , & 10.” “No matter what age your in your still going to feel like your a little kid.”</i></p> <p>Function of Claims: 1. <i>“No matter what age your in your still going to feel like your a little kid.”</i></p> <p>Symbolism: 3. Numbers interpreted beyond the world of the story. <i>No matter what age your in your still going to feel like your a little kid.”</i></p> <p>Evidence: 1. Includes segments from the story to support the claims.</p> <p>Reasoning: 1. <i>“When she says...”</i> allows implicit connection.</p> <p>Organization: 1. Claim – example – conclusion – generalizes claim.</p> <p>Coming of Age and Synthesis: 0 on both.</p>

Table 3 . *Quantitative Aspects of 3rd Period Classroom Discussions from Lessons at the Beginning, Middle, or End of the Module^a*

	Beginning—Day 4	Middle—Days 11 & 12	End—Day 19
Instructional Focus	Identifying symbols in culturally familiar genre (song lyrics). Text: “True Colors”	Interpreting Symbols in a vignette. Text: “Four Skinny Trees”	Interpreting Symbols with respect to what they convey about characters and their worlds. Text: Chapter from “The Joy Luck Club”.
Duration of Classroom Discussion	15 minutes	19 minutes	21 minutes
# Students Contributing to Discussion	6 out of 14 students present	8 out of 11 students present	10 out of 14 students present
Turns per student	AM=7 CJ=2 GN=1 HF=1 LG=2 YR=3	AM=4 CJ=14 CM=3 HF=1 LG=2 RX= 2 VY=2 YR=7	AC=1 AM=3 CJ=4 FM=1 GN=3 HF=5 PX=1 TA=3 VY=2 YR=3
Words per student	AM=36	AM=47	AC=3

	CJ=~8	CJ=~148	AM=~12
	GN=1	CM=7	CJ=46
	HF=1	HF=3	FM=6
	LG=4	LG=3	GN=10
	YR=15	RX=29	HF=56
		VY=~2	PX=3
		YR=~128	TA=10
			VY=6
			YR=16

^a Initials indicate pseudonyms for individual students. There were a total of 14 students in the class all of whom had consented to use of their data in the study.

Table 4 . *The Interpreting Symbolism Worksheet for Four Skinny Trees Constructed during Whole Class Discussion*

Class Worksheet 2: Interpreting Symbolism			
What I think is symbolic: Image, event, character, action, object, name, places	What the text says (page #)	Associations I can make with the image, event, character, action, object, name, or place	What do the words in the text and the associations I make lead me to think about what the symbol means?
<i>Four skinny trees</i>	<p><i>“Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine” (p. 1)</i></p> <p><i>“Four raggedy excuses planted by the city” (p. 1)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Small</i> • <i>Weak</i> • <i>Really bad support; if there is a tornado or something, they will fall.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The narrator feels like the trees.</i> • <i>The trees represent four unpopular friends.</i>

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Symbolism				✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
Argumentation	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓
Coming of Age										✓			✓	✓							
Annotations, Close Reading Questions, Charts, etc.			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓			
Scenarios: Slip or Trip and The Case of the Dead Musician	✓	✓																			
Song Lyrics: True Colors and Bag Lady				✓	✓																
Excerpt: When I Was Puerto Rican Gateway (Day 3): Excerpts from An Immigrant Class			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓	✓
Vignette: Four Skinny Trees											✓	✓									
Poem: A Song in the Front Yard												✓	✓	✓							
Short Story: Two Kinds Gateway (Day 15): Asian proverbs and Tiger Mom video															✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 1. Symbolism module at a glance

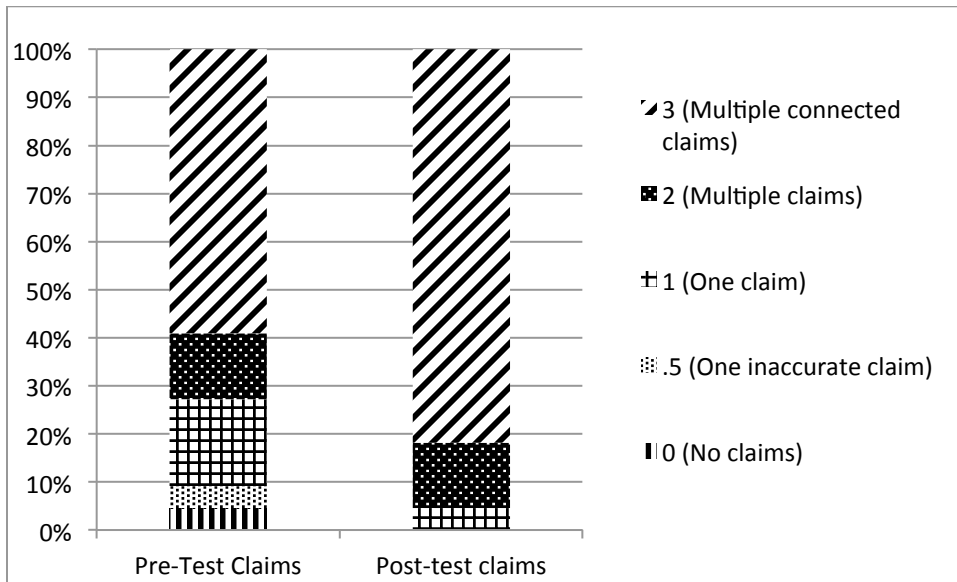


Figure 2a. Pre- and posttest scores for Claims

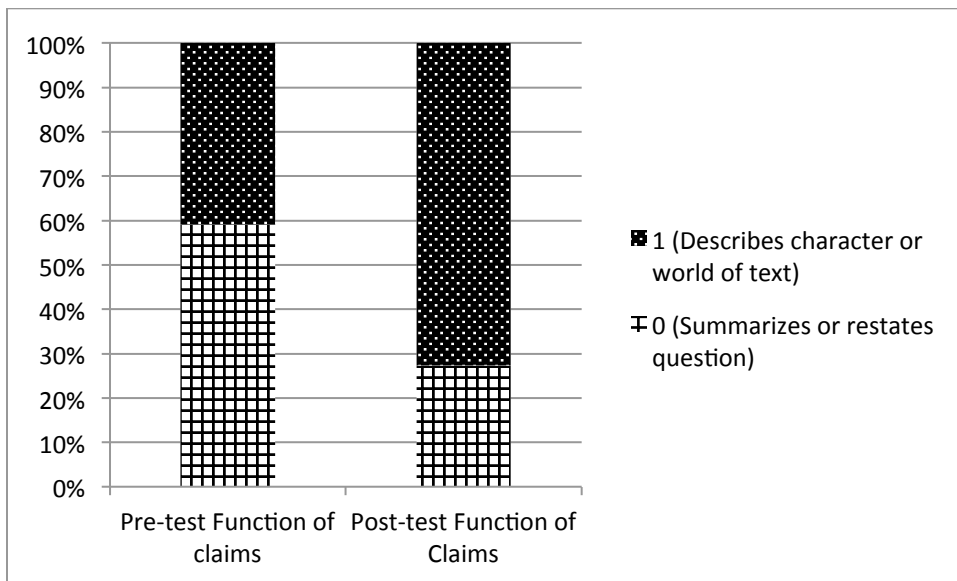


Figure 2b. Pre- and posttest scores for Function of Claims

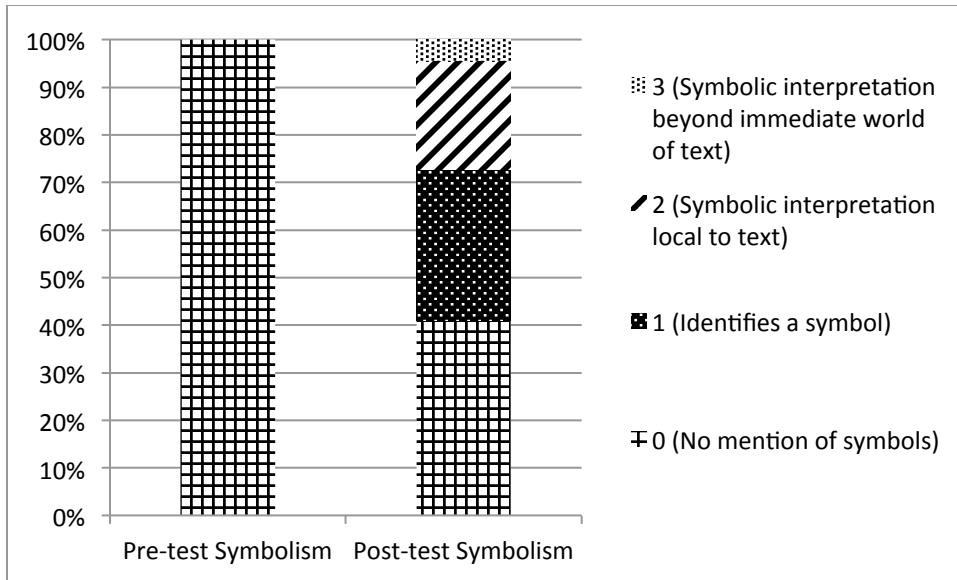


Figure 2c. Pre- and posttest scores for Symbolism

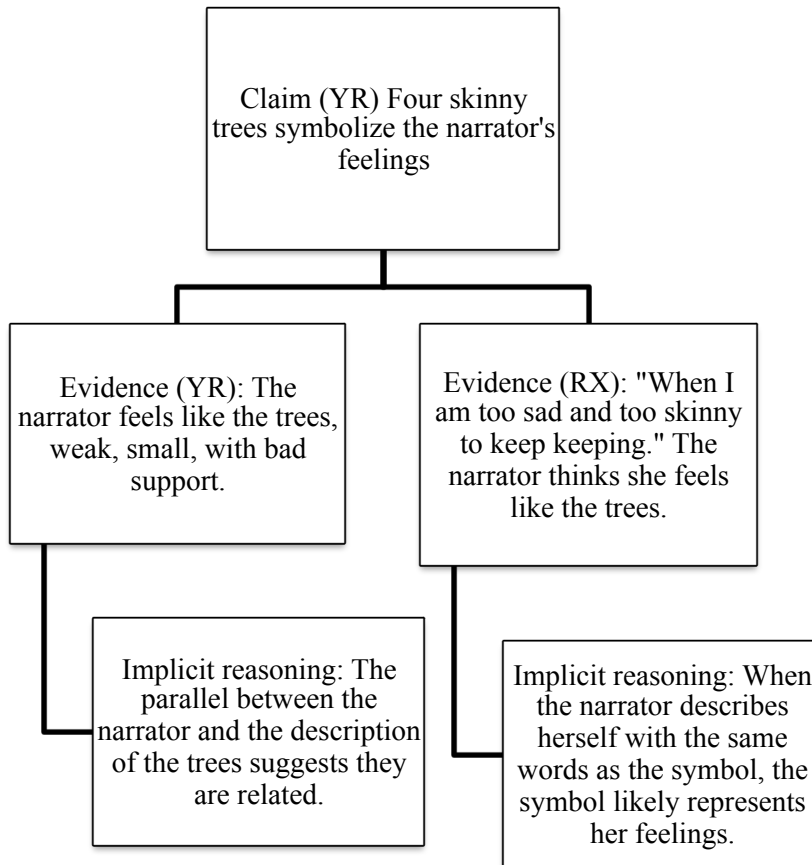


Figure 3a. YR's claim about the interpretation of "Four Skinny Trees"

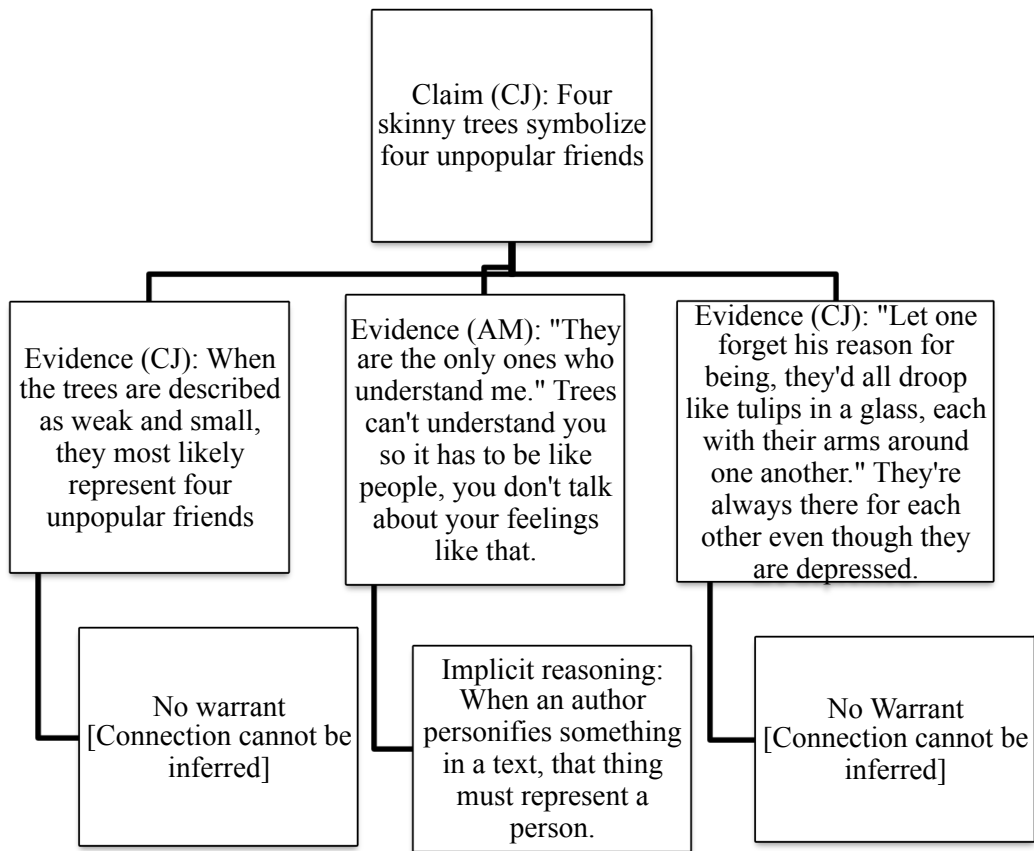


Figure 3b. CJ's claim about the interpretation of "Four Skinny Trees"