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## Texts Used in the English Language Arts Classroom of an American Islamic School

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### Abstract

*In this article, we examine what texts were selected for use by a middle school language arts teacher working in an American Islamic school. The literature has found that schools play an important role in supporting immigrant students to navigate a new culture, especially by selecting and providing appropriate texts for learning. Since students' interaction with texts can mediate knowledge and identity construction, what cultural information and whose culture is embedded in the texts matter for language learning. As such, we wondered what texts a teacher would use to bridge the minority culture of the students with the majority culture in which the students lived. One teacher's language arts class with 20 students at one American Islamic school was observed for one academic quarter and then described using a case study method. We qualitatively analyzed classroom observations, field notes, teacher interviews, and teacher and student work samples. We found that the teacher was able to use both academic texts, virtual texts, and teacher-created documents to explore some of the issues that the students face on a daily basis. This study further adds to the existing knowledge that culturally relevant texts may mediate students' understanding of the larger socio-historical contexts in which they reside including a chance to develop language skills necessary for communication and learning.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Immigrant children constitute the largest minority and the fastest-growing sector of the U.S. child population (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). The majority of these children are ‘second-generation immigrants’, children born in the U.S. to one or two foreign-born parents, and most of them speak a language other than English at home. This population presents new challenges and opportunities for classroom teachers. Studies have shown that immigrant children often struggle to navigate the culture and language of their school and community. The major impediment for this student population to successfully participate in U.S. classrooms is their limited English proficiency which can lead to failure in literacy attainments and other subjects (August et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2014). This process of becoming competent members of their community also entails a negotiation of new identities at the intersection of becoming an American while retaining their heritage (Ghiso & Low, 2012; Lucas, 2011).

Additionally, immigrant children’s literacy and personal identities as learners are often developed in faith settings, including faith-based schools and places of worship like churches or mosques (Baquedano-López 2008; Gregory et al., 2012). These settings provide uniqueness and exclusiveness for children’s literacy development that is intertwined with faith-based literacy practices in addition to the process of knowledge building. Specifically, Lytra et al. (2016) argue that children in these settings acquire rich and complex language and literacy repertoires, extending two or more languages and scripts, including vernacular, standardized, and liturgical languages. Children in these settings not only share a common faith, beliefs, and values but also develop literacy skills that create social affiliation and belonging over time and space through continued socialization (Peele-Eady, 2011).

Understanding immigrant children’s interaction with literacy in faith settings like religious-based schools or places of worship provides a window to the children’s experiences of becoming community members and academically literate citizens. Faith-based settings provide both personal and community support for immigrant children’s learning. Researchers in this area highlight that texts can mediate immigrant students’ literacy learning, especially when the texts acknowledge their agency and identity (Campano & Ghiso, 2010; Honeyford, 2014). Through continuous use of texts, immigrant students simultaneously internalize and challenge the dominant sociocultural knowledge of a society different from their own (Veum et al., 2020; Zine, 2008). Other studies have also demonstrated that immigrant children’s interaction with various types of texts may enrich their language skills, such as oral language and comprehension (e.g. DelliCarpini, 2008; Kibler et al., 2015; Purdy, 2008). Thus, the texts available and used in schools matters for immigrant students’ literacy learning.

### 1.1 Integrating Cultural Information in Texts

Immigrant students bring a set of distinct knowledge and cultural capital into the classroom. We undertook a wide-ranging review to identify what literature would

inform this study. First, we are in line with the notion that what cultural information and whose culture is brought into the classroom needs to be carefully examined (Lantolf, 2011) because culture can support language learning (Drucker, 2003; Hite & Evans, 2006; Toppel, 2015). As such, teachers must make connections between the students' culture and the target culture read in the text. Thus, this study is grounded in the notion and the significance of culturally-relevant texts for learning (e.g. Kganetso, 2016; Louie & Sierschynski, 2015; Sharma & Christ, 2017) and the notion of culturally-linguistically relevant pedagogy to facilitate the English and literacy learning in the mainstream classroom (e.g., de Oliveira & Shoffner, 2009; Islam & Park, 2015; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Lucas et al., 2008; Lucas et al., 2014).

The idea of including or integrating cultural information in texts in the mainstream classroom lies in the underpinning notion that children need to develop a particular schema, including cultural schema and background knowledge to comprehend text (Drucker, 2003). In particular, they easily understand a meaning of the text that appears similar or close to their own culture. In their description of how teachers could implement more culturally relevant teaching, Sharma and Christ (2017) argued that a greater diversity of perspective and culture within the classroom can be represented in texts that reflect such diversity. This suggests that teachers should reflect on and evaluate their own beliefs and the framework of teaching and learning.

In a similar vein, Kganetso (2016) argued that compared to other genres of text, access to procedural and informative/explanatory genres that are culturally relevant is limited. Informational texts have been used largely to develop students' expertise in the content area, including in language and literacy learning. As students progress through school, they are required to rely more on informational texts to acquire knowledge across disciplines (e.g., science experiments, history books). As such, Sharma and Christ's (2017) notion may be followed with an extra emphasis on familiar content and genre-specific characteristics and processes, not just relevance or responsiveness.

Louie and Sierschynski (2015), in addition, suggested another way to incorporate cultural information in the text by the use of a wordless picture book. This type of book poses all the literary elements and narrative structures as found in written texts but is delivered through a series of illustrations. It allows students to engage with complex contents as they discuss complex meanings toward oral language and construct the written text of their own. The teacher's role is to help readers identify the plot and structure, the characters, and the setting of the book; support their decisions to use details from the book; and help readers orally retell the story, using details of the illustrations to construct a text.

## 1.2 The Present Study

Today's classroom may consist of very diverse students with various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity should be seen as a resource for learning in which its recognition in the class might facilitate language and literacy development. As such, teachers should make sure that the students have access to culturally relevant texts that help them build the necessary schema and background knowledge to construct meaning from the text. Additionally, teachers should make connections between the students' own culture and the target culture being learned. This connection can be built through the implementation of culturally responsive/relevant teaching in

which issues around self, culture, larger social-political context, and knowledge construction are made visible during the process of learning. That being said, this notion supports [Martinez et al.'s \(2014\)](#) study that a culturally compatible classroom is needed for students to achieve higher rates of literacy attainment.

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions:

1. What kind of texts were available for and accessible to the students studying English Language Arts (ELA) in an American Islamic School?
2. How do the ELA teacher used these texts to bridge the students' minority culture with the dominant majority culture?

By minority culture, we mean practices and viewpoints held by immigrant Muslim children and community, and by majority culture we mean the practices and viewpoints held by the city in which the school was located. The site of the study was a private Islamic school situated in a suburban Midwestern area of the U.S., which teaches a state-approved literacy curriculum to Muslim children.

## **2. METHODS**

Using a case study design, we wanted to explore what kinds of texts are available and how a middle school language arts teacher used the texts to bridge students' minority culture with the dominant majority culture. The case study that we used in this study is grounded in [Merriam's \(1998\)](#) work. She states that a case study is a descriptive-holistic-analytical tool to help uncover the complexity of a particular case bounded to its complex context that cannot be made explicit in other research designs.

### **2.1 Site and Participants**

We conducted the study in an Islamic private school situated in a suburban Midwestern area of the United States where the classrooms were composed predominantly of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The participants included one English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and 20 sixth graders. The ELA teacher was selected based on the recommendation of the school principal and her willingness to participate in the study. Generally, not all teachers in private schools are licensed by the state. However, the teacher participant in this study did successfully complete a graduate-level teacher preparation program, held a state-issued teaching license, and had 5 years of teaching experience. The teacher participant self-identified herself as an American Egyptian who speaks English as her primary language and Arabic as a second language. In this paper, the teacher is coded with TC, while the students are coded as S1, S2, S3 and so forth, until S20.

In addition to the teacher participant, we sent parental consent forms to parents whose students were taught by the teacher participant in the sixth-grade classroom. The parents were asked to confirm their children's participation by returning a signed consent form. Their children's participation does not affect their performance at school. The 20 students whose parents/guardians responded positively to the study were included as participants. More demographic information about the student participants can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the student participants.

Characteristics	Number of students
Number of student participants	20
Male students	5
Female students	15
Age range	11-12 years old
Language background:	
Somali	8
Arabic	7
Turkish	1
Indian	4
Parents' cultural background:	
Somalia	8
Syria	4
Egypt	3
Turkey	1
India	4
Socio-economic status:	
High-income family	6
Middle-income family	14

## 2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted data collection for four months. The tools of data collection included classroom observations, field notes, interviews, and documentation. The use of multiple tools for data collection is necessary in case study design to promote data validation and the holistic coherence of the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). The classroom observation was conducted to see what texts are available for and accessible to the student participants and to see how these texts were used by the participants in the classroom. Observations lasted for the duration of 2-hour English Language Arts classes for the second academic quarter which ran between four months. This equated to about 50 observations and 100 hours of instruction. We audiotaped all of the observations and used fieldnotes to record thick descriptions of the texts used in the classroom.

We also used interviews that focused on the teacher participant as a tool to understand her opinion and perceptions of the texts being used. Kvale (2007) explains that interviewing is a good way to find out how people make decisions. We conducted two types of teacher interviews. The first was short 1-2-minute interviews before and after lessons which allowed us to clarify what was observed and how the teacher made particular decisions on the texts. The second was two semi-structured hour-long interviews at the beginning and ending of the quarter in which deeper levels of questions related to text options, choices, and teaching were discussed. All of the conversations during the interviews were audio-recorded. Finally, we used documentation to collect information on texts used and produced by the teacher and students. Bretschneider et al. (2017) suggested that documenting work samples is a good way to understand the classroom.

In a qualitative case study, data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously as suggested by Merriam (1998). Since our interest is to explore the kinds of texts and how they were used by the participants, we first organized the data

obtained from the documentation into categories, such as print books, digital texts, teacher-made worksheets, and school policy and curriculum. We decided to start with this process to avoid collecting abundant data that were irrelevant to the research focus (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Likewise, we conducted interviews with the teacher participant. We audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, analyzed, and coded all interview data into temporary categories (e.g. teacher perception of texts, teacher's decision making, school policy and curriculum, instructional practice). After that, we reanalyzed and compared these interview transcripts to the data obtained from observations, field notes, and documentation to find out similarities and differences related to our codes. We stopped the analysis process when a core category emerged and no more negative cases were found (Dei, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

To address the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016), we employed member-checks, peer-debriefings, negative case analysis, and data triangulation. The member checks were conducted with the teacher participant to support the confirmation of the findings. Peer-debriefings were conducted with two doctoral students and one university faculty member in literacy who were engaged in qualitative research. A negative-case analysis with a focus on instances, situations, and causes that may not fit with the patterns of interpretation was conducted. The intent was to reduce the effect of predisposed notions on the participants (Merriam, 1998).

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Using four kinds of data sources; documents, interviews, observations, and fieldnotes, we tried to make sense of the data to understand what texts were available for the students and how these texts were used by the middle school ELA teacher in literacy learning to bridge the students' minority culture with the dominant culture of the U.S society. We presented the findings in three sections based on the three main codes derived from the data analysis, including texts such as print books, digital texts, and teacher-made worksheets. Within each section, we offered multiple examples of each type and then described the contents of the material, how the teacher used the materials, and how the students responded.

#### **3.1 Print Books**

The state's learning standards for K-12 English Language Arts (ELA) advocate a wide range of independent and proficient reading in complex literary and informational texts. We found that in this study the participants read and discussed 'Bud Not Buddy' (Curtis, 1999), 'Out of the Dust' (Hesse, 1997), and 'Blood on the River' (Carbone, 2006), which contain stories portraying the history and cultural diversity of America. Since the student participants were considered second-generation immigrants whose parents came from different nationalities, their learning about American culture and the larger historical context was crucial, so that they can become competent and knowledgeable members of the community (Heath, 2010; Soto Huerta & Perez, 2015). During the process, their identity was also negotiated which



included an intersection between what it means to be American and an effort to maintain their heritage (Ghiso & Low, 2012; Lucas, 2011).

The teacher selection of those texts was informed by the State Standard for ELA's literary texts for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grades as reported in Table 2. However, the list of texts in Table 2 is only a recommendation. The teacher in this study also considered text exemplars provided by the school curriculum, Wit & Wisdom. For example, the major theme of the literary texts of module one in this curriculum is 'Resilience in the Great Depression' with the essential question 'How can enduring tremendous hardship contribute to personal transformation?' ("Implementation guide: A guide for teachers," 2017, p. 22). Two suggested core texts were 'Bud Not Buddy' by Christopher Paul Curtis and 'Out of The Dust' by Karen Hesse. Different texts were suggested in the other modules.

**Table 2.** Print books selection.

Texts Suggested by the State Standards	Texts Suggested by Wit & Wisdom Curriculum	Teacher's Selection
1. Little Women by Louisa May Alcott (1868)	1. Bud Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis (1999)	1. Bud Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis (1999)
2. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain (1876)	2. Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse (1997)	2. Out of The Dust by Karen Hesse (1997)
3. A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle (1962)	3. The Odyssey by Homer (1990)	3. Blood on The River: James Town in 1607 by Elisa Carbone (2006)
4. The Dark is Rising by Susan Cooper (1984)	4. Ramayana: Divine Loophole by Sanjay Patel (2010)	4. Number the Stars by Lois Lowry (1989)
5. Dragonwings by Laurence Yep (1975)	5. Blood on The River by Elisa Carbone (2006)	5. Written in the Bone: Buried Lives of Jamestown by Sally Walker (2009)
6. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor (1976)	6. Written in Bone: Buried Lives in Jamestown and Colonial Maryland by Sally M Walker (2009)	6. Shipwrecked at The Bottom of The World by Jennifer Armstrong (1998), and
7. The People Could Fly by Virginia Hamilton (1985)	7. Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World by Jennifer Armstrong (1998), and	7. I am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World by Malala Yousafzai and McCormick (2013)
8. The Tale of The Mandarin Ducks by Katherine Paterson (1990)	8. I am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World by Malala Yousafzai and McCormick (2013)	
9. Eleven by Sandra Cisneros (1994), and		
10. Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of The Iliad by Rosemary Sutcliff (1993).		

The teacher's selection of texts was mainly informed by the state standards and the school curriculum. However, her decision regarding the text quality was based on her judgment and teaching experience:

- (1) "As different years go by and as I see how kids react to the book, I change the map a little bit. For example, in the Wit & Wisdom curriculum, I read the books that they gave us with the kids, you know, for the first time or I read them on my own, and then if I am bored with the book and I can't handle it, then I don't put my kids to read them". (TC)

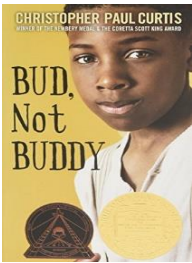
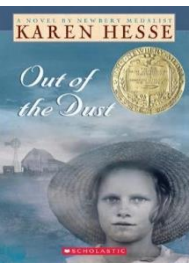
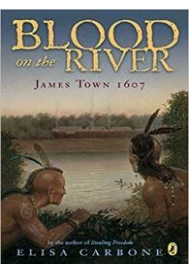
She also explained that her selection of the book should be approved by the principal and be at the students' grade level. Grade 6 students are required by the state standards to read 6-7 books a year. Only the teaching of the first three books was

observed during the study as can be seen in Table 3. The seven literary books selected by the teacher in Table 2 were expected to be read in four quarters throughout the academic year. Each quarter, which is a ten-week period, included two books to read. Because of different circumstances, the class may not finish all of the books within a year depending on the students' reading progress and any other possible interruptions.

- (2) "Last year I did [finish all of the books]. This year I am not really sure because I have a lot of students in that class who are lower level than what I normally have last year. I slow it down a lot. We just have done with Bud Not Buddy. I should have been done with that like a month ago. I am doing a lot more hands-on group projects with them so they can grasp the information, so I doubt that we are going to get through every single book unless, you know, they pick up with them and start moving quickly". (TC)

We argue that the teacher's selection of the print books was considerate. Reading texts about past American society through a series of literacy events enabled the student participants to construct knowledge and identity in American culture within the timeframe and setting of the texts. Appropriate learning materials, in this case, books, can be extremely effective in fostering students' multicultural communication competence (Deswila et al., 2021). Additionally, the participants may connect to the global ecology or the larger social situations where the texts and the participants reside mediated by language or talk about the texts which take place in a local ecology (Erickson, 2004).

**Table 3.** Description of three books observed.

	<p>'Bud Not Buddy' (Curtis, 1999)</p> <p>'Bud Not Buddy' showcases the difficulties of the Great Depression and portrays American cultural diversity while encountering day-to-day issues of racism and discrimination against people with different skin color, economic status, and political views. In terms of alignment with state learning standards, this book contains opportunities for students to use knowledge of language and language conventions and enrich vocabulary acquisition, including figurative language, word relationships, and word nuances.</p>
	<p>'Out of The Dust' by Karen Hesse (1997)</p> <p>This book is related to 'Bud Not Buddy' which was set in the 1930s, but an American white child is the main character. The Dust Bowl or Dust Storm is also an important episode in the history of America during the Great Depression. This book portrays how a low-income American family struggled to survive financial difficulties during that time. It also pictures the condition of American society in general. 'Out of The Dust' (Hesse, 1997) is cleverly written in a poetry format, so it may be categorized as a cross-over novel or novel in verse.</p>
	<p>'Blood on the River': James Town 1607 by Elisa Carbone (2006)</p> <p>This book is about Native Americans and the new colonies in American history. It portrays the life and culture of Native Americans, which now have become an indigenous minority group in the U.S. The story of this group is crucial in American history because it tells the success and failure of European colonialism in the 'New World'. As a work of historical fiction, each chapter of this book begins with a quote from the primary source. These quotes became topics for classroom discussion.</p>



### 3.2 Digital Texts

Digital texts were also available for the student participant that focus mainly on informational texts. We found that every student had access to the internet with an iPad and was used when the teacher asked them to research information on online sources. Most of the texts that they accessed on the internet were informational texts. The iPad was used only for certain activities like ‘Current Events’ as the teacher explained in an interview:

- (3) “What I like to do is depending on the topic that we’re on in class and the reading that we are doing, I like to have them figure out something that relates to a real-life situation, so that’s when the ‘Current Events’ come in. And they watch the news, listen to the radio, and go online. So, I told them, you know there is a lot of racism going on these days right, not just against different people of different races, but also with religion. So, their ‘Current Events’ assignment was to go online or watch the news, and find the topic that relates to discrimination”. (TC)

‘Current Events’ activity was usually conducted as an after-reading activity. The participants engaged in literacy events that reformulated their thoughts regarding the larger culture and history of the community around them. They also constructed a connection to how these issues relate to their current roles and identities within the community. The digital texts in this sense serve as mediational means for the student participants to understand what Gee (2013) said is a cultural model of society. A cultural model can be defined as “what is typical or normal from the perspective of a particular Discourse [or a related or aligned set of them” (p. 144), which is dynamic across times and spaces (Peele-Eady, 2011).

One of the students that observed during the ‘Current Events’ activity, S1, read an article, found on Google search, from the ‘Guardian’ about the life of a black man growing up in the U.S. The article was an argumentative text written by Brian Jones and published on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018. After having scanned a couple of other articles, he decided to use this particular article because he thought that it was easier to read and understand. Since the text was going to be gathered as an artifact, we asked why S1 decided to use this article. S1 stated:

- (4) “I think this one is simpler like the sentences are easy to read. The writer of this article is a black man. Bud is also black. They have the same experience of racism in America. Bud’s story was in the 1930 and this article is in 2018. It means that racism is still happening till today. That is why I think this article is related to the book ‘Bud Not Buddy’”. (S1)

To this end, this finding indicates that the digital text helped the student participant to make a connection to the texts previously read and construct new ideas for learning. A similar finding was found in Rajendra and Kaur’s (2022) study which investigates how multimodal texts can help 10 secondary school students in Selangor, Malaysia generate ideas for their language learning. S1 built a sense of cultural awareness and understanding (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2021), which according to Telaumbanua et al. (2020) is crucial for effective communication and establishing healthy social relationships in the future.

Another use of the iPad to research informational texts online was in the activity called ‘Islamic Misconception’. It was a group work activity where the students were assigned to a topic related to common misconceptions about Islam in the U.S. They were given some time to work in their groups, search for supportive information, and

solidify their arguments as a group. Each group needed to explain the misconception and defended their arguments during the whole class discussion. This is one example:

- (5) T1 : But I see that there is a lot of war in Islamic countries, why is that? If Islam is so peaceful, why is that happening?  
S2 : They [the society] think that we are terrorists because I read that Al Qaeda and ISIS consider themselves as Muslims, that's why they think we are terrorists.  
S3 : There are terrorist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda that consider themselves as Muslim. Fake Muslims. Bad Muslims. Also, in the holy book that we call the Quran, there is a verse in surah Maidah that says [reading an article in iPad] 'Indeed, the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world, and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment'. So, there is a huge punishment for people who start a war and kill their brothers.

In (5), the group's topic was 'Does Islam permit terrorism?' The students were trying to answer the teacher's question about why there is a lot of war in Islamic countries. S2 argued that ISIS and Al Qaeda were the terrorist groups that create a bad image of Islam in society. His argument was derived from a news article in *The New York Times* published on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 entitled 'ISIS Maybe Waning but Global Threats of Terrorism Continue to Spread'. This finding indicates that the discourse used by the students contains an expression that is more of a feeling. It shows learning and understanding of the larger social context which derived from reading multiple texts. The complexity requires the building of relationships and coherence both inside and across texts (Britt & Rouet, 2012). Similar support to this argument was found in Triana et al.'s (2020) study examining students' social practices and discourses while engaging with digital texts on Facebook. They mention that the participants in their study were able to produce new discourses for discussion as a result of reading other texts.

### **3.3 Teacher-Made Worksheets**

Another important finding related to what texts are available in literacy teaching and learning in this study was the teacher-made worksheets that focus on literary text, informational text, and vocabulary learning. Worksheets are considered texts because they resemble both texts and tasks that are used in the classroom (Evans & Cleghorn, 2022). Most of the teacher worksheets were used as supplementary materials to the main reading texts. The worksheets were in the form of reading comprehension tests or vocabulary tests. The worksheets were made in relation to the book that they currently read or a current class discussion.

For example, when the class was reading 'Out of the Dust' (Hesse, 1997), the teacher provided the students with an additional text of a poem entitled 'The Dawn's Awake' by Otto Leland Bohanan. This poem was part of the Wit & Wisdom curriculum. Otto Leland Bohanan is an African American poet during the Harlem Renaissance which was the same setting as 'Out of the Dust' and 'Bud Not Buddy'. Generally, the poem expresses the power and beauty of a sunrise as it clears away the darkness. The teacher gave the students this poem because she wanted them to have more exposure to figurative language which is one of the language standards included

in the state standards. The teacher asked some comprehension questions related to the poem and the figurative language embodied in the poem.

During an observation, we noticed that there were didactical steps taken by the teacher in using this text. First, the students were asked to read the poem individually and try to answer the questions that followed. The questions were about figurative languages, such as personification, hyperbole, metaphor, and imagery. After reading the poem individually, the teacher began a whole class discussion for comprehension. Since the poem has a complex level of meaning, the class had an extremely rigorous discussion to unpack the meaning. For example, they talked about an interpretation of the 'Dawn' beyond its literal meaning of what the 'Dawn' might represent. They also talked about the tone of the line "Fathers! Torn and numb,--" and how it is different from the rest of the poem.

The second form of teacher-made worksheets was in the form of informational text followed by reading comprehension questions using texts from the school curriculum. T1 argued that,

- (6) "The supplementary materials, like the worksheets and vocabulary in Wit & Wisdom, are really good. Sometimes I use them if I think my students need more exercises or they need a break from the book that we read...". (T1)

Figure 1 is an example of this kind of text.

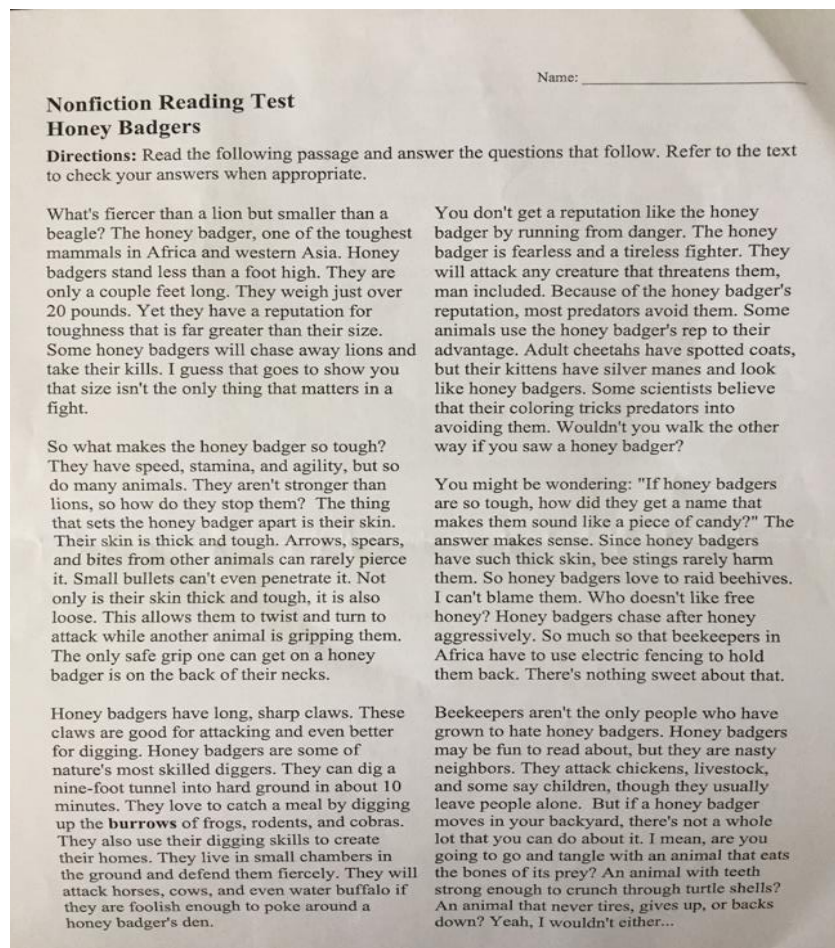


Figure 1. Teacher-made worksheet on informational text

Figure 1 shows an informational text about ‘Honey Badgers’. There are six paragraphs. Each paragraph consists of approximately eight to nine sentences. Some of the comprehension questions posted by the teacher following this text are questions about the main idea of each paragraph, the title, other textual information, the author’s intention, and vocabulary questions.

The third form of teacher-made worksheets is related to vocabulary learning. The teacher argued that vocabulary is one of the major focuses of her teaching and it is also mandated in the state standards. The teacher always emphasized four aspects of the vocabulary that she introduced: definition, part of speech, a synonym of the word, and an example of the word in a sentence. Figure 2 is a teacher-made worksheet that asks the students to identify those components.

**Word Wizard-** Define the following words from this section. Make sure you write down the page number, part of speech, and the correct definition of the word.

13. Kerosene- 60 -

14. Scorched- 66 -

15. Squirreled- 67 -

16. Quench- 67 -

17. Stupor-71 -

18. Writhed- 73 -

19. Carcasses- 73 -

20. Cereus Plant- 81 -

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

6th Grade Vocabulary Quiz

Write the definition of each word, and write the word in a sentence. For root words, write each root into an actual word, and use it correctly in a sentence. (2 Points Each)

1. Great Depression

Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Revved

Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 2.** Teacher-made worksheet on vocabulary learning.

In Figure 2, the teacher made two different forms of vocabulary worksheets. The picture on the top consists of some vocabulary from ‘Out of The Dust’, such as kerosene, scorched, squirreled, quench, stupor, writhed, carcasses, and cercus plant. To complete this worksheet, the teacher asked the students to define each word and its part of speech. The teacher provided the page number where the word was located.



The picture below in Figure 2 was based on 'Bud Not Buddy'. The teacher asked the students to write a definition of the word and write the word in a sentence. For example, the word was 'Great Depression'. The students needed to fill in the blank provided in the worksheet for 'What does Great Depression mean?' and then provide a sentence that used the phrase Great Depression. Another example was the word 'revved'. Students were to define 'revved' and provide a sentence that used it.

Taken together, worksheets as supplementary texts play a significant role in language learning. Other studies have also demonstrated that worksheets enable students to exercise and learn better the concepts discussed in the classroom (Yerizon et al., 2018). When used appropriately, worksheets also promote learning autonomy, especially in building comprehension of texts (Kurniati & Suthum, 2019). Worksheets can also be an assessment tool in which teachers can also monitor students' progress in learning on how far they have internalized ideas and concepts (Ozturk & Tekin, 2020).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings showed that there were three types of texts available for the participants in this study: print books that focus on literary texts, digital texts that focus on informational text, and teacher-made worksheets that focus on literary text, informational text, and vocabulary learning. The texts were claimed to be inclusive of American culture as the target culture and the students' own minority culture. The idea of including or integrating cultural information in texts in the mainstream classroom lies in the underpinning notion that students need to develop a particular schema, including cultural schema and background knowledge, to comprehend text (Drucker, 2003). In particular, they will easily understand the meanings of the text that appear similar or close to their own culture. A greater diversity of perspective and culture within the classroom can be represented in texts that reflect the classroom diversity (Sharma & Christ, 2017).

Based on these findings, some recommendations can be made for ELA teachers. Teaching literacy to students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds requires teachers to select texts that permeate both the target culture and the students' own culture. The proximity between students' own culture and the target culture represented in the texts may facilitate students' reading comprehension. Additionally, culturally relevant texts may mediate students' understanding of the larger socio-historical contexts where they reside. If the school is a religious school like Islamic school, text selection should consider the school's religious values, so that the students may have opportunities to develop knowledge and identity which are in line with their community practices.

Recommendations can also be made for future researchers. This study indicates that a culturally compatible classroom is needed for students to achieve higher rates of literacy attainment. More research is needed to support this framework. More research could demonstrate how culturally relevant teaching promotes literacy learning in mainstream classrooms through the instrumentation of multiple measures of literacy outcomes. For instance, experimental research could be conducted to examine the effects of this framework on outcome measures like reading comprehension or to evaluate whether this framework has more significant effects on literacy learning than



other frameworks. More case studies, ethnographies, and discourse analyses are also needed to uncover teachers' decision-making and delivery of instruction, the detailed interaction and discourse processes of this framework within the classroom, and its connection to the sociocultural context of the students.

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