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Developing Critical Inner Literacy: Reading the Body, the Word, and the World

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Abstract

Developing Critical Inner Literacy: Reading the Body, the Word, and the World By Chelsea A. Jackson

This qualitative research case study analyzes the lived stories and experiences of Black Girls and Women of Color who participated in a two week Yoga, Literature, and Art (YLA) Camp at a Women's Historically Black College (HBCU) in the southeastern region of the United States. Utilizing Critically Conscious Research Methodologies, this case study was structured to engage the following research questions:

1. What might we learn by inquiring into how Black girls' perceptions of identity intersect and contradict their lived experiences when yoga and culturally responsive literature are used for mediums of learning?
2. How might inquiring into the lived stories and experiences of Black girls and Women of Color deepen our understandings of the cultural, institutional, and social narratives that shape learning?
3. How might narrative inquiry, critical literacy, and yoga be brought together to create an embodied and liberating pedagogy that honors lived experience?

This qualitative research focuses on the work I did last summer with 13 Black teen girls and nine adult Women of Color who practiced yoga, discussed poetry by Women of Color throughout the Diaspora, and shared lived experiences through art and poetry. This work lends itself to advocates for social justice, educators, and practitioners of yoga. Moreover, this research offers culturally responsive teaching techniques for yoga teachers interested in working with marginalized youth.

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Finally, I thank the girls and women who participated in this study. We did this work together! I learned so much from each one of you. The stories and experiences we shared during YLA will be in my heart for eternity. I am so grateful that the Universe allowed our paths to cross and I pray that the love we shared will live in our hearts forever.

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Introduction

Three years ago I was interviewed for an article entitled, *Yoga in Public Schools* by Lisa Ann Williamson (2012) which appeared in *Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center*. During the interview I discussed how I implemented yoga throughout the school day with my third graders in a Title I School. I remember feeling uneasy when the article was published and reflected on the consequences of what had been written.

Jackson is now pursuing her doctorate in education at Emory University, studying yoga integration in the classroom. She and other advocates of yoga for kids point to learning-specific benefits and the ways in which yoga has the potential means to address a wide range of challenges in the classroom (p. 28).

Although the retelling of my experience was true, I was afraid that my words could potentially be used to support another one-size-fits-all mandated curriculum that teachers are forced to perform. I feared that professional development meetings would be taking place across public school districts and faculty would be forced to learn yoga techniques in order to increase test scores. I was concerned about the standardization of yoga and thought deeply about the consequences of making yoga an intervention to pacify public school children.

As yoga becomes more prevalent across the world, conversations surrounding yoga in public schools are moving beyond yoga communities and making headlines in national newspapers. In 2013, Encinitas Unified School District in California won a case against a group of families who argued that teaching yoga in public schools violates the

separation of church and state (Nikias, 2013) because of the practice's roots in Hindu philosophy. Despite the controversial press surrounding the trial, California continues to be one of the leading U.S. states with non-profit organizations, independent yoga instructors, and internal consultants who facilitate yoga programs in schools. This case illustrates just how rapidly conversations around yoga in public schools are growing across the nation.

More specifically, yoga and mindfulness programs used as interventions for students labeled "at-risk" are becoming more prevalent across public school systems in the United States. When searching the key terms *yoga* and *at-risk students*, I encountered dozens of organizations and programs making claims that yoga and other mindfulness practices are beneficial specifically for "at-risk students." Aside from using outdated dehumanizing terms like "at-risk" to describe students and communities who have been oppressed and marginalized, many well-meaning organizations also fall short when it comes to thinking deeply about the ways in which pedagogies grounded in yoga and mindfulness can be used to interrogate and critique systems of oppression. As a result, this qualitative study is designed to explore the ways in which yoga, culturally responsive literacy experiences, and storytelling can be used together as a liberating pedagogy that resists oppression.

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Labels and Limitations: Yoga with Marginalized Youth

The pilot study for this dissertation unexpectedly revealed one of the undergirding problems observed throughout my lived experiences and observations of yoga-based programs working with underserved youth and communities. Two years prior to the case study presented within this dissertation, I was invited to assist a local yoga teacher who taught yoga throughout local public schools. For eight weeks I assisted and led yoga classes for an eighth grade girls' physical education class at a local public school with this teacher. Initially, I thought this would be an ideal research site because of the population and the amount of girls involved; however, some of the co-occurrences I observed within the space were disturbing and eventually spurred my decision to not use the public school as my research site.

Throughout the eight-week yoga program within the public school, I observed the lead teacher exclude the majority of Black and Brown girls within the first week of yoga class. As I observed this white woman ask each girl to either "do yoga or leave," I also observed the triggers for her and ultimately the girls' dismissals. I noticed how laughter and talking agitated this woman whenever the Black and Brown girls engaged; however, when I observed white students within the class communicate in similar ways they were not asked to leave. By the second week of watching girl after girl being asked to leave for her "unruliness" I started to think more about how critical it is for teachers and programs, especially those concerned with healing, to understand how critical culturally responsive

approaches to yoga are.

Co-founder Michelle Mitchell of *YoKid*©, a District of Columbia based yoga program and training for yoga teachers, works with students labeled at-risk and describes her work with youth to Huffington Post (2008), “There’s the overarching goal in yoga, which is to get the kids to settle their minds into stillness.” Mitchell continues, “*YoKid*© classes are helping at-risk students to relax and concentrate.”

The label “at-risk” is still used frequently to describe the demographic of families with whom I have worked during my tenure as an elementary school teacher in a Title I school. And although I observed uneasiness, anxiety, and a lack of engagement from my students at times, I also witnessed the ways in which our oppression was institutionalized and rarely challenged. In light of my lived experiences with yoga and my work with youth who have been marginalized, this study is designed to understand what happens within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) when yoga is used in conjunction with culturally responsive experiences with literature and storytelling as tools to name and resist oppression.

Mindful Schools, a Bay Area based program offers online mindfulness training to teachers, instructing them in how to equip children to concentrate in classrooms and deal with stress. Launched in 2010, the group has reached more than 300,000 students, and educators in 43 countries and 48 states have taken its courses online (Pickert, 2014). In a PBS documentary released in 2013, *Room to Breathe*, teachers trained by Mindful Schools are followed through an overcrowded middle school that holds the district record for having the highest amount of suspensions in the San Francisco Public School System. A description on the documentary’s website reads:

Room To Breathe is a surprising story of transformation as struggling kids in a San Francisco public middle school are introduced to the practice of mindfulness meditation. Topping the district in disciplinary suspensions, and with overcrowded classrooms creating a nearly impossible learning environment, overwhelmed administrators are left with stark choices: repeating the cycle of trying to force tuned-out children to listen, or to experiment with timeless inner practices that may provide them with the social, emotional, and attentional skills that they need to succeed. The first question is whether it's already too late. Confronted by defiance, contempt for authority figures, poor discipline, and more interest in "social" than learning, can a young mindfulness teacher from Berkeley succeed in opening their minds and hearts?

Contemporary yoga and mindfulness programs working with youth who have been marginalized may be well meaning; however a closer look at the tensions and contradictions occurring within these spaces could offer a fuller picture. Although a study designed to understand these occurrences extends beyond the scope of this study, it is critical to understand that pedagogies and spaces that use language like "defiant" and "poorly disciplined" to identify students misrepresent youth who have been marginalized as being the problem. Similar to my experiences with the lead teacher at the local public school who dismissed the majority of Black and Brown eighth grade girls from the physical education class, a number of programs that bring yoga to underserved populations also seem to miss the mark when it comes to honoring students' lived experience in culturally responsive ways.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study is designed to understand what happens in spaces meant for healing that intentionally honor lived experiences in culturally responsive ways. The research site for this case study was co-constructed by youth, adults, and community members concerned with healing the consequences of oppression, specifically systemic oppression that targets Black and Brown women.

To increase the relevancy of culturally responsive pedagogies grounded in yoga, this qualitative case study is designed to examine the role yoga can play as a transgressive and liberating tool for both students and teachers. More specifically, this dissertation is designed to reimagine the ways in which yoga and culturally responsive experiences with literature can be used together as a platform to illuminate the voices and lived experiences of community members. This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What might we learn by inquiring into how Black girls' perceptions of identity intersect and contradict their lived experiences when yoga and culturally responsive literature are used for mediums of learning?
2. How might inquiring into the lived stories and experiences of Black girls and Women of Color deepen our understandings of the cultural, institutional, and social narratives that shape learning?
3. How might narrative inquiry, critical literacy, and yoga be brought together to create an embodied and liberating pedagogy that honors lived experience.

Theoretical Framework

Critically Conscious Research

Critically conscious research (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, Burke, & Herrera, 2008) is a framework that guides the research questions as well as the methods for this study. In order to represent multiple and intersecting experiences, critically conscious research provides a framework that makes space for silenced narratives, or *counter-stories* (Bell, 1987, 1992; Delgado, 1995; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001 Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). Derived from the field of Critical Race Theory (CRT), counter-stories are defined within the context of this study as a method for understanding the lived experiences of people who experience and resist marginalization at the intersection of race, class, and gender.

As a response to a need for People of Color to begin to move discussions of race and racism from the realm of the experiential to the realm of the ideological (Tatum, 1997), CRT emerged from the legal field as a method to uncover patterns of racial exclusion. With roots in Indigenous, African-American, and Latina/Latino critical social thought, CRT legitimizes the narrative and storytelling that present a different interpretation of how the law has been used to justify an ideology of racism against Persons of Color (Bell, 1987, 1992; Delgado, 1989,1995). In the context of this study, *counter-stories* are used as the primary data source used to understand the lived experiences of the participants.

Critical Race Theorists within the field of educational research define the counter-story as a method of telling stories that are not often told. Solórzano and Yosso's (2009)

work defines the counter-story as a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. As a result, this critically conscious qualitative case study works from a lens that privileges the counter-stories of the participants who share their lived experiences with marginalization through yoga, poetry, and group dialogue.

The term *critical* will be used throughout this study in multiple and intersecting ways. As mentioned, the privileging of the counter-story and narrative within this study supports a critical approach that relies on the voices of the participants to name, confront, and challenge oppression. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) observe, “Inquiry that aspires to the name *critical* must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society and public sphere within the society.” (p. 291)

Critically conscious research within the field of language and literacy challenges institutionalized oppression in ways that dismantle systems that privilege some while others are silenced. Willis et al. (2008) assert, “We challenge the status quo in language and literacy research that ignores and marginalizes oppression as we advocate for valuing, respecting, appreciating and validating the systems of meaning-making and communicating used by all people.” (p. 13)

Counter-storytelling and Narrative Inquiry

Within the field of education, narrative inquiry provides a framework for researchers interested in solving research puzzles through the stories and lived experiences of research participants. Narrative inquiry guides this research because it is particularly useful for studying experience. Narrative inquiry methods have served as the foundation for how this research site was facilitated, for the ways in which CDG sessions

were conducted, and for how the data have been analyzed. In other words, experience was valued throughout this study.

Circle Discussion Groups (CDGs), poetry, and art were used as a collective medium for participants to exchange stories in ways that made space for narratives to be shared. Ginwright (2010) suggests, “The power to speak about painful experiences related to racism, sexism, and poverty facilitates healing because the act of testifying exposes the raw truth about suffering and releases the hidden pain that is a profound barrier to resistance” (p. 9). Not only was narrative inquiry used as a method to engage testimonies of pain brought on by social toxins, narrative inquiry also revealed the courageous ways in which participants in YLA camp retold and relived their experiences with oppression as a transformative practice for critical consciousness.

Resisting policies, research, and curricula that compartmentalize education in ways that disconnect human experience from the learning process, this critically conscious (Willis et al., 2008) and humanizing research methodology (Paris & Winn, 2014) contributes to fields within education concerned with youth who have been marginalized, social justice, and embodied ways of knowing. As a framework, narrative inquiry honors the embodied and experiential commitment focused on critical literacy development and critical pedagogy by exploring what happens in co-constructed literacy communities occupied by people who have experienced oppression through social toxins on individual, social, and institutional levels.

The significance of the population with whom I worked will be explained in detail later; however, it is important to mention why narrative inquiry is an appropriate and a transgressive method to use within a study focused on Black Girls and Women of Color.

Narrative inquiry is a humanizing approach to research that engages relationships of care and dignity and dialogic consciousness raising, for both researchers and participants (Paris and Winn, 2014). Guided by narrative inquiry methodologist Clandinin's (2013) claim that "Narrative inquiry is a way of studying people's experiences, nothing more, nothing less" (p. 38), this study seeks to learn from the lived experiences of both youth and adult participants, as well as their experiences of processing these experiences.

As a learner, educator, and educational researcher who is Black and also a woman, my lived experiences with the word and the world have been shaped by my race and gender. On the one hand, there have been moments throughout my educational career as a learner and teacher that have left me feeling silenced, ignored, and invisible because of my race and gender. While on the other hand, there have been moments throughout my life and experiences with literacy that have left me feeling supported, celebrated, and valued because of my race and gender. Methodologies that seek to find answers to questions surrounding learning and literacy practices within marginalized communities sometimes fall short and disregard the voices of the people with whom they live and work as a result of methods that do not engage the stories and experiences of participants.

Similar to the concerns of researchers within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) who are critically conscious and attentive to the individual voices that contribute to larger Discourse, narrative inquiry is a method concerned with the voices and lived experiences of participants within a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998). Critical literacy theorist and critical discourse analyst Soto-Manning (2014) asserts, "Critical language researchers interested in humanizing approaches must understand that while the theoretical discussion of institutional discourses that often take place in the

field of Critical Discourse Analysis is important, we must start by listening to and analyzing the stories people tell every day if we are to engage in social change” (p. 220).

When used as a method, narrative inquiry acknowledges and legitimizes the wealth within the lived experiences of learners and the multiple ways of knowing within a learning community.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This review of literature brings together the multiple fields, disciplines, and practices that contribute to and inspire this work. The design for this qualitative case study is unique because it unites fields of education and frameworks for understanding healing, as well as oppression, in ways reimagine definitions of literacy. This case study acknowledges the work that has already been done with youth in underserved schools and communities in relation to healing; however, this work expands into fields of critical literacy, critical pedagogy, and embodied ways of learning. More specifically, this work draws from previous and current research that focuses on the lived experiences of Black girls in relation to oppression, healing, and critical literacy development.

Oppression and Radical Healing

Building from Ginwright's (2010) theory of *radical healing*, which is, "the process of building hope, optimism, and vision to create justice in the midst of oppression," (p. 9), this study seeks to understand the ways in which yoga, culturally responsive literature, and storytelling work together as an integrative medium for dialogue and storytelling. This qualitative case study illuminates the lived experiences of Black girls and Women of Color as shared within a Yoga Literacy Community (YLC) at an eight-day Yoga, Literature, and Art (YLA) camp on the campus of a Historically Black College for Women.

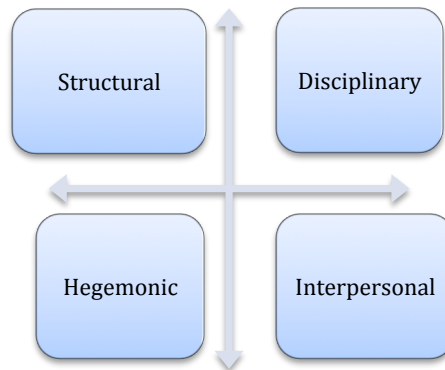
Understanding the process of radical healing (2010) as a method for resisting and transforming social toxins, this study seeks to fill in gaps within educational, social movement, and youth development research concerned with, but not limited to,

marginalized communities. Ginwright (2010) critiques educational, social, and youth-centered research by asserting how these fields inadequately address the theoretical significance of suffering or consider the empirical dimensions of healing (p. 2). Thus, this study seeks to understand the impact of and responses to social toxins experienced in the lives of Black girls and Women of Color.

A clear definition for the term *oppression* is central to the understanding of this study. Essential to the process of radical healing is the understanding that oppression is a form of social and collective trauma. According to Ginwright (2010), this view of oppression allows us to identify and name the cultural, social and spiritual consequences of trauma for oppressed communities. This lens supports ways of understanding the lived experiences of Black girls and Women of Color who encounter oppression at the intersection of race, gender, and class.

Using Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) *matrix of domination* as a framework to understand oppression within this study, systems of oppression are defined within four domains of power: (1) structural (an organization's laws, policies, and practices), (2) disciplinary (rules/bureaucracies), (3) hegemonic (ideas and ideologies), and (4) interpersonal (lived experiences of discrimination). In this light, the lived experiences with and the ways in which YLA participants resist social toxins, both within and outside of the context of school settings, will be analyzed across all four domains.

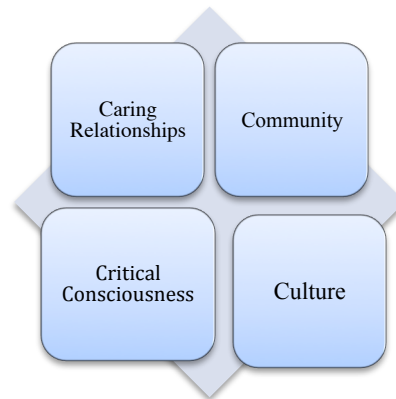
Matrix of Domination (Collins, 2000)



In order to analyze YLA participants' responses to social toxins, as illustrated by Collins' (2000) matrix of domination, I call on Ginwright's (2010) *four areas of black life* to understand components of the radical healing process that can be used as tools for resistance against oppression at the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal levels. Again, this study frames social toxins as products of oppression. Ginwright (2010) explains the four areas of black life contributing to the radical healing process as *caring relationships, community, critical consciousness, and culture*. First, caring relationships connect people in profound ways that can lead to meaningful acts of resistance. Ginwright further explains, "*Caring relationships* in this sense does not imply simply individual acts of kindness; rather, care prepares black youth to know themselves as part of a long history of struggle, and triumph" (p. 10). Second, radical healing takes place in *community* settings that support young people as they confront pain from the past while transforming fear into fuel for hope, love, and optimism. Third, developing a *critical consciousness* about the social world strengthens the awareness of black youth and supports resistance against multiple forms of oppression. Ginwright explains, "This form of consciousness focuses on building an awareness of the intersections of personal and political life by pushing youth to understand how personal struggles have profound

political explanations” (p. 10). Finally, *culture* is positioned as the foundation that connects young people to a racial and ethnic identity that is both “historically grounded and contemporarily relevant” (Ginwright, 2010, p. 10). Ginwright’s four areas of Black life shape how I organize the components working together within the research site for this qualitative case study.

Four Areas of Black Life and Radical Healing (Ginwright, 2010)



Ginwright’s (2010) four areas of Black life inform this study by providing a lens for the analysis of the participants’ responses to social toxins. As a Black woman who has witnessed and participated in the four areas of black life in spaces similar to the Black church (Lincoln, 1990), Black sororities and fraternities, and a host of other Independent Black Institutions (IBIs) YLA was created as a space to practice radical healing based on the interest of the participants.

There are many ways people experience and respond to domination at the intersection of race, class, and gender. In the context of this study, components of Ginwright’s (2010) four areas of black life found in the YLA community will be used to illustrate the ways in which participants identify, interrogate, and resist oppression at the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal levels (Collins, 2000).

Black Girlhood

Pertaining to research on the lived experiences of Black girls, Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) examines how performances of everyday Black girlhood are mediated by hip-hop culture. Brown's (2009) qualitative case study places Black girls and Women of Color at the center of analysis by illuminating their individual and collective lived experiences as told by them. This qualitative case study engages Brown's work; however, what makes this study unique is the way in which yoga is used as an embodied and liberating tool for dialogue, storytelling, and addressing social toxins and trauma. Brown (2009) reminds us, "Narratives created about Black girls without our input never seem to recognize our worth, our value, and our power." (p. 2) This study privileges the voices of Black girls and Women of Color who share lived experiences within a Yoga Literacy Community (YLC) mediated by yoga and culturally responsive literature. Brown (2009) describes the social implications of being young, Black, and female further:

The citizenship of Black girls is inherently tied to their social-political identity as marginal group members. Their childhoods are not free from injustice and inequality, and, as they negotiate state structures and agencies that are often hostile to their well-being, Black girls experience politics at an early age, with girls of color taking political action and learning political skills (p. 3).

The lived experiences belonging to individuals and communities who have traditionally been marginalized by society deserve to be told in ways that honor the depth and fullness of experience. This study does not build from a deficit model of Blackness or femaleness, nor will it operationalize terms like "at-risk" for the sake of naming oppression in a way that shames the victim with outdated, inaccurate, and dehumanizing labels. Instead, this

study relies on the voices of YLA participants to provide portraits of themselves, their lived experiences, and the ways in which they process and resist oppression. Brown (2009) further explains the implications of this type of work:

The goal of this work speaks directly to many well-meaning adults and state directives that attempt to “empower” girls without an understanding of what it means to be a Black girl and to participate in a Black girlhood that is mediated by race, class, gender, sexuality, and hip-hop. I am convinced that it is possible to transform popular and apolitical “girl empowerment” into a kind of work that is focused on personal and collective emancipation in a way that speaks to the material realities of Black girls (p.33).

This qualitative case study contributes to and even redirects conversations focused on the lives of Black girls by asking questions specific to the role yoga plays in spaces where lived experiences are shared and learning is co-constructed. Research that focuses on Black girls and Women of Color is important to the field of education and social justice as it offers insight on the consequences of social toxins as told by those who have experienced marginalization.

In a study of playwriting and performance with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated girls, Winn (2011) argues, “Playwriting, ensemble building, and performing are mediating tools used to excavate the stubborn walls of generalizations and stereotypes” (p. 35). Winn’s observation can also be made in the context of Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp with teen Black girls and adult Women of Color. Within the research site for this study, teen Black girls are encouraged to contribute to a space, as well as their own healing, by sharing the continuities and discontinuities within their

lived experiences at the intersection of race, class, and gender. Similar to Winn's (2011) work with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated girls who used performance as an embodied and liberating tool for confronting social toxins, this work analyzes the role yoga plays when employed as a tool to resist oppression.

Although the practice of yoga is seldom referred to as a performance, the physical practice of yoga provides the practitioner with an opportunity to embody creativity, emotion, and their lived experiences all while using the body as text. Similar to Madison's (2005) observations on "performances of possibilities" that guides Winn's work with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated girls, this study builds from Madison's framework with an acknowledgement that "creation and change," along with the merging of text with the world, is just as present within the practice of yoga.

Similar to the work of Brown (2009), Gaunt (2006), and Winn (2011), this analysis focuses on the ways in which bodies belonging to Black girls and women are used as text. Gaunt (2006) describes *kinetic orality* as the transmission and appropriation of musical ideals and social memories passed on jointly by word of mouth and by embodied musical gestures and formulas (Gaunt, 2006). Similar to performance, Gaunt illuminates the "unique repertoire of chants and embodied rhythms in their [Black girls] play that both reflects and inspires the principles of black popular music-making" (Gaunt, 2006, p. 1). Whether the medium of communication is playwriting or performance, hip-hop, yoga, or the games played by Black girls across our nation's schoolyards, this work illuminates the ways cultural literacies experienced by Black girls can transform oppression into hope and optimism.

Critical Literacy

It is important to understand that literacy, as understood within this research, extends far beyond the acquisition of reading and writing skills. This work resists limited views of literacy and analyzes the ways in which the body can be used as text. Critical literacy theorists Stuart Greene (2008) asserts, “Increased testing has resulted in a reductive curriculum that focuses language learning on phonemic awareness and skills, preventing students from developing a repertoire of strategies for increasing their abilities to comprehend, interpret, and produce texts of their own”(p. 7). This dissertation broadens conversations on literacy and further strengthens theories that define literacy in terms of social practice by asking participants questions specific to the ways in which yoga is used during YLA camp.

Greene’s (2008) framework entails seeing literacy as social practice. Greene asserts, “Literacy involves the ways in which people use texts for culturally meaningful purposes within culturally meaningful activities” (p. 9). This qualitative case study explores what happens when yoga is considered a culturally meaningful activity with its own system of embodied literacy—an embodied literacy used for communication, telling stories, and radical healing. Furthermore, this study supports fields of education that acknowledge the integral role social practice plays in *critical literacy* development.

Critical literacy theorists believe that literacy is inherently political and a critical perspective of literacy is one that resists hegemony and inequality. Willis et al. (2008) assert, “Language and literacy researchers who are critically conscious challenge barriers to social change, inequality, and democracy as they resist the reproduction of the ideas and values of privileged and dominant groups” (p. 13). This qualitative case study is

designed to offer unique perspectives on perceived social, institutional, and personal barriers experienced by a group of Black girls and Women of Color who use their bodies as text through yoga.

In the context of urban schools, Morrell (2008) suggests that critical literacy is not necessary only for the purpose of navigating hegemonic discourses; however, it is also essential to the “redefining of the self and the transformation of oppressive social structures” (p. 5). This qualitative study expands and makes connections between embodied literacy practices and critical literacy development. More specifically, this study is designed to understand the role yoga plays in critical literacy development when culturally responsive literature addressing oppressive social structures is integrated.

Critical Pedagogy

James Baldwin (1963), in his *Talk to Teachers*, spoke with educators about the role of the teacher during the developmental stages of the self-concept of Black youth. Baldwin makes reference to the role schools play within the lives of African American children and their learned understanding of their oppressed position in society. Baldwin pointed out that, beyond the way students are treated, schools perpetuate myths about US history to maintain a racial hierarchy of White superiority and Black inferiority. He argued that to prevent the internalization of oppression of young Black students, teachers have a responsibility to challenge the stereotypes created in society and in schools. In alignment with Baldwin’s view that internalized oppression is perpetuated in schools, this study is designed to understand the ways in which pedagogies grounded in the guiding principles of yoga can be used as tools for liberation and healing.

Turning to hooks’ (1994) concept of education as a “practice of freedom” she

asserts, “We learned early that our devotion to learning was a counter hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization” (p. 2). For hooks, the very act of learning was revolutionary for both teachers and students during her childhood in the South. In the context of this study, critical pedagogy is understood as a practice of freedom that allows teachers to facilitate a co-constructed learning community that relies on the knowledge of the student just as much as the knowledge of the teacher.

In order to understand how the term *critical pedagogy* as a practice of freedom, I turn to Freire (1970) who describes problem-posing education as the ability to break the patterns of a vertical relationship by rejecting the view that the teacher is the only one who teaches. Instead, the teacher and student become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. Guided by a principle to facilitate a learning environment that helps all learners develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, make connections between knowledge and power, and take action, this study is designed to understand the ways in which yoga can be used as pedagogy. Freire asserts,

The role of critical pedagogy is to lead students to recognize various tensions and enable them to deal effectively with them. Trying to deny these tensions ends up negating the very role of subjectivity. The negation of tension amounts to the illusion of overcoming these tensions when they are really just hidden” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 49).

The role of yoga within learning environments has the potential to impact both students and teachers when used as pedagogy. This study adds to fields of education and yoga by understanding the lived experiences of yoga practitioners and the role yoga plays throughout the learning process.

Critical Perspectives on Yoga and Marginalized Youth

Critical literacy theorists and critical pedagogues conceptualize alternative strategies for teaching literacy in ways that interrogate and critique systems of oppression. Critical literacy theorists believe that literacy is inherently political and a critical perspective of literacy is one that resists hegemony and inequality. Willis et al. (2008) assert, “Language and literacy researchers who are critically conscious challenge barriers to social change, inequality, and democracy as they resist the reproduction of the ideas and values of privileged and dominant groups” (p. 13). From this perspective and in the context of urban schools, Morrell (2008) suggests that critical literacy is not necessary only for the purpose of navigating hegemonic discourses; however, it is also essential to the “redefining of the self and the transformation of oppressive social structures” (p. 5). In this light, I draw connections to the first written text on yoga, *The Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali*.

The Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali makes it clear that yoga’s goal is a continually unfolding process of self-knowledge through the fulfillment of *dharma* (righteous duty), *artha* (prosperity), and *moksha* (liberation) (Stiles, 2000). Conceptualizing Pantanjali’s ancient text in terms of critical literacy and pedagogy, yoga can be utilized as a resource for critical literacy instruction and as a tool for resistance and transformation. A major component of yoga philosophy is the emphasis that critical self-reflection involves the mind, body, and emotion (Bachman, 2011) and has the potential to inform the ways in which practitioners interpret and participate in the world.

Turning to hooks’ (1994) concept of education as a “practice of freedom” she explains, “We learned early that our devotion to learning was a counter hegemonic act, a

fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization” (p. 2). For hooks, the very act of learning was revolutionary for both teachers and students during her childhood in the South and continues to prevail in classrooms that have the courage to resist hegemony and oppression through nuanced ways similar to the development of critical literacy through yoga. The type of transgressive pedagogy hooks highlights relates directly to the ways in which I view the integration of yoga in the classroom for urban youth. To employ literacy activities that engage the body, mind, and principles of yoga is to move beyond the boundaries of a standardized classroom that perpetuate linear ways of thinking and being in the world.

When explaining the purpose for yoga, Indian master yoga teacher B.K.S. Iyengar (2005) asserts, “Yoga offers us techniques to become aware, to expand and penetrate, and to change and evolve in order to become competent in the lives we live” (p. 22). Aligned with the sentiments expressed by Iyengar in 2005, many yoga practitioners have introduced yoga into schools and juvenile detention centers; however, the focus has been placed on calming students for the purpose of instruction or to control anger and manage stress (Stanec, Forneris, & Theuerkauf, 2010). Although I agree that yoga has the potential to address these important issues that occur in the lives of youth, this research pushes educators to utilize yoga as a way to confront systems of structural oppression that may in fact be the trigger for emotional stress and anger for our youth.

Just recently has yoga been considered a practice worthy to be explored by educational researchers in K-12 physical education (Harper, 2010; Slovacek, Tucker, & Pantoja, 2003); however, the limited amount of educators and yoga practitioners who write about yoga and youth focus more on physical wellness (Harper, 2010), education

for children with special needs like Attention Deficit Disorder and autism (Ehleringer, 2010), and stress management (Stanec et al., 2010). Educational scholars have yet to analyze the critical literacy practices that are prevalent as students acquire knowledge about yoga, utilize components of yoga when making choices, and apply elements of the practice beyond the classroom to understand and navigate the world. Lack of resources and inadequate empirical data evaluating the role of yoga outside of physical education classes generally keeps yoga education out of, or marginalized in the K-12 curriculum. The limited amount of research on yoga in urban schools also neglects to critique or even acknowledge the role standardized and oppressive school policies may play in the lives of students in urban schools.

This dissertation is a step closer to moving beyond the perspective that the purpose of yoga in urban education is for physical exercise or a way to manage stress. Harper's (2010) research on yoga in urban schools explains, "Addressing students' overall wellness and giving them tools for coping with stress and managing their emotions is crucial if we can reasonably expect them to focus their attention on learning" (p. 100). Harper's intention to contribute to the overall wellness of urban youth by integrating yoga in schools is clear; however, I want to move beyond the narrow view that posits yoga as a tool for surviving and more in the direction toward utilizing yoga as a tool of empowerment that resists systems of oppression. This work pushes well-intentioned yoga practitioners to think critically about the ways in which they share the practice of yoga with youth who have been marginalized. Similar to the work of Winn (2011) who illuminates how playwriting and performance can be used as a tool for empowerment in her work with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth girls, this

work values the experiences and strength youth bring with them to a space. Winn (2011) asserts:

Voice, or the notion of voice, is often overused if not misunderstood. Literacy research has helped shift the idea of educators giving voice to youth (and marginalized youth in particular) to a more nuanced understanding that youth come to formal and informal spaces of learning with powerful voices and ideas. Rather than needing “voice,” most youth need a space, an opportunity, and an engaged audience so they can share their voices (p. 20).

In the context of this research, critically conscious educators who engage the practice of yoga have the potential to develop teaching pedagogies in a way that simply offers space for youth and enhances the knowledge and experience they already bring. Moreover, this work pushes educators to extend notions and definitions of critical literacy in a way that positions yoga as a tool for empowerment when reading the word and the world.

In the 2009 AERA program, yoga emerged one time and I encountered a discussion panel with Dr. John P. Miller, professor at the University of Toronto. Although Dr. Miller did not speak as much as I anticipated he would on the practice of yoga, he instead discussed his theory on holistic curriculum and education. Through this panel discussion, never once did Dr. Miller mention terms like critical literacy, critical pedagogy, or critical consciousness; however, he spoke extensively about cultivating holistic approaches in our teaching as educators in order to facilitate autonomy in our students. Similar to the principles illustrated in the *Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali*, Miller’s work illuminates the ways in which the cultivation of awareness through body and mind

integration strengthens and carries over into the way we approach tensions we encounter in our world (Miller, 2007). Extending this notion of mindfulness to the development of critical literacy, holistic and mindful practices like yoga can be potentially used as strategies that cultivate awareness and eventually confront tensions surrounding the lives of underserved youth in urban schools. Miller (2007) reflects on definitions of mindfulness:

By being mindful we develop a connectedness with our body. After practice, the awareness becomes natural, even effortless. Mindfulness lets us become aware of any tension in the body almost immediately. Often we let tension build up in areas without being aware of the stress. However, mindfulness lets us deal with tension almost immediately as it arises in the body. Mindfulness can be applied to all of our movements and other exercises can easily be applied to other activities (e.g., eating, swimming, and writing. (p. 119)

Extending this notion of mindfulness to the development of critical literacy, holistic and mindful practices like yoga cultivate awareness and can eventually confront tensions surrounding the lives of underserved youth in urban schools. Theorists who consider yoga as a tool for empowerment in the field of education have yet to explore the practice within the field of critical literacy. An influx of research has been conducted within the area of holistic education in higher education (Miller, 2006; 2007), contemplative pedagogies (Simmer-Brown & Grace, 2011), and *sentipensante* (sensing and thinking) pedagogies (Rendón, 2009); however, this study considers critical pedagogies similar to these in K-12 education and multiple fields of literacy.

When searching for research and theories focused on holistic education within fields of critical literacy and critical pedagogy, the work of educator and theorist Laura Rendón was encountered. Although not specifically in the form of yoga, Rendón's work with students from marginalized communities focuses on the ways in which pedagogy can be both transformative and liberating when the mind and heart are engaged. Rendón theorizes the term *sentipensante*:

The word *sentipensante* comes from the combination of two Spanish words: *sentir*, which means to sense or feel, and *pensar*, to think. Galeano is taking the stance that rationality and intuition can exist in dynamic and complementary opposition. Our early ancestors all over the world recognized the epistemological position, but as consciousness evolved, Western philosophers assumed that intellectual training and rationality alone were key for understanding (p. 131).

Sentipensante is a courageous framework that reconnects the body, mind, and heart during the learning process, especially within educational institutions that serve Black and Brown youth who have been marginalized. This study contributes to the work of Freire, Rendón, Winn, Miller, hooks, Morrell, and a host of other critically engaged educators and scholars who explore the multiple ways of learning that value the whole person during the process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative case study analyzes the lived experiences of Black Girls and Women of Color who participated in a two week Yoga, Literature, and Art (YLA) Camp at a Women's Historically Black College (HBCU) in the southeastern region of the United States. In this chapter, I will explain how Critically Conscious methods guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and narrative inquiry inform this study. Next, I will describe the research site and participants. Finally, I will explain the sampling methods, data collection, and the data analysis processes structured to engage the following research questions:

1. What might we learn by inquiring into how Black girls' perceptions of identity intersect and contradict their lived experiences when yoga and culturally responsive literature are used for mediums of learning?
2. How might inquiring into the lived stories and experiences of Black girls and Women of Color deepen our understandings of the cultural, institutional, and social narratives that shape learning?
3. How might narrative inquiry, critical literacy, and yoga be brought together to create an embodied and liberating pedagogy that honors lived experience?

Understanding Critically Conscious Methodologies

Critical Race Theory Methodology

In order to understand the guiding research questions for this critically conscious case study, a lens grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) was applied to qualitative methods specific to *coding* (Miles & Huberman, 1984; 1994; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw,

1995; Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2013) explains, “How you perceive and interpret what is happening in the data depends on what type of filter covers that lens” (p. 6). When critically conscious theoretical lenses like CRT are applied to research relating to language, literacy, and culture, the multiple consciousness and literacies used by People of Color are privileged (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). Moreover, stories and lived experiences of people who have been marginalized based on race and other intersecting social constructs are valued.

Methodologies used within the field of educational research that use CRT as a filter value narratives (autobiography and personal stories) by foregrounding the voice, experience, and realities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009) as a way to confront and resist multiple forms of oppression that exist in schools and society. The data used to inform this study were collected from stories as told by YLA participants. Personal journals and transcripts from Circle Discussion Groups were used as data sources.

Storytelling, Counter-storytelling, and Restorative Justice

The design for this qualitative case study expands definitions of critically conscious research when it comes to the methods used to collect data. *Peacemaking circles* (Boyes-Watson and Pranis, 2010) were used during YLA camp as the framework and ritual for storytelling, sharing, and dialogue during Circle Discussion Groups (CDGs). Borrowed from the field of Restorative Justice, peacemaking circles were used as a method for collecting stories. Peacemaking circle practices guided CDGs daily and facilitated a space for participants to contribute her voice for as long as she needed without being interrupted. Essential to the CDG was the presence of the *talking stick*. The

talking stick is a physical and meaningful object that reminded all CDG participants who had the floor to talk.

Similar to the lineage of CRT that honors democratic processes for being heard in Indigenous cultures and communities, the presence of the talking piece within our circle made space for the creation of counter-stories.

Narrative Inquiry

The final chapter of this dissertation demonstrates the ways in which narrative inquiry guides a series of interviews conducted with Maya who is a Yoga Teaching Volunteer, former public school educator, and full time yoga instructor. The decision to use Maya's voice throughout the discussion on the educational implications of this work was made as a way to demonstrate how to construct understanding and meaning throughout the entire research process.

Most narrative inquiries begin with stories. Extending beyond notions that narrative inquiry is a simplistic process of going out, asking a few people to tell stories, and then writing the stories down (Clandinin, 2013), this framework seeks to make sense of individuals' experiences through narrative inquiry, especially those who have been traditionally silenced. Bruner (1990) asserts that narrative is, "an organizing principle by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world" (p. 35). My conversations with Maya used narrative inquiry as a tool for understanding the guiding research questions and findings for this case study by engaging lived experience, dialogue, and placing value on the social and collaborative aspects of learning.

Setting

The first half of this research study was conducted on the campus of a HBCU for women within a metropolitan city in the southeastern region of the United States over the course of eight days. Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp for teen girls was guided by a self-created curriculum (Appendix: C) that was influenced by my experiences as a classroom teacher, yoga instructor, and the findings from my empirical study.

The YLA camp convened within the only museum in the nation that features art by and focuses on women of the African Diaspora. The museum space was donated with the only condition that the word *art* be included within the title of the camp and that YLA participants participated in an interactive tour that showcased the art archival vault belonging to the college. Yoga, Literature, and Art participants were the only people occupying the museum space, as the campus was closed for the summer. The camp was conducted during the summer on Mondays through Thursdays for two weeks between the hours of 10:00 am and 3:30 pm. Appendix C illustrates a typical day at YLA for the first week.

A portion of this research study (e.g., follow-up interviews) was conducted through home visits and coffee shop dates over the course of four months following YLA camp.

Participants

The adult participants selected for this study were recruited through convenience sampling and have either been colleagues I have worked with in multiple yoga teaching communities and/or colleagues within the field of education. The initial ten adult volunteers either expressed interest in participating in the research study or I directly

asked if they would like to participate. Out of the seven adult yoga teachers who volunteered to participate, one participant had to discontinue because of a family emergency and one other discontinued because of a work-related schedule conflict. There were two additional adult women volunteers who did not teach yoga, but assisted on the first and last days of camp. There were a total of eight adult women who volunteered on different days the duration of the camp. In summary, there were a total of six yoga instructors (including myself), one adult woman volunteer who assisted with registration on the first day and one adult woman volunteer who facilitated a smoothie station for the girls on the final day.

Autobiographical Profiles: Yoga Teacher Volunteers

Below are self-reported autobiographical profiles for the five Yoga Teacher Volunteers (YTVs) in the study. These profiles were submitted by the adult volunteers one month prior to YLA camp and placed on the recruitment website. Pseudonyms have been used for all youth and adult participants with the exception of my name. The names of specific teaching locations and names of trainings have been changed or eliminated in order to maintain anonymity.

Maya: Age 34, Black. The peace, strength, grace, integrity, and discipline that Maya found through her own practice inspired her to train to become a yoga teacher. In 2007 she completed a 200-hour yoga teacher training with a 30-year yoga veteran and teacher. She has also received additional certifications from two additional yoga teaching certification programs centered on youth. Additionally, she is the local programming coordinator for an international yoga center's Yoga Retreat for Women of Color. She is also a certified level 1 Reiki practitioner. Off the mat Maya has over a decade of

experience in public and community based educational work. She has worked as a Language Arts teacher, educational nonprofit director, and curriculum specialist for a local community outreach program. She supports her local yoga community by contributing to multiple blogs focused on yoga. As a yoga activist and teacher Maya beckons students to witness and observe without judgment, to move with awareness and safety, to dance at their edge yet find sweetness, and to breathe deep and feel- and to most importantly take the peace and harmony they experience on the mat and share it in the community and world.

bell: Age: 33, African American, Filipina, Mexicana. *bell* is a life enthusiast, mother, activist, artist and co-founder of a local bike riding community organization for People of Color. *bell* is mastering the handstand and has happily resorted to enjoying life the way she did when she was 13 years old. As a yoga instructor she is committed to making yoga accessible to as many folks as possible. *bell* is interested in using yoga to bring communities together in an active and healing manner. She believes that practicing yoga can increase a community's overall wellness (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) and hopes to ignite yoga practices in the communities she loves and lives among. After obtaining her yoga teaching certification in 2012, *bell* wasted no time finding a space for her yoga offerings in the community. In summer 2012, she introduced students of a local Historically Black University's youth outreach program to yoga. In fall 2012, she brought yoga to a local community health wellness center via a five-month yoga residency program that she created. Most recently *bell* started a community yoga series at the oldest feminist bookstores in her city.

Zora: Age 32, African American. *Zora* is the Museum Curator of Education at the

research site for this study. She has over ten years of experience working with artists, organizations, and students across the country to produce engaging cultural experiences. Zora has served as a guest lecturer at several academic institutions and provides expertise on contemporary programming practices. An alumna of the college that houses the research site, Zora studied English and Art History and participated in a Summer Arts Institute for the study of the African Diaspora at a major northeastern university. Zora received her M.A. in Arts Administration and Policy from the School of the Art Institute in a major mid-western city and served on several planning committees on workforce development, wellness initiatives, and arts advocacy. This year Zora began yoga teacher training within the same city of the research site, and will graduate in July. She is very excited to merge two of her loves: the arts and yoga in this exciting program.

Audre: Age 34, African-American. *Audre* is co-founder of a southeastern-based urban boutique wellness company. She and her business partner located their studio in a historic arts community in order to ensure accessibility to neighboring communities. *Audre* started practicing yoga as a college senior in 2001, and her divine experience with prenatal yoga in 2007 inspired her to become an instructor. As a mind-body-spirit healer, *Audre* combines holistic, integrative principles with motivating practices to help students live their best lives. As a mother to mothers, *Audre* provides her own daughter as well as expectant mothers a space for deepened self-awareness and increased self-confidence to honor their full potential. These rights-of-passage experiences facilitate girls and women being fully present to their inner wisdom and strength.

A life-long dancer, *Audre* brings an artistic fluidity to meditative movements. She

choreographs yoga sessions that leave her students feeling relaxed, rebalanced and revitalized. Audre's passion for empowering women is bolstered by her investment in training and education, including a B.A. in Psychology from the college where YLA camp takes place and an M.A. in Communication Management from a university on the West Coast. She will become a certified Holistic Health Coach in fall 2013. Audre embraces the roles of both teacher and student, recognizing that continuous learning is key to an inspired life. In 2009, she completed her 200-hour yoga teacher training at a local yoga studio. She also holds a second 200-hour certification in Kemeti Yoga and is a certified Prenatal/Postnatal Yoga instructor. She is both honored and excited to be a part of this groundbreaking program created by her long-time sister-friend, Chelsea Jackson.

Sonia: Age 24, Korean American. *Sonia* uses yoga as a counterweight to the busy life she leads. An aspiring physician, she fosters her curiosity and compassion for the people around her by plugging into her community through diverse outlets. This past year, she taught yoga for local area teens in a youth leadership program and for college-bound students at a local university. A graduate of a private southeastern university, *Sonia* loves studying all things math and science. She volunteers much of her time to nonprofit work in public health and looks forward to the day that she can bring yoga into a stimulating medical practice.

Chelsea (me): Age 34, Black. As an elementary school teacher, Chelsea decided to integrate the practices she learned in yoga with the students she served every day. Overtime, Chelsea noticed that her students were not just becoming more focused, but

they began using their personal yoga practice to think critically about their work, reflect on their words and actions, and develop awareness around their personal contributions to the classroom and the world. After completing a 200-hour yoga teacher training in 2007, she decided to teach yoga to both adults and children. Gaining more interest in the intersections between yoga and the development of youth, Chelsea completed yoga training in New York City for teachers interested in teaching youth. Currently, Chelsea is a PhD candidate in the field of education with a concentration on Language, Literacy, and Culture. Chelsea's research focuses on the ways in which yoga can be used as a tool for critical literacy development.

Demographic Profiles: Youth Participants

The information provided in table 1.0 illustrates the demographic profiles for the 13 youth participants in the study. The data for these profiles have been collected from the applications for YLA camp. Each youth participant submitted an application (Appendix B) and all applicants were accepted. The biographical information for the youth participants is not as full as the biographies for each adult participant within this study because chapter four will provide fuller narratives through written artifacts, observations during yoga sessions, and participation in Circle Discussion Groups.

Table 1.0 *Demographics for Youth Participants*

Name	Yoga Experience	School Type & Grade	
Jill	Yes, summer camp.	Private/Christian School	8 th
Phillis	Occasionally with family & friends.	Public School	8 th

Angelou	Yes, yoga studio & school	Public School	9 th
Erykah	Yes, summer school.	Public	9 th
Giovanni	Yes, local yoga studio.	Public	9 th
Lauryn	Yes, aunt teaches yoga.	Public	9 th
Lucille	No.	Private /single gender	9 th
Pearl	No.	Charter	9 th
Toni	No.	Charter	9 th
Walker	No.	1 st year in public school coming from private/single gender/IBI	9 th
Alice	Yes, from Godfather who is in his 70s. She has been practicing for the last 5 years	Home	10 th
Nikki	No.	2 nd year in public school from single gender/private/IBI	10 th
Gwendolyn	Yes, summer camp.	Magnet	10 th

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a period of six months. The data collected consisted of 1) self-reported information found in YLA applications, 2) other written artifacts produced during YLA camp including journal entries and poems written by youth participants, 3) transcribed group discussions during the eight-day camp, 4) field notes, and 5) interviews.

Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp Applications

Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp (YLA) participants were recruited through electronic flyer announcements distributed via social media. The flyer used for recruitment, along with any additional wording used on social media posts can be found within Appendix A of this study. Three months prior to YLA, electronic applications

were posted to my public yoga blog (www.chelsealovesyoga.com). According to Facebook analytics, the electronic flyer received 8,760 views and was shared 85 times within the Facebook social network. Ultimately, 13 families submitted applications for their daughters and 13 young women were accepted.

Applications for camp were posted online to the YLA website in addition to details about camp, the biographies for all yoga instructors, and my email address and Google phone number for questions about camp. Applications were due three weeks after the posting and could be submitted electronically. The online flyer also indicated that arrangements for application and inquiry could be made in the event a computer was not accessible. Responses to the following questions found in the application were collected as data for each youth participant:

1. Why do you want to practice yoga this summer?
2. Have you ever practice yoga before?
3. What is your favorite book?
4. Based on the information you have about camp, what do you hope to gain from the experience?

The decision to include information from the YLA camp applications was made in order to begin this data collection process with the voices of the participants. Not only did the application provide demographic information, it also provided a snapshot for each girl, briefly describing why they were interested in YLA camp, their level of experience (if any) with the practice of yoga, and their interests and experiences with literature.

Written Artifacts

Although YLA applications were the first written artifacts collected for this study, other written artifacts were used to triangulate data collected from Circle Discussion Groups (CDGs) and one-on-one interviews. The two additional sources for written artifacts used within this study include journal reflections and poems. The written artifacts chosen for data analysis were selected based on 1) their relevancy to understanding the guiding questions for this study and 2) the response rate. For example, throughout the first reading of the journals, I flagged all reflections that received a response from all participants. The following list describes the specific written artifacts analyzed within this study.

Second Day of Camp:

1. Journal entry based on the “Still I Rise” lesson led by Maya.
2. Poem inspired by “Still I Rise” based on a personal experience of overcoming experiences with social toxins/oppression.

First Day of Final Week:

3. Extended metaphor/poem describing the Self, led by bell.

Last Day of Camp:

4. Journal entry (last day): What does yoga mean to you?
5. Journal entry (adults): YTVs reflections on teaching experience.

Journals

Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp (YLA) participants engaged personal journals each day, multiple times throughout the day. Participants used their journals during yoga and poetry sessions, following Circle Discussion Groups (CDGs), and ten minutes before

the final relaxation pose, *svasana*. Each journal was collected on the final day of camp and all participants agreed to leave their journals with me. Participants were aware of their participation in this dissertation study, and were excited to contribute.

Additionally, Sonia and bell, two adult volunteer yoga instructors, completed brief video reflections following their teaching experience during YLA Camp. One adult volunteer who did not teach yoga but assisted with registration and stayed the entire first day recorded a video reflection as well. Adult written reflections from Maya, bell, and Sonia were also used in the data analysis process as another way to triangulate the information gathered during the CDGs and interviews with youth participants. Two journal reflections written by youth participants and one journal reflection written by the aforementioned YTVs were collected for data analysis.

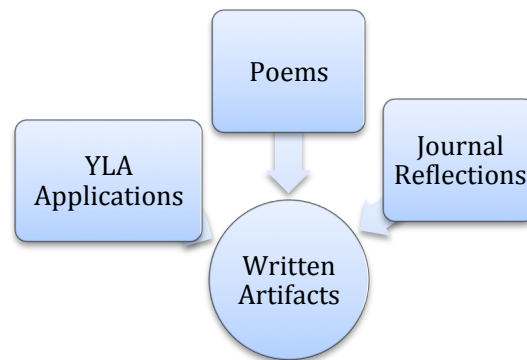
Poems

Poetry began on the second day of camp following the first day of getting acquainted with yoga and each other. Each day, a *Yoga Teaching Volunteer* (YTV) led a 30-45 minute morning yoga practice, followed by a journal reflection on the experience, poetry session, and Circle Discussion Group (CDG). Each YTV had full autonomy and creativity during the planning of the lesson. Each YTV agreed to choose, a guiding poem written by Women of Color (a full list of poems can be found within Appendix D).

Each day, yoga class was guided by an undergirding theme inspired by a poem selected by the lead YTV for the day. For example, YTV Maya integrated yoga postures that embodied the motion of rising the day *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou was used as the guiding poem. During each session, all YTVs provided opportunities for youth

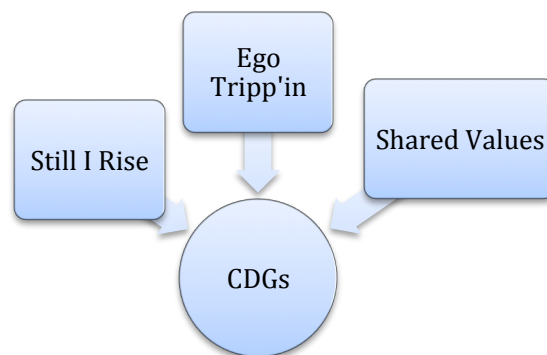
participants to create and share a poem that was in conversation with the guiding poem.

YLA participants' poems were collected for seven days and two poems were chosen for data analysis.



Circle Discussion Groups

Circle Discussion Groups (CDGs) began on the first day of camp and were audio recorded. CDGs occurred daily and were guided by questions that continued the theme inspired by the guiding poem and yoga practice. For example, the guiding CDG question the day *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou was used, the lead YTV for the day asked, “What is something you’ve had to rise above?” Each CDG session was recorded and transcribed; however, a total of three sessions were chosen for data analysis based on relevancy to guiding questions and the variance in voices heard during the discussion.



Interviews

In order to triangulate data in the form of written artifacts and CDGS, I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews with each participant and conduct multiple interviews with one of the YTVs (Maya) through narrative inquiry. I emailed and called families to schedule follow up interviews with all youth participants. I intended to conduct one-on-one interviews with all participants; however, once the school year began, and after several attempts, many of the girls were unavailable for interviews. I completed three one-on-one interviews with youth participants once YLA camp was over and the school year was in session. I made the decision to include Gwendolyn's voice in the findings chapter of this study as a way to integrate narrative and triangulate the other two data sources in order to understand the second research question more fully.

After reading, re-reading, and noting reoccurring themes within transcripts from the CDGs, videos, and written artifacts, I conducted one-on-one interviews with one adult volunteer instructor in order to understand my findings with someone who experienced YLA. I chose Maya because she attended the most sessions as a Yoga Teaching Volunteer (YTV), she was a classroom educator for ten years, and she was familiar with one of the YLA participants (Giovanni) whom she taught in eighth grade.

I did not intend to interview each adult participant individually when I began this work because I made the decision to ground this work with the voices of the youth participants. However, once I began and realized the level of engagement Maya had during the planning of YLA, her attendance during camp, her flexible schedule for coffee shop meetings, and her vantage point in this work, I decided to interview her multiple times using narrative inquiry as my method. Through narrative inquiry, I worked with

Maya through data analysis and our conversations will be integrated through the discussion regarding the educational implications of this work.

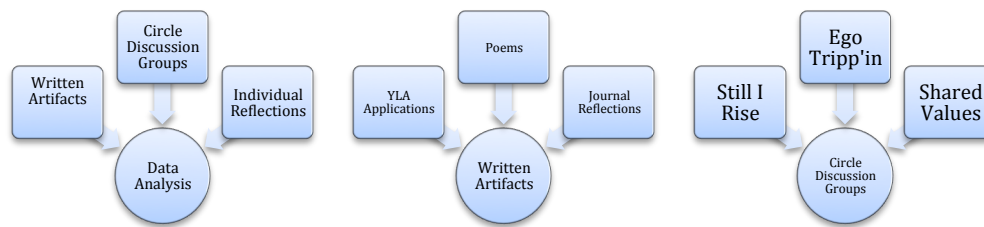
Data Analysis

Data Analysis Binder

Once YLA concluded and the data were collected, I created a binder with sections specific to data sources (e.g., applications, other written artifacts, etc.). First, I looked at the photos taken during camp by YTV Audre, one parent volunteer, and myself. I reflected on the images in order to provide an experience that did not require note taking or facilitating a session. After looking through more than 200 photos taken over the course of two weeks, I listened to and transcribed all of the audio recordings of yoga sessions and CDGs. First, I read each journal without making notes. Then, I transcribed each journal and created sections in my data analysis binder based on the guiding questions for each journal entry. I followed this routine for all of my data sources.

Following the recommendation of Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), I kept a copy of my research questions, theoretical framework, and goals of the study on the first page of my binder in order to stay focused and consistent as I coded data. Before beginning the coding process for a new data source, I returned to the first page as a reminder.

The following images illustrate the sections of my data analysis binder and for the ways in which data and events have been triangulated in order to increase validity and reliability. A research matrix for this work can also be found within Appendix G.



What Gets Coded?

Continuing to work within a critically conscious framework, I analyzed the data through a lens that emphasized the social interaction that occurred within and outside of the research site. It was important for me to emphasize social interaction because of the nature of my research questions and theoretical framework. Lofland, Snow, and Anderson (2006) remind us that social life happens at four coordinates, “the intersection of one or more participants engaging in one or more behaviors during a specific time and in a specific place. I used Lofland et al.’s methodology for choosing what gets coded in order to guide analysis. The following list describes Lofland, Snow, and Anderson’s major units of social organization:

- 1) Cultural practices (daily routines, occupational tasks, micro-cultural activity, etc.);
- 2) Episodes (unanticipated or irregular activities such as divorce, championship games, natural disasters, etc.);
- 3) Encounters (a temporary interaction between two or more individuals such as sales transactions, panhandling, etc.);
- 4) Roles (student, mother, customer, etc.) and social types (bully, tight-ass, geek, etc.);

- 5) Social and personal relationships (husband and wife, party-goers, etc.);
- 6) Groups and cliques (gangs, congregations, families, jocks, etc.);
- 7) Organizations (schools, fast-food restaurants, prisons, corporations, etc.); settlements and habitats (villages, neighborhoods, etc.); and
- 8) Subcultures and lifestyles (the homeless, skinheads, gay leather bears, etc.)

When the units above are combined with *aspects* listed below, they then become topics for study and coding. Lofland et al.'s aspects include:

- 1) Cognitive aspects or meanings (e.g., ideologies, rules, self-concepts, identities);
- 2) Emotional aspects or feelings (e.g., sympathy in health care, road rage, workplace satisfaction);
- 3) Hierarchical aspects or inequalities (e.g., racial inequality, battered women, high school cliques).

I began to move through the data analysis binder with colorful sticky notes and flagged sections that coincided with Lofland et al.'s major units of social organization. As a result of that process, I chose what data would be used to understand the guiding research questions for this study.

After choosing the documents and events for analysis with the guidance of Lofland et al., I made the decision to create codes unique to this work and the voices of the participants. I moved through an additional pre-coding process (Layder, 1998) by circling, highlighting, and underlining significant participant quotes and passages that struck me as “codable moments” (Boyatzis, 1998) and continued with an open-ended process of recording my first impressions of the data. Although this was not a linear process, I did this with each section of the binder for the selected data.

Once I assigned descriptive codes to the data, I then began to look for patterns. I looked for similarities and differences across the participants and data sources. I also looked for how frequently a code was assigned. Once I identified patterns, codes were collapsed into themes. This process occurred for each data source.

Researcher's Perspective

“For me, the individual is not a case to be used to illustrate a theory, but a wellspring of awareness, a source of understanding that enables others to understand themselves in turn.” (Miller, 1998)

Like many young girls, I grew up with gendered insecurities and uncertainties about my appearance, intelligence, and aspects of my identity. Throughout my life I remember and still experience the challenge of not being heard. Moving through this world both Black and female, I have experienced social toxins and stress spurred by the consequences of my race and gender. As a result, this qualitative case study is auto-ethnographic in many ways in that it allows a deeper understanding of myself through a deeper understanding of the girls and women with whom I worked.

Despite the fact that I was not conducting formal research growing up as a Black girl in the Midwest, my lived experiences serve as the preliminary evidence for the ways in which Black girls' bodies, emotions, and intentions have been policed by others. For example, I can vividly remember the first time I felt shame for my Blackness and my femaleness during my weekly ballet classes as a little girl. Regardless of how graceful and in tune I was with my body, I was constantly reminded by my ballet teacher to tuck my backside in because it was too large for a ballerina. I was reminded that my body and more importantly my being was too much; yet, not enough. As time went on my body

began to grow and change and I was constantly reminded to change in order to make others feel comfortable.

Resentment towards my Black and female body was a learned behavior based on the way I was treated by peers, adults, and society. Despite my suburban public school education, countless extracurricular activities, and two emotionally engaged parents, I was not immune to toxic experiences that attacked both my race and gender. I was not protected from the misogyny and pain that was embedded in the lyrics of my favorite rap artists who normalized the word bitch and made it synonymous with the Black female body. Although I could not name the oppression I experienced during my adolescence, I knew something was wrong with how I felt. As time went on, I encountered more experiences at the intersection of race and gender that disconnected me from my body, mind, and heart.

My lived experiences brought me to this work. My lived experiences brought me to yoga. It is necessary for me to be transparent with regard to my connection with the research site, the participants within this study, and most importantly the ways in which I collected and interpreted the data. On the one hand, I am an insider within this work and my familiarity with the lived experiences of the participants gives me access to the language, social cues, and understanding of Black girlhood in general. On the other hand, my identity as a Black girl and Woman of Color can also be a limitation because my familiarity with some of the occurrences observed can make the familiar hard to see throughout the data collection and analysis process. The following chapter describes the themes that emerged during data analysis and provide examples for how the data were used to understand the guiding research questions for this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Still I Rise

*I was young. I was shy.
 I had eyes that were never dry.
 And in my life I had a void
 A vacancy that I could not avoid
 A flower wilts without water;
 Without the proper care
 So I bowed my head, colors dull
 Because my father wasn't there
 And as I grew, for my pain, I went fishing
 For a few close friends who had what I was missing
 Thinking that in some way that could fill the missing piece
 So that the puzzle; my life, could feel somewhat complete
 So emotional attachment became a character trait
 Insecure about others leaving me,
 And myself I began to hate
 But after failed attempts, and uncovered scars
 I held onto myself, and put together my broken parts
 Realization came that I am complete
 I might be different, but I have to learn to love me
 It wasn't my fault; I wasn't even born
 So when I look into the mirror, myself I shouldn't scorn
 Leaving behind nights of terror and fear, I rise
 I am beautiful and whole, so I rise
 My old watery eyes, should now be dried,
 Because I am complete, so I rise.*

(Gwendolyn, 10th Grade)

Everyone was silent after she finished, including me. Gwendolyn's reading of her life happened in a way that extended an invitation for others to not only share, but to relive moments in their own lives as well. Over the course of the eight-day Yoga, Literature, and Art camp (YLA), participants shared lived experiences through yoga, poetry, and dialogue. Gwendolyn allowed herself to open to this space by sharing a deeply personal part of her life with people whom she never met. Without hesitation, Gwendolyn raised her hand to read her poem in front of the group. Softly, yet powerfully,

Gwendolyn read the words from her poem in front of the other 12 girls and three adult women. Through her poem, Gwendolyn shared her past and present within a community of young Black girls and women who served as “worthy witnesses” (Paris and Winn, 2014) during her self-reflective journey that illuminated the ways in which insecurities rooted in her relationship with her estranged father once spurred feelings of shame and fear.

Participating in the yoga practice of *holding space*¹ other participants including myself did nothing but listen as Gwendolyn’s self-discovery through storytelling unfolded before our eyes. Throughout YLA, Gwendolyn began to unpack the feelings she revealed in her poem and encouraged other girls to do the same. During a home visit and one-on-one interview, Gwendolyn shared with me reflections on YLA camp, as well as, how life has been since high school started.

The following is an excerpt from the one-on-one follow-up interview with Gwendolyn.

Chelsea: Tell me how life in general has been since yoga camp.

Gwendolyn: Well it’s been much more calming kind of since yoga. I feel much better after going to the camp. I learned how to handle myself better in situations, like with anxiety and stuff.

Chelsea: So, do you wish you had practiced yoga when you started high school last year?

Gwendolyn: Yes.

Chelsea: Like what is it about yoga that you wish you knew when making the transition between middle school and high school?

¹ Holding space: Providing stable, solid ground for someone to be completely where they are emotionally,

Gwendolyn: Connecting with myself and knowing who I was when I started. Also, I wish that I would have understood my anxiety more.

Chelsea: What were you anxious about?

Gwendolyn: I was anxious about my best friend not being there, having classes without any of my friends, and having to meet new people. I had to figure out how to make new friends and how to stay calm during the school day. I don't know; having faith that everything would be ok.

Chelsea: So, do you think yoga has influenced your interaction with others?

Gwendolyn: It has. We had to speak a lot in yoga camp and I am not that outspoken. It is hard for me to make new friends because I usually stick with the same people. Yoga camp helped. It was something about getting to know myself better through yoga that helped me connect with others. That has carried on through this school year especially since my best friend is not here. I connect with others more now.

I visited Gwendolyn for 60 minutes the day of our interview and had tea while her mother prepared dinner. After listening to my interview with Gwendolyn, I transcribed and analyzed the document for themes. Gwendolyn was very excited about noticing the ways in which she is evolving into a more outgoing person at school. Linking Gwendolyn and other YLA participants' consistent interest themes of interpersonal relationship development as motivation for attending camp, I then began making connections. As the coding proceeded, I came across the following excerpt:

Chelsea: So if someone were to say, "You know this yoga camp is not necessary, what would you say to that?"

Gwendolyn: I think it is necessary because it helps a lot with confidence—learning who you are as a person. I was talking to a girl who went to the YLA who goes to my school now (Lauryn) and she said that she has made a few new friends too and yoga really helped out with that.

Interpersonal relationship development proved to be a consistent theme of interest during my interview with Gwendolyn. Written artifacts and transcribed CDG sessions that engaged all participants reflected this interest as well. Along with interests in making new friends and experiencing feelings of acceptance, intrapersonal relationship development was prevalent as well. In other words, as much as YLA participants expressed interest in sustainable and healthy relationships with peers, they were just as interested in these types of feelings and experiences within themselves. I talked with Gwendolyn more:

Chelsea: So I hear you say that yoga helps you understand yourself better. How does that work?

Gwendolyn: It's like connecting with yourself. When we wrote poetry, all of the discussions, it helped me connect with myself better, even understand myself. That made me more confident. And when we connected through yoga and talked after our practice, it showed me that I am not alone in my insecurities. It was helpful to hear other girls talk about their insecurities. How you go through it.

It was like a process of getting to know myself better. It forced me to face my own insecurities. Realizing and accepting that about myself—knowing that it's me.

By the time our interview was over, I asked Gwendolyn if she had anything she wanted to ask me. Gwendolyn replied, “Will we have camp next summer?” I responded, “I am working on it and this group will be the first to know.”

Gwendolyn’s interview provided insight into how feelings spurred by transition, in her case the beginning of a school year, may contribute to anxiety and sometimes silence. Throughout the analysis of Gwendolyn’s narrative I noticed the ways in which she acknowledged transition within herself as well. Gwendolyn articulated how she felt encouragement from both youth and adult YLA participants. She explained further that the space made her feel more comfortable about revealing and sharing insecurities.

The instructor for YLA camp the day Gwendolyn shared her poem was Maya, a full time yoga teacher who taught middle school for ten years until she decided to leave the field. Maya was one of the first instructors to teach the girls, as well as, the first teacher recruited to be a part of YLA camp. Maya transitioned from the position of middle school teacher to full time yoga instructor the month before YLA camp. Maya and I have had numerous conversations around our experiences as Black women within yoga communities and our experiences as one of few Black teachers in predominately white schools serving Black and Brown children. As soon as Maya learned about the camp she was on board and ready to participate in any way she could. Prior to YLA camp, Maya voluntarily created a snack menu for the participants and donated the majority of the fresh fruit and water. Teaching was second nature to Maya and I wondered even before camp began what types of stories we would create together with the girls, how much this experience would inform both our teaching and yoga practices, and how much we would learn from the girls.

Maya's experience with middle school youth led me to seek her input regarding how we would engage literacy throughout YLA camp. Initially, the plan was to read a novel and the yoga instructors would integrate themes from the book into their yoga class; however, after planning with Maya, we decided to focus on poems by Women of Color since we only had eight days and multiple teachers working with the girls. Allowing for more autonomy in their lessons, each yoga instructor had the opportunity to self-select poems to accompany their yoga class. Teachers were also provided a selection of poems chosen by me in the event they did not find one. Poems by Nikki Giovanni, Lucille Clifton, and Mariahdessa Ekere Tallie were just some of the works integrated into YLA camp. The decision to integrate poems by Women of Color was made in order to create a *culturally responsive* environment, not just by recruiting Women of Color as teachers, but by engaging the voices of Women of Color through poetry pieces that illuminated the experiences of Black and Brown women throughout the Diaspora.

On the second day of YLA camp, Maya self selected Maya Angelou's (1978) *Still I Rise* as the guiding poem for the yoga class she facilitated. Maya taught yoga and literature class twice during YLA camp, using Lucille Clifton's (1991) poem *Won't You Celebrate with Me* to guide her lesson during the final week. The following excerpt is taken from the beginning of Maya's lesson on the second day of YLA camp:

Maya: You all are beautiful. So my name is Maya, feel free to call me that. So today our practice will be focused around the word and concept of rising and what it means *to rise*. So without putting a whole bunch of thought into it, it's just like, when you hear the word rise what comes to mind? It can be popcorn style. Just say what comes to mind.

Girls begin sharing responses while Maya writes on chart paper:

“Phoenix”

“Sun”

“Yeast”

“Growth”

“Tree”

“Bird”

“Maturity”

“Jesus”

Maya: Jesus? Well, amen! (*Giggles heard in the background*). So we have to come up with a definition of to rise, just kind of like if someone asks:

What does it mean to rise?

“To move up!”

“To progress!” two other girls exclaimed simultaneously.

Maya: Anything else? (*Pauses for response*) And then maybe if someone needs to rise, it means that perhaps they were being? Fill in the blank.

One girl energetically shouts the word *promoted*.

Maya: What are some things you can rise from, or to, or through?

The words *sleep* and *oppression* are heard in the circle.

Maya: Some might say sleep is a form of oppression. Like you could be asleep literally or metaphorically. Like, just not aware. Are you with me?

(*Silence followed by laughter*).

So that's just to get your thinking minds, your intellectual minds thinking about what it means to rise.

Although this may have been Maya's first time teaching yoga and literature in this particular setting, her ability to teach yoga and her familiarity with this age group was captivating. Maya's invitation to YLA participants to call her by her first name appeared to be a gesture of mutual respect that coincided with the *shared values* established on the first day of YLA camp. I watched as each girl began to open to the space and each other as they shared definitions of and experience with the concept of rising. The unfiltered ways in which participants shared made it seem as though this group had been together for longer than just one day.

Writing Sample: Still I Rise

I watched and listened as Maya encouraged the girls to think critically about personal experiences remembered and relived during our yoga class. *Empowered*, *uplifted*, and *refreshed* were words used by the girls to describe the feelings experienced during and after the yoga class. During the analysis of poems, I assigned codes and then identified two overarching themes that were consistent across all writing samples. The data show an emphasis on the role **voice** plays in **resistance to obstacles** throughout the girls' poems. I also observed how often girls made reference to **transitions** throughout their lived experiences and how much of an obstacle certain transitions were, or still are in their lives. The following table illustrates the poems created during the *Still I Rise* session with YTV Maya.

Poem: Still I Rise
Instructor: Maya

Theme: Voice (Interpersonal & Intrapersonal)

(Self-Acceptance)

Giovanni- I will not and cannot change me. I am a gift. The creator made no mistakes. I was sculpted carefully the exact way I was envisioned. I am the dream and hope of the slaves. In my moments of weakness I call on my ancestors to guide me in the right way I am a black ocean leaping wide. I do my best to bring my family pride.

(Resisting Silence)

Toni- Confused, lost, slow, unsure?
Dumbing myself down for you to be secure?
Why? For what?
These are the questions I ask myself.
What do they see? What do they think?
How come I'm not the one complete?
Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Or, could I be strong for once and pay no one mind.
Jealous eye and saucy stares, lucky for me I'm the one who doesn't care.

(Resistance)

Jill- My hair is one of my best features and when someone insults it at school I feel bad and think of telling the teacher. Then I think, no, I just have to stay cool. Boom! They insult me again. But, this time I have a plan.
They don't know what's coming when I walk up to them they start running.
I catch up to them to have a little chat and I start telling them off just like that.
I tell them its not making them any cooler to go around making me feel like a loser.
Then I say, making sure they are alert, "You may trod me in the very dirt, but still like dust I will rise.
Then I walk away feeling quite surprised I stood up for myself in a crisis where I felt like I was they bigger person

(Self-Acceptance/Resistance)

Angelou- Do you want to see me broken, bowed head, and lowered eyes? Does my confidence upset you? Would you like me to be something I'm not? I'm charming and I'm witty. I guess it's something that you're not
I rise above the expectation and things other might say and become who I am and there I wil...

(Self worth/Resistance/Self Acceptance)

Lauryn- Don't expect me to conform to your self-sacrificial ways.
If I had wanted that sort of bliss I wouldn't have left you standing there confused and in a haze.
Doesn't everyone want this you ask yourself, clearly confused with something so simple.
No, my dear I have a better source of happiness that will not contaminate my temple.
Sorry to hurt your false pride and security.
But I will not leave behind my innocence and purity.

Theme: Transitions

(Physical Move)

Phillis- I was scared I was shy nobody even cared to say hi.
Would I make friends?
I didn't know, but to the 6th grade I have to go.

(Life Event)

Lucille- Seven years ago,

Tears filled my eyes
 And suddenly I despised.
 The God above me and the world around me.
 I thought to myself, why did she die?
 I began to lie...
 She will come back I said.
 But deep inside I knew my little sister was dead.
 I looked to the sky
 And asked why...
 Why did you take her before her first breath?
 Why did she succumb to death?
 Why won't you come back to dry my watery eyes, instead of leaving me here to cry?
 As the days turned into months and the months into years the pain began to subside, but she will
 always be with me
 As I rise.

(Life Event)

Walker-August 19, 2010
 That was the day of her death
 My grandmother
 Everyone. Devastated.
 Solemn
 Depressed
 Silence took over
 No one talked. No one laughed.
 Just silence
 Everybody was sad
 But my mom took it the worst.
 She would never leave her room.
 She would just sit
 In silence.
 How she felt?
 Nobody knew for sure
 How would you feel
 If your other passed?
 She was gone at last
 The funeral
 Tears, tears.
 So many tears
 We had to move on.
 We had to get over this
 Right?
 My mother.
 She hasn't moved on.
 But she has risen.
 Risen over the fact
 That her mother is gone
 And realized She'd in
 A
 Better
 Place
 Which made her happy.
 She is at peace now.
 R.I.P. Grandma

(Physical Move + Life Event)

Alice-A slew of sharp words were exchanged from my own bladed tongue. I felt broken and helpless through the situation. I wondered how the two people that created me could become so harsh to each other. Leaving the building I walked west and visualized my future falling with the burning sun. But its never ever because once you leave one situation, you're on to the next. And that's just what happened. Before I knew it, I was on a train to Georgia leaving my father behind and for good reason. But I can't hate him because if I did I would hate a part of myself. Shattering through the window of the fragmented future I attempt to clean what little I can. But what's done is done so I am making the best of it.

(Physical Move/Environment)

Erykah-The influence floods my neighborhood
 A influence of a gangster, who acts hard but falls quickly
 Or a fighter
 Or even a 14 year old mother or part time addict
 I had to rise
 I chose that I will not sink in this pool of failure
 I chose to rise and pick a new road, a road for success.
 A road that leads to college and a joyous job, a road that not only benefits one but other who have maybe fallen in that pool of failure, a road that will bring a ladder so people can climb out and make a detour to the new road, a new road for change.
 I chose to never stay in my neighborhood and go to local high school where influence grows like weeds.
 Drugs fly through hands as babies pop out like an assembly line
 I chose to rise
 And when they ask me to join, I laugh like I got gold mines digging in my own backyard
 Cause I chose to rise not fall

Journal Reflections and Collective Discussion Groups: Still I Rise***Intrapersonal Relationships***

The guiding poem for the second day of camp was *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou and the lead teacher for this day was Maya. Maya began the lesson asking YLA participants to respond to the following question in their journals: *What is something you've had to rise above?* On average, participants wrote between two and three lines describing obstacles from which they have risen.

Gwendolyn, a rising sophomore who attends a local magnet school responded, "I have been afraid to be myself around classmates." Gwendolyn expressed similar sentiments in her YLA application and placed emphasis on "getting in touch with inner

and spiritual self”. Like Gwendolyn, other YLA participants reflected on intrapersonal obstacles in their journals. Giovanni, a student in Maya’s middle school homeroom last year responded, “I used to be insecure about who I am and where I came from.” As camp progressed, Giovanni became very vocal about how she has felt like a social “misfit”; however, she admits to growing and accepting herself more each day. In the final chapter, Maya shares the ways in which Giovanni “seems like a different type of student” in the YLA community compared to the classroom setting where Maya was her English/Language Arts teacher.

Overall, knowledge and understanding of Self was a concern expressed throughout the journals in response to Maya’s question about rising above obstacles. More specifically, YLA participants expressed concern with their ability to use their voices during moments of injustice. As a result of the overwhelming response focused on YLA participants’ relationship with Self, concerns and stress spurred by relationships with others were consistent as well. In other words, for those who shared concern with an acceptance or rejection of the Self spoke about how their intrapersonal relationship directly influences interpersonal relationships discussed in the following section.

Interpersonal Relationships

Uncertainty and fear towards peer acceptance was a reoccurring topic identified throughout journals, Circle Discussion Groups (CDGs), and poetry sessions. “I had to get over people thinking I am a goodie-two-shoe,” responded Lucille who attends a predominately white private school for girls. Lucille opened up about interpersonal relationships during the CDG session and talked more about the obstacles she faced on a daily basis as one of only two Black girls in her 8th grade class last year. Although

Lucille's reflection written in her journal talked more about her resistance to peers labeling her a "teacher's pet," she spoke candidly during CDG session about the ways in which negative comments and probing by white peers about her natural hair created even larger obstacles in her life.

Lucille was not the only person who shared her lived experiences as a Black girl in a predominately white space. The youngest YLA participant and rising 8th grader Jill shared, "I have to rise above the expectations of what people think of me." Jill was the first to arrive on the first day accompanied by her father who is a pastor at a local church. Jill was petite and had braces with a smile that became increasingly brighter as I showed her around the museum. Jill's curly afro-textured hair was pulled back with a colorful headband and she wore a t-shirt with a megaphone. Jill explained during a CDG session that she encounters ridicule from white peers at her private, predominately white and Christian school because of her natural hair.

Overall, the participants expressed a great deal of concern when talking about acceptance by peers. As conversations developed during CDG sessions, there was more engagement by girls who did not necessarily elaborate within their journal. As a result, a theme of acceptance by others was identified as a source of stress for the participants both inside and outside the context of school.

Utilizing Voice

YLA participants used daily journals to reflect on lived experiences, followed by a practice of vocalizing those experiences within the larger group during CDGs. Each time a participant shared her story, she allowed and encouraged someone else in the circle to share as well. As mentioned in the previous sections, a consistent theme

identified was the challenge to either resist or accept interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships across lived experiences. For example, Lucille reflected on her intrapersonal acceptance of the decision to wear her hair natural to school instead of straightening it. “I can remember a time being afraid to stand up to some of my white classmates who would talk about my natural hair,” shared Lucille. “Oh my gosh! I wrote about the same thing!” commented Jill as she shared her experience of having to explain “hair shrinkage” at a pool party for her cheer squad where she was the only Black girl. Although the majority of the YLA participants attended predominately Black schools, many of the girls chimed in with experiences of having to explain their decision to wear their hair natural to Black peers as well. As the sharing developed, YLA participants began to unpack the various tensions within interpersonal relationships spurred by race, in this case afro-textured hair

Truth telling (Fisher, 2008) became a practice within the YLA community and I observed the girls support one another throughout the process. “I can remember being afraid of saying no to classmates who wanted to copy my work,” explained Phillis who shared in her application that she wanted to learn how yoga could help her make new friends. Phillis was only a few months older than our youngest attendee Jill; however, she was not as vocal during CDGs as Jill was. Many times Phillis would pass the talking piece when it was her time to share her journal reflection and eventually began to share more during the second week. Phillis was not alone in her fears of silence. Concerns about standing up against bullies at school, resistance against teasing, and resistance against the peer pressure to tease others were all topics shared in personal journals and during CDG sessions.

Transitions

Another consistent theme identified as an obstacle for YLA participants was overcoming the trauma of transition. Themes of transition were identified as being significant life events like a death in the family, a move to a new school or city, and family separation. For example, three participants shared obstacles and/or trauma spurred by the move to a new school. “I was afraid that I was going to be judged. I was afraid that I was not going to make any new friends because they would judge me because I am new.” Angelou shared her written reflection during CDG with other participants who also expressed fears around making new friends at new school. Angelou was a former student I taught in third grade and one of two YLA participants I knew prior to camp. Angelou was a rising 9th-grader and would be attending the public feeder school for her middle school in the fall.

During camp I observed over half of the YLA participants ask to sit with Angelou during lunch, work with her during sessions, and/or make arrangements to hang out with her after camp. In other words, other girls gravitated towards Angelou on a daily basis. Angelou described herself as funny, warm-hearted, and kind during an exercise on the first day; however, her journal reflections and sharing during CDG sessions revealed the anxiety she has experienced when making new friends within new social settings. When discussing her journal reflection with other YLA participants, Angelou opened up about the pain of being bullied by an anonymous person on social media that she later found out was a friend. “It is just hard for me to trust new people when I meet them and that is why I am nervous about making friends in my new school.” As the talking piece was passed around the circle, the more stories were shared and heard. YLA participants began to

open up about anxieties that some participants admitted later were never shared with others before YLA camp.

Alice also shared her experience with transition and the stress it caused in her life. Alice has been homeschooled since elementary school and quite vocal about the uneasiness she felt with her abrupt move to Georgia after her parent's separation. Not only did Alice describe the stress caused by a geographical move, she also elaborated on the sadness that came with the transition within her family unit when her parents separated. Although Alice was very transparent about the sadness these transitions caused her, she also made it a point to say that within the same year she started her own LLC vegan catering business at the age of 13.

Alice's story inspired Lucille to share immediately after and she spoke about the fear associated with her parent's divorce. "I thought it was something I did," Lucille courageously shared during her reflection. Not only did Lucille share her fears surrounding her parent's divorce, she also shared the trauma associated with the death of her little sister a few years ago. Lucille shared even more about the profound impact the death of her younger sister had on her life and how transitions like death and divorce created stress in her life. Similar to Lucille, Walker reflected on the stress caused by the death of her grandmother in her journal. Walker dedicated her poem to both her grandmother and mother and expressed how much her death impacted both her and her mother.

I noticed how during the sharing of life changing events, many of the girls expressed feelings of guilt and responsibility for someone else's emotional state. As the talking piece made its way around the circle I also shared:

I know what it feels like to feel responsible for other people and their happiness. Sometimes I feel like I am responsible for the world. I especially feel responsible for my parents because they are all the way in Ohio. I actually used to feel guilty for leaving. Truth is, sometimes I still do, but I know that I cannot put that stress on me. I do what I can and have to remember that I am here living my path and following my dreams. I can't blame myself for that. We cannot put stress on ourselves to feel responsible for other people's happiness.

As an adult, it was comforting to experience youth as my peers. Each story shared helped me work through some of the stress within my life. I remember and even reflected within my journal how relieved I felt to finally say what I shared. As I passed the talking piece the final story shared by Lauryn made quite an impression on the group as she shared one of her obstacles. Lauryn spoke freely and with confidence about a transition that had not yet been shared. "I have really been attached to my dad ever since he was released from jail. I don't want him to ever leave again." Lauryn was the only YLA participant who did not know any other participants prior to camp, yet was fearless in her storytelling. Lauryn moved beyond writing about her relationship with her dad and spoke multiple times about the feelings she experienced (and continues to experience) after her father's recent release from incarceration.

Individual and collective storytelling provided a space for YLA participants who shared unique and intersecting experiences that were sometimes the impetus for daily stress and anxiety. The overlapping ways in which YLA participants experienced and

shared their lived experiences with rising above obstacles was remarkable and set the foundation for yoga, poetry, and CDG sessions that followed.

Yoga Session led by Maya: Still Rising

Maya: So we've got the Phoenix. We've got Jesus. We've got yeast.

(Laughter)

We are human beings. We can fall down and we can rise again and again.

So this practice is going to be focused on movement upward. So, in the spirit of moving upward, go ahead and find an "easy seat". Whatever feels good and if you have a cushion you might want to sit on the edge of the cushion and let's roll down. Let's slump and close our eyes in this slump. Just notice how the base of the spine feels all the way up to the center of your heart. How does your heart feel when you are folded over? Can you even breathe deeply? And then with your eyes closed, begin to feel what you feel in your physical body while you are in this shape? Go ahead and walk your hands back and start to rise up. Then, bring your hands to your knees. I call this the Frankenstein stance. Keep squeezing and now bring your shoulders back and around and feel your heart open up. Begin thinking about the center of your chest. Inhale and then rise up even more. Now soften into this rising.

Through observation during the yoga session I noticed how frequently Maya asked the girls questions about their bodies. I recorded in field notes how often she made reference to the poem as the girls embodied the movement of rising. After camp concluded, I watched video recordings of each girl practicing with her own unique smile

and expression of the postures. It was while listening to their voices, watching their yoga practice, and understanding their stories as told by them that I felt a connection and the confidence to facilitate another class. It was during moments like these that I understood the ways in which this case study could inform my own pedagogy as a practitioner. Maya continues,

So y'all don't have to be rigid. Notice the difference around the space around your heart when you're rising up, verses falling down. Just notice if it feels any different. And then draw your hands into this arisen heart. Then lift your heart to your head and then we let the head bow down just a little bit. Then I like to take a deep breath in through the nose. You can't be shy about this... Exhale through your mouth, hands to your heart. I always give people a chance; no matter where I teach, I invite people to set their intention. So collectively, I would love for us to think about intention. So each time our hands come back to our hearts, we think, *I rise*.

Together like a chorus, the girls bring their hands to their hearts and say in unison, *I rise*. I observe how some of the girls are uncertain on when to say the words through their hesitation to speak and by the way they are looking to one another for cues. Maya takes notice too, everyone giggles in response to the uncertainty. Maya continues:

So we are going to plug into the floor. When you root down you are able to rise. Here is the key to getting balanced. Focus on just one point. If you focus on someone else who is moving, then you eventually move right? Now lift your hand slowly. See how much more balanced we are? You pull in your belly a little bit, but not so much that you can't breathe. Wait,

you all look like you can't breathe. (*Girls fall out of postures and burst into laughter*).

For the following 90 minutes, Maya guided the girls through a yoga practice anchored in Maya Angelou's (1978) poem *Still I Rise*. Integrating yoga postures that embodied the upward movement of rising, Maya engaged the personal experiences and feelings of the learners in ways that transgressed both time and space. This experiential literacy community valued the roles of both the mind and body throughout the learning process. The girls opened to the space in a way that was being articulated through their bodies, words, and the action of remembering lived experiences.

"I feel like Buddah," giggled Lauryn.

Sitting gracefully with her legs crossed in a meditative position, Lauryn's eyes were closed as her thumbs and index fingers touched lightly. Lauryn was the tallest of the girls, but not the oldest. Lauryn's natural two-strand twists reflected her energetic personality as they extended from her crown and resembled rays of sun stretching through the sky. Starting a new school in the fall as a ninth grader, Lauryn expressed her anxiety about the transition from middle to high school more than once during the camp. She also shared the uncertainty around coming to YLA camp and not knowing anyone before applying. "I just didn't know if people were going to be nice. But everyone is. Like, I can honestly say everyone is genuinely nice," Lauryn mentioned on the last day of camp.

Lauryn took one bus and one train each morning to campus for YLA camp, and her mother and I made arrangements for Lauryn to be dropped off by me after camp each day. The decision to place emphasis on Lauryn's story was made to illustrate the amount

of agency YLA participants had within their lives. Lauryn made a choice to come to camp each day on her own. Similar to Jill, Lauryn did not know any other participants prior to the first day. On the first day of YLA camp during an exercise, I asked all of the girls to write down words or phrases they think their best friend would use to describe them. Lauryn responded:

Weird
Sarcastic
“Hipster” I detest that phrase, but that’s what she would say.
Open
Out there
Risky
Happy-go-lucky at times
Chill at times
A hugger
A lover
The BffL
Open Minded
Boundary pusher
Attitude changer

The adjectives Lauryn used to describe herself during the exercise fell right in alignment with my observations of Lauryn during CDGs and her interaction with peers. I noticed how Lauryn pushed boundaries during discussions by being unapologetic about her experiences. Lauryn rarely held her tongue during CDGs and openly shared her excitement about the recent release of her father from a three-year incarceration sentence on more than one occasion. In fact, Lauryn’s relationship with her father was a reoccurring theme during CDGs and she was very vocal about his presence in her life. In addition to Lauryn’s admiration for her father, she often took the opportunity to share her thoughts on loyalty and friendship, which shaped much of her writing during the camp. The following is an excerpt is a poem grounded in extended metaphor and written by Lauryn.

I am like a dog.

Even though you may step on my tail, I will not hold a grudge.

But abuse me and I will turn mean and angry.

Call me when you need a friend and I'll come running, enthusiasm and loyalty in tow.

When you are faced with pain, I will comfort you best I can.

But when you are faced with danger, my stance becomes strong and my bark becomes tough.

(Lauryn, 10th Grade)

Loyalties and concerns with friendship seemed to be a popular topic amongst the group during CDGs and Lauryn was not the only participant concerned with the ways in which people valued them as friends. As Maya continued to teach the yoga portion of her lesson, she frequently engaged the girls in conversation while everyone continued to practice movements that embodied the act of rising. By the end of the yoga session, Maya moved the girls into *savasana*² while the audio recording of Angelou reciting *Still I Rise* played in the background.

The lights were turned off, the doors leading to the museum closed, and the sound of flutes followed the voice of Maya Angelou. Then, eventually silence. The girls were positioned on their spines. Not moving a muscle. Their eye pillows were secure, and somehow they all managed to neatly tuck their blankets underneath them in a uniform-like fashion. There was nothing to observe other than stillness. After about ten minutes, the sound of soft chimes signaled that *savasana* was over. I wondered if some of the girls

² Savasana (shah-va-sa-nah): The name comes from the Sanskrit words, "sava" meaning corpse and "asana" meaning pose. This is the customary pose practiced at the end of a yoga class or session. The pose is lying on back, and completely still.

had fallen asleep; however, I knew they had not because they immediately responded to Maya's words through their movement:

Maya: Begin to gently wake yourself from savasana. You can do this by wiggling your fingers. Now wiggle your toes. Begin to make circles with the wrists and the ankles. Good. Now slowly begin to bring your body onto the right side. Knees bent like you are in the fetal position. Slowly begin to bring your body back into easy pose.

The room was silent. Some girls looked straight ahead without saying a word, while others sat still with their eyes closed. The silence and stillness lasted for at least three minutes and then Maya spoke softly:

So before we talk about the poem, look at the poem, or do anything with the poem, I just want you to share how the practice made you feel. How did the physical practice make you feel? (Maya looks around for volunteers) Yes? Jill right?

Jill: Well, like at the beginning it made me feel worn out. But then it made me feel refreshed. I feel like I have a lot more energy.

Maya: Okay, so your energy rose up. What else? Giovanni?

Giovanni: Positive.

Lauryn: It made me feel empowered.

Maya: Wow! We got uplifted, refreshed, positive, empowered. So when we started you all said "Jesus rose up", someone also said the Phoenix, the sun. Through the course of this rising, did anything else come to mind in relationship to this theme of rising?

Lauryn: Fighting against anything that tries to hold you down.

Gwendolyn: Rising above obstacles in your life.

Maya: Lord knows we have some obstacles don't we? Anything else? (Maya paused for a few seconds).

I want to look at this poem. I would like for us to do a choral reading. And we will go around. But you can't sleep on your lines when it's your turn because we lose the power. So I will take a volunteer to read the first lines and we will keep going around until everyone has read.

A choral reading of Maya Angelou's (1978) *Still I Rise* began and each girl read two lines. As I listened to the words of Maya Angelou, first through her voice while the girls took savasana, and then later spoken through the voices of the girls, I observed how this particular literacy community was becoming more alive. Maya valued the contributions of each learner and wanted everyone's voice heard. Instead of relying solely on the audio recording of Angelou, Maya engaged the girls in a way that connected our voices with the voice of Angelou's recorded in the past. Following the choral reading Maya continued:

Maya: So who is the author of this poem talking to?

Lauryn: She's talking to her haters.

Maya: Okay, so Maya Angelou is talking to her haters in this poem? What is she saying to her haters? Who is she talking to?

Lucille: She is talking about people trying to put her down, and she's not giving in.

Maya: She's not giving in? Ok.

Lucille: Despite all of the people trying to bring her down, she is still going to rise. She says, “Still I rise. Did you want to see me broken, bowed, and lowered eyes?”

Maya: And that’s your evidence!

Angelou: I think she is overcoming people putting her down I guess, and she is saying that she is going to rise.

Maya: What is she overcoming?

Jill: She is overcoming all of the bad things that people are saying about her.

Maya: What are the things people are saying about her? What is she overcoming?

Jill: I just think that they are jealous of her.

Maya: Who are *they*?

Jill: All of the people that she is talking about in the poem. Like, people who are mad at her because of what she has accomplished or something. Because it says, “So do I upset you?” Basically, do I make you mad because I’m great?”

Maya: Have you ever had that experience with someone?

Maya facilitated the discussion grounded in Angelou’s poem *Still I Rise* and invited girls to share their own lived experiences. As I continued to participate in and observe the community of practice, I thought about the various reasons YLA participants applied to camp. As a way to understand the expectations for and the motivation behind participation in YLA camp, the following sections illustrate the findings from the analysis of YLA participants’ applications.

Application: Why do you want to attend YLA camp?***Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Relationships***

Themes related to building relationships, either within the individual and/or with others, were the most popular responses reported in the YLA application for questions one and four. Responses focused on a relationship with Self were reported in seven out of the 13 applications and will be referred to as *intrapersonal relationships*. Responses focused on an interest to develop relationships with others were reported in over half of the applications and will be referred to as *interpersonal relationships*. Overall, an interest to develop intrapersonal, interpersonal, or a combination of the two, were reported in all 13 applications.

Intrapersonal development, or interest in developing a relationship with Self, was articulated by applicants through statements like, “I want to practice yoga because it would allow me to tap more into my inner self and in turn be able to assist my community.” With the exception of one applicant who specifically expressed a desire to “become a better student,” all applicants expressed a general interest in self-development, using phrases like “become a better person” and “become aware of spiritual self”. Gwendolyn, a rising tenth-grader explains in her application, “I would like to practice yoga this summer so that I can learn to relax and learn about being more in touch with my inner self, my inner mind, and about better self control.” As applications were analyzed, an interest in intrapersonal development was found to be consistent motivations amongst the girls.

Along with an intrapersonal motivation for self-development, a sub-category of stress management was found to be consistent amongst the applicants as well. Based on

question number two in the application, five out of the 13 applicants reported that YLA camp would be their first experience with yoga. These previously experienced applicants mentioned how yoga makes them feel relaxed and peaceful. Local yoga studios, summer camps, and after school programs were all reported as the types of communities in which the girls practiced yoga. In addition to these communities, three applicants mentioned the role family members played in their experiences with yoga. “I want to learn techniques for peace”; “I need to manage stress”; and “I need to learn how to be calm” were some of the phrases used to describe why the applicants were interested in practicing yoga more. Throughout the coding process, stress management was a guiding theme for why applicants were interested in yoga.

Along with responses coded as intrapersonal, applicants also expressed interest in interpersonal development articulated through statements like, “ I want to make new friends”; “ I want to get out of the house”; and “ I want to assist the community”. Once YLA began, interest in interpersonal development was a reoccurring theme during Circle Discussion Groups, poetry sessions, and throughout journal reflections.

Multiple Literacy Development

An interest in *Multiple Literacy Development* (MLD) is another theme identified during the thematic coding process of YLA applications. Applicants reported interest in learning techniques to improve writing, as well as an interest in developing artistic skills and knowledge around the connections between yoga and literature. “I want to develop a more well-rounded view of health and healing,” responded Alice, a vegan/raw food chef who has owned her own business since she was 12. “I have my own catering business and have founded an institute for living foods.” A rising sophomore who has been

homeschooled since elementary, Alice, along with other YLA participants, expressed an interest in learning more about how yoga can be used as a tool for healing within her community.

Within the realm of developing literacy skills, art was another common interest amongst YLA participants. Three applicants directly expressed their interest in learning how the practice of yoga can contribute to their artistic creativity.

Physical Fitness

Although body awareness was not the most popular response reported, six out of the 13 girls were interested in the ways in which yoga could improve their physical bodies. In general, body strength and improved flexibility were mentioned; however, three applicants expressed specific interest in improving their bodies for extracurricular activities like dance, cheerleading, and soccer. This particular finding was not surprising because of the emphasis on the physical practice of yoga in the United States.

Focus

One of the least mentioned interests amongst applicants was an interest in the ways in which yoga can be used as a tool for focus. Four out of the 13 applicants expressed concern for learning how to use yoga as a tool to gain focus and clarity. Out of the four applicants who mentioned either focus or clarity in the application, all but one of the girls practiced yoga for an extended period of time. The low response from participants within the area of focus is notable because of the abundance of yoga for marginalized youth in schools that present yoga as a tool for focus and concentration.

I bend but I do not break

The following poems were written by YLA participants and illustrate the type of data collected during group poetry sessions and CDGs.

*I am a long river
That continuously flows, carrying so much life
And brings hope to a dry land.
I am a strong river
That cannot break
And instead moves around the rocky obstacles
That lie in my river bed.
I am a pure river
That refuses to carry along dirt and baggage
Flowing as cleanly as I can through life.
I am a bright, beautiful river
Making my way through storms
That may crash me, and rattle me.
But I always continue on,
Growing, bending but not breaking, and
Always flowing free.*

(Gwendolyn, 10th grade)

*I am there for people
Whenever they are cold
Or just want somebody to hold
I am soft and flexible
But, strong
For my stiches hold me together so that I can hold other people together
I spread out and come in any type you want
I am like a blanket*

(Jill, 8th grade)

*I am like a bird.
Soaring just high enough to gaze down at the beautiful creations that God makes.
But not so high that I am higher than God himself.
I see only beauty and reflect it by mirroring only beauty.
Cool, rough wind washes through my feathers but they never fall.
I build a shelter that never breaks.
I see for miles through the night and never go blind, for I am unstoppable.
And when it is time for me to join my ancestors,
I only go higher than the heights that I once traveled.*

(Alice, 10th grade)

Each day at YLA camp I observed stories being told through movement, poetry, and dialogue. Stories like the ones told by Gwendolyn, Jill and Alice through poetry that illustrates the ways in which their experiences may have bent them, yet never left them broken. “I am a long river,” unites many of the stories told by the YLA participants. “I am a strong river,” suggests the courage and resiliency that Gwendolyn knew she possessed even in the face of toxic situations and the anxiety caused by peer relationships. The youth participants were not the only ones I observed use storytelling, poetry, and yoga as a way to confront and transcend obstacles, adult Yoga Teacher Volunteers (YTVs) were involved just as much.

Throughout YLA camp I observed adults being just as open to learning from the girls, as the girls were open to learning from adult women. Throughout this analysis, I observed how active voice cultivated mutual respect between community members the more vulnerable they became through sharing. More specifically, I observed that when adults within the YLA community shared poems grounded in authentic lived experiences, engaged their bodies through yoga practice alongside the students, and took the passenger’s seat during discussions, adults gained insight as well.

Bell was the lead teacher for the lesson grounded in extended metaphor. I met bell during a teacher’s certification course for yoga and always noticed the intense, yet soft gaze she maintained when speaking. Bell, who identifies as Black, Mexicana, and Filipina was often mistaken for me throughout various yoga communities because of our skin tone and similar thick free-form dreadlocs that I no longer have. Bell was one of the first volunteers I came across who reminded me why I embarked on such an ambitious

study and why this work is important. During her video reflection, bell reflects on her own identity and the ways in which YLA contributes to her own healing as a Woman of Color.

What's really exciting about the Yoga, Art, and Literature Camp is that it allows people the space to share their stories through their own voices, through their own hearts. This is something Black people in general, but let alone young folks and young women don't typically have spaces to express themselves. We are often being dictated on how we feel, how we should express ourselves...But this space is allowing for stories to be told. We are now getting stories from young women about themselves, about the ways they are living their lives, what inspires them. I just think that this is an element that we don't have enough of in spaces. This camp is allowing that opportunity.

This case study illustrates how spaces committed to making space for all voices to be heard provide opportunities for students to become teachers and for teachers to remain students. In other words, mutual respect was observed throughout the relationships between youth and adults. Bell's sentiment, "We are often being dictated on how we feel and how we should express ourselves..." reinforces how social toxins like racism and sexism can extend even into our adult years. More importantly, bell's presence and encouragement to the YLA participants to share their stories illustrates how storytelling can be used as a tool to resist silencing and oppression when spaces are provided to use our stories and even our bodies as text. Bell continues,

What I have witnessed in my short time here is that people want to share their stories. If we continue to create more spaces like that, then we will get more authentic stories, which will make more authentic people being able to be who they truly are. Storytelling also allows us to create our own history, but also our own healing and we all have some type of healing to go through, which I think is continuous. One of the most powerful healing tools of course is yoga, but then also being able to tell your own stories. When there is a space that allows for sharing, you cannot be wrong in the retelling of your experiences because it is yours. I just think that this space that Chelsea has created has allowed for that. (bell, YTV)

Bell's understanding of the critical role storytelling plays in healing was not only conveyed through her interviews, but during the observation of the lesson she taught as well. Bell's yoga and poetry class invited YLA participants to define themselves for themselves and the following passages illustrate findings based on writing sample collected from each YLA participant on the day bell led class.

Writing Sample: Extended Metaphors

I observed bell invite YLA participants to explore, reflect, and share their perceptions of identity first through yoga, and then through writing poems grounded in extended metaphor. Beginning with a yoga class that embodied balance and flexibility, I watched as the girls moved through physical postures that seemed to challenge their ability to stay grounded. Throughout the practice girls giggled, fell, and attempted postures again. Once the 45-minute yoga practice concluded with svasana, or corpse

pose, the girls were awakened by bell who began reading *height* by Mariahdessa Ekere Tallie.

*Like bamboo
I only look fragile
bend,
but do not break
sway dangerously close to
the ground in painful angles
do not break
stand straight
stretch high
face close to the sun
this time
do not break
do not merely bounce back
bend
low
and not always graceful
but taller
always taller
when I choose to stand again.*

Once bell finished reading the poem, each girl was invited to read a line as the talking piece was passed around the circle. Once the group finished reading the poem and before a CDG session began, bell requested, “Through an extended metaphor, or poem using metaphor, describe who you are and who you felt yourself to be during your practice today.” The girls wrote in their journals for about 15 minutes with indigenous flutes and drums playing in the background.

*Written like a Story
I am written like a story and no its not prewritten
The story is made up as time progresses
It makes quick decisions
All decisions are not good
But that’s just the nature of it
It also does not belong to one genre: mystery, romance, comedy and a little horror all
come together to make this story.*

People who say that is cant be so, in response I say, My story flows like a river for it is not prewritten, it grows as I grow and it takes some unexpected turns. That's what makes it exciting.

(Erykah, 9th grade)

*Like meat
I'm tender
But tough
People can try to
Rip me apart.
But like Ma'at I'm tough*

*Like water
I'm unbreakable
You can't stop me in my path
Because like water
I'm unstoppable
You can't walk
All over me
Because like water
I can't be walked on.*

(Pearl, 9th grade)

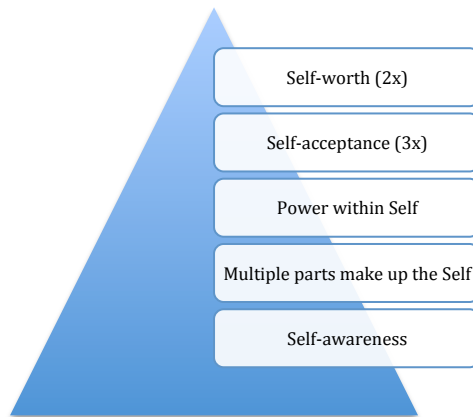
Once participants finished writing, bell invited each girl to share and talk about her poem in conversation with how our bodies felt during the practice. The findings discussed within this section focus on the coded writing samples produced by YLA participants in response to bell's lesson grounded in extended metaphor. All poems collected within this section can be found within Appendix H.

Emerging Themes from Extended Metaphors

The first theme that emerged during the analysis of the language used throughout writing samples was the observation of **self-affirming** metaphors used to describe the type of person she felt herself to be. Codes were assigned to all collected poems in order to describe the ways in which metaphor was being used in relation to perceptions of

identity. Consistent with eight of the twelve poems collected (one girl was absent this day), the following figure illustrates the codes assigned during analysis³.

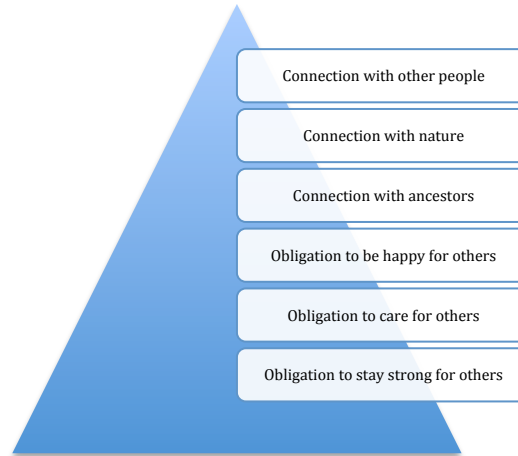
Emerging Theme: Self-affirming language



As I moved through analysis, I observed another consistent theme throughout the writing samples created during bell's lesson. Six out of the twelve YLA participants expressed an acknowledgement for, and connection with other people throughout their poems. In other words, YLA participants articulated that identity is shaped by an acknowledgement that an **individual is a part of the whole**. The following figure illustrates additional codes assigned to YLA participants' poems.

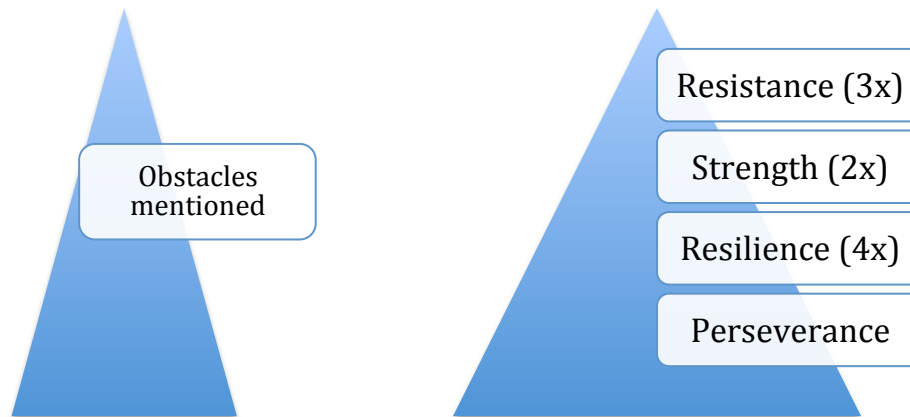
Emerging Theme: Individual is a part of a whole

³ Each time a number is followed by the letter x, it means the code was assigned multiple times.



The final theme identified during the analysis of the writing samples for this session led by bell was an **acknowledgement of obstacles** and the use of language that described **resistance, resilience, and perseverance** in response to obstacles. The following figure illustrates the final group of codes assigned to YLA participants' poems.

Emerging Themes: (a) The acknowledgement of obstacles; (b) Resistance/Resilience



Collective Discussion Group: Images and Portrayal of Black Women in Media

By the second week, YLA participants were becoming more familiar with each other and more vocal during CDG sessions. CDG sessions occurred daily and sometimes organically. For example, I observed that although lead teachers for the day were

prepared with lists of guiding questions, they would often have them transformed by YLA participants based on the dialogue after a yoga practice or poetry session. The decision to include the CDG session grounded in Nikki Giovanni's *Ego Tripp'in* led by YTV Audre was chosen because YLA participants were so interested in the topics and the particular session lasted the longest.

The lead teacher for this session was Audre, a full time yoga instructor who left "corporate America" four years ago to pursue yoga as a profession. Audre, who is trained in *Kemetic Yoga*, shared the origins of this Indigenous African yoga practice with YLA participants. Preceding a 45-minute yoga practice that incorporated yoga poses described as *Warrior*, *Goddess*, and *Sphinx*, Audre distributed a copy of the poem around the circle and a line-by-line reading of the poem began. A transcript of *Ego Tripp'in* can be found within Appendix D of this study. Following the reading of the poem the follow CDG session took place.

Excerpts from CDG session.

- Chelsea: I have a question. How would you describe this woman? Like, her appearance.
- Jill: I think she is the stereotypic perfect woman. Like she's tall. Well (hesitating) she's like well...African American.
- Chelsea: Why do you think she is of African descent?
- Jill: Because the way the poem is. How it's stated and the content in it. I don't know....That's just what envision.
- Erykah: I think that she is beautiful and has natural beauty and not superficial beauty because in her poem she talks about natural stuff. You know like

not that my hair is perfect, or that my nails are perfect. She is a strong woman and beautiful in her own way.

Giovanni: I imagine her tall and strong –mentally and physically.

As the conversation continued, a discussion focused on the imbalanced portrayal of Black women in the media evolved. This conversation was spurred by Jill's assertion that she imagined the woman to look like pop artist, Beyoncé Knowles and some YLA members made comments about how Black women like Beyoncé are portrayed in the media.

Chelsea: So, how many of you watch videos? Like BET music videos? How do you see Black women? How are we portrayed?

Toni: Well usually in the videos, they make the Black women a lot lighter than what they usual are. They portray that light skinned women are beautiful and look a lot better than darker women. They also portray Black women as ones who flaunt their bodies a lot. Sometimes they always show things that say Black women don't know how to act. They will do whatever just to get a man. And it's just ugh. (Passes the talking piece with frustration.)

The full transcript for this CDG can be found within Appendix H; however, Giovanni's narrative is emphasized in order to demonstrate her level of engagement during CDG sessions. This information is important because Maya, who was Giovanni's English/Language Arts teacher in eighth grade, will talk more about Giovanni's level of engagement during school in comparison to her engagement during YLA camp within the next chapter.

Giovanni: I have a lot to say on this. BET videos, I don't watch them often. I try to

stay away. But they make African women as ignorant, easy, and very well people use the term "exotic". When I hear that term, it makes me think of animals and it is very degrading. It's terrible to me. So to have a Black woman in the video with her hair down past her butt when you know it's not like that. Our hair is naturally curly. I mean, if your hair is not curly, and it's your natural hair, that's okay. But to have added in hair that goes past your behind when it is not like that. Or, to have on short shorts with your butt cheeks hanging out, and your boobs are hanging out, and you're shaking in videos and laying in pools.. Caucasian people see that and that's how they see us. There are Black men out there in the world who are educated and don't talk about drugs, women, and money. Whatever they talk about in videos. You can't understand most of the stuff they say anyway. But they are not all sagging in their pants. Have a gun on their waist. There are educated Black women and men out there who are not flaunting their bodies, or talking about drugs.

“Can we continue the conversation about our images in the media after lunch Audre?” asked Jill when it was time for break. The girls were so excited to share their experiences with racism and sexism and requested to come back to the discussion because they had more to say. I observed how eager the girls were to talk about issues that directly impact who they understand themselves to be.

The second half of the CDG session began with a You Tube clip of an old television sitcom, *A Different World*. A spin-off from the *Cosby Show* and based on the experiences of students at a HBCU, the excerpt shared with the YLA participants was a

dramatic interpretation of Nikki Giovanni's *Ego Tripp 'in*. "I understand the poem now!" exclaimed Jill who was the youngest participant and reminded us to finish the discussion that began before the break. Immediately, the girls began making connections between their yoga practices, the surrounding art in the museum, and the guiding poem for the session with Audre. As I read through the full transcript of the CDG session led by Audre, I began to notice undergirding themes guiding the session.

Guiding question for CDG: How do you see your image reflected in the media? What messages do you receive?

<p style="text-align: center;">Privilege & Whiteness</p> <p>Lighter skin = beauty Sends message that lighter is better</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Standards of beauty defined by media</p> <p>Long hair and a lot of body Voluptuous Straight hair Implants You are only considered pretty if you have a weave. Weave. Weave= Self-hate (insecurity)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No control of emotions/body</p> <p>Black women don't know how to act. Black women don't know how to act. Black women will do whatever to get a man.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Imbalanced images</p> <p>White people don't act the same way as Black people do in their videos.</p> <p>Seems like Black boys are always portrayed as ignorant and Black girls are easy.</p> <p>Concerns about the opinions of White people about Black people.</p> <p>Imbalance in how we see our images in the media.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sexualization/objectification of Black female body</p> <p>Term exotic Black women like to flaunt their bodies a lot.</p> <p>Women moving like strippers just to be on a video, they do stuff off camera too.</p> <p>Not covered in pool scenes on videos.</p> <p>They act promiscuous</p>

<p>We don't see enough educated Black men represented</p>	<p>Everyone is twerking (black/white) women in general</p>
<p>Double standard- Black girls angry= crazy. White girl crazy= Frustrated.</p>	<p>All Black women are not sluts</p>

By the second half of the CDG session that took place after the lunch break, the conversation shifted into stories specifically about racial stereotyping within the context of school. Erykah, who attends a predominately Black charter school, shares an experience that happened at school that left both her and her family angry.

One time this community service group came to my school and they were teaching us stuff. It wasn't just yoga, but yoga was involved. Anyway, they gave us flyers to take home to share with our parents and my parents were really angry. They were angry because the flyer said that they wanted me to be a part of an after-school program for "at-risk" students. I'm not at-risk. What does at-risk even mean? I just was really bothered that they called me that.

I observed similarities between bell's reflection on Black girls being "dictated to about how we feel," and Erykah's story about her family's anger towards being labeled "at risk" by the community service group. Through analysis, I understood how critical spaces like YLA are to individuals and groups of people who are often marginalized and silenced. Moreover, I noticed how obstacles revealed during the CDG session led by Audre were actively being resisted during the session. For example, a concern with the

imbalanced images presented in the media that depict Black and Brown women as out of control was being rejected through the girls' yoga practice, CDG, and poetry sessions that allowed participants the space to confront lived experiences may yield uncontrolled and chaotic responses for others. Instead, YLA participants talked about intersecting and unique obstacles, the ways in which they are healing from obstacles, and how obstacles make them more aware and stronger when given space to share.

Overall, findings show that when culturally responsive environments engage holistic and healing practices like yoga to ground discussions about the word and the world, learners have an opportunity to transform the consequences of social toxins that create emotions like fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Findings also indicate that social toxins like racism, sexism, and other social constructs that sustain oppression are prevalent in the lives of youth; however, when given an opportunity to discuss these toxins, youth use these experiences as fuel for transforming oppression and becoming agents of change through counter-stories. More specifically, this case study offers examples for the types of social toxins experienced by Black girl youth and the ways in which yoga, literature, and dialogue can be used to understand how these social toxins shape learning.

Chapter 5: Conversations with Maya through Narrative Inquiry

As a Black woman in a predominately white school, a Black yoga teacher in a predominately white profession here in the United States, and as a Black woman who was once a Black girl who learned (and continues to understand) oppression through lived experience at the intersection of race, class and gender, Maya endured social toxins in ways that influenced her identity. Maya's path has been very similar to my own in that our experiences with yoga and our experiences with teaching youth in formal institutions make us more aware of the tension that exists between our multiple identities as teachers and Women of Color. Through conversations with Maya about her experiences as an educator who also did not agree with the standardization of education, her experiences with racism in different yoga communities, and the ways in which aspects of these experiences intersect, I was able to understand the findings of this case study more fully.

When I began this work I was overwhelmed. I knew that there was something within myself I wanted to understand as a researcher, as an educator, as a youth advocate, and as a Black woman in need of healing. As an educator in a Title I school, I felt responsible for my students' learning and I also felt obligated to teach in critically conscious ways. The framework I used for teaching and learning was often challenged by the institutionalized and structural forms of oppression that were sustained by standardization, high stakes testing, and dehumanizing ways of experiencing learning, specifically in schools that served Black and Brown children.

This critically conscious qualitative case study is designed to inform practice, methods for research, and theory. This study is designed to offer strategies for collecting,

analyzing, and interpreting data in ways that allow educators and educational researchers permission to remain whole and not fragmented, reflective and not inflexible, and to approach research findings not as a destination, but as a constant and evolving journey.

The findings for this qualitative case study will be discussed through a conversation with YLA volunteer Maya. Through narrative inquiry, Maya and I discuss our experiences during YLA camp, lived experiences as a Black woman teaching and learning in multiple communities, and her thoughts on teaching yoga in schools.

Critical Race Theory methods privilege the counter-stories told by individuals who experience marginalization in ways that dismantle oppression. Critical Race Theory in Education pushes research to be transformative and to challenge racism in our society and our educational institutions (Yosso, 2005). As a way to understand the cultural, institutional, and social narratives that shape learning, I invited Maya to talk about her experiences with social toxins in schools and society in conversation with the experiences shared during YLA.

Maya: So, I got to see Giovanni as her 8th grade language arts teacher and at the camp. It was night and day. It was complicated because we always had this Black woman to younger Black woman connection. So my experience with her was quite different than it was in all other 6 of her classes. I didn't see in her at camp what I would see at school. We had so many conferences about Giovanni...so many interventions and parent meetings. She would be in ISS (in-school suspension). Her locker, things would pop out. She never knew where anything was. It was difficult for her to be prepared for class because of this. She couldn't or wouldn't participate in

classes because it seemed like she just couldn't pull it together. This was every single day. So, to see her at the camp, showing up. Even to keep her mat and everything together. Somehow being invested in the space around her was really eye opening.

Giovanni's participation in the CDG session anchored in Nikki Giovanni's *Ego Tripp'in* illuminated the level of importance a conversation on the imbalanced portrayal of Black women in the media was to her and how she experiences gendered and racialized oppression within her own life. Through storytelling, Giovanni offered solutions to these problems by sharing her experiences inside and outside of school. Both before and after Giovanni had an opportunity identify and talk about the social toxins in her life, she and other YLA participants practiced yoga with an emphasis on postures that embodied themes from the poem. In other words, YLA participants engaged the body and lived experiences in order to discuss the text, and for Maya, it was exciting to observe Giovanni full engaged.

In school, it was just like everything of hers was spread out to the radius of the classroom. And to be able to see her on one level, contain her personal stuff to her on her mat, it seemed like (if this makes sense) that it allowed her to engage more in some kind of way. Because it seemed like at school, the way she engaged was to have stuff everywhere. Does that make sense?

Chelsea: So are you saying that in camp it seemed like she didn't use physical items to be the way in which she engaged and contributed to the classroom?

Maya: Right, she didn't do it at all. She was actively contributing. And when it was time for them to write, she actually wrote. In the school setting I would take her to a small back office to work because she was really distracted by her surroundings. But watching her at the camp, we [yoga instructors] just said "Now it's time to write" and she wrote! (laughing)

Maya: I think all of those girls were clearly bright. But I think this about all young people when they are engaged they get to shine. But to me, it felt like that if we would have lifted them out of that type of environment, we would have seen them and wondered....well who is that child?

Throughout the two weeks I observed participants make reference to how fun the camp is and how it was appreciated that they had so many opportunities to talk about their lives. The findings indicate that youth have stories to tell and experiences to share, and when given the opportunity to engage stories, critically engaged learning takes place. Moreover, when teachers understand the learning community and the people who contribute to this community, culturally responsive ways of teaching can be informed when are opportunities for storytelling are provided. Maya continues,

Maya: If we could visit them in their classrooms now, it would be interesting to see their level of engagement. How much are they contributing? Because everyone contributed to discussion during YLA and that is a hard thing to pull off in a classroom. In any setting, when you have more than a couple of people it is difficult to get them actively engaged. Listening to each other's voices and to watch them connect dots throughout conversations. I

watched them retain information from day to day at YLA each time they made reference to a previous day. Kids during the school year will forget what was just explained 10 minutes ago. So, I think that was interesting. Just because one girl in the group, I have a context for her in an academic setting.

I got to see her be who I thought she was, and I would see glimpses of her in my classroom. Other teachers saw none of it. So I actually contacted some of the teachers after the camp and said you know I just want you to know that Giovanni thrived in this particular setting because I felt like I was being her advocate in meetings.

As our interview progressed, Maya spoke more in depth about what made the environment at YLA so different from the environment at the middle school. Maya also talked more about the freedom she felt as a teacher in YLA, compared to the restriction she felt in her position as a middle school Language Arts teacher. I met with Maya a second time and we talked more about the data collected during YLA camp.

Chelsea: So, for you as teacher who has taught for 10 years and who also practices yoga, I think that in many ways our experiences intersect. We occupy one community where we are taught that freedom and liberation is this thing that can be encountered within, whether it is embodied or through meditation. Then we have our identity at school. For example, I felt very restricted by standardization. I did not feel liberated at all. It felt like the exact opposite. So, my question is, as a teacher, how does it feel to be a

practitioner of yoga and maintain identity in spaces that tend to confine and oppress us?

Maya: I think it is conflicting and is ultimately why I left the classroom. In one sense, you take the whole classroom premise of standardized testing along with the whole premise of those standards that we have to teach.... that is a huge confine. So, I taught in a school that was predominately white, yet served some Black children and thought it might be a little different. I do feel like my class was much like a fish bowl, in that if I deviate too far from the path someone would be there to put me back on track. But I felt like I had more liberty than when I taught in a Title I school that was super regimented.

Maya: I couldn't ever really reconcile my voice and who I was authentically with this thing I had to present in front of students. I started to realize that because of the persona of professionalism as a teacher I was disconnected from students unless I did what I did with Giovanni, which was meet outside of the space. So when I would meet outside of that space, it would be clear that ok, we are not in a Language Arts class, we are having a conversation. I think one of my strengths was that I could get to this place of authenticity in comparison to many teachers, but I was walking all over all kinds of boundaries. I told them things about my life. If they would tell me things, I would say, "Look sweetheart, that happened to me too!" It's not anything that you would have learned in a school of education. You

can't really teach anyone that you can't begin to feel an authentic relationship with.

Findings from this qualitative case study reveal that authentic relationships were created within the YLA community through a practice of mutual respect. Or, as YLA participant Gwendolyn explains, "When we connected through yoga and talked after our practice, it showed me that I am not alone in my insecurities. It was helpful to hear other girls talk about their insecurities." As illustrated through the findings of journal entries, poems, and CDG sessions, insecurities around acceptance by peers, self-acceptance, and issues surrounding change and transition were revealed. As an educator, Maya reminds us how critical it was for her to connect with students in order to support literacy development in her former English/Language Arts classes. As a youth YLA participant, Gwendolyn describes how critical a connection with others is when opening up about lived experiences. In the context of critical literacy development, the data show that spaces that facilitate mutual respect while engaging literature can use

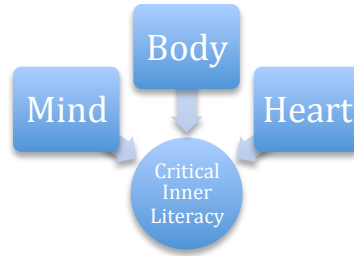
The implications for research, practice, and participation became more apparent as I met with Maya three times after YLA camp. I became curious about the elements that contributed to YLA and Giovanni's increased level of engagement in comparison to Maya's observation in the classroom. I wondered more about the unique environment occupied by Black girls and Women of Color and the ways in which yoga and literature were used as mediums for learning.

Chapter 6: Educational Implications

Theorizing Critical Inner Literacy

The stories and lived experiences shared by the participants within this Participatory Literacy Community (Fisher, 2008) inform how I introduce and theorize Critical Inner Literacy (CIL). What makes YLA a literacy community is the presence of literary events (Heath, 1982). Literary events within the YLA community are described as poetry reading and writing sessions, the integration of poetry and song during yoga class, storytelling during Collective Discussion Group sessions (CDGs), and journal reflection. According to Street (1993), literary events employ literacy practices that include both behavior and conceptualizations related to the use of reading and/or writing. The YLA community provides several examples for how literary events engage multiple forms of literacy. In the context of this case study, storytelling through yoga postures is one example for how the body can be a site for a literary event.

A theory of Critical Inner Literacy places value on the body as an instrument that understands, receives, and sends information. CIL suggests that the body is never separate from thought processes or memory; instead, the body and mind work as a unit. The process of CIL engages the mind, body, and heart throughout the learning process. In order to understand the mind, body, and heart metaphor more fully, a theory of CIL associates the mind with cognitive aspects of learning, views the body as an instrument for communication and site for literary event, and values the heart as the intention behind action.



Similar to critical literacy, CIL is always evolving and developing within spaces where learners are encouraged to share and use lived experiences as a tool for thinking critically about multiple forms of text. Critical Inner Literacy is a practice that uses an understanding of Self in order to understand other texts. Never relying on cognition alone to recall lived experiences, a theory of CIL recognizes the significant role the body plays when making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections.

Critical Inner Literacy, Yoga, and Radical Healing

Returning to an understanding of *radical healing* (Ginwright, 2010) as a method for resisting and transforming social toxins, the data collected during and after Yoga, Literature, and Art camp illustrates how spaces that rely on community, caring, and critical consciousness can use mediums like yoga and poetry to transform the consequences of social toxins into hope and action. Although this qualitative case study focuses on the lives of the Black girls and Women of Color within the YLA community, the educational implications for this work inform both educational research and pedagogy for research communities and practitioners.

A theory of Critical Inner Literacy views the mind, body, and heart as a working unit during processes of radical healing. For example on a collective level, a theory of CIL values the communal positioning of participants' bodies within a circle during yoga,

CDG sessions, and poetry sharing during the radical healing process because it encourages everyone to see and feel who is in front of them. On an individual level, a theory of CIL acknowledges the body, as well as practices like yoga as tools for creation, communication, and healing. In order to understand the educational implications for this work in the words of youth participants, I turn to the final reflections written on the last day of camp.

“To me, yoga is the spiritual connection between me and my inner self. It brings peace to my mind, soul, and body.” (Gwendolyn, 10th grade)

“Yoga benefits my body by stretching muscles that aren’t stretched regularly and it relaxes my mind.” (Giovanni, 9th grade)

“I think yoga is exercise for my mental and physical health.” (Phillis, 8th grade)

“Yoga teaches us relaxing poses that are simple and complicated. Yoga helps me realize and slow down my breaths. Yoga helps me practice moving my body in peaceful ways. It is refreshing and meditating.” (Lucille, 9th grade)

“To me, yoga is a practice that forces me to relax and let stress go. It’s like a way to occupy my life with peace. And as a result I know it will keep me healthy throughout life.” (Alice, 9th grade)

“To me, yoga means releasing all past anxieties and worries and being peaceful and centered within myself as a person.” (Erykah, 9th grade)

“Yoga to me is a practice that is more than stretching my physical body, but also mentally. I believe it is a way to get to know myself better and reclaim my inner self and to know who I am.” (Toni, 9th grade)

“To me, yoga is a time to reflect and a time to stop in the middle of my busy lifestyle to take in one moment to breathe, think and try to relax.” (Jill, 8th grade)

“Yoga to me is a way to relax and really find myself and get centered. It’s a type of exercise that gets rid of a lot of toxins in the body.” (Walker, 9th grade)

“Yoga means relieving all stress and pain. Yoga means cleaning all thoughts. Yoga means tuning out the world. Yoga means creating positive energy.” (Pearl, 10th grade)

“Yoga teaches me how to let go and relax.” (Angelou, 9th grade)

“Yoga has been helping me relax myself and release negative energy from my body.” (Lauryn, 9th grade)

The reflections written on the final day of camp tell us how valuable the body is during a process of healing. The root word of yoga is *yuj*, which means to join or unite. Connecting the mind, body, and heart through the practice of yoga is an ancient practice that allows the practitioner to use the breath and body as tools to focus the mind. More specifically, yoga has also been used to soothe the nervous system and calm anxiety and fear (Stiles, 2005). Yoga breathing techniques are often the element that makes the practice attractive to schools. Similar to the Oakland based program discussed earlier in the study, schools concerned with teaching students how to concentrate often enforce yoga with an intention to increase test scores.

Contrary to frameworks that use yoga to calm students for the sake of controlling behavior to take a standardized test, yoga communities for youth grounded in CIL and radical healing engage yoga to confront, critique, and heal the impact systems of oppression have on youth both inside and outside of the classroom. When yoga is used as a tool for radical healing and the development of CIL, practitioners like the YLA participants become more aware through their practice and use their yoga practice to critically engage the word and the world.

Limitations & Future Research

As with any research study it is always important to discuss the limitations presented in the design and unforeseen circumstances that occur during the data collection process. Although many insights were gained through observations, interviews, and field notes, it is imperative to acknowledge that the YLA participants in this study are unique to their own context and life experiences. The small number of participants, the limited amount of one-on-one interviews, and the length of the camp limits insight on how this information would look with a greater amount of participants over a longer period of time.

As I continue to understand and develop the design for this research, I plan to collect data over a longer period of time. Additionally, I plan to engage the voices of Yoga Teacher Volunteers (YTVs) more by conducting Collective Discussion Groups (CDGs) with volunteers after camp has concluded. An unforeseen obstacle I encountered was the challenge of conducting one-on-one interviews with youth. In the future, I plan to engage technology when participants have access and conduct interviews through Skype.

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Appendix A: Camp Flyer Announcement

YOGA, LITERATURE, & ART

Summer Camp for Teen Girls






This eight day camp for teen girls will explore movement, literature, and photography within the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art. Chelsea Jackson, and a host of local yoga teachers, will teach an eight day yoga series for beginners. This camp integrates literature and photography while participants engage reflective practices through journal writing, yoga, and art.

Mondays -Thursdays
July 22nd- August 1st
10:00 am- 3:30 pm

\$35 fee for materials





For more information and to download application please visit:
www.chelsealovesyoga.com / Email: chelsea@chelsealovesyoga.com / Phone: 404.721.3079

Appendix B: Applications for YLA

Yoga, Literature, & Art Camp Application Summer 2013

Name: _____ Birth date: _____

School: _____ Grade: _____

Email Address: _____

Parent/Guardian's

Name(s): _____ Phone: _____

Email
address(es) _____

Mailing

Address: _____

Are there any dates or times you will be unable to attend? (Camp dates are July 22nd-
Aug, 1st, Mondays-Thursdays/10 am- 3:30 pm). Please share dates (if
any): _____

1. Why do you want to practice yoga this summer?
2. Have you ever practiced yoga before? If yes, when and where?
3. What is your favorite book?
4. Based on the information you have about the camp, what do you hope to gain
from your experience?

Options for sending document:

1. Print this document, write or type information, scan, and send as a word attachment to chelsea@chelsealovesyoga.com.
2. Copy/paste this document and provide answers in the body of an email and send to chelsea@chelsealovesyoga.com.
3. Contact Chelsea at chelsea@chelsealovesyoga.com to request a PO Box address to mail application.

Please contact me at chelsea@chelsealovesyoga.com if you have any questions about the application process. 😊

Appendix C: Daily Schedule

Monday: Getting Acquainted

9:30-10:00 am

- Registration/Check-In/ Create Name tags & name plates (collect name plates at end day)

10:30 am

- Opening yoga practice led by Chelsea
- Theme: Getting Acquainted (ice breaker)

11:00 am ~ Opening Circle led by Chelsea (Guidelines for conducting Circle, p.54 + Sharing)

- Girls will share/describe their object. *Girls are instructed in acceptance letter to bring in an object that means a lot to them to share on the first day.
- Chelsea will facilitate the sharing by using *The Circle Process*.

12:00 pm

- 30 minute break in front of the Cosby building. Snacks/Water/Juice

12:30 pm

- Core Values Circle: Purpose: To identify core values of participants, to create awareness/recognition of the core self. Reference: pg. 45&50.
- Alternative Guiding Questions for “Values” Circle:
 - What is your ideal classroom experience at school? Describe how people treat each other there.
 - How do you want to be treated there?
- The “Values” generated from this activity will be displayed on chart paper (or paper plates) as mutual agreements we will use throughout the camp.
- Closing: Guidelines Web Activity. p. 57

1:15 pm

- Afternoon Yoga practice led by Chelsea
- Theme: *Getting Acquainted*: Partner Practice

2:00 pm

- 15 minute break

2:15 pm

- Yoga, Literature, & Art Camp Overview for Campers

- Girls will receive their journals and other materials.
- K-W-L chart for yoga

3:00 pm Closing Circle led by Chelsea

- Journal Reflection/ *Svasana if schedule permits.
- Journal Guiding Question options:
 - What value would you like to offer our space together?
 - What demonstrates respect?
 - Reflect on a time when you acted upon your core values, even though others were not.

3:30 pm Dismissal

Tuesday: Still 1 Rise

10:00 am –noon (Octavia)

- Opening yoga practice led by Octavia
- Poetry session led by Octavia

12:00 pm

- 30 minute break in front of the Cosby building. *Snacks/Water/Juice

12:30 pm

- Icebreaker: Group Juggle (p. 82)
- Circle Check-in led by Chelsea

1:15 pm

- Afternoon Yoga practice led by Chelsea

2:00 pm

- 15 minute break

2:15 pm

- Closing Circle: “Who am I really?” led by Chelsea (p. 82).

2:45/3:00ish pm

- Journal Reflection
- Possible Guiding Questions for reflection:
 - Reflect on a time when you “made lemonade out of lemons”.
 - Reflect on a time that was one of your most difficult challenges. How did you deal with it?

3:30 pm

- Dismissal

Wednesday: “Like bamboo, I do not break”

10:00 am

- Opening Circle (short check-in) led by Chelsea
- Introduction of the guiding poem: “height” by Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie (Listen Up!, p. 160) Link to the poem:
<http://www.kindovermatter.com/2010/09/i-only-look-fragile.html>

10:30 am

- Opening yoga practice led by Jennie
- Theme: Use the poem “height” to guide practice.

11:15 am

- Core-Self Circle led by Chelsea (p. 88).
- Opening & activity
- Purpose: To explore the concept of the core self as good, wise, loving, peaceful, strong, and permanent—no matter what

12:00 pm

- 30 minute break in front of the Cosby building. *Snacks/Water/Juice

12:30 pm

- **Exploring the Vault with Makeba!**

1:45 pm

- 15 minute break

2:00 pm

- Afternoon yoga practice led by Elizabeth
- Theme: Use the poem “height” to guide practice.

2:45/3:00ish pm

- Journal Reflection
- Possible Guiding Questions for reflection:
 - What is something you value about yourself why?
 - What are three gifts (attributes of yourself) that you bring to the circle?

3:30 pm

- Dismissal

Thursday:

10:00 am

- Opening Circle (short check-in) led by Chelsea
- Introduction of the guiding poem: "Some timing" by Alex Elle

10:30 am

- Opening yoga practice led by zahra
- Theme: Balance

11:15 am

- Pick An Emotion Circle led by Chelsea (p. 104).
- Purpose: To enable participants to identify and label a range of emotional states, also to develop greater empathy for others expressing similar feelings.

12:00 pm

- 30 minute break in front of the Cosby building. *Snacks/Water/Juice

12:30 pm

-

2:00 pm

- Afternoon yoga practice led by Makeba
- Theme: Use the poem "height" to guide practice.

2:45/3:00ish pm

- Journal Reflection
- Possible Guiding Questions for reflection:
 - What is something you value about yourself why?
 - What are three gifts (attributes of yourself) that you bring to the circle?

3:30 pm

- Dismissal

Appendix D: Poems

Monday

First Day No Poem

Tuesday (Instructor: Maya)

Still I Rise by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
 With your bitter, twisted lies,
 You may trod me in the very dirt
 But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
 Why are you beset with gloom?
 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
 Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
 With the certainty of tides,
 Just like hopes springing high,
 Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
 Bowed head and lowered eyes?
 Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
 Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
 Don't you take it awful hard
 'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
 Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
 You may cut me with your eyes,
 You may kill me with your hatefulnes,
 But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
 Does it come as a surprise
 That I dance like I've got diamonds
 At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
 I rise
 Up from a past that's rooted in pain
 I rise
 I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
 Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
 I rise
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
 I rise
 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
 I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
 I rise
 I rise
 I rise.

Wednesday (Instructor: Sonia)

“height” by Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie

Like bamboo
 I only look fragile
 bend,
 but do not break
 sway dangerously close to
 the ground in painful angles
 do not break
 stand straight
 stretch high
 face close to the sun
 this time
 do not break
 do not merely bounce back
 bend
 low
 and not always graceful
 but taller
 always taller
 when I choose to stand again.

Thursday(Instructor, bell)

Some-Timing by Alex Elle

Sometimes I don't think I am pretty but
 some days I smile when I pass the mirror.

Sometimes I don't feel worthy but
 then I look at my reflection and see my daughter, mother, and
 grandmother who are worthy of all things. That in itself says
 a lot about me.

Some days I don't want anything to do with anyone but
 then I remember who's been there for me when I've had no
 one.

Sometimes life sucks. Other times not so much.

I've come to the conclusion that I need balance in my life so

These "sometimey" feelings are welcome to stay.

If everything was all good all of the time I would be

miserable. And if everything was all bad I'd feel the same.

My ups and downs are reminiscent of yin and yang; they need
 each other to help me get through the good and bad days.

Monday (Instructor: Audre)

Ego Tripping by Nikki Giovanni

Ego Tripping (there may be a reason why)

I was born in the congo

I walked to the fertile crescent and built
 the sphinx

I designed a pyramid so tough that a star
 that only glows every one hundred years falls
 into the center giving divine perfect light

I am bad

I sat on the throne
 drinking nectar with allah

I got hot and sent an ice age to europe
 to cool my thirst

My oldest daughter is nefertiti
 the tears from my birth pains
 created the Nile

I am a beautiful woman

I gazed on the forest and burned
 out the sahara desert
 with a packet of goat's meat
 and a change of clothes

I crossed it in two hours

I am a gazelle so swift
 so swift you can't catch me

For a birthday present when he was three

I gave my son hannibal an elephant
 He gave me rome for mother's day

My strength flows ever on

My son noah built new/ark and
 I stood proudly at the helm
 as we sailed on a soft summer day
 I turned myself into myself and was
 jesus
 men intone my loving name
 All praises All praises
 I am the one who would save
 I sowed diamonds in my back yard
 My bowels deliver uranium
 the filings from my fingernails are
 semi-precious jewels
 On a trip north
 I caught a cold and blew
 My nose giving oil to the arab world
 I am so hip even my errors are correct
 I sailed west to reach east and had to round off
 the earth as I went
 The hair from my head thinned and gold was laid
 across three continents
 I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal
 I cannot be comprehended except by my permission
 I mean...I...can fly
 like a bird in the sky...

Tuesday (Instructor: Maya+Zora)

Won't You Celebrate with Me by Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
 what i have shaped into a kind of life? i had no model.
 born in babylon
 both nonwhite and woman
 what did i see to be except myself?
 i made it up
 here on this bridge between
 starshine and clay,
 my one hand holding tight
 my other hand;
 come celebrate with me that everyday
 something has tried to kill me
 and has failed.

Appendix E: Recruitment Letters

Youth

Consent to be a Research Subject

Title: Developing Critical Inner Literacy: Reading the Body, the Word, and the World

Principal Investigator: Chelsea A. Jackson

If you are the legal guardian of a child who is being asked to participate, the term “you” used in this consent refers to your child

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. **It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study.**

Before making your decision:

- Please carefully read this form or have it read to you
- Please listen to the principal investigator (Chelsea Jackson) explain the study to you
- Please ask questions about anything that is not clear

You can take a copy of this consent form, to keep. Feel free to take your time thinking about whether you would like to participate. You may wish to discuss your decision with family or friends. Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and get answers that make sense to you. By signing this form you will not give up any legal rights.

Study Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore how yoga contributes to literacy development when yoga is integrated throughout the reading of text(s), group discussion, and independent reflection. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how youth participant feel about learning in this particular way. This study will be evaluated through observation, group discussions, and individual interviews.

Procedures

I will ask you a series of questions regarding your experience during Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp. During the camp you will be reading and producing multiple texts individually and collectively over the course of the eight days and I will ask you specific questions about your experience. You will be asked to maintain reflective journals that will be used to contribute to this research. You have the option to withdraw from the study at any time (i.e., during interview process, journal entries, etc.).

Risks and Discomforts

Rare but possible risks include:

Breach of confidentiality.

New Information

It is possible that the researchers will learn something new during the study about the risks of being in it. If this happens, they will tell you about it. Then you can decide if you want to continue to be in this study or not. You may be asked to sign a new consent form that includes the new information if you decide to stay in the study.

Benefits

This study will provide summer enrichment for youth participants for eight days.

Compensation

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Confidentiality

Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent we are required to do so by law. A study number rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

Costs

There are no costs, research or standard of care related, associated with the study. There will be no costs to you for participating in this study, other than basic expenses like transportation. You will not be charged for any of the research activities.

Withdrawal from the Study

You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

Contact Information

Contact Chelsea A. Jackson by phone at 404.488.8025, or via email cajack2@emory.edu

- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it,
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research

Contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or irb@emory.edu:

- if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.
- You may also let the IRB know about your experience as a research participant through our Research Participant Survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6ZDMW75>.

Consent

Please, print your name and sign below if you agree to be in this study. By signing this consent form, you will not give up any of your legal rights. We will give you a copy of the signed consent, to keep.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject
Time

Date

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion
Time

Date

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion

Signature of Legally Authorized Representative
Time

Date

Authority of Legally Authorized Representative or Relationship to Subject

Signature of Assent for 17 year old Subject
Time

Date

Adult

Consent to be a Research Subject

Title: Developing Critical Inner Literacy: Reading the Body, the Word, and the World

Principal Investigator: Chelsea A. Jackson

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. **It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study.**

Before making your decision:

- Please carefully read this form or have it read to you
- Please listen to the principal investigator (Chelsea Jackson) explain the study to you
- Please ask questions about anything that is not clear

You can take a copy of this consent form, to keep. Feel free to take your time thinking about whether you would like to participate. You may wish to discuss your decision with family or friends. Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and get answers that make sense to you. By signing this form you will not give up any legal rights.

Study Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore how yoga contributes to literacy development when yoga is integrated throughout the reading of text(s), group discussion, and independent reflection. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how youth participant feel about learning in this particular way. This study will be evaluated through observation, group discussions, and individual interviews.

Procedures

I will ask you a series of questions regarding your teaching experience during Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp. During the camp you will be engaging multiple texts individually and collectively over the course of the eight days and I will ask you specific questions about your experience. You will be asked to maintain reflective journals that will be used to contribute to this research. You have the option to withdraw from the study at any time (i.e., during interview process, journal entries, etc.).

Risks and Discomforts

Rare but possible risks include:
Breach of confidentiality.

New Information

It is possible that the researchers will learn something new during the study about the risks of being in it. If this happens, they will tell you about it. Then you can decide if you want to continue to be in this study or not. You may be asked to sign a new consent form that includes the new information if you decide to stay in the study.

Benefits

This study is not designed to benefit you directly; however, this study is designed to learn more about the multiple learning styles of youth and can potentially inform the pedagogy of educators in the future.

Compensation

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Confidentiality

Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent we are required to do so by law. A study number rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

Costs

There are no costs, research or standard of care related, associated with the study. There will be no costs to you for participating in this study, other than basic expenses like transportation. You will not be charged for any of the research activities.

Withdrawal from the Study

You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

Contact Information

Contact Chelsea A. Jackson by phone at 404.488.8025, or via email cjack2@emory.edu

- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it,
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research

Contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or irb@emory.edu:

- if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.
- You may also let the IRB know about your experience as a research participant through our Research Participant Survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6ZDMW75>.

Consent

Please, print your name and sign below if you agree to be in this study. By signing this consent form, you will not give up any of your legal rights. We will give you a copy of the signed consent, to keep.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject
Time

Date

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion
Time

Date

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Materials needed (Youth Interviews):

- Journal
- Copies of the poems (inside gold folders)
- Digital recorder & phone
- Research Consent papers
- * Gift for girls: framed group photo
- Yoga posture book –or— a series of photos of poses

Themes:

- ❖ critical literacy development (ask questions specific to poems read during camp, current books being read now).
- ❖ yoga/mind/body connection (series of photos)
- ❖ critical consciousness/citizenship

What do you want to know (Revisit **Research Questions**)

1. What are the experiences of teachers who use yoga as a pedagogical tool for critical literacy development?
2. **In what ways do youth yoga practitioners engage yoga as a tool for critical literacy development?**
3. How can the experiences of yoga practitioners both inside and outside of this literacy community contribute to a theory of Critical Inner Literacy (CIL)?

Interview Protocol:

I want to ask you some questions about your experience at Yoga, Literacy, and Art Camp at Spelman College. Many of the questions I ask will be specific to that experience; however, I may ask you questions about school and your life after the program. Please know that you can pass on any question you may not want to answer.

Demographic Info:

1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you in?
3. What type of school do you attend? (public, private, single-gender, etc.)

Yoga/School Questions:

1. So tell me how life has been since school has started. (narrative inquiry). Use this question in order for participants to set the tone.

2. Now that school has begun, have you used or noticed yourself observing any of the tools you learned during yoga camp?
3. On the last day of class, I asked the question, “If you could take one thing with you to school this year (idea, routine, etc.), what would it be? Now that school has begun can you think of anything else you would have taken with you? Or, have you already used that one lesson or tool you learned during camp?
4. I am going to show you a series of yoga postures. Some of them we learned, some we may eventually learn together. I want you to re-read one of your favorite poems from camp and tell me which photo you think represents the poem and why. Please take your time. (flow in conversation with participant during interview).
5. Please look through your poetry folder and choose the poem that was most difficult for you to understand upon your first reading. What was difficult for you?
6. Did you understand the poem any better by the end of camp? In what ways (if any) did our yoga practice & discussion help you understand the poem better?
7. Are there any ways that your yoga practice has influenced how you interact with other people? (school, friends, teachers, family, etc.)
8. How important is it for you to see images that look like you practicing yoga?
9. We had a long discussion about the imbalanced portrayal of Women of Color in the media and the ways that our bodies are seen in negative ways. We also talked about how poets like Maya Angelou and Nikki Giovanni used poetry as their response to imbalanced ways of seeing Black women.
10. If someone made the comment “spaces like Yoga, Literature, and Art camp are unnecessary” what would you say in response?

*Be sure to share my life with them as well. For example: “I was very struck by what it means to be a woman of color....”

*The more you tell me, the more I will tell you.

Narrative: Draw a timeline with the girls through their life. What were some of the big moments? What do you see the difference between your old school and your new school?

- It’s a conversation.
- Who are your models of Black womanhood?

Appendix G: Data Analysis Matrix

Research Questions:	Data Source(s)	Guiding Question(s)	Findings
<p>Question 1: What might we learn by inquiring into how Black girls' perceptions of identity intersect and contradict their lived experiences when yoga and culturally responsive literature are used for mediums of learning?</p>	<p>Bell's reflection.</p> <p>Writing sample (extended metaphor)</p> <p>CDG Session led by Audre (Ego Tripp'in)</p>	<p>How was it teaching yoga + literature?</p> <p>Using extended metaphor, describe yourself.</p> <p>How do you see your image portrayed in the media? What messages are you receiving?</p>	
<p>Question 2: How might inquiring into the lived experiences of Black girls and Women of Color deepen our understandings of the cultural, institutional, and social narratives that shape learning?</p>	<p>Journal entry (experiences w/ social toxins)</p> <p>Interview with Gwendolyn</p> <p>CDG session w/ Maya (Still I Rise)</p> <p>Writing Sample</p>	<p>What can we learn from these experiences?</p> <p>What can we learn from her now that school as begun?</p> <p>What can we learn from narratives?</p>	
<p>Question 3: How might narrative inquiry, critical literacy, and yoga be brought together to create an embodied and liberating pedagogy that honors lived experience?</p>	<p>Field notes from first day.</p> <p>Field notes from yoga session</p> <p>Application</p> <p>Final day reflections</p>	<p>What can we learn from spaces that cultivate mutual respect?</p> <p>How does yoga cultivate mutual respect?</p> <p>What draws youth to camps designed like YLA?</p> <p>How does this inform pedagogy?</p>	

Appendix H: Data Analysis/Codes & Themes

Application

	Grade/School Type	Why do you want to attend?	Have you ever practiced yoga?
1. Phillis	8 th /Public School	focus, body strength, make new friends, express artistic abilities	Occasionally with family & friends, but not on a consistent basis.
2. Lauryn	9 th / Public School	get out of house, exercise, learn techniques for peace/manage stress, be around other kids	Yes, aunt teaches yoga
3. Pearl	9 th / Charter School	Help body for dance, make new friends, build strength & flexibility	No.
4. Giovanni	9 th / Public School	Yoga makes me feel better. Improve writing & learn new writing styles.	Yes, local studio
5. Erykah	9 th / Public School	Be more flexible, be a better athlete, loves literature, explore other arts & yoga. Gain inspiration from yoga to fill journal with stories	Yes, summer program.
6. Alice	10 th / Homeschool	Tap into inner-self, assist community more, new friends, personal focus. Wants a more well-rounded view of health & healing.	Yes, from Godfather who is in his 70s. She has been practicing for the last 5 years.
7. Walker	9 th / first year in	Focus, prepare body	No.

	public school coming from private single-gender school	for sports, better student, better person.	
8. Nikki	10 th / second year in public School from single gender private school.	Become a better person, learn techniques to pursue art	No.
9. Angelou	9 th /Public School	Gain focus, clarity for school, develop knowledge around yoga and literature	Yes, yoga studio & school.
10. Jill	8 th /Private/Christian School	Become more peaceful, flexible, & condition body for cheerleading	Yes, summer camp
11. Gwendolyn	10 th / Magnet School	Relax, be in touch w/ inner self, inner mind, and have better self control, gain writing skills, aware of spiritual self, & clarity	Yes, summer camp.
12. Toni	9 th /Charter School	Learn how to be calm, get to know inner self	No.
13. Lucille	9 th /Private (single gender)	Wants to learn yoga techniques & meditation. Artist.	No.

Grades:

8th Graders: 2

9th Graders: 8

10th Graders: 3

CDG: Full Transcript of Session led by Audre

Instructor (Audre) begins: This poem is by Nikki Giovanni. Does anyone want to share what you know about Nikki Giovanni?

Audre: She's a poet, writer, activist, and educator. She has been writing here in the U.S. a Black woman who fights for justice around the world.

Giovanni walks in late....All of the girls are greeting her and Audre explains the instructors.

The girls begin reading lines of the poem.

Audre: What are your thoughts on the poem. Like even the title? Or how did your understanding of the title change once you read it?

Jill: I was confused. In general. The poem was kind of like a real person couldn't do it. So I was confused. Like was it God or something?

Nikki: I'm kind of confused, but I think she is like Mother Nature. Because (reciting the poem.)

Walker: I think she has a big ego. Like everything she is saying is big. Like Hannibal is big. She is thinking that she is perfect. She thinks highly of herself.

Giovanni: I thought was she was trying to say that she could create this and that because she is that powerful I guess.

Audre: It can be literally like an ego trip. Like a celebration of pride. And within this poem you are kind of seeing all of these miraculous things taking place and she is proud of that in way that she is taking her place within civilization. And again, an ego so large that the author is tripping over it. Ultimately, I think this poem is about self pride as African Americans and contribution to the rest of the work. Like in the beginning she talks about the Congo in Africa. So she walked to the fertile crescent and walked to the Sphynx. So what I want to do today is introduce you all to a form of yoga called Kemetic

Yoga that actually has its origins in Egypt.

Chelsea: I have a question. How would you describe this woman in appearance.

Jill: I think she is the stereotypical perfect woman. Like she's tall. Well (hesitating) she's like well....African American.

Chelsea: Why do you think she is of African descent?

Jill: Because the way the poem is. How it's stated and the content in it. I don't know....That's just what I envision.

Erykah: I think that she is beautiful and has natural beauty and not superficial beauty because in her poem she talks about natural stuff. You know like not that my hair is perfect, or that my nails are perfect. She is a strong woman and beautiful in her own way.

Giovanni: I imagine her tall. Strong....Mentally and physically.

Audre: So we think an ego trip is negative? (girls chatting amongst themselves in the background, "no") I mean traditionally it has kind of had negative connotations right? But then looking at all of these beautiful aspects of this woman. Do you think she is justified?

Erykah: What is the definition of ego?

Nikki: I think it has to do with self awareness and how you think about yourself. You haven't heard Beyonce's song?

Chelsea: So have any of you ever encountered people who are considered as having a big ego?

Giovanni: Laughing....When it is to that extent, that is not really having a big ego. It is more like being over confident. Another girl the background "full of yourself". Yes, you are really full of yourself if you put yourself on such a high pedestal. I know people who claim they have large egos and it's just cockiness really.

Chelsea: So where does that come from?

Giovanni: It's more like not having a big ego at all, it is like you are self-conscious. Well maybe not self conscious, but (searches for word).

Chelsea: Insecure?

Giovanni: Yes! Insecure. It's like if you are always saying that I am can do this, and I am better than you, or I am better than them. And I always have blah blah blah....You are making yourself bigger than you feel.

Chelsea: So I think this takes us back to what Vanya was talking about. Does ego always have to have a negative connotation?

Giovanni: No. There is a difference between being insecure and seeming like you have a big ego, or you can be like I am proud of myself and I can do great things. You don't have to flaunt that and toss it around into people's faces. If you have a big ego, then you are who you are. YOU are not trying to force people to believe it. You are just there.

Erykah: From the definition I got, you don't really have a big ego if you have to walk around like that. If you are great at something it will show, you don't have to force it and push it on to someone because that is to the point of being rude and people don't like you.

Audre: So as we move through today's practice, I might be referencing some of the lines in the poem and that may give us a chance to let it sink in more.

Jill: I just realized who I imagined.....(Referring to a question I asked earlier, Who is the woman in the poem? LIke what does she look like?

Audre: I would love to hear that.

Jill: Beyonce. ::laughter::

Audre: Yes, honey....I understand that. Beyonce is my girl. I mean, she's just so fabulous.

Girls talking.

Chelsea: How many of you watch videos? Like BET music videos? How do you see Black women? How are we portrayed?

Toni: Well usually in the videos, they make the Black women a lot lighter than what they usual are. They portray that light skinned women are beautiful and look a lot better than darker women. They also portray Black women as ones who flaunt their bodies a lot. Sometimes they always shows things that say Black women don't know how to act. They will do whatever just to get a man. And it's just ugh. ::passing around talking piece within the circle.

Pearl: Well, I see women shaking and stuff. ::laughter in background:: You know, looking like strippers and stuff. Like some women are like that, but not all of them. I mean some women need the money, so they do the videos. They do stuff off the video too.

Jill: Well I see Black women or Women of Color on tv. they are giving off a vibe that is not very great. They don't know how to act. They are like wild and ratchet. ::laughter:: Like especially in the videos, and then you see white people and they don't act like that necessarily. I think they do that so they can show that they are more sophisticated than Black people in their videos. Beyonce is like one of the few. I mean not all of her videos, but in some of the videos she does other things, but it's not bad.

Gwendolyn: They have long hair and a lot of body. They are always....Yeah ::hesitates:: That's what I see in videos (passes talking piece).

Lucille: When I see videos of Black women, they are usually like...If it's a pool scene they are not very covered. And they are very voluptuous. They act promiscuous. Like, can you just calm down a little bit? YOur don't have to be out there with everything open.

Nikki: I don't usually watch BET music videos, but when I do it's kind of provocative in a way. I am not saying that there are not ignorant Black women or People of Color. But when I watch these videos, they make it seem like everyone is ignorant and easy. I mean I have even heard guys say they want to get with Black girls because they are easy. It's like Black women get implants. Like Nikki Minaj, and I think to myself, you are beautiful the way you are. Why are you doing all of that? And I am not saying that there

is anything wrong with getting your hair straightened, but when you try to do it permanently and you know that is not what you are, it just kind of upsets me because you make other people feel insecure.

Walker: When I watch music videos nowadays....We all know twerking is the thing of 2013 so every music video that comes on someone is twerking on that video. Whether they are Caucasian or African American. Somebody is twerking in that video. ::Girls in background collectively say Miley Cyrus laughing:: K continues. "EXACTLY". They always have to have, like Olivia said, the super long hair? I am like why? Just have your natural hair. That is like so annoying. Well, that is for the African American women. Men, they are either talking about drugs or something stupid. They make us all look stupid as a race.

Giovanni: I have a lot to say on this. BET videos, I don't watch them often. I try to stay away. But they make African women as ignorant, easy, and very well people use the term "exotic". When I hear that term, it makes me think of animals and it is very degrading. It's terrible to me. So to have a Black woman in the video with her hair down past her butt when you know it's not like that. Our hair is naturally curly. I mean, if your hair is not curly, and it's your natural hair. But to have added in hair that goes past your behind when it is not like that. Or, to have on short shorts with your butt cheeks hanging out, and your boobs are hanging out, and you're shaking in videos and laying in pools. Whatever you're doing. It is degrading to that image out there and children pick that up. And then Caucasian people see that and that's how they see us. There are Black men out there in the world who are educated and don't talk about drugs, women, and money. Whatever they talk about in videos. You can't understand most of the stuff they say anyway. But they are not all sagging in their pants. Have a gun on their waist. There are educated Black women and men out there who are not flaunting their bodies, or talking about drugs. Me and my mom were talking about the movie Fruitvale Station. There is a book out, called "The Little Black Book" or something that gives a set of guidelines and rules for young Black boys to follow in order to stay safe in the world. I mean just to be a Black man in the world you have to move differently. Like my cousin is off to college, he has a car seat in the back of his car and a sign that says "Baby on Board" because it is less likely that a Black man will be arrested if he has a car seat in the bag. Kids at my school see that and want to be like that. They want to be like what they are seeing on tv. I have kids at my school who say they want to be a stripper when they grow up ::K in background, "Yes, they will say that"::: There is a girl at my school who was pregnant at

the age of 13. They need to show more African American people who are doing better. Who aren't degrading themselves and showing off their body and talking about ignorant stuff. I mean if you are rapping and you have something meaningful to say that is fine. But they are rapping about absolutely nothing and it is stupid. (passes piece)

Erykah: I feel bad for the girl in the video who is dancing with the long hair when she knows it is not her hair. I also feel sorry for the girl in India who probably woke up bald.
::laughing::

Chatter begins about the origin of human hair for weaves. "Yes, that is human hair." "Oh my gosh really?"

You have girls in this type of environment who think, "Well, if I do this then he will love me" I am like no, you are going to end up dead or in rehab. It's like a mixed message too with the way we handle anger. For example, if a Black girl is mad, people see her as that crazy Black woman who doesn't know how to control herself. But when a White girl gets mad, they are like oh she's just frustrated, you should just leave her alone. But again, if it is a Black girl people label her as ignorant. It doesn't make sense. But it seems like for different races it has a different interpretation of what it is.

I can't stand my community. I hate it. You see people walking down the street and it looks like they just rolled out of bed and they are lost and it is ugly. Or, you may see people who look like they just got off their shift at a strip club. I am like where are your clothes? The Black boys, that's kind of sad because I know that my little brother is going to deal with that stuff. I try my best. I know that when we go in Buckhead we get looks like "What are you doing here?" They look at me like I am going to steal or hurt someone. Also, the portrayal of Black boys it is sad. I hate sagging pants. It is disgusting. What is wrong with you? Pull up your pants. My grandmother yells out the window for people to pull up their pants.

Some boys were caught for selling marijuana at my school. I thought it was stupid.

Gwendolyn: Basically everybody said everything I was thinking. I probably never have seen BET. I am into a different kind of music. I just think that it stereotypes women. It makes me sad. All Black women are not sluts. I mean there are Caucasian women who are doing the things you see Black women portrayed doing, but they choose to only put the worst of us (Black women) out into the world.

Chelsea: So it seems like we are all objecting to the ways Black women in particular are portrayed at times in the media. So be thinking about, as you move through your practice with Vanya how you feel in your body because you are all Black women, or of African descent. Is that safe to say? (Girls heard in the background agreeing). So, think about not just our practice, but also the poem. How are they both a response to the conversation we just had? So think about that as we move through our practice.

Audre begins yoga practice: As we move please consider how you want to be a positive reflection. How you can counter that. How you might use your yoga practice to facilitate that. Because we all go through our own changes about how we feel about ourselves. That's being human. Being able to take time to pause. Meditate. Be within ourselves is equally important to all of our development as Black women.

CDG: Ego Trippi'n (Images and Portrayal of Black Women's Bodies)

<p>Privilege and Whiteness</p> <p>Lighter skin = beauty Sends message that lighter is better</p>	<p>No control of emotions /body</p> <p>Black women don't know how to act. Black women don't know how to act. Black women will do whatever to get a man.</p>	<p>Standards of beauty defined by media</p> <p>Long hair and a lot of body. Voluptuous Straight hair Implants You are only considered pretty if you have a weave. Weave. Weave= Self-hate (insecurity)</p>
<p>Imbalanced Images</p> <p>White people don't act the same way as Black people do in their videos.</p> <p>Seems like Black boys are always portrayed as ignorant and Black girls are easy.</p> <p>Concerns about the opinions of White people about Black people.</p> <p>Imbalance in how we see our images in the media.</p> <p>We don't see enough educated Black men represented</p> <p>Double standard- Black girls angry= crazy. White girl crazy= Frustrated.</p>	<p>Sexualization/objectification of the Black female body</p> <p>Term exotic</p> <p>Black women like to flaunt their bodies a lot.</p> <p>Women moving like strippers just to be on a video, they do stuff off camera too.</p> <p>Not covered in pool scenes on videos.</p> <p>They act promiscuous</p> <p>Everyone is twerking (black/white) women in general</p> <p>All Black women are not sluts</p>	

Final Reflections: What does yoga mean to you?

Last Day of Camp

Based on your experience here at Yoga, Literature, and Art Camp. What is yoga? Or, what does yoga mean to you?

<p>Interpersonal</p> <p>Spiritual connection b/w you & inner-self. Being <u>peaceful</u> and centered within yourself as a person. A way to know yourself better. Reclaim your inner-self Know who you are. Find yourself. Center yourself.</p>	<p>Body</p> <p>Benefits body by stretching. Exercise for physical health. Simple and complicated stretching Moving your body in <u>peaceful</u> ways. More than just stretching your physical body. A way to get rid of toxins in the body.</p>
<p>Stress Management</p> <p>Brings peace to mind, body, & soul. Relaxes you and your mind. Relaxing poses. A practice that relaxes you and lets go of stress. A way to occupy your world with peace. Releasing past anxieties & worries. A way to relax. A way to relieve stress and pain. A way to let go and relax.</p>	<p>Mind or Mindfulness</p> <p>Exercise for mental health. Realizing your breath. Slowing down your breaths. Stretching your mind. A time to reflect. Stop and take a moment to breathe. Cleaning all thoughts.</p>
<p>Transformation & Agency</p> <p>*A way to occupy your world with peace. *A practice that results in keeping yourself healthy through life. *Cleaning all thoughts. Tuning out the world. Creating positive energy. Releasing negative energy from the body.</p>	

Journal Guiding Questions

1. If I were to talk with one of your best friends, someone who knows you well, what would (s) he say?
2. What three words would you use to describe yourself?
3. What is something you've had to rise above?
4. Day 2 Reflection: What were the most challenging and highest moments for you today?
5. Girls created a poem utilizing metaphor.
6. What does yoga mean to you?
7. How do you feel now? How do you want to feel?
8. Girls received two words randomly and had to reflect on a moment when they experienced the emotions they chose.
9. What are some of the things you are learning in yoga? How do you use these things as tools?
10. What are some of the connections you are noticing between yoga, literature, and art?
11. What have you learned about yourself that has surprised you through your yoga practice?

Poetry Samples:

- Still I Rise
- Won't You Celebrate with Me
- Extended Metaphor

Journal Entry: Sources of Stress/Social Toxins

Sources of stress Instructor: Maya Guiding Question: What is something you've had to rise above? Data Source: Journal →	
<p><i>Intrapersonal</i></p> <p>Afraid of what others think of me</p> <p>People thinking I'm a push-over</p> <p>People thinking and I am a goodie-two-shoe</p> <p>People thinking I am not intelligent</p>	<p><i>Interpersonal</i></p> <p>Afraid of being myself</p> <p>Insecure about who I am</p> <p>Insecure about where I came from</p>
<p><i>Transitions</i></p> <p>Parent's divorce</p> <p>Sister's death</p> <p>Moving to a new state</p> <p>Grandmother's death</p> <p>New School (no friends)</p> <p>New school where people judged me</p> <p>Father's incarceration</p>	<p><i>Voice</i></p> <p>Afraid to speak out</p> <p>Letting people walk over me</p> <p>Letting people copy my work</p> <p>Letting people make fun of me</p> <p>Standing up to white classmates who talk about my natural hair</p> <p>Telling teacher about a bully</p>
<p><i>Environment</i></p>	

Poem: Still I Rise

Poem: Still I Rise

Instructor: Maya

Voice (Interpersonal & Intrapersonal)**(Self-Acceptance)**

Giovanni- I will not and cannot change me. I am a gift. The creator made no mistakes. I was sculpted carefully the exact way I was envisioned. I am the dream and hope of the slaves. In my moments of weakness I call on my ancestors to guide me in the right way I am a black ocean leaping wide. I do my best to bring my family pride.

(Resisting Silence)

Toni- Confused, lost, slow, unsure?

Dumbing myself down for you to be secure?

Why? For what?

These are the questions I ask myself.

What do they see? What do they think?

How come I'm not the one complete?

Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes?

Or, could I be strong for once and pay no one mind.

Jealous eye and saucy stares, lucky for me I'm the one who doesn't care.

(Resistance)

Jill- My hair is one of my best features and when someone insults it at school I feel bad and think of telling the teacher. Then I think, no, I just have to stay cool. Boom! They insult me again. But, this time I have a plan.

They don't know what's coming when I walk up to them they start running.

I catch up to them to have a little chat and I start telling them off just like that.

I tell them its not making them any cooler to go around making me feel like a loser.

Then I say, making sure they are alert, "You may trod me in the very dirt, but still like dust I will rise. Then I walk away feeling quite surprised I stood up for myself in a crisis where I felt like I was they bigger person

(Self-Acceptance/Resistance)

Angelou- Do you want to see me broken, bowed head, and lowered eyes? Does my confidence upset you? Would you like me to be something I'm not? I'm charming and I'm witty. I guess it's something that you're not

I rise above the expectation and things other might say and become who I am and there I wil...

(Self worth/Resistance/Self Acceptance)

Lauryn- Don't expect me to conform to your self-sacrificial ways.

If I had wanted that sort of bliss I wouldn't have left you standing there confused and in a

haze.

Doesn't everyone want this you ask yourself, clearly confused with something so simple.
No, my dear I have a better source of happiness that will not contaminate my temple.

Sorry to hurt your false pride and security.

But I will not leave behind my innocence and purity.

Transitions

(Physical Move)

Phillis- I was scared I was shy nobody even cared to say hi.

Would I make friends?

I didn't know, but to the 6th grade I have to go.

(Life Event)

Lucille- Seven years ago,

Tears filled my eyes

And suddenly I despised.

The God above me and the world around me.

I thought to myself, why did she die?

I began to lie...

She will come back I said.

But deep inside I knew my little sister was dead.

I looked to the sky

And asked why...

Why did you take her before her first breath?

Why did she succumb to death?

Why won't you come back to dry my watery eyes, instead of leaving me here to cry?

As the days turned into months and the months into years the pain began to subside, but she will always be with me

As I rise.

(Life Event)

Walker- August 19, 2010

That was the day of her death

My grandmother

Everyone. Devastated.

Solemn

Depressed

Silence took over

No one talked. No one laughed.

Just silence

Everybody was sad

But my mom took it the worst.

She would never leave her room.

She would just sit

In silence.

How she felt?

Nobody knew for sure
 How would you feel
 If your other passed?
 She was gone at last
 The funeral
 Tears, tears.
 So many tears
 We had to move on.
 We had to get over this
 Right?
 My mother.
 She hasn't moved on.
 But she has risen.
 Risen over the fact
 That her mother is gone
 And realized She'd in
 A
 Better
 Place
 Which made her happy.
 She is at peace now.
 R.I.P. Grandma

(Physical Move + Life Event)

Alice-A slew of sharp words were exchanged from my own bladed tongue. I felt broken and helpless through the situation. I wondered how the two people that created me could become so harsh to each other. Leaving the building I walked west and visualized my future falling with the burning sun. But its never ever because once you leave one situation, you're on to the next. And that's just what happened. Before I knew it, I was on a train to Georgia leaving my father behind and for good reason. But I can't hate him because if I did I would hate a part of myself. Shattering through the window of the fragmented future I attempt to clean what little I can. But what's done is done so I am making the best of it.

(Physical Move/Environment)

Erykah-The influence floods my neighborhood
 A influence of a gangster, who acts hard but falls quickly
 Or a fighter
 Or even a 14 year old mother or part time addict
 I had to rise
 I chose that I will not sink in this pool of failure
 I chose to rise and pick a new road, a road for success.
 A road that leads to college and a joyous job, a road that not only benefits one but other
 who have maybe fallen in that pool of failure, a road that will bring a ladder so people
 can climb out and make a detour to the new road, a new road for change.
 I chose to never stay in my neighborhood and go to local high school where influence

grows like weeds.

Drugs fly through hands as babies pop out like an assembly line

I chose to rise

And when they ask me to join, I laugh like I got gold mines digging in my own backyard

Cause I chose to rise not fall

Poems: Extended Metaphors

Gwendolyn

I am a long river
 That continuously flows, carrying so much life
 And brings hope to a dry land.
 I am a strong river
 That cannot break
 And instead moves around the rocky obstacles
 That lie in my river bed.
 I am a pure river
 That refuses to carry along dirt and baggage
 Flowing as cleanly as I can through life.
 I am a bright, beautiful river
 Making my way through storms
 That may crash me, and rattle me.
 But I always continue on,
 Growing, bending but not breaking, and
 Always flowing free.

Giovanni

I am that one puzzle piece that doesn't fit.
 Thrown in a box with other misfits.

Phillis

I am like a monkey swinging from tree to tree enjoying what life has to offer me.
 I am smart and funny always around friends and family.

Lucielle

Extended metaphor:

I am a box of crayons
 Colorful and unique
 In the dark of my box
 I am cunning like a fox.
 I sit still and wait
 Until the date
 When I show my colors to the world unapologetically.

I am Light
 Cunning and bright
 I do not falter

In the face of darkness
Instead I shine bright

Alice

I am like a bird. Soaring just high enough to gaze down at the beautiful creations that God makes. But, not so high that I am higher than God himself. I see only beauty and reflect it by mirroring only beauty. Cool, rough wind washes through my feathers but they never fall. I build a shelter that never breaks. I see for miles through the night and never go blind, for I am unstoppable. And when it is time for me to join my ancestors, I only go higher than the heights that I once traveled.

Erykah

Title: Written like a Story

I am written like a story and no its not prewritten

The story is made up as time progresses

It makes quick decisions

All decisions are not good

But that's just the nature of it

It also does not belong to one genre: mystery, romance, comedy and a little horror all come together to make this story.

People who say that is cant be so, in response I say, My story flows like a river for it is not prewritten, it grows as I grow and it takes some unexpected turns.

That's what makes it exciting.

Toni

Extended metaphor

I bounce up, I bounce down

I'm the one that brings joy all around

My struggles toss me

Here and there

But never am I hurt

I'm full of care

Like a ball I bounce high and reach

For the sky to capture my dream that's no lie.

Jill

Extended Metaphor:

Like a blanket

I am there for people

Whenever they are cold

Or just want somebody to hold

I am soft and flexible

But, strong

For my stiches hold me together so that I can hold other people together

I spread out and come in any type you want
I am like a blanket

Walker

Metaphoric poem

The sun
Shines bright
At a miraculous height
As do I.
Some days
I do not blaze
As strong as other days
Because
I'm not perfect
Or graceful
But I am still praised.

Pearl

Like meat
I'm tender
But tough
People can try to
Rip me apart.
But like Ma'at I'm tough

Like water
I'm unbreakable
You can't stop me in my path
Because like water
I'm unstoppable
You can't walk
All over me
Because like water
I can't be walked on.

Lauryn

I am like a dog.
Even though you may step on my tail, I will not hold a grudge.
But abuse me and I will turn mean and angry.
Call me when you need a friend and I'll come running, enthusiasm and loyalty in tow.
When you are faced with pain, I will comfort you best I can.
But when you are faced with danger, my stance becomes strong and my bark becomes tough.

Table: Extended Metaphors

<p><i>Self-affirming</i></p> <p>Self-worth Self-worth Acceptance of unique Self Self-acceptance Power within the Self Multiple parts that make up the Self Self change and acceptance of that change Self awareness</p>	<p><i>Individual is a part of a whole</i></p> <p>Connection with other people Connection with other people & nature Connection with ancestors</p> <p>Obligation to be happy for others Obligation to care for others Obligation to stay strong for others</p>
<p><i>Acknowledgment of Obstacles</i></p> <p>Obstacles Obstacles Obstacles Obstacles</p>	<p><i>Resistance/Resilience/Perseverance</i></p> <p>Resistance Resistance Resistance Resistance Resilience Resilience Resilience Resilience Perseverance Strength Strength</p>