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REFRAMING THE PEDAGOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD: QUEERING A HIGH SCHOOL TEXT

Hovsep Hovannesian

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REFRAMING THE PEDAGOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF TO KILL A
MOCKINGBIRD: QUEERING A HIGH SCHOOL TEXT

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Hovsep Hovannesian
May 2021

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ABSTRACT

Given the current climate for social and political change in relation to identity and being, traditional high school texts like *To Kill A Mockingbird* are being rejected as degrading, out of touch, and even regressive and are being taken off the pedagogical shelf. This article pushes back on this outlook by suggesting that a more critical approach to such texts can make them not only useful but enlightening for the high school population asked to read them. Specifically, by proposing that high school pedagogy apply the foundations and frameworks of critical, identity-focused theories, like queer theory, to traditional high school texts, this article examines the reason for change and the benefits such a change might bring about. Therefore, the question to answer is how can queer theory be woven into standard high school pedagogical practices so that the study of literature is more meaningful to the students? Joining the conversation of queer theory and literary pedagogy by queering the characters of Scout and Dill in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a pedagogical approach for rereading high school texts in order to help students identify and unpack their own gendered identity is considered and tentatively applied. Through the comparison of performativity and the complex construction of the "I" in the reading of Scout and Dill, we can invite students to view the text as a social artifact with which to further develop their identities and recognize the intersections that make up those identities.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: REFRAMING THE PEDAGOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD: QUEERING A HIGH SCHOOL TEXT.....	1
Motivations and Foundations for a Queer Reading.....	6
Queering Scout and Dill	17
Creating a Standard of Theory in the Classroom.....	36
Applications of Theory in the Classroom.....	53
Lesson Plan Rationale	54
Planned Activities for Class.....	58
Conclusion and A Call For Action	64
REFERENCES	67

CHAPTER ONE

REFRAMING THE PEDAGOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD: QUEERING A HIGH SCHOOL TEXT

The year 2020 brought to the forefront many civil rights issues that have increasingly become topics of reform across the U.S. One such topic is the use of pre and post antebellum literature that are often interpreted as being too racially charged to be kept in the canon of American literature or to be used in classroom settings. This is felt even more so the case in high school English classrooms where these books have been well worked into the curriculum for many decades. Due to the increased attention to racial degradation that students are exposed to, these books are now under closer scrutiny for their blatant racist verbiage and content, and the result is that they are less and less likely to be found in the high school classrooms they once frequented. These books include titles such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *To Kill A Mockingbird* (*TKAM*). While, as a high school teacher who has taught *TKAM* many times, I can appreciate the movement against accepting racism because it is in canonized literature, I also think that simply removing them from the classroom altogether is a bit hasty.

For many who read *TKAM* in grade school, the themes they are exposed to as part of the reading are usually related specifically to the racism and social injustice that existed in the time of narrative. While such themes can be critical to young readers, because the time spent wrestling with them leads students

through concepts of justice and equality, the pedagogy currently used to approach *TKAM* in the classroom seems to exist on the surface of historical context only, rather than delving into the complexities of its structure that allows readers (especially students) to question the various hierarchies of power under which they are participants.

If we continue to use surface-level pedagogy, of course the use of *TKAM* will be continually called into question because of the problematic portrayal of people of color without the necessary analysis of the narrative that seeks to understand what such portrayals can tell us. Isaac Saney, for example, explains that the book “portrays blacks as somnolent, awaiting someone from the outside to take up and fight for the cause of justice” (103). However, he calls into question the lack of conversation regarding “the necessary historical contextualization for dealing adequately with the book [which] rarely occurs in the classroom” (103). Furthermore, in a *Newsweek* article regarding texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *Huckleberry Finn*, and their usefulness as texts about race, Allison Samuels reflects on educators across the U.S. who openly struggle with the legitimacy of keeping books that “portray African-Americans as inarticulate and unintelligent souls in need of white America” in circulation for students learning in a world with a black president at the head of the U.S. She argues, similarly to Saney, that a lot of what readers (students) take from the text largely depends on the context through which it is presented and suggests, based on the testimonies of educators grappling with this text in their

classrooms, that we are only teaching half of the story to be told and not really delving into the foundational power structures that led to such portrayals.

In response to such criticism, Ernest R. House argues that the result of this lack of foundational context means that the reading of *TKAM* (especially in the classroom) is as much about perpetuating the “white racial framing” (167) of minorities as it is about battling racism and social injustice because the text keeps the black man in a childlike position, even denying him a main, protagonistic role. He states that the book sets in contrast whites versus blacks: “[w]hites are noble, brave, kind, natural-born leaders who defend hapless blacks against evil whites” (171). House argues that frames used to interpret texts as they relate to the world shape behaviors and society. As such, he suggests that the white framing of the text makes the racism that still exists in the U.S. less overt: “In [this] frame conception, social mechanisms and structures generate racism and reproduce it. Moreover, the frame serves to hide that racism is built into American society” (172). As a result, he sees *TKAM* as a necessary work for the historical and political applications it has to offer if approached in the right way. In response to this need for a new reading of *TKAM*, Michael Macaluso argues that we need to approach *TKAM* with the lens of “new racism” in order to see and uncover the invisible, systemic racism and more importantly power dynamics that silently control minorities within the framework of white patriarchal power (283). Although he does not exclude the significance of looking at racist hate crimes/speech as important to our current context of racial problems in the

U.S. (old racism), he also suggests that we need to allow our students to see the power structures that affect their own participation in these topics. Macaluso explains that many teachers, though, do not have the training to read/teach the text in this way: “I simply did not have the language or the knowledge to talk about racism in this way in my own classroom, and thus, I failed to engage the text’s (largely unexamined and largely racial/racist) power structures” (282). In order to change this, he outlines the ways in which old and new racism differ and the kind of language needed to explore these racisms in the text. This critical approach allows for a broader reading of *TKAM* that makes room for conversations that include other forms of invisible, systemic power that exist concurrently and sometimes intertwined with racism and social justice.

Based on the above discussion, then, and because the text deals with resonating issues we grapple with still today, the goal of this project is not to suggest that the themes of racism and equity, particularly as they pertain to power structures, be put to rest, nor is my goal to suggest that because of these themes the book should be excluded from high school reading lists. Rather, my goal is to encourage teachers, as Macaluso does, to broaden their parameters to include broader themes of invisible, systemic power that are as equally relevant to a 21st-century classroom as they are to the characters in the text. That being said, the purpose of this article is to explore the subversive moves made by the characters -- subversive moves often unread and unrecognized because of the habitual canonical readings that, as argued above, still prevail.

The question, then, is how can we use *TKAM* as a tool to begin new conversations regarding power dynamics (both visible and invisible)? Jennifer Murray, in “More Than One Way To (Mis)Read a Mockingbird,” suggests that the novel deserves critical attention because of the ambiguity of symptomatic results of systematic repression (89). She explains that we need to find the unsaid, the explicit and implicit, and the contradictions in order to allow *TKAM* to tell us something about otherness. To begin this search, Murray argues that this can be done by first recognizing that Scout exists as two characters: the adult and the child, and that both characters function as lenses through which to sift through the information and context of the narrative. Through the adult voice of Scout, we can discern and interpret the behaviors of the characters of the story as equal protagonists with equal influence on the context of the reading. If we use this reading of the text, we can more easily differentiate between the adult character of Scout who reflects on the invisible power dynamics of the story and the child character of Scout who reflects on the more visible power dynamics as she sees and interacts with them. Through this differentiation, Murray suggests that we can better grapple with concepts of otherness in regards to those power dynamics.

Taking that step forward, then, I seek to join the conversation of queer theory and futurity specifically as it relates to the childhood identification of the “I”. By utilizing the characters of Scout and Dill in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I examine these concepts with the goal of arriving at a pedagogical approach for

rereading high school texts in order to, specifically in this work, identify the unseen power dynamics that shape the “I”.

Motivations and Foundations for a Queer Reading

I have been teaching *TKAM* in the high school classroom for at least seventeen years. It has always been one of my favorite novels to read because of the richness of the characters. However, I have always struggled with how to approach the reading so that students are able to see the relevancy of the conflicts in the book in their own lives. The safe place, for me, has always been to have the same conversations of historical racism, specifically in the south, that students have already been exposed to time and again, as mentioned previously, in history and other literature classes. Although those are important conversations to have, I always knew that there was more to Harper Lee’s invention of her characters, but I didn’t have the knowledge and tools necessary to shed light on these inventions and/or intentions, other than the prescribed rites of passage and historical racism conventions for teaching *TKAM*. It was not until I took a queer theory class, and was introduced to literary theory in general, during graduate school, that I was able to see how these new readings of texts, specifically those texts I teach in my classroom, could benefit from such applications. I wonder how many other high school teachers find themselves in similar situations. Therefore, in order to help myself and my fellow teachers enter into new pedagogical territory, my goal is to introduce literary theory as a means

for building pedagogy and as a way to get our student readers invested. This project deals specifically with queer theory because I find queer theory to be a lens through which not only race, but other layers of identity can be explored -- layers that are particularly salient and accessible to high school students, as well as for teachers like myself who are looking for new and complex ways to read texts in their classes and open the conversation up to deal with the current and complicated power structures that our students are already so embedded in.

Since the power structures that inform and shape identity, as queer theory suggests, are overlapped and often integrated with each other, if not vertically scaffolded from the base of what makes us most apparently different (race and sex), it is important that as readers and teachers we recognize the intersectionality of these structures and their influences in ways we can deconstruct. According to Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," addressing these structures must include the concept and application of intersectionality "because the intersectionality experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (140). By specifically speaking on the impact of both sexism and racism on black women, Crenshaw explains that intersectionality takes into consideration that "Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men" (149). In this way, intersectionality proposes that the process of queering something via a

queer theoretical approach makes clear how heteronormative and white the world is in which we live and how all forms of identity in some way orient themselves around white heteronormativity. Therefore, intersectionality not only informs the queering of our readership, but validates it, because it allows us to go back to our first form of identity and what that looks like before and as it is shaped into other forms, i.e the development of the “I”.

Jacques Lacan theorizes that the concept of “I” develops from the transformation that a subject experiences when he/she takes on the image of what is perceived as the totality of homogenization reflected by social cues/behaviors on which likeness is based. He refers to this as the “mirror stage” of identity creation from which the “ideal-I” is constituted. Therefore, the “ideal-I” is based on the “mirror apparatus” in terms of both sameness and difference.

As a consequence of the juxtaposition of the heterogeneity and homogeneity that the “ideal I” is exposed to, Lacan refers to the mirror stage as a drama in which the “ideal-I” and the reality of fragmentation (which is hidden) collide via and towards one’s ego.

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation -- and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic -- and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity,

which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (Lacan 1114).

The process of arriving at the last scene of this drama, "alienating identity," is carried out as a performance of identification. In fact, Lacan suggests that this marks the end of the mirror stage or the creation of the "I" in that it also marks the inauguration of "the dialectic that will henceforth link the / to socially elaborated situations" (1115) and leave the "ideal-I" and the fragmented "I" in performative opposition. In this way, the fragmented "I" becomes representative of the intersections at which multiple aspects of identity converge and overlap (Crenshaw). If there is a convergence, there must also be an origin from which identity finds its mirror image.

Sara Ahmed argues that this origin is based on the way we position and orient ourselves to what is around us in terms of what is the same and what is different from us. She suggests that this juxtaposition of homogeneity and heterogeneity that Lacan refers to means that both act as an orientation to what the subject seeks or is influenced to be. In "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology," she argues that queerness is directly related to the process and experience of developing a sense of "I," as this process is based on what "takes shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, which are available within the bodily horizon" (543). In other words, the mirror that Lacan says the "I" develops from is mirroring what is in the spatial obtainability of the subject. For Ahmed, the objects reflected in the mirror are recognizable to us in

that we know them and know how to navigate them even when they present different paths that we may or may not follow. Ahmed defines objects, in this case, as “something that has integrity and is in space, only by haunting that very space, by coinhabiting space, such that the boundary between the coinhabitants of space does not hold” (551). Therefore, whether the subject chooses to align themselves with the object or not, the object remains a background influence upon the subject because the subject is actively and purposely not engaged with it. As a result, the object will always be significant to the orientation of the subject as what the subject is (homogeneity) or is not (heterogeneity).

This being the case, as identity becomes gendered, it does so with a view to what is similar and what is different. In line with this, Judith Butler suggests that to then align with one or the other or both is to perform what is viewed. She argues that the fragmented section of the “I” that is gendered is primarily performative in that it “has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler 2384). Gender, then, is only one of the fragments which constitute the “I.” But this fragment is problematic as it is based primarily on public and social discourse that regulates the inner and outer integrity of the subject. This is reflected in Crenshaw’s argument when she explains that if the gendered racial experience does not have a name to it, then it does not appear to exist. The orientation of gender is then only recognized if there is a name given to it. As a result, Butler defines gender as “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (2388)

and therefore cannot be considered the “locus of agency” or a “stable identity” because of the fabricated nature of such acts that rely primarily on a white, heteronormative base.

For Butler, then, the greatest common denominator of this gendered power structure is the force of the heteronormative through which all gender performances originate. Performativity is that the “I” is always performing for the greater common denominator in order to be, simultaneously, one with (as it is fragmented) and distinctive from (by maintaining its ideal) the group it intends to interact with. Although the greatest common denominator, namely heteronormativity, can be subverted by means of overt/covert performances, Butler adds that this is not an easy accomplishment.

This brings us to the significance and necessity of queer theory, in that queerness is the very subversive performance that Butler refers to. Cathy J. Cohen, in “Punks, Bulldaggers, And Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?”, defines queer theory not by the standards of gay/lesbian identity categories of sexuality, which is often how queerness is marked, but by its multifaceted resistance to the hegemony that marginalizes those who stand outside of the “dominant constructed norm,” Butler’s common denominator of heteronormativity. She argues that an intersectional analysis of power constructs can allow queer theory to assess how systems of oppression work to “police” queer people of color by regulating their identities according to the hetero, white, mid to upper class, male-driven power structures of society: “Thus, if there is any

truly radical potential to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of queer politics, it would seem to be located in its ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin” (438). Therefore, queer theory dissects the layers of class, race, gender, sexuality, and privilege in an attempt to reframe social and political power devices. By so doing the process of queering is the process of actively looking forward to the fluidity of becoming, rather than looking at a static being. Just as Lacan resists a specific “I,” so too does queerness in that each intersection of identity is leading to yet another, but has never quite arrived.

Along with Cohen, Annamarie Jagose, in *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, argues that “queer” does not have any fixed value. Therefore, it acts as a radical that allows for a future of oppositional critique and resistance of whatever is considered “normal.” She suggests, then, that queer is the future because it disrupts and problematizes the consolidations of sex, gender, sexuality, race, identity community, and politics. As Jagose puts it, “Clearly, there is no generally acceptable definition of queer; indeed, many of the common understandings of the term contradict each other irresolvably” (Jagose 99). As a result, socially constructed markers of understanding queerness via gender appear in terminology that defines difference, “us vs. them”: tomboy, sissy boy, girly, butch, etc. Unfortunately, many of these terms are derogatory in nature because they specifically mark not just difference from but a kind of indifference to the

heteronormative power structures that maintain and regulate performative standards.

If queer has no fixed value, how do we discuss the way that identity is both different and indifferent to power structures that are oppositional to queer performance? José Esteban Muñoz, in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, gives us terminology with which to refer to this specific form of identity. Muñoz refers to the power structures of dominant ideologies as apparatuses that come with specific practices. Therefore, “ideology is the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (11). In other words, ideology is the performance of practices that align with the apparatus. Via this definition, individuals can choose from three modes to build their relationships or performances of the constituting practice of the apparatus: identification, counteridentification, and disidentification. Although queerness is often theorized in terms of counteridentification, Muñoz suggests that queerness occurs in the mode of disidentification which “is open to the charge that it is merely an apolitical sidestepping, trying to avoid the trap of assimilating or adhering to different separatist or nationalist ideologies” (18). Disidentification is the intersectionality of the subject as they negotiate their alignment and disalignment with any apparatus and its embedded performances simultaneously. With this in mind then, queerness has no fixed value as a result of its disidentification.

This brings us back to Lacan, because Lacan argues that the performance of identity begins in childhood through the intersectionality of the “ideal-I” and its inevitable fragmentization. The Child, then, as it represents the initiation of the self, functions as the locus of queerness and its process of disidentification. This is in line with Lee Edelman who suggests that the Child represents both the futurity of the gendered social order (the apparatus) and the refusal of the gendered social order. Edelman argues that the politics of gender revolve around the Child because queerness cannot reproduce anything but an “otherness” that would threaten the hetero status quo that parents, church, or state seek to continue. What is lacking here is the complication of race, where the “hetero status quo” is always white. The addition of race in this argument creates a space wherein the Child is the tool of a political battle between not only hetero and homo ideologies, but whiteness and people of color. The Child is caught in the intersectionality of identity, and as Edelman argues the futurity of the Child is problematized due to the social order of the majority and what has been established as “good” for all. He calls this “reproductive futurity” in that there will always be a majority, which consequently assures the reproduction of the order, regardless of its form. Queerness, then, is here and now (the “ideal I” for the Child) in the struggle for some future undefined (the fragmentation of the adult), effectively resulting in no future for queerness. For Edelman, disidentification is to lack the power of a future, specifically in terms of bipartisan politics in which “[q]ueerness thus comes to mean nothing for both: for the right wing the

nothingness always at war with the positivity of civil society; for the left, nothing more than a sexual practice in need of demystification” (28). Furthermore, as the political order fantasizes its future, the Child must be part of its structuralization, and so the “sacrilization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer” (28). In other words, queerness is minimized as nothing but an idiosyncrasy that does not work to reproduce the future of the apparatus, thus the future of the order means no future for queer.

In contrast, Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, suggests that the future is where queerness actually can occur because moving towards queerness is a rejection of the here and now, and an embracing of the future where the future is not reproductive, but productive, since the here and now is always incomplete, and the future always leaves more to gain. Therefore, queerness is not yet here, but still in the process of both creation and realization. Muñoz argues that the hope for the queer future is based on an “educated hope.” Edelman, however, argues that hope (educated especially) is what leads to the reproductive future, and instead says that we need to “refuse the insistence of hope as affirmation,” and thereby recognize that hope, as affirmation of the order, leads to the negativity of queerness and the resulting question, “if not this, what?” In response, Muñoz explains that the productive future of queer is not invisible, thereby requiring hope, but visible if we “squint, and strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now” (22). This requires an educated hope as the motivation to reach

the horizon on which productive futurism exists; which means of course, that we must have education of/through queerness as a goal. Muñoz is not the only one to argue that the queer future is not here yet, but is visible on the horizon as a productive future: “if queer lives up to its radical potential -- and does not solidify as merely another acceptable (though oppositional) category -- its ongoing evolutions cannot be anticipated: its future is -- after all -- the future” (6). In line with this reasoning, Eve Sedgwick, in *Tendencies*, argues that the overarching analytical pressure of queer theory allows us to see the mesh of identities that constitute gender via the “gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, laps and excesses” (8) that makes gender non-monolithic. In this way, she suggests that queer must also have to do with any and all *other* identity-constituting categories such as race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationalism, language, migration, skin, class, and state, since gender is only the beginning to these types of categorizations.

So, again, returning to Lacan, the educated hope of which Muñoz speaks is for the ever-evolving “ideal-I” to sustain itself as the Child picks and chooses which practices and performances with which to align and/or dis-align, thereby advancing the disidentification of queerness. As ideations of a gendered identity and its performances begin with the Child, it is here, in the idealized, disidentified, productive futurity of queerness, that queer readings can find both their motivation and their foundation as trajectory tools of a hopeful education.

Queering Scout and Dill

In such a Civil Rights focused text as *TKAM*, Scout and Dill are often read as characters that resist the status quo of the postbellum, gentrified south. As children, we read them as not only what they are (youthful blank canvases performing as idealized participants), but also as what they will become (mature palimpsestual canvases performing as fragmented participants). These simultaneous views are typically used as representations for the moral of the story and the implicit transformation of the reader. Through their childlike views, we are meant to see that resistance (whether visible or not) is the way to some level of equality. Although we read this resistance as a key component of their identity, their characterization only presents their resistance as a type of adolescent behavior that is not necessarily important to the plot or message of the narrative, but rather a vehicle for telling the story. However, if we apply the framework of identity developed above, their resistance complicates the structures of race and gender that are presented through them. In this way, the Child becomes a neutral space where it is no longer just Edelman's "white child," but representative of the blank canvas each child presents to society. Therefore, through the process of disidentification, the Child is the means for uncovering the intersectionality that these characters highlight, and the use of them, although white, as the lens by which we view the text can be validated. Albeit not a black lens, such an approach allows for a broader reading of identity that extrapolates the power of social norms on the Child overall.

This being said, in order to realize the best possible readings for Scout and Dill in the greater context of the narrative, we need to deconstruct the binaries that Scout and Dill are placed in: resisting/conforming, boy/girl, middle class/lower class, black/white, etc. and instead look at how these binaries intersect and the effects those intersections have on the story. This means we need to begin with a simple statement: Scout and Dill are queer.

Scout, or Jean Louise Finch, is not the average little girl for Maycomb County. She is tough, straightforward, brave, a risk-taker, smart, and overall fearless. She is nothing of what her fellow townspeople think a six-year-old girl should be. She is six years old when the story begins, and we can assume that she is big for her age since she is larger than most of the boys in the story. Even though Walter Cunningham Jr. is older, Jem tells her, "You're bigger'n he is." (Lee 30). Furthermore, cousin Francis is a year older than Scout, but Scout has no problem with him once she decides to "split [her] knuckle to the bone on his front teeth" (Lee 112). She is eight years old when the story ends and although her world view shifts as the story unfolds, little else about her seems to change about her appearance. Scout prefers overalls and "breeches" to dresses and skirts which she views as "starched walls of a pink cotton penitentiary" (182) that close in on her and bring about ideas of running away; but she tells us little else about her actual appearance. In short, she fits every stereotypical representation of a "tomboy."

In fact, Scout does not respond positively to anything “typically” feminine, preferring reading (which she can do and her classmates cannot) instead of sewing, playing outside with the boys instead of inside, and the nickname “Scout” to the girlish “Jean Louise.” Maycomb is a place where “[l]adies bathed before noon, after their three o’clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum” (Lee 11). Scout, however, refuses to be a “soft teacake,” no matter how often her Aunt Alexandra reminds her that is the goal. Scout does not seem to care about what others in the town think of her. The only opinions she seems to be invested in are those of three males: Atticus, Jem, and Dill.

Scout is never reprimanded for her traits or appearance by her father who tells her, in contrast to Aunt Alexandra, that “there were already enough sunbeams in the family and to go on about my business, he didn’t mind me much the way I was” (108). Atticus treats her and Jem without differentiation of gender, even by notably giving them both air rifles for Christmas. Furthermore, the thing that Scout finds most remarkable and even extraordinary about her father is that he is/use to be a deadshot: “ain’t everybody’s daddy the deadeast shot in Maycomb County” (130). Scout considers Jem her equal and is insulted when he says she was “being a girl...and if [she] started behaving like one [she] could just go off and find some to play with” (54). For Scout, being a girl will negate the equal status she has with her brother which she assesses by noting whether Jem is fighting back when she tussles with him: “I knew he was fighting, he was

fighting me back. We were still equals” (184). Dill is the only one for whom Scout is willing to perform the role of a girl. She accepts his proposal of marriage, his desire for kids, and misses him when he is gone. In fact, she is even perturbed when he spends more time with Jem than with her: “he staked me out, marked as his property, said I was the only girl he would ever love, then he neglected me” (55). However, her relationship with Dill does not impede her ability to perform roles “not” of a girl: “I beat him up twice but it did no good, he only grew closer to Jem” (55). Even in being Dill’s fiancé, Scout defines being a girl differently from the expected norm. Ultimately, she is consistent in choosing otherness.

Scout is then fulfilling Cohen’s definition of queer identity in that she is portraying the multi-faceted resistance to dominant norms by neither conforming to the performance of the “white southern girl” or the “white southern boy.” In other words, she is creating an intersectional space where otherness may be oriented towards whiteness because that is what is most homogeneous to her mirror image (Ahmed, Lacan), but she is not specifically oriented towards a particular gendered whiteness. Rather, she is performing her own combination of what she prefers, thereby using disidentification as the means for her gendered sense of “I.”

With this in mind, the queering of Scout makes it clear that she chooses otherness as a means of defining her sense of self, thereby turning her “tomboyishness” into one type of performance of girlishness, one that belongs to

her. For readers and for the members of Scout's community, Scout's clothing choices, her behavior, and her alliances mark her as a "tomboy" because these attributes have a tendency of being affiliated with the male gender/identity. Such a term (an us-versus-them marker) creates a sense of impersonation wherein the attributes of Scout's identity are viewed as faux characteristics that she puts on and performs for some end goal. In other words, she is in a sense, wearing a costume. Butler, however, argues that the putting on of certain characteristics and the performing of certain roles does not preclude that those belong to someone else exclusively: "drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of expropriation or appropriation that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex" (722). Although not drag specifically, Scout plays at a type of drag (being a tomboy) wherein she is not exactly performing as a boy, but rather performing a specific element of herself with more umph, even if it is an othering act. While doing this, she is also inadvertently disrupting accepted gender performances. This is clear in the scene when she plays with the boys and chafes at the idea of being the damsel in distress rather than the hero. Scout says, "I reluctantly played assorted ladies who entered the script. I never thought it was as much fun as Tarzan" (Lee 52).

Scout is balancing herself between two elements of herself: she is able to perform as the kind of girl she is expected to be, the one her dreaded Aunt Alexandra expects her to conform to, hetero-female normativity, and the one she seems to put on -- typical boyishness. By Lacan's definition of the self, Aunt

Alexandra's hetero-female normativity is that female identity that has been fragmented by growth within the confines of particular power structures. But Scout's "ideal I" remains intact as Scout refuses to allow her idealized sense of identity be quashed. Instead of allowing either one to overpower the other, she creates a fluidity between them allowing herself to disidentify with either part of the binary of fragmented and idealized selves. This fluidity can be noticed most predominantly in the way Scout picks and chooses the elements of identity that she will acquiesce to. For example, when Aunt Alexandra tells Scout to act like a lady and wear a dress so she can "be a ray of sunshine in [her] father's lonely life," Scout retorts that she can "be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well" (Lee 89). However, when Aunt Alexandra is faced with the death of Tom Robinson and must continue happily with her society luncheon, Scout says, "[w]ith my best company manners, I asked [Mrs. Merriweather] if she would have some. After all, if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I" (318). In both cases, Scout is choosing attributes to perform as parts of her identity. She seems to do this consciously, which adds to the complexities of power with which disidentification comes.

Because Scout the Child makes strategic choices about her performances, the elements of identity that she puts on or performs are not to be taken lightly as they become the infrastructure of her own disidentification. Furthermore, in the wake of Tom Robinson's death, she is clearly oriented towards white womanhood, and her performance along with the "ladies" is one

that emphasizes the actual problem of the text wherein to be a southern, white lady means to be passively concerned about race. Scout as the Child then is representing a futurity that is calling into question gendered norms, but simultaneously perpetuating racial disparity, even though she is not aware that it is occurring. Importantly, Scout the Child is really only the neutral ground that we can utilize for understanding the situation of the story and consider her calculation of risk in such situations, but the adult, Narrator Scout, who makes this troubling performance visible, does not quite tell us what to think about it. In both cases it is clear that the development of the “I” is me-focused. But the issue is that to be me-focused is to not be you-focused. In other words, both Child Scout and Narrator Scout eliminate the consideration for the way the performance perpetuates racism in regards to Tom Robinson and focuses primarily on the gratification of gendered performance in the moment. This is interesting to note, given that at many other times in the narrative, Narrator Scout recognizes her negotiation of a gender binary and comments on or interprets the result of these negotiations.

We can see this at two specific moments in *TKAM*. The first occurs when Narrator Scout reflects on the feelings Child Scout had for Dill.

Dill concluded by saying he would love me forever and not to worry, he would come get me and marry me as soon as he got enough money together, so please write. The fact that I had a permanent fiancé was little compensation for his absence: I had never thought

about it, but summer was Dill by the fishpool smoking string, Dill's eyes alive with complicated plans to make Boo Radley emerge; summer was the swiftness with which Dill would reach up and kiss me when Jem was not looking, the longings we sometimes felt each other feel. With him, life was routine; without him, life was unbearable. I stayed miserable for two days. (154)

In this moment, Narrator Scout reveals emotions attributed to what we might call heteronormative desire. Both Narrator and Child choose this longing, showing that Child Scout is perhaps even more cognizant of her affections towards Dill than she let on and that Narrator Scout reflects with seeming regret that can only come from still being cognizant of those affections. Narrator Scout's reflections serve to validate and solidify the choice being made by Child Scout.

This serves to underscore Edelman's argument about the futurity of queerness: "the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself" (18). In other words, the power structures that govern our identities as members, specifically in this case our gendered identities, are only symbolic as we choose performances or elements of our identity for specific end goals or benefits related to the power structures. Furthermore, given that Scout really only has heteronormative ways by which to orient herself towards a sense of belonging to another person, the benefit of her

identity's limited attachment to Dill is that she is still orienting herself away from the performances that are guided by the social norms because Dill is not a typical southern boy. Because queerness rejects impersonation in favor of authenticity, we can see that queering Scout, leads us closer to a more authentic reading of her as a character where her choices are not to impersonate any one type of gender, but to display her own sense of self. Furthermore, Edelman points out that the politics of the power structures "construed as oppositional or not, never rests on essential identities" (17) meaning the essential aspects of our identity, our authentic selves, have nothing to do with the power structure, but rather on choices we make for and about ourselves. On one hand, this contends with the futurity of the power structure and therefore the legitimacy of queerness, but on the other hand, this authenticity provides for the futurity of the self as made up of essential and chosen components. For Child Scout, her longing for Dill is an essential part of her identity, whether it is "feminine" or not. She does not attribute this to other categories of being/performing the kind of girliness prescribed by the governing power structure: Aunt Alexandra, etc.

Narrator Scout shows the essential futurity of this aspect of Scout's authentic identity in that Narrator Scout still seems to long for Dill. The above being said, it is clear that this element of her identity is not about "being a lady" and is not in opposition to "being a lady" but is in alignment with Scout's own sense of identity. However, there are other elements that both Child Scout and Narrator Scout agree should not be included.

There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water... [but] ladies seem to live in faint horror of men, seemed unwilling to approve whole-heartedly of them. But I liked them.

There was something about them, no matter how much they cussed and drank and gambled and chewed; no matter how undelectable they were, there was something about them that I instinctively liked...they weren't -- '[h]ypocrites.'" (313)

Scout simultaneously chooses and rejects elements she finds essential/nonessential to her identity. On the one hand, she realizes that there are aspects of men's behaviors that she does not desire to emulate (behavior Dill does not engage in, incidentally); on the other hand, she appreciates their candor, something she does not find evidence of in women's behavior. Since both Child Scout and Narrator Scout note this, we can assume the futurity of Scout's disidentification process that leads to her queerness.

By queering Scout, we acknowledge the meshing of identities that she carries out -- that her queerness comes by way of her consciously enhancing her "ideal I" as the core of her identity, because in this case, she is not fragmenting her identity, instead, she is layering her own identity with the fragments of others (disidentification). In doing so, her queerness creates a futurity for Child Scout that is manifested by Narrator Scout, making Narrator Scout as significant as Child Scout the character and protagonist of her story. While Child Scout bases

her identity construction largely on performing in the intersections of the binaries she is surrounded by, Charles Baker Harris (Dill) seems to base his identity construction on the performances that show his attempts to align with the masculine traits of the boy/girl binary.

Dill is introduced to us as a curious little boy. He wears blue linen shorts, has hair described as duck fluff, and is far shorter than other children his age including Scout. In contrast to Scout, Dill's looks mean everything to him. His mother entered him in a beautiful baby contest and won, and he is always conscientious of maintaining that beauty. But he does not think twice about this, as this is the element of his identity he chooses to put in the spotlight: his attractiveness. He arrives at a sense of self through his otherness. This otherness comes from his confidence that simultaneously allows him to not directly be the white, southern boy that Jem is, but he is still able to manipulate his environment so that the attention he gets is the attention he wants. His attributes of independence, curiosity, and bravery are always in direct contrast with his sensitive, spoiled nature, and he uses that to his advantage in his performance, even though it does not perfectly fit into the performance of little boys prescribed by his social environment, noted by his parents' concern, "You're not a boy. Boys get out and play baseball with other boys, they don't hang around the house worryin' their folks" (191).

Dill initiates himself as Scout and Jem's friend through his interest in Boo Radley's story. He further asserts his curiosity by proposing a dare to Jem which

immediately calls into question Jem's masculinity. This act establishes Dill's status as a potential dominant figure in the group. As Jem and Scout, and the readers, get to know more about Dill, it becomes clear that Dill is able and willing to construct his own narrative, regardless of Jem and Scout's doubts of his authenticity. Dill's strongest attribute, as noted by Scout, is his ability to perform any role assigned (whether through play or through necessity): "Dill was a villain's villain: he could get into any character part assigned him, and appear tall if height was part of the devilry required. He was as good as his worst performance; his worst performance was Gothic" (52). While Dill's villain is well regarded by Scout, the villain is not the only part Dill plays. Through the story, Dill performs as characters in play, the city socialite, Scout's fiancé, Jem's friend, and the fearless risk taker in the group.

In each of these performances, his masculinity reflects fluidity as he is able to shift and negotiate between spectrums of normative and non-normative types of masculinity. Furthermore, in each case, Dill's point of reference seems to be Jem. He tends to align himself with Jem when Scout is being "too much of a girl," when he waits for Jem to be looking away to kiss Scout, when he dares Jem to do feats of courage, and when he rescues Jem from the wrath of Atticus and their neighbors. When Jem's pants get stuck in Boo Radley's fence, the three kids have to find a quick reason for being absent during the "commotion" they caused. Dill is the one to "quickly hatch one" by explaining that they were playing strip poker and that he won Jem's pants from him. "The neighbors were

satisfied” (73). This scene puts in the spotlight Dill’s willingness to take risks, his knowledge of city life as neither Scout nor Jem know what strip poker is, and his alliance with Jem. This, as in many instances, seems to put him at the top of the triad in terms of manipulation of his power in the group. He follows this climactic moment up with a kiss for Scout (74), sealing his role as a Boy.

Despite Dill’s being able to “tell the biggest ones I ever heard,” according to Scout (63), and his performances of rigidly normative masculinity, Dill is still the boy who won the prettiest baby contest. Dill’s softness and non-normative masculinity appears the most when he is one-on-one with Scout and engages in interactions with her that he would never engage in with Jem. Aside from his role as her fiancé, Dill is always willing to confide in Scout his sorrows when it comes to his life at home. When he runs away from his parents, it is Scout he seeks out in the middle of the night, not Jem, since she is more compatible with his softer demeanor: “Move over Scout’...Dill got in bed beside me.... ‘I just wanted to sleep with you. Are you waked up?’” (190). Dill explains that the reason he ran away was that his parents were emotionally neglectful of him. “They just wasn’t interested in me...they stayed gone all the time, and when they were home, even, they’d get off in a room by themselves...just sittin’ and readin’-- but they didn’t want me with ‘em” (190). Dill’s necessitous behaviors surface when his childhood feels compromised by adult interactions that remind him of the voids he experiences as a child. At these times, Dill’s performances become questionable as he is unable to fill these particular voids with any performance

and/or narrative. This is likely because he is only oriented towards white, heteronormative masculinity that tells him that he must bury certain desires in favor of looking “strong.” By Ahmed’s reckoning then, Dill must engage with orientations that are both homogeneous to his mirror image (Jem and other white, male characters) and heterogeneous (Scout). However, as Ahmed explains, the heterogeneous orientation remains in the background or in this case in the dark bedroom where he finds Scout out to confide in. This is why he cannot turn to Jem for comfort. He has cemented his position as Jem’s friend in a heteronormative, homogeneous manner wherein talking about one’s feelings is taboo and can jeopardize his performance and role in the group. Furthermore, Jem is not as fluid as Scout in his performances. This means Scout is the more likely companion when it comes to emotion driven interactions. Scout is able to perform both boyish friend and girlish nurturer, leaving Dill’s sense of self untarnished.

We see this again in the courtroom scene when Tom Robinson is treated poorly by the cross examiner, Mr. Gilmer. Dill is the only one in the room who cries openly as a result of Mr. Gilmer’s treatment: “For some reason Dill had started crying and couldn’t stop; quietly at first, then his sobs were heard by several people in the balcony” (265). Despite his emulation of Jem, Dill is so sensitive he must openly respond and is then escorted out for “inappropriate” behavior in the courtroom. Scout attends Dill and seeks to understand why he is so upset and explains that Mr. Gilmer is like that with everyone in the courtroom.

But Dill counters that he is not upset by Mr. Gilmer per se, but does not seem to have the language to explain himself. Mr. Dolphus Raymond (the quintessential “other” of the town) comes to Dill’s rescue: “You aren’t thin-hided, it just makes you sick, doesn’t it” (266)? Raymond, as a fellow townsman, gives leave for Dill’s emotional state by explaining that injustice has that effect on those who have not been jaded by continuous exposure.

[Raymond] jerked his head at Dill: ‘Things haven’t caught up with that one’s instinct yet. Let him get a little older and he won’t get sick and cry. Maybe things’ll strike him as being – not quite right, say, but he won’t cry, not when he gets a few years on him.’

‘Cry about what, Mr. Raymond?’ Dill’s maleness was beginning to assert itself.

‘Cry about the simple hell people give other people -- without even thinking. Cry about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they’re people, too.’” (269)

Although Dill’s maleness (as Scout refers to it) asserts itself in order to defend the fact that he is crying, Raymond’s words give credence to Dill’s softer tendencies and reminds Dill that his overt male instincts, as he calls them, have not reached full capacity, by suggesting that such “instinct” comes in time and through the process of becoming hardened by the experience of being both a member of the heteronormative, masculine community and the orientation of his identity towards whiteness, as with the other members of the town.

In other words, Raymond's understanding of acceptable, normative, external, white "male" projections into society are based on a learned lack of the very fluidity that Dill demonstrates. Jem has already and is continuing to learn this lack as he watches and is taught by his father. However, Dill is still able to function as a whole version of himself. Although he seems to be mastering the performance of "male instinct," he is able to manage those performances and still exhibit an ideal version of himself that remains intact with all the components of his personhood/identity, wherein he is able to connect with both Scout and Jem; wherein he can be both the prettiest baby and the daredevil; wherein he displays the strength to lead and the fragility to cry at injustice.

Dill's fluidity of gendered performances aligns perfectly with Butler's definition of the gendered "I" as part of the fragmentation of the "ideal I." As noted above, Butler defines the gendered "I" as primarily performative in that it "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler 2384). Dill's acts or performances of primarily normative masculinity seem to counter his "ideal I" in that he is acutely aware of the role that gender performance plays in his ability to be accepted and establish a dominant standing in his social groups. In this way, his identity has already been fragmented as he is careful regarding how and to whom his non-performances are revealed.

If as Butler explains, the greatest common denominator of the gendered power structure of society, and particularly Dill's society, is the heteronormative community through which all gender performance originates, then Dill's

fragmented identity makes sense given the context in which his performances take place. Performativity, as mentioned above, is that the “I” is always performing for the greater common denominator in order to be, simultaneously, one with and distinctive from the group it intends to interact with. We see this when Dill both befriends Jem (to be one with) and dares Jem in order to test their differing levels of courage (to be distinctive from). Dill’s choice of performance leans heavily towards heteronormativity and seems to lean away from the “ideal I” and therefore authentic disidentification as a goal for identity.

Whereas Scout picks and chooses the attributes of identity that she will use to create and maintain her own “ideal I,” Dill dismisses his “ideal I” in favor of gendered fragmentation through which his identity is maintained according to the power structures that Scout seems to counter. In doing so, he fulfills Edelman’s concern regarding the futurity of queerness. In other words, Dill’s queerness seeks to align with power structures rather than navigate through them. His choices for performances create a different kind of queerness -- one that might not be as noticeable as Scout’s because it is able to fly under the radar. However, his queerness is more significant than Scout’s in that he has more challenges to face in terms of society’s prescriptive expectations for how he should *be*.

Scout’s queerness is seen as merely a phase by society, one which she will eventually grow out of. And even if she does not fully grow out of it, she has Miss Maudie as an adult figure to look to as a representation of what her future

could look like: “Miss Maudie hated her house: time spent indoors was time wasted. She was a widow, a chameleon lady who worked in her flower beds in an old straw hat and men’s coveralls, but after her five o’clock bath, she would appear on the porch and reign over the street with magisterial beauty” (56). However, Dill the Child has no representation of what his future could look like except for heteronormative maleness and no acceptance from an adult figure that his queerness is even a phase to begin with. One might argue that Atticus, due to his lack of “typical” performances of adult maleness, could potentially be Dill’s version of Miss Maudie. However, the fact that Atticus is not as consistent in Dill’s life as Miss Maudie is in Scout’s suggests that Atticus has little to no sway in Dill’s performative choices. Furthermore, Atticus represents the law that upholds the heteronormative, white power structures that both Scout and Dill chafe against. Ultimately, Dill’s queerness does not have the leeway that Scout’s has leaving no room for interpretation. Although his being a child gives him some room to be fluid, it is taken for granted that that fluidity will change into the concrete, solidified performance of his white, gendered “I”. In other words, his futurity seems far more limited than that of Scout’s.

Because we are able to queer Dill and Scout in terms of what constitutes their gendered “I,” we are able to see two things: one, gender is a multi-faceted performance that does not and cannot rely solely on prescribed notions of gender, but must also rely on certain levels of fragmentation and orientation in order to maneuver within the over-arching power structure and its intersections

that dictates and maintains societal binaries, rather than resisting it only; two, Scout's and Dill's queered gender performances position them as active participants while at the same time letting them teeter on the peripheral where they are able to critique the events of the story as they unfold, thereby being the lens the readers need to decipher the most poignant themes and motifs of the text. Without working through the gendered aspects of their identities, Scout and Dill are merely spectators of the events of the story. By gendering them as significant characters and then subsequently queering them, it becomes clear that they are active participants by means of their roles as the Child which makes visible the ways in which the power structure tries to silence them and coerce them towards silence in both gender and racial awareness. This allows them the advantage of creating a power structure reserved for the Child separate from the adults who have become calloused to the effects of the power structures governing their day to day lives. Within the framing of the Child's power structure is a certain kind of access to a variability of interactions and outcomes that adults are not granted because of the Child's ability to take the position of innocence when choosing which influences will be allowed to impact decisions regarding the formation of the "I."

For high school students reading this text, the process of exposing the power structure of the Child allows them to establish their own queer futurity. Because *TKAM* is such a foundational text, most high school students will have read this text by graduation. As such, *TKAM*, as accessible as it is in its

relatability to the students' lives, can act as the starting place to catapult them into reading other canonical works via a queer lens. Setting a theoretical or queer framework of essential outcomes for approaching multiple texts in the classroom allows students the opportunities often not afforded them to reflect on the ways in which their own identities have been and continue to be shaped and developed by their agency to make choices and perform those choices accordingly.

Creating a Standard of Theory in the Classroom

High school literature classes can be a space for cultural critique if students are asked to recognize and critique the context and message of the text via plot, characters, and motifs, for example. Through their recognition of the efficacy of the context and their ability to carry out an analysis of what that context delivers, students can access the meaning of the text via its historical underpinnings and the ways in which those influence the projection of the narrative. Once access has been achieved, students can begin to realize the significance and the relevance of those same influences in their own lives and domains. Only then can they accurately and meaningfully respond to the text by critiquing what it offers. In creating this model of learning, we change the model being used to present literature like *TKAM* to our students currently (the first model students experience), and steer clear from secondary school model that assumes a certain level of readership from the students (the second model students experience). In the first model (often found in high school classrooms),

instructors teach literature through a guided outline of what the text is about and how students should respond. Being very prescriptive, this model leaves little room for students to find themselves invested in the text and their connected academic activity. Though this is a straightforward model, it gives very little room for the creativity with the text that leads to analysis and then critique. In the second model (often found in college classrooms), instructors present literary theory to their students and then work with the students to use theory as an extrapolation tool in order to dig out the text's significance on their own. Although a useful model for college students, it presupposes that students are cognitively ready to learn and understand unabridged literary theory. In this third model (the one I am proposing for high school classes), instructors use the frameworks of theory to inform the teaching of the text in order to show the students the significance of the text first. Once the relationship to the text has been established, they can begin to more easily and actively understand why reading literature is/should be important to them. This changes the prescriptive model into a much more fluid exercise in reading and makes learning theoretical approaches in secondary education more meaningful later on. High school literature classes, therefore, need to be a space where connections are made between the issues of the text and the issues students face in their everyday lives. This way, the power of literature can be utilized and information is not simply regurgitated for the sake of a grade and some kind of basic literary

awareness or as a tool of reading assessment. So, how can we best put this into practice?

Cristina Vischer Bruns, in her book, *Why Literature*, puts forward the idea that in order for students to not only best utilize, but also best appreciate the power of literature and literary theory (which she refers to as critical literary reading), students must be immersed in the text in ways that give them “their own initial ‘naïve’ reading of a text and to attend to that experience as a part of the subject matter of the course” (117). By taking such an approach, she suggests that students will better understand the value of literature as it unveils to them visible connections to their world, provides them with deeply significant personal experiences with the text, and opens opportunities for them to form opinions and responses. Bruns argues that this can only occur when students are able to immerse themselves in what they read before doing anything else with the text, thereby bridging the gap between personal reading and analytical reading. Her concern and reasoning for this type of approach to teaching literature is twofold. One, she is concerned that teachers may inadvertently, by denying students the opportunity to connect with the text, make the activity of reading literature too analytical from the beginning. Two, Bruns is troubled by the notion that the teaching of literature is a one-to-one ratio of the delivery of information and the receiving of information, wherein students simply listen to a lecture and are able to remember information without the significance of why the information may be important to them. Bruns’ goal, then, seems to be to encourage teachers of

literature to make the experience of reading literature more about the student experience first and critical approaches second.

To a certain degree, Robert Scholes, in his book *Textual Power*, agrees with Bruns in the sense that Scholes argues that textual power starts with the experience of reading, wherein reading is based on students' ability to "understand the basic elements of narrative coding" (21).

In other words, textual power comes from students' ability to construct and internalize the most basic intentions of the text without very much thought. This is because they have been taught to read and answer specific, prescriptive questions about the text regarding plot, characters, and general situations, as well as to make assumptions about the arching message or theme of the text. With this in mind, both scholars suggest that students must be able to relate to the text in foundational ways that provide them with the basic form and function of the plot. Additionally, both scholars suggest that giving the student opportunities for personal interpretation as a kind of result of their foundational reading skills is significant to the student's experience with advancing their relationship with the text. However, while Bruns argues that this interpretation be student driven, specifically because the student will then be encouraged to interpret from a personal stance thereby making the text more decodable, Scholes argues that interpretation must also account for the gaps in knowledge that the student inevitably has in relation to the text. These gaps include knowledge of power dynamics between social and political structures, the

nuances of social and political norms that appear as undertones in the plot, and character experiences that the student may never have themselves. Scholes points out that it will be difficult for a student to sympathize with the text if those gaps are not addressed via furthering the knowledge of the student in contexts outside their own. Scholes argues that this must lead to criticism which involves “a critique of the themes developed in a given fictional text, or a critique of the codes themselves, out of which a given text has been constructed” (23). In order for this criticism to occur, however, Scholes points out that students must be given the position to respond to representative characters and contexts that they may not already be capable of relating to because of the difference in systems of experiences and values. Therefore, “our students should learn finally [after reading and interpretation] how to criticize...from some viewpoint beyond the merely personal – and the merely literary” (23). Scholes seems to argue that the initial activity of reading should engage literary theory as one of the foundational elements that students must be able to decode. Students can then interpret the implications and finally critique the applications of the theoretical elements they have decoded. It is here that these two scholars find themselves in conflicting positions.

On the one hand, Bruns does not see the need for literary theory as the foundation for students’ initial literary reading experiences. She uses a recounting of Deborah Appleman’s use of literary theory in the classroom in *Critical Encounters in High School English* as part of her reasoning for this

opinion. Bruns explains that Appleman's approach to teaching literature is to help students develop the ability to see and understand that different perspectives must affect the way one reads. Through this approach, Appleman exposes students to various types of literary theory and then asks them to read and interpret both the text and their own lives via the application of those theories. The goal for Appleman is to help students recognize and deconstruct the ideologies within the "structure of systems that oppress them" (104). While Bruns agrees that this is necessary, she also questions the validity of students' (specifically high school students') application of theory since the data exhibited "more attitude than insight" (104). For Bruns, this is problematic because she wants students to recognize the author's intended meaning and immerse themselves in the text first rather than beginning with theoretical critique as the primary objective, which she believes would undermine "any value in both the text itself and in the critique of it" (105). Although she acknowledges the need for the pedagogical shift that gives students the means to apply the text to their lives in more meaningful ways, and in fact, thinks that it is necessary to do so, she also believes that application should come through the lens of the students' own experiences before anything else.

On the other hand, Scholes sees literary theory as part of the foundation for students' ability to have any real reading experiences at all, as it allows them to step outside of their own contexts and recognize or understand the contexts of others before moving on to other interactions with the text. Appleman's work

even shows, as Bruns points out, the “importance of Scholes’ claim that textual power requires reading sympathetically before reading critically” (Bruns 105). Scholes points out that a student’s initial, personal reading will be colored by the student’s own assumptions of their world and that it is the teacher’s responsibility to “bring the assumptions that are in place out in the open for scrutiny” (Scholes xi). So, while personal immersion in the text may provide value for the text, it may also convolute the ability to view the text through the lens of sympathy or critique. Scholes, then, argues the need for literary theory as it blatantly acknowledges that “texts are places where power and weakness become visible and discussable, where learning and ignorance manifest themselves, where the structures that enable and constrain our thoughts and actions become palpable” (xi). One may even argue that the introduction of literary theory into students’ initial reading experiences might enable them to actually see their own limitations in ways they have not before and would not without that lens.

It is therefore, important to solve this opposition in a way that benefits high school teachers’ desire to improve the student’s experience with literature in ways that help them improve themselves, since “[o]ur task as teachers is to introduce students to this web [the intersections of power and being], to make it real and visible for them, insofar as we can, and to encourage them to cast their own strands of thought and text into this network so that they feel its power and understand both how to use it and how to protect themselves from its abuses” (Scholes 21). As teachers, our completion of this task, to give our students power

through the texts they read and how they read, bridges the gaps between the reader and their experience with the text, between a response-driven reading of the text and a critique-driven reading of the text, and finally between high school and college readership that propels students into action rather than complacency. Therefore, both Bruns and Scholes – both the personal and the scholarly – need to be accounted for in our pedagogical approaches as both recognize the simultaneous needs of high school students in literature classes.

With this mind, Rita Felski, in her book *Uses of Literature*, argues that personal interpretation and scholarly interpretation of literature share “affective and cognitive parameters” (14). This argument is based on what Felski calls the “practical impossibility” of attending any text on its own merit. Rather, she suggests that real and meaningful reading of literature relies on the knowledge and understanding of the values that are assigned to the text by those participating in the conversation regarding the literature in question, which includes us as readers (3). In doing so, Felski points out that we would be able to disrupt common and popular, or simply habitualized readings of canonized literature and prevent the same from happening to other literary texts. Ultimately, she says “there is no reason why our readings cannot blend analysis and attachment, criticism and love” (22). For this kind of blending to occur, specifically for our high school students, it is important to help them navigate the initial reading experience in a way that synthesizes as seamlessly as possible the

technique of analysis and the process of personal response based on our personal drives to appreciate the plot and function of the text.

This said, the reading experience we seek for our students is multifaceted and therefore, pinning down what it looks like in the classroom can be a bit complex. Scholes explains that “[w]e can only read a story if we have read enough other stories to understand the basic elements of narrative coating” (Scholes 21). This suggests that students must have a clear understanding of narrative construction in order to scaffold themselves into the text at hand. Such expectations presume that students have already been building a knowledge bank of readership so that they go into each reading experience with a sense of what is to come. Teachers, therefore, do not need to explain the concept of the narrative to the students. Rather, they need to begin by helping students position themselves (via life experience) in order to participate in and with the text. By doing so, we are able to build on Bruns’ approach to creating a personal reading of the text for our students because we, as she says, “enable a reader to hold onto or recall an emotional state or stance, important for making that state available to consciousness for thought and reflection which can lead to other possible developments of self-experience and insight” (Bruns 19). In other words, we teach students to use their own real-life narratives to understand the text so that they can better appreciate or better understand the relativity of themselves and others as it pertains to the text with which they are engaging. This is an important step for our literature students in high school. However, for the fuller,

more fruitful reader experience we are looking for, this cannot be where our work ends.

Moving forward, once a stance has been constructed by our students, with help from the teacher, they can and must then begin the process of responding to the text as semi-knowledgeable patrons of literary readership and can begin to build their own interpretations and applications that are necessary for not only building their own sense of self, but figuring out where to situate the self they have built. Scholes suggests that this kind of response is meaningful for our students: “The response to a text is itself always a text. Our knowledge is itself only a dim text that brightens as we express it. This is why expression, the making of new text by students, must play a major role in the kind of course we are discussing” (Scholes 20). It seems that a student’s literary reading experience, in the way that Bruns and Scholes define it, is based on two factors: first is the student’s ability to relate to or connect to the text (via characters, plot, etc.) in ways that mirror real life situations or encourage reflection on issues brought up by the text; second is the teacher’s pedagogical process of creating connections and relatability for the students in the first place. This is in line with Felski, who says that the “enlargement of the reader’s understanding is steered not only by the formal devices and literary techniques [which the teacher provides], but also by the magical illusions, imaginative associations and emotional susceptibilities [the students’ relation to the text] that such techniques call into being” (133). However, if the devices and techniques that the teacher

provides the students are not effectively utilized as a means of broadening students' reading experience and overall comprehension of how the text relates to a bigger picture, the problem remains that a "naive" personal reading experience of literature exists only on the surface level of students' understanding, especially considering their youth. The experience becomes temporary and lacks long-term meaning in that it barely contributes to the students' development of their "I."

With the goal being to purposefully contribute to the students' development of their "I," we must consider the reason for reading texts like *TKAM* with our high schoolers in the first place. Any text that we engage with meaningfully and skillfully will leave an impression on us that we can return to again and again as we navigate the kind of topics and situations the text presents. In doing so, the characters and their experiences meld and mesh with us and our own experiences, helping us to construct a sense of self that can recognize and respond to current power dynamics and their impacts on us. It is for this reason that I propose that we combine the process of personal immersion with the frameworks of critical theory so as to build a pedagogical process that shapes literature classes into something much more meaningful to our high school students.

However, when I suggest the use of critical theory frameworks, this is not to say that all literary theory is necessarily significant or imperative for high school students' experience of reading the text, nor that the entirety of any theory

be taught in the classroom. First of all, while all literary theories are significant to the understanding of power structures in our society, there are only some theories from which high school students can readily develop social and cultural currency in order to further develop their “I,” which of course is our goal. For example, deconstructionist theories may do a lot to open up a text and allow students to see the structure of binaries and how those binaries relate to both the text and the students’ background knowledge and then push the students to move on to deconstruct them. However, without the basis of social, political, and cultural background knowledge and investment, the process of deconstruction in order to break down a piece of literature will likely not result in the kind of currency students need to fruitfully and meaningfully critique and analyze literature. The result is that, contrary to our hopes, they will not keep coming back because it has not been well enough woven into their understanding of themselves. Second of all, if the goal of high school literature classes is that students, by being exposed to the literature of the canon, will both become better writers and develop their own ideas of personhood based on the text, then we need to be conscientious of the way we bring theory into the classroom so that it aids them in their reading of the text, but does not overtake them or the text. This means that we must pick and choose the elements of the theory strategically and then determine the best ways to make those elements known and available to our students. In other words, the kind of theoretical underpinnings we choose for

the pedagogy that we develop needs to help us achieve our ultimate goals and outcomes for high school literature students.

For this reason, I argue that we must start with theories that are particularly focused on social and cultural norms and what those norms mean to us as participants in society. The frameworks of queer theory seem, then, to be most applicable to the experiences and needs of high school students as they are still in the process of creating their identity or their “I.” Queer theory and its connections to gender studies, race studies, and the power structures that gatekeep (i.e. queer theory’s intersections) allow students to place themselves in an immediate space of connection with the text and their peers, thereby achieving the goal of giving our students both personal and critical reading experiences. Via queer theory, the text becomes real and even tangible to students because they can see the ways that the text replicates their own life experiences and perhaps even validates their responses to those experiences. As a result, they can position themselves or immerse themselves in the text, thereby building a framework of how they will continue to navigate themselves through the world and see those connections that queer theory provides them.

This brings us full circle, as both Bruns and Scholes seem to be in line with this thinking as they imply the need for the kind of pedagogical underpinnings that queer theory provides since it would warrant the personal experience with the text they think students should be having. As Scholes points out, “[w]e must help our students come into their own powers of textualization.

We must help them to see that every poem, play, and story is a text related to others, both verbal pre-texts and social sub-texts, and all manner of post-texts including their own responses, whether in speech, writing, or action” (20). This process of helping our students gain their own textual power to create and sustain themselves must begin by acknowledging that the creation and development of the “I” is sociopolitical in its complexity. We must, therefore, recognize the climate of sociopolitical interferences with which our students grapple.

The political climate and social norms have changed as injustices in our society are more seen, discussed, and brought into the forefront of our attention, particularly with the recent Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 and the #metoo movement of 2019, which require our commitment to change. We are now more purposefully discussing these injustices and the kind of change we can bring about with our students. Through these changes and shifts, new and more transparent opportunities for developing the “I” or self have also emerged, *especially* for our students who are becoming more confident in the construction of their “I.” In the past, we know these opportunities for confidence and even acceptance or tolerance have often been denied so that our students who grapple with being othered by society in some way have not always been confident in either their readership of literature or the development of their “I,” in or out of the classroom. Now with these opportunities come new ways to approach literature and its critique so that even those antiquated literary texts

most drenched in white, heteronormative power hegemonies become useful tools for our students to interpret, critique and deconstruct/collapse the power structures that still seek to oppress their identity or deny them their sense of “I.” Queer theory’s frameworks of taking into account binaries, social norms, performances, and identity allow us to look between the lines of the surface of the text, thereby revealing an entire new narrative and interpretation – a whole new experience of the text. Using queer theory’s frameworks allows us to become more personally connected with the text as we dig in deeper to find its secrets and messages. By giving our students awareness of what we gain from queer theory and its applications, as Scholes suggests, they can tap into those “concealed, non-obvious levels of meaning” (22) that exist in whatever text they approach. Only when students have the ability to use the frameworks of literary theory, such as queer theory, can they fill in the gaps of incompleteness and thus their process of interpretation begins.

Since, as mentioned above, the goal is not to teach queer theory to our students in its entirety, what we pull from queer theory as a lens for analysis needs to be carefully chosen and integrated into the framework of the literature class, discussed obviously with the students, and then applied to the texts of the course in ways that instruct and influence students’ relationships with the texts. Since *TKAM* is often presented in one way (a record of narrative and historical racism), the tendency has been to either teach it in this one way or to avoid the text altogether. If we are able to apply the lens of queer theory to our pedagogical

frameworks, there is a greater payoff to our reading of *TKAM*. Felski sums up this payoff quite nicely by saying that it “is the hope of getting a better handle on how and why we read that steers clear of finalized formulae and preemptive or programmatic conclusions, that looks anew at what we have assured ourselves we already know” (132). For high school teachers, this means that we can finally leave behind the prescriptive method of teaching that has forced us to read at the surface level of the text and with which we have become so complacent. It seems that to this day, we have only been trained to teach to the test and even the test is so prescriptive that there is little room for creativity regarding the literature we introduce to our students. This new approach to the teaching of high school literature that certainly fulfills the student learning outcomes of the required curriculum would make *TKAM* a much more important addition to the high school literature class than it seems to be now.

As we integrate critical theory into our pedagogy, the question is what are the essential outcomes of queer theory that we are looking for as a result of such integration? Cohen offers some insight by defining the label of queer:

The label ‘queer’ symbolizes an acknowledgement that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility. At the intersection of oppression and resistance lies the radical potential of queerness to challenge

and bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics. (440)

This definition offers us two points of entry into the conversation we have with our students: one is the actual denotation of the word queer as it relates to the sociopolitical space that grapples with power structures; two is the highlighting of where queer is in relation to these much more powerful structures that have historically oppressed all those who have ever been labeled “queer” or who have been marginalized for their differences by telling them what and who they have to be and denying them the voice to say otherwise, thereby perpetuating marginalized spaces of being. While we do not have to unbox queer theory, we do have to allow the students to understand the basic foundations of queer theory and how it relates to each of them. By doing so, we give them the power to use queer theory in order to understand the text and at the same time allow them to apply the concepts of queerness as a means of developing their “I.” The essential outcomes, then, that we ask students to reach as they read the text, specifically in this case of *TKAM*, include being able to recognize and define the power structures that guide the narrative and its reader, locate marginalized characters and characters in positions of power or authority, highlight the significance of marginalized characters and how they reflect and relate to current political climates, and understand the complexities of queered performance and how it applies to the characters and thereby to the students and their construction of their “I.” These goals of literary analysis would necessarily need

to be supplemented with discussions regarding the intersections, as Crenshaw discusses, of race, gender, sexuality, and orientation. In order to achieve these outcomes with our students, it is important that we make the pedagogy interesting and relative to our specific student body, which means that any pedagogy we put in place needs to be fluid.

Applications of Theory in the Classroom

In the high school classroom, as I consider applying the concepts of queer theory to the assignment of reading *TKAM*, there are a couple of things that are forefront in my mind. The first is that I am certainly not trying to sort out, for my students, the lived-ness of the LGBTQIA community, nor do I want them to feel the need to label themselves or their peers in any particular way by means of this sort of application; in fact, my desire, as their teacher, is to steer clear of any pinpointing at all. The second is that I want to make use of close reading analyses in ways that alert students to the intersections of the text and, as explained in length above, make those close readings applicable to them in meaningful ways beyond the text and the classroom, particularly since topics of gender are often either avoided and ignored in fear of raising controversy in the classroom. As must be obvious by now, my greatest desire in this project is to engage with these controversies and demystify them through structured analysis. In order to amalgamate these two desires, I return to the close reading done above of *TKAM*. In the close reading, I was able to demonstrate the ways in

which Scout and Dill become primary characters for understanding gender roles, gender performances, gendered orientations and intersections, and the power structures that Scout and Dill must navigate to approach their own gendered “I”s. Such a close reading is going to be important for students to experience, but in order to achieve the most impact, it would need to be a guided close reading where students are given opportunities to participate in and even structure the close reading themselves as it unfolds in the classroom through the lesson plan.

Lesson Plan Rationale

For this lesson plan, I am using my English 9 – Freshman Literature Class (FLC) from Adelanto High School in Southern California as my reference point, as it is what I am most familiar with. However, I suspect that many freshman literature classes are the same and so this would not affect the ability for modification. For this class, texts like *TKAM* and *Romeo and Juliet* are assigned, and in the honors program *The Odyssey*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *The Tortilla Curtain* are additionally assigned. This is the traditional canon for freshman English literature classes in my district. As students read these two texts, in their general education class, they are assessed via vocabulary, journal keeping, essays, and quizzes/tests. The student learning objectives for *TKAM*, in this class, include: discussing first person narration including pros and cons, identifying settings and the effects of settings, understanding the relationship between education and socioeconomic class in relation to major themes, recognizing the significance of Calpurnia being the substitute mother figure in the

text, understanding the symbolism of Tom Robinson and the deep-rooted racism of the South, and discussing the significance of Boo Radley as an outcast in society. In other words, the text is used for conversations regarding narrative construction and racism as a major theme of the narrative. Yet, over the course of 8 weeks, there is certainly room for conversations that intersect and build off of these objectives. And my goal with this lesson plan is to show how that can happen.

Text Selection and Connections to Student Population. In my FLC, I begin the school year, day one, by looking at a room of thirty-six 14-year-old high school students. Aside from noticing that the student population is a broad mix of low-income minorities (68.5% Hispanic, 21.7% African American or Black, .9% Pacific Islander, .5% Asian, and 3.8% White (*California School Dashboard*)), I am also hyper-aware of the students who come into their freshman year in the process and struggle of trying to figure themselves out. As their literature teacher for the year, it is easy for me to become rather nurturing towards these students as I desire to help them in their journey. Yet, my position and status in the school prohibit me from being able to bring any of this up to my students directly. Therefore, my literature class becomes a space wherein I hope to foster conversations that my students can participate in so as to vocalize their struggle or process in some way meaningful or helpful to them, while monitoring and facilitating the space to keep it safe for each of them. With this in mind, it is important to note that when I first assign *TKAM* it is first clear that they have no

clue what it is, so they tend to think it is about a hunting game to kill mockingbirds; it is also painfully clear that most of them have no enthusiasm whatsoever to read whatever this text is regardless of the content, especially since this is their first novel (unabridged). My goal, as a result, is to get them to find their enthusiasm as quickly as possible, and I start with explaining the title.

Along with the student learning objectives for the course, I am always excited to teach *TAKM* and always choose it as my initial assignment for the year because I see Scout's experience with going to school for the first time as something that might help them connect to the text and set the trajectory for everything to come. Through Scout they will, I hope, learn more about how to be strong of character, how to be proud of being intelligent, how to overcome the hardships of growing up without significant parental interaction, how to adapt to certain situations while still speaking their truth, how to own who they are without fear of repercussions, and how to self-reflect on what is actually happening around them. While of course the text centers around conversations regarding bigotry, racism, judgment, social prejudice, and equality of justice, the text is also ripe for conversations about coming into one's self and pinning down some sort of identity. This is where the use of queer theory comes into play.

Since I am teaching to freshmen (14-year-olds), my goal with introducing queer theory is to primarily expose them to the concepts of intersectionality and how that influences gender performance and the building of identity under the power structures that maintain social norms. In line with Scholes (21), if one of

our goals as educators is to provide for students the concept of their own connections to the text, then we must begin by making them aware of not only what they and the text have in common (as Bruns (117) suggests), but also highlight why what they have in common with the text is so significant. With this mind, I want to start our conversation of intersectionality by showing students Crenshaw's TED Talk, "The Urgency of Intersectionality." This will help them start thinking about the text through the lens of queer theory because it will help them see the complex connections the characters have with each other, thereby aligning with Felski's (14) argument for the need to develop a shared consideration for affective and cognitive readings and interpretations of the text. In this way, students will not only be aware of the intersectionality of the *TKAM* (cognitive), but they will also be aware of their own place in the intersections that are exposed to (affective). I think that for this age and grade level this will be quite enough for them to process in terms of how the basic frameworks of queer theory are relevant and perhaps supportive to their own stage in the construction of their "I." Specifically, for *TKAM*, I want to focus on the interactions between Scout, Jem, and Dill with other people in the town (Black/White, upper/lower class, masculine/feminine), the social norms and expectations of old southern towns that play on their identity, the ways that these characters perform their gender in non-traditional ways, and how all of these elements of the text are still in play today for many of our students, but especially mine. For this lesson plan, I am focusing on the ways in which intersectionality influences the gender

performance of Scout and Dill so as to get to a close reading with the students that mirrors the close reading done above.

Planned Activities for Class

The activities planned for this lesson are inspired by activities that I read about in both Elish-Piper, Wold, and Shwingendorf who discuss the value and usage of Linked Text Sets and Macaluso who discusses the importance of building critical conversations about the text through questionnaire worksheets for group and individual work. In this case, I am creating a Linked Text Set by combining our reading of Scout and Dill with “Ain’t I a Woman” by Sojourner Truth and “Why I’m Done Trying to be ‘Man Enough’” by Justin Baldoni. Although these are not literary pieces, they do speak to the kinds of performances that we latch on to through social norms and show that the performances are long lasting so that we still see them today. In this way, I hope to show students that power structures that govern society are a kind of text that we create our own textual response to, as Scholes (20) suggests, and that in doing so we are able to elevate our casual discussions of any text to a level of action. In order to create critical conversations, I want to use some of the questions from Macaluso that are meant to get students thinking about the text in terms of racism, power structures, and dominant ideologies. Some of the questions he asks are “How does power work in the text?, Who has power and why?, Are characters from historically marginalized populations complex or stereotypical?” (284). I like these

questions as they help students consider intersectionality as it relates to power structures, particularly in the text, but also outside of the text in their own world. One of the long-term activities that I like from Macaluso is the concept of organizing ideas about what we are discussing as we go: “Have students critically engage with the text, using the tools introduced in the previous steps. Create organizers that help them track their ideas and see the ways in which new and old racism [in my case, intersectionality] are at play in the text” (286). This type of activity responds directly to Bruns’ call for students to experience the subject matter or the text for themselves as it relates to the knowledge they already have through the lenses their own experiences have given them (105). By setting up organizers, students are able to track their experience with the text in clear and precise ways that prepare them for deeper analysis by engaging in primary and personal forms of early analysis (Bruns 105; Felski 22). For this lesson plan, then, I have organized the activities with the above in mind and designed them to help students begin unpacking gender performance specifically. The lesson would take place at the end of chapter 2 in *TKAM*, when Scout has had her first fight at school. At this point, we should assume that the students have already some basic, foundational experience with queer theory (intersectionality) and the context of *TKAM*.

The following activities are based on Common Core Standards for high school education, specifically for English Language Arts (ELA), and therefore reflect the terminology and strategies used for high school ELA student learning

outcomes. This means that each activity must balance between theoretically based pedagogy and the pedagogy required by state standards. My goal is to showcase how this balance might be achieved by outlining the lesson plan a single class period of 55 minutes while utilizing an approved lesson plan template from my district.

Pre-Analysis Activities Lesson Plan

Activity 1: Introduce the Topic of Gender Performance (15 minutes)

Students begin class with a quick write prompt. Students would be asked to write a response to two questions: “Have you ever been told how to act or not to act like a boy or a girl?” and “If so, did you stop? Or did you continue to get your point across like Scout did?” This would be followed with an open discussion, beginning with my own experience to help create a safe environment for sharing.

Activity 2: Performance Reading (20 minutes) In a think, pair, share activity, students would be asked to find a moment in the text, so far, where a character is performing according to the social norms of Maycomb or performing according to their own identity. Students have 3-4 minutes to find a moment and then they would pair with a student next to them and discuss. Students would need to identify who is performing, what role they are performing, and which power structure they are performing or not performing to. After about 5 minutes, students would be asked to share with the class and discuss.

Activity 3: Predictions and Foreshadowing (10 minutes) Refresh students on the reading skill of prediction and foreshadowing. Students would be

asked to list main characters and predict what would happen through foreshadowing clues in the text, particularly based on what we have already discussed this lesson. After students have practiced prediction through foreshadowing, students would be prepared for chapter 3.

Activity 4: End of Class Discussion to Prepare for Next Day (10 minutes) In chapter 3, Atticus says to Scout, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee 39). This would be a significant point for the students in that it would allow them to consider many aspects of the characters, but for now they can begin by connecting the quote to the predictions they made in Activity 3 and the Performance Reading in Activity 2.

The following day, students would be asked to “try on” someone else’s shoes by choosing a shoe from a box and building a character based on the shoe. In groups of 4-5, students work together to fill out a ten-question worksheet in order to describe the person they think wears that shoe. At the end of class, each group would share their profile of the person they have created.

To prepare students for this activity ahead of time, students would be directed to the quote in chapter 3 and we would discuss that this sets the tone for the entire text as Lee chooses the word “skin” instead of “shoe.” The class would discuss how this quote influences their predictions. Importantly, this quote comes before race is directly discussed, which is a kind of foreshadowing in itself. Therefore, it is important to get students thinking about the kinds of predictions

and judgements they make about people, even if it is only based on gender performances at this point in the text to help them prepare for discussing race and other power hierarchies like socioeconomic privilege and social standing.

Homework Activity 5: Vocabulary (20 minutes) Have students focus on and define the term “identity” by reading the following two paragraphs from James Paul Gee’s “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction.”

- “At any moment we are using language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs and attitudes. Thus, what is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations. These combinations I call “Discourses,” with a capital “D” Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of “identity kit” which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write so as to take on a particular role that others would recognize. Being “trained” as a linguist meant that I learned to speak, think, act like a linguist, and to recognize other when they do so. Some other examples of Discourse: (enacting) being an American or a Russian, a man or a woman, a member of certain socioeconomic class, a factory worker or a boardroom executive, a doctor or a hospital patient, a teacher, an

administrator, or a student, a student of physics or a student of literature, a member of sewing circle, a club, a street gang, as lunchtime social gathering, or a regular at a local bar. We all have many Discourses” (Gee 6-7).

Following their reading of these two paragraphs, student would answer the following five questions and read 2-3 chapters from *TKAM*..:

1. What is the dictionary definition of identity (denotation)?
2. What is Gee’s definition of identity in your own words (connotation)?
3. How is Gee’s definition different from the dictionary definition?
4. Which do you prefer and why?
5. What is your definition of identity?

Moving Forward Post Lesson Plan. In the next few days/lessons that follow, students would be exposed to different ways of thinking about identity as it relates to gender performance. One lesson, as explained above, would focus on being in someone else’s shoes. Another lesson would focus on the Linked Text Sets as ways of thinking about identity so that students can think about how society expects us or influences us to perform a particular way based on gender. Finally, a lesson would ask students to think about how race, socioeconomic status, and education influences the way gender can be/is performed as a way to lead into conversations about gender and race intersections. In each lesson, students would have an activity in which they are asked to relate to the lesson in a personal way. After these lessons, a debriefing class period would encourage

students to consider how *TKAM*, regarding gender performance, is relevant to them so far and the current society they are living in. Although themes of gender performance and identity would continue through the reading of the text, it would be perpetually complicated by other factors of the text, the plot, and future readings of other canonical texts. These 4-5 lessons serve to set a foundation for thinking about and discussing gender as something more fluid and intersectional than what students are used to. In this way, they are prepared for and more comfortable with the more complex discussions that using queer theory as a foundational resource would bring about.

Conclusion and A Call For Action

Here, at the end, I am aware that perhaps one of the most personal driving forces for this project was the fact that after fifteen years of being away from college, going back and being introduced to a queered way of thinking intrigued me and awoke in me a higher level of curiosity. Even with all my life experience, I had to work to shift my understanding of my world and myself because discussing the kind of topics that queer theory brings forth in the classroom had previously been so taboo in the educational arena of my former college days and even still are to some degree in my current work environment that the idea of discussing it openly and not with sociopolitical goals, but rather with goal of enlightenment as the motivation was both shocking and illuminating. This made feel that finally, the classroom could be a safe place for students to

explore identity and being. But it equally made aware of how unsafe comparably the high school classroom can still be for my students. Consequently, I can imagine that it might be just as shocking for students transitioning from high school to college to experience, finally, a space where they can confidently and safely engage with the identity they have built for themselves thus far. As a high school educator, I wonder why we have not started to create that kind of space for them before they go to college via the kind of work we ask them to do and how we ask them to do it.

I perceive my job as being twofold. Firstly, I need to prepare my students for college and adult life by giving them tools (via basic education) to function in the next phase of their life. Secondly, I need to prepare them to understand and engage with the politics and social boundaries that they will have to function in and navigate through. Currently, I find myself doing only the first and this is worrisome to say the least. If my job includes preparing them for that second part of job, it is necessary to have the discussions that queer theory bring about in the high school classroom so that they are primed for critical theory that they would be expected, at some point, to not only understand but enact and respond to in the real world. What better way to do this than to fit it into their own process of identity creation – the development of their “I”? In other words, it is time for high school education to evolve and align itself with the same kind of deep engagement with our world, our texts, and our responses that higher education is working to accomplish.

To my fellow high school teachers, the education that we received in college, the pedagogy, the teaching process, has all evolved since we left or was even evolving while we were there. If we do not evolve with it and if we do not encourage the high school education field to evolve with us, we are failing the students that we are charged with and leaving them to a collegiate and real-world culture shock, as well as denying them important opportunities to come to terms with themselves via the literature we teach. This is why *To Kill a Mockingbird* offers so much more than the racism that is forcing it off of library and school room bookshelves. We can still save this and other texts if we find new and inventive ways to approach the text. It is up to us as teachers to make the literature current and relevant in positive ways that respond to the social upheaval of identity and social membership we are currently experiencing and even working toward. Queering literature like *To Kill A Mockingbird* in purposeful ways that are geared towards our students is one of the ways that we can achieve this.

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