

Summer Reading Assignment: Preparing for Dual Enrollment English

Welcome to Dual Enrollment English!

Complete the below assignment AND read one New York Times Young Adult Best Seller from the last 5 years. It can be any one of your choosing and you will need a copy (either digital or print) to use throughout English 1001.

This summer, you'll complete a three-part reading assignment designed to introduce you to two important concepts we'll focus on in English 1001: **narrative style** and **personal literacy**. Each part of this assignment builds toward helping you understand how writers use storytelling to explore and communicate identity, experience, and literacy.

Please follow the instructions carefully and bring your completed work with you on the **first day of class**. This assignment will serve as the foundation for our early semester writing and discussion.

Part 1: What is Narrative Style?

Required Reading:

Selections from the *New York Times Personal Narrative Short Story Contest* (Section 1 of PDF)

Your Task:

1. **Read the assigned personal narrative examples.**
2. As you read, use **three different colors of highlighter** to:
 - **Color 1:** Highlight any **figurative language** (similes, metaphors, personification, etc.).
 - **Color 2:** Highlight any **descriptive details** that help you visualize the **author, setting, subject, or events**.
 - **Color 3:** Highlight your **favorite sentence(s)** from each piece.
3. Be prepared to share and explain your choices in class discussion.

Part 2: What is Personal Literacy?

Required Reading:

Methods of Teaching Early Literacy: Chapter 1. What is Literacy? Multiple Perspectives on Literacy by Constance Beecher (Section 2 of PDF)

Your Task:

1. Carefully read the full chapter.
2. Answer the **26 comprehension and reflection questions** provided (attached to this sheet).
 - You may write or type your responses. Be thorough and thoughtful, your answers will be used for discussion and as part of the grading of this assignment.

Part 3: What is a Literacy Narrative?

Required Reading:

Selections of **personal literacy narratives** (Section 3 of PDF provided)

Your Task:

1. Read each personal literacy narrative carefully.
2. Apply the **same three-color highlighting system** from Part 1:
 - Figurative language
 - Descriptive visual details
 - Favorite sentence(s)
3. After reading and annotating each narrative, write a brief reflection (2-3 sentences) for **each author** answering:

"How does this author define or describe personal literacy in their story?"

You may write this directly below your annotations or on a separate sheet.

Final Checklist:

- Annotated *NYT personal narrative* examples (with three highlighter colors)
- 26 questions completed for Beecher reading (typed or handwritten)
- Annotated *literacy narratives* (with three highlighter colors)
- Reflections defining each author's view of personal literacy

Tips for Success:

- Take your time with each reading—this assignment is meant to introduce you to college-level reading and analysis.
- Don't worry about having "right" answers—your interpretations matter. Be ready to explain **why** you made the highlighting or reflection choices you did.
- Use post-it notes, margin notes, or a notebook to keep track of any big ideas or questions that come up.

Questions from *Methods of Teaching Early Literacy: Chapter 1. What is Literacy? Multiple Perspectives on Literacy* by Constance Beecher

Foundational Definitions & Importance

1. How does UNESCO define literacy?
2. What is the relationship between literacy and health outcomes in the U.S.?
3. According to NAEP (2022), what percentage of children from low-income families are not proficient readers by the end of third grade?
4. Why is reading proficiency by third grade considered a significant indicator?
5. What are the implications of low literacy rates on life expectancy?

Multiple Perspectives on Literacy

6. How does the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) define literacy?
7. What is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) definition of literacy?
8. What role does context play in how literacy is defined?
9. What are the key components of literacy?

New Literacies and Digital Media

10. What are “multiliteracies” as defined by the New London Group?
11. How does the NCTE (2019) describe the evolving nature of literacy?
12. What are the skills required to be a literate person in a global, digital society according to NCTE?
13. How is literacy defined by the ICT Literacy Panel (2002)?
14. What does Sternberg (2008) say about teaching beyond facts?

Digital Literacy Framework (ALA)

15. What are the five main areas of the ALA digital literacy framework?
16. What is the difference between traditional and digital methods of “finding” information?
17. Why is managing search results an important digital literacy skill?
18. What types of media must learners understand in the “understanding” category of digital literacy?
19. What challenges exist when evaluating digital information for credibility?

Communication in Digital Spaces

20. What are the two main categories of digital communication skills described in the ALA framework?

21. How does digital citizenship differ from traditional face-to-face etiquette?

22. Why is cultural awareness important in digital communication?

23. What challenges arise in collaborative digital environments?

Critical Literacy

24. What is the goal of critical literacy?

25. How can word choice in the media (e.g., “protesters” vs. “rioters”) reflect bias?

26. How do community-based literacies affect children’s access to books and learning environments?

Cracks in the Pavement

By Adam Bernard Sanders

It was my third time sitting there on the middle school auditorium stage. The upper chain of braces was caught in my lip again, and my palms were sweating, and my glasses were sliding down my nose. The pencil quivered in my hands. All I had to do was answer whatever question Mrs. Crisafulli, the history teacher, was going to say into that microphone. I had answered 26 before that, and 25 of those correctly. And I was sitting in my chair, and I was tapping my foot, and the old polo shirt I was wearing was starting to constrict and choke me. I pulled pointlessly at the collar, but the air was still on the outside, only looking at the inside of my throat. I was going to die.

I could taste my tongue in my mouth shriveling up. I could feel each hard-pumping heartbeat of blood travel out of my chest, up through my neck and down my arms and legs, warming my already-perspiring forehead but leaving my ghost-white fingers cold and blue. My breathing was quick. My eyes were glassy. I hadn't even heard the question yet.

Late-night readings of my parents' anatomy textbooks had told me that a sense of impending doom was the hallmark of pulmonary embolism, a fact that often bubbled to the surface of my mind in times like these. Almost by instinct, I bent my ring and little fingers down, holding them with my thumb as the two remaining digits whipped to my right wrist and tried to take my pulse. Mr. Mendoza had taught us this last year in gym class. But I wasn't in gym class that third period. I was just sitting on the metal folding chair, waiting for Mrs. Crisafulli to flip to the right page in her packet for the question.

Arabella had quizzed me in second-period French on the lakes of Latin America. Nicaragua. Atitlán. Yojoa. Lake Titicaca, that had made Raj, who sat in front of me, start giggling, and Shannon, who sat three desks up and one to the left, whip her head around and raise one fist to her lips, jab up her index finger, and silence us. Lakes were fed by rivers, the same rivers that lined the globe on my desk like the cracks in the pavement I liked to trace with my shoe on the walk home. Lake Nicaragua drains into the San Juan River, which snakes its way around the port of Granada to empty into the Caribbean Sea. I knew that.

At that moment I was only sure of those two things: the location of Lake Nicaragua and my own impending doom. And I was so busy counting my pulse and envisioning my demise that I missed Mrs. Crisafulli's utterance of the awaited question into her microphone, as I had each year in the past as one of the two people left onstage.

"... Coldest ... on earth," was all I heard. My pencil etched shaggy marks as my shaking hands attempted to write something in the 20 seconds remaining.

“Asia,” I scrawled.

So, for the third time in three years, I got it wrong, and for the third time, I didn’t die. I walked home that day, tracing the faults in the pavement and wondering what inside me was so cracked and broken. Something had to be fissured inside, like the ridges and rivers on my desk globe that I would throw out later that evening, but fish from the trash can when the sun rose the next day.

Pants on Fire

By Varya Kluev

I never kissed the boy I liked behind the schoolyard fence that one March morning. I never had dinner with Katy Perry or lived in Kiev for two months either, but I still told my entire fourth-grade class I did.

The words slipped through my teeth effortlessly. With one flick of my tongue, I was, for all anybody knew, twenty-third in line for the throne of Monaco. “Actually?” the girls on the swings beside me would ask, wide eyes blinking with a childlike naivety. I nodded as they whispered under their breath how incredible my fable was. So incredible they bought into it without a second thought.

I lied purely for the ecstasy of it. It was narcotic. With my fabrications, I became the captain of the ship, not just a wistful passer-by, breath fogging the pane of glass that stood between me and the girls I venerated. No longer could I only see, not touch; a lie was a bullet, and the barrier shattered. My mere presence demanded attention — after all, I was the one who got a valentine from Jason, not them.

This way I became more than just the tomboyish band geek who finished her multiplication tables embarrassingly fast. My name tumbled out of their mouths and I manifested in the center of their linoleum lunch table. I became, at least temporarily, the fulcrum their world revolved around.

Not only did I lie religiously and unabashedly — I was good at it. The tedium of my everyday life vanished; I instead marched through the gates of my alcazar, strode up the steps of my concepts, and resided in my throne of deceit. I believed if I took off my fraudulent robe, I would become plebeian. The same aristocracy that finally held me in high regard would boot me out of my palace. To strip naked and exclaim, “Here’s the real me, take a look!” would lead my new circle to redraw their lines — they would take back their compliments, sit at the table with six seats instead of eight, giggle in the back of the class when I asked a

question. I therefore adjusted my counterfeit diadem and continued to praise a Broadway show I had never seen.

Yet finally lounging in a lavender bedroom one long-sought-after day, after absently digesting chatter about shows I didn't watch and boys I didn't know, I started processing the floating conversations. One girl, who I had idolized for always having her heavy hair perfectly curled, casually shared how her parents couldn't afford to go on their yearly trip the coming summer. I drew in an expectant breath, but nobody scoffed. Nobody exchanged a secret criticizing glance. Instead, another girl took her spoon of vanilla frosting out of her cheek and with the same air of indifference revealed how her family wasn't traveling either. Promptly, my spun stories about swimming in crystal pools under Moroccan sun seemed to be in vain.

The following Monday, the girls on the bus to school still shared handfuls of chocolate-coated sunflower seeds with her. At lunch, she wasn't shunned, wasn't compelled to sit at a forgotten corner table. For that hour, instead of weaving incessant fantasies, I listened. I listened to the girls nonchalantly talk about yesterday's soccer game where they couldn't score a single goal. Listened about their parent's layoff they couldn't yet understand the significance of. I listened and I watched them listen, accepting and uncritical of one another no matter how relatively vapid their story. I then too began to talk, beginning by admitting that I wasn't actually related to Britney Spears.

Methods of Teaching Early Literacy

Chapter 1. What is Literacy? Multiple Perspectives on Literacy

Constance Beecher

Definitions of literacy from multiple perspectives:

Literacy is the cornerstone of education by any definition. Literacy refers to the ability of people to read and write (UNESCO, 2017). Reading and writing in turn are about encoding and decoding information between written symbols and sound (Resnick, 1983; Tyner, 1998). More specifically, literacy is the ability to understand the relationship between sounds and written words such that one may read, say, and understand them (UNESCO, 2004; Vlieghe, 2015). About 67 percent of children nationwide, and more than 80 percent of those from families with low incomes, are not proficient readers by the end of third grade (The Nation Assessment for Educational Progress; NAEP 2022). Children who are not reading on grade level by third grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of school than their peers who are reading on grade level. A large body of research clearly demonstrates that Americans with fewer years of education have poorer health and shorter lives. In fact, since the 1990s, life expectancy has fallen for people without a high school education. Completing more years of education creates better access to health insurance, medical care, and the resources for living a healthier life (Saha, 2006). Americans with less education face higher rates of illness, higher rates of disability, and shorter life expectancies. In the U.S., 25-year-olds without a high school diploma can expect to die 9 years sooner than college graduates. For example, by 2011, the prevalence of diabetes had reached 15% for adults without a high -school education, compared with 7% for college graduates (Zimmerman et al., 2018).

Thus, literacy is a goal of utmost importance to society. But what does it mean to be literate, or to be able to read? What counts as literacy?

Here are some definitions to consider:

- “Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.” – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

- “The ability to understand, use, and respond appropriately to written texts.” – National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), citing the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)
- “An individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.” – Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Section 203
- “The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.” – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), as cited by the American Library Association’s Committee on Literacy
- “Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” – Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu, & Dunleavy (2007). Literacy in Everyday Life: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NCES 2007-480)

New literacy practices as meaning-making practices:

In the 21st century, literacy increasingly includes understanding the roles of digital media and technology in literacy. In 1996, the New London Group coined the term “multiliteracies” or “new literacies” to describe a modern view of literacy that reflected multiple communication forms and contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity within a globalized society. They defined multiliteracies as a combination of multiple ways of communicating and making meaning, including such modes as visual, audio, spatial, behavioral, and gestural (New London Group, 1996). Most of the text’s students come across today are digital (like this textbook!). Instead of books and magazines, students are reading blogs and text messages.

The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE, 2019) makes it clear that our definitions of literacy must continue to evolve and grow ([NCTE definition of digital literacy](#)).

“Literacy has always been a collection of communicative and sociocultural practices shared among communities. As society and technology change, so does literacy. The world demands that a literate person possess and intentionally apply a wide range of skills, competencies, and

dispositions. These literacies are interconnected, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with histories, narratives, life possibilities, and social trajectories of all individuals and groups. Active, successful participants in a global society must be able to:

- participate effectively and critically in a networked world.
- explore and engage critically and thoughtfully across a wide variety of inclusive texts and tools/modalities.
- consume, curate, and create actively across contexts.
- advocate for equitable access to and accessibility of texts, tools, and information.
- build and sustain intentional global and cross-cultural connections and relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought.
- promote culturally sustaining communication and recognize the bias and privilege present in the interactions.
- examine the rights, responsibilities, and ethical implications of the use and creation of information.
- determine how and to what extent texts and tools amplify one's own and others' narratives as well as counterproductive narratives.
- recognize and honor the multilingual literacy identities and culture experiences individuals bring to learning environments, and provide opportunities to promote, amplify, and encourage these variations of language (e.g., dialect, jargon, and register)."

In other words, literacy is not just the ability to read and write. It is also being able to effectively use digital technology to find and analyze information. Students who are digitally literate know how to do research, find reliable sources, and make judgments about what they read online and in print. Next, we will learn more about digital literacy.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Socio-cultural context refers to the idea that language does not exist in isolation and is closely linked to the culture and society in which it is used and taught. Activities that can raise awareness of socio-cultural context include using stories from different countries, analyzing newspaper headlines, and looking at slang and idiomatic language.

Literacy in the digital age:

Literacy in any context is defined as the ability “ to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society” (ICT Literacy Panel, 2002). “ When we teach only for facts (specifics)... rather than for how to go beyond facts, we teach students how to get out of date ” (Sternberg, 2008). This statement is particularly significant when applied to technology literacy. The Iowa essential concepts for technology literacy reflect broad, universal processes and skills.

Unlike the previous generations, learning in the digital age is marked using rapidly evolving technology, a deluge of information, and a highly networked global community (Dede, 2010). In such a dynamic environment, learners need skills beyond the basic cognitive ability to consume and process language. To understand the characteristics of the digital age, and what this means for how people learn in this new and changing landscape, one may turn to the evolving discussion of literacy or, as one might say now, of digital literacy. The history of literacy contextualizes digital literacy and illustrates changes in literacy over time. By looking at literacy as an evolving historical phenomenon, we can glean the fundamental characteristics of the digital age. These characteristics in turn illuminate the skills needed to take advantage of digital environments. The following discussion is an overview of digital literacy, its essential components, and why it is important for learning in the digital age.

Literacy is often considered a skill or competency. Children and adults alike can spend years developing the appropriate skills for encoding and decoding information. Over the course of thousands of years, literacy has become much more common and widespread, with a global literacy rate ranging from 81% to 90% depending on age and gender (UNESCO, 2016). From a time when literacy was the domain of an elite few, it has grown to include huge swaths of the global population. There are several reasons for this, not the least of which are some of the advantages the written word can provide. Kaestle (1985) tells us that “literacy makes it possible to preserve information as a snapshot in time, allows for recording, tracking and remembering information, and sharing information more easily across distances among others” (p. 16). In short, literacy led “to the replacement of myth by history and the replacement of magic by skepticism and science.”

If literacy involves the skills of reading and writing, digital literacy requires the ability to extend those skills to effectively take advantage of the digital world (American Library Association [ALA], 2013). More general definitions express digital literacy as the ability to read and understand information from digital sources as well as to create information in various digital formats (Bawden, 2008; Gilster, 1997; Tyner, 1998; UNESCO, 2004). Developing digital skills allows digital learners to manage a vast array of rapidly changing information and is key to both learning and working in the evolving digital landscape (Dede, 2010; Koltay, 2011;

Mohammadyari & Singh, 2015). As such, it is important for people to develop certain competencies specifically for handling digital content.

ALA Digital Literacy Framework:

To fully understand the many digital literacies, we will look at the American Library Association (ALA) framework. The ALA framework is laid out in terms of basic functions with enough specificity to make it easy to understand and remember but broad enough to cover a wide range of skills. The ALA framework includes the following areas:

- finding,
- understanding,
- evaluating,
- creating, and
- communicating (American Library Association, 2013).

Finding:

Finding information in a digital environment represents a significant departure from the way human beings have searched for information for centuries. The learner must abandon older linear or sequential approaches to finding information such as reading a book, using a card catalog, index, or table of contents, and instead use more horizontal approaches like natural language searches, hypermedia text, keywords, search engines, online databases and so on (Dede, 2010; Eshet, 2002). The shift involves developing the ability to create meaningful search limits (SCONUL, 2016). Previously, finding the information would have meant simply looking up page numbers based on an index or sorting through a card catalog. Although finding information may depend to some degree on the search tool being used (library, internet search engine, online database, etc.) the search results also depend on how well a person is able to generate appropriate keywords and construct useful Boolean searches. Failure in these two areas could easily return too many results to be helpful, vague, or generic results, or potentially no useful results at all (Hangen, 2015).

Part of the challenge of finding information is the ability to manage the results. Because there is so much data, changing so quickly, in so many different formats, it can be challenging to organize and store them in such a way as to be useful. SCONUL (2016) talks about this as the ability to organize, store, manage, and cite digital resources, while the Educational Testing Service also specifically mentions the skills of accessing and managing information. Some ways to accomplish these tasks is using social bookmarking tools such as Diigo, clipping and

organizing software such as Evernote and OneNote, and bibliographic software. Many sites, such as YouTube, allow individuals with an account to bookmark videos, as well as create channels or collections of videos for specific topics or uses. Other websites have similar features.

Understanding:

Understanding in the context of digital literacy perhaps most closely resembles traditional literacy because it is the ability to read and interpret text (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2006). In the digital age, however, the ability to read and understand extends much further than text alone. For example, searches may return results with any combination of text, video, sound, and audio, as well as still and moving pictures. As the internet has evolved, a whole host of visual languages have also evolved, such as moving images, emoticons, icons, data visualizations, videos, and combinations of all the above. Lankshear & Knoble (2008) refer to these modes of communication as “post typographic textual practice.” Understanding the variety of modes of digital material may also be referred to as multimedia literacy (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2006), visual literacy (Tyner, 1998), or digital literacy (Buckingham, 2006).

Evaluating:

Evaluating digital media requires competencies ranging from assessing the importance of a piece of information to determining its accuracy and source. Evaluating information is not new to the digital age, but the nature of digital information can make it more difficult to understand who the source of information is and whether it can be trusted (Jenkins, 2018). When there are abundant and rapidly changing data across heavily populated networks, anyone with access can generate information online. This results in the learner needing to make decisions about its authenticity, trustworthiness, relevance, and significance. Learning evaluative digital skills means learning to ask questions about who is writing the information, why they are writing it, and who the intended audience is (Buckingham, 2006). Developing critical thinking skills is part of the literacy of evaluating and assessing the suitability for use of a specific piece of information (SCONUL, 2016).

Creating:

Creating in the digital world makes the production of knowledge and ideas in digital formats explicit. While writing is a critical component of traditional literacy, it is not the only creative tool in the digital toolbox. Other tools are available and include creative activities such as podcasting, making audio-visual presentations, building data visualizations, 3D printing, and writing blogs. Tools that haven't been thought of before are constantly appearing. In short, a digitally literate individual will want to be able to use all formats in which digital information may be conveyed in the creation of a product. A key component of creating with digital tools is

understanding what constitutes fair use and what is considered plagiarism. While this is not new to the digital age, it may be more challenging these days to find the line between copying and extending someone else's work.

In part, the reason for the increased difficulty in discerning between plagiarism and new work is the "cut and paste culture" of the Internet, referred to as "reproduction literacy" (Eshet 2002, p.4), or appropriation in Jenkins' *New Media Literacies* (Jenkins, 2018). The question is, what kind and how much change is required to avoid the accusation of plagiarism? This skill requires the ability to think critically, evaluate a work, and make appropriate decisions. There are tools and information to help understand and find those answers, such as the Creative Commons. Learning about such resources and how to use them is part of digital literacy.

Communicating:

Communicating is the final category of digital skills in the ALA digital framework. The capacity to connect with individuals all over the world creates unique opportunities for learning and sharing information, for which developing digital communication skills is vital. Some of the skills required for communicating in the digital environment include digital citizenship, collaboration, and cultural awareness. This is not to say that one does not need to develop communication skills outside of the digital environment, but that the skills required for digital communication go beyond what is required in a non-digital environment. Most of us are adept at personal, face-to-face communication, but digital communication needs the ability to engage in asynchronous environments such as email, online forums, blogs, social media, and learning platforms where what is written may not be deleted and may be misinterpreted. Add that to an environment where people number in the millions and the opportunities for misunderstanding and cultural miscues are likely.

The communication category of digital literacies covers an extensive array of skills above and beyond what one might need for face-to-face interactions. It is comprised of competencies around ethical and moral behavior, responsible communication for engagement in social and civic activities (Adam Becker et al., 2017), an awareness of audience, and an ability to evaluate the potential impact of one's online actions. It also includes skills for handling privacy and security in online environments. These activities fall into two main categories: digital citizenship and collaboration.

Digital citizenship refers to one's ability to interact effectively in the digital world. Part of this skill is good manners, often referred to as "netiquette." There is a level of context which is often missing in digital communication due to physical distance, lack of personal familiarity with the people online, and the sheer volume of the people who may encounter our words. People who know us well may understand exactly what we mean when we say something sarcastic or ironic,

but people online do not know us, and vocal and facial cues are missing in most digital communication, making it more likely we will be misunderstood. Furthermore, we are more likely to misunderstand or be misunderstood if we are unaware of cultural differences. So, digital citizenship includes an awareness of who we are, what we intend to say, and how it might be perceived by other people we do not know (Buckingham, 2006). It is also a process of learning to communicate clearly in ways that help others understand what we mean.

Another key digital skill is collaboration, and it is essential for effective participation in digital projects via the Internet. The Internet allows people to engage with others they may never see in person and work towards common goals, be they social, civic, or business oriented. Creating a community and working together requires a degree of trust and familiarity that can be difficult to build when there is physical distance between the participants. Greater effort must be made to be inclusive, and to overcome perceived or actual distance and disconnectedness. So, while the potential of digital technology for connecting people is impressive, it is not automatic or effortless, and it requires new skills.

Critical literacy:

Literacy scholars recognize that although literacy is a cognitive skill, it is also a set of practices that communities and people participate in. Next, we turn to another perspective on literacy – critical literacy. “Critical” here is not meant as having a negative point of view, but rather using an analytic lens that detects power, privilege, and representation to understand different ways of looking at texts. For example, when groups or individuals stage a protest, do the media refer to them as “protesters” or “rioters?” What is the reason for choosing the label they do, and what are the consequences?

Critical literacy does not have a set definition or typical history of use, but the following key tenets have been described in the literature, which will vary in their application based on the individual social context (Vasquez, 2019). Table 1 presents some key aspects of critical literacy, but this area of literacy research is growing and evolving rapidly, so this is not an exhaustive list.

An important component of critical literacy is the adoption of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. One definition comes from Dr. Django Paris (2012), who stated that Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) education recognizes that cultural differences (including racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, sexuality, and ability ones) should be treated as *assets* for teaching and learning. Culturally sustaining pedagogy requires teachers to support multilingualism and multiculturalism in their practice. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literary, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling.

Community-based literacies:

You may have noticed that communities are a big part of critical literacy – we understand that our environment and culture impact what we read and how we understand the world. Now think about the possible differences among three Iowa communities: a neighborhood in the middle of Des Moines, the rural community of New Hartford, and Coralville, a suburb of Iowa City:

You may not have thought about how living in a certain community might contribute to or take away from a child's ability to learn to read. Dr. Susan Neuman (2001) did. She and her team investigated the differences between two neighborhoods regarding how much access to books and other reading materials children in those neighborhoods had. One middle-to-upper class neighborhood in Philadelphia had large bookstores, toy stores with educational materials, and well-resourced libraries. The other, a low-income neighborhood, had no bookstores or toy stores. There was a library, but it had fewer resources and served a larger number of patrons. In fact, the team found that even the signs on the businesses were harder to read, and there was less environmental printed word. Their findings showed that **each** child in the middle-class neighborhood had **13** books on average, while in the lower-class neighborhood there was **one book per 300 children**.

Dr. Neuman and her team (2019) recently revisited this question. This time, they looked at low-income neighborhoods – those where 60% or more of the people are living in poverty . They compared these to borderline neighborhoods – those with 20-40% in poverty – in three cities, Washington, D.C., Detroit, and Los Angeles. Again, they found significantly fewer books in the very low-income areas. The chart represents the preschool books available for sale in each neighborhood. Note that in the lower-income neighborhood of Washington D.C., there were no books for young children to be found at all!

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Doing the Impossible

My sophomore year in the second semester, I turned in an essay thinking it was not the best thing I wrote, but certainly not bad. I do not think much about it until two weeks later when I see the grade. My eyes start to feel crusty from how long I had been staring in awe at the paper that reads 100%. After this event, my confidence and ego in writing have been inflated to an extreme, in which I decide to enroll in Dual Enrollment English, expecting a challenge and a much harder course than previous courses. This course would greatly exceed my expectation, yet I will prevail in this seemingly impossible task with all odds stacked against me.

I notice how everyone already has some idea as to what they are writing about; meanwhile, I am still processing that the prompt was said eight separate times in my face, and I still do not understand what to write about. I rack my mind for answers and start typing random words in no particular order. Every paragraph I write ends up either not following the prompt or seems to go nowhere. I lend my hand out to my teacher for help, but the words coming out of her mouth sound almost foreign to me. I know what she is telling me is crucial information, but I just cannot seem to listen properly; Moreover, my head goes numb when trying to explain why I cannot start the first paragraph of this essay. Finally, my ears catch English from my teacher's mouth in the form of useful information. "Maybe your literacy is high when talking in concrete terms, but lower when the topic is more abstract like this essay."

Finally, I get a glimpse at what I need to do. I slave away at this paper, reserving office hours for my teacher, getting peer reviews, and smashing my face into doors for hours trying desperately to get a single thought and hopefully a sentence out of my mind and onto the paper.

After hours of grueling work, I have an essay. I was not particularly proud of what I created, but at the very least, I would be able to survive another peer review. However, this would not matter, as the next day would reveal that I have been writing something that only vaguely connects to the prompt, causing me to start completely over. A great sadness resided in my soul as the fact that several hours of my life was all for naught. My life felt like how an A minor chord being played every eighth of a second sounds.

Eventually, I snap out of my self-imposed limbo and begin to panic as the bone breaking reality of the current situation pierces my debilitated morale. This essay is due in nearly twenty-four hours, and my slate has been cleaned against my will once more. Thousands of voices outcry in my mind, forlorn screeches of agony begging and pleading to just be done so that I may rest. I try not to dwell on my setback, and desperately start trying to figure out how to finish this.

I interrogate my teacher for advice; anxiously waiting for her reply, she notices my state of trepidation and whips some sense into me. My world abruptly stops spinning, I am brought to my senses finally. Like how Jesus calms the waters, her advice gives my mind tranquility for the first time in two weeks. At last, I understand the prompt, I can write with confidence and integrity. What was once a jumbled mess of thoughts is now coming together and appearing on the screen before me. I feel the adrenaline coursing through my veins, mind, and hands fueling me with inspiration and determination to finish this essay.

My final conference with my teacher only strengthened my will to obliterate the word count. Every bit of turmoil, every sleepless night, every moment I spent torturing my brain to think of an original thought will not be in vain, for now I see the story splayed in front of me. The reason why I had to fight tooth and nail for two weeks was because I was trying to write a story that did not exist, for it had not happened yet. The story was the war with myself all along,

I was writing this tale as soon as the prompt was hammered into my desk, without me even knowing it. I only realize now that this impossible task was made possible because I had to bring into existence the concept of it being possible.

And so, even with every probability stacked against me I have prevailed. I do not know for sure what my grade will be, but I do know one thing for certain. I have successfully reached the word count and turned it in. I can rest easy now; after so long, I can close my blood shot eyes, stretch my fish hooked back, and put my mind at ease knowing for certain that tomorrow I need worry no longer.

The Long Road to Literacy

I open the first crinkled, cracked page of the book my older sister gave me, and begin my long road to literacy. Even though I had previously complained to my sister that I did not like reading, I opened the book she set in my lap anyway. She explained to me that the main character, a demigod named Percy Jackson, had the same learning deficit that I had: ADHD. This new word meant nothing to me at the time. I had no idea what it meant, but I was aware that I was different than the kids around me. When it was time to read in class, my classmates took ten minutes to read a chapter while it took me thirty minutes. When it was time to write an essay, my friends could write it in two days, while it took me a full week. The idea that I was just as capable and smart as those around me slowly began to slip away.

My sister was always the greatest writer in her class. Song lyrics and poetry were written on anything and everything. I always wanted to be just like her; she never struggled like I did. One day she brought home a book, with every page highlighted and annotated, that was called *Percy Jackson*. She talked about it all day and all night. Once she finished the series, she gave me the books and told me she really wanted me to read them. Although I was initially reluctant to read it, I set forth and tried my hardest to stay on task. For the first time in my life, I could not set a book down. After the first book was read, I eagerly started the next one, just as highlighted and annotated as the one before. Although the stories were entertaining and the settings were interesting, there was one detail that would change how I am as a writer and reader: the main character had ADHD and dyslexia.

Percy Jackson said that it was more difficult for him to sit still and focus on an assignment than it was for him to fight monsters and gods. As I read the books, I realized that this thing called ADHD wasn't something only I struggled with. This heroic character was able

to save the world and fight infamous Greek mythological creatures while also being different than the kids around him. Although he struggled in a classroom, it did not change how capable he viewed himself to be. Just like Percy Jackson conquered the mad titan Kronos, I could write an essay that I am proud of. If he could make it through Tartarus and back, I could read as many books as the kids around me.

The more I understood about myself, the more I realized that there were other people in my grade who shared the same difficulties; for the first time in my life, I didn't feel alone in this. Reading Percy Jackson helped me connect with those around me who struggled the same way I did. Watching people with ADHD succeed in literacy inspired me to continue in my efforts in literature, and eventually English was my favorite subject. The opportunity to be friends with other people, as well as the chance to be mentored by people who had ADHD facilitated the growth in my confidence in writing, and suddenly I could not stop. Now, I am able to help others understand and conquer literacy the same way my sister helped me.

To watch a character be a hero and do great things despite the learning deficits he had was critical to my literacy journey. The characters of Percy Jackson learned like I did and had the same difficulties I went through every day. To read about someone who was like me shaped how I saw literacy. I went on to submit poetry into nationwide contests and read hundreds more books. English is now one of my best subjects, and instead of stressing over not being capable of sitting down to write a paragraph, I look forward to it.

ADHD is not a disadvantage, but a difference. It took me a while to learn that, and I am honestly still working on embracing the notion. Just because I had ADHD did not mean I would not evolve in my literacy journey. Now I welcome the difference and choose to not let it hinder my academics. Essays will continue to be written and books will still be read, and I don't

have to worry about not being “good enough” to do it. Although it was a long journey to get to where I am, it is a journey that I have grown to love. Now, reading and writing is something that I share with my sister, and if it weren’t for her and a young protagonist named Percy Jackson, I would not have fallen in love with it in the first place.

A Library of Friendship

Stories have a profound way of connecting people across time and space. Books carry the ideas of their authors to countless readers, no matter who they are. Growing up, life always seemed confusing, but books never were. If I didn't understand something I'd read, I knew I could go learn more about it, and the book would wait for me to return later. I've always loved to read for these reasons, and it's impacted my personal literacy as I can now understand literature quite well, and I'm learning more about it every day.

The first books I can remember reading were always flat, simple, children's books. They were helpful when I was starting out, but I never really connected with them. I didn't understand why I had to read them; all I knew was if I didn't read the books assigned, I'd have my classroom clip moved down. Considering that I especially valued my teacher's opinion of me in elementary school, getting my clip moved was a dreaded punishment. So, when it was story time, I picked a book and read, no matter how dull it seemed.

But one day, I was sitting alone and found myself reaching for yet another thin, colorful, children's book on the wall to find that it was much longer and wordier than the others. It was called *The Story of Holly and Ivy*, and although it was different than the books I was used to, the pictures were lovely, so I continued reading. I soon found myself engrossed in a Christmas story that I had the inexplicable desire to finish. It took a long while, considering that I had to frequently ask what certain words meant, but a wonderful thing had happened: I was invested in a story and genuinely cared for its characters. For the first time, I wasn't reading by obligation, but by choice. The book was about a poor girl and a porcelain doll, both of whom felt unwanted. Christmas came for these characters, and the girl received no gifts, and the doll gained no owner.

But at the last moment, fate brought these two together, and they were both overjoyed to have found a friend.

By the end of the year, I had finished the story, and felt like I too had made a new friend. I was sad to put the book back on the shelf, but the hope that came from reading such a good tale was enough to cheer me up. On nearly the last day of third grade, I was ready to leave for break, but my teacher stopped me and asked if I'd like to take home a book from her room. That book was *The Story of Holly and Ivy*, and I couldn't believe she'd be willing to give it to me. She said that since I liked it so much, I could keep it. I was beaming with joy and happily brought it home; I still have that book today.

My love of reading might've begun there, but it certainly didn't end with that one Christmas story. I read numerous books during free time in the elementary library and felt so accomplished when I finished one story or another. But although I enjoyed books so much in elementary school, my love of reading eventually hit a slump. Around early middle school, I just didn't feel the thrill of books anymore. It was mostly because I hadn't found the right novels, but once I discovered series like *Percy Jackson* and *Kingdom Keepers*, that familiar joy had returned. And the more I read, the more efficient I became. I went from spending days reading twenty-page children's books to finishing whole novels in an afternoon.

Part of what made me enjoy reading so much was that I received approval from other people, like my parents or teachers, when I finished an especially difficult narrative. But the main reason I kept reading was that the books felt like my friends. It took me a while to read that first Christmas story, and after putting myself into the shoes of Holly and Ivy for so long, I felt like I had gone through their trials with them and come through triumphant.

I struggled as I grew older with making friends that I could really be myself around. It seemed like everyone around me knew what they were doing, and I was the only one confused. So, I didn't confide in the people around me to develop deeper friendships. With books, however, I didn't have to be someone who had it all together; I could just sink into the story and hear about other people's lives.

Gradually, I started to realize that the friendships I really, desperately, wanted weren't in those books; they were in the real world. So, I decided to take the lessons of courage and love that I'd learned from all those stories and put them into practice. Through reading about the ideas of those who came before, I learned that I wasn't alone. Writers and poets had questions just like me, and if we were so similar, maybe the people around me were too. So, I started making genuine friendships, and I'd read enough stories to know that having reliable people in our lives is always worth the stress of vulnerability.

As I go through life, books have continued to teach me. They improve my literacy daily by expanding my vocabulary and teaching me more about the English language. But above that, they show me what it means to be a good friend, and how to face life with courage, grace, and compassion. Stories let us know that we aren't alone, and that other people have walked through what we're going through. But I'd never have known this if it weren't for that first book that showed me the wonders of reading and the connection between people that literature can bring.