

TRULY ANTIRACIST?: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTS OF AN ANTI-RACIST  
APPROACH TO *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

*To Kill a Mockingbird (TKAM)* is a text that is widely read in the high school canon. Despite its problematic images of Black characters, studies have indicated that when taught using culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), reading *TKAM* can help students build cultural competence and critical consciousness. However, these studies do not include the voices of Black students. This study tried to fill this void by conducting a case study on three classes of honors Freshman in a micropolitan area who are reading *TKAM* through a CRP lens. Through classroom observations, interviews and writing samples this study looked to answer the following questions: What are the perceptions, experiences and feelings of Black high school students who read *TKAM* in a micro-urban school district? How and in what ways does using *TKAM* affect Black students' sense of self? How do the experiences of Black students reading *TKAM* compare to those of White students? Once data was collected it was coded for themes relating to student emotion, cultural competence, critical consciousness, peer relationships, and engagement. Examples of common themes were chosen and then evaluated using critical discourse analysis. Ultimately, this study found that while there are benefits and disadvantages to reading *TKAM* in this way, many of the benefits applied exclusively to White students. Additionally, while Black students were able to have a space to use their voice and gain community, it was otherwise a very negative experience. Recommendations include use of a different text and better teacher training.

*Keywords: To Kill a Mockingbird, Canon, Critical Consciousness, Cultural Competence, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Critical Discourse Analysis*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There are two common complaints I hear from my students when I assign a new text. These complaints have been the same for my entire seven year career as an English teacher. One echoes Scott, Wright and Ford's (2018) response of a Black student confronted with the typical canon of high school literature: "How come there ain't no Black boys in these books?" (p. 357). The second complaint is that the only images of Black people students are presented with in literature are those of Black people as slaves, in jail, in trouble with the law, powerless or portrayed as unintelligent. While it is important to introduce students to characters that are "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" (Bishop, 1990, p. ix) to expose them to both characters who look like them and those who do not, a problem emerges when these images are "distorted, negative or laughable" (Bishop, 1990, p. ix). This contributes to these students learning a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in a society of which they are a part (Bishop, 1990; Bishop, 1994a; Bishop, 2016; Rose, 2021). This is especially true in texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird (TKAM)*.

Of the seven years that I have been teaching, I have taught *TKAM* for six of them in my honors freshman English course. Before me, the book was taught in that class for as long as anyone left in the school or community could remember. There are several teachers in the department with photos of Atticus Finch poised as superman hanging on their walls or who argue Scout is their favorite character in literature. With *TKAMs* focus on the harm of racism, not just the teachers at my school, but people all over the world have held it as a great work of literature. In fact, in 2022, it was voted the best book in the last 125 years by *The New York Times* (New York Times, 2021). Despite that, and my attempts to teach the book using Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, the Black students in my classes always seem silent or uncomfortable and later report

how much they hated reading the book. In fact, as our school has made a greater effort to increase students of color in our honors courses, the enthusiasm for the book seems to increasingly dwindle. Curious, I started asking my Black students why they hated the book and they reported the following: they were “tired of seeing Black people as the victim and White people as the hero,” “having to read or hear the N-word over and over again frustrated them,” and that “the story left them feeling hopeless” I began to wonder, how beneficial is this storyline for our kids after all? Is the use of *TKAM* culturally relevant?

While some scholars (Moore, 2018; Barlow, 2009; Malcuso, 2017; Saney, 2003) argue the harmful effects of these storylines, some researchers have explored the teaching of *TKAM* (and similar texts) as a way to combat racism through a social justice lens, there are no direct interviews or quotes from students of color (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Dyches, 2018; Malcuso, 2017). All of these studies were conducted in schools where both the researchers and students being studied were White and therefore do not acknowledge the effect of reading these texts on students of color. In turn, these gaps in the research inspired this study’s research questions:

1. What are the perceptions, experiences and feelings of Black high school students who read *TKAM* in a micro-urban school district?
2. How and in what ways does using *TKAM* affect Black students’ sense of self?
  - a. How do the experiences of Black students reading *TKAM* compare to those of White students?

In order to grasp a deeper understanding of the missing voices of Black students are placed at the center. This exploratory study will use interviews, observations and writing samples of both Black students and other students who are being taught *TKAM* through a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy lens (CRP). CRP is an approach to pedagogy popularized by Gloria

Ladson-Billings that integrates Critical Race Theory with education. It focuses on approaching curriculum through a social justice lens in order to help all students experience academic success, develop or maintain cultural competence in all students and develop critical consciousness in students (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p.160). This research will follow students in three classes in a micro-urban school for the duration of their *TKAM* unit. Using this data, I will not only listen to Black students, but will examine the benefits and disadvantages of teaching *TKAM* through a CRP lens to all students.

### **Background on To Kill a Mockingbird**

*To Kill a Mockingbird (TKAM)* by Harper Lee started as a controversial text and today the same remains true. Told by Scout, a young White girl growing up in small-town Alabama in the Black man, Tom Robinson, against a rape accusation made by a White woman in their community. When it was published, the novel was lauded as ahead of its time, and even in recent years Oprah Winfrey called it “America’s Novel” (Mcdonagh, 2015). In fact, it remains one of the most widely read novels in the US high school canon (Dyches, 2018; Applebee, 1992). Because of the way curriculum is chosen, a high school canon, or group of books that is commonly read in schools, has formed and is one of the ways that books are chosen.

However this applause is not without contention. A school in Biloxi, Mississippi in 2017 pulled the novel from their required reading list because “there is some language in the book that makes people uncomfortable” (Schaub, 2017). This likely refers to the fact the book uses the N-word over 50 times. Moore (2018) argues that, whether intended to cause harm or not, the N-word comes with negative connotations and images that reinforce the social mentality that students and people of color are less than their White peers. Therefore, even if we don’t say the word aloud, having it in our classrooms as part of our curriculum helps perpetuate these images

(p.199). As a teacher who teaches primarily students of color, and who has guided students of color through texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird* that use the N-word, I can attest from experience to the lack of comfort I see among my students of color when the word comes up. Like the college professors taught us, we also start with explaining why the N-word exists in these texts still today, the historical background of the word, and we make a class decision about how we will approach the word in class while having discussions or reading aloud. No matter how much front loading we do, however, a division line is always drawn between the Black and White students. Black students become required to be a voice for their entire race, while White students can comfortably defer. Once again, the pain that comes with our country's dark history and current reality is placed upon the Black students in the room. This is not only a problem with *To Kill A Mockingbird*, though, it also appears as an issue in another high school canon member *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Barlow (2009) states “The thing that makes teachers and students so uncomfortable with Huck, the thing that causes so many complaints, of course, is the repeated use of the word “N\*\*\*\*\*” . Eddie Moore, in his book *The Guide for White Women who Teach Black Boys* argues that “We need more courageous conversations and critical analysis related to how the N!gga(er) word has influenced and continues to influence generations of young people across all race, gender, social class and Moore.” (Moore, 2018, p.199) Whether intended to cause harm or not, the N word comes with negative connotations and images that reinforce the social mentality that students and people of color are less than. Therefore, even if we don’t say the word aloud, having it in our classrooms as part of our curriculum helps perpetuate these images (Moore 2018).

The N-word is not the only negative portrayal of Black people in these texts, however. The portrayal of Black people in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and other texts like it is limited to that of

servants, victims, poor people, and flat characters whose personalities are defined by their race and their race alone. Bloom (2010) describes this by saying “The most egregious characteristic of the novel (*TKAM*) is the denial of the historical agency of Black people. They are robbed of their role as subjects of history, reduced to mere objects who are passive hapless victims, mere spectators and bystanders in the struggle against their own oppression and exploitation” (p.61). The most prevalent example of this exists in the form of Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping a White woman and cannot defend himself. We hear little from Tom, but the little we hear is when he is on the witness stand fighting for his life. He is portrayed as an uneducated worker who is crippled, and therefore could not have attacked Mayella. We very briefly see his wife, but the humanity of the family who are the actual victims of this novel is minimal. The most round portrayal of a Black character in the novel is in the portrayal of the Finch's servant, Calpurnia. Calpurnia allows the reader glimpses into her life when they visit her Black church, but we know little of her family or her history. Additionally, she is likewise helpless and agentless against racism.

Additionally, the book includes themes of racism and injustice against one of its two main Black characters: Tom Robinson. Representative of the Uncle Tom caricature in more than name, Tom is happily submissive, docile and non-threatening (even having a physical disability). He is accused of rape by a White woman, and despite his obvious innocence, determined as guilty and eventually killed. The other main Black character, Calpurnia, is a servant to the main character's family and aligns closely with the Mammy caricature due to her loyal domestic servitude, love of her White family, and maternal nature. While her characterization is more round, she still exists almost exclusively in relation to the White characters. Saney (2003) describes this by saying “(t)he most egregious characteristic of the novel (*TKAM*) is the denial of

the historical agency of Black people. They are robbed of their role as subjects of history, reduced to mere objects who are passive hapless victims, mere spectators and bystanders in the struggle against their own oppression and exploitation” (p.102).

This portrayal of Black characters also bothered the school district board in Peel, Ontario, CA who sent a memo asking who the text serves. They argued “the use of racist texts as entry points into discussions about racism is hardly for the benefit of Black students who already experience racism” (Domoise, 2018). In reporting on these cases, various reporters of color remind us of other problematic elements of the novel: It was written by a White woman who had never experienced racism; the hero of the story, Atticus, is a White male that is not only portrayed as a White savior, but also as a victim for having to deal with the negative response from his town for representing a Black man; Lastly, all of the portrayals of people of color in this novel reinforce the message of a racial hierarchy where White people will always be at the top. (Domoise, 2018, Jalaluddin, 2018, Randall, 2017). Atticus is not only the main character of the text, but he is the only character who is viewed as being able to “fix” the racism that is happening in the world. In fact, throughout the text he is viewed as a hero who defeats the mad dog, defends the Radley family, protects Tom in jail, and of course, represents Tom in court. He continues to be portrayed as a hero when he is given a standing ovation by the Black members of the courtroom, is brought gifts as thank you’s by the Black community and is portrayed as the victim because of the negative response of the White community. “In considering Atticus TKAM, it seems, marginalizes its Black characters to validate and tell a story by, about, and for its White protagonists (and intended readers)” (Macaluso, 2017, p.280). Black readers continue to see themselves as less than and undefendable while White readers can have a “feel good” story that allows them to dissociate themselves from racism or being racist and instead condemn

it without critical analysis by associating with any of the books main White characters (Jem, Scout, Dill or Atticus). For White students there are a variety of great role models, while for Black students there are none. Told from the perspective of a White girl in the south, by a White woman as the story of her White family, this story that is seen by many as combating racism centers the White experience.

It is not only the text itself however, but the arguments around the text that marginalizes Black voices. Saney (2003) tells the story of a Nova Scotia community that tried to ban TKAM for racist themes, however they had a lot of push back and were unable to do so. Led by an African-Nova Scotian ad hoc advisory committee, which is formed by parents and educators, a group of parents presented a report of community concerns. It stated that in *To Kill a Mockingbird* “students are presented with language that portrays all the stereotypical generalizations that demean them as people... The terminology in this novel subjects students to humiliating experiences that rob them of their self respect and respect of their peers.” (Saney, 2003, p.100). In response to this, the media and others who opposed the decision of the district to follow this group's recommendation and remove the book from the curriculum quickly started to refer to the removal as oppression or “book banning.” Eventually, the school district reversed its decision. “The arguments advanced by the Black community were consistently presented as non-serious, even risible, light so as to give the impression that the Black educators and parents are ignorant of the merits of literature.” (Saney, 2003, p.101) Instead of valuing the opinions and feedback of the people who have the negative experience with the texts, White voices were again the dominant and valued narrative (in turn devaluing Black voices).

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is not the only problematic book, as there are several high school canon texts with similar racialized issues including *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Adventures of*

*Huckleberry Finn*. When teachers use *TKAM* and other racially questionable canonical texts like *TKAM* that portray Black characters at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, they construct a racial narrative that perpetuates racism not only in the school building but also in society. *TKAM* is not an outlier; it is just one example of the White, Eurocentric perspective in high school canonical texts.

### **The High School Canon and *To Kill a Mockingbird***

From district to district and state to state different curricular materials, books, and teaching systems are used in English classrooms. The books taught in American high schools are often determined by state standards, what has been taught historically in a district and by the high school canon. For the purposes of this paper, I refer to the high school canon as the groups of books that are most commonly taught in American middle and high schools as well as have been commonly taught for some time. These texts are commonly referenced in the Common Core State Standards as suggested texts, pre-service teachers are taught how to teach them in schools and have become part of the canon because they have been taught over and over again in schools. Some examples of these books, which most people can say they were assigned in school, are *Romeo and Juliet*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Catcher and the Rye*, *Animal Farm* and *Night*. While individual states have taken the lead on developing the standards they will use, “45 states and the District of Columbia have opted to use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021). This is truly the first widespread and federally recognized set of curriculum standards as curriculum is generally a states rights issue (Bidwell, 2014). Therefore, while they are not federally mandated and they differ between each state, these standards are recognized as the way to build curriculum. However, “the standards are not curricula and do not mandate the use of any particular curriculum” but rather

“help inform decisions about purchasing materials” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021). Currently, in a state that has adopted CCSS like the one chosen for this study, curriculum is generally created within a school district by using the CCSS standards and recommendations.

Curriculum is often also based on what has been taught in the district previously, meaning curriculum does not change frequently. Depending on the district, stakeholders to create curriculum may include teachers, administrators, students, community members and district curriculum directors. The process of building a curriculum is long, grueling and expensive. Given the number of people involved, cost and other factors, changing an English curriculum is expensive. Curriculum also often remains the same because most high schools have many copies of the book and it is expensive to buy new materials, changing books often causes turmoil in the community (especially when getting rid of classics), and teachers become specialists of the books they teach (Jalaluddin, 2018; Applebee, 1992; Dyches, 2018). They often do not want to teach something they have never taught before and it is certainly less daunting to read something they read in high school.

To examine the canon, Applebee (1992) analyzed books most read in public high schools, Catholic schools and independent schools and found that the curriculum "remains relatively traditional in its emphasis" (p.30). He found that in all three contexts, the most common ten books were the same and written by 81% male, 98% White, and 99% Western authors (p.27-28). He also suggests this may be due to these titles being included in popular anthologies (p.29). Applebee explains that "as long as these texts remain unchanged, ‘canonicity’ is likely to elude non-White authors and women" (p.32). Dyches (2018) agrees that the forming of a high school canon that privileges White students has allowed them intellectual property over the curriculum; a right Black and Brown students are denied (p.540). White students and teachers are granted the

privilege of seeming images that uplift characters who look like them or are portrayed as heroes while people of color are only represented in these texts as helpless, stereotypical, or in a negative light.

No matter how a district picks its texts, which is often a combination between CCSS, historical choices and the canon, *TKAM* becomes a common choice. In the Common Core State Standards Appendix for Teaching English Language Arts, *TKAM* is listed as one of 16 “text exemplars” for stories 9th and 10th graders should read and has been on this list since it came out in 2010 (CCSS, 2010, p.7). In Applebee’s (1992) study of High School Canon *TKAM* appeared lists 5th, 5th and 6th respectively for public schools, Catholic schools and independent schools. as most read. In fact, according to a Fordham study, *TKAM* was read in more 9th and 10th grade classrooms than any other book (Shanahan & Duffet, 2013, p.35). The *National Council of Teachers of Education* is also a guiding force for teachers of English and includes *TKAM* in their high school literature series which includes detailed lesson plans for teachers to include the text easily in their classroom (Gibbons, 2009).

In regards to teacher knowledge of the book and historic popularity, the book has sold 40 million copies and won a Pulitzer Prize since its publishing in 1960 (History Editors, 2019). Being so widely read likely contributes to its renown in the general public: it was voted by *The New York Times* readers as “The best book of the last 125 years” in 2022 and in 2018 was crowned “The Great American Read” by PBS watchers. *TKAM* is a text that is not only commonly taught in high schools, but is representative of many of the books in the high school canon given that it is written by a White Western author. Notably, it is one of the few books in the High School Canon that is written by a woman.

## Significance of the Study

As stated above, *TKAM* is read widely across America's high schools. Students of all races interact with this book and many educators see it as a way to interject social justice and race conversations into the curriculum. These studies, which can be used to uphold the belief that reading *TKAM* is benefitting students, only address the voices of White students and teachers. This leaves Black students voiceless. If this study, which will examine that missing demographic's voices, finds that teaching *TKAM* causes negative emotions or harm to Black students, it will call for a change to be made within the popular curriculum to include books other than *TKAM* that will benefit all students and truly exemplify a CRP approach. This study will amplify the voices of students of color to examine *TKAM*'s merit as a valuable CRP teaching tool. This research will also be generalizable to other similar high school canon texts. Given that *TKAM* is so similar to other high school canon texts that cover similar topics (like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), this research will also be able to be used to examine how useful these texts are when taught through a CRP lens.

## Paper Structure

In order to fully understand the structure and significance of the study, chapter two will begin with a review of the pertinent literature including Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and its roots. It will also explain how CRP is the most appropriate vehicle to explore this research topic. I will then overview the previous research that has highlighted the effects of high school canon texts taught through a CRP lens and how they relate to this study. Chapter three will outline the research designs and methods of this research including participants, location and data analysis procedures. Chapter four will present the research and include both a general overview of common themes found throughout the research as well as more detailed discourse

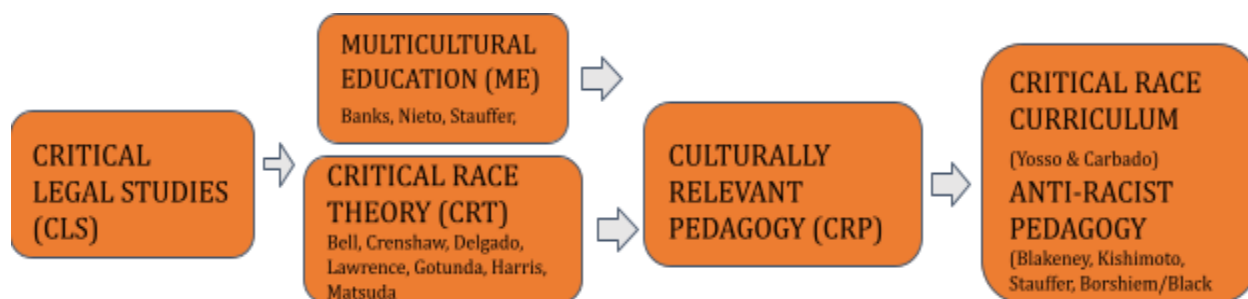
analyses of specific interviews, observations and writing samples to highlight those examples.

Finally, chapter five will summarize the research as a whole and explain, based on those conclusions, the implications of the study for future researchers and educators.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several approaches to curriculum reform through a culturally relevant perspective that generally reflect or build upon one another. Yosso (2002) defines curriculum not just by the books that are chosen but also by the structure of the class, how knowledge is presented and who has access to that knowledge. This study will use Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). In order to truly understand the background and meaning of this approach it is necessary to investigate and understand all of the movements it was built upon. This includes Dubois (1903) and Friere and Ramos(1970), Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Multicultural Education. After CRP more modern offshoots of CRP emerged like Critical Race Curriculum and Anti-Racist Pedagogy. This evolution, and each movement's major tenants is shown in Figure 1. I chose to use Culturally Relevant Pedagogy because of its depth of research, consistency in the research and overall similarities to these new approaches used in other studies relevant to this research.

**Figure 1: The Evolution of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**



After reviewing the relevant literature for this framework, I will outline the relationship that CRP has had with the canon. Then, I will highlight studies that have examined the effect of teaching the canon using CRP and similar offshoots. This will provide a backdrop for how these approaches have been previously viewed as well as point out what is missing from those studies.

## **The Roots of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Critical Legal Studies & Critical Race Theory**

### ***Critical Legal Studies***

To truly understand the background of CRP, one must first understand where it originally emerged from: Critical Legal Studies. The neo-Marxist Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement emerged during the 1970s and focused on the fact that the law is intertwined with social issues and inherently had social biases. Some of the areas in which they saw this issue were in private property, meritocracy, individual rights, equality of opportunity, and power and class (Flores, 2020; Dixon, 2020). Borrowing heavily from the Legal Realism of the 1920s and 1930s, Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars rebelled against accepted legal theories arguing that the law enforces a power dynamic that favors the historically privileged and disadvantages the historically underprivileged (Unger, 1983).

### ***Critical Race Theory***

In the 1980's CRT emerged through scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Neil Gotunda, Angela Harris, Patricia J. Williams and Mari Matsuda when they felt that Critical Legal Studies was not properly representing their needs (Crenshaw, 2011; Flores, 2020; Dixon, 2020). Some of the issues that CRT scholars had with the CLS movement were that it was “non-pragmatic, over idealized, inaccessible, and cynical” (Matsuda, 1987). They also argued that there was dissonance in combining anti-racism with an aspirational vision of the law (Matsuda, 1987). In particular, these problems with the CLS movement made it hard for scholars and people of color to have their voices heard in the CLS movement; this led CRT scholars to create a movement to support people who are both underprivileged by the law and of color. Critical Race Theory also has roots in early scholars like WEB Dubois (1903) including his rich articulation of “double consciousness” (Shuford, 2001).

Double consciousness explains the “two-ness of black Americans” as Black people always must see themselves as both American and Black, creating conflict as America does not accept Black people as part of its history or society. Dubois (1903) describes this as “carrying the hereditary weight of the attempt to obliterate the negro” (p. 12).

Critical Race Theory tenets include the idea that Racism is endemic to American life (often referred to as the permanence of racism), a critique of the idea of color blindness, the idea of Whiteness as property, interest convergence, the use of counter stories to empower underserved voices, intersectionality, racial realism, and a push for social change (Flores, 2020; Dixson, 2020; Crenshaw, 2011; Carbado, 2011). While many of these tenets are adopted in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, the two that are most relevant to this study are Whiteness as property and a push for social change. Carbado (2011) argues that CRT is fluid and constantly changing, molded by contemporary movements, and unbounded; this versatility allows its application to education.

### ***From CRT to CRP***

Critical Race Theory in education emerged in the mid 1990s, with pioneers of Ladson Billings & Tate (1995b), and eventually developed into Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. In fact, before the emergence of CRT in education, discussions centered on the significance of culture: culturally appropriate, culturally responsive, & culturally compatible (Flores, 2020). Carbado (2002) argues that Critical Race Theory can be used in education to show that “race is a social construct, racism has been central to American institutions (including schooling) and race and racism are produced by, and not merely reflected in, law and social policy, including educational policy” (p. 181).

In her study reflecting this concept, Ladson-Billings (1995) strove to determine why “so little good teaching seemed to be happening in the classrooms populated by African American students” (p. 159). She found the answer in linking school and culture, referencing studies in which researchers explain that African American students are unable to feel like themselves in school because of the gap of culture between home and school. To rephrase, much like CRT argued the law was not built to serve Black people, schools are not built to serve Black students. She provides a remedy in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) which includes three criteria:

- “Students must experience academic success
- Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence
- Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160).

Billings explains academic success as academics that do not just make students feel good, but as a technique that gets students to choose excellence by finding ways to value skills and abilities that students already have and valuing them academically. The takeaway of the second tenet, cultural competence, is that students' cultures should form a bridge between home and academics by bringing students' stories into the classroom. She suggests when teachers allow the narratives and stories of students' lives into the classroom, teachers can better understand them and adjust for their needs. This is also highly reflective of ensuring that curriculum does not fall into the trap of becoming the property of White students (Whiteness as property). The last tenet of CRP is highly reflective of CRT's call for a social justice approach by attempting to ensure that students engage with the world around them to call out inequities whenever possible.

### ***Whiteness as Property***

Harris (1993) defines the concept of Whiteness as property as “the legal legitimization of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a natural baseline, while masking the maintenance of White privilege and domination” (p. 1715). Carbado (2011) illustrates this concept by explaining the idea of an intergenerational transfer of racial compensation: the inheritance of advantages and disadvantages that people inherit based on race throughout the economic and social structures. To summarize, Carbado argues Whiteness in America is a normative baseline.

Ladson-Billings (1995) applies this concept to the field of education, and curriculum specially, arguing that given the Eurocentric nature of curriculum, educational spaces and the things taught in schools are the “intellectual property” of White students. This can be illustrated by the mostly White authors that are read in a typical school canon as well as in the history lessons taught from a European perspective, but also includes fewer course offerings, the level of curriculum offered, and properly certified and prepared teachers to teach that curriculum (Ladson-Billings et al, 1995b). In support of this point, Cutler (2018) reminds us that "Whiteness has consistently remained an invisible form of "normal" operating within the system of education in America" (42). The canon or typical high school literature contains a hidden curriculum that perpetuates Whiteness as “normal and neutral” as well as helps to “construct and reinforce Whiteness, even amid anti-racist intentions, in individual and day-to-day interactions” (Borsheim-Black, 2015).

Ladson-Billings (2015) continued this argument stating that curriculum has taken a back seat to research or research methods debates, and that reports on curriculum have focused on "raising standards" instead of the specifics of curriculum. She highlights new studies that

reference bringing in Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) literature, but argues this kind of curriculum has been pushed to the fringes and has created social backlash that pushed people “back to basics,” leaving students of color once again not able to claim the curriculum as property. Given that the basics of the American canon curriculum have been Eurocentric and White, moving to basics would be leaning into Eurocentrism. Even recently, many states have introduced bills pushing against the use of words like culturally responsive, CRT, or anti-racism in their curriculums (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). This leaves students of color unable to claim the curriculum as property. Ladson - Billings (1998) states “Critical Race Theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” by “stories of African Americans being muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power” (p. 18) In order to avoid a White-centered curriculum she suggests avoiding stereotyping, distortion and omitting images of people of color. For this study, this concept becomes important because *To Kill a Mockingbird* is part of that same White Eurocentric Canon/curriculum that is regularly taught in schools. By examining the effect this text has on students of color, we further the research on how White-centered curriculum affects this group as well.

### ***Social Change***

Finally, one element that CRP has adopted from CRT is a push for social change. Even the genesis of CRT was a social fight to encapsulate the racial experience when scholars felt that Critical Legal Studies and other critical lenses did not encapsulate the life of people of color (Crenshaw, 2011). Additionally, CRT was an offspring of Civil Rights Activism that fought for social change for people of color. When Derrick Bell left Harvard Law School and the school refused to replace his position of teaching CRT classes, students protested by creating alternative

classes on CRT. These classes illustrated CRT as a movement for social change. Because it is so based in current social movements, Critical Race Theory is not a fixed concept; as Crenshaw (2011) argues, CRT is ever-changing to meet the needs of society's current movements.

In their seminal piece "Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education," Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) apply the this tenet of CRT to the state of education stating "Critical Race Theory in education, like its antecedent in legal scholarship, is a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms" (p. 62) and that, using Marcus Garvey's words to make their point, "any program of emancipation needs to be built around the question of race first" (p. 55). In analyzing the permanence and prevalence of racism, they identify the lack of widespread educational success for students of color in public schools as well as the fact that our schools are more segregated than ever before. They continue on to argue that "the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system" (p. 18) as previously voices of color have been silenced.

Work in social justice is at the forefront of CRP by recognizing that students need to be able to "engage the world and others critically"(Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.162) in order to question the permanence of racism within their society and schools. This is a concept Ladson-Billings refers to as critical consciousness: being able to "critique cultural norms, values, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.162). Ladson-Billings provides the example of students in a school with little funding questioning why there is inequality in funding. She also suggests analyzing the information within old textbooks to examine bias and whose stories are being highlighted.

## **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy's Other Roots: Multicultural Education and Ethnic Studies**

While Critical Race Theory is a clear predecessor to CRP, CRP does not just have roots in legal scholarship. CRP is also an expansion of Multicultural Education, an approach to culturally conscious curriculum developed by Banks based off of Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

### ***Multicultural Education***

Nieto (2002) defines Multicultural Education (ME) as “a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students” that “rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in school” (p. 303). More deeply, “[a]s a foundational principle, ME challenges racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, cisgenderism and linguisticism as sources of systematic oppression in educational settings” (Stauffer, 2020). It accomplishes this by encompassing curriculum, instructional strategies, and pedagogy (Nieto, 2002; Banks, 1991; Banks, 1993b). Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed is also credited as a building block for ME (Nieto, 2002); ME is defined as “[p]edagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors and makes the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism” (Freire et al, 1970, p.54). While ME initially included racial, ethnic and social class groups, it has more recently expanded to include gender ability and sexual orientation (Banks, 1993b; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The dimensions of Multicultural Education are:

- (a) **Content integration**—the use of curriculum examples from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts in a subject.
- (b) **The knowledge construction process**—when a teacher helps a student understand how knowledge is created and influenced by multicultural identities.

(c) **Prejudice reduction**—strategies implemented to help students develop more democratic attitudes and values.

(d) **An equity pedagogy**—teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse multicultural backgrounds.

(e) **An empowering school culture and social structure**—created by the restructuring of the culture of the school so that students from diverse multicultural backgrounds will experience empowerment (Banks, 1993b).

The early beginnings of the ME movement were in ethnic studies with Willaims, Woodson, Wesley and Dubois who pushed for “knowledge about African Americans that could be integrated into school and college curriculum” (Banks, 1993b). This scholarship was mostly consumed by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). After the first wave of ethnic studies and before the second, the intergroup education movement emerged. This movement focused on using religious and racial groups to reduce prejudice and discrimination and “shared many of the goals of today’s [M]ulticultural [E]ducation movement because it shared many of the same goals and experienced many of the same problems” (Banks, 1993b). However, another important movement within intergroup education was inter-racial harmony and desegregation. This is highlighted by its emergence during the sharply segregated period before the Civil Rights Movement. Banks (1993b) explains that ethnic studies scholars were frustrated with the pace of desegregation: “when the civil rights movement began, the intergroup education movement had quietly died without a requiem” (p. 17) as the separatist ideology emerged. An important outcome of the Civil Rights Movement was that African Americans demanded that their histories, struggles, contributions, and possibilities be reflected in textbooks and in the school curriculum (Banks, 2013).

In the second wave of ethnic studies, educators focused on incorporating multicultural resources into the teacher education curriculum, then focused on responding to the unique needs of minority students. This expanded with the inclusion of other underserved groups like people with disabilities and women, and finally moved towards the development of theory, research and practice. While all these elements exist today, they are more prevalent in more recent waves (Banks, 1993b). More recently, Sleeter (1996) argued that ME should also include a social action component. Additionally, in Nieto's (2002) more recent work he revises what he calls the characteristics of ME to include antiracist education, critical pedagogy and education for social justice (305).

Blakeney (2005) argues that ME struggles to “make a provision for understanding the impact of race on opportunity as well as the cultural differences associated with upward mobility patterns by focusing on the constructs of these inequities” (p. 120). In general, multiculturalism sees society as democratic and egalitarian (James as cited in Brotman, 2003, p. 10). Therefore, while Nieto did adjust the tenets to include antiracism, social justice, and critical pedagogy, ME is still viewed by some scholars as having gaps.

### ***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy's critique of Multicultural Education***

CRP emerged from ME partially due to those gaps. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) contend that “current practical demonstrations of [M]ulticultural [E]ducation in schools often reduce it to trivial examples and artifacts of cultures” (p. 61). Additionally, they express concern that there is much debate over what exactly “multiculturalism” is and feels that it has been intermixed with the term diversity. They state “instead of creating radically new paradigms that ensure justice, multicultural reforms are routinely ‘sucked back into systems’ and the current multicultural paradigm is mired with liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current

order” (p. 62). In order to combat this, Ladson Billings et al (1995) introduces us to the concept of CRP which builds on Banks’s original ME model by adding a social justice component and ensuring that students from all backgrounds are set up for success no matter their background.

### **Modern Offshoots of CRP: Critical Race Curriculum and Anti-Racist Pedagogy**

After the emergence and popularity of CRP, several scholars have attempted to introduce their own social justice pedagogy. The most popular of these include Critical Race Curriculum and Anti-Racist Pedagogy. These are likely attempts to modernize or keep relevant the concepts surrounding CRP, but end up being highly repetitive and redundant of CRP itself. With that being said, many of the studies relevant to this research have used the terminology of CRC or Anti-Racist Pedagogy, therefore it is important to understand their background in order to understand why this study is related to those studies as well as why this study has chosen to use CRP as its major framework.

#### ***Critical Race Curriculum***

Both Carbado (2002) and Yosso (2002) refer to a culturally relevant approach as Critical Race Curriculum (CRC) and explain the concept is informed by the experiences of marginalized students. Additionally, they state that CRC challenges discourses that discount “pedagogies of the home.” It allows people of color to be central rather than marginal to schooling as well as challenging discourses that discount students of color as creators and holders of knowledge. Additionally they describe the importance of “building curriculum from knowledge that originates from the very people who have been pushed to ‘the bottom of society’s well’” (Bell, 1992; Yosso, 2002). Specifically Yosso (2002) argues that “most curriculums tend to distort, omit, and stereotype Chicana/a, Latina/o, African American, Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander and Native American experiences...which serve to maintain racial, gender and class

inequality.” This reflects Ladson-Billings’s (1995) second tenet of CRP in that they both suggest the injection of the home culture into the school. Billings was also inspired by the “faces at the bottom of the well” to introduce this approach, aligning with Yosso and Carbado’s message.

The need for this cultural approach to curriculum for Yosso and Carbado stems from the idea that traditional curriculum often serves upper/middle class White communities at the expense of communities of color (Yosso, 2002). This is problematic because educational institutions do not just teach students about race, they also racialize students as well as teach them how to be raced. These both “help to sustain the racial consciousness of colorblindness” (Carbado, 2002). If students learn how to be raced from the texts they read in school, books that paint People of Color in a negative light become even more problematic as the text that strives to question racial injustice serves as the model presented to students of color. These “model characters” are those of Black victims of injustice with little to no self-advocacy who are seen as flat characters lower on the racial hierarchy than their White counterparts. As Carbado states, from these texts students end up “learning very little about themselves and what they do learn often reflects stereotypical conceptions of their identities and cultures” (Carbado, 2002) which, again, maintains and perpetuates a White dominated narrative that silences underrepresented voices.

According to Yosso (2002) the main tenets of CRC include the potential to challenge subordination in the curriculum, provide students with the language needed to challenge problematic societal discourses, empower stakeholders to focus on strengths in communities of Color while combating negative messaging about those and other underrepresented communities, move towards a model of critical thinking about race, and work towards social justice in the classroom and the world (p. 98). Marie Micheal, the director of the Office of Equity and

Community Engagement at The Blake School in Minnesota argues that CRC stresses the importance of creating classrooms where children do not just learn about themselves, but also learn about those that look different than them to allow them to talk about both racism and White privilege in “intentional and explicit ways” (Micheal, 2018). In doing so, she suggests "teachers can begin to help students understand that race is a social construction that has been used to oppress some and to uplift others" (p. 363).

While these are great points, it is also very similar to, if not nearly the same as, CRP. Firstly, the founders of this method admit they are using “Critical Race Theory as a framework to analyze and challenge racism in curricular structures, processes, and discourses” (Yosso, 2002, p. 93). In fact, Ladson-Billings is referenced several times in Critical Race Curriculum’s defining work “Towards a Critical Race Curriculum” as a “critical race scholar in education” (Yosso, 2002, p. 96). The major differences between the two seem to stem from the following: CRC’s focus on race specifically and a focus on curriculum versus pedagogy. Generally, it is argued that curriculum is what you teach and pedagogy is how you teach it. However, in this case, Ladson-Billings also introduces the concept of Culturally Relevant Literature (CRL) which this paper will discuss later. CRC, similarly, addresses “the hidden curriculum” that is “not merely the information included or excluded from a textbook or in a class discussion but includes the structure of the class” as well as “methods of presenting knowledge and who will have access to that knowledge” (Yosso, 2002, p.93). With that in mind, the difference between CRC and CRP is in name only. In regards to race versus culture, Ladson-Billings specifically references Critical Race Theory as a basis for her research in “Towards a Critical Race Curriculum” and “Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?”, emphasizing her focus on race. Additionally, culture becomes an umbrella for which different races would fall under.

Again, this makes the difference between these two approaches negligible. For this researcher, this means that the more seminal of the two is the better to use.

### ***Anti-Racist Pedagogy***

Much more recently Anti-Racist Pedagogy (AP) emerged as an approach to social justice pedagogy. “Anti-Racist Pedagogy was born of the meshing of Multicultural Education and Critical Race Pedagogy” and is “a tool for analysis which helps identify the...structure[s] that allow individuals to navigate between dominant society and daily life events” (Blakeney, 2005, p.121). Kishimoto (2018) explains that AP does not include just incorporating racial content into course, content, curriculum and discipline, but it also about how one teaches.

While Anti-Racist Pedagogy stems from Multicultural Education, Anti-Racist Pedagogy being informed by Critical Race Theory (and therefore Critical Race Pedagogy) allows a more “in-depth analysis of structural racism and social justice” so “in contrast to Multicultural Education that celebrates diversity, Anti-Racist Pedagogy attempts to teach about race and racism in a way that fosters critical analytical skills which reveal the power relationship behind racism and how race is institutionalized in U.S society to create and justify inequalities” (Kishimoto, 2018, p.541). Building upon Friere (1970) the goal is to transform the structure, not integrate the oppressed into the already oppressed system.

Stauffer (2020) argues that AP and Multicultural Education cannot begin and end with books that are multicultural, but instead confront the idea that “[s]ystematic racism pervades every part of US society, from the socio historical racist ideologies propagated in schools, curricula, and cultural messaging of the media, to the policies and practices of institutions, which reflect and sustain dominant cultural norms” (p. 596). To dismantle this system requires “multiple layers of transformative, rather than mitigative, action” (Stauffer, 2020, p. 596). In

order to practice AP, she argues that educators must routinely and intentionally take on resisting and pushing against racism or oppression. Additionally, anti-bias work is required in order to transform harmful, individual, internalized ideologies and work to dismantle structural inequities. The major goals of AP are: to acknowledge the importance of racial and cultural identities, to honor the voices and experiences of people of color, to teach through collaboration and dialogue, to examine power and oppression, to examine discrimination as systemic, to critique traditional schooling, and to advocate for social action (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Kishimoto, 2018; Blakeney, 2005).

Essentially, AP takes the thoughts and ideas central to critical theory and CRP and uses them to create a framework for implementation in schools. Two of the goals that AP stresses is the importance of faculties' critical reflection of their own identities as well as professional development that allows teachers to explore their own positionality and learn the basis of CRT (Blakeney, 2005; Kishimoto, 2018). The second important consideration that AP highlights is a challenge to Eurocentrism by including racial content into syllabi, course materials, course activities and curricula. Most importantly, “people of color should not be an additive or tokenized but be integrated throughout the curriculum” (Kishimoto, 2018, p.544). Additionally, people of Color should not be seen as victims but as people empowered and with agency, which means incorporating counter-narratives (Milner, 2007). This argues that it is not merely enough to show voices of Color; voices of Color must be amplified and empowered at the same rate as those who are White.

Much like CRC, AP highlights the same points as CRP in that it focuses on a social justice approach to curriculum and ensures that students hear from all different types of voices, referred to in CRP as gaining “cultural competence.” While AP may include a more explicit

outline for how to implement this approach, it originates from the same sources (CRT and ME) as both CRC and CRP and highlights the same importance. Therefore, given its historical weight, wealth of research and familiarity in both the research and K-12 education worlds, CRP is the best choice as a framework to structure this research.

### **Social Justice and The Canon: Can it be culturally competent and canon?**

This study focuses specifically on a canon text, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (*TKAM*), and the other high school canon texts it resembles. In order to understand how *TKAM* should be handled in this research, it is important to examine scholars' recommendations on how to approach literature from a CRP approach specifically. Bishop and Banks both addressed how to include multicultural literature in schools, Ladson-Billings expanded CRP to include CRL, and several scholars have argued the value (or lack thereof) of the canon in high school literature.

### ***Multicultural Literature***

Bishop (1990) introduced the concept of “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors,” reminding her reader that books are sometimes windows into worlds that are “real or imagined, familiar or strange” as well as can “transform human experience and can reflect it back onto us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (ix). However, the non-White reader often struggles to find their reflections in books because so few books are about non-dominant cultures. When images of Black people do appear, these images are “distorted, negative or laughable” which contributes to these students learning “a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in a society of which they are a part” (Bishop, 1990; Bishop, 1994a; Bishop, 2016). Bishop argues that “our classrooms need to be places where all children from all the cultures that make up the salad bowl of American society can find their mirrors” (ix). Bishop’s (2012) approach allows for readers to “examine their past history, raise

questions about where we are now and think about where we would like to go in the future” (p.12) while still allowing students of color to have mirrors of their experiences.

### ***The Canon Debate***

While Bishop focuses on multicultural literature in K-12 education, Banks (1993) addresses the canon debate: teach the canon for its historical value or allow students to read other texts that are more representative of the world around them? He argues that students should be given opportunities to investigate and determine how cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives and the biases within a discipline influence the ways knowledge is constructed. Therefore, he would suggest that students should read some culturally diverse texts and also read the canon, however they should approach canonical texts through a critical lens. This process “allows the voices of the teacher, the textbook, of mainstream and transformative authors-and of the students-to be important components of classroom discourse” (p. 10).

Morrison (1993) tackles the propensity for the canon to be Eurocentric. She argues that “the arbiters of critical power in American literature seem to take pleasure in, indeed relish, their ignorance of African American texts” (p. 13). People who make decisions about the canon are those that are generally uniformed about African American texts and therefore cannot include them. When people of Color are included in a text, they are often for the benefit of the White reader. Morrison gives the example of Tom in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* who is absolutely not written for Black readers but instead “an extraordinary meditation on the self” (p. 17) for the White reader. Characters of Color allow White “Americans to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence” (p. 17). Morrison suggests that given America’s beginnings as a nation of fresh starts and the very real pull of the “American Dream,” the allegory of freedom that is often

represented in characters of Color, particularly in slave narratives written by White authors, is used to represent the White author's desire for "autonomy, authority, newness and differences, and absolute power" (p. 45) which she argues are the "major themes and presumptions of American Literature" (p. 45). In this vein, when people of Color are presented in canonical texts, they are not in positions of autonomy, power or authority and therefore do not give students of Color positive role models. If students do not have these types of role models in the high school canon, creating a classroom where all children can learn about themselves and others and where "classroom race, and eventually racism and White privilege, can be talked about in intentional and explicit ways" (Micheal, 2018, p. 363) becomes impossible because the canon does not present these "windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors". Toni Morrison (1990), when interviewed on her life and career, reminds us that we need to move away from art that does not properly represent Black people but instead portrays Black people as two-dimensional objects instead of people.

Some researchers call for use of works of literature like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *TKAM* and *Raisin in the Sun* even if they make students uncomfortable. Barlow (2009) looks at another controversial high school canon classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and argues that these books help us understand that we need to look past labels and "discover the common ideals that bind us together" (Barlow, 2009, p. 68). By looking at these stories of racism that seem unfamiliar, he suggests that we can remove the distortion of images of people of Color and instead familiarize ourselves with other peoples stories (Barlow, 2009). The main character of this novel, Huck, travels with a Black enslaved person, Jim, and despite coming from a very racist culture, Huck eventually begins to understand Jim as not just an object but as a person. Barlow compares this transition in Huck to the reader by stating that "[i]f Huck is to grow in his

understanding, respect, and eventually love for Jim, he has to begin at the level of, and with the perception of, the culture in which he lives - a deeply racist culture” (Barlow, 2009, p.67). In arguing this, he suggests that we need to understand our deeply racist culture in order to move past it. He argues that books like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *TKAM* attempt to blast America’s racist notions that keep us from being created equal and therefore need to continue to be read in schools (Barlow, 2009).

The National Council of Teachers of English (2015), upon examining the scant representation of diverse cultures within the English curriculum in the United States, determined “[m]ore representative writing for young people is needed on bookshelves and in e-libraries to reflect the cultural diversity of the United States” (p. 2). They resolved to “advocate for more children’s and young adult books from publishers and booksellers that reflect the culturally diverse lives and experiences present in the United States, and highlight and support authors, illustrators, publishers, and booksellers whose work represents multiple perspectives and cultural diversity in the lives of *all* children” (p. 2). This is reflected in the diversity-based literature initiatives including CRL. That being said, the NCTE has also included *TKAM* and other canon texts in its literature series and provides resources for teachers to use Common Core State Standards which lists *TKAM* as a recommended text for 9th graders.

### ***CRP and Literature***

In her introduction of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that the use of culturally relevant reading material would create more academic success and provide more meaningful content to students. Scullin (2020) states that CRL is a powerful tool, especially for students of Color, to support engagement, proficiency, increase comprehension, broaden social consciousness, and in helping to validate a reader’s identity (pp. 82-83). If they

are not exposed to CRL, Carbado (2002) states “students of color end up learning very little about themselves, and what they do learn will often reflect stereotypical conceptions of their identities and cultures” (p.182). Roberts (2018) says “I have to find texts that represent diverse identities so that my kids can see themselves and the world in the books they read” (p. 46).

Therefore, for a book to be culturally relevant Roberts (2018) argues it needs to be engaging, focus on the chosen skill, be based in diverse perspectives and be challenging but not impossible. Micheal (2018) highlights the importance of "creating a classroom where all children can learn about themselves and others. In that classroom race, and eventually racism and White privilege, can be talked about in intentional and explicit ways" (p. 363) and suggests that CRL can be the answer to that problem. Through a literature review and interviews with eight students of color, Scullin (2020) compiled a rubric (Figure 2) that identifies the components of CRL which include authenticity, accuracy, and culturally conscious ideology. These are applied on the rubric through guiding questions in the following categories: language and dialect, characterization, illustrations and pictures, setting, relationships, and messages and conclusions. If a book is able to fit all of these criteria, it is considered culturally relevant text

Figure 2: Scullin's Rubric for Culturally Relevant Literature

*Rubric: Identifying Potential Cultural Authenticity, Accuracy, and Consciousness in Literature*

| Criteria                            | Student Self-Questions                                                                               | 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 0                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Language &amp; Dialect</b>       | <i>Do the characters in the text communicate like me, my friends, and my family?</i>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate usage and representation of language conventions and dialect.</li> <li>• Well-crafted language that is appropriate to the culture portrayed.</li> <li>• Accurate dialogue between characters should also adhere to the language patterns of the culture.</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inaccurate usage and representation of language conventions and dialect.</li> <li>• Language used is not appropriate to the culture portrayed.</li> <li>• Dialogue between characters is inaccurate and does not adhere to the language patterns of the culture.</li> </ul>                                                   |
| <b>Characterization</b>             | <i>Do the characters in the text look and act like me?</i>                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characters are represented in an affirmative light.</li> <li>• Main character is very close to the age of the reader.</li> <li>• Race, gender, and personal characteristics are significant to the story.</li> <li>• Characters are believable, grow naturally, and show depth.</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characters are not represented in an affirmative light.</li> <li>• Main character is not close to the age of the reader.</li> <li>• Race, gender, and personal characteristics are not important to the story.</li> <li>• Characters are unbelievable, do not grow naturally, and show little depth.</li> </ul>               |
| <b>Illustrations &amp; Pictures</b> | <i>Do the characters and places in the text look like the people and places I know?</i>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture is accurately characterized through the physical features and color of the individual characters.</li> <li>• Accurate representation of time frames, dates, and settings for the historical event(s) they signify.</li> <li>• Book cover is accurate and realistic by reflecting reality.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture is not accurately characterized through the physical features and color of the individual characters.</li> <li>• Inaccurate representation of time frames, dates, and settings for the historical event they signify.</li> <li>• Book cover is not accurate or realistic and does not reflect reality.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Setting</b>                      | <i>Have I lived near or visited places just like those in the story?</i>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture is accurately characterized through the location's physical appearance.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture is not characterized through the location's physical appearance.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                     |                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting is natural in relation to the content and characters of the book.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting is unnatural in relation to the content and characters of the book.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Relationships</b>                | <i>Have I had or know of relationships like the one in the story?</i>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships between characters are typical of that culture.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships between characters are not typical of that culture.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Events &amp; Experiences</b>     | <i>Have I had experiences like the one(s) described in the story?</i>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experienced events represent the "real world" and could possibly happen or have actually happened to someone in real life and are naturally incorporated into the literature.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few or none of the experienced events represent the "real world" and not could possibly happen or have actually happened to someone in real life and are not naturally incorporated into the literature.</li> </ul>                                                                                                           |
| <b>Message &amp; Conclusions</b>    | <i>Does the message of the text represent what I know about myself, my family, and my community?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conclusions hold true to the culture they are representing.</li> <li>• Characters still retain their primary culture at the conclusion.</li> <li>• The message conveyed ensures the identity of the main character and pride for their culture.</li> </ul>                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conclusions do not hold true to the culture they are representing.</li> <li>• Characters do not retain their primary culture at the conclusion.</li> <li>• The message conveyed does nothing to ensure the identity of the main character and pride for their culture.</li> </ul>                                             |

Notably, when evaluated on this rubric by a student of color, it is likely that *TKAM* receives a 0 (or not culturally representative) on most, if not all, of the categories. *TKAM* does not contain language, characters, illustrations, settings, relationships, or messages that are representative of Black culture or accurate to the current Black experience. While the main event that occurs in the book, the wrongful conviction of a Black man, is realistic, the likelihood that a White man in Alabama would represent a Black man in the 1930's is highly unlikely. Additionally, this message does not ensure "pride for their [Black students] culture. While, as seen above, some scholars still argue that the canon can be used in a social justice curriculum to build cultural consciousness, this begs the question, can reading a book like *TKAM* ever truly follow the recommendations of CRP and CRL?

### **Previous Studies' Approaches to CRP and the Canon**

This study will be a direct reflection of other studies that have taught *TKAM* using a CRP lens. While some of these studies have defined their frameworks as CRC or AP, as discussed above they are highly representative of CRP. Borsheim-Black (2015) and Dyches (2018) have used *TKAM* or similar canon texts with negative imaging of Black characters to investigate the effects of teaching these texts with a social justice focus. Both of these studies have reported that the experience helped create critical consciousness, gain cultural competence and interrupt discourses of Whiteness. However, in all of these studies one group of voices seems to be missing: Black students. In both qualitative research studies the teachers, researchers, and parents were almost exclusively White. While these researchers found that the novel can have a positive effect on critical consciousness in these classrooms, these research studies fail to acknowledge the group for which racism is most prevalent. In turn, this brings up the question of who really benefits from the teaching of these texts, even if taught through an anti-racist approach.

### ***Borsheim-Black***

In the study “It’s Pretty Much White,” Borsheim-Black (2015) conducted a qualitative case study following a White teacher from a mostly White, affluent area while she taught *TKAM* using AP which, as discussed earlier, is very similar to CRP. During her teaching, the teacher addressed racism in a more deliberate way by “prioritizing a focus on anti-racist pedagogy, integrating texts to honor voices of color, engaging students in reading against racial ideologies in *TKAM*, and reflecting on their own Whiteness” (p. 410). The school itself was in a wealthy community of approximately 2,500 people ranked in the top 2% of US high schools. 98% of the student body identified as White (p. 412). The researcher observed the classes, collected artifacts from the students as well as conducted formal interviews with focus groups of students as well as the teacher herself. There were 26 students in the class total.

Using AP, Borsheim-Black asked “are we challenging Whiteness or reinforcing it by teaching these texts?” In order to determine this, Borsheim-Black coded her data regarding whether the pedagogy reinforced or interrupted Whiteness. She came to the conclusion that by using APy that “this case did not just reveal challenges; it also revealed opportunities for interrupting Discourses of Whiteness at each level” (Borsheim-Black, 2015, p.425). Therefore, if we are going to teach the canon, she argues teachers need to do it in such a way as to challenge the perpetuation of Whiteness. With that being said, the findings of interrupting discourses of Whiteness were relatively surface level. One example that Borsheim-Black provides of deconstructing Whiteness is when the class deconstructs the quote from the text “It’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” and the symbolism behind that quote. They determine that mockingbirds are innocent and so they likely symbolize Tom Robinson and then that Tom Robinson likely represents the fact that the Black race is often wrongfully convicted and are often represented as defenseless victims. As Borsheim-Black (2015) recognizes, this does not help deconstruct

Whiteness but instead “reinforce problematic racial ideologies about White heroes and Black victims” (p. 419).

Borsheim-Black (2015) did, in fact, find that in some cases students were able to deconstruct Whiteness; one example emerged when the students were asked if they thought Atticus was racist for using the word “colored” to describe Tom. While most students determined that this did not make Atticus racist, they did have a discussion around this topic and there was one student who argued that by Atticus using that word he felt superiority over people of Color. The researcher argues that this allowed a complex discussion around Whiteness and racism to have a less superficial discussion about them (p. 420). With that being said, there are certainly deeper discussions that could have been had around this topic.

Borsheim-Black (2015) came to the conclusion that by using AP that “this case did not just reveal challenges; it also revealed opportunities for interrupting Discourses of Whiteness at each level.” Therefore, if we are going to teach *TKAM*, she argues we need to do it in such a way as to challenge the perpetuation of Whiteness. Additionally, trying to teach *TKAM* or other Eurocentric texts through a CRP lens is difficult and requires significant work. As mentioned, there were no Black students in this study and it does not address students' feelings about the book, but rather their examination of Whiteness.

### ***Dyches***

Dyches (2018) builds on Yosso’s CRC and Ladson-Billings & Tate’s (1995) concept of curriculum as intellectual property that is held by White people. She argues that, in the American high school canon, certain students enjoy the right to the intellectual property of curriculum while, historically, Black and Brown students are denied access to this right. In this way,

curriculum is a “politically imbued entity that both privileges and marginalizes voices and experiences of sociocultural groups and, consequently, preserves hegemony” (Dyches, 2018).

Dyches uses a framework that is highly reflective of CRP to approach her 2018 study in which she does a qualitative case study of seniors enrolled in two British literature courses in a predominantly White (85%), wealthy school high school in the midwest. She used a 5 day unit around a British text that is generally recognized as part of the canon and texts that help students understand the history of those texts and the canon as well as critical arguments surrounding the canon. In the classes that Dyches evaluated, 30 students elected to participate and 90% of those students identified as White. 10 percent identified as people of Color. Much like Borsheim-Black, Dyches tries to determine if approaching the literature through a critical approach can disrupt Whiteness.

In order to teach through a critical lens, the unit focused on analyzing and restorying the canon itself that exists within American high schools, including *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Much like Borsheim-Black, Dyches conducted classroom observations, collected work samples and focus groups. Through this approach, Dyches (2018) found that critically evaluating canonical literature allows students to “open up conversations about inequitable literature and, by extrapolation, social-conditions” (p. 559). Additionally she argues that it “sharpened students' critical consciousness” by providing them with a framework by which they could evaluate the canon. An example of this critical consciousness is a student who said “I had no idea (the canon) was overrun by White men. I now see it wouldn’t take that much effort to change the standard” (p.557). While it is great that this student sees the overarching problem, the realization seems to be very surface level. Additionally, there are many students who didn’t take issue with the Whiteness of the canon, arguing “notions of greatness were inextricably bound to canonical

works” (p. 558). After her study she concluded that perhaps picking a side of the “canon debate” of whether or not the canon should not be taught in schools is not worth the time of literary stakeholders when we can instead have students engage critically with canonical works (p.560).

This argument, however, does not account for the lack of positive role models for students or voicelessness of students of color in our predominant canonical texts. Additionally, it should be noted that the students that critically engaged in this study were predominantly White, so while their critical consciousness may have improved, the curriculum is still owned by White students but has little effect on the Black students who must read the problematic racial messaging in canonical texts yearly in school. In this study, there were two students of color who Dyches was able to get emotional responses from: Marcus (Black) and Hestia (Mexican-American). Marcus expressed that he found it “awkward to talk about the canon in front of his mostly White peer group” (p. 557) and therefore refrained and Hestia stated “she didn’t want to offend anyone” by “critiquing others’ race” (p.558). Therefore, while some White students may have gained critical consciousness, it was at the expense of students of color feeling voiceless. It is notable that in this study, the students of color are the minority unlike this study. Additionally, this study examines the canon as a whole being overly White and male, while my study focuses specifically on canon texts with problematic images of people of color (which neither *Romeo and Juliet* nor *Macbeth* contain).

### **Literature Review Summary and Implications**

Throughout the studies and arguments about whether or not *To Kill a Mockingbird* should be taught in schools, one group of voices seems to be missing: Black students. In both qualitative research studies, Borsheim-Black (2015) and Dyches (2018), the teachers, researchers and parents were all White. While these researchers found that the novel can have a positive effect on critical consciousness in these classrooms, these research studies fail to acknowledge the group

for which racism is most prevalent—Black students. In turn, this brings up the question of White students owning the curriculum. If schools read these books because it helps improve the critical consciousness of White students and teachers, are schools providing a service to White students under the guise of harming Black students or reinforcing stereotypes and negative hierarchies of White people in America? In order to truly understand how reading books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* impacts our students of Color we need to hear from them. What seems to be missing is a case study in which the voices of students of Color who have read or are currently reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

As the ever-relevant constant in race and education, CRP will be the framework that this study uses to guide its exploratory research. I will be observing two classrooms that are both teaching *TKAM* using CRP with a specific focus on social justice. This unit, which was created by the teachers teaching the course, uses *TKAM* to highlight institutionalized racism within the story of the text itself as well as in the examination of the continued teaching of a canon text with problematic imaging of Black characters. Lessons focused on building critical consciousness to challenge the status quo include but are not limited to an evaluation of the use of the N-word in literature and the classroom, the identification of institutionalized racism in the text and how those examples connect to current day examples of institutionalized racism, and an evaluation of Atticus Finch as a White savior character. *TKAM*, despite being published more than 60 years ago, remains at the forefront of the high school canon (Dyches, 2018; Applebee, 1992) and is therefore an important text to examine given how many students it reaches every year.

Despite being widely read within the high school canon (Dyches, 2018; Applebee, 1992) *TKAM* includes stereotyped images of people of color in the characters Calpurnia, Tom Robinson, and Zeebo. Not only this, but all of these characters are portrayed as disempowered

and saved by White characters (Camera, 2017; Domoise, 2018; Jalaluddin, 2018; Randall, 2017). Even being taught through an anti-racist lens, this researcher wonders if this text an example of “feel good curriculum” that Ladson-Billings (1995) argues against (p. 62) by allowing White educators and students to feel like they are doing the work of anti-racism while in fact continuing a history of Eurocentrism in the curriculum.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of effective comparison, this case study is shaped by the aforementioned studies of Borshiem-Black (2015) and Dyches (2018). Specifically, all three studies are qualitative case studies that seek to approach canon texts through a CRP lens. Additionally, all three researchers act as critical researchers that evaluate data through a race-conscious lens. One major difference between Borshiem-Black (2015) and Dyches (2018) studies and this one is that the research questions in those studies center around the curriculum's ability to help students develop critical consciousness or disrupt Whiteness. Another major difference includes the population of this study; while the other studies focused on White participants, this study includes both White students and a significant number of students and teachers of Color. In the case of this study, the research questions instead centered on the experiences and effects of the text on Blacks students.

#### **Research questions**

1. What are the perceptions, experiences and feelings of Black high school students who read *TKAM* in a micro-urban school district?
2. How and in what ways does using *TKAM* affect Black students' sense of self?
  - a. How do the experiences of Black students reading *TKAM* compare to those of White students?

#### **Research Design**

##### ***Qualitative Case Study***

This study followed the design of a qualitative case study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define qualitative research as “based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon. (p.23) and data is collected in interviews, observations or document analysis. They explain that

this differs from quantitative research because it does not focus on “how much or how many, and results are not usually presented in numerical form” (p. 5). Instead, qualitative research uses words as data and “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p.6). This was an appropriate approach for this research study given that the research questions sought to understand the experiences and feelings of students of color by analyzing their words in interviews and observations. Qualitative research became popular among anthropologists and sociologists and moved into other fields like education and law. In the late 1970s and 1980s qualitative research became more popular (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 7-8). The core elements of qualitative research are that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the research is inductive, and the researcher uses rich description (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 16-18). In this study, the researcher conducted interviews and observations without using additional surveys, numerical analysis or data collection tools. Additionally, this researcher did not approach the research with a pre-determined hypothesis to prove or disprove, but instead intended to understand the experiences of students of Color based on the data collected in interviews, observations and work samples. Finally, critical discourse analysis allowed this researcher to incorporate detailed description that allows the voices of the participants to be amplified.

According to Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) “a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). Stake (1995) explains that case studies are bounded by time and activity and that researchers collect data over a sustained period of time. In this case, the bounded system that was studied is 3 sections of honors English at a micropolitan high school during their *TKAM* unit. This unit is four weeks long and the researcher conducted

observations two-three times per week in each class. Creswell (2013) states that case study research uses “detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents, and reports), and reports a case description and case based themes” (p. 97). This researcher included interviews, observations, lesson plans, and student work in order to find themes that encompass the experiences and emotions of students of color in this bounded system.

### ***Critical Research***

In this research, and in general, I viewed myself primarily as a critical researcher. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain the goal of critical research is “to specifically help people understand and challenge power relations in the process of the study” (p. 59). Patton (2015) observes that critical research “critiques existing conditions and through that critique bring about change” (p. 692). Additionally, “critical qualitative research raises questions about how power relations advance the interests of one group while suppressing those of other groups” (Merriam et al, 2016, p. 61). This study used culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (which is informed by critical race theory (CRT)) in order to challenge power relations in the American education system. Specifically, it sought to analyze power relations in the high school English curriculum.

I conducted a qualitative case study on that bounded system of students (three sections of AP Prep Composition 9 students reading *TKAM*) to examine and amplify the experiences of Black students who read *TKAM* through a CRP lens. The high school canon has been shaped by predominantly White male authors and generally excludes voices of color. By identifying the emotions and effects of reading *TKAM* on Black students, as well as how those responses compare to White students, I sought to understand how the use of this text, even taught through a CRP lens, affected students' emotions and sense of self differently. This study looked to use the

data on students' emotions and sense of self to provide evidence to guide educators in their use of not only this text, but also in similar canon works.

### ***Positionality***

As someone who has taught *TKAM* many times and has seen how the text can affect Black students, this topic is very near and dear to my heart. It is important to me to determine how and if *TKAM* should be used in the classroom because it allows me, and the teachers I work with personally, to do the best for our kids. However, going into this research I heard one opinion about *TKAM* from my students and I recognized that I needed to stay grounded in the data to ensure that I don't let that one opinion sway me in a particular direction. As I worked through the interviews and research some of my biases were confirmed, but others were changed. I found that there were positives in the teaching of this text taught through a certain lens, but still was able to rely on the voices of Black participants to reveal its issues.

In this research scenario, I am both an insider and an outsider and both of these affect the power dynamics I have with the teachers and students I plan to interview. I am an insider because I am a teacher at the school and I have built relationships with many of the students at my school as well. I am an outsider because I am not any of these students' direct teacher, so while they will see my face in the hallway, they will be aware that I have no direct control over their grade or treatment in class. I am also not the boss or evaluator of any of the teachers and therefore they know I have no control over their job safety. This will allow for greater trust. Working at the school will allow me to more easily access students and observe classrooms. However, working at the school could cause ethical concerns because if I find out about a problem with another teacher I am their co-worker and this could cause a difficult decision about how to handle the situation.

As a teacher who has seen Black students emotionally struggle with reading *TKAM* before, I will need to put in place safeguards to ensure my bias about teaching *TKAM* does not cloud the data. This will be done by using a dialogue analysis approach, member checks and triangulation of data. Additionally, because I am close to the situation, I could struggle with certain results of the data and therefore need to make sure I am not skewing the data to favor my previous beliefs.

In regards to race, I am an outsider. I primarily want to research problems that are experienced by students of color; however, I am White. Therefore, students I interview might not trust me to understand the struggles they go through on a regular basis. Additionally, being White automatically suggests an unequal power dynamic in current typical power structures. I am also significantly older than the group of subjects that I want to research. For some of the students, I will have a higher socioeconomic status than them as well. Both of these again put me in a position of power over my participants. This means I need to make additional effort to ensure students feel comfortable and understood.

Lastly, it will be important for me to remember that no matter how many students or teachers of color I talk to, I will never fully understand the experiences or struggles of people of color. Therefore, it is imperative that throughout the research I stay grounded in and amplify the students' voices over my own. By using discourse analysis, it will allow me to stay focused on the participants' authentic messages without importing my voice.

### ***Unit Plan Using CRP and TKAM***

The teachers of this unit intended to teach *TKAM* through a CRP lens. In order to do so, they focused on social justice so students could “critique cultural norms, values, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.162),

otherwise known as critical consciousness. Additionally, the teachers intended to help students “develop and/or maintain cultural competence” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.162). These goals were apparent in the teacher interviews when teachers were asked: “What goals did you have in teaching *TKAM*?” One of the teachers in this study, Ms. M, explained she wanted her students to “critically think about the books that they are reading and whether they are actually teaching from an authentic point of view or not.” Some additional questions that she used to push students to question cultural norms were “what was different about society back then that made the book acceptable?” and “what makes a book good nowadays? Like, what kind of topics are talked about? Does the author have to be a certain race? Do they have to be credible? What makes someone credible?” Mr. Jiko emphasized helping students develop and maintain cultural competence stating he wanted to “expose them to more information [about the racial topics in the book] and more research that is credible, and that is unbiased”.

The unit itself focused on argumentative writing using multiple sources of evidence and strong analysis. In regards to reading standards, we focused on analyzing author’s choices and themes throughout the text. The actual standards are different for every state, but these skills are reflected in some way in each state that uses the common core. The essential questions for this unit, which were also the essay questions were “Is *TKAM* an anti-racist text?” and “Should *TKAM* be used in High Schools to talk about race?” We began the unit by providing students with differing opinions on these questions by reading news articles, opinion pieces and documentaries about the text. While engaging with these pieces and throughout reading *TKAM* itself, students tracked evidence that would allow them to effectively answer the two essential questions. Throughout the unit there were discussions and lessons about race and racism and how these appear not only in *TKAM* but also in real life. Short argumentative writings on topics

about the characters and racism were used as formative assessments. Finally, using content from all of the literature, discussions and activities students wrote an argumentative essay answering one of the essential questions.

Most activities completed while reading the text started with helping students build cultural competence and moved towards asking students to build critical consciousness. One example of this is a lesson in which students were first taught about the common stereotypical literary tropes of “Mammies” and “Uncle Toms”. The lesson began in each class with the teacher informing the students about the historical background of these tropes. This expanded students' knowledge of historical concepts and the experiences of Black people being portrayed in literature. Then, students were asked to determine if Calpurnia and Tom Robinson fit these common tropes. Generally, students found that they did, which led to the discussion of the following questions: Are these tropes harmful?; How do these tropes affect a reader's perception of Black people?; Why would the author choose to use these tropes? These two steps allow students to push against these normalized tropes and determine how they perpetuate inequities.

Another example of the CRP approach to this unit was a lesson that compared the trial in *TKAM* to the cases of George Floyd and Trayvon Martin. To build cultural competence, students were given direct instruction and asked to research about these recent cases of violence against Black men. These cases were chosen specifically because they varied in how recent they were, were important in current social justice movements, and had several high-quality pieces of writing readily available about them. After reading about these issues of social justice and learning more about the experiences of Black men in America, students were asked to compare who, in court cases involving race, has voice, accountability and power in the case of Tom

Robinson in *TKAM* and in these more recent cases. This allowed students to build critical consciousness by examining racial power structures and the legal system over time.

### ***Site Location and Description***

This research study took place at a high school in a micropolitan area in the midwestern United States. This school will be referred to as Lincoln High School (LHS). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines micropolitan as “a nonmetro labor-market area centered on urban clusters of 10,000-49,999 persons and defined with the same criteria used to define metro areas” (USDA 2020). This city reflects metropolitan areas because it is largely liberal and is very racially and socioeconomically diverse. The town also houses a major university but is mostly surrounded by commuter cities and farming towns. The school’s student population breakdown is 36% Black, 34% White, 14% LatinX, and 14 percent Asian (ISBE, 2021). About two-thirds of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged. However, many of the students at the school were children of professors of the nearby university or health care professionals at the major surrounding hospitals. Therefore, in every classroom there was a diverse range of perspectives in regards to race, socio-economic status and political affiliation.

The teaching faculty and administration, like that of the teacher workforce across the United States, was mostly White. Specifically, it was seventy-five percent White, nine percent Black, nine percent LatinX and eight percent Asian (ISBE, 2021). However, given its close proximity to several major state universities with popular education programs, this school attracted a wide range of teachers from larger urban and suburban settings that stay in town after their college experience. This led to both diverse perspectives and experiences as well as more diversity within the teaching staff. This was indicated in this study where both teachers identify as Asian American. I was a teacher at this school and therefore this site was partially chosen out

of convenience, but was also chosen because it was highly representative of the problem statement and desired subject pool.

### ***Participants***

The participants of this study were drawn from three sections of honors freshman English at Lincoln High School. These sections were taught by two teachers who identify as Asian American (Mr. Jiko and Ms. M) and one student teacher who identifies as White (Ms. Francis). Ms. M is a fourth year teacher; Mr. Jiko is a second year teacher and Ms. Francis is in her first month of student teaching. All three of these teachers completed their high school experience in midwestern suburban high schools where the demographics of their schools were predominantly White. Ms. M transferred from the intercity right before high school and explained in her elementary and middle school experience she had significantly more friends of color.

All three teachers read *TKAM* in their middle or high school experiences. Ms. M indicated she read the book twice in school, once in her inner city middle school and once in her high school experience. All three expressed either a disconnect or displeasure with their experience reading the text when they were in school. Mr. Jiko explained that when he read *TKAM* in school the focus was mainly on Boo Radley and on empathy. After teaching it through a CRP lens, Mr. Jiko expressed that he “got a lot more out of it” as well as “feels more intimately connected with *TKAM*”. Ms. M had a unique experience reading the book with two Black teachers, one in the inner city and one in a primarily White suburb; Ms. M felt that “they taught it very differently,” specifically, in the White dominated suburb “it felt more catered to the white palate.” Much like Mr. Jiko, Ms. M found that the primary focus in both cases was not on racism. In her case, the focus was on literary techniques and unreliable narrators. She did say, however, in her inner city school’s reading of the text they did hit a little more on race which felt less

“cautious” and “white-serving.” Given these experiences with the text, all three teachers involved felt disinterested in teaching the text initially. Only Mr. Jiko had taught the text previously.

Across the three sections of honors Freshman English, there were 59 students including 37 white students, four Latinx students, four Asian students and 14 Black students. At this school, freshmen are placed in honors classes based on a combination of their 8th grade Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test scores, 8th grade grades, and teacher recommendation. Students or parents of students can also self-place the student in an honors class. 15 students decided to participate in the research study including six White students and nine Black students. Notably, no Asian or LatinX students decided to participate. This is possibly because there were so few students who were Asian or LatinX in these classes. Additionally, it was made clear that the study was looking for the perspective of Black students and therefore Asian or LatinX students may have felt that their voice was not being looked for in the study. Additionally, while the percentage of Black students overall in the classrooms was 23.7 percent, the percentage of Black students in the study is much higher (60%). This could potentially have been because students were informed that the perceptions of Black students were the focus of the study. There was one student (White) whose parents reached out and specifically asked that their student not be included in the study in any way.

While this researcher was content with the number of interviews she received, there were some difficulties in gaining participation in the study. Firstly, this study took place in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, there were often many students missing from classes given positivity numbers and quarantine restrictions. Additionally, because consent and assent forms were on paper and students in these classes were used to all assignments being virtually

available, some students struggled to remember to get papers signed at home and bring them back to school. Seven additional students turned in assent forms, but never returned a parent signed consent form and therefore could not participate. The students who were most vocal in their courses, however, all turned in assent and consent forms to participate.

These classes opened the spring semester with reading *TKAM* through a CRP lens. Ms. Francis joined Ms. M's classroom at the beginning of second semester and therefore, this was the first unit she saw taught in this room. In the first semester of the year, students read personal narratives from diverse authors, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Inherit the Wind*, and ended the semester with a research unit on structural racism in America. In the research unit, students were first presented with information about the history of the following: the emergence of the construct of race, slavery (across the globe and in America), and the N-word. When learning about the N-word, each classroom also had a conversation about how to handle the reading or use of the N-word in English classrooms when it appears in a canon text. Students then chose an example of racism in America and constructed their own presentation of the history of that topic. Some topics included sharecropping, the desegregation of schools, the breaking of the color barrier in baseball, the wealth gap, the pay gap, the oversexualization of Black women in the media, the war on drugs, and the school to prison pipeline. This unit was intended to not only build critical consciousness, but to use this historical knowledge to prepare students to approach *TKAM* through a CRP lens.

All of the students included in the study came from the same middle school. In their middle school experience, these students read mostly White authors. In one unit, they use the Langston Hughes short story *Thank you, Ma'am* to discuss character traits. While the race of the author and character is discussed, it is not a major focus of the unit. In eighth grade, the students read *Of Mice and Men* which centers around two white men: George and Lenny. In the text there

is a Black character, Crooks, who is a stable hand and is generally isolated from other characters because of the color of his skin. The N-word is used repeatedly in the text. When discussing the handling of the N-word while reading texts in class many of the Black students expressed frustration that the appearance of the N-word in the text was not addressed by their teacher. This book was taught to the students virtually due to the pandemic. Some students indicated the actual word was read aloud while others indicated that their teachers would skip the word or say “N-word”. In any of these cases Black students were shaken to see this word in the text without warning.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Gaining Site and Participant Access***

While I am a doctoral student and researcher, I was also a teacher at the school in which this research was conducted. This allowed me a deeper understanding of the demographics of the site as well as afforded me relationships that allowed easy access to the site. I began having conversations about the use of *TKAM* in honors freshman English with Ms. M and Mr. Jiko before my dissertation topic was chosen. Once I chose the topic, I asked them each if they would be interested in taking part in a study of this sort and they both agreed. I then went to the principal at the school and pitched my research topic. Equity is one of the school’s major focus areas of development. The school defines equity as “ensuring that ***all students*** receive the resources, supports, and opportunities they need to achieve success in school by identifying inequities in access and possible barriers”. Given this, the principal was excited about the research because it would allow the school to explore possible barriers or opportunities to support Black students. Because of this, he gave me permission to conduct the study. Once I was given clearance by the principal, I registered this with the College of Education Research

Placements. I then worked with Ms. M and Mr. Jiko to create a research schedule of when observations and interviews would be most conducive to their classroom schedules. In order to gain access to student writing samples, Ms. M and Mr. Jiko gave me access to those students' Google classroom assignments. While I am a teacher at the school for which I am researching, I do not teach in any of these classrooms or any of the students involved in the study.

All students in Mr. Jiko's and Ms. M's three freshman honors English classes were invited to participate. Regardless of their race, their perspective on the book is vital to understand how it impacts groups of students in different ways. No student was excluded from participation in the study. I went in person to each class and explained the purpose of the study, the consent and assent forms, and the potential benefits and risks of participation to the students in late December before the study began. All students' guardians were then emailed with the same information and with copies of the assent and consent forms. Teachers were chosen based on their position teaching the text and were given the overview of the research, benefits and risks in an in person meeting. They were each given and signed the consent form. No adult was excluded from participation. Before each interview, the student or teacher was reminded that they could choose not to participate at any time.

### ***Data Samples: Interviews, Observations and Writing Samples***

All data pieces that were collected were examples of discourse. This allowed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to be used. I interviewed all 15 students and three teachers who agreed to be a part of the study. I also completed observations in the three classrooms two to three times per week during the duration of the *TKAM* unit. Each interview and observation was audio recorded and then transcribed. Interviews with each of these students and teachers were conducted using a semi-structured interview format that focuses on their feelings towards *TKAM*

and their experiences reading the text. Notably, when asking students about their backgrounds I asked students about their ethnic background as opposed to their race. I did this because several of the Black students in the school are from the Congo or other places in Africa. I have gotten the feedback on previous research from students in that group that being asked their ethnicity over their race feels more inclusive. In order to respect that request I asked about ethnic background. The interview for students includes the following questions:

### **Demographic Questions**

1. How would you describe your ethnic background?

### **Research Specific Questions**

2. What emotions do you feel when reading or talking about *To Kill a Mockingbird* in Class? What causes those emotions?
3. How did your teacher handle the use of the N-word in the text? How did you feel about that decision?
4. How did reading about Calpurnia and Tom Robinson in the text make you feel?
5. What do you feel like you learned from reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
6. Describe your ideal book to read in an English Class about race.
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about the topic?

For teachers, the question protocol was slightly different and included:

### **Demographic Questions**

1. How would you describe your ethnic background?
2. How long have you been a teacher?

### **Research Specific Questions**

3. What is your relationship to teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
4. What emotions do you feel when reading or talking about *To Kill a Mockingbird* in class? What causes those emotions?

5. How did you handle the use of the N-word in the text? How did you feel this decision was received by the students?
6. What important moments or thoughts about Calpurnia and Tom Robinson did you bring up in the text? How did you frame these conversations? How did students respond to these conversations?
7. What goal(s) did you have in teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
8. How did your students receive or respond to *To Kill a Mockingbird* as opposed to *Romeo and Juliet*?
9. Describe your ideal book to read in an English Class about race .
10. What are the benefits of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
11. What are the pitfalls of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about the topic?

In both cases, the interview protocol began with demographic questions and gathered information about the participant's race. This allowed me to disaggregate the data by race. Teachers are also asked about their teaching experience and relationship to the book *TKAM*. This allows background knowledge about the teacher's experience to understand how and why they were approaching the unit the way they were. In the teacher interview protocol I asked other questions that allowed me to understand the teachers' intentions behind the way they taught the unit and how those intentions fit a CRP approach. This included their goals and how they taught concepts like stereotypes and the N-word. I also attempted to gain the students' perspectives about how these concepts were taught in their protocol. Finally, interview questions were focused on gaining two types of information: how students were shaped by the unit (including their learning and critical consciousness) and the emotions that both teachers and students felt when reading the text.

Each student was interviewed one time for approximately 15-30 minutes at the conclusion of the unit. Additionally, students were observed within their course during the unit

two to three times per week for the duration of the four week unit. During these observations I focused on dialogue analysis of the conversations that happened within the class. The purpose of the observations was to understand how students of Color operate/respond similarly or differently from their White peers when reading a text with negative imaging of people of Color. It was also to collect the emotions of the students and what they gained (or did not gain) from the unit. Lastly, I analyzed student writing samples (mini-writes, essays) about *TKAM* to look for students' feelings about reading the text. I also looked for the text's effect on students' sense of self. I collected 2-3 writing samples from each student. All data collection processes and tools were aligned in order to answer the research questions; This is why they focused around emotions and collecting the potential benefits and disadvantages of students' sense of self while reading the text.

### ***Limitations of study***

This study, like any study, had limitations. In general, it lacked the ability to be generalized across many populations because it occurred with a small number of participants and in a very specific demographic. In this study, fifteen students and three teachers were involved. The primary goal of this study was to capture Black students' emotions and the benefits of disadvantages of reading *TKAM* on Black students. In this study, only nine Black students were involved. While there are diverse perspectives and emotions given by these nine students, they were in no way able to represent the perspectives of all Black students who read *TKAM* through a CRP lens. Similarly, with only one White teacher, ten White students, and two Asian American teachers the full range of perspectives on this topic is not captured in this study.

The location of this study similarly limited its generalizability. The town in which this study takes place was generally very liberal. In the honors courses in which this particular research occurs, not only are the students more liberal and informed of social issues, they were also, in general, from a higher socioeconomic status than students in non-honors courses. Given that some of the goals of CRP are to improve critical consciousness and advocate for social change, it is possible that this type of approach would be more successful in this more liberal and socially informed way.

### ***Ethics and Confidentiality***

There were minimal risks to the students and teachers who participated in this study. However, safeguards were in place to protect both students and teachers. Interviewing teachers could have been problematic because I was the department head for English at the school and a tenured teacher. It was made clear to my participants that nothing that was said within their interviews is going to be shared outside of the context of my research and that they can remain confidential under a pseudonym. In a sense, I needed to remove my department head “cap” and only use my researcher role to conduct interviews. However, this could have caused teachers to be tentative about being honest in their answers for fear of retribution. For students, I was a teacher at the school which could have led to their trepidation in participation or honesty. I was very clear with students that everything they say in interviews is entirely confidential and cannot lead to a change in their grade or be able to lead to any kind of discipline.

The risks to adult participants included sharing one’s views, which may not be popular, and could potentially lead to employment consequences if they disagree with their supervisor. However, much of what participants shared will be their opinions on a topic that many have already shared publicly, such as in faculty meetings, so that the risk is only minimally greater

than their general participation in school meetings. The risks to students were of a peer reading their responses over their shoulder if they are in a crowded classroom or sharing opinions about the topic aloud in class. Students are regularly asked to share opinions on various topics in their classes, and that has always included the topic of racism. Additionally, it is common for students to talk to each other about their opinions on this topic. Students were not required to speak or write in front of others if they felt uncomfortable speaking on the topic in front of classmates. This should also eliminate risk for them. We had conversations at the beginning of the unit about how to talk about race in a productive and kind way in order to ensure emotional safety for students. We discussed what language is and is not appropriate to use and discussed respecting the experiences and knowledge of people who have experienced racism. This was done in an effort to affirm Black students' experiences and avoid the trauma of offensive language or opinions being expressed. Lastly, while the approach to the reading of *TKAM* is slightly different, the concern about possible negative consequences for students of Color in reading the text lies in reading the book itself. The book would be read with or without the research being conducted. Therefore the risks were minimal.

Students' names when sharing the content of their interviews and classroom work remained confidential in the piece. To do this, student descriptions in the study are under pseudonyms with minimal descriptions as to disallow possible identification of any student. Teachers are also listed under pseudonyms and therefore will remain confidential. Pseudonyms were kept in a separate password-encoded document on a separate server from encrypted data. Also, students and teachers did not only need to turn in a consent form but were informed that participation is entirely voluntary. Students who chose not to participate in the research were informed that teachers did not know which students agreed to participate and which did not and

that their participation had no bearing on their grades. All students received the same instruction regardless of their participation and therefore no group was harmed one way or another.

Supervisors will not know which adults are involved in the study, and all names and the school name will be pseudonyms. This should eliminate the risk of employment consequences. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. In transcription, no identifying names or descriptions were used. I did not take any notes that include names or school sites.

In order to further protect the students and teachers involved, written documents and audio files were stored with privacy in mind. I did not provide identifying information for participants or the school district in any written documents, including notes, drafts, or publications. The only data with participants' names were audio files, consent forms, and a list of pseudonyms matched to participants' names. All of this data was kept in a password-protected computer in the Principal Investigator's office at home in an UIUC box account. Audio files were destroyed after transcription was complete, and pseudonyms were used in all transcribed data. The pseudonym list and consent forms will be destroyed three years after completion of the project. Data may be used for future research purposes connected with research methods courses or research on school culture. Until they are destroyed, consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigators locked office. The pseudonym list will be kept with the consent forms in a filing cabinet, separate from all of the data, which will be stored on a computer. All classroom observations were anonymous and collected via notes and video or audio recording. The researcher transcribed and took notes on these observations. Classroom documents were collected, scanned by the researcher with anonymity added, and given back to the students..

### **Analytic Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis**

After the data was collected and coded, I found examples in the data of the major themes. Those examples were analyzed using CDA, which emerged from discourse analysis. “Discourse analysis is a research method that provides systematic evidence about social processes through the detailed examination of speech, writing and other signs” (Anderson & Halloway, 2018, p. 1). Anderson et al (2018) defines discourse as “talk, text, and action as well as more broadly circulating narratives, sets of beliefs and ways of seeing the world” that can be “treated as a vehicle for making meaning, doing things or both” (p. 190). In the case of this study, I will focus on the dialogue that happens in interviews and observations as well as the text in written student work samples as examples of discourse to analyze.

CDA is a subset of discourse analysis that is about power and analyzing power relations between groups (Rogers, 2016; Fairclough, 2001). In educational research, discourse analysis came from sociolinguistics, narrative research, linguistic anthropology and the ethnography of communication eventually making schools places for discourse analysis. CDA in education has become particularly popular, however, in the last two decades (Rogers, 2016, p.3). While “CDA analyzes texts and interactions, it does not start from texts and interactions. It starts rather with social issues and problems, problems which face people in their social lives, issues which are taken up with sociology, political science and/or cultural studies” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 26). Fairclough explained “It is critical in the sense it seeks to establish non-obvious connections between semiosis and other elements of social processes, including connections which contribute to unequal relations of power. It is also critical in the sense that it is a form of research and analysis which is committed to changing people’s lives for the better” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 26).

CDA allowed a critical approach to using CRP to teach *TKAM*. Specifically, it allowed me to use language analysis to investigate the power relations involved when teaching *TKAM* in

this way. Much like Fairclough describes, this is not a problem that began with language, but instead was a problem I recognized in my own classroom and experiences. CDA will allow me to determine what the power relations actually are in order to shape further teaching in a CRP approach for the betterment of all students. Discourse studies provides a particular way of conceptualizing interactions that are compatible with socio-cultural perspectives in educational research,” and both “discourse studies and educational research are both socially committed paradigms that address problems through a range of theoretical perspectives” (Rodgers, 2016, p. 1).

Rodgers (2016) explains why CDA is an appropriate framework for educational research given that “educational practices are considered communicative events” (p.1). In fact Fairclough assumes all cases of language are communicative events. Therefore, CDA is appropriate anywhere that language exists. A communicative is analyze in three dimensions, the text itself (which can be written or oral and is analyzed at word level), discourse practice (which includes text production and text consumption and analyzes at the text level) and sociocultural practice (“the cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of” (Fairclough, 1995, p.57) and analyzes at the norm level). For this study, this means that each communicative event (interview, observation or writing sample) was analyzed through all three dimensions. By examining events at the word, text and norm lever level I was able to take into account students' individual responses, how those responses interact with those of their peers and how all responses are affected by the social context in which these exist.

### **Data Analysis**

My overall data analysis model was discourse analysis. I coded the information from the interviews, observations and writing through each of these three levels of CDA looking for themes that answered the research questions. This allowed me to look at each piece of text

through both a very detailed and general lens and also ensured that texts were read thoroughly to help avoid themes being missed. My specific focus in initial coding was to find evaluative indexicals that identify students' emotions towards reading *TKAM*. Evaluative indexicals are defined as “identifying signs or signals that point to relevant context in ways that potentially characterize and evaluate participants” (Wortham & Reyes, 2021, p.53). In this case, I looked for words, phrases or actions that pointed to a participant's potential emotion. This could be obvious like a student stating “that made me sad” to more assumed based on behavior like a student wiping a tear from their eye. I additionally looked for evaluative indexicals outside of emotions that suggested how the unit affected students sense of self. Applying the CRP lens, I will specifically look for indexicals that show cultural competence, critical consciousness or other types of learning as well as space for Black student voices. Lastly, in addition to finding evaluative indexicals, I looked for personal diatects; these are “words that refer to speakers and those that are spoken to and about” (Wortham & Reyes, 2021, p.50) like I, we, me, them. This allowed me to investigate the study’s impact on students' connection to the characters in the text as well as peer relationship and community. I disaggregated this data by race to determine if the experience for Black students was different from the experience of White students. I did not presuppose specific indexicals but instead used the coding process to look for common trends or themes. This allowed me to remain focused on the research question without placing bias on data sources

Once I found common themes, I chose examples within the interview or observation data of each theme. With each of these exemplars I completed a detailed discourse analysis that followed Wortham and Reyes’s (2021) approach by examining the event, selecting indexicals (relevant context), configure and construe evaluative indexicals and identify student and teacher

positioning within the event. This evaluation allowed me to analyze power structures and illustrate how these examples are indicative of common emotions or effects on students sense of self found during initial coding.

### ***Trustworthiness***

In order to improve the trustworthiness of this research, with regard to suggestions from Creswell (2009), I used member checks and triangulation. I also presented any discrepant information that runs counter to the themes found in the study. Lastly, I spent an extended period of time in the field in order to “develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and convey detail about the site and the people that lends credibility to the narrative account” (Creswell, 2013, p. 178). I used member checks to make sure that I embodied the actual feelings of the subjects of my study. This was done by showing individual participants the themes that were coded in their interviews to determine if they felt those codes were accurate. Lastly, I triangulated the data by using multiple methods of data collection as well as multiple subjects. I did not only compare each individual participant's data sources but also compared individual participants to one another. I did not use an individual student or teacher response as a blanket feeling held by all students or teachers but instead looked for common evaluative indexicals and positionalities shared by many different students. While I was observing I kept notes on what was occurring in the classroom to be able to check these responses as well. Because I am already a teacher at this school, I did not have to work very hard to build trust with the students and teachers in this study, but this natural trust did mean that I needed to make sure I remained objective on the topic.

The previous studies that have been conducted in this area argue that a major benefit of using CRP to read canon texts is that students gain critical consciousness. By analyzing the data

through a CRP lens, I was able to see if all students, including Black students, gained the critical consciousness and cultural competency that these studies promise. Additionally, because of its roots in CRT, CRP allowed me to examine the use of *TKAM* in relation to the idea that the curriculum is the property of white people. By looking at students' emotions and the benefits and disadvantages of this unit, as well as comparing the data of White students and Black students, I examined if it is possible to both improve a black students cultural competence and critical consciousness about race using *TKAM*.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Introduction

*To Kill a Mockingbird (TKAM)* by Harper Lee is widely read in high schools across the United States as part of the high school canon. It is widely regarded as one of the best books in US history (The New York Times, 2021). Over the last seven years, I have read *TKAM* with my honors freshman English classes every year. As these classes became increasingly diverse, Black students in my classes expressed discomfort and anger in reading this text. However, past studies by Borshiem-Black (2015) and Dyches(2018) have indicated that, when taught through a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) lens, reading *TKAM* can improve critical consciousness. Problematically, these studies failed to include Black students. This study seeks to fill those gaps by including Black students while reading this text through a CRP lens. Additionally, the data for Black students will be juxtaposed with the data of White students to compare how the two groups react. The research questions for this qualitative case study are:

1. What are the perceptions, experiences and feelings of Black high school students who read *TKAM* in a micro-urban school district?
2. How and in what ways does using *TKAM* affect Black students' sense of self?
  - a. How do the experiences of Black students reading *TKAM* compare to those of White students?

I observed three classes of students two to three times a week over the course of their *TKAM* unit. The unit was taught through a CRP lens by two Asian-American teachers at a micro-urban school district. Fifteen students, six White and nine Black, chose to participate in the study. Additionally, two head teachers and one student teacher participated. Throughout the unit, writing samples were collected through journals, essays, and worksheets. After the culmination of the unit, all participants were interviewed.

Data was coded through a cyclical inductive and then deductive process until the point of saturation. While coding, I focused on finding common themes that indicated students' emotions and then the benefits and disadvantages of reading *TKAM* for both Black and White students. Once I found common themes, I chose examples to analyze through discourse analysis. When choosing examples to analyze, I focused on including data from a diverse range of participants in order to include all perspectives. Using thick description, member checks, and by triangulating the data I ensured trustworthiness of the data.

### **Demographics of Participants**

There were fifteen student participants in this study divided among the three classes. Two sections of the classes were taught by Mr. Jiko and one section was taught by Ms. M with her student teacher Ms. Frances. All of these students self-identified their race and gender in their interviews and are presented here under a pseudonym in order to protect confidentiality. There were nine Black or Mixed-race students that chose to participate and six White students who chose to participate. All students who identified as mixed had families with one White parent and one Black parent. All students were first time freshmen with ages between fourteen and fifteen. This study was conducted in their second semester of freshman year. Notably, all of these students were in virtual school for the two years before this study (seventh and eighth grade years) due to COVID-19. All participants' pseudonyms, race, genders, and teachers they were assigned to are in the below charts.

**Table 1: Student Participants by Race, Gender and Teacher**

| Pseudonym | Race (Self-Identified) | Gender | Assigned Teacher  |
|-----------|------------------------|--------|-------------------|
| Jeanette  | White                  | Female | Ms. M/Ms. Francis |
| Patricia  | White                  | Female | Ms. M/Ms. Francis |
| Hermionie | Black                  | Female | Mr. Jiko          |
| Dante     | Black                  | Male   | Mr. Jiko          |
| Nia       | Black/Mixed            | Female | Ms. M/Ms. Francis |
| Sara      | White                  | Female | Mr. Jiko          |
| Kayla     | Black                  | Female | Mr. Jiko          |
| Olive     | White                  | Female | Mr. Jiko          |
| Ja        | Black/Mixed            | Male   | Ms. M/Ms. Francis |
| Todd      | White                  | Male   | Ms. M/Ms. Francis |
| James     | Black                  | Female | Mr. Jiko          |
| Elizabeth | White                  | Female | Ms. M/Ms. Francis |
| Nix       | Black                  | Female | Ms. M/Ms. Francis |
| Micheal   | Black                  | Male   | Mr. Jiko          |

In addition to the fifteen student participants, three teachers also participated in the study. These teachers designed the unit in such a way to teach *TKAM* through a CRP lens (as described in Chapter Three), were observed with the students in their classrooms, and were interviewed based on their own observations. All three teachers self-identified their race, gender, age and teaching experience. This data is listed in the below chart.

**Table 2: Teacher Participants by Race, Gender, Age and Year of Teaching**

| Teacher Pseudonym | Race           | Gender | Age | Year of Teaching |
|-------------------|----------------|--------|-----|------------------|
| Mr. Jiko          | Asian American | Male   | 24  | Year Two         |
| Ms. M             | Asian American | Female | 26  | Year Four        |
| Ms. Francis       | White          | Female | 22  | Student Teacher  |

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Question One: Emotions***

The first focus of this study was to answer the question “What are the perceptions, experiences and feelings of Black high school students who read TKAM in a micro-urban school district?”

While I observed classes, read written responses, and conducted interviews, I recorded emotions expressed by students. Generally, these emotions were explicitly expressed. For example, a student might have said “That was really frustrating”. In this case I recorded the emotion of frustration. On occasion, students used evaluative indexicals that indicated an emotion implicitly. For example, a student may have responded to the story of Tom Robinson being jailed and say “of course he was jailed, we are always jailed.” In this case, I recorded the emotion that I felt was being expressed. In this case, annoyance. Then, I completed member checks by asking students if that was the emotion they were feeling at that moment. I also triangulated data around that emotion on that day. For example, if there was an observation and a writing sample about the same topic I would look at both samples to see if emotions matched.

After collecting data on students' emotions, I determined what percentage of students in each category (Black students and White students) expressed the emotions that I recorded. As indicated in the key, depending on how many of the students expressed that emotion I labeled them below as “very frequent,” “somewhat frequent,” “not very frequent,” and “infrequent.”

They are also listed in the below chart from most frequent to least frequent. Below these charts, each emotion is explored through examples in the data.

**Table 3: Black Student Emotional Response Frequency**

| Emotion                   | Frequency         |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Frustration/<br>Annoyance | Very Frequent     |
| Resigned                  | Somewhat Frequent |
| Discomfort                | Somewhat Frequent |
| Sadness                   | Not Very Frequent |
| Confusion                 | Not Very Frequent |
| Anger                     | Not Very Frequent |
| Stressed                  | Not Very Frequent |
| Bored                     | Infrequent        |
| Disgust                   | Infrequent        |

**Table 4: White Student Emotional Response Frequency**

| Emotion                   | Frequency         |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Discomfort                | Very Frequent     |
| Confusion                 | Very Frequent     |
| Frustration/<br>Annoyance | Somewhat Frequent |
| Anger                     | Not Very Frequent |
| Fear                      | Infrequent        |
| Enjoyment                 | Infrequent        |
| Sadness                   | Infrequent        |
| Curiosity                 | Infrequent        |

***Key for Table 3 and 4***

| <i>Label</i>      | <i>Percentage of Black or White students who expressed this feeling</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Very Frequent     | >80% of students expressed this feeling                                 |
| Somewhat Frequent | <80% but >40% of students expressed this feeling                        |
| Not Very Frequent | More than one student, but <40% of students expressed this feeling      |
| Infrequent        | One student expressed this feeling                                      |

**General Notices about Emotions.** I found eleven emotions after analyzing all of the instances of student emotion in the interview, observation and written data. Several of the emotions were expressed by both the Black students and the White students, but at varying frequency. The emotions that were common between White and Black students are frustration/annoyance, discomfort, sadness, confusion, and anger. For Black students, the two most frequent emotions found were frustration/annoyance and resignation. For White students, the two most frequent emotions were discomfort and confusion. For the purposes of this study, I evaluated the two most frequent emotions expressed for each race and included instances of both Black and White students for each of these emotions when applicable. While students expressed other emotions (sadness, curiosity, anger, stress, disgust, enjoyment) they were expressed by a limited number of students. Notably, for all students, there was only one positive emotion expressed at any point and it was only expressed by one White student: enjoyment. Not a single Black student expressed a positive emotion about the reading of *TKAM*. This, alone, seems to indicate that for most students, but especially Black students, reading *TKAM* is an unpleasant experience.

**Frustration/Annoyance.** Every single Black student noted feeling annoyance or frustration during their interviews at least once. Many Black students expressed frustration or annoyance multiple times during their interviews. Additionally, Black students expressed these emotions frequently during observations and writing samples. More than half of White students who were involved in the study expressed frustration or annoyance during their interviews as well. Both Black and White students expressed frustration over the content of the book and about the use of the book in our unit. Black students also expressed frustration with the content of the book. They felt it brought up reminders of the way Black people are treated in America. One

White student expressed frustration around not knowing what to say or how to behave in the classroom.

Many Black students and one White student expressed frustration about the characters in the book specifically. Several of them focused on the inclusion of the stereotypical portrayal of Tom Robinson and Calpurnia. It is possible that teaching students about these stereotypes caused greater frustration, as they may not have known about or connected those stereotypes to this text in a more traditional unit. However, it appeared that several of the Black students in the class were already aware of the stereotypes. Dante, when Mr. Jiko said he would be discussing Mammy and Uncle Tom stereotypes, exclaimed “oh lord—I swear to god” and shook his head. He was met by several other Black students in the classroom rolling their eyes and nodding to his comment. Given that the teacher had not yet provided a definition of these two concepts, it appeared these students already knew what they were and already had a negative association with them. One of the lessons that the unit used focused on was investigating if Calpurnia and Tom Robinson fit the Mammy and Uncle Tom stereotypes; therefore, it makes sense that students focused on the problematic nature of these characters. Micheal, a Black student, stated:

“Here you have two African American caricatures. Calpurnia works for White people, Tom Robinson is the Black man who did nothing but is accused of raping a White woman. If I don’t like any other part of this text, I do like how they show how much of a threat I am in this world”.

Another Black student, James, shared a similar sentiment saying:

“I thought that Calpurnia was—I think Calpurnia is a good character in the book. But there's also-like-some limitations placed on her because she is-like—the Black mother figure in the book. So there's some, there's a box there. So she didn't have as much room to grow as any of the other characters in the book did. Tom Robinson, even though he was necessary to the plot of the book—he felt very, like, one dimensional—he didn't even get—he just had his own trial scene and he was very much used as a plot device for the message of the book and progression of the book and he didn't even really get to be a character”.

For both of these students, their frustration about Black characters emerged because the only two main Black characters in the text were not complicated enough to appear as believable people. To express this, Micheal described them as “caricatures” and expressed that they were portrayed for singular roles that Black people are traditionally put in: Calpurnia, the Black woman, as a dedicated servant and Tom, the Black man, as a criminal. For Micheal, these one sided portrayals, especially of Black men in America as solely criminals, frustrated him because it reminded him that he is seen as “a threat in this world.” Micheal indicated that he felt connected to Tom Robinson being a threat by using the person dialect “I am” when describing that he thinks he is seen as a threat; Micheal felt the characters in the text are meant to represent him and other Black Americans.

James also felt that the representations of Black characters in *TKAM* are shallow. To express this she used phrases in relation to these characters like “limitations are placed on her,” “there’s a box there,” “one dimensional,” “plot device,” and “he didn’t even really get to be a character”. Like Micheal, James indicated the stereotypical roles that these two characters were slated to play: “the black mother figure” and a criminal (which is indicated by James' mention of the trial scene). Unlike Micheal, James did not explicitly connect these representations to their own existence, but instead focused on how the Black Characters in the text were portrayed as less than human or contained. Saying Tom “doesn’t really get to be a character” or is a “plot device” suggests he was treated by the writer as less than human. Calpurnia on the other hand was “limited” by the text and “kept in a box.” While it was not explicitly stated, James seems to be frustrated by being a Black person in America being dehumanized and kept in a box and was potentially frustrated by how that would affect her own experience as a Black woman in America.

One White student, Todd, also expressed frustration about these two stereotypes, but instead of arguing that the portrayal of characters were flat, he instead focused on the writer's intentions behind using these stereotypes. He says:

“I just think that they're like, templates for like stereotypes that she—like—just reused because she wasn't educated enough—on the topic. I feel—like—that she just—like—got two positive stereotypes, and then used them and—like—kind of used it to be like I'm anti-racist by using non negative stereotypes, but they're still stereotypes”.

While Todd did express that these were stereotypes, and implied that the use of stereotypes is negative, he called them “positive” stereotypes and “non-negative” stereotypes. This likely referred to the idea that both the Mammy and Uncle Tom characters are seen as the loyal Black character that White readers can empathize with. Based on the Black students' responses, they would refer to these stereotypes as positive. This brings light to the idea that these are positive stereotypes from the perspective of the White reader and writer. Todd's frustration was not just with the characters being flat but with the idea that Harper Lee “wasn't educated enough on the topic” and failed at her attempt to be “anti-racist.” Black students are directly affected by stereotypes that they are forced to see themselves reflected in; It is possible for Todd, his frustration was with the author because in her Whiteness is where he saw himself reflected.

Other than the characters, Black students struggled with the plot and use of the N-word in the text. Nia stated:

“I felt anger and frustration because it's reading about a book that—one uses the N-word and it's not just Black people using the N word it is the White people using the N-word towards the Black people which is very angering. And it talks—it shows evidence—um—that the man is innocent and then he is still proven guilty because he's Black and then at the end he ends up dying somehow but we all know that they ended up killing him eventually because he was Black and they accused him of this crime. When I was reading, I had to take out my headphones because I was getting very frustrated to the point where I didn't even want to pay attention to it and it made me very upset at the

end when I found out he ended up dying because they accused him of this and they said he killed himself, no he didn't... and it made me very upset.”

Nia's frustration was clear not only because she stated that she “felt anger and frustration” but also because she stated that when she read she had to “take out her headphones” because “she was getting very frustrated.” In fact, it got so bad that “she didn't even want to pay attention anymore.” These feelings, in both the cases of the N-word and the plot, were brought about because of the violence against Black people perpetrated by White people in the text. She said “it's not just the Black people using the N-word” but was instead upset that “White people [were] using the N-word towards Black people.” In regards to the plot, the violence by White people included them taking a “man who is innocent” and still proving him guilty, the idea that “White people end up killing him (Tom), and (White people) accuse him of killing himself.” With each plot event that Nia mentioned, she became more frustrated which was indicated by her repeated statement of her emotion, starting with “it is angering”, moving to “I was getting very frustrated” and escalating to her twice saying “it made me very upset.” It is possible the reason these events were so frustrating to Nia was because of her real life experience with violence against Black people by White society.

The other issue Black students had with the plot was that it was “unrealistic.” James expressed this by saying that a lot of the moments in the book were unrealistic because they were “White savior moments” and “it's just a very inaccurate portrayal of the Black experience.”

Hermionie echoed this feeling when she discussed the instance of Scout confronting the Ku Klux Klan outside that jail by saying:

“I felt annoyed more so mainly because the way she portrayed the book is like, oh, this could happen. Like, when Scout went and stopped the KKK. It's like, oh- yeah- all you have to do is this- like, that's not how it would be in real life and stuff. So I just feel like she was downplaying the seriousness of the actual events that could happen.”

In this case, the unrealistic event that Hermione mentioned was that Scout could de-escalate the KKK simply by asking a question about one of their sons. This portrayal was annoying to Hermione because it “downplays the seriousness of actual events,” making it seem like fighting racism is simple. This is likely frustrating for Hermione and James because being people who incur “the Black experience” daily, they are fully aware that fighting racism isn’t that simple. Additionally, making fighting racism seem that easy trivialized the feelings and experiences of Black students who have to deal with racism every day. The events in the text where White people could save the day by doing so little may be frustrating because it allows White readers to feel they can fix racism by doing so little and allows them to feed into the “White savior moments” as truth. This, again, trivializes the difficulties that Black people and Black students face. The book making it seem like racism is easy to fix could make it feel to Black students that their feelings are not valid while it could make White students think that Black people are overreacting to instances of racism. This creates a greater divide between White students' understanding of the Black experience.

This connects to another frustration that was expressed by Black students in this unit: that reading about the events of Tom Robinson was a reminder of the negative experiences that Black people experience in real life every day. For Nia and Micheal, the text reminded them that in the United States Black people are disproportionately criminalized. Nia said reading *TKAM* reminded her that “Black people are always perceived as the villain type of person no matter how hard we come with like evidence we are still proven guilty and it makes it look like we’re bad people when we’re really not.” Similarly, Micheal said he was reminded that “being a Black male with a plan is the most

intimidating thing in this world. It was a further reminder that I will always be systematically oppressed.” In both cases, the students stated that reading *TKAM* caused them to associate Black people with negative images. This was indicated by associating Black people with “villains”, “guilty”, “bad people”, “intimidating” and “systematically oppressed”. It was also clear that both Nia and Micheal self-identified with this messaging as they both include personal dialects that indicate their inclusion in that group. Nia used “we” when referring to Black people while Micahel used “I” when discussing Black men being systematically oppressed. Being reminded of this reality by *TKAM* was not just frustrating as seen here, but is possibly re-traumatizing to Black students.

Lastly, once or twice, Black students expressed frustration with other students. For Black students, this frustration emerged from White people not understanding racism or what it is like to be Black. When completing a worksheet about examples of racism in the text, one White student, Todd, said “how can a little kid be racist, like she’s just a little girl.” Overhearing this comment from nearby in the room, Nix, a Black student interjected:

“Kids' minds are like a sponge, if they hear racism while they’re still young then... Do you know how easy it would be to manipulate a child into thinking Black and White, you know Black bad and White good? Do you know how easy that would be to instill into a child literally with a brain the size of a peanut and like a sponge? It’s like-almost hilarious that you don’t know this at this point.”

Nix’s frustration was evident because she felt the need to interject in a conversation which she was not a part of, indicating that she felt it absolutely necessary to explain this concept to her White peers. She also started her point, paused as if to regroup her thoughts and quell her frustration (indicated by the ...), and then continued again. The repetition of the beginning of her question that she rephrased when she says “Do you know” at the beginning of sentences two and three amplifies this frustration. Nix expressed how annoyed she was that someone could not know

this by presenting the concept as simply as possible when she removed any verbs from her point and said “Black bad and White good.” She reiterated this feeling of annoyance with this White student not understanding what she felt was a simple concept when she said it was “hilarious” that these students “don’t know this at this point.” I assume Nix was frustrated because, given that she grew up around racist White children and she and her peers are still considered children, she has had to experience racism by people like Scout her whole life. While she was frustrated that Todd doesn’t understand initially that it is possible for a child to be racist, Nix was likely more frustrated that he had not had to live with or think about experiencing this racism or how he, himself, might have been a child perpetuating racism.

**Resignation.** While the most frequent emotion that Black students felt during this unit was frustration, the second most frequent emotion they exhibited was resignation. Specifically, Black students on multiple occasions expressed that they were resigned to the way racism would present itself in *TKAM*. At no point in the study did I witness White students expressing resignation. This was possibly because White students are less likely to have to confront racism in their daily lives and/or do not understand how racism works in America as well. One student, Nix, seemed to put her emotional guard up in order to be less affected by the book. When asked about her emotions when reading the book she stated:

“I tried to keep my emotions from the book so I can give my best analysis on it. So to say personal emotions would kind of be like—too much or too big to describe, although there is—like—some moments of disgust when I see just how far they really went. But I don’t really like having personal attachment or emotions to the characters or really the story line.”

Nix wanted to be able to analyze the text unbiasedly, as she stated here, but it is also clear that the content of the text caused her negative emotions. Nix said her personal emotions would be “too much or too big to describe”. While big emotions can be negative or

positive, the fact Nix described her emotions as “too much” seems to indicate that feeling such emotions would be overwhelming for her. Given the content of *TKAM* as well as the fact that Nix was trying to protect herself from her own emotions, these emotions were likely negative. In order to protect herself from being overwhelmed by these negative emotions, she instead focused on analyzing the text and tried to stay removed. The fact that these emotions were negative is also supported by her stating that she had “moments of disgust” when she saw “just how far they really went.” Despite having her guard up, Nix still felt disgust while reading about how White people (they) treated Black people in *TKAM*, showing how destructive the images in this text can be for Black students. Instead of complaining about these images or refusing to read, Nix instead resigned herself to focusing on analysis and taking emotions out of reading. This is likely because Black students are so used to reading upsetting things about Black people in school that they have developed ways to protect their emotions (like focusing on analysis) instead of being able to fully experience the content because it would hurt too much.

In a classroom discussion about the trial of Tom Robinson Mr. Jiko first asked his students to summarize how the trial ended. Then Mr. Jiko asked the class if that was the way they expected the trial to end. This is how they responded:

Hermionie: When I read that I was not surprised at all, I was like ain’t no way he’s gonna win this trial even though there was so much evidence.

Dante: I wasn't surprised.

James: Nothing's really changed.

Mr. Jiko: Why do you guys feel that way?

Kayla: That’s the whole vibe of the book-racism. Why would anything change?

Like Nix, these students seemed to be accustomed to reading and seeing horrible things happen to Black people both in real life and in literature . In this case, when they read that, despite clear evidence of his innocence, Tom Robinson was found guilty, they all seemed resigned to the fact that this was the only way this trial could have ended. All four students who responded to this question were Black, and notably, many of the other Black students in the classroom were nodding their heads in agreement with these statements. All of these students expressed a lack of surprise indicating their resignation to the way that the legal system operates for Black people. Hermionie gave the specific complaint that “even though there was so much evidence,” “there ain’t no way he’s gonna win this trial.” This comment was reminiscent of the comments that students made when discussing more recent court cases where Black people did not win despite being proved innocent. James also seems to connect the case of Tom Robinson with more recent cases by saying “nothing’s really changed” indicating that she felt that the world still operates in the way it did for Tom Robinson. Kayla expressed her resignation with the way the book itself operates by saying the vibe of the book is racism and that there is no reason this would change. Given that she puts the whole book in that category, this feeling of resignation about the outcome of the trial may have been built by the repeated exposure to the racism in the book before that point. For all of these Black students unjust behavior towards Tom Robinson was no surprise which is likely because they were used to seeing Black people and Black characters experience similar situations regularly. While these students were vocal and engaged about being resigned, coupled with their frustration it seems to indicate they were tired of having to repeatedly see these same images.

**Discomfort–White and Black.** White students felt discomfort very frequently while Black students expressed discomfort somewhat frequently. For Black students, reading about

Calpurnia and Tom Robinson made them uncomfortable. Kayla, when asked about reading about these two characters made her feel, simply responded with the word “uncomfortable.” She took a deep breath, shrugged her shoulders and waited for the next question. For the other questions in the interview, Kayla went into detail about how she was feeling. About this topic, however, she only said “uncomfortable.” This may indicate that it was too difficult to say anything more, showing just how uncomfortable the topic made her. Nix, when asked the same question, said:

“I feel like they very much fit different black stereotypes that put people into a box and I don't feel like they exactly perpetuated it but I don't feel like it dismantles it. I don't really have any personal emotions towards them, but the fact that they fit the stereotype, but didn't dismantle them didn't really sit right.”

Nix's discomfort was evident most obviously when she said that reading about these characters “doesn't really sit right.” Her discomfort could also be seen when she talked about putting Black people “into a box.” Nix identified as Black so if she felt that these stereotypes constrain Black people it is possible she was uncomfortable because this would force her to fit those stereotypical images. This would be especially disconcerting given Nix's focus on the idea that these characters do not “dismantle” the stereotype because it insinuates that Nix will be stuck with these stereotypes for a long time.

White students who were uncomfortable during the unit were less uncomfortable with the characters themselves. Instead they were more uncomfortable with talking about race in general and specifically with discussing or coming in contact with the N word. This was almost certainly because White students were not forced to see themselves in these stereotypical Black characters which makes the characters themselves less upsetting or uncomfortable. Additionally, White students could be more uncomfortable discussing race because it is a topic they have never had to directly confront. For Black students, this is something they experience every day and therefore they did not struggle as much to talk

about. Mr. Jiko and Ms. M both expressed that students felt uncomfortable when the N-word appeared in the book, on a worksheet or in class conversation. All three classes had discussions before the unit began where they learned the history of the N-word and decided how they felt it should be handled when read in *TKAM*. Both classes decided to replace the actual derogatory term with the phrase N-word. While Ms. M explained that Black students would follow this classroom rule, “they weren’t afraid to say the N-word.” Of her white students, however, she said

“They wouldn’t even want to say-like- anything near- like... N-word, and sometimes- like they would just like, stop. And so it seems like for them like we all agree as a class we would not use the N-word. But to them even using the euphemism felt uncomfortable, like acknowledging the fact that it was there was uncomfortable.”

Ms. M was surprised about this because as she said “It’s in music, on television, we hear it in the halls.”

Jeanette lent a possible explanation when she explained her experience of talking about the N-word. She said “we did group discussions about the N-word and that—that made me feel very uncomfortable—and unsure of myself.” While Jeanette also directly expressed being uncomfortable, she explained what made her so uncomfortable: she was unsure. Not only did she directly state she was unsure, she also paused to try to find the correct words and repeated herself when she said “that—that”. She also paused after saying the word uncomfortable, as if it was not the correct word and clarified that she is unsure. Generally, Jeanette is the first student to speak in class and is very confident about what she says. In this quote and throughout the unit, however, she paused frequently to clarify her words or restate what she was saying. The fact that she was so unsure when talking about race, but usually

finds school to be her safe space, illustrates how primarily White her educational spaces and curriculums have been. Jeanette went so far as to call her discomfort fear.

This is not just true for Jeanette, however. Another prime example of the uncertainty many White students expressed, Patricia also struggled to find her words when discussing race. She explained that it was because she didn't feel like speaking about race was her place.

Patricia said:

“I think that obviously as -like- a white person, it's not my position to like-- like it's not-- it's not my position to really like get offended or anything. Or-- or-- or-- whenever we were-like-having discussions on what we think should happen with the book-just because the only reason I feel like that's not my place to be able to say -like, we shouldn't read this book because the word isn't-it's not used towards me. I still think that obviously, some of the ideas and like, the racism that's in the book is like-is bad. I don't know. Words are hard.”

Much like Jeanette, Patricia struggled to find her words and had many instances where she paused and repeated herself or stumbled over her words because she was not sure how to express herself. Some of these included when she said “like, like” or when she said “the racism in the book is like-is bad.” This uncertainty was also expressed more directly when she said “I don't know. Words are hard.” Patricia's uncertainty stemmed from her not feeling like there was a place in any conversation about race for her because it was not her “position to really like to get offended,” and she felt like it was not her place to be able to make comments on the book. While it was a great use of critical consciousness to recognize that, as a White person, she should not be making decisions for Black people and that she is not the expert on the topic, the idea that White people should not participate in conversations about race is concerning. This showed that White students have been taught that issues of race are not theirs to handle, which put the onus to fix racism and discuss race on Black students. This is a huge problem because it should also be the

responsibility of White people to fix racism. If White students have never been taught how to talk about race, this also means that they have not been exposed to enough non-White content to have these conversations. This further highlights the White ownership of classroom content and spaces and the lengths that are gone to to make White students feel comfortable when discussing race.

**Confusion–Black and white.** This uncertainty also arose in feelings of confusion for White students. The second most common emotion that White students felt during the unit was confusion. Less than 40% of Black students expressed confusion and when they did express confusion it was about how to feel about the unit. When asked how he felt about reading *TKAM*, Ja said “I really didn’t feel—I don’t know how I felt. I just wanted everyone to be mature and not like laughing about the topic and everyone was pretty serious about it. I know the book was like a good book for like learning about the topic... but... that’s it.” Ja was conflicted about how to feel because it seemed he was concerned about how students would respond to the topic of race, saying “I just wanted everyone to be mature.” He also seemed to struggle with the content of the text as he said he knew it was “a good book for learning about the topic, but that’s it.” He seems to say the only good thing about reading the book is that it’s supposed to be good for talking about racism. Lastly, Ja saw a positive in that he thought *TKAM* was a good book for learning about the topic. This is an interesting perspective given that the way we framed the unit, we asked students to evaluate the use of *TKAM* in our curriculum. Never did teachers state or imply it was a good book. Given the book's popularity, it is possible Ja assumed it was a good book for the topic because it has been so widely read before. It is also possible that purely because we were reading it, he assumed that the content that teachers give their students are always good ways to teach. This would indicate that, to this point, Ja had never been asked to think critically about why

students read what they read in school. Despite his obvious discomfort with how some handle the topic and the book itself, he ended up confused about how to feel because the teachers he trusts presented him with a text so he assumed it was good. This is also a problem and exposes the need for teachers to be able to accept constructive criticism from students while also being able to teach students to push back in a constructive way.

In general, when White students were confused it was about the evaluation of TKAM while thinking about race. Some struggled with the actual analysis, but some struggled with what to do with the information after they had analyzed through this lens. These students seemed to want a right answer of how to react or respond to these instances beyond just analyzing the text. Some students, like Jeanette, struggled with how to feel about characters like Calpurnia. After learning about the stereotypes she portrayed, Jeanette stated she had “mixed emotions about Calpurnia.” She really liked Calpurnia as a character. She says

“She is obviously a sweet lady and Lee writes her to make you feel love for the character but also, I don’t like the thought that she is completely loyal to the family and would do anything for the family. Even though they have obviously been racist towards her many times. They may not have known that they’ve been racist towards her but they are. And she’s oblivious too. I don’t know. It’s just really, it kind of brings to life like the worksheet we were doing yesterday. The mammy stereotype and that’s— I don’t know.”

Despite thinking Calpurnia is a “sweet lady,” after learning about the Mammy stereotype (which is the worksheet Jeanette mentions) she seemed unsure about how she was “supposed” to feel. As was seen earlier, Jeanette was unsure about how to talk about race and seemed to want to “get it right,” something she expressed in other parts of her interview. She noted that Calpurnia had good aspects and tried to get at the fact that she was problematic, noting that she was “completely loyal to the family” even though they have been racist and that “she’s oblivious.” She also seems conflicted about how she should feel about the family when she is saying they have been racist

but also that they may not have known that. After scanning through her thoughts, Jeanette repeated the phrase “I don’t know” to end her thinking showing she is unable to create an opinion on how she is “supposed” to feel about Calpurnia. In the brief moment where Jeanette said Calpurnia is a “sweet lady,” Jeanette immediately mentioned that “Lee writes her to make you feel love for the character.” Jeanette seemed concerned if it was okay for her to praise or like the character of Calpurnia, and in case it was not okay to say she is a “sweet lady” defended that position by explaining that Lee made her think that by writing Calpurnia in that way. While she was not confused about how to evaluate the text, Jeanette was confused about how to feel.

White students who are more culturally conscious than Jeanette were not confused about how to feel, but instead were confused about why we would use *TKAM* to talk about race. Todd said:

“I just think it's really stupid. Because I think it's a super outdated book. and I feel like using old books doesn't make any sense because all we've talked about is like, like middle school and elementary school we talk about like, past racism, like really old things. And that kind of gives—like—the idea that it's no longer a thing. And then we talk about how it's actually a thing, but we used *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is an outdated book by a white woman.”

Todd felt strongly that the use of *TKAM* didn’t make sense because it was “super outdated” and “by a White woman.” Particularly, he brought up that, before this point in school, they had talked about racism that occurred in the past and, given his mention that *TKAM* is outdated, reading *TKAM* is doing more of the same. He brings up the concern that if we continue to only read about racism in the context of the past, it will give people the idea “that it’s (racism) is no longer a thing.” He mentioned that this does not seem to match the unit because in the next sentence he said “and then we talk about how it’s actually a thing.” Not only does this contrast with the sentence before it and models the same sentence structure and language used to show their

relationship, he also uses the word “but” to show the misalignment between racism “actually being a thing” and using *TKAM* in the last sentence. Because of his high level of critical consciousness and cultural competence, Todd did not struggle with how to feel about the problematic nature of the text like Jeanette did, instead he struggled with why he would be given this text to talk about race. Given his level of frustration, this may create distrust between him and the teacher or school system because he felt like he was being presented with an inadequate text. It is additionally interesting that despite the fact that Todd not being directly impacted by the negative racial images in the book, he was willing to question its usage, while Ja, who was impacted by these images, was not. This may indicate that Todd has been given the space and tools in his academic career to question authority figures, while Ja has felt like he needed to respect what was given to him.

### ***Question Two: Effects on Students Sense of Self***

In addition to evaluating students' emotions throughout the unit, I also looked for how students' sense of self was affected by reading *TKAM* through a CRP lens. Much like coding for emotions, I cyclically coded for common themes in the interviews, observations and writing samples until saturation. Because this study's framework is CRP, while coding I specifically looked for growth in the components of CRP, including critical consciousness and cultural competence. Also following CRP's approach, I approached the data from a social justice lens to evaluate the peer relationships within the classroom during the unit. Finally, I looked at data around student engagement with the unit. While initially I approached the data looking specifically for benefits and disadvantages of reading *TKAM* through a CRP lens, what I found was that many of the themes were not just positive or negatives but were instead double-edged swords. For example, White students generally built critical consciousness and cultural

competence, but all but one Black student reported learning nothing at all from this unit. In regards to student relationships, there was tension between Black students and White students, but Black students built camaraderie. Finally, while Black students were very engaged in the unit, they also felt expected to explain Black trauma and the Black experience to their classmates. I examine each of these themes more deeply with examples below.

**Critical Consciousness and Cultural Competence.** In previous studies where CRP is used to teach high school canon texts, researchers found that students built critical consciousness and cultural competence (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Dyches, 2018). As mentioned before, these studies lacked the perspective of Black students. Therefore, the two studies showed growth in these areas for White students. Similarly to these studies, many White students also showed growth in the areas of cultural competence and critical consciousness.

In regards to Cultural Competence, all but one of the White students in the study discussed in their interviews a better understanding of how Black people are portrayed in literature. It makes sense that this topic is where their cultural competence grew because we focused on this topic frequently throughout the unit. Specifically the unit focused on the Uncle Tom and Mammy stereotypes. In these cases, students explained that they learned what these stereotypes are and described them as “strengthening stereotypes” (Patricia), “harmful” (Olivia), “racist” (Todd), and “disgusting” (Elizabeth). By understanding these stereotypes, students become more culturally competent because they understand how Black people are portrayed in literature as well as how that portrayal can perpetuate racism and affect Black readers.

Several White students also gained cultural competence about racism in the past and racism in our current world. During the unit we learned about direct racism, systemic racism and

antiracism, as well as showed examples of each type of racism from *TKAM*'s time period and from recent history. Elizabeth explained that she learned

“a lot about society and racism back then. And also how society has evolved since then, but also how it really hasn't because you can still see instances that totally relate that you just like you never think about how like, wow, it's taken this long for like zero change to happen.”

In this quote, Elizabeth likely refers to the lesson in which we analyzed the similarities and differences between Tom Robinson's trial and more recent trials that were highly racialized (the Travon Martin and George Floyd cases). Elizabeth showed greater cultural competence because she learned about instances of racism and how they affect people of color from the past and current day. This example also shows a growth in critical consciousness because Elizabeth was able to analyze the instance of racism she learned about through a critical lens. She started by stating what was the status quo about race for many of these students: that “society has evolved since then”. She then challenged this belief by stating that “it's taken this long for zero change to happen”. When she discussed “instances that totally relate,” she was able to critically analyze events in the past and today to see how racism has evolved.

Elizabeth was not the only student who showed a gain in critical consciousness, however. All White students exhibited critical consciousness in their interviews. Other than discussing the harmful effects of stereotypical images and analyzing instances of racism, several students used this skill to critique the use of *TKAM* to teach about racism. This makes sense given that one of the guiding questions of the unit, which students could choose to write their essay on, was “do you think *TKAM* should be used to teach about racism?” When preparing for the essay, the students discussed this question in class. Todd and Ms. M had the following conversation:

Todd: There are books written by Black people that understand racism better than this book. Why don't we read those books?

Ms. M: Why do you think we don't read those books?

Todd: Because White people who are racist decide it. Maybe the people on the school board? I don't know, I just think we shouldn't, or we could like—read more books that aren't this book. I also don't like it.

Ms. M: Do you not like how it's written?

Todd: No, I think it's weird and old

Ms. M: So as far as a book that talks about racism would it need to be completely up to date?

Todd: No, but like books like *The Hate U Give* is a really good book that talks about more modernized racism and is not by a White woman I think it's weird for a white woman to be the main-like-the main person we are supposed to learn from about race when there is so many other options.

For this school, as well as in many schools across America, *TKAM* has been established as a 9th grade, status quo text. In multiple places in this conversation Todd pushed against this status quo. He questioned the use of *TKAM* by explaining that there are “books by Black people that better understand racism” and then asking “why don't we read those books?” When prompted by Ms. M about why we read this book, he states “White people who are racist decide it.” While this was not a detailed or research-based claim (which Todd recognizes when he immediately says “I don't know”), Todd used his knowledge of systemic racism to evaluate why a book like *TKAM* became popular. Knowing that White people are generally in power, like the people he mentioned “on the school board,” he was able to analyze why this book may be used. He was also able to use this critical consciousness, with some assistance from Ms. M, to determine what would make a more effective text to talk about race: being written by a Black person and being more modern.

While it is fantastic that all white students grew in regards to their critical consciousness and cultural competence, Black students did not have the same benefits. Ms. M, when talking to

Ms. Frances after the lesson on the Mammy and Uncle Tom stereotypes, expressed that she felt her Black students already knew these stereotypes. She expressed frustration that while she was able to teach White students something new, Black students did not benefit. Black students expressed similar feelings. When asked what they learned from reading *TKAM* all but one Black student noted that they didn't learn anything while reading the text. Some of their responses included:

Nia: There wasn't much. It was stuff that I already learned-it was stuff I already knew that was made more obvious

Dante: I don't feel like I learned anything, I don't know? It might have been-uh-close mindedness on my part, but yeah-I didn't really-I didn't care for the book. I just didn't take anything really away from it.

Hermionie: So I feel like you don't really learn anything. The fact that people can be racist and will continue to be racist. And even though they might care. Like a part of who they are-like-past history like mindset. They're still racist.

Ja: Not too much that I didn't already know, because I have experienced racism and know these things exist...so.

Each of these students expressed that the information learned in the unit was "stuff that [they] already learned." Hermionie elaborated on what she assumed she was supposed to learn or what she assumed that White students learned: "that people can be racist and will continue to be racist." Ja also assumed that he was supposed to learn about racism from the book because he said the reason he had not learned is because he had "experienced racism and know(s) those things exist". As Ja explained, it makes sense that Black students would not learn about racism or being Black in America from a White woman author when they have first hand experience with racism. In other words, reading about a Black man in a book written by a White woman cannot replace or enhance the knowledge gained from actually having to be the victim of racism as a Black person.

Dante gave another reason why he and other Black students may not have learned anything. He said it might have been his own “close-mindedness.” It seems that, when going into a unit about race, Dante did not feel from the beginning that he could learn anything from a non-Black teacher and a book written by a non-Black author. While this “close-mindedness” may have had some impact on Dante’s learning, combined with his peers’ responses it is more likely that his presumption was correct. This also suggests that even before the unit began, it was frustrating to Black students because they knew that they would not learn anything and that their teachers would try to teach them about the Black experience that they live first hand, and their teachers do not.

While Black students did express critical consciousness in their interviews and observations, the elements they analyzed differed from what their White peers focused on because they went beyond the topics we analyzed in class. Black students applied knowledge they had from their own experiences to analyze the validity of the text. While White students focused on how the book itself, and stereotypes in the book, perpetuated racism, several Black students expressed that they already knew about these things and how problematic they can be. In fact, Michael, when asked how he felt about reading about Tom Robinson and Calpurnia, stated

“It made me feel no different from always. Here you have the same two African American caricatures. Calpurnia works for White people, Tom Robinson is the Black man who did nothing but is accused of raping a White woman. If I don’t like any other part of this text, I do like how they show how much of a threat I am in this world”.

Michael first showed that he was aware of these stereotypes by explaining they did not make him feel different from always. This suggests that his emotion did not change because he didn’t learn anything new. This is further supported by the fact that he calls them the “same two African American caricatures.” By using the word “same” Michael shows these are caricatures he has

experienced before. Therefore while he does have the cultural competence to be aware of these stereotypes, he did not gain them from this unit. Additionally, he uses critical consciousness in that he analyzes the harm of these stereotypes stating “they show how much of a threat I am in this world.” Much like cultural competence, this notice does not seem to be a new insight or skill from this unit. Firstly, we did not discuss this in our analysis of these stereotypes as a possible problem. Secondly, if these stereotypes were not new information and he stated that his emotions did not change, Michael likely learned that images like that of Tom Robinson portray him as a threat from his everyday life.

It was also evident that while Black students had the skills that CRP pushes to improve, they were not gained through this unit because their critical analysis focused on topics that were not hit on by our unit. Hermionie, for example, focused on how the text was not realistic. When asked how she felt when reading *TKAM* she said:

“I knew in a way that the book was incorrect. I knew that it wasn't actually how real life is and it followed a lot-like-of stereotypes and stuff. So I never felt like -any sadness, But I felt annoyance more so mainly because the way she portrayed the book is like-oh- this could happen. Like, when Scout went and stopped the KKK. It's like -oh yeah, all you have to do is this like, that's not how it would be in real life and stuff. So I just feel like she was downplaying the seriousness of the actual-like-events that could happen.”

Hermionie expressed critical consciousness first by stating that the book “wasn’t actually how real life is” and by saying “that's not how it would be in real life and stuff.” Given that many people view *TKAM* as a way to teach what racism was like in the 1930s, this pushes against the status quo. Additionally, she analyzed how this lack of realism can be harmful by stating that “she was downplaying the seriousness of the actual events that could happen.” She gives the example of how Scout goes to the jail and sees a mob of KKK members surrounding her father. She disbands them purely by asking about one of their sons' well-being, humanizing them. Like

Hermionie said, if a White person thought that they can fight dangerous racist groups like the KKK by humazing them, they wouldn't understand just how dangerous that group is. By using this critical consciousness, Hermonie also exhibited cultural competence. In order to be able to evaluate how realistic the book itself is, she would need a deep understanding of how racism operates in America and how it operated at that time. While we gave some background on this topic, it was not nearly enough to be able to make this analysis. Michael and Hermonie's account support most of the Black students' arguments that they did not learn anything from the unit. While it is fantastic that White students did, it is problematic that even in a unit about race and racism, Black students' learning is still relegated to the sidelines. This reinforces the classroom as a White-centered space.

**Peer Relationships.** Peer relationships were affected both positively and negatively during the unit. For the relationship between Black students and White students, as well as Black students and their non-Black teachers, this unit appeared to be divisive. One way in which this was apparent was in how groups were formed during the unit. In both classes, students were often given the opportunity to choose their own small groups to work in. In Ms.M's class, the groups were almost always the same. One Black student, Nix, would generally work alone, but would sometimes work with a group of two white students: Todd and Elizabeth. All other student groups are separated by race. Both Todd and Elizabeth had high critical consciousness and cultural competence which is likely why Nix worked with them. The room itself had White students sitting in the middle of the room, while most Black students sat on the outside edges of the room. Nix always sat at a desk removed from the rest of the desks in the classroom. In Mr. Jiko's class, Black students all sat in one of two places, the middle two rows of his 5 row

classroom or removed up at the front table of the room. This physical separation seemed representative of the students' feeling of division in their interviews and observations.

Nia illustrated this division by attaching the way White and Black characters are portrayed in the book to White and Black people in general. She specifically associated herself with Tom Robinson in the book. When asked what she learned from the text, she stated:

“That... it isn't so much that I already learned, it was stuff I already knew that made it more obvious in the movie that black people are the victim—not a victim—are perceived as this villain type person no matter how hard we come with like evidence we are still proven guilty and it makes it look like that were bad people when we're really not, and that some people are, like Atticus and they are nice but they don't—speak all the way up they'll agree with us but they don't do as much as it needs to be done to help us out in certain situations and then you have other white people who literally want the worst for you because you are Black. Ummm—like I said it points to Black people as being villains —um—and it makes it seem like all White people are bad and they're not like not all White people are like the people who were sitting in the court and allowing it to happen even though they had evidence with them.”

In this answer, Nia situated the experience of the students in the class as aligned with and defined by the roles of Black and White characters in the book. This, in turn, separates the experience of the White teacher (Ms. Frances) and students as well as Nia and the Black students in the class. Nia used personal dialects and evaluative indexicals throughout the interview that highlight the division she sees between White people and Black people. When asked what she learned from reading *TKAM*, she started speaking about what she learned from the character Tom Robinson being convicted as guilty that “**we** are still proven guilty and it makes it look like that **were** bad people when **we're** really not.” Later she said there are White people like Atticus that “don't speak all the way up **they'll** agree with **us** but they don't do as much as it needs to be done.” She identified herself with Black people and what they learned and continued to identify Black people as those who would need to defend themselves or provide evidence and prove they are not villains. White people, not included in the “us,” are identified as “them” or other.

Based on the separated descriptions in both personal diatects and evaluative indexicals, it appears that Nia saw a clear divide in the experience of reading the text between Black people and White people. She used the separation of the characters in the book and applied it to the readers of the text as well. This caused her to feel separation from her White peers and identified with the Black characters in the text. It is also important to mention that when she describes these situations at other points in the interview,,, she repeatedly associated negative emotions with reading. She stated “I feel anger and frustration because it’s about reading a book that uses the N word,” “it makes you look at it in a bad way,” “I had to take my headphones out because I was getting very frustrated to the point where I didn’t want to pay attention,” and “it made me very upset.” Not only was Nia emotionally distressed, the text also caused her to feel distance between her and her White peers because they did not have to identify with the same “villains” in the text. While talking about racism or reading about race relations, it will always be easier for Black students to identify with Black characters and White students with White characters. However, because Black characters are portrayed in only a negative and stereotypical light in *TKAM*, this division causes significant negative emotion.

White students also felt this divide during the unit. As opposed to being about the portrayal of characters in the book, for White students it was about the conversation of race itself. Many White students expressed feeling uncomfortable talking about race or like it was not their place to make commentary about(this is illustrated in the section about White discomfort). Because of this discomfort they often did not speak up or express opinions and seemed removed from the conversations in the classroom. One student, Jeanette, expressed that she didn’t feel comfortable talking in class for a different reason: she did not want to be judged. While she was not comfortable expressing these emotions in class, and was often uncharacteristically quiet in discussions, she was very open about these feelings during her interview. This is likely because in the interview room only White people were present and therefore she

did not feel like she could be judged by the Black students she mentions in the below quote. When asked how reading *TKAM* made her feel Jeanette answered:

“I’m also afraid. I’ve also been—I was afraid to speak up and say my opinion—because I am terribly afraid of being judged. And being scolded for the things I say, without knowing that—without me knowing that the things that I say will be taken badly and that’s like a fear of mine to be—uh—scolded for things that I say like, times when when I’ve said something and it’s wrong and Nix goes ‘well actually’ and I get really—and even though I know Nix means no like, means no like meanness towards it. I feel. I feel bad that I said these things because it was wrong. And that I didn’t get it correct.”

In this quote, Jeanette described a type of interaction that I witnessed several times while in Ms. M’s class. Particularly, this interaction happened towards the beginning of the unit. Ms. M asked a question of the class and Jeanette would respond with her perspective. Jeanette, having a low cultural competence, would often say things in such a way that offended Nix, a Black student who was very vocal in the class. Nix corrected Jeanette and explained to her why what she said was problematic without accusation but also without “kid gloves.” Jeanette stopped contributing to the conversation, got very quiet and in some cases removed herself from the class by asking to go to the bathroom or nurse. Because she was “afraid” of being “judged” or “scolded” for saying something that is in her words “wrong,” Jeanette often chose not to speak in class at all. Additionally, in these conversations she saw Nix as the opposition who would “scold” her. While she recognized that Nix did not intend to be mean, Jeanette clearly felt uncomfortable talking around her. Because of this, White students and Black students were not working together to build critical consciousness or cultural competence because some White students were resistant to Black students’ support in helping them understand the Black experience. Instead, this White student disengaged by removing herself from the class experience and positioning herself in opposition to Black students.

Despite the divide that seemed to appear between Black students and White students, one positive was that Black students within classes seemed to build camaraderie over these topics. Given that racism like what is portrayed in *TKAM* is something they have to experience every day, and often don't get to talk about in classrooms, these discussions seemed to open space for Black students to have conversations about how they are affected by their race in school. In a conversation in which all students were asked about how we should teach about race and racism in schools, students had the following conversation. Notably, in answering this question, all students that responded were Black:

Kayla: I feel like teachers who are like White, or not Black, I feel like they have White guilt around the topic of like slavery and it's like.. You don't understand...

James: It's performative. They aren't actually saying anything. And it was one of the most uncomfortable times of my entire life but like what are you actually doing? How are you fixing it-- it's like people who have BLM in their instagram bio- <sighs and shakes head>

<as James talks Kayla nods>

Kayla: =The moral of the story is a lot of White people want to appear approachable and like they are woke to Black people and they want to understand our struggle but at the same time they want to hold on to their fragility and privilege but at the same time you can't have the benefits or rewards from our degradation of our people and also that they support us but that isn't possible.

Hermionie: =Like when they don't realize White privilege is real, like they think they can speak from our experience. They feel like they want to understand. A lot of people have a White savior complex and you can explain it a thousand times, but they'll never understand.

<Kayla and James nod>

In this conversation three Black students, Kayla, James and Hermionie, bonded over their experience with well-meaning White people. They explained that the White teachers and people they have come in contact with have “White guilt” and feel like they need to seem like they

understand and are “woke.” However, they explain this effort often falls short as White efforts are “performative” and that White people will “never understand.” Again, in this excerpt the person indexicals show a clear us versus them bifurcation between White people and Black people. In this case, the students specifically pointed out non-Black teachers as an example. When discussing Black people, all of the students use the words “I,” “my,” “our,” and “us.” When talking about White people, the students used “they” and “you.” Kayla in particular emphasized the word “our” when describing “**our** degradation” and “**our** people” as if to reiterate that the experience was one that is exclusive to Black people and not something that White people, no matter how hard they work, can understand or be a part of. By using these different evaluative indexicals, the Black students in this conversation clearly separated their experience from that of their White peers and made clear—with phrases about White people trying to understand the Black experience like “never understand,” “that isn’t possible,” and “it’s performative”—that they don’t see a way to break down the barrier between these two groups. In fact, this conversation made me as a researcher question if the use of CRP to teach *TKAM* was an example of this performative White saviorism where we try to teach about critical consciousness and cultural competence to “understand the struggle,” but by using a text by a White author that is primarily about White characters hold on to our “fragility” and “privilege.”

This conversation had a positive element, however. The students in this conversation were provided with a space to express a common experience and bond over that experience. One way in which we can see this camaraderie being formed was in the students’ physical response to one another. When James spoke, Kayla nodded along with everything James said, silently agreeing. When Hermionie spoke, James and Kayla both nodded to acknowledge that they had all felt the emotions that Hermionie expressed. In addition to this physical response, the students who

identified themselves as girls showed their common experience by finishing each other's sentences. Without having a discussion about the topic beforehand, anytime one of the students paused, without more than a second, the next student would pick up exactly where they left off in their thoughts. Kayla, starting with “the moral of the story is” seemed to try to summarize James’s thoughts while Hermionie, after Kayla spoke, said “like when they” as if to give an example of what Kayla was speaking about. This indicates that not only were the other students very engaged when their peers spoke, they had also clearly experienced the same thing. This engagement also shows that the topic likely hasn’t been given space to be discussed in a classroom before.

Lastly, James started talking about the Black experience by using the word “my.” Kayla then introduced using the word “our” when talking about “our struggle,” “our people,” and “our degradation.” By replacing the word my with our, Kayla seemed to signal to James that she was not alone in her experience. Hermionie continued this use of the word our, including herself in the common experience that Kayla and James had built. While this conversation indicated the separation and frustration that these Black students felt towards White people, it also allowed them the space to feel like they belong. In a space that traditionally values White voices, this conversation allowed Black voices to be heard and for discussions about an infrequently talked about commonality to be expressed.

**Black Student Engagement Voice and Responsibility.** The last double-edged sword that appeared in coding was that although Black students appeared to be more engaged than in previous units and invested in the content, they also indicated that they often felt responsible for explaining Black trauma to their White peers. In both Mr. Jiko’s class and Ms. M’s class there were two Black students in each section who appeared to be disengaged. This was indicated by these students spending a significant amount of time on their phones, turning in little to no work,

not participating in discussion, and at times putting their heads down during class discussions. Based on the emotions indicated by other Black students, it is possible that these students were frustrated by the content and responded to that frustration by tuning out of the conversation. These four Black students accounted for less than 25% of all Black students in these classes. While they are a small percentage of the overall population, these students still showed that for some Black students this content causes them to disengage.

Despite these few Black students who disengaged from the unit, overall both Mr. Jiko and Ms. M expressed that Black students seemed more engaged in this unit than they had in their previous unit: *Romeo and Juliet*. While both of these texts are part of the high school canon, *Romeo and Juliet* is not race-related and does not have any Black characters. The two teachers in this unit believed introducing race was the reason for the change in which students were most engaged. When asked how students responded differently in the *TKAM* unit as opposed to the *Romeo and Juliet* unit Mr. Jiko and Ms. M responded:

Mr. Jiko: “I think the voices that were most present were very noticeably different. In *Romeo and Juliet*, it was a lot of my White students and a lot of my students who were comfortable with-like-acting for example. Transitioning to our conversations throughout *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it was largely my students of Color who were more firmly participating and even my White students who are normally participatory they were, they took the backseat to at least listen first and then contribute later.”

Ms. M: “I had a few students of color, who were very passionate about this book about this topic, and didn't mind informing their classmates about-like-things such as microaggressions or like what the stereotypes are like what's okay what's not okay. And so I think especially like-my White students, they were a lot more respectful, a lot quieter, a lot more careful with what they said. And I think from what I've seen in the journals, they were a lot more comfortable explaining, like their thoughts and emotions and feelings there, in writing for only me to see.”

Both teachers mentioned that they had noticeably more participation from their Black students. Ms. M says her Black students were “very passionate about this book” while her White students were “a lot quieter, a lot more careful.” Mr. Jiko noted that White students who usually participated “took a backseat” while Black students were “firmly participating”. Ms. M noted that she felt that the Black students in her class participated more because they were “very passionate about this topic” and “didn’t mind informing their classmates” about topics surrounding the Black experience, such as microaggressions and stereotypes. While Mr. Jiko did not note this “passion,” he did describe Black students’ participation as not only increased but “firm.” As firm can mean “strongly felt,” he likely also saw this passion. While passion can be a good thing and mean that there is high student interest, given the high level of Black student frustration, it is possible Black students were so passionate because they were so upset about the topic. In this case, the passion is not positive.

The teachers also noted a change in their White students. Mr. Jiko said White students were participating less because they “listened first and then contribute(d) later.” Ms. M said something similar when she said her White students “were a lot more respectful, a lot quieter, a lot more careful.” The first positive of this change was that there was more participation from Black students. Before this unit and in this honors freshman English class previously, White students tended to dominate the conversation. Hopefully, amplification of Black voices meant that Black students felt more comfortable. This may be because Black students feel like experts on the topic because they experience them every day. It is also positive that, as the teachers said, White students were “more respectful” and “listened first.” This allowed White students to listen to and learn about the Black experience from those who have seen it first-hand. This likely built cultural competence and critical consciousness.

One negative here was that White students did not feel as comfortable speaking in class and participated less. This was made clear not only by the high level of discomfort that was seen when asked about their emotions but also in that Ms. M described her White students as “careful.” This was also clear when Ms.M said they were more comfortable explaining their thoughts and feelings writing in their journals where only she could see them. It appeared that this discomfort led to a lack of active engagement in class conversations for White students. Another negative that was mentioned here is that Black students were often tasked with “informing their classmates” about the racialized elements of the curriculum. Ms. M references one example that I witnessed when she said that Black students informed her White students about microaggressions. During a class in which the students were discussing hidden examples of racism, Nix brought up the idea of microaggressions. The following conversation ensued:

Ms.M: Ok, before I write that down, does everyone know what microgression means?

Jeanette: no...

Ms.M: Ok, we have a no so can anyone define microaggression for us? Have we heard of the term microaggression? Kind of-we have a little bit. Nix, do you want to go ahead and tell us?

Nix-So long story to the short it's not blatant and direct racism but its little comments and remarks, facial expressions that still contribute to the bigger idea of racism. But the-like famous “oh, can I touch your hair” type of thing. It’s not exactly boasting that you're racist but it's not okay either. It’s just that sometimes you might not even realize you are doing it until we point it out. There have been multiple instances within this school where someone has put an angry black woman stereotype on me like even some of my friends, so you might not have that intention or you might not realize you’re doing it, but that doesn't mean that you’re not doing it.”

In this instance, Ms. M asked for clarification on the term microaggressions, something Black students have likely experienced but White students have not. Ms. M waited for several seconds after asking for a definition and was met with silence. She then asked if “we’ve heard of it” and

got no response. After waiting again and getting a couple of confused looks from the classroom, Ms.M turned back to Nix to define the term. It is possible that Ms.M called on her because Nix was the student who brought up the term, but she is also the only vocal Black student in that section. By asking her to define this term it put the responsibility on her to explain the Black experience to her White peers (like Jeanette) who did not have this understanding. It also allows the teacher to be released of their responsibility to teach cultural competence. This reveals a problem in the teaching through a CRP lens when teaching to a class with Black students. While the lessons that were planned in this unit intended to use CRP and were designed through a CRP lens, there were moments in the unit where in unplanned conversations the teachers did not adhere closely to the tenants of CRP. If the teachers had better training on CRP and how to teach through a CRP lens this may not have happened and it may have led to less negative emotions from Black students.

Nix went on to give a definition of microaggressions and then added two additional things. First, she gave an example of a micro-aggression that she experienced in the school building (being placed under the angry Black woman stereotype). She then explained to her White peers (referring to them with the person indexical “you”) what they needed to think about in regards to micro-aggressions: “you might not have that intention or you might not realize you’re doing it, but that doesn't mean that you’re not doing it.” The positive here is that Nix was helping her White classmates build cultural competence by better understanding her experience and by cautioning them that they may not realize they were using microaggressions, it may help them build critical consciousness by examining their own behaviors. However, again, White students’ learning in this scenario was dependent upon a Black student having to explain their trauma. Additionally, we again saw Black students not gaining any learning because Nix already knew

what microaggressions were (cultural competence) and was able to evaluate where they exist in the status quo (critical consciousness).

While Ms. M noted that Black students “didn’t mind informing their classmates about things” like microaggressions, stereotypes and what is and is not okay in regards to race, Black students were still tasked with being the voice for the Black experience. Multiple Black students expressed that they felt obligated to speak up about these concepts. Nix stated:

“It's obvious that I'm one of the only POC's in the classroom so I felt like it wasn't said but there was-like-kind of an expectance in the air that I knew certain things. I don't know. It's like I guess that's how I felt personally, and I'm glad that it wasn't exactly expected but you always feel that sort of pressure to represent your people.”

While Nix recognized that it was not required of her to explain everything, she did note the obligation she felt when she said “there was kind of like an expectance in the air” and “you always feel that sort of pressure to represent your people.” Nix noted that she felt this expectation because she was “one of the only people of color (POC's) in the classroom”. Additionally, she was the only Black student in the classroom that was vocal in discussions regularly. In fact, most other students in that class were relatively quiet during this unit because many White students felt uncomfortable speaking aloud (as is seen above) and the other Black students in the class were typically pretty quiet even in other units. In my observations, Nix often carried the conversations in this class. Given that many of the conversations in this unit were about race, it makes sense that Nix dominated conversation if she felt “pressure to represent her people.” Much like the above example where Nix explained microaggressions, this had Black student voices being heard and built cultural competence for White students, but again, it put significant responsibility on Black students. Nix hinted in her above quote that this could be an isolating experience because “she is one of the only people of color in the classroom.” Because the other Black students in the

classroom were quiet, Nix felt the responsibility to explain the Black experience fell on her. This was clear in her person indexicals. When she talked about feeling responsibility, she did not say that it was expected of Black students. Instead, she repeatedly used the pronoun “I,” indicating that she felt the responsibility fell solely on her shoulders. For one student to feel responsible for the education of most of her peers is not only isolating but a lot of pressure for one person. While White students benefit from this and while Black student voice was amplified, the cost may not have been worth it.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a summary of major findings in this study including a comparison to previous related studies. This section then expands upon these findings and comparisons to provide insight to educators for future use of *To Kill a Mockingbird (TKAM)* and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Finally, this section concludes with limitations of the study and recommendations for future scholars to extend this research and further examine the use of the canon in high schools.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### ***Emotions of Black Students***

The first question in this study asked “what are the perceptions, experiences and feelings of Black high school students who read *TKAM* in a micro-urban school district?” The data indicated that while Black students showed nine different types of emotion in observation, interviews, and writing samples, not a single one of them was positive. While White students' emotions were also largely negative, there were White students that indicated that they felt enjoyment or curiosity. While students' overall lack of enjoyment of a unit is a red flag, the Black students in this study did not express the negative feelings I usually see students express about a unit: there is too much work, the book doesn't make sense, or the topic is boring. Instead, Black students most commonly expressed frustration and resignation about the racial content of this text. In addition to the reminder of racism in their daily lives, many of them expressed these feelings about having to discuss racism in a way they found dehumanizing.

The number one emotion Black students expressed was frustration about the content of the book. Firstly, students found the characters in the book stereotypical and shallow, with the main two Black characters in the book following the stereotypical Uncle Tom and Mammy literary

tropes as well as the repeated use of the N-word by White characters about Calpurnia and Tom Robinson. Students expressed that they felt Black characters were portrayed as negative, shallow tropes and used Black people as plot devices to glorify White characters. Additionally, students expressed that the plot of the book only presents Black characters through a White lens where White people are seen as saving, or attempting to save, Black characters from negative situations. Seeing Black characters portrayed in only that way was frustrating for students because it was dehumanizing and did not allow Black students positive role models in the text. Instead, these characters were a reminder for students that Black people in America are often dehumanized by stereotypes and used for the gain of white people. Micheal powerfully exemplified this feeling when he stated that reading about Tom reminded him he is seen as a “threat in this world.” Not only does *TKAM* portray Black people in America unrealistically, it allows White students, who can identify with characters like Atticus and Scout, to take comfort in thinking that they can take minimal effort and successfully do their part in helping end racism. Students indicated frustration with this kind performative allyship and connected the text to a modern day example by talking about social media movements like #BlackLivesMatter. The last source of frustration Black students showed was with their White peers’ lack of understanding about racism and how it operates in America. Paired with these negative images of Black characters, White students can use characters like Scout and Atticus as templates for performative allyship. This likely caused Black students frustration because while Black students reading *TKAM* have to re-experience the racism White students already escape, White students are provided with more examples of how to comfortably escape responsibility around ending racism.

The second most common emotion expressed by Black students was resignation. Specifically, students were resigned to how racism operated in the text, both in the plot and

writing overall. The plot of *TKAM* is riddled with instances of racism, most prominently discussed being the guilty verdict in the case of Tom Robinson. Noting current examples of racism in our world and historical knowledge, Black students indicated that, before even reading the end of the trial scene, they were resigned to the fact that Tom Robinson would lose. Instead of hoping for uplifting stories of Black characters, the students expected the guilty verdict because negative images of Black characters in books and in their daily life were so normalized. This highlights that Black students are generally exposed to negative images of Black people instead of allowing for a diverse range of stories. This is further exemplified by students' acceptance of reading *TKAM* despite being frustrated by the text. While all Black students were emotionally affected by the text, not a single student asked for an alternate text (which were available for all texts read in class). Instead of asking to read something different, Black students dealt with their feelings likely because they were accustomed to being frustrated by school content that addresses race. One student noted that she “tried to take emotions out of it,” showing that in order to protect themselves some Black students have learned how to put up barriers so as to not be too deeply affected by the content. Perhaps classrooms are such a White dominated space in curriculum and opinion that these students would rather put up emotional barriers than push against the status quo to be comfortable.

### ***TKAM's Effects on Students' Sense of Self***

The second question in this study asked “How and in what ways does using *TKAM* affect Black students' sense of self?” and then asked “How do the experiences of Black students reading *TKAM* compare to those of White students?” While initially I thought that there would be clear positives and negatives on students' sense of self, what I found is that in students' critical consciousness, cultural competence, peer relationships and student engagement the data revealed

mixed results. While there were some things that were exclusively positive or negative, many individual effects could be seen either way.

The unit was taught using CRP, which stresses students ability to build cultural competence and critical consciousness. In regards to students' growth in these areas, the results were clearly positive for White students and clearly negative for Black students. All White students expressed greater cultural competence, citing new knowledge of not only how racism operated in the text but also how it operated in the past and currently in our world. Additionally, White students showed greater critical consciousness and identified problematic elements of the text and in reading *TKAM* to talk about race. While this was extremely positive for White students, Black students did not see the same benefits. Almost all Black students in the study expressed that they did not learn anything. This was supported by their teachers who noted that when teaching new concepts, such as the Mammy and Uncle Tom stereotypes, their Black students already knew what these things were. This is also supported by the fact that Black students were often observed explaining the Black experience to their White peers throughout the unit. The fact that White students learned from this unit while Black students did not shows that, in regards to learning, teaching *TKAM* through a CRP lens benefits White students over their Black peers. Given that *TKAM* is written by a White author who could not possibly understand the Black experience better than a Black student, it makes sense that Black students would not learn anything.

The unit's effect on peer relationships was also multifaceted. Firstly, the discussions that occurred during this unit created division between the White students and Black students. Students often self-separated themselves by race when working in groups and in where they sat in the classroom. Additionally, Black students often seemed frustrated with White students during

the unit because of their lack of understanding of racism. This likely caused frustration because not only do Black students have to deal with racism every day, in this unit they also had to explain racism to their White peers. In their interviews, some Black students associated themselves with Black characters in the text and White people with the White characters in the text. This may have been an additional source of frustration because White students were able to identify with White savior characters and innocent children in the text while Black students felt forced to identify with Black characters who were helpless or criminalized. White students also felt this division, often removing themselves from conversations because they felt it “wasn’t their place” or they were fearful of their peers’ reactions to their thoughts. Not only does this show separation, it indicates that if White students were not contributing then discussions in class were not as authentic or rounded as they could have been. A positive, however, was that Black students seemed to build camaraderie over these topics because they were given a space to share common experiences.

The last way that the unit affected students’ sense of self was in student engagement. From both observations and teacher feedback it was clear that White students were less vocally engaged in this unit than in other units. Many White students self-expressed discomfort at talking in class. For most Black students, conversely, vocal engagement significantly increased. This has both positives and negatives. On one hand, Black students were given a place in the school building to express their voice and issues they face. Black students not only explained concepts to their White peers such as stereotypes and microaggressions, but they also shared personal experiences they have had with racism inside and outside of the school building. This is positive because not only did Black voices gain a space, but White students gained cultural competence from hearing the experiences of their Black peers. However, this is problematic because Black students expressed feeling expected to be the voice of the Black experience. Several students stated that because they

were one of the few Black students in the classroom and they “knew certain things,” there was an expectation for them to explain those things to their White peers. While space for Black voices is great, Black students should not feel that they need to re-experience their trauma in order to teach White students.

### **Relationship of Findings to Previous Literature**

Two studies reflected the core concepts of this study: Dyches (2018) and Borshiem-Black (2015). Each of these examined using an offshoot of CRP to analyze the use of canon texts in a high school setting. Dyches (2018) conducted a study in which primarily White students were taught a five day unit that engaged a critical approach to Whiteness in the high school canon. Specifically, she focused on which stakeholders and voices are represented, and which are not, in British canon literature. She found that teaching through a critical lens “sharpened students’ critical consciousness by providing them with a discipline-specific framework from which to understand canons as politicized social constructs” (p. 552). Evidence of students’ critical consciousness being built was evident in their ability to analyze how and why the canon was designed: “by and for the dominant group” (p. 554). Borheim-Black (2015) observed a classroom of 9th graders reading *TKAM* through a social justice lens and conducted interviews with students and their teacher following the unit to examine if this pedagogy helped reinforce or interrupt discourses of Whiteness. She found that while there were challenges, this approach to *TKAM* made “Whiteness more visible” and “revealed opportunities for interrupting discourses of Whiteness” (p. 426).

Much like these two studies, this study found that teaching a canon text through a CRP lens allowed students to develop critical consciousness. In the case of this study, students were both able to question the Whiteness of a canon text (like in Dyches (2018)) and interrupt

discourses of Whiteness, namely stereotypes that have been perpetuated by White authors (like in Borshiem-Black (2015)). The difference in this study, however, was that White students showed growth in their critical consciousness and cultural competence while Black students noted that they did not learn anything from the unit. This difference stems from the very small number of Black students included in either earlier study (only one Black student in Dyches's (2018) study). Without Black voices, it is impossible to track the Black experience. For the White students in my study, however, their growth closely resembled that of the other studies. In both Dyches (2018) and Borsheim-Black (2015), however, there seemed to be more resistance to questioning the canon than in this study. In Borsheim-Black (2015) the researcher noted that parents called "to demand that the teacher be fired for teaching students about racism" (p. 421). In this study, we experienced no such resistance from parents or students. One parent asked that their student not be included in the study. While this was the parent of a White male student, no reason was given and no complaints were made. This is likely because Borshiem-Black's (2015) study happened in a much smaller, less diverse town.

In Dyches (2018), a few students "had difficulty engaging in conversations about race and continued a preference for the color-blind canonicity" (p. 557). She explained that "class discussions left students feeling uncomfortable and unsettled." Marcus, the only Black student, described the discussions as "awkward." White students in the present study also expressed discomfort in conversations about race, noting that they didn't feel it was their place to talk about or, like a student in Dyches's (2018) study noted, they "didn't want to offend anybody" (p. 558). Unlike this study, some students in Dyches's (2018) study "clung to the belief that notions of 'greatness' were inextricably bound to canonical works" and struggled to see the problematic nature of White narrative dominance within the canon. This was not a problem I saw in this study.

While one student expressed that they enjoyed reading *TKAM*, all of the students expressed that reading a text by a White woman about race was problematic. Students in this study may have been more receptive to this analysis because they were from a more diverse school and therefore had more often been exposed to diverse perspectives. Additionally, in the four years since Dyches's study, a significant movement towards racial equity in society emerged, potentially allowing students to be more open to changing their worldview. Neither previous study deeply explored student emotion or other effects on their sense of self, leaving no ability to compare to this study in those areas.

### **Limitation of Findings and Implications for Future Research**

During interviews with students, many of them expressed their desire to read a text by a Black author about race. While *TKAM* is written by a White woman, these two classes read the text *A Lesson Before Dying (ALBD)*, which is written by a Black author, at the end of the semester in which this research was conducted. Because this study took place over the course of only the *TKAM* unit, we were unable to see how reading a text from a Black perspective might have adjusted the data in this study. Given that Black students, when reading a text by a White author, did not show any learning and felt responsible for explaining the Black experience, it would be interesting to see if that would be different when reading a text written by a Black author. In the future, it would be interesting to conduct a research study in which *TKAM* is taught concurrently with a text by a Black author (such as *ALBD*) through a CRP lens and students are asked to compare their experiences.

An additional limitation is that this study was conducted in only honors courses. Firstly, this is limiting because the data only comes from students who are traditionally successful in school. In the case of Lincoln High School (LHS), it also means that the classes where this

research was conducted were significantly less diverse than the school itself. While the majority of students in this study were Black students, Black students were still the minority population in the honors classes. If this study were conducted in a non-honors course, the data might have reflected a more diverse and complex Black perspective. The non-honors course at LHS does not read *TKAM*, and therefore, this was not possible. For future research, conducting the same study within a non-honors course or alongside an honors course would allow the researcher to determine how different types of students react to this approach. If conducted in a similar high school, it would also allow for a greater number of Black students to participate because there is a greater percentage of Black students in the non-honors courses.

This study was conducted in the time of COVID-19 which led to some limitations. Schools were no longer online allowing in-person observations and interviews. However, because of close contact and quarantine rules, many students were often missing from classrooms. This made it difficult to get consent and assent forms from students which limited the number of participants in the study. Also, if classes had better attendance, discussions may have been different. If students had not missed lessons, their understanding of the text may have been different.

The last limitation is that this study was only conducted in one high school in a relatively liberal area. In our current world, where Critical Race Theory and discussions of racism in schools are becoming significantly more politicized, this does not offer a rounded perspective of how all types of students would receive this unit. Therefore, if a researcher were able to find a less liberal area with a high population of Black students it would be interesting for the same study to be conducted. This would provide insight on how Black students are affected by reading *TKAM* through a CRP lens where social justice would be controversial.

Lastly, while the teachers in this study were taught about CRP briefly in their college careers, they were not trained in a detailed way to use CRP or how to teach *TKAM* through a CRP lens. Based on their limited training, they created this unit and scripted moments and lessons followed the CRP tenants well. However, when unscripted conversations occurred, teachers did not always use CRP effectively. With proper and detailed training for teachers, Black students may have felt less responsibility to teach their White peers about racism.

### **Implications for Practice**

While there were some benefits for Black students and White students, like a space for Black student voice, the building of Black students' peer relationships and White students gaining cultural competence and critical consciousness, there were also many negative effects in this study. Black students experienced overwhelmingly negative emotions, expressed learning nothing, felt division from their White peers, and often felt responsible for being the voice of the Black experience. Given these negative effects, adjustments to the way this text is taught or what texts are taught may help alleviate some of these issues.

Both talking about issues of race and approaching them from a CRP lens seemed to have overwhelmingly positive benefits. Issues seemed to arise because Black students were faced with exclusively negative images of Black characters and unrealistic depictions of combating racism as well as having to be the voice of the Black community. All of these issues could be fixed by providing students with a different book about race but still teaching it through a CRP lens. When asked what kind of book they felt should be read about race, students and teachers overwhelmingly suggested books that are by people of Color, are accurate and realistic, and include a variety of portrayals of people of Color. Ms. M described this multifaceted portrayal as books showing the problems and conflicts that a race experiences but also “showing that that

racial group also has so much culture, so much richness and beauty in it too.” If books are by an author of the race that is being discussed, it allows the students to have an expert on that race incorporated in that unit and takes some of the responsibility away from students of Color. Additionally, if a book is by someone who has experienced racism, it is more likely to have a realistic portrayal of what it feels like to experience racism. If a book shows both positive and negative images of People of Color it is not only more realistic, it also allows students of Color to have positive role models to identify with. Taking away this responsibility and providing positive images would hopefully remove some frustration and other negative emotions from these students while still allowing a safe space to discuss race, build critical consciousness and cultural competence, and share common experiences.

There are many good options for books that could serve this purpose. One such book is also mentioned in this study: *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines. Another book that repeatedly came up when asking students what book they would want to read was *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. Both of these books are written by Black authors and contain stories about wrongfully convicted Black men, much like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The difference between these texts and *TKAM*, however, is that there are diverse representations of Black characters. Other books that would serve this purpose include *Fences* by August Wilson, *The Sun is Also a Star* by Nicola Yoon, and *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson. This is by no means an exhaustive list; not only are there many more books that already exist that would fit these criteria, new and fantastic literature is published by Black authors regularly. Much like in the spirit of this study, Ms. M suggested that in order to find the best books to read about race, we should ask Black teachers and Black students what books they think would be most effective and best represent Black culture.

I do recognize how difficult it can be for a teacher or a school to change what text is chosen. The process is expensive and time consuming, given that teachers need to entirely rewrite curriculum and activities and buy new books for every student. Therefore, if a school is unable to replace *TKAM* in their curriculum, several Black students indicated that if *TKAM* is to be taught it is most effectively taught through a CRP lens because it allows students to break down the book's problematic elements. One student, James, noted that if a school chooses to take a CRP approach, it is important that the teachers are well-trained in how to apply this lens as well as in how to be race-conscious. Without training in these topics, especially given the overwhelmingly White demographic of teachers in America, teachers will be unable to effectively and accurately grow students' cultural competence or critical consciousness and the teaching technique may be seen as White savior-esque.

Mr. Jiko also expressed that “if the goal is to increase anti-racist lessons in schools in an apropos, respectful way, then it needs to be part of teacher preparation programs.” He argued “a lot of educators don’t feel comfortable doing this kind of work simply because they aren’t well-read enough themselves or are still learning themselves.” Therefore, teacher preparation programs need to instruct pre-service teachers on how to effectively teach about race and use CRP especially if schools are going to continue to teach books like *TKAM*, but even if schools choose to read books that better represent Black people. As indicated by Mr. Jiko, programs also need to ensure they are supplying pre-service teachers with a diverse range of texts with positive images of People of Color written by People of Color and instructing them on how to effectively teach these texts. This will not only allow these future teachers to feel more comfortable teaching these texts, but will hopefully change what is read in the high school canon over time. Greater training

would eliminate teachers struggling to use CRP fully in unscripted moments like the moment that was seen between Nix and Ms.M.

There are positives to using a CRP approach to *TKAM* and students felt that teaching *TKAM* through a CRP lens was more effective than teaching it using an exclusively literary lens. However, this study makes clear that teaching *TKAM* does not best serve Black students by causing them negative emotions, making them feel responsible for White students' learning, and causing them to miss out on learning. If the education system wants to better support Black students, we need to better represent them in the high school canon.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

**Student Interview Protocol*****Demographic Questions***

8. How would you describe your ethnic background?

***Research Specific Questions***

9. What emotions do you feel when reading or talking about *To Kill a Mockingbird* in Class?  
What causes those emotions?
10. How did your teacher handle the use of the N-word in the text? How did you feel about that decision?
11. How did reading about Calpurnia and Tom Robinson in the text make you feel?
12. What do you feel like you learned from reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
13. Describe your ideal book to read in an English Class about race.
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about the topic?

**Teacher Interview Protocol*****Demographic Questions***

13. How would you describe your ethnic background?
14. How long have you been a teacher?

***Research Specific Questions***

15. What is your relationship to teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
16. What emotions do you feel when reading or talking about *To Kill a Mockingbird* in class?  
What causes those emotions?
17. How did you handle the use of the N-word in the text? How did you feel this decision was received by the students?
18. What important moments or thoughts about Calpurnia and Tom Robinson did you bring up in the text? How did you frame these conversations? How did students respond to these conversations?

19. What goal(s) did you have in teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
20. How did your students receive or respond to *To Kill a Mockingbird* as opposed to *Romeo and Juliet*?
21. Describe your ideal book to read in an English Class about race .
22. What are the benefits of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
23. What are the pitfalls of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
24. Is there anything else you would like to share about the topic?

## APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTION KEY

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “_”             | abrupt breaks or stops (if several, stammering)                                                                                                                             |
| “?”             | rising intonation                                                                                                                                                           |
| “.”             | falling intonation                                                                                                                                                          |
| “_”             | (underline) stress                                                                                                                                                          |
| (1.0)           | silences, timed to the nearest second                                                                                                                                       |
| “[”             | indicates simultaneous talk by two speakers, with one utterance represented on top of the other and the moment of overlap marked by left brackets                           |
| “=”             | interruption or next utterance following immediately, or continuous talk represented on separate lines because of need to represent overlapping comment on intervening line |
| “((...))”       | transcriber comment                                                                                                                                                         |
| “:”             | elongated vowel                                                                                                                                                             |
| “...”           | segment quieter than surrounding talk                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>ALL CAPS</b> | segment louder than surrounding talk                                                                                                                                        |
| “,”             | pause or breath without marked intonation                                                                                                                                   |
| “(hh)”          | laughter breaking into words while speaking                                                                                                                                 |
| “(...)”         | doubtful transcription or conjecture                                                                                                                                        |

(Wortham et al, 2021, Appendix A)

## APPENDIX C: IRB EXEMPTION



## Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research &amp; Innovation

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects  
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095  
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

**Notice of Exempt Determination**

December 10, 2021

**Principal Investigator** Yoon Pak

CC Alyssa Pavlakis

**Protocol Title** *Truly Antiracist?: An investigation into the effects of an anti-racist approach to To Kill a Mockingbird*

**Protocol Number** 22467

**Funding Source** Unfunded

**Review Category** Exempt 1

**Determination Date** December 10, 2021

**Closure Date** December 9, 2026

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) has reviewed your application and determined the criteria for exemption have been met.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing major modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Changes to an **exempt** protocol are only required if substantive modifications are requested and/or the changes requested may affect the exempt status

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