

Chapter 3: Reading and Literature



BIBLIO THERAPY

Books can be powerful tools to use in helping students understand themselves, others, and the world around them. In the classic text, *Literature as Exploration* (1983), Louise Rosenblatt describes literature as something that contributes powerfully to students' image of themselves, the world, and the human condition. Through literature, students can (a) clarify their own emotions; (b) vicariously experience new situations; and (c) interact with and come to understand humans from a variety of regions, historical contexts, and cultures. Also, books take readers inside the heads of literary characters. When reading stories about people dealing with similar feelings, situations, and life issues; students realize that they may not be so different or weird, that others have gone through similar situations. Books can bring understanding to students' own situations and sometimes provide ideas for possible solutions or courses of action.

Biblio Therapy uses literature to help students understand themselves or to help them understand and solve personal problems (Herbert & Richard, 1999). It can take a variety of forms, but the three key elements are: identification, catharsis, and insight. In the identification phase, readers identify with a particular character in the story. Catharsis happens when there is an active release of emotions. Here readers have followed a character through a situation or a problem to its resolution. During the insight phase, readers apply the insights gleaned from the story to their own lives or situations. This is often followed by a small-group discussion or journal activities where students can share their insights. Each of the activities described below can be used to help students connect literature to their lives.

Story Connectors

The Story Connector in Figure 3.1 can be used to provide structure in connecting events in a story to students' lives. Using the Feelings Connector, readers first select and describe an interesting or important event or action from the story. In the second column, readers list the characters involved with or affected by the event and describe their feelings or perspective. In the third column, readers list a similar event or action from their own lives. And in the fourth column, readers list the feelings and perspective of all people affected by it.

Figure 3.1. Feelings Connector - *The Wizard of Oz*.

| event/action in the story | feelings of character/s | similar event/action in my life | my feelings |
|--|--|--|--|
| - Dorothy lands in Oz and finds herself in a strange, new place. | - Dorothy doesn't really know what to do or expect. There=s new people and situations. | - Reminds me of when I went to jazz camp when I was in 9 th grade.. | - Like Dorothy, I felt out of place at first. I had never been to a music camp. There were many new people. I was by myself. Like Dorothy, I made friends once I got to know people. |

Using the Problem Connector in Figure 3.2, readers describe a problem found in the story and brainstorm possible solutions. They then describe a similar problem in their own life and brainstorm possible solutions.

Figure 3.2. Problem Connector - *The Wizard of Oz*.

| problem in the story | possible solutions | similar problem in my life | possible solutions |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| - The Wicked Witch is trying to hurt Dorothy | - Give her the shoes. - Reason with her. | - A colleague is saying incorrect and negative | - Explain the concept of synergy. |

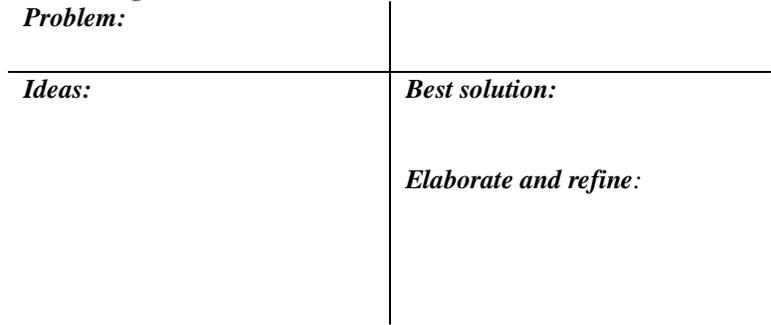
| | | | |
|---------------------|---|------------------|---|
| and take her shoes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ignore her. - Explain the situation with her and try to get her to understand. - Try to find compromise. - Share the shoes with her. | things about me. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invite the colleague to by part of our program. - Look for a common ground. - Ignore the colleague and maintain my standards. |
|---------------------|---|------------------|---|

Creative Problem Solving

Creative problem solving (CPS) is best used in pairs or small groups, as it is easier to generate ideas and get multiple perspectives when working with others. Here students (a) identify a problem in the story, (b) brainstorm to list as many possible solutions as possible, (c) pick the best solutions, and (d) elaborate and refine the solution. CPS helps to provide greater perspective and more possibilities to problems that students may be facing. The CPS Organizer in Figure 3.3 can be used to provide structure here. (Problem solving will be covered more thoroughly in Chapter 9.)

The process of CPS is more important than the product. That is, the solution students produce is not nearly as beneficial to their emotional, mental, and social growth as hearing the thoughts, moral reasoning, problem-solving strategies, and multiple perspectives of other students. To extend this, students can also focus on problems in society, at school, in the community, or in their own lives.

Figure 3.3. CPS Organizer.



Double Journal Entry

The double journal entry is a way to combine students' objective observations and subjective views. In their journals, students draw a line down the middle of the page (see Figure 3.4). On the left side, they select and record interesting or important passages from the text verbatim (objective observation). On the right side, they describe their thoughts, impressions, or associations related to the selected text (subjective view). Finally, students' perceptions or subjective views are shared with a friend, in a small group, in whole class discussions, or as part of a writing activity. This can be used for a post-reading activity with both narrative and expository text and is a good alternative to worksheets, study guides, or comprehension pages.

The double journal entry allows students to select salient elements and make personal connections or observations. It can also be used in science or inquiry projects by describing what is observed on the left side and students' ideas or interpretations on the right side (see Chapter 6). To extend this idea with older students, they can observe and record events around them or describe events in their lives on the left side. On the right side they would record their subjective analysis or interpretation. To highlight differences in human perception and multiple interpretations, have students observe the same event. Eventually they will discover that "objective" reality is not quite as objective as they might have initially thought.

Figure 3.4. Double Journal Entry.

| text | my ideas |
|--|---|
| <p>Dorothy: No - it was an accident. I didn't mean to kill anybody; really I didn't.</p> <p>Witch: You didn't eh? Accident eh? Well, I can cause accidents too, my little pretty, and this is how I do it...</p> | <p>- The Witch, green face, scrunched up. Everyone is scared. The Witch represents the shadow side, that part of us that we all have inside us.</p> |
| <p>The Lion jumps from the woods and starts</p> | <p>- Dorothy is showing courage and acting on</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>terrorizing Scarecrow and Tinman. They are frightened. Toto, not afraid, barks. He chases Toto behind the tree. Dorothy slaps him and tells Lion he should be ashamed. Lion starts crying.</p> <p>Uncle Henry tells Dorothy that he won't let Miss Gulch take Toto. Miss Gulch tells him that he could lose the farm as a result. Uncle Henry takes Toto from a sobbing Dorothy and puts him in Miss Gulch's basket.</p> | <p>moral principles. It is not right for bigger things to pick on smaller things. Not knowing Lion is just a big coward, she risks her life to stand up for this principle. Isn't it funny that the one character who does all the killing in this movie also acts upon the highest moral principles?</p> <p>- Apparently Uncle Henry doesn't have the moral fiber that Dorothy has. He takes a moral stand, but then changes his mind. He is willing to have Toto destroyed. Uncle Henry seems kind of spineless.</p> |
|---|--|

From the movie script, *The Wizard of Oz* (MGM, 1939).

Aesthetic Response Questions

The reason why so many people (including the author of this text), have read the Harry Potter books is because they engaged our emotions and imaginations. Post-reading activities and questions for the stories our students read should be designed to engage their emotions and imaginations as well. Getting students to respond in this manner is called an aesthetic response to literature (Rosenblatt, 1983; Zarillo, 1991). The purpose here is to invite students to enter into the story, to relive it in some way, or to create associations and connections to real life events or experiences. The prompts in Figure 3.5 reflect this aesthetic response. These can be used for class discussion, small group activities, or as writing prompts.

Figure 3.5. Aesthetic Response Prompts.

| |
|--|
| <p>The following prompts will elicit an aesthetic response and can be used as writing or discussion prompts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Record a passage or part of the story that you find interesting. Tell why you recorded it. |
|--|

2. Describe a time when you had a similar situation or feeling as one described in the story.
3. Which character is your favorite? Why?
4. Which character is your least favorite? Why?
5. How are you like one of the characters?
6. Create a Web-of-Comparison using you and a character from the story.
7. Create a Web-of-Comparison using a book character and a real life character.
8. What things in this story remind you of your life?
9. If you were a teacher, would you read this book to your class? Why?
10. What were the five most interesting things that happened in this story? Put them in order from happiest to saddest.
11. Ask a question of one of the characters in this story and write what you think the character=s answer might be.
12. Describe a problem a character in your book faces and predict how you think that character will solve it.
13. Where and when did this story take place? Find clues to support your guess.
14. If you appeared someplace in this story, what might you see? What might you do?
15. Describe a thought or feeling that went through your head as you read.
16. What other books or movies does this story remind you of?
17. Describe something interesting or important in the story that other people might not have noticed.
18. Draw a picture, create a diagram, or design a symbol that might represent an interesting or important part of this story.
19. Describe something that might happen after the story has ended.
20. Would you recommend this book to others? What kind of person might enjoy this story?
21. Write a letter to somebody you think might like this book. Convince that person to read it.
22. Record a short dialogue in which you talk to somebody in this book.
23. Write a newspaper headline and an article for an event in this book.

- 24. Write a journal entry for one of the characters found in this book.
- 25. Break the story or chapter into beginning, middle, and ending parts.
List the three most important events in each part.
- 26. What do you want to say about what you read today?
- 27. Draw an interesting book cover for this story.
- 28. Create a poster or advertisement that might convince others to read this story.

Values Clarification Activities

Values clarification activities will be covered more thoroughly in Chapter 8. A value is any trait or characteristic that one finds important, such as honesty, creativity, loyalty, hard work, cooperation, participation, self-discipline, responsibility, dignity, freedom, positive attitude, equality of all, compassion, or kindness. Values clarification activities are those in which students are asked to identify, rate, rank, or apply a value. Three values clarification activities are described here: (a) ranking decisions, (b) inferring values, and (c) predicting actions.

Ranking decisions. In ranking decisions, students are presented with a description of a situation found in the story. As a whole class or in a small group, students generate three to four possible decisions that could be made by one or more of the characters. Students then rank the decisions and describe the value or values reflected in their top choice (see Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6. Ranking Decisions.

| Situation | Possible Decisions | Rank in Order of Preference |
|---|---|--|
| - Miss Gulch wants to take Toto and have him destroyed. | - Run away from home. - Talk with the humane society. See if they can help. - Take the matter to court. - Get to know Miss Gulch. Try to reason with her. - Send Toto away to live with | 1. Get to know Miss Gulch. Try to reason with her. Offer to help her at home. 2. Talk with the humane society. See if they can help. 3. Send Toto away to live with somebody else. |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| | somebody else. - Threaten Miss Gulch/ | 4. Take the matter to court. 5. Run away from home. 6. Threaten Miss Gulch. |
| <p>Reflected values: Our group values human interaction, reasonableness, and a willingness to understand and compromise. Our top choice reflects this. We think people are basically kind and reasonable. Our group does not value threats or the use of violence in any situation, as this always makes things worse.</p> | | |

Inferring values. In inferring values, the teacher or students select an example of a choice or an action made by a character in the story. Inference is then used to try to describe what values determined that character's choices. The Values Infer-O-Gram in Figure 3.7 can be used to provide structure here. In the left-hand column students, list relevant data or clues gleaned from the story. In the right-hand column, students list any relevant knowledge they may have related to similar things, people, or experiences in their lives. Based on this data, students make an informed guess or inference as to what values determined a particular character's choice or action. For younger children, a list of values may need to be provided.

Figure 3.7. Values Infer-O-gram.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Choice or action: Dorothy slaps Lion on the face when he is threatening Toto. What value may have determined this action?</p> | |
| <p>Important things the story tells us about the character:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dorothy takes action. She steps in to save Toto, not knowing that Lion is a coward. - Dorothy says it is wrong for big things to pick on little things. She is standing up for a principle here. - After hurting Lion, Dorothy tries to comfort him when he cries. | <p>Important things you know that were not in the story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lions will usually hurt you if you slap them on the face. - Courageous men and women throughout history have stood up for what they believed, even though they may have been hurt: Malcolm X, Martian Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks. - Cowardly men and woman throughout history |

Important things the story tells us about the situation:

- Dorothy does not know Lion is cowardly.
- Lion is growling and trying to scare Toto.
- Scarecrow and Tin Man do not take action. They only cringe.
- Lion threatens Scarecrow and Tin Man. Makes fun of them. Says he want=s to fight.
- Lion is brave until he=s challenged.

change their mind, retreat, or don=t stick to their guns when threatened or challenged.

- In books and movies, the hero or heroine often display the traits that Dorothy does.
- Many of the traits described by Joseph Campbell in *Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1968) apply to Dorothy.

Conclusion: Dorothy has courage and stands up for what she believes. She is willing to take action based on a principle even though she may be hurt. Dorothy represents the classic hero archetype as described by Joseph Campbell.

Predicting actions. In predicting actions, students stop at a point in the story in which a character must take action or make a choice. The Predict-O-Gram in Figure 3.8 is used to list values and clues that will help in predicting the possible action or choice. Students would then read ahead to test their predictions. (This is also an example of an inquiry project [described in Chapter 6], where students are asking a question, collecting data, making a prediction, and then testing their prediction.) To extend this activity, create an imaginary situation outside the story in which a character must make a choice or take action. It is sometimes interesting to put the story character in a real-life situation at school or in situations related to local or national events.

Figure 3.8. Predict-O-Gram.

Situation and choice or action:

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Important story clues: | |
| What the character values: | What I value: |
| What the character will do: | What I would do: |

Comparison Web

The comparison web can be used to help students find similarities and differences between any story element, character, or situation and their lives (Figure 3.9). Once a story element has been selected for comparison, similarities are listed in the middle column and differences are listed in the two outer columns. Students are then asked to describe an insight, observations, or idea.

Figure 3.9. Comparison web

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| The Wizard of Oz | | |
| Similarities | | |
| ↓ | | |
| the story | | my life |
| - Dorothy discovers she has | - My life has been a journey. I seem to | - I discovered my magic is |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| magic shoes. | be following a path. - I have had good friends to help me along. | determination and discipline. |
| - Dorothy kills two people (Wicked Witch of the East and Wicked Witch of the West). | - I have encountered selfish people that seem to want to take or destroy. - Water, in the form of consciousness, can make selfishness disappear. | - I have never had to kill anybody and hope I never will. |
| - Glinda the Good Witch teaches Dorothy and points her to where she needs to go. | - Dorothy and I have traveled to strange places. - We both discovered the importance of caring for those in your own back yard. - Dorothy and I have both had to fight and stand up for what we believe. | - I have had good books, wise teachers, and parents to teach me and point me to where I need to go. |

The lesson, observations, or ideas: There are many similarities between Dorothy=s life and my journey. I am hoping that my journey will have a happy ending like Dorothy=s. I would like to know what happened to Dorothy after she woke up at home. How was her life different? Did she ever reconcile with Miss Gulch?

T-Chart for Comparing

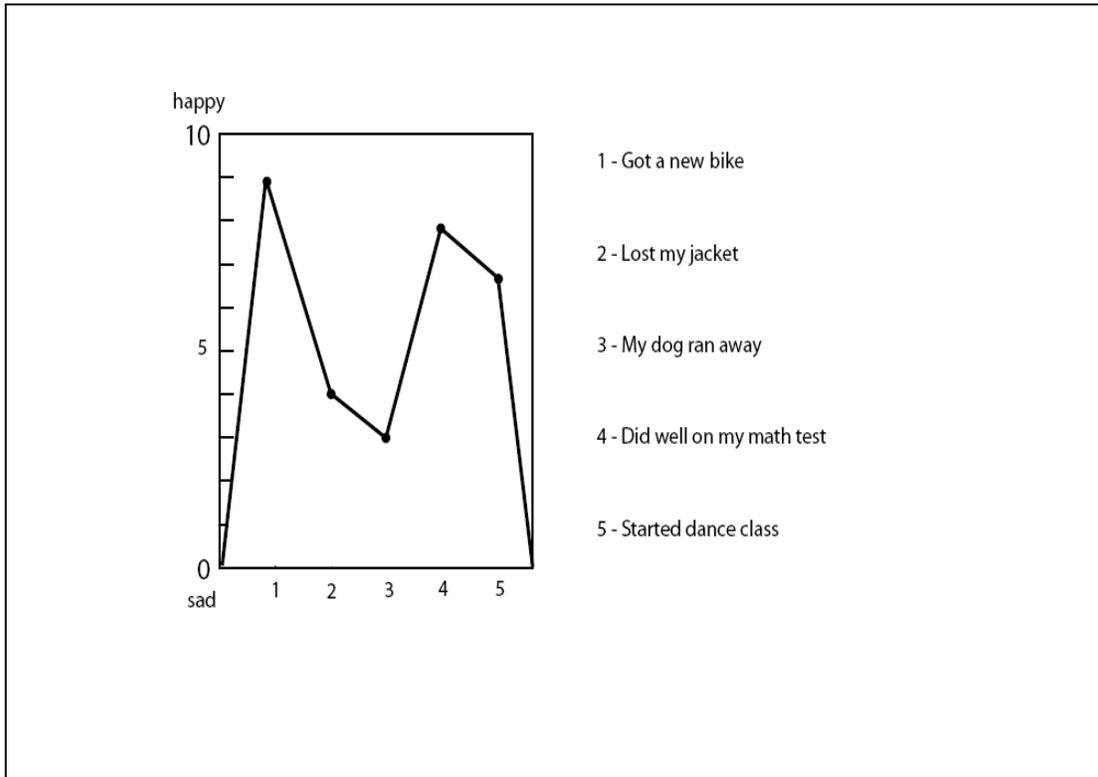
The T-Chart is used to find the similarity between items and events found in a story. A T-chart is used to list their attributes and find their similarities (Figure 3.10). To make multiple comparisons, a Compare-O-Graph is used (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.10 Comparing T-Chart

| my bad | Dorothy's bad day |
|-------------------------|---|
| got up late | fell in the pig pen |
| no breakfast | got yelled at by Aunt Em |
| got yelled at | crabby lady tries to take her dog |
| didn't finish homework | family locks her out of tornado shelter |
| got teased | gets hit on the head by a window |
| dropped the ball in gym | has a witch who wants to kill her |

Ideas/Conclusions: Both Dorothy and I got yelled at, however, she had a much worse day than I.

Figure 3.11 Compare-O-Graph



Feelings Chart

A feelings chart can be used to analyze different characters’ reactions to similar events. Eventually these ideas are applied to their own lives. After reading a story, the teacher begins the activity by identifying three or four story events. Using the feelings chart (Figure 3.13), these events are listed vertically in the column marked “events.” Next, two to four story characters are listed horizontally along the top of the chart. Finally, students describe each character’s reaction to each of the events. This activity can also be applied to social studies by

using real-life events found in history or the news.

Figure 3.13 Feelings Chart.

| | | Characters |
|--------|--|------------|
| Events | | |
| | | |

To extend this, the feelings comparison chart is used (Figure 3.14). Here, students use the event or feeling from the story to identify similar events and feelings from their own lives. These ideas are shared in small groups.

Figure 3.14 Feelings Comparison Chart.

| Find an event from the story. Pick one character from the story. Describe that person=s feelings related to the event. Then describe an event from your own life that caused similar feelings. | | |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Story Event | Character=s Feelings | Your Life Event/Feelings |
| | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|

Adjectives

Three activities using adjectives are described here. With some imagination and tweaking, these activities can also be used with nouns, verbs, pronouns, and other grammatical elements.

Ordering adjectives. This activity uses the thinking skill, ordering (see Chapter 7). Here students examine some or all of the adjectives found in a chapter or a book and arrange them according to those that are most like them to those that are least like them. It is usually best to use no more than five to ten adjectives. With older students, have them look for adjectives to arrange.

Describing adjectives. Students can also look for one to five story adjectives that describe their day, their week, or where they are in their lives. They would first list the adjective(s) in a journal or on a piece of paper and then describe the connection.

Adjectives of our lives. Students select or are given one or more adjectives from the story. They then look for and describe various events or moments in their lives that are related to each adjective.

I-Chart

After reading a story or a chapter in a text, students list what they consider to be the interesting or important events, ideas, or facts. Students examine these to create a related inference or big idea (see Figure 3.15). This activity can be done individually, but it works best with a buddy or in a small group. To extend this, students work individually and use the I-Chart to list and examine interesting or important events that occurred in their lives, the past year, or the past week.

Figure 3.15. I-Chart.

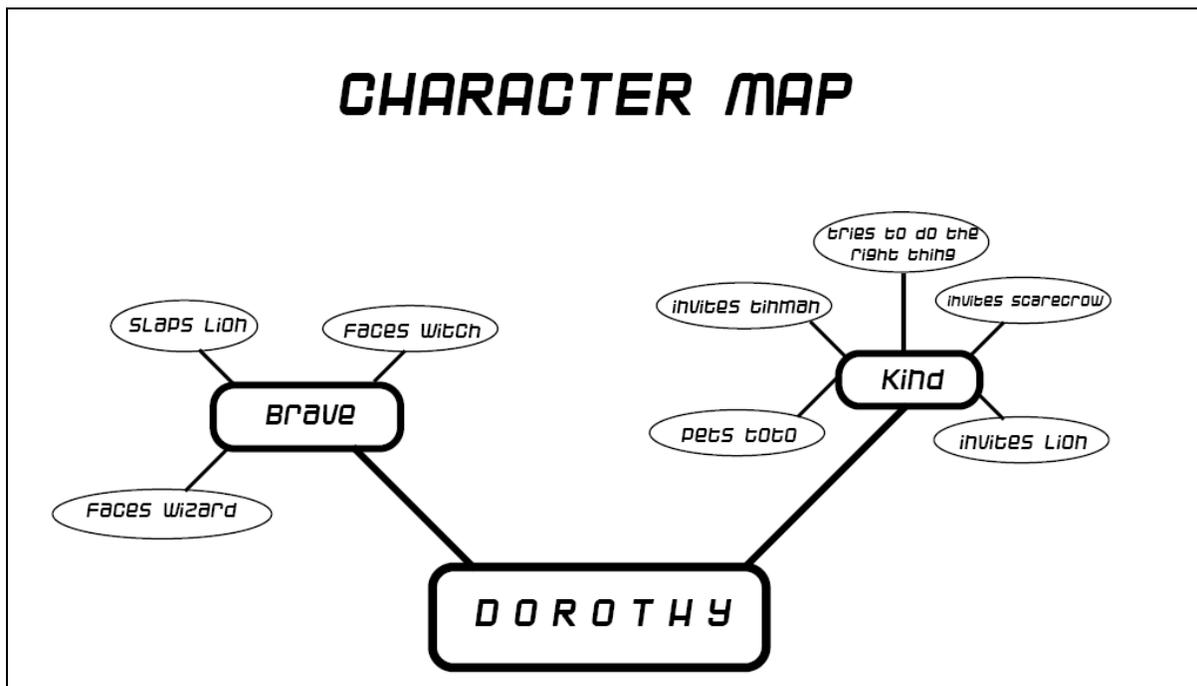
| |
|--|
| Interesting or important events, ideas, or facts: |
| Inference or big idea: |

Character Map

To create a character map, first draw a circle in the middle of a sheet of paper with the name of a story character on it (see Figure 3.16). Next, find two to three character traits or adjectives that are descriptive of that character. These become nodes around the first circle. Then, list story events that reflect or indicate each of the character traits or describing adjectives. To make the personal connection, students would then create a character map of themselves, a friend, or a person they admire.

Figure 3.16. Character map.

CHARACTER MAP



Book Talks

Voluntary reading is the reading students do outside of school or during free time at school. Nothing kills voluntary reading like book reports. Nothing enhances or promotes voluntary reading like book talks. A book talk is where students simply talk about a book they like. They briefly describe the book and tell why they like it. These are different from reports and should be short, from fifteen to sixty seconds. In my classrooms, I have always had students sign up for a book talk. It seems to work best to do no more than three to four a day.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The activities described in this chapter can be used to help students make personal connections to the literature they read. They also make much more interesting post-reading activities than the usual vocabulary or comprehension worksheet.

References

- Herbert, T. & Richard, K. (1999). Nurturing social and emotional development in gifted teenagers through young adult literature. *Roeper Review*, 22(3), 167-170.
- Rosenblatt, L.M. (1983). *Literature as exploration* (4th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association.
- Zarillo, J. (1991). Theory becomes practice: Aesthetic teaching with literature. *The New Advocate*, 4, 221-234.