

GEOGRAPHY IN THE COMMON CORE: EMBEDDED  
THEMES OF SPACE, PLACE, AND SOCIETY  
IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by

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*There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book.*

--Phillip Pullman, 1996

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my three nephews, Miles, Rhys, and Liam. You three already have a love of reading – now I cannot wait to share the geography with you, too.

It is also dedicated to Travis, my significant everything.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation investigates the embedded geographic information inherent in a collection of children's literature – as set forth by the Common Core curriculum – intended for second to eighth graders. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis and a critical lens revealed a wide range of geographic themes and spatial information about space, place, and society. In addition to basic geographic building blocks such as diffusion, migration, Earth-sun relations, and physical and cultural patterns, discourse analysis revealed a diverse set of embedded geographic narratives ranging from geographies of race, gender, and exclusion, to complex interactions between humans and their environment. These themes also vary quantitatively and qualitatively across the grades. As the concepts' complexity scaffolds and evolves, they develop from brief mentions in the early books to multifaceted interactions set within larger societal issues in the middle school books.

The wealth of geographic information contained in these works of fiction has implications for how we construct our identity as Americans and how we view the world around us. Additionally, these findings demonstrate an important opportunity for expanding geographic education utilizing the literature already being taught in classrooms as a tool for spatial learning. Geographers and public school teachers can locate the geography inherent in the existing curriculum and build bridges connecting

subjects, creating a powerful technique to help students become more geographically literate.

Keywords: geographic education; geography & literature; children's literature; Common Core; identity; Five Themes; Six Essential Elements; Geography Standards; qualitative content analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

The vibrancy of geography springs from the reality that geographic and spatial information are all around us. Some is overt, such as the GPS and Google maps on our phones, learning that one of Putin's friends plans to build a bridge from Russia to Crimea (BBC 2015), or when we watch the weatherman giving a forecast using a weather map. We may be peripherally aware of how this information guides or molds our actions or behavior, from what geopolitical situation to worry about to whether to grab an umbrella, yet there is a whole other category of banal, incidental geographic information embedded in our public and private discourse. This information influences the way we view and interpret the world by contributing, overtly and subliminally, to our perceptions. Despite the implications of such power, this type of information receives little focus or careful examination because of its ubiquity and embeddedness. This geographic information about what a place or people are like, how places are similar or different, and how places relate to each other comes from movies, television, music, comic books, and the myriad of other popular culture sources we encounter at home, work, school, on the phones and tablets we carry, and even at the grocery store checkout line.

Although globalization and increasing interconnectedness triggers more opportunities for encounters with other regions, cultures, and sources of overlooked geographic information, formal geographic instruction is actually going through a period of decline in the United States. Indeed, geography received no dedicated funding from the federal government from 2002-2012 even as other subjects received hundreds of millions of dollars (National Geographic Education 2015). The discipline's position

eroded even further when an influential state like Texas, which has supported geography for many years, recently removed geography from high school graduation requirements, collapsing geography into the world history course, and eliminating the end-of-the-year standardized test in geography (Hardy 2013; Weiss 2013), perhaps setting a trend for even further reductions in formal geographic learning around the country.

As a result of this, geographic information conveyed in classrooms and curricula is ever increasingly incorporated incidentally; it is consumed without comment, notice, or critical engagement by either teachers or students. Outside of school, when students absorb the geographic information from movies, television, comic books, video games, and the myriad of other popular culture sources they are less likely to have learned the broader spatial context that could help provide a more balanced or complete view of the people or places in question. Without a formal geography course, the incidental geographic information students are exposed to might disseminate in a history course through maps, in an earth science course through discussion of habitats, or in an English course where literature provides information about different places and peoples. This is especially concerning because young students are at the “developmental moment when socio-spatial frameworks are being formulated” (Dittmer 2005, 628) and when foundational concepts about this country, its identity, and its position in the wider world are being absorbed and processed.

Unfortunately, this combination means students are likely to have far less context for how this information contributes to the perceptions we have of the world around us. Yet, even though students may not realize they are receiving geographic information, all

of these formal and informal information streams contribute to their mental maps and, to borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase, their imagined communities (2006), the very things that help them form their ideas about the world.

### Purpose and Significance

Despite a great deal of concern and research revolving around the lack of geography in schools, there is a lack of literature about the embedded or tacit geographies communicated in K-12 curricula. This dearth of analysis establishes one of the starting points for this research; if we are to succeed in creating a spatially literate population that can operate successfully in today's increasingly interconnected world, expanding our understanding of the geographic messages people receive all around them is a critical piece of this puzzle. Gaining a more complete awareness of the types of implicit geographic information present in K-12 curricula gives us the potential to leverage that knowledge, helping educators create tools to convey geospatial frameworks rather than building incomplete or inaccurate representations of nature, space, society, and other places. Therefore, addressing the lacunas around analysis of tacitly absorbed geographic information in school curriculum contributes to the larger field of Geographic Education. Moreover, my research into the geographic information conveyed through means other than formal geography instruction can provide geographic educators with ways to help strengthen both geographic education and other curriculum areas. This research provides concrete examples to help non-geography teachers enhance their instruction by exposing opportunities for them to illuminate a deeper context and significance in the material they

already teach. However, first, the geographic information streams from unconventional sources need to be examined and identified.

It would not be possible to query the full breadth of implicit geographic information conveyed in our educational system. Instead, this study focuses on a single way geography knowledge is conveyed through the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts literature recommended for students from second to eighth grades (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices 2010). This research is intended to identify the geographic discourses and narratives embedded in this defined body of literature. These discourses cultivate students' spatial frameworks and contribute to their understandings of places, the environment, culture, values, and behaviors. When applied to people and society, they also cultivate a sense of the familiar *us* and an unfamiliar *them*. This information is weighty because these are constructs which affect our relationship with the world around us and our ability to function within it. This is especially true since such perceptions and categorizations open up the potential for misrepresentations, incomplete representations, and stereotypes. For example, in his book *The Colonial Present* (2004) Derek Gregory argued that for many people those being bombed in recent geopolitical hotspots like Iraq and Afghanistan are not real but have been reduced to "an abstraction of other people as 'the other'" (248). From this perspective, there are clearly issues and consequences of an "us" versus "them" paradigm.

This kind of abstraction and labeling makes it easier for us to categorize the world and process it, and, humans being human, when we see "diversity and complexity, the

mind grasps for simple stereotypes and explanations which will bring the unusual under control” (Johnson 1995, 20) either through familiarity or by distancing oneself from differences. As a result, people often fall back on reductionist or incomplete representations that can become habitual. Such patterns are significant because research into stereotypes and preconceptions illustrates how lasting and ingrained perceptions and labels can become, as well as how difficult it is to overcome expectations and values learned in childhood, even when confronted by contradictory evidence (Carnaghi and Yzerbyt 2007; Hamilton and Rose 1980; Hilton and von Hippel 1996; Lyons and Kashima 2006; Meehan and Janik 1990). Misrepresentations and stereotypes can color both the learning and the absorption of corrective information since early encoding can remain intact and strengthen over time, even in the face of authoritative contradictory evidence (Hilton and von Hippel 1996). Meehan and Janik (1990) feel that this is because humans “have a cognitive tendency to ignore information that does not fit with our already existing cognitive model” (93). If, therefore, geographical information about ourselves and other people and places from uncritiqued information streams such as children’s literature is helping establish patterns of fragmentary representations or stereotypes, this unqualified socio-spatial information may establish constructs that interfere with understanding the world well into adulthood.

Examining such issues through children’s literature is a particularly fitting strategy because there is a long tradition of using this kind of literature as a didactic tool. Some of the earliest children’s literature was religiously-oriented, for example, while during the age of colonialism and imperialism, this genre established “the self-conception

of the new national cultures” and guided “their conception and evaluation of non-European cultures” (Randall 2010, 30). Although some of the overt didactic nature of children’s literature may have faded, it remains “taken for granted that children absorb lasting attitudes towards others from the books they read” (Desai 2011, 41). This means children’s literature occupies a powerful position within education: it is at once incredibly potent and yet so ubiquitous that many forget it has the potential to shape attitudes and perceptions through anachronistic or biased geographic and cultural messages embedded in the required literature curricula. Children are instilled with geographic information, but not well instructed on how to critically engage with that knowledge. In our increasingly interconnected world, this can present serious challenges for their understanding of other places and their ability to interact successfully with other peoples.

The idea that children’s literature can mold or shape children into the “appropriate,” normalized kind of citizen is not new. Using formal education to deliberately and overtly shape the values and perspectives of people is a long-standing tradition. Indeed, literature, in particular, has long been a popular tool for helping “forge a national identity” (Rury 2005, 4) out of the diverse cultures and ethnicities that have come together to form this country. During the early colonial period, for example, “the purpose of formal education was simply to augment the development of reading and reasoning abilities necessary for active participation in the life of a society governed by religious values” through reading religious literature (33). As a larger number of non-religious books and other printed materials became more commonly available, a flow of ideas related to the Enlightenment began to shift the focus away from religious values in

schools and helped lay the groundwork for one of the most important touchstones of the American identity: the American Revolution (37).

After the Revolution, classrooms played a central role in the effort to forge a common feeling of national identity. As more immigrants arrived to the fledgling nation, there were concerns about encroaching cultural influences, so schools focused on preventing “a loss of their own cultural traditions” (Spring 2011, 11). Similar efforts though agencies such as reservation schools sought to “civilize” Native American children and eradicate their differences by imposing American ideals on them, often by isolating them from their existing culture. Clearly reinforcing a cultural identity through conformity and “othering” those perceived as non-conformers has been a part of education in this country for a long time. The system evolved so that American values and ideas were revered and rewarded and those who conformed to the expected norms were acknowledged with praise, success in school, and feeling that they fit into society as a whole; those who did not fit the acceptable identity were ostracized or held up as examples of what not to be.

Later, progressive reformers like John Dewey advanced the idea that public schools were “the central institutions in a modern democratic society” and were necessary for the kinds of “political participation” that allowed for the full development of each person in a society (Rury 2005, 150). Of course, the American school system was not uniformly about equality and equal access for all; *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, for example institutionalized the concept of “separate but equal,” a doctrine which was not, of course, really equal at all. Many felt that “schools, after all, were simply supposed to efficiently

reproduce existing social division of labor,” and perpetuate the societal norms of minorities occupying lower-class, servile positions (175). Eventually, *Brown vs. Board of Education* reshaped schools, ending school segregation and reflecting the social and cultural upheavals occurring throughout the country. Finally, during the 1960s and 1970s, the rising tide of multiculturalism reshaping the United States reshaped the educational messages once again, even as critics of such approaches protested that “public schools should emphasize a single culture—traditional Anglo-American culture” (Spring 2011, 407). These conflicts continue to be debated and contested today – including recent efforts in Oklahoma to ban AP U.S. History because it is unpatriotic and “emphasizes ‘what is bad about America’” (Rampell 2015) – but whatever the era, there is ample evidence of a long history of education in the United States carrying implicit and explicit messages about what it is to be an American, the kinds of participation required to have that identity, and the normative ideals and values children need to absorb to be included in the national image of Americanism. As Rury (2005) states, the public education system in this country has been used “as both an instrument of assimilation and a way of promoting national unity” (233); educational researchers such as Jenlick and Townes agree that the process of identity building is ongoing in our nation’s schools and extends the challenge to educators that we “must learn to examine the consequences” of the forces of social construction that underlie so much of our educational system (2009, xii).

The literature assigned in schools played – and plays – an important role in these efforts at assimilation and national unity, especially since the books read in schools have been specifically chosen by those in authority and for that purpose. Further, the books

that are part of the school canon also provide a kind of common experience that students all across the country can relate to – many of us remember when we first read *The Little Prince*, for example, or *A Wrinkle in Time*. Indeed literature has long been recognized for its impact on the minds and feelings of humans; the very fact that many governments have tried to censor so much fiction is evidence that literature has an effect on people and their beliefs (Rockwell, 1974, 29).

To describe the power of children’s fiction within the school system, Kidd (2007) asserts that American education is founded upon the “lingering belief that children’s literature builds good citizens” (184). Sometimes the fact that the books filled this function was overt; the book choices for the Newbery Awards, for example, often “functioned to clarify that which is American – even when the books were ostensibly about other cultures” (177) because identity is often defined through labeling what is different. Other times, the messages were more subtle but still carried “discourses of agency, belonging and citizenship” (Lefebvre 2008, 92). In either case, children’s literature is a vital conduit for nation building and identity shaping. This is not, of course, a recent phenomenon; in 1892, Field wrote that the books “provided by each generation for the training of its young successor are interesting as exponents of the prevalent modes of thought and intellectual tendencies of the time” (5). More recently, Peterson and Lach (1990) called children’s books “especially useful indicators of society norms” (188) and a “vital force of persuading children to accept” and perpetuate those values (189). Even Benedict Anderson, the man who wrote one of the most respected and widely-cited books about the phenomenon of nationalism, (2006) declares that such books “provide the

technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (25).

This power and ubiquity, then, makes children’s literature an ideal vehicle for identifying all sorts of messages and narratives, from inherent geographic information that contribute to the oft-overlooked underpinning of children’s socio-spatial understandings of the world around them; to the ways that kind of information is framed, and affect children’s perceptions of their environment, nature, and the like; to how those concepts and conceptions manifest perpetuate a both sense of national identity and a sense of who does not share that identity. The exemplars suggested by the Common Core curriculum are well suited for this examination about the underlying themes and discourses students are exposed to because, while the overall program is not without controversy, nearly all the states in the nation have adopted the curriculum. Since the Common Core State Standards “describe what students should know and be able to do” (California Department of Education) and are intended to facilitate successful moves between schools or states, this list of books carries with it the implication that these are the kinds of books American students are likely to encounter all across the nation, not just in a single region, state, or district (Common Core State Standards Initiative). This widespread applicability aids in understanding the overarching narrative and concepts that contribute to children’s socio-spatial frameworks and their sense of national identity in the United States.

## Research Questions

This research examines the issues above through a geographic lens and employs qualitative content analysis and elements of critical discourse analysis to identify and illuminate discourses, narratives, and language patterns in the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade Common Core literature exemplars. Specifically, this research answers the following research questions:

- 1) What geographic themes, as articulated by contemporary geographic education standards, are embedded within the 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade Common Core literature exemplars?
- 2) How do these themes vary, quantitatively and qualitatively, across these grade levels?

These questions are answered using quantitative analysis to discuss general trends in coded geographic themes, as well qualitative analysis to interpret the content and nature of the embedded geographic information. Results are organized around current geographic education standards, as articulated in the Five Themes of Geography and the National Geography Standards. A table providing the assessment tool for the qualitative analysis is located in the methods section (Table 2).

## Study Limitations

Given its specific goals and parameters, this research does have limitations. First, I chose the literature included in Common Core curriculum because, at this time, 43 of the 50 states have adopted the curriculum. Although this means the list of included works apply to the vast majority of this country, increasing the probability that most students would encounter these texts, the 33 books included in this study are not required or assigned to every single student. They are, however, intended to represent

the kinds of literature students should be encountering and analyzing in 2-8<sup>th</sup> grades, making them an appropriate data set for examining the discourses students tend to be exposed to in these grades and for exploring the geographic information embedded in these works.

A second limitation involves my choice of the Five Themes of Geography as the over-arching coding frame for the content analysis. I selected the Five Themes because they provide a manageable rubric for this analysis. They are widely recognized within geography and provide a convenient framework for categorizing and structuring my coding. While the National Geography Standards have, in many ways, supplanted the Five Themes within geographic education, the Standards contain 6 Essential Elements divided amongst 18 strands, making them a more unwieldy choice for a coding protocol. Ultimately, the elegance of having just five categories, each encapsulated in just a few words, rather than a more complex Standard, proved a more workable rubric for a project of this scope and focus. To help offset this limitation, I have extended my analysis to cast my results in light of both the Five Themes and the six Essential Elements from the newly revised National Standards. Although most current geography teachers are most familiar with the Five Themes, the ever widening presence of the National Standards indicates that future research should include a more detailed tailoring of my results to the emerging geographic education standards.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As this study focuses upon a critical analysis of literature for its geographic content, it must pull from both disciplines' scholarly literature, especially the subfields of critical geopolitics and children's literature research. There are, however, a number of other research streams situating and informing this study, including issues of identity and nationalism, as well as the issue of defining what "geographic themes and concepts" means. These will be explored in depth below.

### Defining "Geographic Themes"

First, for the purposes of this study, the rubric for defining what constitutes the geographic themes, concepts, and discourses being queried in the literature set is based upon the Five Themes of Geography. Released in 1984 by the Joint Committee on Geographic Education of the Association of American Geographers and the National Council for Geographic Education, the Guidelines for Geographic Education sought to dispel misunderstandings about the nature of geography (Natoli 1994, 2), to help clearly define what geography was and was not for the public, and to provide a guide for how to approach effective geographic learning by defining the scope and defining sub-sections of the discipline. Another of the project's goals involved informing people about the fact that geography conveys "perspectives, information, concepts and skills to understand ourselves, our relationship to the earth and our interdependence with other peoples of the world" (Joint Committee for Geographic Education 1984, 1).

These Five Themes (Location, Place, Human-Environment Interaction, Movement, and Region) were a key part of this structure for comprehending the world, and they proved to be extremely popular. Natoli felt this was because they not only solidified a definition of geography, they also “seemed to provide teachers with a recognizable conceptual base” for how to approach geographic education, and they were quickly adopted by the Geographic Alliance networks “textbook publishers, map producers, and curriculum developers” (5). While the Five Themes have been partially supplanted by the National Standards for Geographic Education, both document’s influence is widespread and educators and geographic practitioners continue to use them as ways to teach, talk about, and write curricula for geography (Oberle and Palacios 2012, Strait 2010, Zeiler 2013). This legitimacy and wide-spread acceptance make the Five Themes (Table 2) and the Six Essential Elements (Table 2), a logical and fitting basis for beginning to classify the major discourses within geography, grounding it in a widely accepted and recognized view of geography the ways it engenders an understanding of the world around us.

#### Identity & the “Other”

Since this research also asks questions about national identity, starting with a construct for identity is crucial as well. Actually attempting to define something as fluid as “identity” is problematic, however. While identity starts with the idea of characteristics shared with other individuals or group of individuals, and often carries “the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (Hall 1996, 2) there is, of course, more to the concept than that. Other theorists feel that “identity is conscious

identification” and that humans may have cognitive predispositions to being part of (self-identified) groups (Favell 2005, 1113). Along with these beginnings, there are many permutations, including personal identity, national identity, cultural identity, social identity, gender identity, to name just a few; all of these are suggestive of the complex make up of different aspects of humans, but do any of them actually capture what a person is – or perhaps even more importantly – what a person is *not*? Beyond this, most people continuously juggle multiple identities because they either identify with more than one category or are placed into several by others. Indeed, most people also move through several a day; they may always frame themselves as an American or a Lithuanian, even as they are also Texan or a woman, but they also have different identities or personas at home versus work versus school versus the shopping mall. Todd calls this phenomenon the “fluctuating, relational, and situational quality of self-definitions that are constructed in social practice and interaction” (2005, 432). This kind of multiplicity can lead to feelings of fragmentation or to people feeling as though they lack an identity because people can simultaneously have global, national, regional, local and individual identities all at once, especially in a world where rapid communication and ubiquitous social media can connect widely dispersed groups. Clearly, identity and identification are not only multifaceted, they are transitory; “they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty” that “other” (i.e., displace or exclude) outsiders by their very structure (Butler 2011, 68) because they not only delimit what *does* fit, but by definition exclude what does *not*. This, of course, adds issues of power and alterity to the nexus of ideas around identity, adding to the denseness of the concept of identity. The fact that entire disciplines –

psychology, sociology, philosophy – have developed in part to answer these questions of who we are and are not is further indication that there is no one way to define or delineate identity.

Indeed, Brubaker and Cooper, who conducted an in-depth inquiry exploring how identity is discussed and described, feel that the concept is losing its “analytical purchase” because the current paradigm of considering identity as constructed has removed any hard limits around the concept, and that by “Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of ‘identity’ saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary” that obscures and diminishes analysis (2000, 2). Hall agrees that the concept is problematic, although his critique develops more out of Foucauldian deconstructionism. He says that while theorists have ripped apart the idea of identity and identification and put the concepts “‘under erasure,’” meaning the concepts have had their flaws exposed and are no longer workable constructs, “they have not been superseded dialectically” and nothing stands ready to replace them, so we must go on using them in these deconstructed and critiqued forms (Hall 1996, 1). Yet for all of these critiques, theorists like Butler feel exploring these questions and difficulties is vital because through the act of identifying – or of excluding – these questions serve a role in exposing power, inequality, and spaces where such issues can be contested, and perhaps, reframed to mediate the inequality:

Although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of disidentification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation . . . . Such collective disidentifications can facilitate a reconceptualization of

which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as critical matters of concern” (2011; xiii-xiv).

Dittmer agrees when he links people’s increasingly fragmented sense of identity with popular culture: “With people’s possible identities drawing on numerous overlapping geographical definitions, and with culture being produced and consumed in new and various places, identity has become less of a taken-for-granted concept than in the past. Instead it has moved to the forefront of the study of both popular culture and geopolitics” (2010, xvii). Clearly, despite the problematic definitions, the concept is still relevant, both generally and in this research.

So, despite the slipperiness of the term and seemingly ever increasing umbrella of conceptions “identity” encapsulates, attempting to define – or at least explore – the idea is important because it helps illuminate who falls into a group, who they are not, where these ideas come from, how they are being used, and what all of these pieces can tell us about where we are going. Brubaker and Cooper express this idea this way: “‘Identity,’ too is both a category of practice and a category of analysis. As a category of practice, it is used by ‘lay’ actors in some – though not all – everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others” (2000, 4). Defining identity, then, is how humans write the narratives of themselves, of who they were, who they will remain/maintain, and who they will become. When these ideas become wide-spread, and especially when they are adopted/co-opted by the political elite, ideas of identity can take on a shape of their own, becoming almost mythic – people begin to accept them as primordial, as having always been there – and these identities often evolve into entities like nationalism or national identity. This aspect of

identity will be discussed in a subsequent section; for the moment, however, there is the question of where the information to form these conceptions of identity comes from.

There are as many ideas about origins as there are definitions. Hall, for example, feels identity is “constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1996, 4); the ways we portray ourselves, or see those who share our identity, portrayed, and the fact that we represent ourselves through describing, writing, discussing, filming, conveying, etc., – indeed, the very fact that we *do* represent ourselves in these ways – is how those identities evolve and develop. It is the very *portrayal* that creates the space for the definition and for identity to form. This kind of reflexivity does seem to add to the confusion and lack of clear boundaries around identity and how it is delimited, but this, too, is hardly a new conundrum; Descartes’s famous “I think, therefore I am,” for example, confirms his own existence, his own identity, as a being through his ability to think. He has defined limits around what constructs existence and what does not, creating himself and his identity.

Identity is, therefore, represented through the ways we, as humans, are created through different aspects of our culture, whether that is the way we think, to borrow from Descartes, or the art we create, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, the ways we form our governments, the laws and values we hold dear, the books we write, movies we watch, and all the other forms of culture/media humans have created as ways to represent ourselves and to reiterate or codify the “Others” who do not share our identity. As

Dittmer writes:

it should be clear that the processes by which self-identity is generated are paralleled by the processes by which collective identities (nations, religions,

political parties) are constructed. The difference lies in the specifics of the discourses involved and the scale of the media involved. (2010, 160)

Clearly this process is similar no matter what form of identity is under consideration.

In addition to qualities that can coalesce to shape identity, all of these are pieces of culture that can be examined as texts using a critical approach. These texts send messages, informing perceptions and the ways people think about the world, even if they cannot consciously articulate what is happening or where the specific ideas came from. This is exactly why a critical approach is important. If we are to gain a better understanding of the world around us and the reasons we interpret it and react to it the way we do, we must look at the messages that underlie the everyday texts we constantly encounter and that shape the ideas that define the lenses through which we view ourselves and others.

Indeed, Derek Gregory in particular feels it is essential geographers conduct this kind of research because such texts are “sources of power, of textuality as a site of representation and resistance” that necessitate active engagement, not passive acceptance or neglect (1994, 135). Hubbard et al. emphasize a similar point in *Thinking Geographically: Space, Theory, and Contemporary Human Geography* (2002). They assert that “When subject to critical interpretation, texts of all kinds begin to reveal partial simplified and distorted representations of people and place, often shot through with notions that serve to reproduce social inequality” (125). All of these aspects can often be a part of identity, especially in terms of othering individuals for not being part of an identity. When such ideas become entrenched, they can take on what Short calls a myth or “intellectual construction which embodies beliefs, values and information, and

which can influence events, behaviour [*sic*] and perception” (1991, xv). This takes the discussion of identity from definitions through where these ideas come from and into the outcomes and impacts of identity and its formation. All of these considerations are integral parts of the questions being asked in this research.

One of the most famous and influential attempts to address such issues and to coalesce these questions of identity, theorize the origins of such ideas, and to explore their influence is *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978). Since its publication, this book has had a vast influence on theorists from a variety of disciplines; one critic stated “hardly any student reading list in the humanities and social sciences was deemed to be complete without it” (Johnson 1995, 20). In the book, Said discusses his views of the evolution of the ideas of East versus West, making the point that both labels (both identities) are not only artificial human constructs that shift and change, they are not neutral ideas that exist in isolation: “they are in fact humanly and imaginatively made” (Jazeel 2012, 5) and weighted down by implications about their effects, meanings, and outcomes.

The influential idea of Said’s definition of Orientalism and the way it frames questions of identity and the power of such constructs has been brought to bear in topics as widely ranging as images of Middle-Eastern women in Victorian travel books (Gendron 1991); issues of Marxism and race in film studies (Sim 2012); Western discourse on Russian foreign policy (Brown 2010); a critique of Said’s theories using the historian Herodotus as the avenue for the appraisal (Martin 1990); ways Chinese poetry enacts Occidentalism, the inverse of Orientalism (Song 2000); the “cracks in ‘the master narrative’” about empire and conquest in Joseph Conrad’s *Nostromo* (Ramirez 2000, 93);

and issues of Western reflexivity in museums and galleries in the United Kingdom (Bryce and Carnegie 2013). Clearly the ideas Said explores in his work have spurred a great deal of discussion and analysis and have laid the foundation for explorations of identity across many cultures and disciplines.

Clifford (1988) encapsulates Said's importance this way: behind his work "lies a substantial and disquieting set of questions about the ways in which distinct groups of humanity (however defined) imagine, describe, and comprehend each other" (260). Indeed, Said's work is particularly apt for this particular research because, along with other forms of art, Said uses an array of literature for evidence for his theories. He draws on several centuries of such works and conducts a discourse analysis to explore how the label and identity of "the Orient" became what he calls "Orientalism." This process, he contends, set up a binary that has shaped and informed the relationship between Europe and the rest of the West, and the "exotic," mysterious, dangerous East for hundreds of years now: "For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (43). This came about because Europe sought to solidify and maintain its own power so it created a whole "body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment" (6) from those maintaining the hegemony.

Said also feels that literature, a significant conduit of cultural representation, has reiterated and inculcated these identities until the discourse of difference, otherness, and vague implications – even calling it a "European day-dream" at one point (52) – became

an unquestioned script, reaching the “level of accepted truth” (250). Indeed, one of his other goals in the book was to “show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). In other words, the very act of representation, of defining identity, and of labeling the East as “the Other” shaped perceptions. These perceptions were then further perpetuated within the literature people read since they helped reify the categories of belonging and exclusion; the literature reiterated a discourse of positive attributes, correctness, and virtues for the West that stood in opposition to the dissolute mirror image of the East. This process also robbed the East of its diversity; Said argues that since “the Orient” lumps together the entire area from China to the Mediterranean (xxviii; 42), these imposed strictures and definitions conflate and telescope a massive swath of the world, completely eclipsing the range of cultures, history, peoples, languages, and lives that actually exist there, vanishing huge aspects of distinctiveness. Though the discourses in the literature under consideration for my study may not be as stark as the ones Said described, the idea of categorization and reductionism being portrayed through literature has implications for this research since similar patterns may be present when different settings, locations, or peoples are portrayed in the children’s literature being explored.

Said clearly felt that questions about identity, power, and representation need be asked. His work actively critiques the authority of inculcated messages, especially since much of their influence comes from the fact that the messages are accepted without critique or engagement: “the strength of Western cultural discourse, a strength too often

mistaken as merely decorative or ‘superstructural’” (25) actually reinforces perceptions that may be accurate or may be stereotypes or at least misrepresentations. To counter this pattern, Said argues that we must question the prevailing discourse, and that “The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (21).

This research is influenced by Said’s approach, since I examine elements such as figures of speech and narrative devices which are two aspects of the literature; other aspects, such as the historical and social circumstances, are, as previously discussed, beyond the scope of this research. Despite my more narrow approach, Said’s overall ideas serve as the basis for my explorations into power and of how a cultural artifact like fiction helps manifest conceptions of identity. Indeed, this over-arching theory of large cultural messages being expressed in literature and the ways such discourses generate perceptions of home and other places and peoples helped spark the ideas behind this research.

Taking Said’s constructivist view of literature and its influence, but then applying it to the narrower focus of children’s literature is an intriguing way to extend the conversation about (national) identity and about where the perceptions and structures that affect the way we view the world come from. To take this a step further, then, it is vital that we do these kinds of analysis because “All of these Orientalist ‘visions’ and ‘textualizations,’ as Said terms them, function to suppress an authentic ‘human’ reality” (Clifford 1988, 258), subdue reality, and lead to continuing distrust, misunderstandings,

and inequality. At the very least, we risk conveying only part of the picture and obscuring the complexity of reality. We may even be deepening the rut of our own habitual perspective by surrounding ourselves with narratives that only reinforce the view of the world we have come to accept rather than encountering other perspectives or narratives.

Of course, despite his influence, Said is not universally accepted or revered. Some critics, like Ibn Warraq, question Said's methods and thinking, charging him with being as reductionist as those he accuses and of ignoring both individual works that might disprove or counter his points, as well as whole bodies of work like the entire canon of German Orientalism: "A part of Said's tactic is to leave out Western writers and scholars who do not conform to his theoretical framework. Since, for Said, all Europeans are racist, he obviously cannot allow himself to quote writers who are not" (2007, 33). Hitchens makes the same point with more moderate language: "it can be argued that he chose a one-sided approach and employed rather a broad brush" (2003, 155).

This frequent critique that Said focuses on a narrow suite of literature while extolling universal ideals from this work, is, however, beyond the scope of my work. I am engaging with Said's over-arching theory of the power of literature to act as a form of cultural representation and to reiterate a hegemonic discourse about identity. By conducting this analysis on a purposely narrow selection of literature aimed at children in schools, I am decreasing this risk, especially since I am not attempting to analyze multiple centuries' worth of work, nor claiming that these books should or could stand in for all forms of literature in the entire West. Instead, my pool of texts will contribute to an understanding of one information strand that helps build socio-spatial frameworks.

### Identity, Nationalism, and National Identity

Many of the issues about identity and cultural representation and reification take on even greater significance when they evolve beyond the individual and develop into a collective identity in the form of nationalism. This view is clear in Said's discussion of Othering and its consequences for the relationships between different communities or places. Of course, delineating nationalism and/or national identity is nearly as difficult as defining identity. Like identity, the definition of what nationalism entails has shifted over the years.

For many, the concept has evolved: "large-scale mass-democratic nationalisms of the earlier nineteenth century were later joined by a host of small-scale mini-nationalisms led by intellectuals who appealed to language and cultural differences" (Smith 1998, 2). All of these reshaped how nationalism was perceived or applied and gave rise to the calls for independent nations based on religion, ethnicity, language, history, etc. that swept around the world before and after World War I.

Other theories of nationalism take the perspective that the phenomenon can be traced back to antiquity, while for many, nationalism evolved "from other historical forms of social identity and associate its origins with the seventeenth-century development of the modern apparatus of statehood" (Ishay 1999, 1). Anthony Smith, who has written extensively about nationalism and its many forms has called the concept "a new religion of the people' – a religion as 'binding, ritually repetitive, and collectively enthusing' as any other" because it binds and unites a community and "distinguishes the sacred from the profane and unites its adherents" (Brubaker 2012, 3). In other words,

just like other forms of identity, nationalism not only defines itself by what is a part of it, it also defines itself through exclusion and othering.

No matter where the concept first began, however, the “power of nationalism comes from its power to create an identity based on emotion and the irrational” (Langman 2006, 66). This power has been used to wage wars, reshape territory, and continues to spark conflict all over the world, from the reactionary ISIS, to South Sudan’s recent creation, to the ethnic violence between different groups in Burma. Certainly in more recent years, the “tension between the state nationalist project and the aspirations of popular nationalism” (Deans 2005, 46) have emerged as a dominant discourse in the way nationalism operates, and the debate about whether nationalism is still even a viable option in today’s world continues alongside with theorists who feel it is still one of the most active sources of identity in the world.

Two of the discussions of nationalism/national identity that have had the most influence on this research are Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (2006) and Jason Dittmer’s *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity* (2010). Anderson’s book, which takes a largely Marxist view of the issue, explores the evolution of the concept of nationalism across time and place, including through the advent of the printing press, which not only helped information spread beyond the elite, but allowed communication in vernacular languages. This meant distinct bodies of literature geared to specific communities, and only those communities, began to spread, solidifying awareness of distinct identities (44). This pattern of individual countries possessing their own literature clearly continues today, even if some books achieve more widespread exposure.

Ultimately, Anderson defines nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6) in that it has bounds that do not extend to the entire earth and that the individual nations claim control or the right of dominion over territory. He also argues that this concept has been conceived of over the last two hundred years, despite a ubiquitous, general belief that such identifications go back into time immemorial.

No matter where it came from, however, as nationalism developed and specific national identities began to emerge, distinct markers and themes emerged to define what characterized and delimited a particular nation. In the case of the United States, for example, Anderson declares a variety of ideas and ideals came to represent the American sensibility through positive association and repetition:

Out of the American welter came these imagined realities: . . . republican institutions, common citizenships, popular sovereignty, national flags and anthems, etc. and the liquidation of their conceptual opposites: dynastic empires, monarchical institutions, absolutism, subjecthoods, inherited nobilities, serfdoms, ghettos, and so forth. (81)

In other words, nationalism, like other forms of identity, is formed by not only common characteristics, but also takes shape through the qualities a nationality deliberately sets itself up against. For the United States, the characteristics providing the counterpoint to the emerging sense of nationalism were qualities like the monarchy, a system of peerage, and a lack of a voice in the government; yet again, identity is formed not only by what it prizes but by what it rejects and sets itself apart from. No matter what qualities bound it, however, “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” that produces deep emotional bonds people have been willing to die for over the past two

centuries (7). Since these ideas are linked to place through the land the community or nation lays sovereignty to, place and location get tied up into this form of identity that usually comes attached to a concept of a homeland, the “native sod,” the mother/fatherland, etc.

No matter what this link is called, though, nationalism is a sense of collective identity that continues to locate us in today’s world; “nations are the largest-scale collective identities to which we are strongly attached” (Dittmer 2010, 74). The process of constructing that collective identity gives us a sense of patriotism, a sense of where we belong, of who we are (and are not), and how we relate to others. It positions us in the world. A sense of national identity can also define our allies and enemies, or how we frame ourselves in relation to others, as a rescuer, protector, isolationist, etc. From a poststructural or constructivist perspective, the process of creating this type of identity is constantly being reenacted and narrated to conform to “tell the national story” (Dittmer 2010, 90) and to maintain the collective sense of identity.

There is also an aspect of nationalism that characterizes such identifications as deliberate manipulations and constructions on the part of those in power so as to create a united of people who feel part of a collective sense of identity and who can then be controlled or contained. In addition to the points Said made about this topic, many critics feel “the language of ‘identities’ is above all else the province of politicians and pundits: the folks who invoke identities precisely to build collective power, and to blur and mystify the underlying reasons why individuals engage in collective social cooperation, interpersonal relations, or personal identification” (Favell 2005, 1113). They control this

message to keep people focused on the sense of togetherness and community over splitting the community/nation apart and affecting their power base. These issues of whether nationalism is a deliberate manipulation or the organic outgrowth of humans seeking a sense of community are beyond the scope of this study, however.

Nevertheless, the ideas that form national identity are translated into the hegemony and solidify the sense of national identity; according to Antonio Gramsci, this is because such ideas operate “not through the brute application of force in nontotalitarian societies, but by consent—a tacit, unwritten agreement often passed off as conventional wisdom or common sense” (Bayoumi and Rubin 2000, 64). It is almost as if the ideas are always there, floating in the ether, accepted unquestioningly because it seems that everyone believes the same thing. This unqueried acceptance only adds to the power of the messages because they are so habitual. The ideas seem natural and omnipresent. Indeed, Dittmer makes a powerful argument that in today’s world, this shared knowledge is not just produced by tradition or common history, it is “produced through the serialized mediation of these narratives through television, the Internet, comic books, and other webs of connection, as well as our performance of consumption” (2010, 90). Along with the over-arching national narrative involving patriotism, flags and other symbols, unifying documents like a constitution that define values (Pedersen 2008, 70), and official government policy, the popular, banal culture all around us, literature to movies to comic books, constantly reiterates who we are and what shape our collective identity takes. All of these sources establish our national story over and over again; the fact that these narratives are produced and consumed is part of the process that continues the cycle

of acceptance because they become part of the fabric of daily life. Through this process, these pieces of pop culture “are accepted and assimilated within old narrative forms and ritual structures that are used to legitimate, appropriate, and redefine the practices, thus assuring continuity of meaning despite change in practice” (Todd 2005, 433).

In a critical approach, such as the one Dittmer takes and that is utilized for this research, there is a recognition that this is an on-going and constant process and that this development and the narratives themselves are of vital importance (Dittmer 2010, 73). Because these narratives shape people’s realities and perceptions, they may inculcate a hegemonic tone of superiority, inequality, or difference that needs to be interrogated and exposed for the powerful force it is so that it can, at the very least, be recognized, if not mediated. After all, these ideas of national identity often get translated into action or attitudes to/towards other national identities; for example, “The definition of otherness, the degree to which others can be persuasively shown to be discordant with the putative norm, provides a rationale for conquest” (Eagleson, Jameson, and Said 1990, 12), which was readily apparent during the era of colonialism and imperialism, and, many charge, is still active today in terms of the post-colonial power relationships all over the world. Brubaker and Cooper also feel such issues of national identity are often “Understood as a product of social or political action, ‘identity’ is invoked to highlight the *processual*, *interactive* development of the kind of collective self-understanding, solidarity, or ‘groupness’ that can make collective action possible” (2000, 7) and that gets translated into the relationships between different nations, societies, and groups.

Thus the definition and implications of nationalism, the narratives that create it, and the ways those narratives are generated are vast, multi-sided issues with world-wide implications. I do not claim that the children's books in this study are fully engaging with world-wide geopolitics, but the fact that the messages and discourses contained within these books may have implications for the socio-spatial frameworks that everyday people, as well as those who make the geopolitical decisions, are carrying with them is an idea that needs examination and explication; as Barker said in 1927, "the literature embodies in the language of any nation is one of the moulds [*sic*] of its life, and one of the influences which shapes its development" (219). We need to examine that literature and language to see where that development is taking us and how it shapes the way we perceive the world.

### Popular Geopolitics

As part of exploring the elements of identity and nationalism that intersect with and situate this research, the concept of a critical approach and the elements that involves has been discussed several times. Much of the methodological philosophy for a critical analysis of a text is an intent to illuminate and scrutinize the underlying meanings and discourses a text carries within it. Although critical methods are utilized in many aspects of geography, for this research, the most relevant application of critical theory springs from the literature found within Popular Geopolitics.

This subfield, an outgrowth of the more traditional strands of geopolitical literature, focuses on the ways geopolitical messages are constructed, perpetuated, and reproduced in different forms of popular culture. Such analysis investigates insights into

“the practical geopolitical reasoning found in informal, everyday discourse” (McFarlane and Hay 2003, 213). It also seeks to expose these discourses’ impacts on people, their thinking and actions, and to challenge any underlying assumptions that may carry inequity or disparities between those who are affected or excluded. Indeed, popular geopolitics is an approach and paradigm that endeavors to break through the more monolithic, elite-focused geopolitics of the past by engaging actively with the shape of geopolitics in today’s world and that individuals (versus official government entities) encounter every day. For this paradigm, geopolitical messages are made up of a set of problematized discourses which can act as texts requiring careful analysis to expose their meanings and to challenge and encourage recognition of problems or inequalities, if not actually change them. This focus on the everyday texts or sources of knowledge is a key component of any critical analysis and appropriate for this research considering the study pool of exemplar books encountered by large numbers of American school children.

Every day, “banal” (Dittmer 2007, 250), and ubiquitous sources and media provide the texts in popular geopolitics; the diversity of the media for these messages is evident in even a cursory survey of popular geopolitical literature. Researchers have examined the messages in media as disparate as the political cartoons in Arab newspapers (Falah et al 2006), warrior figures in movies like *Gladiator*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *The Kingdom of Heaven* (Dalby 2008); Captain America cartoons (Dittmer 2005); banknotes (Penrose 2011); *Reader’s Digest* (Sharp 1996); representations of China and Africa in British newspapers (Mawdsley 2010); and Finnish stamps (Raento 2006). The ideas and insights into identity, geopolitics, and the ways popular culture is influential to political

discourse are particularly important for understanding how the world truly operates; this body of literature “draws our attention” to the ways discourses construct the hegemony (Mawdsley 2010, 510). This is especially important because these messages “usually operate beneath the gaze of most cultural critics” (Dittmer 2005, 628), escaping critique or active questioning. As previously discussed, this kind of “under the radar” reality is highly relevant for exploring children’s literature since these books are being taught in schools. Their presence as parts of the official, sanctioned curriculum gives them the added gravitas of authority and of being part of the canon, even as the kinds of messages (geographic or other) within them have received relatively little scrutiny from this perspective.

Many popular geopolitical articles also examine the effects of popular media on the construction of mental maps, geopolitical imaginations, and national identity, all of which have significant impacts on the way people view the world around them, as the books in this study may have on their readers and their socio-spatial frameworks. Debrix (2007), for instance, explores the influence of the news on people’s perceptions of the world by analyzing several examples of “tabloid geopolitics” which reflect the media’s tendency to be “eye-catching, fear-inducing . . . and overtly simplistic” (933) and the ways this reductionist approach affects viewers’ images of the places being described. She states that these media messages “appear natural, normal, or given when in fact they are the product of particularly scripted constructions of meaning” that shape people’s geopolitical imagination and understanding of the world (935), whether they consciously realize it or not, reiterating the critical approach’s mission to challenge the pervasive

paradigm. Mawdsley also examines discourses in the news by examining the ways China, Africa, and the West are all represented in British newspapers. Tropes like “timelessness, savagery, sexuality, tribal identity, conflict, and environmental disasters” that are used to describe and represent Africa to such an extent that “Despite efforts to challenge these stereotypes, they still persist to a remarkable extent within popular and political imaginations” and shape the way governments and everyday people perceive and reduce an entire continent (512). Indeed, through a critical discourse analysis, Mawdsley identifies four narrative tropes in the newspaper stories: “a) a tendency to homogenise [sic] China . . . b) a decided preference for focusing on China’s negative impacts [on Africa] . . . c) a tendency to portray Africans as victims or villains and d) . . . a frequently complacent account of the role and interest of different western actors in Africa” (518). Interestingly, all of these narratives echo Said’s concepts about the West versus the Orient. The representations in this geopolitical study reveal the West frequently representing itself as a benign, parent-like force working to counter corruption and a lack of development to “save” regions that need constant intervention to function, while the othered, still-evolving China and Africa struggle to rise up to the level of those who seek to help them (517-519). The fact that the four discourses about the United States, China, and Africa Mawdsley identifies all represent reductionist and stereotypical views of the areas in question reiterates the importance of studies challenging such narratives. Each discourse instills and calcifies unequal relationships that limit equitable communication and growth as the countries and the global atmosphere changes. The methods Mawdsley

used to reveal these insights in this study are also very similar to the approach undertaken in this research. After repeated readings, Mawdsley:

looked for patterns in terms of, (1) *content*: the issue(s), argument(s) and locations(s); (2) the *semantics* and *images* deployed; and (3) what was *omitted* or *downplayed*. Reading through two more times, I interrogated the themes that had emerged, searching for examples, but also for anomalies and mismatches. (517)

This study follows this same kind of qualitative content analysis procedure, including an intent to reveal assumptions, binaries, and stereotypes that are laced within everyday texts and that mask important inequities in the ways different places are portrayed and perceived.

Jason Dittmer's 2007 article "‘America is safe while its boys and girls believe in its creeds!’: Captain America and American identity prior to World War II" is another crucial exemplar of this kind of method and approach. By analyzing a number of early Captain America comics, he focuses in on the way the comics "both disciplined the social boundaries of Americanness and constructed geopolitical frames through which readers could understand the place of themselves, and the United States, in the world" (402). These discourses provided a lens for readers to view other peoples and themselves, including narratives highlighting quintessentially American qualities such as "courage and honesty" (409) and the rewards and necessity of hard work (410). More specifically, these comics served as a vehicle for defining and repeating ideas of what is seen as typifying what it is to be "American." The touchstones of national identity are incorporated into the basic makeup of this example of popular narrative; by reading them, the (largely) young consumers encounter norms that help them situate themselves and reinforce their identity. By contrast, in the first ten issues of Captain America, the villains

are “circus freaks, beggars, and the handicapped, and most of the super villains are ugly or deformed” (410), while most foreigners were portrayed as not just different, but as diametrically opposed to all that was good, i.e., all that is “American.” German Nazis, for example, were always “identifiable through a variety of physical and veritable markers” including “big teeth, a large mouth, a pointing nose, greasy hair” (414), while Japanese men were often portrayed as sinister thugs (417-420). All of these repeated images and tropes meant the otherness, or at least abnormality, stood out even more starkly. The lines are also made clear through the fact that characters “who do their duty as Americans” – fighting Nazis, being kind to worthy immigrants who happen to be German, acting brave – are lauded, while “unpatriotic actions are disciplined” and may even result in death (413).

While it is true that these were broadly-drawn caricatures created in the midst of the emotion and chaos of war, the comics still contained clear messages about proper and improper behavior that not only engendered feelings of patriotism during the war, but that shaped readers’ perceptions of themselves and others that surely lingered after the war. Indeed Dittmer feels that through these comics “readers learned about the importance of nationhood to self-identification and also about the types of behavior that can bring about approval or approbation within the context of the territorial unit” of the United States (421), and to a lesser degree, the territory of those defined as our enemies. This kind of analysis, looking for repeated images or themes, which, in conjunction with views of identity and nationalism typified by Said and Anderson, forms another important piece of the approach to this research.

Ultimately, all of these examples have implications for this research; their insights into how the often un-queried, common aspects of life can have a significant impact on the way people view and interact with the world and on how they judge other peoples and places. This type of pattern, of unexamined media streams that in reality have a large impact on the ways people frame and relate to their world, has clear implications for this research and shaped the approach and methods used for this study. This task, which seeks to expose and foreground once hidden discourses, takes on an added urgency when the audience is children being exposed to new places, people, and ideas for the first time and who may be encountering only partial, fragmentary, or crude presentations in these works. For all of these reasons, critical geopolitics' assumptions and conventions greatly inform the underlying approach and methods brought to bear on my research and data set.

#### Geography & Literature

Another strand of research informing the structure of this study comes from the body of work centered on geography and literature. Sometimes called literary geography, the two disciplines have a varied history together and interact in two main ways. The first is the large number of articles and books that look at the intersection of the two disciplines largely in terms of curricula. For example, many articles and books explore ways to use literature to purposefully teach geographic themes or facts, from sense of place, to map reading skills, to the Five Themes of Geography (Brodie 1994; Chicola and English 1999; Gandy 2006; Hannibal 2002; Litner 2010; Macken 2003; Merra 1996, Perez-Sable 2005; Silverman 1981; Squire 1996). Other works are bibliographies of books centered on a particular place, culture, or country, providing examples for

exploration of that particular location (Bolding 1994; Dowd 1990; Louie 1993; Oden 1992; Rogers and Bromley 1995; Singer 2002). Both of these types of exploration contain useful information and pedagogy, especially for classroom teachers, but neither is particularly relevant to this research. I identify the themes and discourses of geography within children's literature, and do not focus on how to teach those concepts or discuss how these themes can specifically be used to teach geography. As such, both issues are beyond the scope of this research at this time. These two bodies of literature may prove helpful in future avenues of analysis, however.

The more pertinent intersections between literature and geography are those studies where the literature is used as a data source and where geographers have interacted with literature in a more detailed, analytical way. These interactions have varied and evolved a great deal through a series of paradigms, especially in the last few decades. Before that, particularly during the years of the quantitative revolution in geography when the focus was on primarily logical-positivist research, focusing on a data source as "unscientific" and subjective as literature was not embraced in many quarters. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, as deliberate counterpoint to the waning quantitative paradigm, more humanistic and qualitative approaches began taking precedence, and explorations between geography and literature gained traction. In 1977, for example, Salter and Lloyd wrote a booklet published by the Association of American Geographers entitled *Landscape in Literature*. In it, after discussing the fact that for many, literature may seem to be "too personal or subjective" to be of any value for geographers (2), they counter this view with a wide-ranging discussion of just how much

can be gleaned from such sources by demonstrating how geographic topics as varied as transportation networks and sacred space are illuminated by drawing examples from literature (5-24). The two authors also feel that literature should be considered carefully as a source for geographic research because it has great “untapped” potential to be “a supplemental and special source of landscape insight” (1).

Donald Meinig advanced this position even further in 1983 in his article, “Geography as Art,” taking the position that geography, as a discipline, would not be fully developed or fully worthy of being part of the humanities until geographers began to create their own literary geography as evidence that they had established firm roots in the humanities to balance the established roots in the sciences (325). More recently, Luria takes a similarly strong position about the importance of geographers exploring literature: “Perhaps the most obvious way literature and geography can expand each other’s horizons is to challenge their shared faith in, as literary scholar Barbara Eckstein puts it, the ‘artistic recreation of the empirically observable and nameable world’” (2011; 67). Luria seems to be pushing geographers into exploring literature in a more thoughtful, analytical way, not just as a source of description, thereby deepening the discipline and tapping into a valuable source of knowledge.

Whether literature was perceived as a valuable research avenue or not, literature has actually been a source of geographic inquiry for a long time. In 1925, for example, one of the most venerated American geographers, Carl Sauer, said that geographic literature begins with “the earliest sagas and myths, vivid as they are with the sense of place and of man’s contest with nature” (1963, 317). Other geographers narrowed in on

examples that are more specific. In 1948, Darby wrote an article about the regional geography in Tomas Hardy's novels set in Wessex, in which he discusses attempts to "trace the topographical features of the novels and to identify their scenes with particular localities" (430). Additionally, the article details descriptions of locations and localities, exploring how the rich description and vivid detail helped create the world of Hardy's works. Darby also discusses how much had changed with the advent of the railroad and the economic and political shifts since the times the books were set, but that, because the books were so detailed and faithful in recreating the real places "underneath all these changes . . . the main liniments of the countryside are still to be discerned" (443); clearly geographic discussion, especially of places changing over time, can be illustrated through works of literature.

Another seminal article, Gilbert's "The Idea of the Region" from 1960, takes this idea of exploring regionalism through geography even further and exhorts his audience that geographers have a responsibility to teach the subject in ways that pull from a variety of sources (172); because novels such as Maugham's *Razor's Edge*, D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, and George Elliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, do such a good job of reproducing their settings, they are important tools in a geographer's arsenal for not only understanding the world, but for passing that knowledge on to students (164-169). This is because the descriptions and information people read about places, true or not, fiction or non-fiction, news or narrative, have an impact on the way people think of those place: "landform descriptions in literary works have often strong symbolic overtones, the result of memories, suffering and nostalgia" and so they create a lasting impression (Lando

1996, 3). For example, for many people, the Yorkshire Moors are inexorably interwoven with the image of Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* striding across them; the contrasts between apartheid-era village life and Johannesburg came alive in *Cry the Beloved Country*; and Anne's descriptions of Prince Edward Island in the Green Gables books have made the Canadian province sound like a magical place for generations of readers. As Mennel says, "Much as images of place can shape actual places, fictional writings exert influence on our perceptions of places." (2011, 85).

Geographers have worked within a number of paradigms or frameworks when approaching literature over the years, several of which also inform this research. J. Douglas Porteous, for example, in his "Literature and Humanist Geography" (1985), critiques the way the geographers interacted with literature in the past because he felt their work focused far too much on description, regions, and landscape, which limited their work by keeping the focus largely on the rural, pastoral past and trapped geographers into frame of nostalgia that led to stagnation. Instead of looking solely at landscape descriptions, Porteous contends, geographers should be examining "landscapes of the mind" (122), shifting their research to the ways literature can allow explorations of "human experience, rather than on places themselves" (118). To do this, he recommends geographers move beyond traditionally geographic methods and rely more heavily on the traditional tools found within literary criticism so that elements like symbols, the meanings *behind* descriptions, and metaphors about the human experience can be incorporated into geographic research. This emphasis links to the humanist framework he was working within, an approach where researchers focus on "human action and on the

subjectivity of culture” (Lando 1996, 3). Other critics agree that divorcing the description serves only to turn the literature into “mines” of information that are used to simply confirm what the analyst already knew (Sharp 2000) and to “separate the regional-landscape deceptions from their literary context” (Lando 1996).

Porteous also created a conceptual framework to guide such inquiry; it encouraged geographers to interrogate the themes of Inside/Outside and Home/Away to access the humanist side of geography carried within literature, including issues of sense of place, entrapment, travelers, and journey and exile (119). This matrix was one of the first attempts to create a protocol for literary geographers to use to guide their explorations. I have not incorporated this type of matrix into this study because while the idea of focusing on concepts such as sense of place or the theme of a journey may have some overlap for my own research, Porteous uses the chart mostly to categorize authors and genres as a way to begin discussing geographic themes rather than to analyze the texts or narratives themselves; some of his ideas about rootlessness, alienation, and sense of place, however, may have future implications for the themes I have identified.

Porteous’s critiques and recommendations were not wholly accepted, however. Douglas Pocock, for example, responded directly to Porteous’s article; this led to a short set of exchanges in the journal *Area* in which the two debated their perspectives and encapsulated the two paradigms of the regional and humanistic approaches. Pocock concedes that while the matrix Porteous created “is a helpful articulation, making explicit what is implicit in the writings of some humanist geographers” (1986, 55), human experiences, by their very nature, are “grounded in place” because important and

significant memories are often highly linked with where we were when they happened: “who we are is inseparable from where we are” (56). With these claims, Pocock argues for resituating geographical interactions with literature in terms of place and region and for not following Porteous’s admonitions to leave the older paradigm of geographic inquiry – largely focused on regional or landscape description – behind. Indeed, Pocock feels that if geographers are going to be able to fully understand and analyze literature for insights into geography or human nature, inquiry with traditional literary tools may be important, but these inquiries must also be integrated with space and place in order to avoid “accusations of lopsidedness” and short-sighted analysis (56) that is too far removed from a grounding in geography; to do anything else is to divorce the ideas from their context.

These two short articles were then followed by a brief rebuttal from each man later in 1986. Porteous reiterated his concerns that literary geographers had largely been stuck in the past “because they overwhelmingly study pre-First World War novels, when men were men, places were unique[,]” in addition to twentieth century novels increasingly incorporating themes of alienation from home or other places, making a place-centric analysis problematic (254). As a result, Porteous recommends that geographers also change with the times and update their methods and perspectives. Although conceding that many novels have “become increasingly studies of introspection, alienation, even absurdity” Pocock once again counters that those changes to not alter his argument that “Person, plot and place form an integrated triad: character and story. . . are intimately related to place” (254).

This debate reflects interesting changes going on within literary geography at the time; on the one hand, the camp represented by Porteous seems to feel that the descriptive, place/regional focus such analysis tended to center on was too closely tied to the somewhat discredited regional approach to the field as a whole. Regionalism, it was felt, was too linked to the past, lacked methodological rigor, and focused more on the pastoral than the urban. The views represented by Pocock, however, seek to keep literary geography centered upon the central issue of place even in the midst of expanding the approaches to literary analysis geographers were beginning to apply.

Both of these arguments are a product of their time – one an attempt to solidify methods in a field of analysis that was still finding its footing after a period of quantitative ontologies, and the other an attempt to remind literary geographers not to abandon the past wholesale for new (post-structural and critical) theories about how analysis should be done when the old theory could still engender insights. Both views, however, attempted to use literature as a data source within geography to answer questions about human experiences and relationships within society, something this research continues to build upon. While I did not utilize a specifically regional lens, my analysis has illuminated ideas of space and place that have implications for how those spaces or representations of place and culture create narratives of identity.

After the regional and humanist paradigms that shaped geography's interactions with literature, and as a step closer to critical analysis, a number of studies within geography utilized a structural approach to guide their explorations. These studies look at the structure *behind* a work and how the context of the story informs not just the

configuration of the story, but reflects the underlying underpinnings of society. Authors in this perspective, for example, are no longer independent creators detached from society: “Instead, he/she is now very much a product of a particular society, and reflects and reveals the ideology and values of that society. This emphasizes the importance of situating any analysis within an understanding of particular historical and geographical contexts” (Kong and Tay 1998, 134). In other words, one needs the historical and geography context of the writer – as well as the setting, characters, etc. – for the analysis to be complete.

Although this approach does take a step towards the focus of a more critical analysis, and it views literature as “part of a complex and interlinked set of texts through which discourses of identity and difference” are created and conveyed (Sharp 2000, 328), this study does not take a structuralist approach for two reasons. The first is a need to contain the scope of the research by focusing in on identifying the geographic discourses that are present in children’s literature. Certainly, the larger contexts of the authors and their works could also reveal fascinating insights into how a country has created narratives that represent, perpetuate, or challenge the prevailing national narratives of their present or their past. For the moment, however, other than accessing a shared interest in scrutinizing literature as sites of production for national or communal consciousness, and agreeing that as “products of culture” literature has “a role in the creation of hegemonic culture” (Sharp 2000, 329), the more critical approach of interrogating and questioning the hegemony and exploring issues of inequality is a more appropriate framework for this research. Sharp states the goal of a critical kind of

approach very starkly: “The role of the geographer then is to examine how the images produced in literature create certain forms of class, national or gendered consciousness” (328); a structuralist approach to these images or themes inserts other issues into the analysis and may distance the analysis from the texts itself in favor of discussion of the authorial context or the social history of the setting. From my perspective, this sounds worryingly similar to the “intellectual history” Clifford criticizes in Said’s work.

Secondly another important strength of the critical approach involves what Sharp calls listening to “the voice” of the text and examining the literary devices like metaphors and themes for their meanings. Studying these devices allows a deeper examination of the discourses carried within the literature; they strengthen the analysis because this accesses “the manner in which a literary text ‘functions’” (331) and taps into the power of literature itself to create worlds and environments that can reflect or challenge the “real” world. Utilizing literary devices also allows insights into how literature acts as a way to fortify or destabilize the norms of a society, including what it accepts and what it rejects, both processes that shape the overall national narrative that contours how people view themselves and the world around them. My focus on themes, metaphors, tropes, repeated images, language use, etc. facilitates this kind of interaction and analysis. Studies like Kong’s and Tay’s examination of the recurrent theme of nostalgia and the construction of heritage in the children’s literature of Singapore (1998) illustrate this point. The two authors trace repeated images of village, or *kampung*, life versus city life through a number of children’s books, illustrating the way the *kampung* is consistently portrayed as idyllic, serene, and full of a sense of community while urban

settings are described as harsh, sterile, and alienating (137-138). This focus on the village life of the past, a past that many readers never experienced, is part of an effort in Singapore to find “an anchor to the past” in their rapidly changing society. Indeed, these discourses parallel several projects the Singaporean government created for nation building “in its quest to develop and inculcate a Singaporean identity that would anchor Singaporeans in an ‘imagined community’” (140). This was part of a deliberate construction of national identity that the authors feel emerged in multiple levels of narrative, from government programs to children’s literature. The two authors describe the phenomenon this way: “Yet, in harking back to a lost place and time, a selective amnesia and concomitant mythologizing is at work” that “valorizes” the correct messages of the past, community connections, and family to promote and construct the kind of image the government wants to be represented and reproduced as the national identity (141). Whether this collective identity is accurate or even representative of most people is not important. What is important is the transmission of the collective idea as part of nation building and that reflects the approved and dominant value system. Kong and Tay’s study discusses the impact of children’s literature on the constructive processes, illustrating the power of a critical approach of expose discourses and illuminate the constructs they create around national identity.

### Children’s Literature

In addition to the scholarship reviewed above, works centered specifically on children’s literature, the messages this literature can convey, and the way such texts capture or reproduce aspects of society also situate and inform this research. Scholarship

surrounding children's literature is still a relatively new area of study if viewed in terms of the history of literary criticism; for a long time, children's literature was marginalized and seen as a genre for popular consumption, not for critical study. This seems ironic considering the amount of learning and growth its audience undergoes during the time in which such texts are consumed, and the fact that children's literature acts as "a vital force" for encouraging children to accept the "correct" norms and values (Peterson and Lach 1990, 189) in a society. This does seem like something that should have been more apparent since the earliest forms of children's literature focused on religious stories which, one presumes, were explicitly intended to influence the moral rectitude of their young readers.

Even now that scholarship in the genre has evolved into a recognized entity, complete with national centers of study, such as the one at San Diego State University and a number of dedicated journals, encapsulating exactly what constitutes children's literature can still be a thorny issue. Teachers, parents, librarians, publishers, and children may each have different answers about what constitutes "children's literature." The fact that at the upper age limit of the category, the labels "young adult" or "juvenile fiction," blur the "imaginary boundaries" (Shaw 1968, 89) between children's and adult fiction further complicates what is classified as children's literature. In addition to this range of possible responses and ages, the genre also contains a multitude of different *kinds* of literature, including everything from picture books to poetry to nonfiction, in addition to adventure stories, fantasy, science fiction, and historical fiction, and many more sub-genres. Children's literature also has the distinction of being "unique among literary

forms in that its ultimate audience, children, is neither the creator nor the primary consumer” of the works; instead, before the literature reaches children, it has passed through several levels of approval of what adults *think* is appropriate for children (Kimmel 1979, 357).

Indeed, what is contained and what ages groups are included in the definition, as well as what kinds of materials are considered suitable, has evolved a great deal over the years, decades, and centuries:

Children’s literature emerged on a larger scale because at some time in the seventeenth century society began to recognize that childhood was a special period in people’s lives and that children had their own special needs . . . The view of childhood and the educational aspects of reading have been crucial for the evolution of children’s literature. It has gone hand in hand with pedagogical views; literature was a means, and a very powerful one, for educating children. (Nikolajeva 1995, ix)

During this early period, children’s books were largely used as vehicles for transmitting morals and religious themes that chiefly served as a means of instruction, not entertainment (Bowker 1986; Heins 1982; Kimmel 1979; Skjønberg 1995). This overtly moral/religious overtone has largely dissipated from popular children’s literature, but the “expectation that children’s books should instill correct values has not disappeared” (Desai 2001, 91) and, therefore, children’s literature remains a crucial means of conveying cultural values through a society (Crisp and Hiller 2011, 197-198). Peterson and Lach agree with these assessments, taking the discussion a step further and affirming the continuing power of such literature “to articulate the prevailing cultural values and social standards. Children's books are especially useful indicators of societal norms” (1990, 188). Those norms and discourses are then inculcated in their readers, and, over

time, transform into the beliefs held by adults who are now part of the political process and who shape everything from educational policy to foreign policy (Stahl 1992).

There is, then, a strong sense within the field of children's literature about the power of the works to convey messages, norms, and attitudes. The importance of these insights goes beyond this awareness, however, because there is also an awareness that these messages and norms have the potential to impart major impacts. Children's literature and its discourses can actually "shape and specify the child's being, doing, and becoming" (Randall 2010, 30). Indeed, some critics postulate that literature in general may actually have more strength than any other form of cultural production in this process of inculcating norms and perceptions of society (Dudeck and Ommundsen 2007); Hunt categorically states that it is "inconceivable that the ideologies permeating" books for children have no influence on the children's development or their thinking as adults (1995, 1).

Within children's literature, this potency may spring from several factors. First, the readers encountering these narratives and themes are at an impressionable age and are swiftly constructing an understanding of the world around them from information all around them every day. Their own identities are still being formed, so information about how people in their country live and act, or information about other places, customs, and values, gets absorbed during this important period. This absorption is only aided by the fact that many works for children rely on repetition of images and ideas and the kinds of characters of cultural representations, both within a book and across books (Coats 2004, 7), Second, the books can take on added meaning and significance because they have

been “filtered” or recommended by adults: parents, relatives, and/or schools are providing the texts. All of these entities enjoy positions of authority, heightening the impact of the discourses and narratives in the texts; this may be an unconscious process, but that, too is part of the power of these messages. They are encountered and absorbed without mindful effort, furthering their air of everyday, common sense perceptions.

A third possible reason for this kind of literature’s influence on the young readers links back both to ideas of identity and to Said’s theories about how literature can be used as a tool to maintain and establish authority. Cohoon (2008) draws on Said’s theories when she explores the fact that the characters in children’s books are often written to be relatable to children, so that children can see themselves in similar situations, or to allow them to live vicariously through experiences they may not have access to. These characters often become role models. When these characters convey information about “social interactions, dress, and behavior,” both in terms of what is acceptable and what is not, “Young readers, positioned to identify with [characters like the main character in Alcott’s *Eight Cousins*] Rose, are then aligned with her positional authority” and so ideas about national identity and values are made more identifiable. They also gain added influence because the characters and their ideas are relatable (51) and serve as role models.

No matter what the reason or combination of reasons for influence the narratives in children’s literature can carry, this issue has been a topic of study within children’s literature scholarship from a variety of different aspects of identity formation. Indeed, Coats (2001) emphatically states that such studies are “the imperative of serious critical

study of children's literature: Children's books make us who we are culturally and individually" (Coats 2001, 390). Powell et al. (1998), for instance, examine gender roles in Newbery Medal award winners, exploring how the representations of gender have (or have not) changed over time. They feel that the winning books "reflect gradual changes in the way gender roles have developed over time in children's literature" (43), but many of the representations of gender roles remain locked within stereotypical, or at least "traditional" roles and that these depictions are being "passed from generation to generation" through these books, despite changing times, allowing for these ideas to linger on. Peterson and Lach (1990), who examined the ratio number of male to female characters in children's literature, found that although the numbers of male and female main characters was nearing equality, the roles the characters portray remained quite stereotypical. They expressed concern about this continuing trend: "It seemed obvious that repeated exposure to these kinds of images was likely to have detrimental effects on the development of children's self-esteem, particularly on that of girls, and on the perceptions children have of their own, and of others' abilities and possibilities" (186). These patterns are of particular concern because the more often, or the longer, children were exposed to these kinds of stereotypical representations of male and female characters, "the more sex-stereotyped their attitudes became, and the longer those attitudes were retained" (194). This article clearly articulates the idea that there are not only underlying discourses contained in these works, they have an impact on children. My study seeks to illuminate parallel insights about national identity and othering as viewed through the perspective of geography.

Similar critiques of other narratives and representations and their potential impacts are apparent across many aspects of children's literature scholarship. George (2009), for example, explores both the original book *The Little Princess* and the Cuarón 1995 movie based on the story for the ways various characters and entities are represented within them, leading to discussion of narratives of British imperialism and American exceptionalism, the fact that India is portrayed solely through its exoticism and otherness, and the reality that "there is very little historical, geographic, or race-relations accuracy" in any of the depictions of people or places (144) in either work. Non-white races are largely blank canvases or represented as magical and otherworldly, not as actual whole entities. These portrayals, even in a modern update, do little to move the representation of the Western countries away from tropes of exceptionalism and imperialism, while other locations remain the mysterious other; insights such as these may provide valuable parallels between my findings and the kinds of ideas other researchers have identified. Further studies address other types of narratives in children's literature, including images and representations of West Africa and the ways they may or may not have changed recently (Yenika-Agbaw 2008); questions about white supremacy in Isabel Allende's young adult fiction (Maddy and MacCann 2009) and constructions of American history in *The American Girls* books (Hade 1999). There are also examinations of hunting stories from colonial-era Canadian juvenile fiction that "conformed to the cultural values of the time" including the power and beauty of nature (Stringham 1999, 136), in addition to the ways three different tellings of the Mulan story expose the socio-cultural identities of the story-teller and whether they were insiders raised in the Chinese

culture and thus “able to contribute more nuanced language and cultural knowledge to a text that may elude” the authors who were outsiders (Hsieh and Matoush 2012, 214). In each case, discourses and narratives about peoples and places inherent in the stories were interrogated for their meanings and for the kinds of messages about people and places that they had the potential to convey to their readers. In each case, the narratives are also critically engaged to illuminate the validity of these discourses. The fact that I pursue my research from the geographic perspective does not alter that fact that I pursue similar goals with my examination of the Common Core exemplars.

A final example that illustrates the common bridge between the analysis from more conventionally children’s literature analysis and the methods of this study can be found in Christina Desai’s 2011 study, “The world as presented to U.S. children: building bridges or confirming expectations.” In this article, her sample for analysis comes from the bibliography *Growing Up Around the World: Books as Passports to Global Understanding for Children in the United States* (2009), which she calls “an ideal sample of current images of today’s world that American children are likely to encounter” (42) and that are likely to shape and shade their perceptions of the world. She analyzes the books in the bibliography in several ways. First, she “maps” them by counting up the number of representations of the different regions of the world; unsurprisingly, she finds there is a greater availability of books “from more developed countries and from countries with closer cultural ties to the U.S.” (43). Her second avenue of analysis, tracking recurrent themes in the books on the list, is more relevant to this research. She finds a variety of repeated themes, including representations of village life, war or

conflict, and girls' striving for greater freedom. All of these recurrent discourses "can be said to increase cultural understanding" (47), but often these themes are presented through the perspective of difference rather than through commonality: "The overall picture, then is of a familiar, homogeneous western world contrasted with a very different world beyond, emphasizing both geographic and cultural distances" (48). Although I am using a more critical approach in my discourse analysis, I am still interested in exposing these kinds of patterns and inequalities to further our understanding of how children's books contribute to perceptions of difference between different parts of the world and the ways we construct our identity, whether that is as part of a "homogeneous western world" surrounded by difference or whether these narratives encourage a different perspective of ourselves and of others. As Desai writes in another article from 2006:

Images of these others formed in childhood are difficult to dislodge. Negative images or omissions may linger in the subconscious even among those who strive for open-mindedness, and certainly in the minds of those children portrayed as Other or omitted altogether. Unrealistic or superficial portrayals, as in the cases of characters with different-sounding names but identical faces and behavior, or portrayals in which characters from certain groups are always shown as passive, or taking second place, are also damaging. (181)

It is these kinds of insights that are the main reasons Desai's work is proving so influential for my own analysis as I seek to unpack and illuminate the issues operating below the surface of children's literature.

### Children's Literature & Geography

There is a widespread belief in the power of children's literature to reproduce cultural and national narratives and influence and create identity. This idea has not penetrated as far into the relatively small pool of studies exploring geography's interaction with children's

literature. One example, however, is an examination of place and landscape in the Beatrix Potter books and the way “literary images of place may mediate, in practice, certain cultural attitudes and values” (Squire 1996, 75); the article also includes considerations about the author and the time the books were written in the analysis. Squire explores some interesting insights, but much of her focus grounds her within the regional paradigm of literary geography; many of her insights include comments centered on “idealized pastoral myths” that reproduce narratives of English country life (80) and the ways the books, even today, convey “notions of class, gender, family life, and perceptions of rural and urban experiences” that are part of the culture the books convey (82). There is an overlap here with this study, in terms of geographic concepts intersecting with children’s literature, but by working within a different paradigm and excluding aspects of authorial and reader influence, there are also significant differences as well.

Another example of the interaction between children’s literature and geography revolves around the Nancy Drew books. Brooker-Gross (1981) does examine her texts through the lens of landscape, but she extends this analysis further, not so much looking at the landscapes themselves, as representations of place, but about how they convey “covert lessons in moral social geography” (59). For example, she illuminates the fact that characters with good intentions live in well-kept, neat houses with gardens, while villains are consistently telegraphed through the fact that they live in dirty, unkempt houses that cannot be seen from the street, but hide away from society. In this way, she argues, moral judgments are attached to landscape, and these ideas are conveyed to

readers through discourses of positive and negative patterns of behavior. After all, Nancy helps the kinds of people who may have fallen on hard times but who keep their houses and yards neat, while she is always critical – and often actively pursues – of those who hide away from society in ugly, slovenly houses. Brooker-Gross also illuminates interesting ideas about the underlying narrative of “the moral superiority of the romantic and pastoral” over more urban settings (61).

This literature review has explored relevant issues about identity and nationalism, as well as situating my research amongst other studies about geography, literature, and geography *and* literature. It has also revealed a lack of studies illuminating explicitly geographic concepts, issues of identity, or discourses contributing to a sense of national identity carried within children’s literature within the discipline of geography. The ways I address this lacuna and explore the discourses of geography in these books is explored in the following methods section.

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

The goal of this research is to identify and illuminate the embedded spatial or geographic information within a collection of children's literature. To reach these goals, I conducted a mixed methods analysis. First, I completed a quantitative analysis that informed and launched the second stage, the qualitative content analysis. Both methods were applied to the literature exemplars in the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, And Technical Subjects: Appendix B: Text Exemplars And Sample Performance Task* for 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades (Table 1). This inductive approach examined the information carried within the texts using methods based partially upon critical geopolitics in geography, including the work of Jason Dittmer (2010) and Emma Mawdsley (2008), and influenced by research undertaken within children's literature by Christina M. Desai (2011). It is also situated within theories of identity informed by Said and Anderson's perspectives on nationalism.

Philosophically, this study is positioned within both critical and post-structural approaches and theory. Some of the more important aspects of these ontologies revolve around their focus on efforts to actively examine narratives at play in the social and political world rather than simply "reproduce existing norms, or regurgitate conventional knowledge" (Bauder and Engle-Di Mauro 2008, 4). This kind of approach involves questioning and querying the hegemony, in this case the canon of children's literature used in schools, to look for underlying messages and meaning that affect the message and influence readers. By assuming that meaning is not pre-given, but is constructed and subjective, critical and post- structural approaches listen to the "'voice' of the text"

(Sharp 2000, 331) and the “multiplicity of meaning” (Murdoch 8) carried within a text. This allows for deeper consideration of the texts at hand because it does not accept texts as given and unchanging, but as products of the culture or structure that created them.

Put another way, critical approaches interrogate “how and why we have come to think of the world (or parts of it) in a certain way” (Dittmer 2010, 11), while the post-structural looks at the crossover between a culture and its material artifacts and at who controls those artifacts. These concerns are all relevant to this research because I am examining the way a culture stream helps shape the mental maps and perceptions of its readers and exploring what the information in this culture stream says about both those who chose the works (those who control the artifacts) and how they help construct that power’s narrative of who we are as Americans.

To explore these issues through my analysis, I looked for patterns, recurrent structures (Atkinson and Delamont 2008, 296), and themes that transmit geographic information, from aspects of culture to the ways characters affect their environment. Since these kinds of ideas make the discourses and frameworks people operate within visible, identifying such themes and tropes is a fundamental aspect of discourse analysis. The geographic information carried within these works helps construct the mental maps of their readers, as well as cultural norms and mores about how we, as Americans, relate to the environment and nature, identify ourselves, and view the world around us. By critically examining these ideas and narratives, we gain a deeper understanding of several interconnected threads, the literature students are reading in schools, the geographic

information carried within them, and the ways that information and these works contribute to conceptions of national identity.

#### Data Source & Selection

I considered a number of possibilities and bodies of literature when considering the data pool for this analysis. One of the first decisions involved narrowing in on children's literature as the branch of texts to investigate. There were several reasons for picking this genre. As previously discussed, children's literature occupies a curious position within literature and education since it is both so common to be considered banal and yet is codified enough that it is part of the curriculum in schools across this nation and world. On the one hand, it is often dismissed as unworthy of serious study; sometimes labeled "childish" (Jones 2006, 287) and discounted as "kid's stuff" (Fadiman 1976, 9), its significance is often discounted as nothing more than children's entertainment (Yenika-Agbaw 1997, 446). Certainly many in academia "have been slow to take children's literature seriously and treat it canonically" (Clark 2003, 2). On the other hand, and countering this dismissive attitude, lies an awareness that the impact of children's literature on the minds of its readers is "greater perhaps than any other mode of cultural production on the shaping of individual and group perceptions of their social environment and beyond that, on the future of social and cultural relations" (Dudek and Ommundsen 2007, 4). The very fact that as this entire genre has a tendency to be ignored gives even further weight to the need to investigate the messages it contains and conveys.

Indeed, this power to affect children's understanding of the world contrasted with the undercurrent of "flying under the radar" makes children's literature an intriguing way

to investigate these research questions. The choice of children's literature took on added significance when a survey of the academic literature revealed a consensus that hegemonic cultural norms and values can be passed through children's books (Cohoon 2008; Desai 2011; Jenlink & Townes 2009; Kidd 2007; Lefebvre 2008; McGillis 2008; Osa 1998; Peterson & Lach 2006, to name just a few). Additionally, there are relatively few examples of children's literature being examined within the discipline of geography. This lack of investigation indicated a ripe source of under-examined data.

The final consideration that made children's literature a logical and important avenue for investigating these research questions is the kind of lasting impact books can have on young people. Indeed, few pieces of literature can evoke the same level of nostalgia and devotion, or engender the same kind of "excited delight" (Spufford 2002, 10), in an adult as a book she read as a child. As Kortenhaus and Demarest state, conversations with teens "showed that individuals whose parents had read to them during preschool years could still name the title of their favorite children's book, had accurate memory of the story content, and expressed enjoyment in remembering" the books, while their recall of television shows was not nearly as detailed or complete (1990, 220). This impact is also clear from the power recollections of stories encountered in childhood can have. Aiken describes how reading a poem about a beetle scratching on a wall can lead to a "phobia about beetles" that lasts for years (Aiken 1970, 33). My own experiences as a young child with the repulsive spider, Shelob, in Tolkien's *The Two Towers* led to a strong dislike of spiders that lingers to this day; I know the power of literature to create strong impressions.

These kinds of lingering impressions can be formed about more than just scary creatures, however – descriptions of places and people can also shape a long lasting imprint on the mind of a reader as they “discover worlds beyond their own life space” (Peterson and Lach, 1990, 189), broaden their horizons, and are exposed to more varied perspectives (Desai 2006, 165). This combination of potential lasting impact, ability to convey information, and everyday ubiquity shaped the decision to explore the geographic messages in children’s literature.

After deciding on the genre of literature, the next choice involved selecting a set of works to examine. Since this study sought to examine the messages students receive that are given further weight by the authority of their being read in school, the list obviously had to involve books read widely in schools around this country. First, I considered using lists provided by a state Board of Education as part of their curriculum standards. Since this research pursues an understanding of the national or culture-wide messages of the literature children read, however, using a list from one state, even an influential one like California or Texas, risked narrowing the scale to statewide messages rather than national ones.

A second possible source for a pool of books involved well-respected awards lists such as the Newbery or Caldecott winners, both among the most prestigious in the country. While this level of endorsement first appeared to be a promising source for this research, several issues with their suitability emerged with further investigation. First, the Newbery list is selected by a group of librarians, who, while undoubtedly very well-qualified and thoughtful specialists, are guided by a loose definition of “excellence” for

picking the books, a term that is left mostly to a changing, annual committee to define each year. Further, the committee is picking the “author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” (Association for Library Service to Children 2013), precluding works by authors whose works might have contributed to student’s mental map of the world but who had not been born in the country.

Additionally, the Newbery Medal books are often “not usually primary teaching texts,” but instead make up a “secondary or supplemental curricula” in schools that is often used as free or additional reading in schools, particularly in gifted and talented tracks (Kidd 2007, 175). This all increased the likelihood that only a subset of American schoolchildren would read them.

Stahl (1992) takes these concerns even further when he discusses the fact that while prizes for children’s literature often start with the goal of reaching a broad audience, in actuality the people they influence “tend to be confined to the educated and relatively privileged” (197), not the general population of children or teachers. Another concern about the Newbery Medal Award winners involves the extensive body of literature expressing concerns about bias, including charges of sexism and a lack of gender, ethnic, and racial diversity (Agee 1993; Cook 1985; Gillespie et al. 1994; Green 1977; Kidd 2007; Kinman and Henderson 1985; Powell et al. 1998; Wilkin 2009). Although similar charges could also be leveled against the books used more generally in schools, taken with the concerns about the rigor of the criteria and their association with only a sub-set of schoolchildren, I elected not to use the Newbery winners as the data pool for this research.

Ultimately, since my questions revolve around national discourses, the best choice of a data pool involved a list of books applied at a national scale for students at all levels. For these reasons, I narrowed in on the list of literature included in Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. Although not without their own controversies, the Common Core Standards, an education initiative originally sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), has been adopted in 43 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories. It also has buy-in from the federal government; adopting these standards qualifies as the kind of educational reform that qualifies a state for Race to the Top grants, as well as the endorsement of large education-focused organization like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). The Common Core initiative is not universally popular, but it clearly has widespread, national-scale applicability, making it an appropriate choice for this study.

The list of literature included in the Common Core was not created to provide a complete or required reading list for schools and teachers but rather to “be suggestive of the breadth of texts” students should encounter in classrooms, and to illustrate the complexity, quality, and range of readings the Common Core encourages (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices 2010, 13). The books and stories on the list are offered to help teachers meet the central goal of the Common Core: to “lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century” and to train American students to compete in a global society (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices 2010). These works were clearly chosen for containing

information intended to educate and elevate the young people of this country, something that makes them a fitting choice for examining the kinds of underlying messages about us and the world around us such works carry.

Once this initial decision was made, I elected to examine only the fiction on the exemplar list. This allowed a more consistent focus and more uniform group of books and stories to analyze. For example, the early grades' exemplars include texts for reading out-loud. Not all the grades have this category, however, so for consistency I excluded this category of books. Poetry and verse was also excluded since many of the suggested poems were written before the Nineteenth Century, and, therefore, from a period of time significantly earlier than any of the fiction on the lists. This was deemed a significant enough difference that I removed all poetry and verse from consideration. The final types of literature included on the list of exemplars but excluded from this study are all the primary sources and informational/non-fiction materials. Despite the fact that many of these works include a wealth of information about the United States and the world at large, non-fiction has a different set of aims and guiding principles than fiction. As a result, they were not included in the data set for this study; they may provide an excellent avenue of future analysis, however.

Finally, I narrowed the fiction list one step further to create the most consistent set of literature possible. Since the works at the Kindergarten-1<sup>st</sup> Grade levels are much more about sight words, building vocabulary, and learning to read, the earliest books under consideration are for Grades 2-3; by these grades chapter books tend to contain more extensive narratives and plots, increasing the likelihood that a more fully realized world

will be present. Conversely, the upper end of the data pool is 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades; after this point, most students are entering high school where literature tends to be taught in a dedicated English course focused on a single theme like World Literature or English Literature. Students are also more likely to be divided college-bound or non-college bound tracks. There is likely, therefore, to be a splintering of books lists by level rather than a single, consistent pool of literature the vast majority of students would be exposed to, creating a common experience. To avoid this kind of division, I made the decision to make the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade books the last set of literature under consideration.

In conclusion, the set of fiction analyzed in this study comes from the Common Core Curriculum and involves the independent reading fiction from grades 2 through 8 (Table 1). This list includes 33 books chosen to be representative of the kinds of books a national panel feels are appropriate to shepherd students into adult citizens who can be a part of American and global society, i.e., representative of the kinds of ideas and philosophies that help pupils learn what it is, and is not, to be an American.

#### A Critical Approach

In addition to delimiting the data pool, I also had to narrow in on an approach for this study. Since my research questions revolve around interrogating non-traditional sources of information, explore how these sources may shape perceptions of people and places, and involve an “every day” and often unqueried set of narratives, a critical approach is appropriate for this study.

A critical approach also contains the idea of deconstructing norms for their meaning. Shapiro describes this component as the examination of the discourses that

reify geographical imaginations and that are complicit in reproducing the hegemonic views of power that maintain the existence of nations (1997, 15). This research reveals such norms, further solidifying the appropriateness of using a critical paradigm. One other aspect of a critical approach informing this research is what Patton characterizes as going beyond just the study of a subject and seeking to “critique society” – here the educational system – for the messages it carries and to “raise consciousness” (2001, 548), in this case highlighting an unexamined source of information and identifying the messages it carries.

Critical studies of literature through a geographic lens such as Kong and Tay’s 1998 study of children’s literature in Singapore or Sharp’s 2000 study of fictive geographies also situate the methods employed in this study. In addition to examining discourses within literature, both Sharp and Kong and Tay explore the ways literature unfolds as a type of material culture that has the power to make the social fabric of a society visible while also defining identity and difference (Sharp 2000). There are a variety of approaches critical studies can take to illuminate these discourses, from the perceptions of the audience, to the context of the author, to the time of a book’s setting. Sharp, for example, writes about the context of the author and the time in which the book was written (333), but this study will examine only the narratives and discourses being conveyed to the audience.

I made the decision to abridge the focus of this critique this way for several reasons. First, for feasibility, this research needed to be delimited, and since I seek to

**Table 1. List of Books Included in the Analysis.** Source: *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*

Grades	Books
Grades 2-3	<p>Gannett, Ruth Stiles. <i>My Father's Dragon</i>  Averill, Esther. <i>The Fire Cat</i>  Steig, William. <i>Amos &amp; Boris</i>  Shulevitz, Uri. <i>The Treasure</i>  Cameron, Ann. <i>The Stories Julian Tells</i>  MacLachlan, Patricia. <i>Sarah, Plain and Tall</i>  Rylant, Cynthia. <i>Henry and Mudge: The First Book of Their Adventures</i>  Stevens, Janet. <i>Tops and Bottoms</i>  LaMarche, Jim. <i>The Raft</i>  Rylant, Cynthia. <i>Poppleton in Winter</i>  Rylant, Cynthia. <i>The Lighthouse Family: The Storm</i>  Osborne, Mary Pope. <i>The One-Eyed Giant (Book One of Tales from the Odyssey)</i>  Silverman, Erica. <i>Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa</i></p>
Grades 4-5	<p>Carroll, Lewis. <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>  Burnett, Frances Hodgson. <i>The Secret Garden</i>  Farley, Walter. <i>The Black Stallion</i>  Saint-Exupery, Antoine de. <i>The Little Prince</i>  Babbitt, Natalie. <i>Tuck Everlasting</i>  Singer, Isaac Bashevis. "Zlateh the Goat"  Hamilton, Virginia. <i>M. C. Higgins, the Great</i>  Erdrich, Louise. <i>The Birchbark House</i>  Curtis, Christopher Paul. <i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>  Lin, Grace. <i>Where the Mountain Meets the Moon</i></p>
Grades 6-8	<p>Alcott, Louisa May. <i>Little Women</i>  Twain, Mark. <i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i>  L'Engle, Madeleine. <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i>  Cooper, Susan. <i>The Dark Is Rising</i>  Yep, Laurence. <i>Dragonwings</i>  Taylor, Mildred D. <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>  Hamilton, Virginia. "The People Could Fly"  Paterson, Katherine. <i>The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks</i>  Cisneros, Sandra. "Eleven"  Sutcliff, Rosemary. <i>Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of the Iliad</i></p>

explore geographic discourse as a first step to understanding how the socio-spatial messages help construct a socio-spatial framework in readers, limiting the inquiry to issues revolving around audience perception was a clear place to start. Second, this research is merely the first step in what I anticipate will be a much longer thread of inquiry about how these geographical messages, for good or ill, get absorbed, how educators perceive and mediate (or do not) these messages, and how these ideas can be applied to a whole array of popular culture sources, from movies to videogames. Before any of that research can take place, however, the narratives and discourses present in an example of source material must be identified so that other comparisons or explorations can take place. In other words, identification is the goal of this research, and since identifying such themes and narratives involves the approach of asking questions about the origins of dominant images and narratives or how identities are constructed and contested (Kong and Tay1998, 135) lie within the bounds of critical approaches, despite the narrowed scope from the range of possible inquiry, this research qualifies as a critical study.

#### Quantitative Content Analysis

Before this deeper critical analysis began a quantitative analysis of the data provided an important first step in organizing the data for comparison, contrast, and analysis. In order to summarize the data and to gain a better understanding of the general trends, as well as any patterns of concentration or scarcity in a code or subcode, I enumerated the data in several of different ways. After cleaning the data and checking for consistency within the codes, I tallied the number of times the different codes occurred in

each book or story. The tabulation also allowed analysis of the number of times the codes occurred across all 33 of the texts, as well as the number of times the different kinds of embedded geographic discourses appeared in the three blocks of grades (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>; 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>; and 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>).

This kind of frequency count is one of the most common techniques in quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff 189; Riff et al. 2014, 139). Krippendorff also states that “Counts of textual units in terms of coding categories,” such as the codes I used from the Five Themes, is an “act of abstracting textual matter on which qualitative content analysis rely on heavily” (190); that certainly proved to be the case in this analysis. Once the data was summarized quantitatively, it was far more approachable and digestible. I was able to begin comparing and contrasting the different kinds of geographic discourse, as well as the geographic information present at different grade levels. These insights created the starting point for insights ranging from the lack of narratives classified as Region or the importance of repeated themes such as the idea of Home or Adaptation of the Environment.

Another part of the quantitative summary of the findings across the categories and subcodes also needs methodological discussion and explanation. Deciding how long the particular quote or passage would be for each instance of a code, or where each individual data point should be labeled is a highly subjective process; while I might have viewed a paragraph as two different examples of a particular code, another researcher might perceive that paragraph as a single entity. Additionally, an extended discussion of a journey or a place description might have yielded multiple examples of the same code

because there was intervening information or dialogue, rather than a single coding of “Place: Description” for a single three page section. While this did lead to more easily digestible data chunks for analysis, this may also have inflated the number of counts for the different codes and subcodes. These two situations taken together mean that while having counts of the total number of an individual code, or of the count of the codes for a book or short story, does give a broad of the scope of the data and a starting place for further comparison, the totals should serve as an overall view of the data, not an absolute indication of the number of times a particular kind of geographic information occurred within these works. Despite these limitations, the quantitative analysis yielded important insights by summarizing the data and setting the stage for the qualitative analysis. The qualitative comparison and contrast of the data built on the quantitative summaries, allowing more specificity and detail about the kinds of geographic content included in the collection of literature.

#### Qualitative Content Analysis

Once the quantitative summaries had been tabulated, I then subjected the findings to a qualitative analysis. Within the broader critical paradigm, many of the specific techniques used to carry out the analysis come from qualitative content analysis. Although I did utilize some aspects of critical discourse analysis (CDA) because it focuses on the ways texts coalesce societal patterns (Fairclough 2001) as well as the “way social power, . . . dominance, and inequality are enacted” in a text (van Dijk 2001, 352), CDA serves more to inform the process rather than dictate it. This is because much of CDA focuses more on the actual processes of construction of discourse, its effects, and

the ways in which it is conveyed, while this study focuses upon *identifying* the discourses in question and taking the first steps to seeing how they fit together to construct identity. As such, qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a more fitting method because it focuses on “*latent* meaning” (Schreier 2012, 15) and because it “utilizes a standardized set of principles to code documents” (Dittmer 2003, 32), something highly appropriate here given the specific list of geographical elements the research question centers upon, vis a vis the Five Themes of Geography.

Qualitative content analysis also utilizes what Gee calls “a ‘pattern recognizing device’” to explicate patterns and place them within the context of the cultural model they are part of (1999, 40). Considering the use of repetition within a book or across many books is a hallmark of children’s literature, this is another reason this approach particularly apt for my analysis. Krippendorff’s 2013 works illustrates another aspect of QCA that fits this study’s approach, when he writes that QCA does not necessarily examine the texts from an author’s or reader’s perspective as CDA tends to do (2013, 10). I also found Krippendorff’s discussion of the epistemology of content analysis relevant. He states that someone doing such analysis needs to start from a position of expecting the texts to be significant to their readers (27), which seems like a very logical place to start in a study concerned with the effects of a set of texts on an audience and the ways those effects can linger and considering the significance of books in the lives of many younger readers.

### Coding the Literature

To answer the questions I have posed, I read each of the 33 books in the selected pool completely to become familiar with the characters, settings, and plots; Krippendorff calls this process of familiarizing oneself with the texts under consideration “housekeeping” (2013, 356). During this initial read through, I made notes to highlight key passages for future analysis or to pose ideas to consider, but this initial read through focused more on familiarizing myself with the stories; attempting to read the work for the first time and simultaneously code risks missing data, decreasing the accuracy of the coding. Also, being familiar with the plot and characters before coding is pivotal since many of the more subtle instances of themes like landscape, place, or culture, will emerge out of the events and interactions of the book. Therefore, coding took place during the subsequent readings.

Coding involved making note of each example and/or instance of an element of the Five Themes (Location, Place, Human-Environment Interaction, Movement, and Region) and then recording the code and its corresponding quote in the coding chart (Table 2). The use of a set of guiding principles or ideas to structure the analysis is also referred to as a “qualitative codebook” and serves to “provide definitions for codes and to maximize coherence among codes” (Creswell 2014, 1999).

More specific codes evolved as is expected in a qualitative study of this kind. Codes started with one the Five Themes, of course, but more nuanced subcodes such as “Human/Environment Interaction: Land Ownership” or “Place: Language” proved necessary to describe the range of geographic information contained in the works (See

Appendix A). This approach is based up on Desai's 2011 study "The world as presented to U.S. children: Building bridges or confirming expectations," where she analyzed a bibliography created by the American Library Association (ALA) by querying recurring themes such as village life; war and political or ethnic conflict; and girl's strivings, as well as creating a table of the locations of the books settings by breaking the world into regions (Africa, Asia & Middle East, Europe, etc.). She did this to "map" the book's settings, to expose gaps in regional representations, and to explore "realistic portrayals," "outdated stereotypes," and the kinds of "images of today's world that American children are likely to encounter" in the books they read, all as "a way to glimpse how the literary imagination constructs cultural value" (42). Using a similar approach of analyzing passages of recurring themes, this research explored narratives of landscape, place, movement, etc. as geographers view them, to look more deeply at the kinds of information the texts convey. The evolution of the codes and the development of the subcodes follows Creswell's recommendation that after deciding on a preliminary codebook, that the researcher "permit the codebook to develop and change based on the information learned during the data analysis" (199).

All of these steps are, of course, by their nature, subjective processes, but multiple readings of the text and the ability to compare a wide-range of examples, codes, and attitudes over a pool of 33 books strengthened the validity of my findings. Also, as suggested by Schreier (2012), I returned to the texts for a second reading/coding 10-14 days after the initial coding to recode passages and check for consistency. This provided built-in check for completeness and accuracy of coding and helped clarify the coding

**Table 2. Discourse Analysis Coding Instrument with an example from *A Wrinkle in Time***

Code	Page #	Quote/Notes
<p><b>Location</b> <i>Identifying specifics, absolute/relative location . . .</i></p> <p><b>Place</b> <i>Physical/human characteristics: Climate, vegetation; resources; architecture, politics/hierarchy; cultural markers (religion, ethnicity, class, multiculturalism, etc.) . . .</i></p> <p><b>Human-Environment Interaction</b> <i>Adaptations; Human impact &amp; change</i></p> <p><b>Movement</b> <i>Migration; connections between places; movement of resources</i></p> <p><b>Region</b> <i>How are different areas defined? Subdivided? is this perception the same for all? human? physical?</i></p>		<p>[this top row with definitions provided a reminder of the coding system and a column for notes about over-arching themes at the beginning of each book's data]</p>
<p>movement: return; movement: transportation: walking; movement: route; region; place: rural vs urban; place: description; place: sense of place; movement: wayfinding</p>	<p>224</p>	<p>She walked slowly down the hill, her heart thumping painfully against her ribs. There below her was the same row of identical houses they had seen before, and beyond these the linear buildings of the city. She walked along the quiet street. It was dark and the street was deserted. No children playing ball or skipping rope. . . . In the same window of each house was a light, and as Meg walked down the street all the lights were extinguished simultaneously. . . .</p>

categories since “two rounds of independent coding should yield approximately the same results” and if they do coincide, the coding frame can be considered more rigorous (34).

The Five Themes contributed an excellent structure for managing the coding; they provided a workable number of consistent guiding themes, while the addition of the “other” category for types of geographic information that did not fall easily into one of the five categories also aided data collection. There were times when it was problematic deciding which category was the most appropriate for some examples and occurrences; this issue is explored in more detail at the beginning of the findings section.

After all of the books were processed and analyzed using the instrument in Table 2, the quoted passages, their codes, and the manner of representations were compared and contrasted to find commonalities, differences, and over-all patterns within the data; this analysis and reflection is detailed in the next chapter.

#### IV. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The scope and variation of the instances of geographic themes and concepts present in this collection of books is as wide-ranging as the books themselves. Examples run the gamut from basic geographic building blocks, like place names and physical features, to complex human-environmental interactions where characters are inexorably linked to the land they and their families have called home for generations. Overall, these books convey more cultural or human geography than physical geography, but physical geography often manifests through information about the climate or the flora and fauna where the narratives are set. Indeed, rich threads of traditionally geographic concepts exist throughout the stories, including site and situation, diffusion, sequent occupance, hazards, and transportation, as well as examples of more post-structural aspects of geography such as gendered spaces and spaces of discrimination and exclusion. The data gathered takes shape explicitly framed as geography, yet the embedded nature of the spatial information conveys a great deal about how we perceive the world, interact with and view the environment, and pass that information on to our young people. Ultimately, the amount of intrinsic geographic information carried within the stories clearly belies the more static idea that literature is simply a resource for geographers to mine for information about landscapes.

##### Research Question 1:

What geographic themes, as articulated by contemporary geographic education standards, are embedded within the 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade Common Core literature exemplars?

A total of 374 individual codes emerged under the umbrella of the Five Themes.

While I initially thought Location, which includes concepts like place names, would

emerge as a dominant theme, examples from Movement and Place proved far more frequent. Indeed, only twelve codes were needed to tag and describe aspects of Location, while 131 individual codes emerged to describe the different facets of Movement present in the books, and 153 sub-codes were necessary to capture the different aspects of Place (Table 3). The next most frequent category, Human/Environment Interaction (H/E), also included a smaller number of codes, 42, while Region proved more elusive with only eleven sub-codes. Finally, Other, the category created for examples and instances that did not fit comfortably under the umbrella of any of the five themes, ultimately encapsulated 25 codes.

**Table 3. Totals for the Sub-codes for Each of the Five Themes**

Location	Place	Movement	Region	H/E	Other
12	153	131	11	42	25

The number of times an individual code appeared varied a great deal, both in terms of frequency within the distinct books and in the total number of books with instances of the code. For example, Place: Creation, occurs only once, describing a location important to a creation myth in Lin’s *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* (2009), while Place: Home occurs in all but two of the works. One of the works in which Place: Home is missing is a short story about slaves working in a field flying away, escaping to freedom, so home is never mentioned (Hamilton 1993); the other is a book about a little girl who spends all her time in the barn or with her horse, so her home is immaterial to the story (Silverman 2006). The ubiquity of this concept of home, how it manifests, and how it is represented – it occurs in 94% of the books – emphasizes its significance as both a concept of place and a touchstone of society.

Similarly, a code having a relatively low number of instances in the data does not necessarily indicate its relative unimportance to the books or to the types of geography present in these works. One of the best examples of this low occurrence/high importance dichotomy is H/E: Adaptation, which arose just 52 times across 18, or 54%, of the 33 books included in this study. When compared to other codes, such as Place: Community (159 occurrences), Place: Differences between Places/People (257), or Movement: Journey (316), the relatively smaller number of times H/E: Adaptation appears in the data may seem to diminish the importance of the code. The ways the characters adapted to their environments or reacted to the hazards or challenges they faced, however, was often vital to their particular stories and the characters' personal journeys and growth. The examples tied to this single code also often carry important insights into the way the different stories convey information about the environment, hazards, and the ways human react to such things. So, while H/E: Adaptation may not have occurred often, when it does appear, it has significance.

There were some codes that shifted after returning to the texts for a second reading/coding to check for consistency and as the shape and analysis of the data evolved; those issues will be discussed in more detail later. Overall, however, examples of Place occurred the most often (Table 4). In fact, there were nearly 2,000 more examples of Place (7,036) than of Movement, the next closest code (5,217). This is because Place encompasses a vast array of information that involves both the physical and cultural characteristics that make one place different from another place and answers the questions, "what is there" or "what is it like there?" Put another way, everything from

landscape descriptions, to examples of superstitions, to mentions of climate and the seasons falls into this category. Setting is a key element of fiction, and many of the aspects of place describe aspects relevant to setting, it thus follows that Place has such prominence.

Movement, the next most populated category, also involves many types of geographic information, from connectivity and transportation to the diffusion of ideas, information, and disease. References to different forms of transportation were numerous, as were examples of journeys and traveling. This code also included examples of migration, way finding, and daily movement, in addition to less conventionally geographic ideas like hiding, and visiting/visitors.

Human/Environment Interaction, the third most common category with 2,586 occurrences, captured information about the interrelationships between humans and the environments they live in, including how humans modify, adapt to, and depend upon their environment. Examples tagged with this code include environment as Resource, Hazard, and Source of Wonder, in addition to Ownership (of land) or Stewardship (or responsibility) to that land.

Location, or information about position on Earth's surface, occurred far less frequently (525 times) than the top three categories, because while place names do fit in this category, the other codes did not occur frequently. For instance, there almost no addresses or other absolute locations given and, although more common, relative location references were intermittent.

**Table 4: Total Occurrences for Each of the Five Themes by Book.** The total for all the books is 16,729.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Grades</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Movement</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>H/E</b>	<b>Other</b>
Alcott, <i>Little Women</i>	6th-8th	32	788	847	15	70	287
Averill, <i>The Fire Cat</i>	2nd-3rd	1	54	34	0	1	3
Babbitt, <i>Tuck Everlasting</i>	4th-5th	14	352	244	10	172	48
Burnett, <i>The Secret Garden</i>	4th-5th	22	497	232	0	174	92
Cameron, <i>The Stories Julian Tells</i>	2nd-3rd	5	30	46	0	44	2
Carroll, <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>	4th-5th	17	104	65	7	9	29
Cisneros, "Eleven"	6th-8th	1	7	2	0	2	1
Cooper, <i>The Dark is Rising</i>	6th-8th	29	427	346	10	129	41
Curtis, <i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	4th-5th	26	349	244	11	19	14
du Saint-Exupery, <i>The Little Prince</i>	4th-5th	36	146	105	8	151	52
Erdrich, <i>The Birchbark House</i>	4th-5th	21	364	247	10	387	50
Farley, <i>The Black Stallion</i>	4th-5th	32	213	229	3	240	17
Gannett, <i>My Father's Dragon</i>	2nd-3rd	11	77	105	4	6	14
Hamilton, "If the People Could Fly"	6th-8th	1	22	27	0	3	6
Hamilton, <i>M. C. Higgins, the Great</i>	4th-5th	27	753	481	25	293	70
LaMarche, <i>The Raft</i>	2nd-3rd	2	45	19	4	46	22
L'Engle, <i>Wrinkle in Time</i>	6th-8th	68	330	262	15	37	49
Lin. <i>Where the Mt. Meets Moon</i>	4th-5th	56	312	354	27	131	37
MacLachlan, <i>Sarah, Plain and Tall</i>	2nd-3rd	5	115	39	0	62	8
Osborne, <i>The One Eyed Giant</i>	2nd-3rd	11	110	63	3	60	15
Paterson, <i>Mandarin Ducks</i>	6th-8th	3	49	32	1	19	9
Rylant, <i>Henry and Mudge</i>	2nd-3rd	3	46	32	7	6	16
Rylant, <i>Poppleton in Winter</i>	2nd-3rd	0	21	8	1	27	2
Rylant, <i>The Lighthouse Family: The Storm</i>	2nd-3rd	4	60	51	0	60	15
Shulevitz, <i>The Treasure</i>	2nd-3rd	4	14	19	7	1	5
Silverman, <i>Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa.</i>	2nd-3rd	2	4	15	0	15	2
Singer, "Zlateh the Goat"	4th-5th	2	59	27	0	60	3
Steig, <i>Amos &amp; Boris</i>	2nd-3rd	7	15	31	2	15	15
Stevens, <i>Tops and Bottoms</i>	2nd-3rd	1	8	7	0	15	1
Sutcliff, <i>Black Ships Before Troy</i>	6th-8th	18	185	262	21	73	25
Taylor, <i>Roll of Thunder</i>	6th-8th	18	448	165	42	102	24
Twain, <i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i>	6th-8th	25	380	344	0	48	63
Yep, <i>Dragonwings</i>	6th-8th	21	652	233	28	109	69
Totals of Each Code		525	7036	5217	261	2586	1106

The catchall category, Other, consists of 1,106 examples, ranging from gendered space to mental maps, and from perception to spatial language, which did not fit smoothly with the scope of any of the Five Themes. There were ideas that did not mesh well with the over-reaching framework guiding the coding, which was not a surprise. The category was created to address such a contingency, but the fact the concepts coded into the category were such important geographic ideas was one of the first indications that the Five Themes were insufficient to capture the full scope of the geography encountered during coding and recording.

These concerns become more apparent because Region has the fewest individual codes (11) and the lowest frequency of the six categories. A large part of the lack of range in the category stems from the divisions between Place and Region being far from distinct. After all, human and physical characteristics define regions. Yet these kinds of characteristics are also some of the most important defining characteristics of Place. It is true that Region carries with it an *area* or *zone* of that characteristic or phenomenon, but the boundary between the two themes is often indistinct and hazy. For example, in *The Secret Garden* (Burnett 1910), the main character, Mary, moves to the Yorkshire moors and begins to learn about the area from her servant, Martha. The moors are definitely a region of England, but Mary also asks about Martha's house several miles away (45). Should the description Martha gives of her home and the moors around them be an example of Place or Region? Economically and socially, it is a very different world from the stately Misselthwaite Manor where Mary lives, and it is certainly beyond Mary's mental map at this point in the story, yet both are located on the moors, perhaps even on

the same estate. This same problem occurs repeatedly. Occasionally it was easy to solve, as in *The Little Prince* (de Saint-Exupéry 1943) when the Prince describes the rocky landscape around him as he climbs a mountain (45); he sees an area of landscape all around him that is distinct from what he had previously encountered, making the excerpt a stronger match for Region than Place. In *M.C. Higgins the Great* (Hamilton 1974), on the other hand, M.C.'s friend's house is in the same section of the Ohio River valley (Region), but it is in a different, nearby hollow (Region or Place?). This particular example is further complicated by the fact that the friend's house is very different from M.C.'s own, and his father has forbidden him to go there because the friend's family has its own rules and livelihood (Region?). There were times when I coded a passage as both Region and Place, as in the last example, but, in many cases, Place served as the better choice because of the localized scale being discussed. This meant Place received the lion's share of the codes and entries. Ultimately, some of these problems were issues of scale, but I realized that all of these issues hampered a deeper understanding of the complexity of the geographical and spatial concepts emerging from the data. Besides the difficulties defining the line between the physical and cultural characteristics of Place vs. Region, where did concepts like boundaries, identity, othering, nationalism, and hospitality belong? Each concept was tied intimately to culture, community, and human patterns, but all seemed beyond the Five Themes' definitions for Place and Region.

These concerns expanded as I continued coding and analyzing. Sorting Spaces of Discrimination and instances of Space Being Invaded to the Other column was problematic, because the concepts did not fit well in any of the five codes. Again, these

were issues of community, tied to the values and traditions of a place or region. Was Movement more appropriate for Space Being Invaded since invading space often implies someone actually moving into that space? I defaulted to coding these instances as Other, but that compromise underscored the reality that adherence to the Five Themes was dividing highly linked geographic concepts. However, “the five themes were not intended to be the definitive and complete explanation of geography,” or to be mutually exclusive categories according to Boehm and Petersen (1994, 212). Even Salvatore Natoli, one of the Five Themes’ creators, conceded that critics have said that they were insufficient to capture the full scope of ideas contained in geography (1994, 5).

This is not to say that the Five Themes are not an important and effective tool for approaching geography; the number of textbooks and curriculum based upon them proves their importance and effectiveness. They also, clearly, not only provided a structure strong enough to allow a wealth of data to be coded and categorized from these books, they provided enough substance to allow the realization that further work was necessary. So, although the Five Themes provided a logical starting point, in order to reach a fuller understanding of the complexity of the geography inherent in these books, the lens for viewing and analyzing the data needed to evolve to include a more inclusive interpretation of geography. To achieve this expanded view while keeping the data consistent, I re-sorted the codes defined by the Five Themes according to the structure provided by the six Essential Elements from *Geography for Life: the National Geography Standards* (2012; Table 5), expanding and enhancing the definitions to be more inclusive.

The Standards also have strengths similar to those that shaped the original decision to use the Five Themes as a guiding principle. They are widely accepted across the discipline and by geographic educators at all levels. They were created to help educators understand the scope of geography and then convey that knowledge and those skills to their students. The combination of the two paradigms, the Five Themes and the Six Essential Elements, allows for a more holistic and nuanced view of the geography and spatial information inherent in these works.

This shift in framework allowed a much stronger and clearer interaction with the data, despite Essential Element #6: The Uses of Geography, not being widely applicable to this research since none of the works touch on applications of geography. The benefits of this merged coding more than outweighed this one facet not fitting as well, however. With this new framing, Geographic/Spatial Vocabulary, Scale, Location, and Mental Maps all came together under Essential Element #1, The World in Spatial Terms, rather than being scattered between Location and Other. Further, now identity, nationalism, othering, boundaries, and conflict and cooperation, and several similar codes all fall under the purview of Place & Region. Discussions of place and movement became more nuanced because I was able to think of them through enhanced definitions with more depth of choice and greater integration of ideas between Place & Regions, Physical Systems, and Human Systems. Some codes remained under in the Other label, such as Telling the Story of a Journey, Curiosity, and Journey: Spiritual/Moral, but it is now a much smaller, more contained group that addresses concepts that are beyond the conventional bounds of the geography studied in K-12 education. The tables and

**Table 5: The Six Essential Elements and Their Subdivisions.** Source: *Geography for Life: The National Geography Standards* (2013)

<p><b>The World in Spatial Terms</b></p>	<p><b>Standard 1:</b> How to use maps &amp; other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information</p> <p><b>Standard 2:</b> How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, &amp; environments in a spatial context</p> <p><b>Standard 3:</b> How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on earth’s surface</p>
<p><b>Places and Regions</b></p>	<p><b>Standard 4:</b> The physical and human characteristics of places</p> <p><b>Standard 5:</b> That people create regions to interpret Earth’s complexity</p> <p><b>Standard 6:</b> How culture &amp; experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions</p>
<p><b>Physical Systems</b></p>	<p><b>Standard 7:</b> The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth’s surface</p> <p><b>Standard 8:</b> The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems and biomes on Earth’s surface</p>
<p><b>Human Systems</b></p>	<p><b>Standard 9:</b> The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth’s Surface</p> <p><b>Standard 10:</b> The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth’s cultural mosaics</p> <p><b>Standard 11:</b> The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth’s surface</p> <p><b>Standard 12:</b> The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement</p> <p><b>Standard 13:</b> How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth’s surface</p>
<p><b>Environment &amp; Society</b></p>	<p><b>Standard 14:</b> How human actions modify the physical environment</p> <p><b>Standard 15:</b> How physical systems affect human systems</p> <p><b>Standard 16:</b> The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources</p>
<p><b>The Uses of Geography</b></p>	<p><b>Standard 17:</b> How to apply geography to interpret the past</p> <p><b>Standard 18:</b> How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future</p>

discussion earlier in this section reflect this reorganization and reassessment, as does the discussion below.

### The World in Spatial Terms (Essential Element #1)

#### Location & Its Forms

Location is one of the basic building blocks of geography, whether framed in terms of place names or in terms such as absolute and relative location. There were, unsurprisingly, a number of place names and locations in these works of fiction: some were of real places, like the sites and landmarks in *Little Women* that Amy March visits on her European tour and time in Italy (Alcott 1997, 425-437); San Francisco's Chinatown in Yep's *Dragonwings* (1975); and Troy in *The One-Eyed Giant*, a retelling of *The Odyssey* (Osborne 2003). Fictitious or fantastical locations also occur, such as the Island of the Lotus Eaters, again in Osborne's book; the Island of Tangerina in Gannett's adventure *My Father's Dragon* (1948), or the planets Uriel and Camazotz in L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962). In each case, both the characters and the reader receive a frame of reference and general sense of the location or context and something to tether to whether in the real world or in their mental map of the story.

#### Absolute & Relative Location

This context deepens when absolute and relative locations are added to the place name. Examples of absolute location, or the kind of location with a specific address or grid reference, were rare; although there were many discussions of locations like people's houses, schools, cities, etc., concrete addresses were not usually included. *Little Prince* contains one of the few examples of absolute location; as the narrator describes the

Prince's travels, he says, "Only the lamplighter of the single street lamp at the North Pole and his colleague of the single street lamp at the South Pole led carefree, idle lives" (45), describing the variation around Earth. This is also actually one of the only references to latitude and longitude in all of the books; the other involves Alice wondering what latitude and longitude she has reached as she falls down the rabbit's hole (Carroll 1865, 9). Another example of absolute location occurs in *M.C. Higgins*, when the narrator first describes M.C.'s home, and says he lives on "a low hill called Kill's Mound" (4), although this reference is far less precise than the first.

In the same sentence, M.C.'s house is also described through relative location, or a location being described in terms of another place or landmark; "M.C. lived three miles inland from the Ohio River . . . out at the edge of a plateau between Sarah's Mountain, where he lived on the low outcropping" (3). This description may not be as concrete, but it conveys a great deal of context about where he lives. Indeed, most of the locational context in these books appears in terms of relative location. Will, the main character in *The Dark is Rising*, knows his location in the midst of the terrifying events at the climax of the novel when he recognizes the building next to him and when "Lightning flashed at his left side . . . and in its light he saw the dark mass of Windsor Castle looming high and close. He thought: if that's the castle, we must be in the Great Park" (Cooper 1973, 220). The realization steadies him a bit, linking him to the familiar in the midst of the fantastical. In *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* (Lin 2009), Minli gets directions to find a waterfall during her quest: "At the top of that waterfall, beyond anyone's view, is the Dragon Gate" (92), where the wise man she is looking for resides.

Sometimes context adds to the tension of the story as well as contributing information. In Singer's "Zlateh the Goat," (1966) a little boy gets lost and disoriented in a snow storm that lasts for days. Luckily, he finds a haystack to use as a refuge with his goat without knowing exactly where he is or how far he has wandered. Just how dangerous the situation actually was becomes apparent when the storm finally stops, and hearing a sleigh nearby, he realizes: "The haystack was not far from the road" (89), making this a very fortuitous haystack. Another example of this is apparent in *Little Women*; because Mr. Laurence lives just next door to her own house does not make it any less terrifying to Beth as she pushes passed her comfort level to cross the hedge which defines the safety of her own house, to thank him for letting her use his piano. The fact that the two houses are so close underlines how shy Beth is and how difficult she finds this task (80-89).

#### Site & Situation

Another geographical concept, site and situation, also conveys location and context in these books. When Mary suddenly finds herself transplanted from India to the north of England in *Secret Garden*, readers learn that she is going to a massive old house in Yorkshire "on the edge of the moor" – its site – and that other than the large park around it, there is "nothing else" around it for miles and miles. It is clear that the house's situation is quite isolated and cut-off, which sets the stage for the mysteries she encounters (12-13). In Rylant's *The Lighthouse Family: The Storm* (2000), the story takes place at a site on the ocean and centers on a cat, Pandora, in charge of a lighthouse. We also learn that it is in an isolated place, "far from city and town, far from the comfort of

friends,” a situation that explains why she is so lonely and sad. Site and situation also convey context and significance in *Black Ships Before Troy* (Sutcliff 2005). Troy, where much of the action in this retelling of *The Iliad* takes place, is located “on the northeast coast of the Aegean Sea.” The significance of that location and why the Greeks might be interested in gaining control of Troy becomes clear just a few words later: “It had grown rich on the tolls that its kings demanded from merchant ships passing up the nearby straits to the Black Sea cornlands and down again” (3). The city has gained great wealth and power by virtue of its situation along a major trade route; no wonder they are able to withstand the siege for so long and no wonder the Greeks are interested in taking control of the area.

### Spatial Vocabulary

Spatial or geographic vocabulary also conveys geographic information by its very nature, and a variety of examples appear in the Common Core fiction exemplars, including scale and proximity.

### **Scale**

Scale is definitely an aspect of the kinds of spatial organization covered by *The World in Spatial Terms*. It is, in addition to the ratio between Earth’s surface and a map, the size of a place being studied. Scale did not occur frequently in these works (it was coded just 34 times), but it did appear in several ways. Events in *Alice in Wonderland* touch on the ratio aspect of scale when Alice eats the mushroom and drinks from the vial, making herself shrink and grow, leaving her feeling she must be ““shutting up like a telescope”” (11). Her size and relationship to the space she finds herself in vary

considerably as her scale changes. First she cannot get into the garden she so desperately wants to see because she can no longer reach the key on the table now towering over her (12). Once she grows again, she can no longer fit through the small door (16). Later, she bursts out of Rabbit's house when her size once again increases (30-31). Her interactions and success vary a great deal with her scale and her ability to relate to the world around her.

Scale also appears in *Little Prince*, and once again reflects differences in the way people relate to the space around them. On his own planet, "everything's so small" that "Straight ahead, you can't go very far" (8); even the volcanoes are so small that the prince tends them with a rake (25) and he must constantly worry that a baobab tree will take root and overgrow the entire planet, maybe even destroying it by breaking the planet into pieces (14): scale is very much on the Prince's mind. He also encounters others who view scale in very different ways. The king he visits, for example, rules a planet so small that it is almost entirely covered by his ermine cloak (29), yet the king does not perceive the smallness. Instead he views everything he sees, the stars and other planets, as part of his territory despite never having visited any of the other places (30-32). His view of scale varies greatly from the view the prince holds.

Scale is only one type of spatial language present in these stories. The stories reflect the ubiquity of spatial language in our lives since we all speak of going in, out, around, under and through spaces in daily life. At Meg's wedding in *Little Women*, the guests traipse "through house and garden, enjoying the sunshine without and within. Meg and John happened to be standing together in the middle of the grass-plot . . ." (344).

After a horrible day, the little girl in Sandra Cisneros's "Eleven" (1991) yearns for escape, "I wish I was anything but eleven, because I want today to be far away already, far away like a runaway balloon, like a tiny O in the sky" (9). Additionally, in *A Wrinkle in Time*, one of the mysterious guides, Mrs. Whatsit, flies the three children up to the top of a mountain so they can see the growing Shadow that they must soon battle: "The garden was left behind . . . and then Mrs Whatsit was flying upward, climbing steadily, up, up. Below them the trees of the mountains dwindled . . ." (78). One whole book, *Tops and Bottoms* (Stevens 1995), is devoted to the tops and bottoms of different crops and why understanding the distinction makes the difference between getting the good part of a crop or being left with the undesirable bits. This book's message is a good example of why being aware of different spatial references is important.

### **Proximity**

Other spatial concepts like proximity also appear. In *The Birchbark House*, one of the characters, Omakayas's friend Ten Snows, welcomes a voyageur to the community, offering him soup from her own bowl and encouraging him to sit close to the fire. Looking back later, Omakayas, remembers the man "sitting by the fire as close as he could without scorching." Unfortunately, Ten Snows is the first to fall sick, "then those in the lodge where the sick man had stayed fell ill," all because of the proximity to a visitor with small pox. Sadly, all of Omakayas's village lives so close together, the disease spreads quickly, despite attempts by the villagers to distance themselves from the threat: "the visitor's body was taken to the farthest end of the island" (Erdrich 2002, 142-143). Another example of this concept comes from *Secret Garden*. Mary tries to solve the

mystery of the nighttime crying she keeps hearing. She tries following the sound and soon realizes the “crying is nearer than it was” when she first started following it (50). In one of the early reader books, a boy observes that it was “hot by the stove” while he helps his father cook (Cameron 5), while in *Bud, Not Buddy*, a Hooverville has sprung up next to the train tracks for access to transportation (Curtis 1999, 82), and for M.C. Higgins and his family, the slag heap that looms just up-slope from their house dominates their lives with its constant threat.

### Mental Maps

Another facet of geography found in these books concerns mental maps, which involves the mental construct or image of “what a person knows about the location” (National Geography Standards 2012, 27) and its characteristics that allow the characters to navigate through their lives. Just as mental maps shape peoples’ perceptions and are a tool that allow us to navigate our world – effectively or not – the characters in these works also use mental maps to process and navigate their own lives. One of the early reader books, *Henry and Mudge* (Ryland 1987), deals with this concept by having the characters move beyond their mental maps and end up getting lost. Mudge, Henry’s dog, decides to take a walk without Henry: “He went down one road, sniffing the bushes, then down another road, kicking up dust. He went through a field, across a stream, into some pine trees . . . And when he came out the other side, he was lost.” (23-25). He knows he is lost because nothing about his location is familiar: it smells different, and he cannot see any landmarks he knows (26). He lies down, lonely, and waits. Soon Henry pushes past his mental map of places he feels safe, ventures out, and walks until he finds Mudge

waiting in the field (30). After this experience, despite the fact that neither of them want to repeat having gotten lost, their mental maps have been expanded and widened their view of the world: “in their dreams, they saw long silent roads, big wide fields, deep streams, and pine trees” (39).

Other characters use their mental maps and knowledge of locations around them to both move through their lives and succeed at a variety of tasks. Cassie in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor 1976) uses her knowledge of the woods near her home to create a plan to take her revenge on a white girl who torments her (180-181). Earlier in the story, she and her brothers also use their knowledge of their surroundings quite effectively. They know the distance between their school and a nearby section of the road prone to flooding, the way the rain interacts with the mud, and the route the white children’s bus takes. That bus’s driver always deliberately splashes Cassie and her brothers as they walk to school. Knowing they have just enough time to make the trek there and back during lunch time, the children take their revenge by digging a large hole on a particularly rainy day after once again being deliberately soaked and humiliated. The bus sinks, breaking its axel, and it takes a long time before the children have to worry about getting splashed on the way to and from school (51-55).

Tom Sawyer uses his mental map and knowledge of his area of his area to run wild in the woods and find his hideouts and various buried treasures (Twain 2001, 60-70); to run away and find a perfect hiding place on a nearby island (96); and to help rescue himself and Becky Thatcher when they get lost inside the caves (219-229). Even Mary from *Secret Garden* is able to use spatial thinking and her nascent mental map

when she begins putting the pieces together, realizing that the wall in the garden “did not seem to end with the orchard, but to extend beyond it” (31) to create an irregularity she eventually realizes is the hidden garden. As in real life, it is the characters with the well-developed mental maps who are the most successful and the most capable of navigating their environments.

### Distance

One final aspect of seeing the world in spatial terms concerns awareness of distance, something that manifests in this set of books in several ways. Sometimes distance is a threat, as in *Amos and Boris* (Steig 1971), when Amos the mouse rolls off his boat in the middle of the ocean, “a thousand miles from the nearest shore, with no one else in sight as far as the eye could see and not even so much as a stick of driftwood to hold on to” (9). Or, in *The Black Stallion*, when the ship sinks soon after passing “Cape of Finisterre on the coast of Spain,” days from England, marooning Alec and the Black on a small deserted island (Farley 1941, 7).

Distance also acts as a plot point in the stories. The old man in *The Treasure* (Shulevitz 1978) travels for days to a city, across vast distances and varied terrain, only to turn around, reverse the trip, and discover what he had been looking for was back home all along. In *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt 1975), the little girl, Winnie, goes farther away from home than she has ever been, first into the woods by herself, where she adds to her mental map, “looking at everything, listening to everything, proud to forget the tight, pruned world outside” that she is moving away from (25). Then the distance her adventure covers expands rapidly when she come across a mysterious young man and his

mother. They end up kidnapping her because they are afraid she will divulge their secrets. The journey and distance fascinates Winnie at first, “It was amazing, then, the climb a long hill, to see ahead another hill, and beyond that the deep green of a scattered pine forest, and as you climbed, to feel the air ease and soften” (47) and she knows she is far from home. While being away eventually loses much of its charm, the experience changes her forever, in terms of both her mental map and her worldview (130-133).

Distance can also act as a barrier. In *Bud, not Buddy*, Bud discovers that his favorite librarian, a woman who has helped him in the past, has moved away. With the assistance of another librarian, an atlas, and a mileage guide, they calculate the distance to Chicago. Bud is left dismayed by the distance and his inability to get there: “Shucks. Chicago might as well be a million miles away from Flint” (56-57); his hope for getting the help he needs vanishes. Distance also acts a barrier in *Lighthouse Family*. The main character feels constantly lonely because the lighthouse sits so far from anyone else. In *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan 1985), Sarah must decide whether to stay in the Midwestern prairie, and leave her beloved Maine coast behind. This distance is a barrier because of the limited modes of transportation available in the 1800s when the story takes place. The distance means she is unlikely to ever see her beloved home again, providing much of the conflict and drama shaping the story.

### Place & Regions (Essential Element #2)

#### Description & Sense of Place

Descriptions of setting are, naturally, central to nearly all fiction, and the data from these books confirms that: there are 475 instances of the code Place: Description,

one of the larger code counts. Sometimes the descriptions are quite simple, as in the early-reader book, *Poppleton in Winter* (Ryland 2012), where the setting for a sleigh ride is described as: “The moon was full and white. The stars twinkled. The owls hooted in the trees” (47), while many books for the higher grades contain ornate descriptions full of detail, like the one in *Dark is Rising* about the site where Will must defend the world from the evil trying to destroy it:

Through the mounded snow, sometimes ice-hard and sometimes soft enough to drop him thigh-deep, he set out to explore his strange island. He had thought it a circle, but it was shaped like an egg, its highest point at the end where the white mare stood. Trees grew round the foot: above them was an open, snowy slope; above that a cap of rough scrub dominated by a single gnarled, ancient beech tree. Out of the snow at the foot of this great tree, most perplexingly, four streams ran down over the hill-island, dividing it into four quarters. (Cooper 207)

Regardless of how detailed they are, though, each description contributes to a sense of place, revealing what makes that particular place special or unique.

Guiding characteristics for descriptions vary widely. Some focus upon people, like Bud’s description of the Hoovervilles he encounters while considering traveling west to California in *Bud, not Buddy* (Curtis 1999):

. . . the city was bigger than I thought it was. The raggedy little huts were in every direction you looked. And there were more people sitting around than I first thought too, mostly it was men and big boys, but there were a couple of women

every now and then and a kid or two. They were all colors you could think of, black, white and brown, but the fire made everyone look like they were different shades of orange. (67-68)

At times descriptions focus on the physical or natural characteristics of place, i.e., “The lagoon water moved in sparkling crescents. Thick swales of swamp grass rippled. Mud turtles napped in the sun. . .” (Erdrich 2002). Other descriptions focus on cultural or

human aspects of place, such as the architecture and urbanization in *Wrinkle in Time* when the three children walk through the eerie city controlled by some unseen force: “After a while the apartment buildings gave way to what must have been office buildings, great stern structures with enormous entrances” (122).

Indeed, many of the descriptions contribute to sense of place by conveying an atmosphere or mood. M.C. describes his mother’s fancy decorations in the living room and the way it makes him and his family feel to have such nice things: “The room did have the hush of ceremony about it. It had a crimson wall-to-wall carpet. Banina proudly called it her plush carpet and so it was” (Hamilton 108). The fancy decor elicits a respectful feeling and extra care being taken when in the room. The description Omakayas, the little girl in *Birchbark*, provides of the community celebration in the midst of winter expresses the sense of fellowship and happiness in the lodge as everyone dances and visits together:

A fire was kindled in the center of the dance lodge, and its fragrant smoke rose through the central opening in the roof. The fire was hardly needed though, in spite of the cold, for the crowd of dancers, the drummers, the children, the old men in the farthest corner, seated on soft skins, the old ladies at their games and gossip, the young women in the center and the young men surrounding them, the people of all ages talking, laughing, and dancing. . . . (140)

Not all the moods contributing to a sense of place are positive; the growing sense of unease that Meg from *Wrinkle in Time* feels at apartment buildings and offices started increasing when they were in the suburbs a few minutes before. The aura the uniformity creates, and the very “offness” from what she is used to, adds a layer of discomfort and fear to the description, sense of place, and atmosphere:

Below them the town was laid out in harsh angular patterns. The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small, rectangular plot of lawn in front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door. Meg had a feeling that if she could count the flowers there would be exactly the same number for each house. In front of all the houses children were playing. Some were skipping rope, some were bouncing balls. Meg felt vaguely that something was wrong with their play. It seemed exactly like children playing around any housing development at home, and yet there was something different about it. She looked at Calvin, and saw that he, too, was puzzled. (115)

Senses other than sight contribute to the description and construction of a place.

Winnie feels charmed by the home her captors take her to in *Tuck Everlasting*, partially because of the way the place sounds and smells. Over “everything was the clean, sweet smell of the water and its weeds, the chatter of a swooping kingfisher, the carol and trill of a dozen other kinds of bird, and occasionally the thrilling bass note of an unastonished bullfrog at ease somewhere along the muddy banks” (52) of the lake next to their house. Mary in *Secret Garden* falls under the spell of a place because the scent of the freshly turned earth after a rain intrigues her and sparks her curiosity (70), and the Little Prince talks about how his rose perfumes the whole planet and the way he misses it (24). Even taste can define a place; the warm cocoa defines safety in her kitchen for Meg during a storm in *Wrinkle in Time* (16). For Moon Shadow, the young Chinese boy in *Dragonwings*, the awful “greasy” taste of the milk his friendly landlady give him adds to the sense of foreignness in her kitchen with its “cheery red-checkered tablecloth in a cold, abstract arrangement of squares—the kind of pattern the demons favored” (Yep 1975, 132-133).

One final aspect of sense of place is the meaning that humans ascribe to sites, a vital element for making a place particular. One prominent example of this comes from

the narrator in *The Little Prince* who exhorts the reader to look out for the place he encountered his young friend:

For me, this is the loveliest and the saddest landscape in the world. It's the same landscape as the one on the preceding page, but I've drawn it one more time in order to be sure you see it clearly. It's here that the little prince appeared on Earth, then disappeared. (85)

The place has meaning for him because of the associations he has with it and the memories it engenders.

Similar feelings of significance can come from responsibility or connection to the land. In *Roll of Thunder*, Cassie and her family own their land outright, a rarity in the 1930s Deep South, and the land has deep significance for them, since it means safety and freedom (7-8). In *Poppleton*, being out in the snow with his friends makes Poppleton feel like he has everything (46-48). Just as in the world outside stories, people attach significance and meaning to places.

### Special Places

Place also manifests in a several special ways. First, there are repeated instances of places that are, in and of themselves, special to the particular character. A favorite swimming hole covered by “branches of the walnut and hickory trees” meeting like long green fans that creates a stillness that hovers “in the high air, soft, quiet, peaceful” is a special retreat from the heat of summer, for example (Taylor 229). Jo March has a garret in the attic, a special place where she writes, reads, and often retreats: “wrapped up in a comforter on an old three-legged sofa by the sunny window. This was Jo’s favorite refuge; and here she loved to retire with half a dozen russets and a nice book, to enjoy the quiet . . .” (33). The little boy in *The Stories Julian Tells* has his own room, with his

games and his rock collection that he takes a new friend to see (Cameron 1981, 63). Even a stray cat, Pickles, has a barrel that he considers special enough to defend from other cats who try to come near it in *The Fire Cat* (Averill 1960, 1). In each case, these places are a retreat, a safe place, and a place that is uniquely theirs.

A second way special places manifest is a few specific sites that have consistent characteristics. Examples of this include libraries being a source of refuge and safety and the woods being both a place of danger and a place of adventure. Libraries are repeatedly portrayed as places of wonder where people not only learn, they find a welcome place of solitude and refuge from their troubles. Bud associates libraries with a sense of safety and home because he and his now deceased mother used to go check books out together (Curtis 79-80) and spend time in their local library. Now when he finds himself in trouble he knows they are a safe place (36-37): “no other place smells anything like it . . . I closed my eyes and took a deep breath . . . that soft, powdery, drowsy smell that comes off the pages in a little puffs when you’re reading something or looking at some pictures, a kind of hypnotizing smell” (53-54). Jo hates helping take care of Aunt March, but the fact that it means she has access to her late uncle’s library almost makes up for it: “the wilderness of books, in which she could wander where she liked, made the library a region bliss of to her” (Alcott 52).

The woods also take on repeated themes in their portrayals. Sometimes they are a place of fear and danger; “pakuks, the skeletons of little children, flying through the woods” (Erdrich 13) make them scary, as do descriptions like “brooding trees” (Cooper 220) and “thick, dark, damp, scary jungle.” (Gannett 27). They can also be a playground

for characters like Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, or Omakayas in *Birchbark*, as well as a place of refuge and growth. In Omakayas's culture, children are sent out into the woods as a rite of passage, "and sometimes lived out in the woods alone until the spirits took pity on him or her and helped out with a special vision, a special visit, some information" (Erdrich 39). She also experiences her own rite of passage while out in the woods when she realizes she is meant to be a healer (212-214). The couple in the *Tale of the Mandarin Ducks* is able to hide in the woods and escape the evil local lord, living a long and happy life there (Paterson 1990, 22-33), reflecting yet another manifestation of the kinds of information "place" carries with it.

### Home

A final special kind of place revolves around the concept of home. This idea of what a home *is*, the shape it takes and why it is significant, manifests in a variety of ways throughout these books and stories. Sometimes home revolves around simple things, like Mudge the dog loving Henry's home and room because of the dirty socks and the way Henry's bed smells (17-18). Other times, the concept of "home" takes on a deeper set of meanings; when Mary in *Secret Garden* faces returning to England, the children she is temporarily staying with taunt her that she is being "sent home" because her parents are dead. When she asks where "home" is, they laugh at her scornfully, answering "'She doesn't know where home is!' said Basil, with seven-year-old scorn. 'It's England, of course'" (8). Layers of colonialism, being an expatriate, and the idea of a place these children have lived their whole lives not being considered "home" shows how complex the associations of the idea can be.

Home is a place of refuge, for the young girl in “Eleven,” who just wants to end her horrible day, get home, and eat her birthday cake (9), and for Will from *Dark is Rising*, in the midst of the danger he faces, “suddenly he was as small boy wanting very much to be at home” (224). Other times it manifests as something denied. For Bud, who has already lost his mother, the fact that the orphanage is called a Home seems especially ironic since it is not home-like at all (6). When he goes to live with a foster family who treat him terribly, the woman in the house screams at him after her son pretends Bud hurt him: “I do hope your conscience plagues you because you may have ruined things for many others. I do not know if I shall ever be able to help another child in need. I do know I shall not allow vermin to attack my poor baby in his own house” (15). In fact, he is so unfamiliar with what a home should be, when he stays overnight at the home of the man who rescues him from the side of the road, he does not quite know how to respond to their kindness and friendliness (119-126). In *Tuck Everlasting*, the Tucks are denied a permanent home because the curse of their long life means they can never stay in a single place for long (53-54).

Home also takes on the role of a place characters yearn for. From brief mentions like Mudge the dog feeling lonely in the field while he is lost, to the Little Prince’s concern and worry about the planet he left behind (30), homesickness threads throughout the stories. Minli in *Mountain/Moon*, when she thinks of home on her long journey, “thought about her own home – the wood floor always swept by Ma, the extra blanket Ba put over her when the wind blew cold – and she felt a strange tightness in her throat” (104). Sarah yearns for the sounds and the smells of the sea (25-26). Odysseus mourns

“the separation from his wife and was terribly sad that he had missed seeing his son grew up” (Osborn 13) while he is away fighting for more than ten years. In each case, they are missing specific characteristics of what makes home special.

Indeed, the unique sets of variables and traits that create a sense of home are also described in the stories: the process of the creation of home appears over and over.

Seabold in *Lighthouse Family* realizes he has found a home when the “gingham-curtained window, in view of the cherry trees budding and the daffodils in bloom” combine with the smell of the fresh bread Pandora makes, and he realizes he feels happier than he had ever been before (73). Omakayas loves the birchbark house she and her family build in the spring because of the peace and quiet: “It was good to sleep where the village dogs didn’t bark all night and where the only sound to disturb their dreams was the pine trees sifting wind in a lulling roar” (12). In *Little Women*, the whole family works to make Beth as comfortable as possible as her health declines and a large part of all of their sense of home revolves around Beth and her presence:

The pleasantest room in the house was set apart for Beth, and in it was gathered everything that she most loved – flowers, pictures, her piano, the little worktable, and the beloved pussies. Father’s best books found their way there, mother’s easy-chair, Jo’s desk, Amy’s finest sketches; and every day Meg brought her babies on a loving pilgrimage, to make sunshine for Aunty Beth. . . . and from across the sea came little gifts and cheerful letters, seeming to bring breaths of warmth and fragrance from lands that knew no winter. (563-64)

They all work together to turn their home into a comfortable place for Beth, and when she dies, the light goes out of their home for a time. They all miss her presence in the corner by the fire (611), but they eventually find other ways to renew their sense of home. When Moon Shadow and his father must move out of Chinatown after some

trouble with Black Dog, he feels very unsure about where they are going and what it will be like, but when his father sets up all of their belongings, creating a sense of home, Moon Shadow begins to feel more comfortable:

Our mats and blankets were laid in one corner . . . I wandered around the room and touched everything to reassure myself that it was real and not some demonic illusion. Father waited patiently in the doorway with his arms folded. When I went back to him, I nodded that it was all right. (128)

One of the more unique examples of the ways a sense of home is created involves Bud; he carries his home with him. It all fits in a suitcase and he has a specific order that everything that goes in and how it all fits (6-8). It acts as his touchstone, and since it is the only link he has left to the home he shared with his mother, it has become his de facto home, whether he verbalizes that or not.

Finally, sometimes a sense of home coalesces through differences and contrasts. Meg Murry in *Wrinkle* hates Camazotz because everything about it seems wrong, unpleasant, and tinged with badness. When she looks at the buildings, her disquiet grows because “In each of them was a vertical line of light, but it was a dim, eerie light, not the warm light of stairways in cities at home” (224). Will knows that something outside is evil and threatening because of the way it changes his normally noisy and cheerful home:

Then it creaked again, and he knew what it was: a certain floorboard that often talked to itself at night, with a sound so familiar that usually he never noticed it at all. In spite of himself, he still lay listening. A different kind of creak came from further away, in the other attic, and he twitched again, jerking so that the blanket rubbed against his chin. You’re just jumpy, he told himself. . . . Another strange crackling noise came, this time above his head in the ceiling, and the wind whined suddenly loud, and Will sat bolt upright in bed and reached in panic for the lamp. (16-17)

Huck Finn, in *Tom Sawyer*, hates living with the Widow Douglas because all of his freedoms are taken away, so he goes back to living in the empty hogsheds “down behind the abandoned slaughterhouse,” which are as much home to him as anything (250), rather than stay in the place people are telling him he should think of as home.

#### Sequent Occupance & Place Change Over Time

Places and regions, including homes, changing over time and patterns that shift are two other facets of both spatial concepts. Sequent Occupance is one aspect of how places change over time. The concept concerns the marks and changes successive waves of occupants or immigrants make on a landscape. So, in *M.C. Higgins*, when M.C. observes that some of the paths near his home “had names from long ago, such as Wee Woman Path, Mighty High and Mighty Low” and that there are still traces of “old, rutted wagon roads” despite also being able to see highways for cars, those are both examples of this phenomenon (16). Hallmarks of the past are also depicted in *Dragonwings*, when Moon Shadow and his father have to move to Oakland “on what had once been a rich estate belonging to the *Esperanza* [sic] family” (258), the remnant of an old rancho from when the area was a Spanish colony. Will in *Dark is Rising* learns that the old magic still lingers in his more modern world:

. . . Oldway Lane. Yes, and it was not named for some distant Mr. Oldway. The name simply tells you what the road is, as the names of roads and places in old lands very often do, if only men would pay more attention. It was lucky for you that you were standing on one of the Old Ways, trodden by Old Ones for some three thousand years. . . (69)

This last example may be a melding of the real world and a fantastical one, but this is still an example of remnants of past cultures and ways of life appearing on the landscape of a

place and the way places change over time. Indeed, as Will moves through time through his magic, the expanse of woods around his house changes, buildings come and go, and the course of the Thames changes. Readers encounter this same phenomenon in *Tuck Everlasting* when Ma and Pa Tuck, who are seemingly immortal because of a magical spring, return to the village that, in the time of the story, was just a small town bordered by a large wood. Now the town has grown:

. . . [they] clattered on into the village proper, past a catholic mixture of houses which soon gave way to shops and other places of business: a hot dog stand; a dry cleaner; a pharmacy; a five-and-ten; another gas station; a tall white frame building with a pleasant verandah, The Tregap Hotel. . . The post office. Beyond that, the jailhouse, but a larger jailhouse now, painted brown, with an office for the county clerk. A black and white police car was parked in front. . . (135)

Now there are new businesses, building materials, cars instead of wagons and horses, and the once large wood has been bulldozed.

#### Physical Characteristics of Places & Regions

*Geography for Life* (2013) characterizes the physical traits that define places and regions as including “landforms, climate, soils, and hydrology” (35). The vast majority of the physical characteristics describing places and regions in these works of fiction center upon climate and biogeography, although other characteristics do occasionally appear.

One particularly vivid example of climate comes from *Roll of Thunder*. This passage also contains a rare reference to soils with a description of the red Mississippi mud:

By the end of October the rain had come, falling heavily upon the six-inch layer of dust which had had its own way for more than two months. At first the rain had merely splotted the dust, which seemed to be rejoicing in its own resiliency and laughing at the heavy drops thudding against it, but eventually the dust was forced to surrendered to the mastery of the rain and it churned into a fine red mud that

oozed between our toes and lopped against our ankles as we marched miserably to and from school. (42)

One the one hand, this rain is welcome relief from the heat of summer, but it brings with it its own problems, including a season of having to slog through mud and getting splashed by passing cars and buses.

Omakayas knows to expect ice and snow during the winter in what is probably today's Wisconsin or Michigan, but that does not make the depths of winter and the difficulties it brings any easier to bear:

. . . earth had frozen with a vengeance, and spring seemed far away. Omakayas was tired of all the different kinds of ice around her. There was the just plain ice, the kind you couldn't see through, that covered the lake and hid the water and the fish below. That was the ice she had to help Nokomis chop every day from the keep hole they fished through. The fish were biting only rarely. They could fish all day and not even come up with a skinny lake trout. . . . Empty ice nets! There was the ice on the oiled paper window, ice on the inside of the cabin walls on cold mornings, ice on the frozen paths and ice in the water bucket. Transparent ice, white ice, ice so black and solid you couldn't see through it. (167-168)

Alec in *Black Stallion* encounters a desert climate when shipwrecked on a deserted island: "The sun blazed down and the sweat ran from his body. If it would only rain! The last week had been like an oven on the island" (24). Summers are "too hot and sticky to sleep indoors" for the little boy experiencing an East Coast summer in *The Raft* (LaMarche 2000, 17), and tornadoes strike out on the prairie in *Sarah Plain and Tall*: "We ran outside and saw a huge cloud, horribly black, moving towards us over the north fields" (53). Each of these references describe climates and provide further context about the kind of place the story takes place in.

Some books also lend themselves to regional comparisons between physical characteristics. *Sarah*, for instance, contains overt comparisons of climate, landform, and

vegetation regions between the Midwest and East Coast. Sarah asks the children to describe what winter is like, since it is summer when she arrives on the prairie and they talk about how there is wind in both places, but many different qualities to the winter weather (38-40). She also tells them that near her home in Maine, there are rock cliffs rising from the sea and sand dunes, neither of which are like the flat, open prairie she is visiting and the children are used to (33-34). They eventually realize that both locations experience “squalls” – a regional word for storm (56) – and that the waves on prairie grasses are surprisingly similar to the waves on the sea (65). Indeed, much of the book is an extended comparison between two regions of the United States.

Alternatively, the unnamed main character in *Father's Dragon* is able to describe the biogeographical differences between his home, where it is rainy and cold when he leaves on his journey (1), and the more tropical islands where it is clear and sunny (24), and where tangerine trees (24) and jungle plants grow (27). There are even of examples regional variations in a smaller scale; Omakayas and her family canoe to a nearby island every year to find wild rice that grew in great sloughs (91) and different parts of their own island are better for finding things like mushrooms and maple syrup (91-92). Winnie in *Tuck Everlasting* recognizes the differences between the trees near her house and the trees by the Tuck homestead (61) and is very appreciative that those trees are far cooler than the sun-parched grassland they had just traveled through: “The late sun’s brilliance could penetrate only in scattered glimmers, and everything was silent and untouched, the ground muffled with moss and sliding needles, the graceful arms of the pines stretched out protectively in every direction. And it was cool. Blessedly cool and green” (47). Each

of these examples demonstrates how understanding physical differences between places and regions is a key aspect of both concepts' definitions.

### Human Characteristics of Places & Regions

The examples of human and cultural characteristics of place and regions varied more than examples of physical characteristics. Some of these attributes are conventional parts of geographic information like language, and though other aspects may not seem quite as clearly spatial, all are tied to place and variations between places.

In terms of patterns of religion, in *Little Women*, a French maid's Catholicism (259) stands out strongly amidst the rest of the girls' New England Protestant upbringing. Religion is a large part of the March girls' lives. They read *Pilgrim's Progress* (14-15), are encouraged by their parents to value simplicity, and to be helpful, industrious, teetotal, and observant Christians, all values and traditions tied to the Puritan roots of the area they live (299-302; 339-440). Omakayas and her family live in a very different place (and time) and their religious patterns reflect significantly different patterns from the Marches. Omakayas's grandmother makes an offering of tobacco to the spirits before cutting into trees to make their summerhouse for the year (Erdrich 7), honoring the spirits of the environment they live within. In *Roll of Thunder*, religion takes on yet another shape, this one of regular church attendance and revivals where everyone gathers for seven days (234).

Language patterns also define places and regions; when Moon Shadow first arrives in San Francisco from China, he does not speak any English – which he at first calls demonic because all white people seem like demons to him – and everything sounds

abnormal and scary to him. He soon discovers that “Demonic was easier to speak than to read. It was hard to understand a language that only used twenty-six symbols, the *letters* of their *alphabet*” (64). He struggles to learn this new language and adapt to his new environment, especially considering he lives in an area surrounded by other Chinese people who speak mostly limited English. *Dragonwings* also has a unique example of cultural blending and influences; there are many instances in the book when Moon Shadow and his relatives face discrimination because they are Chinese. At one point, an uncle responds to a drunk calling them ““chai-na-maan”” by stepping in and replying “No sabe. No sabe. So sorry” (23). That a Chinese man is speaking in both broken English and Spanish is a clear indication of the cultural influences present and interacting around them.

Multiple cultural influences are also visible in *Birchbark* when Omakayas’s older sister begins going to a school run by Catholic missionaries, and when they are visited by voyageurs (111). Finally, M.C. can tell that a visitor is from elsewhere by the way he talks, and softens “his usually hard hill voice to fit the gentler, flatter tones of the dude” (Hamilton 34).

There are a variety of other cultural characteristics as well, both material and non-material contributing to place and region. There are jazz musicians in *Bud, Not Buddy* who play together in “a storm of music” (200), funeral laments for fallen comrades in *Black Ships Before Troy* (Sutcliff 2005, 120), and folk songs as old as the hills in *M.C. Higgins* (114). Omakayas and her family eat “makuks of moose stew and fresh greens and berries” (12), while in *Little Women*, a fancy meal Amy prepares for friends involves

lobster, tongue, chicken, and cake (353-354). Feasts and celebrations are held at Christmas (*Little Women*; *Roll of Thunder*, and *Dark is Rising*), Hanukkah (“Zlateh the Goat”), and mid-winter (*The Birchbark House*), reflecting a variety of traditions and cultures.

There are also passages describing the culture of a community or region and what that encompasses. In *Roll of Thunder*, for example, Cassie and her siblings contribute to that sense of community by taking food to a neighbor whose husband has been attacked (74). Cassie’s mother talks about the “welfare of the community,” drawing on common ties and struggles as she tries to organize her neighbors into no longer patronizing the local white-owned store to protest the discrimination and violence from the white community. Finally, the yearly revival

was the year’s only planned social event, disrupting the humdrum of everyday country life. Teenagers courted openly, adults met with relatives and friends they had not seen since the previous year’s “big meeting,” and children ran almost free. (233-234)

All of these descriptions and passages reflect the values and traits of the community, place, or region.

### Hospitality

One of the most interesting and recurrent cultural traits in these works conveying values and traditions is the way they outsiders are treated and offered hospitality. Many of these works portray hospitality as not just important, but as expected. Indeed, hospitality is intimately linked to the sense of community and place. Some examples of this are explicit, such as when M.C.’s father says ““If you see somebody is a stranger, you act polite until you see what they’re up to. That’s how you show you have some manners

and find out something besides” (Hamilton 71). Another examples is when he and his siblings do not even look inside a tent “out of respect for someone’s privacy. They all knew they were not to be bold with strangers” (135). In *Father’s Dragon*, the little boy is so appalled that his mother is not being hospitable to the cat he brings home, it contributes to his decision to run away and have an adventure: “he was so angry at his mother for being rude to the cat that he didn’t feel the last bit sad about running away from home for a while” (19).

Other times, hospitality is so much a part of the fabric of a place or region, no one discusses it; it is simply portrayed as the normal or expected response. When Paris and his friends first arrive at King Menelaus’s palace, in Sutcliff’s retelling of *The Iliad, Black Ships before Troy*, as soon as they walk into the fortress palace, “Slaves met them, as they met all strangers, in the outer court, and led them in to wash off the salt and the dust of the long journey” (1993, 7). Indeed hospitality plays such an important role in this culture and place that when Paris violates this code by running away with Menelaus’s wife, Helen, the offense becomes a justification for vengeance and war: “Grant me my rightful vengeance on this man who did me foul wrong, even while he ate my salt and slept beneath my roof” (28).

Hospitality is also a value shared between cultures. As different as Moon Shadow and his family are from his landlady, Miss Whitlaw, when they are all left homeless after the earthquake, they share food together. When the Chinese men invite her over to their tent for dinner, she brings a bottle of wine to repay their hospitality. Moon Shadow’s oldest uncle approves of this shared hospitality, when he rarely likes anything about the

non-Chinese world, saying it is a “universal gift that is cherished in all cultures” (Yep 233). Despite their otherness, both cultures share values and traditions, helping bridge gaps between communities.

### Functional, Formal, & Perceptual Regions

Examples of the three different types of regions geographers commonly study – formal, functional, and perceptual – all exist within the characteristics that define regions in these stories.

Formal regions are regions defined by the presence of a particular characteristic such as a crop, ethnicity, climate, etc. The presence of a Chinatown in *Dragonwings*, based on the concentration of a group of people, is an example of this kind of region. There are several regions in *Father’s Dragon* as the young character comes across areas of sandy and rocky beaches, jungle, and swamp (29-32). Each of the wild animals that he encounters – monkeys, lions, alligators – have their own defined territories, which they do not usually cross, until the little boy causes all sorts of uproar by trying to rescue the dragon they are holding captive. The prairie that Sarah decides to move to defines a very different formal region than the Maine seashore where she grew up.

Functional regions are defined in terms of a node and the ties or connections attached to that node, like a warehouse and its delivery area or a county government and the territory its laws control. Examples of this kind of region also include the Chinese community in San Francisco. Chinatown is an important node economically, not just in terms of real estate, but also in terms of the services the community provides, including domestic service and laundries. Moon Shadow’s uncle communicates this importance

when he prevents the forced movement of the Chinese community after the earthquake by telling the city fathers, ““We Tang people own one-third of the land in the Tang people’s town outright . . . did you ever stop to think how important we are to the demons? We run a lot of businesses and services that they need. If we were to leave this city completely, their whole community would be wrecked”” (Yep 245-246). The school that Cassie and her siblings attend in *Roll of Thunder*, the only black school in the area, also qualifies as this kind of region. It draws students from a wide surrounding area and is “located near three plantations, the largest and closest by far being the Granger plantation. Most of the students were from families that sharecropped on Granger land, and the others were mainly from Montier and Harrison plantation families” (15-16). The store the share croppers are forced to shop at in the story also qualifies, since it draws from all the surrounding plantations (163-164). Moon Shadow (179), Will in *Dark is Rising* (57-58) and Jo March (201) each ride various forms of public transportation, all of which are examples of functional regions, as well, as is the fire station in *Fire Cat*, and the circuit judge in *Tom Sawyer*. Finally, in *Black Stallion*, there is an East Coast champion horse who won the Kentucky Derby and other East Coast races, while on the West Coast, the champion dominated at Santa Anita indicates the presence of two functional regions for horse racing (144-145).

Finally, perceptual regions, or those that are shaped by people’s perceptions, attitudes, or mental maps of an area, manifest in references like “His grandmother filled him with all kinds of tales about the glory of the South before the war” (Hamilton 1976, 163), making the largest land owner in the area want to maintain the patterns of

discrimination from the past to help keep his perceptions alive. Everyone Moon Shadow knows thinks of the United States as Golden Mountain because of stories of a great golden mountain promising unimaginable wealth shaping their perceptions. At the same time, they also perceive the United States as a “fearful place” because so many men die in mining accidents and are victims of violence and abuse by Americans (12). The perceptions and associations both attract and repel the Chinese migrants, shaping their mental maps and their interactions with place. Even a little boy’s fears about his route to school – when “he walked he used to worry about tornadoes, ghosts, biting dogs, and bullies” (14) – create a perceptual region because his fears are shaping his mental map of the world and dividing it into safe and unsafe perceptual regions (Rylant 1987, 14).

#### Identity & the Other

One final aspect of place or region centers upon identity and those places or peoples who are “other” and do not fit in with that particular identity. As the National Standards say, “Personal, community, and national identities are inextricably bound with a person’s and a population’s experiences in . . . places” (35); part of what creates identity, on any scale, ties into the place where that identity happens. Indeed, people who come from other places and are different do not share that identity, so yet again, an aspect of place or region manifests through difference. Meg in *Wrinkle* does not feel like she fits anywhere (55) and her mixed up identity frustrates her constantly. When Odysseus and his crew encounter the Cyclops, they identify themselves through their nationality, protesting, they are ““not pirates . . . [but] Greeks blown off course by storm winds”” (Osborn 42). Moon Shadow’s oldest uncle keeps a cup of soil “that he brought back from

one of his trips to home. For Uncle the soil was very special, being a bit of the Middle Kingdom and home, and more: part of the land which his fathers and their fathers had worked before him” (121). He constructs his identity and conception of himself through a link to that land and a particular place he holds important, especially living in a place so far from home.

Examples of othering tied to place also permeate these works. Some operate at a wide scale like nationalism; other examples construct identity quite parochially in terms of more interpersonal interactions. One example of nationalism occurs when visitors from England join the March girls and Laurie for a picnic. During a game of croquet, Jo catches one of the boys cheating, and as part of her accusation, draws a contrast between herself and him:

“We don’t cheat in America, but you can, if you choose,” said Jo, angrily.

“Yankees are a deal the most tricky, everybody knows. There you go!” returned Fred, croqueting her ball far away.

A few minutes later, when Jo wins the game despite the boy’s sabotage, she highlights the difference again, drawing attention to the fact that the Americans had won the revolution against England: “‘Yankees have a trick of being generous to their enemies,’ said Jo, with a look that made the lad redden, ‘especially when they beat them,’ she added” (168-170), making her point by further invoking nationalism. *Little Women* contains several additional examples of othering, including the idea that “Germans like messes” (358) – in this case a random assortment of left overs – while Jo says that people like Professor Bhaer “in spite of his foreign ways” (457) and “I wish Americans were as simple as Germans don’t you?” (459).

At a more localized scale, in *Bud, not Buddy*, despite everyone in the Hooverville suffering from the same plight, a white family refuses to associate with anyone else, especially the black people. The husband refuses to the point that they are starving and their child is ill because, as he says, “Thank you very much, but we’re white people. We ain’t in need of a handout” (Curtis 78). He holds himself apart because he sees himself as different from everyone else caught in the same undesirable place. Omakayas’s father others the white people invading his ancestral lands, labeling them “greedy children. Nothing will ever please them for long” (Erdrich 121), while a boy Minli encounters tells her that the people from the fancier, wealthier area of the city he lives in are quite different: “The people in there think we’re a bunch of dumb oxen” (Lin 101). He thinks she should not go to those parts of town, drawing the distinction between where he belongs and where he feels he does not.

Additionally, M.C. Higgins knows himself to be tied to the land he and his family have lived on for generations, but he also defines part of that identity through difference: “He and his family never did any fishing. For them to resort to it for food was unheard of. Water was the opposite of land, which they possessed and loved” (169). When he sees that Lurhetta, the girl he encounters, fishes, it draws a clear distinction between them in his mind. Alec also draws distinctions tied to place in *Black Stallion*. The “dark-skinned” man who boards in Arabia panics during storm, endangering himself and others due to his uncivilized and dangerous behavior.

Then Alec saw the man had no life jacket. Terror in his eyes, he turned away from the captain toward Alec. Frantically he rushed at the boy and tried to tear the life jacket from his back. Alec struggled, but he was no match for the half-crazed

man. Then Captain Watson had his hands on the man and threw him against the rail. . . .

Alec saw the man's eyes turn to the lifeboat that was being lowered. Before the captain could stop him, he was climbing over the rail. He was going to jump into the boat! Suddenly the *Drake* lurched. The man lost his balance and, screaming, fell into the water. He never rose to the surface. (10)

The man never has any other name than “the dark-skinned man.” The only identity he has comes from his otherness, his lack of “civilization,” and his abominable behavior.

Sometimes the othering is part of the structure of a place. Many of the differences in *Roll of Thunder* particularly exemplify this, including the massive contrasts between the school that the white children attend versus the school Cassie and her brothers attend. The white school has a number of buildings, a massive sports field, two busses, and, “In the very center of the expansive front lawn, waving red, white, and blue with the emblem of the Confederacy emblazoned in its upper left-hand corner, was the Mississippi flag. Directly below it was the American flag . . . .” (15). The black school, however, consists of “four weather-beaten wooden houses on stilts of brick,” (15) with classrooms demarcated by a “heavy canvas curtain” (18). It is a physical manifestation that the black children are labeled as less deserving of funds and resources. The “new” textbooks that arrive at the beginning of the school year also typify the pattern of otherness and exclusion. The textbooks prove over ten years old and have aged from new condition through average and poor, all of which are acceptable for the white children according to the column for race on the label inside the books. Now that they have reached “very poor,” however, they are labeled “nigra” (24; Figure 1), a label that infuriates Cassie's

brother, Little Man, so much he stomps on the book in the midst of class, highly uncharacteristic behavior for a little boy who reveres books.

This labeling and othering by the white community clearly has the power to wound deeply and affect identity and sense of self. Cassie and Little Man's teacher reacts to this by perpetuating it:

This time Miss Crocker did look, but her face did not change. Then, holding up her head, she gazed unblinkingly down at me.

"S-see what they called us." I said, afraid she had not seen.

"That's what you are," she said coldly. "Now go sit down." (26)

The children's mother, however, who teaches in another room, understands and fights back against the labeling the only way she can, by covering up the offensive bookplates for her two children, and for the children in her own classroom, despite the fact that they are county property:

She had trimmed the paper to the size of the books and was now dipping a gray-looking glue from the brown bottle onto the inside cover of one of the books. Then she took the paper and placed it over the glue.

"Mary Logan, do you know what you're doing? That book belongs to the county. If somebody from the superintendent's office ever comes down here and sees that book, you'll be in real trouble."

Mama laughed and picked up the other book. "In the first place, no one cares enough to come down here, and in the second place if anyone should come, maybe he could see all the things we need—current books for all our subjects, not just somebody's old throwaways, desks, paper, blackboards, erasers, maps, chalk . . ." Her voice trailed off as she glued the second book.

"Biting the hand that feeds you. That's what you're doing, Mary Logan, biting the hand that feeds you."

PROPERTY OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Spokane County, Mississippi  
September, 1922

CHRONOLOGICAL ISSUANCE	DATE OF ISSUANCE	CONDITION OF BOOK	RACE OF STUDENT
1	September 1922	New	White
2	September 1923	Excellent	White
3	September 1924	Excellent	White
4	September 1925	Very Good	White
5	September 1926	Good	White
6	September 1927	Good	White
7	September 1928	Average	White
8	September 1929	Average	White
9	September 1930	Average	White
10	September 1931	Poor	White
11	September 1932	Poor	White
12	September 1933	Very Poor	nigra
13			
14			
15			

Figure 1. The bookplate from the textbook in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (25).

Again, Mama laughed. “If that’s the case, Daisy, I don’t think I need that bit of food.” . . .

“Well, I just think you’re spoiling those children, Mary. They’ve got to learn how things are sometime.”

“Maybe so,” said Mama, “but that doesn’t mean they have to accept them . . . and maybe we don’t either.” (29-30)

This attempt to mitigate the effects of the othering does help Cassie and her brother feel better, at least for a while, but later, when their mother begins pushing back against the oppressive power structure in the community in other ways, her actions have

consequences. Men from the school board visit her classroom, see what she has done with the books, and fire her from the teaching job she loves (184-185). Fighting back against the othering and the identity that the white power structure has created for itself creates a backlash in this region, state, county, and school.

Shadow Moon also experiences othering, including being tormented by a group of boys who make fun of his English and kick him (183-184), but he also others the white people he encounters by grouping them together as “demons” (14). When he first meets his new landlady, he does not know what to expect because he had never interacted with an American woman; “I had expected her to be ten feet tall with blue skin and to have a face covered with warts and ear lobes that hung all the way down to her knees so that her ear lobes would bounce off the knees when she walked” (130). She proves to be friendly and sympathetic, however, and tells her niece to stop calling him crazy: “*How would you feel if you were plunked right down in China in a small village with almost no hope of going back? Wouldn't you be scared?*” (155; italics in original). Miss Whitlaw understands the differences place can make on how people perceive each other and themselves.

### Physical Systems (Essential Element #3)

Although physical properties can be one of the defining characteristics of a region or place, the physical systems that “create, maintain, and modify” Earth’s surface are the processes and structures that create or provide the context for those individual features or traits. These physical systems operate at more of a macro scale such as ecosystems, the atmosphere or hydrosphere, and Earth-Sun relationships. For the most part, such systems

are not large elements of these works, but many of the components do unfold in several ways.

### Earth-Sun Relationship

The cycle of season and months caused by the relationship between Earth and the Sun is explicit in *Birchbark*. The story takes place over a year, with the structure of the book broken into four parts, one for each season: Neebin (summer), Dagwaging (fall), Biboon (winter), and Zeegwun (spring). Each season becomes visible both in the description of changes in weather and vegetation and in the activities Omakayas and her family complete on a daily basis: building a spring/summer house; gathering and storing food for winter; harvesting rice (91); enjoying swimming in the heat of a summer's day. The shift of seasons and the way they create patterns on Earth also emerges in *Roll of Thunder*, which moves from the heat of summer, to the rain and cold of winter around Christmas, and back towards summer. In *Black Ships*, while the Greeks lay siege to Troy, "Nine times the wild almonds flowered and fruited on the rocky slopes below the city. Nine times summer dried out the tamarisk scrub among the grave mounds of long-dead kings" (17).

### Ecosystems

Many elements of ecosystems are described. In *The Raft*, the main character has to leave his urban home behind for the summer and experience a completely new ecosystem: the rural river where his grandmother lives. At first, he dismisses the area as uninteresting, ignoring his grandmother's suggestion that he try fishing near the lily pads, because he does not understand the environment and thinks fish are more likely to be out

in the middle of the river (7). Once he begins observing more closely, however, he quickly learns to appreciate the different ecosystems he comes into contact with. In the forest around the river, he encounters raccoons, rabbits, foxes, and deer; on the water, he watches the birds, and observes turtles swim “up from the bottom of the river” (11). He even discovers niche environments along the river when he poles the raft into “the shade of a willow, then waited to see what animals the raft would bring. It wasn’t long before a great blue heron whooshed down with a crayfish in its bill” (19). A different day, he poles farther up the river than he had ever been, and “near a clump of tall cattails” he finds a family of otters (22). Each one of these habitats is their own ecosystem with their own plants and animals.

M.C. Higgins also encounters a variety of ecosystems around his home, from the ecosystem at the top of the mountain he lives on, which is so disrupted by mining that it no longer supports any growing thing, not even insects or birds (Hamilton 34-35), to the misty valley filled with vines where he hunts rabbits (201-202). A number of other ecosystems are also depicted, at least by name: jungle in *Father’s Dragon*; “endless miles of barren desert shore” in *Black Stallion*, pine forests in *Henry and Mudge* (24); a pool with ducks (Paterson 1995, 2); and a patch of special trees in the midst of an otherwise barren mountain landscape (Lin 183), to name just a few.

### Altitudinal Zonation

Those mountains in Lin’s *Mountains/Moon* illustrate another ecological concept, altitudinal zonation, or the idea that different levels of elevation (and the conditions there) create different zones of vegetation. As Minli and her friend the dragon travel from the

city down in the flats to the mountains looking for Never-Ending Mountain, they get progressively colder and notice changes in the landscape and vegetation around them: “As they traveled, the land became more barren, rocky, and steep” until there were hardly any trees, and “without trees to tame it, the wind blew wildly, burning Minli’s cheeks red with cold” (157). They move up through a variety of zones, from lush flats to a barren, treeless landscape.

The foothills and mountains M.C. Higgins roams through in the Ohio Valley also reflect altitudinal zonation. High up on the slopes, near the peak of his mountain, he can look down into the ravine and see an “abundance of trees” (4). Down in the bottom of the valley, it is soft and muddy enough in patches that he has to be careful of sink holes and the “Growth covering them was yellow-green or black with rot” because of all the damp (7). At another elevation, there is a clearing with “ginseng and wild daisy,” two plants described only in that one place while in a nearby ravine, vines grow so thickly he and his friend can swing on them, flying through the mist that lingers at that level (8-9). Each elevation has its own characteristic vegetation not described at other levels.

Lastly, a description in *Wrinkle* perfectly captures that way vegetation changes as elevation increases; when Mrs Whatsit flies the children up the mountain towards the beginning of their adventure, the narrator reports:

Below them the trees of the mountains dwindled, became sparse, were replaced by bushes and then small, dry grasses, and then vegetation ceased entirely and there were only rocks, points and peaks of rock sharp and dangerous. . . .

Now they were in the clouds. They could see nothing but drifting whiteness, and the moisture clung to them and condensed in icy droplets. (78)

By the time the children arrive at the peak, not only is all the vegetation gone, they are very thankful for the mysterious flowers they brought with them from a lower elevation that allow them to breathe in the thin atmosphere. This example illustrates not only the concept of altitudinal zonation, but the idea of different levels of atmosphere.

### Invasive Species

Finally, there are even a few mentions of invasive species impacting an ecosystem, like the baobab seeds that can infest a planet in *Little Prince* (14-15). Even the Prince's beloved rose is not native to his planet, since it had "grown from a seed brought from who knows where" (22), making it an invasive species, as well. Another example of more of an "out-of-place species" than an invasive species transpires when the beasts in *Father's Dragon* know someone has invaded their island because of tangerine peels the main character dropped. As the animals who find them say, "Since tangerines do not grow on our island, somebody must have brought them across the Ocean Rocks from the other island" (30). Interestingly, Alec and the Black could be considered invasive species; certainly neither of them are native to the deserted island they are marooned on, and they substantially alter the ecosystem by decimating the limited vegetation available, first by eating the few berries (21), and the carrageen moss (25) and then by accidentally starting a fire that burns down the only trees (33-35) on the island. Despite their variations, all three examples illustrate ecosystem change and the effects of invasive species.

#### Human Systems (Essential Element #4)

As the last section details, several physical systems appear in these books; as in the place and region category, however, the spectrum of human systems present in this collection of fiction proves far wider. Human systems, which describe the “growth, spatial distribution, and movements of people” (Standards 51), appear at a variety of levels of detail and specificity. Some mentions are quite brief or oblique, like colonialism being the backdrop for the beginning of *Secret Garden*; Mary’s father has a position with the British government in India (1) and the class differences between the British raj and their Indian servants are quite distinct (3-7). Colonial ties are also clear in the fact that Mary travels to England in the company of a British family taking their children home to attend school in England rather than staying in India (8).

Political systems or organizations also appear occasionally, such as the emperor Minli encounters in *Mountain/Moon*, a local lord being compelled to follow an emperor’s orders in *Mandarin Ducks* (Paterson 19), the Queen and King of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*, and many interrelated Greek kingdoms in *The One-Eyed Giant* and *Black Ships*. Indeed, Sutcliff’s retelling of *The Iliad* also contains a number of geopolitical issues encapsulated by the ways the Greek kingdoms relate to each other, come to each other’s mutual aid, and even wage war against Troy. Client states or allies like the Amazons (97-98) or King Memnon (115) coming to Troy’s aid also displays geopolitical patterns. Although these all operate largely in the background or context of the story, there are a variety of human systems that manifest in more detail.

## Migration

Some of the most frequent examples center upon migration. Many characters move a great deal, sometimes as tourists or to temporarily follow a job, sometimes as regional, or even international, migrants in more permanent moves. For this later type of migration, Mary from *Secret Garden*'s move from colonial India to the Yorkshire moors certainly qualifies, as does Sarah's decision to move from the Maine to the Midwest.

Many of the other examples of migration are driven by economic factors; the Chinese characters in *Dragonwings*, for instance, all traveled to the United States in search of economic opportunity, a journey which impacts the characters in a variety of ways. Wives and families are left alone back home in China, "seeing their husbands every five years or so if they were lucky—though sometimes there were longer separations" (3). Some of the men never come home because they are lynched or killed in work accidents (1). The migrants have to deal with loneliness of their own, along with abuse and violence from Americans who resent the Chinese and claim "the Tang people took their jobs away from them" (35). Some of the men also resent the drudgery and hard work, including Moon Shadow's cousin, Black Dog, and turn to gambling, prostitution, and opium (35).

Other migrations are more temporary. Bud and a friend contemplate a move out west to escape the problems of the Depression:

"Where you heading?"

"There's always fruits to be picked out west, I heard we can make enough money to get by out there. There's supposed to be a train leaving sometime tomorrow. . . ." (Curtis 62)

The boys and the others in the Hooverville waiting for a train also face discrimination and abuse for their movements when a group of armed policemen and Pinkerton agents raid the camp, destroying it while trying to prevent people from jumping on the train (82-84), reflecting barriers and restrictions on movement. In *Roll of Thunder*, Cassie's father spends months away working on the railroads in Louisiana to make enough money to pay the mortgage (6-7), but comes home when he can.

There is even an example of reverse migration in *M.C. Higgins*. At one point, the man M.C. hopes will take his family to the big city and save them from the slag heap above their home tells M.C. about other people from the Appalachians he has encountered. While they have migrated to urban areas, he says, these people miss the mountains so much, they are inexorably drawn back to them:

And every weekend, thousands of them just pile into these cars without windshield wipers or without hardly enough gas— And they head for home over the border, right across there.” Lewis gestured beyond the Ohio River where distant mountains loomed. “They kind of flow out on Interstate 60. We lose a few there in about sixteen spectacular highway deaths between Friday, 4:30 p.m., and seven minutes after midnight on Saturday. A portion of them never make it back to that dreamland they loved so much but had to leave—the one they can't wait to get back to when the plant or mill or factory closes on Friday . . . . (45)

Despite the danger and difficulty, the chance to return home is too important and necessary for them to pass up. This overall pattern of returning home, even temporarily, creates a new set of spatial connections between the two places.

Yet another migration pattern centers on seasonal movement. Cassie's father, for instance, searches for work at specific times of the year when he can be spared more easily from the farm: “not returning until the deep winter when the ground was cold and barren. The following spring after the planting was finished, he did the same” (7). The

family in *Birchbark* also moves seasonally, following resources and long-established patterns. During the winters, “Omakayas’s family lived in a cabin of sweet-scented cedar at the edge of the village of La-Point, on an island in Lake Superior that her people called Moningwanaykaning, Island of the Golden-Breasted Woodpecker” (6). Once spring arrives, the time to cut birchbark for their spring/summer lodge comes, so they move to another island where they also grow corn (6). Once the corn is planted and established, her father pursues his work as a fur trader: “which meant that he was often gone, paddling the great canoes for the fur company or sometimes trapping animals himself” (9), sometimes making it back only after the ice has formed on the lake (113).

#### Remittances

The money the characters send back to their places of origin, or remittances, is also linked to economic migration. The father’s earnings from his migrant work in *Roll of Thunder* mean that the mortgage can be paid and the family can keep their land and independence (7-8). Moon Shadow says “Thanks to Uncle’s hard work, Black Dog and his brothers and sisters had been raised in luxury back in the Middle Kingdom,” (35). He also observes that despite the years of separation and hardship, and the struggles for the migrants and their families, “our own clans discouraged wives from leaving because it would mean an end to the money the husbands sent home to their families—money which was then spent in the Middle Kingdom” and that made a significant difference in many villages (3). This pattern of connectivity and interaction is an important component of the migration patterns inherent in these stories.

### Forced Migration

In all the previous examples, the type of migration is largely voluntary; Cassie's father may not like being away from his family, but he chooses to work in Louisiana because it is better than losing the land he loves. There are, however, a number of situations where the migration patterns being described reflect forced migration. In Hamilton's short story "If the People Could Fly" (1985), the characters working in the fields "were captured for Slavery [sic]" and transported across the ocean on slave ships (166). Now they are forced to work "from sun up to sundown" by their owner (166) and the Driver's whip [sic] (169), trapped and oppressed. Although it is far less vivid or explicit, *Tom Sawyer* also contains mentions of slavery, largely through the character Jim, Aunt Polly's slave (11).

While they are not trapped in slavery, the Chinese in *Dragonwings* are compelled to move after the San Francisco earthquake. Soon after the disaster, soldiers come and round up the Chinese people in Golden Gate Park, sheltering along with much of the rest of the city: "There were more soldiers there, standing with rifles at the ready, waiting for some outbreak of rebellion" (241-242). Over the next several days, they must move repeatedly first along Van Ness Avenue, then to a warehouse, then "Thursday morning we were moved to a golf course at the Presidio, another army base slightly to the east of the *Golden Gate*. It was as if the demons could not make up their minds" (242). All of this movement reminds the men of the year before:

officials of the city had tried to move the Tang people out of our old area to a place called *Hunter's Point* in the southern part of the city, where some Tang fishermen already had a camp. It was now rumored that the demon officials were going to make us rebuild the Tang people's town not in our original location but

down at *Hunter's Point*; and yet every other ethnic group in the city was going to be allowed to return to its old homesite. (243)

This forced movement pushed many into leaving the area, “By that Friday, we had dwindled from some twenty-five thousand of us to only a few hundred. Many Tang people had just got disgusted and left for points east, south, and north.” However, the community, led by Moon Shadow’s uncle, decides to take a stand and fight back against the discrimination (243). Forced migration is also a threat in *Birchbark*, as more white settlers arrive in the area and word starts trickling in that the unnamed government may be about to make the local people move, although in this case there are also rumors of “government payments” being given to those who leave (79-80)

#### Push & Pull Factors

These books and stories portray a wide variety of factors around migration, all of which are push or pull factors, influencing some to move on and others to stay depending on the situation. Seabold, the dog in *Lighthouse*, feels pulled to the sailor’s life by a huge love of the sea (18). In *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, Sarah faces the push factor of her brother marrying and her desire for a family of her own (10-11), while the pull factors that might keep her from staying in the Midwest include missing her beloved coastline (14). The Chinese migrants are pulled to the United States by economic opportunity and pushed by the lack of jobs at home. For the Native American family in *Birchbark*, one push factor that may shape their decision to leave is that the village where they winter “was becoming more chimookoman,” or outsider, (79) all the time. Mary leaves India because of the loss of her parents and the pull factor of needing a new place to live. Bud’s

mother's death is a factor pushing him away from Flint, Michigan, while the chance of finding his father pulls him toward Grand Rapids (111).

Environmental factors can also be push and pull factors, which is very much at play in *M.C. Higgins*. The family's house and lives are threatened by the "half-congealed spoil heap bigger" than their house that sits just above them on the mountain (22), but the entire family feels a massive sense of loss at the thought of leaving the land that they love and are so intimately linked with (2), a factor keeping them tied in place.

### Chain Migration

In some cases, once these push and pull factors have done their work, the migrants establish a pattern of chain migration. This kind of pattern refers to a migration trail where links between a place of origin and a destination become ingrained after kinship ties draw people to follow early migrants and move to the new site. These kinship ties are evidenced in how the Chinese men around Moon Shadow are uncles, cousins, or long-term friends and most come from the same district in China (25). Moon Shadow's father's desire to bring his wife over from China, and her eventual arrival (82-84; 313), also reflects chain migration.

Omakayas describes the pattern when she observes that "every time the grownups began to talk, they discussed travel routes west" that others they know had followed (122). Her concern that "the non-Indian, or white people, were traveling in larger and larger numbers than ever to Ojibwa land and settling down their cabins, forts, barns, gardens, pastures, fences, fur-trading posts, churches, and mission schools" (77) shows her recognition of the start of new chains of migration.

### Ethnic Enclaves

Once chain migration patterns are established, the migrants often establish ethnic enclaves. These areas of concentration, usually surrounded by another ethnic group, become the focus of the ethnic community as expressions of culture or ethnicity like restaurants, bookshops, and stores selling traditional clothing and food congregate together, creating links with “back home.” In the last example from *Birchbark*, the white settlers build homes, businesses, and schools for themselves in the midst of what had long been an Ojibwa village. In *Dragonwings*, Chinatown exists as a well-established ethnic enclave. Indeed, it is so distinct and familiar, that when he first arrives after his long journey from China, Moon Shadow, who had been feeling very lost in this foreign land, suddenly felt at home because the sights are so familiar:

The roofs of the buildings here were tiled and arched, and the walls, windows, and doorways were in gold or red or green. Before the fronts of the buildings were sensible safeguards against demons of any kind. There were lions laying down protectively before some; other houses had pictures of the door guardians on their doors, and still others had scrolls of red paper on the doorways, asking a certain god to protect the inhabitants against demons. (23)

Vendors selling products he recognizes walk the streets singing songs he knows, selling foods he loves (25), while benevolent associations to help each other and foster a sense of community within the enclave (63). Finally, although not spelled out as explicitly, the community where the family in “Zlateh the Goat” lives is a Jewish enclave somewhere in Eastern Europe, or the Jewish Pale, which is where most of Singer’s stories are set.

### Foodways

As varied as the types and effects of migration are in these works, migration is far from the only human system conveyed within them. There are a number of examples of

different ways of procuring food, reflecting a wide array of historical and more current patterns of food production. Since catching a fish proves nearly impossible, Alec resorts to gathering moss to keep himself and the Black alive (19; 22-23). In *Birchbark*, the Native American family and their community hunt bear, moose, and deer (19-20), trap crows (57-60), gather berries and other plants (82-83), collect maple sap (198-200), in addition to harvesting wild rice (91) and cultivating corn (57). Cattle are raised in the area around Troy, and other groups try to raid those herds (Sutcliff 5). These different livelihoods each produce their own geographic patterns, as do the instances of more intensive agriculture. There are references to the antebellum plantations in *Roll of Thunder*, and now the entire region Cassie and her family live in is characterized by sharecropping (99). Plantations and the slave labor used to work them are the central focus in “The People Could Fly.” The Tucks are also farmers, the father in *Sarah, Plain and Tall* teaches Sarah how to plow his hay fields (37), and when messengers first arrive to tell Odysseus he needs to go off to war, he is “tending his fields and orchard” (Osborn 6-7). Urban agriculture even makes a brief appearance in *The Stories Julian Tells* when the family plants a garden in their small backyard:

In just one week the seeds did start to grow, and we watered them and weeded them. By the end of the summer we had vegetables from the garden every night. And the corn did grow as high as the house, although there wasn't very much of it, and it was almost too tough to eat. (34-35)

One other recurrent theme in the different foodways is the presence of servants in the several of the stories. Hannah does most of the cooking in *Little Women*, while Mary was so used to servants bringing her food in India, she does not know what it is like to be hungry (27). Finally, although there are a few restaurants, like the one in *Bud, Not Buddy*

(161-165), most people cook their own food, sometimes over an open fire, like smoking fish in *Birchbark* (99-100), and other times in their modern cooking spaces, such as the one filled with “pots and the pans and the jars of this and that” where Julian, his brother, and father make pudding for his mother (2-3).

### Economic Sectors

As the discussion of foodways illustrates, many of the economic activities in these stories are primary sector, extractive activities like fishing and farming and the mining briefly mentioned in *Dragonwings* (290). Secondary sector activities appear in the books as well: building the rail lines (239-240) in *Roll of Thunder* and *Dragonwings*, the steel mill where M.C.’s father occasionally works (54), and the factories on Camazotz. There are also a few examples of tertiary sector economic activities focused on services and education. The mother in *Roll of Thunder* is a teacher (188), while Mr. & Mrs. Murry in *Wrinkle* are scientists and researchers (20), and Mr. March in *Little Women* is a minister (349). Vendors selling food in the city in *Mountain/Moon* (97-98) also belong in this category, along with many of the shops and restaurants the Tucks see in Treegap when they visit after so many years. Each of these groups of economic activities conveys different geographic and spatial information about livelihoods and the development of the country or region where the story takes place.

### Urban vs. Rural

Another indication of development and economic structure of a location centers upon the distribution of urban and rural areas. Most of the stories in this collection take place in rural areas. Of the 33 works, only a few contain major plot points or elements

that take place noticeably in cities, such as Jo March moving to New York to write (447), the siege taking place outside Troy, “a great city surrounded by strong walls, and standing on a hill hard by the shore” (Sutcliff 34), or M.C. dreaming of getting to move to a big city to escape the threat to his beloved house and valley (3). However, some works allow for comparisons between these two different settlement patterns. When Bud finds himself trying to walk to Grand Rapids, he sets out from Flint and discovers that it “ended all of a sudden” and that he was unexpectedly “in the country” with dirt paths. The boundary seems so abrupt to him, he even takes a few minutes to jump back and forth between Flint and “the country” just because he can (96-97).

*The Raft*, on the other hand, starts in a large city, which the little boy is very loathe to leave for his grandmother’s more rural home. He says there will be no one to play with and nothing to do out in the country (1-2), drawing a contrast between the activities in each. In *Black Stallion*, the distinctions between the more urban area and suburbs stand out clearly. When Alec has to guide the Black through the noise and congestion of the city docks (64), he is “glad now they had moved out of the city last year to Flushing, one of New York’s suburbs. He was sure he would be able to find a place near his home” where there would be room to keep the Black outside the higher density city (52). Comparisons are also possible between the different settings Minli travels through on her journey, from the poor, isolated farming area she is from, through the wilderness, and to the city of Bright Moonlight where:

An enormous wall, like a giant patchwork curtain of stone, surrounded the thousands of houses of the city. And almost glowing with the splendor of its red columns and golden top, a palace stood up over the clusters of buildings in the far

center – like a glorious boat floating above the waves of the scalloped rooftop tiles. Even from a distance, the city looked majestic. (95)

When she first goes inside, the urban setting is completely foreign. She can only stare all around her because the “streets were crowded and bustling; the city seemed to be bubbling with people like boiling rice” (97). Another important geographic concept, population density, becomes visible with these last two descriptions, and both density and the rural/urban distinction describe how people are distributed across a landscape.

#### Transportation, Movement, & Access

The ways humans arrange themselves also involves different forms of transportation; they allow the movement of people and goods from place to place and reflect different levels of mobility and access. Nearly every common mode of transportation occurs across the books and stories from boats to feet, trains to airplanes. There are seasonal modes, like the sleigh ride Poppleton and his friends take (46) and the ice skates Jo, Amy, and Laurie use on the lake (105-107); both of these examples also reflect a pattern of humans moving for recreation, a spatial pattern that is not present in all spaces or times. There are also less seasonally dependent modes, such as canoes, which are vital to daily life and survival in *Birchbark*. The father uses his for fur trapping and to trade for winter supplies, and the women use another for activities like the wild rice harvest: “Mama set out with Auntie Muskrat, who poled in back while Mama used her rice sticks to bend the stalks toward her and knock the grains off into the bottom of the boat” (95).

A ship takes Alec from India where he is visiting his uncle towards home before it sinks in a storm; he eventually makes it back to New York by way of Rio de Janeiro,

reflecting trade and shipping networks (49). Once he makes it back to New York, Alec must pass through the port, which contains a myriad of different forms of transportation and further signs of connectivity, trade, and other economic activities:

He could see the two small tugs effortlessly pushing the big freighter. The buildings climbed higher and higher into the sky. A large liner, ocean-bound, passed them—its stacks belching white smoke into the heavens. Tankers and flatboats loaded with railroad cars crept past.” (62)

All of the hustle and bustle makes him very happy because it means a return to his familiar “civilized” world.

A less positive description of a port highlights another function: the control and regulation of people into a country. When Moon Shadow first arrives, customs quarantines him for over two weeks while he is processed and inspected: “We were kept on the bottom story [of a warehouse], where we slept and ate off the floors. All the time, we smelled the sewage and the bilge of the bay—besides which there was no way to bathe there, so after the long boat voyage, we were a rather fragrant group on our own” (15). During this period, the officials take his measurements and write all of his defining characteristics down so he can be identified should he ever leave and someone try to sneak into the United States in his place.

Automobiles appear in several books, including *The Raft*, *Roll of Thunder*, *Dark is Rising*, and *Bud*, but there are more examples of horses and various kinds of wagons or carriages (*Secret Garden*, *The Treasure*, *Little Women*, *Sarah*, *Tuck Everlasting*, “Zlateh the Goat,” *Tom Sawyer*, *Dark is Rising*, *Dragonwings*, *Roll of Thunder*, and *Black Ships*). No matter the transportation format, however, different levels of access to that transportation often creates patterns of inequities between those with access and those

who lack it. When Meg March sprains her ankle at a party, she and Jo are both very concerned about getting home safely because the family cannot afford to keep a carriage or take a taxi (42-43). Luckily, Laurie happens upon them and offers to share his grandfather's carriage, which is very luxurious and illustrates the Laurences possessing far more money and greater mobility than the Marches (42). Similar issues appear with M.C.'s mother having to walk to town for her job as a maid because they cannot afford a car. Additionally, he and his siblings are fascinated that Lurhetta, the girl they come across at the lake, has a car of her own and can go where she wants. The \$300 she spent on the car seems like unimaginable wealth to M.C. (142). Those who have access to private or personal transport have far greater mobility and a wider array of choices that do not restrict their space.

Poverty also affects Bud's mobility and access to the places he wants to travel. As an orphan in the midst of the Depression, he has no money or other means of transportation. Early on, he attempts to hop a train out west in hopes of finding work picking fruit. After failing to make it onto the train, he heads back to Flint to use the library to determine the distance to Grand Rapids, where he thinks his father lives (89-90). He has no option but to walk, however, and it does not take "too much time before" he "figured out that twenty-four hours' worth of walking is a lot longer" than he had originally thought (97). He walks until very late at night, when an older black man sees him walking along the side of the road and stops because he knows the risk of a young black man being out on his own in the area. It turns out that Bud is nearing a town called Owosso, where "folks used to have a sign hanging along here that said, and I'm going to

clean up the language for you, said, ‘To Our Negro Friends Who Are Passing Through, Kindly Don’t Let the Sun Set on Your Rear End in Owosso!’” (105). Getting caught by these people could have had dangerous, perhaps deadly, consequences for Bud. In this case, in addition to his lack of money, a culture of prejudice and discrimination in this part of Michigan also limits Bud’s mobility (105).

Similar patterns of inequity affecting both means of transportation and mobility occur in *Roll of Thunder*. The white power structure discriminates against Cassie’s ability to move freely in a store (110-112). Later, her Uncle Hammer comes to town with his big fancy car, and the depth of the effects of prejudice and discrimination on the African-American community in the area becomes patently apparent. The family goes out for a drive one afternoon and are crossing one of the main bridges in the area:

Only one vehicle could cross at a time, and whoever was on the bridge first was supposed to have the right of way, although it didn’t always work that way. More than once when I had been in the wagon with Mama or Big Ma, we had had to back off the bridge when a white family started across after we were already on it.

As the bridge came into view the other side of the river was clearly visible, and it was obvious to everyone that an old Model-T truck, overflowing with redheaded children, had reached the bridge first and was about to cross, but suddenly Uncle Hammer gassed the Packard and sped onto the creaking structure. The driver of the truck stopped, and for more no more than a second hesitated on the bridge, then without a single honk of protest backed off so that we could pass.

“Hammer!” Big Ma cried. “They think you’re Mr. Granger.”

“Well, now, won’t they be surprised when we reach the other side,” said Uncle Hammer.

As we came off the bridge, we could see the Wallaces, all three of them—Dewberry, Thurston, and Kaleb—[the instigators of some of the worst violence against Black people in the area] touch their hats respectfully, then immediately freeze as they saw who we were. Uncle Hammer, straight-faced and totally calm,

touched the brim of his own hat in polite response and without a backward glance sped by, leaving the Wallaces gaping silently after us. (138-139)

As amused as they all are at the situation and at Hammer's boldness, they are also scared about the possible consequences for violating the Jim Crow status quo.

*Wrinkle in Time* also contains controls on mobility, although these limits are set by the totalitarian control of IT rather than an inculcated history of racial discrimination. On the planet of Camazotz, no one can go from place to place, or even be out at certain times of the day, without the correct papers (120-121). The lack of freedom and mobility is one of the most disturbing and scary parts of life on the planet for the three American children from (comparatively) modern Earth. In each of these cases, mobility, access, and transportation are all inexorably intertwined and different combinations of the three elements create their own unique patterns.

#### Spaces of Discrimination & Gendered Space

As the above discussion illuminates, a number of these books also convey spatial information in terms of spaces of discrimination. Most of the discrimination previously detailed revolves around race, but there are other factors shaping spaces where people cannot access something. M.C.'s father will barely allow the Killburns, a family who live nearby and in a very different way from the Higgins family, on his land when they come to sell ice, and he absolutely refuses to permit them onto his porch because he thinks they are "witchy" (185-186). In *Little Women*, there are several references to Irish children being at the edge of things: they congregate outside Amy's school, but do not attend and are the "sworn foes" of Amy's classmates (93). Another time, the Irish children are described in a list of "two ducks, four cats, five hens, and half a dozen Irish children" as

if they belong with the animals, not with the rest of society, because they are Irish (207).

This kind of spatial analysis may be a more recent area of study within geography than other geographic concepts like transportation or regions, but discrimination does take on spatial dimensions, as does gender. Indeed, gendered space has a variety of spatial aspects. In *Birchbark*, there are definitely spaces afforded to each gender. At the large mid-winter gathering people are grouped according to gender and age: “the old men in the farthest corner, seated on soft skins, the old ladies at their games and gossip, the young women in the center and the young men surrounding them, the people of all ages talking, laughing, and dancing” (140). Gender also affects Omakayas’s and her brother’s daily movement, because once she begins to take on some of the tasks of a woman, jobs that once fell to them both become his sole responsibility: “Pinch was sent out to bring wood. He made a face at Omakayas, for with her beadwork she was set apart, another of the women, and Pinch was left to fetch wood all by himself” (132).

*Little Women* contains many examples of gendered movement, although much of the focus on traditionally gendered roles and behavior reflects the Civil War era setting. Jo is frequently criticized for behaving in a “gentlemanly manner” (4), moving through rooms by “marching up and down, with her hands behind her back and her nose in the air” (9), or for running in public where someone might see her (207-208). She should be moving through space in a more appropriate, ladylike manner.

Gender limits mobility for the March girls in other way, as well; when Laurie talks about going away to college Jo wishes she could attend, too, but universities were not spaces for women at this time, even if her family could have afforded to send her

(41). Beth also inhabits a gendered space. She sticks close to home because she is “a housewifely little creature” (53), and is so timid that even school proved too much for her. Instead she takes on a traditionally feminine role and rarely goes out into the world.

Other books have examples as well; Winnie in *Tuck* alters her personal space when she realizes she’s alone with a boy by shifting to sit more “primly” (27). M.C. Higgins cannot believe a girl is traveling all by herself (97-99), and over at the Killburn farmstead when gender roles break down, it disconcerts him. During a visit, he realizes he cannot tell which adults are men and which are women because they all dressed in the same kind of overalls and are all working similar tasks and chores (208-209). He feels quite disquieted by the lack of gender roles and separation. The people of Troy are equally shocked when the Amazons arrive to join the battle and the women ride in on horseback “which was the custom of their country, instead of driving in chariots in the usual way” in Troy (110).

### Diffusion

A final category of geographic information falling under Human Systems involves diffusion or “the spread of people, ideas, technology, and products among places” (Standards 107). This collection of fiction contains many examples of contagious diffusion, although there are a few examples of relocation diffusion, or something being diffused in a leap when someone relocates to another area. Relocation diffusion manifests in the presence of the Catholic missionaries in *Birchbark*; considering the setting and time period of the story, they most likely arrived from France and are now attempting to diffuse their religion throughout the area (109). They also relocate their diseases,

including smallpox. Alternatively, Mary brings her knowledge of India, rajahs, snake charmers, and the like with her to England and then passes them on to her cousin, Colin. Interestingly, he participates a form of syncretism, the combining of two disparate cultural traits into something new, when he combines the Yorkshire views of the benefits of fresh air off the moors, exercise, and gardening with Mary's knowledge from India, creating what he terms Magic, a new way of thinking and acting that will make him well and, he believes, guide the rest of his life (219; 225).

Most of the examples of diffusion in the stories, however, typify contagious diffusion, or the spread of information, ideas, etc. from person to person. At times, the diffusion is literally contagious – small pox in *Birchbark* (142), scarlet fever in *Little Women* (238), cholera in *Secret Garden* (3-4) – but most of the time it is information or a cultural practice that is diffusing. Sometimes those are more negative aspects of a culture, such as the introduction and spread of opium use in San Francisco (Yep 37-38), or the way the Darkness has spread from planet to planet, oppressing people, like on Camazotz. This diffusion of evil happened on Camazotz and now threatens Earth (98-99).

Other aspects of culture and information spread as well. Tom Sawyer learns a new whistling technique from a slave (6), for instance. News of the murder in town spreads like wildfire: “No need of the as yet undreamed-of telegraph; the tale flew from man to man, from group to group, from house to house, with little less than telegraphic speed” (84). In *Mountain/Moon*, a jealous magistrate hears about a family famous for their happiness because stories about them “spread like seeds in the wind, sprouting and blooming everywhere, until finally even young Magistrate Tiger heard of them” (81).

Finally, when the news that Winnie helped Ma Tuck escape from jail diffuses around town, she suddenly became very popular amongst the children: “She was a figure of romance to them now, where before she had been too neat, too prissy; almost, somehow, too clean to be a *real* friend” (130).

#### Environment & Society (Essential Element #5)

This fifth section of the *National Geography Standards* focuses upon the ways humans and the environment interact, especially in terms of the human imprint on the environment and the ways humans both modify their surroundings and adapt to them. All of these interactions have consequences – positive, negative, intended, unintended – (75) and all have large geographic implications since all human action takes place within the context or confines of the natural environment.

#### Hazards & Resources

When those contexts of the natural environment are positive or good things, humans tend to label them resources, while confines or dangers from the environment receive the label hazard. The stories present many kinds of environmental hazards, ranging from natural disasters to human-induced damage. One of the most significant natural disasters in this collection changes Moon Shadow’s life forever; one morning he and the rest of San Francisco get shaken awake by the massive 1906 earthquake:

. . . when the earthquake hit, I did not believe it at first. It seemed like a nightmare where everything you take to be rock-hard, solid basis for reality becomes unreal.

Wood and stone and brick and the very earth became fluidlike. The pail beneath the pump jumped and rattled like a spider dancing on a hot stove. The ground deliberately seemed to slide right out from under me. I landed on my back hard enough to drive the wind from my lungs. The whole world had become unglued. Our stable and Miss Whitlaw’s house and the tenements on either side heaved and

bobbed up and down, riding the ground like ships on a heavy sea. Down the alley mouth, I could see the cobblestone street undulate and twist like a red-backed snake. (197)

He sees people buried under rubble, houses collapsing and trapping others, and entire blocks leveled: “Everywhere, what man had built had come undone” (198). Since scientists had only nascent understanding of the effects and mechanisms of earthquakes at this time, there were no building codes or disaster preparedness plans. Instead, people evacuate to Golden Gate Park (217), and when the fire breaks out, officials have no way to fight it because the water mains south of Market Street are broken, leaving the whole area without water (213-215).

Not surprisingly, this event led to other kinds of hazards, these from the humans themselves: “It was kind of scary. One day we were living in a law-abiding community and the next day the city and the community had both dissolved, with every person for themselves” (225). Although human adaptation to the environment will be discussed later in more detail, it is interesting to note that this particular environmental hazard led to a number of human adaptations and a great deal of learning; according to the United States Geologic Survey, the 1906 spawned “a flurry of scientific investigation” (USGS 2012) that greatly expanded knowledge of earthquakes and set the standard for future study. The quake eventually led to other changes and adaptations as well, such as building codes and safer construction processes (MCEER 2008)

There are also other natural disasters, including the hurricane in *Sarah* and the horrible squall Pandora feels coming in *Lighthouse Family* because the sky is darkening and shifting. She has learned that “a sky above a sea loves unpredictability. It loves to

surprise” (40). A massive storm also sinks Alec’s ship and maroons him and the Black (8-12). Massive snowstorms in *Birchbark*, “Zlateh the Goat,” and *Dark is Rising* also describe hazards. When the snowstorms in *Dark is Rising* and the snow melts, it produces flooding that nearly kills Will and his sister (198). The extreme heat described in *Tuck* and *Black Stallion* also qualifies.

Interestingly, sometimes the explanations for these hazards are tied to the culture in which they take place. Moon Shadow asks his father if dragons caused the earthquake like the stories he heard back in China (198). In *One Eyed Giant*, Odysseus and his men are bewildered about the storm that suddenly surrounds them and immediately attribute it to the gods: “Why was Zeus, the god of the skies, hurling his thunderbolts, at them? Why was Poseidon, lord of the seas, sending great waves over the waters?” The men in the group who angered Athena brought this calamity down upon them (23-24).

Besides these assorted climate or weather-induced disasters and hazards, no matter who caused them, other risks dot the stories, from the labyrinth of caves in *Tom Sawyer* that Tom and Becky Thatcher get lost in (201-232); to the thin ice Amy falls through in *Little Women* (106-107). Wild animals of various kinds also threaten characters including bears in *Birchbark* (201-202); alligators, rhinos, and boars in *Father’s Dragon* (14-15); the Black Stallion itself; and a ferocious tiger in *Mountain/Moon* (159). Volcanoes play a part in *Little Prince* (25), as do deserts and a lack of food and drinking water (13, 19). Finally, *Wrinkle in Time* has a unique place-based hazard; one of the planets the three guides take the children to turns out to be very hazardous to their health. When they arrive, Meg cannot breathe because “her lungs were

squeezed together . . . This was completely different from the thinning of the atmosphere . . . She tried to gasp but a paper doll can't gasp. . .” Luckily, the three guides soon realize the problem: “Oh, no! We can't stop here! This is a two-dimensional planet and the children can't manage here!”

The flip-side of these hazards are the resources the different environments offer. Some resources are as straight forward as the icicles hanging from Poppleton's eaves; they please him, which makes them a resource to him. Once they get knocked down, they have additional utility because he uses them to build a picket fence around his house: “And by evening, Poppleton had the most beautiful picket fence in town” (15), leading to more enjoyment. The environment Omakayas and her family live in provides abundant resources during much of the year. In *Black Ships*, the wind provides power for the Greek ships (8), while later, when they must build pyres for fallen heroes, characters travel “far inland as the forests of Mount Ida” (86) to find wood, tapping into the resources available to them. Other times, as in *Roll of Thunder* with cotton (6) and *Sarah* with hay (35), the resource takes on the form of a climate or soil well suited to agriculture. Occasionally, the resources are a mixed blessing, like the coal in *M.C. Higgins* that provides jobs in the area and is used to heat homes, but also carries a massive environmental cost throughout the region.

The resources found within the stories' environments do go beyond the extractive, however. These environments are also sources of wonder, beauty, and places where the characters play and interact. Tom Sawyer's frequent romps in the woods with his friends, playing pirates and Robin Hood (66), the March girls going outside to work on a hill

while playing at *Pilgrim's Progress* (189), and the snow ball fights Will and his brothers have in *Dark is Rising* (58) all exemplify the use of the environment for play and enjoyment.

The idea of the wonder of nature takes shape in a number of different ways as well. M.C. regularly greets the dawn up on top of the tall pole in his front yard, surveying the landscape, loving the mountains' "long, lingering dawns" (2). He feels intricately bound to the land, and his enjoyment of and connection to his surroundings is often palpable. His mother shares this love; one day when they climb down to the lake to go swimming, they watch the rising sun and she muses, "'Must be what Sunday people call God Almighty,' she said about the mountain. 'High enough for heaven and older than anybody ever lived'" (127). They are appreciative of the beauty all around them, even as they worry constantly about the danger looming over their house (1).

In *Dragonwings*, the characters take trips to the beach to play in the sand and have picnics, but also because it is the best place to find open space and good wind for testing the glider models the father is obsessed with. The resource of wind power fascinates them, the way it catches the glider, lifting it "upward toward the sun, veering and soaring like a thing alive, pulling stubbornly at the string" (177). The wonder and beauty of nature also creates settings for other kinds of tourism, like Amy's tour abroad in *Little Women*. She writes home, telling her family about the beauty she sees and the way she wishes she could capture it in her paintings: "It was the most romantic thing I ever saw – the river, the bridge of boats, the great fortress opposite, moonlight everywhere, and music fit to melt a heart of stone" (432). All of these typify a different

kind of resource than the kinds of physical resources that can be exploited, but all address the more ephemeral resources humans have available to them in their environments.

Finally, nature also acts as a resource for healing in several of the books.

Omakayas's grandmother is a great healer and finds many of her herbs in the woods (7), but the plants and herbs also begin to talk to Omakayas one day when she is out gathering wood in the forest. They begin sharing their secrets, and setting her firmly on the path of becoming a healer, too:

She set to work gathering a huge load of dry sticks, dead branches torn off during the winter by heavy snow and ice. As she was piling the branches higher and higher, she saw, on the side of a dry piece of birch wood, the grey hoof of a mushroom. A tiny voice whispered in her head, a low voice, muttering. When she picked up the branch, the voice grew louder but she still couldn't make out individual words. (202-203)

She still has much to learn, but now she has tapped into the resources all around her, and shortly after, saves her brother from being badly scarred from a burn (211-215).

In *Secret Garden*, the power of nature changes Mary and Colin's dispositions and lives. Being outside and exercising in the fresh air helps change Mary from a contrary, peevish child into someone interested in other people and driven to help bring the garden back to life again. Soon she begins "to like being out of doors; she no longer hated the wind, but enjoyed it. She could run faster, and longer, and she could skip up to a hundred" (78) and gardening becomes a "fascinating sort of play" (79). Eventually, even she notices "she looked quite a different creature from the child she had seen when she arrived from India. This child looked nicer. . ." and has a healthy glow on her cheeks (133). She even asks for "a bit of earth" (103) to tend to, taking advantage of the resources available to her and becoming closer to nature and its restorative effects.

Once she meets her cousin, Colin, who has been sickly his entire life and reveals the secret of the hidden garden to him, he, too, becomes obsessed. When she tells him about the garden, “Colin’s aches and tiredness were forgotten and he was listening enraptured” (166); nature has the ability to begin healing him, even remotely. Once he starts visiting the garden and helping take care of it, he becomes healthier and healthier: “The waxen tinge had left Colin’s skin and a warm rose showed through it; his beautiful eyes were clear and the flows under them and in his cheeks and temples had filled out” (277-228). When his father eventually returns, the power of nature has had such an effect, Colin is able to rise from his wheelchair and walk to his father, “as strongly and steadily as any boy in Yorkshire” (262).

#### Environmental Change

Another component of the ways human interact with their environment centers upon the ways humans change and modify the environment through their actions. Some of these changes are perceived as benign, such as the impacts farmers and agriculture have on their surroundings. Minli’s quest is originally motivated by trying to effect positive environmental change to help her family and local area; she goes off on her journey hoping to find the answer to how to make Fruitless Mountain grow green and produce crops again (9). The hay, cotton, and other crops being grown in these stories may have incredible utility, but that perception does not alter the reality that the fields replace native species, that water use patterns will shift, and that pollutants from fertilizers, the trucks taking the crops to market, and many other things have an impact on their

surroundings. In other cases, the characters may not be thinking about the consequences of their actions, but their activities will surely have an effect.

The Greeks in *Black Ships* are agents of environmental change when they journey to the woods, “with axes in their hands” and fell trees around Mount Ida: “They felled oak and pine and maple, and harnessed mules to the trunks and hauled them down to the camp” to build their camps and their funeral pyres (133). The patterns of the woods are changed by their actions. Alec and the Black also exact environmental change on their small deserted island while trying to survive (21-26).

Some of the characters seem more aware of these effects than others; Alec does worry about the effect he is having and about his limited food supplies running out, even as he must continue to eat what he can to survive (27). For Omakayas’s family, their cultural mores demand acknowledgement that their actions have an impact on their surroundings, and they give thanks for the resources they take. When Omakayas’s father, Deydey, goes out hunting in the dead of winter to stave off starvation, he:

prepared himself carefully to meet the animal’s spirit. He washed, put on his best clothing, new makazins, and had Mama comb and braid his hair. He cleaned and oiled his new gun and prepared it with extra care. Then he went immediately out and followed Grandma’s directions exactly. Just as he had said, in the clearing past the rocks and back of the trees. One Horn was waiting. The great buck stood still in the calm light. Deydey lifted his gun, breathed his hopes. Then thanks. One shot. The shot went true. One Horn died easily, right then.

Deydey gave tobacco to the deer’s spirit and thanked him, brought back as much as he could carry, then buried the rest of the deer in the snow. (189)

They acknowledge their part in the ecosystem and try to prevent undo damage, living as sustainably as possible.

No one seems to be taking as much care with the hills, mountains, and streams in *M.C. Higgins the Great*. Here, humans are changing the environment at a prodigious rate. As Lewis, the man from the big city, says when he talks to M.C.: “. . . I’m telling you, I’ve never seen anything so clear in my life. You look back there and then you look over here to the river and you have two lands about as danged different as right be to wrong. Two lands separated by this mountain.” On one side are the lush hills M.C. loves so much and knows so intimately, “rolled and folded, green and perfect” (34-35); on the other side, stand the fifty-mile long coal seam gashes and shredded hills. This same massive impact created the slagheap above his house, “an enormous black boil of uprooted trees and earth plastered together by rain, by all kinds of weather. Some internal balance kept the thing hanging suspended on the mountainside, far above the outcropping, in a half-congealed spoil heap bigger than M.C.’s house” (21-22), but M.C. knows some day soon the heap will change even more and slide down the hill, taking his house with it.

Other works also reflect human-induced environmental change. Alice cries such large tears when she is tall, that once she shrinks again, the pool is almost like an ocean: “her foot slipped, and in another moment, splash! she [sic] was up to her chin in salt water. Her first idea was that she had somehow fallen into the sea” (19), and she and a number of different animals must swim for shore.

When the Tucks return to the town of Treegap after many years away, incredible changes mark the landscape. As they drive into town, “It was very hard to recognize anything, but from the little hill, which had once lain outside the village and was now

very much part of it, they thought they could figure things out. ‘Yes,’ said Mae, ‘that’s where it was, I do believe,’” but so much has changed and so much time has passed, it is difficult to orient themselves (134-135). Despite the loss of the forest and the urban growth, they are both glad that the spring has been bulldozed over (137) and that no one else can be affected by its mysterious powers.

### Human Adaptation

As many changes as human exact on their environments, humans also adapt to physical conditions and realities in different biomes, habitats, and environments. Sometimes the adaptations are as simple retreating to the “coolness of the forest” in the heat of summer (Taylor 227), or wearing clothing appropriate to the conditions, like the small community in *Mountain/Moon* who dress in “red wadded-cotton outfits” and have “little moveable stoves” in their houses to keep out the cold in their high-elevation surroundings (193). When they give Minli a jacket of her own, “The fabric looked like plain cotton, but she felt as warm as if she had put on a thick fur” (207); their adaptation is the perfect counter to the cold winds constantly blowing around them.

Omakayas and her family have generations of ancestors who have passed on their knowledge of how to adapt to their environment, including practices like spending the summers “pressing fistfuls of gumbo clay, taken from the center of the island, into those places where the dried mud had crumbled” to prepare for the freeze of winter (121). In *Sarah*, Caleb tells Sarah “When there are bad storms, Papa ties a rope from the house to the barn so no one will get lost,” (39), and ““Papa needs five horses for the big gang plow . . . Prairie grass is hard.”” (44), both examples are different adaptations to survive the

hazards of the prairie. The lighthouse at the center of *Lighthouse Family* reflects yet another version of adaptation to an environmental hazard: the dense fog that can lead ships astray and into disaster. The lighthouse attempts to counter this danger with tools such as a fog horn and “the great light . . . [with] its strong beam out upon the water” and a year-round lighthouse keeper (42).

Of course, even with all of these attempts from humans to escape heat, cold, or other dangerous conditions, there are times when the power of nature overrules them all. When the massive winter storm envelops most of England in *Dark is Rising*, Merriman, Will, and their neighbors do everything they can to deal with the horrible conditions:

“There’s not much we can do down there, ma’am. The furnace is out, of course. All the electric power lines are quite dead. So is the telephone. I have had all the house blankets and quilts brought out, and Miss Hampton is making quantities of soup and hot drinks.”

. . . “I am having as much wood as possible brought in to keep the fire up,” Merriman said, but in the same instant, as if in mockery, a great hissing and steaming came from the broad fireplace. . . (188-189)

as snow comes down the chimney. Despite their best efforts, “The room was full of misery and chaos: small babies wailing, parents huddling their bodies round their children to keep them warm enough to breathe,” (190) because the power of nature simply overrules their efforts.

Omakayas and her family work all year to have enough provisions to make it through the winter, but sometimes the winter is so long and harsh, their preparations prove insufficient:

There usually was a food cache buried last fall, filled with good things that had lain far beneath the snow. But this year, Deydey had already made the trip to the

end of the island and raided the cache. To keep from starving, they had already eaten their store during the lean moon” (196).

### Time Being Measured by Nature

In addition to all of these interactions, there are also other social implications for the ways humans organize themselves within their physical environment and the ways that environment shapes their behavior. One repeated theme that reflects some of the social implications is the pattern humans use to measure time through indications or variations in their environment. In *Birchbark*, the structure of the book reflects this – each season has its own section, but the interconnections go beyond that. When spring comes, Omakayas knows it is “time to cut the birchbark” (6), she marks her age by saying that she has “seven winters” (7), one of the summer months is for picking heartberries, and she looks forward to winter because she knows her grandmother will tell scary stories around the fire, something she does no other time of the year (171). M.C. Higgins can tell that the seasons are beginning to change because of subtle changes in the temperature of the ground near his house (225), while planting season means everyone is out in the fields for Minli and her village (11). The geese, mallards and warblers flying overhead on way south mark the beginning of Pandora the lighthouse keeper’s busy time, and when the Greek army sees “the almond trees . . . coming into flower for the tenth time” their impatience to have this war ended grows even stronger (Sutcliff 18). Finally, Winnie in *Tuck* can tell that the worst of the summer heat is over when the goldenrod blooms (127). These examples partially reflect the close relationship between the characters and their environment and their reliance on the environment for survival, but it is interesting to

note the different ways humans mark their lives and years through varying aspects of their environment and the way examples like these reflect a spatial pattern of livelihoods and human activity.

Research Question 2:

How do these themes vary, quantitatively and qualitatively, across these grade levels?

In short, there is, indeed, a great deal of variation in the portrayals of geographic information across this collection of books for students in second to eighth grades. These books and stories include early reader stories with a large number of pictures as well as more complex works that are considered literary classics; the geographic information inherent in them reflects a similar progression in complexity.

Table 6 displays the breakdown of codes by book for each of the three grade blocks. The final total for grades 4-5 (7,777) and 6-8 (7,322) reflect a much higher total number of instances than the works for grades 2-3 (1,630), which is logical from a variety of angles, including the length of the books, the complexities of the stories, and the density of the information carried within the stories. Each code is present at the earliest level, however, reflecting the presence of embedded geographic information throughout all the grade levels. The 4-5<sup>th</sup> grade stories had the highest grand total. This is likely because the grade block had several books like *Birchbark*, *M.C. Higgins*, and *Secret Garden* which involved characters and plots with large amounts of daily movement and great deal of vivid setting descriptions, resulting in high Movement and Place counts.

**Table 6. Code Totals for Each Block of Grades.**

<b>Grades</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Movement</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>H/E</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total for Each Grade</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup>	56	469	599	28	358	120	1,630
4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup>	253	2,228	3,147	101	1,636	412	7,777
6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	216	2,520	3,288	132	592	574	7,322

Interestingly, despite the higher total for grades 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, when examining the proportion of each code per grade block's total, the results for all three sets of grades are remarkably consistent (Table 7). This once again underlines the ubiquity of the embedded geographic information, no matter how simple or complex the treatment of the spatial information.

The one number that does not reflect the overall pattern, the percentage of Human/Environment Interaction at the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade level, probably results from more of the books at this level focusing on older characters who spend less time out of doors, and more of the books taking place in cities, like *Little Women* and *Dragonwings*.

**Table 7. Percentage of Each Code per Grade Block Total.**

<b>Grades</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Movement</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>H/E</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total for Each Grade</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.4%	28.8%	36.7%	1.7%	22.0%	7.4%	1,630
4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup>	3.3%	28.6%	40.5%	1.3%	21.0%	5.3%	7,777
6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	3.0%	34.4%	44.9%	1.8%	8.1%	7.8%	7,322

Although this quantitative data does illustrate overall trends, examining the data qualitatively reveals other insights. As seen in the discussion of Question 1a, many – if not most – of the geographic information inherent within these books is present throughout grade levels included in this study. The more significant variations across the grades involve the complexity and the scale of the geographic themes and information carried within them. This is logical since as they develop, children's awareness of the world grows from their own house, to the local community through “experiences in and around the home and the local streets,” before developing to further afield (Catling 2006, 56). This growth expands though the city scale, and eventually up into state, country, and

international scales. The National Geography Standards reflect this progression of expanding awareness in the very way it is constructed and arrayed. Each standard is broken down with benchmarks of knowledge and skills students should have by 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, and each successive block of grades reflects more nuanced discussions and conceptions of the world and its patterns, scaffolding atop the previous information and skills.

For example, in the discussion of Standard 2 (Essential Element #1, the World in Spatial Terms), “How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context,” the mental maps students should be able to identify involve locations of the students’ home or school, the location of landmarks on their school’s campus, and the map of North America. By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, however, students should be able to identify patterns at the world scale, such as deserts and mountain ranges (29). A similar pattern unfolds in Standard 4: The physical and human characteristics of places” (Essential Element #2, Places and Regions). In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, students should be able to “Identify and describe the defining characteristics of the student’s community as place,” while in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade column, students should be facile with knowledge that centers upon “personal, community, or national identities.” By the 12<sup>th</sup> grade – a level beyond the scope of this study but that helps this progression and scaffolding become visible – students need to be able to tie “place-based identities” with a variety of scales, from international sporting events or regional identities influencing nationalistic movements (36). This kind of progression and increasing complexity emerges through the geographic information in the literature examined in this study; the discussion below

traces several examples of this pattern.

### Wayfinding

In the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade books, much of movement in the characters' daily lives involves a proscribed setting; they move largely around their neighborhood or city. Julian goes off by himself one afternoon, for example, and walks down his street and around the block (59). Poppleton interacts with his close neighbors (31-33) and the mail carrier (6), an important part of the community. For his birthday, his friends come over and they take a sleigh ride around town (47). The animals in *Tops and Bottoms* and the little girl and her horse in *Cowgirl Kate* each move about their local environment; the rabbit family moves back and forth between their own house and Bear's farm, while Kate and horse move around their farm herding cattle (21-22). This is not to say that characters from these early books do not travel further afield, but when they do, the trips are rarely detailed or intricate. The old man in *The Treasure* goes on a trip to a far-away city and travels for days, but the wayfinding seems to be along a single road, albeit through a number of environments. The whale in *Amos & Boris* possesses enough knowledge of the sea to be able to help Amos back to his home and to attend "a meeting of whales from all seven seas" off the Ivory Coast of Africa (12), but how he finds his way is not described, and the ways the places interconnect are not very clear. Although the travel in *Father's Dragon* is more extensive and includes preparation and several modes of transportation, the descriptions are far briefer than similar examples from the higher grades.

In the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade books, more detail about the way finding and character movements is present. Alec from *Black Stallion* knows enough geography that he

understands the route his ship takes from India, through “the Gulf of Aden and into the Red Sea” (3); then “The Drake stopped at Alexandria, Bengasi [sic]; Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers, passed the Rock of Gibraltar and turned north up the coast of Portugal” (7). His more developed mental map allows for a more complex route description. Further, his knowledge of different environments means he is able to survive in an environment far beyond his usual scale.

Minli in *Mountain/Moon* goes on a very long quest, traveling for weeks, and finds her way both through asking for directions and by constructing a compass out of a needle, a piece of bamboo, and her white rabbit bowl (34). Later she is able to realize just how far she and her dragon friend traveled when he flies her back home after gaining the ability to fly: “Minli was impressed by how far they had journeyed and how much faster they were able to travel by flying. The sun was only beginning to go down past the horizon when they saw the edge of the peach forest” (263). Omakayas, M.C., and Bud also each navigate their own complex environments. M.C. is so aware of his mountain and how to move around it, he is able to rely on his “his keen senses and his knowledge of the paths” to find his way home despite getting disoriented in the fog (254-255), for instance, while Bud knows where to find at least some of the services he needs, including the location of the library and soup kitchen in Flint (45); operating both within his local scale and then going further afield, figuring out how to read Grand Rapids.

The wayfinding present in the books for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade often takes place on an even larger scale. For instance, while much of *Little Women* focuses upon the girls’ daily movements around their house and town, there is also regional and international

movement and awareness operating at a higher level. Jo learns to function in New York, for instance, Laurie knows many of the cities and countries in Europe, including Germany and Italy (580-581). In *Dark is Rising* Will has to navigate throughout his district during variations in time and the changes in landscape several centuries can make:

Turning to the right, he walked up the narrow road that in his own time was called Huntercombe Lane. It was the way that he and James had taken to Dawsons' Farm, the same road that he had trodden almost every day of this life, but it was very different now. Now it was no more than a track through a forest, great snow-burdened trees enclosing in on both sides. (22)

Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace in *Wrinkle in Time* operate at such a larger scale, they travel between planets and cross the universe by tesseract (63-65).

#### Environment as Resource & Hazard

The way the environment can be both a resource and a hazard is another geographic theme that is described throughout all levels of these stories, but that operates on an increasingly complex scale as the audience gets older.

At the 2nd-3<sup>rd</sup> level, the environment operates as both hazard and resource for the family in *Sarah*, since their farm is located within the fertile Midwest, but that region is prone to dangerous storms like the one that turns the sky dark and “strange clouds hung in the northwest, low and black and green” (50). Mr. Poppleton loves winter because it brings beautiful icicles to decorate his house, but his mother warns him that they would surely “bonk him in the head” (9) or hurt someone else.

At the higher grades, this same dichotomy of resource versus hazard appears, but instead of brief, undeveloped mentions, this contrast takes on more depth. In *Birchbark*

(4-5<sup>th</sup>), the area where Omakayas lives provides her family and community many different kinds of food as well as a place to play, but it also threatens her in the form of a mother bear and her cubs (29-33) and the risk of starvation the long, brutal winter brings each year (165-184; 196). For M.C. Higgins, the mountains he lives on helps provide food for his family – he hunts rabbits, for instance (2-3) – and takes on the shape of a more ephemeral resources as part of the source of his identity and a place of beauty.

The resource/hazard split also operates at a more macro scale in Hamilton's book. The region is full of coal, but that abundant resource leads to many hazards, including the slag heap threatening his house. That heap is made increasingly dangerous by the environment: the region's abundant rainfall makes it slip slowly, inch-by-inch, down the mountain, closer and closer to his house. The high precipitation also combines with the hazardous mining practices and "harsh acids . . . washed down when it rained," affecting the whole area, including the grapes that no longer grow abundantly around his house (55-56). In *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt), the hazard from the horrible heat of the August sun almost becomes a character because the days are "mindlessly hot, unspeakably hot, too hot to move or even think" (116); Winnie's grandmother even repeatedly warns her about heat stroke (14). In *Dark is Rising* (Cooper), one of the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade books, Will and his brothers enjoy the snow, much like Poppleton, sending the day in "snowball fights and improvised toboggans with his brothers, in the sloping field behind the house" (58), but as much fun as they have and as pretty as it is, the hazard from it goes far beyond the danger from a few icicles. Now the hazards and effects of snow stretch far and wide, paralyzing most of England, as the news report Will overhears details:

Heavy snow is falling again over the south and west of England, said the impersonal voice. “The blizzard which has been raging for twelve hours in the North Sea is still immobilising [sic] all shipping on the Southeast coasts. The London docks closed down this morning, due to power failures and transport difficulties caused by heavy snow and temperatures approaching zero. Snowdrifts blocking roads have isolated villages in many remote areas, and British Rail is fighting numerous electrical failures and minor derailments caused by the snow. A spokesman said this morning that the public is advised not to travel by rail except in cases of emergency. (154)

This hazard has large regional implications and operates at a much larger scale seen at earlier grade levels.

### Human Impact on the Environment

The ways the environment and humans interact also reflect the trend of increasing complexity through the grade levels. There are only a few examples for the first block of grades and the effects operate largely at a small scale. Julian, for instance, has an effect on his immediate environment – a tree in his backyard – because he thinks eating the leaves on his fig tree will help him grow: “I got taller than my fig tree. And every time my fig tree got new leaves, I saw them and ate them secretly. And when nobody was looking, I did a growing dance. . .” (40-41). He eventually realizes that eating the leaves is hurting the tree, but only after his father nearly gets rid of the tree because it never seems to grow (41).

*Sarah* and *Tops & Bottoms* both involve farming, which is another kind of human-induced environmental change, but that impact does not play a role in these stories; farming just exists as an activity. In *The Raft*, the little boy is more aware of his possible impact on the environment he is increasingly entranced with than in these other examples. He takes care not to startle the otter family as he explores (22), for instance,

and when he rescues a fawn, he immediately backs away, not wanting to upset the fawn or its mother (28). His respect, however, really reflects the only developed awareness of the ways humans can impact their surroundings at this level.

Stories from the other two blocks of grades expand on this theme, however, and reflect a more nuanced discussion of humans affecting change. Now, instead of the presence of farming being neutral, there are mentions of change and impact: in “Zlateh the Goat,” as the boy walks to town, he passes “new fields, pastures, and huts with thatched roofs” (187), while in *Tuck*, the forest has been cut down and the fields paved over with blacktop to such a degree that “It was very hard to recognize anything” and shocks the Tucks when they return (134-135). In *Little Prince*, the narrator worries at the end of the book about forgetting to put a strap on the muzzle for the sheep he drew for his young friend (81-83) because he is worried about the sheep the Prince brings back eating the rose (21). In Sutcliff’s *Black Ships*, the Greeks change the landscape outside Troy when they “build a wall of turf and stakes” and a large ditch on one side of their camp (43), a camp they built into “halls and huts . . . so that in a while there was something like a seaport town” where there had never been one before (17).

Sometimes the changes are positive, as when Mary begins taking care of the secret garden she finds, clearing weeds, and making “nice little clear places” around the neglected plants. After her first attempt, she thinks, “Now they look as if they could breathe” and cannot wait to help the plants even more (71). In *Mountain/Moon*, the friendly family Minli encounters plants new seeds every day from a magical tree, making a beautiful oasis in the middle of a barren landscape. They observe that “Maybe in

another hundred years all this stony land will be covered with trees and the mountain will be as golden as the Moon” (187); they clearly understand the way they are impacting the environment and the way such change can happen over time, even if this does seem to be a change beneficial to them.

More often, though, the human effects on their surrounds take shape more negatively. The massive tracts of forest disappearing in *Dark is Rising* exemplifies this: Will realizes the magnitude of the loss when he visits the past, and “All around him the trees stretched to the flat horizon of the valley” with no breaks (21). Omakayas and her family are worried about the growing presence of outsiders and that lately, they have been hearing “the chimookoman ax ring in the woods, chopping a tree” and clearing the forest for their houses (79)

The effects are even more negative in *M.C. Higgins*: coal mining is actively changing the Valley all around him, on all scales. In terms of the region, M.C. can look out over the landscape – something he does not like to do because of all the damage – and see the effects of twenty-story-high mechanized shovels:

To the north and east had been ranges of hills with farmhouses nestled in draws and lower valleys. But now the hills looked as if some gray-brown snake had curled itself along their ridges. The snake loops were mining cuts just like the one across Sarah’s Mountain, only they were a continuous gash. They went on and on, following fifty miles of coal seam. As far as M.C.’s eyes could see, the summits of hills had been shredded away into rock and ruin which spilled down into croplands at the base of the hills. (34-35)

M.C. links these changes to his concerns about the growing degradation all around them. On a more local scale, besides the slag heap that constantly looms in his mind, the grapes that used to grow by the side of his house have been affected by the acidic runoff from

the tailings: “The arbor was green now but skimpy. Grapes grew small and not at all sweet to the taste. Used to be Mama could make quarts of jelly out of a yield, M.C. thought, but not now” (55-56). The crops his friend’s family grows reflect similar environmental degradation:

Up to the porches and foundations of piled stones, every foot of ground was taken up by tomatoes or potatoes. Runner beans, beets, lettuce, and peas. Even in the hot darkness under the houses grew ghostly spreads of mushrooms. The trouble was, none of the vegetables looked healthy. Some had blight of rust eating at the leaves. And others were being attacked by a black and white mold similar to mildew. (207)

Finally, in the 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade books, there is even more complex example: human driven environmental change becomes intertwined with social mores and politics. Since Cassie’s grandmother and father will not sell the land to the white landowners who are pressuring them, the men use the unequal social structure of the Jim Crow south to escalate the level of intimidation. The effects of this are apparent when Cassie and her grandmother go on a walk one day:

As we neared the pond, the forest gapped open into a wide-brown glade, man-made by the felling of many trees, some of them still on the ground. They had been cut during the summer after Mr. Anderson came from Strawberry with an offer to buy the trees. The offer was backed with a threat, chopping and sawing, destroying fine old trees. Papa was away on the railroad then . . . . He returned and stopped the cutting, but not before many of the trees had already fallen. (88-89)

The felled and rotting trees are an open wound on their property, but the family continues to hold strong and not bow to the intimidation. Human-driven environmental change has been turned into a weapon, a much more nuanced and complex use of this theme than seen in the earlier books.

### Stewardship vs. Ownership

A fourth geographic theme that amplifies and progresses through the grade levels focuses upon the relationships characters have with the land itself. This theme is part of the Environment & Society or Human/Environment Interaction and reflects an interesting set of narratives. Throughout the books, there are many examples of people who own land, but they fall into two distinct categories. People who own land, but who take care of it, and consider themselves bonded or connected to their land are completely different from the second group, people who own land for ownership's sake. Those who do own the land without a connection to it, who seek merely to control or collect it, invariably have negative traits ranging from laziness to downright evilness, and are usually the antagonists in the works. This pattern repeated so many times, I created two codes especially for it: h/e: ownership and h/e: stewardship. I designated the positive relationships and interactions with the land as "stewardship" because the term connoted an ethic of responsibility and careful management. The characters who had a stewardship-based relationship with the land did frequently own their land, but because of their care and awareness, they did not fall prey to the more venal impulses of those interested in simple possession.

This pattern unfolds at all three groups of grades. At the earliest level, there are several examples, including the description of Odysseus, the great and heroic figure, wanting to stay home and take care of his land rather than going off to perhaps gain more through war. What he most desires is to someday teach "his son to farm the land and care for the orchards" passing on the positive relationship he has with his land (6). Another

book, Steven's *Tops and Bottoms*, exemplifies this theme throughout the entire story. Indeed, it is clear from the very first sentence: "Once upon a time there lived a very lazy bear who had lots of money and lots of land." We learn that while his father was a hard worker, "all Bear wanted to do was sleep" something he is able to do since he had been given all of his father's wealth (1). Rabbit, on the other hand, had once owned land, although he had not been very responsible and lost it in a risky bet (2). Rabbit is, however, far more interested in the land than Bear is and offers to be business partners. They make a deal: Rabbit and his family will take care of all the planting and labor, and at harvest, they will split all the profit with Bear (5). So, as Bear sleeps, the rabbits tend the land, planting carrots, radishes, and beets, because Bear chose the tops for his share, and they get to keep the bottoms (11). When Bear sees the results, he is disgruntled and makes another deal; this time, he will take the bottoms, and Rabbit the tops (13). He promptly goes back to sleep, leaving everything to Rabbit once again, neglecting his responsibilities. Rabbit tricks him again, this time planting lettuce, broccoli, and celery so he can reap all the benefits (18). They repeat this process one more time, with Bear still sleeping and the rabbits still doing all the work, after agreeing that Bear should get all the tops *and* bottoms this time (20). Of course, Rabbit finds a way to profit anyway and plants corn, which grows in the middle (27). Each season, Bear shirks his responsibilities, neglects his land, and proves to be a poor steward. Each time he reaps the consequences of his laziness. Finally, however, Bear learns his lesson and "never again slept through a season of planting and harvesting" (31). He steps up, becomes more than just an owner, and takes care of his land.

This dichotomy between ownership and stewardship also plays out in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade books, such as *M.C. Higgins*, where the distant entities controlling the coal are incredibly careless with the land as they focus just on exploitation. Their actions when they first began mining the coal above M.C.'s house is a good example of this; the miners started blasting with no warning:

“Yessir,” M.C. said. “We were just playing down around the house when there was a bursting noise. Some rock and coal hit the back of the house real hard. It fell all around my sister on her tricycle. Knock holes in her spokes, too. It fell all around her and she was never touched.” (38)

The company also just pushed the rubble down into the trees and left the slag heap; they are definitely not stewards of their environment. The Killburns, the family of M.C.'s friend, exist on the other end of the ownership/stewardship scale. They work to take care of the land and heal the damage the coal companies are inflicting. Mr. Killburn even tells Lurhetta, ““We don't own nothing of it. We just caretakers, here to be of service” to the land they are using (222). Their link to the land is so strong, M.C.'s father finds them odd and labels them “witchies” (231).

Likewise, in *Tuck Everlasting*, ownership and stewardship are presented in several ways. At the beginning of the story, Winnie feels disconnected from her family who are portrayed as controlling, and are largely characterized through their ownership the wood and the land around it. They have fenced their land, partially cutting themselves off from the surrounding community, and live in “their touch-me-not cottage” (7). The book's narrator even discusses what ownership means and the ways it leads people to try to control their space:

The ownership of land is an odd thing when you come to think of it. How deep, after all, can it go? If a person owns a piece of land, does he own it all the way down, in ever narrowing dimensions, til it meets all other pieces at the center of the earth? Or does ownership consist of only a thin crust under which the friendly worms have never heard of trespassing? (7)

Winnie has never been interested in what her family owns, or even in the wood that is right over the fence because “Nothing ever seems interesting when it belongs to you—only when it doesn’t” (7); she is quite divorced from the environment all around her. As soon as she breaks away from her family’s paradigm, however, sees a bit of the wider world, and interacts with the Tucks, who are more respectful of the land and nature (82), Winnie begins to be more appreciative of her home. By the end of the story, she has even begun to shift away from ownership and into stewardship. She shoos away a dog harassing a toad she had been watching and even pours some of the magical water onto the toad to protect it forever (133).

The man in the yellow suit from *Tuck*, on the other hand, is a particularly strong example of the corrupting power of trying to control the land and its resources. His interest in gaining land lies with acquiring the magical spring so he can make money and have power. His intentions are clear when Winnie’s family thinks Winnie has been kidnapped. The man in the yellow suit extorts Winnie’s family into selling him their land to him in exchange for Winnie’s whereabouts: “. . . I’ve got what you want, and you’ve got what I want. Of course, you might find that child without me, but . . . you might not find her in time. So: I want the wood and you want the child. It’s a trade. A simple, clear-cut trade” (74). The extent of his avarice becomes even clearer when he rides ahead of the sheriff, threatens the Tucks, and reveals the full extent of his plan:

A faint flush crept up his neck, and the pitch of his voice lifted, became a fraction higher. “Like all magnificent things, it’s very simple. The wood—and the spring—belong to me now.” He patted his breast pocket. “I have a paper here, all signed and legal to prove it. I’m going to sell the water, you see.”

“You can’t do that!” roared Tuck. “You got it to be out of your mind.”

“The man in the yellow suit frowned. “But I’m not going to sell it to just anybody,” he protested. “Only to certain people, people who deserve it. And it will be very, very expensive. But who wouldn’t give a fortune to live forever?”

“I wouldn’t,”

“Exactly,” said the man in the yellow suit. His eyes glowed. “Ignorant people like you should never have the opportunity. It should be kept for certain others. And for me. (97-98)

When he threatens to make Winnie drink some of the water so he can demonstrate its power, forever trapping her as a child, Mae Tuck cannot bear the thought and smashes his head with her shotgun, killing him (100). His greed and acquisitiveness lead to his downfall.

The increasing complexity in this pattern of how humans relate to their environment continues in the books from the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade level. Here the effects of ownership and control operate at an even wider scale. In *Dark is Rising*, the Dark wants to spread its shadow over everything in the “ordinary world,” destroying life, not taking care of it, while the oppression and control in *Wrinkle in Time* is so vast, it controls whole planets and casts its shadow over whole sections of space (81-82). IT is interested only in ownership and forcing conformity, not taking care of any of the spaces it controls (115).

At the more localized scale in *Roll of Thunder*, the dichotomy between stewardship and ownership is explicitly discussed in a way it had not been in the earlier books and now. For the first time, the two different relationships to the land are

connected to societal or cultural power. The Logans are lucky to own their own land in the Jim Crow South, but because they have such respect for their land and feel so connected to it, they avoid the negative consequences of their ownership. As Big Ma says, her sons and late husband “blood’s in this land” and they are willing to make the sacrifice of having Mr. Logan go away to work so that they will have enough money to make their mortgage. Cassie’s father knows the importance of his land and works to pass on that knowledge and connection to his children so that they will understand the kind of power that owning your own land can bring, when it is done correctly:

“Look out there, Cassie girl. All that belongs to you. You ain’t never had to live on nobody’s place but your own and long as I live and the family survives, you’ll never have to. That’s important. You may not understand that now, but one day you will. Then you’ll see.” (7)

This kind of stewardship does not extend to Mr. Granger, the area’s largest landowner.

One day, Mr. Granger stops by their farm. When Cassie asks why he has come, Big Ma replies that he was trying to buy their land again, and Cassie asks more questions:

“Big Ma,” I said, “what Mr. Granger need more land for?”

“Don’t need it,” Big Ma said flatly. “Got more land now than he know what to do with.”

“Well, what he want with ours then?”

“Just like to have it, that’s all.”

“Well, seems to me he’s just being greedy. You ain’t gonna sell it to him, are you?” (88-89)

Mr. Granger is not trying to purchase the land because he wants to care for it; he wants to collect and control it. The reasons behind this desire become clear later in the story, when a local lawyer tells them:

His grandmother filled him with all kinds of tales about the glory of the South before the war. You know, back then the Grangers had one of the biggest plantations in the state and Spokane County practically belonged to them . . .and they thought it did too. They were consulted about everything concerning this area and they felt it was up to them to see that things worked smoothly, according to the law—a law basically for whites. Well, Harlan feels the same now as his grandmother did back then. He also feels strongly about this land and he resents the fact that you won't sell it back to him.” (163)

Mr. Granger's craving for the land springs from his desire for supremacy and power, not because he feels invested in the land and how he can take care of it. This is not simply someone being lazy and not taking care of their land, this land is being used as a weapon to exert control over others and maintain power relationships in his own favor.

### Summary

These four geographic themes – wayfinding, the environment being a hazard or a resource, the ways humans impact the environment, and the idea of land being tended in a pattern of either ownership or stewardship – all develop and evolve, becoming more complex as the books under consideration also progress in complexity across the grade levels. These themes are also just a sampling of the breadth of the embedded geographic discourse present in these works. The diversity of the content carried within these books and stories underlines the importance of this kind of examination: the better our understanding of the content embedded in these stories, the better this information can be harnessed to help develop stronger and more complete socio-spatial framework within their young readers.

### Narratives & Discourses of National Identity

Having identified these narratives, it is now possible to explore some of the implications of the geographic information and the ways it may contribute to socio-

spatial frameworks. When I first began this research, for instance, I anticipated finding evidence setting up a strong pattern contrasting an “us” of American society and a “them” of everyone else that would contribute to a sense of American identity. Indeed, some of the ideas that set me on the path of this research sprang from wondering where the sources of an American identity come from, how we are taught to think about other places, and how we present these kinds of information to children. Ultimately, however, as much geographical and spatial information as the books in this study contain, a consistent pattern of othering any culture or person who was different did not manifest.

Yes, there are specific instances of othering – the discrimination Moon Shadow and his family face as immigrants, the racism in *Roll of Thunder*, the way India is portrayed as exotic and constructed largely through negative elements like heat, poverty, and disease in *Secret Garden* (2-6) – yet there are relatively few overt examples of American exceptionalism. The specific references to Yankees in *Little Women*, qualify, as do the descriptions of the Christmas ball Amy describes while she is abroad. The American organizers are described as “hospitable” and “having no prejudice against titles, secured a few to add lustre [sic]” to the party. A variety of nationalities attend, including a “large-nosed Jew, in tight boots” and the groups are reduced to surface descriptions: “there were many light-footed, shrill-voiced American girls, handsome lifeless-looking English ditto, and a few plain but piquant French demoiselles” (520-521). These kinds of descriptions are the exception rather than the rule, however. Indeed, the quotes from Alcott’s work seem more influenced by the time they were written than anything else.

This does not mean, however, that the works are not contributing to a sense of what it means to be American; it simply means that the narratives and discourses are couched in less explicit ways. First, there is definitely an emphasis on historical events of shared national significance, although this focus does dominate in the stories for the older students. *Birchbark* takes place during early European contact; “The People Could Fly,” focuses on slavery; *Sarah* portrays the settlement of the prairies; *Little Women* takes place during the Civil War; and *Roll of Thunder* is set in the Jim Crow south. Further, *Dragonwings* portrays Chinese immigration and *Bud not Buddy* the takes place during Great Depression.

Along with these historical events, many of the books and stories also convey a sense of the regions of this country. Prairies in *Tuck* and *Sarah*; New England in *Little Women* and *Wrinkle in Time*; the Mississippi River in *Tom Sawyer*; the Deep South in *Roll of Thunder*; and Appalachia in *M.C. Higgins* all portray portions of the United States, contributing to the socio-spatial framework used to categorize and understand the United States. All of these regional classifications vividly reinforce traditional perceptual regions, contributing to the way we think of and arrange ourselves.

There are also narratives about the environment that reify and reinforce national values and attitudes, especially in terms of the way the significance of nature and wilderness are viewed. Americans have a long history of prizing wilderness and a life lived close to nature. That so many of these books take place in the rural settings, often with large, untamed areas nearby for the characters to explore and enjoy, underlies this long-standing cultural tradition. Roderick Frazier Nash, in his *Wilderness and the*

*American Mind* (2001) traces the history of this pattern to the need to establish a national identity after the Revolution:

It was widely assumed that America's primary task was the justification of its newly won freedom. This entailed more than building a flourishing economy or even a stable government. Creation of a distinctive culture was thought to be the mark of true nationhood. Americans sought something uniquely "American," yet valuable enough to transform embarrassed provincials into proud and confident citizens . . . The nation's short history, weak traditions, and minor literary and artistic achievements seemed negligible compared to those of Europe. But in at least one respect Americans sensed that their country was different: wilderness had no counterpart in the Old World.

Seizing on this distinction and adding to it deistic and Romantic assumptions about the value of wild country, nationalists argued that far from being a liability wilderness was actually an American asset. Of course, pride continued to stem from the conquest of wild country, but by the middle decades of the nineteenth century wilderness was recognized as a cultural and moral resource and a basis for national self-esteem. (67)

For so many of the books suggested for school children to incorporate respect for and positive portrayals of Nature, the natural, and wilderness indicates that this fascination with wilderness still contributes to the creation and reification of the national sense of ourselves.

The importance and significance of having adventures in the wilderness and battling against nature is also visible in several of the early reader books, as well as through the more complex works in the older grades. The mouse in *Amos and Boris* launches himself on an adventure with the open sea:

he marveled at the sight of some whales spouting luminous water; and later, lying on the deck of his boat gazing at the immense, starry sky, the tiny mouse Amos, a little speck of a living thing in the vast living universe, felt thoroughly akin to it all. (7)

Similarly, the little boy in *Father's Dragon* loves the idea of going off into the wild to have an adventure (19) and the little boy in *The Raft* quickly learns to appreciate the beauty of the wilderness all around him and despite his early reluctance.

This same pattern of people valuing the wilderness and the adventures and beauty it affords unfolds repeatedly in the works for the older ages. The beauty of nature and its significance is a major theme running throughout *Birchbark*. Lurhetta goes off in search of nature and adventure in *M.C. Higgins*, and when she finds it, it delights her: “. . . this is like being lost in wilderness when you know there's a town close by. I walked all yesterday. I love to walk. Everything's so quiet! I never had so much fun” (142). In *Tom Sawyer*, Tom escapes to the woods every chance he gets. The forest on the edge of his town is the scene of an endless array of adventures and he glories in the freedom he has there:

. . . all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life . . . The locus-trees were in bloom and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation and it lay just far enough way to seem a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting. (11)

Later in the book, when he runs away, part of the joy of escaping to the island comes from being in the wildness because it “seemed glorious sport to be feasting in that wild, free way in the virgin forest of an unexplored and uninhabited island, far from the haunts of men” and he and his two friends vow to never return to civilization. Additionally, as Tom, Omakayas, M.C., Lurhetta, Sarah, Mary, and Alec all prove, being able to hold one's own against nature and have the courage to encounter nature are the interesting, successful characters.

Wilderness's importance also plays out a couple of other ways. At times, it acts as a refuge. The couple in *Mandarin Ducks*, for instance, find a safe place to live in the wilderness of the forest (31), and in "The People Could Fly," when the slaves fly away, "They cross the rows, the fields, the fences, the streams, and were away" into places beyond civilization where they could be safe and free (171). Even other kinds of beauty are spoken about in terms of the wonders of wilderness; Jo describes the library at Aunt March's house as a "wilderness of books" where she can wander as she likes and find bliss (52). No matter which shape it takes, however, the importance of wilderness constitutes a narrative running through these works and that reinforces the long-standing American idealization of the concept.

Of course, the other side of the American obsession with wilderness is the preoccupation with taming it. This, too, is part of our national psyche and takes shape in what Nash calls the "push westward," or the effort of bringing civilization that "caused the wilderness to surrender to ax and plow" (41) because the "subjugation of wilderness was the chief source of pioneer pride" (42). Part of that civilizing influence involved locking the land into sections someone owned rather than the shared organization of the "savage" indigenous peoples. The discussion in Question 1b explored the way the discourses of landownership take shape throughout these books. It is interesting that, while landownership is clearly prized in many of these books, it has to be the *right kind* of ownership; again, ownership purely for control is portrayed negatively and leads to serious consequences. The pioneer spirit of controlling the land must be paired with a

sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the land for it to be a positive force and a worthy part of the American identity.

In addition to these aspects of American identity which spring from the connection with land and the environment, there are also several discourses that connect American culture with broader, Western values and traditions. Indigenous and African traditions have certainly played a part in shaping American identity, but much of what has traditionally been thought of as “American” arrived with European immigrants and the culture and traditions they brought with them. This pattern is visible through the presence of two versions of Greek classics, *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, on the Common Core literature exemplar list. In fact, there are several narratives running through these books that tap into the larger set of Greco-Roman/Western Civilization discourses. The importance of hospitality and the rules for the ways visitors should be treated date back to these traditions and still, as discussed in question 1a, shape the pattern of our cultural identity today.

The idea of a journey contributing to growth is another of these ancient carryovers still having an impact on American cultural expression. Joseph Campbell wrote about the recurring path of the mythic hero going through a rite of passage in terms of a journey of separation, initiation, and return (2008, 23). Many of the works analyzed in this research repeat this archetypal pattern, indicating their continuing influence on American identity. Journeys play a key role in many of the books and stories on this list. Some of the journeys are actual physical trips to distant lands, like Alec’s in *Black Stallion*, or the adventure Amos and Boris share in Steig’s book. Others are undertaken closer to home,

like Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher being trapped in the cave, or the boy and goat getting lost in the snowstorm in “Zlateh the Goat,” but still tap into the primal power of the idea of separation, initiation, and return. Other journeys are more spiritual or psychological, like the struggles Beth has to thank Mr. Laurence and to accept an early death, or Omakayas’s spiritual realization that she is a healer like her grandmother. All of these examples, no matter their scale, reify Western tradition and archetypes and reinforce messages about national values.

## CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite expanding globalization and the increasing connectedness between different peoples and places around the world, geographic education in the United States is experiencing a period of decline. Relegating geography to the sidelines in K-12 classroom is increasing problematic, because it decreases the probability that students will have a framework or context for processing the non-formal geographic information all around them. After all, as we navigate our lives, we are constantly inundated by banal and incidental geographic information influencing how we view ourselves, other people, and other places. These messages are embedded in movies, television, music, comic books, and many other popular culture sources we encounter at home, work, school, and the internet. This incidental geography is frequently overlooked because people are so used to these ubiquitous information streams, they are habitually accepted without critique despite their power to shape perceptions.

This power is particularly important when the information streams are intended for children: young people's socio-spatial frameworks are still evolving. If the embedded geographic information being conveyed is incomplete or flawed, it can have lasting impacts on their mental maps since impressions and ideas formed during childhood can, and do, linger into adulthood. This contrast between influential power and banality means that these discourses require critical examination, not just unquestioned acceptance.

This research critically engaged with one of these banal information streams, children's literature, to answer questions about the kinds of informal geographic information which may shape young readers' mental maps and perceptions. After all, if

we are to succeed in producing a spatially literate population who can succeed in our interconnected world, we must understand more about where perceptions about people and places come from.

In order to understand these narratives and discourses, I focused upon identifying the embedded geographical and spatial narratives in the Common Core literature exemplars for 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades by engaging in a critical, qualitative discourse analysis, and by asking two questions:

- 1) What geographic themes, as articulated by contemporary geographic education standards, are embedded within the 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade Common Core literature exemplars?
- 2) How do these themes vary, quantitatively and qualitatively, across these grade levels?

As my data and analysis demonstrates, the Common Core literature exemplars contain a wide range of embedded geographic themes and information. In addition to basic geographic building blocks such as diffusion, migration, Earth-sun relations, and physical and cultural patterns, the spatial discourse conveys a diverse set of embedded geographic narratives. Examples of, geographies of race, gender, inclusion, and exclusion pervade these works, each with their own spatial patterns and qualities. Narratives about the ways humans interact with and adapt to their environment, whether they perceive the environment as a hazard or a resource, and how the land should be cared for, as well as a variety of different ways sense of place can manifest, thread throughout the works,.

The themes presented vary quantitatively and qualitatively across grades 2-8, and their level of complexity scaffolds and progresses across these grade levels. Geographic concepts such as wayfinding, or knowing an environment and how to navigate it,

manifest largely at the local scale in the early books. By the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade stories, however, the world the characters know has expanded beyond the local or neighborhood level. By the last block of grades, 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade, many of the characters have mental maps that include large scale or international knowledge.

This same pattern and progression is visible in other geographic concepts. Themes such as the way humans impact the environment and the responsibilities people owe to the land they own begin with brief mentions in the books for 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> graders. When these same themes manifest in the books and stories intended for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders, however, these ideas have evolved. Now, themes such as social and political power and the geographies of inclusion and discrimination have become wrapped up with the geographic discourse, creating far more nuanced representations of the concepts. Across all of the variation and progression, however, there is one constant: embedded geographic information is present throughout all of the stories and at the three grade level blocks included in this research.

#### Implications for Stakeholders

The results from this research are significant to and have utility for a variety of stakeholders, from the classroom teachers responsible for guiding their students through children's literature, to geographic educators seeking to strengthen geography instruction.

#### Academic Geographers

For geographers this research reaffirms a growing understanding of the intersections and interconnections between geography and the humanities. When examined critically, considering embedded discourse, literature is far more than an inert pool of landscape descriptions or place names. Instead, it contains a wealth of geographic

information that provides windows into how people organize themselves, relate to their environment, and construct identities through material culture. The revelation of this much geographic information within a relatively small set of children's literature also exposes a need for geographers to consider the discourses and narratives surrounding children more deeply.

These opportunities for further research also provide bridges between academic geography and the kinds of geography included more often within K-12 education. Academic geographers have a history of expressing concern that K-12 geography focuses far too much on "food, fun, and festivals," without ever touching on the real-world applicability of geography and the way it can be used to solve problems. This research shows that there are, indeed, places beyond traditional geographic instruction where "real" geography can be incorporated into K-12 classrooms, incorporating geographic concepts as diverse as diffusion, exotic species, and perceptual regions.

#### Geographic Educators & K-12 Educators

For educators and practitioners, my results expose opportunities to enhance geographic education. For a long time, the predominant paradigm for geographic educators has been to lobby for greater representation within the Social Sciences, or, more recently, within Earth Science and Ecology courses, seeking a foothold to stop the erosion of geographic and spatial instruction. Both are important efforts that should continue, yet this research reveals that they are decidedly not the only prospects for creating connections between geography and K-12 curricula.

Instead, the fiction students read provides stimulating opportunities to show

geographic concepts in context within texts that are already part of classroom instruction and assigned curricula. Even more exciting, the geography embedded within these stories can be a two way street: geographic educators can harness the ideas and concepts to provide non-geography teachers avenues for expanding geographic instruction in their classrooms using materials that are already part of existing curriculum infrastructure. At the same time, these non-trained geographers can incorporate geographic concepts using sources they are already know. This method means not just increasing the amount of geography their students are exposed to and more ways to practice spatial thinking. It also deepens and enhances their literature lessons by helping students see connections to the world around them, and to other subjects and disciplines.

This kind of applicability also indicates that these results are not just an interesting list of data, but can be constructed into new approaches and ideas for helping enhance educators' toolboxes of skills. If teachers want to talk about scale, they can draw on *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Little Prince*. When they begins units on the seasons and Earth-sun relations, they can draw on books like *The Birchbark House* and Omakayas's journey through the year. Discussions of the interconnections and independence of habitats can be deepened by juxtaposing the ecology lesson with discussion of *M.C. Higgins the Great* and the way changes in his environment reflect the concepts. Instead of the geographic tie in with literature being an activity like mapping the route Huck and Jim take along the Mississippi – an idea that has its own merit and applicability – geographic discourse can be tied far more intimately into lessons, heightening the real

world applicability of the concepts, providing stronger context, and building stronger geo-spatial frameworks for students.

This applicability also allies with the Road Map Project, a joint initiative between the National Geographic Society (NGS), the Association of American Geographers (AAG), the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE), and the American Geographical Society (AGU), all widely respected entities in geography and geographic education. The initiative focuses on research and ideas for improving K-12 geographic education and on exploring new avenues for helping Americans gain “critical geographic understanding and reasoning skills that will be required for careers and civic life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (NGS 2015, 18). Recommendations from the Road Map’s reports include more instructional time for geography and enhanced preparation for teachers to teach geography across grade subjects and grade levels (9), and the Executive Overview for the project recommends collaboration across disciplines: “*Geography should be taught wherever it is found* – whether in math, science, social studies, literature, technology, or the arts” (10; italics in original). My research reveals the richness of the geography “found” in the children’s literature already being used in classrooms. This powerful combination of geography and literature is even more important since many initiatives like the Common Core often mean geography is supplanted in favor of other subjects and topics, further decreasing the amount of traditional spatial education in schools. This research reveals a way to stop this erosion by locating the geography inherent in the recommended curriculum and building collaboration between disciplines.

Finally, these results are significant because discourse analysis and critical examination have wide-ranging applicability for other kinds of information streams. Exposing movies, television shows, comic books, video games, etc. – especially those intended for children – to this type of analysis should yield equally interesting insights into questions about not just geographic discourse, but about national identity. Such insights can lead to better geo-spatial frameworks and a more nuanced understanding of perceptions of identity. Indeed, it is research like this that draws attention back to the reality that geography is inherent across many forms of cultural expression. The embedded geography is important because it helps us understand our perceptions of the world around us and ourselves more completely. It also provides powerful opportunities to help people become spatially literate and prepared to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**APPENDIX SECTION**

A. CODING CHART.....192

## APPENDIX A: CODING CHART

Location	Movement	Place	Region	Human/Enviro Interaction	Other
<b>Absolute</b>	Way finding (or not)	description	misinformation about	knowledge of environment (& lack of)	exploration/ exploration
<b>relative</b>	different from normal (magic) [not normal]	knowledge of other places (prized?)// K of place (or not)	contrast between places	enviro affecting character/you	connection to other places//connection between other places
<b>lost</b>	danger	danger	danger	danger from enviro	telling story of journeys
<b>found</b>	return	safe	variation	adaptation	adventure
<b>other /exotic</b>	travel/traveling	“normal” or expected	“normal” or expected	changing enviro	alone & no longer alone
<b>distance</b>	mobility	desire for a place (denied)	human traits	enviro as resource	isolation
	ranging	special		disliking enviro	loneliness
<b>directions</b>	rescue	secret	physical traits	prizing enviro	us vs. them
<b>navigation</b>	running away	differences between places/people	economic	ownership (of land)	the woods
<b>wayfinding</b>	escape	privileged space	lacking something	stewardship (of land)	homesick
<b>fantastical</b>	chased	belong/not belong		relationship with nature	home: -return -leaving -yearning for -creating
<b>destination</b>	playing	neighbors		separation between (human & nature)	gendered space
<b>site and situation</b>	wander(ing)	neighborhood	dream of travel	connection w (with) land	domestic space
<b>scale</b>	sneaking	community	diffusion	connection to (and with) nature/natural	family
<b>context</b>	searching	helping community		interdependence	
	quest	road		passing info on	
	hunting	rural			
	gathering	urban		struggle against nature	
	constrained	rural vs urban			
	barrier	inside v. outside		collecting	
	forced	outdoors			
	speed	new		healing	
	repeated	unknown		defiling/dishonor	
	emergency				

Location	Movement	Place	Region	Human/Enviro Interaction	Other
	hiding	self-sufficient			
	retreat	stay			quarantine
	can't move	invaded			perspective
	coming to help	forbidden			proximity
	lead/ing	desire for another place		disaster	identity
	follow/ing	layout		hazard	
	left behind				curiosity
	leave	wonder (ing) about other places		nature used as a weapon	stranger
	waiting	sacred space		toy	hospitality
	visiting/visitor	unknown			nature metaphor
	gendered				learning from travel
	logistics	different places, different behavior		time measured by enviro	learning of nature
		diff place, diff rules		enviro effect on human settle	destruction
		similarities		agriculture	shunned
	w/i own world (his normal, makes him happy, Sawyer)	emotional connection		harvest	sharing – K of enviro or place
	none	boundaries		trying to control nature/natural	missing
		crossroads		taming nature/natural	trapped
	daily	dream of place/dreaming of a place space		courage in the face of nature	cleverness
	repeated	refuse to go		enjoy	homebound
	summoned	controlling		fear	withdrawal
	invitation	destination			seclusion
	dismissed	seasons			refuge in nature
	escort	climate			world outside
	cooperation	human traits			freedom
	violence	physical traits		gods	spatial vocabulary (terms)
	accident	culture (values)		nature personified/personification	inclusion
	swimming	plants		pathetic fallacy	access
		animals			geography
		food			misinformation

Location	Movement	Place	Region	Human/Enviro Interaction	- Other
		tradition			art and nature
		scent			emotional landscape
		sound			hiding
		superstition			mysterious/magical
	power	change			
	defending territ	sequent occupance			<b>Journey:</b> -wonder of
	beyond	creation (origin story)			-danger of
	<b>transportation</b>				-bringing people together
	-walking	nationalism			-return from
	-wagon	reductionism			-changing you
	-train	patriotism			-beginning
	-car	knowing your place			-difficult
					daily
	-flying; plane	discrimination			
	-boat	excluded			-playing
	-raft	out of place			-provisions
	-public/private	slavery			-destination
	-sleigh	exile			-spiritual/moral
	-carriage	common ground			-growing up
	-wheelchair				-enjoy
	-drive				-not enjoy/dislike
	-bicycle				-route
		no description			
	<b>migration</b> -seasonal -temporary -permanent -rural to urban				
	pilgrimage				
	refugee	favorite			
	tourism	abroad			
	job				
	vacation	settlement			
	outside	origin			

Location	Movement	Place	Region	Human/Enviro Interaction	Other
	illicit				
	expelled	infrastructure			
	punishment	punishment			
	attack				
	timid	wonder (@ place) or of Nature			power of nature
	cautious	wilderness			being part of nature
	confidence	civilization			wonder of nature
	industrious	responsibility			respect for nature
	purposeful	bucolic past or ideal			respect for power of nature
	idle				relationship with nature
	lazing	emergency			connection to nature
	showing off	fear			beauty of nature
	exhausted	access			
	restless	avoiding			spatial exploitation
	exercise				
	romanticizing				space
	disabled	landscape			real world
	surprise	yearning for			space: imaginary
	joy	perception			
	brave	own world			conquest
	<b>diffusion</b>	imagined/created space			equality (inequality)
	health	magical			pushing boundaries
	death	surprise			constrained by others
	disease	atmosphere			controlling own space
	information	mysterious			others controlling space
	ideas	rich/luxury			space being invaded
	gossip	poor			invading space
	messenger	disliked			intruding
	economic	prized			trespassing
	goods	shelter			transgressing/transgressive space
	remittances	hearth			bridging difference
	gift/personal	library			personal space
		landmark			defending territory
	difficult	public			space: shame
		house			
	shortcut	domicile			
	bridge	garden			economic: sectors
	battle	exotic			

Location	Movement	Place	Region	Human/Enviro Interaction	Other
	warfare	romanticizing			agency
	soldier	economic			
	of a parent	black market			anthropomorphizing
	separation	marking territory			subset???
	delay	territory			importance of name
	different	density			
	relationship	architecture			

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