

From Fake News to Racism: A Study of Change in a Reading Intervention Class

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Teaching a unit in which discussions would range from “fake news” to racism produced feelings of trepidation, but I could not pass up the opportunity to teach students to evaluate sources, study representation and bias, and make their own decisions.

—Sandy, a high school reading intervention teacher

Like educators across the United States, Sandy was grappling with teaching controversial topics and texts in a time of social and political polarization. Avoiding these topics may seem safe, but bypassing difficult conversations can rob students of meaningful opportunities to learn from and through critical thoughts and conversations about text (Nyachae, 2019). Sandy aimed to engage students in critical reading and thinking by opening a space for tackling difficult conversations about complex realities that often blur truth with alternative facts (see Apple, 2018). Although propaganda, conspiracy theories, and alternative facts have been around for years, the advent of modern fake news, as we know it, has been co-opted by the far right to discredit opposing views. Therefore, Sandy thought it important to teach students to be skeptical of what they read and hear and decided to focus on historical events that involved disinformation. As students had expressed an interest in racism, she wanted to help them understand propaganda and racism through a historical lens.

Sandy initially tried a commercial reading program to help students improve their reading but noticed they were bored and disengaged. Drawing on Kim et al. (2017), who connected less enthusiastic readers to cognitively challenging texts through reading, writing, discussion, and debate, she chose to provide similar opportunities that supported students’ higher level thinking. She intended for students to critically examine multimodal texts and discuss examples of dis- and misinformation, inequity, and bias. Whereas reading intervention classes typically position students as poor or struggling readers (Frankel, 2016), Sandy’s pedagogical approach positioned them as capable thinkers and

learners. Since Sandy was not required to follow a specific curriculum, she had latitude to develop her own.

Using historical texts and primary sources, Sandy created a “brave space” (see Arao & Clemens, 2013) for reading and discussion. Her decision to focus on historical texts was intentional and served several purposes: (1) to provide background information on the content students would need to know in their secondary history classes and (2) to enable them to see that fake news and biased information about marginalized groups has existed for years.

In this article, we describe a study that shows how developing adolescent readers discussed and questioned historical texts using brave spaces as a springboard for discussion (Arao & Clemens, 2013). We report how teaching an historical unit through a critical lens encouraged students to make connections between past–present historical events and their lived experiences. We argue the need to move beyond commercial reading programs and remedial instruction to provide developing readers with opportunities to analyze, critique, and examine the kinds of texts and genres they encounter in content area courses.

Sandy employed critical literacy, an assumption that all texts are informed by the perspective of the author (Luke, 2012), and provided access to a variety of texts with the goal of fostering “powerful readers and writers of the word and the world” (Morrell, 2017, p. 459). Reading critically, problematizing perspectives (see Cho et al), and considering how sociohistorical narratives

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about marginalized people are constructed and normalized (Mirra et al., 2018) are essential skills that prepare students for the world beyond school. Using critical literacy helps students understand and participate in the world by reading, analyzing, and questioning topics to “consider the points conveyed” (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 301) and evaluate the accuracy and trustworthiness of sources and messages (Coiro et al., 2015). The ability to think critically, reason, and evaluate sources is necessary for constructing knowledge, as is exposure to texts that enable students to examine the persistence of historical inequities over time (Lee, 2020).

Teaching historical texts, however, involves care to avoid portraying marginalized people and communities as damaged and broken. Tuck (2009) explained that damage centered research tends to focus on suffering, loss, historical exploitation, and oppression to explain “contemporary brokenness” (p. 413). She proposed a framework based on desire and interest to help students understand the complexity and ambiguity of lived lives and experiences. Keeping this in mind, Sandy created spaces for discussion around historical events that supported meaning making and offered possibilities for interpretive responses (see Thomas et al., 2020).

To facilitate student conversations, Sandy employed Arao & Clemens’ (2013) “brave spaces,” a framework for classroom discussion about sensitive topics. This framework encourages students to be brave when participating in difficult conversations. As these conversations can be emotionally laden, respectful dissent is essential. Given the importance of creating spaces for engaged learning, critical conversations, and risk-taking, we sought to understand how brave spaces engendered critical literacies and dialog in a 9th-grade reading intervention course.

Conceptualizing and Enacting Brave Spaces

Arao & Clemens (2013) conceptualized brave spaces to support learning that involves reassessing one’s beliefs. Inspired by Singleton & Hays’ (2008) conversations about race, they considered bravery to be necessary when engaging in conversations about race, equity, and social justice. Arao and Clemens posited that honest dialogue requires risk-taking and they developed a set of guidelines for conducting discussions.

When launching brave spaces, it is important for students and teachers to create a learning environment that cultivates sensitivity, honesty, and respect (Arao & Clemens, 2013). Arao and Clemens suggested that educators adapt the brave spaces guidelines when talking about sensitive topics to meet the needs of their

students. They recommend that participants (a) engage controversy with civility to work through disagreements; (b) avoid judgment and personal attacks by focusing on ideas and perspectives; (c) allow students to step in and out of difficult conversations; and (d) show respect by demonstrating respect both to and for others. When engaging sensitive topics, brave spaces can help students own their intentions and identify how their opinions might impact others. According to Arao and Clemens, it also supports students’ internalization of significant concepts during participatory learning.

Brave spaces offer a means for evaluating texts and discussing differing perspectives. As texts play a role in producing and maintaining disparities, Janks (2014) calls for teachers to help students make connections between their lived experiences and the world around them. She encourages teachers to help students problematize texts by finding and naming the issues. As such, we view brave spaces as a vehicle for “knowing *with* and *about* stances, viewpoints, and positioning involved in inquiries into specific problems and questions” [emphasis in original] (Cho et al., 2020, p. 277). It is a means for students to critically question and examine whose story is being told and to take stock of their perspectives in dialogue with others (see Thomas, 2020). To this end, we thought it important to understand how brave spaces would work with high school students as they read and discussed historical multimodal texts.

Why Propaganda and Fake News Matter

As noted, propaganda, conspiracy theories, and fake news are nothing new. Comber and Grant (2018) remind us that fake news is “fabricated” and not factual (p. 329). Sox (2018) maintains that it is tempting to think of “fake news” as a 20th-century phenomenon but explains that it has “characterized news reporting since the founding of the republic” (p. 222). What is new, however, is that false reports, alternative facts, and conspiracy theories are disguised as reputable news (Lazer et al., 2018). Fake news and conspiracy theories circulate quickly on social media with a wide distribution. They activate a charged emotional response (Vosoughi et al., 2018) that tends to build on cultural models, stereotypical assumptions, and portrayals of marginalized communities that exacerbate fear (Valencia, 2010). Using examples from the past can help students confront fake news, better understand contemporary issues, and make history more relevant (Manfra, 2019).

The Internet has accelerated ways to participate in social messaging (Hobbs, 2019). According to Hobbs, learners take in messages and also participate in

constructing them. This can be problematic because Generation Z (iGen) youth are “digitally inspired,” and their ways of knowing are mediated by “visual, linguistic, and aural modes” of information sharing (Alvermann & Sanders, 2019, p. 1). They typically prefer social media and are often unaware of its potential to manipulate. News that spreads through social media can build on historical inaccuracies, leaving individuals unsure of what to believe due to its persuasive, emotional dimension (see Hobbs, 2021), which reflects the need for students to critically read and evaluate claims and sources across texts and genres (Moje et al., 2020).

Despite their comfort with social media, students often lack evaluation skills to differentiate fact from fiction and unpack bias (Stanford History Education Group, 2016). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) address the need to manage dis-or-misinformation and focus on “functional knowledge of what counts as knowledge,” “strategies of reasoning,” an understanding of “relevant genre,” and “language structures” (Goldman et al., 2016, p. 225). The CCSS require students to question what they read, interrogate media to find bias, notice what is said and how language can position readers, and analyze the political leanings of a source (Comber & Grant, 2018). Since the need for students to analyze and evaluate persuasive texts is great (NCTE, 2019), brave spaces can encourage discussion and counter intolerance that has become commonplace in today’s society (Martinez-Cola et al., 2018).

Teaching students to read and think critically is challenging, especially when texts and teaching conflict with deeply held beliefs and values. Because disinformation is designed to promote ideologies and advance agendas, it is particularly harmful (Mills et al., 2019). Thus, Thomas et al. (2020) reiterate the need for young people to critically analyze and reimagine the metanarratives they encounter in texts. And as Janks (2014) reminds us, this kind of reimagining and restorying can raise awareness and create possibilities for change.

Context of the Study

The study took place in one of Sandy’s 9th-grade reading intervention classes. The year-long course is required by the district for students who failed 8th-grade reading intervention, scored below 8th grade on a reading benchmark assessment, failed the state reading test, or did not pass at least one “text-rich” academic subject (e.g., English Language Arts or Social Studies). The rationale for assigning 9th-grade students to reading intervention courses supported Sandy’s intention to design instruction that supported comprehension of content area texts.

In her 6-week unit, Sandy curated a variety of historical texts including primary and secondary source documents related to the Trail of Tears, Japanese American Forced Imprisonment, propaganda and the Holocaust, and the Civil Rights Movement. Before introducing each historical topic, she posed questions to elicit students’ prior knowledge. Sandy also used videos and primary source documents to provide additional context. Before launching the unit, Sandy explained brave spaces and introduced the guidelines. She stressed that it took courage to participate in difficult conversations. Sandy initiated brave spaces discussions by asking open-ended questions and probes about students’ beliefs, understandings, and interpretations to provide opportunities for students to broaden their perspectives. She discussed the study with her three reading intervention classes. One class agreed to participate.

Participants. All 28 students in Sandy’s reading class returned consent forms and agreed to participate in the study: 14 males and 14 females (13 Latinx, 10 African American, and 5 white) participated in the study. In all, 16 focal students (all names are pseudonyms) took an active role in the class discussions (see Table 1).

Researchers’ Positionality. Carol and Heidi are white women who teach undergraduate teacher preparation courses and graduate courses in disciplinary literacies with an emphasis on critical literacies and social justice. Carol taught middle and high school as a reading specialist for 8 years, and Heidi is a former high school business teacher and K–12 reading specialist. Sandy is also white. She designed the curricular unit and co-conducted the study with Carol. She is a reading specialist with secondary social studies certification and had previously been a student in Carol’s graduate reading courses.

Methodology

To answer the question of how brave spaces helped facilitate students’ critical literacies, Carol and Sandy collected data from class discussions during the 6-week unit. Carol observed the classroom 4 hours per week for the first 3 weeks and captured her observations using field notes. As Carol was unable to be present for the second half of the unit, Sandy kept a researcher reflective journal, audio-recorded 12 additional hours of class discussion, and transcribed the recordings verbatim. In total, more than 24 hours of observational notes and transcriptions were collected. Other data sources included written responses to two open-ended prompts,

Table 1
Focal Participants

Student	Age	Ethnicity	Home Language
Ana	14	Latinx	Spanish
Adrienne	15	Latinx	Spanish
Avery	14	African American	English
Bree	14	White	English
David	14	White	English
Fabian	15	White	English
Freddy	14	White	English
Israel	15	Latinx	Spanish
Joe	14	White	English
Juan	15	Latinx	Spanish
Monique	15	African American	English
Serena	15	Latinx	Spanish
Steven	15	African American	English
Travon	14	African American	English
Yael	14	African American	English

five reflective journal entries collected at the close of each topic, and student-created birthday cards for a Holocaust survivor.

Data were organized by source, date, and then iteratively read by the researchers. An open-ended investigation of the data was conducted to identify key phrases, patterns, and preliminary themes in preparation for “themeing the data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 198; see also Boyatzis, 1998). When themeing data, Saldaña notes that a theme is an “*extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit is about and/or what it means*” [emphasis in original] (p. 199). Themes are identified, clustered, and woven together to form a coherent whole (Boyatzis, 1998; Saldaña, 2016).

The data were themed to preserve the integrity of the connections between participants and the data (Ayres, 2008), which facilitated an examination of specific ideas and phrases thought to be meaningful and reflective of

participants’ stances and concerns (Benner, 2008), such as “I’m feeling lost,” “now it seems confusing,” and “I thought I understood this.” We looked within and across the data to find and contextualize commonalities and differences. A second round of analysis was conducted to solidify and cluster the themes found in the data, such as “misinformed thinking vs. misunderstandings.” Themes that surfaced were fine-tuned and clustered relationally (in relation to other themes) (Boyatzis, 1998). Four overarching themes were interpreted from the thematic clusters: background knowledge and misconceptions, confusion between new and conflicting information, acknowledgment of different perspectives, and applying knowledge to take action. Finally, data were member-checked with individual students to ensure an accurate interpretation of their oral and written comments.

Evolving Student Perspectives

In our findings, we illustrate how brave spaces offered opportunities for students to voice concerns, challenge beliefs and assumptions, and reframe their thinking. We describe students’ unfolding understandings related to their knowledge and beliefs, confusion and changing perspectives, acknowledgment of different perspectives, and how they took action as they wrestled with their thinking in light of new or different information.

Background Knowledge and Misconceptions

Before beginning the unit, Sandy assessed students’ conceptual understanding of discrimination. She administered an open-ended writing prompt asking students to “Write about a time when you felt you were discriminated against.” Responses from four white students reflected little knowledge of or experience with discrimination. They highlighted misconceptions based on experiences where they had been treated differently:

- Fabian: I felt discriminated against was when I was 12 at the county fair. You needed to be 15 and older to get on the ride, and they told me I couldn’t get on the ride.
- David: When I didn’t get shoes because they sold out when I got to the mall.”
- Bree: How varsity gets treated differently than junior varsity. Varsity gets more and it’s unfair.
- Freddy: I was told you had to be 13 so they wouldn’t let me in the bowling alley.

These examples represent students' feelings when treated unfairly, whereas African American and Latinx students shared experiences of discrimination and overt racism.

Yael: A month ago, some new people moved in across the street. One day I was outside when I heard, "He's Black. I don't want my kids around that thug. He's probably going to rob us." The kids told me they couldn't talk to me because their dad was racist, and he didn't like us.

Serena: One time I was discriminated [against] because I was speaking my language. I was having a conversation with my friend, and was told, "This is the USA, not Mexico. Stop speaking Spanish."

Israel: I was discriminated [against] was when I was called a Mexican and told to go back to your country.

Of the 28 students who responded to the prompt, 11 African American and Latinx students demonstrated understanding of or described instances of discrimination, while 17, including the white students, did not appear to understand the concept or were unable to describe a discriminatory experience or micro-aggression. Students' written responses showed that although some understood what it meant to be discriminated against and had experienced discrimination, most exhibited confusion about discrimination and how it is enacted and manifested. Sandy helped the students understand discrimination as they worked through the lessons in the unit.

Confusion Between New and Conflicting Information

Sandy adapted the lesson "The trail of tears: Determining the facts" from the National Park Service's lesson bank (2015). She scaffolded the lesson by having students watch a video on the relocation of the Cherokees in the 1830s through the Indian Removal Act. Students then read a primary source from the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper (1828) which was printed by the Cherokee Nation. Students learned about the Indian Removal Act and read primary sources describing the 1838 removal of the Cherokees by the U.S. Military. As students discussed the video and readings, Serena, Bree, and David, commented on the injustice of the removal.

Serena: So many of them died. Didn't the army protect them like they were supposed to?

Bree: Some died from weather. But they needed to make room for the white man, didn't they?

David: The white man wanted gold. The Indians were there first.

Serena: Yea, it seems really wrong to remove them from their homes.

After reading the primary source documents, students shared differing views on whether the removal was justified. Some did not view Native Americans as Americans but perceived them as foreigners. Sandy asked, "Why do Native Americans seem like foreigners?" The following discussion ensued.

Joe: Because they don't look American. Well, they weren't American. So, what were they?

Monique: They were Indians, not Americans. Then they are foreigners, right?

Sandy: Why do you think they were foreigners? What were they foreign to?

Juan: I'm feeling lost.

Sandy: What is making you feel lost?

Juan: I thought I understood this, but now it seems confusing. Indians were foreign looking.

Sandy: Someone add to this. Continue talking. You are sorting it out by talking.

Ana: I think we're getting confused because Indians didn't look like what we think Americans looked like.

Yael: What Americans? The British are the ones who came to America.

Ana: Right. But the Indians looked different.

Sandy: So, then who was foreign to whom?

Avery: The Indians seem foreign because they were different, but this was their land so if anyone was foreign it was the British. They were the visitors who came and took over.

Most students agreed with Avery's statement and began to sift through the concept of how people tend to use themselves as a standard by which to compare or judge others. They discussed how this thinking can lead to stereotypical beliefs and questioned how standards used to judge others came to be. Students asked, "who determines the standard and who represents the standard today?" Sandy reprised the students' questions for them to answer.

- Sandy: So, who sets the standard and who do you think represents that standard?
- Monique: Well, we sure aren't the standard. I am Black.
- Sandy: What does that mean for you?
- Monique: I am compared to white people. We are always held up to white people.
- Israel: I am Mexican, we aren't the standard. We aren't even encouraged to speak our language.
- Travon: White people set the standards.
- Sandy: How do you think that happened?
- Travon: Because there are more white people.
- Monique: Yea, there are more white people than Black.

In keeping with the notion of controversy with civility and avoidance of judgment and personal attacks, students in the excerpt above respectfully entertained divergent opinions. As they considered the concept of ethnocentrism, they came to understand that one tends to view the world from their own perspective. The use of brave spaces helped students model respect, as they read, discussed, listened, and grappled with their beliefs.

Students also expressed confusion when reading about the Japanese American forced imprisonment during World War II. They did not seem to understand that American citizens of Japanese descent had been imprisoned. From their reading, they discovered that two journalists, Walter Lippmann and Westbrook Pegler, were influential in convincing Americans that Japanese Americans were plotting an act of sabotage (The National WWII Museum, n.d.), which caused widespread fear and hatred of Japanese Americans. The students were surprised to learn that President Roosevelt issued the order to imprison Japanese Americans under pressure from civilian and military leaders.

- Bree: Why did the president believe those newspapers? Wasn't it a lie?
- Travon: It was like fake news.
- Monique: That's crazy. So, if we went to war today, anyone related to the people we're fighting could be locked up?
- Sandy: Good question. Have we [the U.S.] experienced anything like that?
- Avery: What about after 911? People got pretty paranoid about anyone from Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

- Sandy: Why is that?
- Ana: I think they became scared of Muslims. Still are. Because the terrorists were Muslim.
- Freddy: Well, that's not right. Don't people have rights?
- Yael: That's pretty scary.

Students connected hatred toward Japanese Americans to the backlash against Muslims and Arab Americans after 911 and employed a critical lens as they made connections between past and modern-day historical events. They likened Japanese American forced imprisonment to a modern-day example of stereotypical assumptions and fear. Students questioned what motivated the government's actions; they further wondered about the boundaries between protection, oppression, and discrimination. They asked, "When does protection become oppression or discrimination?" Sandy's questioning prompted students to continue the conversation, and they gained skill in practicing controversy with civility. Their brave spaces discussion enabled them to reach back, connect to present-day happenings, and question power relations.

Acknowledgement of Different Perspectives

To assess students' knowledge of the Holocaust, Sandy asked students to respond to a second writing prompt. She asked, What is your prior knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust? Half of the students indicated they believed the Holocaust was a hoax. Students then read *Introduction to the Holocaust* (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1995a), viewed a series of videos, and analyzed German propaganda cartoons.

Sandy then shared a primary source document, a propaganda leaflet dropped by German planes over the skies of London during World War II. The leaflet titled "A Last Appeal to Reason" by Adolf Hitler contained excerpts of Hitler's speeches. Sandy used the leaflet for dual objectives (a) to help students understand propaganda, which set the stage for a brave spaces conversation about the Holocaust and (b) to help them understand the significance of primary sources and why they are more reliable than secondary sources.

The following excerpt illustrates how Sandy used questioning to help students understand propaganda and bias in sources of information.

- Sandy: What makes propaganda believable and powerful?

- Steven: I think because it appeals to people's beliefs. What they want to hear or believe.
- Adrienne: It confirms what you want to believe.
- Sandy: Let's refer back to the definition of propaganda. What is it used for?
- Fabian: Propaganda is not based on fact. It is trying to get people to believe a certain way.
- Sandy: Why is it powerful? Why does it work?
- Fabian: Because it is what people want to hear. It makes them feel better about being racist.
- Sandy: Group, how does that speak to propaganda and belief systems?
- Norma: It is easier to believe propaganda if no one you know contradicts it.
- Fabian: Yeah, if everyone I know and trust feels the same as me, then propaganda would be easier to accept. If people I knew and trusted disagreed, I would wonder if I was right or wrong.

The students' discussion shows how a supportive classroom environment stimulated conversations about difficult topics such as bias and emotional appeals.

The class discussed how people's fears contributed to a willingness to believe propaganda, which fast-forwarded to claims of fake news in today's media. Students' journal responses reflected their growing understandings: "It is really important to make sure you have the facts and not accept the first thing you read or hear" and "With today's social media it is easy to fall into the trap of believing everything you read without questioning it." Journal responses suggested an awareness of bias and the need for information from multiple sources to differentiate truth from bias and fact from opinion.

Applying Knowledge to Take Action

After concluding their inquiry into propaganda and the Holocaust, Sandy moved forward in time to the Civil Rights Movement and the Children's March. Students read news articles written by Southern journalists in the 40s and 50s, which fomented racial injustice and violence. They wondered if this was an historical form of "fake news."

Prior to viewing a video on the Children's March (Hudson & Houston, 2004), Sandy asked the class if children could change the course of history. Almost all

said no. After viewing the video, however, the class discussed the likelihood of students coming together and starting a movement. Students seemed unsure, and Sandy asked, "Even if the stakes were high?" Several Black and Latinx students responded by expressing fear of calling attention to themselves or their families. Adrienne commented that "Black people are getting killed and protests haven't resulted in change." Steven added that "people tend to ignore things unless it happens to them." Sandy prompted students to continue the conversation.

Sandy: Who do you feel possesses power?

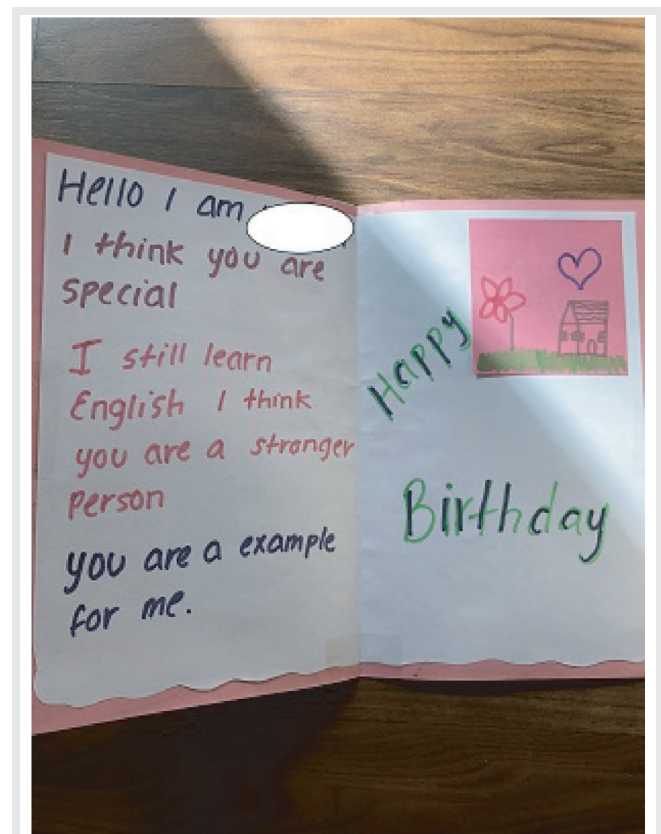
Adrienne: The police and white people.

Fabian: Adults, especially police or rich people.

Sandy: What can change that?

Adrienne: I don't know because it's been like that a long time.

Figure 1
Gerda: Strong and Special



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

- Yael: Some things will never change.
- Steven: I think if kids start changing how they treat each other, maybe the next generation will get it.
- Fabian: This makes me feel frustrated and sort of angry.
- Sandy: Talk to me about the anger.
- Fabian: Well, it's just not fair and it feels hopeless.
- Sandy: Do you think the children in Birmingham ever felt that way?
- Adrienne: I bet they did. I guess at some point you get angry enough to do something about it.
- Fabian: Yea, maybe we will do something someday. I hope so.
- Steven: I'm pretty sure that nothing will just change as long as people don't stand up to it.

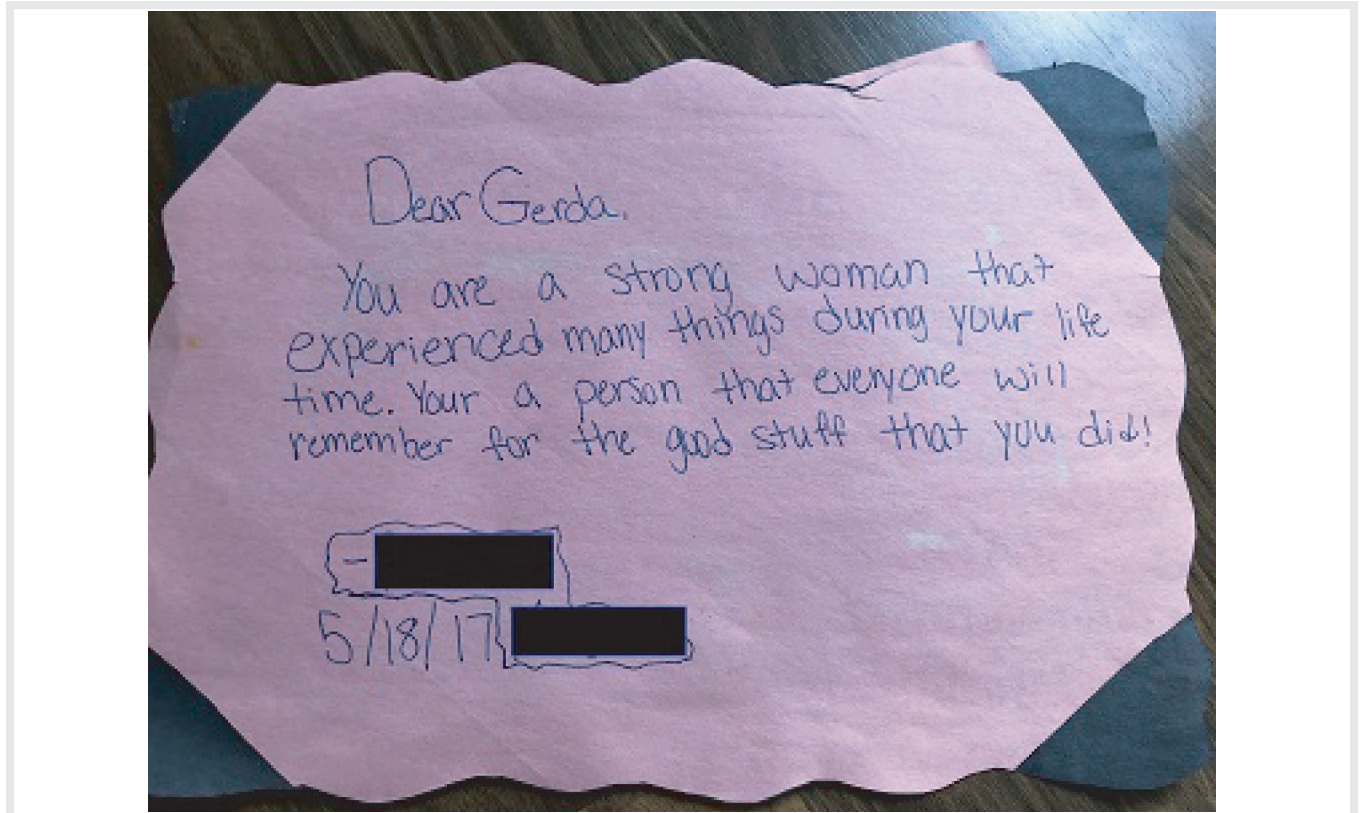
During this discussion, Sandy challenged students' ideas and thinking. She elicited their feelings and

acknowledged their perspectives. As students gained an understanding of discrimination and connected historical readings to current events, they reported feeling a general sense of helplessness; they also expressed their desire to make the world a more socially just place (See Janks, 2014; Tuck, 2009).

The readings and brave spaces discussions inspired the students to take action. They were moved by the fate of Jews and the LGBTQ population during the Nazi regime. After watching *One Survivor Remembers* (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1995b) about Gerda Weissman, a living Holocaust survivor, the students asked Sandy if they could make cards for her upcoming birthday (See Figures 1, 2, and 3).

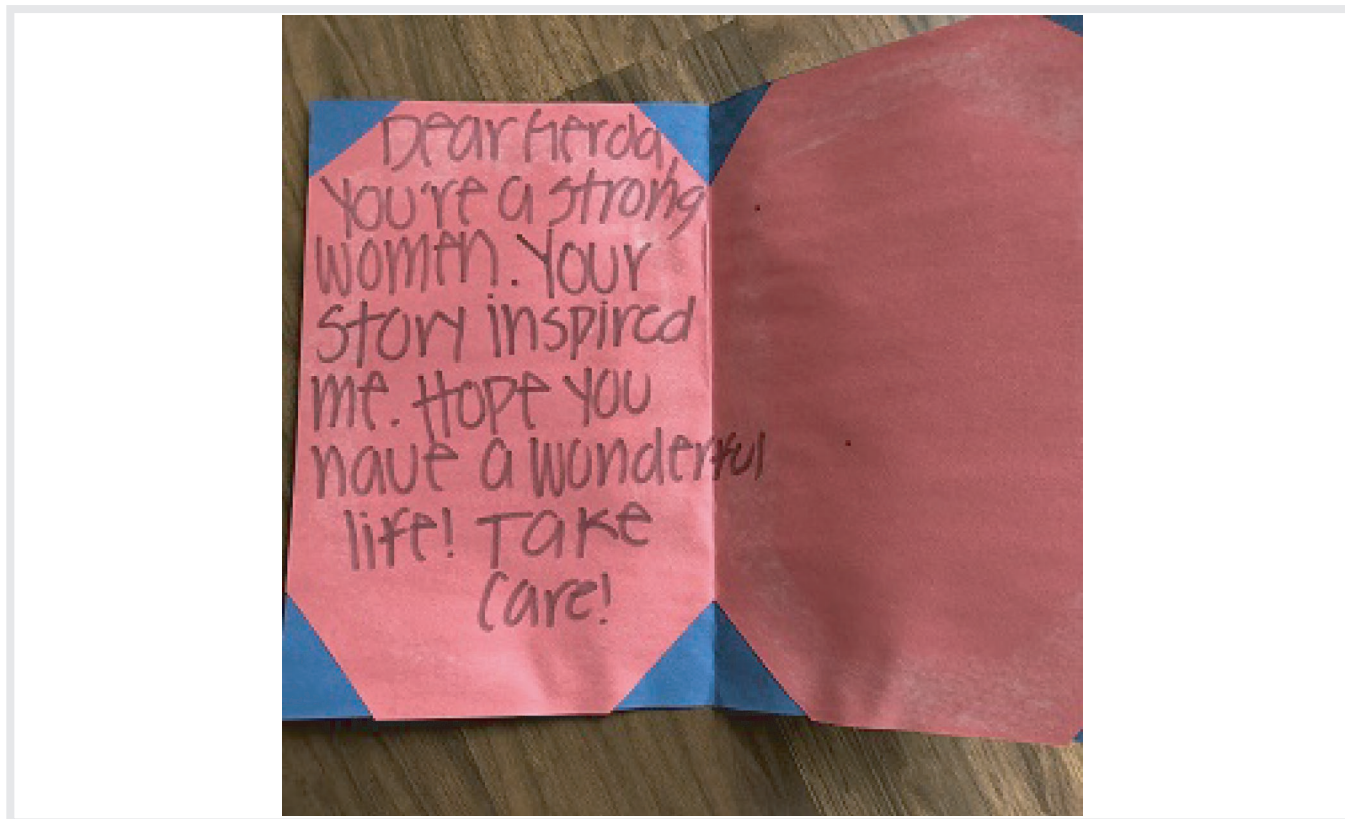
Other students enacted random acts of kindness to stop bullying in their school. For example, Ana, who identified as gay, formed a club that welcomed students of all races, religions, and sexual orientations. She talked to classmates and posted signs around the school encouraging students to join. By the end of the year, the club had 15 active members.

Figure 2
Gerda: An Inspiration



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

Figure 3
Gerda: A Women to Remember



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

Sandy's instruction provided opportunities for learning and discussion. Students reported feeling confused as they grappled with new information, questioned previous assumptions, and concluded that separating facts from fiction and identifying bias was challenging. They agreed it was important to identify stereotypes and call out racism. Brave spaces seemed to encourage conversation and the sharing of ideas and beliefs. Sandy observed in her researcher journal that "the whole class pulled together and became tight and cohesive." She noted that students began to sit in mixed groups and were more attentive and respectful to one another.

Discussion and Implications

In a recent *Washington Post* column, Kimberlé Crenshaw (2021) addressed attempts to ban students from learning about and understanding racial injustice. She pointed to the Tulsa Massacre as an example of the "convergence of law, institutions, and individuals" (para. 11). This convergence was present in the historical

events Sandy selected for her unit, starting with the Indian Removal Act and ending with the Civil Rights Movement. The unit challenged students to make critical connections between the past and present and their lived experiences. As a result, they came to question the boundaries between protection, oppression, and discrimination.

The use of Brave spaces engendered civility and respect when discussing discrimination and injustice. Students' understandings developed as Sandy probed their thinking to reexamine their assumptions. Her instruction deviated from typical reading intervention classes focusing instead on reading and discussing primary and secondary sources that supported content area learning. To this end, Rubin (2018) maintained that students must be able to "break down arguments, see the facts from all sides, and come to a clear independent decision free from hype and hearsay" (p. 71). The use of brave spaces facilitated a classroom ecology that encouraged students to weigh-in and voice their thinking.

Open dialogue can be a viable tool to promote risk-taking, as brave spaces facilitated opportunities for students to read, discuss, reflect, and take action, debunking typical stories and creating new or different thinking. We see this as a beginning to teach about alternative facts and realities. We also see where reliance on canonical texts can be problematic, and care must be taken to ensure that further harm is not done in recompense (see Thomas et al., 2020; Tuck, 2009). Cruz & Stake (2012) explain that changing minds occurs in small steps. Teaching and learning in brave spaces require trust, relationships, and community to collectively consider feelings, make biases visible, and discuss them freely. Brave spaces helped Sandy's students identify bias and reshape their thinking.

We have come to consider reading the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987) as a process of building bridges that connect students' learning to their lived-in worlds. Sandy's students experienced confusion and had misconceptions about discrimination and citizenship. They questioned the existence of the Holocaust and doubted whether children and youth could initiate social change. Their assumptions and beliefs stress the importance of providing ways for individuals to seek out the origins of biased perceptions, counter them, and work toward equity and understanding (Hall, 2012). In today's sociopolitical landscape, tomorrow's citizens need to be discriminating readers, thinkers, and leaders, particularly given the propensity of fake news in the media.

This research demonstrates the importance of critical literacies and the need to evaluate texts and media for bias. Students who previously experienced failure were given opportunities to think at higher levels of abstraction and to question the power relationships that exist in texts. As today's media is filled uncomplicated, inaccurate representations of marginalized people and communities, we elaborate the need for students to be savvy, critical consumers of texts and media.

Concluding Thoughts

Our findings concretize the need for teachers to address the proliferation of falsified, biased information and to support developing readers through lenses that entertain multiple perspectives. Students' voices were honored, and they were empowered. They evaluated historical and made connections to their lives and their communities. Students recognized their ability their capacity to take action and make a difference, which complicated

and stretched the boundaries of a typical reading intervention class. We encourage educators to find ways to address controversial topics in the classroom and continue working toward this goal with bravery.

Conflict of Interest

None

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