

Internalizing Narrative Text Structure Impacts Student Writing

Timothy G. Weih, Ph.D.

University of Northern Iowa, USA

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Abstract

This article describes an investigation with a class of seventh graders to determine what impact the study of traditional literature would have on their narrative writing. The classroom teacher emphasized the narrative structure of the traditional literature genre by prompting his students to respond both orally and in writing with their thoughts about the settings, characters, plot development, and themes inherent in Native American Folktales. Following literature discussions, the seventh graders developed outlines for their individualized narrative stories representing Native American folklore using story maps. After the students developed four story maps each, they selected the one they liked the best and developed it into a complete narrative story. Qualitative data analysis employing the constant comparative method was employed to determine the study outcomes. The study findings and implications for literacy instruction are discussed.

Keywords

Adolescent Literacy-Identity of Text, Identity of the Reader; Reader Response; Response Theory; Critical Literacy; Popular Culture; Cultural Identity; Creative Writing; Narrative Writing; Middle School/Level Education; Native American Literature; Culture and Traditional Influence in Literature; Qualitative Methodology: Text Structure; Literature Circles; Literature Discussion

Introduction

Written responses to texts can take many forms (Altieri, 1995; Vacca & Newton, 1995). These responses are often viewed as a higher-level interaction with books that reconstructs reading images and meaning into personalized thoughts on paper. Student response to literature can serve as a springboard for extended writing activities that follow the format or genre structure of a written work. Reader's draw on their concept of narratives when writing stories and this concept can be enhanced through teaching practices that influence students to think about the structure of the text.

Research has demonstrated that when readers make connections from their lives to that of the characters in a book, reading comprehension is increased (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Sipe, 2000). These responses are revealed when the reader takes direct or indirect personal life experiences *outside the book* and applies them to make sense to what is happening *in the book* during the act of reading.

Philosophical responses are conveyed when the reader writes about his deepest convictions on the theme directly suggested by the book. Through an open-ended response to literature, a reader can share his values, criticisms, fears, and joys as they relate in a transactional response to the book (Rosenblatt, 1995). Louise Rosenblatt described this phenomenon in her literary criticism about the evocation of the poem, she wrote, "The poem cannot be equated

solely with either the text or the experience of a reader...What each reader makes of the text is, indeed, for him the poem, in the sense that this is his only direct perception of it" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 105).

The Reader, the Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work, by Louise Rosenblatt, published in 1978, contributed probably the clearest and most influential theoretical framework for "the poem." She makes it clear that the poem is not something that is non-existent unless experienced and that it is not recreated in every experience. She writes:

The assumption that recognition of the reader's activity in evoking the poem inevitably implies that any reading is as valid as any other. Any such view would of course lead to critical chaos. But nothing in my insistence on the reader's activity necessitates such a conclusion. (p. 104-105)

She argues that the poem refers to the relationship between the reader and the text, and that the text is responsible for the guidance of the relationship.

Variations of text can have an influence on the reader's response (Altieri, 1996; Reissman, 1994; Wilkinson & Kido, 1997). Research in response theory has resulted in a wealth of instructional strategies that invite students to draw on and explore a range of meaning-making influences (Karolides, 1997; Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1999). Students' written responses to text communicate their understanding of the text and the complexity of their thinking (Jewel & Pratt, 1999). Text structure and instructional focus have suggested a relationship in students' responses to literature (Many & Wiseman, 1992).

This article describes an investigation with a class of seventh graders who listened to their teacher read aloud from four Native American folktales. The teacher emphasized the narrative structure of the traditional literature genre by asking his students to respond both orally and in writing with their thoughts about the settings, characters, plot development, and themes inherent in each traditional story. Following literature discussions, the seventh graders developed outlines for their own narrative stories about Native Americans using story maps. After the students developed four story maps each, they chose the one they liked the best and developed it into a complete narrative story. They concluded by sharing their individual stories in small groups.

The purpose of the inquiry was to determine what impact the study of traditional literature, the Native American folktales, would have on the seventh graders' writing. The aim was to support the students in writing a well-crafted and rich narrative story. While some research has suggested that when students are exposed to many different written genres their writing improves, yet, students frequently do not receive the support that would prepare them for composing a text type of a specific genre (Eckhoff, 1983; Pappas & Pettegrew, 1998).

Methods

The Setting

The setting for the study was a university laboratory school that served as an attendance center for approximately 531 students living within a Midwestern metropolitan area of approximately 100,000. The school was chosen because it was representative of the population of the surrounding community. From this school, Jon's (all names are pseudonyms) seventh grade classroom was selected for the investigation because it represented a cross section of the

children in the city where the study took place. Jon was interested in being a participant in the study, and he was curious to discover what the outcomes of the inquiry would reveal. During the study, Jon's classroom consisted of 12 boys and 9 girls that were from families representing several ethnic groups including: 14 Caucasian, 5 African American, and 2 Indian. Of these students, two qualified as low socioeconomic status and were also identified as having learning disabilities related to reading and writing. One student was identified as being academically gifted. Jon's language arts program was framed around the following units: a mythology unit, short story unit, a novel unit on civil rights, a research unit on world cultures, a speech unit connected with a state speech contest, and a World War II unit focused on the Holocaust. Jon engaged his students in literature circles, individual reading, small group cooperative learning, and note taking instruction. He preferred to teach skills and strategies within the context of the reading and writing activities that he planned for his students. He implemented a writing process in his instruction that engaged students following a pre-writing, draft, revise, edit, and publishing sequence. He taught a six-trait writing model that included instruction and assessment. Jon said that his students spent about 25% of their time in class writing, and that he also read aloud to his students.

Procedures

Study activities with the students took place for one hour, two times per week for 6 weeks in Jon's seventh grade classroom. In brief, Jon read aloud to his seventh graders from a Native American folktale and invited them to respond orally to the book before, during, and after reading. Following the reading and discussion, the students completed a story map for a self-created narrative story, identifying the characters, setting, problem, three main events, the solution, and a theme or moral. Following this activity, the seventh graders discussed their maps together in small groups. The above described procedures were followed for three more folktale read alouds. After the students had a total of four self-created story maps, they selected one to develop into a complete narrative story.

The four books chosen for the study were: *Coyote: A Trickster Tale from the American Southwest* (McDermott, 1994), *The First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story* (Bruchac, 1993), *The Legend of the Bluebonnet: An old tale of Texas* (dePaola, 1983), and *Crazy Horse's Vision* (Bruchac, 2000). Although *Crazy Horse's Vision* could classify as an episodic biography, it also holds many thematic elements typically found in folktales such as a quest for identity, a display of courage, and sacrifice. These books were chosen because they have well defined events; demonstrate character development, clearly described settings, and quality illustrations that help to enhance understanding of the text.

Coyote: A Trickster Tale from the American Southwest (McDermott, 1994) was chosen for the first lesson. This book is an adaptation of a Zuni folktale. It is an amusing, uncomplicated read aloud, with brilliantly colored, full-page illustrations that add high interest. Coyote, the main character, decides he wants to fly with the crows. They humor him, give him feathers, and tolerate his off-key singing and out-of-step dancing, until he begins to boast and order them about. Then, as coyote struggles in midair, they take back their feathers one-by-one, and he plummets to the earth. His tail catches fire, and he roils in the dirt. To this day he is the color of dust, and his tail has a burnt, black tip.

The story is clear and uncomplicated. It has animals as main characters taking on human characteristics, something common in many Native American folktales. It also involves the crows as tricksters, another frequently encountered ingredient found in traditional literature.

The second book chosen for the study was *The Legend of the Bluebonnet: An Old Tale of Texas* (dePaola, 1983). This book is a retelling of an old Comanche folktale that explains how the bluebonnet, the state flower of Texas, came to be in existence. It relates the story of She-Who-Is-Alone, an orphaned Indian girl raised by her tribe during a time of drought and famine. This young girl is the sole remaining member of her family. The other members all died in the famine. The tribe calls upon the Shaman to commune with the Great Spirits to divine what it is the People must do to regain harmony with nature. The Shaman states that a “great sacrifice” needs to be made. She-Who-Is-Alone thinks this directive is meant for her, so she sacrifices her most valued possession, her warrior doll, made by her deceased family. Because of her act, the Great Spirits bring rain and the drought and famine are ended, and Bluebonnets quickly sprout and bloom as a sign of the Great Spirits’ acceptance.

In addition to possessing the qualities that would help to build comprehension of the folktale genre, this book holds the potential to provoke deep, insightful, and emotional responses from students. The main character demonstrates unusual sensitivity to the well being of others through an incredible selfless act.

The third book selected for the study was *The First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story* (Bruchac, 1993). A simple, uncomplicated Cherokee folktale about the Sun’s healing of marital discord by a gift of ripe strawberries that magically grow at the feet of an angry woman as she flees her husband’s harsh words, thus halting her departure long enough for him to catch up and make amends. The book has full-page, beautiful illustrations that enhance the meaning from the text and also helps to build an understanding of historic Native American culture by depicting homes, dress, utensils, and activities. The message of friendship, kindness, and forgiveness holds an important message meaningful to both young and older students.

The fourth and last book chosen for the study was *Crazy Horse’s Vision* (Bruchac, 2000). This is a folktale of Crazy Horse’s boyhood. As a youth, Crazy Horse (then known as Curly) witnesses U.S. Army soldiers attack his people. Troubled, he embarks on a vision quest and sees a figure on horseback riding untouched through a storm of lightning, hail, and bullets. His father interprets the vision, telling him that the man on the horse is the man he will become and that he is destined to defend his people. His father also tells him that if he keeps nothing for himself, no arrow or bullet will hurt him. Because of his vision, Curly received the name of his father, *Tashunka Witco*, which in English is *Crazy Horse*.

This book was selected because of its historical significance and the relationship it holds to Native American studies in elementary curriculum. Students will admire and appreciate Curly’s (Crazy Horse’s) acts of bravery, leadership, and selflessness as a young boy. The story line is straight forward and uncomplicated and the full-page illustrations help to enhance the text by recreating the action of the story.

Data Collection

The study combined multiple methods of data collection to achieve a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation and to increase the validity of the findings (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Study data included videotaped reading, writing, and discussion events; student-created story maps and completed narrative stories; and journals from the

students, teacher, and researcher. Specifically, I videotaped each session with the students, asked questions from the seventh graders to gain understanding, and recorded observational and interpretive notes in a journal.

Results and Discussion

Oral and Written Responses to the Literature

When students are encouraged to respond spontaneously to literature through discussion and supported in their response by the teacher, they can come to think of literature as something everyone can enjoy and understand (Rosenblatt, 1995). Teachers and students should feel comfortable enough to interpret meaning held within literature. The following prompts were used to encourage students to talk about their thoughts, feelings, and opinions of the folktales the teacher was reading aloud.

- What are your thoughts about this book?
- What feelings did you experience while listening to the book?
- What was your favorite part?
- What did this book remind you of in your own life?
- What special meaning or message did the story hold for you?
- After listening to this book, what ideas do you have for your own story?

Not only were these prompts meant to stimulate valuable discussion, but also to enhance reading comprehension and possibly to help generate creative writing ideas for the seventh graders as they discussed the books together. However, when Jon posed these prompts, he was met with an uncomfortable silence, and then only a few students offered an oral response. Jon reflects upon this classroom experience and reveals some insight into seventh grade student behavior in the following data excerpt from his journal.

The seventh grade students really don't like to answer the question about what feelings they are experiencing when they heard the story. I picked up on this early and have since dropped it from the prompt routine. Seventh graders don't seem to want to talk about their own personal feelings in such an open public environment. I think they fear the negative effects of possible peer interactions. There are some kids in the class who will pick on others for being honest about feelings and emotions. The sad truth of this is that students at this level will not respond even if they have something to say.

Rosenblatt (1995) realized this hindrance to open discussion with students when she stated, "There is no special formula for giving students the assurance to speak out" (p. 67). This is especially true for middle school students who are going through a tumultuous time in their lives dealing with changing bodies and emotions, along with added peer awareness and pressure. They simply do not want to take any unnecessary risks. Teachers, however, can approach eliciting response in a different format, and that is exactly what Jon did. He decided that he needed to modify his instruction to accommodate the emotions and behaviors of his seventh grade students. He wanted to provide a safe way for them to express their responses to literature. Jon decided to ask his students to write their thoughts in a journal instead of speaking them out aloud in front of

the whole class. Asking his students to provide brief written comments about the book allowed for Jon's seventh graders to express their thoughts without risking public exposure. Writing also provided a means for students to formalize their responses and to reflect upon their thinking. Then, if the students wanted to share their thoughts aloud, they could, with the added support that comes from having time to prepare, along with reading what they wrote and not having to respond cold, from memory. In a classroom of students, there are frequently those who are more comfortable in speaking out while other students are more reluctant to have their voices heard. By having students write their responses to literature, all voices have a chance to be heard and validated. In the following data excerpt from his journal, Jon describes his thinking that led him to encourage his seventh graders to respond to literature through brief, written comments.

I made some changes for our class reading of Crazy Horse's Vision. Today, I wrote the discussion prompts on the board prior to reading the story. Then I had the students individually write down their answers to these questions. I did this because I have been disappointed in the students' participation in classroom discussion. There are a handful of students who do the majority of the talking during discussion. After working with these students all year, I know there are some students holding back. I don't know if this is due to a lack of self-confidence, peer pressure, or interest. What I do know is that there are a number of bright students, with good ideas, who are sitting back and letting others do the work.

With this perspective, the strategy of pre-writing [the response prompts] was suppose to help the students by giving them time to formulate more complex thoughts and description. To my great pleasure this worked. The students wrote in great detail about the prompt questions. Because of this, not only did more students volunteer to participate [in whole class discussion], but I was able to call on students, too. I had confidence that because they had time to prepare for the questions, and they were written down in front of them, the students would be able to add to the discussion.

After the students had time to reflect and write their responses to the book, Jon asked if anyone would like to share what they wrote. Students who typically had not discussed the literature in class spoke up. For example, Derek discussed the theme of generosity in doing something for someone else. This possibly could be a central theme that students could develop in their own narrative writing. However, sometimes teachers are hesitant to point out a student's good ideas to the class for fear all will take the same path and therefore limiting the range of possibilities. Jon discusses this below in a data excerpt from his journal.

The students seemed to like the story Crazy Horse's Vision. They liked the themes of bravery, generosity, and selflessness. It was interesting that Derek, a new student who is having a lot of difficulty integrating into the class, mentioned that the story had a good idea of someone doing something for someone else. I keyed in on this and brought it out to the class to give Derek some positive re-enforcement and public success. I don't know if this will have any other effects on Derek or the other students. I may have "given" them a theme for their story maps. By publicly acknowledging Derek's idea as good, seventh graders seem to pick up on and copy what they believe the teacher wants. In their mind this will help guarantee them a good grade—something seventh graders are starting to focus on.

By encouraging students to write their literature responses, however, it was discovered that they were taking the first steps towards developing mature, primary reactions (Rosenblatt, 1995). Each student wrote a response that was uniquely their own. In a response, the reader does not necessarily need to have had identical experiences related to a text, but he or she must have experienced some needs, emotions, concepts, some circumstances and relationships, from which he or she can draw from in making meaning from the text (Rosenblatt).

In the following data excerpts of students' written responses gleaned from their journals, evidence can be seen that some of the students were making personal interpretations about the book through the lenses of their personal life experiences. In the student responses below, Bridget expresses that she was in anticipation along with the main character in waiting for the "vision." Casey relates Crazy Horse's acts of bravery and courage to present day world leaders in relationship to war. Latisha points out the importance of generosity. Joel discusses the civic duty one has to his or her community in solving problems. Zach simply states not to give up hope. Amber points out that even though Crazy Horse did not follow the advice of the tribal elders and his father, he still accomplished receiving a vision. She seems to emphasize her own personal desires for independence when she states, "You don't always have to do things by-the-book." Ryan interprets the special theme to him was one that asks the reader to consider that being different from others in some ways can be an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

- Bridget: *I thought the story was good overall. The plot was good. It also had a strong meaning. I think this is because it is a story of a boy that wants to be a good leader and because of the vision quest. The most memorable part was when Curly saw his vision. I think it's memorable because it is very powerful and creates a good image. You are also waiting for the vision because Curly waited so long. The special theme showed that if you want to do something, you should do it because it could benefit lots of people. It also shows that there are some times when you have to be independent.*
- Casey: *I thought the story was good because it had a very useful theme. I felt that if someone or somebody was brave enough to do that [what Crazy Horse did] for America, maybe we would not be so ready to go to war. The most important part for me was the vision because I was waiting to hear about one. I was waiting for one because of the title. The theme was about a boy who was unselfish and the rewards that it gave him.*
- Latisha: *The story was very powerful because of the vision. It showed what he was going to become, and I thought it was very powerful. I had a lot mixed emotions, I was curious when he was about to get the vision. I was excited about what he was going to become. The most memorable part has to be the vision. That was the main part of the story. It was so powerful; it stuck in your mind. The special theme maybe to me was you have to be a generous person if you want good things to come to you.*

- Joel: *The most memorable part was when Curly's dad told him about Curly's visions.
The special theme was that you should help your community out with leading them to solve problems.*
- Zach: *I think the special theme was not to give up hope.*
- Amber: *The most memorable part for me was when Crazy Horse got his vision. It really got my attention because the description was neat; I also liked the colors in the illustrations.
The special theme was about when Crazy Horse got his vision and his dad was mad. I think the message was you don't always have to do things exactly "by the book." Because he didn't get help from the elders, and he still got a vision.*
- Ryan: *The most memorable part for me was when Curly had his vision because you had to listen so you could try to understand what it meant.
The special theme was that differences could be good because Curly was different and he became a great man.*

After reading these responses the seventh graders wrote, Jon thought these were reflections and insights that they would not have dared to share openly in class for fear of classmate reprisals. In the responses that the students wrote, they pointed out *what* their interpretations were of the text, drawing from individual experiences and present interests, and in doing so, they were able to make the text come "alive" in each their own way (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Writing Process and Discourse

Following the oral and written responses to each book, students were asked to think of their own story to write, and to outline the story using a story map. Students created these story maps individually, but did so in small groups, which provided the opportunity for them to discuss their ideas with each other. Jon moved from group-to-group answering questions and offering support when needed. It is important to note that even though the students could discuss their story ideas together, each student developed their own unique narratives.

The literature discussions and story map creation were considered to be the prewriting phase of the writing process. After the students had created four story maps, they selected their best or favorite one to develop into a complete narrative story. Following the first drafts of the stories, each student read their story to the same small group that they were a member of, and the group members offered ideas for clarifications, which lead to revisions. When a student felt that his or her story was sufficiently clear and no more revision were needed, they typed the story on a computer and checked for spelling and other mechanical errors. For the publishing phase of the writing workshop, students were reassigned to different groups and each student read aloud the story they had created.

Student-Created Narratives

Prior to examining the student narratives, each Native American folktale that was read to the students was analyzed to determine distinguishable patterns in settings, characters, plots, and themes. Using the constant comparison method of analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the student narratives were analyzed to determine patterns that existed across all the literary elements identified in the books that held relationships to the student narratives. This analysis (see Table) suggested that the many of the seventh graders had developed an internalization of the narrative structure or schema for traditional literature as it related to the Native American folktales they studied. The data indicated that the opportunity to develop a personal response to the folktales through journal writing and small group discussions, empowered students to write stories that were reflective of their personal life experiences. The stories revealed their perspectives of the issues, concerns, and struggles that many adolescents face today. Because students had the opportunity to have their literature responses validated, they felt confident in bringing to their writing what applied most clearly to their emotional tensions and perplexities.

The findings that emerged from the students' self-created narratives are discussed next with each literary element addressed. The seventh graders chose names for their characters that were similar, yet different than the books that were read. Some of the names they chose were: Little Bear, Small Badger, Selfish One, and Red Claw. The students stated specifically that the characters were Native Americans, warriors, chiefs, or spirits. Although the seventh graders briefly described *some* physical features of their main characters, it was most noteworthy how they developed their characters' *personalities* by describing how they acted or what they liked to do. Through character development in the students' narratives, the problems of their stories took shape. The following data excerpt from a student's story highlights this finding.

Courage tried to be fearless, but with this fearlessness, was boasting. Courage would brag about how he had no fears. He would be mean to all the other boys. The only boy he was not mean to was Small Badger.

The students developed a variety of problems or conflicts that their main characters dealt with through their stories, not unlike the real-life problems that adolescents face today. The problems strongly illuminated the human characteristics of selfishness, stealing, poor self-esteem, betrayal, and loneliness. Other story problems portrayed the historic hardships Native Americans faced from the forces of nature, such as drought, floods, and fires. The seventh graders took the time to carefully develop the problems in their narratives and did not just simply state in a few words what the problems were, but instead, intricately developed their problems through a series of events and explanations as the plots unfolded.

The resolutions that the seventh graders developed were introspective, examples included: accepting advice from others, learning a lesson, accepting oneself, changing one's attitude, and finding a new identity through a quest. These problems, many times, exposed the student behind the writing and the range of personal emotions and feelings seventh graders go through and face. I sensed the stories the students were writing sometimes represented their own internal struggles and fears. As I read them and reflected upon the student authors, reread the written responses they did for the folktales, and watched their behavior during discussions and writing, it became more obvious to me that they were projecting themselves into their writing. I think the opportunity the students had to respond emotionally and critically to the Native

American folktales helped to evoke a deeper reader-text relationship that carried into their writing. Their writing became a vehicle of self-reflection and revelation. The following data excerpts from the students' stories recounts some of the personal issues these students were facing in their lives.

[Jessica wrote in the conclusion of her folktale]: *Shashqua [which means she-who-is-alone] would still go to the forest to pray; only now she went and talked to the Spirit of Popularity. She would talk to the spirit about who is always being left out. When Shashqua died, she became the Spirit of Popularity to help others.*

[Jake, a small boy for his age, wrote at the conclusion of his folktale]: *“That’s a great idea!” exclaimed Man of Leadership. “I am terribly sorry about how I only saw your body and not your mind! You have saved your village and your people despite your size. We are all very grateful. Although I don’t know how to repay you, but I will give you your own horse, my approval for hunting, and the respect of the whole village!”*

“Thank you!” cried He Who is Small. With that they mounted their horses and rode off to hunt.

Table. Patterns in Seventh Grade Narrative Stories

Characters	Settings	Problems	Resolutions	Themes
Native Americans	Tribes	Not helping	Name change	Generosity
Chiefs	Forests	Selfishness	Change of attitude	Following rules
Warriors	Plains	Drought	Accepting advice from elders	Seeking a vision
Spirits	Villages	Not following tribal rules	Accepting yourself	Accepting yourself
	U.S. States	Name quest	Learning a lesson	Accepting differences in others
	Woods	Floods		Proving yourself
	Rivers	Loosing trust		Sacrifice
	Summer time	Fire		
	Winter time	Finding courage		
		Stealing		
		Poor self-esteem		
		Too small		
		Too young		
		Controversy between tribal members		
		Being alone		

Conclusions

Based on the findings that surfaced from the implementation of the constant comparative data analysis, the following conclusions and implications were revealed. The social interaction provided by literature discussions served to help build connections between the reading and the writing process for the students. Through the literature discussions, the seventh graders developed a vocabulary from which they drew from for future discussions and for understanding traditional literature, and in this case, folktales. The discussions served as an integral component in linking the folktales to the students' writing. Given the opportunity to discuss their writing in small groups helped the seventh graders evaluate, and revise their writing, leading them closer to creating well-written narratives and better understandings for a specific genre. When students shared ideas for writing, they developed clear thinking for approaching revisions.

The repeated exposure to the folktales across multiple texts, the opportunity to reflect upon the stories, and then extending these experiences into the writing process, deepened the seventh graders' comprehension of the genre. Moreover, the findings indicated that they developed an appreciation for the value of folklore as seen reflected into their narratives. Studying one genre in depth, helped the seventh graders experience how authors construct texts, and since several folktales were studied, to be able to examine relationships across texts within a genre.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Findings from the study suggested that students' writing was influenced by the Native American folktales that the students studied and responded to during classroom read alouds and literature discussions. Student writing indicated that they were able to integrate many of the folklore elements into their own narratives. Building from a genre that holds promise for rich, literature response can help in the process. As the seventh graders listened and discussed more books related to the genre, they were able to examine relationships and see patterns across the texts that influenced their narrative writing. This practice will help students develop a better understanding for how authors develop texts, and with this knowledge, increased reading comprehension and literary interpretation can be nourished.

Findings from the study indicated that the discussion prompts used to encourage oral and written responses were found to be beneficial in helping students form deeper, more meaningful reader-text relationships with the Native American folktales. Teachers can influence these relationships by knowing when, what, and how to encourage students to respond to a text. Although the seventh graders in this present study were reluctant to share *orally*, whole-class in front of their peers, they appreciated the opportunity to *write* privately an open-ended critical response, which they then could choose to share in a small group. When left on their own without guidance or instruction, frequently student discussions fall short of being beneficial for building reading comprehension and literary interpretation that can be manifested into richly written narratives. Once students know how to critically discuss a text or their writing, they can do so with confidence and with an evolving knowledge leading them to becoming accomplished readers and writers. Moreover, when teachers validate students' literary criticisms, they help students discover their voices or personalities that can be carried over into their writing.

The studying and writing of many different genres will benefit students in multiple ways. Folklore is a good beginning point because of the potential it holds for evoking vibrant literature response among students. It is a genre type that many students are familiar with. Students can readily create reader-text relationships to the characters, which are universal and found in many cultures. As the findings of this present study suggested, the seventh graders viewed the characters as generally recognizable in aspects of their own lives, rather than just characters in a story.

Finally, with instructional focus on drawing from students' lives and cultures for what *they* can bring to an interpretation of a text, rather than focusing on literal text comprehension, teachers can advance reader-text relationships with their students. In addition, when teachers combine the practice of using one specific genre for internalizing text structure blended with implementing the writing process, the greatest impact upon student writing can be experienced.

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About the Author

Timothy G. Weih is a retired elementary teacher who currently is an associate professor teaching literacy and literature methods courses to students majoring in elementary education at the University of Northern Iowa, USA.

timothy.weih@uni.edu