

Artist or Author? Making Meaning through Verbal and Nonverbal Texts in Secondary
English Language Arts

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Dedication

For my mother and father, my first and forever teachers.

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Abstract

ARTIST OR AUTHOR? MAKING MEANING THROUGH VERBAL AND NONVERBAL TEXTS IN SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

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This qualitative study examined ways a 10th grade ELA teacher integrated analyses of literary texts and evocative, nonverbal texts (e.g., images in visual art or advertising) to teach meaning-making processes. The study sought to understand the teacher's goals and methods as well as how her students responded, both as a class and as individuals. Data were gathered over one semester and included field notes, interviews with the teacher and five focus students, student work and journals, and researcher memos and journal entries. Findings show that students and the teacher integrated the modes—verbal and nonverbal—seamlessly as they practiced and discussed meaning-making. Nonverbal texts helped the teacher emphasize aesthetic meaning-making and dispel preconceptions, held by some students, that a single autonomous meaning was embedded in literary texts. Students participated more readily when the texts were nonverbal, and this participation may have served to support meaning-making processes with verbal texts. Some students

expressed confusion about what stance to take toward texts, sometimes reading for information or representation when an aesthetic transaction was more appropriate. Some students showed resistance to evidence-based meaning-making, expressing a preference for personal, emotional responses, based only loosely on only a portion of a text.

Findings suggest that integration of evocative nonverbal texts in the study of meaning-making allowed more students to access texts and, thereby, the processes used to create meaning. Nonverbal texts also helped challenge the expectation, held by many students, that they were expected to find a single meaning embedded in a text.

Keywords: literary texts, nonverbal texts, visual texts, high school English, secondary English language arts, reading

Chapter One: Introduction

We need to move beyond teaching children about the technical features of language ‘functions’ and help them instead towards awareness of the socially and ideologically constructed nature of the specific forms we inhabit and use at given times.

-- Street, 1995, p.6

In the 19 years I taught secondary English language arts (ELA) — “advanced” or heterogeneous, in public, international, or independent schools—there seemed always to be readers and non-readers. Whether due to personal choice, motivation, or ability, students came to class prepared in varying degrees to engage with others in discussion and analysis of how meaning is made in written texts. Because of these variations, I’d spend some class time reviewing—with the participation of some but not all of my students—“what we know” about a text, summarizing and establishing the more apparent and literal meanings so that we could then together delve into more divergent and less literal readings and discussions of how meanings are made through lettered texts. While my aim was always to engage students with questions of how meaning is made, I know I spent a substantial amount of time on helping students with the first level of understanding a work. I found that I spent more time than I wanted helping students with a basic level of comprehension and less with helping them look for connections, argue an author’s possible purpose, or defend an atypical but insightful reading of a character, for

example. The richest parts of class, I thought and tend to think my students thought as well, lay in these post-comprehension discussions and analyses. These were the times students learned to think through questions and weigh factors affecting their thinking; they learned to take responsibility for listening to others and for what they themselves contributed. This is when they developed the habits of mind that I took as my responsibility to help form.

But what about getting to this point—what about gaining access to this level of meaning-making that lay beyond that initial, basic, literal level of comprehension of the words written on the page? Throughout my career as a secondary level English teacher, I’ve struggled with how much time and effort I should put into encouraging, rewarding, cajoling, and enforcing the “reading” of texts included in the curriculum. Some of my students loved to read and would read anything, from “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” to *Beloved*, with apparent ease. For others the task of reading pages of linear, print text, particularly text that was unfamiliar and, at least initially, uninteresting to them seemed insurmountable. Many, but not all, of these struggling readers had diagnosed learning disabilities. Some were not native English speakers. “Could they listen to ‘it’ on tape?” “Is it okay to watch the movie instead?” “Are *Cliffs Notes* allowed?” they, their parents, or their special education teachers would ask me. What other versions of a literary work, written in ways more accessible to struggling readers, could I find?—and what was preserved, added, and lost in them? What, I’d ask myself, is carried over in these other versions or modalities, and what is not? If some students have read print, others listened to a recording, some seen a film, and others read something related in plot

or theme but with simpler vocabulary and sentence structure, what were we discussing when we discussed a text and the meaning(s) we made from it or them? Were we experiencing works of literary art, or were we looking to reach consensus on a single meaning carried in various ways through various versions of a single work? Were we engaging in multiple ways to convey a single meaning, reaching one “correct” or “preferred” understanding of a text through these various modes? And, if so, is that the goal of studying literary art—to uncover and understand “a” meaning? Also, how does this position students? Are they active and critical participants in making meaning, or are they recipients of a transferred meaning?

Over the course of my career, I’ve come across many teachers who wanted only very capable readers in their “advanced” classes, whether “Honors,” Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB). In their classes, then, students could be expected to engage with the assigned text, without alternatives or intermediaries. Concentrated, intensive instruction and discussion about meanings made through a given text could then occur. I’ve taught in some schools that went to great lengths to develop an application process that allowed only those with well-developed reading skills to take advanced literature classes. Too often, I saw school settings in which students’ level of ability to work with verbal texts often allowed them into or kept them out of sophisticated discussions about meaning-making. It seemed the ability to read well was the prerequisite; students who weren’t able were expected to keep at it until they were. Other schools, by contrast, encourage any interested student to take advanced courses, challenging teachers to keep heterogeneous groups of students, with a wide array of

ability to process verbal text, engaged and progressing through a curriculum of complex—and many would say difficult—texts.

Like many educators, I saw a distinction between students' ability to understand written text and students' ability to engage in thoughtful discussion and meaning-making about ideas present in those texts. I looked for opportunities to include and engage my slower or reluctant readers in meaning-making with their peers who could read as easily, it seemed, as they could eat. I didn't want those struggling or reluctant students reading alternative texts and forming sub-groups in our classes. I didn't want stronger readers to tell those students what the text "meant." Nor did I want students going to the *Cliffs Notes* or *Spark Notes* to be told what the texts "meant." It was important to me that those students engaged, themselves, with the ideas and techniques used to make meaning. It was that engagement and the processes involved in making meaning with texts that I believed important to work with and develop, not the transfer of a particular interpretation into their heads. And, I should note, I had often seen my struggling and reluctant readers build upon others' ideas and make complex and compelling arguments based on oral communications they'd absorbed in class. These oral communications about texts however, were, by their nature, already mediated by others; they were not formed by students directly with texts.

Early in my career, I found ways for students to create multimodal and nonverbal texts to present their understandings of meaning in texts and their own meaning-making. I always found the depth of imaginative—but still text-based—meaning-making to be remarkably rich when students sensed the freedom to create expressions of meaning that

were nonverbal and non-linear. I suspect this might, in part, be related to my students' sense that in these projects I was not looking for a right answer, but rather for a thought-provoking expression of their thinking. Eighth graders' sculptures, wordlessly communicating the salient characteristics of the Greek gods they'd met in *The Odyssey* demonstrated the accuracy of their research and an impressive level of detail and creativity. The production of a sound track for several of the books of *Paradise Lost* and the corresponding explanation of the thinking behind his choices impressed the classmates of a very reluctant reader in a tenth grade on-level English class. This young man's writing was far below that of his peers, but his reasoning and his presentation of this project were mature, engaging, and demonstrated to me that he had created meaning through his interaction with the some form of the text—though I suspect that those interactions came primarily from listening during class discussions and reading secondary sources such as *Cliffs Notes*.

While teaching an International Baccalaureate class comprised of international students in London, I attended an IB workshop. One session emphasized the value of expanding our notion of texts to include advertising and other images, sometimes without words. The workshop presenters were careful to emphasize that, as is essential in written texts, nonverbal texts are consciously constructed, carry meaning, and can be interpreted in different ways depending on what the reader or perceptor brings to the interaction, including the perceptor's setting, culture, purpose, and biases. The thinking and writing we want from students can emerge from the meanings they make with these texts, I was told, and it is thinking and writing that we're after, at least as much as reading words on

pages. Upon returning to teach my literature course with nonnative English speakers, I introduced advertising texts for study and found that many of my students, many who struggled with reading the poetry and novels we studied together, were able to engage in sophisticated and critical analyses of these mostly nonverbal texts. Several became more involved in the class and had more to write about than when our texts were strictly verbal.

Around the same time, I attended an exhibition of World War I art at the Barbican Art Gallery in London. I was teaching classes consisting of non-native English speakers whose English language skills were quite well developed. I attended this exhibition after having recently taught an interdisciplinary World War I literature unit with the World History teacher. That unit included much poetry from the period, extending from the build-up to the aftermath of the war. Walking through the exhibition, looking at paintings and sculptures, I was struck by the parallels I saw between them and the poetry my students and I had studied. Shifts in moods and attitudes expressed in the art—from early enthusiasm and patriotism to overwhelming despair—mirrored the changes from optimism to bleak nihilism my students and I had found in the poetry spanning the same continent and time period. It seemed to me surprising and yet so obvious that people living through the same shared upheaval would evoke similar, related meanings through various art forms, visual and literary.

Why then, should I be so concerned with students “reading” the words on pages before they can engage in the meaning-making process with their classmates and me?

What, ultimately, was I after? How restricted was I—and restricted by what— in my use of texts in an ELA classroom?

Before, during, and since this series of events, I struggled, alongside many of my colleagues, with what to teach in my ELA classes and why: The canon? What about texts in American literature containing the n-word? What do we tell African-American parents who ask if there isn't something else their son or daughter could read? Why are we so wedded to Huck Finn? The arguments in favor of transmitting a cultural heritage seemed less and less convincing as more and more of my students emerged from cultures outside of the United States. I continued questioning which texts achieved canonical status, which didn't, and why.

Many of these questions remain unresolved for me. My only comfortable identity as a teacher of literature was as a teacher who shared with, supported, and guided my students—all of them—as they made meaning with texts. Whether these texts were canonical or not, verbal or not, I concentrated less on that basic comprehension stage—one in which we conveyed some single meaning to be grasped—and more on the reader or the perceptor as one who engages with a text at a certain time and in a certain place as a member of certain communities, and who makes meaning of and through texts. I also wanted my students to value, to practice, and to develop their role as active participants—critical, insightful readers and perceptors who are called upon to respond to the texts in their worlds. I wanted my students to see these texts as artifacts of relevant and ongoing cultural conversations and to see themselves and each other as participants who could contribute meaningfully to those conversations.

During my doctoral program, I sought out secondary ELA teachers who were using or who had looked into using nonverbal texts. I found that teachers of AP Language and teachers who had been certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), in particular, were finding ways to use nonverbal texts in their classes. These teachers told me that, in the last several years, the AP Language exam was including a nonverbal text as a source for its synthesis essay, in which “reading” nonverbal texts and using one’s reading of the nonverbal text as evidence in an essay was part of the exam. Also, the NBPTS was requiring teachers to include the teaching of a nonverbal text in their certification portfolio. I also learned that the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) supported the use of multimodal texts in ELA.

Through a very informal network and series of connections, I met Elaine, an AP and NBPTS-certified teacher who had used nonverbal texts in her classroom and who was interested in looking at the practice more systematically. She agreed to work with me on this study, in part because she wanted to have someone with whom to share ideas and questions.

As teachers of literature, Elaine and I both saw ourselves as committed to developing our students as active participants who thoughtfully considered and interacted with the signs in their worlds. In our separate experiences teaching high school students, Elaine and I had each found a tendency in many of our students to read literary texts in ways similar to reading informational texts. They looked for a single meaning encoded in the text. Many students found it unfamiliar to think of a school literary text as something that invites them into an experience and that can be interpreted in multiple ways. Our

students commonly had to be reminded or directed to consider word choice, sentence length, and the structures of sentences, paragraphs, and whole texts as ways to evoke various, not singular, meanings. “Why don’t authors just say what they mean?” was a refrain familiar to Elaine and me, one that emanated from high school English students grappling with a text that Elaine or I or many other English teachers might claim is rich, meaningful, or perhaps beautiful. We were both also familiar with a tendency for students to await or at least hope for the teacher’s explanation of what a text “means” or what significance it held, rather than asserting their own developing understandings.

Other times, some of our students wanted freedom to respond very personally to texts, often regardless of any limitations imposed by the elements embedded in that text. These students wanted to immerse themselves in the free-write part of a reading response—the “what do you think?” or the “how does the text make you feel?”—without grounding their responses in the more analytical, “what in the text are you responding to; what *in the text* is affecting you, helping you to respond as you do?”

Students orienting themselves as passive recipients of encoded meanings was something Elaine and I both found anathema in our practice. And we wanted our students aware of what, in texts and in their worlds, affected the meanings they made and the experiences they had as they transacted with texts—the how and why of the meanings they were making through texts, particularly literary texts. At the outset of this study, Elaine shared with me her desire to help students understand that reading literary verbal texts and “reading” evocative nonverbal texts involves, on the one hand, something very different than looking for an answer or uncovering a single, fixed meaning. On the other

hand, she wanted students to recognize that not every reading of a text, at least in her class, is “valid”; interpretations must be linked, in part, to elements in the text. She also told me she was intent on “creating literate citizens, helping them ask questions and challenge other people’s thinking.”

In order to achieve this and develop readers who were aware, participatory, and critical, over the semester I studied her class, Elaine sought to provide students with opportunities to interact with multiple texts in both verbal and nonverbal modes. She also provided students with opportunities to act as both creators and preceptors of those texts. Elaine challenged her students to *transact*, in Rosenblatt’s (1978/1994) aesthetic sense, with verbal and nonverbal texts, going beyond any literal decoding to participate in developing meaningful interpretations based in the texts.

While interpretation in secondary ELA classrooms is most often practiced through the use of traditional, verbal texts, this study explored meaning-making processes through the use of both literary, verbal texts—such as poems, short stories, the novel, and essays—and evocative, nonverbal texts—such as thought-provoking images where communication of a single message does not seem to be the purpose or the effect of the image; i.e., what some might call artistic rather than instrumental images. The study examined how Elaine approached teaching meaning-making with verbal and nonverbal texts. It also sought to understand how students responded to this approach.

The design of this study includes explorative, qualitative methods. I became a participant observer in Elaine’s 10th grade English class, in attendance at each class meeting from the second day of school in Fall 2011 through December of that year. I also

reviewed students' written work and met with and interviewed five students at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Elaine and I met for three formal interview sessions and spoke daily about our observations and Elaine's plans. Throughout the study I maintained a field journal of my notes, thoughts, and observations. During the class sessions I kept a running log of what was said and done. I transcribed each of the interviews myself and listened multiple times to the recordings. Data analysis, in addition to writing memos about what I saw happening throughout, consisted of looking for connections and coding for themes that emerged in field notes, interview transcripts and students' work.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

The first section of this chapter is designed to help readers understand what Elaine and I had each sensed—separately and over many years of teaching—in our students as they approached the reading of literary texts. Through our instructional practices, we each aimed to have students read critically and with awareness of how meaning was being created with texts. Though some of our students were comfortable with this and with positioning themselves as active participants in a process, we had each repeatedly encountered a range of abilities and inclinations toward this emphasis on creating meaning as a reader transacted with a text. We had commonly encountered, and wanted to redirect, two orientations toward reading in our ELA classes: In one, students expected to arrive at a single, correct answer to questions about the meaning of a text, even a literary text. Students with that orientation seemed to believe that the meaning of a text was presented by an author (or a teacher as proxy for the author), and that the reader's role was to learn that single, embedded meaning. In the other commonly held orientation, students sought personal and individualized meaning-making that began in the text, but was free of any constraints imposed by that text. If something in the text contradicted the meaning the student created, they wanted nonetheless to hold and protect the meaning they created because it was important to them personally. This was akin to free association that began in a text but quickly left that text. In the first section, below, I

share examples from the work of two literacy researchers and theorists to help illustrate these two orientations.

Following that, I describe how several literacy researchers and theorists have come to understand reading practices and processes that also mirror some of the meaning-making processes Elaine and her students engaged in during the course of this study. I examine Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) theoretical framework in greatest detail, as her criteria for a valid reading had the most profound influence on Elaine's thinking and teaching and because Rosenblatt's treatment of the continuum of aesthetic and efferent stances offers a way to conceptualize issues that arose in this study. Also in that section are findings from the research of Langer (1992, 1997), Whitcomb (2004), and Applebee (1996) that describe practices in the teaching of literature in classrooms in the United States. Many of these practices may have helped develop the kinds of orientations toward reading literature that Elaine hoped to change; a few of these practices facilitated the kinds of inquiry processes Elaine wanted to foster.

In the last section of this chapter, I review some of the existing research on the use of nonverbal texts in ELA classrooms, specifically the use of transmediation, to help students engage in the processes of making meaning with literary texts. The findings from those studies helped shape some of my questions regarding students' roles in the reading process and in ELA classroom communities.

Expectations of Literary Texts in ELA Classrooms: Autonomous and Expressive

In *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education*, Street (1995) defines autonomous literacy as a model "in

which many individuals, often against their own experience, come to conceptualize literacy as a separate, reified set of ‘neutral’ competencies, autonomous of social context” (p. 114). Although neither Elaine nor I ever used the term *autonomous literacy* in our conversations, we readily recognized this concept from our past experiences and discussions with students, colleagues, and parents of students. We repeatedly came back to the concept in our conversations about the pervasive desire of many of our students to arrive at a single, correct answer as they engaged with literary texts.

In his research in an upper-middle class, suburban community in the northeastern United States, Street (1995) found that in 1st and 5th grade elementary school classrooms, “language is treated as though it were a thing, distanced from both teacher and learner and imposing on them external rules and requirements as though they were but passive recipients” (p. 114). The presentation of texts, Street observed, was “unproblematized regarding its meaning and content, focusing on form. Technical problems [were] set, to do with grammar and syntax, and solutions once given [were] assimilated to a general list of rules and prescriptions about the nature of language itself” (p. 116). This was the case, he writes,

Deeply embedded in the tradition of the English language arts is a text-based set of beliefs and behaviors guiding instructional goals, decisions, interactions, and evaluations—derived from the New Critical theory...that strongly changed English education in the 1960s. This now-traditional view called for close reading of texts, with particular emphasis on the narrator, the point of view, and the “correct” interpretation. (Langer, 1992, p. 2)

In this approach to reading literature, Both Street and Langer describe an approach in which the reader is positioned as a recipient of meaning embedded in the text. The printed marks on the page act according to rules and thereby convey a meaning, and the role of the reader is to correctly identify that meaning. Elaine and I were very familiar with this expectation in some of our students, evidenced in part in their impatience with examining possibilities and nuance as we discussed meaning in literary texts.

At times, Elaine and I also encountered in our students a less common but fervently defended approach. In their interactions with literature, not all of our students responded as recipients of meaning embedded in texts. Some instead tended to create meanings that had little basis in a text. Soter, Wilkinson, Connors, Murphy and Fu-Yuan Shen (2010) discuss this orientation toward reading. Soter and her colleagues describe an analysis of classroom discussions of literary texts that they conducted as part of a larger study on high-level reading comprehension. The transcriptions of ELA class discussions and small group discussions showed that, rather than focusing on form and textual features as in the autonomous approach, many students used some element they discovered in the text to connect to a personal experience or emotion. The students then put their attention on that personal response, rather than considering the workings of the elements present in the text. These researchers found that typical responses of this type included “strong empathetic connections with the text and, therefore, typically involve[d] the inclusion of parallel personal experiences and feelings elicited by the text” (p. 206). Instead of looking for the right answer in a text, as in an autonomous literacy approach, in

these discussions students used the text as a launch pad into a personal universe of experience or opinion. The comments and discussions, then, were largely unrelated to other elements in the text or to the text as a whole; they were related to the text through only one or two elements and were dismissive of much of the rest of the text. In a sense, this was the antithesis of the autonomous approach. Soter et al. (2010) cite the following examples from the various transcripts used in that study:

S: It was sad all those people dead or in hospital. Why can't people talk instead of wars, fights, and bombs? If everyone was nice to each other, everything would be alright. (1994)

S: It reminded me of when I came home happy and I got out of the truck with Trend and my sister told me Grandma passed away. I remember when I went to her room. I was real uncomfortable sitting and talking when she died on the bed. I was in Houston and didn't want to leave Grandma. (1996)

S: It was like *I'll Fix Anthony*. I'll fix my sister too. She always thinks she's the boss, so I'll fix (her) (name of sister). (1997)

S: I felt sad when he said "I have something to say to you: 'Goodbye.'" I felt sad when he had to move back and forth. (1999)

S: Imagine it was your birthday and you went to the movies and someone brought you a rabbit that was a vampire, what would you have done if you had seen a vampire? (2000)

(Soter et al., 2010, p. 212)

Far different than the emphasis on form that Street found, these researchers encountered responses that were highly personal and only very loosely associated with some feature located in the text: “few [students represented in these transcripts] have a sense of the qualities of the text that play on their perception of the experiences portrayed. ...They are *experiencers* of the text but [are] relatively unaware of what is playing into that experience” (Soter et al., p. 206, emphasis in the original).

Soter and her colleagues did not propose attempting to eradicate this type of response as a part of ELA; on the contrary, they noted the importance of valuing affective (personal, emotional) and experiential response to literary works. They suggested using the term *expressive* to describe this orientation, distinguishing it from Rosenblatt’s approach to *aesthetically* experiencing literary works. Unlike Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) aesthetic, the expressive interaction with literary texts does not require a reader to reflect on the role the text plays in eliciting or shaping a personal response.

The two very different approaches to literary texts described here, autonomous and expressive, reflect what Elaine and I (and other English teachers I’ve spoken with) have encountered in many of our students over many years of teaching: For some students, a desire for a right answer; for others, a desire for control over a personal relationship with a text, free of any perceived impediments imposed by textual features. These, respectively, reflect formalist, new critical approaches on the one hand and reader response approaches on the other. Both fall short of the critical, analytical thinking we wanted from our students. While some aspects of each of these approaches appealed to

Elaine and me as teachers of literature, neither one, exclusively, provided our students the kinds of experiences with literary texts we wanted them to have.

Rosenblatt's Aesthetic Orientation: Empowering Readers to Transact with Texts

Often mis-characterized as a reader response theorist, Louise Rosenblatt discusses a stance toward reading that more accurately falls between reader response and formalist positions. Echoing Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934), Rosenblatt's *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem* (1978/1994) and much of her earlier work explain her theory that meaning results from an experience undergone, a process of "living through" a text. Rosenblatt (1978/1994) observes that what has become a traditional practice in the teaching of literature, the new critical approach, treats a literary work as something that exists as complete in itself, regardless of the reader or context in which it is read. This echoes the autonomous approach and reduces literature, "at worst, to a series of automatic signals, like traffic lights and, at best, to a collection of static symbols or emblems" (p. 103). By contrast, in Rosenblatt's view of reading literature, a "text" is not a "literary work of art" due to the characteristics of its marks on the page—due to codes transmitted by an author to be received accurately by readers—but rather it is a literary work of art because it is the result of the experience a reader has with that text. The "poem" in the title *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem*, Rosenblatt explains, is the creation of meaning arrived at as a reader lives through a text and creates meaning.

The experiential continuum: Efferent through aesthetic stances toward texts.

In *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem*, Rosenblatt (1978/1994) explains and refines the "aesthetic approach" to reading that she first described in *Literature as Exploration*

(1938) and that she elaborated on in various essays and articles throughout her lifetime. Rosenblatt's theory emphasizes the active role of the reader in creating, rather than uncovering, meaning. She takes care to distinguish between the symbols—the “inkspots on paper”—and the meaning created when those marks transact with a unique reader:

Books do not simply happen to people. People also happen to books. A story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. When the symbols lead us to live through some moment of feeling, to enter into some human personality, or to participate imaginatively in some situation or event, we have evoked a work of literary art. Literature provides a *living through*, not simply knowledge *about*.... (2005, p. 63).

Attributing her use of the concept of “a transaction” to Dewey and Bentley (cf. Connell, 1996 and Faust, 2000), Rosenblatt describes the transactional nature of the relationship between a reader and a text. Rather than two, “separate, self-contained, and already defined entities acting on one another—in the manner...of billiard balls colliding” (1978/1994, p. 17), the reader and the text instead transact to form a new creation. Each reading, Rosenblatt argues, is a creation and neither the symbols appearing on the page nor the qualities of the reader dominate the process. In this way, while a text “patterns and delimits” (p. 15), a reader transacts with a text to create a “literary work of art” (p. 49); a new creation is made each time.

Not every interaction between a reader and a text—even a literary text—results in a “literary work of art,” however. For each reading of a text, whether literary or non-literary, Rosenblatt describes a continuum of stances available to a reader as he or she

endeavors to make meaning through that text. On one end of the continuum is an “efferent” stance, on the other, “aesthetic” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). When acting on the “efferent” end of the continuum, a reader’s attention is focused on gleanings a fixed meaning from that text, to take something specific from it (*efferre*: to take away). Rosenblatt provides the example of a mother whose child has just swallowed a poisonous substance, frantically reading instructions on how to administer an antidote (p. 24). Less dramatic instances include interactions between readers and scientific formulas, recipes, or news reports, where the purpose of the interaction, again, is to gather information.

It is important to note that Rosenblatt states that the *text* does not determine the placement along the continuum, but rather the *reader’s experience*—the stance he or she takes in the act of reading and way the reader directs his or her attention—does:

The mathematician turns from his efferent, abstract manipulation of his symbols to focus on the ‘elegance’ of his solution... We may focus our attention on the qualitative living-through of what we derive from the text of ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ or we may turn our attention to efferent analysis of its syntax. (p.25)

Rosenblatt states clearly that valid readings must be grounded in the text. The *transaction* is a mingling of the text and the reader:

The aesthetic stance... should not be confused with a simple reverie or train of free associations. Perusal of a text merely leading to free fantasy would not be a reading at all in the transactional sense. The concept of transaction emphasized the relationship with, and *continuing awareness of*, the text. During the literary experience, concentration on the words of the text is perhaps even more keen than

in an efferent reading. The reader must pay attention to all that these words, and no others, these words, moreover, in a particular sequence, summon up....What is lived through is felt constantly to be linked with the words. (p. 29, emphasis in the original)

For a reading to be “valid,” Rosenblatt requires that “the reader’s interpretation not be contradicted by any element of the text, and that nothing be projected for which there is no verbal basis” (p. 115). These criteria served as the backbone of the meaning-making practices Elaine’s students engaged in, for both verbal and nonverbal texts, throughout this study.

Thus, the expressive that Soter et al. (2010) describes (above) is a stance that is separate from the range of aesthetic to efferent transactions with a text that Rosenblatt places on her continuum. Soter et al. suggest the use of the term expressive to add a dimension related to but apart from the transactions with texts Rosenblatt describes. In this dimension, this other stance, the reader engages in a free association or more personal reverie initiated by, but not closely linked to, the features of a text.

Reading and Teaching Literature in the Secondary ELA Classroom

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Judith Langer, with a team at the National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning (now the Center on English Learning and Achievement), conducted research aimed at examining and improving the teaching of literature in U.S. schools. In part, their studies sought to discern first, how successful readers of literature thought as they read and second, what pedagogies supported the development of those thinking processes. Langer’s work forms a bridge

between theoretical considerations—of autonomous literacy and the expressive, aesthetic, and efferent stances toward reading, discussed above—and research on secondary English language arts pedagogy in the United States.

In two reports written about this series of studies, Langer (1997, 1992) calls for a shift from pedagogies dominated by New Critical and autonomous approaches to practices that place a greater emphasis on the role of readers transacting with texts. She and her team approached their research from a “constructivist and social/communicative” perspective and found that “the reading and shaping of literature is both an intellectual and social process and that literature classrooms are particularly good environments not only for the learning of literary works... but also for the development of literate thinking” (1997, p. 1). Like Rosenblatt’s aesthetic approach, Langer accentuates the experiences of readers and the processes they conduct as they transact with literary texts. Langer (1992) notes that, while the teaching of *reading and writing* was undergoing a shift to emphasize the “processes involved in students’ constructing, rethinking, and elaborating on their understandings (p. 2),” the study of the teaching of *literature* was not undergoing such a shift:

There has been relatively little research into the cognitive and communicative processes involved in either the learning or teaching of literature. When people think of literature instruction at all, they generally think of the content; literature education is generally considered a way to lead students into the cultural knowledge, aesthetic judgments, and high culture of society. However, literature’s

role in the development of the sharp and literate mind—its role in reasoning and higher literacy—is generally ignored. (p. 2)

This reference to transferring the content of literary texts to students is an example of reading literature at the efferent end of Rosenblatt's continuum, with a goal of taking away information. By contrast, "development of the sharp and literate mind" falls, I would argue, at the other end of the continuum, an example of the aesthetic approach, and requires transactions between the reader and the text to create meanings.

Through their research on what successful readers of literature did as they read, Langer and her team found that the more successful readers were able to "explore multiple perspectives" (1992, p. 3). Reminiscent of Rosenblatt, Langer found that, in what she termed *literary understanding* (1992), readers lived through an experience. Langer also notes that uncertainty is a normal and necessary part of a reader's response and that new understandings continually led readers to "explore horizons" (1992, p. 8) and form new and multiple possible meanings, rather than a single correct one. In Langer's research, some of these new meanings were enriched by fellow students' responses and shared experiences in class discussions. Langer found that readers played a prominent role "as active meaning makers with personal knowledge, beliefs, and experiences that affect responses and interpretations—thus creating the potential for more than one 'correct' interpretation" (1992, p. 3). Emphasizing readers' roles in transacting with texts, Lange argues that pedagogy must support ambiguity and diverse sense-making:

Effective instruction focuses on exploring multiple perspectives, on arriving at a broader base of knowledge from which interpretations can be developed and enriched, on sensitivity to others' well-defended views, on the expectation that convincing arguments will differ based on who the people are—both the readers and their audience—and that good defenses need not always move others to agree, but to offer additional complexity to others' understandings. (Langer, 1992, p. 3)

In the classes where this kind of literary thinking predominated, Langer and her team (1992, 1997) found that four principles presided and created a culture in the classrooms wherein:

1. Students were treated as thinkers, with interesting thoughts and questions
2. Literature reading was treated as question generating
3. Class meetings were treated as time for developing understandings
4. Multiple perspectives were used to enrich interpretation

In these settings, students shifted among their own experiences, the voices of others, current contexts, their own imaginings, and the texts as they constructed and reconstructed what Langer calls “envisionments” (1992, 1997). Thus students were able to tap an array of meaning-making sources as they developed meanings from texts.

By contrast, what Langer and her team more often found in classrooms in the United States was that, even in ELA classes, critical thinking was typically seen as logico-scientific. What counted as knowing and as successful reasoning in traditional English lessons emerged from “the belief that there are common images, evocations, and

responses to a literary piece that all good readers experience” (1992, pp. 2-3) and those common responses led to a “consensus” (1992, p. 3) rather than a diversity of understandings. “This [logico-scientific approach] led to instructional goals that focused on the learning of particular interpretations, and of convergent ways of thinking.” (1992, p. 3):

Educational research and practice has focused almost all its concern on one kind of reasoning, the kind represented by the traditional domain of logic. ... We have ample evidence that across the United States, literature is too often taught in a non-literary manner, with the kinds of productive thinking involved in ... "storytelling" never taught, rarely noticed, and sometimes suppressed. ... This is largely due to the fact that the processes underlying literary thinking have been largely unexplored, and connections between such thinking and the goals and processes of instruction have barely been made. (1992, p. 2)

ELA teachers and traditional, autonomous approaches to literature. Moving to the constructivist, social/communicative practices that Langer’s research supports—and away from the autonomous and logico-constructivist approaches to teaching literature found in research by Street and Langer—was difficult even for teachers invested in the shift. Langer cites conversations with teachers who wanted to move away from New Criticism and logico-scientific approaches and engage their students in more literary, aesthetic approaches to literary reading:

Even teachers in our project, who wanted to embrace this perspective all the time, had difficulty doing so. They were held back by their more traditional notion of

literature teaching that included single “best” interpretations, plot retracing from beginning to end, close reading for the author’s message, and using class time to fill in what students didn’t “get,” instead of as a time to help them develop strategies to move their thinking along. Traditional notions of “good” teaching were so internalized that they were difficult for most teachers to overcome, although this is what they wished to do. (1997, p. 7)

In more recent studies, consistent with Langer’s findings, researchers have found that teachers often act as givers of information, centers of discussions, and approvers of assertions. In her review of literature for a study on fostering a community of learners in the ELA classroom, Whitcomb (2004), like Langer and her team, found teachers struggling to abandon traditional, autonomous approaches to reading literary texts and move toward constructivist, aesthetic experiences with texts. Whitcomb writes that, although literary critics in the United States no longer rely as heavily on the New Critical approach, “its vestiges endure in middle school and secondary school English classrooms, particularly in the sense that students often perceive that the purpose of class discussion is to uncover the teacher’s ‘superior’ reading of a literary text” (p. 185). Whitcomb writes that the conception of “language as artefact, dominates the landscape of middle school and secondary school English in the USA; it views literary texts as privileged artefacts [sic]” (Whitcomb, p. 185); i.e., the autonomous approach described by Street was still pervasive in American schools. Applebee (1996) referred to this practice of positing all meaning within a text, interpretable by experts, as the “deadly tradition” because, in it, learners strive to memorize and produce “knowledge-out-of-

context” rather than engage in active meaning-making. As Applebee describes this phenomenon: “Most students quickly understand the game of school is to figure out what the teacher wants; and it is a game many students simply do not want to play” (as cited in Whitcomb, 2004, p. 33).

Whitcomb’s review also noted the presence, in smaller numbers, of more generative, constructivist, and transactional pedagogies to support to meaning-making, in which interpretations involved elements of both reader-response and critical literary theories, more in keeping with the aesthetic approach described by Rosenblatt and the literary approach described by Langer. In these pedagogies, the autonomous role of the text was diminished, and the teacher “scaffolds and guides students’ growth in both understanding and generating language and text...Student talk is more likely to occur, for [these strategies offer] teachers a way of engaging students in meaningful dialogue with one another” (p.185). So, Langer and her research team and Whitcomb, in her review of research, found that some teachers in some schools were effectively engaging students in literary and aesthetic transactions with literary texts, though most were not.

What Counts as a “Text”?

Presumably, the theory and research on the teaching and learning of literary texts discussed above involves meaning-making with written literary texts. While the words literature and literary derive from significations for letter, suggesting the literal connection to words, meaning-making practices with texts—in ELA classrooms and in human communication and mediation generally—include far more than transactions among readers and words and lettered texts. Pedagogical work in literacy and literature

has transcended the bounds of letters and “verbocentric” approaches to include other semiotic systems, such as gestures, images, and combined sign systems like those we see when words accompany graphics and images in advertising.

In “Rereading the Signs: Multimodal Transformations in the Field of Literacy Education,” Siegel (2006) states that “language arts education can no longer ignore the way that our social, cultural, and economic worlds now require facility with texts and practices involving the full range of representational modes” (p. 65). Restricting our conception of texts for meaning-making in ELA to only alphabetic texts seems unnecessarily narrow and limiting. Practicing responsible, aware, and agentic meaning-making with texts—verbal and nonverbal—in the worlds we inhabit, on the other hand, seems a worthy goal of ELA instruction. The literary and aesthetic approaches described by Langer and Rosenblatt can be practiced with texts that are not alphabetic but that allow for transactional relationships between texts and perceivers. In the following section, I summarize some of the research on the use of evocative nonverbal texts to support literary meaning-making in ELA.

Review of Research on Meaning-Making with Nonverbal Texts in ELA Classes

In each study discussed here, a nonverbal text was used to help readers transact with a written, literary text in an ELA class context. In each of these studies, nonverbal texts were created by students to capture or develop a concept they thought was present in the verbal text, a practice called transmediation (Suhor, 1984).

Like Elaine's approach, the studies included here demonstrate ways that nonverbal texts can be used pedagogically to enhance students' meaning-making experiences with literary, verbal texts. Also like Elaine's approach, the practices described in these studies positioned students as active, agentive, collaborative, and thoughtful participants in meaning-making with both verbal and nonverbal texts. These studies, though, should not be taken as representative or a source of Elaine's work or approach.

The pedagogies discussed in these studies share in common the goal of helping students make meaning with literary texts. Not included here is research on using art to develop myriad ELA skills. None of these studies used artwork as a prompt for expressive response. None examined the use of artwork to express students' personal stories. Elaine was intent on helping her high school students read literary works analytically, and she used evocative, nonverbal texts to support this goal. The studies below add insight to Elaine's practices.

Nonverbal Texts and Making Meaning through Personal Connection

Personal connection to a literary work, for example feeling empathy for a character, often provides students with an entry point into a literary text. The studies reviewed in this subsection made use of students' personal experiences, though in only one of the studies were students required to make a personal connection to the story. This personal connection occurred nonetheless, once students were given agency to make choices regarding how they would create meaning with a text. In other words students, most often of their own volition, consistently chose to depict their own experiences as

they created representations of the meanings they made as they read. This served as an initial connection as well as a means to understand an aspect of the story.

Connecting personal experience to texts served as a way to help students make meaning in Allison L. Baer's dissertation study (2005, 2007). Baer worked with a group of ten sixth-grade struggling readers, five African American and five White, three female and seven male. All had been selected by their fifth-grade teachers, who had been instructed by the dean of students to recommend students based on reading ability for a class that would provide extensive remediation to improve their scores on state-mandated tests.

Baer became a part of the class on the first day of the school year and was accepted as a teacher by the pupils, teaching and co-teaching lessons regularly from the outset. Among other reading activities, Baer read stories to the students and asked them to generate, collectively, words from their own experiences that came to mind when cued with a significant word from the story. Later students were instructed to develop, individually, a symbolic representation "about a time when they experienced this same concept or theme from the story" (p. 23). Students were told to include a small graphic representation of themselves in their creations, demonstrating their perception of their own relationship to the concept or theme in the story. Baer videotaped students' presentations of their artifacts and then asked them to review with her what they were thinking as they made and presented them. These reflections became the source for student written work as well as formal data collection for the study.

Baer found the students' visual work insightful and provocative, and she believed it contributed to more fluid and detailed writing. One student who typically wrote very little filled almost two pages, explaining the meaning of his creation, its relevance to the story, and his own personal connection to the theme. Students constructed meaning and made sense of the stories they read by creating—and thinking through the process of creating—these visual objects. They also made connections between the texts, the objects, and their own lives.

Peter Smagorinsky (1997) also emphasized the usefulness of combining artistic work and a personal connection to help students make meaning of literary texts. During the study, Smagorinsky worked with the classroom teacher in a substance abuse rehabilitation center. The center was different than most school sites in several ways: only two teachers worked in all subject areas with a student body of 30-35 (fluctuating due to the nature of the program). Because of state and federal confidentiality laws, Smagorinsky was unable to provide many descriptive details about the subjects, though the nature of the program suggests that the students were at the secondary school level, and in a 1994 paper on the same study, Smagorinsky focused on just one student and identified him as 16 years old.

The participants in this study had been working with the arts in their ELA class for some time. The teacher was a published poet, his family members were successful in the arts, and, though he had been a public school teacher for more than 15 years, he had also run a music store for several years and developed social connections with musicians through that experience. For some time prior to data collection, students were asked to

use artistic media as they engaged in literary interpretation, and the classroom research site was stocked with materials such as art supplies, Tinker Toys, a keyboard synthesizer, a computer with a graphics program, and the traditional pen and paper for writing. Smagorinsky notes that, “at the point of data collection...students in the facility had grown comfortable with the idea of using artistic representation in their schoolwork and recognized it as a legitimate form of academic expression” (p. 89).

Unlike Baer, Smagorinsky did not require students to use personal experiences as they interpreted texts, but each of the students in his study chose to do so, and for each this was a key step in accessing the texts and creating meaning. The assignment that served as the focus of the study required that students read a short story distributed by the teacher, decide whether to work individually or in a group, and produce a visual and/or spatial (such as dance or movement) interpretation of the story. Smagorinsky’s study focused on three student groupings, including two students who performed an interpretive dance, several who presented a dramatic interpretation, and one boy who drew a symbolic representation of his interpretation. In stimulated recall interviews following their presentations, each student noted that their entry into the story was personal, and that their own experiences led them to make other connections within the story. Suzie noted that “When I was hiding from [Jane in the dance] she was the doctor and I was the daughter...and it was just like me....” (p. 92). When Dexter began reading the story, he found it difficult to interpret on a literal level. Then, he said, he began to pay attention “to something difficult. That’s how I got involved the story. ... I can relate something in my life to the story and ... draw” (p. 93). In each case, students first generated meaning by

empathizing with a character, and then made spatial and visual representations to demonstrate the meanings that they were creating.

Other studies included less pronounced, but still significant, examples of personal connection to texts exhibited and enhanced through artwork. In another dissertation study, Siegel (1984) noted that some of the fourth grade students in her study created roles for themselves in their artistic renderings, voluntarily inserting images of themselves into their representations. She observed that the more popular stories resulted in more personalized sketches (p. 23). In Whitin's 1996 study, the chart made by a seventh grader to show the emotions felt by a story's characters resulted in increasing his own personal response to their situation:

As I started to really look at [my visual representation], it became truer, and more fit toward the story, and at the end, and when I finished the book, I looked at it, and it occurred to me that this is how the Logan family felt the whole story. I got to feeling the same things, too. (p. 121)

The ability to care about and to connect personally with any endeavor, including reading, increases a person's participation in it. Teachers have long known that making personal connections with texts brings students much closer to meaning-making with that text. Personal investment and prior knowledge are tools that become available to a reader who sees a connection between herself and the text. By assigning the creation of nonverbal or visual representations, these teachers invited the personal into the equation as each student made his or her unique representation. This practice invited connections

to students' experiences and beliefs, allowing them to create a bridge between the written text, themselves, and the meanings they created.

Nonverbal Texts and Making Meaning through Collaboration

One of the most salient characteristics of each of the studies examined in this section is the students' use of collaboration in creating an artistic, nonverbal presentation of the meanings they made with verbal texts. The research designs and pedagogical practices in the studies cited in this section did not require collaboration, but group activities and discussion around visual representations evolved through the classroom practices nonetheless. This section outlines several variants of the collaborations that emerged as students developed nonverbal representations in their efforts to create meanings with literary texts.

The earliest study reviewed here (Siegel, 1984) was among the majority that did not require collaboration. Siegel was examining how fourth graders created meaning based on written stories they read in class. One of her methods was to ask students to sketch their interpretations of what they had read. One of the most prominent findings to emerge from the study was the role friendships played in the way students handled this assignment. Siegel found that the students relied heavily on each other to help them create, and then to articulate, the meanings in their drawings. Presentations about a piece of artwork became dialogues and small group presentations with friends acting as mediators, translating others' thoughts for their audience.

Two separate studies by Phyllis Whitin (1996, 2005) either emphasized or required the role of collaboration in their designs. From the outset, students were

expected to build upon each other's ideas as they developed visual representations of meaning. Whitin's studies examined the framework of socially constructed meaning and the notion that sign systems are socially constructed systems, holding meaning only when recognized by others in a group. Particularly in the 2005 study, in which she focused on socially constructed meaning through collaboration among the fourth grade students, texts were treated overtly as contributions to an ongoing social conversation. Whitin found that generative talk—exploratory, interpretive discourse that promoted thinking and the creation of new ideas—served to help students postpone judgment, use tentative language, entertain multiple viewpoints, and tolerate ambiguity (p. 365). The study also looked at the role of the teacher, and demonstrated that effective teachers modeled this behavior and students learned to emulate it.

In the 2005 study, with fourth graders, Whitin's process required students to collaboratively develop an artistic rendering in response to a story, with generative discourse a crucial part of the process. The sketches were not seen as ends in themselves, but as tools for mediating thought within a social setting. This could have developed because of the benefits seen in the sharing of individual student renderings in the earlier, 1996 study.

Seventh grade students, in the 1996 study, observed: "I think when you share one of your [sketches] it really helps change it, or if it can be better, then it will help it be better" (p. 131). "I like visuals. When you talk with other people, they say things you didn't see before" (p. 131). "It doesn't give you one right answer. It gives you a choice of

answers” (p. 131). Clearly in these cases the combined responses to student creations yielded richer meaning than what one student acting alone could produce.

Less satisfying with regard to both collaboration and personal connection to texts is the study by Peter Smagorinsky (1998) of high school seniors taking on the task of interpreting characters in Hamlet. Smagorinsky joined a classroom teacher in the final quarter of the school year for the study of an interpretive activity designed by that teacher. Cindy, the classroom teacher, had worked throughout the year to accustom the students to artistic assessments and creative ways of thinking. In his field notes, Smagorinsky shared that students sometimes saw some of this teacher’s activities as appropriate to “kindergarten” (p. 207). For the study, students were told to organize themselves into groups and were assigned the task of completing a “body biography” of a character from Hamlet. For this activity, one student would lie on a large piece of butcher paper while another traced his body outline. Then the group would locate particular characteristics in areas of the body that had been selected (placing an example of the character’s will power near the spine, for example). Unlike the more open-ended interpretive practices engaging students in the studies previously outlined, this “assignment cued a textual reading for the students, not requiring them to consider or provide personal associations with the character” (p. 208, *italics added*); it also yielded more limited outcomes. The class had studied the play with more than customary direction from this teacher because of the difficulty of the text. The transcripts of the group work, though demonstrating a division of labor and some negotiation as evidence of successful collaboration on the project, also described students who seemed rushed

and more focused on finishing than understanding. The transcripts showed that students did briefly negotiate meaning on more than one occasion, but the goal, for them, seemed to be adequacy rather than mastery, far different from the other studies considered in this review. While spring is rarely ripe for refined and highly thoughtful activity from seniors, modifications of the creative aspects of the project, focused on increasing both personal connection and more interpretive collaboration for these older students, could conceivably have produced a richer outcome.

These several studies show suggest several outcomes of collaboration in meaning-making with literary texts. While not critical in order for students to reap some benefit from their visual processing, collaboration nonetheless generated additional layers of meaning; added focus to individual students' interpretations; and encouraged students to construct, challenge, process, and verbalize together.

Nonverbal Texts and Empowering Students in the Process of Making Meaning

Another topic of interest in this review is the role students played in the learning process when nonverbal representation was used as a teaching tool. Unlike some more traditional, teacher-centered lessons, students were tasked with constructing meaning, representing it, and often, processing aloud the steps they took with peers, the teacher, and/or the researcher(s) to develop meaning. Motivation, goal-setting, and a multitude of ELA skills come into play here, including higher-order thinking skills, listening, speaking, and contributing to a class culture. The teacher played the important but less prominent and less controlling role of facilitator. Across all of the studies, one of the most impactful elements of this approach to helping students make meaning from texts is

the degree of engagement needed from them. This approach contributed to the development of a student-centered classroom, with significant self- and group-monitoring and meaning-making, independent of teacher intervention.

Wilhelm (1995) examined the use of artistic expression in helping students interpret literary texts when he worked as a teacher-researcher with a heterogeneous group of seventh graders. His study focused on two boys, Walter and Tommy. Both boys had learning disabilities and tested at a second-grade reading level, and both were particularly resistant to participating in reading activities in Wilhelm's class. Tommy referred to his lack of ability to "see" a story and expressed himself emotionally when Wilhelm tried different ways to learn of his response to the story: "I can't think about it, talk about it, do anything about it, if I can't see it!" (p. 476).

Wilhelm compared Tommy's response to a response from Chris, a successful reader who evoked similar "seeing" imagery. As Chris described the bland response of another successful student in the class to a passage that he had found particularly exciting, Chris said: "I guess...he must not see the story the same way I do.... He can't be seeing what I'm seeing...." (p. 476). Wilhelm found "this idea of 'seeing' the work in order to experience it fully a compelling idea that was corroborated by much other student data that [he] had collected" (p. 476). He then capitalized on Walter's and Tommy's interest in comic books and graphic designs to encourage them to begin looking at texts in class. This step was followed by asking the boys to respond visually to what they read. Both students demonstrated greater interaction with the texts after creating nonverbal representations of meanings they found in the written texts. Walter

said, “it’s like I don’t see much but I start to make the [visual representation] for a person and before I’m done doing it I can see exactly where they’re at and that’s just got to be a part of [the image I’m creating] then” (p. 486).

Wilhelm wrote in his field journal that these nonverbal texts “helped Tommy and Walter to enter and merge themselves into the story – not immediately as we expect students to do, but over time as they created the [images] – and the creation and performance of the scenes made them want to do that.... I have never seen them so motivated or involved in response to a story. I’ve never seen them be so much a part of the class (December 1992)” (p. 486). When Tommy began to feel comfortable using the nonverbal text to demonstrate his interpretation of a story, Wilhelm observed him refer back to the story multiple times, this former non-reader intent on getting it right. “Tommy had never much cared before about getting answers to quiz or test questions right so I asked him what the difference was here. He stopped short of scoffing at me. ‘I’m making this,’ he told me, ‘and other people are gonna see it’” (p. 485).

Wilhelm used the interest both boys displayed in graphics, comics, and drawing to provide them an avenue for expression in literature classes. Eventually, their artistic renderings brought them into the literary community of the classroom. These two boys did not, during the course of the study, transform into high achieving readers, and their visual renderings were more literal than those of their classmates, but they changed from inactive outsiders to real participants in the literature classroom.

While Wilhelm’s study presents the starkest illustration of students’ increased participation in the classroom and in their self-directed efforts to learn, all of the studies

presented here provide examples of students guiding their own and each other's' learning through visual representations. The process of transmediation—re-creating meaning onto one expressive plane from another—provided access to meaning-making for some students that was not available to them when the only medium available was verbal.

The studies summarized here helped me see clearly ways in which transacting with multimodal texts helped position students as active meaning-makers. In none of these studies were students looking for the right answer or awaiting a single, correct answer to emerge, either from the text or through the teacher, what Street (1995) described as an autonomous approach, above. Instead, students were empowered to transact meaningfully with both their created, nonverbal texts and the published verbal texts that initiated their transmediation projects.

These studies also alerted me to the very social nature of meaning-making when texts are open-ended and allowed for envisioning possibilities (Langer, 1992, 1997). These descriptions of ways in which meaning was constructed through transactions with texts and interactions with peers highlight the social nature that constructivist meaning-making can exhibit, much like that described by Langer, above. The activities outlined in these studies develop literary understandings and support multiple perspectives and horizons of possibilities as described by Langer (1992, 1997).

Providing students opportunities to practice meaning-making with literary texts and undergo a “lived through experience” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) with a literary text was enhanced by the use of nonverbal texts. The teachers in these studies, knowingly or not, positioned students in the aesthetic stance described by Rosenblatt (1978/1994) and

echoed closely in Langer's literary orientation (1992, 1997). Neither Rosenblatt nor Langer referred to nonverbal texts, but both theorists called for an emphasis on the role of the reader in making meaning with texts. The studies presented here show ways that nonverbal texts support students in this endeavor.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have distinguished among various stances readers might take toward texts. Echoing the New Critical theorists, the autonomous approach (Street, 1995) treats texts, including literary texts, as though there is a single meaning encoded in the text and the reader's task is to uncover that meaning. Related to this approach is what Rosenblatt (1978/1994) referred to as an efferent stance toward a text, a stance in which the role of the reader is to take away information from a text. Langer (1992, 1997), Whitcomb (2004), and Applebee (1996) discussed pedagogical practices commonly found in their research on ELA classes in the United States that supported this approach to reading of literary texts.

Another common approach to reading texts was described by Soter, et al. (2010). The expressive approach allows for very personal, affective responses to texts, based only loosely on the features of a text. Soter and her colleagues found this type of interaction with literary texts to be common in their analyses of transcripts of small group discussions in ELA classes in the United States.

An "aesthetic" (Rosenblatt 1978/1994) orientation, much like Langer's "literary" orientation (1992, 1997) shares some commonalities with both the autonomous and the expressive. It, though, requires transactions between a reader and an entire text. Here,

meaning is not found solely in the features of a text as in the autonomous or in the reader's subjective and free response to a text as in the expressive. Rather, this orientation results in text-based but new creations of meaning for each reading of a literary text. The aesthetic approach allows for a "living through" a text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1995) and "envisioning possibilities" and "shifting horizons" (Langer, 1992, 1997) as a reader works to create meaning with a literary text.

I use all of these concepts—autonomous, efferent, expressive, and aesthetic/literary—in the following chapters to describe and explain what I found in my study of the integration of nonverbal texts in a 10th grade ELA class. The studies on transmediation I summarized in the review of literature alerted me to some of the specific ways in which nonverbal texts have helped students transact aesthetically with literary texts in ELA.

Chapter Three: Methods

In order to learn more about how using nonverbal texts in ELA can affect students' meaning-making with literary texts, I spent one semester studying a heterogeneous 10th grade ELA class in which the teacher used evocative, nonverbal texts alongside the traditional verbal texts in the curriculum. A description of my methods is below. The study was guided by these research questions:

1. How does the teacher use nonverbal texts to develop students' meaning-making with texts?
2. How does this approach in this English class affect students' learning in terms of:
 - making meaning through texts? (i.e., what happens in class and what do the participants do as they endeavor to make meaning through texts?)
 - understanding their processes as they endeavor to make meaning through verbal and nonverbal texts? (i.e., what are they understanding about what they're doing as they read and perceive these texts?)

Setting

I conducted this study at Weybridge Secondary School (all names used here, of places and people, are pseudonyms). Weybridge is located in an upper-income neighborhood within a school district that is urban, socioeconomically diverse, and

densely populated. Twenty-three percent of the school district's residents were born outside of the United States, and approximately one-fourth speak a language other than English at home. Immigrants from more than 100 countries are represented, and nearly 100 languages are spoken. At the same time, the area ranks very high in the percentage of people with bachelor's or graduate/ professional degrees, and about 90% of all graduating high school seniors in the school district go on to attend college.

Weybridge Secondary School is the site of a public school "program" that was originally proposed by students and faculty and then adopted by the Steventon District School Board in 1971. Admission to the school is through lottery, and all district students are eligible to participate in the lottery. While the wider community is quite diverse, Weybridge is predominately white, though many of the students' parents have lived abroad and many are multinationals. Due to the makeup of the community, the students typically have wide exposure to racial and ethnic diversity. The building is shared by a county center for students with Asperger's syndrome, and these students, accompanied by trained assistants, are included in mainstream classes at Weybridge.

Affectionately referred to by some as "Hippie High" because of its progressive approach to education in its early years, the school is now "an A.P. school," according to its principal, Tom Francis. At one point, students convinced somewhat wary faculty members to sign on with the College Board to offer Advanced Placement courses. It was then, Francis explained, that the Weybridge Secondary School program took on more typical characteristics in terms of scheduling and course offerings. This was necessary to support the curriculum requirements of the A.P. courses. Before that, courses might meet

only a few times a week and students could take many more courses than what is considered a typical load. If several students wanted a course created and could find a teacher to work with them, the course would run. While these activities and approaches are still supported, they're less common than previously. Francis told me that the alternative nature of the school is now found primarily outside of the classroom, where students are responsible for monitoring themselves and the time they spend on various commitments and distractions. Also, Francis said, "We don't sweat the small stuff. Shirts go untucked and kids wear hats inside the building. It helps free up teachers to do the work we think is important."

The Weybridge community is committed to keeping enrollment numbers relatively low, so that students are known to one another and to the faculty. One result of the "alternative" program that affected this study is the small size of the class I observed. The program supports decision-making shared by students and faculty, often taking place at weekly town hall meetings. A few years ago, faculty and students together decided to allocate more faculty to the high school's earlier grades, making the 11th and 12th grade classes quite a bit larger than the 9th and 10th. The 10th grade class I studied was quite small—14 in the first few weeks and then 16 after two students transferred in from other classes midway through the semester—while the same teacher's 11th grade classes were almost twice that size.

Despite examples of democratic decision making at the school level, I agree with Francis's assessment that inside the classroom, Weybridge does not seem particularly "alternative." In the class I studied, I found students and the teacher functioning in very

familiar ways. The only aspects of the class that struck me as alternative were the small class size; the untracked, heterogeneous group of students; and the students calling their teacher “Elaine” rather than “Ms. Cummings.”

Elaine’s classroom walls, like those of the Weybridge School hallways, were decorated with student work, including a mural depicting a character from a fantasy novel. One entered the room through a small hallway, as the room was situated behind another classroom. That small hallway was covered in paint splatters, reminiscent of Jackson Pollock’s work, apparently created by students. Projects from previous years’ students and a four-foot, stuffed alligator (the mascot from Elaine’s alma mater) dotted the classroom walls and shelves. Tall windows under high ceilings let in natural light. In the back of the room, beyond a low, plush, tattered couch and alongside an equally low, plush, tattered chair, Elaine’s family photographs, portraying four generations—from Elaine’s grandparents to her very young daughter—surrounded her desk and computer station. Bookshelves with the semester’s reading books lined the lower half of the back wall, above which hung an in-progress timeline, made of construction paper and yarn, of notable events in American literary history. Opposite that, on the front wall of the room, a Smart Board was mounted over a wall-to-wall white board. Also near the front of the room a tall director’s chair was available for Elaine’s or a student presenter’s use. A shelf and countertop in the front corner opposite the door held dictionaries, scissors, and extra pens and pencils for students to borrow. Opposite that, near the entrance to the room, open shelves contained “choice books” for students’ use. Also near the entrance were plastic office trays where students would submit assignments and retrieve graded work.

Filling the center of the room, 30 student desks faced the front, six rows across and five deep.

Participants

My Role as a Researcher Participant and my Relationship to Site Participants

As noted in the introductory chapter, I come to this study with a particular interest in bringing reluctant and struggling adolescent readers into thoughtful conversations around texts. Over the course of twenty years of teaching in a variety of secondary school settings and many classes with mixed ability students, as well as two years of supervising student teachers, I have consistently been struck by the abilities of some non-readers to reason, discuss, and build cogent arguments at a high level of sophistication when a lesson is not dependent on a written text. Too often, I and my colleagues, peers, and more successful students have allowed these students to play catch-up roles or participate as bystanders, as more capable readers and the teacher set the discussion agenda and moved deeply into literary texts. I have also seen the negative outcomes of adolescents “checking out” or giving up when they do not feel connected to the classroom, their peers, the teacher, or the readings.

As a result of this, also mentioned in the introduction, I had tried using images—nonverbal texts—in my ELA classes and had seen a shift in the roles played by various higher and lower achieving students. Hence, I brought to this study expectations about the effectiveness of using nonverbal texts to reach a variety of students who had diverse abilities and proclivities. I also felt strongly that the use of nonverbal texts might be one

way that we, as a community of educators, might keep adolescents in school and invested in their own intellectual development.

In the spring semester of their tenth grade year, Weybridge students could choose from an array of proposed English electives, sometimes suggested and designed by students. Almost two years before the start of the study described here I approached Elaine, who was then the English department chair at Weybridge, for the first time. I inquired about teaching an English elective course on “reading” nonverbal texts. At the time, I was a doctoral student in adolescent literacy and teacher education at a nearby university. Elaine was encouraging and excited about the idea, and when it was time for students to make choices for the spring semester, the course description ran alongside those of other electives. She and I were both disappointed that too few students enrolled in my proposed elective for it to run. It was through that effort, though, that I learned Elaine and I had a shared interest in using nonverbal texts in secondary ELA.

Teacher Participant: Elaine

Elaine had experimented with using visual texts, including film and still, un-narrated shots from film as well as two-dimensional artwork, in her own classes to help students practice analysis and interpretation. In an informal conversation during that spring when I proposed the elective course, I asked Elaine whether she thought the experiences with visual texts she provided students helped her students achieve the interpretive, analytical goals she had set for them. She hesitated before answering: “I think so, but I can’t prove it or show it.” A short time later I sent her an email asking her to consider being a part of a possible dissertation study on including visual texts in the

teaching of ELA. She replied that she would like to participate and integrate that participation into her professional development plan (PDP), a requirement of the Steventon school system for all tenured teachers.

Elaine is in her seventh year of teaching, has a Master's degree in teaching English, and is certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She said she had always been "reading" visual texts and was excited to learn, in her English Masters in Teaching program, that the English curriculum could include visual texts:

I think I was initially introduced to the idea that the English classroom was more than just reading [traditional, verbal texts], that there were many different approaches, when I was in grad school ... in a media literacy class that I had to take. We did things like plan a unit around a TV show, plan a unit around print advertisements, talk about messages in images—you know, reading the image—and it really struck a chord with me.

Elaine thinks she was primed for this inclusion of nonverbal texts in ELA through her studies before her Master's program. As an undergraduate, she took an English class called *The World is a Ghetto* and the class "looked at ghetto spaces in literature, but we also included film and other non-print texts and so I was first intrigued there." She also shared her interest in studying advertising:

I've always been interested in advertising - I was a journalism [and English] double major for two years of college - specifically because I think media messages for me are very strong and I was always reading commercials. I was

doing things naturally that I felt lent themselves nicely to the same types of readings I was doing in my college English classes.

Elaine thought that her graduate school classes confirmed for her that nonverbal texts were legitimate texts for reading in ELA; she found that they promoted the development of many of the same skills as traditional verbal texts:

I think being taught [in the Master's in Teaching English courses] the history of the English classroom, and how it came to be and what the purpose is, and the goals of English being reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing, and that we're practicing a certain set of skills but that our texts can change ... for me it really opened up the possibilities of what the classroom could be about.

I found it interesting that, as Elaine described her interest in visual texts, her perspective as a student emerged. In addition to valuing nonverbal texts from the perspective of a teacher and one who influences the English curriculum, Elaine expressed her appreciation for the inclusion of nonverbal texts from the stance of one who is learning; she thought that it was “empowering” for her as a student:

To be taught that those are valuable skills equivalent to the same kinds of *reading*—more traditional print *reading*—was kind of empowering to me as a person, and I found the assignments really compelling. And I found myself able to speak really clearly and just enjoying the process.... [Interpreting texts that were not traditional print texts] was something I knew. I was very confident in my own skills to decode the world around me, and maybe a little more hesitant myself in

some other texts in traditional English classes. I felt real freedom and success in those classes [that invited me to interpret nonverbal texts].

Student Participants: Nick, Mary, Jody, Mike, and Melodie

This section provides brief, introductory descriptions of the five focus students, primarily as Elaine and I perceived them at the beginning of this study and of their 10th grade year. More in-depth descriptions follow in the findings chapters. I try to capture here what Elaine and I thought we knew of these students at the time we asked them to participate and why we asked these students rather than others. In the purposeful selection (Light, et al. 1990, as cited in Maxwell, 1995) of these student participants, Elaine and I were guided primarily by a desire to arrive at a group with a range of ELA skills and attitudes toward ELA.

In selecting participants, our discussions included (a) observations we made, separately, over two weeks of classroom interactions; (b) Elaine's impressions, formed through seeing students in other situations in the school, like the hallways, cafeteria, and town meetings; (c) several brief, in-class and informal "journal" writing samples from assigned prompts; and (d) Venn diagrams that students completed to describe themselves in an initial, introductory class assignment. To a lesser degree, we also considered how talkative and forthcoming the students seemed. We considered one student briefly, Wayne, but we were both concerned that he might be "too quiet"—i.e., more constrained and less forthcoming in his responses than what we were hoping for—and so decided to ask Mike, a student who seemed, at this early stage, to have similar abilities and approach to the class as exhibited by Wayne. The emphasis, though, was not on articulateness but

on gaining diversity of students in terms of their skills and attitudes to their ELA studies. One of the students we asked to participate declined, and so we asked another student who seemed to us to share similar attitudes and abilities.

Our selection of students was not based on previous grades or standardized test scores. Elaine was opposed, in principle, to looking up students' past grades and test scores. She wanted to meet the students unencumbered by any bias that this knowledge might promote. Elaine believed that students could change dramatically in a short time period and wanted these students to have a fresh start with her. I did not request institutional review board approval to look at the grades, as I wanted to be able to discuss with Elaine what she and I were seeing without trying to "keep" from her knowledge that she didn't want to have. So, we discussed these students throughout the semester, neither of us knowing about their past performance or grades in other classes unless the students divulged that information themselves. We did know, because Elaine sponsored the group, that Mary and Daniel (Daniel was not a focus student) were the only two members of the class invited to join National Honor Society.

Nick. After reading his initial writing assignments, both Elaine and I were struck by how sparse Nick's writing was compared to his consistent, enthusiastic, and fruitful contributions to class discussions. Some of my interest in him emanated from this disconnect, and I wondered whether his writing over the course of the semester might demonstrate differences if the source for the writing were a nonverbal or a verbal texts. Elaine shared that some of her "interest in Nick comes from having taught his older brother, who could barely write a sentence. I get such a different feel from Nick, and I'm

really curious to see about his writing, because his insight verbally is – he’s just so good in discussion. And he seems very open.” Nick also was the only African-American student in the class.

Mary. One of the two students in the class who was invited to join the National Honor Society at Weybridge, Mary is a high achiever. Once, when an assignment was due early in the semester, she came into class and pulled from her bag a two-page, single-spaced document. Other students affectionately teased her with: “Hey, what is that? You’re making us look bad!” Most of them had written about half a page. In her self-descriptive, Venn diagram assignment, Mary noted some anxiety about her ability to succeed and her concerns with getting things right. I found that Elaine was right when she said, in that week-two discussion: “I think Mary is very open, she allows you to see her inquiry in real time, like: Oh, I was thinking this and this and this.”

Jody. Elaine and I also wanted a focus student who had strong English skills but was less concerned with grades and excelling than Mary. Jody certainly exhibited this in her early writing. I asked Elaine whether she thought Jody was a stronger writer than Mary. “Maybe. I think she might have more insight. I think Mary is going to produce more. But Jody, I think -- I get the sense that her parents are very educated, she’s very educated. There’s just something about her background that has created a real complexity. She doesn’t volunteer as much as Mary... everything that Jody is doing is happening inside, in a very deep way. ... It’s hard to compare them.”

Mike. Elaine and I agreed that Mike was quieter in class than many others, and we both thought that, when he did contribute, he offered more literal than interpretive

responses. His early writing assignments were short and addressed the prompts, but did not reveal very in-depth thinking. (Mike was absent, due to illness, the entire last week of the study. During that week the class engaged in presentation and discussions of the final project. The third interview explored this final project, which was developed with participation from the entire class. He completed an alternative assignment after the study was finished that did not require such significant input from his classmates and did not affect this study. So, unlike the other focus students, Mike participated in the first two interviews, but not the third.)

Melodie. Both Elaine and I thought that Melodie entered her 10th grade year as a low achieving student, despite what we believed were her genuine efforts to succeed. Melodie's responses to both the verbal and nonverbal texts we used in class were quite literal and undeveloped. Elaine said, "I think she's a struggling student. I think she struggles in English. I think she struggles in a lot of her classes. I don't get the sense that she's a particularly strong student." I was also interested in talking with Melodie because of a reference she had made in an early journal assignment to her enjoyment in reading Manga texts. (Unfortunately, by the middle of the semester, Elaine had excused Melodie from the regular classes and asked her to go to a quiet study space so that Melodie could try to catch up with the course reading. There was also some talk among Melodie's teachers at about that point in time about identifying Melodie as having a learning disability and establishing an individualized educational program (IEP) for her to provide her with additional learning support. Elaine and I decided not to take any more of Melodie's time mid-semester as she was struggling so much to catch up with her work.

For this reason, Melodie was only interviewed twice for this study, once at the beginning and again at the end.)

Data Collection Procedures

In order to answer the research questions that guided my study, I used several data collection methods, as shown in Figure 3.1 and described below.

Field Notes from Classroom Observations

From the second day the class met, in early September, until the day before the winter break, I conducted daily observations of the class as a whole, typing running notes of what I heard and saw into my laptop computer. Because Elaine would be on maternity leave after the break and a substitute teacher would cover the final two weeks of the term, Elaine looked at this time frame as the whole semester and designed the courses so that her primary objectives would be covered in this time frame (September through December). The class met for 55 minutes, four days each week. After most classes, I read, edited, and commented on my notes so that I would more easily remember details and could better understand my many abbreviations.

On the first day of school, when I was not present (in accordance with Elaine's request), Elaine explained to the students that she wanted to participate in a study with a university doctoral student on using visuals to teach literacy skills. She explained that I would be present in class and would ask several students to volunteer to be interviewed about their thoughts on what was happening. Though this research was classified by the institutional review board as exempt, we provided the students with assent forms and asked that they have parents sign so that parents were apprised of the situation and knew

how to contact me if they had any questions. All of the assent forms were returned within the first week. Later, the focus students and their parents were given a second form, describing the one-on-one interviews they were being asked to participate in.

Beginning with the second day of class, I was visible to the students as I sat to the side of the room and typed running notes into a laptop. Elaine introduced me and, that day and as the term went forward, occasionally asked what I thought, I think mostly to humanize me for the students and make me less strange and more a natural part of the class. At the end of the first week, I invited students to ask me any questions and asked them whether it felt “creepy” to have me there. They responded affably and encouraged me to do my thing. Later, the five focus students, of course, had more of a sense of me as a person, as I’d ask for clarifications of what they said and tried to engage them in order to draw out their thoughts on the topics we addressed in the interviews.

Notes, Journal, and Memos

In addition to running field notes, I regularly wrote notes and memos for myself about what I saw and heard during class and in the student interviews, synthesizing what I thought was happening, noting possible relationships and emerging categories as well as possible themes and areas where I wanted to gather further information. I also made notes about conversations I had with Elaine after class (some of those conversations were recorded and later transcribed).

Interviews and Conversations

My research design included three formal and multiple informal interviews and conversations with Elaine, in addition to the interviews with the five focus students.

These interviews, with Elaine and with the focus students, took place at three different times: approximately three weeks into the semester, two to three weeks after that, and again in the last week of the term as the students were completing their final projects. As mentioned above, I did not meet with Melodie for the midterm interview, due to her falling behind in her work, or Mike for the final interview, due to his absence during the final project.

Artifacts

Students' work served at the outset to help Elaine and me in our selection of student participants. The focus students and I also referred to student work as common texts to prompt students' responses during the interviews. We spoke in the student interviews not only of the student's own work but also the work presented by other members of the class. I also examined handouts and PowerPoint slides that Elaine provided the students.

Table 1

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

RQs	Data Needed	Methods Used	Sample Selection	Analysis
RQ1: How does the teacher use nonverbal texts to develop students' meaning-making through texts?	Examples of Elaine's facilitation of meaning-making with nonverbal texts through curriculum planning/design and pedagogy	Whole-class observations Interviews with Elaine Examination of curriculum/assigned materials	One teacher, selected because of her interest in the topic and her commitment to learning more about it	Coding of observation notes and interview transcripts Connecting analysis Memo writing
RQ2: How does this approach in this English class affect students' learning in terms of:				
a.) making meaning through texts? (i.e., what happens in class and what do the participants do as they endeavor to make meaning through texts?)	Examples of students making meaning as they transact with verbal and nonverbal texts	Whole-class observations Students written work, e.g. journal writing about class discussions and classwork	Elaine's heterogeneous 10 th grade ELA class Five focus students selected due their diversity of attitudes toward and skills with ELA	Coding of observation notes, students' written work, and interview transcripts Connecting analysis Memo writing
b.) understanding their own processes as they endeavor to make meaning through verbal and nonverbal texts? (i.e., what are they understanding about what they're doing with these texts?)	Examples of students' thinking about the processes Elaine uses in class	Interviews with focus students Class observations of focus students	Five focus students selected due their diversity of attitudes toward and skills with ELA	Coding of observation notes, students' written work, and interview transcripts Connecting analysis Memo writing

Data Analysis Procedures

As described in the section above, the data sources I used to address my research questions included:

- Observation notes (field notes)
- Notes, memos, journal
- Interview transcripts – student interviews (13) and teacher interviews (three formal and multiple informal)
- Artifacts (student work and course handouts)

To manage the data, I initially grouped and arranged it chronologically in three segments, aligned with the first, second, and third set of interviews. While sets of interviews with the focus students (the first set taking place three weeks into the semester, the second taking place two to three weeks after that, and the third in the last week of the term) didn't take place on the same day due to students' availability, the interviews did take place within days of each other, and so the students and I were discussing approximately the same classes, assignments, and texts. This allowed me to consider their experiences and observations individually as well as compare them with each other. I.e., each focus student and I were talking about, approximately, the same body of information in each of the three interviews.

An approximate breakdown of the data segments I examined follows:

- Segment 1 (roughly three weeks), included:
 - the first set of interviews with the focus students and the teacher
 - observations of the whole class during the first 2-3 weeks of class)

- in-class, informal “journal” entries written by students about texts and about their meaning-making with texts
- Segment 2 (roughly eight weeks), included:
 - the second set of interviews with the focus students and the teacher
 - observations of the whole class as the participants studied *A Separate Peace*, examples of advertising, *Of Mice and Men*, and much of *Kite Runner*
 - observations of the whole class as they developed, presented, and discussed their two “metaphor projects”
- Segment 3 (roughly 2 weeks) included:
 - the last set of interviews with the focus students and the teacher
 - observations of the whole class as they developed, presented, and discussed their final, “image essay,” projects

Analysis of Data

Throughout the data collection process, I made notes on what I saw and heard and questions that were forming for me as I tried to capture my ideas about what was developing in the study. My analysis of the interview data began during each of the interviews.

I began with an unstructured protocol—a list of questions I thought would prompt the students to talk about their experiences with ELA in the past and their thinking about what Elaine was asking them to do in class. As the students and I interacted during the interviews and I gained clearer insight into their experiences, I responded to comments

they made with unplanned follow-up questions. Also, new questions were added to the interview protocols for some students due to something another student or Elaine said in their interview or because of something that emerged during class (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). So, the interview questions were not exactly the same for each student in a given segment. My guiding principle in my work with the focus students was not to compare students' parallel experiences, but rather to learn "what's going on here?" (Maxwell, 2005) in terms of the range of experiences of these students. If one interview provided me the insight to ask a different question or ask a similar question differently, I did so.

Connecting strategies. After the initial set of interviews (Segment 1) and again after several of the midterm interviews (during Segment 2), I listened to the recordings of the interviews I had conducted at those points in their entirety. I paid close attention to possible emerging categories and themes and noted, with more focused attention than I was able while conducting the interviews, what the participants saw as important. I also listened with the conscious intent of trying to understand what the participants were experiencing through their perspectives. Over the course of the data collection period and several weeks following, I transcribed all of the interviews (13 student interviews and three interviews with Elaine along with several portions of impromptu conversations with Elaine that I had recorded). Listening to the participants' voices—hearing again their emphases, hesitations, and places they might have sounded eager, impatient, or uncertain—aided my subsequent reading and re-reading of transcripts. Participants' nonverbal communication, expressed in their voices or pauses, remained for me a part of

the meaning of the transcripts, meaning that may have been lost without that intensive, aural review of the interviews.

Multiple interviews with each participant allowed me to compare not only participants' impressions and experiences with those of other participants but also across their own individual interviews and with my impressions of what was happening as the semester unfolded. In these ways, I was trying to get a sense of how the individual students were thinking about and responding to the approaches Elaine used and of their respective impressions of what was happening with the class as a whole.

Emerging categories. Initially, in reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, I noted—in the margins and in pencil—what I found interesting, especially as related to my research questions and participants' processes of meaning-making as readers, learners, creators, writers, or viewers. I then went through the same process as I read my observation notes and memos, although by this stage I was already seeing overlap and difference; i.e., I was not only making observations, I was engaging in comparison as well as adding new topics to what I was seeing in my field notes and in my memos (Glaser and Straus, 1967).

Following this first step of reading, re-reading, and annotating the data, I wrote about what I was seeing. From that memo and from the marginalia I had made in the data, I made a list of the ideas that repeated in the different slices of the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) or that I thought were relevant in terms of the processes of meaning-making that the students and Elaine engaged in. For example, for the data in Segment 3, I

listed the following emerging categories; I have placed them into four groups here to show some of the similarities and overlapping meanings I saw:

Group 1:

- “Socially constructed meaning” (students collaborate to create meaning from a text; shared ideas scaffold new meaning-making for others)
- “Revision/ Development” (this is often related to socially constructed meaning because, when I was able to see it happening, it was primarily done by a student in response to comments or observations made by others)
- “Sequence” / “order” / “progression” (occurrences when students could articulate or I could observe steps in the process of creating meaning—this was also generally constructed with or in response to others)

Group 2:

- “Aesthetic” / “Evidence” / “Analysis” (students refer to features in the text to draw conclusions or form opinions about meaning communicated with the text)
- “Expressive” / “Emotional” (emotional or gut response to text, with little or no attention to how this response is formed; i.e., without reference to what, in the text, evoked such a response)
- “Representational” / “Mimetic” / “Literal” / “Illustrative” (this refers to communication (text) that strives to achieve, or is understood as achieving, some one-to-one correspondence with something it represents; it is seen as imitative, accurate, “efferent” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), or embedded with “autonomous” meaning (Street, 1995)).

Group 3:

- “Awareness” / “metacognition”: (often related to, and might eventually be blended with, “sequencing,” above; refers to students noticing their own processes of creating meaning)
- “Audience” (awareness of and/or attention to the experience of a perceiver who will interact with a text and create meaning)

(The interview transcripts showed that some focus students demonstrated confusion and contradictions with these ideas—even within themselves, esp. Jody)

Group 4:

- Influence or effects of: technology and/or Google Images

Analysis of the data in segments 1 and 2 produced the same list as did analysis of Phase 3, above, though with these additional emerging categories:

- “Coverage” (refers to the notion that there are ideas housed in texts and that the combination of the ideas and the texts that convey them must be “covered” in class, i.e., a body of knowledge must be transmitted from authority (teacher and/or text) to student (Street, 1995): to some students, this is the purpose of reading: to get that knowledge from the texts)
- “English as art” (refers to ways in which literature and other arts, and authors and artists, are similar or different or ways in which there is some comparison made or implied between the two)

After deciding that these topics seemed important to the study, at least temporarily, I returned again to my data and reread it all—interview transcripts, field

notes, and memos—and this time in the margins and with ink rather than pencil, so I could see the development of my thinking, I noted, in very short form, examples of the above topics. I then constructed tables, one for each of the focus students. I listed the above topics along the left side and then cut and pasted examples of each student's thinking (generally quotes from the interviews) regarding that topic in the table to help me see and organize the emerging categories. This provided me with a means to collect responses and quickly review how each of the focus students responded to the topics raised by the class, the other focus students, Elaine, or themselves. See Figure 3.2 for an excerpt of such a table.

Table 2:

Excerpt of a Coding Table for Mary						
Representational (Efferent) Mimetic, Illustrative, Literal (Suggests that there's an inherent "it" contained within the text) i.e., Capturing something that's there, more than creating something	*1.2 I'm good at remembering things from books. I can describe to you almost perfectly [from freshman year] ...the man in 1984 who lent Winston the room in the shop. I can describe to you exactly what I thought he looked like, but I can't tell you what the point of that story was.	1.9 **something that bothered me the <i>entire</i> time is where he was looking. I couldn't figure out <i>why</i> he was looking over there. I still don't know. It still bothers me.	3.2 I found the pictures first. I knew I wanted to outline the rules on women and the Taliban.			
	1.4 I think right now we're looking at what the author wants – what the author's response to what they saw, what they're putting on paper is. And how it's supposed to make us think and	*** →K: So what you're doing this year, you feel like it's more attached to what's on the page? As opposed to: I looked at the page and now this is how I	→ K: And is that true when we're talking about the poems and the short stories <i>and</i> the pictures? Or more on than another? M: yeah, I think it's the same	1.5 K: Would [Rosenblatt's rules] help you [defend your position in class discussions]? when you think about yourself in class – so, okay, 8 th grade's past, going forward, if	1.8 TS: I first thought it was a decrepit French palace. I didn't see the spray paint. I thought it was ornate decorations. So once I realized it was spray	1.9 GS: I liked how it just changed every time. ... But I started out with him being a slave . a slave boat, and he was just finding his peace
Aesthetic (includes evidence, support) There is an INTERACTION or TRANSACTION; something new is made with the text OR In this participant's case,						

anti-aesthetic or
aesthetic-resistant

go to a certain
point. →

feel and you'd
get to kind of
separate the two
[what's on page
and what you
feel] a little
more – or ?
M: Nodding
and chewing. →

[thin voice here
– sounds like
she's still
thinking]

you said smthg
and somebody
tried to shoot
you down, like
happened before,
do you feel like
you'd be better
able now to
maybe push back
a little bit?

M: ye..ah [a little
hesitant] .. I'm
also not the best
at supporting my
answers with the
text. I sort of
take a
roundabout and:
oh this makes
sense and oh
this, then oh
wait, and then
I'm like: where
did I come from?
But, um, I feel
like I would be
better prepared
by Rosenblatt,
yeah.

paint, I was
kind of like:
well, I still
think it could
be a palace, but
.. I know I
didn't have that
much of a
reaction to it.
My first
reaction to the
palace was
like: Oh, that's
beautiful! And
then I realized
there was
graffiti on it
and I was ..
Oh, that's ..
weird. I don't –
you know, I
was like: that's
ruined. Great.

[piece?] and
he was really
worried, he
was looking
for his family
and of course
they weren't
there, they
weren't on the
boat. He was
being
mistreated, he
was tied
down, all this
bad stuff. And
then after that
I realized very
quickly that
he was on a
tiny boat and
there was
nobody else.
And he – it
was
interesting. I
never noticed
the boat [ship]
in the corner,
until someone
pointed it out
and
something
that bothered
me the *entire*

Autonomous meaning
References to “right”
answer or meaning
inherent in the text

Ø

Expressive/emotional;
Experience over
thinking,
reaction over evidence

1.4 [In previous
English classes]
we haven’t done
as much
analyzing...what
we’ve been doing
is our responses.

1.7 [The
Snowman
poem] made me
kind of sad. I
just felt like it
was a giant
metaphor for all
this stuff. The
class was like:
well this is how
to analyze – I
was like: no it’s
just a big
metaphor [for a
feeling of
sadness?]

2.8 [Referring
to the study of
art and literature
together]: I
think that
there’s a deeper
personal
connection to
both, and I
don’t think it
should be set in
stone the way
anybody
analyzes
anything, but ...
K: like, leave
room for the
personal

JRNL (Boy at
Window) Write
your first
impression on
reading the
poem: I think
that for the little
boy the
snowman is a
metaphor for
something else.
This poem made
me really sad,
and the phrasing
is very tender. I
think this poem
could be a
metaphor for

→ The poem
could also just
symbolize the
relationship
between man
and his
creations. How
what you make
is a part of
yourself and
when it suffers,
you suffer.
This is a
humbling
poem and
speaks to me. It
brings up
emotions I

time is where
he was
looking. I
couldn’t
figure out *why*
he was
looking over
there. I still
don’t know. It
still bothers
me.

SCM
(socially constructed
meaning)

2.7 K: Do [other
students, in class
discussions] ever
change your
mind?

M: Yeah.

K: How do they
do that?

M: Half the time,
I'll say something
and I'll still be
working it out
while I'm saying
it, so as soon as
someone says
something else, I

3.2-3 I didn't
even think
about them
being non-
humanized. I
got how the
burqas non-
humanized
them. I got to
the point where
I was like: well
they don't look
like humans,
but I didn't
fully realize
that's why.

connection?

M: Yeah.

watching
someone die.
The being dying
isn't upset, just
sad that the
others are so
sad/afraid. This
poem could also
be about the
emotions we feel
for those who we
create and see
(or just see) in
what we on the
outside see as a
sad or painful
situation. →

usually try to
suppress.

Next journal:
The poem is
about the
compassion we
have for our
creations.
[Her father was
diagnosed with
terminal brain
cancer and died
3 months after
this was
written]

3.3 I remember
Nick got my
thesis spot on,
and he was the
first one to say
anything.
Which was
really nice.

Google Images or Technology

realize that what they're saying is actually what I meant – what I was going to get to in like a YEAR, and that I should just jump to their point.	They just don't think of them as humans. When Elaine brought it up, I went: ohhhhhhh. That's what I was saying!
3.1 we [American journalists] didn't go in and take a bunch of pictures of women in burqas, just in ordinary life. So I was mostly trying to illustrate the rules of the Taliban on women, and there's not that many pictures of that.	3.1 It was REALLY HARD to find a burqa in every pose [?]. Really hard. And that's why I got rid of a lot of pictures – because they didn't have a burqa – they had a nijab or one of the other 2 or 3 types of head coverings.

*Numbers preceding each entry in the table refer to interview number (i.e., the first, second, or third interview with the participant) and the page number of the transcript. So, for example, “2.4-5” indicates that the quote can be found in the second interview transcript on pp. 4-5.

** In reference to *Gulf Stream*, John A asked if we were going to tell him what the guy was looking at outside of the frame (similar to Mary, to some degree his expectation was that the painting referred to an actual event).

***The arrow symbol (→) indicates that the quotation is continued in an adjacent cell.

Chapter Four: Findings, Whole Class

“The point here is not to eliminate different readings but to support them.” –

Elaine

My primary finding in this study is that the students and Elaine, together, became engrossed in the processes of constructing meaning. Creations of meanings were grounded in the various texts—whether verbal or nonverbal—but the meaning-making was the result of shared transactions among the texts and the community of perceptors. In the environment Elaine and her students created together, it was impossible to anticipate a single answer to “what does this text mean?” or to expect the teacher to dispense the final word on “the” meaning of a text. Also, after some initial practice, no student seemed comfortable providing a response to a text that was not text-based.

To review, my research questions were:

1. How does the teacher use nonverbal texts to develop students’ meaning-making through texts?
2. How does this approach, in this English class, affect students’ learning in terms of their:
 - processes of meaning-making through texts?
 - understanding of the processes they use as they endeavor to make meaning through verbal and nonverbal texts?

Within this milieu of shared, constructivist meaning-making, I found that:

- Students interacted regularly and readily with both verbal and nonverbal texts, and integration of the two modes in the class was natural and seemed to take place unconsciously.
- This integration of different modes precluded any emphasis on texts as entities complete unto themselves or holding fixed, autonomous meanings; students' attention was focused on the meaning-making process—i.e. the readers' / perceivers' transactions with the texts was the focus, not the texts as autonomous and separate from the readers / perceivers.
- Nonverbal texts provided opportunities for immediate, visible, shared transactions more readily than verbal texts did.
- Students developed critical, analytical, and aesthetic interpretive skills using both modes (verbal and nonverbal). The students' initial practice with the more immediately accessible nonverbal texts provided simultaneity in the opportunities for them to practice and for Elaine to model these skills, which they then used for subsequent texts, both verbal and nonverbal.
- Students' voices were prevalent throughout the discussions and increased over the course of the semester, though the more complex, typically verbal, texts brought Elaine's voice into the discussion more often.
- Elaine's participation, however, was not autonomous (Street, 1995) or authoritative during discussions; it was instead like that of a master craftsman modeling a well-developed skill to be practiced by apprentices.

- Very early in the semester, the students—some easily, some with more effort—let go of a tendency to seek a single, correct answer; there was no place for that approach in the meaning-making processes engaged in in this classroom.
- A few students offered brief defenses of a predominately expressive approach.
- Several of the focus students, at times, demonstrated some confusion about the use of Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading and of the use of nonverbal texts in ELA. This confusion resulted, to some extent, in resistance to the interpretive processes Elaine was teaching. Lack of understanding of the efferent, aesthetic, and expressive stances toward reading may have contributed to these misunderstandings and resistances.

These last two bullet points, which emerged largely through interviews with the focus students, are discussed briefly in this chapter and in greater detail in the next.

Making meaning: Reading and perceiving verbal and nonverbal texts

From the start of the semester, I encountered a community of exploration in Elaine’s classes; each student’s journey was far more important than any destination. After initiating the study of a given literary or nonverbal text with opportunities to write in response to questions like, “What is your gut reaction?” followed by “what, in the text, made you feel that way?” Elaine encouraged students to allow classmates’ responses to influence their own: “Draw a line after what you’ve written, after your thoughts. Then you can feel free to write what others share as we talk about it.” Not only was it clear to the students and to me that, in this class, it was their thinking about the texts—and their thinking about the transactions they were making with the texts—that mattered; it was

apparent that, when interpreting a text, there was no expectation of a response that couldn't be further developed. The students quickly became comfortable offering ideas and unfinished thoughts as well as what they might have termed "answers." These shared ideas and thoughts were treated as contributions to be examined and then kept or discarded, as each student considered paths to follow and options to weigh. In this environment, any "answers" clearly lay in the transactions among the students, the teacher, and the texts, not in the "authority" of the teacher or a text (Street, 1995).

Building Foundations: A Reader's Lens

In order to introduce and emphasize the transactional nature of the reading process, Elaine began the school year with an exercise that drew attention to the effects of a "reader's lens" on the meaning a reader creates with a text. On the second day of class, Elaine distributed a handout with standard recommendations on how to annotate a written text, recommendations such as circling words or phrases that impede understanding and attending to the titles and subheadings provided. Not entirely satisfied with the recommendations on this handout, Elaine said to the class:

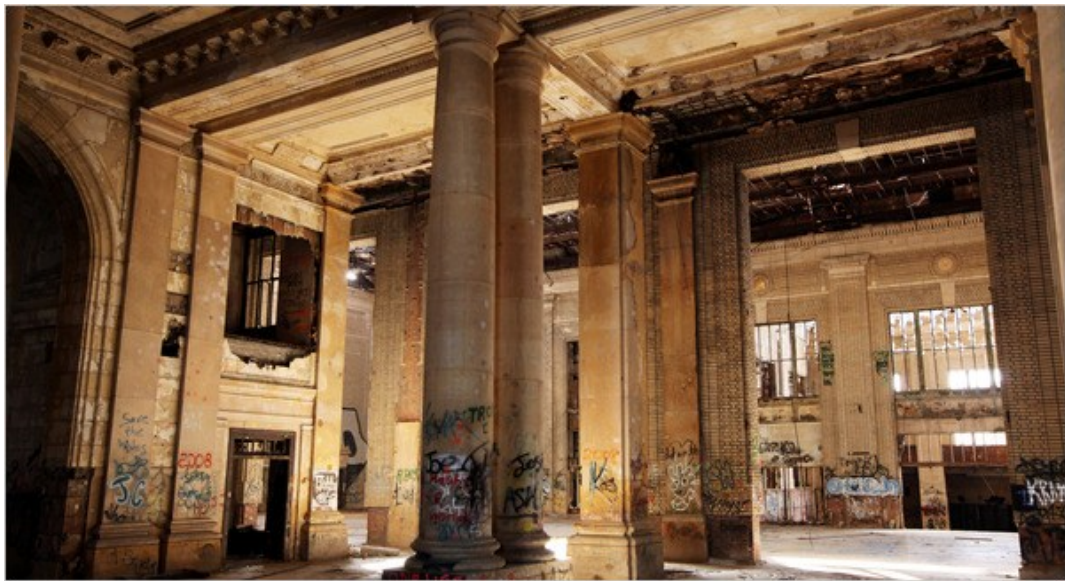
One thing that I'd like you to add: Pay attention to your first thought about something. Your first impressions.... If you read something and have a gut reaction, note that. Especially in literature, when you have an emotional, impactful thought, it's nice to record your gut response. Then we can think about your brain responding. It might be: "I don't agree with this." "Wow" might help you remember your thought. Keep track of the way that you're thinking about a text.

She followed this with a series of readings of a single, very short (less than one-page) “story” entitled “The House” (Pichert & Anderson, 1977). Students were asked to perform a reading of the text from first one, then another, and then a third assigned perspective. This “story” was actually just a brief, informational description of a visit by one boy to another boy’s home: The inhabitant of the house shared facts about the various rooms and their contents and purposes, seemingly with no particular goal other than to introduce his friend to the layout of, and some of the possessions in, his home. Elaine asked the students to read the story and then practice the annotation skills they’d just reviewed. The students took pens and highlighters from bags and pockets and began to read the story.

I observed a variety of student reactions as they did this, reactions ranging from a few students enthusiastically highlighting and writing, to others reading and not writing, to some reading, re-reading and then fiddling with their writing implements. After a few minutes of some awkwardness, Elaine told the students to re-read the piece, but this time to read and annotate from the perspective of a thief. The climate in the room changed abruptly. “Ah!” one student exclaimed, as many heads bent over desks and all the students eagerly and comfortably undertook the now sensible task. Through their annotations, the students could acknowledge the significance of the closet with the father’s rare coin collection and the fact that the mother left the door unlocked for the younger siblings when she wasn’t home on Thursdays. For a third reading, Elaine had the students change pen or highlighter colors and annotate from the perspective of a real estate agent. Here students noted the master suite addition and problems with the

plumbing. In these latter two readings, unlike the first, all the students actively engaged with the text, highlighting segments and making notes in the margins.

Elaine then initiated a discussion of readers' various possible lenses. It was clear to me, to the students, and to Elaine that the meaning students made of that short story varied depending on the stance they took. The goal of the highlighting exercise was to support those meanings. "Each of you is wearing a different lens," Elaine told them. "If someone's wearing yellow, blue, pink, lenses—if you're looking through a colored lens, you'll see that color. And it's okay; I just want you to be aware of that." These words set the tone for much of the work the class did with texts throughout the semester.



In your view, what is this about? To you, what does it mean?

*Figure 1: First nonverbal text presented to students in Elaine's class
Michigan Central Train Station, by Stephen McGee for *The New York Times**

Practicing “Reading”: Rosenblatt’s Criteria Applied to Texts, Both Nonverbal and Verbal

The class engaged with their first visual text, *Michigan Central Train Station*, projected before them on the Smart Board and distributed to them in color copies, during their next meeting. The students were not told the name of the photograph or any information about it. Though the photograph was in color, the dominating structure—an old, abandoned train station—appeared in sepia tones due to its cream-colored walls and the subtle lighting. Distinctive in the image were the lofty height of the ceiling, classical architecture, looming columns, and high, large, sunlit windows. Layers of bold, colorful graffiti covered most of the lower portions of the pillars and walls. Looking more closely, one could see that this grand, elegant building was dilapidated, home to exposed wires and peeling plaster.

Elaine directed the students to ignore the verbal text below the picture (beneath the image, were the typed words: “In your view, what is this about? To you, what does it mean?”), and to free-write their initial response to the image. As they settled in to write, she further instructed them to:

Look at the detail. ... Write down the detail [you’re referring to] so you can remember. Respond with your first instinct. Remember about recording your first instincts. If you have a gut feeling, record it. What do you think it’s about? How does it strike you? ... Just write down the way you personally are responding.

Several minutes later she followed this with: “Once you record your gut feeling, then look at the directions [the verbal text beneath the image]. “What does it mean?” is kind of a big one in English. Write as much as you need to answer this question.”

I was surprised when she told the students they had “longer than usual—15-20 minutes” to write. This seemed a long time for 10th graders, untrained in visual analysis, to respond to an image. A few students stopped writing after only a few minutes and did not continue. A few more wrote for the entire allotted time, breaking only to look up at the board and study the picture. Many other students wrote for a few minutes and stopped, seemingly finished, and then picked up their pens and wrote again, often more than once. So, many of the students did make use of all the time provided.

Despite Elaine’s probing questioning—“What is it about?” “What does it mean to you?”—the students first responded on a very literal, informational level, offering answers on the efferent end of Rosenblatt’s continuum; they suggested answers that could be proved right or wrong by checking factual information provided either in the image or in researchable, contextual information about the photographer or the site of his work. Their role in the process of creating meaning was minimal. The students focused on determining what was physically represented in the photo and where the photograph was taken (Elaine had not yet shared the title of the image). As clues, they referenced both the architecture and the graffiti: “2008” was spray painted on one column, and the writing was in English. Their guesses included London, Los Angeles, New York, and Detroit. In trying to identify the building, they wondered aloud about the function of the building based on what they saw in the photograph:

Nick: The place itself is somewhere public; there's nothing like a desk; it's not a shop. It's like [a nearby transit station] – it could be anywhere in [our state].

Melodie: It looks like an old abandoned train station. It's big. It will hold a lot of people.

Elaine then provided the students with the factual information they were seeking, giving them an “answer.” This, however, was not the end, but the beginning of the inquiry. She did this in order to move students closer to the kinds of transactions with this photograph that she wanted them to experience. She told them the photograph was of a train station in Detroit. Remarkably, to me and to Elaine, from that point the students' thinking became more insightful and inferential. No longer were they partaking in an informational guessing game about location and function, expecting someone to arrive at the winning answer. We found that many of the students knew something of Detroit and its economic struggles, and they combined that prior knowledge with what they saw projected before them. They made richer meanings once context and their associations were brought to bear on this nonverbal text. With no intervention from Elaine beyond the provision of the locale of the photograph, students began to consider the artwork captured within the photo—the graffiti and the architecture—as meaningful elements of a more meaningful whole:

John A.: it's about showing that during a certain time what's elegance (*sic*) and a cultural icon goes away. Then what people see as disgusting art, graffiti, turns it into a different atmosphere. It's better [with the graffiti] in my opinion. It shows the culture in

Detroit. The economy and all affects people's mindset. This says that the people there are free thinkers.

...

Ethan: I agree with John A. to me it shows how abandoned—how people go in and mess around with it. It could be a metaphor for something else, like how something beautiful could be destroyed over time.

Oscar: I thought the picture represents change or abandonment or both. This [place] didn't change because people wanted it to change.

Zach: It represents grunge and new age stuff in Detroit. It's about what different generations find tasteful. Now it's spray paint. Some people find that beautiful.

Elaine: So it's still beautiful even though it's been taken over by people with different values?

John R: It shows a new world order – new meets old: architect art meets graffiti art. [They're] just as substantial, new and old art.

Elaine: There is a big English word: *juxtaposition* – it's when we put two things side by side to bring out their differences; this new overlay gives us a new message.

Wes: it shows a loss of innocence. Like in Detroit, a lot of people are out of jobs. It shows when people had transportation, jobs, and there was movement. Now it's graffiti, a loss of innocence. Violence can corrupt people and make them act violently; but a loss of innocence says there is still some goodness left in them.

...

Melodie: It's new and old next to each other. [The building was] built by an older generation, [and they] stylized it; it represents them; they left bits of themselves. It's the same with the new generation [through the use of graffiti].

...

Lyn: It shows the deterioration of old art and then the new art. In the picture, there's more graffiti on the bottom – but maybe it's working up, maybe the whole building will be consumed by graffiti.

Students began to imagine people who might have created both the architecture and the graffiti and considered what may have been their motivations and inspirations. They also began to see the image as a composition that could, as a whole, evoke complex meaning, not merely as a representation of a particular building in a particular time and place. They were beginning to link their responses to elements present in the text.

While listening to this exchange and reading and re-reading it in my field notes, I was struck by two things: First, the degree to which the students' (predominately sympathetic) conceptions of Detroit, its people, and its circumstances affected their reading of the image. Second, I noted the extent to which the students comfortably built on each other's thoughts and impressions—with no contestations of ownership and no race to get somewhere (a correct or teacher-approved answer). Beginning with an evocative, nonverbal text and combining the contributions of classmates who had varying degrees of prior knowledge and impressions of Detroit, most of the students quickly, and with little intervention from Elaine, left the realm of the literal and transacted more deeply with this nonverbal text, arriving at rich, aesthetic creations of meaning. There

was also no expectation that the students would arrive at the same meaning; contributions were offered for the taking or the leaving. This was more of a group brainstorm than a building of a single response. I also noted that the students used the concept of juxtaposition, both before and after Elaine named it.

Oscar brought the class back from their musings, challenging how much they could bring to the text that's not clearly present in it: "Do we know if there's a reason for the graffiti...? Maybe it's just for fun. How do we know if we should take it seriously or not? Should we go so deep, saying it represents the economy in Detroit...?"

Despite these concerns, in their written responses following the discussion, many of the students did indeed go "deep." In the last few minutes of the period, Elaine brought the discussion to a close and asked the students to try writing a thesis statement capturing their individual interpretations of the image. "This is a reach," she said. "Could you write a thesis statement?: 'This picture is about... and I could support it... This image means... This is about....'" Some students wrote that the image suggested a loss of innocence, others wrote of the expression of different artists at different times—the original architects and artisans and then the recent graffiti artists—each wanting to leave his or her mark. One student was uncomfortable about writing down an argument about what the text might mean. John A. asked Elaine: "What if you don't *know*?" Elaine explained that, in this activity, "knowing" an answer wasn't called for; asserting and defending one possible interpretation was. John A. was struggling with relinquishing his expectation that he should come to "know" an intended meaning embedded in a text rather than create a meaning based on his transaction with the text.

Elaine had intended to include the study of a poem during that same class period, following the “reading” of the image *Michigan Central Train Station*. Her plan was to emphasize and practice the same processes of meaning making but with a verbal text. The discussion of the image, however, was involving enough that Elaine altered her plan during the class period. In response to my question afterward about whether she had intended the lesson on the image to last the whole period, Elaine told me with some excitement:

No! I had a whole agenda for the day that we didn’t get to. What I gave them for homework was going to be done in class. I’ll do it later. ...Wow, this is the group I thought was going to be slower! I’m so impressed with what they came up with!

Parallel reading process with a verbal text. The homework then was to read—to transact with—the Richard Wilbur poem “Boy at the Window” (Appendix A) and answer the same questions they had answered for the image: “In your view, what is this about? To you, what does it mean?” When Elaine assigned the homework, she instructed the students again to “pay attention to your gut reactions ... answer the question ... and write as much as you can.”

The next day, Elaine began the class with a warm-up, asking each of the students to turn their written homework response into one sentence. She told them they might begin their responses with “‘The Boy at the Window’ is about....” After that, in initiating the class discussion of “Boy at the Window,” Elaine reminded the students that their homework had been to answer the same questions they had answered for the “reading” of the *Michigan Central Train Station*. She wanted to demonstrate to them that, though the

texts were made up of qualitatively different elements, the processes used to make meaning for each shared significant similarities. She also reminded students of the earlier, reader's lens exercise in which students read "The House" from three different perspectives when she said: "The key is 'in your view.' Everyone will be coming at it personally. What is the angle you took?" Her aim was to engage students in shared, active meaning-making, much like they had done for the photograph, only this time with verbal text.

On its surface, the poem is about a boy looking out a window through a snowy, stormy night at the snowman he had created earlier in the day. He feared for the snowman's safety and that fear showed in the boy's face. In the second of the two stanzas, the snowman's perspective is expressed. The snowman is able to empathize with the boy and feel the fear the boy is experiencing on his behalf. The snowman sees that, though the boy is physically safe and warm inside the house, he is yet tormented by "so much fear."

Mike, leading off the discussion, shared his initial understanding that the boy feared the snowman being taken away by the storm. He compared this to his experience of making a sandcastle on the beach and his sadness about knowing it would be washed away. He made a reference to the name "Adam" in the poem and evidently took the name "Adam" as simply the name of the boy character and made no reference or allusion to "Adam" of the Old Testament creation story. At this point, Mike was reading the poem as a literal narrative. The allusion to the creation story didn't seem to have occurred to any of the other students either. Elaine briefly reviewed the story, making note of the name

“Adam.” As happened the day before when Elaine contributed “Detroit” to the discussion of the train station photo, more insightful and less literal meaning-making then ensued, built upon this association. After some discussion about the weight and abruptness of the word “fear” relative to other words in the poem, a point raised by Mary (“I didn’t feel like the “fear” fit the poem. If I had written it, I would have put a different word. Maybe it [the word “fear”] was [there] for the juxtaposition of “warmth, love, light”), John A. recognized an extended metaphor: “[So] the boy is like God looking at Adam!” Elaine responded simply: “I think you could make that argument.” It is interesting that Elaine didn’t respond more definitively, as in: “Yes, that’s right.” The students arrived at a meaning Elaine believed was plausible (“the boy is like God looking at Adam”), and Elaine confirmed that it was a good argument—one that could be defended. She did not, though, present that argument herself, assert that the final word was hers, or in any way let the students think that John A’s thought was “the correct” or final answer representing a true, singular meaning of the poem.

So, similar to the pursuit to discover the location of the train station in the photograph the day before, the students’ discussion of “Boy at the Window” began with a rather literal evocation of the situation presented in the text. And, like the discussion of the train station image, Elaine provided a pivot point—this time the allusion to the creation story—from which the students were then able to penetrate more deeply, creating more complex meaning: Lyn said, “[When you told us about the creation story,] I imagined Adam turning and looking at Paradise.” In the discussion of this verbal text though, unlike with the image, Elaine participated more regularly in the discussion, more

often offering thoughts that students then built upon. Elaine provided information, but the students actively used it to create meaning that they had not made when they studied the poem for homework without her or their classmates.

In this example, class members, including Elaine, again experienced transacting with the text and each other's ideas and experiences to create new meanings. Elaine scaffolded their meaning-making by sharing her own reactions and the specific elements of the poem that affected her. As compared to the discussion around the image, this time Elaine contributed more often, enhancing the group's meaning-making with her expertise about the allusion. She was not, though, demonstrating that she had "an answer" or that the students' role was to await information from her. They still made meaning together, but this time Elaine engaged more prominently than with the nonverbal text.

Criteria for a Valid Reading: How We Make Aesthetic Meaning with Texts—Verbal and Nonverbal

In these first few days of the semester, students were beginning to practice meaning-making as Elaine had hoped: They were referring to aspects of the image or the poem that were affecting the meanings they were in the process of creating, and they also were weighing the input of other class members and using that to revise and build upon their initial responses. The elements in the texts—verbal or nonverbal—and the contributions of others as they made meaning with the same text combined to help these students create meanings.

At this point, Elaine also wanted the students to think about *how* they were making meaning. In the lesson using "The House," above, Elaine demonstrated and then

explained how a reader's stance can affect meaning. In a subsequent lesson, described below, Elaine led the students in another discussion about how meaning is *made*, rather than discovered or transmitted intact and immutable. Again, the attention was placed on the processes involved in meaning-making, and Elaine focused on these processes whether the text was verbal or nonverbal. She did not lead students to a single answer embedded in the text or suggest that there was an authority on what a literary text can mean.

At the close of the discussion of "The Boy at the Window," Elaine said: "Who's 'right' and whose interpretation is legitimate is a big source of contention." She then described for the students a meeting she'd once had with a parent. That parent told her that "he had felt like English [class] was a place where you come and someone tells you what something means, and your job was to accept it. That's not my experience or belief," Elaine said. "I was raised at a different time, and people had a different view of what interpretation is." She then displayed the following discussion questions on the board:

1. Who gets to say what something "means"?
2. What kinds of experiences have you had in the past with interpretation in the English classroom? In other words, who's been "right" about what something meant?
3. What kind of balance do you need between what you think it means and what the author "says" it means (if the author does)?

On the same slide, in a shaded box set apart from the rest, was the phrase: “Finding the balance between your interpretation and the author’s intent.”

“We have to establish parameters for our interpretations. Sometimes an interpretation is not okay,” she said. “Any initial thoughts?” The discussion that followed extended Elaine’s constructivist approach to helping students become better makers of meaning. Though it was not about a verbal literary text or an evocative nonverbal text, the discussion was another example of students extending each other’s thinking. This time the discussion was not about making meaning with a particular text, but about making meaning with texts in general. Students expressed a range of ideas, reflecting some of the theoretical stances one might find in a literary theory class. Though I think the students had already been affected by the approach they’d taken to generating meaning with texts in the first few days of Elaine’s class, I also believe, particularly because it was so early in the semester, that the ideas expressed here were mostly formed prior to these students entering Elaine’s classroom. The following comments illustrate how thoughtfully students were considering meaning-making with texts—and had been, I believe, before coming into Elaine’s class; the deep thinking that many of them were capable of with regard to their transactions with texts; and the ability of so many of them to listen to and build on each other’s ideas:

Oscar: If the author says it means something, then that’s what it means. J.D. Salinger wanted *Catcher in the Rye* to mean what it means.

Lyn: Yeah. People look for stuff that isn’t there. What does this desk mean? It’s a desk. That’s it.

[Some other students, very enthusiastically, in response: Yeah!]

John R: [Disagreeing] There is some kind of information provided; it's up to you to interpret it. That's the point of English. You can take what you want out of it.

Elaine: Remember last week we talked about "lens?" [These comments are] an example of the different perspectives [people can bring to interpreting texts].

John A: When an author writes something, they're putting it out there; they don't control what happens after they put it out. Even though Salinger kept rights to [*A Catcher in the Rye*], the killer of John Lennon interpreted it much differently. An individual [reader] gets to say [what he thinks it means]. (John A. is referring here to Mark David Chapman citing J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* as he attempted to justify his murder of John Lennon.)

Jody: When authors want it to mean a certain something, and people read it as something different, it's because [the author] layered metaphors on top of metaphors on top of metaphors. That's something that's happened to me. It's a personal thing; an author shouldn't be offended --

Nick struggled to articulate his thoughts, and eventually used math as a counter-example to English: "In math, a symbol is exact. [In English, you have] wider concepts."

Elaine: Yes. A symbol versus a metaphor; metaphor allows for more interpretation.

Ethan: There's what the author wants it to mean and what it means to you. Only the author knows what it's supposed to mean. But what it means to you, you interpret.

Far from being blank slates or empty vessels, several of these students seemed to be containing thoughts and feelings under pressure; some of their responses were vehemently expressed. This discussion suggested much about what ideas students have already formed about how meaning is really made vs. what they might be asked to do in English class. Several of them were suggesting a discrepancy between what they actually do when they read and what English teachers often ask them to do.

Elaine used Ethan's comment to begin directing the discussion about how meanings are created: "You can only start with what it means to *you*. You can't start with what the author intends. You make your connections, [the meaning you make is] different depending on who you are...."

Mike: The author gets to say what it means; they use words for a reason. But the experience - [trails off]

Wes: So there's the way a writer writes something—and you get meaning depending on what you think? So anything goes?

Lyn: What it's *supposed* to mean is the point of view of the author, then there's what it means to everyone else. What it means depends on who's reading it and when.

Elaine: If you come with the idea that we create meaning based [only] on experiences, interpretations can be endless. If I tell you that the poem ["Boy at the Window"] was about my family and a boat, you could say: "No Elaine, there's no boat." [So] we have to establish some criteria and get common language. ... [There are] different schools of thought, one that says when you come to a text, it's the author. You come to [the text to] learn the author's meaning. Another [school of thought asks] how do

you personally interact [with the text]? This [range of approaches] drives people crazy; it drives my husband crazy—he’s a math major. [To him], if an author didn’t intend it, it shouldn’t be; the author’s view should be [most] important. Some [though] create art because they want people to experience it. They do it in order for us to have a conversation....

She then distributed to the students a handout entitled “What is a Valid Reading?” with Rosenblatt’s (1978/1994) criteria listed as two bullet points:

1. The interpretation is not contradicted by any element of the text.
2. Nothing is projected for which there is no verbal basis.

As she was distributing the handout, Elaine said, “Most of you could justify your interpretation or change it slightly to justify it; I can’t [though] do my family-on-the-boat interpretation. It’s not who’s right but what you get to offer when responding to literature.

On the next day, following the two days of discussion of how meaning is created in the *Michigan Central Train Station* and the “Boy at the Window,” and of how meaning is made with texts, generally Elaine and the students practiced analytical skills with two more texts, one verbal and one nonverbal. The students first engaged in a “close reading” of a painting, Winslow Homer’s *Gulf Stream*. Initially, students saw only a small portion of the painting, the primary area of interest, and responded to that (answering: “What emotions are evoked? What specific aspects about the painting contribute to those feelings?”). After each student privately recorded his or her initial reaction, the class was shown a little bit more of the painting, in effect a zoom-out, allowing them to consider more information from the painting and then revise and further develop their responses.

The sequence consisted of six slides, each revealing more of the painting until the final slide conveyed the full image.

Again, students considered elements of the text and asserted possible meanings. *The Gulf Stream* suggests a narrative about the man on the boat, and students used other objects in the painting as well as color and dark / light contrast to suggest possible interpretations. They built on each other's contributions, as they'd done in the previous classes. Elaine prompted, but added much less than she had in the discussion of "The Boy at the Window." She also suggested that they now had a guide in the form of Rosenblatt's criteria for a valid reading: In response to a student's suggestion that the figure in the painting could be an escaped slave, Elaine said:

To feel or see suggestions of slavery or the Civil War would not be off-base. I'm also thinking of Rosenblatt's Criteria – can [this assertion] be contradicted? We can't prove that he's an escaped slave, but we can say 'could' if it's not contradicted and there's evidence to support it.

The purpose of the series of slides was to have the students experience the change in their transaction with the text as more information was added. As the students were writing their responses to the final, complete version of the image, Elaine said,

Be sure to include the part of the question where I ask if there's a change in your feelings since the first slide....What feelings are you left with? How have your responses changed – do you notice any change in feeling?

Through this exercise, students were asked to consider *how* different meanings were made. When Nick said, "I was thinking he was a slave, surrounded; nowhere for

him to go – sharks, storm, ship—” Elaine asked: “A ship? [Does it offer] hope?” Nick responded: “[No,] a threat.” Two other boys maintained, throughout the discussion, their initial belief that the image showed someone relaxing on a boat and the primary evocation for them was of calm; even when it became clear that the boat was broken, the sharks were near, and the man had little hope, they said that the image evoked the figure’s quiet acceptance of his fate. Other students disagreed, but a variety of meanings were accepted, as long as nothing in the text contradicted the meaning and there was basis in the text for the meaning. Though the elements in the painting were very simple—a black man, a broken wooden boat, stormy seas replete with sharks, and a ship in the distance, these elements combined to evoke emotions, questions, gaps, and possibilities, much like literary works of art.

As the discussion of the painting and what the elements in it might “mean” came to an end, Elaine again asked the students to think about their thinking: “Did you notice a difference between [our whole group] discussion and what you wrote or what someone else’s paper contained?”

Daniel: When we pool all our thoughts together we come up with a better view; combine our minds.

Nick: When you do it yourself you only have that source, but when you bring yours [your ideas] to others, and someone else brings their idea to you, it sparks an idea and you can give it back to others. And it goes around that way.

John A.: I agree. One discovery comes and it builds up another one—like real life; I didn't see a lot of things until others pointed them out; that developed the painting and my reaction to it.

The next day, to practice using the criteria for a valid reading, Elaine and the students read and discussed two more poems. One student observed, "You can use Rosenblatt to prove your arguments," and Elaine replied, "especially in poetry and literature, which can have more than one reading or response that can be supported. The point here is not to eliminate different readings but to support them."

In the next several weeks, the class engaged in transactions with texts that were structured very much like those described above, transactions in which students considered and constructed meanings for nonverbal and verbal texts. The class performed close readings of

- the opening scene of Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (nonverbal but for the words "Here lie the broken bones on L.B. Jeffries" written on the main character's plaster cast) paired with the first several pages, the opening scene, of the novella *Of Mice and Men* and
- a series of advertisements (which did include written words, though Elaine focused the students' attention on the images) paired with an essay.

As in the examples described above, students spoke more and were able to develop meanings more independently when the texts were nonverbal, while Elaine participated along with them. Elaine spoke more often when the class considered verbal texts, though her contributions were designed and served to prompt students'

observations of elements in the texts or some meanings that those elements might suggest. Her contributions supported the students going forward with their own creations of meanings with texts. Elaine modeled by sharing her own transactions with portions of texts—making associations and drawing on her prior knowledge to enrich the interaction, just as the students had done with their prior knowledge and associations in reading the nonverbal texts that were more immediately accessible to them. With few exceptions, the students were not posited as receivers of knowledge about a correct or incorrect reading of a text, but as apprentices involved in developing their skills in a process—in this case a process of creating meaning. Elaine’s richer and more detailed meaning-making processes were added to the students’ own thoughtful but less nuanced ones. With the nonverbal texts, the students were able to practice skills independently; they and Elaine operated almost as equals. Elaine offered more support when the texts were verbal, contributing elements that the students didn’t see by themselves to the shared meaning-making process.

Making meaning: Composing Verbal and Nonverbal Texts

Elaine was committed to raising students’ awareness of the meanings they were making with texts—both nonverbal texts and verbal. To achieve these goals, Elaine asked her students first, to practice recognizing their initial responses to a text and then, second, examine what, in the text and in themselves and their worlds, led them to or affected the meanings they created. Over the semester-long course, Elaine facilitated the honing of these skills in two phases. The first phase, described above, focused on reading or perceiving verbal and nonverbal texts. The second phase, discussed below, consisted of

students creating their own texts and presenting them to others in order to explore how meaning is developed when other people transact with the texts they authored or composed.

In this second phase of her approach, Elaine positioned students as the authors and composers of texts. As authors or composers, they presented what they thought of as completed texts, imbued with meaning and designed to convey meaning to their classmates and Elaine. What followed from those presentations were further discussions about, and hence new creations of, meaning—as was the case earlier in the term when students read and viewed published texts. In this phase, though, the authors (the students themselves) were physically present, available to share their intentions with the readers / perceivers of their work.

Metaphor Projects

Elaine challenged the students to make their own visual texts to represent an idea that, to them, was compelling or important in a literary text that the class was studying together. She called these “metaphor projects,” as the students were creating metaphors to show that a part of the literary text shared something in common with this representation. For example, in conjunction with the novel *A Separate Peace*, Elaine asked the students to present to their classmates an image of something concrete and unrelated in any obvious or literal way to the novel. They were then to explain how that image could stand as a metaphor for the important idea or concept in the novel they had selected.

Elaine provided an assignment sheet describing the project, part of which read, “the concrete object gives the viewer, or the reader, a ‘way in’ to a concept that might be

hard to follow without it, or it brings to light a new way of looking at the abstract, or intangible, concept” [Appendix A: Metaphor Project Assignment Sheet]. The directions then state, in part:

Your task for the Metaphor Project is to choose some aspect of the text that you find interesting and create a *visual* metaphor for it. You may create the visual yourself or you may bring in something visual that was originally created by someone else or for another purpose. The goal is that we can see a new interpretation of the work in a visual way. You may want to start with the abstract concept first and then think of how you might portray it, or you might start with a visual that reminds you of something in the text and explain how it exemplifies an idea you have about the text. You may not use film, music, or anything with written text.

The assignment sheet also included a visual image, her own metaphor project for *A Separate Peace*, which Elaine explained to the class.

When the students had created their images (or, as in most cases, had downloaded from the Internet an image they had selected), each student presented the image and explained his or her thinking to classmates and Elaine. One student showed a picture of two magnets and explained that they could be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between the two protagonists, Finny and Gene: When Finny and Gene embraced their differences—e.g., sports star and academic star—these two characters attracted one another, like opposite poles on a set of magnets, and the two combined well. When they tried to be like one another, this student claimed, Finny and Gene repelled each other.

Following each presentation, the class was to engage in further analysis of the image and the meanings suggested by the metaphor.

Elaine contributed to these analyses, but her role was primarily to facilitate students' meaning-making with the metaphor projects that their peers had developed. After these shared interactions with classmates, the presenting student could revise the image he'd presented if he chose. Then each student wrote a short piece describing his or her metaphor, including any new insights gained through the discussion. Central to this lesson were the presentations of the metaphor projects and the discussions that proceeded from those presentations, not the product (the metaphors images or the written summaries that followed). This was consistent with Elaine's goal of raising students' awareness of the transactional nature of reading.

When Elaine first assigned this project, I was very curious to see what the students would make of what I thought was a particularly challenging, abstract, and open-ended assignment. If Elaine had not already established a climate in the classroom and a relationship with her students that promoted and supported risk-taking, I thought, this could prove to be a very ineffective undertaking. Some students clearly were skeptical: In response to the explanation of metaphors and of this project, John A.—only half-jokingly—said, “my head hurts.” I thought at the time that, in my experience, an exercise like this—an opportunity like this for creative thinking, where no solace in a “correct” answer is offered—is often reserved for the “talented and gifted” students. This class certainly consisted of some very bright and creative students, but it was not the class with the most “honors” students; it was, in fact, quite a heterogeneous group. Though there

were obvious sub-groups of friends, it was also a cohesive group. In discussions, people listened to and responded to others equally; no competition or hierarchy of more and less talented emerged that I could see; nearly all—at some time or another—had valuable insights and observations to share. If one were to take a risk, this seemed a good place to do so.

On the day the projects were due, Elaine reminded the students that they were to “challenge each other to clarify the metaphors ... [and to] help each other make the ideas clear.” As students settled in, questions arose about who would go first, what if there was not enough time to have each person present, and when the written, follow-up component of the project was due. Elaine quieted them and began the presentation session with: “Because Mary’s project is frozen and in danger of melting, she’s going first. You might take notes about the metaphors; we’ll use them in our class discussion tomorrow.”

The students’ nonverbal creations were arguably more challenging to interpret than *Michigan Central Train Station* and other nonverbal texts Elaine had presented to the class. The audience members (classmates) were trying not only to connect their responses to or gut feelings about the presenter’s visual metaphor, they were also trying to see the connection of the metaphor to a larger realm of meaning evoked by the novel in which the student creations were based.

In the presentations of the metaphor projects, all students were again perceivers, except the one student in each presentation who was the creator of the text. In these transactions with nonverbal texts, the intended meaning of the author—the student who is presenting—is a part of the mix. Rather than saying, “we can’t ask an author about his or

her intention,” the author is present and can be consulted about what meaning(s) he or she intended. Here, the presenting student is also invested in what meanings are evoked by the work. Presenting students may have begun believing there was a right answer—the meaning they had in mind as they formed their composition—and the other students would try to determine what that answer was. But as they participated in the perceivers’ meaning-making processes, it would become clear to all that multiple meanings might be made. Some projects evoked richer, deeper meanings than the author intended, some evoked entirely different meanings. The discussion, focused on the elements the creator had used in his or text and how they created meaning for the perceivers. This, though with the attention placed on a nonverbal rather a verbal text, again demonstrated the nature of the “reading” process and the role of the active reader, and it incorporated Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading.

In the first few presentations, Elaine did much of the responding, modeling the interactions she wanted from the students. Her questions and comments, like the students’ questions and comments that followed her lead, focused on what more could be made of the relationship between the concrete object and the concept from the novel it represented. Students again contributed their insights, resulting in developing deeper meanings.

Mike presented his project after several students had shared theirs, and like those that came before, it elicited contributions from his classmates and Elaine. He presented a close-up image taken from the Internet of a bullet with shell casings lying nearby. He explained that this represented Gene and Finny’s friendship: Once a bullet is fired, even

though there might be doubts about a motive, the bullet is still fired and the bullet is separated from its shell. Similarly, Gene and Finny were irrevocably separated as friends once Gene jounced the tree limb on which Finny was balancing, causing Finny to fall. Ethan responded first with: “Do you need a gun to play a role in that, too?” suggesting that Mike add a gun to the image he presented. Their classmates seemed to agree, and presented reasons for supporting Ethan’s suggestion, and Elaine added her thoughts as well:

Ray: Yeah, the tree is the gun.

Lyn: Shooting the gun is violent and fatal; it’s a fatal event that separates them.

John A.: When you shoot a gun, it’s instant. In *A Separate Peace*, the pushing from the tree and the end of their friendship—they happened quickly as well.

Elaine: Going along with that, I like your choice [of the bullet and casing]. A lot of things separate. This is an image of violence. We might question Gene’s motives; it seems small, but it’s violent. The bullet gets at the violence in Gene’s heart. His motive toward Finny is to harm him—whether he’s conscious of that desire or not. A lot of things can be put back together—not so with a bullet.

Here, the students led and provided most of the original thought; Elaine articulated connections and refined what the students had suggested.

In an interview with me, Elaine later cited a project Daniel presented as an example of one that was less successful, but I recap it here because I found impressive his classmates’ efforts to help him develop a richer metaphor from his initial, rather literal rendering. For his metaphor project, Daniel presented a rough pencil sketch of two rivers,

one that was dark and turbulent; the other light and calm, with the boys' school drawn in between. Rather than inventing a new metaphor, Daniel, consciously or not, was sharing a metaphor that was already present in the novel: these two rivers joined together near the school. As Daniel explained, the more peaceful river, the Devon, represented goodness and beauty, fun, and the relaxed summer session at their boarding school. The dark and rough river, the Naguamsett, stood for winter and misery, the unknown, and the unfamiliar. Daniel said the Naguamsett also suggested World War II—the war that alternately fascinated and repulsed the two main characters. These two rivers and their symbolic, contrasting qualities are significant in the novel, and Daniel responded to that, or replicated it, in his project; rather than creating a new metaphor as was assigned, Daniel had re-presented images and symbolism that already existed in the novel.

When Daniel concluded his presentation, John R. asked: “What exactly is the metaphor?”

Daniel: I got feelings from the river – goodness of Devon, bad of other; Devon represents the role of the boys; Naguamsett is WWII.

Ethan: How is Naguamsett WWII?

Daniel: It's ugly, gross, unfamiliar.

John A.: Here's a question: Are you saying that this [image represents] a loss of innocence?

Mary: I found what you [John A.] just said interesting: It's uncharted. That's what I got. It made me think of nuclear bombs in WWII.

Lyn: And the name itself; the other name is so awkward—strange and unfamiliar.

John A.: It sounds like a bad guy in a Disney movie.

Jody: To me, one [river] is exclusively Gene, and the other is exclusively Finny.

Daniel: Yeah, one is pure and good and beautiful; the other is ugly and tainted.

Mary: The Naguamsett is an Indian name. You might look up the definition of it—maybe it's an allegory....

Nick: I also looked at this [the idea of two rivers] for a metaphor—the rivers connect but they don't mix because of the Beaver Dam [where the Devon River ends, as its waters flow over the dam into the Naguamsett].

Elaine: Yes look into that—[the idea of] convergence; they don't mix, and why not? If dark is evil, and light is goodness, what [would be] the interpretation of the Beaver Dam?

Daniel: The school is between the two.

Elaine: Why did you use a literal picture of the river to show a river?

Daniel: To show the contrasts and the differences.

Here, the perceivers are as engaged in creating meaning as the student who composed the metaphor project, if not more so.

Projects that were unified and carefully planned touched off discussions that were cohesive and responsive to the text as a unified whole; the 'meaning-making' was guided more carefully by the text. Other projects, less carefully formed, produced responses that seemed scattershot, like Daniel's, above. More consistency and cohesion emerged in the responses to Mike's bullet and casings, while disjointed though intriguing suggestions

emerged in response to Daniel's rivers. The same pattern held true in presentations of the image essays (described later in this chapter, below).

After three days of interactive discussions about the individual metaphor projects, Elaine encouraged the students to use the projects and the feedback they'd received to help them develop essay topics:

Last night you should have done some brainstorming about your metaphor project, or someone else's. I wanted you to narrow down your thinking to what is interesting to you.... [Now,] look back at all your brainstorming and pare it down ... to one phrase or argument ... to capture and summarize your area of interest. This should be an *argument*, something that not everyone else thinks ... It isn't a summary, it is your "take" on some aspect of the novel.... What you've chosen comes out of your own inquiry [and] discussion with your peers.

She then distributed a list of possible topics she had prepared for essays on *A Separate Peace*, but reminded the students that the ideas they had generated themselves might be better.

The directions for the next metaphor project, aligned with the next novel the class read, *Of Mice and Men*, were nearly the same, except that when students presented their metaphors they were required to refer to and quote, with page numbers, specific elements within the novel that supported their assertions about what their images represented. At the conclusion of the metaphor presentations, Elaine reminded students that they were to develop an essay on *Of Mice and Men*:

Remember, at the center of your paper is a thesis statement, an *argument*. I'm asking for [what you think is] Steinbeck's *message*—what is he saying about friendship, or justice? [Your essay is] not about the plot, but about what Steinbeck, the author, is *doing*.

She distributed another assignment sheet with topic choices, but again reminded the students that they were welcome to pursue a topic not listed there, one possibly inspired by a metaphor project, as long they conferred with her about it first.

About three-quarters of the way through the semester, Elaine had this to say about the metaphor projects, specifically, and the approach she'd taken to making meaning with texts in general:

I think [the metaphor project] was a bridge. We've been getting there, slowly, where they can interpret texts, realize that it's open-ended, and realize that it's ok to ask questions... because there is not a right answer with an image.... A lot of times an image that they've brought in [to present to the class as their metaphor project] is just thoughts at the ends of threads. They aren't even fully developed thoughts. And so it gives them a chance to bring in an unfinished thought and allow the class to help them develop it, which is, I think, an ideal way to approach literature.

For Elaine's purposes, whether a text was verbal or nonverbal was essentially inconsequential. The value provided by nonverbal texts was the immediate access they provided to everyone present. The constructivist meaning making discussed above took place with the range of texts, verbal and nonverbal, that Elaine assigned to students and that students created. She clearly was teaching how to respond to and interpret a text as

well as to develop and support an argument about a text. This was true regardless of mode and regardless of whether one's role was perceiver only or perceiver and creator. What was consequential, for Elaine and her students, was the quality of the transactions they formed, with the texts and as members of a community:

If I'm creating literate citizens, helping them [to] ask questions and challenge other people's thinking, openly, in this environment—that's part of what I would love to see happen. I just appreciate that I feel like that attitude is being developed, and that approach toward literature is being fostered. —Elaine

Image Essays

Students' image essays served as the final assessment of the semester. To create these, students were to develop a thesis around either a literary or cultural topic they were drawn to in the novel *Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. A literary topic might include the use of a symbol or development of a theme or character; a cultural topic was defined broadly and might pertain to the sport of kite running or life under foreign occupation or the Taliban. As the students read and the class discussed the novel, Elaine encouraged them to mark parts of the text that they found interesting from either a literary or a cultural perspective. In preparation for composing the image essay, students were to research their topics either by considering the occurrences, within the novel, of the literary element they chose to examine or by doing background reading and research on their cultural topic. Then, after the students became more expert in their chosen areas, they were to develop a thesis about it—a statement that could not be factually “proven”

but that could be supported even if there were arguments against it—similar to a thesis they might develop for a traditional essay.

Once they had arrived at a thesis, students were to present it and support it through an “image essay.” This was a series of images presented on a PowerPoint to their classmates, limited to 10 slides including a title slide. The presenting student was to suggest his or her thesis to the audience via these images; i.e., the images were to evoke an intended meaning, or variations of it, in the audience. The title slide, only, could contain words; and those words were to suggest the topic but were not to state the thesis.

The presentations, followed by highly participatory class discussions and opportunities for revision, closely resembled those of the metaphor projects with the notable exception that the student presenting was not to talk during the presentation; the series of his or her slides were to evoke meaning in the perceivers. Like the discussions for the metaphor projects, the give-and-take among the students following the presentation helped the presenting student realize what meanings were created by the perceivers as they interacted with the image essays. After the discussions, the presenters could explain what they had intended as they created their essays. They could also revise any part of their essay they chose based on offerings from the class about what meanings they created through the series of images.

One example of an image essay was presented by John A. It showed photographs, taken from the Web, of daily life with aspects of war present, and these intrusions of war on life became more prominent in each slide, e.g., a marketplace where people were buying bread and eggs with armed men standing stolidly nearby and a home with evident

effects of shooting or explosions on its exterior walls while children played alongside. These demonstrated John A.'s thesis that the war in Afghanistan became a part of everyday life for the people living through it. Students understood this immediately, and were impacted by the contrast present in the images of the routine, human, and natural activities juxtaposed with the violence of war and occupation.

Some students who struggled with this assignment did so in a way similar to what I've seen with students and written essay assignments. A tendency is to describe a topic, and perhaps to communicate a loose narrative, but fail to develop a thesis and make an argument. As I describe in the next chapter, some of Elaine's students chose a topic that interested them and then illustrated it with pictures; they arrived at a visual elaboration of a topic, but no argument was coming across to the audience. Through the presentation and discussion, most of these students realized that they did not yet have a thesis. More on this confusion about purpose and type of text—e.g., narrative, argument, description—is included in the next chapter.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude this chapter of findings from the whole class with some observations from Nick, one of the focus students, on what he saw as the progress of the class over the semester:

Nick: I kind of have done my own experiment, too. From the beginning of the semester until now, the folks in class, it's been a very big slope, you know. It's gone really high, really quickly. With Mary – she was always smart. What it was in the beginning, I thought, was all about impressing and going out of your way to impress. But

now I've seen it like later on in the year, it's been more about getting to the point and to the right point. It wasn't about saying the biggest word or using the biggest thing, it's about: everybody can understand my point and here it is. With John A., it was just crazy. At the beginning, every time he would talk, everyone would look at him like: What the heck are you talking about? It's because he was trying to think outside the box, and say the thing that nobody else was going to say – but he really didn't know how, because we hadn't been doing it long enough. But now that we have been doing it long enough... The whole class, I think, has learned how – especially with Rosenblatt's thing: If it's not there, you're not going to say it's there. Even if you're trying to look better than everyone else, you're still not going to try to say it's there. I think everybody understands that. To get your point across, you need to analyze the image first, which is what, I thought, not a lot of people were doing at the beginning. Because we've been doing it for so long ... everybody's learned how to interpret these images and texts and everything. ... [When we were discussing] *Kite Runner* [the third novel of the semester], I don't think one person said something that I was like: Oh, that could not have been in the book. Whereas in the beginning of the year with *A Separate Peace*, people were saying things about it and I was like: What? What? I don't think so. Even with *Of Mice and Men* a little bit, but with *Kite Runner* everyone was on-task with it I thought.

K: and [they were] using the Rosenblatt rules, whether they thought about Rosenblatt or not?

Nick: Right. Using the Rosenblatt rules. I really like the Rosenblatt rules.

Chapter Five: Findings, Focus Students

I don't really think of it as reading, but I think there could be another word for it.

I think of it more like analyzing it. And breaking it down.

Which is sort of what you do when you read. —Mike

In the previous chapter, I tried to show that the students in Elaine's class grew to accept: layered meanings; multiple, valid interpretations; and the use of elements of the texts to support the meanings they created. Further, they engaged in transactions with texts and each other, taking in the factors—embedded within the texts and in the insights and perspectives provided by classmates and Elaine—that affected the meanings they created. In this chapter I present what I learned from individual focus students about their understandings and, at times, misunderstandings of the meaning-making work they were doing in class.

The focus students are treated here as individuals, not as representatives. As such, this section attempts to communicate and highlight the diversity of the experiences of these five members of the class. These students did not consistently agree with each other or raise the same issues. Students' reasons for liking and disliking Elaine's approach varied greatly, and some reasons lay in direct contradiction to others, even when these ideas originated with the same student (i.e., at times these students contradicted

themselves as they tried to work with and think through the conceptual tools they, to varying degrees of awareness, were employing).

Below, I briefly discuss what several focus students said were some of the general, positive aspects of including nonverbal texts in their ELA. Mentioned as highly beneficial by some students were the ease of access, including the speed of “reading” nonverbal texts and the simultaneous interaction with texts and with other students offered by the study of nonverbal texts in ELA. These benefits manifested themselves in discussions in which these students said they were able to build on others’ contributions.

Following this I describe some of the confusion students seemed to experience as they made meaning with various texts in this class. For instance, I found that at times they confused the stances they were unconsciously taking—i.e., efferent, aesthetic, and expressive—as they transacted with both verbal and nonverbal texts. Although Elaine made very pointed references to Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading, she otherwise supported the students in their meaning-making without naming or describing other conceptual tools—such as accurate representation or narration, and expressive and efferent stances toward reading—that the students were, at times, using. I think this largely unintended lack of transparency contributed to some of the confusion these students experienced.

Finally, I relate Elaine’s reasoning about whether or not to explicitly address these conceptual tools. When I asked Elaine about addressing with the students what they were learning, she explained that she did not want to make them self-conscious about what they were doing, and implied that she didn’t want to make the concepts themselves into a

knowledge base to be acquired. She wanted the students to practice *doing* the meaning-making, without becoming sidetracked by the definitions of and distinctions among these concepts. She also expressed concern that some students might feel self-conscious if they began to focus on getting these concepts “right.”

What Students Valued in the Use of Nonverbal Texts in ELA

Mary was a high achiever, one of only two students in the class who received an invitation to join the National Honor Society. She was affectionately teased by some of her classmates in the first week of the semester when she brought two, single-spaced pages of writing for a homework assignment, as compared to the half-page or so that others had completed. “I like doing well in class. I like getting good grades. I like working hard,” she told me. Mary also told me that she’s never liked English and that she struggles with writing—not with filling a page, but with organizing her thoughts and focusing:

I’ve never liked English. I don’t like English. I don’t know, I’ve always had trouble with writing. I love reading, so if I had all the spare time in the world, all the books in the world, I would be perfectly happy....

I’m very good at taking notes. I take a lot of them – I do it a lot. If there’s something I need to remember, I’ll always write it down. My English papers and other things tend to be kind of lengthy because I always want to cram everything in.... I’m not very good at writing. I’m not very good at organizing my thoughts on paper. I’m not very good at critically reading.

The texts she reads in history are easier, she says:

In history [when] everything is chronological, I'm able to organize it more. But when it's a bunch of different countries in one time period, I have trouble keeping it straight – keeping it in the boxes that I need it to be in.

In a lesson early in the semester, Elaine had students consider an image and make an assertion about what it might mean, then decide what within the image supported that assertion and develop an argument to tie these pieces together. She then had the students follow the same steps using a verbal text. Eventually they were to use these steps to write a structured essay. Mary told me that beginning with an image made it easier for her to develop the steps in the thinking process that Elaine wanted them to follow because “it's all there” and “nothing's hidden” when using pictures:

I think that the pictures are really interesting. I like analyzing pictures more than I like analyzing writing. ... I think we did enough of them [pictures] so it was good because that's how we first learned what we're doing today [developing thesis statements about a published essay and supporting them with evidence]. ... It's definitely easier if it's a visual. There's not as many layers [as there are in verbal texts]. While it's not exactly straightforward, it's all there. You can see it. Nothing's hidden. “

When I asked Mary how she thought she'd do with this step-by-step development of an argument and then writing an essay if they had used the verbal text only, instead of an image first, Mary said, “I would not have done well at all. I would be so confused.”

Nick was a standout in class discussions. Though he sometimes struggled to get his words to move as quickly as his thoughts, and he often started more than once to articulate a thought before he found the words he wanted to use, he consistently made

valuable contributions to the class discussions. He exhibited a remarkable ability to listen to others' contributions and then synthesize them along with his gleanings from a text to move a discussion forward. Nick told me that he liked to read, but repeatedly remarked that he is a slow reader. Nick is also a very active and sociable young man, playing varsity football as a tenth grader, singing in three choirs, playing in the school jazz band, and holding the lead role in the school musical. He does his homework when he returns home after these activities, often beginning it around 10:00 p.m. Nick was one of the most popular and well-liked students; he was also the only African-American student in the class.

Nick stated that the ready access to the nonverbal text made a positive difference for him as well, but for him, the particular benefit was speed and efficiency. He also noted, in response to my question, that supporting one's answer with evidence is needed in both verbal and nonverbal texts. Nick recognized the importance of using the text (verbal or nonverbal) to support a point, but liked not having to comb through pages to find a passage and then transforming that passage into his own words in order to make his point:

Nick: When you're writing from the written, there's a lot of looking for a passage and basically rewriting that in your own words. ...

K: So [with nonverbal texts] you don't have to go back and look as much?

N: Well, I mean you do, but it takes a lot less time.

In a different interview, Nick again expressed his preference for making meaning with images due to the accessibility and time involved in "reading" the image versus a

verbal text such as a novel. He added to this the role of the reader, noting that the reader has “input” in the meaning-making process:

With a book – everybody reads at a different pace. I read very slow. [With a book] everybody gets a different input, just like in an image – but then you’re always searching through pages, bringing it up. But with an image, it’s just right there. Like 200 pages of a book are in an image right there.... [For example, in] the first one, the Detroit one, we could have read that in an article. Someone could have told us about that. And we would have said: Oh, it’s about before and after effect. They would have described what it was and how it slowly deteriorated. Instead, we just get the picture.

Additionally, as noted at the end of the previous chapter, Nick valued the role nonverbal texts played as students construct meaning together. Not only does the individual reader participate in the meaning-making process, but in Elaine’s class readers construct meaning with each other:

If I said [a text meant one thing], and then somebody said something else, that would probably change my opinion a little bit. And I probably changed theirs a little bit. It goes back and forth that way, and I just like it a lot.... when one kid raises his hand and says something, then four more kids raise their hands and say something else [in response]. It’s like, not only do they respect your opinion, but they take what you said and it goes into what they’re about to say.

Mike was a quiet, unassuming student. He was not a star in the class, nor was he a student with high needs. He came across as open-minded, and he listened, considered, and calmly offered his opinions in class discussions and in our conversations.

Mike agreed with Nick and Mary that nonverbal texts provided easier access to meaning-making. I asked Mike to try to imagine communicating the same ideas that he presented in his metaphor project, but by using only words and not an image, as in an essay. He told me he thought “it would be harder for [classmates] to understand, because they wouldn’t have anything to see.”

He also readily applied Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading to meaning-making with nonverbal texts. He seemed to have a more positive experience with transacting with nonverbal texts in Elaine’s class than he’d had in previous years with verbal texts in other English classes. What he perceived as the more open-ended nature of the images appealed to him:

Mike: I like the visuals, because it seems that there’s less of a right answer than – like we’ve talked about, as long as I can justify it, it’s the right answer.

K: And you don’t think that’s true when you’re reading books and short stories and poems?

Mike: Well, yeah, because I feel like a lot of times whatever I come up with is somehow wrong...especially with poetry. For English teachers, especially in 7th grade, I feel like [they would tell me]: “It means this.” And I’ve gotten a completely different meaning from it.

These students found the kind of access provided by the nonverbal texts helpful because of immediacy and simultaneity. Mike also said he valued what he found to be the open-ended nature of the nonverbal texts. He seemed to think he was more successful in making meaning that was grounded in the text and accepted by others

(particularly the teacher) than he'd had, in other classes, with verbal texts. Neither Melodie nor Jody mentioned any kind of shared meaning making, ease of access, or appreciation for the open-ended nature of the nonverbal texts. Jody mentioned very little that she found valuable and, in fact, disliked the practice (her responses are described further, below). Melodie, did share what she saw as advantages in the nonverbal texts, but these in effect demonstrate her confusion about what was happening in class. Her responses are also discussed below.

Students' Confusion and Tensions with Elaine's Approach

As described in the previous chapter, Elaine's approach was to have students practice the processes of meaning-making for both nonverbal and verbal texts; the nonverbal texts were included to help place the emphasis on these processes. Throughout the semester Elaine was increasingly satisfied that the primary goal she had set—of developing students' ability to transact with a text while noting what elements influenced the meanings they were making—was achieved. I agreed that, in class, students engaged consistently in developing meanings that were both based in the texts and were constructed through their transactions with the texts and the contributions of their classmates and Elaine. The students were not focused on finding a single correct answer, nor were they imposing meanings on texts that could not be supported with elements of the text.

However, through reading their in-class free-writes and, more so, in my one-on-one interviews with the focus students, I saw that several of the students were experiencing confusion over what they were doing when they "read" both the verbal and

nonverbal texts. As I reviewed my field observations and compared them to the transcripts, I made the following note:

There IS progress -- in students' comfort with making meaning and interpreting, as Elaine says; but there is NOT movement in the understanding of some students of what's happening, and their objections (expressed to me) are not being addressed. What they DO and what they UNDERSTAND are not aligned.

The lack of understanding that I perceived fell into two primary categories: I outline these briefly here and follow with elaborated descriptions below.

- 1.) Some students went along with the approach in class and on assignments, but felt a conflict between the way they were being asked to make meaning—using Rosenblatt's aesthetic approach that required them to support their interpretation with evidence from the text—and their own deeply held desire to preserve their expressive relationships with texts.
- 2.) Some students were not aware of the difference between aesthetic and efferent readings (in both nonverbal and verbal texts), though they performed both at various times. Students' expectations—at times misplaced—that a text was asking them to orient themselves efferently (i.e., to look for the illustrative or re-presentational), along with students' related confusion over genre and purpose of a text, frustrated them and inhibited their understanding. Also, when they created their own texts, they sometimes positioned the perceivers of these texts efferently, expecting to provide them with information or a re-presentation of a reality, rather than asking them to transact more deeply with

texts, allowing the texts to affect them. This might be a result of expectations formed through prior experiences with images in other ELA classes and with prior instruction that called for “right” answers.

In defense of the expressive. The most readily apparent tension lay in some students’ affinity for the expressive and their resistance to taking an analytic scalpel to a work of art that they had enjoyed or for which they held strong feelings. This response, like so many others throughout this study, emerged regardless of whether that work was verbal or nonverbal.

Jody displayed the strongest reaction, a negative one, to Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading (recall that Elaine had students apply this to both verbal and nonverbal texts). Outside of school, Jody engaged in many literacy practices not required for her classes, including blogging, other kinds of creative and descriptive writing, and taking photographs. She told me the reason she thought she had difficulty, at times, in meeting teachers’ expectations for essays: “I can only write about things when I am passionate about them.” She said that her teachers in the past had allowed her to write a poem or a “response” in place of an essay. I understood this to mean that she was free to express her opinions about or her associations prompted by the piece in whatever manner she liked. This also suggested to me that her responses were not necessarily the kinds of transactions required by Rosenblatt’s criteria, in which “the interpretation is not contradicted by any element of the text and nothing is projected for which there is no verbal basis” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). In the class discussion described in the previous chapter, regarding “who’s right” when interpreting a text (pp. 80-82, above), one of

Jody's contributions was that the approach Elaine suggested, Rosenblatt's criteria for a valid reading, is "practical for school assignments. For pleasure, this isn't how I enjoy reading." In her free-writing response to Rosenblatt's Criteria for a Valid Reading), Jody wrote the following:

I completely disagree w this criteria. Contradictions, interpretations, and projections are entirely based on the reader's opinions, bias, etc.; their lens. In my own words [Rosenblatt's criteria are really saying]:

- 1. Your interpretation must be, literally and entirely, the text itself.*
- 2. Imagination is discouraged.*

Some text does require more literal interpretation; for example historical fiction or memoirs. But in my opinion authors should present their work in the mindset that readers will understand things in their own way.

I suggest that the "literal interpretation" of historical fiction Jody described here lies on the efferent end of Rosenblatt's spectrum. In that case, within Rosenblatt's framework Jody is exactly right that the meaning lies primarily within the text and is not developed extensively through a transaction with a reader. Here though, Jody was only gleaning fragments of Rosenblatt's paradigm. At that point in the course, Jody apparently thought that Elaine, with the help of Rosenblatt, was asking her to ignore or suppress her own impressions and responses as well as those of her classmates and to re-present what meaning she could uncover in the text. This is particularly ironic given that one of Elaine's primary goals was to eradicate the notion that literary texts held one meaning to be discovered. Though Elaine had asked the students, in each reading or viewing activity

to begin with their first impressions or initial reactions (“how does this make you feel?” and “to you, what does it mean?” and “write your first impression”), Jody seemed to forget or ignore this and was opposed to the next steps, which consisted of asking how these initial reactions were evoked. As noted above, the handout on Rosenblatt given to the students—“the interpretation is not contradicted by any element of the text and nothing is projected for which there is no verbal basis”—only stated the part of the aesthetic meaning-making process that imposed limits on ways readers could transact with texts. Jody clearly reacted strongly against these limitations and seemed to lose sight of, forget, or understand as insignificant Elaine’s repeated directions to note initial, gut reactions to texts. The full transaction with the text, the essence of Rosenblatt’s theory, came across inaccurately to Jody.

Elaine told me about the reaction of another class to Rosenblatt’s criteria, and it mirrors Jody’s strong, negative reaction to Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading:

[My other class] is an interesting crew. They’re very enthusiastic, very involved. They have their own thoughts....When I was talking about Rosenblatt, there was way less buy-in in that class [than the class being studied for this research]. Way less. [They said things like:] “I just don’t know. I just don’t think that I agree. I just can’t see it. Whatever you think is the right answer is the right answer – don’t try to tell me that it’s not,” and then pulling out some really crazy interpretations. So it’s like: Okay. So, how can you support that? Show me why you feel this way. And then actual, like, almost *anger* from certain students.

K: I’ve seen that. [It’s as if they’re saying:] It’s mine, don’t bug me.

J: Yeah! Like [they're saying], "I feel like you're coming into my territory."

Jody and the students Elaine describes here saw themselves, mistakenly, as faced with an either / or proposition: either the reader or the text creates the meaning, and they positioned themselves against the latter. Even when Elaine asked students to "Show me why you feel this way," they seemed to resent the imposition of that structure on their responses. They responded emphatically against the notion that one's response to a text must be grounded in that text. They wanted freedom of expression and response, using the text as a starting point for only a very personal experience.

Mary did not feel as strongly as did Jody about allowing for expressive readings of texts, but she clearly stated her preference for not relying too heavily or exclusively on what she, too, sometimes perceived as the text-only-approach set forth via Rosenblatt's criteria. She, like Jody, was defending the role of the reader in the meaning-making process, a role crucial to Rosenblatt's theory and to Elaine's approach, but seemingly lost to varying degrees in the understanding of these students. (Because Mary had to eat lunch during our interview sessions, she would say a little and then eat. When I asked for clarification or asked another question, she would nod or shake her head and use facial expressions to communicate with me while she was chewing. The latter portion of following transcript excerpt has me speaking more than I would like, but this is due to the circumstance of Mary eating her lunch.):

K: What is the point, do you think, of looking at all these pictures in English class?

Mary: To show the continuities between analyzing literature and analyzing art....

K: Do you believe that, or is that the right answer?

Mary: I mean I believe it. [But] I think that there's a deeper personal connection to both [kinds of texts], and I don't think it should be set in stone the way anybody analyzes anything.

K: Like, leave room for the personal connection?

Mary: Yeah.

K: And the personal connection—how would you describe that? What does that mean? If I didn't know what that meant, how would you -

Mary: I think each person's experience changes how they view the world, so if someone was related to someone who'd been eaten by a shark, they would be very deeply affected by the painting we did—that we saw with the guy on the boat with the shark. Whereas with me, I look at it, and I go: Oh wow, that's a shark. Okay. And then I get over it.

K: So the intensity of their experience is a lot greater than yours, though both of you are responding to the shark. So if a person who was feeling really intensely about it wanted to say that, they could talk about the shark AND, you're saying, add their personal bit, and then we'd understand [their reading of the text].

Mary: Yeah, I just think you get more of a personal viewpoint – and [fades out].

K: Yeah. So, the class right now is emphasizing a lot of what is in the text, whether that's pictures or words, and you're saying fine, but don't forget the other, personal dimension.

Mary: I don't think you would have to go in and talk about your stories, I just think that

raising a point with your personal intentions is probably better than “The bone means that the dog was hungry.” Like that’s dry; it’s just really, really dry.

Nick also brought up the role of the personal. While Mary was cautioning against ignoring the personal when interacting with a text, Nick saw Elaine’s lessons as supporting it. When describing what he valued about discussions in Elaine’s class, Nick said: “Not personal information but personal insight is coming from you a lot of the time.” Nick seemed to recognize a layer in the meaning-making process that the other two students didn’t. Jody and, to a lesser extent, Mary were focused on the limits placed via Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading, a portion of Rosenblatt’s aesthetic approach, that they saw as excluding the expressive. Nick seemed to understand the wider dimensions of Rosenblatt’s theory enacted in Elaine’s classes. He saw the role of unique readers in making meanings with texts.

Neither Melodie nor Mike raised the issue of defending an expressive response to texts.

Stepping back from the students’ remarks and wondering what factors could be contributing to the differences in reactions to Rosenblatt’s criteria, I recalled that Jody was the most avid reader and active writer of the five, and Mary also said that she loved to read. Nick read quite a bit, too. Melodie read graphic novels and picture books, and Mike said he read when he could find the time (which sounded rare). I wondered whether Jody and Mary, more than the others, might have had past experiences in which they read and felt strongly affected by text, only to have that experience diminished, in their eyes, by a subsequent academic analysis. If this is the case, they were not yet seeing how the

academic analysis might heighten the experience rather than lessen it; they saw the two as separate and competing, not as sequential or mutually enriching. They were defending their view against what they incorrectly understood to be autonomous readings (Street, 1995)—in which correctness lay exclusively and formally within the text—while in fact Elaine was trying to offer tools to enrich personal readings by transforming them into deeper, personal transactions with texts. To the two students who most liked to read, this wasn't coming through, though they did successfully and regularly participate in aesthetic transactions with texts during class.

Students' expectations of the mimetic (or re-presentational) in artistic texts.

Not evident during class, but in our conversations over the course of the semester several of the focus students indicated their expectation that if nonverbal texts are being used in English class, those nonverbal texts must be there to illustrate or otherwise elucidate some aspect of a verbal text. Some of the students told me they expected to use the nonverbal text as illustrative, or a re-presenting, of some salient element of a given verbal text, such as plot, setting, or mood. This was not the case, though, for any of the nonverbal texts Elaine used. I've wondered whether this expectation on the part of some students has developed over years of looking at pictures in illustrated picture books as well as in textbooks, when the purpose of the image was indeed to further illustrate a concept presented through words. Students are not commonly asked to look at images as texts unto themselves but rather as re-presentations of or supplements to something else. This is what several of the students seemed to expect, though Elaine never suggested a thematic or conceptual alignment between an image and a verbal text. On the other hand,

she also never clearly stated that she was not after that kind of coupling, though it seemed quite obvious to me that there was no connection among the texts, only a connection in how the students were being asked to approach meaning-making with these texts.

For example, Melodie in particular was operating on the assumption that images are illustrations that help carry the fixed meaning of the written texts. Melodie said she liked using the pictures in ELA because they helped her understand the story they were reading in class. This was an unexpected comment, because, as noted, none of the images aligned with any of the verbal texts with regard to content or style, and none illustrated a “story” that was present in any of the verbal texts we read. Melodie did not provide an example from class of the alignment she asserted was there, but she compared the work the class was doing to the Manga texts she loved to read outside of class, in which drawings parallel plot throughout: “With Manga, the pictures are there but there are also words, so it’s much easier for me to see the scene the author is trying to show.” When I asked her why she thought Elaine was including images in English class, she responded:

I guess when you’re given an image, it gives you a different perspective of a story. So you’re not sitting there reading words. Instead of reading a story, you’re looking at a picture of the story and trying to figure out like what scene this is from.

Again, Elaine was not providing any images from or for the verbal texts that they did in class. No student in class claimed that there was any connection. My impression, based on her few contributions to class discussions and our one-on-one conversations, was that Melodie struggled with moving beyond the literal in any text—verbal or nonverbal—and assumed that the purpose of all was to be representational rather than

evocative. When I asked her some of my questions, I think she had no idea how to answer and didn't feel comfortable saying so. In fact, in our initial interview, her first response when I asked, "Do you know what Elaine's purpose was for having you [support what you think the image means]?" Melodie answered: "I have absolutely no idea. I think she does it because she's an English teacher and she can." Here, I think she was trying to make light of the situation; overall, though, I don't think she had very much understanding of what was happening and didn't want to say so. Recall also that I only had two interviews with Melodie, as she missed the second one because she was so far behind in her reading and had not submitted assignments; because of this she was spending class time catching up on her work in a different room and would be unable to comment on what was happening in class.

When Melodie composed the final presentation, the image essay, hers did not contain a thesis, as assigned, but only a topic that she then re-presented through an array of images gathered from the internet. "Where are the Refugees?" was the title of her project, and her slides showed images of refugees in various settings. She told me that entering the search term "Afghan refugees" provided her a plethora of images of refugees, and she selected several that she thought illustrated where refugees went when they left their home countries—there were images of refugees on ships and in tent cities, for example. She then uploaded these images to her PowerPoint, and considered the project finished. In our conversation, she told me that this series of images of refugees served to show, or re-present, events and settings in the lives of the refugees:

Melodie: So I put “Afghan refugees” [as the search term] and then I got a lot of pictures of like camps, and people in the camps; there were quite a lot of pictures....

K: So then you went through your pictures, and then how did you make your selection? You could only include 10, and I’m sure you found a lot more than 10. How did you pick what you picked?

Melodie: I went with ones that related to the “where” question. The title [I came up with for my project] is “Where are the Refugees?” I kind of – the one where – there are refugees just sitting on a wall, so the question is kind of like: *Where are they? Where are they sitting on this wall?* And then there are pictures of refugees in a boat, and then there are some in a truck, and it’s like: *Where are they going?* And I’ve got pictures of the camps, and it’s like: *Where are the camps?* I just picked the pictures that I thought would fit best. I don’t really think some pictures were as good – they all kind of have the same question, but you have to narrow down your choices. I just went with the ones I thought would be the best.

Here Melodie tells me that she is aiming to illustrate or re-present factual information answering “where are the refugees.” Though perceivers of her project could or might respond to the evident suffering of the refugees, Melodie is not conscious of asking the readers to make meaning beyond the transfer of factual information. She is not designing her project to evoke an aesthetic, lived-through experience in her audience, but instead she has designed a text with the expectation that her audience will take an efferent stance. Melodie expects her audience to take from her project answers to the question: *Where are the refugees?*

In another example of some confusion over the stance—efferent, aesthetic, or expressive—taken in a given transaction with a nonverbal text, Mary said the *Gulf Stream* exercise was one of her favorites; yet she said she was frustrated that the image, in her view, withheld information about where the figure in the painting was looking. Mary wrote thoughtful responses to images as texts in her journals and made many contributions in class that others then built upon. She sometimes showed some confusion and, at times, disappointment, when there was not a literal, representational correspondence evident in a nonverbal text. For example, in discussing with me the figure in the *Gulf Stream* painting, Mary said: “Something that bothered me the *entire* time is where he was looking. I couldn’t figure out *why* he was looking over there. I still don’t know. And it still bothers me.” With this question, Mary is taking an efferent stance. She is assuming that the painting represents a reality, and that some of the critical details about that reality are being withheld from her. Rather than transacting aesthetically with the painting, living through it and creating new meaning—perhaps of hope or desperation or some other, more universal human experience or one evocative of a personal experience, supported by elements in the painting—Mary sees the figure and wants to gain an objective understanding about an event that she thinks of as being represented. At this moment, she was expecting to take away information, taking an efferent stance, and she was critical of what she described as a frustrating, incomplete, efferent experience. Seeking factual information from an artistic work is, of course, one approach to looking at art, but at this moment, Mary did not seem aware that Elaine was striving to develop a *different* approach—Rosenblatt’s aesthetic or Langer’s “horizons of

possibility.” Mary expressed that she was frustrated, and she seemed to feel that the work, to some degree, had failed her.

Another illustration of this efferent approach to the *Gulf Stream* painting occurred at the end of the class discussion on *Gulf Stream* in which students discussed possibilities about what the painting might mean to each of them and why. Elaine said to the class: “I like to see that you’ve been able to pull out individual details to support individual arguments [about meaning in this painting]. You’re using different lenses, and differences are fine.” Joe A. then asked Elaine a question that I couldn’t hear because students were starting to pack up. Elaine responded with, “I wish I could tell you.” I then heard Joe A. say, “so there’s not a right answer?” and Elaine answered: “Right, that’s what we’re left with.” Elaine told me after class that John A. wanted to know who that figure was or if he was really a slave. Similar to Mary, John A. experienced the painting, not incorrectly, as a historical document. Both students wanted to know what was being re-presented through the image. Both were at least partly unsuccessful in experiencing the painting in a meaningful transaction that was not informational or re-presentational.

Jody, whom I described above defending the expressive approach so strongly, also sometimes seemed confused about stances toward the verbal and nonverbal texts they were reading in class. At times she combined stances but was unaware she was doing this, and I think this confusion over stances led Jody to make some very critical appraisals of the opportunities Elaine provided the students for transacting with texts. Through the descriptions below, I aim to give a sense of the various approaches Jody

took to making meaning with texts, her strongly felt opinions, and the lack of understanding she demonstrated about what Elaine was doing in class.

Two of Jody's remarks, one made early in the semester and the other late, suggest that she, too, was at times thinking that the purpose of using nonverbal texts in English class was re-presentational more than evocative. In our first interview of the semester, I asked Jody if she thought there was any overlap between reading words and reading images. She told me that "if you had [an example of] writing about something that was completely pure and completely accurate, that would be the same [as reading an image], I think." This suggests that she thought of a successful nonverbal text as an "accurate" and "pure" representation of something; by implication then, a successful transaction with such a text consists of taking away correct information—an efferent transaction. I wondered how she could make such a comment when she and her classmates had been engaged together in creating multiple and rich meanings with nonverbal texts such as *Michigan Central Train Station*—meanings that were developed through elements present in the texts but were multiple and layered. In our third and final interview, after the class had been engaged in aesthetic, non-literal meaning-making with nonverbal texts for most of a semester, I asked Jody what she thought about using nonverbal texts in English class. Her answer suggested that she was again thinking of images in ELA as re-presentations, this time as illustrations of verbal texts: "Having the option to do a project like painting your five favorite scenes from a book, you know, is a great option for people who are more interested in images." This reveals an expectation that the nonverbal texts—the paintings of five favorite scenes—would be designed to re-present information

in the verbal text. The nonverbal texts, it seems, would be assessed on how accurately they re-presented information taken—efferently—from the verbal text. (This painting of favorite scenes was never an option in Elaine’s class while I was there; Elaine’s nonverbal assignments required students to make meanings that pushed beyond the representational or literal.)

At other times, when I asked Jody questions about arriving at different meanings when reading a text—either verbal or nonverbal—she repeatedly communicated the frustration she felt when people were “reading into” a text what is “not there.” She told me that she disliked the metaphor project assignment but appreciated the use of metaphor for describing a literal, concrete entity: “I don’t like using metaphors for large ideas, but if I’m saying the tree looks like a hand reaching up into the sky or something like that – I like to be able to say stuff like that.” When I asked about some of the more complex ideas that had arisen in class in relation to the nonverbal texts we had used, such as the discussions about old and new and the resilience of people in Detroit during the discussion of the train station image with the graffiti, Jody and I had the following exchange:

Jody: It’s not English. Those are interesting conversation topics, but I don’t think it’s something that really applies to English. I think it’s more of like – if you want to look at how we were talking about the graffiti and the train station and something sort of philosophical, like I can go into a philosophy class or a psychology class or an art class or photography class to talk about how they got the image across. But I think in an English class we should be reading.

K: reading? – words. It should be about words?

Jody: yes.

To Jody, the meanings her classmates created through the text were separate from the work of English class and perhaps separate from reading the text. The focus in reading and writing, for Jody, should be on the words and not the meanings students were making with and through them. This seems a manifestation of the autonomous view of language and literature described by Street (1995), above.

Other times when Jody and I talked about meaning in texts, she indicated a concern for the intention of the author or artist and the meaning they encoded or embedded in a text. She intimated that the artist's or author's intention—which she stated she can't know—should determine the meaning of a text: “[Looking at Homer's *Gulf Stream*,] I'm not going to say that Homer was giving the message of mortality of man or something.” Jody went on to reiterate her dislike for someone saying something is present in a text when it's not. Regarding the class discussion about meaning in *Gulf Stream*, she said that:

I couldn't tell whether that was what the artist wanted me to see or not ... I don't want to put words into the artist's mouth. And like, with reading, I don't want to say that something means this when it really doesn't. And simultaneously, I don't know if the artist wants it, I don't know if he was trying to give a message or if he was just painting a picture and that was just something that spoke to him.

I read Jody's frustration here as emanating from the inability to accurately, correctly, or conclusively discern the author's intended meaning or purpose. Listening to

her classmates develop meanings based on the text seemed to Jody to be a violation of the creator's intended meaning. When she couldn't "know" the creator's intent, Jody wanted to respond expressively; analysis of the work seemed senseless to her because, she thought, it was impossible to learn the truth about what the artist intended. By contrast, the engagement Elaine was trying to foster did not ask students to put themselves in the mind of the author, but rather to be themselves and to transact with the work and then consider what that transaction consisted of—in both themselves as readers and in the text. This is the aesthetic transaction that Rosenblatt describes. Elaine explicitly taught only the criteria for a valid reading, though implicitly she again and again taught the aesthetic transaction.

For Jody, it seems that the text—verbal or nonverbal—means what the author/artist intended it to mean and that she saw herself as inadequate to determine the author/artist's intention. She also seemed very respectful of an artist/author's wishes, which may be an empathetic reaction emerging from her own work as a writer. Interestingly, in the previous quote, amid her frustration, Jody comingles the terms artist and author ("I don't want to put words in the artist's mouth") and holds readers and perceivers of literary and visual arts accountable for the same transgression: saying that some meaning was "in" a work when to her, it is not because she cannot know or prove the author/artist's intention. Transactions that develop between a work and a perceiver/reader are inappropriate to Jody unless the transaction consists of an accurate or pure understanding of what was conveyed by the author/artist through the text.

Jody also said: “I really am not interested in symbolism or metaphors or any of that. I just really just like reading. I like writing ... I like trying to paint a picture with words. So I wish we did more of that.” This suggests that Jody enjoyed the craft of re-creating an image through words. It also suggests that she thought creating an experience for the reader is possible—a recognition of an aesthetic stance—but she wants that experience to be re-presentational, a taking away of “accurate,” “pure” information, which is done in an efferent stance. When she spoke of her writing, she spoke in terms of the challenge it set for her to portray reality accurately.

Jody expressed thoughtful though sometimes contradictory notions about creating meaning through texts. At times, she seemed to think that meaning is embedded in texts and that good writers are able to accurately convey information (and thereby tightly control the experience of a reader). Yet, it seemed that Jody, as a reader, wanted the freedom to respond to literary and visual art expressively (without limitations imposed by elements in the text) and she vehemently defended her right to do so. She was very resistant to the idea of people reading “into texts” what she believed was “too much” or “not there.” Tensions and confusion arose for Jody in the way she understood Elaine’s purpose for teaching the aesthetic approach (Rosenblatt’s criteria): She thought Elaine was trying to supplant more personal, expressive responses to texts, when Elaine was presenting the aesthetic transaction as one (preferred in English class) of several approaches to textual analysis. Yet Jody does, to some degree, value creating meaning in a reader/viewer’s mind—an aesthetic experience—but the meaning she strives to create is an accurate, single portrayal of a single meaning—a conveyance of an existing, rather

than a new, creation (“a tree is like a hand reaching up to the sky”). Jody sometimes, then, seems ready to acknowledge that there are qualities in writing and visual art that work in transaction with readers to both evoke and proscribe meaning; i.e., that the text does to an extent limit the experience of a reader and it is possible—and in critical analysis of texts necessary—to consider how that occurs. I did not hear from Jody a willingness to accept development of multiple meanings that readers/viewers could make in transaction with texts. With more discussion, explanation, and transparency in class about possible stances—not only aesthetic—and about the role of artist/authors’ intention in the viewing/reading process, Jody might have been able to make more sense of what Elaine was asking and reconcile it better with Jody’s own developing and passionately held beliefs about literary and artistic texts.

Students’ perspectives. These perspectives, shared by the focus students (and also evident in the two whole-class discussions about how meaning is made described in the previous chapter), suggest that the students had or were forming ideas about how meaning-making with texts does take place or should take place. Several of the students were struggling with what principles underlay ways of making meaning with texts. Some placed a high value on the mimetic—re-presenting accurately some event or scene, either with words or images. Some expected an image to tell a story, either alone or as an illustrative complement to a written text. Several wanted to include the personal response to varying degrees; one said she thought that in using Rosenblatt’s criteria for a valid reading “imagination is discouraged.” What these students expressed were thoughts in progress. They shared with me evolving understandings and impressions about making

meaning, prompted by the emphasis Elaine placed on process rather than right answers, and on the use of nonverbal texts along with verbal texts to elicit responses and analysis.

Elaine's Thinking and My Questions Regarding Transparency

During the data collection process, I saw that, together in class, all of the students, including Jody, were successful in contributing to, developing, and/or articulating complex, text-supported meanings about literary and visual texts; they were engaged together in very generative processes of meaning-making. The focus students, however, did not all understand what they were doing, and they were experiencing some confusion and, at times, some mental discomfort about it. It wasn't until after the semester ended and I delved more deeply into the data analysis that I understood the situation in the ways and terms I used to describe it above.

As outlined in the methods chapter, my role was primarily to observe and act as a sounding board. I also, early in the semester, suggested using some texts and pairing the "what does this text mean to you" approach with a verbal and a nonverbal text. I was not a co-teacher and there was never any doubt that we were working with Elaine's class. Though I understood that my presence was apparent and may have had some mild influence, especially early, I was interested in understanding what was going on, not in altering or affecting it. Further, I agreed with Elaine that what was happening in the class throughout the semester was enriching for the students, despite the concurrent confusions I learned of through my conversations with the focus students. The following section describes the interaction Elaine and I had once I realized that the success I saw in class

coexisted with some tensions and some confusion in some of the students about what they were being asked to do.

Also, as noted in the previous chapter, in class Elaine made very pointed references to aesthetic reading, which she referred to as Rosenblatt's criteria for a valid reading. Otherwise she supported the students in their meaning-making without naming or describing additional conceptual tools—such as expressive and efferent stances toward reading and accurate representation and narration—that the students were using to engaging with texts at various times. I think this largely unintended lack of transparency contributed to some of the confusion the focus students experienced. I also began to think, after listening to the students talk about what they thought was happening with these texts, that some easy opportunities for developing their knowledge of conceptual tools in class were lost.

I was not conscious of it then, nor was Elaine, but one example of an opportunity lost took place in the introductory lesson Elaine conducted for *Of Mice and Men*. To provide students information about the characters' living conditions during the Great Depression, Elaine presented a combination of verbal and nonverbal texts, including graphs and tables to convey information about poverty and joblessness and pictures of the Dust Bowl and people living in tents. Elaine had used this same lesson in previous years when she was not practicing with her students aesthetic reading of nonverbal texts. As in the previous years, Elaine was using these texts efferently, positioning the students to gain information from these texts, not asking them to respond and interpret. They could observe in the images such information as crowded conditions, ragged clothes, and the

lack of secure shelter. One image, though, was the very evocative *Migrant Mother* by Dorothea Lange, which could have provided a departure point for Elaine and the students to compare informative and evocative texts. The *Migrant Mother* could particularly, though the other images could as well, evoke responses from the students and allow them to make meanings that went beyond the gleaning of factual information in the text. This range of images, tables, and verbal text included in this lesson provided a chance to quickly point out the difference between reading texts (nonverbal or verbal) for information—efferently—and for the experiences readers might have when they encounter an evocative text, such as *Migrant Mother*—reading it aesthetically. At the time, though, I did not see this opportunity and, like Elaine, found all of the texts very helpful in giving the students a rich understanding of the living conditions during the time period.

In an interview that took place about two-thirds of the way through the semester, Elaine and I discussed assessing how well they understood the meaning-making processes they were undertaking regularly in class. As I began to raise the issue, Elaine noted how much growth she had seen in the students from early in the term and expressed hesitation about drawing their attention to their practices. In effect, she seemed to think that making them aware would make them more self-conscious and more focused on arriving at right answers than on transacting with texts:

K: What kind of growth did you see between the first metaphor project and now?

Elaine: Their initial responses [as shown in the first set of metaphor projects] were more literal, now they're much more open-ended; I think they're thinking in terms

of the possibilities, as opposed to the definites – and I like that because we can work with that in a way that I think that could be, potentially, more insightful. ... It kind of moves along the five tiers of questions – that you start with the knowledge base and then you can get open-ended questions [followed by] more open-ended questions, it's one of those English ed. things [English methods]. I feel like they're doing it naturally and without me ever presenting those types of questions. ... I've used that [questioning] model in the past, where I've actually asked students to write questions on each level [from factual and knowledge-based through interpretive] and then come back to the text.

She emphasized that the students were successfully doing what she'd hoped for, and described her concern that drawing attention to it might be a distraction:

I think that not using any of that language, at least at this point, has worked fine, because they bring it up themselves. ... On the whole, I feel like a lot of them have moved to thinking that way really naturally. I don't sense any of the resistance when we're talking about multiple interpretations; I'm not sensing the same kind of resistance that we had at the beginning.

I wanted to give Elaine more time to consider this, because I didn't think she had thought about my question before or had given conscious thought to being more transparent prior to the interview. I prompted her several times more in this interview, and she developed her thoughts further as to why she did not want to discuss more overtly with students what they were doing:

K: Do you ever get concerned about what their awareness of – You and I can sit here and talk about [the meaning-making we see in class] and be so impressed, but how much do they know that they're learning, or does it matter?

Elaine: I'm hoping that I can do some of that meta-cognitive thinking aloud for them in my presentation of the [image essay, final] project. [I could say:] "We have done this, we have done this, have done this. You know how to challenge one another. You know all these different components, now we need to make it cohesive. And we need to kind of link them." [I don't really want to say]: "What do you think you've learned this year?" but more so just verbalizing what I see happening and hoping they can identify with that – in the affirmative, like: yes, this is how – (trails off).

K: I was going to ask you how hard or messy you think it would be to ask them as a class: "Do you see any connections between these [these ways of making meaning with different types of texts]?" I mean, they're not going to immediately have an answer, but if they had time to think it through, [I wonder] what they would come up with.

Elaine: Yeah, I don't know -

K: It might take a long time but it would be interesting to see if they could articulate anything, or come up with something different than what you've already seen.

Elaine: Yeah, and I also don't know if I think that would be really beneficial, or if it would become something that they're too self-conscious of. You know? I think because – I think the willingness to ask questions [about meaning] and be hanging in this place, where you could be wrong, if that exists [being wrong in this context], it's a really

delicate place, and if I point it out, their comfort with that delicate place, some of them, the intellectuals, will think too much into it, and I think it could silence them.

K: Interesting.

Elaine: And the ones who are timid, or who think there's a right answer, will think there's a right answer *now*, and that could also close them up. So, for me, I think observing, kind of modeling some of the things I see, some of the skills I see, might be better than talking about the overall connections. Since part of my goal is to get them to think aloud metaphorically, interpretively, about a text in a way that lacks the self-conscious.... I don't know, I feel like it falls more in line with our goals to wait and see – maybe at the end have them [think through this in] their reflection [about the course or the final project]. But as long as I still want more out of them, I think I should wait [to draw attention to what they're doing and how].

So, at this point if not before, Elaine considered discussing with students the thinking processes they were undertaking, and she decided not to do so. Looking back now, I think that quick explanations of and references to the distinctions among aesthetic, efferent, and expressive stances and narrative, persuasive, descriptive, and informational genres would have been helpful and unobtrusive. At that time, however, I hadn't yet recognized the students' struggles as existing within those conceptual frameworks. Also at that time, I wasn't sure I agreed with Elaine about the students' self-consciousness and the possible effects of that. It was clear to me, however, that Elaine had reasons for making the decisions she did, and that she was committed to her approach.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to show the advantages several of the focus students saw in using nonverbal texts in ELA. They explained that being able to see and discuss the nonverbal text immediately—without the time or, in some instances, the struggle, involved in reading verbal texts—permitted them greater access to meaning-making. They also described value in hearing how other students were perceiving texts and the features that contributed to their meaning-making. In these ways, richer experiences with texts and deeper and more complex meanings developed.

My conversations with these students also revealed some expectations and some confusion that they experienced with the processes they engaged with in Elaine's class. Though they were generally able to enact the processes Elaine asked of them, several students expressed some resistance and some confusion regarding these processes. My analysis of these conversations identified stance and purpose—how one was approaching a text and what one expected from it—as areas of confusion. Students at times expected re-presentation and efferent transactions and sometimes wanted freedom to respond expressively. The aesthetic approach required by Elaine, in which students created and supported meaning through texts, seemed to them at times to intrude on their personal, subjective, and strongly felt relationship with a text.

Elaine explained that she was trying to balance what she perceived as (a.) the value she saw in having the students practice the skills they were developing with (b.) having students reach a point where they could articulate a metacognitive understanding of what they were doing. While I understood the students' tensions in terms of conceptual

tools after I completed my data analysis, during the data collection phase of the study I only saw that some students were resistant and seemed confused about what they were undertaking in class. She chose to emphasize the practice and active meaning-making while guarding against what she believed could be distracting attempts to correctly identify what they were doing in any more obvious ways than she already was enacting.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications

Effective instruction focuses on exploring multiple perspectives, on arriving at a broader base of knowledge from which interpretations can be developed and enriched, on sensitivity to others' well-defended views, on expectation that convincing arguments will differ based on who the people are—both the readers and their audience—and that good defenses need not always move others to agree, but to offer additional complexity to others' understandings. (Langer, 1992, p. 3)

I first came across the above passage, also cited in Ch. 3, after I had completed my data analysis for this study and was considering ways to relate Elaine's work and that of her students to existing theory and research about meaning-making. Because the passage so accurately and succinctly described the practices Elaine used in her classroom, in the margin next to that passage I wrote "Elaine's." As I continued reading Langer's report on the research she and her team had conducted over eight years, I was struck by how well her descriptions of those practices that are supportive of "literary orientations" aligned with what I saw in the semester I observed Elaine and her students. In Elaine's class, in large part through the inclusion of nonverbal texts, meanings were created and supported; students looked to each other for input and scaffolding; paradigms of

autonomous meaning in texts were challenged and then replaced with an aesthetic approach and a sociocognitive view of meaning creation. In another report, Langer (1997) listed four principles that supported this type of teaching (also discussed above in Ch. 3). These principles describe what I found in Elaine's classroom as she and the students worked with verbal and nonverbal texts:

1. Students were treated as thinkers, with interesting thoughts and questions
2. Literature reading was treated as question generating
3. Class meetings were treated as time for developing understandings
4. Multiple perspectives were used to enrich interpretation

Following ten years of standardized testing regimes, the principles and thinking outlined by Langer and the work Elaine did with her students, sadly, felt novel.

The students in Elaine's class transacted first as individuals with texts: Elaine initiated each textual analysis with a question like "what does this mean to you?" and students responded in their notebooks and journals. Following that, in an effort to make transparent their individual meaning-making processes and to model the role of evidence in arriving at a valid reading or perceiving of a text, Elaine and the students shared their thinking aloud. Typically, this sharing led to increased complexity in the meanings students made, as they borrowed each other's ideas and refined their own. This helped Elaine engage the students in meaning-making that allowed them to break free of the "more traditional notion of literature teaching that included single 'best' interpretations, plot retracing from beginning to end, close reading for the author's message, and using class time to fill in what students didn't 'get'" (Langer, 1997, p.7). The emphasis on

process, not a correct answer, was central. No expectations of a single right answer were present. In the class discussions, autonomous conceptualizations of texts, in which students treat “literacy as a separate, reified set of ‘neutral’ competencies, autonomous of social context” (Street, 1995, p. 114), were quickly dispelled, as meanings were suggested, revised, built upon, and deepened as students and Elaine transacted with the texts. Students saw that texts do not carry single embedded meanings, but rather that meanings are constructed in transactions between readers / perceivers and texts. Through this sharing, students created and encountered multiple legitimate readings of these verbal and nonverbal texts, consistent with Langer’s principles.

The Role of Nonverbal Texts in Implementing Langer’s Principles

Like several of the student participants, when I began this study I expected to encounter a more guided, rules-based approach to interpretation. I planned to read about and discuss with participants the syntax of visual texts and grammars of visual design, and compare these to formal elements of literary texts. I found, however, a much stronger emphasis on the reader or perceiver than I expected. Elaine and her students certainly and consistently engaged in text-based reading; they examine, very closely, features embedded in texts, and they created and discussed the meanings those features helped them create. But Elaine’s approach quickly made clear to me and to her students that the emphasis in this class was on what happened off the page, not on it. The focus of Elaine’s teaching was on the transactions the students had with artistic texts that involved “a *living through*, not simply knowledge *about*...” the text (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 63). The processes that the *readers* used to make meaning with the symbols and signs they found

in the verbal and nonverbal texts were the focus of study, not the symbols and signs themselves or, implicitly, the formal rules that governed them. Rather than informing students about—or even instructing students on how to apply—established forms or conventions, Elaine and her students “lived through” experiences with artistic texts, sharing the development of their thinking as they made meaning. They drew on formal elements, but their experience with these artistic, literary texts was theirs, and the goal was to form meaning and to “explore horizons” (Langer, 1992, p. 8), not to uncover a fixed meaning embedded in the text.

To accomplish this, Elaine capitalized on the pedagogical advantages supplied by the nonverbal texts. As she had expected, students made meaning in very much the same ways regardless of the mode, either verbal or nonverbal. The degree of students’ agency with meaning-making was high for all, much different from what Elaine and I had separately experienced over many years of teaching ELA with only alphabetic texts to diverse groups of students. As noted in the introduction, typically our stronger readers had made meaning readily with alphabetic texts, while the struggling readers deferred to the teacher or the stronger students. In Elaine’s class during this study, all of the students consistently engaged in meaning-making with the complex, open-ended, and evocative nonverbal texts they worked with in class. These texts were more accessible, not because the meanings students made with them were simpler, but because the nonverbal texts were immediately available, in their entirety (rather than word by word or line by line), to each student, whether or not a student was a good reader of alphabetic text. The students and Elaine could literally see, immediately and simultaneously, various ways that

features in a nonverbal text could interact to form a meaningful whole, though the meanings they each made often varied. The meaning-making practices students engaged in with nonverbal texts then served as models and set the tone for meaning-making practices with verbal literary texts. Elaine did not neglect the reading of alphabetic text; rather she provided practice and modeling with nonverbal texts, then offered more modeling and more practice with the verbal texts, and returned again to nonverbal, integrating both modes throughout the semester. In this way, all of the students were consistently and actively involved in meaning-making with sophisticated texts regardless of their abilities with processing complex alphabetic text. Over the semester, students were practicing the same skills with both types of texts. Over the course of the semester, all of the students were able to take active roles in meaning-making processes, and all were able to contribute valued insights and observations to others with at least some of the texts.

In accord with the positive examples described in Langer's work, participants generally seemed eager to share, discuss, build upon, and agree or disagree about the meanings they were making. Again, this was much more readily done when the text being discussed was nonverbal, because the text was visible, in its entirety, to all, immediately and simultaneously. Students selected, focused on, and at times literally pointed to particular features in a text as they discussed with each other and Elaine how those features transacted with other elements of meaning-making, both within and external to, the text. Of course, one can point to, highlight, or underline elements in a verbal text also, such as a metaphor, stanza, paragraph, term, etc. The meaning-making

capabilities this kind of physical interaction with printed text offers a group of diverse learners, though, is more limited than referring to an element in an image illuminated on the board at the front of the room. Sophisticated meaning-making processes take place regardless of the mode, but the immediate access to the features that combine to form the text—and the ability for members of a heterogeneous class to discuss and construct meaning with them— is enhanced with nonverbal texts. This was evident in the amount of active participation by students in the discussions of the nonverbal texts vs. the verbal. When the text being discussed was verbal, Elaine typically made more contributions. When the text was nonverbal, Elaine and the students often seemed on an even playing field, with students and teacher sharing ideas, thoughts, and perspectives on how they were making meaning with the text. An appreciation for the access to meaning-making provided by nonverbal texts was also supported by the observations students shared during the interviews, with remarks such as “it’s all right there” and “with a picture, you can see it.”

Students’ Confusion, Tensions, and Resistance

Although in class students appeared primed and eager to participate in the process of meaning-making described above, a few expressed some confusion, resistance, or tension regarding some of what they perceived to be happening in class. During interviews, the focus students and I discussed the texts Elaine used in class, and I was able to listen to their thinking about creating meaning. It surprised me that several students’ expressed their expectations that the purpose of a text—verbal and nonverbal— was to accurately transmit some reality or actual occurrence, even when that text fell

under the heading of “art.” For some students, the expected role of a nonverbal text as illustration or re-presentation was prevalent in several interviews, even though these students had actively engaged in rich, aesthetic meaning-making with texts in class for at least a few weeks. Though they participated actively and successfully in class activities—discussions, free-writes, presentations—that engaged them in open-ended meaning-making, their conscious, articulated understanding of the purpose of a texts, particularly a nonverbal text, was to re-present some real event or some an aspect of a verbal text. They expressed the expectation that the purpose of an image was to present a one-to-one representation of something else. In the interviews, several expressed a reluctance to apprehend an image as a work of expression in its own right, rather than as an illustration or representation of something outside of itself.

In a much different vein, some students also at times resisted and seemed to resent the notion that features of a text could contradict a personal meaning they had created, based loosely on or associated with a text. They wanted to respond to a text in a way that Soter et al. (2010) termed “expressive” (see Ch. 2, above). It was interesting that, when the students discussed this, there was not a particular text or particular response in question. They were objecting in principle. They entered Elaine’s class at the beginning of the semester already familiar at some level with what seemed to them a conflict between two ways of engaging with texts—what they didn’t know could be called “expressive” and “aesthetic”—and had come down firmly on the side of privileging whatever interpretation they liked better, regardless of what a teacher or others considered adequate support for that interpretation. School reading might be different,

Jody and Mary told me and Elaine's F Block told her, but that is not how they liked to read or would choose to read (literary texts or evocative nonverbal texts) on their own. It seemed that these students opposed the idea that they somehow would not be allowed such a personal and free relationship with a text. More importantly, and a significant finding of this study, these students did not understand that multiple stances toward a text were possible: A text could be read expressively, as they were suggesting; but the same text could also be read aesthetically, with support for the meanings they created that were embedded in the features of the text; or the text might be read efferently, with the goal of gleaning information from that text. These students seemed to think that transacting aesthetically with a text would nullify a more emotional, expressive response.

Implications for Practice

ELA Curricula and Nontraditional and Multimodal Texts

The findings in this study suggest that nonverbal texts allowed all the students, regardless of reading level, to transact with complete, complex, evocative, and intellectually challenging texts. One of the reasons the class members were able to successfully engage with nonverbal texts is that the texts were immediately meaningful to each student; i.e., students were able to make meaning, at some level, with these complete texts immediately and independently, before sharing and revising with their classmates and Elaine. All students, not just the successful readers, were able to form a relationship with and an opinion about a text and then, from that point, work with others and through the criteria for a valid reading to revise, extend, or deepen these meanings.

With verbal texts, students continued to actively engage with the texts as well as they were able but often while building upon contributions from Elaine. The practice of alternating between nonverbal and verbal—more and less immediately accessible texts—maintained a high level of interaction among students, texts, and teacher throughout the semester. Given that the focus of Elaine’s teaching was on learning how to construct meaning, a primary concern for her was that students were able to access the elements that form the text. If our aim is to have students act as thoughtful participants, intellectually engaged with the signs in their worlds, the inclusion of modes other than alphabetic texts can legitimately be included in ELA class to promote students’ learning. Boykin and Noguera (2010) point to the impact on achievement, particularly for underachieving students and minority students, of engaging in active, higher-level thinking:

The kind of engagement that optimizes task performance is not simply measurable time on task or attending to a lesson, but rather active engagement in academic tasks—the student is actively doing math, reading material at a non-superficial level, and making strides toward task accomplishment.... [Such engagement] is particularly linked to favorable learning outcomes for minority students who have been placed at risk for academic failure. (Boykin and Noguera, 2010, p. 42)

It’s also important to note that the nonverbal texts Elaine used did not prove to be more accessible to the students because these texts provoked easy or obvious interpretations. In part they were accessible *because* they were complex, layered, and

open-ended—characteristics that made them engaging to the students. Additionally, through their meaning-making, the students also made the texts relevant: The participants in this study readily questioned nonverbal texts from the various perspectives that were available to them and, thereby, made them part of their lives.

Addressing Students' Struggles

Feedback, particularly from the focus students in the interviews but also from a few other students via the two class discussions about how meaning is made (e.g., Lyn's comment that "a desk is a desk, that's all!" noted in Ch. 4, above), highlighted some of the intellectual work these students were already doing. They had needs and questions forming before they arrived in Elaine's class, and brought these with them. Many of the students in Elaine's class had already formed strong opinions about the role of the author's intent, of readers, and of the "ink spots on paper" (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 63) before the first day of Elaine's class. Eliciting these students' questions and assessing their understandings can inform us as educators and allow us to better address their developing concerns and possible misperceptions. The focus students' responses remind us of the importance of transparency, formative assessment, and feedback loops. My role as researcher and interviewer provided me a window to see ways that the focus students were struggling some of the questions they had. More so than Elaine, I saw that several of these students were at times grappling with trying to reconcile what they learned in class regarding how meaning is made with prior instruction and strongly held personal beliefs about meaning they made with texts. Though the students were quite successful in enacting the practices Elaine facilitated in class, they were experiencing tensions and

conflicts due to the limitations they thought these practices imposed. Clearly, taking the time to gauge students' understanding and addressing their concerns directly could further students' ability to transact meaningfully with a variety of texts and text types. Had there been more time in class for Elaine to prompt the kinds of discussions students had with me in the interviews, she could have helped them understand the possible stances they might choose to take toward reading and the purposes that align with those stances. Reading for information, expecting and looking for re-presentational accuracy, and responding emotionally to some part or all of a text are each legitimate experiences readers can choose to have with texts.

Further, based on students' feedback, it seems that extending the base of conceptual tools that Elaine shared with students would aid them in becoming more conscious of the reasons one would elect a given stance at a particular time. Beyond Rosenblatt's criteria for a valid reading, teachers can share with students the aesthetic through efferent continuum with the addition of the expressive. In this study, such an approach would have allowed several students to become aware of the stances they took as they read and compare the value and appropriateness of each. This might also reduce the tension and sense of conflict some of them felt when they were asked to apply Rosenblatt's criteria to texts. I agree with Elaine that directing the students' attention to these tools could be a distraction, but I think that, had she been able to recognize the students' frustration and identify the source, Elaine would have been able to handle this with subtlety and in proportion to the task.

Multimodal Texts, Stance, and Common Core State Standards

When I began forming a proposal for this study, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were in early stages of development, and I had little familiarity with them. I was motivated to conduct the study, as noted in the introductory chapter, by a desire to differentiate instruction and include students across ability levels in equitable, shared, sophisticated meaning-making practices. I was also motivated by a desire to address questions I had about whether the content of literary texts was as important as the processes involved in making meaning with those texts. I questioned what qualified as a text, and I asked whether our purposes in teaching literature do or should include the transmission of some cultural legacy. In the recent rollout of the CCSS in literacy, I have heard echoes of many of these same questions.

The CCSS in literacy call for increased focus on text-based analysis. They also emphasize the use of informational texts. I am hopeful that the practices and findings described in this study can contribute to a richer conversation about literacy practices and our purposes in teaching students to make meaning with the texts in their worlds. The work I observed Elaine and her students doing highlighted the importance of aesthetic transactions and of literary thinking. These include considering multiple perspectives, exploring possibilities, the limitations and dangers inherent in uncritically attributing autonomous meanings to the texts in our worlds, and the importance of students enacting participatory practices.

Accurate reading of informational texts is no doubt important, but the thinking involved in transacting with texts and reading them critically—discussed throughout this

study—is crucial to our shared development as a society. The strategies Elaine used with her students are valuable in reading/perceiving many kinds of texts, as is the understanding of efferent, aesthetic, and expressive stances toward the reading of these texts. Discussions about literacy must go beyond accurate reading of fictional and nonfictional, literary and informational texts. Far more is at stake than accurately transferring coded meaning from text to pupil or teaching students to re-present what they uncover in a text.

Community and Democratic Practices

The literary thinking and the four principles described by Langer offer students opportunities to envision possibilities, to consider different perspectives, and to engage in discourse in order to reach shared understandings. The practices described in this study positioned students both as unique, individual thinkers and as participants in a diverse community of learners. Elaine’s students regularly went further and could see more—their horizons broadened—as they interacted with each other and with the texts they made, read, or perceived. Due in part to the equity of access provided by nonverbal texts, the culture that developed in Elaine’s classroom valued and supported the complexity and intellectual diversity that students brought individually and that they and Elaine formed together.

These students and Elaine were not focused on competing or achieving high scores on tests; they were far too busy asking, wondering, sharing, supporting, and developing. They also were acting, daily, to support something outside of themselves as individuals: they practiced listening, postponing judgment, living with ambiguity,

weighing different perspectives, communicating and revising their thoughts—in sum, they were acting as and in support of a community of learners.

Recommendations for Further Research

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Questions about what and how much literary theory we share with students (e.g., the aesthetic, efferent, and expressive stances discussed above), and how transparently we do this, are linked to questions about teacher preparation. When I co-taught an English methods class to 20 pre-service ELA teachers at a large state university, only one or two students said that they had had any experience with literary theory in their college English classes. Most had practiced reading texts and writing about them and expected to reproduce these practices in their own teaching. Elaine knew of Rosenblatt's criteria for a valid reading but was not aware of Rosenblatt's efferent to aesthetic continuum, which I thought would have been helpful for many of her students as they, privately in our interviews as well as in class discussion, questioned or challenged the aesthetic approach to reading verbal and nonverbal texts in class.

ELA teachers' knowledge about and preparation in theoretical concepts is present, though not always consciously addressed, in their teaching of literary texts. Research into how ELA teachers are prepared to engage students in meaning-making with a variety of texts types and from an array of stances would help shed light on whether these areas are adequately addressed in teacher preparation and what, if any, changes are needed . Particularly in an era of standardization, with the emphasis the CCSS place on the distinctions between informational and literary texts, greater knowledge and

understanding of text types and ways of reading will be necessary to improve teaching and learning in ELA. Also, given that the CCSS place a strong emphasis of literacy with informational texts, in order to improve the teaching and learning of informational texts across the curriculum teachers in all subject areas should understand and be able to discuss stances readers take in transacting with texts.

Participants, Setting, and Addressing the Achievement Gap

The students in this study exhibited very diverse learning styles, and the approaches Elaine used reached the array very effectively. Though Weybridge was a school of choice (students in the district were admitted by lottery) in a socioeconomically diverse school district, it was located in an affluent area, and most of the students in Elaine's class came from relatively high SES groups. The school also promoted student-centered decision-making, with expectations that the entire community of students and teachers participate in school governance. These factors might well have contributed to the ease with which the students interacted with each other, with the various texts, and with Elaine. I would like to see research on the pedagogical approaches describe here in other settings and with different student profiles. Particularly in terms of the achievement gap and engaging minorities and students of color with their learning, the use of multimodal approaches and a wide variety of texts, verbal and nonverbal, such as Elaine and her students used seems very promising.

The Writing Process and Development of Students' Learning

Throughout the semester, Elaine's emphasis was on making meaning and creating critical, active, and aware readers. Observation of class discussions was our primary means of assessing how the use of nonverbal texts influenced this group of learners, and we supplemented this with analysis of what students wrote about the meaning-making process and with my interviews with the focus students. The class discussions demonstrated the effectiveness of Elaine's approach in realizing her goals; Elaine's students demonstrated deeper and more text-based transactions with texts in these class discussions as the semester progressed. Further research is needed that examines, more systematically than this study did, implementation of the practices Elaine used but with greater emphasis on students' writing and the progress they make in their writing over the semester as they transact with both nonverbal and verbal texts. The increased engagement with nonverbal texts suggests a rich environment to promote critical, text-based writing practices for a broad array of student readers.

Limitations and Validity

As I formed both tentative and more lasting conclusions throughout the research process, I kept in mind the question: How might I be wrong? Continually during the study I discussed my impressions with Elaine regarding all that happened during the class meetings. I also asked her to describe what she thought she was seeing. When our interpretations of what we observed didn't align, we discussed what we'd considered important until I felt certain that I wasn't missing any significant details. I also checked

and re-checked my field notes to confirm that I was remembering and portraying events and discourse accurately.

With regard to the focus students, I asked them about their thoughts and experiences in different ways to see if subsequent responses confirmed what I thought I understood them to say. I believe that students answered questions on the same topic multiple times, in the end providing me with a fairly nuanced sense of their experiences.

In the case of one of the focus students, Jody, I often felt unsure that I understood her perspective. Much of what she said seemed incoherent to me in relation to other things she said; even with my questioning and our open dialogue during the interviews, I found her responses to be inconsistent and, at times, contradictory. I looked for ways to connect her thoughts and searched for cohesiveness in those thoughts to help me form themes; I kept trying to find the clue that would make all fit together and give me an “aha!” moment so that her thinking would no longer seem so fragmented. In the end I asserted in the findings chapter what I thought I could assert with some justification and described other of her thoughts as divergent threads. The “meaning” I found in Jody’s experience is that of someone struggling with what seemed to her to be competing intellectual priorities. I do not feel that I was able to adequately capture her experience, but I did try to convey a sense of it. I was careful not to make claims about Jody’s thinking when I was unsure.

As I began the study, my greatest concern regarding validity centered on what I believed would be my bias: that my expectation, based on my experiences as a classroom teacher of ELA, that inclusion of nonverbal texts would help students make meaning

would color what I saw. To address this, I regularly asked Elaine and the focus students about what they saw happening with the nonverbal texts. I used their impressions to check my own. Also, though my findings do support my belief that this is a valuable practice, I did not anticipate the multiple ways, described above, in which I found it to be valuable. These unexpected findings further led me to believe my bias is not responsible for the conclusions I outlined here.

Appendix A: Boy at the Window

Boy at the Window

by Richard Wilbur

Seeing the snowman standing all alone
In dusk and cold is more than he can bear.
The small boy weeps to hear the wind prepare
A night of gnashings and enormous moan.
His tearful sight can hardly reach to where
The pale-faced figure with bitumen eyes
Returns him such a God-forsaken stare
As outcast Adam gave to paradise.

The man of snow is, nonetheless, content,
Having no wish to go inside and die.
Still, he is moved to see the youngster cry.
Though frozen water is his element,
He melts enough to drop from one soft eye
A trickle of the purest rain, a tear
For the child at the bright pane surrounded by
Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear.

Appendix B: Metaphor Project Assignment Sheet

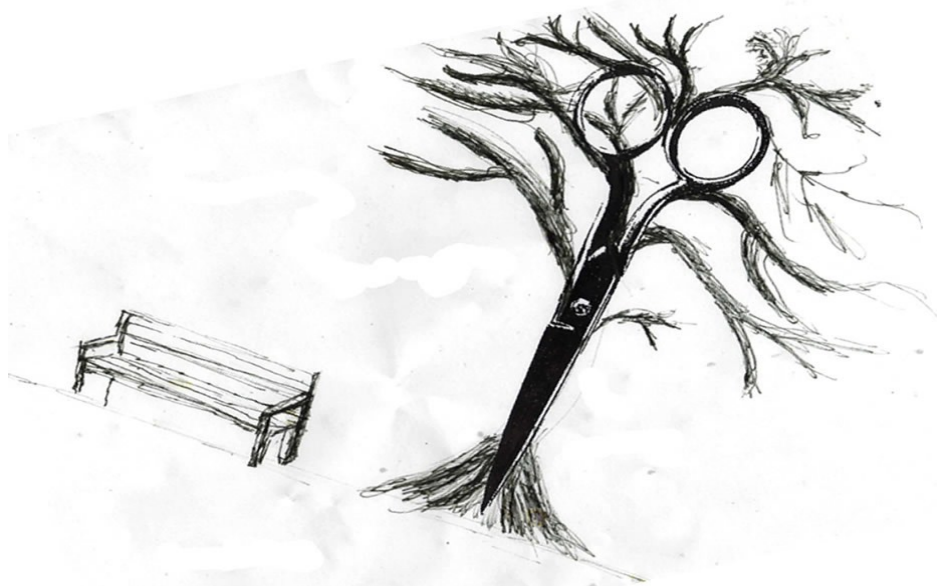
***A Separate Peace* Metaphor Project**

Rationale: A metaphor is, in its simplest form, a comparison of an abstract concept with a concrete object; metaphor functions to help make that abstract concept a little easier to understand. These concrete objects give the viewer, or the reader, a “way in” to a concept that might be hard to follow without it, or it brings to light a new way of looking at the abstract, or intangible, concept.

Directions: Your task for the Metaphor Project is to choose some aspect of the text that you find interesting and create a *visual* metaphor for it. You may create the visual yourself or you may bring in something visual that was originally created by someone else or for another purpose. The goal is that we can see a new interpretation of the work in a visual way. You may want to start with the abstract concept first and then think of how you might portray it, or you might start with a visual that reminds you of something in the text and explain how it exemplifies an idea you have about the text. You may not use film, music or anything with written text.

Requirements: Bring in your visual to class on the day that it is due, Monday October 3 and present it to the class. You will explain the abstract concept that your visual image is a metaphor for, and you will give the class a chance to ask questions, push your thinking further, etc. Presentations will be on 10/3. Once you have heard from the class, you will write up your metaphor explanation and include: how you came to

thinking of this concept, where you found or how you created the visual, what and how it “means” to you. This should be a full discussion of your metaphor. Due 10/5.



Here is an example¹; I will explain in class, how I came to interpret this visual.

1 From <http://djahren.deviantart.com/art/Scissor-Tree-92104269>

Appendix C: Unstructured Interview Protocols

STUDENT

Student Interview 1 (of three; near the beginning of data collection)

Are you looking forward to this upcoming semester?

In terms of all your school work:

- What kinds of things do you most like to do? What kinds of things are you best at?
- What do you least like to do? What do you think you're less good at?
- What about in terms of just your English classes? (same questions, above, about proclivities and perceived shortcomings)

Then, if needed:

Think about the **English classes you've taken in the past**:

- Can you tell me what things you liked about them?
- What things you didn't like?

If needed:

- Tell me about things you yourself did in those classes.
- Do you remember any writing assignments? projects? presentations? group work? How did you like those? Do you remember being particularly good at any of these?
- Is there anything you felt you were unsuccessful at or wish you could have done better?
- Why do you think your teacher asked you to do those assignments? What do you think you were expected to learn? (Probe here for opportunities in

class for students to interpret, make meaning, and demonstrate agency and independent thinking.)

- Do you think your classmates in your English classes before have found your ideas interesting? Helpful?
- Do you think your English teachers have liked your ideas in the past?
[Prompt: Can you think of any examples of you sharing your ideas in class? Can you describe them?]

Take a look at train station – what do you remember about looking at this the first time?

Same for Gulf Stream -

ADD:

How did (Snowman, Train Station, Gulf Stream) make you feel?

Would you choose to spend free time reading?

What do you choose to read?

Any background/ experience with art? Do you have anything hanging on your walls in your bedroom? (Discourse communities)

Did you notice any other elements of the artwork – colors, brush strokes? Did you notice any words to the poem?

If made to write a paragraph/ essay, would you rather begin with picture or written text? Why?

Emotional response to train station (I asked about Snowman and Gulf Stream)

Student Interview 2 (of three; after one unit of study, about halfway through the data collection, i.e., 4-5 weeks)

So far in your English class this year:

What have you liked and not liked about what you and your classmates have done?

How successful do you feel you've been?

What do you think you've been most successful at?

Least?

Do you know why your teacher asked you to do [a particular assignment]? What do you think you were expected to learn?

[Probe here for opportunities students might recall to interpret, make meaning, demonstrate agency and independent thinking;

If present, how were these accomplished or attempted?

Do you think your classmates in your English class find your ideas interesting? Helpful?

Do you think your English teacher likes your ideas? [Prompt: Can you think of any examples of you sharing your ideas in class? Can you describe them?]

Student Interview 3 (of three; after two units of study, at the end of data collection)

Since we last spoke ...

Same questions as Interview 2

And:

What do you think of using [visual texts] as part of English class?

Do you think they have helped you learn? If so, in what way or ways?

TEACHER

Teacher Interview 1 (of three; near the beginning of data collection)

1. What do you find interesting about the use of visual texts in ELA class(es)? / Why did you first start to use visual texts to teach English?
2. What have been your impressions about the use of visual texts in your classes? E.g., what are they good for? What has surprised you?
3. What do you hope to learn during the course of this study?
4. Is there anything else on your mind about the use of visual texts?

Teacher Interview 2 (of three, after one unit of study, midway through data collection)

1. So far this year, what have you found interesting about the use of visual texts in your class(es)?
2. [If not included in response to question #1:] Particularly in terms of your goals (see question 3 from interview 1), what are your thoughts at this point about the use of visual texts in ELA?
3. If not answered above: Do you see any differences in terms of different students' learning with regard to visual and verbal texts (i.e., differentiation)?
4. If not answered above: Do you see any differences in terms of different students' engaged participation with regard to visual and verbal texts?
5. Is there anything else on your mind about the use of visual texts?

Teacher Interview 3 (of three; after two units of study, at the end of data collection)

1. Since we last spoke, have you found anything new that interests you about the use of visual texts?
2. [If not included in #1:] Particularly in terms of your goals (see question 3 from interview 1), what are your thoughts at this point about the use of visual texts in ELA?
3. If not answered above: Do you see any differences in terms of different students' learning with regard to visual and verbal texts (i.e., differentiation)?
4. If not answered above: Do you see any differences in terms of different students' engaged participation with regard to visual and verbal texts?
5. Is there anything else on your mind about the use of visual texts?

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Curriculum Vitae

Kathleen A. Reilly earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from James Madison College at Michigan State University in 1986. While at Michigan State, Kathleen also completed requirements for her certification in the teaching of secondary social studies and English language arts. In 1991, Kathleen earned her Master of Arts degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Maryland. For 19 years, prior to beginning her doctoral program at George Mason University in 2008, Kathleen taught English language arts in public and independent schools in Maryland and Virginia and international schools in Milan and London. Kathleen grew up in the city of Detroit where she first developed her love for literature and the arts and her interest in education and social justice pedagogy. She is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Instructional Leadership and Professional Development at Towson University.