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PLANNING, CO-CONSTRUCTION, ACTION: A Framework for Critical Literacy Instruction

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"WE CHOOSE TO go to the moon!" Almost 60 years have passed since John F. Kennedy's 1962 Moon Speech, and it is difficult, even today, not to cheer upon hearing this emphatic line. The Space Race: an American story passed down for generations. The moon landing had always seemed like an event easily agreed upon as positive and hopeful—certainly worthy of celebration. In my (first author) household, we love space. My son's middle name is even Apollo! Then one day, while watching the movie *Hidden Figures*, I heard a song that offered a new perspective of the Space Race, and I realized that I was experiencing the very thing I wanted my students to learn—a critical stance. The words "The man jus' upped my rent las' night, ('cause Whitey's on the moon) No hot water, no toilets, no lights. (but Whitey's on the moon) I wonder why he's uppi' me? ('cause Whitey's on the moon?) I was already payin' 'im fifty a week. (with Whitey on the moon)" rang through my head. Quite suddenly, I realized not everyone wanted to spend upwards of 28 million dollars to go to the moon.

The song "Whitey on the Moon" by Gil Scott-Heron was the first time I heard a different view of the Space Race. It was the first time I began to think critically, asking myself, "Whose story is missing here?" (the Space Race opposition), and my questions emerged from the juxtaposition of these two different perspectives on America's role in the Space Race. Experiences such as these are a continual catalyst for us as literacy educators to answer the questions, How can we teach students to critically analyze texts for issues of equity, power, and social justice? and What texts are most useful for teaching students to read from a critical stance?

Rooted in sociocultural perspectives of literacy, critical literacy is an instructional approach for examining the relationships of language and power in texts. As Vasquez et al. (2019) claimed, "critical literacy is not a singular concept to be studied over a period of time and then mastered," but rather is a way of teaching students to "view the world with a critical eye" (p. 306). Critical literacy requires looking "beyond a passive acceptance of a text" (Kelly et al., 2020, p. 298) in order to interrogate and explore texts for issues of power and privilege, stereotypes and assumptions.

Lewison et al. (2002) synthesized years of research in order to define critical literacy as an intermingling of four dimensions: (a) disrupting the commonplace, (b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting social justice. Disrupting the commonplace may include rethinking a traditionally accepted interpretation of a well-known story, highlighting stereotypes and examining the author's purpose for using them. Interrogating multiple viewpoints could mean exploring the perspectives of various characters within the story and readers' own reactions and responses to the story. Considering the sociopolitical aspects of a text entails thinking about how power is distributed in the story, by whom, and for what reasons.

Taking action and promoting social justice can be a post-reading response to a new understanding from reading

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texts critically, but inquiry and action can also be centered within the dimensions of critical literacy as the text is being read. Taking an active stance, the reader searches for and may intentionally construct counternarratives for the story that is presented by the author. Readers interrogate texts with critical questions, such as, Who wrote this text? Is there anything that was omitted from this text that might be important? Whose experience is being presented? Whose experience is being ignored? Engaging in this critical interaction with a text allows readers to consider power structures and issues of social justice as they read and respond to texts.

In the classroom, critical literacy is a way of approaching texts through a collaboration between teacher and students (Vasquez, 2014). Together, even the youngest classrooms are capable of negotiating a critical curriculum if they are willing to "tune in to issues of social justice and equity" (Vasquez, 2014, p. xiv). In a pedagogical sense, the teacher designs a classroom environment that is conducive to inquiry and welcoming to multiple perspectives. This environment encourages questioning and deconstruction of texts, setting up frameworks and introducing books and other media using a critical stance. Teachers and students become co-constructors of knowledge as they encounter texts together with a critical lens. As Vasquez (2014) argued, critical literacy must also be "about the active production and redesign of those problematic ways of being," or the stereotypes and assumptions present in texts (p. 14). It is not enough to simply question and think deeply about a text, but one must also *respond*. As Vasquez et al. (2019) stated, it is "teachers' jobs to help students assume agency and act to make a difference, however small" (p. 306).

Discussion is an important part of taking a critical stance. Classroom dialogue around texts allows for teachers and students to negotiate meaning and co-construct new ways of thinking. This type of discussion moves beyond the common, but ineffective, Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) model of questioning (Flood, 2021). In this model, the teacher initiates a question, the student answers the question, and the teacher evaluates if the answer is right or wrong. IRE questions typically have one right answer, encouraging a teacher-dominated discussion path, rather than dialogic, critical discussion. Encouraging critical accountable talk, including teaching students to respectfully agree, disagree, and use evidence, is crucial to this type of discussion.

Reading and discussing picturebooks boosts children's general language competence as well as the process of questioning, listening, and responding to a story. These skills offer a foundation for critical thinking and reflections (Demoiny & Ferraras-Stone, 2018). A high-quality, diverse text can encourage critical conversation around life and history by providing a voice to individuals who have been marginalized in society, and can illustrate how individuals can address issues related to significant social matters (Wandasari et al., 2019).

Discussion is an important first step, but the work toward a critical stance does not end with classroom conversations. "Critical expressionism" is a term that describes an expanded view of what critical response looks like in the classroom (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2019). In critical expressionism, students might respond critically to texts by creating a podcast, a piece of art, a short film, or a song in a call for action or social change. Students use multiple representations of their thinking, responding in multimodal ways as "text-designers," working in and across various sign systems to create and express meaning (Knobel & Lankshear, 2004). This response can lead to deeper comprehension and can serve as the springboard for reconstruction and social action.

In this article, we present a pedagogical framework for teaching critical literacy with picturebooks and middle-grade novels, giving examples that encompass several grade spans. Then, we will offer several texts we have found useful for teaching critical literacy and embed them in this framework as classroom examples in action.

Framework for Teaching Critical Literacy

The purpose of this framework is to help teachers plan and implement critical literacy lessons using carefully selected texts. This framework contains three connected parts: the *Planning*, the *Co-Construction*, and the *Action* (see Table 2). There is no one way to teach critical literacy. We offer this framework as a way to help guide teachers' thinking as they work to present critical curriculum to their students. This framework can be adapted to meet the needs of each educator as they develop their own ways of being in the classroom.

The Planning

Although there is no one way to teach critical literacy, it is well established that "teachers themselves must first become critically literate" before teaching a classroom of students with a critical pedagogy (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2019, p. 588). One way to develop as a critical literacy educator is to participate in thoughtful, reflective, guided planning. Designing a strong

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essential question can help orient students to the critical stance because the nature of this big, overarching question with many possible answers lends itself to deep, inquiry-based thinking. Initially, the teacher may choose the essential question, but as the classroom becomes more comfortable with critical thinking, students can help to create new essential questions. This idea of developing an essential question in the planning stages lays the groundwork to accomplish all four dimensions of critical literacy. According to McTighe and Wiggins (2013), an effective essential question is open-ended and thought-provoking, requiring higher-order thinking and sparking further questions on a topic. The essential question might be inspired by or connected to state standards and creates a space for students to think critically about texts and concepts presented.

After identifying the essential question, it is time to choose texts that can support the co-construction of knowledge toward this question. One text alone will not be able to "answer" an essential question, but will serve as a springboard for conversation, knowledge building, and future inquiry. Book award lists are a great place to start when choosing a trustworthy, current, diverse book. See Table 2 for a list of reliable sources for choosing texts. It is important to note that high-quality texts can also inspire essential questions. At times, a teacher may build a unit with essential questions inspired directly from the text.

When planning a critical literacy experience, it is helpful to read through the texts or portions of the text multiple times. In the first read of the text, read for enjoyment and understanding, looking at the text through the lens of the essential question. In the second read, begin to search for keywords, marking places of considerable importance for knowledge building. Ask yourself, What is the key content I want students to understand? Consider three to five effective places in the reading to stop and discuss something related to the essential question. Reflect on the content you want to present and ask yourself, Are there any multimodal ways outside of this text to present this content? This question forces thought on the expansion of the view of what counts as text. Is there a video or photo that could be linked with a QR code to help clarify meaning, expand knowledge, and make this text multimodal? Think about the setting and time period of the text. Are there related pieces of music, aspects of culture, maps, or photos that would bring the setting to life? Anticipate where a student might have trouble understanding or where they could dig deeper.

In the third read of the text, consider multiple perspectives and differing viewpoints. Ask yourself the question, Is anything being left out of this text that I want my students to know? Is there another perspective to demonstrate? This is an opportunity to link new content into the text via a QR code. Link a video, article, or photo that demonstrates another perspective, making the read-aloud multimodal and bringing the reader outside of the text to interrogate multiple viewpoints. Lastly, consider current events and updated information. Is there a current event that could help students build knowledge and perspective in the content? Link these within the text via QR code. Schrodt et al.'s (2020) work includes more information about conducting a professional development on adding QR codes to texts for knowledge building.

The Co-Construction

The second part of the framework for teaching critical literacy with texts is the co-construction of meaning. Co-construction happens when the teacher and the students work together to make meaning of texts. It is important to privilege the funds of knowledge and multiple perspectives that students bring to a text (Vasquez, 2014). As the class engages with a text, each student brings their own way of being, with unique perspectives and background knowledge. The co-construction allows the classroom to grapple with the text, consider multiple viewpoints, and together create a more in-depth understanding.

In order to include all voices in co-construction, the read-aloud of the text must be interactive. Planned stopping points will facilitate times for students to turn and talk from a critical stance about the text. It is helpful to implement and practice discussion protocols with students, scaffolding them into effective critical discussion. The first protocol is practicing a co-construction twist on accountable talk. Accountable talk is intentional, open-ended conversation where participants listen, confirm, question, justify, and add on to thoughts and opinions related to the text or subject at hand. Wolf et al. (2006) described three aspects of accountable talk: accountability to the learning community, accountability to accurate knowledge, and accountability to rigorous thinking.

A common accountable talk classroom practice is to give students sentence stems before they begin discussion. A twist on this practice helps create a more organic approach, allowing students to be a part of the construction of authentic talk. Rather than handing students sentence stems, begin by directing students' attention to their own body language and words

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as they discuss. After the initial discussion, reflect as a group, charting what students noticed about their own discussion. Allow effective pairs of students to fishbowl model, reflecting on the discussion in action. As students learn to thoughtfully and respectfully interrogate a text, modeling and practicing accountable talk could be helpful to encouraging both listening and responding. Table 1 gives steps for co-constructing discussion norms as a class.

The Action

The third part of the framework is the action. Critical literacy practices can lead to change when we make space for the critique and subsequently the redesign and reconstruction of a text or idea (Vasquez, 2014). Social action is an important p art of critical literacy practice (Lewison et al., 2002), and it is critical that students take action linked to social justice and a call for change. As students do the work of analyzing texts critically, it is important for them to take the time to take action, sending a new text out into the world beyond the four walls of the classroom.

The action begins after engaging in the co-construction. Students and teachers together can ask themselves, What does this text now inspire me to do? (Fisher et al., 2020). After students have analyzed a text, they can transform that text into something they can send out into the world that represents a new point of view, or advocates for an issue, or remedies problematic ideals. This could include the creation of a public service announcement (PSA), poster, or podcast informing readers of a social justice issue. This could also be the creation of artwork or other multimodal representations, linking back to the idea of critical expressionism. Students have the opportunity to continue to practice critical thinking in the way they choose to express their newly synthesized ideas.

Below, three effective texts representing multiple grade spans have been chosen to represent how they might look when embedded into this framework for critical literacy instruction. These lessons could be used tomorrow in the classroom, or they could be adapted to meet the needs of individual learners. We hope these examples will help make visible the work of critical literacy in the classroom using children's books.

***Hidden Figures* (Grades 2–5)**

The Planning. The book *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly (2018) is the story of four Black women who were NASA engineers during the civil rights era. This award-winning book aligns with a fifth-grade social studies standard addressing John

Table 1

CO-CONSTRUCTING DISCUSSION NORMS

ACTION STEP	EXAMPLE
Direct student attention to their discussion.	While you discuss today, take particular notice of your body. What do your eyes do when you are talking? How does your body feel? What about when your discussion partner is talking? What are you doing? Also notice your words. What kinds of things are you saying to your partner? Do you always agree? What happens when you disagree?
After the discussion is over, reflect as a class with a shared writing on a piece of chart paper.	Let's create a chart together as a class that will help us be the most effective communicators we can be when we are discussing critical topics. **Effective Classroom Discussion** **Looks like…** / **Sounds like…**
Fishbowl model.	I see that some of our discussion partners disagreed today. What did this look like? Would one pair like to volunteer to fishbowl model for us, re-creating your discussion?
Reflect, revise, and co-construct.	After seeing the fishbowl, what else do we need to add or change on our chart? Hang the chart on the wall. Continue to come back to the chart to reflect, revise, and co-construct as a class.

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Table 2
FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING CRITICAL LITERACY WITH TEXTS

FRAMEWORK COMPONENT	ACTION STEPS	DETAILS
Planning	Identify the essential question.*	Does my essential question meet the following criteria? • Open-ended • Thought-provoking • Calls for higher-order thinking • Points toward important, transferable ideas • Raises additional questions • Requires support and justification • Recurs over time (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013, p. 4)
	Choose current, high-quality diverse texts (including an expanded view of texts: songs, photographs, blogs, etc.).*	A variety of dependable lists guide our choices. These include (but are not limited to): • Coretta Scott King Book Award (African American experience) • Stonewall Book Award (LGBTQIA+ experience) • Pura Belpré Award (Latino cultural experience) • Orbis Pictus Award (nonfiction) • CLA Notables Award • Nerdy Book Club • We Need Diverse Books movement
	Plan multimodal stopping points and questions for an interactive reading.	While planning, consider reading through the text (or portions of the text) multiple times. • 1st read: Read for enjoyment and understanding through the lens of the essential question. • 2nd read: Consider 3–5 stopping points for discussion. Link multimodal QR codes related to the setting (including music, photos, maps, etc.). • 3rd read: Consider multiple perspectives and differing viewpoints. Link QR codes of articles, photos, and current events that help the reader interrogate the text.
Co-Construction	Conduct an interactive read-aloud.	Turn and talk during the read-aloud, including all voices in the classroom.
	Engage in critical interaction.	Use protocols to scaffold students into critical conversation: • Co-constructing effective classroom conversations norms • Argument protocol
Action	What does this text inspire you to do beyond the walls of the classroom?	Redesign, construct, and create new text to share outside of the classroom. This could include (but is not limited to) creating the following: PSAs, letters, posters, songs, written arguments, podcasts, or a gallery of artwork.
	Explore further reading.	What questions did the co-construction inspire? What further reading needs to be done?
	Consider new essential questions.	Engaging in this process can inspire new essential questions for further reading, inquiry, and action.

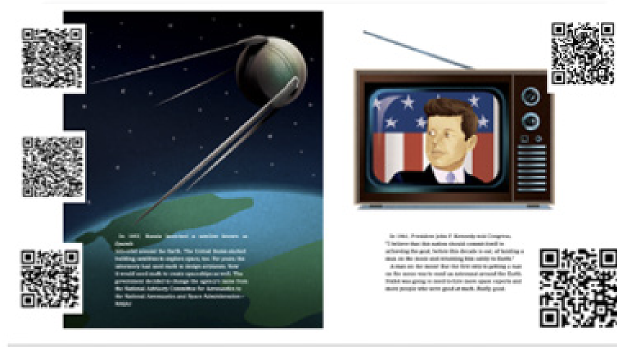
**The first two steps may be switched. A carefully selected text can also inspire essential questions.*

F. Kennedy's impact as president, including civil rights and the space program. The essential question for this text is, *What is progress? Is all progress good?*

One page in *Hidden Figures* quickly references John F. Kennedy's famous Moon Speech. This page will serve as an example of one effective place to stop for discussion in the text. JFK's live speech is readily available on YouTube and can be linked by a QR code as a primary source. Seeing this speech live demonstrates its persuasive power. The transcript will serve as an important text for students to critically analyze during the co-construction. Students might feel excited as JFK emphatically states, "We choose to go to the moon!" But then they might take a closer look at how he addresses money and justifies the extraordinary spending. This speech set in motion a race to the moon that would culminate in 28 billion dollars ($283 billion adjusted for inflation) of government spending.

While reading the book for planning, ask the questions, Whose story is being told here? Are there any other sides of the story that are not being told? What else might I want to know about what was going on during this time period? These planning questions lead to a series of three QR codes. On the left-hand side of Figure 1 is a link to the government spending for the Apollo space missions, an article about opposition to the moon missions, and a song by Gil Scott-Heron titled "Whitey on the Moon" addressing racial and socioeconomic implications of the space missions. These QR codes help students build knowledge and critical thinking skills as they learn about the complexity of the historic space missions. On the right-hand side of Figure 1, the links to JFK's speech and the current status of NASA's 60 years of service to space exploration help support another side of the essential question, *What is progress? Is all progress good?* This planning then leads to the co-construction as teachers and students make meaning of the text together. Finally, teachers can plan for a discussion on how this is important to us today, circling back to the essential question. What progress is being made now? Is it all good? At what cost does progress come? Can we apply this to technology we use now?

Figure 1
Hidden Figures Embedded QR Codes



The Co-Construction. *Hidden Figures* might be used to explore how JFK, the space program, and civil rights are all connected and engage in critical conversation. The first step is to read the book to the class as an interactive read-aloud, stopping multiple times to allow for discussion and basic understanding of the text. During a second read-aloud of the text, stop and allow time to explore multimodal resources connected via QR code, such as the page in Figure 1. As a class, explore the multiple viewpoints presented in the QR codes. Analyze JFK's speech and Gil Scott-Heron's song. What is Gil Scott-Heron trying to say when he says, "A rat done bit my sister Nell (with Whitey on the moon)…I can't pay no doctor bill (but Whitey's on the moon)"? What is JFK trying to do when he says, "That budget now stands at $5,400 million a year—a staggering sum, though somewhat less than we pay for cigarettes and cigars every year"? JFK speaks of progress in his speech. Pose the questions, What progress is presented in the book *Hidden Figures*? Is the progress good?

As a class, allow the students time to have a conversation using the co-constructed norms for discussion (Table 1). During the discussion, pause the class, asking, "Has anyone disagreed in their discussion yet? If so, please share with the class your interaction." After the pair shares their experience, reference the norms chart and ask students, "Has hearing from this group changed your thinking? Continue to discuss." Close the co-construction time with a whole-group discussion: What progress is being made now? Is it all good? At what cost does progress come? Can we apply this to technology we use now?

During the co-construction of this text, students and teachers are weaving in the first three components of critical literacy, co-constructing meaning that (a) disrupts the commonplace, (b) interrogates multiple viewpoints, and (c) focuses on sociopolitical issues. During this discussion, students disrupt the commonplace as they begin to consider new frames of thinking for commonly held beliefs, such as that the Space Race was supported by all Americans and was completed through the work of white, male astronauts like Neil Armstrong. As the students begin to disrupt the commonplace, they are naturally led to multiple viewpoints, hearing the stories of Black women mathematicians and

Table 3
EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION FOR HIDDEN FIGURES

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: WHAT IS PROGRESS? IS ALL PROGRESS GOOD?	
Topic	**Action**
Elon Musk and Tesla cars	Students create a piece of art showing a Tesla car. The artwork will advocate for electric cars as good for the environment. Knowledge-building supporting fact: *Over 550K Tesla vehicles have been sold, and they have driven over 10B miles to date, resulting in a combined savings of over 4M metric tons of* CO_2.
Creation of social media and mental health	Students create a TikTok post demonstrating the potential for social media to negatively affect mental health. Knowledge-building supporting fact: *A 2018 University of Pennsylvania study found that reducing social media use to 30 minutes a day resulted in a significant reduction in levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and sleep problems.*
Fracking for oil and gas	Students create signs for an environmental protest. Knowledge-building supporting fact: *Hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," is revolutionizing oil and gas drilling across the country. However, without rigorous safety regulations, it can poison groundwater, pollute surface water, impair wild landscapes, and threaten wildlife.*

reading articles of the Space Race opposition. This opposition is interwoven with sociopolitical issues, as students begin to see the stories of these "hidden figures" come to life. Students are exposed to artists who used their songs as a form of protest against the Space Race and are given the opportunity to analyze a very persuasive presidential speech. This co-construction builds a foundation of knowledge and critical thinking that allows for students to do the fourth tenet of critical literacy instruction, (d) taking action and promoting social justice.

The Action. As students think through the essential question in relation to the Space Race—*What is progress? Is all progress good?*—it will lead to the action of how this relates to our lives now. In what other ways has progress served us well or been of harm? Is there anything going on now that is similar to JFK and the Space Race? Table 3 is a chart of possible social justice action topics that students can research and respond to.

The Night Diary (Grades 4–8)

The Planning. *The Night Diary*, by Veera Hiranandani, is a 2018 Newbery Honor book, suggested for children ages 8 to 12. Through entries written each night to her mother who died giving birth to Nisha and her twin brother Amil, *The Night Diary* tells the story of a family fleeing their home when Pakistan and India are divided in 1947. Nisha and Amil's mother was Muslim, and their father is Hindu. The religious difference becomes deadly when British rule in India ends, and Nisha feels confused and conflicted as she sees her community and her family torn apart. As Nisha leaves everything she has ever known, she writes to understand who she is. Asking students to explore the essential question *What shapes our identity?* could help them to connect with the main character and to think about the text from a critical perspective.

The cube strategy could assist students to view the book through multiple perspectives and to examine the characters' and the author's values and assumptions. A possibility appropriate for older middle school students is to adapt Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative analysis framework for thinking critically about *The Night Diary*. The narrative analysis framework includes three dimensions: continuity (time), situation (place), and interaction (relationships).

The Co-Construction. Since there are three components in this framework and six sides of the cube, students can juxtapose two characters' perspectives, values, or stereotypes/biases for each of the components. Ideally, the teacher models thinking and then opens discussion for suggestions or asks students to talk through plans for their own cubes. The cube's sides can

include QR codes, quotes, images, six-word stories, or poems.

For the continuity dimension, students might assign one side of the cube as an analysis of the past and how that contributes to Nisha's and her uncle's beliefs and values, and another side to the events happening currently in the story. Students could create a QR code that links to historical information on the partition of India and write a found poem underneath the code, giving the viewer a hint of what is activated by the QR code.

To represent the situation dimension, students could paste a map or a QR code linking a map so viewers could see the area through which Nisha traversed leaving Pakistan for India. Images of the terrain might also clarify how difficult the trek was, how little water was available, and how challenging it was to find shelter from the blazing sun.

The interaction dimension might be shown on sides that address Nisha's relationship with her father and Rashid Uncle's relationship with his brother-in-law. Nisha wonders at one point if her uncle keeps a hidden hate in his heart for her father, and this could be a useful tension for students to explore. Readers might explore Nisha's assumptions about her uncle and compare these to the assumptions and stereotypes present in the adults' warnings to Nisha and her brother to hide from the neighbors. Here, students might attach quotes from the story, their own drawings of a scene including the characters, and poems expressing each character's feelings.

The Action. If a class or classes have created multiple cubes, they could be displayed for schoolmates and faculty and administration, families, and community members. Students could serve as docents, guiding visitors around the displays, or students could be stationed at tables ready to answer questions about the cubes or help guests navigate the QR codes.

The World of Weird Animals Series (Grades K–3)

The Planning. Jess Keating, children's book author and zoologist, writes a series recommended for ages 5 to 8 titled *The World of Weird Animals*. Information is presented about each "weird" animal, as well as the use of text features, such as photographs, cartoons, and colorful headings. This series aligns with any unit discussing the concepts of animal adaptations and change.

Planning for an essential question for critical literacy is made simple by the author. For example, in *What Makes a Monster?* (2017), the last "monster" is a human. Keating posits that humans don't have fangs or venom but might be considered monsters for the way they act toward the environment. At the end of the book, Keating lists important questions, such as "Why do I think this animal is scary? Is it because of how it looks? Does it behave monstrously?" In all of the books in this series, Keating presents details about animals and then asks readers to question their own biases and consider another perspective. Thus, the overarching essential question becomes, *Why do I think this?* and *How has my thinking changed?*

The Co-Construction. The interactive read-aloud format is an effective way to model and scaffold critical literacy skills in the elementary grades. The planned essential question(s) guide stopping points and the way students analyze and approach text. When using *What Makes a Monster?*, the teacher might read the text focusing on collecting information about each animal and analyzing why students judge an animal to be scary or not. For example, the teacher might create an anchor chart with the headings: Animal Facts / Is this animal scary? / Why do I think that? As the teacher reads about each animal, they model determining important facts, making decisions based on information presented, and synthesizing their thinking with the text to form new ideas. This not only models several comprehension strategies, but forces students to think critically about why they hold beliefs about certain animals.

During the second read of the text, the teacher can highlight four animals from the text and read about each in depth, including new information from other texts like National Geographic Kids. Students choose which of the four they believe is the scariest. The teacher models how to take notes on each animal, continuing to ask, "What makes this animal scary?" and "Why do you think that?"

After critically reading about four select "monsters," the teacher can ask students to check their notes and choose the animal they would like to argue is the scariest. Allowing students to practice oral argument first leads to co-constructed knowledge and is a scaffold to writing argument pieces (Ehrenworth & Minor, 2014). The "Argument Talk Protocol" developed through the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (Ehrenworth, 2017) can be used to teach young students how to synthesize multiple sources of information, present an argument, and gain insight into others' perspectives.

Have photographs of each animal in each of the four corners of the classroom. Ask students to go to the corner that represents the animal they will argue is the scariest. Then, walk them through the Argument Talk Protocol, which can be mod-

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ified for any age level. Ehrenworth (2017) called this oral portion of the protocol a "flash debate." This type of quick debate gives students a low-stakes way to co-construct knowledge as they consider another viewpoint by caucusing with their side, developing an argument, and then debating with an opponent.

The Action. In keeping with the idea of critical literacy naturally leading to critical expressionism, ask students to create something that presents their animal and how their thinking has changed. This could take the form of a presentation to their family, a collage, reading an animal report to the principal, or writing a fiction story with their animal as the main character dealing with the stereotype of being "scary." Having the choice of how to present gives students the space for action that is authentic and meaningful.

Closing

Children's literature offers a way for teachers to help students approach texts from a critical stance. Within the familiar context of a story, teachers can guide students to think in ways that may be unfamiliar, asking them to consider how the text presents issues of power, fairness, or conventional beliefs about the world around them. Critical literacy is complex, and a framework, such as the one we have outlined in this article, may make the challenge of teaching students to read critically more accessible. Planning an essential question broadens and deepens the learning while simultaneously modeling for students the big, overarching inquiry we want them to eventually initiate themselves. Co-constructing meaning empowers students to actively engage in the learning process and honors the concept of multiple perspectives. Taking action seals the learning because the co-constructed meaning becomes a lived experience shared by teachers, students, and possibly a school community as students give expression to their new understandings. The action component further equips students to make connections between the work they have done in the classroom and the world outside the classroom. The multimodal aspect we describe here may also feel familiar and interesting to students as using technology such as QR codes or creating TikTok posts are likely experiences students already engage in outside school. We have created a Google Doc (link) that provides recommendations of engaging critical texts by grade level.

Sixty years after JFK's Moon Speech, billionaires around the world are paying out of pocket for a chance to go to space. The Internet is being flooded with songs and memes about Amazon owner Jeff Bezos as people around the world engage in critical expressionism. Do "we" actually "choose to go to the moon"? Whose story is being told? Whose is being left out? It is important for us to empower children to think and talk about these kinds of things. There is no one way to do this work, but we hope this framework helps more teachers engage in planning, co-construction, and action in their critical literacy instruction. •

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