For this issue, we turn to discussions about the possibilities and potentials of children’s and young adult literature inside and outside classrooms. In 2012, the Children’s Literature Association presented a report (http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/teacher-education.html) on the value of children’s literature courses within teacher education. The authors of the report reminded us that the study of children’s and young adult literature can develop knowledge of critical issues such as the growth of multicultural perspectives and an understanding of the social contexts of literature. The professional resources described in this series of reviews reflect these important goals and extend and deepen the conversation about children’s and young adult literature.

In Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults: Reflections on Critical Issues, Cai (2002) writes that the development of multicultural literature is a political rather than a literary movement and asks readers to consider not only the implications of current definitions of multicultural literature, but also who can write it and how it can be evaluated.

Yenika-Agbaw and Napoli’s (2011) work, African and African-American Children’s and Adolescent Literature in the Classroom: A Critical Guide, delves deeply into similar questions. They challenge readers’ understandings of what, in an age of globalization, multicultural texts really are and how they should be integrated within the school curriculum so that readers have opportunities to consider the ways in which cultures, customs, and people may be at once similar and different.

In Doing Critical Literacy: Texts and Activities for Students and Teachers (Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville, & Newfield, 2013), the authors explore ways to translate theoretical perspectives on critical issues, such as issues of language and power, and act on them in classrooms. They provide models for practice that can be adapted to multiple educational contexts.

Examining the scholarship and research about children’s and young adult literature, the authors of The Handbook of Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature (Wolf, Coats, Enciso, & Jenkins, 2010) consider three disciplinary perspectives: Education, English, and Library and Information Science. Through these multiple lenses, the authors explore readers and reading in home, school, library, and community settings. Each of these books pushed our thinking, made us consider our current stance toward children’s and young adult literature, and prompted us to evaluate our beliefs and practices. We hope you find them equally intriguing and provocative. (PJ)
writer, how to evaluate the literature, what functions it serves, or how to incorporate it into the curriculum. Three interrelated aspects—literary, sociopolitical positioning, and educational foundations—inform this debate. Each aspect implies a different focus, agenda, and criteria. In his book Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults, Mingshui Cai offers his readers a systematic analysis of these aspects in an effort to present a more balanced view of multiculturalism and a lens through which to view this controversy.

Cai’s book is divided into three sections. The first section examines the multiple definitions of multicultural literature from literary and pedagogical perspectives. Literary definitions are concerned with the messages implicit in printed text. According to this perspective, literary works could be explicitly multicultural or implicitly multicultural. Explicitly multicultural are those works that portray the reality of a multicultural society, whereas implicitly multicultural are those that do not openly state their position, but their purpose could be inferred due to its intended audience and linguistic medium.

From a pedagogical perspective, multicultural literature has the potential to break the monopoly of the majoritarian culture and to add a pluralistic view to the curriculum. Cai writes that the purpose of multicultural literature is to expand the curriculum to include literature of cultures other than that of White culture. The author offers three different views of multicultural literature:

- **Multiple + culture = multiculturalism:** “It should include as many cultures as possible” (p. 6). This definition addresses learning about different cultures but without considering issues of equity.
- **The focus is on people of color and calls readers to look at multiculturalism with a critical eye.**
- **Multiple + literature = multicultural:** This posture claims that all literature is multicultural. Regarding this last posture, Cai warns us that this definition may make “the term multicultural all-inclusive to the point of deconstructing its sociopolitical concept, contrib[ing] to its possible demise” (p.12).

The first section also explores multicultural literature’s classification by content and audience, by cultural specificity, and by geographical and cultural boundaries.

The second section explores the idea of entitlement as it relates to the writing of multicultural literature. It analyzes the role of the author and looks at the issue of stereotyping and cultural correctness—not only as a literary issue, but also a political one. Without proposing a deterministic relationship between the writer of a work and her/his cultural background, Cai cautions the reader about the difficulties inherent in accurately portraying the different nuances of a particular culture (cultural correctness) if one is not a member of said culture. He invites the reader to see beyond the insider/outsider dichotomy and focus instead on the relationship between imagination and experience in literary creations. At the same time, Cai urges us to recognize and then critically examine the socio-historical contexts that emerge through literary works in order to develop awareness of the ways in which damaging stereotypes reinforce racism and destroy the image and the dignity of dominated cultures.

The last section of the book focuses on the creation of pluralistic curricula to help students and teachers cross cultural, physical, mental, or geographical borders. The author urges educators to develop “cultural consciousness” and engage in a never-ending process of researching and learning about cultures different from their own. He presents a multidimensional model that aims to support researchers and teachers in the examination of their own beliefs, values, biases, prejudices, and stereotypes and offers a tool to advance the field and allow a critical examination of multicultural literature. Cai’s book is a worthy resource for critical educators who appreciate the value of expanding their understanding of the various strands included in the realm of multicultural literature. (PA and NW)
Yenika-Agbaw and Napoli present a thorough and rich discussion of issues in children’s and adolescent literature that focuses on African and African American cultures. The contents of this book, divided into sections that target pre-K through elementary, middle, and high school levels, provide readers with an overview of a wide variety of issues represented in children’s and adolescent literature involving African and African American cultures, such as the misperception of fatherless families, African Americans with disabilities, alternative families, multiple perspectives within cultures, and discrimination. Each of these topics is discussed in chapters within this section and offers specific texts that can be used in classrooms to engage students in study and discussion. Some chapters, specifically those in Sections 2 and 3 that address middle and high school levels, provide detailed activities that could be used to supplement the suggested texts in the classroom.

The first section of the book focuses on Black multicultural literature that targets pre-K through grade 3. It consists of sections including (but not limited to) family, poetry, spirituality, and book clubs. For example, the chapter on fathers discusses the healthy roles that many African American fathers take in ways that are nonstereotypical and contribute to undoing the deficit model that too often describes African American males. Another chapter emphasizes the importance of spirituality in the lives of African American children and offers models for incorporating spiritual texts into curriculum. Patricia Crawford, the author of this chapter, emphasizes that “children’s spirituality also extends beyond religious inquiries to their authentic explorations in search for explanations about the world and people that surround them” (p. 48). This user-friendly section invites discussion and reflection through easy-to-adapt ideas for use with young children.

Section 2 of the book focuses on Black multicultural literature for grades 4–8. One of the chapters, for example, highlights the characters of Coretta Scott King’s award-winning texts and provides a focus on achievement and dreams, including exploration of mobility, selfhood, and social justice. The authors provide important classroom experiences in this section that center on and illuminate issues of discrimination: identifying discrimination, examining and explaining discrimination, and naming discrimination. Ann Berger-Knorr introduces these activities by explaining that “using literature for the purposes of exploring sociopolitical themes such as discrimination provides many opportunities for both teachers and students to develop more sophisticated understandings of literature as well as the broader society” (p. 107). Each experience is carefully described with explanations of how they could be used in the classroom.

The third and final section of the book is centered on Black multicultural literature for grades 9–12. The chapters within this section vary widely and focus on a variety of marginalized identities such as alternative families and individuals with disabilities. Corinna Crafton, who wrote the chapter on alternative families, explains:

In this section, there are chapters that challenge the exoticizing of African American children, urge readers to keep hope alive in the fight against discrimination, and disrupt the status quo. The authors of these chapters offer lesson ideas for introducing and discussing these topics with students in order to study multiple perspectives.
within a culture. While each chapter is written by a different author, the discussion of issues, specific text offerings, and potential activities provide consistency in their basic content.

This text is engaging for teachers who are actively seeking the inclusion of multicultural texts and experiences that will help them explore these topics with their students. Readers of this text will find several useful components, including specific ideas for bringing together families through community book discussions, text suggestions, and potential activities for classroom and community use. The scholarship of the text provides a wide range of ideas for the classroom that are pragmatic, well organized, and applicable for any teacher looking to broaden knowledge for students. Ultimately, this book provides opportunities for transformative experiences for teachers and students who wish to broaden their knowledge of important issues relevant to African and African American cultures. (BD and CS)

**Doing Critical Literacy: Texts and Activities for Students and Teachers**

“The ability to do critical literacy gives us potent ways of reading, seeing, and acting in the world” (p. 1).

Aligned with Freire’s (1970) belief of forging knowledge through an interplay of theory and practice, this book extends the theoretical framework presented in *Literacy and Power* (Janks, 2010) with educational experiences. As the authors describe their beliefs about literacy, they posit that in order for one to become critically literate, s/he must understand how important language is in “the workings of power, producing our identity positions, and affecting who gets access to opportunities for a better life” (p. 1). Furthermore, the authors link language with power, access, identity, and difference and explain how knowledge of these connections gives a person agency and power to take action—the focal point of doing critical literacy.

Divided into nine sections with different foci on critical literacy, this text invites educators to support students in becoming critically literate. Each section opens with a sociocultural orientation to the teaching of literacy that accentuates the relationship between language and power. A focus on language and position helps readers understand that critically reading the word involves individuals re-presenting their version of the world, as the “world presents itself to us, and we present it again in the act of re-presentation” (p. 11). Readers will appreciate the activities in each section, all succinct and easily transferable to any age or grade. For example, one of the activities helps readers understand how our social positions affect our points of view in what we see in the world. In *The Blind Men and the Elephant* (Saxe & Galdone, 1963), the authors position in physical space what is seen, but this experience also asks that we consider how our social positions affect our points of view[s] as well, because “social positioning influences our view but it does not determine them” (p. 16).

Language and grammar are additional resources for critical literacy identified by the authors. The authors problematize the notion of a “standard” language variety in relation to issues of access and power, because “no language is better than another, no accent is more harmonious, no variety is ungrammatical” (p. 53). The authors note, however, that languages are not equally valued in society. They explain the relationship between language and the sounds of language, explaining, “When we use language we create meaning by the choices and combinations that we make” (p. 71). They shed light on the fact that different languages use sound in different ways, and they remind readers that if language systems do not have a particular sound, it may be hard for non-native speakers to hear or produce these sounds. This information transitions well into activities related to language variety and sound, such as one activity.
where students listen critically to the language of characters in movies to determine how accents may be used in inclusive or exclusive ways.

Everyday texts as objects of inquiry are another element of critical literacy featured in this text. At first glance, everyday texts, like food packages, newspapers, magazines, or junk mail, seem to be unimportant because of their familiarity. However, the authors remind us that they are purposely designed to produce predetermined effects. Everyday texts are connected to political discourses of individualism, gender, class, and nation. For instance, an activity included in this section debunks stereotypes about the notion of beauty in everyday texts and allows readers to think critically about the term as they create counter-narratives to society’s unexamined perceptions of this term.

In a world with rapid technological advances, one must think critically about the impact of technology and constantly ask who has access and who does not. The authors remind their readers, “Because technology has enabled human beings to shape and change the physical world, it is linked to power” (p. 131). They also provide questions to help students understand their positions in comparison to others and to interrogate unquestioned privilege. Questions such as “What sacrifices have you or your parents had to make to afford technologies you have access to?” and “How does having your own tech stuff advantage you?” (p. 131) allow readers to do this kind of recognition work, which challenges the way in which we see the world.

The authors conclude with a call for readers to move from critical literacy to social action. They charge us to continually question and problematize the literacies we encounter in our world, writing that by doing so, we can begin to journey toward agency and action that can create social change in our communities and beyond. This is a compelling book that merges theory with practical engagements. It allows readers to take a step forward, first in thinking critically about their world and then by taking the necessary steps toward creating a more just world. (EB, JH, JR)

The Reader. The Book. The World Around. Dividing their research handbook into these three divisions, Wolf, Coats, Enciso, and Jenkins are careful to create a comprehensive guide on important issues surrounding children’s and young adult literature. Their text provides a wealth of information on diverse topics of interest and from a variety of perspectives. This handbook of research aims to inform and create dialogue—not only about readers, reading, and publishing, but also between readers, reading, and publishing. It is a notable addition to the scholarship on children’s and young adult literature.

In the first section—The Reader—research topics are covered by contributors such as Shirley Brice Heath, Mollie V. Blackburn, and Carmen I. Mercado. As with all sections of the text, contributors are drawn from the fields of literature, education, and library science, which provides a more complete picture of the broader topic of children’s and young adult literature. It is also helpful that this text addresses both children’s and young adult literature instead of only one of these categories, as is the case with many handbooks of research. This section provides theoretical and practical perspectives on various kinds of readers, encompassing different grade levels and different historical time periods and cultures. Readers are challenged to consider the complex identities of children and young adult readers and to keep these identities, progressions, and connections at the center of classroom practices, and in the midst of discussion and debate.

The second section of the book turns the reader’s attention to the various texts available to readers. A wide range of genres—series books,
folklore, picturebooks, and graphic novels, to name a few—are discussed in significant detail. This is in addition to chapters on theories related to culturally relevant literature and the impact of author’s and reader’s culture on interpretation of the text. By arranging the text in this manner, the editors continually draw the reader’s attention back to the interconnectedness between readers, their sociocultural histories, and the text.

Written by bestselling authors of children’s and young adult literature, important features of the second section were the points of departure that conclude each chapter. Researchers such as Rudine Sims Bishop, Lawrence R. Sipe, and authors of children’s and young adult literature such as Markus Zusak and Jacqueline Woodson lend their perspectives at each article’s conclusion and grace the handbook with their wisdom. Since handbooks of research are often impersonal in tone and written less accessibly than other texts, these points of departure humanize the articles and welcome the reader, in practical ways, to personalize the text and to provide a space for readers to “converse” with the ideas and authors.

The third and final section turns the reader’s attention to other external factors that affect children’s and young adult literature. Topics related to translation, international initiatives, book awards and reviews, publication or merchandising/archiving texts, and multifaceted issues associated with censorship are presented with insight by multiple researchers. The format of section two is repeated with points of departure from various stakeholders who participate in these factors that impact children’s and young adult literature.

It is clear that the handbook would be incomplete without this third and final section, since many factors influence the reader’s perception of the text. As classroom teachers strive to match the right reader with the right book at the right time, to paraphrase Teri S. Lesesne, it is important that they are informed about the politics of publishing, the nuances of translation, and the influence of popular culture on readers’ experiences with texts. In this final section, researchers such as Junko Yokota, Jane Jenkins, and Maria Nikolajeva are among those striving to provide that needed perspective, and they are supported by the additional perspective gained from authors like Katherine Paterson, Jane Kurtz, and Kostia Kontoleon.

Due to its many strengths, this text is a necessary and welcome addition to the bookshelf of all those who love, read, and study children’s and young adult literature. It comes with one final recommendation in that it is one of the final contributions of the late Shelby Wolf to her legacy of scholarship on children’s and young adult literature. (AB)

References

Nicole Walker is a doctoral candidate in the Language and Literacy department at the University of South Carolina and can be reached at nwalker@richland2.org. Catherine Sanderson is a doctoral candidate in the Language and Literacy department at the University of South Carolina and can be reached at sande248@email.sc.edu. Jessica Robbins is an assistant principal at Pleasant Hill Middle School and can be reached at jrobbins@lexington1.net. Pamela Jewett is Professor Emerita at the University of South Carolina and can be reached at jewett@mailbox.sc.edu. Jessica Hanko is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina and can be reached at jhanko@lexington1.net. Brennan Davis is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina and can be reached at brenndavis@gmail.com. Elizabeth Bemiss is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina and can be reached at elizabethbemiss@gmail.com. Priscila Alvarado is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina and can be reached at alvarads@email.sc.edu.