

**A Turn Toward Empathy: A Pedagogy for Developing Emotional Literacy with
Multicultural Coming-of-Age Novels**

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2020

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia

April 15, 2023

Acknowledgments

I am incredibly grateful for all the wonderful people that have helped me on this journey.

With a profound appreciation for:

Dr. Tamika Carey, for her invaluable insight, guidance, patience, and encouragement.

All of my wonderful teachers and professors, for their guidance throughout my academic journey.

My family and friends, especially my mom, for her unwavering faith, love, and support.

Adam, for his endless support, love, and confidence. Thank you for always believing in me.

Introduction: Problems of Reading

The bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novels, offer instructors with valuable opportunities to engage their students in discussions about adolescence, maturation, and social and emotional development. Though the bildungsroman was a historically exclusionary form, the utility of the form has invited scholars to expand the genre to incorporate more diverse experiences. Theoretically, discussions of multicultural coming-of-age novels offer space for generative, intersectional discussions. However, in practice, instructors frequently encourage students to focus on singular aspects of a character's identity in multicultural novels, like gender, race, or sexuality. These pedagogical approaches teach students to tokenize multicultural literature, and do not offer students the opportunity to identify the complexity of a character's multiple or intersecting identities. My project offers an approach to this reading dilemma by analyzing three multicultural young adult novels featuring female protagonists of color. In each of the novels, the protagonist comes of age by developing their *emotional literacy*, or a deeper empathy and understanding of how complex social and cultural factors impact an individual's choices and life path. It also offers instructors a method for cultivating their students' emotional literacies and empathy through *turning-point pedagogy*, which provides a framework to identify the stages of maturity and pivotal moments of development in a character. In the first chapter, I will offer an overview of the bildungsroman, its limitations, and contemporary scholarship. Then, I will summarize the three novels that I feature in the project and analyze the stages of emotional literacy development present in each novel. In the second chapter, I will situate turning point pedagogy within scholarship on teaching and reading practices. In the third chapter, I will offer 15 lesson plans on the three featured novels. Each set of lesson plans demonstrates

how instructors can encourage critical discussion and acknowledge the social and cultural contexts of each novel while developing the students' emotional literacies.

Chapter One: Re-Reading the Multicultural Coming-of-Age Novel

Introduction

The bildungsroman, or the “coming-of-age” story, is still a vastly popular and widely recognizable storyline that transcends genres, cultures, and time periods. While the plotline and challenges vary, these stories will always begin by depicting a young protagonist with a limited understanding of the world (Graham 8). The protagonist will encounter challenges that lead them on a literal or figurative journey, through which they learn more about themselves and their social and cultural environment. Most often the conclusion of coming-of-age stories incorporate explicit lessons for both the protagonist and the reader to identify, and apply to their future choices (McWilliams 5). While these concluding themes can present the audience with opportunities for nuanced thinking, often these coming-of-age plots will flatten social realities and cultural experiences and limit the textual impact.

These issues arise particularly from genres intended for adolescent audiences, like young adult literature and new adult literature. Coming-of-age stories are particularly popular in young adult literature. However, these plotlines are often rife with prescriptive lessons that the adult authors, teachers, and caregivers want the young adult readers to internalize (McCulloch 175). Commonly, by the end of their journey, the young protagonist will have learned a lesson about the damaging effects of drugs or alcohol, or the importance of being outspoken and true to their personal values. Popular young adult literature typically features singular plotlines, unrealistic teenage mindsets or behaviors, and decreased opportunities for nuanced thinking. Despite their shortcomings, these texts offer essential functions for young adult readers, as they offer accessible connections and more contemporary, relevant plotlines.

Coming-of-age stories offer recognizable, thought-provoking texts that can shape their thinking of literature and its relevance to personal social contexts. While some young adult coming-of-age literature dismisses systematic oppression and challenges that specific groups face as they navigate young adulthood, the usefulness of coming-of-age stories persists. Keeping the long-standing, recognizable coming-of-age storyline in mind, I identify three contemporary texts that engage the familiar elements of a bildungsroman while highlighting the inherently nuanced encounters of protagonists from marginalized groups. The novels *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sánchez, *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng, and *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett all feature young women of color as they navigate loss, social and cultural expectations, and familial relationships. Rather than introducing singular challenges for the protagonist to overcome, these texts grapple with the protagonists' naivety, knowledge, and emotional maturity. The misunderstandings and pain from the protagonists' lack of experience and emotional knowledge are illuminated through mother-daughter relationships. These relationships bring racial, relational, and patriarchal dynamics into focus as the protagonists develop empathy and awareness throughout the novel. As the texts conclude, readers are not left with one resounding lesson or explicit theme, but a greater understanding of the nuanced motivations and formative experiences of those around them. By highlighting not only how the texts' plotlines develop the characters, but also the ways in which the texts develop the protagonists' emotional intelligence and empathy, the novels contribute more poignant, refined alternatives to coming-of-age stories.

Novel Summaries

The young adult novel *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sánchez follows 16-year-old Julia as she and her family navigate the sudden loss of her sister Olga. As a junior in high school, Julia dreams of going to college to become a writer and leaving her immigrant family's small, cramped apartment far behind. Julia describes Olga, her late older sister, as her parent's "perfect Mexican daughter." Olga met all of her parents' expectations, as she lived at home while she attended community college, always helped their mother Amá with her work as a house cleaner, and regularly attended church with her family. From the beginning of the novel, Amá and Julia cannot get through a conversation without arguing. Amá seems to blame Julia for Olga's death, and Julia states that she is unwilling to fill the "ideal daughter" role that Olga's death has left vacant.

Amid her grief, Julia tries to reconnect to Olga by sleeping in her room and going through her belongings. The two had grown apart in the years leading up to Olga's death, and Julia is shocked to find lingerie and a hotel key amidst her "perfect" sister's belongings. Julia is determined to learn about Olga's hidden secrets, but as she attempts to uncover more information, her relationship with her mother continues to deteriorate and her grades continue to suffer. Julia spends the majority of the novel describing her parents as uninspired, withdrawn, and unambitious, while she describes herself as creative and different. This binary mindset does not recognize her family members' humanity, as Julia does not acknowledge that her parents are in the midst of grieving their daughter's death.

However, Julia's outlook shifts when she is exposed to new information throughout the novel. When visiting family in Mexico, Julia learns that her mother is overprotective and withdrawn because she was sexually assaulted while crossing the border into the United States,

and that her sister was the product of this rape. Family members in Mexico tell her that her father is a talented artist, but that he ceased to draw after crossing the border and witnessing his wife's violent assault. Later, Julia also learns that her "perfect" sister Olga was dating an older married man, and that she was pregnant at the time of her death. These revelations drastically develop Julia's perceptions of her family and her capacity for empathy.

Everything I Never Told You by Celeste Ng is a novel told through multiple perspectives and across a broad timeline. The novel opens with two striking, short sentences, which read "Lydia is dead. But they don't know this yet" (Ng 1). Lydia is the bi-racial 16-year-old daughter of James and Marilyn Lee. Set in a small Ohio town in 1977, the novel describes James's struggles as a Chinese-American history professor and Marilyn's discontentment as a stay-at-home mother, as she had to abandon her dreams of a medical career when she got pregnant. The couple has three children: Nath, Lydia, and Hannah. Nath and Hannah are largely ignored as both Marilyn and James view Lydia as their ideal child, capable of impressive accomplishments and breaking generational patterns. Though James is happy with his academic accomplishments, he never feels respected at work. As a Chinese-American professor, James faces racism from his colleagues and staff. Since he describes Lydia as their least visibly Chinese child, he thinks that Lydia will not face as much discrimination, and fare better in social settings. Marilyn dreamed of going to medical school, but instead, she ended up as a stay-at-home mother and "homemaker," like her mother. Frustrated with her lack of options, Marilyn transfers her dreams onto Lydia and encourages her to enroll in advanced science courses and study additional materials for hours every day.

As the audience reads the perspectives of the deceased protagonist, dismissed children, and regretful parents, they are able to develop an understanding of the nuances that Lydia will

never have the opportunity to understand. There is an imperative need for honest communication and authenticity among the family members. Unfortunately, Lydia believes that she must lie to her parents to appease them. While James is under the impression that Lydia has plenty of friends, and that she has been able to break the patterns of prejudice at school, Lydia pretends to speak with friends on the phone for hours. Marilyn thinks that Lydia wants to become a doctor, but Lydia cannot keep up with the demands of her advanced courses. After Lydia's tragic death, the characters are forced to reckon with this new information and develop self-awareness.

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett takes a multi-generational approach to the coming-of-age novel. The novel unfolds in five parts and includes four main perspectives. Desiree and Stella are twins that decide to run away from Mallard, their small hometown. Mallard is a primarily Black town that glorifies colorism and praises Black people with light skintones. Though the twins do align with this beauty standard, they both feel stifled in the small town. Both twins are heavily affected by their father's murder, which they witnessed as children. It is also later revealed that Stella, the more reserved and cautious twin, agrees to go to New Orleans because she wants to escape the sexual abuse from her employer. The novel continues with the twins' struggles to survive in an unfamiliar city, until Stella disappears without notice one day, to begin a life "passing" as a white woman. Desiree goes on to marry a Black man with a very deep skin tone named Sam, which results in her daughter Jude being born "blueblack." Desiree returns to Mallard while Jude is still a child to escape her husband's abuse, so Jude grows up in a community which rejects her skin tone. As the novel unfolds, the audience learns that Stella began passing as white so she could work as a secretary for a wealthy white businessman named Blake. Blake initiates a romantic relationship, and Stella decides to commit to being white

forever by marrying him. Stella eventually has a daughter named Kennedy, who appears to be fully white.

As the novel progresses, the perspectives shift to Jude and Kennedy as they navigate their early 20's. Jude, determined to escape the colorism and prejudice in Mallard, goes to college in California and finds a loyal partner named Reece, who is a transgender man. Kennedy, having grown up extremely privileged, drops out of college to pursue an acting career. Their paths cross when Jude spots her long-lost Aunt Stella at a party, and then realizes that Kennedy is her daughter. When Kennedy is cast in a play, Jude applies to work at the theater, in hopes of meeting Stella. By the end of the novel, the major secrets between the twins and the cousins have been revealed, but each characters' own limitations prevent them from developing any close relationships with their family members, though they have each desired more intimate relationships. As the novel comes to a close, it is clear that physical distance and secrets were not the only factors preventing the characters from establishing close-knit friendships with the others.

Initial Naivety and Disconnection

As with most coming-of-age narratives, the protagonists in each novel demonstrate the need to mature and grow. Each protagonist displays a significant lack of knowledge about the world around them and their relationships. This includes naivety when it comes to the external pressures that shape their society, the situations that they have been born into, and insight about others' behaviors. While each of these novels features a female adolescent of color, they have not fully developed an understanding of the systemic issues that influence their own life experiences. This lack of worldly knowledge does eventually provide the foundation for growth

and development throughout the novel. It is noteworthy that each novel begins by clarifying how adolescent naivety manifests when it appears in a multicultural context. Importantly, as Lashon Daley's article "Coming of (R)age: A New Genre for Contemporary Narratives about Black Girlhood" posits, there is no way to separate the long history of discrimination and racist beliefs about Black girls from the definition of what it means for them to grow up. Daley's definition of the Black coming of (r)age experience includes how Black girls "maneuver through one's lit experience in pursuit of survival, subjectivity, agency, and autonomy" (1036). As Daley asserts, there is no way to separate these novels' protagonists from their oppressive social circumstances, so a close-reading of the texts must acknowledge how the characters encounter and come to terms with prejudice and injustice. However, though the protagonists are undoubtedly shaped by societal forces at the beginning of each novel, they each experience a disconnection from their family members, communities, and histories. This initial disconnection highlights the immense need for character development at the beginning of each novel.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika Sánchez opens with the protagonist, fifteen-year-old Julia Reyes grieving her older sister, Olga. The novel begins at Olga's funeral, and through Julia's grief the audience is quickly made aware of Julia's disconnection from her family. Julia critiques the way that Olga lived her short life, describing the way that Olga lived at home while attending community college part-time. According to Julia, the only excitement in Olga's life came from watching romantic comedies with her best friend Angie. Julia asks "What kind of life is that? Didn't she want more? Didn't she ever want to go out and grab the world by the balls?" (Sánchez 2). From this harsh criticism of her late sister's life, Julia introduces her own ambitious goals, stating "ever since I could pick up a pen, I've wanted to be a famous writer. I want to be so successful that people stop me on the street and ask, "Oh my God, are you

Julia Reyes, the best writer who has ever graced this earth?” (2). With this introduction, Julia naively draws a harsh distinction between her own dreams and desires and her family’s complacency. From the beginning of the novel, Julia is not aware of the external limitations or restrictions that her family members have encountered. Instead, she assumes that she is the only person in her family born with any desire for life improvement. This mindset extends to her parents as well. Her parents, Amá and Apá, immigrated to Chicago from Mexico before Olga was born. Julia questions why her parents chose to come to Chicago, asking “why would anyone want to come to a place like this?” (210). Amá works as a house cleaner, while Apá works in a candy factory. Both parents come home exhausted and mentally drained, which only compounds as they navigate the grief from their daughter’s death. Julia describes Apá’s daily routine to her therapist as “He works at a candy factory all day, then comes home, watches TV, and eventually goes to sleep. Seems pretty sad to me” (218). While Julia dreams of becoming an author and living a fabulous life, she describes her father’s situation as “Life is passing him by, and he doesn’t even know it. Or doesn’t care. I don’t know which one is worse.”

In order to make sense of Julia’s perspective, it is helpful to think about Vivian Louie’s book *Keeping the Immigrant Bargain: The Costs and Rewards of Success in America*. Upon immigrating to the United States from Mexico, Julia’s parents experienced “downward mobility,” instead of the upward mobility promised in the American Dream. Rather than working up to higher paying jobs, Julia’s parents work difficult, blue-collar jobs. To Julia, a teenager who has never lived outside of the United States, these downwardly mobile choices are bewildering. However, her parents’ optimism and preference for the United States could be related to the “freedom in the United States from the threat of systemic violence” or promises of upward mobility through education (Louie 37). As the child of immigrants, Julia sees the potential for

upward mobility in the United States, but she does not understand how her parents' current economic situation could compare to her goals, since she does not know about the dangerous alternatives, like her parents do.

From these reflections, it is clear that Julia does think critically about her parents actions. However, at this point, she has not developed a full understanding of why her parents would opt into such a difficult life path. She questions their living conditions, asking "couldn't they find a better apartment than this roach-infested dump?" (141). Julia is annoyed when her parents save their money to throw her a belated quinceañera, citing all of the ways that she would choose to spend the money differently. Julia describes her father's daily routine as a conscious choice, as if he could one day choose to opt out of working in a factory and living in a "roach-infested" apartment. Julia does believe that her parents should find cultural and social fulfillment, like she has found in literature and writing. However, she dismisses their attempts to connect with their heritage through her quinceañera, and devalues her mother's attendance at her prayer group.

From these examples, Julia demonstrates a narrow understanding and naivety that is common in adolescent literature. Even though she has lived through some harsh and traumatic experiences, she has not yet been able to develop a full understanding of empathy for others. Rather than noticing broader social trends, Julia processes every event or circumstance as an isolated incident or choice. Before embarking on the journey that helps her gain vital perspectives by the end of the narrative, Julia has not internalized how her own identity make-up impacts her own life. When it comes to applying for colleges, her English teacher Mr. Ingram offers to mentor her through the process. As he describes low-income application fee grants and application essay contents, Julia does not understand the relevance of her background to the application process. Though Julia has encountered the power structures that have kept her

undocumented parents working in horrendous conditions and living in a run-down apartment, she has not made the connections between her family's living conditions and broader social and cultural contexts.

Everything I Never Told You by Celeste Ng primarily focuses on Lydia, a bi-racial sixteen-year-old navigating high school in the 1970's. The narrative unfolds posthumously, as the audience knows that Lydia has passed away from the first sentence of the novel. Still, the novel functions as a type of coming-of-age story, as Ng uses both Lydia and her mother Marilyn to exemplify the gaps and disconnections between mother and daughter. As the narrative progresses, it is clear that Lydia has been living a double life. At home, she agrees with all of the expectations and pressures that her parents place upon her: she tells her mother that she loves science and dreams of becoming a doctor, and she assures her father that she has numerous close friends. However, at school Lydia struggles through her advanced science and math classes and could not be less passionate about studying medicine. She struggles to form friendships with her classmates, and spends all of her time at school alone. Lydia's naivety from the beginning of the novel stems from thinking that she can maintain peace and happiness in her family by agreeing with her parents' misplaced dreams.

When Lydia is a child, Marilyn decides that she will not be happy as a housewife and mother. She leaves her husband and children without saying goodbye to go pursue a college degree. Lydia and her older brother Nath are distraught, since the family does not know if Marilyn will return, or if she is still alive. In the midst of her pain and confusion, Lydia makes a silent promise: "If her mother came home and told her to finish her milk... she would finish her milk. She would go to sleep the second her mother turned out the light... She would do everything her mother told her. Everything her mother wanted" (Ng 137). To Lydia, her

childhood vow resulted in her mother re-entering her life. In reality, Lydia's silent promise had nothing to do with Marilyn's return; she discovers that she is pregnant and returns to her children without explanation. However, from that point forward, Lydia believes that she must maintain her portion of the vow. Marilyn's every request, even her request to choose Lydia's career path, is met with a "yes, yes, yes" (150). Lydia's naivety is not child-like or insignificant; it informs all of her decisions. When she hesitates to immediately agree to Marilyn's plan to complete extra science homework, she reminds herself "she had promised: anything her mother wanted. Anything at all. As long as her mother stayed" (223). As Lydia demonstrates across the novel, her mother's very presence in their home is proof that Lydia must do her part to maintain the peace and stability of their home. Though Lydia conceptually understands that Marilyn is projecting her career disappointments and life aspirations onto her, she has not made the connections between Marilyn's disappearance and her involvement in Lydia's life. So, throughout the novel Lydia's identity is a performance, forged and refined by her mother's abandonment and subsequent expectations. While Lydia has her own complex motivations for complying with both her parents' expectations, she has not yet developed an understanding that her parents' have complex motivations for their decisions and behaviors as well. As previously discussed, the forces of racism and sexism shape the expectations that James and Marilyn have for Lydia. At this point, Lydia is unable to understand that her parents also have complicated emotions informing their behavior, so she assumes that she must comply with their expectations unquestionably. Lydia's naivety is rooted in her misunderstanding of her parents' decisions, and this disconnect creates a foundation for the miscommunication and intense personal pressure presented in the novel.

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett balances the perspectives of the twins, Desiree and Stella, with those of their respective daughters, Jude and Kennedy. Though the stages in each character's coming-of-age moments span the entire novel, Bennett makes it clear that each character begins from the same place of self-focused naivety. Each character has clear moments that demonstrate their adolescent inability to fully empathize with those closest to them. The twins, Desiree and Stella, share an unbreakable bond until Stella suddenly leaves their New Orleans apartment without a word. Having run away from Mallard, Desiree views herself as the brave, strong-willed twin. She disregards her sister's agency by thinking of herself as "the single dynamic force in Stella's life, a gust of wind strong enough to rip out her roots. This was the story Desiree needed to tell herself and Stella allowed her to" (Bennett 58). When Stella does eventually enact her own agency and disappears to "pass" as a wealthy businessman's wife, Desiree is completely stunned.

Stella, on the other hand, is aware of her reputation as the more reserved, passive twin. She is heavily affected by their father's murder, and she resents Desiree for not being more outwardly impacted by the trauma. Throughout her childhood, Stella suffers from intense trauma-induced nightmares, but she states that "Each time she'd snapped awake, Desiree snoring beside her, she felt stupid for being afraid. Hadn't Desiree watched from that closet too? Hadn't she seen what those white men had done? Then why wasn't she waking up in the middle of the night, her heart pounding?" (Bennett 150). Stella is convinced that her place as the more emotionally "sensitive" twin means that Desiree will be unaffected when she abruptly abandons her, which empowers her to do just that. Through her own grief and trauma, Stella is unable to see the ways in which Desiree responds and processes her emotions differently. This disconnection prevents the twins from fully seeing each other in their youth, even though they

share a close relationship. The sixteen-year-old twins do not have the emotional capacity to think of the other as a complex individual. Both feel safe placing the other in simpler categories than they know they fit in themselves. So, both twins begin from a place of emotional naivety.

Desiree's daughter, Jude, grows up in Mallard after Desiree returns to escape her abusive marriage. Jude is heavily impacted by rejection in her adolescence; the residents of Mallard are cruel to her about her dark skin, she misses her father, and she is haunted by the missing aunt that her mother describes. Jude filters most of her interactions through very binary terms: rejection or acceptance; lost or found. When her boyfriend kisses her for the first time and says that she is special to him, she spends the next morning assuming that his every move is an act of rejection. Jude thinks "Maybe he pitied her. He'd only kissed her because he felt so bad about yelling at her. He knew that she hoped that kiss meant more so he was avoiding her" (120). Jude's naivety manifests as insecurity at times, as she tends to believe that others do not have complex motivations for their behavior. While she knows that Reece is transgender, she does not recognize that the beginning of their relationship could induce complicated feelings. Similarly, Jude knows that Stella has been gone since she abruptly left Desiree in New Orleans. However, Jude thinks of Stella as "lost" rather than intentionally staying away from her family. After meeting Stella's daughter Kennedy and working with her at the theater, Jude finally gets the opportunity to locate and confront Stella. When Jude reveals who she is, Stella's reaction is not at all what Jude naively anticipated. Jude describes:

She was angry—Jude hadn't expected that. Stella would be confused. Startled, even. But maybe once the surprise wore off, she'd thought, Stella might be glad to meet her. She might even marvel at all the works of chance that had drawn them together. Instead, Stella shook her head, as if trying to wake herself from a nightmare (248).

Up until this interaction, Jude does not demonstrate the capacity for nuanced thinking about power dynamics and external social pressures. She is aware that Stella has committed to passing as white, and she is aware of the racism and colorism that she has faced as a Black woman. However, Jude has not yet developed the cognitive empathy required to understand others' behaviors in more complex terms.

While Stella, Desiree, and Jude all navigate complex social, cultural, and personal pressures in their childhood, they are united in their naive approach to the world. All three characters filter the choices that others make through their individual experiences, which limits the connections that the characters can form at this stage in their coming-of-age arc. At this point, the characters demonstrate very binary thinking, and center themselves in any considerations that they make about other characters. This stage is a pivotal one to recognize, both in these multicultural coming-of-age narratives, and within readers. Like the protagonists, if readers do not interrogate biases and cultivate a reading practice that does not center themselves, they will also miss opportunities for meaningful connections and growth.

Formative Experiences

Though these three selected novels span a range of time periods, cultures, and life circumstances, the protagonists are united in their adolescent nativity. This naive mindset limits their ability to fully recognize others' needs, or to validate others' emotions. So, a vital component of their coming-of-age arc is the formative experience, or turning point event, which challenges their previously self-focused perceptions. Adopted from Jerome Bruner's article "Self-Making and World-Making," I define a turning point event as "the episodes in which... the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist's story to a belief, a conviction, or

a thought” (Bruner 73). Bruner’s article uses this framework to describe rhetorical significance in the telling of the autobiography, and asserts that these turning point moments allow the narrator to distinguish their individual experiences from the broader world. Though the narrator could not have known that a moment would become a turning point in their lives as they experienced it in the present, they trace themes and reflect on these formative experiences to tell a cohesive story and signal the reader to pay attention to their values and lessons. Similarly, I use this idea of turning points to define a pivotal moment in the text, on which both the author and readers project significance. In a coming-of-age novel, characters must encounter formative incidences to further develop. In these novels, all of the characters have experienced trauma. However, at the beginning of the narrative, none of the characters have developed a sense of empathy that would allow them to extend understanding to others outside of their personal experiences. Therefore, these formative events must generate cognitive dissonance to shift their perspectives and cultivate their emotional literacy.

Throughout *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Julia encounters information that challenges her previously harsh view of her sister and parents. When going through her deceased sister’s room, Julia finds a box with lingerie and a hotel key, challenging her previous assertion that her sister was content living an uneventful life. There are moments that inspire recognition and empathy from Julia in the beginning portion of the novel. When Amá takes Julia to clean a house with her, Julia reflects “now I understand why everyone calls work la chinga and why Amá is always in a bad mood” (Sánchez 104). However, these moments of reflection do not have a notable impact on her empathy for others overall.

The necessary formative moments come when Julia visits her extended family in Mexico. Julia stays with her grandmother, Mamá Jacinta, in her mother’s childhood bedroom. She notices

a drawing of her mother in the room and asks who drew it. When Mamá Jacinta replies that her father drew the picture, Julia quickly responds “What do you mean, my father? My father doesn’t draw” (251). However, her grandmother shows her more of his art, and says that he used to be the town artist. Julia contrasts her father’s beautiful art with the image of him soaking his feet after a long day at work in her mind. She struggles to reconcile the two images, and asks why he would not have continued to draw. Mamá Jacinta replies “He probably got too busy with all the responsibilities of being a husband and father. You know how that is. You know how hard he works” (252). During this exchange, Julia realizes that Apá once had an artistic passion, just like the one that she currently holds for writing. He knows that life could be filled with more than work and mindless television shows, and the physical evidence of his artistic passions confronts Julia. Once she is able to connect her father’s interests with her own, Julia begins to understand the extent of her parents’ sacrifice, as she now is forced to reconcile the fact that her father is not living without art or hobbies by choice.

Julia’s exploration of Apá’s art begins to shift her opinion about the external forces that shaped her father’s daily schedule, but the truly transformative moment happens when she learns more about her mother’s history. As is true for many coming-of-age novels that feature female protagonists, Julia has a more complex relationship with her mother. So, in order for her to develop empathy in this coming-of-age narrative, she needs to understand her mother better. As Julia continues to be overly critical of her mother and dismissive of her love and sacrifice, Tía Fermina decides to disclose traumatic information to Julia. Julia knew that her parents encountered complications when they crossed the border, but her parents told her that their guide had stolen all their money and prolonged their journey. However, Tía Fermina tells Julia that their guide also raped her mother, while holding her father at gunpoint. The assault resulted in

Amá's pregnancy with Olga. Julia is understandably shocked, and describes her reaction "My body feels like it weighs a thousand pounds. I picture my mother's face streaked with tears and dirt, my father bowing his head in defeat" (275). Tía Fermina guides Julia toward understanding her mother better, by stating "see, mija, that's why I want you to know. So when you and your mother fight, you can see where she's come from and understand what's happened to her. She doesn't mean to hurt you" (276). This new information offers Julia vital context about her mother's background, and forces her to begin to reconcile all the ways that she has been naive to others' perspectives. This revelation guides Julia toward a more compassionate and empathetic approach to others as the novel progresses.

The balance and misunderstandings between mother and daughter are even more pronounced throughout *Everything I Never Told You*. Just in the way that Lydia is naive to believe that she can control others' reactions with her own behavior, her mother Marilyn is naive to believe that she could live vicariously through her daughter. Unfortunately, Lydia's death in the novel forces Marilyn to reconcile the weight of her actions, so Lydia is not able to fulfill the coming-of-age arc set before her in the novel. However, though Marilyn is an adult, she has not internalized the empathy and worldly understanding needed for the coming-of-age journey. After Lydia's body is discovered in the town's lake, Marilyn is forced to pick up where Lydia's short life ultimately left off.

In her ongoing attempt to make her mother happy so that she would stay, Lydia hides a cookbook with pages that have been stained by tears. The cookbook belonged to Marilyn's mother, and Marilyn sees the cookbook as a symbol of the domestic life that she feels forced into. Marilyn is secretly thrilled when Lydia tells her that she lost the cookbook, because she views this as a symbol of her own daughter rejecting the domestic life that Marilyn wishes she

could reject. From there, Marilyn is comfortable thrusting her own ambitions and expectations onto her daughter, which the audience knows Lydia only accepts because of her immaturity and disconnection from external knowledge. In a fit of anger and grief, Marilyn goes into Lydia's room and begins pulling all of the scientific textbooks from the shelves. At the very back of the shelf, she discovers the lost cookbook that Lydia had concealed years ago. At this moment, Marilyn understands why Lydia had gone along with her ambitions for so many years. She reflects:

Lydia, five years old, standing on tiptoe to watch vinegar and baking soda foam in the sink... Lydia touching the stethoscope, ever so gently, to her mother's heart. Tears blur Marilyn's sight. It had not been science that Lydia had loved (Ng 247).

Marilyn finally begins to see the care that her daughter had taken to engage with her, and recognizes that she was setting the terms for their relationship. As she looks at the book and posters that she has shredded from the wall, Marilyn realizes they are relics of "everything that she had wanted for Lydia, which Lydia had never wanted but had embraced anyway" (247). This revelation transforms Marilyn's outlook on Lydia and her other children, as she has been operating from an individualistic mindset throughout the novel. Too late, she realizes that her daughter was an individual with nuanced motivations and personal interests and desires, rather than an extension of herself.

Since there are three major protagonists throughout *The Vanishing Half*, the character's transformative moments overlap. When it comes to mindsets that lack operative empathy for the people closest to them, it is crucial that the formative moments include the affected relationships. Desiree and Stella's formative moments to complete their arcs are postponed in the novel, since the twins are not in contact for the majority of the novel. Because the twins did not have the

opportunity to observe the other as adults and recognize that they were more than the limiting boxes that they place one another in, they both conceive of the other as one-dimensional. Both Desiree and Stella think of the other as they were in adolescence, so they do not achieve a more well-rounded view of the other until they interact at the end of the novel. Stella returns to Mallard and meets with Desiree, and the two have an emotional reunion. The twins embrace, with “Desiree tried to push her away but Stella pulled and then they were struggling, and then they were holding each other, Desiree exhausted, whimpering, Stella begging for forgiveness into her sister’s hair” (Bennett 318).

Later, Stella explains the choices that she has made to lie to her husband and daughter. During their reunion, Stella implores Desiree to talk to Jude to convince her to maintain her lie to her daughter Kennedy. Desiree is surprised by Stella’s resolve, and Stella is surprised by Desiree’s sensitivity. Both stare at the other with the recognition that they have chosen drastically different life paths. Desiree reflects:

She’d always felt like the older sister, even though she only was by a matter of minutes. But maybe in those seven minutes they’d first been apart, they’d each lived a lifetime, setting out on their separate paths. Each discovering who she might be (322).

Desiree realizes that the twins are different not because of the surface-level differences that they had projected upon one another, but because the two are two separate humans. They each chose their life path and are now recognizing the extent to which these choices shaped their lives.

Transformed Perspectives

As with all coming-of-age journeys, each protagonist must emerge with a more enlightened perspective that will inform the way they interact with others going forward. As these novels all feature women of color, their journey toward empathy and away from naive disconnection and individuality is crucial. As each protagonist faces challenging and pivotal moments throughout the novels, they are placed in situations that challenge their previous ways of thinking, and encourages them to reconcile with complex, intersecting pressures.

Throughout the first half of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Julia's attitudes and perceptions construct a striking iteration of the "immigrant bargain." The term, conceived originally by Vivian Louie in her book *Keeping the Immigrant Bargain: The Costs and Rewards of Success in America*, references the sacrifices of immigrant parents that leverage their own opportunities to provide their children with educational opportunities. The bargain asserts that the parents' sacrifices hinge on the assumption that their children will achieve academic success. Often, parents will place "moral worth" on their children's academic achievements, and will expect these achievements to then translate into economic success. Children in these first-generation immigrant families will feel intense pressure to achieve academic success, even though they are often missing parental involvement in their education. There are a broad range of experiences that fit within this framework, like those explored by Steven Alvarez in his article "Brokering the Immigrant Bargain: Second-Generation Immigrant Youth Negotiating Orientations to Literacy." In Alvarez's study, second-generation adolescents that experience parental pressures and stress benefitted from external mentorship, especially when it came to literacy and writing. Mentors and tutors in a program called Mexican American Network of Students (MANOS) brokered the cultural differences between students and their parents, and helped students to navigate their academic stressors. MANOS mentors "show support for

families through cultural sensitivity and empathy” and practice “interplay between family, educational support, and institutional guidance” (Alvarez). This mediation is necessary because second-generation adolescents often navigate the “immigrant bargain” with denial and distance. Though familial pressures to succeed can act as motivators, the heightened stress often leads to adolescents denying their Mexican identities and distancing themselves from their parents’ cultural values. This denial contributes to the disconnection between their parents and their own sense of identity. As Alvarez’s study demonstrates, helping students to reconnect to their family’s community and values supported the students’ academic, social, and cultural development.

The concept of the immigrant bargain and Alvarez’s research related to effective ways of brokering the Mexican bargain offer valuable insight to Julia’s behavior in the novel. The novel and Julia’s trajectory are heavily influenced by her parents’ status as first generation immigrants. From the beginning of the novel, the audience witnesses Julia’s refusal to appreciate her heritage or cultural background. It is clear that Julia has ambitions and knows that her parents want her to escape poverty. However, Julia purposefully disconnects herself from her heritage and refuses to understand her parents’ perspectives. Julia’s visit to Mexico illuminates the extent of suffering and sacrifice that have shaped her parents’ lives. Though readers are aware of the external cultural forces that inform Julia’s identity and experience, Julia is not until she completes her coming of age arc.

Julia’s connection with her parents’ history and her own Mexican heritage acts as a form of the cultural facilitation that Alvarez recommends. Upon returning to Chicago and getting accepted to college, Julia is more sensitive to her parents’ perspectives. She is still annoyed when her mother worries about her future at college and says “I’m telling you that you can’t go around

trusting everybody” (332). Julia is annoyed by the lecture, but now reflects “I know where she’s coming from with all this.” Julia endures the conversation with more patience, thanks Amá, and diffuses the serious mood with a joke. Through this exchange, readers observe Julia practicing empathy and understanding and easing her mother’s anxieties.

Throughout most of the novel, Julia lashes out and purposefully misunderstands her parents’ behavior. However, one of the final scenes of the novel depicts Julia and her parents saying goodbye at the airport, as Julia leaves for college. As their last exchange, Julia hands Apá the picture that he drew of Amá, which she has kept since returning home from Mexico. Encouragingly, Julia says “It’s beautiful, and you should have it,” and continues with “I wish you’d draw again, Apá. Maybe you can draw a picture of me sometime?” (338). Instead of demanding that her father sees the value in the arts or scolding him for giving up his artistry, Julia approaches him with encouragement and empathy. She has shifted her perspective from narrow-minded entitlement, and now openly values her parents and their sacrifice. Importantly, Julia has found the balance between valuing her parents’ sacrifice, respecting their background, and pursuing her own passions by attending college. In other words, she has found a way to broker the immigrant bargain by the end of her coming of age journey.

Everything I Never Told You follows the misunderstandings and miscommunication between Marilyn and her daughter Lydia. The novel explores the gendered expectations that both characters have for one another, and the phenomenon that ultimately leads to disaster. As Allison Alford’s article titled “Doing Daughtering: an Exploration of Adult Daughters’ Constructions of role portrayals in Relation to Mothers” suggests, “mothering” has consistently been perceived as a role with cultural baggage. To “mother” is to act in a role “well understood in structural and cultural systems.” In many ways, the perception of “mothering” is the very phenomenon that

Marilyn felt pressured by throughout the novel. However, as Alford suggests, the role of “daughtering” is a less studied and rarely acknowledged role in the family structure. As the burden of emotional labor falls on women in family structures, it is important to acknowledge that this burden is not only being presented to mothers, but also daughters. The role of the daughter has been perceived as a passive or invisible family member, as her social requirements include “the management and avoidance of conflict necessary to maintain a positive- or at least bearable- relationship... managing her mother’s emotions (including emotion work and other emotional labor” and more (Alford). Until daughters begin to enact their own agency, mothers are not aware that their emotional labor is being upheld by their daughters as well.

Marilyn’s pivotal shift in perspective happens once she realizes that her young daughter was bearing emotional weight for her to make her happy. Once she realizes that Lydia did not want to pursue medicine and only went along with her mother’s ideas to make her happy, Marilyn is overcome. Her youngest daughter, Hannah, whom Marilyn has spent the majority of the novel ignoring, enters the room. For a moment Marilyn thinks that “the impossible happens: a small blurred ghost of a little-girl Lydia” enters. Marilyn realizes that this is “Hannah, pale and trembling, her face glossy with tears” (248). After this shift in perspective, Marilyn realizes how emotionally distant and unsupportive she has been to her remaining children. As she prepares herself to bear the emotional weight to alleviate the pressure on her remaining daughter, Marilyn “opens her arms, and Hannah stumbles into them.” This moment is the first portrayal of comfort and emotional connection between a parent and child in the novel.

The *Vanishing Half* follows twins Desiree and Stella and Desiree’s daughter Jude as they navigate the implications of choosing different life paths. Desiree and Stella are from a Black town that praises light skin, so the twins are popular because their skin is the lightest in the town.

Once the twins run away to New Orleans, Stella leverages her light skin to “pass” as white. Initially she only chooses to pass to improve her employment options, but she soon chooses to advance her social and cultural capital by marrying a white man and fully entering a wealthy, white society. Stella trades the support of her sister and friends for the comfort and security that only wealth and whiteness can provide in the American landscape.

The colorism implicit in “passing” is rooted in chattel slavery and the racist laws that struggled to maintain white control over the Black population. The introduction of the “one drop rule” allowed white slave owners to shift the conversation away from color and toward race. The distinction between color and race continued long after the initial abolition of slavery. As Robert Reece asserts in his article “The Missing Social Movement: Colorism in Black America,” “Black Americans, regardless of class and color, believed that their group interests were more important than their individual interests and the supposed niche interests of their various other social identities because it was race policy, not class policy, not color policy, that continued to deny them full participation in American life.” This framework does not encourage the criticism of colorism that white supremacy has fostered in Black life. Instead, it develops the belief that race is the limiting factor, and “passing” into another race will lead to individual freedom. When Stella returns to Mallard and finally reunites with her twin sister, Desiree asks how she managed to “talk like them” and fully integrate into white society. Then, the conversation shifts toward Desiree’s hurt when she says “you didn’t want me to. You left me.” Stella replies that she met someone, and Desiree returns “you did all this for a man?” Stella responds that she liked who she was with him. Desiree responds with one word: “White,” to which Stella refuses and says “no, Free” (Bennett 318). Desiree laughs and says “same thing.” Throughout this exchange, Stella continues to refuse to accept her decision to deny her family and background for her individual

gain. She says that the situation changed when she had her daughter and justifies her decision by saying that she could not leave or tell the truth, as it would mean losing her family. Stella ultimately admits to the loneliness in her chosen life. She understands that she has spent her entire life looking over her shoulder and living in the fear that a Black person will recognize what she is doing and reveal the truth. Stella decides to admit her decision later to her daughter, but her choice only results in more secrecy. Stella tells Kennedy that she wants her to know her, but that they cannot talk about it when they get home, where Kennedy's father is unaware. By the end of the novel, Stella knows that her choice has not led to freedom, but to stifling paranoia and secrecy.

Conclusion

The coming-of-age arc has been a constant and important feature in young adult literature, as it encourages readers to think about their own maturity and development. The coming-of-age trope features young adults "coming into their own" to prepare to meet the world before them. However, the skills and knowledge needed to make meaningful connections in the world differ from characters from different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is necessary, then, to showcase characters that develop into more sensitive, mature, and understanding people within their own social circumstances. The coming-of-age arcs woven within *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, *Everything I Never Told You*, and *The Vanishing Half* emphasize the crucial existence of empathy as the characters navigate adult life. These characters must reckon with the limiting and often prejudicial factors within their societies, in order to reach deeper understandings of their backgrounds and family members. Through these narratives, both the characters and the audience come to understand the range of

experiences for adolescents of different cultural backgrounds. In a classroom setting, students are faced with challenging intersections of identities and shaping social factors throughout the texts, which not only expose them to vary perspectives about what it means to come of age but also require precise pedagogical interventions to properly develop.

Chapter Two: Pedagogical Interventions

Over the past decade, several movements have advocated for more inclusive literature, both in the publishing industry and in the classroom. Contemporary movements advocate for the inclusion of multicultural literature with more diverse characters in secondary and post-secondary curriculums (Naidoo and Park; Williams and Blasingame). There is an increasing recognition for the importance of representation in young adult and new adult novels. However, as the movement for more diverse literature emerges, patterns of performative representation emerge as well. Multicultural young adult novels are rich and generative texts, deserving of the same scholarly classroom treatment that prominent texts by white authors receive. Through my studies of the syllabi and course material for college courses on multicultural literature and young adult literature, I noticed that these tendencies emerge, even when the instructors appear cognizant of diversity and inclusion in their syllabi. As my own close readings of three multicultural young adult and new adult novels illuminated, these texts can offer instructors and students with far more than performative representation in the classroom. The novels *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, *Everything I Never Told You*, and *The Vanishing Half* offer thorough depictions of well-rounded characters, complex motivations, and compelling coming-of-age arcs. While instructors can acknowledge the historical and sociological representations at play in each novel, these novels offer instructors the opportunity to guide their students toward emotional literacy and empathy. For the purposes of this discussion, I am defining emotional literacy as the identification and recognition of complex emotions, as well as the ability to express and respond to emotions in others. In the college classroom, emotional literacy includes self-awareness through the recognition of biases, conflicting motivations, and empathy through the acknowledgment of others' experiences and behaviors. By tracing the emotional and

complex journeys that each protagonist takes in the novel, students have the opportunity to mirror the development of empathy and maturity present in these Young Adult texts. Throughout this section, I will offer an overview of current approaches to multicultural literature in college syllabi, and discuss how these approaches tokenize cultural experiences and limit analysis. From there, I will provide an overview of scholarly approaches to the bildungsroman, particularly as it relates as a frame to analyzing literature that includes a range of gendered, racial, and cultural experiences. I will then offer important pedagogical scholarship about teaching with equity and inclusion, before establishing my major scholarly theorists that inform my framework for literary analysis.

Approaches to Multicultural Literature in the Classroom

The contemporary advocacy for literary diversity in secondary and post-secondary English classes has resulted in numerous classes including multicultural literature. An overview of college syllabi available online revealed courses with names such as: “Introduction to U.S. Multicultural Literature,” “Contemporary Multicultural Literature,” and “Exploring Young Adult Literary Narratives.” Additionally, there are courses that acknowledge the need to teach aspiring teachers how to teach multicultural literature, so I encountered other courses titled “Young Adult Literature in Multicultural Settings” and “Teaching Multicultural Literature.” Upon reading these course descriptions, several patterns and pedagogical approaches become apparent. Between courses that were specifically dedicated to studying or teaching multicultural literature and the courses focused on young adult literature, it is clear that many instructors do want to include literature that feature a variety of gendered, racial, and cultural experiences. However, the

analysis and pedagogical focus of the syllabi is solely connected to the sociocultural and historical moments that the texts illustrate.

The course descriptions echo the purpose of the multicultural texts to be to connect the texts to historical moments. Each description iterates that the class will read multicultural literature to learn about their social, historical, and cultural contexts. The descriptions emphasize the uneven distribution of resources among marginalized communities, and ask students to make connections between the production of the multicultural texts and the writers' circumstances. Most commonly, the descriptions conclude with a similar major goal: by reading and studying the multicultural literature in the class, the students will "make sense of the world around them" (Savonick). In the case of pedagogical classes about multicultural literature, the students are taught to use these texts to help their future students make the same connections and conclusions. Course descriptions that feature young adult literature highlight the importance of the genre in helping students to analyze young adult texts in connection with the larger world (Romero). These sentiments underscore the broadly embraced value of young adult literature as a way to help students understand literature as a way to see the world beyond themselves.

The syllabi that describe the goals of their classes in this way design a course schedule that emphasizes the diverse utility of every assigned novel. Frequently, instructors choose to list each novels' key concepts and themes on the course schedule included in the syllabus (Romero & Sassi). For example, if the syllabus assigned students to read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, the title is accompanied by a list of themes. So, Hurston's novel would have an accompanying list of themes, such as: race, gender, class, ethnicity, politics, and religion. This list of key concepts explicitly guides the students toward those lenses when reading and analyzing the novel. Further, this approach implies that these rich multicultural

novels function as a checklist for diversity and inclusion, both on the syllabus and in the classroom. This approach reinforces multiple harmful ideologies to literature students and prospective literature educators. Under the guise of inclusion, these instructors create environments that understand multicultural perspectives as experiences to be observed by the dominant culture. By incorporating literary works that check off the list of acceptable diverse perspectives, both the instructor and their students come to believe that they are educating themselves on the broader world. In reality, they are reinforcing the expectation that writers that belong to marginalized communities should be read to reinforce their preconceived notions of other cultures and experiences. Dangerously, this checklist allows students to comfortably support beliefs about marginalized groups, under the guise of equitability. This reinforces their interpretations of the broader world- as an observational, distant lens- rather than one of empathy or emotional connection.

By consistently emphasizing the utility of multicultural and young adult texts as vessels for historical or sociological lessons, these pedagogical approaches flatten these generative texts into component parts. The perspectives that both students and future teachers adopt for these types of texts is external and observational. Though these classes are offering multicultural literature on the syllabus and their approaches claim to want students to make connections to the outside world, these lenses teach students to make sense of different racial, cultural, and gendered experiences by “othering” them. The current approaches prioritize exposure to diversity over function of literature, since the classes teach students to read the texts as vehicles for understanding oppression, rather than narratives to generate their own ideas and development. Though it is unfair to assume that these courses do not acknowledge aesthetics, dialogue, or other literary values in their classroom analysis and discussions of these works, their

primary function on the syllabus is to teach students about historical marginalization and oppression. This framework limits the potential for empathetic involvement and emotional development in these texts.

Approaches to the Bildungsroman

As previously discussed, the bildungsroman, often called the coming-of-age novel, is a prominent genre across cultures. Both scholarly and pedagogical approaches to the bildungsroman emphasize the universality of the genre, as “the significance of the journey to adulthood is recognised all over the world” (Graham 8). It is broadly recognized that the bildungsroman offers readers the opportunity to understand what it means to grow up, or “come-of-age” in different cultures and time periods. Historically, the genre was very exclusionary, with some definitions stating that a male protagonist is inherent to the genre. Scholarship has often extended analysis of the genre by thinking about form and commonly-placed tropes. This has allowed writers like Ellen McWilliams to trace the “female bildungsroman” by reading Margaret Atwood.

The genre can generate discussions about class, gender, and sexuality, since youths encountering the reality of adulthood and social expectations will grapple with how these factors influence their choices. As Graham continues, “youths understand the implications of social norms for the first time, and structural inequalities are exposed through the trials they face in maturation.” As echoed in the overview of syllabi, narratives about adolescent development are frequently analyzed by their social and cultural contributions.

There is an understanding that the coming of age arc persists across all cultures and time periods. Still, there must be an acknowledgement of the historically rigid white-centric and male-

centric boundaries of the genre. Often coming-of-age stories worked to solidify the values of the dominant culture. The bildungsroman has effectively conveyed that the adolescent male protagonists become “men” when they achieve socially celebrated feats. These achievements may consist of hunting a large animal, maturing to complete an educational degree or find a job, or taking up a leadership role. In this way, the bildungsroman reinforces that the audience should also respect the values that these achievements convey: male leadership, ambition, and strength (McWilliams 5).

Scholars within the past two decades have questioned the limits of the genre, quoting scholars that have called the bildungsroman the “phantom genre.” Sarah Graham’s introduction to the 2019 collection of essays titled *A History of The Bildungsroman* establishes that the genre contains “little critical consensus” (5). Still, debates about the genre and usage of the phrases are appealing. Stella Bolaki argues that “despite the postmodern challenges to the coherent and autonomous self, which is central to the genre’s definition, the *Bildungsroman* has an enduring power.” Instead of ignoring the historically exclusionary or complex histories of the genre, or dismissing the genre on the basis of its foundational narrowness, scholars working in coming-of-age literature are interested in how both authors and scholars can locate entry points and expand the genre. As Ellen McWilliams writes in her 2016 book titled *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman*, her scholarship highlights “how Atwood is a writer interested in the complexities and contradictions of the genre, not one who unthinkingly takes on the straightforward dictionary definitions [of the bildungsroman]” (5). The idea to use the familiar coming-of-age narrative structure to inform more diverse scholarship is also demonstrated in Martin Japtok’s *Growing Up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction* states that “the bildungsroman as a genre is well suited for an

exploration of the meaning of ethnicity because it focuses on the relations of a protagonist with the wider environment” (Japtok 21). By acknowledging the historical precedence and function of the genre, these scholars advocate for the expansion and utility of the form into more diverse spaces, by using the genre as a framework to discuss and analyze female and multicultural literature.

As scholars acknowledge this history, they also ask whether the genre can evolve, or the boundaries can shift, to incorporate other experiences. In the introduction of her book *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women’s Fiction*, Stella Bolaki states that “in its schematic representation, its primary function is to make integration into the existing social order legitimate by channeling individual energy into socially useful purposes” (Bolaki 16). Bolaki continues to summarize her scholarship as reading against the tropes and cultural markers that often appear in these narratives. This approach attempts to tease out the multicultural perspectives and different gendered experiences within cultures, while maintaining an emphasis on the “difference” of the subjects in these narratives.

The existing scholarship addresses the roots of the bildungsroman, and finds possibilities for analysis within their own frameworks. While many seek a multicultural-informed analysis of the form of the genre, they still approach the texts informed by the established male dominance of the genre. I am more interested in what teaching the analysis of the arcs, as it pertains to emotional development of the characters, can do for scholars and students alike. Through the lens of multicultural perspectives, students can develop their own arcs and sense of being that does not “other” or exclude the world. When it comes to thinking through the bildungsroman and incorporating a broader range of cultural and gendered perspectives, insights often skew toward

observational theories of representation, rather than a differentiation of the characters' experiences.

Shifting the Pedagogical Approach to the Coming-of-Age Novel

An overview of popular approaches to teaching multicultural young adult literature and the Bildungsroman highlights the need for a more equitable approach to analyzing multicultural coming-of-age narratives. Both common pedagogical and scholarly approaches argue that expanding syllabi to include multicultural perspectives adequately incorporate diversity and inclusion into their work. However, it is clear that these approaches leave large gaps within the possible analysis. Not only do these approaches function to read multicultural literature as a collection of tropes and solidify the perspectives of the dominant culture, but they also inherently limit the scope of analysis to these tropes. It is clear that both instructors, scholars, and their students would benefit from shifting their perspectives, and approaching these texts from a more comprehensive and empathetic lens. As my literary analysis highlights, there are rich, consistent threads within contemporary multicultural coming-of-age novels. My approach to thinking about these novels does incorporate form, and acknowledges the cultural impacts and social oppression that are important to those novels. However, it also extends the conversations past the social and cultural features of the text, to find the nuanced complexities of empathetic development within the characters. By acknowledging the multicultural perspectives within the novels and extending the analysis to the characters' personal arcs and development, this framework invites both instructors and students to develop their own emotional literacy.

Contemporary studies in the instruction of young adult literature begin with the importance of developing a field that considers the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of

readers. In a chapter titled “Young Adult Literature: Defining the Role of Research,” from *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today: Insights, Considerations, and Perspectives for the Classroom Teacher*, Hayn and Cobern outline the goals of the field as “emerging, prolific, and vital for the academic, social, and emotional development of young people.” This foundation of values and terms are indisputable. However, as previously discussed, the current practices to teach this literature often does not live up to these goals. By acknowledging the foundational values of the field, it is important to evaluate and continue to develop practices that will ensure that the outcomes of instruction match the theoretical goals.

In order to establish how the approach of tracing consistencies within multicultural coming-of-age novels allows instructors to resist the tendency to externalize, or “other” these texts, it is important to establish the pedagogical philosophies that ground my framework. Current American educational systems have a significant history of oppression, prejudice, and violence. This background cannot be removed from the context of every classroom, so instead instructors should strive to teach equitably. Teaching literature allows instructors to guide students as they develop deeper understandings of literary form, function, and contexts. Rather than reproducing biases, literary pedagogy must seek to develop nuanced beliefs and emotional literacy. In bell hooks’s chapter titled “Ecstasy: Teaching and Learning Without Limits” in her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, she states that modern society is anti-intellectual, and discourages critical thinking. In this context, hooks claims that her radically engaged, critical pedagogy is the only way in which students can successfully learn in the classroom. She continues by declaring “conditions of radical openness exist in any learning situation where students and teachers celebrate their abilities to think critically, to engage in pedagogical praxis” (hooks 202). As the chapter continues, hooks states that engaged

pedagogy is political activism. Students may feel disrupted or disturbed by the critical, engaged pedagogy that hooks performs in her class. However, within hooks's belief in education as practice of freedom, thorough interrogation of texts, beliefs, and ideas is the only way to practice committed classroom pedagogy. She closes the chapter by disclosing that the academy is not paradise, but it is a place of possibility. Within the place of possibility, paradise can be created, openness can be facilitated, and minds can evolve and expand. hooks acknowledges that there is a simpler, more common, and likely easier way to teach literature in the classroom. This is especially true for multicultural young adult literature, as the rich themes make it easy to default to uncritical pedagogy. However, close examination of the texts are generative, worthwhile, and ultimately challenge students' biases.

Just as hooks advocates for a critical pedagogy in her teaching, contemporary pedagogical theorists emphasize the importance of mindset in generating inclusive, anti-racist curricula and classrooms. Kelly Hogan and Viji Sathy's 2022 book, titled *Inclusive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Equity in the College Classroom* recommend tangible practices for instructors when it comes to developing equity and inclusion in the classroom. In the chapter "Inclusive Teaching as a Mindset," Hogan and Sathy establish the role that instructors play in promoting student retention and success in the college classroom. The chapter defines inclusive pedagogy as a mindfulness of which students the curriculum is serving, and which students the curriculum is leaving out or behind. Most instructors would not consider their pedagogy to be hostile or exclusionary, and Hogan and Sathy acknowledge this tension by stating that "many of us educators would be aghast at subscribing to tactics that would exclude students, and yet we often unwittingly do so" (10). The chapter continues by encouraging educators to not only acknowledge their desire for inclusivity in their classrooms, but to accept that their pedagogical

practices could be unknowingly exclusionary. So, in addition to advocating for the positive role of structure and guidance in the classroom, Hogan and Sathy interrogate the ways in which students can feel excluded from discussions, leading to lower engagement or involvement in the course. In order to actively prevent exclusionary practices in the classroom, instructors must be aware of the language and precedence that they set in discussion.

Lastly, to highlight the contemporary discourse on difficult topics in the secondary and post-secondary classroom, I turn to *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature* by Victor Malo-Juvera and Paula Greathouse, which was published in 2020. This collection of pedagogical lenses and strategies suggest equitable ways to discuss violence, sexual assault, sexuality, racism, and sexism in literature. Importantly, Malo-Juvera and Greathouse point out that socially avoided topics, or “taboos” often maintain or reinforce the status quo. They continue by stating that “this may be an attractive outcome if one is in the dominant or privileged class; however, for those who are marginalized or oppressed, the status quo is not desirable” (3). Discussing challenging or uncomfortable topics in the classroom, with an informed and critical perspective can positively develop students’ understanding of nuance and complex issues.

With these pedagogical perspectives in mind, I turn to my approach to analyzing and teaching the multicultural coming-of-age narrative. This approach places emphasis on the complex emotional development of the protagonists, by analyzing their behaviors and thoughts throughout the novels. Readers observe as the characters grow and mature due to their circumstances, especially within the pivotal moments where the characters gain insight into those closest to them. Examples of these pivotal moments happen in the highlighted novels. These significant moments include the main character, Julia, in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sánchez finding out that her mother was raped, and when Marilyn discovers

that her daughter lied to her to make her happy for her entire life in *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng. One of the significant moments in *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett occurs when Jude realizes that Stella has not been yearning for someone to come find her and save her from the entrapment of her chosen life. All of these moments are situated within complex gendered, racialized, and social circumstances, but these transformative moments and subsequent character arcs move beyond the “checklist” of features that the novels bring to the classroom. By focusing on the actions, motivations, and dialogue of the protagonist, rather than their social situation, instructors are able to guide readers through an interrogation of their biases and beliefs about the characters.

Since the highlighted literary texts are young adult or new adult coming-of-age narratives, instructors can use form to mirror the characters’ development for their students. The characters’ coming-of-age arc toward empathy and deeper understanding of their parents, family, friends, and world around them can be replicated for students in the classroom as well. This framework allows instructors and students to interrogate their reactions to the characters and explore complex emotions, to develop nuanced understandings of complicated situations. For instance, instructors might engage students in a discussion about manifestations of grief in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, offering the class the opportunity to voice concerns about the seeming ungratefulness of Julia, and the overbearing nature of her parents’ behavior. These classroom discussions take place against the backdrop of the first-generation immigrant parents household, but the discussion moves beyond tropes or stereotypes. Instead, the discussion allows readers to extend empathy to both the parents and Julia in the situation, and develop an emotional literacy from the novel. This approach acknowledges the multicultural experiences of

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A New Approach to Identifying with the Protagonist

When it comes to teaching multicultural novels, like the featured coming-of-age narratives, instructors must adopt an approach that generates insightful discourse and critical thinking. Though analysis through form or literary diverse function has been shown to be limiting, the approach should still offer space to analyze form, especially in connection to

characterization. In order to be used effectively in the classroom, this approach must encourage students to engage in close reading and analytical practices that interrogate highlighted details, characters' behaviors, circumstances, and beliefs, while maintaining a foundation in cultural knowledge. With these parameters in mind, I considered an intersectional framework that would encourage close reading and emotional development among students in literature classes. This framework derives some of the language necessary for literary analysis from scholarly work considering the autobiography, and how this form connects the self to the world. This language offers a lens through which readers can consider the connections between the literary, the self, and the broader world, without externalizing or "othering" the featured protagonists' experiences.

Identifying Turning Points

In de-centering the "diverse" identity of the protagonist, instructors and readers need to have a way to trace the protagonists' development throughout the narrative. When it comes to developing this perspective, analyzing the development of the autobiography, storytelling, and intersectionality becomes imperative. In his article "Self-Making and World-Making," Jerome Bruner posits that when people give account of their lives, they do so through an "autobiographical" form. This form is inherently retrospective, as the autobiographer gives a shape and significance to the events that they choose to describe. Bruner begins by addressing the misguided assumptions that an "interesting" autobiography is a given if the person has lived an "interesting" life. Bruner asserts that there are key features of a compelling autobiography, of which objectively "interesting" events are not one. Autobiographies are nothing without their form, framing, and contextualization in cultural contexts. During the framing process, the

autobiographer will contextualize their sentences and make meaningful connections. They will derive meaning and common threads that were not- and could not- have been present at the time, since these connections are only obvious when viewed retroactively. These connections must situate their story within the “cultural canon,” while also advocating for the story’s uniqueness. According to Bruner, the cultural canon offers “a set of ‘givens’ in life. But if it is all ‘givens,’ then there is no individuality, no modern Self” (Bruner 71). So, the autobiography must also have a “tellability.” In other words, there must be distinct or striking features that “violate canonical expectancy, but do so in a way that is culturally comprehensible” (72). From this foundation, Bruner analyzes the selection of events in an autobiographer’s narrative. Inherently, the events that they choose to describe are a selection of the experiences that they consider to be the most valuable or significant to their life story, or arc. However, the autobiographer must be sure that the audience will recognize the significance as well, so they use language that distinguishes the “marked,” or striking events, from the “unmarked,” or less significant events. From this language and significance creation, these Western storytellers will emphasize “turning points” in the narrative. These turning points highlight an irresistible moment of change or growth for the storyteller. As a device, turning points “distinguish what is ordinary and expectable... from that which is idiosyncratic and quintessentially agentive” (73). In other words, the turning points are pivotal devices in autobiographical storytelling, which show the audience why the story is worth individual consideration.

As Bruner points out, the storyteller did not have a way of knowing that a singular exchange or event would end up changing the course of their lives, as they were experiencing the event in the present. So, the turning point feature demonstrates a conscious narrative choice. The storyteller chooses to find patterns after the highlighted significant event, which gives “his initial

deviation a new legitimization, a new narrative structure” (74). The turning points signal “inside” transformation, exercise the storyteller’s agency, and demonstrate narrative consciousness.

Bruner argues that the turning point event and following patterns that the storyteller describes shows the audience how the narrator conceives of themselves, and how they would like to be conceived by others. He claims “self-making is powerfully affected not only by your own interpretations of yourself but by the interpretations others offer” (76). The construction of the self, though often viewed as an individual process by Western society, is highly influenced by the subsequent constructions of the world and society, both through the autobiographies and the anticipated reception of them. This idea is important to present to readers in the classroom, their constructions of themselves and others are shaped by broader factors. Recognizing this fact can help instructors and students have better, more reflective, discussions about texts.

Challenges of Narrative and Autobiography

When it comes to offering instructors and students the language to discern challenges in presenting challenging or traumatic events in literature, bell hooks’s thoughts on “Writing Autobiography” are helpful to keep in mind. As hooks astutely describes writing as practicing freedom and autonomy, she writes about the desire to commit her autobiography to the page, so that she will be able to move on from traumatic experiences fully. However, her impulse to document events robotically resulted in deep hesitation and blocks from fear. The vividness of the memories were slipping away, but hooks states that “yet I could not begin even though I had begun to confront some of the reasons I was blocked, as I am blocked just now in writing this piece because I am afraid to express in writing the experience that served as a catalyst for that block to move” (31). The key to jolting her memories and allowing them to flow on the page

happened when she was living in the present, instead of waiting for the memories to appear as she stared at her typewriter. One day hearing a train invokes a childhood memory where her family's car stalled on train tracks, and the memory comes surging back.

hooks describes her autobiographical writing as taking place "in short vignettes." After the initial catalyst, the memories "came in a rush, as though they were a sudden thunderstorm. They came in a surreal, dream-like style that made me cease to think of them as strictly autobiographical because it seemed that myth, dream, and reality had merged" (32). She describes how her recollection, memory, and framing of events differs from her siblings, and acknowledges how these discrepancies are a sign of the limitations of the autobiographical. Though one may have a desire to tell their stories, their story will not be written without release, framing, emphasis, and imagination. hooks leans into the joy and freedom of writing her memories and experiences, with the acknowledgment that certain perspectives or memories have "imprinted on her consciousness" differently than they would have on her siblings', or anyone else's. These reflections are thus not weaknesses or challenges to the autobiography, or personal storytelling. Rather, they serve as reminders that events are always going to be filtered through personal consciousness, and the personal consciousness will always be affected by a myriad of other factors. There is a joy and freedom in embracing individual analysis and interpretation, instead of desperate attempts to pin down the "one true" interpretation of an event, experience, or literary work. These reflections serve as a reminder to instructors that students' analysis or interpretations of literary work may differ, despite the fact that every student participates in the same in-class discussions and reads the same literary works. The best way to guide students through an uninhibited, generative discussion is to acknowledge and support different thought patterns and perspectives. While hooks's "Writing Autobiography" describes the transient nature

of memories and the strikingly unique lens that filters every individuals' experiences and perceptions, these thoughts serve as a crucial reminder to readers, instructors, and students alike. As an instructor striving to develop a framework for emotional literacy and empathy through turning-point literary analysis, a central feature to this framework is the acknowledgement that students will experience a range of emotions toward a text. Fully recognizing the validity of every response for students, and emphasizing the myriad of factors that contribute to each response, will help students to develop emotional identification as they are reading and discussing literature in the classroom.

Conclusion

This section opens with the most common approaches to young adult and multicultural literature in the college classroom. These syllabi unequivocally uphold dominant perspectives by “othering” more diverse experiences related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. With the overarching goal of challenging these tendencies and creating a pedagogical framework that will encourage students to adopt nuanced perspectives of their reading practice and empathy, I considered the most foundational work for my pedagogical literary analysis, from Jerome Bruner’s “Self-Making and World-Making” and bell hooks’s “Writing Autobiography.” Without both of their considerations on autobiography, instructors may lack the lens and language to describe how every students’ previous experiences and biases shape analysis. By folding these ideas together, I offer an approach to teaching narratives, specifically multicultural coming-of-age novels, to college students. As my last section demonstrates, this framework engages inclusive teaching practices with turning-point analysis to challenge student biases, generate emotional literacy, and develop empathy.

Chapter Three: Turning Point Pedagogy in Practice

Through the acknowledgement of the vast possibilities inherent to the narrative and interpretation, instructors are able to offer their students a more inclusive and generative approach to reading and analyzing narratives. The approach must begin with an acknowledgement of the ways that writers, readers, and the narratives' protagonists are shaped by social factors. As Bruner's piece discusses, writers shape their stories with audience reactions in mind; they want their work to be obviously culturally relevant. The audience, which can be defined by both the instructors and the students, make up portions of the social world that the writer would have in mind. However, every reader's interpretations are shaped by their own beliefs and experiences. Rather than denying or ignoring the myriad of factors that shape student experience, instructors can generate real-world connections and foster emotional literacy by using emotions as entry points in their pedagogy. The practice starts with instructors encouraging their students to reflect on the biases and preconceptions that they bring to any text. In the case of my highlighted multicultural coming-of-age texts, this includes acknowledging student expectations for features like family structures and dynamics, gender expectations, immigration, religion, sexuality, and racial dynamics. By acknowledging the preconceptions that students bring to the text, students learn to identify and categorize their emotions as a starting point for analysis. Additionally, this recognition prepares students to address the expectations that they have for characters, and lays the groundwork to trace character development in the classroom.

After instructors have acknowledged the existence of emotional responses within texts, my pedagogical approach encourages instructors to guide students through the development of emotional literacy by considering form. Close reading practices, written reflections, and in-class discussions facilitate connections between the coming-of-age novels and student interpretation.

Rather than approaching literature as facts or documented events on the page, students should acknowledge that every narrative includes specific details to shape the narrative. Drawing on Bruner's idea of turning points in the development of narratives, and hooks's thoughts about the uniquely individual thoughts about the same events, the following lesson plans demonstrate how instructors could incorporate a "turning-point analysis" in literature. This approach promotes emotional identification, and thus develops emotional literacy. These skills are imperative for students as they pin-point significant moments of emotional maturation among the characters in a novel. More specifically, this set of lesson plans on *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, *Everything I Never Told You*, and *The Vanishing Half* scaffold students toward emotional literacy and further develop their empathy by destabilizing and interrogating their own biases and addressing the intersections between character identities and social and cultural pressures.

By introducing the turning-point analysis framework into the classroom, instructors offer students a valuable lens to read narratives closely and discuss challenging textual moments. As shown in the featured multicultural coming-of-age stories, the students will witness how characters develop more acute emotional and social understanding in response to challenging or significant circumstances, and how they shift their perspectives about others' behaviors and circumstances. Through turning-point analysis, students will recognize that impactful textual moments do not simply further a novel's plot forward. Students will realize that these turning point moments function as spaces for transformation and development for the characters. As the students identify the significant moments that they notice in a text as turning points, and then analyze the effects on character behavior, the students discover how characters develop understanding and empathy. As shown in the lesson plans, this framework centers and encourages individual student response, which empowers students to identify the complex

emotions and motivations intrinsic to turning-point moments in the narrative. Clearly identifying and understanding emotions in a text develops emotional literacy and awareness, which means that the students have an opportunity to develop their emotional understanding alongside the characters in a novel.

Schedule and Lesson Plans

The following schedule and lesson plans demonstrate one option for instructors to approach teaching the highlighted texts while incorporating the pedagogical recommendations to foster student emotional literacy. Each set of lesson plans incorporates the unique features of the novel while guiding students toward applying turning-point analysis in their reading. The lesson plans are specifically designed for a writing-intensive, introductory college literature course. This set of lesson plans offer about eight weeks, or a half a semester, of content. The lesson plans are designed for a college class that meets bi-weekly, with 75 minute-class sessions.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter Schedule

Class 1: Introduction- Assessing and Discussing Stereotypes and Biases in reading

Class 2: Close Reading and Characterization

Class 3: Evoking Emotional Responses

Class 4: Mapping Turning Point and Pivotal Moments

Class 5: Assessing Emotional Growth- how has Julia changed from the beginning of the book?

Everything I Never Told You Schedule

Class 1: Introduction- Assessing expectations for families: communication and parents

Class 2: Performance and Motivations

Class 3: Exploring Social and Gender Pressures

Class 4: Living and Performing for Others: Examining Lydia's Behavior through Close Reading

Class 5: Intersecting Themes and Mapping Exercise

The Vanishing Half Schedule

Class 1: Parts 1 and 2: Character Impressions

Class 2: Parts 3 and 4- Introduction to Stella and Jude as Primary Characters- Tracing Misunderstandings

Class 3: Part 5- Mapping Influence of Race and Gender on Character Behavior

Class 4: Recognizing Perspectives and Pivotal Moments in Character Development

Class 5: Sense of Home, Responsibility, and Character Development in Conclusions

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter Lesson Plans

Class One Lesson Plan: Assessing and Discussing Stereotypes and Biases in Reading

Preparation: At this point, the students will not have started the novel *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape each characters' self-conceptions and decisions, and examine how recognizing individual experiences leads to the development of empathy.

Lesson Objective: Students will examine their currently-held beliefs about characters' agency, parental actions, grief, employment, and what it means to "grow up."

Central Themes/Keywords: parental dynamics, immigration, empathy, social awareness

Essential Question: How do readers' established biases and opinions influence how they will read and interpret a novel?

Materials: Copies of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Exercise: Anticipation Guide- 15 minutes

Students will participate in a “four corners” opening exercise. The students will physically move to corresponding corners of the room, to signal whether they agree, somewhat agree, disagree, or somewhat disagree.

The instructor will read the following statements, and each group member will then discuss why they have chosen that corner.

- Readers enter each novel with previously-held biases and opinions.
- Readers should try to begin each novel with no previously-held beliefs.
- As readers, we should be aware of the ways in which our past experiences and beliefs shape our analysis of texts.
- Reading novels can evoke emotional responses in readers.

The goal of this discussion is to:

- Allow students to recognize and identify that emotional responses and understandings of novels will be informed by their background, opinions, and biases.
- Encourage students to understand that they should be aware of their biases, rather than ignoring or denying them.

Writing Response- 25 minutes

Students will anonymously write their responses and thoughts that come to mind when they read a description of a character. These descriptions are:

- This is a parent that is emotionally distant, critical of their daughter’s choices, blames daughter for other daughter’s death, deeply religious, criticizes their daughter’s body and weight, and works as a housekeeper
- This is a parent that is emotionally reserved, works a blue-collar job and then sits in front of the TV right after getting home from work, silent and distant from spouse and children, and does not allow their daughter to voice their opinions
- This is a character that graduated from high school but attends community college part-time, helps their parents with their housekeeping work, does not go out with friends or go to parties, does not pursue other career options, and does not interact with their siblings often.
- This is a character that believes that they can make better decisions than their family members. They think that they can work hard to overcome every obstacle, and they are dismissive of others’ problems and concerns.

The instructor will gather the students’ work, but without including their names on the papers.

Post-Writing Reflection- 15 minutes

Ask the students: did they impose identity markers on the characters? What did you assume about the characters’ identities: religion, race, class, gender from the questions?

Students will discuss:

- Was it difficult to write what came to mind in the description? Did you find yourself trying to challenge biases or stereotypes that came to mind? Why should you recognize the stereotypes or harmful beliefs that came to mind?

Partner Discussion- 6 minutes

What does it mean to “grow up,” or mature as a teenager? What are important qualities to develop?

Whole-Class Ending Exercise

How would we define empathy and self-esteem?

Are they part of maturing and growing into an adult?

What happens if these traits are not developed?
How do we develop these traits?

Class Two Lesson Plan: Characterization Through Close Reading Practices

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read the first 100 pages of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape each characters' self-conceptions and decisions, and examine how recognizing individual experiences leads to the development of empathy.

Lesson Objective: Students will examine how close reading excerpts from characters develop understanding of characterization.

Central Themes/Keywords: parental dynamics, immigration, empathy, social awareness

Essential Question: How do students examine characters' behavior?

Materials: Copies of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Exercise: Students will use their emotional responses as an entry point to the text, by describing moments of surprise, sadness, anger, etc.

Moments might include:

- Olga's cause of death and funeral
- Amá's insinuation that Julia is partially responsible
- Julia and her parents' angry conversations and exchanges
- Julia's determination to go to college and leave her parents

Close Reading Exercise: As a class, we will practice close reading a passage, and discussing what it shows readers about the character and their emotions. Then, the students will practice close reading in groups with two more passages.

Whole Class Passage: Page 14, Julia tries to get her mom to come out of her room. Her mother has been lying in bed all day since Olga's death.

- Important phrases:
 - "I'd rather live in the streets than be a submissive Mexican wife who spends all day cooking and cleaning."
 - "Funny how my slob of a daughter is suddenly concerned with cleanliness. When have you ever cared about that before?"
 - "'Olga's gone now. All you have is me. Sorry.' Silence."
- Guiding questions:
 - What does Amá's response to Julia make you think about her character?
 - How does Julia feel about her parents' treatment of her?
 - What does this make you feel? This happens at the very beginning of the novel. How does this frame your reading of the characters' dynamics going forward?

Partner Passages:

Page 25: Discovery of Olga's secret box in her room

Page 50: Julia's discussion about Olga's life with Olga's best friend, Angie

Page 91: Julia and Amá's exchange about college and Julia's goals

Concluding Writing Response: Students will choose two lines or pieces of dialogue from the close reading passages that illuminated the character's motivations or values. Then, the students will conclude class by writing a response that describes why they chose these lines, what they revealed, and their current understanding and opinion of the characters.

Class Three Lesson Plan: Evoking Emotional Responses

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read until page 250 of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape each characters' self-conceptions and decisions, and examine how recognizing individual experiences leads to the development of empathy.

Lesson Objective: Students will examine how Julia's exchanges with her friends, parents, and relatives evoke emotional responses in the readers. The students will challenge themselves to understand characters' actions and motivations.

Central Themes/Keywords: parental dynamics, immigration, empathy, social awareness

Essential Question: How do students analyze emotional character behavior through social and cultural contexts?

Materials: Copies of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Exercise: Write, Pair, Share

Students will take 4-5 minutes to do a free write about their responses to the opening questions. Then, the students will pair up with a partner for 2-3 minutes to discuss their thoughts, and then the class will meet as a whole group to discuss their thoughts.

Guiding questions:

- Which characters do you find frustrating or challenging?
- What are the roles of parents in times of difficulty, like sudden family tragedy? Are Julia's parents fulfilling this role?
- Readers only have access to Julia's thoughts and emotions throughout the novel. Do you think that your feelings would shift if you had access to her parents' inner thoughts?

Whole-Class Discussion

Tracing events that led Julia to being sent to Mexico to stay with extended family:

- Julia lies to her parents about where she is going to meet with her new boyfriend.
- Her mother repeatedly goes through her room and finds her diaries, and reads them
- Julia attempts to commit suicide
- Her parents encourage Julia to meet with a therapist, but then they decide to send her to Mexico for the summer
- Julia continues to think about Olga's past secret life, even as she prepares to leave for Mexico

Questions:

- How does the above plotline unfold in the novel? What emotions did you have as you read these arcs?
- Julia and her parents do not understand one another. How do you think that their relationship could improve?
- Why do you think they fundamentally do not understand one another?
- How do your emotional responses help you to understand the text?
- Can you anticipate what Julia might learn in Mexico?
- What will the outcome be?

Free Write: Do you think Julia's parents are simply bad people? -Anticipate that the students will answer no, but there is space for the students to explore motivations:

- What do you wish readers knew about Julia's parents' thought-processes?
- What cultural forces do you notice in the novel so far? How are they shaping the characters' experiences?
- Do these cultural and social pressures intersect with the characters' decisions?

Concluding Activity: In groups, write a thought from either of Julia's parents that would illuminate your understanding of their actions toward their daughter. Support your reasoning with evidence from the text.

Class Four Lesson Plan: Evoking Emotional Responses

Preparation: At this point, the students will have fully read *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape each characters' self-conceptions and decisions, and examine how recognizing individual experiences leads to the development of empathy.

Lesson Objective: Students will identify and analyze how pivotal moments in the text act as "turning points" for Julia's emotional development. The students will be able to articulate how Julia's beliefs and actions develop after the identified turning points.

Central Themes/Keywords: parental dynamics, immigration, empathy, social awareness

Essential Question: How do students analyze pivotal moments in a coming-of-age narrative?

Materials: Copies of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint, and index cards

Content warning: sexual assault, violence

Opening Exercise: Reflective Activity:

Premise/ Opening Statement: Literature is often an avenue to discuss difficult topics; novels spark important discussions and offer readers glimpses into others' situations, worlds, and minds. Sometimes these topics can be jarring, upsetting, or challenging, thus evoking emotional responses in readers.

The students will receive 3-4 squares of paper or index cards. The students will write an emotion that they felt during their reading on one side of a card, and then briefly describe one moment in the text that conjured that emotion on the other side. The instructor will collect every card, and then read the identified emotions out loud, sorting each emotion into piles.

This activity will encourage students to recognize their shared emotions in response to distinctive moments in the novel. This exercise will also help students to develop their thinking about the impact of significant textual events.

Identifying Significant Moments: Discussion

Using the sorted piles of emotions from the text, the instructor will read the situations that evoked that emotion out loud to the class. The students will begin to make connections and identify similarities within the events that they each identified as evoking emotions like "sadness," "anger," "frustration," and "happiness."

Guiding questions:

- How can readers use their emotional responses to the text to inform their analysis of the text?
- Do authors intend to guide readers through different emotional landscapes in the text?
- How does recognizing that other readers experience the same emotions as you at similar points in the text inform your reading of the narrative?

Small Group Discussions: Turning Points

The instructor will offer the definition of a turning point as a significant change in the life of a character that alters or shifts their perspectives and leads to new dynamics, mindsets, and possibilities. The turning points in a novel have a clear cause and effect, and readers should be able to identify how the character or their situation has changed.

Then, in small groups, students will discuss the following questions:

- This novel features a 17-year-old protagonist navigating high school, grief, and family dynamics. This transitional time from adolescence to young adulthood is often a time of significant development. How can readers tell that characters are developing?
- What do you think a "turning point" is in a novel? How can readers identify turning points in narratives?
- What is the difference between a "challenge" in the novel and a "turning point" in the novel?

Class-Wide Discussion: Reflections on Turning Points

Guiding Questions:

- How can readers be sure that this is a turning point in the text?

- Are there signals that show the reader that a turning point has taken place?
- How do turning points connect to the evocation of emotion for readers?

Exit Ticket: Free Write

The students will choose one example of a turning point for Julia in the novel, and describe why they believe it is a turning point. What did Julia believe, or how did Julia act before the turning point? How did she behave as the turning point took place? What is different about her behavior after the turning point?

The instructor will collect these responses and create a list of the common turning points mentioned in the novel.

Class Five Lesson Plan: Assessing Emotional Growth

Preparation: At this point, the students will have fully read *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape each characters' self-conceptions and decisions, and examine how recognizing individual experiences leads to the development of empathy.

Lesson Objective: Students will assess and analyze how Julia has matured throughout the novel. The students will use the concept of turning points in narratives within their discussion.

Central Themes/Keywords: parental dynamics, immigration, empathy, social awareness

Essential Question: How do students assess emotional growth and empathy in narratives?

Materials: Copies of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Content warning: sexual assault, violence

Opening Activity: The students will meet in pairs to discuss turning points in narratives, so that the students will be reminded of the lens of turning points before our class activity. During this discussion, the instructor will show PowerPoint slides of the turning points that the students identified on their exit ticket from last class.

Mapping Stations: The students will meet in groups and switch between four stations. Each station will ask the students to choose the most relevant turning point, and map how Julia's emotional awareness and empathy developed from that turning point.

Station One: Think about Julia's relationship with her mother throughout the novel.

- How would you describe Julia's attitude toward her mother before the "turning point" in 5 words?
- What is the turning point that shifted Julia's perspective toward her mother? (At this point, the students will have identified Julia learning that her sister was the product of rape while her parents were immigrated to the United States.)
- What did Julia think about her mother after the turning point?
- How did Julia's behavior and actions shift after the turning point? What emotions did she display toward her mother after the turning point?

Station Two: Think about Julia's relationship with her father throughout the novel.

- How would you describe Julia's attitude toward her father before the "turning point" in 5 words?
- What is the turning point that shifted Julia's perspective toward her father? (At this point, the students will have identified Julia learning that her father used to love to draw and make art, before immigrating to the United States.)
- What did Julia think about her father after the turning point?
- How did Julia's behavior and actions shift after the turning point? What emotions did she display toward her mother after the turning point?

Station Three: Think about how Julia conceived of her sister Olga throughout the novel.

- How does Julia describe Olga's life and actions before the "turning point."
- What information does Julia receive about Olga that shifts her perspective about her sister? (The students will have identified Julia learning that Olga was having an affair with a married man and was pregnant at the time of her death.)
- How does Julia think about Olga after this turning point? Does this change her behavior and opinions?

Station Four: Think about Julia's relationship with herself throughout the novel.

- How does Julia describe herself? Her hopes, dreams, and anxieties throughout the novel?
- Are there any turning points that shift Julia's self-conception? How does Julia describe herself after these turning points? (Examples include Julia's description of her body at the beginning and end of the novel, her aspirations of becoming a writer, and her duty to her family).

Reflective Free Write: After the students have completed the stations, they will participate in a reflective free write. Does identifying the turning point and tracing Julia's emotional development in the novel influence how you view characters? Think about your opinions about

Julia's mother and father at the beginning of the novel. Now that you have read the entire novel, do you conceive of their behaviors and dialogue any differently?

What is the relationship between emotions and turning points in the novel?

- Instructors will know that these lessons have been successful if the students write things like:
 - “I feel sadness toward Julia's parents now, but I was primarily angry or frustrated before.”
 - “Recognizing the turning points have helped me to identify my own emotions while reading the novel.”

Lesson Goals and Reflection

The primary goals of the lesson plans for *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, by Erika Sánchez are to establish emotions as an entry point for considering texts, and to help students expand the conversation about how these significant moments highlight moments of transformation for the characters. Through emotion identification, plot mapping, and cause and effect exercises throughout the lesson plans, the students will be able to make connections between a characters' emotional development and their experience as a reader. This set of lesson plans points students toward textual turning points, and encourages students to think critically about how they identify turning points in narrative texts. Part of the process involves students reflecting on the ways in which they perceive and align with characters as they read and analyze narratives. The final lesson encourages students to identify how the main characters' beliefs, and subsequently her actions and behaviors, have shifted and evolved because of the identified turning points. The lesson concludes by asking students to reflect on how witnessing the protagonists' transformation has affected their own feelings and beliefs about the novel's characters.

As a writing-intensive literature course, the students' in-class writings and activities will take a central role in assessing their development of emotional literacy and thinking. The opening in-class writing exercises and other in-class activities will assess student learning and aid in the differentiation of instruction. Additionally, these assessments generate more opportunities for student engagement because instructors will be able to read all student work and feedback, instead of assessing classroom learning solely through large class discussions.

Everything I Never Told You Lesson Plans

Day One Lesson Plan: Exploring Performance and Motivations

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read the first chapter of *Everything I Never Told You*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape the characters' identities and self-conceptions, and assess how these identities inform their actions and choices.

Lesson Objective: Students will identify the expectations that they bring into a novel, particularly regarding parents and family dynamics.

Central Themes/Keywords: gender roles, race, identity and performance, internal vs. external, parental dynamics

Essential Question: How does the audience's access to the characters' internal and external dialogue affect their understanding of performance and communication in the novel?

Materials: Copies of *Everything I Never Told You*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Activity: Write, Pair, Share The instructor project a PowerPoint slide with the first two sentences from the novel on the board, which are:
“Lydia is dead. But they don’t know this yet.”

The students will participate in a free write about their response to this opening. At this point, the students will have read the first chapter. Again, the students are reading a text about an unexpected death and the aftermath. What emotions arise from this opening?

After the students write, they will meet in pairs to discuss their responses, and then share as a class.

Snowball Discussion: In this discussion, the students will meet in groups of four, and then eight, and then as a whole class. Each time the groups grow larger the students will discuss their answers to a set of questions and develop their thinking.

Meeting One Questions: Make a list of the characters that have been introduced in the novel so far. As readers, you know that they are about to navigate a devastating loss. Describe how you ideally think parents should react to this scenario. How should they treat their other children? How should they navigate this tragedy?

Meeting Two Questions: Share responses to the first set of questions, and then discuss the next set of questions. If you could predict three lines of dialogue that either of the parents will say in the coming pages, what would they be? Why did you choose the lines that you chose?

Meeting Three Questions: Whole Class: Share responses to the other sets of questions, and then discuss the following questions. Who is responsible for helping a family navigate an unexpected loss? The class has just read another book about a teenager that died suddenly. What do you hope will be different about this novel? Are there any behaviors that you think should or should not be repeated?

Exit Ticket: The students will briefly respond to the following prompt: In three sentences, describe the “worst case scenario” for family dynamics during the tragedy. Use as descriptive adjectives as possible.

Day Two Lesson Plan: Exploring Performance and Motivations

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read at least half of *Everything I Never Told You*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape the characters' identities and self-conceptions, and assess how these identities inform their actions and choices.

Lesson Objective: Students will develop their thinking about internal vs. external performances, and how enacted identities inform how others' perceive the characters. They will gain a deeper understanding of the impact of performances on others' identities and constructions of self.

Central Themes/Keywords: gender roles, race, identity and performance, internal vs. external, parental dynamics

Essential Question: How does the audience's access to the characters' internal and external dialogue affect their understanding of performance and communication in the novel?

Materials: Copies of *Everything I Never Told You*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Question- projected on board

What emotions come up when you think about the characters' choices and behaviors thus far in the novel? Do you find them frustrating to read? Why do you think you have these emotional responses to their actions?

Write, Pair, Share

Students will take 4-5 minutes to do a free write about their responses to the opening questions. Then, the students will pair up with a partner for 2-3 minutes to discuss their thoughts, and then the class will meet as a whole group to discuss their thoughts.

- Guiding questions for the group conversation:
 - Which characters are most frustrating or compelling to you?
 - What emotions do James and Marilyn (the parents) evoke?
 - The readers have access to the characters' thoughts and feelings and their dialogue and actions. Does this complicate your reactions and emotions about the characters?

Group Writing/ Thinking

In groups, the students will choose one of the following characters: James, Marilyn, Nath, Lydia, or Hannah

1. List the qualities that you associate with each character. What is their temperament? Personality? How do they act toward their family members vs. other characters?
2. Find three passages where they are in conversation with at least one of the other characters. What do they say to them? How does the conversation impact your chosen character?
3. Find two instances where your characters' dialogue does not align with their internal thoughts or emotions that are available to the reader. What do they wish to say? What do they actually say?
4. List the characters that shape your character's behavior.

Whole Class Discussion The class will discuss each character and the groups will share the ways that they identified that their characters impacted the others' experiences.

Exit Ticket: Mapping and Reflection

Each student will create a bubble map (or use another mapping device) to create connections between the characters and how they shape/ are shaped by others' actions and behaviors.

Class Three Lesson Plan: Living and Performing for Others: Examining Lydia's Behavior through Close Reading

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read all of *Everything I Never Told You*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how gender roles and parental pressures affect the characters' choices and options in the novel.

Lesson Objective: Students will develop their understanding of performance for others' expectations and how this appears in the text.

Central Themes/Keywords: gender roles, parental expectations, self-conception

Essential Question: How do others' expectations shape Lydia's behavior?

Materials: Copies of *Everything I Never Told You*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Activity: Students will respond to the following prompt:

Pretend that you are drafting a caption for a social media post that Lydia is making. What picture would Lydia choose to post? What would the caption say? Be as specific as possible, and justify your reasoning for your social media post with evidence from the text.

As a class, the students will volunteer to share their responses. Guiding questions include:

- Is Lydia “performing” in your social media post?
- Who is Lydia catering the post to? Why do you think she would choose to post this picture and caption?

Class-Wide Close Reading: Throughout the novel, readers observe Lydia “performing” for the sake of her parents’ expectations. The class will find several passages to close-read and analyze the pressures that are at play in the situation, and how this influences Lydia’s behavior.

First class example: Page 177: Lydia calls a friend, at her father’s request. The call ends quickly, but Lydia keeps the phone pressed to ear and pretends to have a long conversation with her friend.

- Choose an example that illustrates Lydia’s motivations for pretending to stay on the phone in this scene.
 - Why did you choose this sentence?
- How does Lydia’s father influence her behavior to pretend to call friends throughout the novel?
 - Why is Lydia placing pressure on her to have an active social life? How does this connect to his experience as the only Chinese-American history professor at the college where he works?
- This scene takes place over halfway through the novel. How does the placement influence how readers think about the first half of the novel? What is the effect of this placement?

Partner Close Reading Practice: After the guided close reading and discussion, the students will meet in pairs to choose another example of Lydia’s performance. The students will consider why this is important to the text, what this tells readers about her behavior, and trace the factors that are at play in this moment.

Other examples may include:

- Lydia’s vow to say “yes” to her mother’s wishes so that she does not abandon them again.
- Lydia tells her parents that she is failing math while her brother announces his college acceptance.
- Lydia meets with her older brother’s friend to smoke.

The students will turn in their written response as an exit ticket.

Class Four Lesson Plan: Exploring Social Pressures and Behaviors

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read all of *Everything I Never Told You*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape the characters' identities and self-conceptions, and assess how these identities inform their actions and choices.

Lesson Objective: Students will develop their thinking about parental behavior and how gender roles influence parenting styles in the novel. The students will analyze how gender shapes each parents' choices.

Central Themes/Keywords: gender roles, parental dynamics

Essential Question: How does the novel's patriarchal roles influence the parents in the novel?

Materials: Copies of *Everything I Never Told You*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Exercise- 15 minutes

The class will open with a creative exercise where the students will be asked to create a character description for a casting call sheet for the novel's parents, James and Marilyn. The students will be asked to describe the role, and which traits they think are crucial to highlight in the casting process. The students will be asked to specifically consider how their roles as parents play into their casting and descriptions.

After the students have written their descriptions, the students will participate in a class-wide discussion about their highlighted traits. The class will consider questions like:

- Did you include explicitly negative or positive language in your character description?
- How did you define the character's parental role in your description?
- How did the characters' relationship with other characters in the novel influence your description?
- What background information did you choose to include?

Partner Thinking: Students will turn to a partner to begin to discuss the following questions:

What was socially expected of Marilyn and James in the novel? What did their children expect of them as parents?

The students will take time to think about these questions and discuss with one or two classmates around them. They will not share out their answers to the class, but they will use them as a framing for the next exercise.

Stations

Station One: Think of all the ways that gender roles and social pressures show up for James in the novel. What are the expectations for James? Find at least three examples in the text that support your thinking.

Station Two: Think of all the ways that gender roles and social pressures show up for Marilyn in the novel. What are the expectations for Marilyn? What are Marilyn's goals in the novel? Find at least three examples in the text that support your thinking.

Station Three: Think about notable moments in the text where James and Marilyn interact with their children. How would you categorize their parenting choices? How do each of them behave as parents? Does their behavior vary between each child? Find at least three examples in the text that support your thinking.

Whole Class Discussion and Reflection

The class will discuss their findings and thoughts from the stations. During the discussion, the instructor will ask follow up questions to create connections between the gender pressures that the students identified and their parenting choices. Finally, for an exit ticket the instructor will ask them to reflect on the ways in which gender pressures reproduce similar pressures in their children.

Class Five Lesson Plan: Intersecting Themes and Mapping Exercise

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read all of *Everything I Never Told You*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how external factors shape the characters' identities and self-conceptions, and assess how these identities inform their actions and choices.

Lesson Objective: Students will identify how themes intersect in the novel, and map how these create significant moments for character development.

Central Themes/Keywords: gender roles, parental dynamics, intersectionality, racial and bi-racial identities

Essential Question: How does the novel portray intersecting identities and themes?

Materials: Copies of *Everything I Never Told You*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint, large paper for mapping exercise

Opening Activity: Students will meet in groups to discuss all of the themes that the class has discussed throughout the novel, such as race, gender, family and siblings, patriarchal expectations, performance etc. Then, the groups will come up to the front of the room and write the themes on the board.

The class will briefly discuss why they chose to identify the themes that they chose, before meeting back with their groups for a large activity.

Exploring Intersecting Themes: Creative Mapping

For this project, your group will choose one of the main characters and map all of the external pressures that shape their experience. As you choose your character, think about themes that we discussed in class about bi-racial and racial politics, gender norms, parental pressures, sibling tensions, educational expectations, etc. Once you have chosen your character, you will find a way to represent your findings, including: a poster board, journal response, or PowerPoint.

The students will support each theme mentioned with a quote or paraphrased section of the text.

Mapping Reflection

After the groups have completed their mapping exercise, the students will reflect on their project and how they chose to trace the intersections. They will consider questions like:

- Did identifying the intersection of themes change your perspective on your character?
 - How did you choose the passage that would represent each theme in your mapping project? How do the overlapping themes influence one another in the novel?
 - Why is it important to recognize how external pressures and systems of oppression intersect?
 - Did you recognize any significant “turning point” moments for this character in your mapping?
-
- Instructors will know that these lessons have been successful if the students write things like:
 - “I realize that the pressures on each character are complex and interconnected.”
 - “Mapping these themes made me realize that the characters have evolved throughout the course of the novel. For example, Marilyn realized that she had placed her own expectations and dreams onto Lydia, and then embraced her youngest daughter, Hannah, with acceptance.”

Lesson Goals and Reflection

The primary goals of my lesson plans for *Everything I Never Told You*, by Celeste Ng are for students to develop an understanding of complex motivations, internal and external worlds, and performance in the text. By analyzing the characters' inner thoughts and motivations and contrasting this information with the characters' actions and dialogue, students will understand how conflicting social and familial pressures contribute to characters' decisions. This set of lesson plans asks students to identify significant textual moments and examine how family dynamics, social pressures, and specific barriers for bi-racial students and women restricted the characters' opportunities. By reflecting on these significant textual moments, students will be able to trace the cause and effect of generational patterns and performances shaped by external expectations. The final two lesson plans ask the students to map the intersecting themes and pressures on characters, and extend student thinking to consider turning points and emotional development in the novel.

Many of the assessments in this set of lesson plans focus on in-class activities, which include writing, mapping, and other creative representations. Instructors can assess student learning based on their identification of intersecting themes and pressures, and how considering these themes affect their empathy and understanding of character decisions. The variety of assessments in this lesson plan allows students to demonstrate their thinking and understanding in multiple mediums, which allows for important pedagogical differentiation and accounts for a range of learning styles.

The Vanishing Half Lesson Plans

Class One Lesson Plan: Character Impressions and Reactions

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read parts one and two of *The Vanishing Half*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how the development of empathy is represented in the narrative, and how the characters must recognize others' experiences to fully develop their emotional intelligence.

Lesson Objective: Students will identify how multiple protagonists inform their readings of a novel.

Central Themes/Keywords: anti-Blackness and colorism, gender identities, self-conceptions, social pressures, family dynamics

Essential Question: How do the characters conceive of one another in a novel with multiple protagonists?

Materials: Copies of *The Vanishing Half*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Initial Responses: At this point, you have read from the perspective of Desiree and her daughter Jude. However, you have been introduced to the twins' mother, Adele, and Desiree's twin sister, Stella. Take a moment to reflect on your impressions of each character. Then, summarize your impressions of each character in five to ten words.

The class will share their responses, and then we will lead into a whole-class discussion.

Whole-Class Discussion: Establishing premises and questions:

- What was the catalyst for the novel? Why did Desiree and Stella choose to leave home?
- What are your initial impressions of this decision?
- How do you think Adele responds to Desiree when she returns home? Why do you think the pair of them choose to ignore Stella?
- What did Stella choose to do that separated the twins?

Identifying Character Perspectives: The class will discuss how Stella is described throughout the novel so far, since Stella's perspective has not been

- Page 50: How does Desiree conceive of Stella?
- Page 167: How does Jude conceive of Stella?
- Page 39: How does Adele seem to think about Stella and Desiree?

Considering Character and Reader Impressions Exercise: By the time Desiree returns to Mallard, the readers know that she is fleeing from her abusive husband. However, Adele only knows that her daughters ran away, cut off all contact, and then one of her daughters returned with her own child years later. This means that the readers' response to a character's actions may be different than the one portrayed in the text.

Writing Practice: The students will consider the situation above. Imagine Adele is talking with a friend about her daughter's homecoming. What perspective and opinions does Adele voice? How does she describe the scenario? Use examples from the text to support your reasoning.

Exit Ticket: Now, summarize your impression of Desiree, keeping all of your information about the character in mind. Use examples from the text to support your reasoning. How do your opinions about Desiree differ from the way in which you imagine Adele thinks about her daughter? Are the characters considering one another at this point in the narrative?

Class Two Lesson Plan: Tracing Misunderstandings in Primary Characters

Preparation: At this point, the students will have read parts three and four of *The Vanishing Half*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how the development of empathy is represented in the narrative, and how the characters must recognize others' experiences to fully develop their emotional intelligence.

Lesson Objective: Students will identify how misunderstandings stem from self-centered perceptions in the narrative.

Central Themes/Keywords: anti-Blackness and colorism, gender identities, self-conceptions, social pressures, family dynamics

Essential Question: How does the novel highlight misunderstandings or misconceptions in the characters?

Materials: Copies of *The Vanishing Half*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint,

Opening Exercise: After reading parts three and four, students will have encountered Stella's perspectives, and discovered that Jude and Stella act as the primary protagonists in the novel.

The students will write a response to the prompt:

These two characters have encountered numerous conflicts, crises of identity, and challenges throughout the novel. Choose one challenge (like Stella's relationship with her Black neighbors, Jude's discovery of Kennedy and Stella in the theater, or Jude's conflict with her now long-distance relationship with her mother.)

Imagine one of these characters is writing a private diary entry about the conflict. What worries do they describe? What are the primary concerns that they voice? How do they describe the situation?

The students will share their chosen conflict and reasoning for the diary entry to the class. Then, the class will begin to discuss the conflicting motivations present in the novel.

Class Close Reading: Page 270: Jude confronts Stella outside the theater:

Guiding questions:

- Why does Jude want to confront Stella?
- Why is Jude surprised that Stella is not excited about seeing her? Why is Stella terrified?
- Jude is immediately regretful and angry after the exchange. Why does this change her perspective so quickly?

Page 280: Stella is worried after Jude confronts her:

Guiding questions:

- Why is Stella terrified of Jude?
- Why does Stella then choose to travel to Mallard then?
- Why does Stella react the way that she does?

Exit Ticket: The class will discuss with a partner, and then share their thoughts to the class. Does the situation from the close reading act as a turning point for the characters? How does their behavior change after the encounter? Do either of the characters consider the other in their decisions?

Class Three Lesson Plan: Mapping Influence of Race and Gender on Character Behavior

Preparation: At this point, the students will have finished reading *The Vanishing Half*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how the development of empathy is represented in the narrative, and how the characters must recognize others' experiences to fully develop their emotional intelligence.

Lesson Objective: Students will understand how race and gender intersect to inform the characters' decisions in the novel.

Central Themes/Keywords: anti-Blackness and colorism, gender identities, self-conceptions, social pressures, family dynamics

Essential Question: How does the novel highlight the intersection of gender and race?

Materials: Copies of *The Vanishing Half*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Exercise: The racial dynamics are complex throughout the novel. Begin by choosing one moment in the text, and tracing how racial dynamics inform the characters' behavior.

With a partner, the students will find a moment in the passage, identify the characters affected, and discuss how this influences character behavior.

- Potential moments include:
 - Jude growing up in the anti-Black town of Mallard
 - Stella choosing to “pass” as white
 - Desiree choosing to marry a Black man, and then moving Jude back to Mallard.

Class-Wide Discussion

- The novel displays several different skin tones and races. How do these influence character behavior? What do you notice about the circumstances upon your initial reading.
- All of the main characters in the novel are women. How does this add another complexity in the text? Would the novel exist if all of the characters were men?
 - Guiding Examples:
 - Stella's status as the young-receptionist-turned-wife to a wealthy white man.
 - Desiree's abusive marriage, which led her to return to Mallard with her daughter, Jude
 - Jude's experience as a Black child with a deep skin tone, growing up in the colorist town of Mallard, and her lack of self-esteem from her peers' rejections
 - Jude's experience meeting her transgender boyfriend Reece and his friends, and navigating the gendered politics of their relationship
 - Kennedy's experience growing up in a white, wealthy family, whose privilege affords her the social safety net to pursue acting, though she does not achieve high recognition in the acting world.
 - Jude's experience working for Kennedy at the theater to save money for medical school.
- Are there moments in the text where the characters reflect about their gender and its impact on their lives? How do they describe their relationship to their womanhood? How do they describe their relationship with their race and skin tone?

Exit Ticket: The students will write a response to the following prompt:

- Choose one character from the novel. Think about how you could represent the ways in which race and gender intersect in their lives. You can choose to convey your response through a written response, or create a map or diagram. Choose at least three pieces of evidence from the text to support your thinking.

Class Four Lesson Plan: Recognizing Perspectives and Pivotal Moments in Character Development

Preparation: At this point, the students will have finished reading *The Vanishing Half*

Unit Objective: Students will identify how the development of empathy is represented in the narrative, and how the characters must recognize others' experiences to fully develop their emotional intelligence.

Lesson Objective: Students will describe how recognizing others' perspectives creates turning points in the novel.

Central Themes/Keywords: anti-Blackness and colorism, gender identities, self-conceptions, social pressures, family dynamics

Essential Question: How are turning points reflected in the novel?

Materials: Copies of *The Vanishing Half*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Exercise: The students will respond to the following prompt, and then discuss their responses with a partner:

Think about our previous discussions about turning points in previous novels. Did the turning points completely transform the characters' perspective or mindset? Now, think about turning points that you might identify in *The Vanishing Half*. Do the characters appear fully transformed by their pivotal moments?

Class Discussion: After the partners have finished discussing their responses, the whole class will meet to discuss their answers to the exercise's questions. The class will also think about:

- What makes a turning point appealing to a reader?
- A major moment of growth from turning points in the past has been the development of empathy in characters. How have the turning points signaled to readers that the characters are now more empathetic?
- What turning points can you identify in the novel? Do you think that these turning points have resulted in each character developing a comprehensive understanding of their own and others' emotions?
- To what extent have the major characters (Jude and Stella, but also Desiree and Kennedy) transformed and developed empathy due to their turning points?

In-Class Activity: Creating a Turning Point

Based on our class discussions and each students' analysis of the emotional development of the characters, the students will think about how an additional scene in the novel could spark emotional growth for a character or multiple characters. The students will consider the following prompt:

- After reading the entire novel, are there characters that you think still need to experience a significant event or turning point? How would this pivotal moment or exchange support their empathetic development?

- Can you imagine an additional scene, or an extension of an existing scene that would function as a turning point for this character?

Draft a scene that functions as a turning point for one or more of the characters in the novel. Think about how we have defined turning points in the past, and what a turning point in the novel seeks to do for character development. Your scene should realistically extend the character development present in the novel, but it should also demonstrate original thought and analysis. After you have written your scene, write a brief paragraph describing how your turning point scene will extend the emotional development of the character. Why would your additional scene enrich the text? How will the characters behave after the significant moment that you describe?

Concluding Activity: The students will meet in groups of 3 or 4 and briefly describe their turning point scenes and reasoning. The instructor will also have the students turn in their work by the end of class, as an exit ticket.

Class Five Lesson Plan: Sense of Home, Responsibility, and Character Development in Conclusions

Preparation: At this point, the students will have finished reading *The Vanishing Half*.

Unit Objective: Students will identify how the development of empathy is represented in the narrative, and how the characters must recognize others' experiences to fully develop their emotional intelligence.

Lesson Objective: Students will trace how the characters developed by the conclusion of the novel, and analyze how their sense of home and responsibility informed each characters' decisions.

Central Themes/Keywords: anti-Blackness and colorism, gender identities, self-conceptions, social pressures, family dynamics

Essential Question: How do characters' responsibilities and connections with others influence their final decisions by the end of the novel?

Materials: Copies of *The Vanishing Half*, paper, pencils, projector/ laptop for PowerPoint

Opening Reflection: Before class, the students will have written a response to this prompt: Think about the arcs of emotional development for each main character in the novel. As we have discussed throughout our conversations about this novel, as well as *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and *Everything I Never Told You*, a major coming of age arc includes developing emotional awareness and empathy. Do you think that all of the characters achieved empathy? Did only some of the characters develop empathy? Did none of the characters achieve empathy? Choose a position and describe your thinking.

Class-Wide Discussion: The students will raise their hands to share whether they chose “all,” “some,” or “none” in their free write. The class will briefly discuss their thoughts. The instructor will also ask guiding questions about the novel’s conclusion, and how it connects to each characters’ emotional development. Guiding questions include:

- By the end of the novel, none of the characters have developed close, supportive relationships, despite some of the veils of secrecy and barriers between them being lifted near the end of the novel. For example, Jude and Kennedy understand that they are cousins, Desiree knows the life that Stella has chosen and where she is living, and Stella knows that Desiree will still acknowledge her, even after years of no communication. Did you expect the novel to end differently?
- Did you expect at least some of the characters to play a more intimate role in the others’ lives?
- Part 5 of the novel describes Adele Vignes’s death. Even though Stella has returned to Mallard, she does not go to her mother’s funeral, and Kennedy chooses not to go to her grandmother’s funeral either. Desiree finally leaves Mallard again after the funeral. How does Adele’s death offer the characters an opportunity to come together again? Is it significant that they do not all take this opportunity?
- As readers, we see the close relationships that the characters choose to invest in at the end of the novel: Jude and Reese, Desiree and Early, and Stella and her career. Is it significant that these characters do have close relationships, but do not have those relationships with their immediate family members/ other major protagonists in the novel?
- Which aspects of the conclusion are satisfying? Are there any aspects of the conclusion that you would change or extend?

Activity: Imagining Another Conclusion: *The Vanishing Half* concludes how the novel is meant to conclude. As the class has discussed, Brit Bennet’s conclusion offers significant insight into each character’s chosen relationship and life decisions. However, as our class thinks about emotional development and turning points that ignite character empathy, could we imagine a more satisfying ending that would signify the characters’ heightened capacity for empathy?

At the beginning of class, students chose whether “all,” “some,” or “none” of the characters achieved transformed empathy through their turning point moments. What would you include in the conclusion of the novel that would convince you that all of the characters had developed a deep understanding for others’ choices and behaviors? Write about how you would either extend the conclusion, or add in a scene or other textual element that would convince you that all of the characters have used these significant moments to develop their emotional understanding.

Final Reflection- Class Discussion: There are numerous significant moments throughout the novel between the major characters. Many of these experiences do function as “turning points” for the characters. However, in this novel readers notice that the degree to which the characters practice empathy and understanding for others’ situations after these turning-point moments is lower than some of the other characters the class has encountered.

Guiding questions:

- Do characters and readers have to choose to practice empathy, even after a turning point has shifted their perspective?
- What does it mean that the characters do not lower their barriers and maintain distant relationships by the end of the novel?
- Why is it important for readers to recognize that turning points do not mean that characters (or readers) will choose to embark on a journey to develop empathy?
 - Part of emotional literacy and understanding is the recognition that the pivotal moment that transforms one person’s perspective might not change another’s: the crucial recognition within emotional literacy that not everyone has a drive to develop it.
- The instructor will know that these lessons have been successful if the students write things like:
 - “Even though all of the characters have developed deeper understandings of their emotions and others’ behaviors, there are still moments at the end of the novel where the characters do not use empathy to inform their interactions with others.”
 - “Characters like Stella and Kennedy do not appear motivated to develop their emotional intelligence. Part of Desiree and Jude’s empathetic development involves acknowledging that their privileged lives have shielded them from needing to empathize with others’ situations.”

Lesson Goals and Reflection

This set of lesson plans asks the students to evaluate the extent to which turning point moments act as an inherent part of emotional development in the characters. As *The Vanishing Half* offers numerous places for students to recognize significant textual moments, there is also space for students to analyze the extent to which emotional maturity and empathy develops. As the final set of lesson plans, students are scaffolding toward the understanding that true emotional literacy must also acknowledge that not everyone will be motivated to see beyond their own experiences and allow empathy to inform their interactions with others. This set of lesson plans asks students to think critically about the intersections of race, class, and gender, and how these factors shape individual experiences. By thinking about these intersections and the significant turning points in the novel, students will deepen their understanding about character development.

The writing in this set of lesson plans incorporates creative writing and imaginative thinking into the prompts. The last two lesson plans ask students to evaluate the extent to which the main characters have developed empathy in response to their turning points, and ask them to design scenes that would shift the readers' response. These activities offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their own emotional understanding, evaluate character development through critical textual moments, and demonstrate how they find emotional literacy is convincingly portrayed in a narrative.

Conclusion

The bildungsroman as a genre has existed to demonstrate ideal social and cultural values, especially when it comes to maturation and adulthood. Contemporary coming-of-age novels are appealing in part because they serve the same function, and allow instructors to highlight important areas of development for their students. By analyzing texts where coming of age means developing emotional awareness and empathy, students learn the value of emotional literacy. Instead of emphasizing common markers of success, like going to college or establishing a successful career, the coming of age arcs highlighted in my featured novels and lesson plans teach students that developing empathy is imperative to maturing into a well-adjusted, understanding adult. Further, emphasizing the value of emotional literacy, and thus empathy, allows for more diverse voices to join the conversation. These values encourage students to recognize and challenge their biases and view both literature and the world with more nuance. In turn, this invites students to think critically about multicultural texts and actively discourages the use of literature as a way to uphold oppressive and narrow-minded misconceptions about marginalized communities. By emphasizing the nuances inherent to developing emotional literacy in these multicultural coming-of-age narratives, and highlighting the importance of empathy across the texts, instructors have the opportunity to guide students to develop open-mindedness and understanding far beyond the classroom.

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