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Scholarship on the social practices of literacy use and education (cf., Barton, 1994; Baynham, 1995; Street, 2003) has long emphasized how written works are inseparable from the contexts in which they were produced. Despite this condition, much of writing at the secondary level continues to be taught through criteria of decontextualized state standards and rubrics. Such measures of students' writing ability and achievement are theoretically flawed at best, and at worst undermine goals of equity, diversity, multiculturalism and inclusivity in schools (Au, 2016). To provide a more socially just writing curriculum, scholars and educators would do well to consider adopting new perspectives and approaches to teaching and evaluating writing in the secondary English language arts classroom. This paper seeks to propose the theoretical constructs of 'reflection' and 'refraction' as ideas that could be productive toward pursuing more socially just goals with writing instruction while meeting state mandated standards.

The focus of the research and analysis here is on writing in the secondary English language-arts classroom, specifically writing arguments about literature because students at the secondary level typically receive the most writing instruction in their English classes (Applebee & Langer, 2009), much of their writing is about literature (Applebee, 1993), and the essays they produce are the most common measure of students' literary understandings (Lillis, 2001). Well-worn practices of plot summary and thematic analysis, though, are only a starting point. Rather, fresh theories and approaches that link social-justice goals to composing literary arguments are sorely needed if teachers wish to deliver inclusive and equitable writing instruction.

Overview

Taking a social-practices perspective (cf., Street, 1995) and through contextualized writing analysis (Newell et al., 2015), I examine a single student's short essay in which she composes an argument making a text-to-world connection regarding Jesmyn Ward's novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017). This writing artifact was collected as part of a year-long ethnographic style (cf., Blommaert & Jie, 2020; Heath & Street, 2008) research project on the study of argumentation and literature learning in a 10th grade English language arts classroom. Two of the primary goals of this study were (1) to observe how literature learning and argumentation were occurring in an authentic classroom context; and (2) from those observations, generate new grounded theoretical constructs and ideas for the teaching of argumentation about literature.

This kind of ethnographic study thus does not offer findings that lead to generalizations or processes whereby similar inputs will lead to similar outputs (cf., Dunkin & Biddle, 1974) but, instead, that generate a contextualized, systematized analysis of patterns of human interaction about aspects of culture, race, language use, economics, institutional, and interactional forces in educational spaces.

Based on a contextualized analysis of the writing of the student at issue here, I theorize "reflection" and "refraction" as constructs. To explain: when people write, they are always in a process of reflecting and refracting uses of language in response to the contexts they write in (cf., Vološinov, 1973). In this process, people's writing reflects histories and expectations surrounding language's use, including aspects of grammar, usage, mechanics, dialects, genre, structure, and arrangement. However, writing is not solely a reflection of imitating previous uses of writing. When people write—in addition to reflecting past uses of language—they also engage in refracting language and writing in response to new contexts, audiences, and social goals. These refractions might be small, such as changing the shade of meaning of a word or phrase, or they may be more substantial, as a person might change an entire genre or invent a new one. Examples in literary history are easy to spot. For instance, modernists such a James Joyce and Virginia Woolf pioneered stream-of-consciousness technique, thereby changing traditional notions of prose and style. Their refraction thereafter became a matter of reflection to today's writers, and so forth. In my study here, the student refracted the teacher's purpose behind the assignment prompt. Rather than adhere strictly to letter of those instructions, she used it to compose an argument and respond to some of the damaging and problematic narratives about race in her English class. This effect demonstrated her agency and created the opportunity for her to voice a rejoinder to such narratives.

Theoretical Frameworks

My approach in this study builds on both New Literacy Studies (Barton, 1994; Baynham, 1995; Street, 2003) and an interactional approach to language and literature (Bakhtin, 1981; Vološinov, 1973). Most notable to New Literacy Studies is Street's (1983) distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy. Street argues that all literacies are cultural and ideological; however, powerful groups of people have sought to normalize and center their own literacies by positioning them as a static and culturally neutral sets of skills, what he calls the "autonomous model." This model is the belief that literacy is a generic set of skills that can be applied successfully to any culture or context. However, as Street (1995) has argued, the autonomous model is far from generic and culturally neutral, instead representing the literacy practices of powerful groups of people seeking to normalize their literacies as natural and default—in short, the ones that they see should be taught in schools. In contrast, the ideological model conceptualizes literacy as a cultural practice that is plural, social, and inextricable from the contexts and people who employ literacies to meet social goals in particular situations. Consequently, interactions between teachers and students entail that they take up multiple literacy practices and employ historically derived literacy uses to meet social goals. These goals often include institutional goals set by the state and school district as well as local goals of the students and teachers such as responding to texts and conversations in the

classroom (Newell et al., 2015).

From a New Literacy Studies perspective, a central goal of research is examining the social practices of how participants use literacy and language to define and construct knowledge, orchestrate social relationships and identities, and form connections among multiple texts across space and time. As such, issues of power and ideology emerge because the use, construction, and juxtaposition of literacies, language, and texts represent social practices that are particular to interactions in different social contexts. Furthermore, it is a necessary framework for building deeper understandings of social and cultural literacy practices, for validating the literacy practices of marginalized populations, and for theorizing new constructs that give educators and researchers insights into the teaching and learning of writing.

Complementary to New Literacy Studies, I draw on constructs articulated by the Bakhtin circle (Bakhtin, 1981; Vološinov, 1973) about how using language and reading literature are interactionally constituted. Within their conception, language (spoken, written, etc.) does not exist as a thing unto itself or an abstract framework (e.g., Chomsky, 1961). Rather it is located in a particular context and is reflective of histories of language use and the ideologies inherent to the social construction of any semiotic sign. This is to say that language is material, constituted of particular uses in specific contexts and *reflects* contexts, histories, other texts and the ideologies inherent within them. However, language and its meanings are not static reflections of their historical uses and other texts. As people use language in new situations and for different purposes, words take on new meaning and change—they *refract* language and its meaning for new social purposes and goals.

As researchers study curricula and instruction and (re)theorize current and new models of interaction, examining how people are reflecting and refracting language can reveal whether dominant and marginalizing power dynamics are being upheld and reflected in a curriculum or challenged and refracted toward new, more socially just goals. Such goals are necessary as schools in the U.S. tend to valorize and reproduce the literacies and interests of the white middle class (cf., Au, 2016; Heath, 1983; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). Thus, issues of reflection and refraction bear examination as a means to understand approaches to writing education that either recreate dominant power structures or challenge and change them toward more equitable goals.

Methodology

Site and Participants

My research site was a 10th-grade English language arts classroom in an under-resourced public high school located in a large Midwestern city. The students were racially, ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and economically diverse, ranging from working class to well below the poverty line. The teacher, Ms. McClure (all names and locations are pseudonyms), a white woman in her late 40s who grew up in a similar Midwestern neighborhood, selected *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (Ward, 2017) as the first novel for her students. At the time of this research project, Ms. McClure had been teaching for over a decade, but this was the first time she had taught this novel. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* follows a Black family in rural Mississippi as they confront complex family dynamics and past traumas, including encounters with the ghost of a murdered boy seeking closure and the ghost of their murdered brother. She believed the novel's themes—exploring trauma,

resilience, and the generational impact of systemic racism—would resonate with her students.

I began collecting data during the second week of the school year, just before the class started reading *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. The focal participant in this analysis is Tessa, a fifteen-year-old Latina girl, who actively participated in the research by sharing her thoughts on what she was learning and showing interest in my research project. Paris (2011) argues that such collaborations between researcher and participants can increase validity within ethnographic studies because they provide an insider's view and humanize rather than colonize research participants. Tessa was an exemplary student in Mrs. McClure's class. She earned high grades, had the respect of her teachers and peers, and regularly participated in discussions, but did not dominate them. She consistently expressed opinions advocating for social justice and argued against racism. I interviewed and spoke with Tessa throughout the study and was continually impressed by her insights, passion, and kindness.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The data reported below were part of a larger research project about how secondary students use argumentation when they study literature (cf., Bloome et al. 2019; Seymour, 2020). This project involved a yearlong ethnographic study of a high-school English language-arts classroom in the midwestern United States and used ethnographic methodologies (Blommaert & Jie, 2020; Heath & Street, 2008; Green & Wallat, 1981). I was participant observer for an entire school year in this classroom. When I observed the class and with the consent of the participants, I took digital video and audio recordings, composed ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011), and conducted ethnographic interviews (Quinn, 2005) as well as structured interviews. Additionally, I collected artifacts from the classroom as they were relevant to my research questions and project—e.g. writing artifacts, assignments, and worksheets. The essay I analyze below was one of these artifacts. Such data-collection methods help researchers understand perspectives from within a community, gaining insights from those directly involved—what Hymes (1982) calls an "emic" point of view (p. 25). These methods also aid in understanding participants' actions within their context, fostering collaboration to interpret events from various points of view. Research employing ethnographic methods is crucial for uncovering the affordances and limitations of specific contexts that influence what is considered literacy and knowledge, and how people use literacy to accomplish social goals. Additionally, these methods enable researchers to question assumptions and develop new theoretical concepts grounded in the contextualized usage of language and literacy.

Once the corpus of data was collected, I used my field notes to build an instructional chain (Appendix A) (VanDerHeide & Newell, 2013) to map instructional conversations regarding literature-based argumentative writing. Instructional chains serve as analysis and data reduction because they allow researchers to chart research phenomena as they occurred by detailing when and for how long they took place as well as what they were (such as direct instruction or discussion). For the second phase of analysis, I used the instructional chain to identify literacy events (Heath, 1982) that constituted rich points (Agar, 2013)—i.e., social interactions that researchers might not expect. Unexpected events can challenge outsiders' assumptions about research sites and serve as substantial areas for analysis.

The occasion for the student's essay analyzed here was an in-class writing assignment about *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Instead of requiring students to write essays that conducted a formal analysis and "stay[ed] within the four corners of the text" (cf., Wilson & Newkirk, 2011) as the Common Core State Standards prescribe, the teacher, Ms. McClure, asked the students to write an argument making a text-to-world connection and told them to forget the five-paragraph-essay format that they had learned in previous years. As researcher and former English teacher, I was surprised by Ms. McClure's instructions to disregard the five-paragraph-essay format because it is so familiar, especially the English language arts classroom (cf., Johnson et al., 2003).

Overall, my analysis involved recursive process of examining fieldnotes, video recordings, and transcriptions of previous classes and events in which the focal student, Tessa, had participated. During this examination I coded notes and transcripts to make connections between Tessa's writing and previous events. Before analyzing her essay, I conducted microethnographic discourse analysis (Bloome et al., 2022) of multiple classroom events preceding the assignment. This involved transcribing and analyzing instructional conversations about literature and writing, as well as transcribing student-led small group discussions. The transcription and its analysis were instrumental for understanding how the context and interactions shaped the focal student's final essay. Then, I undertook contextualized writing analysis (Newell, et al., 2015) of Tessa's response to the assignment. This phase involves examining the *institutional* forces—e.g., formal curriculum, standardized tests, state standards, etc.—and *interactional* forces—e.g., linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge, interactions in the classroom—that shape a written product (Michaels, 1987; Prior, 1991). To illuminate both institutional and interactional forces, I analyzed Tessa's essay for intertextual traces of material evidence of her implicit or explicit use of another text/event in the writing product (Wynhoff Olsen, et al., 2017).

Finally, my analysis is built on coding Tessa's essay for argumentative features (claims, warrants, uses of evidence, qualifiers, etc.) using Toulmin's (1958) model of argumentation to examine how this student composed her argument and took up and used other texts, instructional conversations, and other resources. Toulmin, a philosopher by training, noted that the majority of academic fields beyond philosophy do not rely on syllogisms and logical proofs to build knowledge. Instead, he observed, they craft arguments connecting evidence to claims using warrants. These warrants can be implicit assumptions, theories, rules, or expectations within a discipline and are used to interpret evidence and derive conclusions. Toulmin's model also involves examining how people qualify and rebut arguments, noting their affordances and limitations. His model helps analyze arguments across disciplines, showcasing how individuals use evidence, assert claims, provide warrants, and qualify their arguments to advance knowledge. This approach has proven valuable in analyzing students' argumentative writing, revealing the various elements of their arguments, the underlying reasoning, and how they are structured and advanced.

Text Analysis

Below is the contextualized-writing-analysis (Newell et al., 2015) of Tessa's essay preceded by the brief instructions (Figure 1) Ms. McClure, posted on the

school's online learning management system.

Figure 1
Instructions

You have read three chapters of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Think: Based on what you have read so far, compare something that you have read in the novel to our world today. Then . . . Write an essay that shows how your example from the book is connected to our world.

Although Ms. McClure did not explicitly describe this assignment as composing an argument, the assignment required students to use argumentative moves such as making a claim regarding how the novel is related to the world and using the novel as grounds for the claim.

In her short essay, Tessa took up Ms. McClure's instruction and made a claim connecting *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and the world outside of school, regarding issues of racism. However, her connection and writing were no doubt impacted by more than Ms. McClure's prompt. A contextualized analysis (Newell et al., 2015) of Tessa's writing reveals her use of multiple texts, conversations, instruction, and interactions as resources to complete her writing. As a result, Tessa's writing shows evidence of being shaped by and reflecting both institutional forces and interactional ones. The relationship between these forces and the social practices of writing in this context can be better understood by examining how Tessa's writing not only reflects the texts and events but also how she refracts the purpose of the assignment and academic writing genre conventions to serve a larger social purpose Specifically, Tessa uses the prompt as a way to respond to discussions of race in the classroom and in particular some of her classmates' problematic assertions about race.

Tessa's Essay

Below is Tessa's essay (Figure 2) exactly as she submitted it through the school's learning management system. From a decontextualized perspective and given criteria from most standardized test rubrics, Tessa's writing appears to be unremarkable. She uses a formulaic essay style similar to that of the five-paragraph-essay, her connection between the novel and the world does not offer much depth, the organization is a bit muddled, and her use of first, second, and third person is inconsistent. However, from a contextualized view and emic perspective, her essay represents a complex use of writing in how it responds to the context in which it was written, uses sophisticated language to make rhetorical moves, and serves an important social purpose by responding to racist narratives that had been brought up in class several times in the days prior to this assignment. Namely, a young white boy in Tessa's class had remarked that he was surprised that racism still existed and several white students had implied that racism was only really a problem in the South. In class, Tessa had responded to these conversations, and I

once observed her explain to white classmates that prisons are one of the ways that the enslavement of Black Americans has persisted in the South and beyond. I argue this essay represents her further resistance and response to the problematic assertions from some of the students in her class.

Figure 2

Tessa's Essay

This novel is connected to our world in so many ways. But the biggest thing that really stands out to me would have to be the emphasis that this book puts on racism. Racism has been a problem since the beginning of time because as long as there are differences, there will be racism. For Jojo, it really affects him because he is biracial and I really think that when you are biracial, racism makes it hard for you to state who you are and to identify yourself.

In this story's setting, there is obviously a divide of race. We have a grandfather that refuses to accept his grandchildren because they were born half black. We also have the example of a white man killing a black just because he lost a bet. There are countless examples in the story so far and all because of the color of their skin. I personally don't think that racism will ever stop because no matter what, there will always be people stuck in their ways and new techniques of being indirectly racist.

Today there are still many regions of the US that racist and this isn't just in the south. There are constantly stories on the news of hate crimes

Despite all the efforts and movements put towards ending discrimination, there will always be people who don't want to change. You can't force people to change their mindsets. There may not be "colored fountains" anymore or people forced to sit in the back of the bus, but there are so many other ways that people are racist. There has been police brutality and people making racist remarks. Racism isn't even just towards blacks it also affects latinos and islams and so many other social groups that are frowned upon.

To analyze Tessa's essay, I employ Wynhoff Olsen and colleagues' (2017) approach, using the sentence as my unit of analysis and labeling the intertextual tracings—material evidence of explicit or implicit use of another text/event in the writing product. Intertextual tracings are material evidence of how another text, event, or writing practice shaped the writing product in this context. I also label the argumentative features of Tessa's writing using Toulmin's model (1958) to her use of argumentation to complete the assignment. After each of Tessa's paragraphs, I then discuss her writing and explain the intertextual traces and discuss how she is reflecting and/or refracting these tracings to construct her argument and complete her social goal as she writes in this classroom context.

Introductory Paragraph

I start my analysis with the introduction Tessa wrote for the assignment. Note, she opens her essay with a somewhat formulaic structure, but by the end of the paragraph, she begins to reframe the assignment, responding to discussions from previous classes.

Table 1.1
Introductory Paragraph

Line	Sentence	Toulmin	Tracing
1	This novel is connected to our world in so many ways.	Claim	Assignment Funnel approach
2	But the biggest thing that really stands out to me would have to be the emphasis that this book puts on racism.	Qualification	Assignment, Classroom conversations about race, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*
3	Racism has been a problem since the beginning of time because as long as there are differences, there will be racism.	Claim Warrant	Classroom conversation about race, Essay introduction cliché
4	For Jojo, it really affects him because he is biracial and I really think that when you are biracial, racism makes it hard for you to state who you are and to identify yourself.	Claim Warrant	*Sing, Unburied, Sing,* Classroom conversation about race

In her first sentence, Tessa begins with a broad claim that the book is indeed related to the world. Her prose also reflects the language of the assignment prompt with her use of the word "our"—the prompt suggests that it is not "*the* world" (a place that is distinct and apart from people) but rather "our world" (a place that is shared and constructed in interaction with others). Tessa's uptake of this language affirms this sentiment. The first sentence also reflects the "funnel technique," a traditional approach to writing school essays that prescribes students begin their writing with a broad and general statement and then narrow their topic by adding more specificity until they reach their thesis/major claim. During an informal conversation with me about her writing, Tessa described having learned the "funnel technique" in her middle-school English language-arts class. Keeping to that pattern, in her second sentence, she adds more detail and narrows the focus of her essay with a sentence that qualifies the first one. Specifically, she offers that the way *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is connected to the world is through its depiction and consideration of racism.

Tessa's selecting racism as her topic reflects both the content of the book and at

least two conversations that took place during class. A few classes earlier, Ms. McClure introduced the novel by having students write down social issues that they thought were important. She then wrote them on the white board and put checks next to those addressed in Ward's novel. "Racism" was among these topics, and Tessa's small group had discussed racism after reading an article about Parchman prison, the real-life prison featured in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Tessa's connection between racism in the book and in real life was an intertextual trace that was reflecting the instructional conversation from the earlier class and the article she read and discussed with her peers.

For the third sentence, Tessa uses a sub-claim that continues funneling her topic before she makes an evaluative statement. She writes that she sees racism as a problem and acknowledged that this view is not shared by everyone in the U.S. as well as some white students in her class. Furthermore, her choice of words, "since the beginning of time," reads like the kind of cliché students are often taught to use in their introductions as part of a five-paragraph-essay (e.g., White, 2008). In addition to serving as a sub-claim, the third sentence contains a warrant, which is that racism exists because of difference. Tessa's warrant offers that racism is an immutable quality of humans because she asserts that this facet of humanity has existed for as long as people have.

The final sentence of the introduction continues to funnel the focus of Tessa's writing and makes a more direct link between the topic of racism in the world and how she sees it connecting to *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. The final sentence of Tessa's introduction moves from discussing racism as something abstract and as a quality of people to naming how it impacted a character in the book. Specifically, Tessa argues that racism impacts Jojo due to his biracial identity. At this point in the writing, Tessa's assertion aligns with the goals of Ms. McClure's assignment, meeting its criteria by linking the book to real-world issues; however, in her shift from third to first person, Tessa begins to refract the purpose of the assignment, moving it from merely making a connection to using that connection to assert her point of view.

In the first clause, when she is making the link between the world and the text, she uses third person personal pronouns to refer to Jojo and then switches to first person to make a claim. Her switch to first person disrupts the tone of her writing, which up until this point has been in third person. In breaking from this tone, Tessa uses the intensifying adverb "really," a break in academic tone that reflects how the claim she is offering is not simply a perfunctory performance and display of writing for school. Instead, she's using school to assert her personal opinion and voice. Tessa then switches to second-person pronouns, highlighting the challenge of fitting in that many biracial students experience. Style manuals often discourage the use of second person in academic writing, and they often justify this advice saying that uses of second-person pronouns do not create the "formal tone" of academic writing. Yet, Tessa refracts this injunction and uses it for emphasis in making her claim. Tessa's switching between first, second, and third person might or might not have been a conscious decision; however, in examining Tessa's other writing that I collected throughout the school year, I observed she is capable of using consistent first and third person for school writing, and her shifts here emphasize her points through a change and deviation from writing styles often taught and valued in schools.

First Body Paragraph

After her introduction and claim that a connection between *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and the world is racism, Tessa moves into marshaling evidence from the novel to support her ideas. In this paragraph, she uses plot details evidence to show some of the different ways racism impacts the lives of the characters. She then iterates one of her major claims from the introduction that racism is an ever present and insuppressible aspect of being a person in the world. Worth noting in this sequence is how Tessa often makes a claim or offers evidence and immediately offers a warrant within the same sentence by signaling her reasoning with the subordinating conjunction "because."

Table 1.2
First Body Paragraph

Line	Sentence	Toulmin	Tracing
5	In this story's setting, there is obviously a divide of race.	Claim	*Sing, Unburied, Sing*
6	We have a grandfather that refuses to accept his grandchildren because they were born half black.	Evidence Warrant	*Sing, Unburied, Sing*
7	We also have the example of a white man killing a black just because he lost a bet.	Evidence Warrant	*Sing, Unburied, Sing*
8	There are countless examples in the story so far and all because of the color of their skin.	Claim Warrant	*Sing, Unburied, Sing*
9	I personally don't think that racism will ever stop because no matter what, there will always be people stuck in their ways and new techniques of being indirectly racist.	Claim Warrant	Classroom interactions

Tessa begins the first body paragraph, line 5, with what amounts to a topic sentence as well as a claim. This claim points to the one she made in her introduction that racism is present in the world as well as the novel. In her first paragraph, she argued that racism is a result of people's identification of difference, and this one builds on that premise indicating that a feature of racism taken up in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is a material division of people based on that identified difference. The prepositional phrase she uses to introduce the main clause of her sentence, "In this story's setting," indicates her understanding of racism extends beyond viewing it only as a feeling or an abstraction separate from people, but rather, her mention of "setting" conceptualizes racism as being tied to and enacted in particular spaces and times. In other words, racism is not only personal animosity for others who are different but also actions that substantially impact how people live and act in the world. After giving her topic sentence and claim, Tessa then begins to enumerate evidence from the novel in support of her argument that racism is a problem and creates material divides between people.

In line 6, Tessa summarizes how Big Joseph, the biracial protagonist's white grandfather, has shunned his two

grandchildren because they have a Black mother, and Tessa uses it as evidence to support her claim. One way this evidence supports her claim is through her diction. Instead of using proper nouns and naming Big Joseph as the character who has rejected his interracial grandchildren, Jojo and Kayla, Tessa instead uses "grandfather." During the in class writing assignment, the students were allowed to look at their books, and in my year of collaborating with Tessa, I observed she was not a student who cut corners and would write "grandfather" because she could not remember a character's name. In writing "grandfather," Tessa emphasized a relationship that was destroyed by racism. Whereas Pop and Mam, the main characters' maternal grandparents, love and care for their grandchildren, racism has prevented the same relationship from happening on the fraternal side of their family. In presenting this evidence with this diction, Tessa's writing reflects beliefs about grandparents and their obligations to and relationships with their grandchildren. Her citing the nonexistent relationship between grandparents and grandchildren due to racism exemplifies her argument about the substantial material repercussions of racism and the experiences of being a biracial Black individual within the context of the novel's setting.

In line 7, Tessa continues manipulating diction to make the evidence she uses more effective toward supporting her claim. Again, instead of using the characters' names, she marks them using "white" and "black," a differentiation that illuminates the dynamics of race and how those dynamics can have severe material consequences for people beyond characters involved in Ward's novel. In using pronouns to replace the names of the characters, Tessa's writing draws attention to the fact that the murder of the main character's brother, Given, was the consequence of a broader racial dynamic, not just an isolated spat that emerged from a hot temper and lost bet in the novel. Also, of note is Tessa's using the adverb "just" to modify the dependent clause that explains why the white character killed the black character. By modifying the dependent clause with the adverb "just," Tessa shows her implicit rejection of the reason for the murder. In the next sentence (line 8), Tessa then replaces the idea that the main character's brother was murdered because of a lost bet and offers her warrant that he was murdered because of race.

In the final line of the paragraph, Tessa switches to first person singular and offers her opinion. This switch in person represents another refraction. The assignment required students to make only a connection, not to argue an opinion about the connection. However, Tessa uses the occasion to voice her ideas and perspective. Her opinion is that racism is a part of being a person among others and will continue to endure. While her view might seem like pessimistic, if not cynical, I judge that the moment demonstrates how Tessa is reflecting and refracting some of the interactions among her classmates. In particular, a white student in an earlier classroom conversation had expressed disbelief that racism was much of a problem. Furthermore, after the class had read the first part of the novel, another white student remarked that he was surprised that the racism of Big Joseph rejecting his biracial grandchildren was something that could happen in the present. In a large group discussion, Nichelle, a Black student, stated that she sees racism as adaptive and taking new forms in society, a sentiment Tessa's writing affirms as well (line 9). In all, then, how racism has changed over the years, how it is manifest in society, and to what degree it is still a problem were all topics of

discussion in Ms. McClure's class as they read *Sing, Unburied, Sing,* and Tessa's writing appears to have reflected these conversations, and she refracted the assignment to use her writing to use and respond to them.

Tessa's final sentence in this paragraph is her weighing in on these discussions. She finishes the sentence by iterating a claim in her introduction (line 3) that racism is inherent in people, but she adds that people will find new ways to enact racism. In saying this, she affirms her warrant that racism is a material act that affects people and is responsive to new situations and contexts since people can find new ways to enact racism. Again, while a decontextualized reading of this might assert that Tessa is offering a rather dark view about humanity, I do not read her argument as defeatist. She is refracting Ms. McClure's prompt to respond to narratives and arguments that assert racism is no longer a substantial problem that needs to be addressed, or just a personal bias, and Tessa is taking up Nichelle's claim that racist practices evolve and change. She has, summarily stated, created a premise for her argument about racism in response to those who want to establish premises that racism is not still a problem. She has in this way refracted the prompt into a form of action and resistance against narratives and arguments that perpetuate racism through its denial or minimization. In the next section of her paper, she continues to explore and push against these narratives through her argument.

Table 1.3
Second Body Paragraph

Line	Sentence	Toulmin	Tracing
10	Today there are still many regions of the US that racist and this isn't just in the south.	Claim	Classroom Conversation Novel
11	There are constantly stories on the news of hate crimes	Evidence	News

Second Body Paragraph

This short paragraph begins with Tessa's making a claim that racism is ubiquitous across different spaces and mentions that it is not confined to the U.S. South. The second clause, which says that racism extends beyond the South, I judged to be her response to a remark one of her peers and small group members made during their discussion of the news articles on the first day of the instructional unit. In discussing the conditions and treatment of prisoners in Parchman prison, Tessa's classmate John asked if those conditions were still present, and her classmate Derek remarked that "It's in the South." Such a response indicates that while racism might occur in the present, it was taking place in a different space. Her classmate John then picked up the conversation and began arguing that racism is not as much of a problem today, but Tessa interrupted him by saying that while practices of racism are not the same, they are still a problem.

However, John quickly changed the topic, and Tessa was not able to respond fully. These brief sentences in this small section, serve as Tessa's rejoinder to her two white male peers who minimized racism as a distant issue, and interrupted her when she attempted to reply. In line 11, Tessa offers evidence from an outside source, "the news," that racism is material and ubiquitous because violent crimes motivated

by race continue to occur against people of color. By including these two sentences in this short paragraph, Tessa continues to act against narratives that seek to minimize the presence and effects of racism in present society by refracting the prompt to serve as more than an exploration of literature but also as a way to fight damaging ideas about race.

Concluding Paragraph

Whereas the funnel approach to writing introductions begins by making a broad statement and narrowing down the topic in subsequent sentences, the funnel approach's conclusion suggests doing the opposite: making a more specific statement and then "funneling out" by generalizing the topic with subsequent statements that show how one's writing is relevant to a broader social context than the chosen topic. Tessa's writing reflects this strategy for concluding this short essay; however, she does not stray from what is her overall purpose of using her reading and writing about *Sing, Unburied Sing* to respond to and rebut some of the racist narratives that have been present in the discussion of this novel.

Table 1.4
Concluding Paragraph

Line	Sentence	Toulmin	Tracing
12	Despite all the efforts and movements put towards ending discrimination, there will always be people who don't want to change.	Claim	Civil rights movement 5 Paragraph essay
13	You can't force people to change their mindsets.	Warrant	
14	There may not be "colored fountains" anymore or people forced to sit in the back of the bus, but there are so many other ways that people are racist.	Evidence Claim	History, fountains
15	There has been police brutality and people making racist remarks.	Evidence	News, Experience
16	Racism isn't even just towards blacks it also affects latinos and islams and so many other social groups that are frowned upon.	Qualification	Funnel out

At the beginning of her conclusion, Tessa restates her claim about racism and its endurance through time and space (line 12). This iteration reflects the five-paragraph-essay style of writing that prescribes restating one's main point in the conclusion. She references people's work to quash racism—most notably in the Civil Rights movement—and asserts that these efforts will be futile because people will resist them. Then she continues exploring this notion in the next sentence (line 13) and gives a warrant for why she thinks racism will endure, saying that because people cannot forcibly change the thinking or beliefs of others, they will be unable to eliminate racist beliefs from people who

choose to hold on to them. Similar to her rhetorical use of "you" in her introduction (line 4), Tessa seems to be using it as a technique to offer her warrant as a general truth about people that any reader would accept.

After iterating her claim and asserting her warrant, she offers a rejoinder to her own argument using two examples. Someone arguing that racism is no longer a problem might cite the fact that segregated water fountains and bus seating, once prominent during the Civil Rights Movement and often taught in schools, are now illegal, suggesting that because these practices are gone, racism has largely been solved. Tessa's two counterexamples thus act as a rebuttal to her own argument and thereby demonstrates that her writing is not merely to explore her own ideas or to complete a school assignment; rather, it is her using the prompt as a way of responding to and anticipating others' arguments and narratives about race in contemporary society that have occurred in her classroom and beyond.

Tessa has anticipated that others would respond to and disagree with her claim about racism's persistence and articulated a counter argument so she may rebut it. Using the coordinating conjunction "but," Tessa gives a counterclaim indicating that the practices and impacts of racism extend beyond segregated drinking fountains and bus seating. In the next sentence, she offers a rejoinder that many police officers continue to kill and commit violence against people of color and that people continue to use racist language, including some of her peers. Her final and concluding remark serves to "funnel out" by making her point more broadly that racism is present and extends beyond Black people and can be practiced against other minoritized groups as well. With her final statement, Tessa has refracted the assignment further and connected the novel to herself because as a Latina student, Tessa has encountered racism at school and in the world, and she is negatively impacted when people attempt to shut down conversations about racism by denying its existence.

Implications

Overall, coupling "reflection" and "refraction" holds promise as an arch pedagogical concept for teaching literature-based argumentative writing. In a way, classroom discussion and assessment hang in the balance. In the example here, my application of Toulmin to read Tessa's essay resulted in a deeper understanding of her thinking and reasoning, not just as an overlay of the argument's structure. My consideration of the assignment prompt, how it was presented by the teacher, and how it was built on previous instruction showed how Tessa was taking up her schooling and applying it to a conversation that mattered to her. The lesson is clear: reflection and refraction compel educators to explore how contexts, histories, and conversations influence students' writing and how teachers can encourage students to adapt and reinterpret school-based writing towards the pursuit of more authentic and socially just objectives through their writing.

One way teachers might encourage this practice in their writing instruction is by encouraging students to take more risks with their writing that challenge or repurpose writing processes or assignments that shift a learning task toward making a positive change on a personal or societal level. Encouraging students to take risks might involve adding a reflective piece to the assignment in which students evaluate their own writing and identify different aspects where they are reflecting writing practices they know and explain or examine the risks and "refractions" they added to the assignment through their writing. These

changes could prove to be especially salient in English language-arts classrooms if we are to honor teaching literature in a way that encourages having conversations that promote social justice (e.g. Alsup, 2015; Bloome et al., 2019; Seymour, et al. 2020). They also ask us to consider what "good" writing is and what its purpose is in schools, specifically the literature classroom.

Conclusion

Beyond implications for the classroom, this study suggests that further research on literature-related argumentative writing will continue to be needed in the ever-changing context of American education. In particular, the literacies of students of color are too often ignored and undervalued in schools (Kirkland, 2013), and research has shown some students of color hide their ideas and literacy practices from white teachers, fearing they would not be valued in school (Carter & Zakeri, 2019). The problem at times seems entrenched and, so, needs more study. To that end, ethnographic approaches have the potential to widen the scope and generate altogether new theories about how teachers might best serve their increasingly diverse learning communities. With any luck, the result will be a win-win-win for students, teachers, and researchers alike.

Writing instruction has traditionally emphasized the ability of students to reflect established genres, forms, styles, and structures. Almost symbolic of this situation, the five-paragraph essay, despite research confirming its limitations in improving writing skills (cf., Hillocks, 2005), persists as a principal model for writing instruction and student performance. Instead, approaches to writing instruction stand to benefit from examining and valuing not only reflection in meeting barren curricular standards but refraction in adapting to new social goals within changing contexts. In my study here, Tessa's essay—which might seem unremarkable on the face of it—shows the rich possibilities in how she addressed the denial of racism by highlighting police brutality and racist language that are still present in society. In a very real way, her essay brought the conversation about racism beyond the literary level to the living classroom space. Minimal state standards were met, but so much more of educational value was gained.

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Appendix A

Instructional Chain

9-11-2019	**9-14-2018**	**9-18-18**	**9-21-18**
Introducing *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and articles for reading Framing Reading Discussing in Groups	Preparing to discuss Classroom Discussion of articles	Preparing to discuss Classroom discussion of articles Questions about *Sing, Unburied, Sing*	Discussions of the book Writing instruction Students write short essay
Had not started yet	Chapters 1-5 *Sing, Unburied, Sing*		
9-25-18	**9-28-18**	**10-4-18**	**10-5-18**
Discussions on characters Writing instruction Student writing time	"Blackout" poem about *Sing, Unburied, Sing* Student reading/work time	Writing instruction Students write 2nd short essay	Writing instruction Teacher conferences with students about writing Students work on 2nd short essay
Chapters 1-8 *Sing, Unburied, Sing*			
10-8-18	**10-11-18**	**10-12-2018**	**10-15-2018**
Quiz over *Sing, Unburied, Sing* Class discussion of book Small group discussion of the book	Instruction on literary themes Small group work on theme Further instruction Small group work on theme	Writing instruction Discussion of writing Class discussion of the book Small group discussion of the book	Writing instruction Librarian presentation Discussion about themes
Chapters 1-11 *Sing, Unburied, Sing*			
10-16-2018	**10-17-2018**	**10-22-2018**	**10-23-2018**
Reading and writing about poems instruction "Cross" and "Southern Cop" interpretations Students compose visual arguments	Instruction on visual arguments Students add quote and "rationale" Students present arguments	Small group discussion about *Sing, Unburied, Sing* Class discussion Small group discussion Class discussion	Small group discussion about *Sing, Unburied, Sing* Class discussion Small group discussion Class discussion