IDENTITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHARACTERS IN NEWBERY MEDAL AND NEWBERY HONOR AWARD WINNING BOOKS: A CRITICAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF BOOKS FROM 1991 TO 2011

Tami Butler Morton, B.A., M.T.

Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2012

APPROVED:

Janelle Mathis, Major Professor
Elizabeth Figa, Minor Professor
Carol Wickstrom, Committee Member
Claudia Haag, Committee Member
Nancy Nelson, Chair of the Department of Teacher Education and Administration
Jerry Thomas, Dean of the College of Education
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School
Morton, Tami Butler. Identity of African American Characters in Newbery Medal
And Newbery Honor Award Winning Books: A Critical Content Analysis of Books from
1991 to 2011. Doctor of Philosophy (Reading), December 2012, 119 pp., 14 tables, 3
illustrations, references, 80 titles.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a critical content analysis of the African
American characters found in Newbery Medal award winning books recognized
between the years of 1991 and 2011. The John Newbery Medal is a highly regarded
award in the United States for children’s literature and esteemed worldwide. Children’s
and adolescents’ books receive this coveted award for the quality of their writing.
Though these books are recognized for their quality writing, there is no guideline in the
award criteria that evaluated the race and identity of the characters. Hence, there are
two overarching research questions that guided this study. The first question asked: To
what extent are the African American characters in each award winning book
represented? Foci in answering this question were the frequency of African American
characters and the development of their ethnic identities. The second question asked:
How are the African American characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions
represented? Foci in answering this question examined the frequency of intergroup
interactions and the characters’ attitudes within the context of each book.

The theoretical framework that undergirded this study is critical literacy, which
encourages adults and youth to examine issues of diversity and social justice through
their reading. Eighteen books met the criteria for the study, which provided 98 African
American characters for investigation through content analysis. The qualitative
methodology used frequency counts, anecdotal notes and questionnaires to analyze the
characters. Findings revealed two key themes: the characterization of ethnic identity as a reflection of society and African American characters as models of agency. Further themes became evident in this study as well: the evolution of cultural authenticity, strong African American female characters, importance of the African American family and the acknowledgement of African American involvement in history.

These findings are significant because they provided evidence of the potential of these Newbery award winning books to be the catalyst for critical classroom conversations on identity and agency. Findings also provided increasingly strong examples of ethnic role models within these notable titles.
Copyright 2012

by

Tami Butler Morton
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express extreme gratitude for my dissertation chair, Dr. Janelle Mathis, for her knowledge and expertise, mentorship, and unwavering support. I am also very thankful for my other committee members, Dr. Elizabeth Figa, Dr. Carol Wickstrom, and Dr. Claudia Haag for your guidance and support.

Thank you to Teresa for help during my data collection stage. Thank you to my doctoral student colleagues as well, for your insights and conversations.

I dedicate this study to my family and friends. In particular, Mom and Dad, whose encouragement, support, and love strengthened my desire to succeed.

Last, but certainly not least, I dedicate this to Tony, Chris, and Cameron. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and overall encouragement throughout this entire experience. I love you all.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ vi

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ vii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................. 1
  Background of the Problem ...................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problem ....................................................................................... 3
  Significance of the Study ....................................................................................... 9
  Theoretical Perspective ....................................................................................... 10
  Definition of Terms ............................................................................................ 11
  Limitations ........................................................................................................ 12

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .................................................................. 14
  Critical Literacy .................................................................................................... 14
  African American Children’s and Adolescent Literature ................................ 20
  The Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor Awards ........................................ 25
  Cultural Authenticity ........................................................................................... 27
  Ethnic Identity ....................................................................................................... 29
  Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes ................................................................ 33

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES .................................. 35
  Introduction ......................................................................................................... 35
  Books Examined .................................................................................................. 36
  Content Analysis Procedures ............................................................................. 38
    Cultural Authenticity Questionnaire ............................................................ 38
    Research Question 1: To What Extent are the African American Characters in Each Award Winning Book Represented? ....................... 41
    Research Question 2: How are the African American Characters’ Intergroup Attitudes and Interactions Represented? ....................... 45

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS .......................................................................................... 49
  Research Question 1 ........................................................................................... 50
# Table of Contents

What is the Frequency of African American Characters? ........................................ 50
How are the African American Characters’ Ethnic Identities Developed? 51

Research Question 2 .................................................................................................. 62
What is the Frequency of Intergroup Interactions with African American Characters? ................................................................. 63
Positive Interactions................................................................................................ 64
Negative Interactions ............................................................................................ 75
Nonfiction Stories.................................................................................................. 76

What Attitudes are in Place or are Developed within the Context of the Book? .................................................................................. 77

How Does a Character’s Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes Relate to the Character’s Ethnic Identity Development? ................................................................. 83

Summary of Findings .............................................................................................. 85
Ethnic Identity ........................................................................................................ 85
Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes .................................................................. 86
Effects of Ethnic Identity on Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes .................. 87

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS ................................ 88
Discussion of Research Questions ........................................................................ 89
Characterization of Ethnic Identity as Reflections of Society ............................. 89
African American Characters as Models of Agency ............................................. 92

Further Discussion ................................................................................................. 93
Evolution of Cultural Authenticity ...................................................................... 93
Strong Female Characters .................................................................................... 97
Importance of Family ............................................................................................ 99
African American Involvement in History Revealed ......................................... 102

Implications ........................................................................................................... 104
Implications for Teaching .................................................................................... 104
Implications for Writers, Publishers, and Newbery Committee Members .... 107
Implications for Future Research ....................................................................... 108

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 109

APPENDIX: CHILDREN’S AND ADOLESCENT LITERATURE REFERENCES ...... 111
REFERENCES .......................................................................................................... 113
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>List of Books</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Questions to Assess the Cultural Authenticity of the African American Characters</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Character Ethnic Identity Measure Items</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Character’s Other-Group Orientation Items</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Frequencies of African American Characters in Newbery Award-Winning Books</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>African American Characters at Stage 1 Ethnic Identity</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>African American Characters at Stage 2 Ethnic Identity</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>African American Characters at Stage 3 Ethnic Identity</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Titles and Genres of Award Winning Books with African American Character Interactions</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Characters in Stage 1 of the COGO Measure</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Characters at Stage 2 COGO</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Characters at Stage 3 COGO</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Comparison of Character Ethnic Identity Stage and Intergroup Attitude Stage</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Books with Strong, Supportive Families</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Content analysis methodologies for Research Question 1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Percentage of characters at each ethnic identity stage</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Characters attitudes toward intergroup interactions</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

“Why do I have to read that book?” is a question that I have heard from both of my sons. As an African American who is passionate about children’s and adolescent literature, I often suggest to my boys titles that have African American characters who are the same age or have similar interests. At times they are confused when I suggest a book that is not related to content that is of interest to them, such as sports, super heroes, or comics. While I am encouraged that they enjoy reading books that contain this content, I cannot help but think about the influence of books on me when I was in my early teenage years. As an avid reader, like my sons, I enjoyed high-interest books. As my interest in reading continued during my undergraduate college years, I became more knowledgeable of books by and about African Americans. Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright were African American authors who captured my attention. I appreciated that the characters were pictured in a realistic light. They engaged in cultural experiences that were familiar to me, as well as dealt with negative issues related to their race. Though characters dealt with racism, I particularly loved reading about the characters that were successful in light of these challenges, much like Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God (Hurston, 1937). I appreciated the fact that Janie was on a personal journey, trying to find her own identity. Learning and reading about African American characters like Janie made me honored and proud of my racial and cultural group. I wanted the same benefit for my sons.
African American literature for children and adolescents can provide authentic portrayals of African American culture and history. It develops in young African Americans race consciousness and it promotes Black self-identity. In fact, African American children’s and adolescent literature is important for all children. It serves to influence their values, cultural norms, and world views (Bishop, 1990, 1997; Brooks, 2006; Harris, 1997; McNair, 2008;). Rudine Sims Bishop (2003) so eloquently states:

Children’s literature has long been considered a vehicle for transmitting moral and cultural values as well as entertaining. When a group has been marginalized and oppressed, the cultural functions of story can take on even greater significance because storytelling can be seen as a means to counter the effects of that marginalization and oppression on children. (p. 25)

In addition to the cultivation of cultural, emotional, and moral understanding, adolescents are also challenged by self-awareness issues. Within the ages of 12 and 20, adolescents face many challenges stemmed through their development and the understanding of their own self-identity. Adolescents question everything, trying to determine where they fit in society. It is during this time, as Jane Kroger (1996) explains:

Although each young person is unique in personal history, talents, and attributes, there do appear to be a certain underlying and predictable structural reorganizations that comprise the identity formation; once recognized and addressed, opportunity exists for alleviating developmental arrest as well as supporting the normative process of change in more facilitative ways. (p. xi)

Children’s and adolescents’ literature has been found to be a tool to help readers during this complicated time of self-identification. Often the books that adolescents personally connect with have characters who are dealing with the same issues they face on a daily basis. Though the characters are fictional, authors are creating stories that help youth answer questions. Alsup (2010) explains that “literature is indeed powerful. It does do
something to the reader, especially when the reader is engrossed in the reading process” (p. 7). Considering the emotional and psychological needs of students, the use of literature is significant in the learning process.

Young adolescent readers of races and ethnicities outside of the mainstream, in this case African American, face even further challenges triggered by figuring out how to blend within the mainstream culture as well as their own. With a look at all media outlets, such as television, movies, video games, and magazines, the underrepresentation of our nation’s diverse cultures is obvious. This underrepresentation is also evident within the many textbooks that our teenagers must read in today’s classrooms. This underrepresentation affects the self-identity development of our many African American students.

When African American students do not see representations of themselves in books, they feel “invisible” (Alexander, 1983; Gay, 1995; Nieto, 2000; Wilkin, 2009). Informed educators understand the need to supplement the curriculum based textbooks with additional adolescent and young adult texts with African American characters to foster the development of our adolescents’ identities. Middle and high school teachers will often include award winning books such as Newbery, Michael Printz, Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpre, and Américas Award-winning books in their classrooms. Do these award winning books, or more specific to this study-- Newbery Award winning books, present characters with strong ethnic identities?

Statement of the Problem

Children’s literature is more than a story that is shared for entertainment
purposes. Botelho and Rudman (2009) explain that it is a social construction. Literature is influenced by the social, political, and economic thoughts of the time when it is shared. Authors write books based on what adults want children to know, learn, and experience. By looking at the history of children’s literature, this is evident. For example, beginning in the 1400’s, books were mainly for adult readers, and children read primarily instructional texts, used to teach skills, concepts, and cultural ideas. These books were essentially for children from affluent families who could afford them. Botelho and Rudman continue to point out that in 1744, John Newbery began publishing and selling books primarily for children. This was a new venture for book publishers. These stories were didactic, and including people of color was rare and filled with stereotypes. They explain: “Another example of this phenomenon is James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans (1826/1982), which fueled the notion that no living Native Americans existed in the United States, a misconception that continues to this century” (p.19).

The sale of books primarily to those in power continued, and the stories suited middle class consumers. However, by the early 1800s, periodicals began to appear specifically for Black children. Though these journals were positive, they did not last long due to financial difficulties. By late 19th century, children’s literature seemed to grow again both in England and the United States. However, there were few instances that included characters other than those who were White, Protestant, and middle class.

The number of children’s and adolescent books written by or about African Americans greatly increased in the late 1960s (Bishop, 2007; Brooks, 2009; Harris, 1997). These books were important because African American children were finally
regarded as a part of society. The Coretta Scott King Award is one way that literature by
and about African Americans was regarded as an important resource by literary
scholars. This award was established in 1969 and recognized well respected books
illustrated and written by and about African American people. The Coretta Scott King
Award is one of many literary awards that highlight the work of people of color.

However, in children’s literature, a highly regarded award respected in the United
States and esteemed worldwide, is the John Newbery Medal established in 1922. One
book is selected annually for the Newbery Medal Award, and various numbers are
selected for the Newbery Honor, a runner up category to the Medal. According to the
American Library Association (ALA) website, the Newbery Award is awarded to the
book that is the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children
(http://www.ala.org/template.cfm?, 2011). The committee that selects the Newbery
Medal winner considers the following criteria:

1. In identifying distinguished writing in a book for children:
   a. Committee members need to consider:
      • Interpretation of the theme or concept.
      • Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization.
      • Development of a plot.
      • Delineation of characters.
      • Delineation of a setting.
      • Appropriateness of style.

Note: Because the literary qualities to be considered will vary depending on
content, the committee need not expect to find excellence in each of the named
elements. The book should, however, have distinguished qualities in all of the
elements pertinent to it.

   b. Committee members must consider excellence of presentation for a child
      audience.

2. Each book is to be considered as a contribution to literature. The committee is
to make its decision primarily on the text. Other aspects of a book are to be
considered only if they distract from the text. Such other aspects might include illustrations, overall design of the book, etc.

*Note:* The committee should keep in mind that the award is for literary quality and quality of presentation for children. The award is not for didactic intent or for popularity. (American Library Association, 1999)

The Newbery Medal was the first children’s book award, introduced in 1922. Currently, it is still very well-known and one of the most discussed children’s book award in the world. Cosgriff (2011) explains that though the award-winning writers do not receive a monetary gift, they do receive instant fame and recognition. Because of their popularity, Newbery Medal winning books rarely go out of print. Today, 72 of the 77 medal winners are still in print.

While Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor winners are recognized for the quality of the writing, the criteria used for determining the award winners is relatively open to content, character development, and genre. There is no guideline in the criteria that addresses the necessity of representing characters that have cultural authenticity or accuracy. Scholars in the field of children’s literature understand the necessity of having cultural authenticity as part of the criterion of literary excellence. For example, Fox and Short (2003) point out “While everyone agrees that children’s books should always be evaluated according to the standards of literacy excellence, most believe that cultural authenticity should also be an essential criterion” (p. 14). My experiences as both a reader and teacher have prompted me to focus on the African American characters presented in the Newbery Medal winning books. Botelho and Rudman (2009) make the point that “Even today, when approximately 5,000 new titles of children’s books are published annually, people of color are represented in less than 10 percent of the books” (p. 24). Though respected African American children’s and adolescent titles are
recognized in many ethnically exclusive awards and showplaces, in this research I examine if the books selected by the Newbery committee reflect attention to the diverse characters in contemporary books. Furthermore, I examined African American characters in Newbery award-winning books for their ethnic identity and the character's intergroup attitudes and interactions.

Ethnic identity is just one of the multiple identities people acknowledge in their development. A person can describe himself or herself as African American, male/female, heterosexual, Christian, middle class, vegetarian, golfer, insurance salesman and American. However, Sen (2000) explains that this plurality of multiple identities, or group membership, have elements that fall into two categories—competitive and non-competitive groups. The competitive groups, such as race, ethnicity, nationalism, and gender, play a larger role in people's lives when they are trying to define themselves. The non-competitive groups such as those related to interests and vocation are important to individuals; however, they are not necessarily used as a sociocultural lens through which people are viewed and sometimes judged.

Brittian (2011) notes that current scholars are expanding their research of identity by focusing on multiple aspects of identity, including ethnic (Phinney, 1992), racial (Yip, Seaton, and Sellers, 2006), gender (Egan and Perry, 2001), vocational (Gushue, Clark, Pantzer, and Scanlan, 2006), and national (Sen, 2000) identity. In this study, the focus will be on the ethnic identity of African American characters.

While young adults self-reflect on many aspects of their identities, Brittian (2011) posits African American adolescence is a time when they truly consider their race and ethnicity. For members of minority groups, it is a very challenging endeavor to
determine one’s identity (Cross, 1995; Ogbu, 2003). Cross (1995) states that “many African Americans will experience a dramatic shift in their identity after they have reached adolescence” (p. 51), and from this they will go through five stages: Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment (p. 53). These stages basically cover the initial identity through the development of a new “self” who has a strong sense of him or herself, confidence, and a more sophisticated understanding of how their race impacts their life. Furthermore, Phinney, Jacoby, and Silva (2007) explain that once a person reaches the final two stages of knowing one’s self-identity he or she will attain more security with him or herself.

However, the developmental model emphasizes that an achieved identity represents not only strong identification but also a well-developed and secure sense of self as a group member, based on an exploration process. Security about one’s own group membership may serve to reduce feelings of threat from other groups. (p. 491)

The positive connection of ethnic identity and group membership is apparent in a person’s positive attitudes towards both one’s own group as well as toward other ethnic groups.

The focus of this dissertation is on the description and analysis of the self-identity and the intergroup attitudes of African American characters in the Newbery Medal winning books from 1991-2011. I examined each of the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books that included at least one African American character. Using a critical content analysis framework, I explore the ideas of self-identification in the development of their ethnic identity and their intergroup attitudes recognized though their intergroup interactions.
As previously noted, this study examined the issue of the ethnic identity of the African American characters and their intergroup interactions and attitudes described in Newbery award winning titles between 1991 and 2011. The major questions in this study are:

1. To what extent are the African American characters in each award winning book represented?
   a. What is the frequency of African American characters?
   b. How are the African American characters ethnic identities developed?

2. How are the African American characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions represented?
   a. What is the frequency of intergroup interactions with African American characters?
   b. What attitudes are in place or are developed within the context of the book?
   c. How do the characters' intergroup attitudes and interactions relate to their ethnic identity development?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Initially, it identifies the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor book winners that have introduced African American characters over the past twenty years. Then, through content analysis, I evaluated the African American characters’ ethnic identity and intergroup interactions and attitudes. The data collected from the content analysis of each of the characters' identity
ultimately provided information about the intergroup attitudes evident in these award winning books. I believe that a scholarly examination of the African American characters in these well-known books is necessary. Not only are Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books highly visible to young readers, but teachers are also more willing to include them in their classrooms and develop lesson plans around them.

Binnie Tate Wilkin (2009) wrote the book *African and African American Images in Newbery Award Winning Titles: Progress in Portrayals*. While this book provides significant information about the importance of focusing on the African American images in the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books, Wilkin does not address the development of self-identity or intergroup attitudes and interactions of the African American characters. During my extensive research on African American characters and books, self-identity, intergroup attitudes and interactions, and the Newbery Award, I have not found any research that documented these key ideas.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Though the Newbery Medal Award is a worldwide respected award for children’s and adolescents’ literature, the criteria used to determine winning texts look primarily at the story elements including the setting, characters, and plot. While this is an important framework for evaluating the texts, it is simply not enough. When reviewing books that have culturally diverse characters, committee members must have criteria that confirm the cultural experiences, morals and values they will provide to the children and adolescents who are reading these books. What models are these books providing for our youth? Due to these issues, I used a critical literacy lens to evaluate the African
American characters in the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books. The critical literacy theoretical framework was developed from the ideas and experiences of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire (1970/2007) introduced his critical pedagogy in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which included discussion of dialogue with his adult learners, critical consciousness, culminating with the liberation education. Giroux (2011) and Shor (1997) have extended Freire’s theory by looking at critical pedagogy in American politics and the United States classrooms.

Ultimately, Beck (2005) explains that critical literacy looks at how schools “reproduce inequality and injustice, yet may also be sites for individuals to gain critical consciousness and participate in the transformation of their society” (p. 393). By using a critical literacy stance, I show how readers can gain a critical consciousness, as well as participate in the transformation of society with the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award-winning books focused on in this study. Since Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books are easily accessible in today’s school libraries and classrooms, as educators we need to determine if they are also providing examples of positive ethnic identities or have cultural inaccuracies. Educators also need to encourage dialogue in the classroom that questions the ideas initiated by the authors of these well-known books, and transform their thinking toward social justice.

**Definition of Terms**

In the context of this study, the following terms are defined below:

*African American characters* - A character that is American, and of African descent. Also included are characters that have at least one parent that is African American.
American, and connects with the African American ethnic group.

**Ethnic identity**- A character’s connection to other people, values, and cultural practices to an ethnic group.

**Intergroup interactions**- A character’s interaction with another character from a different ethnic group. An interaction consists of either a one-on-one or group relation in which there is discourse.

**Intergroup attitudes**- Based on the intergroup interactions, the attitudes exhibited by the characters are evaluated, based on their conversation and self-reflections of these interactions (e.g. whether they enjoyed talking or meeting new people.)

**Limitations**

There were two limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. Because this research only looked at Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor winning books that have at least one African American character, the definition of African Americans is restricted to those characters who are described as being American and of African descent, specifically Black American. As Wilkin (2009) points out that within books that have been honored with the Newbery Award, there are some characters that are referred to as “dark” though they are in European, Spanish, and South American settings. The author in these instances does not mention whether this means dark in color, or merely having dark hair and eyes (Wilkin, 2009). In those cases, the character was not examined.

The second limitation is in regards to my perspective on being an insider for evaluating African American characters. My personal background relates to the cultural
traditions of African Americans who were raised in a suburban area of the United States. Though I have visited large cities, my knowledge of lifestyle is limited only to the suburban setting. I know little about cultural experiences related to African Americans who live in urban, or inner city, areas in the United States. That does provide a limitation when reviewing narratives that are set in urban areas.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study is interdisciplinary in nature, with a focus on literature and psychology. Because of that reason, the review of the literature is comprised of several parts that may not seem to go together initially, but come together at the end. It consists of the following six sections: (1) critical literacy; (2) African American children’s and adolescent literature; (3) cultural authenticity; (4) Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor Awards; (5) ethnic identity; and (6) intergroup interactions and attitudes. As stated in the previous chapter, children’s literature is a product of the social, political, and economic ideologies of the times. Authors who are recognized by the Newbery Committee are awarded because of these factors—their noted books are indicative of society. Many authors recognize our diverse society, and will introduce multicultural characters in their texts. The use of multicultural characters brings up the issue of cultural authenticity. Cultural authenticity is a concern of literacy scholars, educators, and parents because they want young readers exposed to positive portrayals of all people. Multicultural characters, and in the case of this study, African American characters, when presented authentically and accurately can also have ethnic identity. All adolescents, regardless of ethnicity, will seek their identity.

Critical Literacy

The theoretical perspective that undergirded this study is critical literacy. As previously pointed out by Beck (2005), critical literacy is a critical pedagogy that looks at how inequality and injustice are reproduced—and when they are, looking at them
judgmentally to gain more consciousness that may lead to social transformation. Even more specific to this research, when teaching literature, Botelho and Rudman (2009) explain that it is important to “examine issues of diversity and social justice by problematizing children’s literature. It is a literary study for social change. Readers, young and adult alike, can grapple, inquire, and engage with issues of social transformation and justice through their reading” (p.33). These scholars also explain that though children’s literature has characters that are not real people, these texts do offer youth an opportunity to read about diverse people, and look into their multiple lives to examine their social practices.

Through this critical lens, the African American characters in Newbery Award winning books during the years 1991-2011 were examined for cultural authenticity and accuracy. This created a context for then examining the ethnic identity of the African American characters. Research indicated that minorities who have a strong ethnic identity are more confident and more willing to mingle with people from other ethnicities (Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007). Therefore, this inquiry actually includes three important elements, ethnic identity and social interactions and intergroup attitudes. Positive social interactions between youth of diverse backgrounds would be a valuable model and justification for our students to experience through a Newbery Medal or Newbery Honor award winning book.

Critical literacy is a theory derived from critical pedagogies and caters toward the understanding of literacy and language. It involves analyzing texts to determine the author’s stance on a topic and then defines the ways in which power is attributed to characters, representations, and perspectives (Behrman, 2006; Botelho, 2009; Shor,
Paulo Freire (1970/2007), a Brazilian philosopher and theorist, created the foundation for critical literacy in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In his book, he discussed the revelations and reflections that he had while teaching illiterate adults in his Brazilian community. He felt that students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, must be provided the opportunity to question what they learn in school, in books and newspapers, and in the community. Once his students understood that they had the potential to have power if they learn to “read the world,” they were motivated to read, write, and learn, and ultimately engage in social action. With these experiences, he found that his students became motivated learners when the text and dialogue related to their world.

Freire’s book laid the foundation for critical literacy through his discussion of the oppressors and the oppressed, banking model of education, the power of dialogue, and the transformation to critical consciousness (Giroux, 2011; Macedo, 2007; Shor, 1997). Freire explained that in his Brazilian community of São Paulo, the people of the dominant society, whom he called the oppressors, had control and power over the lower class, or oppressed. The oppressed were in their situation due to their poverty and lack of control or power. Within his book, Freire (1970/2007) argued that very few people were exempt from oppression of one kind or another; by reason of race, class, or gender, people tend to be perpetrators and/or victims of oppression. He explained that the only way that the oppressed will overcome domination is through dialogue and social awareness. In São Paulo, Freire taught his classroom using his philosophy on how the oppressed could overcome the domination of the dominant class. His students became critically conscious, or gained “conscientization” (Freire, 1970/2007). Once they
gained critical consciousness, or “conscientization,” they understood the influence of how the dominant group’s control kept them in the lowest socioeconomic and powerless status.

Freire’s pedagogy is still put into practice. In one study, Mark Warren (2011) constructed a case study of community agencies that collaborated with parents to help school districts. One community group, the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (Texas IAF), taught teachers, principals, parents, and other adults in the school community to engage in the democratic traditions of American education. The Texas IAF encouraged a response from stakeholders that helped them to discuss complex educational problems in urban schools. Much like Freire’s teaching, the Texas IAF made the communities in these low income neighborhoods understand the truth, and encouraged them to work for social action. The Texas IAF was successful in informing members of the community, which led to more engagement with school districts.

Another study that took place in Flanders, Belgium, was similar to that which happened in the United States in the state of Texas. Roets, Vandenabeele, and Bouverne-De Ble (2012) considered Freire’s teaching when trying to determine a new way to approach adult education in a multicultural neighborhood. After interviewing many members of the community, the researchers observed that there was much ambivalence by community members over the newly diverse population. There was little interaction, and the researchers’ findings showed that it would be beneficial in the adult education classrooms to pay attention to this issue. With Freire’s teaching in mind, they determined that the adult education program needed to follow his philosophy, and have open and honest conversations before learning can take place.
Freire’s (1970/2007) seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* influenced many notable researchers toward the discussion of critical literacy theory. It has provided the theoretical basis for important research studies conducted over the past 30 years. There has been meaningful research done in transforming his theory into practice. For example, educators and researchers developed critical social media (Burnett, 2011), critical visual literacy (Newfield, 2011), teaching writing with a critical literacy perspective (Comber, 2001; Reid, 2011; Shor, 1997; Smith), and understanding the multiliteracies design with a critical pedagogical perspective (New London Group, 1996). Freire’s theory is also viewed in many ways in regards to discourse and storytelling (Enciso, 2011; Gee, 1990). Nonetheless, notable researchers have realized the influence of teaching literature using a critical literacy framework.

Luke and Freebody (1999) are scholars who established effective literacy practices to create the Four Resources Model that allow learners to critically engage in reading and writing activities to

- Participate in understanding and composing meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts, taking into account each text’s interior meaning systems in relation to their available knowledge and their experiences of other cultural discourses, texts, and meaning systems;
- Use texts functionally by traversing and negotiating the labor and social relations around them—that is, by knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform inside and outside school, and understanding that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality, and their sequence of components;
- Critically analyze and transform texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral—that they represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people’s ideas—and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel and hybrid ways. (p. 193)
These literacy practices are directly applicable to analyzing children’s and adolescents’ literature. In this study, I approached the texts in the Newbery Award winning titles as these scholars have recommended, by understanding the texts as my meaning system suggests, considering how the texts are functionally shaped, as well as thoughtfully evaluated the perspective from which the author comes.

Children’s literature provides a context for young readers to think about how race, class, and gender interact in life (Alsup, 2010; Botelho, 2009; Nieto, 2009). Though all of these social interactions are important to view, in this study the acknowledgement of race is considered critically. Locke and Cleary’s (2011) research shares actual findings in a study in which race in literature are evaluated in the classroom. The findings indicated that the student’s background, both social and cultural, did impact what the reading teachers focused on in their high school classrooms. In this case, the teacher had students read multiple texts on a topic. However, when asked to make a decision as to which text should be noted as the truth, it was very challenging for these adolescents. The teachers learned that they had to provide careful scaffolding. Critical literacy also was more effective when students were exposed to a large range of texts. In addition, the researchers found that when the students had knowledge of this large range of texts, they felt more empowered to question authors. Though this study looks at the effects of utilizing a critical literacy framework in the high school classroom, it is an example of how literature is a means of engaging students in a critical discussion of race.

The research questions in this study are drawn from a critical literacy lens. First, I examined the frequency of both the number of African American characters and the
number of intergroup interactions. In addition, I ask questions that focused on how the African American characters are developed as far as their own ethnic identities, as well as their intergroup attitudes and interactions. Scholars note that children’s and adolescents’ literature serves as a model for youth trying to find their own identity as well as understand how others interact with people from different races and ethnicities (Alsup, 2010; Bothelo and Rudman, 2009). Do the Newbery Award books show realistic African American characters with strong identities? Are the characters willing to interact with other races and ethnicities? In light of the goal of taking a critical literacy perspective, the current study examined the discourse and actions of the African American characters.

African American Children’s and Adolescent Literature

Researchers (Bishop, 2007; Harris, 1990, 1997; McNair, 2008) explain that African American literature for children has been around since the early nineteenth century. However, due to the times and situations of African Americans, stories that were considered children’s literature were actually articles and editorials written in newspapers and periodicals by mostly Black religious and secular organizations, along with activists at the time. Many of the materials launched before the Civil War were to protest slavery and begin conversations about abolition and human rights. Another objective of these publications was to uplift the race, and through that, editors and writers often included materials geared to parents and children to help educate and inform them.
In an effort to write African American texts that were positive, scholars like Violet Harris (1990) described *The Brownies Book* (DuBois, 1920) as the publication that led the foundation for the new tradition of children’s and adolescent literature. *The Brownies Book* was a publication that W. E. B. DuBois created during this time of political and social turmoil. It had become commonplace to read books and publications that included stereotypical and negative representations of Black American children, such as the *St. Nicholas Magazine* had done. The *St. Nicholas Magazine* was the number one publication for children at this time. It was established in 1873, and it may have even been the example that DuBois used to create his publication for “our children of the sun” (Bishop, 2007). DuBois, who in 1895 became the first Black to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard, believed that children needed positive images and views of successful African Americans. As stated in the journal’s objectives, DuBois worked hard to make sure that his publication would have stories, articles, and images created:

(a) To make colored children realize that being colored is a normal, beautiful thing;
(b) To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race;
(c) To make them know that other colored children have grown into useful, famous persons;
(d) To teach them delicately, a code of honor and actions in their relations with white children;
(e) To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition, and love of their own homes and companions;
(f) To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things in life;
(g) To inspire them for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifices. (Du Bois, 1920)

Though *The Brownies’ Book* was only in circulation for two years and 24 issues, it was the beginning of thought for other Black authors during the early part of this century. Violet Harris’ research (1990) explains:
Under the direction of DuBois and literary editor Jessie R. Fauset, The Brownies’ Book became a beacon of hope, featuring fiction, folktales, biographies, poetry, drama, news pieces, and five monthly columns designed to inform, educate, and politicize children and their parents and to showcase the achievements of people of color. (p. 546)

In a similar study, Jonda McNair, another scholar of African American literature, conducted a content analysis of DuBois’ publication The Brownies’ Book, and the works of Patricia McKissack. McKissack is a respected African American author who has tried to meet many of the same objectives that The Brownies’ Book met. McNair (2003) concluded that literature by and about African Americans has the ability to counter racism and the negative images that are seen in mainstream America. African American literature also exposed readers to social consciousness, and encouraged discussions about racism and equality. While this information is noteworthy, her focus on the different publications does not extend to the actual African American characters found within books recognized and awarded in the mainstream.

In continuation of DuBois and Fauset’s groundbreaking ideas and objectives, in the 1930s and 1940s, Carter G. Woodson was also a notable contributor to African American children’s literature. He was able to begin Negro History Week, and founded the publishing house called the Associated Publishers. In addition, he also created the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson notes that all three of these accomplishments were done to better the literature for African American children. This is described in his book The Mis-Education of the Negro (Woodson, 1933/1990), in which he described his personal philosophy. Simply, Woodson provided his views that the Black Americans during this time were only taught in a way that would keep them in the lower socioeconomic status (Bishop, 2007; Harris, 1990; McNair, 2008). His ideas
align with Freire’s (1970/2007) views that the lower echelon of people are taught in ways that perpetuate their status in society.

During the 1940’s through the 1970’s, African American children’s and adolescent books emerged. One of the premier authors during this time was Arna Bontemps, who was considered the “father” of contemporary African American children’s literature. He wrote 16 novels, biographies, poetry anthologies, histories, as well as folktales (Bishop, 2007; Harris, 1990). Bontemps and Langston Hughes were the first authors to publish a majority of their works with white, mainstream publishing houses. Though they both wrote about African American characters, they did not want their books printed by publishing houses that only featured African American authors, like the Associated Publishers. They both wanted to sell books to all American children, not just African American children (Martin, 2008). However, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the number of books by and about African Americans fluctuated greatly. Harris (1997) explains that the changing socio-political conditions, the advances of the modern civil rights movement, a burgeoning Black Arts movement, the end of colonialism in Africa and elsewhere, the contradictions evident in U.S. foreign policy regarding the espousal of freedom around the world and the existence of racism at home, an infusion of federal dollars into literacy programs, increasing numbers of authors and illustrators who created for children and the demands of African Americans for literature relevant to their children, combined to result in more books depicting African Americans. (p. 68)

By the end of the 1970s, 14.4% of children’s books published were depicting African Americans characters. The early 1980’s saw a drop in the numbers—fewer than 2% of the published books featured African American characters or plots. During the 1990s there was a great increase in the number of children’s books published annually. In the 1990s there were 4500 to 5000 books published, as
compared to 2500-4000 in the 1980s. The percentage of books written by and about 
African Americans was still low—less than 2%. This small percentage of books fit under 
the heading of cultural conscious books according to Harris. Culturally conscious books 
were written by and about African Americans. They have certain characteristics: African 
American characters were set in African American homes and communities, they 
contained a variety of dialects heard from African Americans, and they included African 
American customs, rituals, and history.

Virginia Hamilton is an example of a culturally conscious author who was 
prominent during the seventies, eighties, and nineties (Bishop, 2007; Harris, 1997). Not 
only has Virginia Hamilton been recognized as a culturally conscious author whose 
books spanned for those decades, she was the first African American author to receive 
a Newbery Medal in 1975 for her book *M.C. Higgins, the Great*. She was followed by 
other culturally conscious authors and illustrators including Sharon Bell Mathis, Walter 
Dean Myers, Patricia McKissack, Christopher Paul Curtis, Marilyn Nelson, and 
Jacqueline Woodson.

While not all of the books in this study are written by or about African Americans, 
they do provide a perspective of African American dialogue, history, and cultural 
practices that are shared in literature. This history of African American children’s and 
adolescent literature also provided background knowledge and the necessary schema 
when considering the characterization of African American personalities, and how 
authors position them in society. The Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award books 
are featured in this study because they are selected as examples of literary excellence.
In addition, these books provided the appropriate context for a focus on multicultural characters.

Little research exists that investigate the African American characters in award winning books. Ussery (2006) provided a descriptive study of how African Americans were portrayed in award winning children’s picture books. She used content analysis methodology to describe the African American characters found within Coretta Scott King award winning books and Caldecott Medal Award winning books during 1996-2005. Though Ussery did consider the cultural authenticity of the African American characters represented in the award winning books, there was no discussion on the ethnic identity of the characters or their interpersonal attitudes and interactions with people from other cultures evident in this study.

The Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor Awards

Virginia Hamilton is the first African American children’s author to be awarded a Newbery Medal in 1975 for her book *M.C. Higgins the Great*. This represents the first time African American characters were recognized by literature scholars and educators in a Newbery Medal book. Since this book was awarded, many other titles that include African American characters have been recognized for this prestigious award created by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC).

According to the Association for Library Service to Children’s (2001) book, *The Newbery and Caldecott Awards: A Guide to the Medal and Honor Books*, this children’s literature award was created in 1922. On June 21, 1921, Frederic G. Melcher proposed to the American Library Association’s Children’s Literature Section the idea of having
this award. He suggested that it be named for the eighteen century English bookseller, John Newbery. The entire group was excited about the idea, and it was approved by the board in 1922. The John Newbery Medal award was the first children’s book award in the world, and it honors the most distinguished American children’s book published the previous year. The term distinguished is defined as:

- Marked by eminence and distinction: noted for significant achievement
- Marked by excellence in quality
- Marked by conspicuous excellence or eminence
- Individual distinct (p.3)

The Children Literature Section of the American Library Association was later called the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and they have continued to review and award the Newbery Medal winning books every year.

ALSC has a committee of fifteen members who decide on the award winning books. Initially ALSC membership elects the chair and seven members for the committee. Then, the president-elect appoints the remaining seven members. All members of the committee must be members of the ALSC. Once the committee has been selected, each member is expected to read as many of the eligible books as possible. These often include books suggested by other committee members and other members of ALSC. Then, twice in the fall months, committee members cast preliminary ballots to begin to focus attention on books that are likely to be in the forefront. This does not make all unrecognized books ineligible. At the time of the vote, each committee member must select their top three books. The first choice receives four points, the second choice gets three points, and the third selection receives two points. To win, a book must identified in the first place position by at least eight committee
members, and earn at least eight points more than any other book. Once the winning book is chosen the committee then decides to name honor books, as well as how many honor books.

Originally Honor books were simply called the Newbery Medal runner ups. It was in 1978 that the ALSC board approved presentation of certificates to the Honor books. It was not until 1986 that Honor award certificates were actually presented to books. As time transpired, the ALSC recognized other important ideas and issues that they needed to consider, much like recognizing the Honor award books with a certificate. They met often and were able to bring forth necessary changes. For example, when the committee first began deciding on the Newbery Medal winning book, they insisted on a unanimous vote by the committee. Ten years later, in 1932, the ALSC board changed this guideline to the existing format. Other clarifications and modifications have been made, showing the ALSC board is aware of the necessity of this.

Cultural Authenticity

In this section, the idea of cultural authenticity will be examined. Cultural authenticity is one issue that is not noted in the criteria for Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award-winning books. Wilkin (2009) explains because Newbery Award winning titles have great “visibility and longevity…Such issues as an author’s fairness in presenting racial issues and accurate delineation of multicultural settings should be important award considerations” (p.7). While the ultimate focus of this study is that of ethnic identity development in African American characters, it is essential to first determine that the characters and contexts represent an authentic perspective of the
culture. Cultural authenticity is a topic that has been explored by many scholars (Bishop, 2003; Mo, 2003; Noll, 2003; Short, 2003). Fox and Short (2003) have found that authors, illustrators, editors, publishers, educators, librarians, and scholars all have different ideas about cultural authenticity based on their sociocultural experiences and personal philosophies. These many opposing ideas have led to debates about the social responsibility of authors, sensitivity of the author’s description of cultural experiences and values, as well as the authenticity of the images in actual illustrations (Bishop, 2003; Fox and Short, 2003).

In this study, it is important to determine the accuracy and authenticity of the cultures being portrayed. Noll (2003) discusses the fact that literature that presents accurate and authentic depictions will “validate those cultures and communicate to all children a strong, positive message about our diverse society” (p. 182). She recommends that those who share literature with children should explore ideas of stereotyping and prejudice and give children an opportunity to take a critical stance toward the books they are reading.

Mo and Shen (2003) also believe that authenticity is not just about accuracy and avoiding stereotyping, but it also provides knowledge of cultural values and the issues that are accepted as norms of the social group. They believe that cultural authenticity is “a multidimensional issue…Authors of picture books need to carefully select and adapt stories that authentically reflect the culture of origin and, at the same time, ensure their value implications are compatible with both universal human rights and the values of the recipient culture” (p. 211).
It is also important to critically evaluate the images in the literature. Authors and illustrators who are not members of the cultural group they are writing about or illustrating may have a difficult time thinking outside of the distortions that are a product with their own cultural experiences. It is the responsibility of both the authors and illustrators to provide factual information and true images in the books they create about people from cultures other than their own (Mo, 2003; Noll, 2003).

In this study, it is important to look at all of the factors that contribute to cultural authenticity. Information gathered about the author’s background and research help to critically establish whether the African American characters have cultural authenticity. If a character has cultural authenticity, he or she can be viewed as a model for both young readers and teachers who are avoiding the use of negative images.

Ethnic Identity

Considering identity formulation in relation to children’s and adolescent literature is an important idea for literary scholars to investigate. Janet Alsup (2010) edited the book *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity across Cultures and Classrooms: Contexts for the Literary Lives of Teens* which is a focus on how teenage identity growth is aided through reading narratives. In this study, the characters are analyzed with a focus on their ethnic identity and intergroup interactions and attitudes. Phinney (2003) explains ethnic identity is a construct that refers to one’s identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group. She continues by saying that the most fundamental aspect of ethnic identity is how strongly or positively an individual feels about their group
membership. While ethnic identity develops over a person’s life span, it begins during adolescence.

Adolescence is the period in human life that spans through the ages of 12 and 20. This is a complicated period in the development of each person’s life. Brittian (2012) points out that it is during adolescence that young adults are experiencing changing cognitive abilities (Steinberg, 2005), physiological growth, changing expectations from family, school, and their community, as well as increasing social opportunities to show their independence (Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). This contributes to a very tumultuous time in adolescents’ development.

The renowned psychologists, Piaget and Erickson, have developed their own theories on adolescent identity (Erickson, 1968; Piaget, 1959). Both of these theorists indicated that it is during this age span that youth begin to develop their identity (Alsup, 2010; Nieto, 2009; Woolfolk, 2012). As indicated earlier, adolescents develop a plurality of identities, based on their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, vocation, nationality, and even their hobbies and interests. It is during this time African American adolescents, in particular, begin to think of themselves in terms of their race and ethnicity. Brittian (2012) contends that “ethnic identity is both historically and qualitatively different than racial identity” (p. 183). She continues by stating that she defines ethnic identity as “one’s connection with other people, values, and cultural practices from a particular ethnic group in the United States” (p. 183). Because of these factors, ethnic identity is the singular identity that I focused on in this study.

Other researchers have developed their own models of identity based on Erickson’s design. Cross (1995) developed his model with a focus on African
Americans. It described how African American identity develops and changes during a life span (McNair, 2003; Phinney, 2003). Cross (1995) explains that many African Americans will go through a dramatic shift in their identities after they reach adolescence or after they have become adults. This is referred to as the psychology of *Nigrescence*. *Nigrescence* is a French word that means “the process of becoming Black” (p. 53). Black researchers have determined that there are four to five stages that African Americans go through when they “tear down their ‘old’ identity and replace it with one that is more Black-oriented” (p. 53). Cross labels the stages: Preencounter; Encounter; Immersion-Emersion; Internalization; and Internalization-Commitment.

Preencounter is the first stage of Black identity. Black people who are in the preencounter stage do not identify themselves as being Black, and are also considered “anti-Black”. This stage is present with Blacks regardless of their socioeconomic status—it is evident with both the poor and prosperous Blacks. In this stage, being Black has no meaning. Cross explained that those people, who are anti-Black, are lacking in value orientation, historical perspective, and in their worldview. They see race as a problem, or a social stigma. Anti-Black people also believe that being Black is negative, and they consider it a “race problem.” The people in this stage also experience different degrees of mis-education. They have been formally educated to embrace the Western perspective, never acknowledging the fact that the role of Africa in the origin of Western civilization is often ignored. They believe that “Black people came from a strange, uncivilized, ‘dark’ continent, and that slavery was a civilizing experience” (p. 56). Anti-Black people also assume a Eurocentric cultural perspective,
particularly in response to notions of beauty and art. Ultimately, anti-Blacks believe that Blacks can overcome any adversities if they learn to assimilate with the White culture.

In most cases, the preencounter stage is the person’s first identity, and it was shaped in their early development. However, as Blacks grow older and have more experiences, their identity begins to change into stage two called Encounter. A person does not experience this stage until they have a racial situation that caught them off guard. A dramatic event such as this is one in which the individual is the victim or witness of a racist attack or situation, and it breaks down their ongoing worldview. Cross explains that in this stage, there are often two steps: one, the actual encounter, and two, personalizing it. The person’s initial reaction may lead to extreme confusion, surprise, and possibly depression. The preencounter person changes from an anti-Black state, into a Black American who is motivated to search for their identity.

Cross continues by explaining that stage three is when a person immerses him or herself into their Blackness. This is called the Immersion-Emersion stage, and this is the point when an individual focuses on Black issues, history, cultural meetings—anything that is relevant to Afrocentricity. Phinney (2003) agreed that in the stages of exploration or immersion/emersion, young people are motivated to learn about the history of their group, become more aware of discrimination, which lead to a greater connection and commitment to their ethnicity. People at this stage of ethnic identity are intrigued by Black literature and arts, the political scene and how it relates to Black Americans, as well as a partaking in a confrontational bluntness when communicating with others, whether Black or White.
Black people who are able to develop an identity that is sustained in Black affairs reach the fourth stage, internalization. It is at this point that a Black American feels like a new person, and they are more relaxed and comfortable with themselves. They have Black pride, self-love, and a deep sense of connection to their community. In this more sophisticated state, research shows that the effect is more on group-identity. At this level, changes occur that define what is important in their adult life with regards to their communities. The last stage of Cross’ ethnic identity is internalization-commitment. Black Americans who reach this stage find ways to turn their long term interest into a plan of action.

Hence, the major difference between stage four and stage five is the commitment. Phinney (1992) continued by explaining that as young people develop into having a strong ethnic identity, they are more accepting of other groups, which contribute to a more “bicultural or integrated position with regard to acculturation” (p. 156).

Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes

Once adolescents develop into stages four or five, they begin to accept that they are bicultural, or both Black and American, and they are more secure with other ethnic groups. Phinney et al. (2007) continues by explaining that once individuals achieve a higher stage of identity, they also have a higher cognitive level of understanding of ethnic groups and their interrelationships, which leads to positive intergroup attitudes. Furthermore, results indicated that individuals from minority groups who have a more mature status of ethnic identity have more sophisticated and positive thinking about
intergroup relationships. Interestingly enough, it was found that European Americans, regardless of their ethnic identity status, showed no relationship between ethnic identity and intergroup attitudes.

Among ethnic minorities, a well-developed ethnic identity serves a secure position which allows people to be more open and accepting of people from other ethnic groups. By reducing feelings of threat, a strong ethnic identity may allow the natural human tendency toward interest in novelty to be a stimulus for imitating contact with people who are different from oneself. (p. 489)

While research indicates positive intergroup interactions with people occur with those who have strong ethnic identities, there are no studies that provide findings that reflect the ethnic identity of African American characters in literature. In our multicultural society, positive intergroup interactions and attitudes in literature would serve as a positive reflection on society.

The theory and research in Chapter 2 provide information to support the need for critical discussions of culturally authentic African American characters in Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award winning books in the classroom. Research also indicates that not only is the culture, discourse, and history of African American characters schema building for adolescents, such characters build empathy and also serve as models of youth for those who are developing their ethnic identities. In reviewing the literature of identity, it reveals that ethnic identity is a major concern of youth from minority groups in the United States. It also recognizes that those people who exhibit strong ethnic identities feel confident and secure about interacting with people from other ethnicities.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore, through a critical literacy lens, the African American characters in Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor Award winning books through the years of 1991-2011 to examine their representation and ethnic identity in relation to their intergroup attitudes and interactions. This study was exploratory and descriptive. Initially, this study used analytic notes and a questionnaire to determine cultural authenticity. After cultural authenticity had been determined, the researcher used two other measures to focus on the two measures identified to evaluate the ethnic identity of the African American characters as well as their attitudes toward intergroup interactions with characters of other ethnic groups. The data resulting from answering questions on the questionnaire was then coded and analyzed with themes and categories. These methods for analyzing data have been well documented by many scholars (Berg, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Grbich, 2007; Miles, 1994) Analysis of these components can potentially further justify Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor Award winning books as being highly respected and valued by educators.

As previously stated, the research questions were:

1. To what extent are the African American characters in each award winning book represented?
   a. What is the frequency of African American characters?
   b. How are the African American characters’ ethnic identities developed?
2. How are the African American characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions represented?
   a. What is the frequency of intergroup interactions with African American characters?
   b. What attitudes are in place or are developed within the context of the book?
   c. How do the characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions relate to their ethnic identity development?

Books Examined

In order to begin collecting data, I initially determined which books met the criteria of the study:

1. It must be a Newbery Medal winner or Newbery Honor winning book.
2. It was honored with the award between the years of 1991-2011.
3. There must be at least one African American character.
4. The African American character must be ten years old or older.

By reading the award information presented on the American Library Association’s website (American Library Association, 1999), all of the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor Award books selected from 1991-2011 were identified. There were a total of 86 books awarded during this twenty year span. As a teacher-educator and reader, I have knowledge of many of these award winning titles. I was able to select titles that I knew included African American characters. Then, after consulting Binnie Tate Wilkin’s (2009) African and African American Images in Newbery Award Winning Titles: Progress in
Portrayals, I was able to confirm the titles that fit the criteria of award winning books recognized from 1991 through 2009. I determined the 2010 and 2011 books that fit the criteria by reading the book summaries written by the publishers. For this study, 18 books met the criterion. These books, listed in Table 3.1, included one book in 2011, one in 2010, one in 2009, two in 2008, one in 2006, two in 2005, one in 2004, one in 2002, one in 2001, one in 2000, one in 1999, two in 1996, two in 1993, and one in 1991:

Table 3.1

List of Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>One Crazy Summer</td>
<td>Rita Williams-Garcia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice</td>
<td>Phillip Hoose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>After Tupac &amp; D Foster</td>
<td>Jacqueline Woodson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Elijah of Buxton</td>
<td>Christopher Paul Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Feathers</td>
<td>Jacqueline Woodson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Show Way</td>
<td>Jacqueline Woodson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>The Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights</td>
<td>Russell Freedman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</td>
<td>Gary D. Schmidt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793</td>
<td>Jim Murphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Carver: A Life in Poems</td>
<td>Marilyn Nelson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Hope Was Here</td>
<td>Joan Bauer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Bud, Not Buddy</td>
<td>Christopher Paul Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Holes</td>
<td>Louis Sachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>The Watson’s Go to Birmingham: 1963</td>
<td>Christopher Paul Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Yolanda’s Genius</td>
<td>Carol Fenner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>The Dark-thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural</td>
<td>Patricia McKissack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Somewhere in the Darkness</td>
<td>Walter Dean Myers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Maniac Magee</td>
<td>Jerry Spinelli</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content Analysis Procedures

Content analysis is a powerful research tool that is often used to examine the trends and patterns found in documents (Berg, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Grbich, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004; Miles, 1994). Furthermore, it is an “examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings” (Berg, 2007, pp. 303-304). Leading researchers continue to debate whether content analysis should be quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative researchers point out the duration and frequency of the forms involved, while qualitative researchers deal with the patterns of forms evident (Berg, 2007). Knowing this information, content analysis offers a rigorous approach to investigate the cultural authenticity and ethnic identities of African American characters evident in Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor Award winning books. In this study, I used both quantitative and qualitative methods to bring forth enumerative and thematic analysis. The approach was enumerative because there was systematic coding and categorizing of large amounts of data which was analyzed for the frequency of African American characters and their relationship to the text. This study also involved qualitative data including narrative descriptions of data from the books (Grbich, 2007).

Cultural Authenticity Questionnaire

Using my critical lens, I considered elements of cultural authenticity each time I read a book. Literacy scholar Vivian Yenika-Agbaw (2009) agrees:

Every time I pick up a picture book that depicts a culture with which I am unfamiliar, I approach it with a high degree of curiosity because I realize how challenging it can be for authors, even those who claim to be insiders, to tell authentic stories. I wonder, why this particular culture? Why did the author
choose to set the story in a particular region of a country? How much does the author know about that culture? (p. 131)

Therefore I considered each of the eighteen books’ cultural authenticity and accuracy before proceeding with the data collection. As noted previously, cultural authenticity is the success of an author who portrays accurate, believable, multicultural characters through their images, actions, and dialogue within a book. In this study, cultural authenticity is essential to a book. Therefore, if a Newbery Medal or Newbery Honor book was determined to not have cultural authenticity, it was not evaluated further.

Cultural authenticity is a concept that has been critically discussed by many scholars (Bishop, 2003, p. 28; Harris, 1997; McNair, 2003; Mo, 2003; Moreillon, 2003; Woodson, 2003). Fox and Short (2003) note the complexities of determining the cultural authenticity of children’s literature in their book Stories Matter. For the purpose of this study, I selected Short’s (2006) instrument Examining Cultural Authenticity within International Literature to look more closely at the cultural authenticity of each book. The instrument was adapted in two ways. First, knowing that the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books are exemplars of quality writing, questions regarding literary qualities have not been included. Secondly, this study is focused on African American characters set in the United States, so the origin of the book is also not necessary to determine. Nonetheless, with the focus of this study on the development of the African American character’s identities, the following questions on authorship, believability, and accuracy of details and authenticity of values, adapted from Short’s questionnaire, are considered. See Table 3.2 for the questionnaire.
Table 3.2

Questions to Assess the Cultural Authenticity of the African American Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Authorship                        | • Does the author include information about his or her personal experience as related to the African American culture in an access feature?  
• Do the author’s experiences connect to the characters in this book?  
• Why might the author have chosen this story to tell? |
| Believability                     | • Is the story believable?  
• Could it happen?  
• Are the characters larger than stereotypes but less than “perfect” heroes? |
| Accuracy of details and authenticity of values | • What values are at the heart of the book? How do these values connect to the actual lives of people within the culture?  
• Does this book reflect a specific cultural experience or could it happen anywhere? |

Through the use of the cultural authenticity questionnaire, all of the 18 books were deemed culturally authentic and accurate. Not wanting to judge a book only with consideration of the author’s background, this instrument was used as a tool. After reading each book, I answered each question that looked at the authorship, believability, and accuracy of details and authenticity. As a researcher who is African American, I critically evaluated the books based on my personal perspective. Though the questionnaire responses could be seen as subjective, I did further investigate answers to the questions by researching the author via websites on the Internet. Short and Fox (2004) recognized “evaluating authenticity could thus involve reviewing an author’s note or some other indication of the process by which a book was created” (p.
378). Using access features, such as author’s notes, provided factual information to support the validity of the cultural authenticity.

Once each book was deemed to evidence aspects of cultural authenticity and accuracy, I proceeded to seek answers to the key research questions. Beginning with the first research question, I closely examined each book for the frequency of African American characters and their ethnic identity development.

Research Question 1: To What Extent Are the African American Characters in Each Award Winning Book Represented?

a. What is the frequency of African American characters?

b. How are the African American characters’ ethnic identities developed?

Five steps were used in this study in order to collect data to answer the main research questions. See Figure 3.1 to view the order that the steps of the methodologies were completed.

1. Frequency count of African American characters.

2. Ethnic Identity determined using the "Character Ethnic Identity Measure" (CEIM).

3. Frequency count of books that included intergroup interactions.

4. Frequency count of the actual intergroup interactions.

5. Character attitudes are determined using the "Character Other-group Orientation Measure" (COGO)

Figure 3.1. Content analysis methodologies for Research Question 1.
What is the Frequency of African American characters?

In order to collect data to determine the extent African American characters in each award winning book are represented, I began by determining the frequency of African American characters in all of the 18 selected books. As each book was read for cultural authenticity, I compiled a list of all of the African American characters described. I summed the total for a basic numeric frequency. Characters were counted as part of the frequency count only if he or she fit the criteria, and were mentioned in the story enough to warrant a response to each statement on the questionnaires.

Objectivist codes were also gathered. As implied by the name, objectivist codes are objective, and they provide description. Objective descriptive coding is usually done at the beginning of the data collection, typically with documents and books (Miles, 1994; Saldana, 2009). This type of coding was a way of documenting the overall, general information. For this study, information was entered in an Excel document. For each of the 18 books, I provided the book title, author, award date, genre, and a brief summary.

How are the African American Characters’ Ethnic Identities Developed?

After the frequency of African American characters was calculated, I looked at each character individually to evaluate his or her ethnic identity. In 1992, Jean Phinney created a measure to evaluate diverse ethnic groups to determine their ethnic identity. It was called the Multiethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) and it was a survey used to measure both the ethnic identity exploration (people’s interest in their ethnic group) and their ethnic identity commitment (having a clear sense of one’s own ethnicity). I decided to recreate this instrument to use for this study evaluating the characters in a book. As
an educator with an emphasis in literacy, I adapted the statements Phinney wrote and made them more pertinent to characters in a text. The instrument was then entitled the Character Ethnic Identity Measure (CEIM) and it consisted of 10 items that assessed three aspects of a character’s ethnic identity: positive ethnic attitudes and a sense of belonging (4 items); ethnic identity commitment (3 items), and ethnic behaviors or practices (3 items). The CEIM items are rated on a 4 point response of *yes, somewhat, no, and not applicable*. Table 3.3 shows the items used on the CEIM.

Table 3.3

*Character Ethnic Identity Measure Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The character takes time trying to find out more about his or her ethnic group, such as history, traditions, and customs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The character is active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of his or her ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The character talks about how his or her life will be affected by their ethnic group membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The character indicates through dialogue and/or actions that he or she is proud to be a member of the ethnic group they belong to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The character feels comfortable and confident when interacting with other people in the same ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The character justifies his or her actions based on their ethnicity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The character often talks to other characters about his or her ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The character engages in dialogue and/or actions that show that he or she is proud of people in his or her ethnic group and their accomplishments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The character participates in cultural practices of his or her group, such as special food, music, or customs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The character exhibits a positive attitude about his or her cultural or ethnic background.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to Phinney’s (1992) process for scoring the MEIM, I scored the CEIM in the same manner of summing across the items in the measure. There were three subscales in this instrument: positive ethnic attitudes and a sense of belonging (Items 4, 5, 10); ethnic identity achievement (Items 1, 3, 6, 8) and ethnic behaviors or practices (Items 2,
The characters were then organized and coded into groups named Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3.

- At Stage 1 the character does not acknowledge his or her ethnicity. There is no ethnic identification.
- At Stage 2 the character has encountered racism, and is beginning to immerse him or her into their ethnicity.
- Stage 3 represents the character that has a strong ethnic identity and is committed to his ethnicity and race.

A spreadsheet was created for each of the eighteen books. Each of the characters received a score for the measure based on the responses.

In addition to the score from the CEIM, analytic memos were taken that provided narratives including additional description and detail. Through the use of analytic memos, the researcher was able to point out details, such as quotes, scenarios, or images that are not always included within the coding (Miles, 1994). Miles notes the ideas from Glaser’s (1978) book, “[A memo is] the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding…it can be a sentence, a paragraph, or a few pages…it exhausts the analyst’s momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration” (p. 83-84 as cited in Miles, 1994, p. 72).

The analytic memos used in this study were primarily written to tie together the information found about the African American characters in the texts. Glesne (2006) pointed out that the analytic memos were effective because they provided space for the analyst to write brief comments that were reflective and may come while reading the
texts. The analytic memos in this study were used to understand the patterns and themes evident in the books related to the African American characters (Glesne, 2006). After reading the texts, the analytic memos were used by the researcher to respond to the statements in the surveys. The data collected from the frequency counts, CEIM, and analytic memos provided the information needed to answer research question one.

Research Question 2: How are the African American Characters’ Intergroup Attitudes and Interactions Represented?

a. What is the frequency of intergroup interactions with African American characters?
b. What attitudes are in place or are developed within the context of the book?
c. How does this relate to the characters’ ethnic identity development?

**What is the Frequency of Intergroup Interactions with African American Characters?**

In order to answer the second research question of how the African American characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions were represented, I first conducted a frequency count of all of the book titles that included African American character interactions with a character of a different ethnicity.

After each book was noted as including intergroup interactions, each individual interaction was then counted. Intergroup interactions were all situations, either one-on-one or group, in which the characters were engaged through discourse. I maintained analytic memos in a Word document to document each interaction.

**What Attitudes are in Place or are Developed within the Context of the Book?**

In addition to the Multiethnic Identity Measure, Phinney also created an instrument to assess the extent to which an individual enjoys and spends time with
people from other ethnic groups. Phinney (1992) named this instrument the Other-group Orientation and it was a 6-item scale (Phinney, 1992; Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007). Because this measure was also used to measure human participants, I reconstructed it to assess characters in a book. I called this adapted measure the Character's Other-Group Orientation (COGO) measure. The COGO is a 4-item scale that assesses characters on the extent to which he or she enjoys and spends time with other characters of different ethnicities. See Table 3.4 for the statements considered.

Table 3.4

**Character's Other-Group Orientation Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The character is involved in activities with characters from other ethnic groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The character likes meeting and getting to know characters from ethnic groups other than their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The character often spends time with characters from ethnic groups other than his or her ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The character enjoys being around characters from other ethnic groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparable to Phinney's (1992) process for scoring the OGO, the scoring for the COGO was summed across the items in the measure. The characters were then organized and coded into groups named Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3.

- At Stage 1 the character does not value interacting with characters from other ethnic groups.
- At Stage 2 the character is beginning to have positive attitudes and interactions with characters from other ethnic groups.
- At Stage 3, the character has a strong, positive attitude about interactions with characters from other ethnic groups.
These codes were compiled in a spreadsheet. One document was created for each book.

How Does this Relate to the Character's Ethnic Identity Development?

In order to determine the relationship between the intergroup attitudes and the character’s ethnic identity, I compared the data from the two instruments. The scores for each character were then compared across instruments and noted in a chart. Next, I examined the chart to determine the percentage of characters at each stage in relation to their intergroup attitudes.

At that point I reflected on the character’s actual intergroup interactions noted in my analytic memos to better understand their ethnic development throughout the story. In the narratives, this was particularly important. Authors often included characters that grew and developed through the story. As I read the memos, I also considered the sociocultural context from which the characters were developed. In addition to being African American characters, a reader must also keep in mind the characters' economic, cultural, and religious background as well (Hancock, 2008). These social elements also influence the character’s ethnic identity development.

Identifying Themes within the Data

After analyzing the data, I began to note interesting and recursive points found within the data analysis. Certain patterns and trends began to emerge across data sources. It compelled me to revisit the texts to find support for the themes that were developing. I was able to locate quotations and experiences that supported the patterns
and trends that had surfaced. These were noted in the analytic memos and were used to help provide narrative descriptions of the evident themes as well as implications.

In conclusion, this chapter reviewed the critical content analysis methodology used in this study. Data collection of frequency counts, anecdotal notes, and questionnaires in the analysis of characters and their interactions were all compiled by the researcher. Chapter 4 provides the data analysis in response to the major research questions.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the study resulting from analysis of data collected by the researcher about each of the African American characters portrayed in the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor winning books between the years of 1991-2011. The main questions addressed in this study are listed below. They are followed by the individual analysis under each statement. The chapter ends with a summary of the results.

As noted previously, the main research questions addressed in this study were:

1. To what extent are the African American characters in each award winning book represented?
   a. What is the frequency of African American characters?
   b. How are the African American characters’ ethnic identities developed?

2. How are the African American characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions represented?
   a. What is the frequency of intergroup interactions with African American characters?
   b. What attitudes are in place or are developed within the context of the book?
   c. How do the characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions relate to their ethnic identity development?
Research Question 1

To what extent are the African American characters in each award winning book represented? For the first main question, the following sub questions were used to help guide the analysis of the representation of the African American characters.

1. What is the frequency of African American characters?
2. How are the African American characters’ ethnic identities developed?

What is the Frequency of African American Characters?

This chapter begins by firstly noting the frequency of books that include African American characters during the years 1991 through 2011. Therefore, there were eighteen Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books that included African American characters. There were eighteen books that incorporated African American characters. Second, the numbers of African American characters in each of the eighteen books were summed, as seen in Table 4.1. Characters were counted as part of frequencies only if he or she was at least 10 years old and was mentioned in the story often enough to warrant a response to each statement on the Character Ethnic Identity Measure (CEIM). There were 98 characters within these 18 books.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Date</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Freq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>One Crazy Summer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>After Tupac &amp; D Foster</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Elijah of Buxton</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Feathers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4.1 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Date</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Freq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td><em>Show Way</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td><em>The Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td><em>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td><em>An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td><em>Carver: A Life in Poems</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td><em>Hope Was Here</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><em>Bud, Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td><em>Holes</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><em>The Watson’s Go to Birmingham: 1963</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><em>Yolanda’s Genius</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td><em>The Dark-thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td><em>Somewhere in the Darkness</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td><em>Maniac Magee</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How are the African American Characters’ Ethnic Identities Developed?

Next, this chapter shared the data analysis that indicated that each of these 98 characters had differing levels of ethnic identity. There were three stages of ethnic identity. If a character had a Character Ethnic Identity Measure (CEIM) score between 0-10, the character had no ethnic identification. He or she does not acknowledge ethnicity and is considered to be at Stage 1 of ethnic identity. If the CEIM score is in the range of 11-20, the character is beginning to understand his or her ethnic group. This character is at Stage 2 and has experienced racism, or witnessed a racial attack and has begun to seek answers to why. An African American character who is at Stage 3, would receive a score within the range of 21-30. This character is proud of his race, yet understands the challenges that may occur. Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of characters in each ethnic identity stage.
Figure 4.1. Percentage of characters at each ethnic identity stage.

**African American Characters at Stage 1 Ethnic Identity**

Data shows that 9% of the African American characters have no ethnic identification. These characters are not cognizant of their cultural group. For example, Soonie’s great grandmother in *Show Way* falls in this category (Woodson, 2005). This woman is a slave, and she thought of herself as property. The author, Jacqueline Woodson, is able to characterize Soonie’s great grandmother in context.

Furthermore, there were other characters that were at stage 1 ethnic identity who were unlike Soonie’s great grandmother. Flo in *Hope Was Here* is also at stage 1 ethnic identity. Joan Bauer describes Flo’s physical appearance and her demeanor; however, there is no information that indicates how she feels about herself and race (Bauer, 2000). Flo is an example of another type of character that is found at stage 1.

Much like Flo, the three African American characters in *Holes* are all at Stage 1 ethnic identity. X-ray, Armpit, and Zero do not acknowledge their race until the end of the book. It was at this point that they begin to blame their ethnicity for their position in
life (Sachar, 1998). See Table 4.2 for the scores of all African American characters at Stage 1 ethnic identity.

Table 4.2

**African American Characters at Stage 1 Ethnic Identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>CEIM Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Bud, Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>Todd Amos</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Amos</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elijah of Buxton</em></td>
<td>Mr. Segee</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Holes</em></td>
<td>X Ray</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Armpit</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hope Was Here</em></td>
<td>Flo</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brenda Babcock</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Show Way</em></td>
<td>Soonie’s great grandma</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**African American Characters at Stage 2 Ethnic Identity**

Fifty-four percent of the African American characters in the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award winning books during these 20 years are at Stage 2 ethnic identity. These characters understand the implications of being Black however have not yet begun to gain understanding of the positive elements of the culture. Cross (1995), who identifies this point of identity development as the “encounter” stage explains:

The person, regardless of class background, feels angry at those perceived to have ‘caused’ their predicament—White people and all the White world.
Furthermore, each person feels anxious at the discovery that there is another level of Blackness to which he or she should aspire. (p. 63)

Such is the case with George Washington Carver as shown in *Carver: A Life in Poems* (Nelson, 2001). In this free verse, Marilyn Nelson includes researched information within the poems that describe different parts of his life. The fact that Carver is born to slave parents who were killed soon after his birth is one reason why he reads or inquires little about his culture and his ethnicity. Like Carver, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were newly freed slaves that were still met by many challenges. Jim Murphy describes their influence on the community during the yellow fever epidemic in 1793 in the book *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793* (Murphy, 2003).

Another type of character that can be found at Stage 2 ethnic identity is seen in Jimmy Little. Jimmy Little is one of the main characters in *Somewhere in the Darkness* by Walter Dean Myers. Jimmy recognizes that he is African American and that he will be judged by his ethnicity in his life. However, in this story, Jimmy focused on the fact that his father came to visit him after being in jail for nine years. He wanted to learn more about his father and his family rather than gain information about his ethnicity (Myers, 1992).

Most of the characters in Jacqueline Woodson’s *Feathers* were at Stage 2 because of the experiences they have with reverse prejudice. This historical fiction narrative is set in 1971. The main character is a Caucasian boy who is a new student at an all-Black school. He is initially teased and ridiculed. It isn’t until the end of the story that the African American characters begin to interact with him in a positive way (Woodson, 2007). In Woodson’s story, *After Tupac & D Foster* (2008), Woodson
introduces the biracial character, D Foster. D Foster knows little about her father, who is her African American parent, and it is evident in her ethnic identity score. 

*Show Way* is an autobiographical narrative that Woodson uses to share her own story. In this picture book she identifies and describes the women in her family over several generations. All the women in her family, starting with Soonie’s great grandmother, dealt with challenges. The pride that Woodson has for all of the female relatives in her family is felt, though the description of each woman’s identity is lacking (Woodson, 2005). 

Christopher Paul Curtis also shares African American characters that fit in Stage 2 ethnic identity. All three of his books are historical fiction, so one reason these characters are at this level is due to the context of the stories. In *Bud, Not Buddy* (1999), the main character Bud is ten years old and is dealing with the death of his mother. He has been living in foster care for several years. One of his foster care parents, Mrs. Amos, also is at this stage of identity development. She is very negative about his ethnicity, though she claims

‘Boy,’ Mrs. Amos said, ‘I am not the least bit surprised at your show of ingratitude. Lord knows I have been stung by my own people before. But take a good look at me because I am one person who is totally fed up with you and your ilk. I do not have time to put up with the foolishness of those members of our race who do not want to be uplifted. (Curtis, 1999, p. 15)

Though Mrs. Amos incorrectly accuses Bud of wrong doing, her discourse indicates that she is in Stage 2 ethnic identity. Similar to Mrs. Amos, there were three characters in *Elijah of Buxton* that are at this stage: Mr. Leroy, Mrs. Chloe, and Reverend (Curtis, 2007). In addition, four of the characters in *The Watson’s Go to Birmingham* are at this stage, for the same reasons.
Lastly, there were characters that though they identified themselves as African American, they did not inquire further into their ethnicity. The Beale family in *Maniac Magee* was an example of this. While they lived in a Black community, there was little discourse on identity (Spinelli, 1990). The same type of character is in *Yolanda’s Genius* (Fenner, 1995). Both Momma and Aunt Tiny did little to indicate that they were seeking understanding of their Blackness. Table 4.3 identifies all of the characters that are at Stage 2 ethnic identity.

Table 4.3

*African American Characters at Stage 2 Ethnic Identity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>CEIM Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>After Tupac &amp; D Foster</em></td>
<td>D Foster</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793:</em></td>
<td>Absalom Jones</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Allen</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bud, Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>Bud Caldwell</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Amos</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Carver: A Life in Poems</em></td>
<td>George Washington Carver</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elijah of Buxton</em></td>
<td>Mr. Leroy</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reverend</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Chloe</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Johnson</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Feathers</em></td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rayray</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maribel Tanks</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hope Was Here</em></td>
<td>Pastor Al B. Hall</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lizzie Bright and Buckminster Boy</em></td>
<td>Lizzie Bright</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>CEIM Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maniac Magee</td>
<td>Amanda Beale</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Beale</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Beale</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Crazy Summer</td>
<td>Big Ma</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pa</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big Mama</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathis May</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soonie</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show Way</td>
<td>Georgiana</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jacqueline</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhere in the Darkness</td>
<td>Jimmy Little</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Crab” Little</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mama Jean</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dark-thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural</td>
<td>Henri</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Legend of Pin Oak”</td>
<td>Charlemae</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Justice”</td>
<td>Alvin Tinsley</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Sight”</td>
<td>Amanda Mayes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Esau Mayes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tall Mays</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charity Rose</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Gingi”</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Aswaldi</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Chicken-Coop Monster”</td>
<td>Ma Franky</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daddy James Leon</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Watson’s Go to Birmingham—1963</td>
<td>Buphead</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rufus</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandma Sands</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Robert</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda’s Genius</td>
<td>Mommy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tiny</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
African American Characters at Stage 3 Ethnic Identity

The remaining 37% of the African American characters evident in the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award winning books are at Stage 3 ethnic identity. Delphine, the eleven year old main character in *One Crazy Summer* is an excellent example of a confident, knowledgeable African American adolescent. In the beginning of the book Delphine indicates her interest in finding out information about her cultural group. Below, Delphine explains everything that she learned from watching the news with her grandmother, affectionately called “Big Ma.” Delphine speaks in first person and is the character saying “I” in this passage:

“Then who were those people?” Vonetta asked.

“In the black clothes.”

“Telling her to carry the weight.”

“Talk, talk, talking, on and on and on,” Fern said.

“They’re Black Panthers. They’re probably who she’s running from.”

Vonetta asked, “Who are the Black Panthers?”

“You know. Like Frieda’s brother.” I made the Black Power sign with my fist. Only Big Ma and I watch the news. Big Ma enjoys hearing about all the trouble going on in the world. It isn’t that she actually likes it. She just needs to hear about everything and talk about it. Since Pa works all day and is tired at night, Big Ma gives me her opinions while I wash dishes. You name it. President LBJ. Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam. Martin Luther King’s funeral. Bobby Kennedy’s funeral. The race riots. The sit ins. Elizabeth Taylor’s next husband. The Black Panthers. Each holds Big Ma’s interest. (Williams-Garcia, 2010, p.47)

Similar to Delphine, several other characters in *One Crazy Summer* are at Stage 3 ethnic identity: Cecile, Sister Mukumbo, Sister Pat, and Crazy Kelvin who are all Black Panthers. Woodson’s characters in *Tupac & D Foster* (2008) were also knowledgeable about their ethnicity. “Me,” Neeka, JayJones, Mama (of narrator), Ms. Irene, and Tash all justify their actions based on their ethnicity; however, they also indicate that they
were proud of being African American. Neeka explains how she envisions her future ‘I want people to see me,’ Neeka said. ‘And I know I’m somebody’ (p. 91).

Marian Anderson, the renowned singer, also exhibits Stage 3 ethnicity. In the biography *The Voice That Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, the author Russell Freedman tells of her plight to be recognized in the United States regardless of her ethnicity (Freedman, 2004).

Christopher Paul Curtis also includes examples of African American characters that fall in Stage 3 ethnic identity in all three of his books. While most of the characters that were at this stage were adults, there were three adolescents that stood out. Elijah in *Elijah of Buxton*, and Kenneth and Byron in *The Watson’s Go to Birmingham, 1963* all exhibit pride in their race. Each of the 37 characters who rank at Stage 3 of the CEIM is a significant character in their corresponding books. See Table 4.4 for a complete listing of characters at Stage 3 ethnic identity.

**Table 4.4**

*African American Characters at Stage 3 Ethnic Identity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>CEIM Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>After Tupac &amp; DFoster</em></td>
<td>Me (Narrator’s name is not revealed.)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neeka</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JayJones</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mama (of narrator)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms. Irene</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tash</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bud, Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>Mr. “Lefty” Lewis</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Herman E. Calloway</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jimmy Wesley</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chug “Doo Doo Bug” Cross</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steady Eddie Patrick</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss Grace Thomas</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
In the 18 Newbery books that fit the study’s criteria, the characters ethnic identities were developed through discourse and their actions. By noting the verbal exchanges that the African American characters had with other characters, a response was given for each statement in the instrument.
The above discussion raised an interesting question. Does the genre of each book influence the ethnic identities of the characters? Therefore, after noting the genre of each book, I did find that it influenced the ethnic identities evident in the stories. In the realistic fiction and historical fiction narratives, authors provided characters at varying levels of ethnic identity. Often, a character begins at Stage 1 or Stage 2, and then ends the Story at stage 3. One example of this is Byron in *The Watson’s Go to Birmingham, 1963*. In the beginning of this story, Byron is the stereotypical older brother who often teased and ridiculed his younger brother Kenneth. He also was problematic at school and in the home with his family. However, by the end of the story, Byron transformed into the older brother who is able to provide great advice and empathy to his middle brother Kenny. Byron is the one family member who was able to help his younger brother Kenny gets out of his depression after being a witness at the bombing of the church in Birmingham.

Kenny, things ain’t ever going to be fair. How’s it fair that two grown men could hate Negros so much that they’d kill some kids just to stop them from going to school? How’s it fair that even though the cops down there might know who did it nothing will probably ever happen to those men? It ain’t. But you just gotta understand that that’s the way it is and keep on steppin. (Curtis, 1995, p. 203)

Patricia McKissack’s *The Dark Thirty: Supernatural Tales of the South* is the only example of the traditional fantasy genre. Hancock (2008) explains that “fantasy fuels the imagination and begs readers to move beyond the real world into an imaginary world where anything is possible” (p. 120). So, while McKissack includes characters that are all three stages of ethnic identity, the characters do not change and grow like the characters in the fiction narratives.

Within these 18 award-winning books, there was also a book that fell in the
poetry genre, *Carver: A Life in Poems* by Marilyn Nelson (2001). True to the genre, this book is a collection of poems that are used to describe different aspects of George Washington Carver’s life in an original way. The precise language that is used provides both insight and emotion (Hancock, 2008). However, because of these factors, comprehensive biographical information was not shared. This affects the CEIM score, and George Washington Carver is noted at Stage 2 ethnic identity when factual information would infer that he is at Stage 3.

There were also several biographies and informational books included in this study. While these genres are fact-based, authors decided the amount of coverage that they were going to provide on the topic or person. Because of these reasons, the change and growth of ethnic identity may not be apparent in the text. For example, in *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*, Jim Murphy highlighted the admirable work of two freed slaves, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, and how they helped with care during this time. The only information provided is about their work. Their ethnic identity score was based on little information about these actual men and their personal lives.

**Research Question 2**

The second main question addressed in this study assessed the attitudes and Interactions between the African American characters and characters from other ethnicities. How are the African American characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions represented? For this question, the following sub questions helped to answer the main question.
1. What is the frequency of intergroup interactions with African American characters?

2. What attitudes are in place or are developed within the context of the book?

3. How do the intergroup interactions and attitudes relate to the characters’ ethnic identity development?

What is the Frequency of Intergroup Interactions with African American Characters?

Initially, a frequency count of the books that actually included intergroup interactions was tallied. Intergroup interactions occurred in 14 out of the 18 Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award-winning books. In each of these books, African American characters interacted with a character of another ethnicity at least one time. There were several genres represented among the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books that have African American character interactions: realistic fiction, historical fiction, poetry, biography, and informational books. See Table 4.5 for a complete listing of titles of books that have African American character intergroup interactions and their genres.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Date</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>One Crazy Summer</td>
<td>Historical fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice</td>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Elijah of Buxton</td>
<td>Historical fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Feathers</td>
<td>Historical fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Lizzie Bright ad Buckminster Boy</td>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 4.5 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Date</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td><em>The Voice That Challenged A Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights</em></td>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td><em>An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793</em></td>
<td>Informational Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td><em>Carver: A Life in Poems</em></td>
<td>Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td><em>Hope Was Here</em></td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><em>Bud, Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td><em>Holes</em></td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><em>Yolanda’s Genius</em></td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td><em>The Dark Thirty</em></td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td><em>Maniac Magee</em></td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of interactions that each African American character has with characters of other ethnicities is more clearly described in the texts that are narrative. In the traditional fantasy, historical fiction, and realistic fiction titles, data was compiled in analytic memos that indicated whether the interactions were positive or negative. Interactions were considered positive if the African American character’s race is not an issue of concern as evidenced through their discourse. There were 9 books that exhibited positive interactions between African American characters and characters of other ethnicities. There is only one book that has only negative interactions. Interactions were considered negative if the African American character indicated through discourse, or their actions, that they were not being treated respectfully, fairly or with equal consideration.

Positive Interactions

_Elijah of Buxton_

As a result of the frequency count of intergroup interactions with the African
American characters in the fourteen books, nine books were identified as containing positive interactions. *Elijah of Buxton*, written by Christopher Paul Curtis, is the first example of a book in which the African American characters had positive intergroup interactions. In this story, Elijah is the first African American that was born free in the Buxton settlement, a Canadian community. His parents, as well as the other adults in this settlement, were all slaves that ran away. The Buxton community is a mixed group of people. Elijah notes that there were children in his school that were Black, White, and Indian. Elijah is a talkative child, and is willing to engage in conversation with anyone who listens. One interaction that Curtis describes is Elijah at the circus with Preacher. Elijah has conversation about a circus act that was going on with a “little white stranger boy, near ‘bout as old as me” (Curtis, 2007, p.121). The other intergroup interaction Curtis writes about is when Elijah traveled with Mr. Leroy on horses to go to America. Elijah was helping Mr. Leroy get the money that is stolen from him back so he could pay to free his family. Unfortunately Mr. Leroy died. Elijah decided to continue to try and help Mr. Leroy’s family, and he meets with a Caucasian man who is rumored to help African Americans. Elijah did find this man, however he did not receive any help.

*Bud, Not Buddy*

Another award winning book by Christopher Paul Curtis, *Bud, Not Buddy*, is the next example of a historical fiction book that had positive interactions throughout. There were two interactions in the book in which the main character, Bud Caldwell, intermingles with characters from other ethnic groups. The first is when Bud and his friend “Bugs” were running away, and they came upon a “cardboard jungle.” Famous
during President Herbert Hoover’s administration, these places were basically small mixed communities of people trying to get ahead. They received the name “cardboard jungle” because homes were made out of cardboard boxes. These homeless people were constantly moving to find a better place to live and work. In this community, Bud and Bugs meet a White man first, and he introduces them to everyone else. They were very welcoming, and they offer the boys food and a place to rest. The second interaction Bud has was in the middle of the story. Bud finally meets Herman Calloway, the man he thinks is his father, and finds out that he is in a famous band. Because Herman Calloway knew that many places did not hire African American entertainment, he always included one Caucasian member in his band. This band member set up “gigs” or shows in places that hire White only entertainment. Dirty Deed is the White band member that Bud meets when he comes to the band rehearsal. The meetings that Bud has with Dirty Deed were all positive (Curtis, 2007).

*Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*

*Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* by Gary D. Schmidt have mostly positive interactions as well. This historical fiction novel is set 1912 in Philipsburg, Maine. In this story, the African American characters were totally separated from the other ethnicities. They live on Malaga Island, which is a short boat ride away from Philipsburg. However, eleven year old Lizzie Bright Griffin takes a dory to the city often. She met Turner Buckminster, and they immediately became friends.

He’d never even spoken to a Negro before. Never once. But he liked the smooth, easy way she stood, as if she were part of the contour of the shore. He liked the oak brown of her eyes and the grip of her long toes on the rocky ground, the tilt of her head like a sail catching the wind. (Schmidt, 2004, pgs. 44-45)
Needless to say, whenever it was possible, Turner and Lizzie would meet and talk. Turner even introduces Lizzie to Mrs. Cobb, a senior for whom he plays the organ. Mrs. Cobb is certainly surprised: “A Negro girl standing in my house,’ she allows her to stay” (Schmidt, 2004, pg. 101).

Nevertheless, negative interactions occur between other characters and their interactions with the African American people on Malaga Island. The town wants to clear Malaga Island and use it as a tourist attraction. As expected, there is a lot of resistance by the African Americans living on the island, so the sheriff decides to take care of the situation himself.

Turner went to stand beside his father, his father of the flinging arm, his father of the heaving chest. “They’ve taken her away,” he said.

“They’ve taken who away?”

“Lizzie. And the Easons with her.”

His father was looking at the sheriff.

“Phippsburg has to look after its own,” the sheriff said standing up. “Everyone around here has known for years that Jake Eason is crazy as a loon—him and his whole lot. Sooner or later they would all have gone to Pownal anyway. We did tonight what we should have done long ago. (Schmidt, 2004, p. 183)

Any negative interactions that transpired in this book were shared in the story after they happened, much like the example noted above.

**Hope Was Here**

Joan Bauer’s book *Hope Was Here* is the fourth book that has only positive interactions. There were three African American characters in this book: Flo, Brenda Babcock, and Pastor Al Hall. All three of these characters were minor characters. The main character, Hope, moves to a new town with her aunt to work in a new restaurant.
She meets Flo, an experienced and well liked waitress, at the restaurant. Brenda Babcock is a police officer. Flo introduces Hope to her when she is eating lunch at the restaurant. There is one interaction between Brenda Babcock and a racist teen. Hope begins to shout “help!” when the teenage boy starts harassing her and grabs her arm. Brenda and her aunt come immediately.

“What’s going on here?” Deputy Babcock shouted.

“Nuthin’”, said one of the guys, dropping the petition on the ground. He had stained brown teeth.

I broke free. “They wouldn’t let me pass. They took my petition.” I pointed to the tall one. “He was grabbing my arm.”

Deputy Babcock, hand on her gun, stared them down.” That doesn’t sound like nothing to me.”

“Well…” the taller one mumbled. “You don’t come from these parts, ma’am.” He didn’t look at her when he said it. His voice showed his disrespect.

A moron and a racist. The two sure go together. (Bauer, 2000, p. 82)

However, Brenda Babcock’s confident use of her power ends the interaction positively.

Pastor Al Hall is one of the restaurant owner’s best friends. Because of this, all of the interactions Pastor Al Hall has with other characters of other ethnicities were also positive.

**One Crazy Summer**

Though several titles had positive interactions, the narratives did not always begin this way. In all of these well written books, the characters grew emotionally from the beginning and transformed by the end of the story. So, in many cases, there were negative interactions initially. As the story progressed, the interactions became more positive. The first case was with the African American characters in *One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia (2011).
Delphine, the oldest sister, feel it is her responsibility to protect her younger sisters from strangers. She did not feel comfortable associating with Caucasian people in particular. The first interaction is in the beginning of the story when a White woman compliments Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern on how well behave on the plane by themselves, and she offers them money. Delphine refuses because she knows that her father would not appreciate them taking money from a stranger. The girls were on a plane ride from New York City to Oakland, CA to meet their mother who abandoned them when Fern, the youngest daughter, was born. Once the girls arrive in Oakland, their mother seems annoyed by the fact that they were visiting. She gave them the independence and freedom to roam the community that they were unaccustomed to having. The second interaction the girls have is with Ming, the owner of a Chinese restaurant. When they walk in, Ming yells at them that there are "no more free egg rolls" (p. 36). However, once the girls explain that they had money to pay for their meal, she took their order. After this episode, the girls begin calling her "Mean Lady Ming." The girls soon found out that their mother did not cook in her kitchen, so they end up going to Mean Lady Ming’s restaurant every night for dinner. Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern’s attitudes about Ming change in this story. Delphine later admits that Mean Lady Ming “wasn’t really so mean but we just got used to calling her that” (p. 92). Eventually, their interactions become more positive.

The three girls also went to a summer program developed by The Black Panthers the entire month they were visiting their mother. Delphine, who know who the Black Panthers are, is surprised when she notices that the summer camp includes a mixed group of children: two Mexican girls, one little white boy, and a biracial boy. Much like
the case with Ming, the girls are at the start unsociable and then they grow to interact more comfortably. Delphine, who took the longest time before she begins to interact, actually ends the story admitting that she has a crush on Hirochito, who is both Black and Japanese. In this story, the African American characters change their attitudes about interacting with people of other ethnicities through the events of the story.

*Feathers*

Only one of Jacqueline Woodson’s three award winning books, *Feathers*, includes positive intergroup interactions with characters from other ethnicities. In this book, the main character Frannie, is a sixth grade student who attends an all-Black school. The story begins when a new student is brought to her class, and he is a White boy. Interestingly enough, the White boy’s name is never disclosed. However, classmates begin teasing him about his pale colored skin and his long blond hair, ultimately calling him “Jesus.” The interactions that take place in the beginning and the middle of this story are all negative. The students do not immediately accept him because of his race. The bully Trevor, who is the most disrespectful and mean to Jesus, actually has a very light complexion because he was biracial. Jesus points this out in front of the class: “One student, Trevor, whispers “Don't any pale faces go to this school. You need to get your white butt back across the highway.” “You’re just as pale as I am…my brother,” I heard the boy say” (Woodson, 2007, p. 4-5).

Jesus Boy finally caught the attention of the main character Frannie. Their relationship becomes more positive when she remembers that she was once the “new kid” at school. He could also speak sign language, a language that Frannie uses to
communicate with her older brother Sean. Other students in the class showed more empathy toward Jesus when he begins crying in class one day, explaining how sometimes he feels as if he did not belong anywhere.

Trevor, who is the only remaining bully to Jesus Boy at this point in the story, challenges him to fight. Jesus Boy stands his ground without even throwing a punch. The interaction ends when Trevor falls to ground, after losing his balance, when trying to throw a punch. Trevor is humiliated when all the bystanders begin laughing. Jesus Boy actually helps him stand up, and then walks away. Students notice his reaction, and are more accepting of him. By the end of the book, Rayray changes the nickname of Jesus Boy to “JB.” The story ends with a sense that the interactions between JB and the other African American characters would continue to improve.

**Yolanda’s Genius**

The African American characters in *Yolanda’s Genius* had both positive and negative interactions too. Yolanda, the African American main character, is an overweight middle school student. She is very protective of her little brother, Andrew. Yolanda, Andrew, and their mother move from Chicago to a smaller suburban town. Yolanda did not have any friends until Shirley introduced herself. Shirley, a Caucasian girl, is impressed with the fact that Yolanda could take up for herself and that she is very smart in school. Though Yolanda had no other friends, it is hard for her to accept the fact that she could be friends with a White girl. Each interaction that Yolanda has with Shirley, she would try to impress her. Shirley really wants to learn to play Double Dutch, and Yolanda lies and says that she could show her how. In the end, Yolanda angrily told
her that she did not want to be friends anymore. Her aunt who had never seen any of Yolanda’s friends before inquire: “Aunt Tiny looked at her curiously when she returned to the kitchen. ‘That a friend of yours, Yolanda?’ she asked.” ‘She’s a white girl,’ said Yolanda. ‘Not what I asked,’ said Aunt Tiny” (Fenner, 1995, p. 126).

Besides Yolanda’s hesitant relationship with Shirley, there were other interactions with diverse people in the community. Once, Yolanda tries to buy a new harmonica for her brother. She convinces the owner to give her a discount if she could prove that her younger brother is a musical genius. He agrees after he heard her persuasive argument. She also talks to a famous Blues musician at the Chicago Blues festival and convinces him to listen to her brother play. Yolanda pays close attention to the ethnicities of other characters within the story, and decides how to approach them based on her personal perspective.

*Maniac Magee*

*Maniac Magee* is another example of a story in which the African American character interactions change from negative to positive by the end of the story. The main character, Jeffrey Magee, is a thirteen year old White boy. Jeffrey ran away from home, and ultimately finds his place in a town called Two Mills. The first intergroup interaction Jeffrey has is with Amanda Beale. Amanda is an African American girl who is on her way to school carrying a suitcase full of books. She is startled by Jeffrey, particularly because White people did not usually come to the East End part of Two Mills. Nevertheless, he shows no reluctance in his conversation and even asks to borrow one of her books, to which she obliges. Ultimately, Amanda introduces Jeffrey to
her family. When her parents realize that he is homeless, Mr. Beale invites him to stay at their home. All of the interactions Jeffrey has with the Beale family are positive.

The intergroup interactions Jeffrey has with other minor characters are negative. Mars Bar Thompson is a bully that Jeffrey comes across often. He calls him disrespectful names like “fishbelly” and takes things away from him. Mars Bar challenges Jeffrey to a running race, “We gonna race, honkey donkey” (Spinelli, 1990, p. 145). Once Jeffrey wins the race, Mars Bar feels defeated. They ultimately begin to talk and establish a relationship.

There are two other negative interactions between Jeffrey and older African Americans from the East End. The first interaction is when an elderly African American woman who came from her porch to stop the fighting between Jeffrey and Mars Bar. She yells to Jeffrey, “You better get on, boy, where you belong. I can’t be following you around. I got things to do” (Spinelli, 1990, p. 37). When Jeffrey is living with the Beale family, graffiti is written with chalk on their house: Fishbelly go home. This was seen after another older Black man told him, “You go on home now, son. Back to your own kind. I seen ya at the block party. Now you get goin” (Spinelli, 1990, p. 61).

Jeffrey decides to run away again after finally noticing the many negative reactions that he receives while living on the East End. He meets other characters; however he is unable to find a home that he feels comfortable in. In the end, Amanda convinces Jeffrey to come back home with her and her family. The book ends with a positive interaction between Jeffrey and Amanda.


_The interactions in Louis Sachar’s (1998) *Holes* began positive; then they turned negative. Stanley, the main character, is taken to a juvenile delinquent camp for boys. In the beginning, “Stanley was thankful that there were no racial problems. X-ray, Armpit, and Zero were black. He, Squid, and ZigZag were white. Magnet was Hispanic. On the lake, they were all the same reddish brown color—the color of dirt” (p. 84). Throughout the story the boys interact when they were digging holes, eating meals, and completing daily chores. Race did not become an issue until the end of the book. In exchange for Stanley teaching Zero how to read, Zero would dig Stanley's holes. The other campers became very upset that Stanley was able to sit and watch Zero dig his holes. “Same old story, ain’t it, Armpit?” X-ray said. “The white boy sits around while the little black boy does all the work. Ain’t that right, Caveman?” (p. 117).

Sachar included flashbacks to the story of Kate Barlow, the outlaw. Within these flashbacks, both positive and negative interactions occur. Kate Barlow was the teacher in her community. She falls in love with Sam, an African American farmer. This is frowned upon by the entire town. Sam is shot and killed after the town finds out about this relationship. Even though this segment of the book ended with a negative outcome, the main story ended with a positive interaction. Zero and Stanley find the treasure chest that the boys in the camp had been digging holes for the entire time. Because the treasure chest actually had his name, Stanley Yelnats inscribed on it, Stanley is able to take it home to his family. Stanley shares half of the money with Zero who helps him dig it up._
Negative Interactions

Only in one case, all of the interactions that African American characters had with people from other ethnicities were negative. Such is the case in *The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural*. In this traditional fantasy book, Patricia McKissack shared ten short stories. There were three stories out of the ten that included intergroup interactions between African American characters, and those from other ethnicities: “Legend of Pin Oak,” “Justice,” and “The Woman in the Snow.”

The first story, “Legend of Pin Oak,” told the story of a mulatto slave named Henri and his Caucasian brother named Harper McAvoy. Though these two characters are brothers, all of their interactions are negative. After their father died, Harper assumes power over Henri and his family. Harper did not realize his father had made Henri free, and tries to sell him to another man. Henri only stays at the farm to work for the money he needs to pay for his wife’s freedom. In the end, Henri and his wife run away so they could be together. The negative interactions were appropriate to the context of this story.

In “Justice,” McKissack’s story again was set in another volatile time in history—civil rights. The main character in this chapter is Hoops, a White man that is a member of the local chapter of the Klu Klux Clan. He is a very bitter man, and all of his interactions with people that look different from him are negative and hateful. In the middle of the story, Hoops actually kills Alvin Tinsely, who is an upstanding African American in the community at the time. Despite the outrage by the African American community, Hoops is found not guilty. However, though he was not serving a jail sentence, the remainder of the story indicates that Hoops is spooked by Alvin Tinsely to
the point that he commits suicide. There is one positive interaction in this story. In the beginning of the story, the sheriff is looking for the murderer of a crime. Hoops accused Alvin Tinsely. The sheriff knew that Hoops was a hateful man and that Alvin Tinsely was wrongly accused, however he had no proof. He treats Alvin with respect and courtesy when he had to come to the police station unnecessarily.

“The Woman in the Snow,” had African American characters involved in negative interactions as well. Just like in “Justice,” this story was set during the Civil Rights on the city bus system. Grady, a Caucasian bus driver insisted that his African American passengers sit at the back of the bus, even when there were no other passengers. One extremely cold and snowy night a young African American mother holding an infant asks Grady for a ride on the bus. She did not have the bus fare, so he refuses. The next morning, there is a news article stating that a woman and a baby died in the snowy night. Grady knew it was the lady he refused and was haunted by her the rest of his life.

Nonfiction Stories

When investigating the intergroup interactions within the biographies and informational books, it was difficult to determine an actual number of times each African American person interacted with people from other ethnicities. For example, Freedman notes in A Voice That Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights that Marian Anderson decided to move to Europe to live and perform for several years. In Europe, she was able to sing professionally and be respected by a large audience unlike in the United States. The other award-winning nonfiction books including Claudette Colvin: Twice toward Justice, An American Plague: The True and
Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793, and Carver: A Life in Poems are also counted as containing intergroup interactions, though an accurate number of intergroup interactions could not be determined.

What Attitudes are in Place or are Developed within the Context of the Book?

The main sub question addressed in this section is what attitudes are in place or developed within the contexts of the books. Not only were the African American character interactions with characters from other ethnicities identified, but the attitudes were also evaluated. The Character’s Other-group Orientation Measure (COGO) was used to determine each character’s attitude toward interacting with people of other ethnicities. If a character received a score within the range of 0-4, the character was at Stage 1 and did not value interacting with characters from other ethnic groups. If a character received a score within the range of 5-8, he or she was beginning to have positive attitudes and interactions with characters from other ethnic groups. Lastly, if a character received a score within the range of 9-12, he or she had strong, positive attitudes and interactions with characters from other ethnic groups. Figure 4.2 shows the percentage of each stage of characters’ attitudes toward intergroup interactions.

![Figure 4.2. Characters attitudes toward intergroup interactions.](image_url)
Characters at Stage 1 COGO

In the 14 books that included intergroup interactions, there were 56 characters that were measured using the Character’s Other-group Orientation measure (COGO). This measure showed whether the African American character had positive or negative attitudes toward interacting with people from other ethnicities. As a result, 25% of these characters were in Stage 1. These characters either did not like intermingling with people from other ethnicities, or there was no occasion in the story where there was an interaction that they were involved. For example, Claudette Colvin was an example of an African American character that was at Stage 1. In this biography, she had very few opportunities to even interact with people from other ethnic groups. She was a teenager who stood up for her rights on the segregated bus system.

Table 4.6
Characters in Stage 1 of the COGO Measure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>COGO Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bud, Not Buddy</td>
<td>Mr. “Lefty” Lewis</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice</td>
<td>Claudette Colvin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah of Buxton</td>
<td>Mrs. Chloe</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feathers</td>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Crazy Summer</td>
<td>Big Ma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural</td>
<td>Henri</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charlemae</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda’s Genius</td>
<td>Momma</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aunt Tiny</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People were angry with her because she didn’t follow the rules, and she demanded that
she be treated fairly. As expected, she had few interactions, and the ones that she did have were negative (Hoose, 2009).

Unlike Claudette Colvin, the characters in *Feathers* that were in Stage 1 COGO did not have any opportunities for interactions within the text of the story. Frannie’s parents and her brother Sean did not meet the single White character in the story. In *Yolanda’s Genius*, Yolanda’s mother and Aunt Tiny were never at the school, where interactions with other ethnicities took place. See Table 4.6 for all of the African American characters whose scores are indicative of Stage 1.

*Characters at Stage 2 COGO*

Due to the fact that more African American characters were beginning to have positive attitudes about intergroup interactions, 23% of the African American characters were in Stage 2 in this measure. In the case with Trevor in *Feathers*, he was very hostile when he first began interacting with Jesus Boy, the only character from another ethnic group. His attitude began to change after having multiple encounters with him. They never become friendly; however the story did get to a point where Trevor did not call him names or bully him anymore (Woodson, 2007).

George Washington Carver was another African American character that scored in the Stage 2. His attitude was very different than Trevor. Carver was actually raised by White foster parents who were his parents’ slave owners. They were caregivers for both Carver and his brother when their parents were found dead. Through his passion for education and learning, he actually had several interactions with people from other ethnicities. Unfortunately, he lived during a time when it was not always welcomed or accepted (Nelson, 2001). Because of this, he rated in Stage 2 in the COGO measure.
Another type of character typical at Stage 2 COGO were those from *One Crazy Summer*. Delphine, Sister Mukumba, Sister Pat, and Crazy Kelvin were often around characters of other ethnicities; however there was little detail to describe their attitude about these interactions. This was also evident in *Elijah of Buxton*. Mr. Leroy, Mr. Segee, and Mrs. Holten who were all recently escaped slaves; however they did not spend time mingling with the characters of other races in the story. See Table 4.7 for a complete listing of the African American characters that rated in Stage 2 for their intergroup attitudes.

Table 4.7

**Characters at Stage 2 COGO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>COGO Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Carver: A Life in Poems</em></td>
<td>George Washington Carver</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elijah of Buxton</em></td>
<td>Mr. Leroy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Segee</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Holten</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Feathers</em></td>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</em></td>
<td>Pastor Griffin</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maniac Magee</em></td>
<td>Amanda Beale</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Mars Bar” Thompson</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delphine</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>One Crazy Summer</em></td>
<td>Sister Mukumba</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sister Pat</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crazy Kelvin</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yolanda’s Genius</em></td>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characters at Stage 3 COGO**

Thus, the remaining 52% of the African American characters exhibited positive attitudes towards intergroup interactions with people from different ethnic groups. These
characters were able to interact with people from other races often, and through their conversation, appeared to enjoy talking with all people. Elijah and his parents Sarah and Spencer, from *Elijah of Buxton*, were excellent examples of characters that were at Stage 3 in the COGO measure. In this historical fiction story, all three of these African American characters interacted with people from other ethnicities in a relaxed, respectful manner. Elijah, the first free born African American in this Canadian settlement, actually went to an ethnically diverse school. His parents were heavily involved in the community of Buxton, and were willing to help all of their neighbors (Curtis, 2007).

All three of the African American characters in *Holes* also were exemplars of the Stage 3 level. X-ray, Armpit, and Zero were all youth who were placed in a juvenile delinquent camp with the main character, Stanley. In this realistic fiction novel, the issue of race was not evident. All of the boys worked at digging holes all day, and tried to rest at night (Sachar, 1998). All three characters had a nonchalant attitude about interacting with other ethnic groups.

In *Bud, Not Buddy* there was four African American characters that interacted on a regular basis with a Caucasian man in their band, Herman E. Calloway and the Dusty Devastators. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were also in constant relations with other races when they provided medical aid during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 as told by Jim Murphy in *An American Plague: A True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1796*. See Table 4.8 for a complete listing of the African American characters that rate in Stage 3 in the COGO measure.
Table 4.8

Characters at Stage 3 COGO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Character’s Name</th>
<th>COGO Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An American Plague: A True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1796</td>
<td>Absalom Jones</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Allen</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bud Calloway</td>
<td>Bud Calloway</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herman E. Calloway</td>
<td>Herman E. Calloway</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Wesley</td>
<td>Jimmy Wesley</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chug “Doo Doo” Cross</td>
<td>Chug “Doo Doo” Cross</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steady Eddie Patrick</td>
<td>Steady Eddie Patrick</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Grace Thomas</td>
<td>Miss Grace Thomas</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah of Buxton</td>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preacher</td>
<td>Preacher</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feathers</td>
<td>Mrs. Johnson</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray ray</td>
<td>Ray ray</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maribel Tanks</td>
<td>Maribel Tanks</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holes</td>
<td>X-ray</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampit</td>
<td>Ampit</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Was There</td>
<td>Flo</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor Al Hall</td>
<td>Pastor Al Hall</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy</td>
<td>Lizzie Bright</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maniac Magee</td>
<td>Mrs. Beale</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Beale</td>
<td>Mr. Beale</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Voice That Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights</td>
<td>Marian Anderson</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Does a Character’s Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes Relate to the Character’s Ethnic Identity Development?

The above discussion raises an interesting question. How does a character's intergroup interactions and attitude relate to the character's ethnic identity development? After comparing the stages of ethnic identity to the stages of intergroup interactions and attitudes, data shows notable information. Beginning with the fourteen African American characters that were at Stage 1 of the Character’s Other-group orientation, 71% of the characters were measured at Stage 2 of ethnic identity. The remaining 29% were at the Stage 3 ethnic identity level.

At Stage 2 of the COGO measure, there were 13 African American characters evaluated. One character or 8% of the characters is at Stage 1 level of ethnic identity and 31% of the characters rank at Stage 2 ethnic identities. A majority of the characters, 62%, who are at this COGO Stage 2 were also identified as being at Stage 3 of ethnic identity.

Lastly, at Stage 3 of the COGO measure, the remaining 16 African American characters were evaluated. Forty-four percent of the characters were at Stage 2 of ethnic identity. The remaining 56% were identified as being at Stage 3 of ethnic identity. See Table 4.9 for a list of each of the characters at ethnic identity Stages 2 and 3, compared to their intergroup attitude toward intergroup interactions. This analysis shows that the characters that had positive attitudes towards intergroup interactions were also comfortable with themselves and their ethnic identity.
Table 4.9
Comparison of Character Ethnic Identity Stage and Intergroup Attitude Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Date</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Ethnic Identity Stage</th>
<th>Intergroup Attitude Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td><strong>One Crazy Summer</strong></td>
<td>Delphine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cecile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister Mukumbo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister Pat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crazy Kelvin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td><strong>Elijah of Buxton</strong></td>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Holten</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Chloe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reverend</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Leroy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td><strong>Feathers</strong></td>
<td>Frannie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maribel Tanks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rayray</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td><strong>Lizzie Bright and Buckminster Boy</strong></td>
<td>Pastor Griffin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lizzie Griffin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td><strong>Hope Was Here</strong></td>
<td>Pastor Al B. Hall</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>Bud, Not Buddy</strong></td>
<td>Miss Grace Thomas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Steady Eddie Patrick</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chug “Doo Doo Bug” Cross</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jimmy Wesley</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Herman E. Calloway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Lefty Lewis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bud</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Amos</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Date</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Ethnic Identity Stage</th>
<th>Intergroup Attitude Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Yolanda’s Genius</td>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Momma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aunt Tiny</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Maniac Magee</td>
<td>“Mars Bar” Thompson</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amanda Beale</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Beale</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Beale</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Findings**

In summary, the findings presented were shown in response to the two main research questions of this study. They were organized into the following three groups: ethnic identity, intergroup interactions and attitudes, and the effects of ethnic identity on intergroup interactions and attitudes.

**Ethnic Identity**

First, measuring the ethnic identity of each African American character in these award winning books provided necessary information about the adolescents and adults characterized. Alsup (2010) points out that when our youth are exposed to characters much like themselves, it... might encourage disenfranchised teen readers to enter narrative worlds when much anachronistic, classical literature leaves them feeling disconnected from school reading...[reading literature] can precipitate important identity work on the part of teen readers; working through the complex cognitive-emotional process of character identification, for example, can help young readers understand their own experiences more clearly and critically. (p. 13)
By knowing how African American characters rank on this scale is meaningful to parents, educators, and students who were looking for characters modeling various levels of ethnic identity.

The CEIM instrument used to determine the stages of ethnic identity helped to categorize all of the African American characters in these Newbery award winning books. A large percentage of the characters exhibited Stage 2 ethnic identities. These characters indicated that they understood that they were African American. They also knew that they were being judged or evaluated because of their ethnicity. In addition, 38% of characters were at Stage 3 ethnic identities. These authentic characters, served as examples of people with strong ethnic identity.

Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes

Only 14 out of the 18 award winning books actually included story events in which the African American characters interacted with people from other ethnicities. One element to take note of besides frequencies of the interpersonal interactions is the context of the story. Several historical fiction, informational books, and biographies were included in this list of 14 books. Because each of these was told in context, particularly when describing the past, African Americans did not have many occasions to interact with people from diverse populations. A majority of the positive interactions occurred in realistic fiction titles, where the author was able to describe the setting as it matched our contemporary, diverse world.

Positive intergroup interactions and attitudes were also found in books that exposed characters that did not follow the status quo and made friends regardless of
ethnicity. One example of this is with Lizzie Bright in Schmidt’s (2004) *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*. The researcher actually considered this book unbelievable due to the fact that Lizzie initiated the conversation with the young Turner Buckminster at a time when everyone from Malaga Island was frowned upon.

In addition to the intergroup interactions described in this chapter, the attitudes of each character were also measured using the Character’s Other-group Orientation measure.

Effects of Ethnic Identity on Intergroup Interactions and Attitudes

After comparing the Character Ethnic Identity Measure (CEIM) scores with the Character Other-group Orientation (COGO) scores, it was determined that all of the African American characters that actually interacted with characters of other ethnic groups were a stage 2 or stage 3 of their ethnic identities. Those characters that were at stage 1 ethnic identity either did not have an opportunity to interact with people from other races, or they avoided interaction.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in light of the major themes that emerged from the data analysis and describes the implications for teachers, writers, publishers, Newbery committee members and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides the discussion of findings from the content analysis used to evaluate 18 Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award-winning books between the years of 1991 and 2011. These books all had at least one African American character which was the age of 10 or older. Once all of the African American characters were identified, the following research questions were answered.

1. To what extent are the African American characters in each award winning book represented?
   a. What is the frequency of African American characters?
   b. How are the African American characters’ ethnic identities developed?

2. How are the African American characters’ intergroup attitudes and interactions represented?
   a. What is the frequency of intergroup interactions with African American characters?
   b. What attitudes are in place or are developed within the context of the book?
   c. How do the intergroup interactions and attitudes relate to the characters’ ethnic identity development?

Data on ethnic identity and the characters’ intergroup interactions and attitudes were collected using frequency counts and two instruments: the Character Ethnic Identity Measure (CEIM), and the Character Other-group Orientation (COGO) measure. After the data was analyzed in light of the research questions, two key themes became
evident in response to this inquiry: the characterization of ethnic identity as a reflection of society and African American characters as models of agency.

Discussion of Research Questions

Characterization of Ethnic Identity as Reflections of Society

The first theme that surfaced in this study is that African American characters within the Newbery award-winning books are reflections of society at the time they were created. Analysis of the frequencies indicated that most of the African American characters were at stage 2 ethnic identity. Cross (1995) and Phinney (1992) described Stage 2 as the point where African Americans realize that have been treated unjustly, on at least one occasion, and they have come to the realization that it is due to their race and ethnicity. Stage 2 is essentially the stage of exploration, where African Americans begin to immerse themselves in history, race, and culture. History shows that the children’s and adolescent literature written over the years bring forth the ideologies and values of the dominant society. The books during this twenty year span indicated that African American characters at Stage 2 in their ethnic identity were aware of their race and ethnicity and cognizant of the images that are upheld in the mainstream culture.

This awareness was present in the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award-winning books. For example, in Christopher Paul Curtis’ (1996) The Watson’s Go To Birmingham, 1963 the main character Kenny fell into a depression after being a witness to the notorious bombing of the church in Birmingham, 1963. Though this was a fictional account, this eleven year old boy was very upset that he could not do anything to help
the four girls that were killed. Kenny’s older brother Byron explained to him that though unfortunate, this bombing was an incident reflective of society, and nothing could be done about it. Another occurrence happened in Jacqueline Woodson’s (2009) *After Tupac & D Foster*. Neeka, one of the main characters, had a brother named Tash in jail. Neeka’s parents knew that their son was innocent, and in this book, they work to find resources and money to pay for a lawyer to help with Tash’s case. They refused to accept the ill fate that was placed on Tash though the reality of the situation insisted on it. Each of the characters that were affected by various racial incidents used their awareness and strength to overcome the challenges that they met.

Because there were fewer people in society that exhibited confidence about their African American ethnicity, it was understandable why fewer characters were at stage 3 ethnic identity in the texts. Those African Americans who are at stage 3 had a very secure feeling about their identities, being both Black and fitting into the mainstream American culture. Besides the fact that most minorities struggle with developing their identities, it is an even larger issue for adolescents. It is not until adolescent age (i.e. 11-20) that this conflict was even considered in their lives. Newbery books are awarded to authors who feature adolescent age characters, so the characterization of a teen that has stage 3 ethnic identity is not necessarily a realistic situation.

Much like the frequency of characters at each stage of ethnic identity was reflective of society, so were the number of interactions African American characters had with characters of other ethnicities. At first glance, it was apparent that there were fewer books that included these diverse interactions. However, in the books that do include intergroup interactions, they were reflective of contemporary society as well.
Hochschild (2007) noted that the intergroup interactions among American racial and ethnic groups were growing stronger than they were in the past. Interestingly enough, Hochschild reported a Gallop poll done in 2004 that stated,

> Almost three-quarters of Americans agreed that relations between whites and blacks, and between white and Hispanics, are “very” or “somewhat” good. They judged white-Asian relations to be a little better and black-Hispanic relations to be a little worse—but at least sixty percent of each racial or ethnic group thought all pairs of interactions were good. (p. 2)

These facts show that intergroup relations in the United States are very complex. Some say that this is evidence of positive intergroup relations. Others say that they are still weak and hostile. Hochschild noted that when people have strong racial and ethnic identities, they are motivated by more than hope of economic growth. Guinier and Torres state “racialized identities may be put to service to achieve social change through democratic renewal” by “build[ing] a progressive democratic movement led by people of color but joined by others” (as cited in Hochschild, 2007).

The Newbery award winning authors in this study provided evidence of this thought in their stories. Keeping in mind that this study focused on characters in books, there were positive interactions in the stories. They were initiated by African American characters that were at stage 2 or stage 3 ethnic identities. The characters in the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award winning books do show that there is a positive relationship between ethnic identity and intergroup relations as well as an overall positive attitude toward intergroup relations. This is similar to what is reflected in our society.
African American Characters as Models of Agency

The second theme that emerged was agency. Agency was evident within several of the characters in these Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award winning books. Moje and Lewis (2007) explained that “agency might be thought of as the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories, as embedded within the relations of power” (p. 18). When a character establishes their ethnic identity, they are able to showcase knowledge of their race when necessary, in a confident way. Hence, characters within stage 3 ethnic identity are prominent models of agency based on their African American race.

Often, the actions appear as characteristics of empowerment, and self-assuredness. Claudette Colvin, the main character in *Claudette Colvin: Twice toward Justice* has agency. Despite the unjust segregation laws during this setting, Claudette refused to move from her seat on the public bus. She screamed “It’s my constitutional right to sit here as much as that lady. I paid my fare, it’s my constitutional right” (Hoose, 2009, p. 34). Her strong ethnic identity was the precursor to the agency demonstrated in this intense interaction.

Though *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* is a biography based on this inspirational teen’s actual life, there are also fictional characters in the Newbery award-winning books that reveal agency. Similar to Claudette Colvin, the characters who demonstrated agency also were at stage 3 ethnic identity. Neeka from *After Tupac & D Foster* was an excellent example. Neeka was one of seven children in her family, and at one point in the story, she confides that she wanted to do something important in her life that will make her stand out from others. As previously noted, Neeka explained how she
envisions her future “I want people to see me,” Neeka said. “And I know I’m somebody” (Woodson, 2008, p. 91).

Agency was also a factor with the intergroup interactions and attitudes. Characters that were at stage 3 of the Character Ethnic Identity (CEIM) instrument also had positive interactions with characters from other ethnicities. For example, eleven-year old Delphine in One Crazy Summer, though initially resistant, evolved into a character that was comfortable with people of all ethnicities that she encountered. Interestingly enough, she even admitted to having a romantic interest in a biracial teen who was African American and Japanese American.

Several authors (Curtis, 1999, 2007; Fenner, 1995; Spinelli, 1999) creatively include the innocence of children and youth as being a characteristic of the initiation of interactions between characters of different ethnic groups, much like Lizzie Bright in Lizzie Bright the Buckminster Boy (Schmidt, 2004). Though the story was set in 1912, Lizzie, an eleven year old African American girl, immediately began talking to Turner, a European American boy, when she realized that he was hurt. Her identity and agency were the stimulus for her interactions with diverse characters. In the text, there was no point where she stopped to think and decide as to whether she should approach him. She naturally took action.

Further Discussion

Evolution of Cultural Authenticity

Other themes became evident as I carried out my inquiry and each of these points to significant considerations of the role of literature for contemporary readers.
After data had been examined using Short’s cultural authenticity measure, one theme that emerged was the evolution of African American characters that reflect cultural authenticity and accuracy over the twenty years. It was noted that the characters in the award-winning books written during the 1990’s (1991-1999) were not as cognizant of their race, outside stereotypical notions, as the characters developed during the 2000’s (2000-2011). For example, in Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli, the African American character “Mars Bar” Thompson was arrogant, aggressive, and belittling to the main character, Jeffrey. This bully also was only found on the neighborhood streets on the East End, rather than on a school campus. Mars Bar also believed that he was a better athlete than Jeffrey, due to his ethnicity and would challenge him to a race. As the story develops, Mars Bar and Jeffrey develop a connection through their competitions.

Other African American characters from the nineties resemble stereotypical notions including Yolanda in Yolanda’s Genius (1996) and X-Ray, Armpit, and Zero in Holes (1999). Yolanda was an overweight, aggressive, and loud black adolescent. She was very similar to the African American teens described in Fordham’s (1993) study "Those Loud Black Girls": (Black) Women, Silence, and Gender "Passing" in the Academy. Fordham’s analysis shows that some Black women speak loudly as a way of being different than the stereotypical European-American girl, who is seen as quiet and agreeable. It is described as a way to show power over White girls (Fordham, 1993). Although Fordham’s study focused on actual women, the image has evolved into a stereotype in some venues such as media.

The three Black characters in Holes did not show evidence of an ethnic identity. All three characters are ranked at stage 1 ethnic identity, which indicates that these
teens do not consider their self-image. This is another type of character typical of the nineties. Since the mid-1970's, all people in America were expected to assimilate and act like the dominant culture. It was called the “melting pot,” and many teachers would proclaim that they treat every student the same and disregard the different ethnicities in their classrooms (Leach, 2011). The representation in the book would lead the reader to believe Louis Sachar wrote the book *Holes* with this same ideology of the “melting pot.”

As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, writers began to challenge the ideas of the “melting pot” and transformed their thinking into the “salad bowl” ideology, a term used to explain how each ethnic culture maintained their identity and still played an important role in society (Leach, 2011).

By 2000, the African American characters in the Newbery Award-winning books were more knowledgeable and realistic. The simplicity of the “salad bowl” ideology was being replaced by a more complex view of culture and sociocultural issues. In several instances, authors highlighted diversity in authentic ways. For example, in *After Tupac & D Foster*, Woodson used this book as a stage to show a variety of African American characters. The title alone indicates understanding of hip hop music which is based in African American culture. Tupac was a hip hop star who was tragically killed at the height of his stardom in 1996. Woodson wrote this text with the understanding that her readers had background knowledge of this rapper, and if not, they should take time find out exactly who he was because of his contributions to society. Understanding that not all African Americans are the same, Woodson characterized several different characters that have strong identities regardless of the way they approached their lives. Within this book, Woodson approached the controversial issues of single parent families, biracial
characters, gay and lesbian characters, as well as African American characters who were in jail. Though each of these characters had their own individual challenges, they were all found to be at stage 2 or stage 3 ethnic identities meaning that they were aware of their Blackness, and were exploring their culture.

Newbery award-winning authors that were recognized in the 2000’s (2000-2011) were also noted for their incorporation of more positive, realistic interactions of African American characters with people of other ethnic groups. Christopher Paul Curtis is an author that provided several examples of this in two of his books, *Bud, Not Buddy* and *Elijah of Buxton*. Curtis set up each story by making sure the readers understand that the African American characters were in multiethnic groups in many situations, however he does not over emphasize the apparent race of each character. For example, in *Elijah of Buxton* it is established that Elijah is African American, and he lived in a settlement created and maintained by escaped and freed slaves. As a reader who had never heard of this Canadian settlement previously, I assumed that all students in Elijah’s school were also children of other slaves. Curtis (2007) cleverly explained that Buxton, Canada was a mixed community:

Near everybody but me was giggling and clowning and thinking this was something good, but I knowed growned folks weren’t going to call off school ‘less something powerful bad was ‘bout to happen or had happened already. And why was Mrs. Guest sending all the white children and the Indian children home right off like that? (p. 55)

As a researcher, I began to look for other clues that indicated there were intergroup interactions contextually immersed within this text. Not only was the class at the schoolhouse mixed, but there were also intergroup relations in the audience at Carnival of Oddities, a show Elijah secretly attended with Preacher.
Over the twenty years of Newbery award winning books investigated in this study, there has been an evolution of culturally authentic African American characters. During the 1991-1999, there was an inclusion of several African American characters, however they were lacking in depth. In light of the increasing awareness of culture and race in academia, writers are paying more attention to their character’s cultural authenticity and accuracy.

Strong Female Characters

After looking closely at the African American characters in these eighteen books, another theme that became apparent is the presence of strong female characters. Susan Lehr’s (2001) research looks closely at the gender stereotypes in children’s literature. She questions:

How would girls’ and boys’ experiences be different if they had access, not sporadically, but consistently, to a wider variety of books with active female protagonists? Would girls perceive themselves differently if teachers explicitly included female content across the curriculum? Would boys’ attitudes towards females change if females were equitably represented in literature, history, science, and the arts? (p. 16)

Lehr challenges educators to incorporate books with strong, independent women in the classroom. The titles examined in this study provided such examples as suggested by Lehr and revealed strong African American female characters who displayed confidence, leadership abilities, and open-minded approaches to new types of experiences. The study also revealed that the strong female characters initiated interactions with people from other ethnicities. Many of these females also ranked in stage 3 in their attitudes towards interacting with characters that were different than they were, such as Frannie, Delphine, and Lizzie Bright. Frannie in *Feathers* is an excellent
example of a strong female character. Woodson created a female character that was respected by all of her acquaintances and friends. She was also the first student to actually interact with “Jesus Boy” when she saw him at the recreational center. Though Frannie was shy about interacting with this new student at first, she never disregarded the matter. She also began to make personal connections to him, thinking about the time she had not been in school for a long time due to an illness, noting how she felt when she returned and did not know her new classmates.

Young adolescent female characters like Frannie provide an image of a girl who does not match the ongoing stereotypes of the passive, “good girl” that is often depicted in literature (Smith, 2001). Botelho and Rudman (2009) remind scholars that ideals about gender were socially created. So, authors generally portray characters that are reminiscent of the values and social norms of the time the text is written.

Traditional tales are one genre where gender stereotypes are widely apparent. These stories were those that were orally told in villages and communities long ago, and then were put into print, still contain the societal norms that were apparent during the times these stories were originally told. One example that is well known to most readers in the United States is Cinderella, a traditional tale that was originally put in print by the Brothers Grimm and translated in 1884. This story has been popular since that time, and several variants have been discovered. However, it is the main character from Brothers Grimm and several European variants that has remained a popular image: Many of the European-based Cinderella tales teach that a good girl should be meek, obedient, heterosexual, able bodied, White, and grateful. Beauty is defined as being blonde, blue-eyed, petite, and slender. Happiness is found by marrying a rich man. If a
poor orphan is unhappy with her situation, she can wish for a fairy godmother or some
other form of magic to solve her problem. (Bothelho and Rudman, 2009, p. 223)
Lehr (2001) adds to this notion by stating that she found in addition to the idea of the
Cinderella character, most traditional female heroes in children’s traditional fantasy
stories actually give up their sense of agency once they find a husband. Consequently,
it is important to recognize female characters in these Newbery Award winning books
that do not fit stereotypical roles and exert agency and self-assuredness. In keeping
with the traditional tales, The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural offers
further examples of characters that exert agency and self-assuredness. In the tale “Boo
Mama” readers are introduced to Leddy, a knowledgeable woman who was committed
to social justice and was an activist against racism and discrimination. Unfortunately,
Leddy’s husband was killed in the Vietnam War, and she was left alone to care for her
two year old son, Nealy. When Nealy disappeared into the woods, Leddy was
distraught. Amidst these tremendous struggles, Leddy never lost faith, and was
rewarded with finally reuniting with Nealy. Unlike the traditional Cinderella, Leddy
neither married a rich man nor did a fairy grandmother appear. She survived through
the care and support of her friends and family.

Importance of Family

Yet another theme apparent in this study of the African American characters in
the 1991-2011 Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award winning books is the
importance of family. In each of the stories that had adolescents at stage 3 of their
ethnic identity, the author also wrote about their supportive family members who were
generally at the same identity level. Claudette Colvin’s family, Lizzie Bright’s
grandfather, Frannie’s family, the Beale family, Elijah Freeman’s parents, and Yolanda’s
mother were all positive influences on the characters in these books. Family members
were supportive, caring, and understanding. They were also knowledgeable of family
history, and notable African Americans in history. Lizzie Bright’s grandfather, Reverend
Griffin, shared with pride the background behind his house in a conversation with a man
who wanted to demolish their home on Malaga Island. Lizzie stood beside him as he
explained:

My granddaddy built that house there, my daddy built the fence around it,” said
Reverend Griffin. “They worked like dogs tending your grandaddies’ and daddies’
places here in Phillipsburg so they could pay right for every nail. There’s no one
here lives on a piece of land that, father and mother after father and mother, that
doesn’t own it. (Schmidt, 2004, p. 34)

Lizzie was a witness to this conversation, as well as being a constant audience of her
grandfather’s stories about their family. This nurtured her identity and agency.

McNair’s study (2008) indicated that Patricia McKissack places emphasis on
strong families in her books (Brooks, 2008). McKissack’s Newbery Honor winning book,
*The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural*, was not included in McNair’s
study, however, it was another text that provided evidence of this theme. The entire
book was described by Patricia McKissack as a collection of short stories similar to what
her grandmother would tell on summer nights. Strong supportive family members were
identified in “The Legend of Pin Oak,” “The Sight,” “The Conjure Brother,” “Boo Mama,”
“The Gingi,” and “The Chicken-Coop Monster.”

The importance of family was also echoed in the research from Rudine Sims
Bishop (2011). Bishop discussed the observations she has traced over the past two
centuries of African American authors and illustrators. One of the main observations was the strength of Black families and the respect of elders. She continues by identifying several titles that are exemplars of this theme. Bishop (2011) notes:

Although picture books focusing on family relationships are hardly exclusive to African American literature, the numbers of such books written by African Americans across three and a half decades and their proportion within the body of literature, particularly picture books, suggest that the theme carries particular importance among African American writers of children’s books. (p. 231)

Bishop’s observations would be confirmed within this study as well. All of the five African American authors who have Newbery Medal or Newbery Honor award winning books during this twenty year span included supportive families and or respected elders. The supportive families and respected elders encouraged and strengthened the adolescent aged main character within the story lines. See Table 5.1 for a listing of all of the African American authored books with strong, supportive families.

Table 5.1

*Books with Strong, Supportive Families*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>African American Character with Supportive Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rita Williams-Garcia</td>
<td><em>One Crazy Summer</em></td>
<td>Delphine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaqueline Woodson</td>
<td><em>After Tupac &amp; D Foster</em></td>
<td>Me; Neeka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Feathers</em></td>
<td>Frannie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Paul Curtis</td>
<td><em>Elijah of Buxton</em></td>
<td>Elijah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bud, Not Buddy</em></td>
<td>Bud Caldwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Watson’s Go To Birmingham</em></td>
<td>Kenny and Byron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia McKissack</td>
<td><em>The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural</em></td>
<td><em>Several supportive families however none with an adolescent age character.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Dean Myers</td>
<td><em>Somewhere in the Darkness</em></td>
<td>Jimmy Little</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
African American Involvement in History Revealed

Lastly, an important theme that several of the Newbery award-winning books noted during 1991-2011 was the role of African Americans within United States history. It is challenging to find information on the influence African Americans in history, particularly in book stores which the general public frequent. A majority of the books available are about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, or current African American professional athletes. Award winning illustrator Jerry Pinkney recognized the omission of African American history as he sought resources for his work on *Sweethearts of Rhythm* (Nelson, 2009):

Because I was delving into the topic like a researcher in many ways, what I did get caught up in during the process was how little documentation of African-American life I found. It was almost as if there were no African Americans unless you dealt with Jim Crow. So the task for me was to find ways to speak and talk about the time period through the eyes of African Americans. (Mathis, 2009, p. 14)

As an experienced teacher and editor of school materials, I recognize that textbooks include concise, factual information about history. However, they do have their limitations. Teachers have been using literature as a resource to support their textbooks for many years. Literature provides engaging texts for students told in a narrative style. Literature also challenges young readers to consider our global society, and the current issues of the day (Vacca, 2011). Fortunately, several of the Newbery award-winning books are providing children and adolescents with texts that include historical and cultural information that would not be found in most academic texts.

In this study of Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor award winning books between 1991 and 2011, all of the biographies, informational books, and historical fiction narratives provided engaging texts that emphasized the influence of African

*Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* by Gary D. Schmidt (2004) is another narrative that reveals history of African Americans. Schmidt introduces readers to Malaga Island, which was a very poor community of former slaves off the coast of Philipsburg, Maine. Another community of former slaves was revealed in *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis (2007). This community was a settlement called Buxton, and it was in Canada located just over the border of Detroit, Michigan. *Claudette Colvin: Twice toward Justice* by Philip Hoose (2009) is a biography about Claudette Colvin, a teenager that refused to move her seat on a segregated bus. Though most students learn about Rosa Parks and her determination, young readers would be intrigued to find out that a teenager was the first to stand up for her rights. *One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia (2010) is another story that introduced readers to an interesting point in African American history. In this narrative, through contextual immersion, Williams-Garcia brings forth a story about Black Panthers. Though in most books, the Black Panthers are seen as intense radicals for African Americans, Williams-Garcia makes
them seem more purposeful and eager rather than militant. All of these books revealed historical events that brought African American contributions to the forefront.

Implications

Implications for Teaching

As an African American, teacher-educator, parent, and reader, I have found that this inquiry has a significant implication for teaching. Books that are awarded with Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor are well respected for being quality literature for children and adolescents. Between the years of 1991-2011, there are 18 books that also can be considered equally respected for their attention to African American characters. Besides adding further justification for using these well-known books, this study has also shown that they would be valuable resources for adolescents who are absorbed with their ethnic identities. All adolescents deal with determining their identities as they develop and grow. For African American adolescents, it is even more daunting because they are trying to figure out their Black ethnicity and how it best fits in with the American image in contemporary society (Cross, 1995; Dangora, 2010; Phinney, 1992). Youth generally develop their identity in stages. Conversations about the ethnic identity stages would help students understand that gaining identity achievement is a process and literature such as the titles described here can facilitate these discussions.

African American characters in all genres can also be looked upon as adolescent models. Hancock (2008) points out those characters must have situations and settings that are reflective of the time period the story takes place. The characters should also
show emotional growth, and learn about themselves though the book (Hancock, 2008). While all of the characters in these Newbery award-winning books have these qualities, the African American characters specifically focused on in this study also provide a greater understanding of African American images and culture. Knowledge of these various characters would also be aesthetically pleasing to African American adolescents who are dealing with the same issues. Researchers at Ohio State University conducted a study that found when a reader can lose themselves inside a fictional character’s world, he or she may actually change their own behavior and thoughts to those of the character (Newswise, 2011). The researchers labeled this type of response as “experience-taking” and found that though it may be temporary, it could lead to positive behaviors. If African American young adults are able to incorporate this “experience-taking” after they have finished a book with characters that have challenges similar to their own, then that too would be further justification for sharing these books in the classroom.

The Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books that present African American involvement in history to the forefront will also be valuable to the classroom because of their sociocultural ramifications. Siegal and Rowe (2009) reminds us that the theorist Lev Vygotsky equates a text to a tool. He explains that a text works in two ways. It allows individuals to act on the world and it also allows individuals to transform their identity and mental functions. When teachers share these nonfiction texts, they are giving their students tools with the potential to understand the world and help them evolve into a person with strong identity and agency. However this potential may not be realized without classroom conversations.
Students need to be able to identify and discuss identity and agency in relation to the characters in these noteworthy books. Lewis and Del Valle (2009) explain that through literacy practices, such as literature circles, students can “take up identities that position them well within the dominant as well as the youth-oriented discourses” (p.310). In classroom discussions, teachers can ask questions that scaffold awareness of character developments of identity and agency, such as with Neeka from *After Tupac and D Foster*. Neeka says in the text that “she is somebody”. What does that mean? How does she know that? Educators should identify such terms as identity or agency with the students.

This study, which focused on the African American characters in these books, offers an opportunity for students to become critical readers of race. As pointed out earlier, Luke and Freebody (1999) have identified three effective critical literacy practices that students should have the opportunity to engage in. First, students should be able to participate in understanding and creating meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts based on their knowledge and cultural experiences. Next, students need to use texts functionally by transforming the social relations around them, both inside and outside school. Finally, students need to critically analyze and change texts by acting on the knowledge that not all texts are neutral--they show various perspectives and “silence” people and ideas. When youth are able to engage in an open, realistic discussion of race and ethnicity, they are motivated to work toward social justice.

Teacher educators should share information about the importance of identifying identity and agency with their pre-service teachers as well. Noting the award winning texts that are available and classroom practices that would encourage this type of
interaction and discussion is an important step in guiding teachers for future classrooms.

Implications for Writers, Publishers, and Newbery Committee Members

The frequencies of Newbery Medal and Honor books that include African American characters interacting with characters from other ethnicities is an important issue that should be considered. Children in the twenty first century have more opportunities to interact with other people from all over the world than those from previous generations. While many writers are developing complex characters, authors of children’s and adolescent literature might also consider narratives that feature interactions within diverse groups. Such interactions highlight the growing complexity of our contemporary communities, and in light of the potential for a well written book to achieve the immortality of a Newbery medal, these authentic reflections of society can maintain the historical and cultural legacy within Newbery books.

In conjunction, publishers should actively seek manuscripts for publication that share stories inclusive of the complex intergroup interactions in today’s society. As publishers work to authentically reflect the growing diversity within society, they contribute to the progress of positive intergroup interactions carried out by individuals with a strong sense of self and agency. As authors are encouraged to go beyond complex characters to providing representations of the complexity of intergroup interactions, publishers are encouraged to acknowledge excellent examples and work to see that they are published and available for young readers.

Lastly, members of the Newbery Committee should also consider evaluating
cultural authenticity of the books that are submitted for review for the annual Newbery Medal. While I’m sure that the very knowledgeable and qualified Newbery committee members do recognize the importance of cultural authenticity and accuracy, I believe that it will add to the integrity of the award if the Newbery criteria include a statement that recognizes it. Books that are awarded with the Newbery Medal or Newbery Honor have a long lifetime of publication. By including another statement in the criteria, those governing the Newbery Award would be making the declaration that they are committed to embracing our global society.

Implications for Future Research

While this study provides information for teachers, publishers, and the Newbery Committee members on the African American characters within the award-winning books, it is not comprehensive. This study provides evidence that African American characters do have varying levels of ethnic identity, which is also indicative of society. This study also shows that these different levels of identity are seen in children’s and adolescent literature. Nonetheless, it would be helpful to educators to know what type of response African American adolescent readers would have to complex characters within the various levels of identity. Rosenblatt (2004) explains her transactional theory that each reader brings a unique, individual response to all literary works. This response is based on each reader’s background knowledge, the context of literary text, and context or setting of the experience (Hancock, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2004).

It would also be significant to study the ethnic identities of other characters representing various ethnic groups. The Character Ethnic Identity Measure (CEIM) was
adapted for African American characters, however with modification, this instrument
could also be used with diverse groups of characters. The same approach can also be
taken with the Character’s Other-Group Orientation (COGO) measure.

It would also be worthwhile to look at other youth media award winning books,
like the Michael Printz Award. Similar to the Newbery award, Michael Printz awards are
also in the forefront of books chosen by educators, parents, and students. The Michael
Printz Award is granted to exemplars of literary excellence among young adult literature.
Because these young adult books are examples of literary excellence and are
encouraged by educators to be read, they can also be tools that aid in the development
of ethnic identity achievement. Exploring ethnic identity and group interaction within
books such as the Michael Printz Award winners can be significant since these books
are for the targeted group of readers enveloped in identity.

Educators should also not limit their classroom conversations about ethnic
identity and agency to only those characters described in award winning books.
According to Askville by Amazon (Grabois, 2007) 29,248 juvenile titles were published
in 2006 alone. When reading books for the classroom, it is important to look through a
critical lens when evaluating any book with diverse characters. How can the characters
aid young readers in their identity development? Which characters show agency? How
do characters interact and develop relationships with those of other ethnicities?

Conclusion

In conclusion, I can’t help but to consider my multiple identities. I am an African
American, researcher, educator, female, mother, reader and book club member. This study has helped in the development of several of these very important personal identities.

As a teacher-educator, I will prepare my pre service teachers to approach Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books, as well as all literature, with a critical literacy lens. As a researcher, African American, and mother, I cannot ignore the impetus of this study—my sons. This inquiry has shown that African American characters are beneficial to youth in many ways. One, they provide opportunities for my boys to read a story that has a familiar context with cultural connections. Also, there are characters they can relate to, or even recognize from various settings. However, I must reiterate to them that they must also read with a critical eye when approaching books with African American characters, whether they are Newbery Award winning books or not. A critical stance must be nurtured as they develop into lifelong readers of the world.

My passion for reading transformed when I was in the process of obtaining my identity. In my undergraduate years, I was at stage 2 of my ethnic identity, so I was eager to immerse myself into the world of African American culture (Cross, 1995). Understanding the ethnic identity levels, I now know that this is a part of identity formation that they will eventually undergo. Knowing books with African American characters are among Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books reassures me that they will be available in the school and public libraries, and perhaps even in classrooms. However, I will continue to provide exposure and information to my sons. Mainly because I know that the stages of identity will occur for both boys, I will be diligent to laying the groundwork for identity achievement.
APPENDIX

CHILDREN’S AND ADOLESCENT LITERATURE REFERENCES


REFERENCES


Reid, J. (2011). “We don’t Twitter, we Facebook”: An alternative pedagogical space that enables critical practices in relation to writing. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 10*, 58-80.


