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Who's 'Ere?: Identifying and Addressing Rural Erasure in ELA Classrooms

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Author Biography

Chea Parton is a farm-girl and former rural student and English teacher. She is passionate about rural representation in books and classrooms. She currently works with preservice teachers and recently created the Literacy In Place website and Reading Rural YAL Youtube channel to support teachers and teacher educators' inclusion of rural perspectives in their teaching. An NCTE member since 2009, Chea can be reached at chea.parton@gmail.com.

Abstract

This article briefly discusses research on the role of rural out-migrant ELA teachers' place-connected identities on rural erasure through text selection and instructional practice. Based on the research findings, it provides resources such as an equity audit for course syllabi and classroom libraries as well as tools for finding and selecting rural young adult literature to combat rural erasure and support teachers' inclusion of critical rural perspectives in their teaching.

Keywords

rural, young adult literature, text selection, equity

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my teacher participants for sharing their time, stories, and teaching practices with me.

Who's 'Ere?: Identifying and Addressing Rural Erasure in ELA Classrooms

Across the room I see two of my "nonreaders" talking. Assuming they were off task, I head over to correct and redirect them. When I get there, they're not talking about our whole class text, *The Awakening*, as they should be. Instead, they're reminiscing about books that they read when they were in upper elementary school.

"Miss P, you ever read *Where the Red Fern Grows*?"

"Yeah, but it was a long time ago."

"Man, that was a good book. I cried when I read it. Made me think of my own hunting dogs. [slight pause] I wish we could read books like that now."

Their comment about what they wanted to be able to read fell on deaf ears as I clung to the "Literature" we were already reading. Rather than listen to their reading interests and desire to read books that reflected their own rural lives, I instructed them to get back to the task at hand and discuss chapters of *The Awakening* that I was sure neither one of them had read.

Fast forward five years to my dissertation work. I was sitting in the classroom of a fellow rural out-migrant as we discussed place-connected personal and professional identity development and its impact on our teaching and learning. Looking around the room at Riley's (all names are pseudonyms) extensive classroom library, I thought, for the first time to ask, "What rural young adult (YA) titles do you have in your classroom library?" Her eyes grew wide as she fumbled to think of even a single rural title in her classroom library, which served rural students. This would've been my exact same response. But why? We were rural people? Why didn't we have stories representing our own lives and the lives of our students in our classrooms?

Statement of Purpose

As Thomas and Fulkerson (2019) discuss, society writ large is urban-normative. Likewise, the Whippoorwill Committee (2020) outlines how educational scholarship, especially that focused on YAL privileges sub/urban spaces even though one-fourth of US public schools are rural and one-fifth of all K-12 students attend rural schools (Showalter et al., 2017). Over 9 million students attend rural schools, which is more than the population of the nation's 85 largest school districts combined. Likewise, although rural areas are diverse, dominant narratives depict rural America as a white conservative monolith – "Rednecks. Inbred hicks. Toothless hillbillies. Racists and homophobes clinging to guns and Bibles" (Kruger, 2020).

One way to disrupt and dismantle this dominant narrative is by including diverse depictions of contemporary rural living in our literature instruction. Thanks to the foundational work of Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), we know that students need mirrors of their experiences in their interactions with literature. And while there's a growing focus on representation for historically excluded populations in in YA literature, rurality has not yet been a focus of that movement. As Riley and my experiences demonstrate, rural stories are not often present in classrooms – even those classrooms where rural students are learners.

This article responds to findings from a larger study examining rural out-migrated teachers' personal and professional identity development and teaching practice to consider how we can identify inequity related to rural students in our classrooms. It will also provide resources for addressing that inequity through our literature instruction.

The Study in Brief

Scholarly Foundations

This study draws on Doreen Massey's (1994; 2005) theories of humanistic geography, Holland et al.'s (1998) work surrounding identity construction through figured worlds, and Louise

Rosenblatt's (1994) foundational work around transactional theories of reading in its understanding of the connections between place, identity, and reading. As Sara Webb-Sunderhaus (2016) illustrates through her work with rural Appalachian community college students, place harbors and is inextricably tied to multiple facets of identity and identity shapes the way we engage with how we understand what we read and write, so it is essential that teachers and teacher educators consider how teachers' decisions surrounding text selection include and/or erase certain identities. Much important work has been done about the omission and erasure of literature that reflects the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (see Brooks & Cueto, 2018; Kirkland, 2011; Sciurba, 2014 for work on this topic); however, scholarship about the inclusion/erasure of rural stories is much harder to come by.

In *Teaching English in Rural Communities*, a much-needed new publication, Petrone and Wynhoff Olsen (2021), demonstrate how teachers' identities and dominant narratives surrounding rural people and communities influence teachers' English curriculum and instructional practices. In another recent piece, Eppley (2019) describes how reading texts is shaped by a reader's (non)rural identity. Highlighting her own reading process as a rural-connected reader, Eppley demonstrates how reading shapes identity formation as well as how sociocultural aspects of the world are shaped by literature - that her reading of a rural text happens through her identity as well as makes her rural identity visible through her reading.

Study Design

This article discusses practices that were developed in response to the findings discovered as part of a larger study that examined how rural out-migrant teachers re-storied their (non)rural personal and professional identities and the ways those identities influenced their instruction. I briefly describe the study and those findings here so readers can see how the practices are

anchored by the research. For the study, I collected audio-recorded interviews and artifacts of teachers' connections to place and their teaching practices and then analyzed them for major themes.

The teacher participants in the study came from various rural regions of the U.S., hailing from Alabama, South Carolina, west Texas, central Texas, and represented experiences of varied intersectional identities. All of them had deep connections to rural areas, out-migrated for university, and were teaching in large sub/urban school districts in central Texas.

My Positionality

Within this study, I situated myself as a participant observer. I identify as a white heteronormative, cisgender woman with hillbilly roots who was both a rural student and teacher. In several of these identities (e.g., white, heteronormative, cisgender, researcher), I occupy spaces of power and privilege. Additionally, because I grew up in a rural place, and identify as rural, working with other out-migrants, I occupied an insider status. However, not all rural areas are the same. There are many aspects of my Appalachian-infused Hoosier rurality that made me an outsider to teachers' rural experiences.

Findings

The teachers in this study discussed how their connections to and movements across rural and sub/urban spaces played a role in shaping their personal and professional identities as well as their own reading lives. They acknowledged that instruction would be dependent upon and need to change according to place but found it challenging to articulate just how. All the teachers taught in districts that had adopted reading workshop pedagogy and/or allowed teachers freedom in their text selection and classroom libraries. So, the role of their identities in the selections they made is a salient factor in their decision-making.

Rural Culture and Pedagogy

Though all the teachers in this study had significant connections to rural places and considered their identities to be rural or rural-influenced in some way, many of them struggled to see the rurality in their identity as cultural. One participant explained, "I always joked. Like, 'Ah, I don't have a culture. I'm white from a small town.' [laughs] 'What kinda culture is that?' You know? Anything outside of that felt like culture." While all the teachers understood culture as being integral and important to include in their classrooms and instruction, not yet viewing rurality as culture meant that they would not have considered it in their efforts to teach in culturally sustaining ways. The teachers didn't understand themselves as part of a historically marginalized population (i.e., rural folks) and thus didn't feel the need to make sure rural stories and voices were represented in their teaching even though their schools still served rural families.

Despite the challenge to see rurality as culture, the teachers did embrace the idea that teaching should look different across different places. However, they found it difficult to articulate what specifically about instruction would need to look different. One participant shared: "Do teachers in diff'rent places need to employ diff'rent techniques? So, my initial response is yes. Like, the communities are diff'rent and the expectations are diff'rent. But I don' really know, like, I couldn't pinpoint what that is." Reflecting on her own movements across rural and sub/urban places and school districts, this teacher remembered feeling the need to be and teach differently in each of those spaces, but still couldn't articulate exactly what she needed to change and why. Even though teachers found it difficult to describe *how* instruction would need to differ, throughout our discussions the teachers described ways that their place-connected identities shaped their instructional practices. One significant way their identities influenced their instruction was through text selection.

Teacher Identity and Rural Text Selection

Recent movements such as #WeNeedDiverseBooks demonstrate the importance of diverse text selection in ELA instruction. However, compared to the number of curated and widely available lists of popular and new YA books, there are virtually no curated lists of contemporary rural YA titles (see Azano, 2014; Parton & Godfrey, 2019; Petrone & Behrens, 2017 for a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon). Even if teachers could find contemporary rural titles, their place-connected identities – rural or otherwise – they might (1) be influenced by the deficit dominant narratives or rural people and stories, or (2) believe that rural stories would reify those problematic stereotypes. For example, the teachers in this study practiced reading workshop and had extensive classroom libraries. They often discussed their desire to build collections that contained mirrors and windows for every student in their classrooms; however, they all had very few to no rural YA titles in those libraries.

The teachers all struggled to name any contemporary rural texts that existed in their classroom libraries or reading instruction. Drawing on the work of Mara Tieken (2014), rather than give them a definition of "rural text," I left space for the teachers to identify texts that fit that description according to their own definitions of rural – to let the rural define itself. It seemed from the few titles they did identify (e.g., *Sounder* and *The Beef Princess of Practical County*) that they defined rural as the not-urban and connected it to nature. They also struggled to name rural texts that were published recently despite being able to name several contemporary urban texts right away. Despite teaching in classrooms with rural students, their classroom libraries offered very few mirrors (Bishop, 1990) for those students.

Combatting Rural Erasure

Through the study, teachers' experiences with text selection revealed a need to combat rural erasure in classrooms for both in-service and preservice teachers. Though they understood the need for instruction to be responsive to place and had lots of identity affirming YAL for various intersectional urban identities, the same wasn't true for diverse rural identities. While I understand that their experiences are likely not the case for all teachers, I imagine that they do reflect a large majority of rural, rural out-migrant, suburban, and urban teachers alike. The following sections provide some suggestions for ways that teachers and teacher educators could work to address this rural erasure in their classrooms.

Rural YAL Equity Audit & Reflection

It is common in urban teacher preparation programs to invite preservice teachers to do an equity audit of the schools in which they will be completing a practicum or their student teaching. In these audits, students walk their placement schools and communities, making observations of both that relate to equity. For example, in Groenke's (2010) audit, students take note of the number of students of color in gifted programs versus regular track and special education programs, the number of women in administrative positions, and who receives the most disciplinary citations (disaggregated by gender, race, class) to consider the effects of systemic oppression in school spaces.

For the rural YAL equity audit, teachers would examine their syllabi and classroom library with an eye toward how and where rural stories do(n't) appear in their instruction. Regardless of whether or not teachers are working in rural spaces, rural stories deserve to be told and heard across geographical locations – as Bishop (1990) reminds us, we need windows and mirrors to have the most informed understanding of the multiplicity in the world and our place in it. Looking at their text selection and instruction teachers should ask:

- What rural stories are present?
- Whose experiences do they reflect?
- Whose rural identities are missing?
- How are the identities present in the rural stories I teach depicted? Are they simple or complex and nuanced? Are they more than just the butt of a redneck joke?
- Where/How can I make more space to include rural perspectives in my instruction in ways that disrupt and dismantle stereotypes and dominant narratives of rural people and communities?

After identifying who's there and who's not in their instruction, it is important for teachers to reflect upon why that is.

As the experiences of the teacher participants in my study demonstrate, who we are as people is deeply connected to the instructional choices and text selections teachers make. While auditing instruction to include more rural perspectives in it is important, it's not enough. Determining why rural perspectives were missing in the first place is necessary to ensure that when teachers are including rural perspectives in their teaching, they're doing so in a way that honors the experiences of rural people rather than reifying the dominant narrative that already exists. In their reflections, teachers should consider:

- Where am I from, and how has that shaped what I believe about rural people and places?
- How have dominant narratives and stereotypical depictions of rural people influenced my beliefs about them?
- How might these dominant deficit ideas infiltrate my teaching, and how can I be aware of them as I teach?

Before teachers can combat rural erasure, they must first understand rural perspectives as having been erased. These two parts of a rural equity audit can help them see the gaps in their instruction surrounding rural experiences and perspectives, allowing them to be more intentional about finding spaces for those perspectives to live in their teaching.

Finding & Reading Rural Stories

In working with the teacher participants in this study, I realized just how difficult it was to locate rural young adult and middle grades titles. Running a Google search of "urban YA fiction" will return a number of curated lists from various sources of the newest and most popular urban YA books. However, when I searched for "rural YA fiction," only four book suggestions popped up and two of them were *The Serpent King* by Jeff Zentner. Understanding that teachers have very little time to seek out things that are hard to find let alone to come up with accompanying instructional activities, I designed a website and YouTube series to support them in that work.

Literacy In Place (https://literacyinplace.com) is founded on three major principles:

1. Rural stories are worth reading and worthy of study.
2. Rural stories are worth telling.
3. Rural cultures are worth sustaining.

It features a number of resources that can help teachers and teacher educators locate and include rural YAL from an array of intersectional rural identities. There is an ever-growing book list, that is organized by major identity markers and tagged by state and major themes addressed in the book. (See Figures 1-8 below for brief examples of those lists)

Nonfiction

Tom Brokaw A Long Way From Home	#South Dakota #Ranching #Memoir #Journalism
Carl Hamilton In No Time At All	#Iowa #Autobiography #Historical
Linda Hasselstrom Going Over East: Reflections of a Woman Rancher	#South Dakota #Ranching #Essays
James Hearst Time Like a Furrow	#Farming #Essays #History
Gary Kelley Moon of the Snowblind	#Iowa #Indigenous #History
Haven Kimmel A Girl Named Zippy	#Indiana #Memoir

Figure 1: Nonfiction

(Dis)Ability in Rural YA	
Christina Henry The Girl in Red	#A Small Town #Retelling #Postapocalyptic #Pandemic #Amputee
Courtney Summers Sadie	#Colorado #Class #Sexual Abuse #Stutter

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Adult Fiction

Louise Erdrich Love Medicine The Beet Queen Tracks The Bingo Palace	#North Dakota #Series #Indigenous #Family

Figure 2: (Dis)Ability and Adult Fiction

Muslim American Experiences.	
Tahereh Mafi A Very Large Expanse of Sea	#A Small Town #9/11 #Islamaphobia

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Queer Rural Experiences	
Becky Albertalli Simon Vs. The Homo sapiens Agenda	#Georgia #Blackmail #Love Story
Jaye Robin Brown The Key to You and Me	#North Carolina #Horseback Riding #Love Story
Emily Danforth The Miseducation of Cameron Post	#Montana #Gay Conversion #Religion #Parent Loss

Figure 3: Muslim American and Queer YA Fiction

Latinx Rural Experiences	
David Bowles They Call Me Guero*	#Texas #Queer
Tehlor Kay Mejia & Anna-Marie McLemore Miss Meteor	#Oregon #Queer #Magical Realism #Beauty Pageant
Laura Taylor Namey A Cuban Girl's Guide to Tea and Tomorrow	#England #Relocation #Food

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Asian American Rural Experiences	
Linda Sue Park Prairie Lotus	#Dakota Territory #Historical Fiction #Middle Grades

Figure 4: Latinx and Asian American YA Fiction

Black Rural Experiences	
Kacen Callender Hurricane Child*	#US Virgin Islands #Queer #Speculative #Middle Grades
King and the Dragonflies	#Louisiana #Loss #Queer #Abuse
Tami Charles Muted	#New York #Music #Class #Abuse #Queer
Leah Johnson You Should See Me in a Crown	#Midwest #Queer #Class #Prom

Figure 5: Black YA Fiction

Native/Indigenous Rural Experiences	
Sharon Creech Walk Two Moons Chasing Redbird	#Ohio #Loss #Storytelling #Relationships #Kentucky #Family #Loss
Eric Gansworth Give Me Some Truth* Apple: Skin to the Core If I Ever Get Out of Here	#New York #Music #Love Story #New York #Memoir #Poetry #New York #Music #Friendship

Figure 6: Native and Indigenous YA Fiction

Middle Grades Fiction	
Ann Braden The Benefits of Being an Octopus	#Vermont #Class #Gun Debate
Peggy Brooke Jake's Orphan	#North Dakota #Farming #Historical Fiction
Leslie Connor The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle	#Apple Orchard #Loss #Learning Disability
Jean Craighead George My Side of the Mountain On the Far Side of the Mountain Frightful's Mountain	#New York #Wilderness Survival #Running Away #Sequel #Siblings #Animal Conservation #Human/Animal Relationships
Kate DiCamillo Because of Winn Dixie	#Florida #Series

Figure 7: Middle Grades Fiction

YA Fiction

*Indicate Whippoorwill Award Winners	
Christopher Barzak The Gone Away Place*	#Midwest #Natural Disaster #Ghosts
Joan Bauer Hope Was Here	#Wisconsin #Food #Cancer
Nina Berkhout The Mosaic	#Montana #Mental Health #Veterans
Amy Jo Burns Shiner	#West Virginia #Mining #Loss
Jimmy Cajoleas The Good Demon*	#American South #Speculative #Religion #Drug Addiction #Loss

Figure 8: General YA Fiction

For teacher educators, there is a downloadable bibliography of suggested reading about critical theories and instructional practices that attend to place and rurality as well as potential activities instructors could use in their courses. (See Figures 9 -10 for examples.)

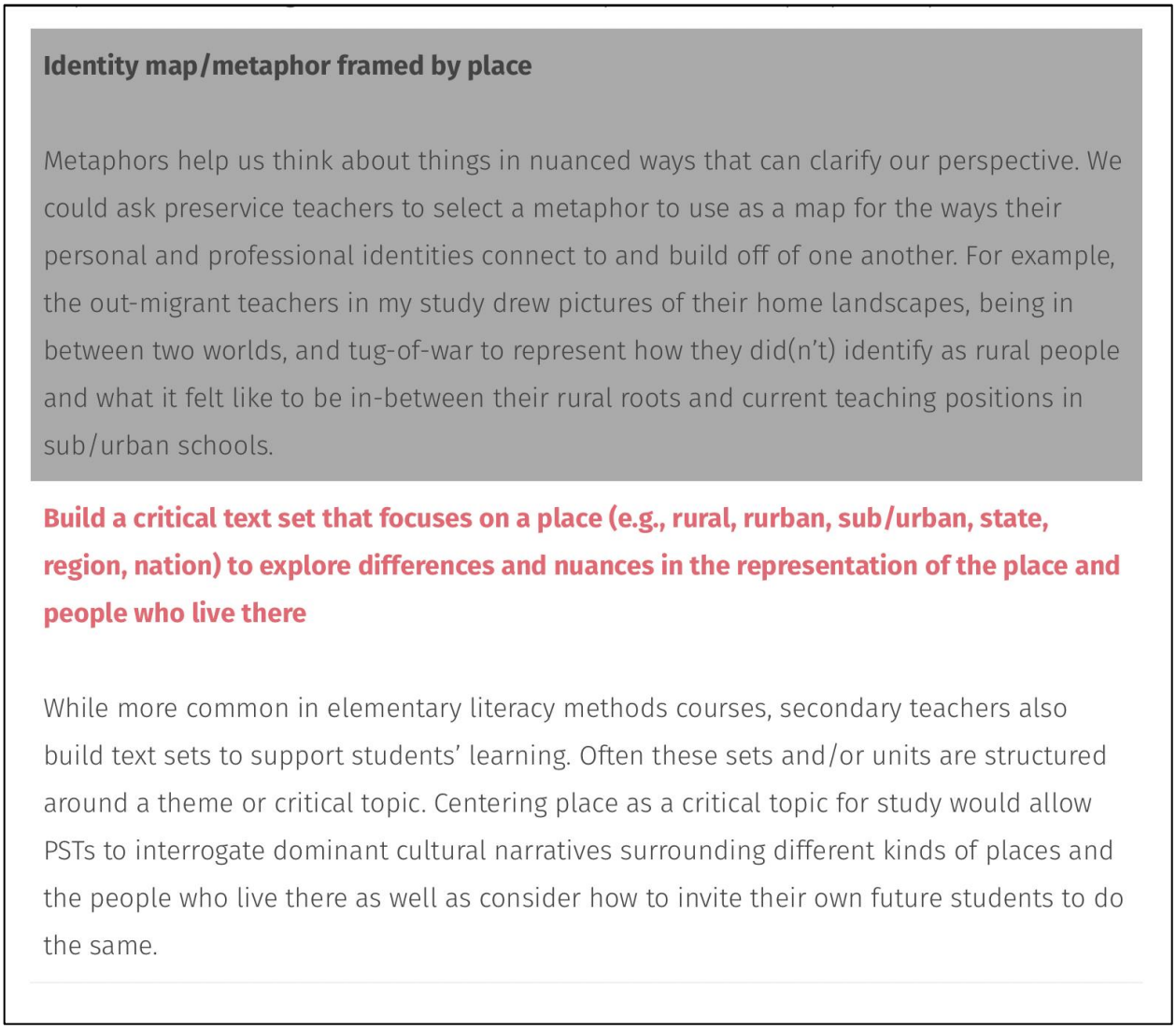

Figure 9: Identity Map and Text Set Activities

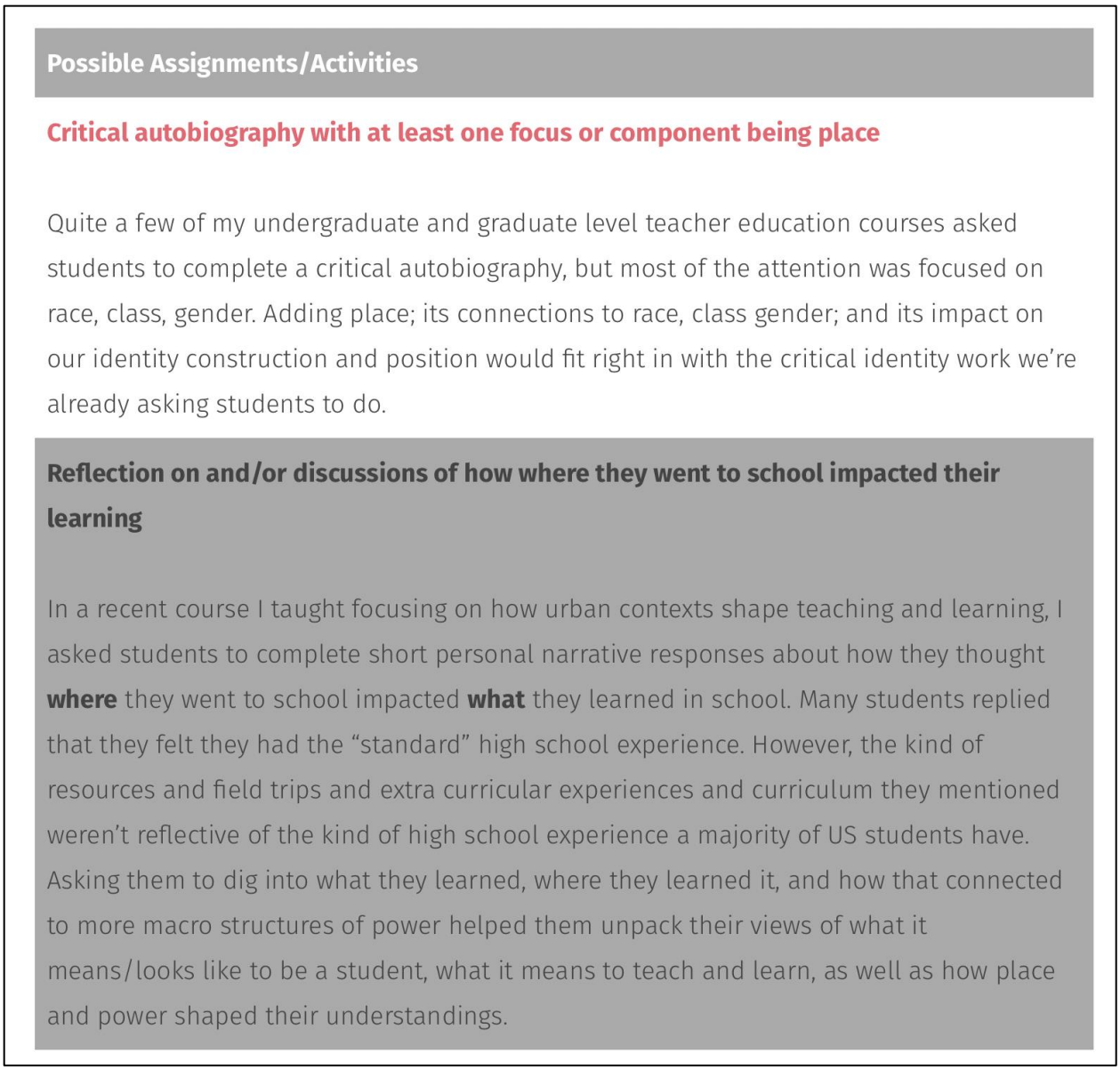

Figure 10: Critical Autobiography and Reflection Activities

To learn about and see more suggestions of possible activities, visit the Teacher Educators page on the Literacy In Place website.

Writing Rural Stories

Rural stories have to be written for readers to have access to rural perspectives. This is the mission of the (Non)Rural Voices blog that features opportunities for rural and rural out-migrated students and teachers to tell their place-connected stories and think through how

(non)rural places have shaped their identities. Through my own writing on the blog I consider various aspects of my rural out-migrant identity and how they have and continue to shape who I am as a person and teacher. For example, in "Can I Be Your Friend," I detail an interaction and misunderstanding my rural dad had when visiting me in Austin, consider how the situation would have been different in our rural hometown, and what that means for the way we think about place and language and cultural practice. In "Who Gets to Be a Hillbilly," I consider the ways rural identities get taken up and policed by both insiders and outsiders. And most recently, in "What's (My) Rural Language Variety," I inquire into the various characteristics of my rural speech and the ways those have been unwelcomed in educational spaces.

Stories like these from students and teachers across rural regions are important to increase awareness of the rich diversity of experiences and identities that exist in rural spaces. In teaching units on argumentative writing, memoir, narrative nonfiction, or creative writing, teachers could offer students the opportunities to write their rural stories for an authentic audience of (Non)Rural Voices readers. Teachers could use the invitation for guest contributions featured on the blog (see Figure 11 below) to give their students a springboard to think about potential topics or aspects of their rural stories they'd like to share.

So, tell us your story

I recognize that my rural experiences are only my own. My hope for this site and the blog is that they expand our understanding of what rural is for folks other than me. So, tell us your story.

Thanksgiving is a prime story-tellin' time for my family, and maybe it is for your family too. If you hear one that makes you think or helps you build your (non)rural identity in any way, I'd love for you to write it up and send it our way.

You are invited to be a guest blogger on Dr. Parton's Literacy In Place. Here are some important details:

Our Founding Beliefs
Literacy In Place is founded on three major tenets:

1. Rural stories are worth reading and studying.
2. Rural stories are worth telling.
3. Rural cultures are worth sustaining.

Possible Formats
I am open to a variety of genres, including but not limited to:

- Essay
- Memoir
- Poetry
- Photo Essay
- Epistolary
- Short Story
-

Other considerations:
~2000 words max

Audience: primarily rural teachers and teacher educators but the site also reaches rural community members more generally as well as rural YA authors.
Include an engaging title that gives us an idea of the focus or theme of your story and is inviting.

Where possible and/or appropriate, use photos, videos, and hyperlinks

Possible Topics:
Visit (Non)Rural Voices Blog for more ideas about what's been written about and how your piece might sit in conversation with it. Here are some possible questions for consideration:

- What does it mean to you to be rural?
- What stands out to you about your experiences as a rural person and/or student?
- What book, TV show, film do you remember reading/seeing that made you feel seen as a rural person?
- What book, TV show, film do you feel authentically represents you as a rural person?
- What do you want nonrural people to know about being a rural person?
- What are you learning about yourself as a rural person or rural out-migrant?
- What current events do you want to talk about or address from a rural perspective?
- What stereotypes about rural people drive you crazy and what about your own story could you tell to disrupt those?
- What interactions have you had with rural or nonrural people that has you thinking about what it means to be rural?
- What does home mean to you?

Figure 1111: Invitation for Guest Contributors

Reading Rural YAL Book & Author Talks

My YouTube channel and podcast, Reading Rural YAL (RRYAL) is also linked to the Literacy In Place (LIP) website and includes book talks of rural YAL (including middle grades books). (See below for a list of recently featured YAL.)

Rural Books Featured on RRYAL
The Serpent King by Jeff Zentner
Sadie by Courtney Summers
The Season of Styx Malone by Kekla Magoon
Rural Voices: 15 Authors Challenge Assumptions about Small-Town America by Nora Shalaway Carpenter
Hillbilly Queer by J.R. Jamison
In the Wild Light by Jeff Zentner
Funny How Things Change by Melissa Wyatt
The Reckless Kind by Carly Heath

Figure 12: Books Featured on RRYAL

Each series is a four-part deep-dive into a particular text that features episodes that include: (1) a summary and reading of the first pages, (2) a mini-analysis of place and rurality in the text, (3) my reaction to the book as a rural reader, and (4) teaching ideas (see Figure 13 below for a transcript of an example episode on teaching ideas). Most recently, the series have also included Author Talks where the authors of featured books and I talk about their connections to rural places, their writing processes, and the advice they have for aspiring writers.

Teaching Ideas for Melissa Wyatt's *Funny How Things Change*
In this final video, I'm gonna talk a little bit about how I'd go about teaching this book. It's definitely going on my next syllabus and I hope you'll consider putting it on yours too. So, there are a lot of important things about this book, but I think one of the most important is the way that it layers place and class. As a working-class kid at a rural school and then as a teacher in a rural school, many of the hierarchical divides exist along class lines. Students feel it. They know how to try to pass as middle class to avoid class injury, but in a rural school where everyone knows where you live and what your parents do for work, it's nearly impossible to do. I didn't do a very good job of addressing this in my own rural teaching, and I'd like to support other teachers in doing this important work.

If you attended NCTE this year, there's a really great on-demand session by Nicole Godard, Sophia Sarigianides, and Amanda Thein that I highly recommend checking out. If you go to the conference platform and search for "Class Acts" you'll find it. Also, they have an issue of *English Journal* coming out with the same title. I have an article in there that will discuss these teaching ideas in much greater detail, so I highly recommend checking that out too.

Essentially, I would:

- Work with students to define social class. They feel it and experience the way it shapes their lives every day, but it's unlikely that they've ever had the opportunity to engage in defining it.
- Then I'd ask them to investigate social class memes. What do they communicate about social class, especially the relationships between classes? How have you experienced this in your life, and how has where you're from impacted and shaped those experiences?
- We'd then read *Funny How Things Change* as a whole class. Each day I would do a mini lesson on analyzing passages in the text for social class asking students to discuss what's there, how it shapes the story, and what we're learning from it.
- I'd also invite them to engage in intertextual analysis by engaging with other texts. For example, using excerpts from *Heartland* and/or *She Come by It Natural* by Sarah Smarsh or *Hill Women* by Cassie Chambers Armstrong. Songs like "Outfit" by Jason Isbell as well as commercials such as the one for Farmersonly.com, film/TV clips to continue to engage with ideas around social class experiences and class injury.
- In a culminating assignment, I would ask students to select one of the pieces we've read as a mentor text to write their own piece exploring and examining social class. These could be memoir and narrative nonfiction or fictional pieces. Students would workshop these with one another in small groups and then publish them for exhibition/check-out in the school or local library.

I really can't say enough how much I loved this book and how important I think it is for students (rural and across all types of geographies) to read and think about.

Welp, that's a wrap on FUNNY HOW THINGS CHANGE. Thanks for being here and following along.

Figure 13: Transcript of Funny How Things Change *Teaching Ideas Video*

It is my hope that LIP and RRYAL help teachers overcome some of the major barriers that the teachers in my study faced in selecting and teaching rural YAL in their classrooms. (1) They make finding rural YAL titles much easier than before. (2) Because the reviews of the books are coming from a rural reader, it makes it easier for teachers to find texts that treat rural characters with the dignity they deserve and work to disrupt rural stereotypes. (3) Together they provide ideas to serve as springboards for teachers' instructional practices. (4) Through the

(Non)Rural Voices blog, they provide avenues for rural readers and writers to tell their stories in connection to and/or apart from the rural stories of others.

Teaching to Sustain Rural Cultures

The teachers' experiences in this study demonstrate how important place-connected identity are to text selection and instructional practice. Place is inextricably connected to how cultural practices and identities are created there and, as Paris and Alim (2014) note, no culture is free of imperfections. Despite those imperfections, with critical reflection, cultures and their ways of knowing and being are worth sustaining. Although most of this work revolves around the urban cultures of People of Color (see Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim 2014, 2017 for a more detailed discussion of [urban] culturally sustaining pedagogy), the idea still transfers to rural cultures which contain members of different social classes, races, ethnicities, genders, abilities, and religious affiliations.

However, despite the rich cultural legacies of the various and diverse identities in rural places, they are often missing from classroom instruction. Using the rural equity audit, critical reflective practices, and web resources discussed in this article, teachers can work toward more equitable teaching practices by which rural cultures can be sustained. Where people are from is such an integral part of who they are, and it is crucial for us all to have spaces to consider the nuances in our ways of being, thinking, and understanding the word and the world.

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