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Trade Books, Comics, and Local History: Exploring Fred Shuttleworth's Fight for Civil Rights

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Exploring Fred Shuttleworth's Fight for Civil Rights

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Abstract

This one-week project utilized the trade book *Black and White: The Confrontation between Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth and Eugene Bull Connor* (Brimner, 2011) to explore non-violent advocacies during the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement. Students read selected excerpts from the trade book and created a comic narrative to convey their understanding of the civil rights advocacies of Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, Alabama. The students were able to accurately portray Rev. Shuttlesworth's actions in a cohesive narrative using evidence from the trade book within their comics. The students demonstrated a solid understanding of non-violent advocacies, and why these methods were ultimately successful. The selected trade book highlighted what is a local history topic for the students. The accuracy of the students' comic narrative suggests that the local connection was benefical to the students' engagement with and processing of the information in the trade book.

Key Words: Trade books, comics, multimodal ensemble, non-violence, civil rights, local history

Trade Books, Comics, and Local History: Exploring Fred Shuttleworth's Fight for Civil Rights

Teaching issues of race in contemporary U.S. society is a hot button issue. Many Republican lawmakers on the state and national levels have attempted to shut down discussing issues of race in the K-12 social studies classrooms (Schuessler, 2021a, 2021b). However, we contend that this is counterproductive for U.S. society to heal the wounds from its past. Howard Johnson argues that we must remember and discuss issues of racial discrimination throughout U.S. history to move forward as a society. "Untreated, the wounds of history fester like necrotizing fasciitis (a.k.a., flesh-eating diseases), spreading uncontrollably while feeding off our souls. Knowledge is a ready, if not, wholly curative antibiotic. Foreknowledge can be an inoculation against repetition" (Johnson, 2020, p. 5). Within the current national debate, an important question in the public discourse not being discussed as much is how do we actually teach issues of race?

In this article, we provide one approach for how to teach issues of race using social studies trade books. Specifically, our manuscript focuses on the implementation of a one week project in a sixth grade U.S. history class focusing on the non-violent civic disobedience methods employed by Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, Alabama. Our one week project was driven by the following research question. *How would students use their comic to demonstrate Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth's methods of non-violent civic disobedience to challenge racial discrimination in Birmingham?*

We start by giving a brief overview of Fred Shuttlesworth and his civil rights advocacies. Then, our focus shifts to examining best teaching practices with disciplinary literacies advocated for by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in its College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework (NCSS, 2013a). Next, we discuss how social studies trade books and comics

can be utilized to meet the learning goals argued for in the C3 Framework. We also discuss the multimodality of comics as they convey information through both visuals and text. The steps for our one week project driven by the trade book *Black and White: The Confrontation between Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth and Eugene Bull Connor* (Brimner, 2011) will be provided. Finally, we close with a discussion of future research needed for teaching civil rights issues with trade books.

A Brief Overview of Birmingham in the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s brought sweeping changes to Southern society. This push for change was fueled, in part, by African American veterans returning from World War II. These veterans desired to actualize the democratic principles fought for aborad within the United States. Civil rights activists utilized varied methods to achieve this goal. They first used the U.S. court system to desegregate different aspects of American society, showing the glaring contradiction between Jim Crow segregation laws and the individual freedoms and liberties enumerated in the U.S. Constitution. The most notable of these court cases was the monumental Brown v. Board of Education case that desegregated U.S. public schools. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activists employed the U.S. court system to strike down numerous segregation laws (Bynum, 2010; Caro, 2002; Mann, 1996).

Civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s also employed non-violent civic disobedience methods to confront and challenge Jim Crow segregation laws in various facets of Southern society. These approaches can be seen with boycotts, marches, sit-ins, and Freedom Rides (Branch, 1988; Hampton & Fayer, 1991; Lewis, 2015). Civil rights activists' non-violent approaches, and the segregationists' typically violent responses, did a great deal to sway much of public opinion against Jim Crow segregation laws (Mann, 1996; Meacham, 2018).

Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth observed these non-violent civic disobedience techniques and decided to implement these methods in Birmingham, considered the most racist city in the country at the time. In fact, the economic and political fabric of Birmingham started in the racist convict-leasing system. Under the convict-leasing system, mainly African American males were charged with minor crimes and then forced to work for an indefinite period in industrial jobs, which played a pivotal role in fueling the Birmingham's economy (Blackmon, 2008; Lichtenstein, 1996; Mancini, 1996). Rev. Shuttlesworth, the minister at Bethel Baptist Church, used his pulpit to advocate for non-violent civic disobedience to desegregate all aspects of life in Birmingham, including schools, department stores, lunch counters, and public accommodations (Connerly, 2005; Manis, 1999; Thornton, 2002).

Shuttlesworth's efforts were met with violent responses by segregationists. Rev. Shuttlesworth and his wife were assaulted as they attempted to integrate Phillips High School, and their home was bombed in 1958 in an effort to stop his efforts to desegregate Birmingham. This violence did not deter him. Instead, these acts of violence strengthened his resolve to continue non-violent civic disobedience methods in his fight to eliminate Jim Crow segregation laws in Birmingham (Huntley & McKerley, 2009; Manis, 1999; McWhorter, 2001; Thornton, 2002).

Rev. Shuttlesworth played an integral role in organizing the mass protests now known as the Birmingham's Children's Crusade, when African American children used non-violence but were violently met by Birmingham's police force. The horrendous images of children being attacked in Birmingham were seen throughout the world. This violence against children engaged in non-violent protest caused the Kennedy administration to initate the bill that would eventually become the 1964 Civil Rights Bill. Enacted during the Johnson administration, it was designed to

end Jim Crow segregation laws (Eskew, 2000; Mann, 1996; McWhorter, 2001; Wilson, 2000). All of these events were set in motion by Fred Shuttlesworth's civil rights advocacies and leadership in Birmingham.

The C3 Framework and Disciplinary Literacy Skills

Since its publication in 2013, the C3 Framework has played a vital role in shaping and driving best teaching practices for the K-12 social studies classrooms (NCSS, 2013a). This seminal document stresses that K-12 social studies teachers should focus on strengthening their students' disciplinary thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills in the four core disciplines of the field: history, civics, economics, and geography (Lee & Swan, 2013; Levinson & Levine, 2013; NCSS, 2013a). To accomplish these goals, social studies teachers should utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources for students to analyze. Then, students use evidence from their research to take civic action (Grant, 2013; VanSledright, 2013). These steps in the learning process alter the dynamics of the social studies classroom to be more student centered (NCSS, 2013a). The focus on disciplinary literacy, thinking, and argumentation skills equips students with the knowledge and learning experiences to be actively involved and informed as future democratic citizens. Through this approach to learning, students gain the knowledge and skills to analyze varied perspectives and public polices surrounding an issue. Through this analysis, students are prepared to utilize evidence in order to support and take informed action to affect change (Levinson & Levine, 2013; NCSS, 2013b).

Best teaching practices advocated for in the C3 Framework cause social studies teachers to search for and integrate meaningful primary and secondary sources into their lesson plans. This begs the question what kinds of sources should social studies teachers use in their classrooms? We argue that social studies-focused trade books are meaningful and appropriate

secondary sources that teachers can readily access for the analysis process advocated for within the C3 Framework.

The Benefits of Social Studies Trade Books

The term trade books refers to novels, biographies, informational texts, picture books, and graphic novels available in retail establishments and libraries (McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991). There are numerous benefits with implementing trade books in the social studies classroom. They are more engaging to read than the typical textbook (Bickford & Schuette, 2016; Palmer & Stewart, 1997). They focus on individuals and events that are more interesting and frequently not included in traditional textbooks, usually in more depth (Berkely et al., 2016; Chick, 2008; Richgels et al., 1993; Tracy, 2003). Social studies trade books allow students to examine diverse perspectives about a specific time or event (Bickford & Clabough, 2020; Clabough, 2021; Palmer & Stewart, 1997). Additionally, the plethora and diversity of available trade books in content, format, and readability allow social studies teachers to select texts that best match their students' reading and learning needs while also exploring diverse groups' values and beliefs about historical events and issues (Clabough & Wooten, 2016; Liang, 2002; Saul & Dieckman, 2005; Sheffield & Clabough, 2022). Trade books that reflect students' cultures also act as mirrors. This allows students to see themselves in their U.S. history curriculum and feel that their culture is honored and valued (Bishop, 1990, 1992).

Trade books offer students an opportunity to analyze issues and events in different places, learn about lesser-known historical figures, and make affective connections to the topics explored (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Sheffield & Cruz, 2012). It is through these connections that trade books can be utilized to strengthen students' historical empathy skills, which is the effort to better grasp historical figures and their actions, decisions, and lived experiences (Endacott &

Brooks, 2013; Nokes, 2013). Through the exploration of trade books, social studies teachers have a vehicle to strengthen their students' disciplinary literacy skills (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008). Examining trade books for historical figures' perspectives, biases, and actions helps students to develop the thinking, literacy, and argumentation skills used by social scientists (Clabough & Wooten, 2016; Sheffield & Clabough, 2022).

Comics as a Multimodal Ensemble

Comics, whether strips, books, or graphic novels, are a form of sequential art (Eisner, 2008; McCloud, 1994). Composed of panels of images, gutters between panels, and textual information, sequential art tells its story through the link between the visual and verbal. As such, comics are a multimodal ensemble, they employ a combination of communication modalities to convey information (Serafini, 2014). The multimodal ensemble conveys more through the synergy of the combined modes than either mode does alone. This is particularly true in comics, where information is conveyed by the artists in choices they make in what to illustrate and how, where images and panels are placed, and the type of text to include and where.

Like all other forms of text, sequential art utilizes a grammatical structure. The words, images, and icons employed by the author and illustrator are its vocabulary. Panel positioning and gutters are its syntax (McCloud, 1994). Action within a comic may occur within a panel, as well as in the gutters between panels. In Western publications (i.e., not Manga), comics are read from left to right, from top to bottom, and from front to back, the same way one would read traditional written text (Eisner, 2008).

The visual and text components inherent within the comic format enable students different ways to communicate information without having to be reliant on just the written word (Sheffield & Clabough, 2022). This is an important benefit. While students may know the

information they want to convey, they are often uncomfortable completing a long writing assignment. Creating a comic offers students the opportunity to convey a large amount of information in a more streamlined format. They are forced to make choices of what visuals to include, what to show and what to imply, and what to emphasize and what to ignore as they construct a narrative for the reader. The decisions a comic creator must make reflect the processes advocated for in Domain 4 of the C3 Framework, Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions. In D4.2.6-8, middle grades students are expected to "Construct explanations using reasing, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data" (NCSS, 2013a, p.60). Creating a comic requires the student to do just that, using both visual and textual information to construct a multimodal ensemble.

Methods

Student and School Information

This one week project on Fred Shuttlesworth was implemented in a sixth grade U.S. history classroom at a free public charter school in Birmingham, Alabama. The teacher completed this project with her four U.S. history classrooms. There were 100 students in her four classes. Of these 100 students, 93% are African Americans. The remaining 7% of the students identify as Latinx, white, or Asian. The teacher gave individual codes for each student to maintian student confidentiality. Demographic information about gender was not given for students' work. Due to this, we assigned gender neutral names as pseudonyms for students' comics and metacognitive writing pieces. The school is best described as an urban middle school serving many students that live in poverty. The social studies teacher, Mrs. Janeway (a pseudonym), identifies as white and has been teaching social studies in middle and high school settings for more than ten years.

Project Implementation

This one week project started with students reading and analyzing quotes from civil rights activists in the U.S. and abroad about challenging unjust laws. Quotes used were from Dr. King, Mahatma Gandhi, and Ella Baker. Students summarized in their own words the meaning from the quotes. This activity helped students conceptualize the logic of civil rights activists to confront and challenge unjust laws. It took students day one of the project to complete and discuss this handout.

On day two, students read excerpts from *Black and White: The Confrontation between Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth and Eugene Bull Connor* (Brimner, 2011). The trade book examines the struggle for the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in Birmingham through actions taken by Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and Bull Connor, Birmingham's Commisioner of Public Safety. The excerpts were selected to illustrate Rev. Shuttlesworth's beliefs about non-violent civic disobedience, as well as how he applied these methods to challenge racial discrimination in Birmingham. In pairs, students read pages 18-19, 34-37, and 72-75 and completed the teacher created handout (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Teacher Created Handout

Name: _____

Black & White
By, Larry Dane Brimner

Code: _____

Page 18 & 19

1. What was Fred Shuttlesworth's profession (job)?

2. Fred believed that the spiritual needs of his members was just as important as their social responsibilities. What did Fred encourage and help them do? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

3. What court case filled Fred with hope that change was coming?

Page 72- 75

1. Why would Fred Shuttlesworth want the Birmingham department stores in Birmingham to hire African American clerks? Use evidence to support your arguments.

2. What tactics did Fred Shuttlesworth urge African Americans to use for the department stores in Birmingham that did not want to hire African American clerks, and why did he use this method? Use evidence to support your arguments.

3. What was the result for Fred Shuttlesworth's civic action through non-violent methods with Birmingham department stores? Use evidence to support your arguments.

Name: _____

Black & White
By, Larry Dane Brimner

Code: _____

Page 34-37

Fred had two daughters that were in high school in 1957. They passed Phillips High School everyday in order to attend Parker High School for black students. Yet Phillips was closer, and it was one of the best schools in the city. Fred and his family formally appealed to the school board for this children to attend Phillips High School.

1. Why should Fred Shuttlesworth **not** have to take civic action to desegregate Phillips High School? Think about what Thurgood Marshall accomplished in 1954 before the Supreme Court in the Brown v. Board of Education case in our last project. (Why at first did he not try and take action to integrate schools?)

2. What does the fact that Fred Shuttlesworth **had** to take civic action to try and desegregate Phillips High School say about Birmingham in 1957? Use evidence to support your arguments.

3. What resistance did Fred Shuttlesworth face for trying to integrate Phillips High School? Use evidence to support your arguments.

4. Why did Fred Shuttlesworth attend the meeting after being attacked at Phillips High School? Use evidence to support your arguments.

The questions in this handout served two purposes. First, students examined how Rev. Shuttlesworth applied methods of non-violent civic disobedience to confront and challenge Jim Crow segregation laws. Second, students' disciplinary literacy, thinking, and argumentation

skills were strengthened since they had to read excerpts about Rev. Shuttlesworth's beliefs and actions to challenge Jim Crow segregation laws. They made evidence-based arguments to answer many of the questions drawing on arguments found within the trade book to support their claims (Sheffield & Clabough, 2022). The teacher floated around the classroom as students completed this handout in pairs to help as needed. It took the students days two and three to complete the teacher-created handout.

On day four, the teacher started by explaining the instructions for the one page comic assignment. Students were given the following prompt for this assignment.

> Create a comic to show Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth's commitment to non-violent civic disobedience to challenge racial discrimination that African Americans faced in Birmingham. Your comic should focus on his actions to integrate Phillips High School or to get African Americans hired as clerks in Birmingham department stores.

The teacher verified that students understood the prompt and stressed for them to use strategical words within their comic page. Students sketched out their comic before starting on the assignment. It took students the entirety of day four and part of day five to complete this activity.

Upon completing the comic, students answered three metacognitive questions. Designed to access student thinking behind their project, the questions asked them to unpack the meaning within their comic, of how the words and images in their assignment demonstrate Rev. Shuttlesworth's civil rights advocacies and are provided in the following section.

1. What event are you showing that we read about with Fred Shuttlesworth? Why did you pick this event? Use evidence to support your arguments.

2. Why did you include certain words, colors, facial expressions, and images to show Fred Shuttlesworth's use of non-violent civic disobedience to challenge racial discrimination that African Americans faced in Birmingham? Use evidence to support your arguments.

3. What is the message of your comic related to the non-violent techniques used by Fred Shuttlesworth to challenge the racial discrimination that African Americans faced in Birmingham? Use evidence to support your arguments.

The comic allows the students an alternative way to communicate their content knowledge (Sheffield & Clabough, 2022). This is especially important given that many of these students struggle with reading and writing. Students were able to use imagery and limited writing to convey their content knowledge. The questions also allowed students more practice to make evidence-based arguments as they had to explain why the images and words in their comics represent content examined in *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011). It took students all of day five to complete their comic and answer the three metacognitive questions.

Data Analysis

Students' comics and metacognitive writing pieces were coded employing qualitative content analysis with inductive and deductive elements (Creswell, 2013; Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Kline, 2008; Krippendorff, 2013; Maxwell, 2010; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative methods are appropriate for this one-week research project in light of both the research question asked and the data sources collected, the students' comics and metacognitive writing pieces (Creswell, 2013; Dinkleman & Cuenca, 2017). During open coding, observations of and outliers to patterns that emerged were created and synthesized into testable codes for axial coding. During axial coding, or deductive analysis, students' comics and metacognitive writing pieces were used to examine the presence, absence, and frequency of the codes. Data were collected and analyzed. Patterns are discussed, and their significance is extrapolated in the following sections. As previously mentioned, pseudonyms are utilized for all students' comics and metacognitive writing pieces to maintain their confidentiality.

Findings

The one week project was driven by the following research question. *How would students use their comics to demonstrate Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth's methods of non-violent civic disobedience to challenge racial discrimination in Birmingham?* From coding students' comics

and metacognitive writing pieces, four themes emerged in relation to the research question. These themes include students successfully using the comic format, articulating Rev. Shuttlesworth's beliefs about non-violent civic disobedience, providing examples of non-violent civic disobedience, and conveying the economic component of non-violent civic disobedience. Each theme is discussed below with a student's comic and excerpts from the child's metacogntive writing piece provided.

Successfully Using the Comic Format

The first theme to emerge was that the overwhelming majority of the students successfully used the comic format to depict their vision of Rev. Shuttlesworth's civil rights advocacies in Birmingham. They used strategic words and symbolic imagery to represent topics covered in *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011). The panels were also organized in a manner to chronologically discuss Rev. Shuttlesworth's actions. This can be seen in Bellamy's comic (Figure 2). Bellamy's comic starts with a panel stating that "only whites were allowed to go" with an image of Phillips High School, followed by a second panel, depicting Rev. Shuttlsworth saying that he needs to do something about this. The third and fourth panels show Rev. Shuttlesworth going to Phillips High School to integrate it along with the violence he encountered. Using a combination of words and imagery, Bellamy conveys the violence that Shuttlesworth faced in response to his non-violent actions. Bellamy's comic ends in panels five and six with Shuttlesworth going to the hospital and maintaining his commitment to non-violent civic disobedience.

Figure 2 Bellamy's Comic

Bellamy explains the contents of the comic by stating, “This (my comic) shows the story of when he (Shuttlesworth) wanted his kids to go to Phillips. For that, he was met with violence.” One thing that should be mentioned is that Bellamy cited page numbers from *Black and White*

(Brimner, 2011) to support claims in the comic. Bellamy provides page numbers from the trade book in response to the first and second metacognitive writing prompts. The social studies teacher placed a great deal of emphasis throughout this past academic year on getting students to support their claims with evidence. Bellamy argues that the message of the comic is "he (Shuttlesworth) didn't fight back and his quote to the church." Bellamy's comic illustrates that the students were able to tell a chronological narrative with a beginning, middle, and end about an excerpt covered in *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011).

Rev. Shuttlesworth's Beliefs with Non-Violent Civic Disobedience

Several students explored Rev. Shuttlesworth's beliefs about using non-violent civic disobedience to challenge racial discrimination in Birmingham. This can best be seen in Charlie's comic (Figure 3). Charlie starts in panel one with an image of Rev. Shuttlesworth stating that "violence is not the answer." Panels two through four focus on his attempt to integrate Phillips High School along with the violence he faced. Panel five shows that he was not deterred by facing violence and was still committed to non-violence. This is shown in the last panel where Charlie says that Rev. Shuttleworth believed "violence was never the answer." The panels in Charlie's comic consistently and accurately convey Rev. Shuttlesworth's commitment to non-violence.

Figure 3 Charlie's Comic

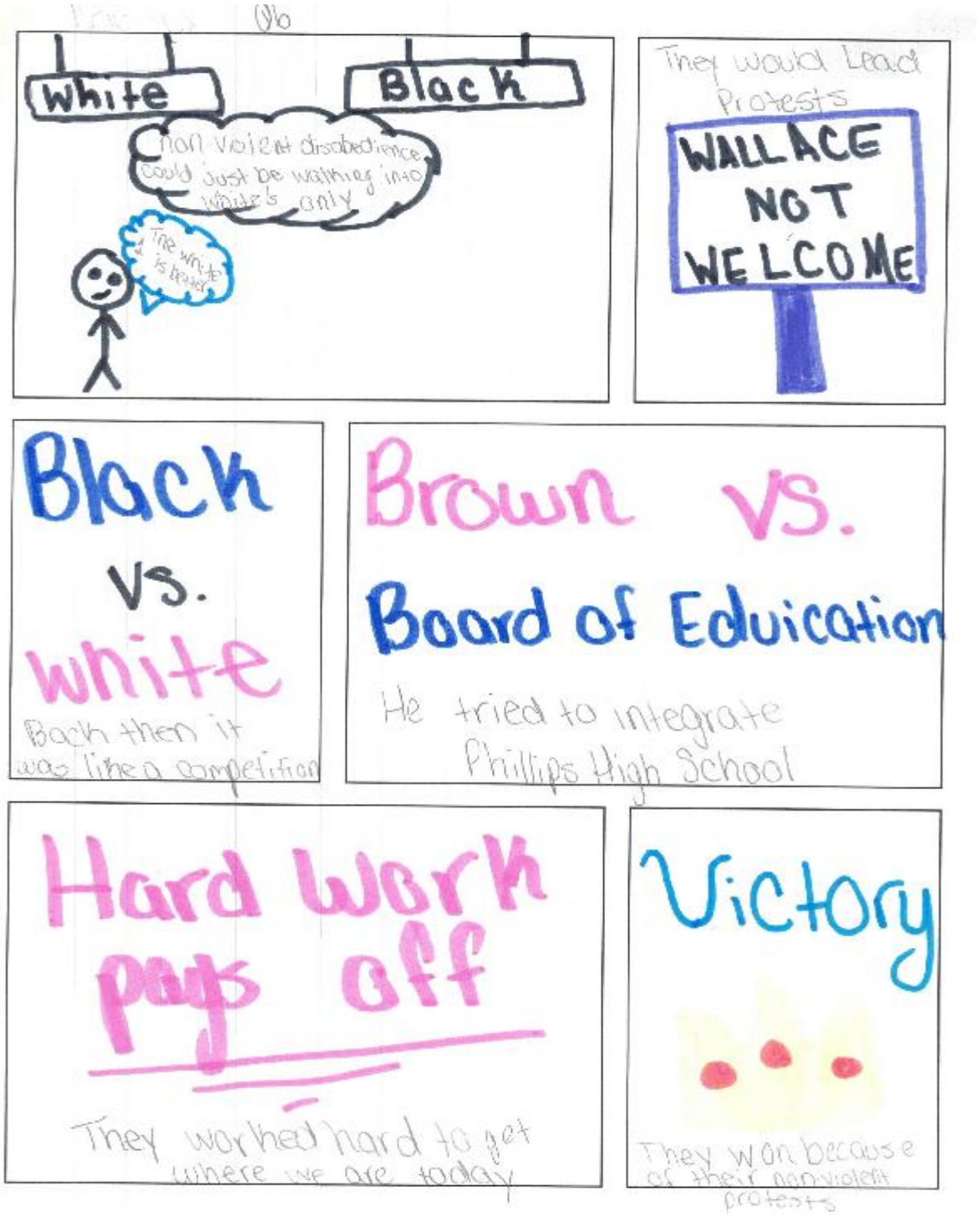
In Charlie's metacognitive writing responses, the focus is on conveying that the comic captures Rev. Shuttlesworth's courage and determination. "I drew … the civil disobedience he did was to enroll his daughters into the best school." Charlie goes on to say, "He preached to everyone about non-violence, so they (his non-violent beliefs) were present in every situation

because he did not fight back because violence isn't the answer." Charlie's statements in the metacognitive writing piece accurately capture Rev. Shuttlesworth's beliefs about non-violent civic disobedience.

Giving Examples of Non-Violent Civic Disobedience

Most of the students' comics focused on Rev. Shuttlesworth's attempts to integrate Phillips High School. Dakota's comic (Figure 4) is the only one that focused on just giving examples of non-violent civic disobedience. Panel one looks at the simple act of walking into a white's only section of public accommodations as an example of non-violent civic disobedience. Panel two shows a different type of non-violence used, protesting. Dakota's image in the second panel has a protest sign that reads "Wallace not welcome," referencing the Alabama governor George Wallace. Panel four also focuses on Rev. Shuttlesworth's attempt to integrate Phillips High School, which is the third type of non-violent civic disobedience seen in Dakota's comic. Dakota ends by claiming that civil rights activists' actions have led to progress in U.S. society. "They worked hard to get to where we are today." It appears that Dakota endorses non-violent civic disobedience as the way that democratic citizens should take action to challenge social injustices.

Figure 4 Dakota's Comic



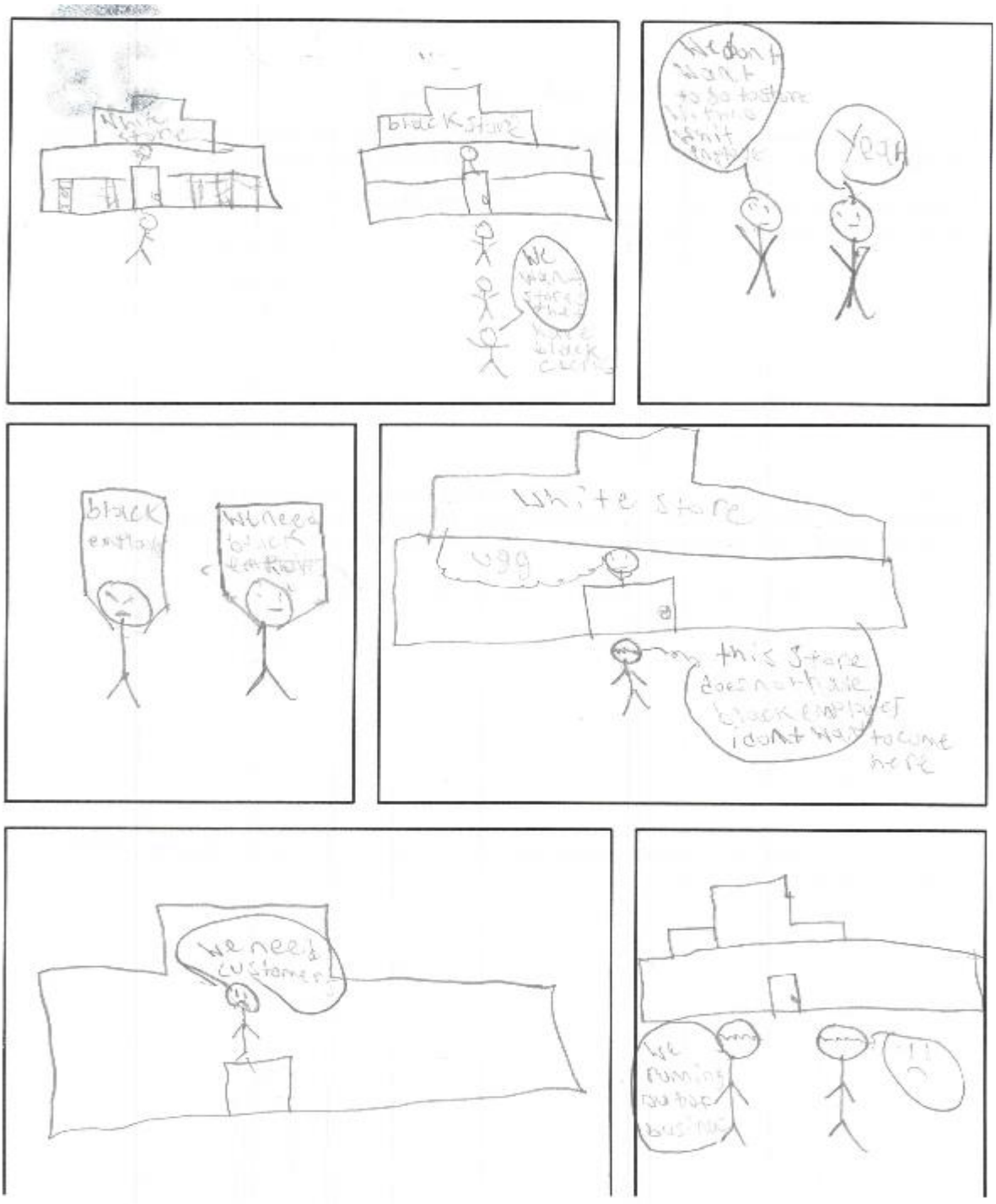
Dakota's responses to the metacognitive writing prompts were short but did convey the importance of non-violent civic disobedience for societal change as well as the methods employed by Rev. Shuttlesworth. In regards to the Wallace sign, Dakota argues that this image

was used to "show that they protested non-violently." The student builds on this point by stating that the images "show things that he (Shuttlesworth) did and protests he lead." Dakota did a nice job of visually depicting several techniques that civil rights activists employed to non-violently protest.

The Economic Component of Non-Violent Civic Disobedience

The overwhelming majority of the students focused their comic on Rev. Shuttlesworth attempting to integrate Phillips High School. There were few students that focused their comic on Shuttlesworth's efforts to get black clerks hired in department stores. This should not be surprising since middle school students often overlook the more abstract economic aspects of racial discrimination (Clabough, 2020), and the sixth grade students can more easily relate to going to school than obtaining a job. Denver's comic (Figure 5) best illustrates Rev. Shuttlesworth's push for Birmingham department stores to hire African Americans. Panels one through three focus on civil rights activists arguing for black clerks to be hired and how African Americans would not shop at stores without this representation. To drive home this point, Denver writes in the fourth panel a civil rights activist stating "this store doesn't have black employees. I don't want to come here." The ripple effects of African Americans not shopping in a department store are illustrated in panels five and six with this company going out of business. Presumably, the store owner is shown in panel five with a sad face stating, "We need customers." The result as shown in panel six is the store "we are running out of business." Denver's comic shows the economic impact of civil rights activist boycotting certain Birmingham businesses due to hiring practices as discussed in *Black and White* (Brimmer 2011).

Figure 5 Denver's Comic



Denver's responses were very short in the metacognitive questions. Denver argues that the message of the comic is to "make things right." It could be assumed, based on the words and images in the panels of the comic, that Denver is referring to the step of black clerks needing to

be hired in order for African American customers to shop at certain Birmingham department stores.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of students' comics and metacognitive writing pieces indicate three over-arching "take-aways" about the students' learning as they examined Rev. Shuttlesworth's non-violent civic disobedience to protest Jim Crow segregation laws.

1. Students successfully used the comic format for this summative assessment.
2. Students contextualized in their comic the racial discrimination that Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth faced in Birmingham.
3. *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011) allowed students to explore local history of Birmingham.

We will discuss each of these "take-aways" in the following sections.

Using the Comic Format

The first item that stood out was how the students successfully used the comic format for this summative assessment. The overwhelming majority of students were able to use the comic format to convey one part of the content knowledge gained from *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011). They used words and images to convey content knowledge gained from reading excerpts of the trade book. The panels of their comics connected well together with each panel building on the content of the previous panels. This allowed students to tell cohesive narratives that consistently included a beginning, middle, and end. It helped that students had previous experience in their social studies and English language arts classes prior to this project in working with the panels employed in comics and graphic novels. Therefore, Mrs. Janeway did not have to spend much class time in the project explaining how to design a comic.

For social studies teachers wanting to see models of how to teach with comics, we suggest some our following articles to help in this process (Carano & Clabough, 2016; Sheffield et al., 2015; Sheffield & Clabough, 2022). Social studies teachers should model for students how to deconstruct the contents of comic book panels and examine the artistic choices that arists make to convey meaning. Then, students need independent practice to analyze comic pages in a similar fashion. Much like working with primary sources, it cannot be assumed students will enter our classrooms with this knowledge (Carano & Clabough, 2016; Sheffield et al., 2015; Sheffield & Clabough, 2022).

Contextualizing the Racial Discrimination of Birmingham

It was noteworthy that the majority of the students to some degree contextualized the racial discrimination within Birmingham during the 1950s and 1960s. Students included details in the trade book about the racial discrimination experienced by Rev. Shuttlesworth and other African Americans in Birmingham. This shows that students were able to use evidence from the trade book to support arguments in their comic. Through this process, students contextualized the racial discrimination that African Americans encountered daily. Pearcy (2016) reminds us that racial discrimination was not a reality only faced during seminal events in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, but was the daily reality for African Americans throughout the United States during the Jim Crow era. The writing prompt given for the comic required students to describe specific examples of racial discrimination in Birmingham, Alabama that Rev. Shuttlesworth attempted to address through non-violent methods. In this way, students articulated aspects of the social and cultural fabric in Birmingham that civil rights activists were trying to change.

Local History and Trade Books

As mentioned above, *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011) is rich in detail of Birmingham's civil rights history. The students conveyed this detail as evidence within their comic, with the majority of the students able to accurately depict Rev. Shuttlesworth's non-violent advocacies. The students' consistent portrayal of factually accurate information about this topic suggests that the majority of the students made a connection to the content. We suspect that this connection is rooted in the fact that Rev. Shuttlesworth's story is local history for the students.

This local history connection can be used with trade books that focus on civil rights-related events in other locations. For example, Susan Goldman Rubin's trade book *Freedom Summer: The 1964 Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Rubin, 2014), which explores the racial discrimination and resistance that civil rights activists faced in the summer of 1964, is an ideal choice for a social studies teacher in Mississippi. There are numerous high-quality social studies trade books that can be positioned in the manner utilized in our project to shine a light on racial discrimination experienced on a local level throughout the nation (Harshman & Darby, 2018).

Table 1 in the appendix lists additional social studies trade books, with their location and civil rights-related topic, that can be used in a similar fashion to how we positioned *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011) in this manuscript to explore Birmingham's civil rights history. For social studies teachers wanting to replicate our project with other trade books connected to their city or state, we suggest that they select excerpts from the text and use analysis prompts that allow students to contextualize racial discrimination that civil rights activists faced. It is important for social studies teachers to explore historical issues and events in depth to capture the unique aspects of local social, cultural, political, religious, and economic factors that work in concert with each other to shape a city's identity (Kyvig & Marty, 2000). This allows students to better

grasp the challenges for how civil rights activists had to work to overcome certain local factors to eliminate barriers that prevented African Americans from actualizing the rights and privileges of democratic citizenship.

Conclusion

This study examined how 100 sixth graders in a U.S. history class within a public charter school in Birmingham, Alabama used the trade book *Black and White* (Brimner, 2011) to examine non-violent advocacies during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The students read selected excerpts from the trade book that highlighted both Rev. Shuttlesworth's role as a minister in Birmingham, as well his attempt to desegregate Phillips High School and integrate the staff of the city's department stores. The students were tasked with creating a comic to convey their understanding of the non-violent advocacies taken by Rev. Shuttlesworth at Phillips High School or Birmingham department stores. Students were also required to complete a metacognitive writing piece to explain their rationale for what they chose to present in their comics.

There were three "take-aways" from the findings of this study. First, the students were successful in depicting the non-violent actions taken by Rev. Shuttlesworth in a one-page comic. Their narratives contained accurate information; their narratives had a beginning, a middle, and an end. They also utilized visuals and text to convey information. The students were able to effectively use evidence from the trade book to construct their comic, including citing page numbers where they found the information in the trade book for their metacognitive writing. Second, the students were able to contextualize the racial discrimination experienced by Rev. Shuttlesworth and other African Americans in Jim Crow Birmingham. They were able to cite specific examples from the trade book of racial discrimination, and provide ways that civil rights

advocates, like Rev. Shuttlesworth, used non-violence to affect change. Finally, the importance of including the local connection to larger social studies topics was highlighted by the accuracy and quality of the comics created by the students.

We encourage other social studies teachers to employ trade book-based learning experiences like the one described in this study. The students in Mrs. Janeway's class, despite the fact that many of the students struggle with literacy, were able to analyze the information from the trade book, and use evidence from that book to convey an accurate narrative through a comic. If good social studies instruction, as described in the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013a), involves analyzing and synthesizing information to find answers and then communicating those answers in a cohesive narrative, this learning experience accomplishes those goals.

We also encourage social studies teachers to continue to highlight the struggle for racial equality and the fight against racial discrimination. If social studies teachers do not address these topics, then, our students may be left ignorant of the struggle for civil liberties that citizens in our nation have experienced, and still experience today. Trade books are an excellent vehicle to address topics of civil rights abuses and the struggle to achieve civil liberties by all citizens within the United States. A well-chosen trade book can engage readers, introduce them to new individuals and events, and encourage an emotional connection with the people and events in the text. Students can also see examples of historical figures that look like themselves taking civic action to address racial discrimination. The current political climate is attempting to extinguish discussions of discrimination, systemic racism, and the denial of civil liberties to all of the people of the Untied States. Learning experiences like the one described in this article provide students with a window into the realities experienced by many in this country. We must push

back against the efforts to stymie these discussions. If not, we disadvantage the students in our class leaving them ignorant of the world around them.

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Appendix

Table 1

Suggested Location-Specific Civil Rights Trade Books

Location	Civil Rights Event	Selected Books
Montgomery, Alabama	Montgomery Bus Boycott	Freedman, R. (2009). *Freedom walkers: The story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.* Holiday House. Romito, D., & Freeman, L. (2018). *Pies from nowhere: How Georgia Gilmore sustained the Montgomery Bus Boycott.* Little Bee Books.
Mississippi	Mississippi Freedom Summer	Rubin, S.G. (2014). *Freedom Summer: The 1964 struggle for civil rights in Mississippi.* Holiday House. Littlesugar, A., & Cooper, F. (2001). *Freedom School, yes!* Philomel Books.
Selma, Alabama	The Selma Marches	Lowery, L.B., & Leacock, E. (2016). *Turning 15 on the road to freedom: My story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March.* Speak. Wallace, S. N. & Wallace, R. (2020). *The teachers march!: How Selma's Teachers Changed History*. Calkins Creek.
Little Rock, Arkansas	School Integration	Walker, P. (2015). *Remember Little Rock: The time, the people, the stories.* National Geographic Kids. Marshall Poe, M. (2008). *Little Rock Nine (Turning Points).* Aladdin.
New Orleans, Louisiana	School Integration	Bridges, R., & Lundell, M. (1999). *Through my eyes.* Scholastic Press. Coles, R., & Ford, G. (2010). *The story of Ruby Bridges.* Scholastic Paperbacks.
Greensboro, North Carolina	Greensboro Sit-Ins	Pryor, S. (2021). *The Greensboro lunch counter: What an artifact can tell us about the Civil Rights Movement.* Capstone Press. Pinkney, A.D., & Pinkney, B. (2010). *Sit-In: How four friends stood up by sitting down.* Little Brown Books for Young Readers.
Washington, D.C.	The March on Washington	Farris, C.K., & Ladd, L. (2009). *March on! The day my brother Martin changed the world.* Scholastic King, Jr, M.L., & Nelson, K. (2012). *I have a dream.* Schwartz & Wade.