

“Those events really happened!” How elementary students
transact with history and historical fiction while reading the
American Girl series

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Dedication

Dedicated to my son, Titus Kane Philpott:

It is you who accompanied me every step of this adventure and you who would often brighten my papers with crayon marks. I rocked you while I read, I wrote while you napped, I typed as you snuggled by my side, and I thanked God every time I gazed into your eyes. Although I am proud of this dissertation, you- and the baby girl that will greet us in June- are my greatest and grandest accomplishments.
I love you, little boy.

And to my mom, Kimberly Hutson Lewis:

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I can no other answer make but thanks.

And thanks, and ever thanks.

-William Shakespeare: Twelfth Night

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how elementary readers transact with history and historical fiction while reading the American Girl series. A review of literature revealed a lack of educational research about the AG series and a need for research concerning how elementary students transact with historical fiction. The researcher attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do fourth grade students transact with history while reading the AG series of historical fiction?
2. How do fourth grade students transact with the AG series of historical fiction?

The researcher interviewed, observed, and participated in a book club with seven public school females. Data were collected over the course of four weeks and was analyzed using the inductive data analysis (Hatch, 2002). Fourteen theoretical codes were identified. They are:

- readers discuss social history
- readers discuss controversial issues
- readers show evidence of engaging in historical thinking
- reading books challenges student's ideas about history
- readers ask questions and make connections with history
- readers share misconceptions about history
- readers show interest in the human impact of historical events
- readers show evidence of being motivated to engage in historical inquiry

- readers use the textual and pictorial elements to their benefit
- readers share personal history
- readers motivated to read more books in the AG series
- readers initially believe the books to be non-fiction
- book club format influences type of talk during book club sessions, and
- readers wanting to engage in on-topic talk face resistance in small group book clubs.

Conclusions from emergent data reveal that the AG series of historical fiction helps readers think about history, discuss history, and ask questions about history. Data suggests that historical fiction is a valid addition to the social studies classroom as it enhances learners' understandings of history.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*I will tell you something about stories...
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
- Leslie Marmon Silko*

In 1986, the American Girl Collection (AG) debuted. With a mission of bringing American history alive to young readers (Morgenson, 1997) founder, Pleasant Rowland, and a talented team of authors, artists, and artisans brought this vision to life by creating an enterprise that offered consumers dolls, historically accurate doll accessories, and historical fiction books representative of specific eras in American history. This multi-million dollar line now includes, in addition to historical fiction and corresponding dolls, contemporary fiction, mysteries, magazines, advice books, crafts, and dolls. The original collection of historical fiction and 18-inch dolls was made available only in catalogs. In these colorful catalogs, Pleasant Company (renamed American Girl, Inc. in 2004) introduced young girls and their parents to high-quality dolls and historical fiction books that all featured a plot of “mixing adventure with actual events” (American Girl, 2011b, para.1). These three original series books featured the fictional lives of Kirsten, Samantha, and Molly. *Meet Kirsten* is the story of a Swedish immigrant making her way on the American frontier in 1854; *Meet Samantha* is the story of an orphan growing up in and near New York City during the time of the women’s suffrage movement and the Industrial Revolution; and *Meet Molly* is the story of a girl living on the American home front while her father serves in the military during World War II.

Although some literary critics welcomed the series with apprehension, from their first appearance the books have been embraced by consumers (Weischedel, Jones, Gale, & Doxsee, 1986). Since 1986, consumers have bought over 135 million books and 21 million dolls proving

that AG was not an ephemeral fascination. Furthermore, the company has garnered a wealth of awards from organizations such as the International Reading Association, Parents' Choice Awards, and the Children's Book Council.

Currently, twelve different time periods of American history may be viewed through the lens of AG's historical fiction collection. The characters/dolls and the corresponding time periods are: Kaya® (1764), Felicity® (1774), Caroline® (1812), Josefina® (1824), Marie-Grace and Cecile® (1853), Kirsten® (1854) Addy® (1864), Samantha® (1904), Rebecca® (1914), Kit® (1934), Molly® (1944), and Julie® (1974). The AG company ascertains that the characters and their companion books provide “ ‘girl –sized’ views of significant events that helped shape our country and they bring history alive for millions of children” (American Girl, 2011c). Each of the twelve historical dolls offers with it a six-book collection. These books narrate the adventures of the young girl as she grows up in a specific time period of American history. In the books, the fictional character's story is told through a third person limited narration and is enhanced with rich details of social history.

The AG books and doll line were launched to motivate girls to become interested in history and as an alternate option for consumers purchasing dolls. In the mid-1980s store shelves overflowed with Barbie dolls and Cabbage Patch Kids. Rowland relays a story of searching for a doll to give her niece for the Christmas of 1983. Looking for a doll that would one day become a family legacy, Rowland said of the available choices, “I didn't think they were particularly pretty and I didn't think they were of very high quality. But most important, they didn't say anything about what it meant to be a girl growing up in America. And they weren't something I thought anybody was going to treasure and put away for their daughters” (Morgenson, 1997, p. 127). This experience of Rowland being disappointed by the types of dolls marketed was coupled with

another experience that led to Rowland's epiphany of creating a high-quality doll line. Rowland had accompanied her husband on a trip to Colonial Williamsburg. It was there she relays that, "history and American traditions came alive" and she realized that "we had not done a good job bringing history alive for kids in schools" (Morgenson, 1997, p. 128). Using her background experience as a textbook creator and classroom teacher, Rowland envisioned offering consumers a different kind of doll line; ones that featured strong female characters who had lived during pivotal times of American history. She contacted her former co-worker, Valerie Tripp, and asked her to pen historical stories that would correspond with a line of historical dolls; this way history could be brought alive and girls could be provided much-needed role models (Hesse, 2011). In Rowland's vision, it was essential to create both dolls and books. She later said, "I believe that the dolls give girls the opportunity to play out those stories of history" (Morgenson, 1997, p. 25). From the start, Rowland and Tripp talked about recapturing the spirit of literature they used to read, literature in which female protagonists were brave and empowered (Hesse, 2011). From 1986 forward, Tripp and a host of other authors have been crafting stories featuring young, strong historical heroines for the AG enterprise.

Astute readers of the books might notice that each series tells a story specifically tailored to parallel the major events of America. Tripp describes writing in this symbolic fashion to the *Washington Post* by explaining, "Felicity is a girl-size version of the American Revolution. Molly learns the concept of sacrifice and self-sufficiency while the world around her erupts in Victory Gardens and scrap-metal drives" (Hesse, 2011). Like Tripp and the group of other AG authors, Connie Porter created an analogous relationship in the AG books she authored. The *Addy* series is set during the Civil War, and Porter crafted the stories to represent what it might have been like for a family to be torn apart within the social context of a divided United States.

Launching the AG enterprise proved challenging for Rowland. She hoped to provide what Yeats (1916) called, “the right twigs for an eagle’s nest” to young girls by offering them a firm foundation on which they could be nurtured and then confidently fly. The foundational piece were young female role models and books about a shared American heritage. But, her vision of creating high-quality dolls and well-written historical fiction books was plagued with challenges that included her lack of business experience and a reluctance, of men in particular, to take her and her ideas seriously. Situated within the historic social context of the 1980s when women were not readily valued in business, a successful business man once told her, “Pleasant, it sounds like you want to start General Motors. You’re talking about the direct mail business, you’re talking about the publishing business, you’re talking about special events, you’re talking about entertainment, you’re talking about being in the doll business, the book business, the clothing business. Get real!” (Morgenson, 1997, p. 125). Rowland persevered. In the end she created what her dad had hoped she would have, “An arena big enough to express your talents and your gifts” (Morgenson, 1997, p. 135). The humble beginnings of AG quickly grew into a successful enterprise. Rowland created an arena that has touched many corners of the American fabric. In 1998, Mattel purchased Pleasant Company for \$700 million dollars (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2001), but the brand continues to espouse the original mission of its founder.

The popularity of the AG historical series is evident not only in terms of finances, but also by its representation in a variety of both popular culture and academic settings. AG book clubs, led by the young and by adults, are offered throughout the United States at public libraries and museums. McDonalds restaurants offered AG prizes in their Happy Meals, the National Museum of American History provides patrons an “Addy’s World” tour featuring the time period of the Civil War, a recent Caribbean cruise offered to AG fans was sold-out within 48

hours (Kirch, 2011), and AG flagship stores- featuring tea rooms, theatrical productions, and activities- can be found in cities throughout the United States. Grandmothers, mothers, and daughters make pilgrimages to these stores not just to purchase dolls, but also for an experience that seems to facilitate familial bonding and adds to their family history (Diamond et al., 2009). In 2006, over one half million girls traveled with their parents an average of over four hours to visit the original flagship AG store in Chicago (Shlaes, 2007).

In addition, numerous readers of the AG series have made positive differences in their communities-- differences they profess to have made after being inspired by the books. For example, Mary Grace Reeves, now a student at Harvard, was the recipient of one of only ten prestigious 2012 AXA Achievement Scholarships (in association with U.S. News & World Report) and is both a Coca-Cola Scholar and National Merit Scholar. At the age of 13, Reeves created an AG Book Club to help the young in her area “strengthen their reading skills, teach them about our country’s past, educate them regarding the value of cultural diversity, and lead them in volunteer efforts to serve our community”(Reeves, 2012a). By the time she graduated from high school, Reeves had worked with over 1,000 young girls. The AG book club provided Reeves a venue to introduce young readers to community experts in the fields of art, history, and culture. She also accompanied young book club members on community service projects that went along with the subjects within the books and, at the end of the book study, Reeves and the girls in the club donated the AG books to the local Ronald McDonald house so that others could enjoy the series. Reeves reflects that the character values she learned in the AG series were her motivation in starting her local AG Book Club which thereby promoted literacy, history, and community service within her own neighborhood (Reeves, 2012b).

Pleasant Rowland, said her intent in creating, what is now a gestalt brand, was to

transport readers to past times of American history (Morgenson, 1997). Nurturing girls through the fragile period of girlhood and helping girls honor a shared heritage (American heritage, personal family heritage, and universal sisterhood) seemed to be the mission of Rowland.

Finding out how a group of seven fourth grade female students transact with history and the AG series as they read from the AG series of historical fiction was the focus of this instrumental case study. During interviews and in book groups, readers discussed texts from the series and were given the opportunity to write their reactions to the stories in a journal.

Statement of the problem

The context for this qualitative study was what occurs when students read the AG series of historical fiction. These ubiquitous works, featuring characters situated in different time periods of American history, are read by countless numbers of young people and have garnered a cult following. There currently is no educational research about the AG series of historical fiction, and few research studies concern how students process historical fiction, specifically from the perspective of a social science educational researcher.

Prior to fifth grade, many public school students do not have much systematic contact with the discipline of American history or world history (Villano, 2005). Social studies, specifically history, is not systematically taught as a discipline in the elementary school classroom (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008). Therefore, student exposure to American history comes from the reading of historical fiction and nonfiction texts, watching media, and extraneous sources. Understanding how students make sense of history through reading the AG series of historical fiction could help educators understand how students process historical fiction and help educators determine whether they might use this series (or other historical fiction) in their classrooms. Furthermore, it will provide researchers with an example

of a case study that can be replicated whereby the AG series could be replaced with other historical fiction narratives so as to expand the knowledge base about children's reading of historical fiction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to gain understanding of how fourth grade readers transact with history and the AG series of historical fiction while reading the AG series.

Research question

The stated purpose of this study led to the formulation of the following research questions as the focus of the investigation:

1. How do fourth grade students transact with history while reading the American Girl series of historical fiction in a book club setting?
2. How do fourth grade students transact with the American Girl series of historical fiction in a book club setting?

Significance of the study

The significance of this study is to inform educators, librarians, and parents what happens when elementary students read the AG series of historical fiction. This might provide insight into ways and if students think about history while reading historical fiction. Furthermore, it might assist stakeholders in using the AG books and other historical fiction books more effectively with children. This study has significance in social studies and literacy education for four reasons.

First, multiple reports suggest that social studies, specifically the content of history, is not systematically taught as a discipline in the elementary school classroom (Boyle-Baise et al.,

2008; Hoge, 1988; Passe, 2006). Students first real exposure to “chronological, academic history” occurs in the fifth grade (Barton & Levstik, 1996, p. 442), even though evidence suggests that students can, and do, develop historical understanding earlier (Barton & Levstik, 1996). Providing opportunities for students to think about and ask questions about history is important and developmentally appropriate (Barton & Levstik, 2004; S. Wineburg, 2001).

Secondly, many teachers rely on textbooks to lead instruction. This presents numerous challenges:

- Social studies textbooks often are written on a readability level not comprehensible for many students (Roser & Keehn, 2002; Villano, 2005).
- Textbooks give the reader the impression that what is written within the text is the single true account of history that is to be unquestioned (Bohan, 2003).
- Textbooks are traditionally not available in the elementary school classroom (Passe, 2006).
- Textbooks are heavily laden with dates and military history (L.S. Levstik & Barton, 2011).
- Textbooks have tended to favor the perspectives of European-men (L.S. Levstik & Barton, 2011).
- The validity of the information presented in textbooks is questioned, even by historians (Wineburg, 1991). Therefore, in addition to textbooks, supplementary and alternative reading materials need to be offered in the classroom.

Thirdly, primarily focusing attention on numerical dates with elementary students is developmentally inappropriate and confusing to many students (Barton & Levstik, 1996). Barton and Levstik (1996) conducted open-ended interviews with fifty-eight students in Kindergarten

through sixth grade to better understand children's understanding of historical time, especially whether chronology was a precursor to historical understanding. The researchers asked students to arrange pictures chronologically in order to depict scenes from American history- and then to discuss their reasoning for their placements. Through talking with the students, the researchers found that numerical dates did not seem to hold meaning for students prior to fifth grade and that their placement of pictures was not dependent on dates. The researchers concluded: "research indicates that children develop important historical understandings prior to, and to some extent independent of, their use of dates and other aspects of adult temporal vocabularies." (Barton & Levstik, 1996, p. 420) One implication Barton and Levstik (1996) made is that the emphases on having students' learn chronological information should be replaced with helping students understand "the variety of people's lived experience" (Barton & Levstik, 1996, p. 444). These findings present an opportunity and reason to use historical fiction and materials other than textbooks in classrooms. Alternate resources help students understand what it might have been like to live in a certain era because the characters in historical fiction seems to act like a person to readers (L.S. Levstik, 1989); readers can accompany these characters in their lived experiences.

Finally, students have many misconceptions concerning the inclusion of females and various racial groups as participants in American history and culture. Reading and discussing historical fiction provides opportunities for teachers to investigate and discuss such common misconceptions with students. Elementary students appear to have misconceptions about the presence of females in American history. For example, Wineburg (2001) conducted an exploratory study researching how boys and girls picture the past. One hundred-sixty one fifth and eighth graders were given a questionnaire and asked to draw a picture of a pilgrim, western

settler, or hippie. Based on previous research about children's drawing tendencies, Wineburg expected that boys would draw pictures featuring males and girls would draw pictures featuring females. However, the analysis showed that 84% of the drawings by boys featured male figures, but only 35 % of drawings by the girls depicted female figures. Wineburg (2001) concluded that "in girls' minds, women in history are absent; in boys' minds, they are virtually invisible" (p.121). The AG books provide readers a fictionalized lived experience of a young female situated in a historical era, thus showing readers that females were active historical agents.

Researchers have found that misconceptions are present, not only about gender, but also about the presence or absence of various racial groups in the past and present. Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2001), scholars in the field of communications studies, found that in the sample of participants they interviewed, the participants perceived various racial groups as not being Americans. This qualitative research study looked at how girls who owned an AG doll created an identity through the interaction of the AG products. Utilizing in-depth interviews, one theme that emerged was that the girls interviewed had the perception that Hispanics and Asian Americans are not Americans, but whites and African Americans are Americans (2001). Clearly, it is necessary to provide students with sources that illustrate how both genders and how all racial groups were part of American history.

All these findings suggest that it is not prudent to rely solely on textbooks or didactic teaching to educate elementary students about history. Other sources might need to be provided- sources that are not heavily dependent on dates, sources that stimulate critical thinking discussions, and sources that provide spaces for the voices of females and members of various racial and ethnic groups.

This led me to investigate the AG series of books. These books are a fictional account of

American history told through the eyes of young girls of varying racial and ethnic groups. The books have a large following, and they are an appropriate reading level for many elementary students. Furthermore, there is a lack of research exploring what happens when elementary students read historical fiction.

Limitations

Limitations of this qualitative study included lack of appropriate funding, a limited time period to complete the research, a research schedule dependent on the schedule of the research site, and absenteeism of participants.

Delimitations

Participants were selected from a public school system where I worked as a teacher. Although I did not teach at this particular school, I had a working relationship with the administrators and teachers. I worked with a teacher who frequently integrates literature into the classroom. By choosing this teacher I ensured that research participants had a familiarity with discussing books in a group setting. Another delimiting factor is that this study was bound to a four-week session with seven female students. The outcome of this study might also have been influenced by my choice to conduct the book club during regular school hours because interruptions did occur. Finally, I was a participant-observer during all book club sessions.

Assumptions

The research was conducted with the assumption that past research reviewed was written without the intent to deceive and that the data collection and data analysis procedures used by the researchers were conducted and reported in an accurate manner.

Another assumption is that authors and AG advisory board teams ensured that the historical content within the AG series is historically accurate.

Definitions of terms

Aesthetic Response: a response to literature with attention to how a reader reacts emotionally or intuitively to a text. Essentially, the reader is concerned with the actual event of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978).

American Girl (AG) books: books from the historical collection series offered by American Girl.

Civic Competence: “knowledge about the community, nation, and world; skills of data collection and analysis, decision making, problem solving, and collaboration; and a commitment to the values of our democratic republic” (McGowan, Erickson, & Neufeld, 1996).

Efferent Response: a response to literature with attention to how a reader attends to the information or data contained in a text. Essentially, the reader is concerned with what can be carried away from reading a text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Elementary Students: refers to students in kindergarten through fifth-grade.

Historical Fiction: the genre of historical fiction, in the field of children’s literature, which includes stories that are written to portray a time period or convey information about a specific time period or an historical event through a fictional character (NCTE/IRA, 2004). Although literary scholars commonly use the term ‘period piece’ to categorize this genre of work, historical fiction is the commonly used term to describe this genre in the field of elementary education.

Historical Thinking: Contextualizing, corroborating, and sourcing are three types of actions taken by historians when they interpret historical documents and evidence (Wineburg, 2001).

Wineburg (2001) refers to these acts as historical thinking. The following framework, developed by VanSledright and Kelly (1998) and based on past works of scholars, has been used to determine whether students engage in historical thinking while reading a variety of historical

texts- including alternate texts such as historical fiction. Students engage in historical thinking if they:

1. Recognize that historical texts are representations of the past constructed by people for different purposes. Textual accounts do not necessarily correspond with the past itself; therefore, historical validity and reliability issues continually affect the creation and consumption of historical texts.
2. Build and work from *event models* based on various accounts of past occurrences as a method for sifting and judging historical evidence.
3. Practice the act of *sourcing*- trying to locate a text and its perspective in relation to other accounts and with reference to the historical context. This is sometimes referred to as *corroboration*.
4. Read for *subtext*- attempting to understand as much about the author and his or her purposes, biases, and sources of information as about the event representation itself. Reading for subtext requires historical *contextualization* (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998, p. 243-244).

Naturalistic, Instrumental Case Study: a bounded system that is studied in its familiar setting in order to provide insight into an issue.

Social Studies: the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994).

Transact: how both the reader and the text come together to make meaning. This definition is based on the works of Rosenblatt (1978).

Theoretical framework

Methodological framework. The epistemological and ontological framework of this qualitative study falls under constructivist principles.

Constructivism. Learning how different research participants interpret history and transact with historical fiction texts while reading books from the AG series is the focus of this study. I do not anticipate finding that all readers have the same experiences. Unlike the positivist, I do not ascribe to the belief that there is one, singular reality waiting to be studied (Hatch, 2002). Each individual constructs the nature of reality based on his or her real-world interactions, readings, experiences and other external factors. Our own realities are not stagnant; they change or expand as a result of experiences and exposure to new knowledge. All of those factors will influence how elementary readers interpret the AG texts. My understandings of the AG series and historical fiction will transition as I transact with participants and documents.

I anticipate generating an idea of how research participants transact with and think about the AG series and the historical time periods presented within the books. Constructivists “seek to draw out the culture of the children and help them meaningfully clarify and connect who they are and what they know” (Gaudelli, 2002, p. 199). I firmly expect that each participant will experience different realities and she will be able to share these realities with the other participants.

Constructivists acknowledge that an absolute truth cannot be obtained. I am interested in gaining insight into how the research participants transact with history and with AG books. This will be accomplished through framing the research within the parameters of a qualitative instrumental case study. Furthermore, the inductive analysis procedure used to analyze the data is a framework that can be used within the constructivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002) as it is founded

upon principles that the researcher is an active participant in the research study when the researcher collects and analyzes data. I acknowledge that my subjectivity as a researcher can affect the way which I coded the data. Findings were influenced by my background as an educational researcher in the field of social science; this is the discipline through which I chose to interpret the collected data.

As the proposed design of the study dictates, the researcher and students would meet together in a book club format to discuss the AG texts. Discussions fall under the framework of the social constructivist theory. Talk helps students “complete their thoughts”(Vygotsky, 1986, p. 251), afford students opportunities to hear alternate viewpoints, and help students make meanings for themselves. Furthermore, discussing historical topics and narratives encourages students to engage in historical thinking (Bolgatz, 2007). How readers construct knowledge and engage with each other while reading historical fiction is a focus of this research.

Substantive framework. The two substantive theories that frame this study are transactional literacy and schema theory.

Transactional literacy. In the seminal work *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978), Louise M. Rosenblatt discussed transactional literacy theory. This theory for understanding how readers respond to various texts gives importance to the process a reader undergoes while transacting with a text. Putting aside the notion and past theoretical viewpoints that there is only one meaning of a text waiting to be discovered by a reader, Rosenblatt focuses attention on how both the reader and the text come together to make meaning. Based on research, she ascertains that the reader is of paramount importance because a reader’s individual emotions and past experiences influence the meaning the text takes. In transactional literacy theory, the act of making meaning from text depends on the reader unearthing a meaning as it relates to

himself/herself.

Rosenblatt also distinguishes between two types of roles a reader takes when reading texts. Involvement in an efferent reading means that while reading, the reader is concerned with what he/she can take away. It can be thought of as a process of collecting information for later use. Alternatively, involvement in aesthetic reading means that the reader is concerned with the process of reading. In this type of reading, words evoke a lived experience in where a reader feels emotions, thinks, and imagines while reading the printed word. Rosenblatt says that a text will not always be read in an aesthetic or efferent manner. Rather, the same text can be read both ways by the same or different readers. The level at which one reads one way or another is on a continuum of response, dependent upon circumstance and purpose.

In relation to the research study, transactional literacy theory supports the idea that each reader interacts with text differently because of past knowledge and prior experience. In this study, I seek to find how readers respond to the AG series. I am interested in how readers respond in both an efferent and an aesthetic manner and, I believe that a single book can garner from readers both aesthetic and efferent responses.

Schema theory. Schema theory is “a theory about the structure of human knowledge as it is represented in memory” (Duffy & Israel, 2009, p. 193). Essentially, it is how our brains relate prior knowledge to new knowledge. Schemata can be described as boxes located in our brains. Each experience we have is catalogued in an appropriate box. With each new experience the memories (past experiences) in our boxes open and make and build relationships with new information (Duffy & Israel, 2009). For example, elementary students might read the stories about Addy, an AG character who escapes to the north with the assistance of the Underground Railroad, and might develop specific schemata about this time period. Later,

when students begin to learn about the time period of the Civil War, these readers will come equipped to the classroom with a schema about the time period surrounding the Civil War because of their interaction with the *Addy* series. Comprehension of the new subject material might be easier, or made more difficult, because of the prior knowledge that the student brings with him/her.

Organization of the study

This study will be organized in five chapters:

- Chapter One contains the introduction, rationale, proposed research question, and methodological and substantive theoretical framework.
- Chapter Two presents a review of literature concerning historical fiction and the history of the AG historical series.
- Chapter Three describes the research methodology and data analysis used in the study.
- Chapter Four describes the results of the study.
- Chapter Five describes implications and recommendations based on the results of this study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Countless proclamations and recommendations have been made in the field of education about the use of historical fiction in the classroom. Methods books about integrating historical fiction into the curriculum line the shelves of teacher stores. Scholarly and practitioner articles abound with directions and assistance for using historical fiction in the classroom. But even though many scholarly articles have been written about the use of historical fiction in the classroom, relatively few peer-reviewed empirical studies have investigated the use of historical fiction in the social studies classroom (Heyer & Fidyk, 2007), historical comprehension gained by readers of historical fiction (Johnson & Ebert, 1992), or how students process historical fiction from the perspective of an educational researcher in the field of social sciences.

McGowan, Erickson, and Neufeld (1996) remarked:

“The number of convincing arguments for social studies instruction based on literary sources far outweighs the amount of published research documenting the extent to which literature-based teaching promotes the knowledge, skills, and values that constitute civic competence. Evidence seems limited, inconclusive, and concentrated on how trade books enhance students’ knowledge acquisition...educators need expanded research about the effects of this approach, particularly its impact on skill development and values formation” (p. 206).

In the same year, Barton and Levstik (1996) suggested that since it appears that narratives influence the historical thinking of elementary students, additional research should be conducted on the impact historical fiction might have on the historical thinking of elementary students. This research study seeks to add to the small body of empirical research and to perform what is called for when Eeds & Wells (1991) remarked that social studies researchers should “examine

what happens when children are allowed to read interesting content and then discuss their reading freely and openly...with their peers and teacher” (p. 137).

Relying heavily on the works of Barton and Levstik (Barton & Levstik, 1996; Levstik, L.S. & Barton K., 2011), the primary researchers on the topic of historical thinking in elementary students and the use of historical fiction, this literature review seeks to categorize content from both anecdotal arguments and published empirical studies. As there is a paucity of empirical research, common themes that emerged in both the literature and from anecdotal accounts of classroom use are presented in this review of literature.

Historical fiction defined

Historical fiction is a literary genre in which authors weave stories around fictional characters that are situated in the past. Through the use of language, setting, and characterization, readers get a feel for the historical period focused upon in the book. There is the common understanding that high-quality historical fiction cannot truly capture the way “it really was” (Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K., 2011, p. 116) for a person living during the presented time period, but it does provide readers with an interpretation of history through the creative and informed lens of an author. Library shelves and bookstores are filled with volumes of this genre, but selecting historical fiction books for the classroom requires discernment. Levstik and Barton (2011) recommend that the following questions must be considered when selecting appropriate historical narratives:

- Does the book tell a good story?
- Is the story accurate and authentic in historical detail, including the setting and the known events of history?
- Is the language authentic to the times?

- Is the historical interpretation sound?
- Whose voices are missing?
- Does the book provide insight and understanding into current issues as well as those in the past? (p. 118-119).

Through reading these historical fiction texts, many readers describe being sent on vicarious experiences into the historic past and that history seems to be brought to life (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2008; Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Roser & Keehn, 2002). Readers join characters as they travel through their everyday life and in turn garner a feeling for the social history of the time period presented. Experiencing the events of history through the lens of a character allows readers to imaginatively feel the same emotions, deliberate between the same choices, and live imaginatively in the same time period as the characters (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2008; Wasta & Lott, 2006).

What research and literature tells us about historical fiction

Historical fiction is an interdisciplinary mode of instruction. History is not often systematically taught in the elementary school level classroom as a discipline (Boyle-Baise et al., 2008; Hoge, 1988; Libresco, 2006). Libresco (2006) suggested that educators should use the lack of class time devoted to social studies as an opportunity to move to a more interdisciplinary mode of teaching; that is, history and literature could be tied closely together. Historical fiction is a genre that provides fluidity and a connection between the two disciplines. This pedagogical technique is supported by many scholars (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2008; Levstik L.S, 1993; Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K. 2011; Tomlinson, Tunnell, & Richgels, 1993; Turk, Klein, & Dickstein, 2007; Wasta & Lott, 2006) and students appear to prefer reading alternative texts to textbooks (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998).

Historical fiction provides what textbooks omit- social history. Social history presents the story of the ordinary, common person. Instead of focusing attention on the political and military discourse, social history provides insight into the lives of everyday people. Historical fiction provides readers with social history and gives voices to the people and groups that have been historically marginalized in textbooks (Turk et al., 2007). Textbooks provide students a condensed version of history heavily focused on military battles, dates, and key people (Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K. 2011). The social history, or story of what occurred through the viewpoint of an individual, is often missing. Information about the lives of women, children, and minorities are often underrepresented in textbooks (Turk et al., 2007). This results in students being exposed to only a condensed framework of history favoring certain voices. It is often difficult to understand, and rarely provides students the information they need to bring history to life. Turner (2005) says that textbooks contain “biases and sanitized sterility” (p.195). This suggests that students are learning a disingenuous and disengaging account of history through their textbook readings.

On the other hand, historical fiction is told through the life of a person living in a certain historical time period and is therefore seeped in social history. Learning about the human side of history is of particular interest to students (Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K. 2011) and could possibly help them comprehend information because it provides readers a personal dimension added to the abstract concepts of history. Johnson and Ebert (1992) discuss the fact that the textbook version of history often omits information that would enable students to have a true view into the past. Research suggests that elementary students use social history to better comprehend history and it is a way in which elementary students appear to make sense of and retain historical information (Barton & Levstik, 1996).

Historical fiction provides a safe place for discussion. Freeman and Levstik (1988) write that stories offer children a safe place to understand complex events. In a case study research, Brooks and Hampton (2005) found that historical fiction offered a safe haven for students to explore and discuss one of the most unpleasant and controversial facets of history-racism. Over a period of eight months, qualitative data were collected from twenty-eight students in an eighth-grade class. The students read ethnically diverse literature. One pedagogical theme that emerged from the data was that discussing literature provided a forum where students could “confront and more deeply understand racism’s impact on the past as well as the students’ current reality” (Brooks & Hampton, 2005, p. 83). This suggests that historical fiction can provide a safe place for discussions to ensue and a place where students can analyze the various viewpoints of historical participants. Discussions naturally encourage historical talk and critical thinking (Levstik, L.S. & Barton, K. 2011) and should be encouraged in the history classroom.

Historical fiction allows students to see how humans respond to historical events.

Freeman and Levstik agree with Egan suggesting that stories allow children to begin understanding the “human response to historical events” (1988, p. 330), which Egan says is the basis of a historical understanding. In Brooks and Hampton’s (2005) research study, the authors found that students reading historical fiction texts were able to grapple with the decision making process of the main character. Students frequently talked about and wrote in their journals about the decisions that the characters had to make in the face of the historic incidents that occurred. They were considering how events had an impact on individuals in history.

Historical fiction is said to bring the past to life. Hoge, (1998) in a literature review about the teaching of history in the elementary school, identifies the purpose of teaching history to elementary students as to “make the past seem real...build insights into their own lives and

contemporary events... develop knowledge of American heritage...recognize important persons of the past, and... build understanding of time and chronology” (p. 3). Multiple articles cite anecdotal examples of readers saying that historical fiction makes the past seem real (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2008; Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Roser & Keehn, 2002). One reason historical fiction might be thought to bring to life history is because readers become emotionally connected to the characters in the books and begin empathizing with characters. Levstik’s (1989) research participant described a narrative as a human person. This suggests that this reader seemed to feel as if she was a part of an interpersonal relationship with the character. The story and information within the text became real, which is what occurs in efferent and aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Crawford and Zygouris-Coe (2008) write an anecdotal experience they had at a professional development conference. There, they learned the potential of using historical fiction as a way of making the past seem real. At this conference they asked teachers to discuss the process of how they learned history in school. Teachers reported many negative experiences with reading the textbook and memorizing dates. Then one teacher mentioned reading the historical fiction text, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976) She described her emotional experience of “feeling as if she had walked in the shoes of the protagonist” (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2008, p. 197). Many other teachers began describing similar experiences with the reading of historical fiction texts.

Bringing the past alive, as Hoge (1988) listed as a purpose of instruction, requires much more than just listening to a story, or reading an account. Collingwood (1946) argues that the base notion of understanding history requires using the imagination. The brain’s function of imagination has a paramount job in re-creating the past in the mind (1946). Bringing the past to

the present mind, as described by the teacher at the professional development seminar (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2008), is a difficult task. It is an especially challenging task when one relies on a textbook account to bring the past alive. Textbooks are linear accounts filled with dates, people, and places. There is little context for understanding the reality of life. Based on Collingwood's arguments, Heyer and Fidyk say that historical fiction texts assist readers in the imaginative play required of reading history and also helps history become more "plausible" for readers (2007, p. 144). They say this genre offers "insight into the complexities of human life" (Heyer & Fidyk, 2007, p. 143) and helps bridge the gap between the past and present.

Further understanding of the role imagination and visualization plays in historical understanding could help illuminate the abstract statement: "the past coming to life."

Historical fiction provides a connection between the past and present. One goal of historical instruction is for students to make a connection between the past and present. Historical fiction aids students in understanding the commonalities and continuity of time (Freeman & Levstik, 1988) and helps students develop personal connections to history (Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K. 2011). Students can gain an understanding about what human experience was like in that particular time period (Johnson & Ebert, 1992; Roser & Keehn, 2002) and, therefore, grow to understand that many facets of life are similar across time periods (Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Roser & Keehn, 2002; Wasta & Lott, 2006). Readers vicariously travel back in time with the main character, and along the journey, students learn that people faced similar situations, dilemmas, emotions, and responses to life. Readers find that, in essence, all humans have the same basic needs and that there is a "continuity of life" (Johnson & Ebert, 1992, p. 489).

Historical fiction provides background knowledge. Students frequently report accessing background knowledge they have received from reading historical fiction. In Barton and Levstik's (1996) qualitative study, which examined children's understanding of historical time, the researchers reported that one fifth-grade student connected a picture with a certain time period because she knew that Samantha, from the AG line, wore similar clothing to that in the picture and had a similar desk. Similarly, in the same study, one sixth grader described one picture as Victorian, because she had read AG books situated in the Victorian time period (Barton & Levstik, 1996, p. 437). This indicates that students' developed a schemata of history from the reading of historical fiction.

Developmentally, stories are an excellent way to introduce elementary aged children to history (Freeman & Levstik, 1988). And, historical stories are a way students store historical information (Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K. 2011). Villano (2005), in an action research study, reports that using literature (picture books, non-fiction, and historical poetry) helped her fifth-grade students better comprehend content because the literature provided the necessary background knowledge to scaffold students' further content understanding. She found that the inclusion of literature not only helped engagement and comprehension, but it also increased motivation for further content learning.

Historical fiction motivates students to pursue further inquiry. Motivating students to pursue further inquiry is an important goal in history instruction. Anecdotally, many articles report how students in social studies classrooms, where historical fiction was used, are motivated to find out more about the historic topic of which they were reading (Levstik, L.S. 1993; Roser & Keehn, 2002; Wasta & Lott, 2006). In her action research study, Villano (2005) accounts how after doing a unit study of the American Revolution which integrated historical literature, her

fifth grade students could not wait to use other sources of information to learn more about the topic. She says that by studying the events through literature, students acquired a schema of the time period. They had been struggling with associating words with actual events. Reading the historical fiction text first enabled students to create a schema about the American Revolution. This assisted them in comprehending more difficult to read non-fiction texts, which they wanted to read at the conclusion of their novel study. She found that her students actually sought non-fiction and other fact checking resources after they read the historical fiction.

In a separate study, Roser and Keehn (2002) write of research they did in two fourth grade classrooms. In these classrooms the teachers used historical fiction and other texts to engage students in a study about the Texas Revolution. At the end of the study, teachers were ecstatic to report that the students not only had learned content but were also motivated to inquire more about the subject on their own. Students were still reading books about the American Revolution after the study had ended, and one student was even reading a 760 page adult book about the event (2002, p. 425). Students had personally decided to continue historic inquiry- and had moved to various sources of information to acquire and analyze content.

Historical fiction might distort reality. Historical fiction runs the risk of distorting reality for students (Freeman & Levstik, 1988; L.S. Levstik & Barton, 2011). As it is up to the author of historical fiction's discretion, historical fiction could be presented as a romantaziced version of history or the author might create an unreliable narrator. If readers do not critically question whether or not information is accurate, solely rely on the perspective of a character (Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K. 2011), or if readers fail to understand the principles guiding the genre of historical fiction they can leave a story with a multitude of misconceptions.

Vansledright and Kelly (1998) posited that the fifth grade students engaged in their research

study might conflate retellings and summarizations of historical content because within the unit of study the teacher allowed the students to use alternative texts. But the qualitative researchers found that students' retellings were free from conflation of content (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998, p. 239).

Series books

The genre of the AG books is historical fiction and the sub-genre is serial books. Readers turn to series books, or companion books, for a variety of reasons. Series books, which have been around for over one hundred years, have been popular with readers but often underappreciated by educators (McGill-Franzen, 2009). What makes them attractive to students is the familiar format, settings, situations, language, style, and characters (Young & Ward, 2010), and the familiar language provides comfort to inexperienced readers (McGill-Franzen & Botzakis, 2009). McGill-Franzen (2009) discusses the strength of using series books in the classroom because they not only help student's foster their reading skills, but they are also of interest to children, which encourages students to read more- a primary goal in reading programs. The AG series has been very popular with readers, evidenced by more than 135 million being sold since 1986 (American Girl).

Implications

As cited earlier, many sources point to historical fiction as providing a great function in social studies classroom, but additional empirical research needs to be conducted about how students transact with historical fiction in the classroom. An abundance of anecdotal reports document non-empirical reasons as to how and why historical fiction is a positive experience for students, but relatively few empirical studies have been conducted to find out whether these posits do occur.

As this review of literature revealed that the body of knowledge about historical fiction is composed of scholarly articles and not research studies, this proposed research study seeks to remedy this paucity of empirical research by describing what happens when students read historical fiction.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Overview of the study

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to gain understanding of how fourth grade readers transact with history and the AG series of historical fiction while reading the AG series.

Seeking to explore the perspectives of participants as they read books from the series, I interviewed, observed, and participated- as a participant-observer, in a book club, with seven fourth grade female public school students as they navigated books from the AG series. Over the course of four weeks, I met with students for thirteen separate book club sessions. During the book club sessions group members and I read and discussed five AG books: *Meet Addy* (Porter, 1993); *Addy Learns a Lesson* (Porter, 1993); *Meet Julie* (McDonald, 2007); *Meet Kaya* (Shaw, 2002); and *Meet Felicity* (Tripp, 1991) (see Appendix A for details of each book).

Each of these two-hour sessions included time spent in book clubs and time spent individually interviewing participants. I was with participants a total of twenty-six hours in a public school during regular school hours. Collected data were rigorously analyzed using the inductive data analysis framework (Hatch, 2002).

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

In order to best meet the purpose of the research design, this study was designed as a qualitative instrumental case study with the researcher acting as a participant-observer. Data were collected using ethnographic tools of interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis. The research methodology and data collection methodology are situated within the constructivist paradigm (as described on page 15 in dissertation).

The purpose of an instrumental case study is to provide “insight into an issue or to

redraw a generalization” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). Since the intent of this study was to understand how readers transact with books from the AG series of historical fiction and history, this particular qualitative design was chosen to help me gain the most understanding from my participants.

Defining the boundaries of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998) is an essential component in designing case study research. Defining the boundaries of the case aids the researcher in focusing on a particular research context and understanding the particularities within that context. This case was bound by time and place as it was delimited to span four weeks and was delimited to seven female students from a specific public school reading selected books from the AG series of historical fiction.

Respecting the tradition of qualitative research as being naturalistic (Hatch, 2002), I situated the research study in a public school during regular school hours. Participants attended the book club in lieu of joining their regularly scheduled reading class. Choosing this research context allowed me to observe student behavior within the framework of a school setting- a natural setting with which students were familiar. Although the book club members were aware that I was a former teacher, I explained to them that my role as a researcher was to learn from them; I was not judging them on “right” or “wrong” answers, and their participation would not influence their academic grade. I assured the group members that my role was to listen to their thoughts, discussions, and participate as a book club member. The seven students appeared to accept my role as a researcher and fellow book club member and not as a teacher. This was evidenced by students not aiming questions toward me, but instead asked questions to other book club members.

Since collecting multiple sources of data is instrumental in successfully implementing

case study research (Patton, 2002), I employed ethnographic data gathering tools of interviewing, participant observation and document analysis (Glesne, 2006). In order to provide insight into how these seven fourth grade students transacted with the AG series of historical fiction, data were specifically collected and analyzed from transcribed interviews, field notes, transcribed book club sessions, and student journal entries.

Participants And Site

I selected my participants from a fourth grade classroom in a public school in Tennessee. Although the county where this school is located is primarily considered rural, the city where the school is situated is home to a private college and several Fortune 500 companies. In addition, a public library, art center, county museum, and several public parks encircle the city. A strong level of community involvement aids the small town feel of this city. This school served 239 students in grades 3 -5. This school served a population with 27.1% minority students including African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan students- the pre-dominant minority being African-American, making up 17.9% of the student body. 65.6% of the students were categorized as economically disadvantaged by the receiving of free or reduced lunch. There were fewer than three English Language Learners.

Rationale for participant selection. I began the process of targeting participants for this study by consulting with a school librarian who has served on the American Library Associations prestigious Newbery Award Selection Committee. Furthermore, as a citizen of the city where the school is located, this librarian had a strong familiarity with students in the area. I felt that her expertise and extensive knowledge, of both books and the students in the area, would help me choose the grade-level for this particular research study. I wanted to ensure that the texts would fit the readers. AG books are written for youths in grades third through fifth, and after careful

consideration and consultation with the expert librarian, I chose fourth grade students.

After choosing the grade level, I contacted a principal of a public school. This school is located within the district where I previously taught and I am a professional acquaintance of the principal. Having a familiarity with school personnel greatly expedited the process of my gaining access and being granted permission to conduct research in this particular school system.

Because I had already established rapport with the personnel of the school district where I formally taught, I was able to verbalize a lay summary to the principal and superintendent, gain access to the site, and be promised relative freedom in executing the design of my study.

Although backyard research is not a favorable context for all qualitative studies, I felt that conducting backyard research best fit the needs of this particular study and the benefits outweighed possible negatives (Glesne, 2006): I was familiar with the research context, familiar with the values and culture of the students, and had a genuine concern for the community.

Another reason I chose to conduct backyard research is because the design of the study required me removing students out of their school day. The school system needed to trust that the time students spent with me would be educationally meaningful and that they would be in a safe environment. Furthermore, I wanted to ensure to students that no academic grade would be attached to any participation in the research study.

Upon being granted IRB approval (Appendix B) from the University and permission from the school district, I shared with a fourth grade teacher a lay summary of the study and the information letter (Appendix C). Mrs. Rock is a district-level recipient of the district's "Teacher of the Year" award, and is known for integrating literature circles in her classroom. She values pedagogy of student discussion and using authentic literature in the classroom; this assured to me that the students in my research study would be familiar with reading and discussing literature.

Mrs. Rock graciously agreed to allow me access to her classroom. I asked her to choose six to eight students to participate in the study. I limited the number of participants to no more than eight so that it would be easier to capture all student voices and to limit the cost of the research study (i.e. cost of books, snacks, video and digital recording equipment). I asked that she identify students who read at or above grade level. I utilized this manner of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) so that student reading ability would not be a limitation in the research study. Mrs. Rock used the student's STAR reading test (which had last been administered five months earlier) and her professional opinion as the determining factor. Although I did not first designate gender restrictions, she told me that she only had four female students in her classroom who were at or above level readers- two fewer than the six I had anticipated including in the study. Mrs. Rock reviewed several AG books and informed me that she had three additional female students who were on the cusp of being on-level readers. She thought they would be able to read, enjoy, and discuss the books. She gave me the choice of conducting the study with the four female students who met the original reading ability requirements, conducting the study with a mixed gender group composed of all on or above level readers, or conducting the study with seven females (the entire female population of her reading class) who ranged in reading ability level.

After consideration, I decided to revise the study and remove the reading ability requirements so that the group could be composed of female readers of mixed-ability level. I did this for a variety of reasons. Although I feel that boys should have access to the AG books as well as girls, my recent research into interviews with Pleasant Rowland, the founder of the AG enterprise, influenced my decision. I had recently performed an ethnographic document analysis of an interview Rowland gave in *Forbes Great Minds of Business* (Morgenson, 1997). After

extensive coding and thematic analysis of this interview and other sources of her life history, I generated five thematic codes from the data. The first theme is a chronology of Rowland's life history and the nature of her character. The second and third themes are her mission and vision for both her company and her life. The fourth theme is the challenges she faced during the creation of AG, and the fifth theme concerns her profound success. Specifically, two of the findings revealed that Rowland had specific purposes for creating the AG enterprises: honoring a shared female heritage and nurturing the period of girlhood. Because of my research findings, I chose to honor Rowland's mission and vision for the AG enterprise by deciding to include all the females in the classroom rather than limiting the participants based on their reading ability.

After specifying the participant requirements, Mrs. Rock provided the information letter (Appendix C) to parents of the students she identified as being potential research participants. This letter introduced information about the research study to the guardians of the potential participants and provided background information about myself. She also sent home a parent consent form (Appendix D) and a student assent form (Appendix E). All seven participants and their guardians signed and returned the forms.

Participants. As described in the previous section, participants were seven fourth grade students at an intermediate public school in Tennessee. The all-female group consisted of six Caucasian students and one African-American student. Participants ranged in age range from nine to ten. Pseudonyms for the study, chosen by me, are: Kendyl, Jenna, Brooke, Mary, Taryn, Leigh, and Rae. Pseudonym for the teacher is: Mrs. Rock. From the onset, the girls in the study seemed extremely excited to participate in an AG book club. Students ranged in familiarity with the AG enterprise. Four of the seven participants were somewhat aware of the AG enterprise, but had never read the books and did not own a doll. Since the study was situated in a school with

an economically disadvantaged rate of 65.6 %, I was not surprised to find that some participants were unfamiliar with the series- as the dolls and books are relatively expensive (at present the historical doll, which includes one book from the series, is priced at \$110.00).

The Tennessee social studies standards dictate that fourth graders in Tennessee should be engaged in studies relating to the historical time periods ranging from four specific eras. The eras dictated are: beginnings to 1620, 1585-1763, 1754-1820, and 1801-1861. Mrs. Rock, the reading and social studies teacher, attested that she did meet the requirements of teaching and covering the standards. She did this through the use of the textbook, multi-media, and supplemented social studies lessons with historical fiction and autobiographical novel studies. As the time of the study corresponded with the end of the school year, the majority of the social studies instruction had been conducted and students had already taken the state mandated assessment test.

Overwhelmingly, book club members stated they enjoyed the subject of reading considerably more than the subject of social studies. Although many students discussed their love of reading, several participants professed to *hate social studies*. Students described this subject as *difficult*, *hard to understand*, and that they disliked the *map work* that was required of them. I'm unsure whether at times these students mistook reading class for social studies class since Mrs. Rock used many sources of literature to supplement her social studies teaching. Nonetheless, students were quite emphatic that social studies was not their favorite subject. Of note is that throughout the study many book club members negatively commented that they were somewhat restricted to reading certain books based on their AR level. These participants professed that they did not like having to acquire points for reading. They self-reported that because of their AR level they did not have access to some of the AG books and that they could

not read the selections in the book club at night because they needed to read their AR books.

Consistent with their age range, the readers professed to enjoy series books as their favorite types of books to read.

Greater detail and background of each young participant is presented in the following table. The following symbols are used to designate reading ability: ↑ above level reader, → on-level reader, and ↓ below-level reader.

Table 1

Description of research participants

Name, reading ability, and total absences	Familiarity with AG enterprise	Opinion on subject of reading	Books enjoys reading	Opinion on subject of social studies
Kendyl ↑ 0 absences	Owens an AG doll and has read some of the books.	<i>Loves reading</i>	Series of: <i>Percy Jackson, Junie B. Jones, Ramona, and The Lost Hero</i>	<i>Enjoy all other subjects more than social studies</i>
Jenna ↑ 0 absences	Owens five AG dolls and has read <i>almost all</i> of the AG books. <i>I just really like them all. I used to play with them a whole lot, but now they are just decorations in the playroom.</i>	<i>Loves to read</i>	Series books	<i>Enjoys history- especially reading about it in fictional books</i>
Brooke ↓ 1 absence	Heard about AG from friends, but has not read an AG book or seen an AG dolls	<i>I like reading to my little sister</i>	Series of: <i>Goose Bumps</i> and <i>Ghost Writer Comic Books</i>	<i>I hate social studies</i>
Mary → 1 absence	Owens two dolls, but has not read any of the AG books.	<i>Reading is alright, but not my favorite subject</i>	Series of: <i>Magic Tree House, Judy Moody, and Bailey School Kids</i>	<i>I hate social studies</i>
Taryn ↓ 0 absences	Never heard of AG	<i>I like it</i>	Series books such as <i>Junie B. Jones</i> series and books by Beverly Cleary	<i>I don't like social studies; it is so hard</i>
Leigh ↓ 0 absences	Heard about AG from friends although she has not read an AG book or seen an AG dolls	<i>I like reading, and I feel comfortable with it too</i>	<i>Magic Tree House</i> series	<i>I kinda like it</i>
Rae → 2 absences	Seen AG books <i>but they are not in my Accelerated Reader Level</i> . Seen AG dolls in magazine. <i>My dad says he would probably be going to buy me one when he gets the money. Dolls are black, mixed, white.</i>	<i>I like to read</i>	Books such as <i>Smile</i>	<i>I like history, hmmm...not as much as reading. It is just hard for me to understand.</i>

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through ethnographic data collection tools of participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. This triangulation of data added trustworthiness to the findings of this qualitative study (Glesne, 2006). I specifically analyzed data from interviews I conducted with students, from observations and conversations during book club sessions, and written information from student journal entries. Furthermore, I collected research notes. All the book club sessions were audio and digitally recorded, the interviews were audio taped, and I retained copies of all the information in the student journals. A third-party and I transcribed interviews and book club sessions.

Individual Interviews. I conducted open-ended qualitative interviews with each participant throughout the study. I chose an open-ended questioning format so that participants could freely construct their responses and I could ask follow-up questions. Although I prepared an interview schedule (Appendix F), follow-up questions were asked and new questions were devised as the design of the study emerged (Glesne, 2006)

I conducted the first interview with each participant prior to the beginning of the start of the book club sessions to establish rapport and ask interview questions. During this initial interview, I asked each of the seven participants a series of questions from the interview schedule (Appendix F). I asked questions to capture student's understandings of the Civil War (the setting of the first book club read), individuals thoughts about the subjects of reading and social studies, individuals experiences or lack of experiences with the AG enterprise, and participant's personal reading interests. Throughout the study, I conducted an additional two to four interviews with all seven participants at the conclusion of each book reading. Participant absences and the loss of a day's interview data (due to technological difficulties) impeded me from collecting follow-up

interviews with each participant after each book was read. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed by a third party and myself.

Group Meetings: American Girl Book Club. The seven members of the research study met with me for eleven book club sessions. During these sessions, we read aloud and engaged in discussions about the books. At the initial book club meeting, I introduced the AG series to all the girls. From my initial interviews I learned that not all participants were familiar with the series. I brought in a large sampling of AG books and gave students time to look through them all. These books were welcomed with large smiles and eager faces. Book club members voraciously sifted through all the AG books and made excited comments about being in an AG book club. Although all the students were familiar with each other as classmates, this informal activity helped establish a community atmosphere of congeniality and commonality. After this, I gave participants their AG folder. This red, two pocketed folder contained plain white paper, post-it notes, a blank calendar for the month of May, and several pages of the “Wow and Wondering” graphic organizer (Appendix G). I created this graphic organizer with the anticipation of capturing students’ inner thoughts concerning new information they were gleaned from the books, information they were surprised to read, and questions they possessed. I introduced this graphic organizer by showing the book club members the graphic organizer and saying to them:

This is a paper where I wrote down the words ‘wows’ and ‘wonderings’. Anytime you are reading, either in here or at home, and something makes you say to yourself, ‘Wow, I didn’t know that’ or ‘that’s really cool’ and you want to try to remember to talk about it during book club, then you can write it down. Anything that makes you say, ‘hmmmm, I wonder things such as: I don’t know what that words means, I wonder why

Addy is doing this, or I wonder why.... you can write it down on this side of the paper.

Do you have to do this? No. But if you want to you can. I also left the back of the paper blank. This way if you ever want to draw, you may. Sometimes when I'm reading I enjoy drawing pictures.

This graphic organizer served as an alternative means for students to communicate with me- one that did not require them to speak aloud their thoughts, and it served as place for book club members to organize their thoughts. The intent was to provide a place for book club members to share when they did not feel comfortable verbally contributing information and to also provide a common language for all students to use during group discussions. I found that book club members frequently would open a conversation using the verbiage of the graphic organizer saying such things as, *I have a wow* and *I wonder*. The inclusion of the graphic organizer seemed to facilitate talk as evidenced by the numerous times the students professed both their written and non-written wows and wonderings with the group.

The students squealed with delight as they received the folder and information within the folder. I told students that my goal as a researcher was to better understand their inner thoughts while they were reading and explained that they could share their “wows” and “wonderings” with the group and with me either in the journal or as comments made aloud. I assured students that I wanted to know both their negative and positive thoughts about the books and subjects within the books. For example, if they did not particularly like a book or something happening in the book, they would not ‘hurt’ my feelings if their thoughts were verbalized. I did not want students to feel compelled to like the books just because I had invited students to join the AG book club. I informed students that I valued their authentic, honest thoughts.

During the course of the four-week study we read and discussed five AG books: *Meet*

Addy, *Addy Learns a Lesson*, *Meet Julie*, *Meet Kaya*, and *Meet Felicity*. We began the study reading two books I selected: *Meet Addy* and *Addy Learns a Lesson*. Both books chronicle the fictional life of Addy Walker during the 1860s. They detail her life as she escapes from slavery and subsequently arrives in Philadelphia to experience life in a free state. I chose to begin the book club with these two selections because *Meet Addy* is the recipient of the International Reading Association's Children's Choice Award for 1994. Books that win this award "have a high probability of engaging students' interests" (Gilrane, 2009, p. 131). After reading these two selections, I informed participants that the whole group could choose the remaining book club selections. I again brought in my sampling of AG books and provided students time to explore and peruse each selection; we also read the summary presented on the back of each book aloud. I then asked students to each vote on the book they would like to read. We voted until we narrowed the choice down to two choices: *Meet Julie* and *Meet Kaya*. *Meet Julie* is the fictional story of Julie Albright- a recent child of divorce- growing up during the 1970s in San Francisco. *Meet Kaya* chronicles of the fictional adventures of Kaya as she grows up as a Nez Perce during the 1760s. The book club members expressed a desire to divide themselves into two book clubs, based on book choice. I noted that book club members did not seem to divide themselves into groups based on prior friendships, but on genuine interest with the particular texts and identification with the character in the book. As Gilrane (2009, p. 130) says, "we want the books to appeal to children and to us [teachers]". Since I wanted to make sure the book club books appealed to the individual readers within the study, I made sure to give them ownership in their selections. Four participants chose to read *Meet Julie* and three participants chose to read *Meet Kaya*. The participants read and discussed the books with both their own group members and with the whole group. At times the *Meet Julie* group would read and discuss in pairs, instead of

as a group of four. I alternated groups. At the end of each of these small group sessions, we met as a whole group of seven for a large group discussion. For our final book club selection, the participants voted to read *Meet Felicity*- the fictional story of a young colonial girl with an interest in horses- as a whole group of seven.

I provided copies of each book for each member of the book club. This gave students the option to take the books home at night. During each book club session we read-aloud from the books, discussed the books and wrote in journals. The original design of the research study specified that students would read the books at home each night and come prepared to discuss their thoughts in book club; but, because of self-reported lack of time to read at night (i.e...due to homework, Accelerated Reader requirements, home obligations) they said they preferred to read-aloud as a group. Not wanting to be viewed as a “teacher”, I did not press the issue. Furthermore, because the participants ranged in reading ability, I thought that reading aloud provided an even footing for all members of the book club. Participants were never forced to read aloud. In fact, I told participants that if anyone did not want to read aloud they could ask me to read for them. Participants appeared to enjoy my reading aloud to them. As a community theater participant and possessing substantial past experience of reading to children, I have an expressive reader voice. This might have contributed to the students inviting me to read aloud.

Each book club meeting was spent both reading aloud from the AG books and in discussion. An indication of positive interest was that participants would “jump-in” to discuss elements or thoughts about the texts while text was being read-aloud. This added to a familiar and comfortable feeling of the book club. I intentionally did not designate a way that the book club should operate; instead I took lead from the students and let them decide when to discuss and who would read. Throughout the study, I acted as a participant observer. I purposefully tried

not to act as a full member of the book club; I did not want to sway book club members in their discussions or thoughts. Instead my aim was to act as an information gatherer. For example, if students all started talking in unison or veered off topic for a few minutes, I would interrupt the discussion to remind them of a statement made by a book club member. Although I participated in the book club, I tried to shield my opinions about matters they discussed. The participants knew that my role was to capture information from them- not be the teacher or information giver. My goal of not being seen as a teacher, but also not being seen as a full book club member, seemed to be reached. Participants did not aim questions toward me, but rather aimed questions to other book club members. They understood and accepted that I was there to learn from them. I also made the decision to not correct any student's misconceptions while they were telling me the misconception. I made this decision based on my readings of research using the think-aloud methodology to gather student's understandings of historical time (Barton & Levstik, 1996). Readers needed to not be scared of saying something 'wrong'. Because I wanted to find out their authentic and inner thoughts, I made the decision not to correct students or guide them to find a correct answer; on the other hand, I did not provide students a remark validating their thoughts. I wavered from this three times. Students frequently confused the Civil War with the American Revolutionary War. After the completion of the *Addy* books, I corrected the participants who were confused so that they did not leave the research study with such a large misunderstanding. I also led students to the correct meanings of the words 'tanner' and 'mending' while we were reading *Meet Felicity* because the words were important in understanding the plot.

I wanted the atmosphere of the book club and interviews to be conducive to honest discussions, confidential, and informal. Therefore the book club met in private areas within the school (i.e. the ESL room, the music room, and the playground) so that participants could share

their thoughts without the threat of third parties hearing our discussions and so that rapport could be more easily established. Glesne (2006) describes rapport as a “distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism” (p. 110). Rapport was established and seemed of great benefit to the study. Participants seemed to trust me - evidenced by open discourse of their thoughts and their self-reported enjoyment of participating in the AG book club. During book club time, we would often stop and break for a healthy snack. If we finished reading and discussing before our allotted two-hour time ended, students drew pictures and wrote letters to each other about the book club and about what they were reading in the AG books. Other ways I established rapport were by dressing in neat, but casual clothing, being friendly, non-judgmental, and ensuring students of their confidentiality.

Of note is that two research participants, Rae and Mary, had difficulty getting along with each other. Towards the middle of the research study an event that happened outside the book club, which caused Rae to be dismissed from her classroom for the rest of the year, affected their inter-personal relationships. At times, Rae and Mary were rude to each another. Two of the research participants asked me to remove Mary from the book club because of her *attitude*. After consideration, I decided not to do this because a classroom teacher would not have the option of excluding learners from learning activities. Based on my prior experience as a classroom teacher, I realized that relationships among students are at times non-idyllic and that inter-personal relationships do influence classroom environment. As a whole, the environment of the research study was full of talk and excitement, but the relationship of the two girls did, at times, affect the countenance of the book club.

I chose to use a group book club format because this approach seemed to best fit into the framework of the social constructivist theory. Discussion and talk help students “complete their

thoughts” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 251), afford students opportunities to hear alternate viewpoints, and help students make meanings for themselves. I wanted students to have the opportunity to engage in such activities. Furthermore, discussing historical topics and narratives encourages students to engage in historical thinking (Bolgatz, 2007). Hence, inviting students to engage in group discussions about the AG books provided students a space to co-construct meaning and provided an opportunity for me to capture these student lead co-constructions. The book club sessions were recorded with video and audio digital recorders, and I wrote occasional field notes concerning details such as attendance and my reflections.

Documents. Students were provided a journal. From the beginning they were told that writing in the journal was not mandatory. Students were invited to record their thoughts and wonderings about the books in this personal journal. A graphic organizer (See Appendix G) was included in the journal to help students organize their thoughts. Post-it notes were also provided to all group members on which students were invited to capture their thoughts and for marking specific text selections. These were offered to students as tools for facilitating both thought and talk and is based on the instructional methodology of Wooten’s (2000) Writing and Sharing Connections.

Data Analysis Procedures

In qualitative research, “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). In order to search for meaning about the research context, I collected data from eleven group book club sessions (lasting approximately two hours each), nineteen individual interviews (lasting approximately 20 minutes each), documents found within each of the seven student journals, and my field notes.

My data analysis was guided and informed by the inductive framework, set forth by

Hatch (2002), and is influenced by grounded theory. In this analysis, a researcher conducts “a search for patterns of meaning in data so that general statements about phenomena under investigation can be made” (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). Hatch (2005, p. 151) states that his framework is to be used as a model for qualitative research. Hatch (2002, p. 162) suggest the steps of inductive analysis are to be followed as:

1. Read the data and identify frames of analysis
2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis
3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside
4. Reread data, refining salient domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data
5. Decide if your domains are supported by the data and search data for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains
6. Complete an analysis within domains
7. Search for themes across domains
8. Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains
9. Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline

I simultaneously performed the acts of performing data analysis and data collection. Baxter and Jack (2008) specify that when conducting qualitative case study research, “data collection and analysis occur concurrently” (p. 554). From the onset of data collection, I was engaged in this constant comparative method of analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Data analysis began when I conducted the first participant interview, continued throughout all interactions with participants and continued as I read, listened to, transcribed and coded the data. Analysis did not subside until the final report was written. I both collected and analyzed data

until the point of saturation. Specific coding techniques used in this study were: in vivo coding, initial coding, process coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Saldana, 2011).

I began first cycle coding methods by manually performing line-by line initial coding (Saldana, 2011). A code is a word or phrase that “symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2011, p. 3). Initial coding is an intuitive process where a researcher writes down initial thoughts and reaction about a datum. At the same time I coded the data using the techniques of in vivo coding (Saldana, 2011). This coding cycle allows a researcher to use the words of a participant to capture the salient aspect of a datum. I employed this method because I valued using the authentic language of my participants. In vivo and initial coding helped me to recognize and generate patterns in the data and was an important preliminary heuristic so that I could later analyze and interpret data.

After I completed in vivo and initial coding, I decided to manually conduct process coding (Saldana, 2011). This type of coding uses gerunds to indicate the action in the data. I decided to not do this line-by-line, but rather chunk data into frames of analysis (Hatch, 2002). For example, I chose to separate data from the book club sessions into what I called “topics of conversation”. Within each portion of data, I analyzed and assigned process codes to connote action within each frame. I generated a list of sixty codes based on the data during this cycle of process coding. To synthesize data, I searched through each transcript and compiled all data sets assigned to a particular process code together. For example, all the data identified as “talking about racism” was cut and pasted into one word processing document. I took this step so that I could have the option of looking at data both holistically and also classified by the code title.

After examining data through the analysis of process coding, I manually began focused

coding- a second coding cycle method (Saldana, 2011). Focused coding is a process used to interpret data by recognizing patterns and the most salient codes- all of which is grounded from the data. Focused coding is useful for “studies employing grounded theory methodology” (Saldana, 2011, p. 155). In this phase I condensed and refined the data into the most salient codes that applied to answering the two research questions. I revisited data until saturation was met to make sure that no new codes emerged and that all codes were supported by data. This process refined the number of coding categories to a total of fourteen.

As the final method of coding I engaged in theoretical coding. Saldana (2011) contends that “a theoretical code functions like an umbrella that covers and accounts for all other codes and categories formulated thus far in grounded theory analysis” (p. 163). I was able to synthesize the data into fourteen theoretical codes that answered both research questions. The themes from the data are:

- readers discuss social history
- readers discuss controversial issues
- readers show evidence of engaging in rudimentary historical thinking
- reading the books challenges student’s ideas about history
- readers ask questions and make connections with history
- readers share misconceptions about history
- readers show interest in the human impact of historical events
- readers show evidence of being motivated to engage in historical inquiry
- readers use the textual and pictorial elements of the AG books to their benefit
- readers share personal history
- readers motivated to read more books in the AG series

- readers initially believe the books to be non-fiction
- book club format influences type of talk during book club sessions, and
- readers wanting to engage in on-topic talk face resistance in small group book clubs.

Trustworthiness. I can ensure internal validity by prolonged engagement in the field-in which reached the point of saturation, triangulation of data, analysis of data to redundancy, providing excerpts of primary data, and providing my reflexivity. Internal validity is enhanced as from the feedback I received from a peer debriefer: a professor in the Theory and Practice in Teacher Education Department at the University of Tennessee who specializes in social science research. Although qualitative researchers do not tend to make generalizations about a population, the rich descriptions- using participant's own voices- will provide scholars and educators insight into how participants in this study transacted with the AG series and interacted with history. This engenders transferability; the results of this study can be transferred to other settings with a similar context.

Positionality. I was among the first generation of young readers with access to the AG collection. I specifically remember reading *Meet Felicity*, in which takes place just before the American Revolution. Opening the book, I felt as if I was transported to a world in the past. Through Felicity's eyes, I learned what it was like for her to live in Colonial Williamsburg. I cannot ascertain that the books provided an elaborate historical study, but because of the books I wanted to know more about the American Revolution; I was self-directed to research the historical time period.

I received the Felicity doll from my parents one Christmas morning. At a cost close to one hundred dollars this was a symbol of sacrifice from my middle-class parents and I treated it

as such. This “legacy” piece, as Rowland described it, still resides within the walls of my house, tucked away to give to my future daughter (Morgenson, 1997).

I was once again reminded of these books while teaching third-grade. For several years I observed how my female students devoured the texts and frequently talked about their AG dolls. In their Christmas and birthday wishes, they often included a desire for an AG item. Some families even made the pilgrimage to an AG store. The closest store was a travel distance of three hours. Impromptu student-led books club sessions would be held during free reading time of my class. Then, one year, much to the excitement of my students- Connie Porter, the author of the *Addy* series, was scheduled to speak at my primary school. So that all students could become acquainted with her body of work, I decided to read *Meet Addy* aloud to my class. I will never forget the faces of my students, both male and female, as I read Addy’s story of escaping life as a slave on a plantation. One particular boy sat with his eyes wide-open. He seemed transfixed, and looked as if he was feeling the danger Addy faced when she encountered Confederate soldiers during her escape. He was holding his breath through the entire account and his eyes were wet. Tears were not only in the eyes of the students, but also in my eyes. It was my first experience reading a book from the *Addy* series. Like the little boy in my classroom, I felt as if I was walking in Addy’s shoes; I felt the danger of her experience. We were late for gym that day. We all were so busy reading the story that we never looked at the clock and only realized time had passed when the gym teacher came knocking on our class door.

Because of my experiences, I possessed the preconceived notion that other readers might have a similar experience of history being filtered through their minds while they are reading historical fiction. Based on my observations of my own students and based on my own experiences, I began to think that historical fiction might motivate students to conduct further

inquiry into a topic. But, when conducting qualitative research, the researcher must recognize that preconceived thoughts might possibly influence the context of study. Through the reflexive process, I examined and presented any potential biases that might have influenced the study (Hatch, 2002). Throughout the design, data collection process, and during data interpretation, I constantly engaged in the task of monitoring those subjectivities (Glesne, 2006).

In addition to my personal experiences with the AG enterprise I recognize that this study was analyzed under my lens as a social scientist. As a result, these findings will be reflected from this unique perspective. I acknowledge that a reading specialist might have found similar, divergent, or supplementary findings.

Benefits and Risks

Potential benefits for the participants in the study included students reading about historical events, students enjoying the act of reading, and students using reading skills. I eliminated any unforeseen risks to the students by ensuring student confidentiality and providing participants the option to withdraw from the study at anytime. Furthermore, student academic grades were not attached to their participation in the study.

Implications

This study may have implications for educators, librarians, and parents using the AG books with their students or children and should contribute to the body of professional research about using historical fiction in a school setting.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to gain understanding of how fourth grade readers transact with history and the AG series of historical fiction while reading the AG series. Seeking to explore the perspectives of participants as they read the books, I

interviewed, observed, and participated- as a participant-observer- in a book club with seven fourth grade female public school students as they navigated books from the AG series. Over the course of four weeks, I met with students for thirteen separate sessions. Each of these two-hour sessions included time spent in book clubs and time spent individually interviewing participants. I was with participants a total of twenty-six hours in a public school, during school hours. During the course of the study we read and discussed five AG books: *Meet Addy*, *Addy Learns a Lesson*, *Meet Julie*, *Meet Kaya*, and *Meet Felicity*.

After performing a rigorous and recursive inductive data analysis, I identified fourteen key themes answering the research questions. Information about each theme is found in Chapter 4. The findings from this study indicate how fourth grade readers transact with history and the American Girl series of historical fiction while reading the American Girl series.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to gain understanding of how fourth grade readers transact with history and the AG series of historical fiction while reading the AG series. It also sought to perform what is called for when Eeds & Wells (1991) remarked that social studies researchers should “examine what happens when children are allowed to read interesting content and then discuss their reading freely and openly...with their peers and teacher” (p. 137). The seven female participants in this book club were a heterogeneously mixed ability group of below average to above average readers. Throughout the study, I detected students successfully using reading comprehension strategies such as: summarizing, making connections, using background knowledge, visualizing, predicting, questioning, inferring, and using textual evidence to support arguments as they read and listened to: *Meet Addy*, *Addy Learns a Lesson*, *Meet Julie*, *Meet Kaya*, and *Meet Felicity*. Typical of group discussions, I also detected students helping each other construct meaning (Vygotsky, 1986). The two questions guiding this study were:

1. How do fourth grade students transact with history while reading the American Girl series of historical fiction in a book club setting?
2. How do fourth grade students transact with the American Girl series of historical fiction in a book club setting?

Through an inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) of transcripts of book club sessions, interviews, and analysis of data from student journals I was able to interpret the data and organize it into fourteen key themes related to the research questions. This chapter begins with three tables presenting each of the themes and subthemes and ends with a detailed discussion of

each theme. All discussions are supported with participant voice excerpts. Excerpts appear in italicized print; clarifying words, not used by participants, are bracketed for reader clarification.

Discussion of tables. Two tables are presented to organize the findings of this qualitative research study. Table 2 presents the eight themes the analysis revealed in response to research question one: how readers transacted with history while reading the AG books, and Table 3 presents the six themes the analysis revealed in response to research question two: how readers transacted with the AG series of historical fiction.

Table 2

How readers transact with history while reading historical fiction books from the AG series

Theme: Readers discuss social history.
Theme: Readers discuss controversial issues.
Theme: Readers show evidence of engaging in historical thinking. • Corroboration • Contextualization/Historical Empathy
Theme: Information read challenges reader's ideas about history.
Theme: Readers ask questions about history and make connections with history.
Theme: Readers share misconceptions about history.
Theme: Readers show interest in the human impact of historical events.
Theme: Readers are motivated to engage in historical inquiry.

Table 3

How readers transact with the AG series of historical fiction.

Theme: Readers use the textual and pictorial elements to their benefit: • Use the “Looking Back” information section • Use the “Friends and Family” section • Use the glossary
Theme: Readers share their personal history.
Theme: Readers motivated to read more books in the AG series.
Theme: Readers initially believe the AG series to be non-fiction.
Theme: Book club format influences type of talk in book club.
Theme: Readers wanting to engage in on-topic discussions face resistance in small groups.

Question 1: How readers transact with history while reading AG books. My analysis revealed that readers engaged in discussions about history and showed evidence of thinking about history while reading books from the AG series. Bolgatz (2007, p. 1) says that, “to think about history is to reason critically and morally about the ideas and actions of people in the past.” In this particular study, participants discussed social history, discussed controversial issues, showed evidence of engaging in rudimentary historical thinking, asked questions and made connections with history, discussed and thought about the human impact of historical events, exhibited motivation to learn about history, and participants shared their misconceptions about history. The following section will explore each sub-category in greater detail and will be supported with excerpts of participants’ voices.

Theme one: *readers discuss social history.* Social history presents the story of the ordinary, common person. Instead of focusing attention on the political and military discourse, social history provides insight into the lives of everyday people. Although the AG books are fictionalized accounts, they are stories that could have happened to a person living in the era and are well researched by the authors, illustrators, and an advisory committee. Participants in this study were curious as to what life was like for everyday people, such as Taryn pondering, *I wonder where they get their cloths from*. I found that throughout the study participants discussed and made statements about particular topics of social history. Table 4 lists specific topics of social history that students discussed or wrote about in their journals. The following paragraphs provide more details for selected categories.

Table 4

Topics of social history discussed and written about by readers of the AG books

Language of individuals
Education and school life of individuals
Jobs of individuals
Home life of individuals
Housing/shelter of individuals
Transportation of individuals
Religion of individuals
Life experience of a slave
Gender inequality

Participants frequently commented on the everyday language of individual book characters: both the dialect and vocabulary used within the books. While reading *Meet Addy*, Mary remarked to the group, *why [they] talk so country* in reference to the dialect Addy’s family was using in their dialogue. Participants also noted words not often used in modern English. For example, the word ‘aye’ seemed unusual to the group and sparked curiosity.

Leigh: *Why do they keep saying “aye”?*

Rae: *Pirates say it.*

Kendyl: *I guess it means okay.*

Later, Leigh stopped the reading of *Meet Felicity* to inquire about the phrase “mending pile.” She posited the question to the group: *is that the dirty clothes pile?* The AG books appeared to acquaint students and pique students’ interest with era-specific vocabulary situated within a context.

Education and school life of individuals was of specific interest to the research participants. Although participants recognized that their own formal education experience was different to those they were reading about, they were uncertain as how the institution of school was the same and different to their own lives. For example, Brooke questioned: *I wonder what they do in school* while the group was reading *Addy Learns a Lesson*. While discussing *Addy Learns a Lesson*, the research participants helped each other construct meaning about the existence and organizational aspect of schools.

Leigh: *I didn't think they had schools back then [during the time period of the Civil War].*

Jenna: *They did. They are kinda like a one room.*

Taryn: *A one room?*

Brooke: *Like the Little House [Little House on the Prairie (Wilder, 1953)]*

Jenna: *They probably had...different schools. They were either homeschooled or they went to a school*

Leigh: *Why would they only have one room for a school?*

Mary: *Because they didn't have money*

Jenna: *Because they didn't have as many kids*

Brooke: *Not as many kids went to school*

Jenna: *They were more for farming than the education*

Brooke: *Leigh, you know that movie Holes? With that little building that looks like a church. That was a school. And that was back in the 1960s.*

The previous discussion illustrates how these particular students were helping each other construct meaning and gather information about schools during the 1860s. Jenna attempted to help Leigh make a prior connection by providing background knowledge that the schools were *one room*. Participants used information from other media sources to support Jenna's remark. The book club members never seemed to understand that Addy- and other African-American children of the south- were purposefully prohibited from receiving an education- which is why Addy had never before been to school. They do not appear to make the connection that attending school was a privilege offered only to select individuals.

In addition to the institution of school and the academic aspect, research participants were

interested in the lived social experience of school. Taryn and other participants related personally to Julie's moving to a new school in the book *Meet Julie*. Taryn attested, *I know what Julie is going through*. Participants also enthusiastically rallied around Addy when she was competing in the spelling bee against Harriet, a schoolmate who treated Addy poorly.

Participants recognized the effects the lack of education could have on an individual. Leigh commented to the group *that would be bad not being able to read signs* after participants read in *Addy Learns a Lesson* that Addy and her mother got off the ship in the unfamiliar city of Philadelphia without the skill of being able to read. Leigh went on to remark, *I would feel awkward because all the other people could read them*. Later on Mary said, *I'm just glad she learned to write her name* after Addy learned this skill in her new school.

Occupations of everyday individuals were of interest to research participants. Participants seemed disgusted by the occupation and personality of the tanner in *Meet Felicity*. Hadley and Rae said that soaking the animal hides was *gross*. Leigh was shocked to learn, while reading *Meet Addy*, that during the time period of the Civil War, *children had to work*, and that their work consisted of doing such tasks as working in tobacco fields and having to *kill worms* [tobacco worms] *with bare hands*. Reading *Meet Addy* and *Addy Learns a Lesson* elicited much discussion and journal writing about the occupation of an overseer during the time period of the Civil War. Kendyl wondered why the overseers were so *mean* and commented in a group discussion about how *mean* it was *of them* [the overseers] *to whip Sam with that whip*. Brooke wrote about how *mean* it is for the overseer to *sell Poppa and Sam* in the slave auction and *why white people were so lazy* that they owned slaves.

Discussions and statements also revolved around the home life of characters. For example, food preparation and types of food eaten was a topic of discussion. While reading *Meet*

Kaya, participants discussed the tribe having a dinner of salmon. Although they did comment on their personal opinions of eating salmon, the small group who was reading the book described to the whole group how the salmon was caught and prepared. They contrasted this information with how someone in present modern society might prepare the dish. Leigh and Kendyl told the whole group that to catch the salmon they had to *stab the fish* and showed an illustration in the book showing this manner of fishing. Leigh further described the process by saying that *they like cut off their head, and then they like dig all the insides out*.

Participants frequently commented on the housing/shelter arrangements described in the books. The following conversation, discussed while reading *Addy Learns a Lesson*, represents these types of conversations:

Jenna: *Addy didn't like the room at first, but then when she saw the window, she loved it.*

Mary: *Because she could like look out and see the town.*

Jenna: *Because she was a slave and they didn't have any windows.*

Mary: *It says right here, [reading aloud from the book] "Addy's cabin on the plantation had no windows."*

Leigh: *I would hate not to be able to see out.*

Mary: *I would have been mad. I would literally just push them open. So I could look out the window. Cut a little hole out or something.*

Conversations, such as the one above, showed that book club members were not only curious about the types of shelter, but also interested in sleeping arrangements. In both group discussions and journals, participants were inquisitive as to why- as written by Kendyl in her journal- *do they [Addy's family] sleep on cornhusks?* Brooke wondered in her journal if *Master Stephens will buy them a bed*. These discussions show that understanding basic day-to-day life rituals and arrangements of humans during different eras are of interest to students; particularly how lifestyles of the past differ from the lifestyle readers are accustomed to living.

Theme two: readers discuss controversial issues. Teachers define controversial issues in the classroom as sensitive subjects that force students to choose a side (Philpott, Clabough, McConkey, & Turner, 2011). Many teachers are leery of discussing topics of controversy in the classroom (Philpott et al., 2011). Researchers and teachers have offered that historical fiction can be a safe way for students and teachers to explore and discuss these contentious controversial issues (Brooks & Hampton, 2005; Freeman & Levstik, 1988). This research study substantiates these claims that historical fiction can help students explore topics of controversy, and that topics of controversy, at times, encompass uncomfortable discussions.

In *Meet Addy*, readers are confronted with raw and real consequences of slavery. At one juncture in the story, Addy was particularly dismayed because her father and brother had both been sold to another plantation owner. Not only was Addy's family both physically and, possibly, permanently separated, but also Addy was recently beaten by the overseer and forced to eat worms. The evening after the beating, Addy's mother found her curled on her pallet crying, Addy sobbed to her mother, "I hate them, Momma. I hate white people" (Porter, 1993, p. 24). Addy asked her mother, "Why white people hate us and treat us wrong?" (p. 25). At this compelling point in the story, Leigh interrupted my reading aloud to make an observation. This precipitated a conversation between the fourth grade research participants about the controversial issue of racism.

Leigh: *That means she hates some of us here.*

Jenna: *Yeah*

Leigh: *Cause we are white.*

Silence

Researcher: *Is that what you think she means?*

Rae: *No, I don't think that's what she means. I think she means that she hates the slave owners.*

Jenna: *She hates the people that rule over them. Cause not all white people are mean.*

Rae: *Mean, yeah.*

Brooke: *Like when she means that she means she hates white people. It is the people*

that treat you bad, that is the way you treat them back. Cause in order to get respect you've got to get the person to respect you.

After a short period of silence, I read aloud Momma's response from the book.

Addy, all white people don't hate colored people. Not all of them do us bad. Master Stevens was wrong to sell Sam and Poppa and to whip you. But Addy, people can do wrong for such a long time, they don't even know it's wrong no more. What's worse is when people hurt each other and don't even care they hurting them. Like that overseer. He a mean man. That's what hate do to people. I don't want you to ever be that kind of person. (Porter, 1993, p. 25).

When I paused at the end of the paragraph, all participants quickly raised their hands in the air in a desire of speaking, and the following conversation evolved. Leigh, Jenna, and Mary showed an unfamiliarity and innocence with the word 'colored'. Then, Brooke made a potentially divisive personal connection with the book.

Leigh: *I was thinking that all people are colored.*

Jenna: *Yeah, it doesn't matter what color we are.*

Leigh: *We are peach.*

Mary: *Yeah.*

Leigh: *Peach or tan.*

Mary: *Hannah is the color of that paper, white.*

Brooke: *Like when she says that she could mean that all people can be different colors on the outside, but on the inside we are all the same.*

Researcher: *Are you saying that this was what Momma was saying? Even though we are different on the outside, on the inside we are the same?*

Brooke: *Yeah, that is what my momma tells me all the time. I used to be racist, but now I'm not.*

Rae: *Ooooh (angry)*

Brooke: *I used to be.*

(Taryn looks confused)

Rae: *You don't know what racist means?*

Brooke: *Means you hate colored people.*

Silence

Brooke: *I used to be like that.*

Mary: *But Zoe and Shaya are your friends. So there is no way you could be racist.*

(Tension and nervousness in participants)

Researcher: *Brooke, you said you used to be a certain way but you changed?*

Brooke: *Yes.*

Researcher: *Is that the same way*

Taryn: (Interrupted) *Addy felt!*

Brooke: *Yes, because that is the way I felt a year or two ago. Because my cousins. I had*

a couple of cousins at Rossevelt where I used to go to school last year. They were black and they used to pick on me. I kept going, "I hate black people".

Rae: *Oooh*

Brooke: *I took it to the extreme and my mom was telling me that even though we are different colors on the outside we are the same on the inside. And I was like, okay. And then, about ten minutes later, I wasn't racist anymore.*

Conversations, such as the selected excerpt above, occurred during the reading of *Meet Addy* and *Addy Learns a Lesson*. They are illustrative of the way in which participants struggled with and discussed racism and the overarching institution of slavery. The conversation is also indicative of potentially divisive claims and fragile questions that can emerge when topics of controversy are discussed.

As a researcher I aimed to not interject any extraneous information or leading questions into book club dialogue, but I did purposely attempt to bridge the gap in the conversation after Brooke professed to once being a racist. I did this because I did not want any participant in the group to feel threatened or attacked, and I wanted group members to hear Brooke's perspective as to why Brooke disclosed her seemingly divisive revelation. From Brooke's statement and her body language, I was able to professionally infer that she was creating an analogous relationship between herself and Addy. In the book, Addy professed to hate white people because the white overseer was cruel to her. Addy projected that all white people were cruel because of the behavior of the slave owners. Brooke professed that she used to be a racist and said that it was because some *black people* used to bully her. Because of her experience, she thought all people of this color were mean but then realized that she was incorrect in her assumptions. I was uncertain whether all the participants would make this analogous connection, and so I did ask leading questions of Brooke so that she could articulate her experience. I found that I did not give to participants the intellectual credit they deserved; they had already made the connection between the book and Brooke's statement.

Theme three: readers show evidence of engaging in rudimentary historical thinking.

Contextualizing, corroborating, and sourcing are three types of actions taken by historians when they interpret historical documents and evidence (Wineburg, 2001). Wineburg (2001) refers to these acts as historical thinking. Participants in this study showed evidence of rudimentary historical thinking by practicing the act of contextualization and corroboration.

Practicing the act of corroboration: Readers compared information presented in the AG books with their own background knowledge, information from their social studies textbooks, information from the informational vignettes in the “Looking Back” section of AG books, and by seeking first hand accounts.

Throughout the study I found that most of the participants (excluding Jenna) perceived the books to be not just historically based--but actual history (see page 87 for further discussion). Leigh said, *the woman that helped them from the safe house, to take them to Philadelphia- I think that woman might be like Harriet Tubman and then Addy and her mom are real.* By the end of the study, participants were able to recognize that the books were historical fiction and not informational texts as they had thought. Throughout the study I monitored why they thought the books to be not just historically based but actual history. I was able to establish that while reading the AG books, some participants corroborated the events in the books against events they had read about in their social studies books and also practiced corroboration by asking their parents (who lived in the same era as some of the characters in the books) questions. Mary said *Meet Julie* was factual because her dad grew up during the 1970s and she asked him questions that helped her establish that the books were *true*. She also said because the books *said the same thing as the social studies book then it would have to be true.*

Kendyl said that both her social studies book and research the class had completed in her

social studies class helped her establish the accuracy of *Meet Felicity* because, for example, the clothing styles were all similar.

Rae, like many of the other participants in the study, used the supplementary “Looking Back” section -which provides readers a place to review primary sources documents and illustrations and non-fiction commentary about the time period portrayed in the book- as a source to corroborate information. Jenna showed evidence of this by commenting on a picture in the “Looking Back” section, *I think that it’s kinda weird that it’s a free state, but angry whites were burning down the schoolhouse.* Jenna frequently cited using the “Looking Back” section to practice the act of corroboration. Throughout the study, Jenna was cognizant of the fact that the books were historical fiction. She described the books saying they were written about *real events, just fake people.* She frequently used this informational section to make sure that the events and social history within the books were accurate. In the final interview, Jenna described her first experience with the AG company after receiving Kit and reading the book about living through the Great Depression. She said, *And after I got her I just kind of fell in love with all the American Girl doll books and stuff because I could rely on it for—if we were learning about that type of stuff I could rely on it for my studies.* She later said, *And that Kit, that events, those events really happened. People had to turn their homes into assisted living and stuff.* I asked her how she knew that those events really happened and she described using the “Looking Back” section and looking up information on the Internet. Jenna said, *I looked up about like if they really had to turn their homes into sort of a hotel thing and it ended up being true!* She describes using the AG books as a source with which to corroborate her social studies book and uses them to acquire additional information.

Last year we were—in social studies we were doing stuff about the American Revolution. Like we were just talking about it, and I read on the Internet at my mom’s work about like

which one [AG doll] went with the American Revolution, because I knew one had to. Because they usually go with stuff like the Great Depression. So I really liked it. I really like to know that Felicity—like that could really happen!

These examples show evidence that these fourth-grade students, in an unprompted context, went through the thought processes of corroborating historical information and did this while reading the AG books of historical fiction.

Practicing the act of contextualization. Barton and Levstik (2004) ascertain that historical empathy is the “process of understanding people in the past by contextualizing their actions” (p.208). Jenna, an above level reader with a keen interest in history and a pre-book club interest in the AG series, showed rudimentary evidence of displaying historical empathy. Although I did not get the opportunity to press Jenna on her comments and observations, I did note that, although Jenna verbalized several times the treatment of slaves by overseers was atrocious and mean, she was able to understand the actions of the slave owner by saying that *he was just like that because he just basically has to because he is the overseer*. Jenna appeared to go beyond assigning a value judgment to the overseer by explaining to the group that he was acting within the socially accepted guidelines of his occupation. Jenna appeared to take a critical look at his occupation and to go beyond viewing his actions as being right or wrong through presentism, but instead looked at the overseer’s actions through the lens of his living in the American south during the 19th century. She was able to contextualize his actions within the era they took place.

This evidence of historical empathy was a single occurrence during the research study, but I do believe that it speaks to the idea that some elementary students engage in the skill of historical empathy.

Theme four: information from AG book challenges student's ideas about history.

Interestingly, student's ideas of what life was like for former slaves living in free states were challenged by the reading of *Addy Learns a Lesson*. In the book, Addy excitedly tells her friend Sarah that they should get on the streetcar to ride the streets of Philadelphia. Sarah explains to her that "colored people" are not allowed to ride on most streetcars and that the few streetcars that do accept "colored" passengers do not allow "colored people" to ride on the inside. Jenna, an above-average reader and self-professed lover of history asked *what do they mean by if they could only ride on the outside?* After Mary and Brooke explained to her that "colored people" were not allowed on the inside Taryn asks, *why they don't let colored people ride?* After a conversation about this issue ensues, I detected confusion and so asked the group, *did you expect it to be like this in the north?* Jenna immediately responded, *I didn't suspect them to not let black people ride on the streetcars since they are kinda abolishing... abolitionists*, broke in Kendyl. Mary soon remarked, *I don't think it is right. Especially since they are not being slaves anymore. They were supposed to be free. They could get pneumonia.*

During individual student interviews, I prodded Jenna about her bewilderment that Addy and Sarah were not allowed to ride the streetcars in Philadelphia. She professed that in social studies she had read and learned that free states were for the abolishment of slavery. She said because of her prior knowledge she did not expect Addy and other black people living in free states to face such restrictions in their lives. *Addy Learns a Lesson*, therefore, seemed to have provided Jenna and the other group participants another event model about the idea of free states- one that helped Jenna refine meaning. Social studies textbooks frequently condense information (Levstik, L.S., & Barton K., 2011) and do not provide details necessary for understanding the experiences of various individuals. It appears that Jenna was viewing the

word “freedom” based on the democratic ideals of current American society. She did not realize that the same freedoms were not afforded to all. One of the themes throughout the Addy series is that “Freedom isn’t free” (Porter, 1993), and Jenna shows evidence that this book theme was helping her understand a contextualized understanding of the word free- a freedom where Addy was no longer a slave, but where she was not free enough to experience social equality.

Theme five: readers ask questions about history and make connections with history

Readers spontaneously asked questions about the subject of history in the book club and in their journals. Notably, most questions were asked about the institution of slavery and were asked while reading *Meet Addy* and *Addy Learns a Lesson*. At times participants tried to help each other answer questions posed during the book club while on other occasions, questions were asked and the other participants provided no responses. Taking the role of researcher, I did not undertake the responsibility of educator and students did not try to press me for answers. Regardless of the discussion or lack of discussion that followed, the mere act of participants asking questions about history provides evidence that students were thinking about history while reading the AG books. The student journals also provided a space for students to capture their wonderings. Many participants, such as Brooke, a below-level reader wrote voraciously in their journals, while others, such as Jenna, did not make much use of the document. It should be noted that the majority of questions students posed in their journals concerned slavery; this indicates that the institution of slavery and racism is an area in which these fourth grade students had much uncertainty. Table 5 lists selected questions found within the student journals and asked during book club sessions. These questions showcase that students have many questions about fundamental aspects about the institution of slavery.

Table 5

Questions participants asked about slavery and the Civil War

Participant Name	Questions about history
Kendyl	<i>Why don't they do slavery anymore?</i>
Brooke	<i>I wonder why they had slavery back in the 1700-1800s.</i> <i>Why were white people so lazy and why did they really have slavery?</i> <i>Why Abraham Lincoln ended slavery but happy that he did.</i> <i>I wonder why slave owners wouldn't understand.</i> <i>Why were people against slavery?</i> <i>Why were slaves that escaped brutally beat?</i> <i>Why did people in the north not want slavery to continue?</i> <i>Why did people in the south want slavery to continue?</i>
Taryn	<i>Why don't they let colored people ride [the streetcars]?</i>
Rae	<i>I have a question. Were there still slaves in this time [period preceding the Revolutionary War]?</i>
Mary	<i>Why are people so mean to them [slaves]?</i> <i>Why don't they do slavery anymore?</i>

I also found that readers made natural connections with history while reading the AG books. For example, In *Meet Addy*, Addy and her mother escape from the plantation in an attempt to get to a safe house run by Miss Caroline. Addy's mother had been told that Miss Caroline would help them to get north. The fictionalized portion of the book never explicitly uses the term Underground Railroad to describe the safe house or the role Miss Caroline takes, but readers had a discussion with one another about Harriet Tubman who *helped people escape from slavery* and the Underground Railroad. During this discussion, Leigh, a below-level reader, made the comment to the group, *the woman that helped them from the safe house, to take them to Philadelphia- I think that woman may be like Harriet Tubman*. Through this study I found that readers, without teacher guidance, naturally asked questions and made connections with history while reading the AG books. This indicates that historical fiction helps students articulate and formulate questions they have about the past.

Theme six: readers share misconceptions about history. I made the decision to not correct any student's misconceptions while they were telling me the misconception. I made this decision based on my readings of research using the think-aloud methodology to gather student's understandings of historical time (Barton & Levstik, 1996). Readers needed to not be scared of saying something 'wrong'. Because I wanted to find out their authentic and inner thoughts, I made the decision not to correct students or guide them to find a correct answer; on the other hand, I did not provide students a remark validating their thoughts. Although participants expressed many correct understandings of historical ideas and chronology during the research study, participants also readily expressed misconceptions. At times, these misconceptions were elevated to the level of conflation and fanciful retellings. I found that the majority of conflation and misconceptions verbalized were not from information they had gleaned during the reading of

the AG books, but rather appeared to be from previously obtained background knowledge-knowledge not necessarily formally introduced in school. Brooke conveyed misconceptions to group members with confidence, as if she was certain that the knowledge she was communicating was factual. Several times she told the group that slavery existed in 1798 and ended in 1888. Many of the misconceptions appear to be a result of students being unable to accurately order historical events by using their mental timeline. Brooke showed confusion of time periods when she told the group that slaves were sent for execution and described the process saying, *They'd make them put their arms in these little things and they'd put handcuffs on them and they would put their heads in them and they'd take a blade and they would pull a string and chop their heads off.*

Some book club members also had difficulty relaying information about certain time periods when only verbal cues were given. For example, in interviews when I asked the research participants to tell me about the Civil War, I found instances when Brooke, Mary, Taryn, and Leigh would confuse the details of the Civil War with other periods. For example, during an interview I asked Leigh to tell me about the Civil War. She said that people lost their lives for *religious freedom*. Earlier in the school year, the members of the book club engaged in a study of the time period of the American Revolution in their social studies class. Based on my questions and the answers given by some, it appeared when the word 'war' was mentioned that some participants associated all wars with the Revolutionary War- never understanding that the Civil War and American Revolution were separate events. This misunderstanding occurred numerous times during the study, including before the book club began and after we had read the Addy books, which are set during the Civil War. Although the students discussed the Underground Railroad, Abraham Lincoln, and the division of the North and the South, these

participants appeared to exclusively associate the word ‘war’ in association with the American Revolution because that war had been formally studied in their social studies class.

Jenna is the only participant who was able to correctly describe some details of the Civil War before we began the book club. She had read *Meet Addy*, which is set during the Civil War, before the beginning of the research study, and when I asked her to tell me about the Civil War she correctly described details of the Civil War and used examples from her past reading of *Meet Addy*. This indicates that Jenna was accessing schemata about the Civil War- prior knowledge that she seemingly developed during her past reading of the AG books.

During individual interviews Brooke relayed many misconceptions to group members and to me with confidence, as if she were certain that the knowledge she was communicating was factual. In describing what would have happened if Addy and Momma had been caught in their escape from slavery, she relayed that the *guards* of the plantation, who *wear gray camouflage suits and wear boots and carry a rifle*, would have *captured them and sent them back to slavery*. Although she did not tell the source of this knowledge, I conjecture that this conflation is due to presentism.

Brooke and Leigh also demonstrated inaccurate understandings of basic underpinnings of life during the Civil War. In response to my question about what it would be like to grow up during Addy’s time period of the Civil War, Leigh relayed to me that she and her brothers would probably be slaves. When I prodded her about her becoming a slave she said that, *there are black people that hate white people* and that some *black people* might have been slave owners. Leigh also professed that *white people* would have been slaves during the American Civil War. In the instances of Brooke and Leigh, it does not appear as if the reading of the AG books helped them correct their historical misunderstandings, but it did give them an opportunity to articulate

their thoughts. This opportunity to discuss misconceptions could help a teacher recognize specific misunderstandings held by specific students. Then, with teacher guidance and scaffolding, students with specific misunderstandings could be lead into an inquiry about the subject of the misunderstanding.

Brooke's misunderstandings were also apparent when she described the process that editors and authors take when writing social studies textbooks. She said that, *the people that are making the social studies books, they type in- pull up pictures from the internet about like John Sevier, Cortez, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington*. She described their process of accumulating information to put in the texts as *tagging off the Internet and doing it the easy way*. When pressed about how she acquired this insider knowledge, she said that the pictures on the Internet and in the social studies books are the same and that is how she drew the conclusion.

I only found one instance of a historical conflation that seemed to be derived from information gleaned specifically from reading the AG books. When I questioned Brooke about what it might have been like growing up during the same time period as Kaya, she crafted a story full of fanciful elaborations, including information that *one-fourth of the Indians* are blind and that *Hispanics* are the product of *Native Americans and Indians* [from the continent of India] having children. One of the Native American characters in *Meet Kaya* was blind.

All of these misconceptions indicate that students' ideas of history are still developing in the fourth grade and that students easily confuse time periods. The data also reflect that students have ideas of history that they believe to be absolute and that these students freely share these ideas with peers-which in turn could cause much confusion to their fellow students. Of significance, though, is that Jenna- a veteran AG reader and above level reader- was able to

correctly articulate her correct understandings of history, and she often echoed that she had learned the information she was heralding from her reading of AG books.

Theme seven: readers show interest in the human impact of historical events.

Textbooks provide students a condensed version of history heavily focused on military battles, dates, and key people (Levstik, L.S., & Barton, K., 2011). The human impact of such events is often confined to a few sentences. The students in this research study showed an interest in the human impact of such historic events such as slavery in North America. Of particular interest to all participants was how the institution of slavery impacted families living in slavery. In *Meet Addy*, Addy's father and brother were sold to another plantation. After this event occurred, Addy's mother made the difficult decision to leave her baby at the plantation with another family so that she and Addy had a better likelihood of safely and successfully escaping the plantation. Throughout the research study, participants wrestled with this difficult decision made by Addy's mother. They were also shocked with the reality that a family could so quickly and forcibly be torn-apart. Jenna expressed to the group, *It is mean that they are taking part of Addy's family away from them. Cause it is their families. It is kinda sad to think that you would lose a brother or father.* When readers discovered a photograph in the "Looking Back" section showing a family of slaves sold at an auction, Rae exclaimed, *What! Really? Oh my gosh!* that humans could be treated in such a manner. The sound of her voice expressed both genuine outrage and surprise. Brooke shook her head in a downtrodden manner and said, *that ain't right.* All the participants were especially vocal in their dismay that the baby was left behind. Even though participants understood that the crying of the baby would foil the escape of Addy and Momma, they could not fathom that a family could be split in such a way, or that a family would have to make such a dire choice. Brooke said, *I feel sorry for Momma because she has to leave her*

newborn baby and she has to take her middle child with her to go find Poppa and Sam, but it is really not fair to leave baby behind. It does not matter if it cries or not, it just matters whether you love them or not. Six of the seven participants commented in their journals about the baby being left on the plantation, and all the participants wrote in their journals about Addy's brother and father being sold.

Participants also showed evidence that they recognized the real human danger of a slave escaping slavery, not just for the people trying to escape, but also for family members and friends left behind who might have been privy to information about the escape. Brooke commented that if, *Master Stephens sees that Momma and Addy are gone they are probably going to beat Solo and Lula to get it out of them.* Leigh questioned in her journal the fate of Uncle Solomon and Aunt Lula by writing, *is their family going to get beat for running away?* This comment shows that Leigh understood the existence of possible consequences for all involved in an escape.

Theme eight: readers show evidence that they are motivated to engage in historical inquiry. Anecdotal records, practitioner articles, and action research suggest that reading historical fiction entices students to become intrinsically motivated to pursue inquiry into historical topics. One common element of these reports is that the teachers provided readily available ancillary materials, related to the historical subject under study (Levstik, L.S., 1993; Roser & Keehn, 2002; Wasta & Lott, 2006). I did not provide ancillary materials, such as encyclopedias, informational texts, or access to the Internet to students in the American Girl book club. In addition, the school library was closed during a portion of the time of the study, and some participants, such as Leigh, told me that her mother did not own a car so access to the public library was not possible. Because of these limiting factors, I am unsure as to whether or

not students would have tried to spontaneously use available additional sources to find more about the subjects of history they were reading about in the AG books. But, Jenna, Leigh, and Rae all vocalized the desire to do an informational *project* about what they were learning. They relayed to me that they had conducted research and created projects on other historical topics in their social studies class and asked to do the same in the book club. I told them it was their book club, and they could most definitely engage in research and create a project if that was their desire, but I did not provide materials or resources. None of the research participants did create a research project, but many showed evidence that with guidance and direction they would have enjoyed engaging in such a task. But, participants did seek information from the “Looking Back” informational section of the AG books and also sought first-hand information from their parents to acquire additional information.

Jenna, Rae, and Kendyl used the “Looking Back” section of the AG books as a source to acquire additional information. All three of these participants related that they had taken home their books so that they could look through this informational section, which Jenna described as *the place where you actually see the real stuff*. During one book club session, Jenna brought to the groups’ attention that the “Looking Back” section addressed a question that Rae had asked of the group the day before, *when you read the “Looking Back” in Felicity- it answers Rae’s question from yesterday- if they had slavery*. Their hands quickly turned to the directed page in search of the information. This indicates that Jenna was using the “Looking Back” section to seek out additional information about the era in which Felicity lived.

Rae, Kendyl, and Mary conveyed to me that they sought information from their parents, who had lived during the 1970s, while they were reading *Meet Julie*. Kendyl referred to this as receiving *first hand* knowledge. In an interview, Rae relayed to me that she *started asking a lot*

of questions to her mom about the 1970s and *Meet Julie*. Her mother told her that, *it was bad because the women had to stay home and some women actually like to work outside of the home, but they couldn't. So it was a bad time*. She also reported to me that she asked her mom to help her look up information about Addy and Julie on the internet, to find out if they were real, but her mom kept telling her *not now, not now*.

The finding that participants were using the informational section of the book to procure additional information and that they were asking questions of their parents suggests that the reading of the AG books incited students to seek out additional information about history; I conjecture that the book club members would have used additional materials to seek out information had I made them readily available.

Question 2: How readers transact with the AG series of historical fiction.

Theme one: readers use the textual and pictorial elements of the AG books to their benefit. Each of the AG books from the historical collection is written in a similar format. The “Family and Friends” tree is located at the beginning of each book; it introduces the main characters in the book with an illustration and descriptor. Another similar feature of each book is that most are comprised of five chapters telling a fictional story about a life of a young girl living in a certain era; each of these chapters include full-color illustrations. At the conclusion of this fictional portion of the book is a section titled, “Looking Back”. This informational piece provides vignettes about the historic era of the book. Included within are photographs and photographs of artifacts- many collected from prominent museums. Some of the books, such as the ones in the Kaya series, also include a glossary of unfamiliar terms. I found that the readers of the AG historical series used these pictorial and textual elements of the books to their benefit.

Readers use the illustrations. During the reading of all five books, participants readily used the illustrations- both the illustrations within the fictional portion of the text, and the photographs and photographs of artifacts located in the “Looking Back” section. I noted that they would consistently stop and examine each illustration, often making comments about their thoughts. During an interview Taryn made a comment that she has comprehension difficulty. She said that she enjoyed the pictures in the *American Girl books*. Understanding the plot was made easier by the inclusion of the illustrations and also assisted book club members in gathering information about history and facilitating talk about instances in history. For example, readers were gathering information and facilitating talk while looking at the illustrations in the “Looking Back” section of the *Meet Addy*. Viewing a picture of slaves in shackles, Leigh said, *I think it was kinda sad when they stuck things around their necks when they were going to slavery.* Katie agreed with her and then said, *yeah, cause they put it around their necks and then next page there are handcuffs that they have to put their arms in.* The strong illustrations, coupled with print, provided students a more holistic picture of what they were reading. Furthermore, it helped students access their background knowledge and provided a contextual situation where they could more readily understand the text therefore helping them get a clearer representation of a historical era or event. Unfortunately, at times, readers were unable to make the textual/ pictorial connection. While reading *Meet Julie*, Taryn and Rae had trouble understanding the meaning of the word “cable car”. Lacking background knowledge about this unique vehicle, both were unable to decipher that a cable car was the mode of transportation on which Julie was riding in the subsequent illustration.

Readers use the “Looking Back” section. The “Looking Back” section seemed of much value to participants; book club members used the textual and pictorial elements to gather information, facilitate talk, and refine meaning.

I noted that participants did not seem to read this section in a linear fashion; instead they browsed through the pages reading the captions and pages that piqued their interest. Although Mary expressed that she didn’t find the “Looking Back” section interesting enough to read, the six other participants seemed to browse the pages and excitedly talk about what they were discovering. Jenna described this informational section to other participants as, *if you didn’t understand what was happening you can read this and figure it out. That is what happened to me when I was reading my Meet Kit book.* In an interview with me Jenna relayed how she wasn’t sure about the authenticity of people turning their homes into boarding houses during the Great Depression and so looked in the “Looking Back” section ‘to gather information and see if events such as this really did occur.

While looking at a photograph of the slaves quarters, Brooke facilitated talk and, in an attempt refine her understanding, queried the group, *did the kids have to stay in the cabins by themselves or was there someone in there with them?* The discussion that followed prompted Mary to subsequently ask three questions, *I want to know why the people are so mean to them. Why do they sleep on cornhusks? Why don’t they do slavery anymore?* Jenna showed evidence of refining meaning and gathering information as she was seeking to understand the strange dichotomy of a free state not being truly free for everyone when she said, *In the “Looking Back”, I think that it’s kind of weird that it is a free state but angry whites were burning down the school house.* Jenna was using both her background knowledge and her newly acquired knowledge to construct a more accurate depiction of what life was like for those living during the

tumultuous era of 19th century America.

These selected examples showcase how readers used the “Looking Back” section. They displayed many instances of efferent reading when reading through this non-fiction portion of the book.

Readers use the “Family and Friends” section. Readers quickly turned to the “Family and Friends” section of the AG books each time they received a new book to browse or read and thoroughly examined facial expressions, clothing, and the words describing each character. I noted that they seemed entranced by the inclusion of this feature. Throughout the reading of each AG book, readers could also be observed reviewing the pages of the “Family and Friends” section- often turning back to this section for character clarification. Book club members utilized this feature to become better acquainted with the characters, the character’s relationships to each other, and to make predictions about the plot. For example, while examining “Felicity’s Family and Friends” tree, one reader rightfully commented that Jiggy Nye looked like he would be the bad guy in the book.

The section also offered some reader disequilibrium in the book *Meet Addy*. Readers had great difficulty understanding why the cruel overseer was depicted in “Addy’s Family and Friends”. This caused readers to wrongly predict that he might learn from his mistakes and turn out to be kind, but by the end of the book they discovered that this was an incorrect prediction, and book club members were angry that he was included in this section when he was neither friend or family.

I noted that readers of all ability levels used this feature of the book. It was not just used by the below-level readers, but also by the on level and above level readers.

Readers use the glossary. A glossary was included only in the *Meet Kaya* book; Jenna, Leigh, and Brooke were therefore the only readers who had access to this feature. These three readers discovered this text feature on their own and used it to their benefit. I would often observe Leigh consulting the glossary when she came across unfamiliar words in *Meet Kaya*. Then, while reading *Meet Felicity*, Leigh began sifting through the back of the book and told me she was searching for the *little dictionary* to look up the word ‘aye’. Rae informed her that this book did not possess one, perhaps showing evidence that she too had looked for a glossary and been unable to locate the feature. A valuable feature of the books, the glossary helped participants grapple with the meaning of unfamiliar words and served as a way for readers to learn how to accurately pronounce selected words. Because readers spontaneously found the section without any assistance, this indicates that the book club members sifted through each new book, scouting book features they could use to their benefit.

Theme two: readers share personal history. Reading and listening to the AG historical fiction books facilitated many group members to share their own personal history in relation to the experiences of the characters. Topics specifically discussed are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Topics of personal history discussed by participants

Topic of personal history	Book that precipitated conversation
Family member's drug use	<i>Meet Julie</i>
Divorce / split of family unit	<i>Meet Addy, Addy Learns a Lesson, Meet Julie</i>
Being bullied	<i>Addy, Addy Learns a Lesson, Meet Julie, Meet Felicity</i>
Racism	<i>Addy, Addy Learns a Lesson</i>
Disagreements with peers	<i>Addy Learns a Lesson, Meet Julie</i>
Scholastic difficulty	<i>Addy Learns a Lesson</i>
Hobbies	<i>Meet Julie, Meet Felicity</i>
Gender inequality	<i>Meet Julie, Meet Felicity</i>
Moving to a new school	<i>Meet Julie</i>

The topics listed in Table 6 provide evidence that the time of girlhood is indeed fragile. As AG founder Pleasant Rowland posited (Morgenson, 1997) that young girls are confronted with mature issues, and this indicates that readers connected with the plot and characters of the AG books even though the characters within the books lived in another era. Participants connected and found commonalities with females living in other eras. Examples of selected topics are provided below.

Five of the seven readers in this book club connected personally to the character and experiences of Julie in *Meet Julie*. Living in the 1970s, the book depicts life for Julie as the child of newly divorced parents. She and her sister are struggling to navigate divorce and the effects of divorce on a family. Taryn, a below-level reader and more of an introvert, bravely shared

with the group her personal connection with the character Julie. This prompted a conversation among group members where they shared their personal history of divorce and the split family.

Taryn: I like Julie

Silence

Researcher: Tell us more, Taryn.

Taryn: Because she is going through the same thing I am because I got to go live with my mom and then my dad. But I don't have any sisters or brothers.

Mary: I have one sister, but she passed away and I have two brothers.

Leigh: I had four sisters and one brother.

Rae: Ooh, I got a story.

Mary: My momma had two miscarriages.

Rae: Me, no sisters, two brothers that died, one is in foster home and my other brother is in jail. And, I'm having to go back and forth between my dads.

Jenna: So you are living with your dad mostly?

Mary: I know where her dad lives.

Rae: I showed her yesterday.

Leigh: I never met two of my sisters and I don't know when I am.

Throughout the reading of *Meet Julie* book club members talked about the subject of divorce, and in doing so, relayed their own personal connections to Julie. At one point Mary shared she felt like Julie too, only she had to travel further, *I've got to go back and forth to my momma and my dad because my mom usually picks me up here every other weekend and it takes us three hours just to get to her house. So it takes us six hours total- three hours to come here and three hours to go back.* I noted that the readers seemed to find comfort that the character Julie faced a reality similar to their own in reference to the issue of divorce. For example, Taryn seemed consoled to find that she was not the only one experiencing sad emotions about her parents' divorce. Throughout the study she continually remarked that she was going to read more of the books about Julie because she identified with Julie's experiences. Book club members who had experienced a family divorce or break wanted to discuss the issue and were able to use *Meet Julie* as a common denominator and discussion starter.

Gender inequality was also discussed while reading *Meet Julie*. Participants had difficulty

understanding why Julie was not allowed to play on the school basketball team. Taryn asked the group, *I wonder why Coach Manley is not letting her play?* Jenna answered, *that is what everyone is wondering.* Participants seemed to understand that *back in the old days they wouldn't let the girls do stuff like basketball* but couldn't quite grasp the subtle message that *Meet Julie* was providing readers about Title 9 legislation changing the fate of sport's programs for both genders. Participants did share with the group personal experiences of playing intramural sports events in mixed gender groups and thought that it was unfair that Julie was not allowed to play with the boys. They also commented on their perceptions that girls used to only be allowed to play sports such as volleyball and soccer. Readers admired Julie and seemed to look to her as a role model because she did not cower to the demands of Coach Manley, but instead created a petition to rally support and convince Coach Manley that she should be allowed to play. Book club members expressed that Julie was very *brave* for standing up for her beliefs, but readers never seemed to completely realize how different life was for female students wanting to play sports before the arrival of Title 9 legislation. But, *Meet Julie* did seem to help them build a foundation for understanding that males and females experienced different realities in the 1970s.

In individual interviews, Rae and Kendyl both expressed that life would have been very different for them, because of their gender if they had grown up in a different era. Kendyl said of the time right before the American Revolutionary War, *I probably wouldn't have as much freedom as I do now. I wouldn't have like as big of a house and we wouldn't get as much money. I would have to wear a lot of dresses and I couldn't play sports or stuff like that because I was a girl.*

These conversations and statements showcase that the young girls in this research study

were able to recognize that gender differences engendered many inequalities felt by females throughout the history of America. The readers recognized that their modern lives were vastly different in terms of gender equality.

Theme three: readers are motivated to read more books in the AG series. Throughout the research study, all participants spontaneously expressed the desire to read more books in the AG historical fiction series and some participants read additional AG books outside of the book club setting. This finding is consistent with prior understandings of what occurs when students read serialized books (McGill-Franzen, 2009; McGill-Franzen & Botzakis, 2009; Young & Ward, 2010).

Before the school library closed for the year, Brooke and Leigh checked out books from the Kaya series. Kate, in addition to reading *Meet Julie* in the book club, says she read *Meet Kaya* and took an *AR* [Accelerated Reader] *test over it*. Kate told the group, that if she gets a *kindle I'll buy all the Kaya books, the Kit books, the Samantha books, the Julie books....* Leigh says she was *going to finish reading the Kaya books*. Taryn and Mary expressed the desire to read more of the books about Julie, Rae wanted to read the books about Rebekah, and Kendyl said she wanted to read the books about Samantha.

Brooke, Mary, and Leigh indicated that it was not important to read the AG historical fiction books in sequential order. I observed Leigh and Brooke have a discussion about which of the books featuring Kaya that they wanted to read. Brooke said, *I want to read the 2nd, the 4th, and the 6th*. Leigh said, *I want to read the 2nd and the 6th*. Observing this conversation I inquired, *you don't want to read the 3rd book?* Leigh responded, *it doesn't look interesting*. These two readers bluntly explained to me that it did not seem important to read series books in order. Similarly, Mary told participants which of the Julie books she wanted to read, and she did not

include all of the titles in the list she verbalized.

Theme four: readers initially believe the AG books to be non-fiction. Readers of the AG books easily bought into the façade that the characters presented in the books are real. The illustrations in the books, the inclusion of a family tree, and the way the books are written add to the allusion that characters such as Felicity, Addy, and Julie really lived. Readers seem to suspend their own disbelief while reading books from the series by offering the characters sympathy. Because of this they more closely identify with the history presented. At the beginning of the research study six of the participants thought the AG books to be non-fiction. During the second book club meeting, I overheard Jenna, an AG veteran, sharing with the other participants that *Meet Addy* was *a real story with fake characters*. This began a fast-paced, lively discussion amongst participants about the ‘truth’ of the books- one that I knew I could not capture on audio or in notes unless they all stopped talking in unison. Wanting to record the conversation on audio, I interrupted their talk and suggested that we might all want to stop and discuss the matter they were arguing about- whether the *Meet Addy* book was a *real story* or *fake story*.

During the course of this conversation, I observed that six of the seven participants thought that the books were about real people in history. Leigh said, *I think it is a true story just because it had the actual people in it*. Brooke articulated, *I think the same thing that Leigh does, because there used to be slavery back then between 1798 and the slavery had to end in 1888 so they have only like twenty-four more years to do it. They tried speaking to the governor, and the governor wouldn't agree so they had to stick with that*. Although the historical evidence for her argument is debatable, to say the least, Brooke illustrated that she was corroborating *Meet Addy* with her background knowledge and inferred the story to be true. Taryn said, *I think it is all real*.

Mary said, *I think it is a 50/50 chance, but I lean toward the real side. Everything in the story could have happened.* Rae agreed. She enthusiastically professed, *I think it is real, I think Addy is real, her mom is real, all of it is real, it really, really happened.* After a few beats of silence she supported her argument by implying that it was real because the character from the story- Miss Caroline- seemed to be working with the Underground Railroad. Kendyl, who had been looking through her book during the conversation, shows that she is using the advanced skill of evidentiary thinking by saying, *I think that it would be real because in the back of the book it says 300 years before Addy was born. So I think it would be real. I think it would be a real true story.* After all participants shared their thoughts Jenna again spoke, *my mom said it is real events but different people. Like all of this* [pointing to pictures in the “Looking Back” section], *like this is the real ragdolls they made, and this is what they came to slavery in. It is real events, but fake people.* Even while reading *Meet Julie* and *Meet Kaya* some participants were confused as to whether the characters featured really lived.

During interviews, I monitored their opinions on the question of the genre of the books. By the end of the study, I found that all seven book club members described the books with characteristics defining historical fiction. At no time did I offer an opinion on the topic; I wanted to appear neutral on the subject so that participants would not be swayed by my thoughts. This evidence shows that participants, upon first inclination, believed the AG books to be non-fiction and gives credence to the realistic manner in which they are written.

Theme five: Book club format influences type of talk. When conducting the study, I found that the type of talk students engaged in changed drastically based upon the format of the book club. I purposefully did not designate a way that the book club should be operated; instead I took lead from the students and let them decide when to discuss and who would read.

Although I chose the first two books to be read, I elected to let my students choose all other AG books read during the course of the study. After we read the first two selections, *Meet Addy* and *Addy Learns a Lesson*, the participants asked if they could divide themselves into two book clubs, based on choice. Four participants chose to read *Meet Julie* and three participants chose to read *Meet Kaya*. I noted that participants did not arrange their groups based on “friendships”, but rather interest in the books. The participants read and discussed the books with both their own group members and with the whole group. At times the *Meet Julie* group would read in pairs, instead of a group of four. I alternated groups. After completing these books, the participants voted to read *Meet Felicity* as a whole group of seven.

I found that the type of talk students engaged in changed drastically based upon the format of the book club- meaning whether students met as a group of seven or whether they met in their smaller interest based book clubs. The design was that all book club sessions would be flexible and student-led, in that no roles were assigned and the only agenda was to read and discuss the books. A “wow and wondering” graphic organizer was provided to help foster discussion and capturing of student thoughts, but this was a voluntary component. I observed three types of talk during the course of the book club. I will refer to them as: on-topic talk, protocol talk, and off topic talk.

On-topic talk occurred when students were engaged in talk spurred by content within the book. For example, a discussion about leeches and bugs that was precipitated by the storyline and corresponding illustration of Addy encountering a leech was categorized as on-topic talk.

Protocol talk occurred when students were concerned with *who will read next*. For example, conversations revolving around who will read and the length of time they should read was categorized as protocol talk.

Off-topic talk occurred when students were engaged in talk that was not spurred by content within the book. For example, talk about personal matters such as a family members graduation or news about a celebrity was categorized as off-topic talk.

I found that when we read *Meet Addy*, *Addy Learns a Lesson*, and *Meet Felicity* participants engaged in on-topic talk. During these readings, members met as a group of seven and I was present. I found that when participants read *Meet Kaya* and *Meet Julie*, participants mainly engaged in protocol talk and off-topic talk. During these readings, members met in their small groups and I was not present in all sessions. It was when we all met together as a whole group to discuss *Meet Kaya* and *Meet Julie* that on-topic talk resumed.

For the purpose of this study and the answering of the two research questions, I analyzed the conversations categorized as on-topic talk; this type of talk occurred recursively enough for me to deem it representative of the two questions. But, I would be remiss not to mention the corollary finding of this research study- that the type of talk was greatly dependent upon format of the book club.

Theme six: Readers wanting to engage in on-topic discussion face resistance in small groups. When students met in their small groups, meaning we did not read as a group of seven but instead portioned off into smaller segments, negative peer pressure overwhelmed positive peer pressure in reference to talking on-topic. Jenna and Kendyl repeatedly tried to convince their other small group participants to engage in on-topic talk, but after repeated attempts at leading their peers in an on-topic discussion, they finally refrained from future attempts and instead sat quietly. For example, Mary and Kendyl- an on-level reader and above level reader- met in a pair to read and discuss *Meet Julie*. This discussion illustrates how Kendyl repeatedly attempted to get Mary to engage in conversation about the book and was repeatedly

unsuccessful. I included the entire conversation to illustrate how many attempts Kendyl made to converse with Mary about the text and how many times Mary ignored the attempts.

Kendyl: Now we can talk about the book!

Mary moves the camera around

Kendyl: Listen, we need to talk about it.

Mary keeps moving the camera

Kendyl: I don't think that is nice.

Mary: Changing the camera angle.

Kendyl: Um

Mary: and um, and um, quit saying um.

Kendyl: I think that it is wrong that Tracy didn't want to go see her dad.

Mary: I know, I thought that was pretty bad. Like every time I get the opportunity to see my momma- every other weekend- I go. I have like zero choices. And plus, if I get to go live with my momma- cause they are in court now- she said I could have any color: pink, purple, blue, green, whatever.

Kendyl: Really?

Mary: Yeah, my mom just got caramel colored highlights in her hair. And you know how it looks so, so dark brown.

Kendyl: Alright, so tell me what you think about the story.

Mary: I already told you [said meanly]

Kendyl: Okay, well let's talk about something else. Of the story...

Mary: Of what?

Kendyl: The story, the book. I'm glad that her dad gets to go to career day.

Mary: What is career day?

Kendyl: Where you bring your dad or mom

Mary: I know.

Kendyl: And I think it is good that she gets to see her best friend Ivy again. Don't you?

Mary: I can't touch it. I can't itch it. [Trying to scratch bug bite].

Kendyl: Be careful not to get any ticks.

Mary: I know, I went out to the woods one day. That's how I got this one. I ran into this bush that had thorns, and I didn't know it had thorns on it and it did. I had a thorn in my boots and it is stuck on my big toe.

Kendyl: Okay, I told you. Now you tell me.

Mary: What?

Kendyl: Something about the story. That we might agree with or disagree with.

Mary: I already told you. [said meanly]

Kendyl: I told you two. Not you tell me.

Mary: What time are we leaving?

Mary whispers and covers the camera.

Mary: We can go asleep. Or, never go back to class.

Kendyl: Video tape, listen, talk, comprehend. [said as if giving an itemized to-do list]

Kendyl: Let's see. I think it was really nice when Julie's dad got her a snow globe.

Mary is picking up camera and moving it.

Groups decide to meet as whole.

Conversations, such as the above, are indicative of negative peer pressure overwhelming the positive peer pressure, which in turn, affected the type of talk in the AG book clubs. When

the groups met as a whole, participants were less likely to veer off-topic or use “bully voices and tactics” to get participants to stop engaging in on-topic discussions. Book club members desiring to engage in on-topic discussions faced less resistance when the group met as a whole.

Furthermore, all participants were more likely to contribute to the conversation.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to gain understanding of how fourth grade readers transact with history and the AG series of historical fiction while reading the AG series. What occurs when students read the AG series of historical fiction was the context for this qualitative study. These ubiquitous works, featuring characters situated in different time periods of American history, are read by countless numbers of young people and have garnered a cult following. There currently is no educational research, specifically research from the perspective of a social science scholar, about the AG series of historical fiction. And few research studies concern how students process historical fiction. The study attempted to answer the following two questions:

- 1). How do fourth grade students transact with history while reading the AG series of historical fiction in a book club setting?
- 2). How do fourth grade students respond to the AG series of historical fiction in a book club setting?

Seeking to answer the research questions and to explore the perceptives of fourth grade students as they read books from the AG series of historical fiction, I interviewed, observed, and participated- as a participant-observer in a book club with seven fourth grade public school students as they read and discussed books from the AG series. Data were collected over the course of four weeks. During the course of the study we read and discussed five AG books:

Meet Addy, Addy Learns a Lesson, Meet Julie, Meet Kaya, and Meet Felicity. After performing a rigorous inductive data analysis (Hatch, 2002) I identified fourteen key themes answering the research questions.

The first research question was, “How do fourth grade students transact with history while reading the AG series of historical fiction in a book club setting?” After analyzing data from participant responses to interview questions, observations and analysis of the transcriptions of book club sessions, and document analysis of student journals, I generated eight key themes. I found that readers: discussed social history, discussed controversial issues, displayed evidence of engaging in historical thinking, found that the information they read challenged their ideas about history, asked questions about history and made connections with history, shared misconceptions about history, showed interest in human impact of historical events, and that readers were motivated to engage in historical inquiry.

The second research question was, “How do fourth grade students transact with the AG series of historical fiction in a book club setting?” After analyzing data from participant responses to interview questions, observations and analysis of the transcriptions of book club sessions, and document analysis of student journals, I generated six key themes. I found that readers: used the textual and pictorial elements to their benefit, shared personal history, were motivated to read more books in the AG series, and that readers initially believe the AG historical fiction books to be non-fiction accounts. I also found that book club format influences type of talk in the book club sessions, and that the readers wanting to engage in on-topic discussions face resistance in small groups.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to gain understanding of how fourth grade readers transact with history and the AG series of historical fiction while reading the AG series. What occurs when students read the AG series of historical fiction was the context for this qualitative study. These ubiquitous works, featuring characters situated in different time periods of American history, are read by countless numbers of young people and have garnered a cult following. There currently is no educational research, specifically research from the perspective of a social science scholar, about the AG series of historical fiction. And few research studies concern how students process historical fiction. The study attempted to answer the following two questions:

1. How do fourth grade students transact with history while reading the American Girl series of historical fiction in a book club setting?
2. How do fourth grade students transact with the American Girl series of historical fiction in a book club setting?

Seeking to answer the research questions and to explore the perceptions of fourth grade students as they read books from the AG series of historical fiction, I interviewed, observed, and participated as a participant-observer in a book club with seven fourth grade public school students as they read and discussed books from the AG series. Data were collected over the course of four weeks. During the course of the study we read and discussed five AG books: *Meet Addy*, *Addy Learns a Lesson*, *Meet Julie*, *Meet Kaya*, and *Meet Felicity*. After performing a rigorous inductive data analysis (Hatch, 2002), I identified fourteen key themes answering the research questions.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the study with background information then followed with a

description of the problem, purpose of the study, and methodological and substantive theoretical assumptions. Limitations, delimitations, assumptions, and definitions of terms were also included in this study.

In Chapter 2, I presented a review of related literature on using historical fiction in the social studies classroom. This included a definition of historical fiction and what research and literature ascertains about using historical fiction in the classroom. A brief review of literature concerning series books is also included in this chapter.

In Chapter 3, I described the methodology of the research study. Within this chapter is a rationale for employing the design of an instrumental case study, specifics about the participant and site, rationale for participant and site selections, information about the ethnographic data collection methods of interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis, information about the inductive data analysis (Hatch, 2002) that framed the data analysis procedures of this study, and information about the specific coding methods used to analyze the collected data.

In Chapter 4, I provided the results of the study by describing the themes I identified from the data analysis procedures described in Chapter 3. The first research question was, “How do fourth grade students transact with history while reading the AG series of historical fiction in a book club setting?” After analyzing data from participants responses to interview questions, observations and analysis of the transcriptions of book club sessions, and document analysis of student journals I generated eight key themes. I found that readers: discussed social history, discussed controversial issues, displayed evidence of engaging in historical thinking, found that the information they read challenged their ideas about history, asked questions about history and made connections with history, shared misconceptions about history, showed interest in human impact of historical events, and that readers were motivated to learn more about

history.

The second research question was, “How do fourth grade students transact with the AG series of historical fiction in a book club setting?” After analyzing data from participant responses to interview questions, observations and analysis of the transcriptions of book club sessions, and document analysis of student journals I generated six key themes. I found that readers: used the textual and pictorial elements to their benefit, shared personal history, were motivated to read more books in the AG series, and that readers initially believe the AG historical fiction books to be non-fiction accounts. I also found that book club format influences type of talk in the book club sessions, and that the readers wanting to engage in on-topic discussions face resistance in small groups.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will present conclusions and implications for future researchers and for practicing teachers about using historical fiction in the social studies classroom, specifically the AG series of historical fiction.

Conclusions

My conclusions, from the emergent data in the study, are that the AG series of historical fiction is a worthy addition to any social studies classroom. Historical fiction helps students articulate and ask questions about history, engages students with social history and controversial issues, motivates them to read and know more about history, and affords students the opportunity to use historical thinking skills. Overall, the AG series of historical fiction helps readers think about history, discuss history, and ask questions about history.

Rowland is often quoted relaying her favorite quote from Yeats. She says, “look up in the sun’s eye and see what the exultant heart calls good, that some new day may breed the best we gave, not what they would, but the right twigs for an eagle’s nest” (Yeats, 1916). Providing

young girls these “twigs for an eagle’s nest” has been a lifelong mission of Rowland. She had a vision of helping young girls become interested in history and also helping them grow-up in the fragile period of girlhood. In the face of great difficulty, Rowland carried her vision from the abstract to the concrete- by creating of a line of timeless books, dolls, and experiences that as a whole form the much-beloved AG enterprise. But did she achieve her mission? Financially, yes. Commercially, yes. The question that remained could be answered in the anecdotal accounts of my hearing the students in my classroom making proclamations that they loved AG and they, too, loved history. The question could be answered by my observing a group of youth coming together to my local town’s Young Authors’ Conference and hearing young people ask AG author Valerie Tripp real, provocative questions about history and hearing them relaying to her their knowledge about the Great Depression- knowledge they professed to learn from reading the Kit series. All that remained was empirically looking at the series through the eyes of an educational researcher, specifically finding out if the series truly had worth in the academic sense of the term.

I have spent the last year researching what does happen when young girls read the AG series. How would a group of seven fourth grade students transact with the AG series and with history while reading and discussing these commercially successful books? The findings from this study indicate that the AG series of historical fiction helps readers think about history, discuss history, and ask questions about history. The data-based themes I generated, by performing an inductive analysis, indicate that the stories, as an entity all their own and separate from the dolls, do have worth and value and appear to accomplish Rowland’s initial mission. Furthermore, it gave these young girls an opportunity to identify with characters facing similar situations as their own, situations of fragility such as racism, bullying, and divorce.

Jenna was a specific participant in the research study who showed an intellectual fascination with history. A veteran AG consumer and reader, she would often cite her reading of the AG books as sources for helping her understand complex events. The books seemed to have provided a context so that Jenna could more easily situate history in her mental timeline, understand differences in historical eras, and help her develop a schema for historical events. In short, Jenna's background knowledge about history was shaped because of her prior readings of AG texts. This corroborates other empirical studies where scholars found evidence that historical fiction helps build students background knowledge (Barton & Levstik, 1996; Villano, 2005). Furthermore, in this research study, Jenna displayed instances of engaging in both historical thinking and historical empathy while reading the AG selections. This indicates that historical fiction books afford readers the opportunities to engage in historical thinking, which is an area of research that needs greater study (Barton & Levstik, 1996). By itself, and separate from the rest of the research study, the single case of Jenna illustrates the strength of the AG enterprise in helping young girls develop understandings of history and of making history relevant to their everyday lives. But these findings are given more vigor when themes from the data of all participants- readers of a mixed reading ability are looked at holistically. The positive aspects of this research study, in relation to how the seven elementary students transacted with history and with the AG series while reading books from the AG historical collection, provide credence and affirmation that the AG books are beneficial to students by promoting and developing historical understandings.

Implications for Educators

There are numerous implications for educators that come as a result of the findings of this study. These implications will be outlined below, and I hope to expand the recommendations

more completely in articles I write for practitioner journals so that teachers can have easy access to how the findings can relate to their classroom instruction. It must be noted that all implications rest on the results of a study that used specific books from the AG series of historical fiction. I posit that many of the findings would be matched if students were to read other selections of high-quality historical fiction.

Using historical fiction to cultivate literacy skills and historical thinking skills.

Students in the research study thought that the characters in the books existed, not in the imagination of the author, but in times of American history. If an educator were to use the AG books in the classroom, I do not think that informing students that the books are historical fiction is a necessary part of the introduction to the novel study. I found that by the end of the research study, all seven participants naturally understood that the events in the book are based on real life and that, although the characters are fictional, they embody the lived experience of someone living in a particular era. Instead of telling students the genre, educators might use the question as a topic of inquiry. Students could investigate whether the characters featured in the narratives existed, thereby creating a place for elementary students to engage in historical inquiry and practice the acts of sourcing. Using the books in this capacity could greatly nurture elementary students skills in historical thinking- which evidence from this study illustrated that students are capable of performing. After students have engaged in such inquiry, then a discussion about genre of the books would be beneficial to readers. This could lead to a richer discussion about the history presented in the books, and lead students to look at other sources to corroborate the events presented in the stories. Social Science scholars recommend that curricular time be spent by helping students cultivate skills in historical thinking (Wineburg, 2001). Reading and analyzing multiple primary sources is the chief pedagogical technique recommended. But

primary sources are written on a reading level more advanced than many elementary students can comprehend. I posit that teachers, in conjunction with using primary sources, could teach students historical thinking skills such as corroboration, contextualization, and sourcing by using quality historical fiction as the text to analyze. This could help students become familiar with the practice and language of historical thinking skills while reading texts they can more easily navigate. The AG series of historical fiction has books that specifically correspond to the eras focused upon in the 4th and 5th grade social studies history curriculum. Using these books, and other sources of historical fiction as texts that students can analyze is a way to cultivate literacy skills and historical thinking skills.

Findings from this study reveal that readers navigated the AG books in similar instances, and did so without me showing them any of the features. Notably readers used all the textual and pictorial features to their benefits. Findings from this study indicate that elementary teachers might use the AG books to their advantage when studying particular time periods-especially in terms of facilitating talk or helping students garner a feel for the social history of the era. For example, a study of the Great Depression might be improved with students being offered to read books from the Kit series. This is because the books provide illustrations, which this research and past research studies indicate (Wineburg, 2001), that illustrations help facilitate talk about a historical topic. Furthermore, the natural accompaniment between the fictional portion of the text and the informational portion of the text proved to be a strong component of the AG series. Questions that students inquired about while reading the fictional portion of the book, could and would oft be, investigated more deeply in the non-fiction “Looking Back” portion. This natural marriage seemed to help the young elementary students in my study contextualize the events in the book within a broader socio-culture context.

Using historical fiction to provide context to historical events and to engage students into the study of history. Findings from this study indicate that the AG historical fiction books read in the research study provided context to ideas students had studied in their social studies class and from background knowledge they had developed outside formal education. This genre of historical fiction provided a piece of the puzzle in helping students shape their understandings of history. Specifically helps readers understand topics that were only superficially presented in textbooks. One such instance of this is when Jenna discovered, from the reading of the Addy series, that the north was not as free of a place for African-Americans as she had inferred from the reading of her textbook. She was especially puzzled that Addy and her African-American friend were not allowed to ride the streetcar because of the color of her skin. By reading about this event in *Addy Learns a Lesson*, an event based upon real historic events, Jenna's ideas about freedom and slavery were enhanced. She started viewing the term "free state" differently than she had before the reading of the Addy series. Her ideas of history were challenged and enhanced by the reading of this historical fiction, and I posit that studies substituting other historical fiction books in the place of the AG series would find similar results.

Students in this study frequently remarked that they *hated social studies* and that it is *difficult to understand*. The notoriousness of these comments was ironic in terms of the enjoyment readers showed about social history. As earlier studies suggest, historical fiction provides readers what many textbooks leave out- social history and a voice to groups that have previously been marginalized (Turk et al., 2007). Findings from this study corroborate indications that the social history of an era greatly excites students and is of particular interest to them (Levstik & Barton, 2011). In this study I found that student-initiated conversations about social history were commonplace while reading historical fiction. Students in this study showed

an interest in social history and how humans responded to the events of history. This should be of particular interest to educators because there is evidence that elementary students use social history to better comprehend history, and studying social history is a way in which elementary students appear to make sense of and retain historical information (Barton & Levstik, 1996). Because the social history in the historical fiction books is of particular interest to students, it reasons to believe that the social history presented in the historical fiction books would help students make sense of history.

The research participants' interest in social history topics spurred them to ask many questions about historical topics. Readers were inquiring about history, both political and social factors, based upon their reading of the historical fiction texts. This research study, along with past studies, indicates that historical fiction motivates students to pursue further inquiry (Roser & Keehn, 2002; Villano, 2005). Teachers would be well advised to use historical fiction in the classroom as a means to motivate students to want to engage in a study of history. This study indicates that social history is one component of historical fiction that is especially intriguing to students. Reading historical fiction appeared to be the gateway into getting the students in this research study intrigued in history and asking questions about history. This study revealed that reading the AG historical fiction books encouraged students to ask self-formulated questions about history. The task of asking questions is paramount in the study of history. Barton and Levstik (2004) equates inquiry with a tool for learning history. They define inquiry as "asking questions, gathering and evaluating relevant evidence, and reaching conclusions based on that evidence" (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 188). Students in this study spontaneously asked many insightful questions. Not just questions about the individual character's experiences in the books, but questions about the larger socio-cultural sphere of American history. For example,

questions concerning gender inequality topics, such as why couldn't girls play basketball in the 1970s and questions about the institution of slavery. Furthermore, students showed evidence that they were motivated to engage in more inquiry about topics by seeking out other sources. Research participants did not spontaneously gather and evaluate large amounts of evidence (other than evidence in the "Looking Back" section and first-hand accounts from family members), but they did show signs that they would have readily engaged in such tasks if additional sources had been provided. Educators might be advised to use historical fiction, such as the AG books, in the classroom because they are ripe with social history—a topic that seems to greatly interest students and is a much needed component to understanding the larger context of history, and because the reading of historical fiction encourages student inquiry.

Using historical fiction to discuss and explore topics of controversy. This study also has implications for educators because it corroborates the evidence that historical fiction helps students discuss and explore controversial issues (Brooks & Hampton, 2005). Connie Porter, author of the Addy series, talks about including uncomfortable experiences of Addy being whipped and forced to eat worms in the book *Meet Addy*. She said, "And when you're writing for children—especially when it's an historical period you're writing about—you can't lie to them. It may not be the truth you want to be history, but that's what it is—history" (Elliot, 1994, p. 40). She went on to say, "children can hear the truth better than we think. They don't want to be patronized or lied to. They don't come to the slavery issue with a lot of baggage. They have no ideas about slavery" (Elliot, 1994, p. 42). Like NCSS (2001) says, students need opportunities to discuss issues with opposing viewpoints— even if they are uncomfortable issues. Reading and discussing historical fiction is one way to engage students in such conversations. As Porter attested, the books that students read need to be filled with examples of true lived

experiences of individuals. AG books, such as the *Addy* series, did provide this opportunity for students to confront issues such as racism and slavery. The seven participants in this study were able to read about and discuss how the institution of slavery impacted an individual family. This elicited many questions from participants, not only about the lives of the individuals, but also on the larger socio-cultural context of the environment. Questions, such as, why slavery existed, were elicited after reading Addy's fictional accounts. Educators should capitalize on this finding that readers discussed controversial issues and asked questions about such issues by incorporating historical fiction books in the classroom with the purpose of connecting students to controversial issues and also as a technique of engaging students in meaningful discussions.

Using historical fiction to uncover misconceptions students' possess about history and use these uncertainties as teachable opportunities for students to engage in inquiry and historical thinking. Students routinely articulated misconceptions they possessed about history. Base misconceptions, such as the idea that both whites and blacks could have been slaves during the time preceding and during the American Civil War, indicate that many misconceptions are not just fact based, but show a deeper misunderstanding about the larger context of history. Educators would do well to monitor students' thoughts about history, and not make assumptions that base ideas are understood by students in the social studies class. This can be accomplished by gathering background knowledge before a unit of study begins, and also by listening and engaging students in discussion. As learned from this study, discussions about history do ensue while readers read historical fiction. Furthermore, when students are allowed to ask questions and when teachers ask non-objective questions to students, teachers will have opportunities to more easily find out what students truly profess to understand about historical concepts. Using the "Wow and Wondering" graphic organizer (Appendix G) can help students capture their

thoughts and then more easily articulate them. The teacher can turn student misconceptions and uncertainties into teachable opportunities for inquiry and historical thinking.

Using historical fiction in a book club setting. Findings of this research study indicate, as many scholars have attested, that integrating talk in the social studies classroom is especially meaningful because talk provides students a place to socially construct knowledge (Levstik & Barton, 2011). Numerous instances of readers helping each other construct knowledge were apparent throughout this study. But, as many other scholars and practitioners have found, integrating books clubs into the classroom is not an effortless undertaking (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007; Mills & Jennings, 2011). The book club format that I used in this study was very much student driven. I purposefully did not create parameters or roles for students because I wanted to see what would naturally happen when they were given the AG books to read. Had I modeled the book club in ways recommended by literacy experts I might have found different results. Social studies educators would do well to read literature from literacy experts (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007; Eeds & Peterson, 1991; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Roser & Keehn, 2002; Wooten, 2000) so that they can be prepared to more easily institute book clubs in the classroom.

One particular implication of this study for educators is the finding that even though some students want to engage in on-topic talk, these students are often overshadowed by peers who do not want to engage in such behavior. This affects the student(s) in the leadership position who want to read and discuss the books. These readers seeking to engage in on-topic discussion may not fully benefit from the book club setting if they are not allowed (by their peer's insubordination) to fully engage in the intellectual exercises of reading and discussing. Educators must monitor whether this is occurring in their classroom and decide how to ensure

that all students are in a context that allows them to be fully engaged to the best of their ability. Educators should be encouraged not to abandon the idea of engaging students in discussion about historical fiction books in their classrooms or implementing book clubs in their classroom, but to persevere in finding the best way to incorporate such frameworks in their classrooms. Reading books from literacy experts (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007; Eeds & Peterson, 1991; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Roser & Keehn, 2002; Wooten, 2000) about book club implementation could help social studies educators become more effective and comfortable in using book clubs. Talk encourages historical talk and critical thinking (L.S. Levstik & Barton, 2011) and should be an integral part of a classroom.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study leaves me detailing six suggestions for future research about the AG series and one suggestion for developers of professional development and instructors in teacher practitioner programs.

First, because these books were read exclusive of any formal topical social studies study, I do not know what might happen when students would read the AG books within a unit of study (for example, reading books from the *Addy* series within a unit of study about the Civil War). Research is warranted to find out how the reading of the AG series during a specific unit of study might benefit elementary students.

Secondly, replicating this study with other AG books and other historical fiction books would add to the body of scholarly research about using historical fiction with elementary students.

Thirdly, finding out elementary teachers' perceptions of the AG series and whether or not they formally use the AG series in their classrooms is of concern. As the results of this study

indicate, integrating the AG books into the classroom could be beneficial, but the question lingers as to whether or not they are actually used in the elementary classroom.

Fourthly, I am interested in gaining more knowledge about the historical understandings girls who are already fans of the AG series possess. I am interested in investigating the phenomenon of the AG fandom through the lens of veteran AG consumers- consumers such as Jenna. Finding out more qualitative data of how the AG enterprise develops young readers ideas about history is of special interest.

Fifthly, further research about using book clubs in the social studies classroom should be conducted.

Sixthly, I am interested in whether readers of the AG series believe females to be active participants in history. As Wineburg's (2001) study found, the elementary students in his study believed females to be absent and virtually invisible in history. Do readers of the AG series have different perceptions of females being actively involved in history as opposed to non-readers?

These suggestions for future research will not only add to the body of research about historical fiction and how elementary students understand history, but also begin to create a body of educational research about the AG series. This research presented in this study is the first research from the perspective of a social science scholar about the AG series of historical fiction.

Furthermore, in-service and pre-service teachers should have opportunities for learning how to more effectively and meaningfully incorporate historical fiction in the social studies classroom. Professional development for both of these teacher groups should be offered and organized so that teachers can more readily understand the potentials, uncovered by this research study, for using historical fiction and the AG series with readers. Specifically, training in using historical fiction to discuss topics of controversy and using historical fiction as a document for

which students to learn and use historical thinking skills is highly encouraged.

Reflections

NCSS (National Council for Social Studies, 1994) ascertains that the study of social studies is to promote civic competence. Civic competence includes knowledge about the community and nation. Findings of this study indicate that the AG series of historical fiction and the AG enterprise enhances student's understandings of the history of America because students are discussing, asking questions, and thinking about American history- an American history that includes the presence of women, children, and a full range of ethnicities and religious backgrounds. Connie Porter, author of the award winning *Addy* series, valued the opportunity to write stories and be involved in a company shared the voices of women and children throughout history. When asked about accepting the offer to write the *Addy* series, Porter said,

It is good to study about history and to know where we all come from. But often, when looking back in the history, we don't see that many women. We don't know what women contributed; we don't know what children did on a day-to-day basis. It is important to know who the first president was, what the causes of the Civil War were, and what lead to World War II, but I think what was intriguing to me about becoming involved in the AG company is that you have a chance to see what history looked like through the eyes of a child and specifically through the eyes of a girl. Often people ask me," What drew you to it?" And I said one thing was to, to have a chance to give a voice to someone who had never had a voice (Porter, 2012).

AG books read in conjunction with the scaffolding of an educator have great potential in the elementary social studies classroom and provide an opportunity for not only a more multi-dimensional interdisciplinary path of teaching and learning but an opportunity where enjoyment,

reading, and historical learning opportunities are merged together. This is what Rowland calls, “putting the vitamins in the chocolate cake” (Morgenson, 1997, p. 125). The AG books might be dismissed by some because of the frills that go along with the series, but as findings from this study indicate, educators should consider using these valuable books, which introduce students to American history, in their classrooms. Series books, by their very nature, encourage students to engage in a task highly recommended by literacy experts: reading (McGill-Franzen, 2009). The AG series books will not only encourage students to read more, but they also provide a much-needed dose of a “vitamin” (Morgenson, 1997, p. 125) that is often absent in education: history. History plus reading plus enjoyment- now that is a healthy and appetizing addition to any reading or social studies classroom; an addition that can easily be obtained by introducing readers to high-quality historical fiction.

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Appendices

Appendix A
American Girl books read during the study

Book Selection:	Annotations:	*Book grade level:	Awards:
<i>Meet Addy</i> by Connie Porter	In 1864, after her father and brother are sold to another owner, nine-year-old Addy Walker and her mother escape from their cruel life of slavery in North Carolina to freedom in Philadelphia.	4.0	• 1994 Children's Choice Award, International Reading Association • 1994 Book of the Year Award (Children), Blackboard African American Best Sellers, Inc. • 1994 Children's Booksellers Choices Award
<i>Addy Learns a Lesson</i> by Connie Porter	After their escape from North Carolina to Philadelphia in the summer of 1864, Addy and her mother begin their new life as free people as her mother gets a paying job and Addy goes to school and learns a lesson in true friendship.	3.9	
<i>Meet Kaya</i> by Janet Shaw	In 1764, when Kaya and her family reunite with other Nez Percé Indians to fish for the red salmon, she learns that bragging, even about her swift horse, can lead to trouble. Includes historical notes on the Nez Percé Indians.	4.2	• 2002 <i>New York Times</i> Bestseller • 2002 <i>Publishers Weekly</i> Bestseller • 2002 <i>Book Sense</i> Bestseller • 2003, Best Books Serving Native Americans/ First Youth Populations, ALSC American Library Association
<i>Meet Julie</i> by Megan McDonald	In 1974, after Julie's parents divorce, she moves to a new San Francisco neighborhood where the school does not have a girls' basketball team so she fights for the right to play on the boys' team.	4.5	
<i>Meet Felicity</i> by Valerie Tripp	In Williamsburg in 1774, nine-year old Felicity rescues a beautiful horse who is being beaten and starved by her cruel owner.	4.2	

*Note: ATOS Book Levels are reported using the ATOS readability formula and represent the difficulty of the text.

Appendix B IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research
1534 White Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865.974.3466
865.974.7400

March 16, 2012

IRB#: 8775 B

TITLE: How elementary students transact with historical fiction and history while reading books from the *American Girl* series

Philpot, Sarah L.
Theory & Practice in Teacher Education
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Madisonville, TN 37353

Turner, Thomas
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Your project listed above has been reviewed and granted IRB approval under expedited review.

This approval is for a period ending one year from the date of this letter. Please make timely submission of renewal or prompt notification of project termination (see item #3 below).

Responsibilities of the investigator during the conduct of this project include the following:

1. To obtain prior approval from the Committee before instituting any changes in the project.
2. If signed consent forms are being obtained from subjects, they must be stored for at least three years following completion of the project
3. To submit a Form D to report changes in the project or to report termination at 12-month or less intervals.

The Committee wishes you every success in your research endeavor. This office will send you a renewal notice (Form R) on the anniversary of your approval date.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda Lawson".

Brenda Lawson
Compliances

Enclosure

Appendix C
Parent/Guardian Information Letter

Dear Guardian,

I am a former _____ teacher who is now a doctoral student at The University of Tennessee. I am working on a PhD in Teacher Education, and I am preparing to conduct research for my dissertation. The topic for my dissertation involves finding out what students “gather” from reading the American Girl series of historical fiction. My study will be conducted this spring in Mrs. Rock’s class. I will meet with students numerous times throughout a four-week period.

Your child has been identified as someone who might enjoy participating in this study. We will be meeting in Mrs. Rock’s class during regular school hours. I will provide all the books and materials your child needs for the study. If you and your child agree, your child’s participation in this study will involve the following:

GROUP BOOK CLUB SESSIONS:

Our book club will meet over the course of four weeks for up to twelve hour long sessions. In these book club sessions, we will discuss various books from the American Girl series of historical fiction. The students will read books during the course of the study and we will discuss them during the sessions. The sessions will be videotaped, digitally recorded, and then transcribed.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS:

I plan to meet with each child individually at least four times during the course of the book club. These 15-30 minute meetings will be conducted at X School during regular operating hours. I will be asking your child about the books we are reading and about his/her perceptions of certain time periods in history. These sessions will be digitally recorded and transcribed.

READING:

Your child will read at least three American Girl books during our project. The books will be supplied to your child free of charge. I will also provide your child with a reading journal to record thoughts while reading. There are no “right or wrong” answers. Nothing your child writes will be scholastically evaluated. The book club sessions, interviews, and journals will not be graded.

If you choose to let your child participate in this study, please read and complete the attached form authorizing your consent and have your child complete the form giving his/her assent.

I look forward to beginning this study and hope that your child will participate!

Sincerely,

Sarah Philpott

Appendix D
Parent/Guardian Consent Statement

American Girl Series Research Study

Dear Guardian,

I am a former _____ teacher who is now a doctoral student at The University of Tennessee. I am working on a PhD in Teacher Education, and I am preparing to conduct research for my dissertation. The topic for my dissertation involves finding out what students “gather” from reading the American Girl series of historical fiction. My study will be conducted this spring in Mrs. Rock’s class. I will meet with students numerous times throughout a four-week period.

Your child has been identified as someone who might enjoy participating in this study. We will be meeting in Mrs. Rock’s class during regular school hours. I will provide all the books and materials your child needs for the study. If you and your child agree, your child’s participation in this study will involve the following:

GROUP BOOK CLUB SESSIONS:

Our book club will meet over the course of four weeks for up to twelve hour long sessions. In these book club sessions, we will discuss various books from the American Girl series of historical fiction. The students will read books during the course of the study and we will discuss them during the sessions. The sessions will be videotaped, digitally recorded, and then transcribed.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS:

I plan to meet with each child individually at least four times during the course of the book club. These 15-30 minute meetings will be conducted at X School during regular operating hours. I will be asking your child about the books we are reading and about his/her perceptions of certain time periods in history. These sessions will be digitally recorded and transcribed.

READING:

Your child will read at least three American Girl books during our project. The books will be supplied to your child free of charge. I will also provide your child with a reading journal to record thoughts while reading. There are no “right or wrong” answers. Nothing your child writes will be scholastically evaluated. The book club sessions, interviews, and journals will not be graded.

This study will be conducted under the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Tennessee and is approved by _____ Schools. The risk to your child is minimal. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your child may discontinue his/her participation at any time by notifying me. There will be no questions asked or consequences for withdrawing from the study.

At the conclusion of the study, I will write the results as a part of my dissertation. It is possible that the study could be published in another form or presented at a professional conference. I would like to use the videotapes and digital audio in presentations and/or further research projects. The possibility exists that your child could be identified on the video but his/her real name will not be used. Pseudonyms will be substituted for the names of all the

children participating. No information will be used that could lead to identifying or locating your child.

Your child may not derive any direct benefit from participating in this study, although I do hope your child will enjoy the readings and the book club. At the end of the study, students will choose one book to keep as a thank-you for participating in the study.

This study is in no way connected with any grade your child may receive at school.

You are more than welcome to contact me if you have any questions about this study. I would be happy to meet with you if you would like to talk in person about the project.

Sincerely,

Sarah Philpott

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study.

_____ Participant's initials

COMPENSATION

Students will choose one book to keep as a thank-you for participating in the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Sarah Philpott, at sphilpot@utk.edu, and 423 730 9902. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the The University of Tennessee Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; your child may decline to participate without penalty. If your child decides to participate, he/she may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which he/she are otherwise entitled. If your child withdraws from the study before data collection is completed the data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the information in the consent form and I give permission for my child to participate in this project.

Student's Name _____

Parent's Name _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E
Student Assent Statement

American Girl Series Research Study

Dear Student,

I am about to begin a book club where we will read and discuss books from the American Girl series of historical fiction. I would love for you to participate.

We will meet up to twelve times over four weeks. The entire book club group will meet during Mrs. Lawson's class time. I would also like to talk with you individually a few times during the five weeks so you can tell me exactly what you think of the books. There are no right or wrong answers; we will just meet to talk about the books. You will not be graded on anything.

Each time we meet I will videotape and digitally record our conversations so that I can capture what your thoughts are concerning the books. If you ever want to stop being in the book club you can just tell your parent or me.

I think that we will have a great time talking about these books. Talk it over with your parents. If you both are in agreement that you can join the book club, sign your name below.

Sincerely,

Sarah Philpott

Print your name here: _____

Sign your name here: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F
Initial Interview Schedule

American Girl Series Research Study

Tell me know what you know about the time period of x (i.e. the American Civil War).

What do you think it would be like for a person your age to live during x (i.e. the American Civil War)?

Have you ever read any of the AG books?

Tell me about what you have read.

Appendix G
Journal Graphic Organizer

American Girl Series Research Study

WOWs and WONDERINGS

WOW

Write down any information that makes you
say “wow.”

I WONDER

What questions do you have while reading?
Write down anything that makes you say, “I
wonder.”

VITA

Sarah Lewis Philpott was born in Riceville, Tennessee in 1982. Sarah graduated from Tennessee Wesleyan College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in 2004. She received both a Master of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction and an Educational Specialist degree from Lincoln Memorial University. In 2013, she completed a Doctor of Philosophy from The University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

Dr. Philpott taught both middle school and elementary school. While completing her doctoral degree, Sarah also worked as a supervisor of middle school interns at The University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

Dr. Philpott has been published in peer-reviewed practitioner and research journals, served as a co-author for several edited book chapters, and has presented at numerous national, state, and local conferences.