

“WE’RE NOT MUCH TO LOOK AT”: RESISTING REPRESENTATIONS OF  
RURALITY USING A CRITICAL RURAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Addressing the challenges and silences faced by rural schools and students is a matter of social justice, making rural issues a valid and needed topic for classroom study. This project addresses the minimal curricular presence of contemporary rural literary representations in the secondary English classroom. It investigates rural depictions in several Young Adult (YA) novels which reveal the persistent presence of stereotypical depictions of rural people and places. Because of the presence of these stereotypes, this project offers an analysis tool for engaging with rural texts called the Critical Rural Perspective. This paper also examines some possible benefits of using rural YA literature in the classroom. When contemporary rural YA novels are read in the classroom, students can transfer their understanding of the discursive construction of rurality seen in textual representations to the ways that language is used to create what it means to *be* rural. By becoming aware of the construction of rural identity, students can analyze, resist, and manipulate the single story of rurality which can set the stage for a more nuanced societal understanding of rural people.

## Introduction

I grew up in a small town in Northeastern Arizona, an island of houses and dirt roads in a sea of Ponderosa Pine trees. It is a town that climbs up hillsides and spills into a canyon; a town that booms in the summer and has entire streets lined with empty houses in the winter; a town originally founded on logging, now searching for new industry; a town of ranchers, teachers, waitresses, builders, and vacationers. I love my hometown. It was a wonderful place to grow up. In the summer, we'd play softball and jump off the cliffs into the lake, the air heavy with the sweet vanilla scent of pine trees. In the winter, the snow would quietly pile up outside while half the town packed into the gym for basketball games. I didn't mind that we didn't have a movie theatre, a Starbucks, or a Taco Bell. I didn't mind that everyone in town knew that I drove the tan F-150 or that they would call my parents when they saw me driving too fast. However, as much as I loved my town, I knew I would leave. My future, whatever it would hold, could not be realized there. I was sure that my town was a dead end, and I was not alone in my conviction that life outside of a small town was the only place to find success. One of the biggest insults one could receive at my high school was the yearbook superlative "Never Going to Leave Heber." So, after graduating high school, I left.

I entered college with the belief that I needed to live in the city to be successful, but I felt out of place and uncomfortable with city living. The congestion, the pavement, and the hectic nature of it all was more annoying than thrilling, and it didn't take me long to

recognize my preference for small-town life. In fact, being in the city made me realize I was “rural.”

Rural is a complicated label. Technically, the term stems from Census Bureau data with the differentiation between rural and urban based on population and proximity to other populated areas, meaning suburban and urban are both considered urban in comparison to rural (“Urban and Rural”). The more isolated a town, the more rural it is. However, the meaning of rural goes beyond the official definition. For many, myself included, identifying as rural is ontological (Eckert & Alsup). People can, and do, classify themselves as rural based on their culture and world view, even if their physical location isn’t deemed rural by the Census Bureau. Rural is a way of being, and during college, I began to understand that it was an important part of my identity. So, in spite of my initial intention to find success in the city, I had a new desire to return to a rural area after I completed my degree; this led me to pursue a teaching career in a small town in Southwestern Montana.

Teaching in Montana has given me a window into what it’s like to grow up in a rural culture rather different from my own. I see aspects reminiscent of my rural childhood in the lives of my Montana students, but there are some marked differences. I did not grow up cheering on the Cats or the Griz, spending my spring calving, or my summer haying. At 15, I could not have told you what center pivot irrigation is. But in spite of the variances in our rural upbringings and cultures, my students’ perceptions of *where* their futures will occur echo mine at that age. Many of them are fiercely proud of where they grew up, yet

they feel that they have to leave after high school to discover more opportunities and “real” life. They are not alone in this feeling.

### Challenges Encountered by Rural People and Places

The idea that rural places offer little opportunity is an ideology inherent in today’s society (Carr and Kefalas, Donehower et. al, Heldke). While I believe significant benefits exist for rural youth when they leave home, the general disbelief that rural spaces offer opportunities for a viable and respectable future is concerning to me, and the “brain drain” (Carr and Kefalas, Donehower et. al) that is the inevitable result of this type of thinking should be alarming to anyone interested in the future of rural places. The reasons to be troubled regarding contemporary rurality do not stop there.

We live in a society driven by metrocentric thought, with the highest value placed on metrocentric concerns. In fact, the very way that rural is defined based on its proximity to urban areas is metrocentric. Because of the focus on the values of urbanity, there is a tendency to ignore or misrepresent the lifestyles and ways of knowing of the significant amount of the population that lives outside of metropolitan areas. The devaluation and distortion of rural life is problematic for both those dwelling in rural spaces and those outside of them (Carr and Kefalas).

The metrocentric focus of society others rural dwellers and causes the creation of an urban vs. rural binary. This dichotomy typically reflects a superior/inferior correlation, which leads to the establishment of further binaries and judgements about rural dwellers, such as sophisticated/unrefined, progressive/conservative, polite/rude, and intelligent/

stupid, with urban as the desirable standard (Heldke). Metrocentrism becomes the norm by which rural is measured, and it always falls short. These categorizations are dangerous in that they establish an either/or mentality that casts aside the value that can be found in rural life and establishes dangerous stereotypes. Conversations need to be had highlighting the challenges rurality is facing with the intent to recognize and sustain those places instead of ignore and deplete them.

While more attention should be paid to rurality in general, I am most concerned with rural students and the inequities they face due to their positionality. Many argue that acknowledging rural in the classroom, the English classroom in particular, is a matter of social justice (Alsup, Azano, Brooke, Donehower et. al, Eckert & Alsup, Eckert & Petrone, Miller). Isolation from urban areas means that rural students are not in the line of sight of those creating policies, causing these students to be overlooked and unheard when it comes to creation of public policy. The result is that “national standards are often referenced to urban or suburban modes of literacy and involve assessments that depend on norm-referencing” (Donehower et. al 21). Since rural students are outside of the metrocentric norm, they struggle to perform at the same level as their urban peers because the material they are required to learn is disconnected from their place and culture; “this creates a situation that is likely to perpetuate the stereotype of rural regions as subliterate” (Donehower et. al 21). Along with policy, curriculum is often developed in urban areas resulting in an emphasis on urban values and cultures. Context matters in learning, and the rural context is too often absent which can alienate rural students in the classroom (Azano). Similarly, societal narratives of rurality negatively impact rural students who “are told by

popular culture, canonized literature, media, music, comedians, and so forth that they are lazy and stupid” (“Addressing the Rural” 268). Rural students are sent a clear message from multiple societal institutions that their ways of knowing and being are lesser.

### A Pathway to Resolution: Recognizing Rurality in the Classroom

Regardless of the cause(s) of the misconceptions and disinterest with rural, since roughly 51 million students in the United States are educated in rural communities it is vital to acknowledge those students by challenging the socially-constructed perceptions of their importance (Teiken 6). In order to teach in a manner that combats the inequalities built into the system, the marginalization of rural needs to be rectified. While the issue at hand is complex and many steps need to be taken in order to resolve the significant inequities present, I believe one step toward that remedy is creating space for *contemporary* rural voices to be recognized and validated in the secondary English classroom. Foregrounding modern rurality as a valid topic of study in the classroom could authenticate the value of contemporary rural ways of living, knowing, and being while allowing students to engage in conversations about what it means to be rural in today’s world.

Initially, I believed a straightforward way to do this would be utilizing Young Adult (YA) novels<sup>1</sup> that have current rural settings. Since many young readers find the texts engaging and relevant (Alsup, Hayn and Kaplan), YA literature is a viable avenue for exploring contemporary narratives of rurality in the classroom. I began my research by

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<sup>1</sup> I am defining YA literature using Janet Alsup’s demarcation that it is “written for readers between the ages of 12 and 20” (1) and Jeff Spanke’s conclusion that YA lit includes characters, plotlines and language that teens find relatable (Alsup 150).

finding and reading contemporary rural YA novels in an effort to answer the following questions: How are contemporary rural cultures, peoples, and places represented in rural YA literature? What rural YA novels have the literary and pedagogical merit to justify use in secondary curricula? How can rural YA novels be utilized in the classroom to teach about and challenge the single story of rurality? However, upon surveying numerous YA texts, I decided I also needed to address the question: How should one read for rural? As I attempted to identify and analyze the stereotypes contained within the stories, I recognized the need for a tool to engage critically with these rural narratives, not just to challenge the common story of rurality but to revise it.

Therefore, in this paper, I argue that in order to continue English education's pursuit for social justice (Alsup, Azano, Brooke, Donehower et. al, Eckert & Alsup, Eckert & Petrone, Miller), an effort must be made in the secondary English classroom to recognize, analyze, question, and resist *contemporary* narratives of rural people and places. To support my argument, I will examine the portrayal of modern rurality in several YA novels and offer a Critical Rural Perspective (CRP) as a tool to engage, analyze, and defy depictions of rural cultures, peoples, and places.

### The Discursive Construction of Rurality

I contend that addressing the inequities faced by rural dwellers is a matter of stopping what Rob Nixon dubs "slow violence." In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon defines his principal concept of slow violence as "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is

dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). When driving through a once-thriving rural community now desperately clinging to life, it is not difficult to believe that apathy toward rural life is an insidious form of violence that is slowly and methodically taking its toll. And one of the most powerful weapons used in carrying out this violence? Discourse.

### Discourse and the Single Story

In its simplest form, discourse is language used with the intention of achieving a goal. It is “language in action” (Wardle and Downs 889). Poststructuralism complicates the idea of basic discourse, identifying a similarity between discourse and ideology “in that both are ways of making sense of the world” (Eppley 2). James Paul Gee further expands the notion of discourse and establishes the concept of Discourse with a capital “D.” Gee uses the capitalization of the “D” to distinguish between lowercase “d” discourse as language with purpose and his idea of Discourse, which is something far more complex. Gee theorizes that language as Discourse actually shapes the way people exist in the world and thus influences the way the world works. He describes Discourse as a “saying (writing)-doing-valuing-believing combination” (278). In other words, a Discourse is a way of existing that integrates all aspects of life such as language, values, attitudes, and behaviors into an “identity kit” which delineates appropriate linguistic and bodily actions for its members (Gee 278). To belong to a Discourse is to *be* the Discourse. Those who share Discourses are connected through their shared ways of being, which makes the concept of Discourse similar to the notion of a discourse community in some ways. However, Gee’s linguistic theory focuses on the ways that language creates identities and

behaviors for members of a Discourse while a discourse community emphasizes the shared goals of community members and the linguistic moves made to accomplish those goals (Wardle and Downs 889). Some examples of Discourses include Montana State University students, Harry Potter fans, and English teachers.

A person's primary (home) and secondary (acquired outside the home) Discourses shape her identity. Identity kits are gained through socialization with those in and outside the home combined with enculturation into the "social practices" of the Discourses (Gee 278). Individuals belong to multiple Discourses and membership is not static, thus a person's identity kits are occasionally, or frequently, under construction. Power is gained from Discourses associated with social prestige and advancement; these are demarcated as dominant. It is important to note that because Discourses have set expectations, not everyone is allowed access. Gatekeepers are in place to ensure that only those with fluency will be welcomed.

I argue that, since access requirements require adherence to and acquisition of identity kits, Discourses and their accompanying identities are often reductive. Because members of Discourses accept specific ways of being in order to gain and maintain access to the groups, a standard emerges which conventionalizes the identities of its members. This results in the emergence of what Chimamanda Adichie calls "the single story." In Adichie's mind, a single story is one that is widely accepted as true and one that is not informed by multiple perspectives. In a Discourse, a single story is established about the identities due to the generalizations about what it means to *be* as a member of the Discourse. For example, there is a widely-accepted depiction of bikers as people who wear

leather, have tattoos, hang out in bars, and fight frequently. While there are members of the biker Discourse that fit this mold, not all do; therefore, the common image of bikers as leather-clad, tattooed fighters is reductive.

Reductive identities are far from innocuous. Adichie claims, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” Stereotypes are concerning not just because of their generalizing nature but also because they lead to “stereotype threat” (Steele and Aronson). Stereotype threat occurs when people are in jeopardy of actualizing the stereotypes of their social groups. Steele and Aronson, the creators of the term, write:

The existence of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs, we have argued, means that in situations where the stereotype is applicable, one is at risk of confirming it as a self-characterization, both to one's self and to others who know the stereotype. This is what is meant by stereotype threat.

While not all stereotypes associated with different Discourses are negative, stereotype threat is still a possibility and its potential to alter an individual's self-perception and performance a cause for concern.

Since stereotypes and stereotype threat emerge from the identity-forming nature of a Discourse, it is useful to consider where, how, and by whom the identity-kits are constructed. As a vital piece of her theory of the single story, Adichie contends, “It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power...How [stories] are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.” Similarly, culture and power play significant roles in the development of

individual Discourses. Discourses do not emerge in a bubble; these identity-kits are shaped by their societal depictions, cultural surroundings, and inter-Discourse relationships.

Certain Discourses are societally dominant and because of their social prestige have the ability to influence the ways of being of non-dominant Discourses. For example, those who have gained access to the Discourse of university administration have more power than university students. Members of university administration establish guidelines, such as admission requirements and academic policies, which determine aspects of what it means to have access to the Discourse of university student. A university student must adhere to the established guidelines in order to remain a part of the Discourse, regardless if he or she agrees with the expectations. An individual's acceptance into a Discourse does not necessarily mean that she will be able to influence the gatekeeping or the identity kit. Members of Discourses adhere to the rules because they want to belong, but that doesn't necessarily mean they always understand, support, or create the rules.

### Rurality as a Discourse

Based on Gee's definition, I argue that rurality is a non-dominant Discourse that can be either primary or secondary depending on the individual's circumstances. For those born in a rural locality and/or culture, the rural Discourse is a part of their primary Discourse. For those who move into a rural area later in life, the rural Discourse is acquired as secondary. There is an identity kit associated with rural life, and it is not all rolling hills, red barns, and stunning sunsets. On the one hand, to be rural is to work hard, rely on one's self, participate actively in one's community, and live life at a slow pace. Yet, the identity

kit also establishes a more pervasive and potent single story of rural dwellers as less educated and behind the times, maybe even backward.

In the discursive construction of rurality, the single story is one of deficit (Azano, Brooke, Donehower et. al, Eppley, Heldke, Schafft and Jackson). Rural people and places are thought of as lacking in many ways, not the least of which is education (Brooke, Donehower et. al, Heldke, Schafft and Jackson). Research shows that anti-rural prejudice deems rural people as ignorant, backward, and sheltered with their ways of knowing as undesirable and unnecessary in modern society (Azano, Donehower et al., Heldke). Rural people and ways of life are systematically marginalized and devalued to the extent that “it goes unremarked, even unbelieved” (Heldke 158). The degradation of rural allows “pejoratives and negative stereotypes to persist in our social consciousness despite a climate of political correctness” (Azano 268). In light of the harmful stereotypes associated with rurality, it is worth considering: Who is being allowed to tell the story of rurality? Who has the power to shape the ways that rural people are perceived? The power for creating the Discourse of their place does not lie solely in the hands of rural people, leaving room for a dangerous single story to be written by those belonging to Discourses with more power. As Schafft and Jackson argue, “All rural dwellers are nevertheless recipients of the messages from the dominant culture regarding what it means to be rural” (18).

It is within the negative stereotypes of rurality that slow violence finds its strength; stereotype threat becomes tangible for rural dwellers as they are bombarded with narratives of their backwardness, stupidity, and irrelevance (Azano, Donehower et. al, Heldke). Steele and Aronson argue, “When the stereotype involved demeans something as important

as intellectual ability, this threat can be disruptive enough, we hypothesize, to impair intellectual performance.” For many rural people, stereotype threat has already been realized: “Somewhere along the way, rural students and adults alike seem to have learned that to be rural is to be sub-par, that the condition of living in a rural locale creates deficiencies of various kinds—an educational deficiency in particular” (Schafft and Jackson 17). Stereotype threat allows the conventionalized images of rural as backward, stupid, and generally lacking to become the reality of the Discourse, and this single story enacts slow violence on rural people and places. For example, the Discourse of rurality, laden with its stereotypes of insufficiency, provides an identity kit for its young members that encourages seeking success outside of the community, leading to a depletion in the population known as “brain drain” (Carr and Kefalas). As young people out-migrate, rural communities lose their most precious resource, and one of the most vital for the continuance of rural life (Carr and Kefalas). The Discourse of rurality has created a rural identity, and the slow violence continues.

#### Challenging and Changing the Discourse of Rurality with Metaknowledge and Resistance

While I do not pretend to have a solution, I believe a return to Gee’s theory of Discourse is helpful for moving in the direction of one. Since Discourses are ways of existing in the world, perhaps revising the identity kit itself can bring about positive change in rural communities; therefore, the identity kit must be confronted. Gee argues that once individuals have gained fluency in a Discourse, they “have little or no conscious awareness of it” (286). In order to challenge a Discourse, one must become aware of both the

linguistic and behavioral expectations of Discourse members. Gee calls this awareness metaknowledge. He claims that “metaknowledge is liberation and power, because it leads to the ability to manipulate, to analyze, to resist while advancing” (287). Gee further argues that in order to adjust the rules of a Discourse, the gatekeeping itself must be challenged and modified. He talks of resistance coming from within a Discourse as a means to adjust the operation of the Discourse. If there is enough opposition to certain Discourse guidelines then there is potential that revision of those expectations can occur. If the dangers inherent in the single story of rurality are to be slowed, metaknowledge must be developed, and the single story must be resisted, challenged, and problematized by rural people.

I believe the needed resistance and metaknowledge could begin in the classroom by making rural people and ways of life a topic of study. The notion of rural as irrelevant in modern life is often established in the ways that rural students see, or fail to see, themselves portrayed in the media, music, children’s books, and the curriculum used in their classrooms (Azano, Eppley). The dominant metrocentric Discourse of education adds to the deficiency narrative of rurality in its curricular disregard for rural people and places. The very act of studying and validating rurality in the classroom is a form of resistance against both the dominant education Discourse and the rural Discourse.

Specifically, this resistance can manifest itself in the teaching of contemporary rural YA literature. Teaching representations of current rural people counters the stereotype that rurality is irrelevant and a thing of the past. Since YA novels are cultural artifacts that develop, perpetuate, and challenge Discourses, they provide a platform for engaging in the

work of resistance and manipulation. In exploring specific depictions of contemporary rurality, students can offer their own experiences as ways to counter and/or uphold the narratives.

In order to resist, metaknowledge must be gained. Herein lies the power of the CRP. In using the CRP to examine a concrete representation of a rural identity kit, students become aware of the construction and function of these ways of being. As they work with a single example of rurality, they can make inferences and begin to peel back the outer layers of the larger Discourse of rurality to explore its inner workings. In doing this, students gain the ability “to manipulate, to analyze, to resist” (Gee 287) the Discourse. Through comprehension of the discursive construction of identity, students can offer their own understanding of what it means to be rural, providing both supporting and conflicting narratives in order to challenge stereotypes by resisting and manipulating aspects of the identity kit.

As Gee writes, “Beyond changing the social structure, is there much hope? No, there is not. So we better get on about the process of changing the social structure” (286). Engaging with rurality in the classroom can be a step toward revising the social ideologies shaping the Discourse of rurality. Arming students with metaknowledge and resistance is an important part of this work. In doing so, possibly teachers and students alike can begin to tell a new tale of what it means to be rural, thus disrupting the current identity kit and modifying the Discourse of rurality. The slow violence can be stopped, and discourse can be used to do so.

Conversations Concerning Literature and Place

To be clear, my claim is not that literature with rural settings and characters is completely absent from the classroom; I recognize that novels with rural settings such as *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, *My Antonia*, and *Grapes of Wrath* are staples in secondary English curricula. However, I am uncertain how often those texts are read specifically as a way to focus on the rural experience. And even with those texts, the presence of rural literature in curricula is minimal. Amy Azano, one of the leading scholars in rural education, writes:

Those concerned with critical literacy believe that the cultures represented in our classrooms influence the ways students learn. From Freire, we learned that teaching the word means understanding the world (or context or culture) in which a text is written, read, and understood. Although we recognize these multiple contexts, I argue that rural ones are too often missing from the conversation. (267)

In Critical Literature Pedagogy, students are encouraged to ask: “Whose stories are most often told and whose are not?” (Borsheim-Black et. al 127). This is a question that teachers and curriculum writers should be asking themselves as well, especially since, as Adichie argues, when and how stories are told depend on power. Those in charge of curricular decisions have the power to choose whose voices get represented and which stories get told; those are not trivial decisions, and they should not be made flippantly. Scholarship recognizes the need to incorporate a variety of perspectives in curriculum, and an admirable amount of work has been published regarding the curricular inclusion of literary representations of marginalized voices, such as those othered due to race, gender, and

socioeconomic status (Alsup, Borsheim-Black, Hayn and Kaplan, Hill, Thomas). Yet, rural perspectives remain hardly acknowledged.

Karen Eppley establishes that “curriculum is always situated within larger ideologies about how the world works” (“Reading Mastery” 1). Because of this, it is worth considering: What kind of ideology is present in a classroom built around urban values and ideals? What kind of ideology is present in a classroom virtually devoid of rural literature? What kind of ideology is present in a classroom in which rural culture is unacknowledged? The curricular tradition of disregarding rurality is reflective of a pedagogy of erasure which Karen Eppley identifies as “the unintentional practice of erasing cultural identity through neglect by not noticing and engaging the cultural practices of the other” (“Reading Mastery” 3). Unintentional or not, practicing a pedagogy that ignores the rural culture is unacceptable.

Thankfully, scholars have begun to pay attention to the absence of rural literature in the classroom. Scholarship advocates the inclusion of more regional literature, particularly rural texts, as a part of place-based learning (Azano, Longhurst). Jesse Longhurst’s work promotes the use of historical rural novels, claiming that knowing their regional history is vital for rural students as they attempt to understand who they are today. This work is important but at the same time, a gap remains regarding contemporary representations of rural. Few seem to be concerned that the already minimal classroom-presence of rural texts consists mostly of historical tales, but I believe we should be because: What kind of ideology is established in a classroom with the presence of historical rural texts and the absence of contemporary ones? I argue it is an ideology that contributes

to the narrative of the irrelevance of rural people and places in today's society, sending the message to students that rural lifestyles are not valued by schools or society in general. The curricular absence of contemporary rural depictions needs to be addressed.

Similarly, reading for place is also missing from curricula. Place, although a viable point of literary analysis, is rarely a focal point in literature study because reading "for the role of place and environment is often subordinated by other concerns, such as a focus on identity, ideology, or culture" (Thomas 14). However, scholarship on the benefits of using place-based pedagogy to contextualize learning abounds, and this work claims that place-conscious education is beneficial for both urban and rural students (Azano, Brooke et. al, Green & Corbett).

Ebony Thomas, who writes on the value of reading with the intent to analyze inner-city spaces, argues that the very nature of our high-tech, globalized world "has inspired a return to that which is tangible, local, and immediate—that is, a sense of place" (14). Thomas emphasizes the need to analyze stereotypical depictions of the deficit of inner city spaces found in literature in order to offer counter narratives. Azano also makes claims regarding reading for place: "Rarely do we hear arguments for using "rural" as a way of "responding" or being "relevant" to students both in and out of rural places. Tapping into a student's sense of place can serve as powerful critical literacy instruction, teaching students how to read the word and 'their world'" ("Rural" 62).

Reading with a focus on place, and in this case rural, is a valuable pedagogical move. If teachers and curriculum writers foreground reading for place, students can have the opportunity to analyze and challenge the ways society uses place to categorize,

marginalize, and silence people. An important aspect of this work is reading with the intention of providing counter narratives. However, if change is desired, the Discourse of a place must be altered, and counter narratives alone are not enough to do so.

### Selection and Survey of Rural Young Adult Literature

As I mention previously, I originally believed that reading YA literature containing contemporary representations in secondary English classrooms would be an appropriate step toward resolving some of the inequities faced by rural students. To answer my questions regarding the merit and usability of rural YA literature, I had to first find and read rural YA novels.

#### Rural Novel Selection

I began my search for YA novels with rural components by asking my teacher and librarian friends. I also did several Internet searches and relied heavily on the recommendations sections of *Amazon* and *Goodreads*. Three criterion determined my selections. First, contemporary rurality needed to be present in some way, ideally as the main setting. Second, I wanted to discuss and analyze rurality in different parts of the United States, so I needed books set in various regions of the country. Third, I wanted to discuss rurality from multiple perspectives (gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, origin) because I wanted to explore diverse viewpoints of rural life. Through this searching, I found 21 novels that fit my criterion, for the most part. I chose a few novels with historical settings due to my interest in reading texts representing life in as many states as possible and the difficulty I had finding contemporary representations set

in certain regions, particularly New England and the South. The list of these 21 books can be found in Appendix A.

### Phase 1 of Literature Survey: Initial Reading and Results

At the time of my initial survey, I had not yet decided how I was going to delineate “contemporary” or how I wanted to approach my discussion of contemporary depictions, so I read all 21 of the books I found, even though some are set in the past. I approached my first reading of these novels as exploratory in nature, and I did not have a specific method of reading for rural. I mainly focused on identifying the ways that rural people, places, and cultures are represented, so as I read, I took notes about the ways I saw rural people and places being characterized.

To summarize my reading, these books are told by: male, female, straight, gay, white, American Indian, Asian American, wealthy and poor narrators, some who are rural dwellers and others who are city dwellers experiencing rural life. The stories span the United States. See Figure 1 for the states in which these novels take place.

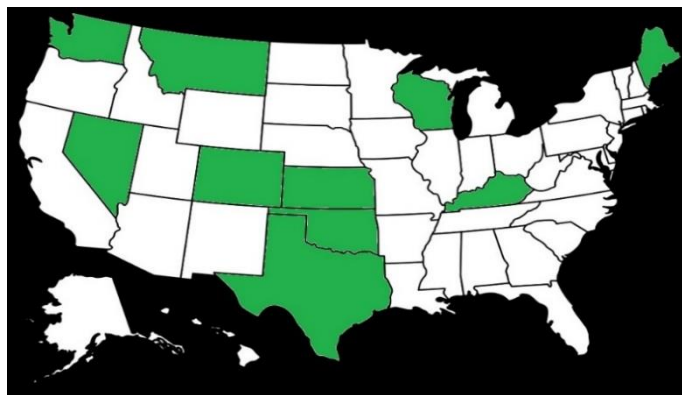


Figure 1. Map of states represented in the novels read

In some of the novels, rurality is clearly addressed, with characters specifically referencing their small-town lifestyles and status. In others, rurality is handled more subtly and almost as an after-thought. The variety of settings reveal multifarious ways of being rural. The characters are lobster fishermen, dairy farmers, waitresses, plumbers, athletes, skateboarders, and bull riders. They live in cottages on a tiny island, run-down farmhouses, tiny apartments, and HUD houses. Nuances stemming from ethnicity, gender, and sexuality exist in the ways characters experience their rural. However, in spite of the diversity in setting, livelihood, and identity contained in these novels, there are significant commonalities in plotline and characterization.

The more novels I read, the more I observed patterns in the ways rurality is portrayed. An identity kit reflecting what it means to *be* rural, one that supersedes locality, occupation, race, gender, and sexuality, is established across these stories. To put it simply, the novels perpetuate rural stereotypes. For example, I noticed that rural youth are often depicted as hard-working and skilled in life outside of school, but in the classroom, they struggle. I also found that rural places and cultures are typically portrayed as dying and unsustainable. In the majority of the novels, the presence, either physically or abstractly, of an urban character or place is used as a standard of sorts by which rurality is measured and found wanting. Rural people and places appear backward and simple in comparison to urban ones.

Based on my survey of the chosen texts, I discovered three things. The first is that a variety of ruralities are represented in these 21 novels, which is something that educators can use to their advantage in making place-conscious curriculum decisions. Novels with

rural components could be chosen to reflect the region and/or culture of students in an effort to contextualize learning. On the other hand, novels from different rural regions and cultures could be used to encourage students to broaden their own understandings of rurality.

The second is that I needed to narrow my reading list. In the beginning of my research, I had contemplated considering contemporary rurality in comparison to historical representations. However, after reading the novels, I realized that was not the direction I wanted to take because the contemporary novels gave me more than enough material to explore and discuss. Therefore, I determined that I wanted to limit my scope to establish a corpus of solely contemporary novels for rereading and deeper analysis. I decided to delineate contemporary as the 21<sup>st</sup> century and because of that, focus only on novels that had been both written and set during or after the year 2000. That left me with 16 novels to revisit for further analysis. See Table 1 for the list of these novels. See Appendix B for a map of these novels' settings.

| <b>Title</b>                                           | <b>Author</b>        | <b>Year Published</b> | <b>Setting</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <i>Bull Rider</i>                                      | Suzanne Williams     | 2009                  | Nevada         |
| <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> | Sherman Alexie       | 2007                  | Washington     |
| <i>The Last Buffalo Hunter</i>                         | Jake Mosher          | 2000                  | Montana        |
| <i>The Last Exit to Normal</i>                         | Michael Harmon       | 2008                  | Montana        |
| <i>The Miseducation of Cameron Post</i>                | Emily Danforth       | 2012                  | Montana        |
| <i>My Life with the Walter Boys</i>                    | Ali Novak            | 2014                  | Colorado       |
| <i>Schooled</i>                                        | Gordon Korman        | 2007                  | Texas          |
| <i>Badd</i>                                            | Tim Tharp            | 2011                  | Oklahoma       |
| <i>Knights of Hill Country</i>                         | Tim Tharp            | 2006                  | Oklahoma       |
| <i>Far from Xanadu</i>                                 | Julie A. Peters      | 2005                  | Kansas         |
| <i>Dairy Queen</i>                                     | Catherine G. Murdock | 2006                  | Wisconsin      |
| <i>The Off Season</i>                                  | Catherine G. Murdock | 2008                  | Wisconsin      |
| <i>Front and Center</i>                                | Catherine G. Murdock | 2009                  | Wisconsin      |
| <i>Hope was Here</i>                                   | Joan Bauer           | 2000                  | Wisconsin      |
| <i>The Queen of Kentucky</i>                           | Alecia Whitaker      | 2012                  | Kentucky       |
| <i>Touch Blue</i>                                      | Cynthia Lord         | 2010                  | Maine          |

Table 1. YA novels written and set during the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Lastly, and most significantly, I realized that using rural YA literature to challenge the single story of rurality is not good enough. Offering narratives that counter the single story is an important step to broadening conceptions of rurality, but counter narratives are just the first step toward addressing the stereotypical identities of rurality that are present in so many areas of society, including Young Adult literature. The Discourse of rurality itself needs to be changed, which Gee tells us happens through metaknowledge and resistance. Therefore, an analytical tool for reading for rural is necessary to create both the needed metaknowledge and opportunities for resisting the Discourse.

#### Phase 2 of Literature Survey: Creation of the Critical Rural Perspective (CRP)

While bringing texts with modern rural settings, people, and issues into the classroom is needed, the persistent presence of stereotypical literary representations of rurality is insidious if unidentified and unchallenged by the reader. We must remember the dangers of a single story (Adichie) and stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson). Students acquire understandings of the ways the world works from the texts that they read, and literature teachers are culpable for helping students see the “ideologies inherent in those texts” (Appleman 3). The discursive construction of rurality contained in texts needs to be identified and resisted because “as cultural narratives often do, these discourses construct realities for rural life” (Eckert & Alsup 1).

Yet, in the realm of critical theory, no lens exists that both questions elements of a novel “with considerations of power and oppression” (Appleman 53) and challenges the societal ideologies crafting the nature of reality with regard to place, and more specifically,

rural. Therefore, I have created the Critical Rural Perspective (CRP) in order to fill the literary analysis gap regarding place and set the stage for readers to recognize and problematize the textual construction of rurality. The CRP brings literary elements concerning rurality into focus and creates the metaknowledge necessary for resisting and manipulating the identity kit of the rural Discourse.

The CRP, found in Table 2, focuses on characterization, setting, conflict, and theme which are four literary elements frequently identified and analyzed in the English classroom; it provides questions for students to explore in those four categories when engaging in textual analysis, as well as questions for considering larger implications of textual elements. Readers can focus on a single category or consider some, or all, in conjunction. The most thorough understanding of rural representations will come from analyzing all categories together. I see the CRP as an entry-point for conversation and examination of rural texts and the Discourse of rurality; in no way do I believe this list of questions is exhaustive, nor is it the only way one could read for rural. Yet, I do believe that the set of questions achieves the goal of reading as a way to gain metaknowledge that can be used to affect social change. These questions are designed using Petrone et. al's Youth Lens heuristic and the Critical Questions from Azano's "Rural: The Other Neglected R" as guides.

For each category in the CRP, readers identify the ways that rurality is depicted in the individual literary element and then analyze those representations. An important part of this work is to determine the definition (or identity kit) of rurality established in the novel through the depictions of rural. The last questions in each category, as well as the

questions in the implications section, encourage readers to think about the creation of rural identity in the text; this is where I see metaknowledge developing. First, readers must become consciously aware of the characterization of rural present in the novel. Then, as students consider rural depictions in the text, they search for the factors determining the portrayals of characters, places, and conflicts (e.g. narrator positionality, rural and urban comparisons, stereotype use). In doing so, they can recognize that rural identity is a design within the novel and does not necessarily reflect reality.

| <b>Critical Rural Perspective: Questions for Textual Analysis</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Characterization</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Setting</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 1) How are rural characters portrayed in appearance, action and acumen?<br>2) How are rural youth portrayed?<br>3) How are rural characters compared with urban characters?<br>4) Who is telling the story of rural people?<br>5) How are these representations defining rural <i>people</i> ?                                                                     | 1) How is the rural community represented?<br>2) What is the relationship between characters and their place (Are they there by choice? Do they want to stay there? Are they engaged with the community?)?<br>3) How do the characters have influence over their place?<br>4) How is the rural setting compared to urban places in the novel?<br>5) How does the setting restrict and/or privilege the characters?<br>6) How are these representations defining rural <i>places</i> ? |
| <b>Plot</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Theme</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 1) What conflicts are forefront in the novel?<br>2) What causes those conflicts?<br>3) How are those conflicts resolved?<br>4) Who is responsible for resolving conflicts?<br>5) How do characters feel about conflict resolution?<br>6) What do these conflicts suggest about rural <i>life</i> ?                                                                 | 1) What are the themes present in the novel?<br>2) What ideologies do those themes convey about rural people and livelihoods?<br>3) How do those themes uphold or challenge rural stereotypes?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Implications</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 1) To what extent does a person's identity depend on the rural place/space she occupies?<br>2) To what extent is a rural place defined by the people who occupy it?<br>3) Why does the novel perpetuate and/or resist rural stereotypes?<br>4) What textual and authorial voices are constructing the depictions of rurality? How does that impact the story told? |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

Table 2. Questions for reading and analysis using the Critical Rural Perspective

The metaknowledge gained through the CRP encourages consideration of the larger societal implications of literary rural representations. Gaining metaknowledge about the textual creation of rural identity can make students aware of the construction of the societal Discourse of rurality and its reduction of what it means to *be* rural. Eppley establishes that textual images “structure our worlds, but also position us in our worlds” (2). Those images “become a part of us, anchoring us to our identity and our place in reality” (Eppley 2). Essentially, literary images can, and do, become part of identity kits. In doing so, literary representations can also add to the establishment of dominant and non-dominant Discourses, as they indicate positions of Discourses in relation to others. For example, in my initial reading, I discovered that urbanity is used as the standard by which rurality is assessed. Rural is portrayed as both reliant on urban for measurement of success and lesser than urban because rural never meets the standard. Therefore, rural is positioned as less powerful in the world. Textual identity is potent because it becomes a part of reader identity (Eppley), which situates metaknowledge of textual identity as valuable and informative when thinking about societal identity kits.

To use the CRP to confront larger societal narratives, readers first need to make themselves aware of the assembly of a novel, identifying and deconstructing the single story (Adichie), or what Deborah Appleman calls the “singular vision” (21), contained in the story. That means instead of ignoring or accepting stereotypes in the text, readers identify their presence and decode them to “understand more about the ways we construct the world around us and how ‘we’ are constructed by others” (Eppley 2). The hope is that readers can then extend their awareness of discursive identity formation in a text to the

world around them, helping them “learn to read both texts and the world with a nuanced and critical eye” (Appleman 10).

This consciousness can, and should, lead to resistance at both the textual and societal levels. Students need to reject the single story of rurality which creates an image of rural that has become normal, expected, and natural; it’s an image that establishes a sense of “that’s just the way things are.” Once students have noticed the ways identities just “are,” they can question identity construction. In doing so, students can push back against the normalized way of representing rural. Rural stereotypes are situated as reality in novels and in society, but those representations do not have to be an individual’s reality. Armed with metaknowledge, students can defy stereotypical depictions by withstanding the identity kit and refusing to self-characterize in that way.

Students can further resist the Discourse by questioning and challenging authorship, authority, and authenticity of representations by offering their own lived narratives. However, implementing the CRP may also make readers confront stories of rurality that they have no counter narrative for, even though they may wish they did. Both moves are vital for helping students engage with rural texts and the world in which they are situated because in order to be critical readers of place, students must engage with and examine the “uncomfortable parts” of place and identity, as “a true knowledge of place...must address the less-than-positive characteristics” (Brooke 68-69).

### Phase 3 of Literature Survey: Reading with the Critical Rural Perspective and Results

After creating the CRP, I reread the 16 novels with contemporary representations using the CRP as a literary analysis tool. In order to track my reading, I created a chart in my notebook for each novel. Each chart was simple; it consisted of large boxes with the title of each of the four categories of the CRP at the top: characterization, setting, plotline, and theme. As I read, I took notes on the charts based on the CRP questions from each category. After reading, I wrote a brief summary of the novel and reread my notes searching for the ways characterization, setting, plot, and theme were working together to create definitions of rural existence.

This systemized approach for both reading and taking notes was incredibly helpful for me as a researcher and a reader as it gave me specific elements on which to focus as I worked to identify rural representations. The notes from my second reading of the novels were better organized, more thorough, and more insightful. In my initial readings, I didn't always have much evidence to support my claims regarding the depictions found, and I missed many of the subtle ways that rurality is constructed in the novels. I also failed to recognize the ways characterization, setting, plot, and theme were working together to define rurality, which was apparent to me when reading with the CRP.

Similar to my first reading of the novels, I noticed that there were patterns in the depictions of rurality. I started naming the depictions I found (e.g. "rural as deficient," "rural women are masculine"), and I also began to keep track of these "named" depictions of rural in each novel. These named representations create identities for rural people and places in the novels, and identifying them is an important part of the metaknowledge

created through the use of the CRP. See Appendix C for a list of the named depictions I saw most frequently and the way I am delineating each. See Appendix D for a break-down of novel elements, including setting, protagonist positionality, and named depictions, for each of the 16 books read with the CRP.

Because metaknowledge is a goal of the CRP, the next part of this paper will discuss the awareness I developed of the depiction named “rural as deficient” when reading with the CRP. I will do this by providing examples of the representation found in several of the novels I read. Although I discovered numerous common depictions of rurality, many of them negative and all of them worth addressing, for the scope of this paper, it makes sense to focus on a single representation. I am choosing to discuss “rural as deficient” due to its presence in each novel I read in spite of the assorted positionalities of the narrators and the varying locations in which the stories are set.

### Rural Depicted as Deficient

When I say that there is a common representation of “rural as deficient” in these novels, I mean that rural people and places are established as lacking in various areas in life such as normativity, intelligence, wealth, and future. An urban character or urban space is present in the text, sometimes only in abstract form, that sets the standard by which rurality is judged and found wanting. All that is lacking in rurality, such as sophistication, brainpower, prosperity, and possibility, is found in abundance in the depiction of urban and suburban spaces. “Rural as deficient” is created by both rural and urban characters’ language usage, thoughts, actions, and conversations, as well as settings and conflicts in the novels. For example, rural characters often dress and act in ways that appear wild,

different, and uncool in comparison to the behavior of urban characters, something that both rural and urban characters point out. Rural characters speak in non-standard English, typically struggle in school or have no interest in it, and often identify as “stupid.” Rural places are characterized by disrepair and lack the sustainability needed for a future.

In the remainder of this section of the paper, I will examine my identification of the presence of “rural as deficient” with a focus on these areas: rural as deficient in normativity, wealth, intelligence, and future. Discussion of each category (e.g. deficit of normativity, deficit of wealth) will begin with an explanation of the way I am defining the specific deficit. Then I will move to identification and analysis of the presence of the representation in the *Dairy Queen* trilogy by Catherine G. Murdock. I have chosen to frame each category with the *Dairy Queen* series since the three novels contain solid examples of each facet of “rural as deficient” I want to discuss. Then, I will explore the portrayal of the deficit in a few other rural YA novels, as well to show that the representation is prevalent in contemporary depictions of rural. I will not be discussing all 16 novels I read due to space and ease of reading. The other texts I will discuss were chosen because they provide the most poignant examples of the deficit and have narrators of diverse genders, ages, ethnicities, sexualities, occupations, and positionalities living in various places across the country.

### Deficit of Normativity

One of the main ways rurality is portrayed as deficient in the texts I read is through its failure to adhere to societal norms established by urban life. Rural people are missing the sophistication, elegance, and polish of urban characters which is made starkly obvious

when rural and urban characters are together. Many rural youth identify their deficiencies in normativity as a lack of “cool” and make efforts to become “cooler” by adopting normative behavior. Settings are also depicted as lacking in normativity and “cool”; rural and urban places are often juxtaposed in these novels, and the city is always much flashier and with-it than the small town.

In the *Dairy Queen* series, the main way the deficit of normativity is developed is through the trips the protagonist DJ Schwenk, a 15-year-old star athlete and Wisconsin dairy farmer, takes into larger cities. In *Dairy Queen*, DJ doesn’t want to go to the city and:

... [have] it rubbed in my face that I was poor and stupid and ugly and just not cool at all. It’s one thing knowing that in Red Bend. But it’s another thing in a real city with a bunch of people who aren’t, and who never were, and who never will be any of those things. (*Dairy Queen* 124-5)

DJ is convinced that she’s uncool because of where she’s from, especially in comparison to those who are city dwellers.

DJ struggles to navigate urban spaces when she finds herself in them. One moment in which this can be seen is DJ’s trip to a hair salon to cut her hair so it will fit underneath her football helmet. Since it’s her first time at a salon, she fumbles through getting an appointment and interacting with the stylist: “When she asked where I was from I blushed because I might as well have had “farm hick” on my forehead” (*Dairy Queen* 187). DJ’s discomfort with the situation and self-identification as a stupid hick upholds the narrative that farmers lack the life experiences required to meet social norms, or in DJ’s terms, to be “cool.” Interestingly, after getting the cool city haircut, DJ gains confidence. Her new look makes her more aware that she is pretty, and she moves around Madison and Red

Bend with more assurance. Getting that little touch of city refinement improves DJ's life, even though it's only in a subtle way.

By the third book of the series *Front and Center*, DJ has spent a significant amount of time in several cities, whether spending time with Brian, taking care of her brother Win, or going on college visits. Yet, she still feels incredibly out of place and lesser than those who are urban dwellers. On one of DJ's college visits, one of the women's basketball players takes DJ to watch a basketball game in her old high school gym:

So we got there, taking the bus, which was a huge adventure in and of itself for a hick like me, and then when I saw her high school gym I must have looked like a hick times ten, standing there with my mouth hanging open. The building was big enough to hold all of Red Bend. The people *and* the houses. And maybe even the cows. (104)

For DJ, being in the city establishes how much "cool" Red Bend, and she, lacks. Adhering to urban normativity helps DJ feel "cool," but there is a sense that no matter how much she conforms, she'll always be an outsider and deficient in normativity.

Similar to DJ's experience with a lack of normativity, in *Far from Xanadu*, a city girl named Xanadu is stuck in small-town Kansas and cannot handle how silly and backwards small-town living is. Xanadu constantly tells the protagonist Mary-Elizabeth, aka Mike, how "Toto" everything is and how she needs to leave the town in order to experience real life. Mike likes the aspects of her hometown that Xanadu so often belittles, and often thinks to herself that Xanadu is wrong, but she never speaks up to defend her town. Her rural voice is silenced by that of a city dweller. Xanadu tells Mike, "I hate this podunk town. Totoland. No offense, but your lives move in super slo-mo. You could die of stagnation" (Peters 116), and Mike simply agrees, and not just because Mike is in love

with her. She truly believes that Xanadu has a level of insight into life because of her city experiences that Mike will never have. Toward the end of the book, Mike begins to view her hometown the way Xanadu does, so “Toto,” and becomes embarrassed by cultural practices, such as Coalton Days, that she used to enjoy. Mike’s desire to adhere to Xanadu’s norms causes her to disassociate herself with the ways of being established by her hometown.

Another example of a novel containing the deficit of normativity is *My Life with the Walter Boys*. In this novel, the absence of normativity is mainly represented through the appearances of the characters and the organization of spaces, both of which are juxtaposed as urban versus rural. Jackie, a wealthy New York City girl who moves to a horse farm in Colorado, is the picture of elegance and poise. She’s incredibly organized and school-oriented with a wardrobe straight off Fifth Avenue. When she arrives at the horse farm, Jackie is worried about her rumpled appearance only to be met by a pool full of wild, shirtless boys, the sons and nephews of her new guardians. Jackie’s tailored pants, collared shirts, and hair ribbons contrast sharply with the rumpled, holey jeans and flannels of the Colorado family. In fact, at one point Jackie wonders if Katherine had taught her boys “*anything* about fashion” as she asks a shirtless Cole, one of the sons, “If we’re having dinner, shouldn’t we wear something more...appropriate?” (Novak 26). Similarly, the setting of the novel is messy, rumpled, cluttered, and a bit run-down. Through Jackie’s urban viewpoint, “stacks of books and board games, dirty clothes, a deflated basketball, and a pile of movies made reaching the second floor” (Novak 23) an obstacle course that a normal house would not have. Jackie comes into the messy rural space and fixes it in many

ways, bringing order to the minute-by-minute chaos. Once Jackie brings aspects of the house to her standard, the space begins to be depicted in a positive manner. Jackie's normative behavior is established as a type of saving grace, and there is a sense that without Jackie, things at the horse farm would fall apart.

Like *My Life with the Walter Boys*, *The Queen of Kentucky* establishes the deficit of normativity through the juxtaposition of characters from rural and urban spaces. In *The Queen of Kentucky*, the rural protagonist Ricki Jo, is starting high school which means she'll no longer be going to the country school she attended previously. She is so desperate to leave behind her redneck roots, fit the norm, and be cool that she demands that everyone calls her Ericka, buys a new wardrobe, and begins reading *Seventeen* instead of her Bible. The characters who fit the norm in the novel, aka the kids who live in town, sneer at Ricki's efforts to assimilate though and tell her she can never leave behind her true hick nature. Interestingly, when a new girl Mackenzie moves to town from an even bigger city, a new norm is established based on her ways of being. To Mackenzie, Breckenridge seems backward in many of its practices, such as having birthday parties at the roller rink. In *The Queen of Kentucky*, the interactions between, and positioning of, characters from various localities establish that the smaller and more isolated the town, the more backward and non-normative its ways of being.

In *Hope was Here*, the lack of normativity is seen most readily through food. Hope is a 16-year-old waitress who moves with her aunt from New York City to Mulhoney, Wisconsin to run a diner. Hope is devastated by the move; she's certain that she is a big-city person and is not excited to be living in what she has dubbed Cowville: "Here I was—

my body heading to one place, my heart stuck in another” (Bauer 10-11). Hope ruminates over the new people she is going to meet in Mulhoney, wondering if they’ve ever eaten sushi; “that’s how [she] normally determine[s] food sophistication” (11). Upon arrival, Mulhoney as a place disappoints; there is no sushi, no street meat vendors, and none of the cosmopolitan hustle and bustle Hope is used to. In a letter to her friends, Hope writes, “The Bad: There are no tall buildings—anywhere. Food-wise, except for Addie, think Dark Ages. No Thai, dim sum, jerk chicken. No Museums either” (Bauer 89). The menu at the new restaurant also doesn’t meet Hope and Addie’s city standards, but they believe that by improving the food (aka bringing in city food) they can improve the space. Addie offers to add a frittata to the breakfast menu in order to liven up the menu. The owner, G.T. Stoop is fine with that, but on one condition, “But in this town let’s call it an egg casserole” (Bauer 24). Interestingly, as Addie and Hope bring their knowledge of city food into the restaurant, the diner’s business skyrockets because, after all, city food is better than country food.

### Deficit of Wealth

The lack of money in rural places is a prevalent form of deficit in these novels, as well. Often the scarcity of wealth manifests itself in the physical aspects of rural life with rusty pick-up trucks, neglected equipment, and crumbling buildings taking center stage. Characters commonly experience failure to make ends meet by doing traditional labor. Characters also frequently miss out on opportunities, such as sports camps or weekend getaways, due to a lack of funds. Money appears to be a constant concern for rural dwellers

and because of insufficient income, talk of moving to the city occurs frequently, where it is believed that more opportunity lies.

The deficit of wealth is seen in characterization, setting, and plot in the *Dairy Queen* series. Things are always breaking on the farm due to old age or adverse weather, and because of money issues, the Schwenk family fixes everything themselves. The Schwenk farm looks particularly old and run-down in comparison to the house of Brian Nelson, which is a mansion with everything brand new and shiny. Once Brian comes out to their farm to work, DJ is so embarrassed by the state of things on the farm that she decides to clean out the barn and scrape the peeling paint. DJ is scraping by hand when Brian shows up for work. He tells her that a power washer would make it easier, a suggestion DJ scoffs at because she doesn't actually know what a power washer is. Her family could never afford one.

Every time equipment or structures fail, DJ's parents become more worried about how they will make ends meet. But making more money is not easy. DJ's dad begins toying with ideas such as organic farming and raising turkeys in an attempt to make more money. DJ muses:

If organic means not using chemicals, we're probably closer to getting certified organic than a lot of farms because we've just been too broke to afford chemicals at all. Which is probably the first time in my entire life that being broke seemed like it could pay off. (*The Off Season* 99)

However, it's expensive to get started with organic farming, and without a guaranteed return of more income, it is not be feasible for the Schwenks.

*The Off Season* makes it apparent that money is not to be had on the family farm, and that really the Schwenks' only option will be to eventually sell. There is a sense of inevitability of the disappearance of that way of life because it is not fiscally possible to have a family and a farm, and there is no one with the means or desire to help farms succeed; "'The government doesn't care about farms this size.' It wasn't nasty, the way Mom said it, just sad" (*The Off Season* 72). The series, and *The Off Season* in particular, paints a picture of the life of a farmer as one that is plagued with financial difficulties.

Likewise, in *Far from Xanadu*, a lack of finances is a significant conflict faced by Mike's family and an obstacle that denies Mike access to opportunities many other softball players have. The serious softball players, those who are going to play ball in college, play in competitive softball leagues and attend training camps, both of which would increase the chances of being recruited to play for a college team. Mike simply cannot afford to participate in those activities, in spite of how important they are for establishing a future in the sport. Mike's money concerns are trivialized by Xanadu, the city dweller, as she emphasizes that wealth is found in urban places. When Mike tells Xanadu about the price of a softball camp, Xanadu remarks, "Three thousand isn't that much" (Peters 127). This moment reminds Mike yet again of Xanadu's superiority stemming from where she's from, a place that obviously has a different understanding of money, a place that Mike thinks is "not in my shack of the woods" (Peters 127).

Likewise, *The Queen of Kentucky* creates a binary between the characterization of country girls and country-club girls, in order to create the depiction of rural as deficient in wealth. Ricki Jo's family were tobacco farmers until her father got a factory job, so he

could earn more money. Even with her father's new job, Ricki Jo's family still has financial challenges, particularly in comparison to the country-club families who live in town. Ricki Jo's family has to be frugal with their money because they don't have any to waste. This means that Ricki Jo has to borrow a dress for Homecoming while the country-club girls spend hundreds of dollars on their dresses. Similarly, the families of the country-club girls have mansions and fancy cars, while Ricki Jo's house is modest and small and her mom drives a mini-van. Other rural families who are still farming have even less than Ricki Jo's family, establishing that farming is not a lucrative business. *The Queen of Kentucky* furthers the conception that wealth and success is to be found in the city but not the country.

### Deficit of Intelligence

Rural characters' insufficient intelligence is seen in a few ways in these novels. One frequent plotline is a rural character who is failing classes or struggling in school, especially English class. Many of the rural characters identify themselves and/or their peers as unintelligent, and urban characters readily apply the label of stupid to their rural counterparts. The type of intelligence considered most valuable is that from school and urban experiences. Although the rural characters often have intimate knowledge of areas such as farming, crabbing, and plumbing, those ways of knowing are not thought to equate to intelligence nor do they provide opportunities for forward advancement in life.

In the *Dairy Queen* trilogy, the deficit of intelligence is most apparent in the ways characters describe themselves and one another. Interestingly, the majority of comments relating to how stupid farmers and farm life are come from DJ. Her self-deprecating voice,

combined with other voices who are insulting her, her family's way of life, and/or her town, leave no other voice in the novel that's providing an alternative view, so in the end, DJ and other's opinions of her, her family, and her lifestyle as lacking intellect reign supreme.

Much of DJ deeming herself and her family as unintelligent is done subtly through her continued remarks about her own stupidity, which she sees as a stumbling block for her social life. When she's hanging out with Brian, she constantly feels like she's doing and saying unintelligent things. When Brian explains his frustration with the way DJ communicates with him, she refers to her lack of intelligence: "I mean, you talk like I'm smart or something, but really, you know, I'm...not" (*Dairy Queen* 103).

DJ feels her stupidity also inhibits what she can do with her future. After training Brian for football, she decides that training may be something she'd want to do in life, but she's not very confident about her ability to do so: "There was certainly no one in Red Bend to go to and say I was a dumb girl farmer who'd flunked English and now wanted to be a sports trainer. Oh they'd line up for that" (*Dairy Queen* 100). This moment establishes not only DJ's view of herself as unintelligent, but also her belief that the town views her as dumb, as well. Interestingly, DJ feels as if she's gained knowledge by spending time with Brian, a kid from a wealthier, larger town, and what she learns from him is that her life is lacking: "Basically what it came down to was that my life sucked. It sucked even more than it had before Brian showed up, because now I knew it" (*Dairy Queen* 100).

Similar to DJ, Hampton Green in *Knights of Hill Country* identifies as stupid. The entire novel is written as if Hampton is telling the story, and he further is characterized as

unintelligent by the nonstandard English used to write the story. For example, he says things like “I done it” and “I didn’t wave no magic wand” (Tharp 1). Others add to Hampton’s characterization as stupid as well, with a teacher telling him that he was “wasting desk space” in the classroom (Tharp 2). Hampton’s struggles with school are alleviated in a small way when Sara, a girl from Oklahoma City, shows Hampton how to use the index of the textbook. Hampton didn’t even know the index existed. Similar to DJ, Hampton gains necessary knowledge from a city dweller, and while he is able to use Sara’s advice to make advancements in the classroom, he is still nowhere near as intelligent as she is.

Considering Mike in *Far from Xanadu* complicates the depiction of the deficit of intelligence because it reveals a hierarchy of knowledge. Unlike DJ and Hampton, Mike does not spend a lot of time degrading her own intelligence, as she doesn’t really seem concerned about the ways her school-based intelligence positions her in relation to others. What is interesting in this novel is that Mike has advanced knowledge of plumbing, and yet that way of knowing is treated as unimportant and disposable. Mike knows the building codes and how to “replace all the electrical [and] update the flex connector to the gas” (Peters 156). She can install a water heater, replumb a shower, and repair drywall, and yet Coach K, Xanadu, and others make it clear that, while that type of information is useful in certain situations, it’s not as valuable for her future as more normative ways of knowing.

Similar to Mike, Capricorn (Cap) Anderson, the protagonist of *Schooled*, lacks many of the normative ways of knowing, although in Cap’s case, the knowledge he’s lacking is social. Cap grew up in a Texas hippie commune and found himself suddenly

placed in a city school when his grandmother gets injured. Cap has no familiarity with the world outside of the commune, so he has never shaken hands or watched TV. Because of his unfamiliarity with city living, Cap is the target of significant bullying by the members of his 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. Through his fumbling attempts to be class president, which includes a request for a bullfighting ring on the school grounds, Cap is characterized as “a space traveler who just landed on Earth and left his guidebook on the home world!” (Korman 45). While Cap is not referred to as “stupid” by any characters in the book, himself included, his lack of comprehension regarding the way life in the city works portrays Cap as backward and lacking in necessary ways of knowing.

### Deficit of Future

In these novels, the deficit of future typically manifests itself through the “dying” of some aspect of rurality, whether it’s a failing industry, crumbling town, or depleting population. The traditional land and resource-based ways of making a living in rural communities (e.g. ranching, farming, and fishing) are usually portrayed as struggling and/or dying. There is frequent talk of the need for new ways to make a living. The hope for the future of the rural areas and industries lies with rural youth. They are the ones who are next in line to take responsibility and potentially come up with ways to “save the farm,” but in the end, rural youth are convinced that they’ll have a better future elsewhere, so they leave. For the younger generation, a “good” future lies outside of the rural space, so rural youth need to go somewhere different if they want to find success, leaving rural communities without a future.

In *Dairy Queen*, the deficit of future is portrayed in the setting and plotline. The dying nature of the Schwenk farm is heavily emphasized. The physical space of the farm itself is extremely run-down and falling apart:

The milk house and toolshed were peeling paint. The granary, the old chicken coops we haven't used in years, the corncribs, all looked terrible. The basketball backboard was just a splintery old piece of plywood, the hoop all bent and rusty from when Bill thought he could dunk. Not to mention all the broken-down equipment we never moved, or the weeds growing everywhere like we don't care... We could have been a "Save the Family Farm" poster only it would have been too depressing. (*Dairy Queen* 38)

On top of that, DJ's parents are facing physical issues that inhibit their ability to do farm work. DJ does her best to keep up with everything, but it's impossible for her. Even though at times she believes she'd be happy taking care of the farm if she could, DJ just isn't equipped to handle the job by herself.

A major conflict throughout the series is what will happen to the farm. The Schwenks wonder: How can they keep the farm alive? Will they have to farm turkeys? Should they go organic? Will they have to sell? The future of the farm rests in the hands of DJ and her brothers, but it becomes clear that her brothers are not willing to sacrifice a life away from the farm in order to keep it running. That leaves DJ as the only hope for the Schwenk family farm, and her willingness to sacrifice her time and energy in order to take care of the farm puts her in the position of the farm's potential savior. However, DJ realizes she doesn't want to stay on the farm and feels that her only escape is going to college. Her mother also recognizes the need for DJ to leave the farm:

*You don't want to spend the rest of your life milking cows. Did I not know this? Of course I needed college to get out of Red Bend! I remembered it every second of the day! But I'd never realized Mom knew it too. I'd never*

heard her say it, say so bluntly, that I needed to *escape*. She sounded desperate... (Front and Center 55)

Red Bend has to be escaped if DJ wants a future, a future that can only be found in college, and her ticket there is basketball. Ultimately, in order to find success in basketball and leave Red Bend, DJ has to “become” someone else. The implication is that she has to be someone new in order to get through the transition from her hometown to the big city, and in becoming that new person, she’ll finally be the best version of herself. While DJ is frightened of the transition and nervous to leave her family, in the end, she chooses to escape the farm, removing the potential of her carrying the farm into the next generation.

Arnold in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* also realizes the need to leave his rural location in order to have a future. Arnold characterizes his reservation as isolated from importance and happiness, which is one of the reasons he decides to attend school in a wealthy, mainly-white small town called Reardan. However, students that attend Reardan believe that there is no future there either. Penelope, Arnold’s semi-girlfriend, says, “I hate this little town. It’s so small, too small. Everything about it is small. The people here have small ideas. Small dreams. . .I want to leave as soon as I can” (Alexie 111). Arnold and Penelope both want to dream big, which means they have to leave their rural areas. The adults in their lives know it too, with Arnold in particular receiving encouragement to get away from the reservation. Arnold acknowledges that, even though it will be difficult for him to leave his home, he will “have a better life out in the white world” (Alexie 217). In this novel, the more isolated one is, the less hope one has, and in order to have big dreams, one has to get away from the rural space.

The lack of future in small towns is present in the novel *Touch Blue* as well. *Touch Blue*, set in Maine, follows the struggle of a small island school and town to stay afloat after a family moves to the mainland. Unlike many of the other protagonists in the novels I read, Tess loves the work of the family lobster-fishing business and wants to be a fisherman when she grows up. She does not dream of far off places; instead she dreams of owning her own boat and laying her lobster traps where she pleases around the island she's always known as home. However, her father does not agree with her future plans, nor does he feel like it's necessary for the happiness of the family to stay on the island. For example, he has no interest in teaching Tess how to drive the boat because he tells her, "You're going to college. Spending the summer lobstering with me is okay while you're in school. But it's a hard, dangerous way to make a living, Tess. Harder'n I want for you" (Lord 55-6). In this case, it's the adult telling the rural youth that there is no future in the life she is currently living.

Similar to Tess, Mike, in *Far from Xanadu*, also experiences an adult encouraging her to leave her small town in spite of her desire to stay. Mike is an incredibly skilled softball player, and her coach is positive she could get recruited by a large college. However, Mike is interested in reviving her father's plumbing business because she has the knowledge and skill necessary to build a thriving business. When Mike tells her coach that Szabo Plumbing is her future, Coach K tells her, "I meant a real future. Away from here" (Peters 144). Although Mike is a good plumber, no one in town, her own family included, believes that plumbing provides a good enough future for her. While Mike resists the push to leave Coalton for the majority of the novel, in the end, she realizes that she has

to leave if she wants to have a happy future, one that involves finding a girl she can love. However, *Far from Xanadu* complicates the deficit of future narrative in that Mike wants to move back to Coalton with her future partner because she believes that “Coalton [is] a good place to make a life, raise a family” (Peters 282). Unlike the majority of protagonists in the novels I read, Mike believes a future can be realized in her home town.

*Bull Rider* is another novel that complicates the deficit of future representation, although it doesn’t seem so at first. Unlike many of the other novels, *Bull Rider* ends with a sense of hope for rural life. This novel takes place in Salt Lick, Nevada during the war with Iraq. Cam O’Mara’s family, owners and operators of a cattle ranch, is known for their ability to bull ride, and his older brother Ben is particularly good. In the beginning of the novel, Ben enlists with the Marines and is deployed to Iraq. He gets injured very badly while overseas and ends up in a wheelchair. The O’Mara family’s legacy of bull-riding greatness seems to be over, and the future of the family ranch becomes questionable: If Ben can’t take over the ranch, what will happen?

The family in this book struggles to stay afloat financially after Ben gets hurt. The income from the ranch isn’t enough to pay for the added costs of taking care of Ben. Plus, Cam’s mom quits her job so she can spend time with Ben. Instead of the family floundering though, the community steps in to help them, pitching in to remodel the house so Ben can have access to it. The town of Salt Lick might not have much financially, but there isn’t a sense of a dying culture or way of life in this book like there was in others. In fact, Cam decides to set aside his skateboard and try bull riding, finding that he not only enjoys it, but is also a natural. There is a sense that the ranch will continue, particularly since Ben gets

involved in fertilizing cows with artificial insemination. While the future of the ranch will look different than its past, it will survive with the dedication of Ben and Cam and the use of modern technology.

### Discussion and Implications

Upon examination, the representations of rurality identified in the rural YA novels I read create a definition of rural people and places-to be rural is to be deficient. Rural people and places are viewed through the dominant Discourse (Gee) of urbanity, and they are found wanting. These novels offer a picture of rural people who do not believe they are cool enough, smart enough, wealthy enough, or relevant enough. Essentially, rural characters actualize rural stereotypes. Rural is a place to escape, and the place to get “cool” and “smart” is the city and “wealth” and a “future” are obtained there. Rural dwellers recognize the lack of opportunity their place affords them, which is why young and old alike dream of futures that involve breaking free from the family farm, ranch, or business, establishing the lack of sustainability and relevance of rural life.

The depiction of rural as deficient perpetuates negative rural stereotypes and imposes itself upon the identity kit of what it means to be rural. This portrayal cannot go unrecognized or unchallenged due to the perils of the single story (Adichie) and of stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson). Deb Appleman writes, “There are things we can’t afford *not* to see” (xii), and if we want to teach for social justice, there are people and places we can no longer afford not to see. The place-based belief systems that are constructing

our understandings of the world must be made apparent in order to better read the word and the world, and a CRP provides a tool for gaining that metaknowledge.

Once metaknowledge is achieved, the next step is resistance. Reading the novels with the CRP, it became apparent to me that both urban and rural textual voices are constructing the narrative of deficit. Herein lies the opportunity to oppose the identity kit as challenging those textual voices by offering counter narratives is the beginning of Discourse resistance. Deciding which stereotypes to resist and which to accept is a task readers will face, and one that each student will encounter differently. That is a difficulty of working with language, stories, and students' lived realities. However, if the goal is to revise the single story of rurality, I believe students should challenge the representations that do not reflect their ways of being. Problematizing representations does not mean that those depictions fail to accurately represent some members of the Discourse; however, it does mean that those ways of being do not accurately portray *all* members of the Discourse, and therefore, not all Discourse members have to adopt those ways of being. Stereotypes of rurality, no matter how prevalent, do not have to *be* a rural person's reality. Rural individuals can refuse to actualize those depictions of what it means to be rural, and instead bring new ways of "saying (writing)-doing-valuing-believing" (Gee 278) to the identity kit. The single story is what must be resisted and multiple perspectives of rural identity must be acknowledge.

### Directions for Further Research

Rural YA literature and reading for rural would both benefit from further research. For starters, the CRP paired with contemporary rural novels needs pedagogical implementation in the classroom. I have high hopes for what it can and will accomplish as an analytical tool, but the only sure way to know is to put my ideas into practice. I do not see the CRP only being used with contemporary texts, so its application to historical texts is worthwhile as well. Through the application of the CRP to a variety of novels, perhaps different and better ways of reading for rural will be developed.

Rural YA literature is worth further exploration in authorship, authenticity, and content. The background of the authors of rural YA novels could be examined alongside the depictions of rurality in their novels. Since the novels I read for this project were written by authors from urban and rural backgrounds, I find it interesting, and a little alarming, that rural is represented in a singular way. However, there could be nuances in the treatment of rurality based upon the origin of the author, which could be intriguing to explore. The histories and cultures informing the narratives would be fascinating and perhaps illuminating. I wonder: Why are rural authors buying into the larger cultural narrative about rural places? The lack of rural components in contemporary YA literature is worth exploring as well, as it was rather difficult to find rural YA novels, and not many have been published or set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's worth asking: Are authors leaving out rural people and places because they feel that they aren't a part of an "authentic" teen experience? Digging into authors' exigence for settings chosen in a text could be an interesting avenue of investigation.

### Conclusion

Today, I live in a small town in Southwestern Montana, a grid of pot-holed streets and snug houses cradled between two mountain ranges. It is a town that nestles into the valley and hugs the river; a town with tree-lined streets and broken sidewalks that celebrates its Lewis and Clark connections; a town that once boomed because of mining and is now struggling economically; a town of ranchers, teachers, miners, builders, and vacationers. I love this town. And yet, I worry about its future. There is little question that it is a town affected by the slow violence creeping through rural America, and if the single story of rural life as irrelevant, backward, and unsustainable continues, I don't see how this town will stay on its feet. However, I do believe that the slow violence can be confronted, and maybe even stopped, with discourse. That confrontation can, and should, take place in the classroom.

While it seems like a lot to hope for, I believe that engaging with rurality in the classroom is a step toward revising the societal ideologies shaping views of rural people and places. Therefore, it is crucial that educators make conscientious decisions regarding the literary narratives structuring the realities of their classrooms and question the ideologies shaping curricular decisions. Teaching for social justice requires the curricular inclusion and recognition of marginalized voices. Rurality is one of those voices needing to be heard, and contemporary YA literature can be an avenue for bringing those perspectives into the classroom. Teaching representations of current rural people challenges the stereotype that rurality is irrelevant and a thing of the past. However, teachers must remember that texts are inherently ideological, and therefore, students must

be equipped with tools for identifying and, if needed, resisting textual representations of people and places. I hope that they can then apply that knowledge and resistance outside of the classroom to affect social change.

The issues facing rurality stretch beyond the need to merely acknowledge ignored places. Stereotype threat must be defied, and the identity kit of rurality must be expanded. The power for telling the stories of their place does not lie in the hands of rural people, and as long as they continue to be stigmatized and deemed as lesser than urban dwellers, they will continue to be silenced. Rural people need to have a voice in order to offer counter narratives and resist the Discourse. Stories have power, but a single story is not, and does not have to be, a mirror. With metaknowledge, rural individuals can recognize that a single story does not determine their reality, making room for new understandings of what it means to *be*. They can take charge of the language used to construct identity kits, and in refusing to adhere to stereotypes, rural dwellers can manipulate the Discourse, and thus tell a more nuanced story. As Chimamanda Adichie writes, “Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.” Perhaps by working to recognize, validate, and empower rural voices, the single story of rurality can be replaced with an expanded version of the Discourse—one that recognizes, and allows for, more than one way to *be* rural.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LIST OF NOVELS SURVEYED

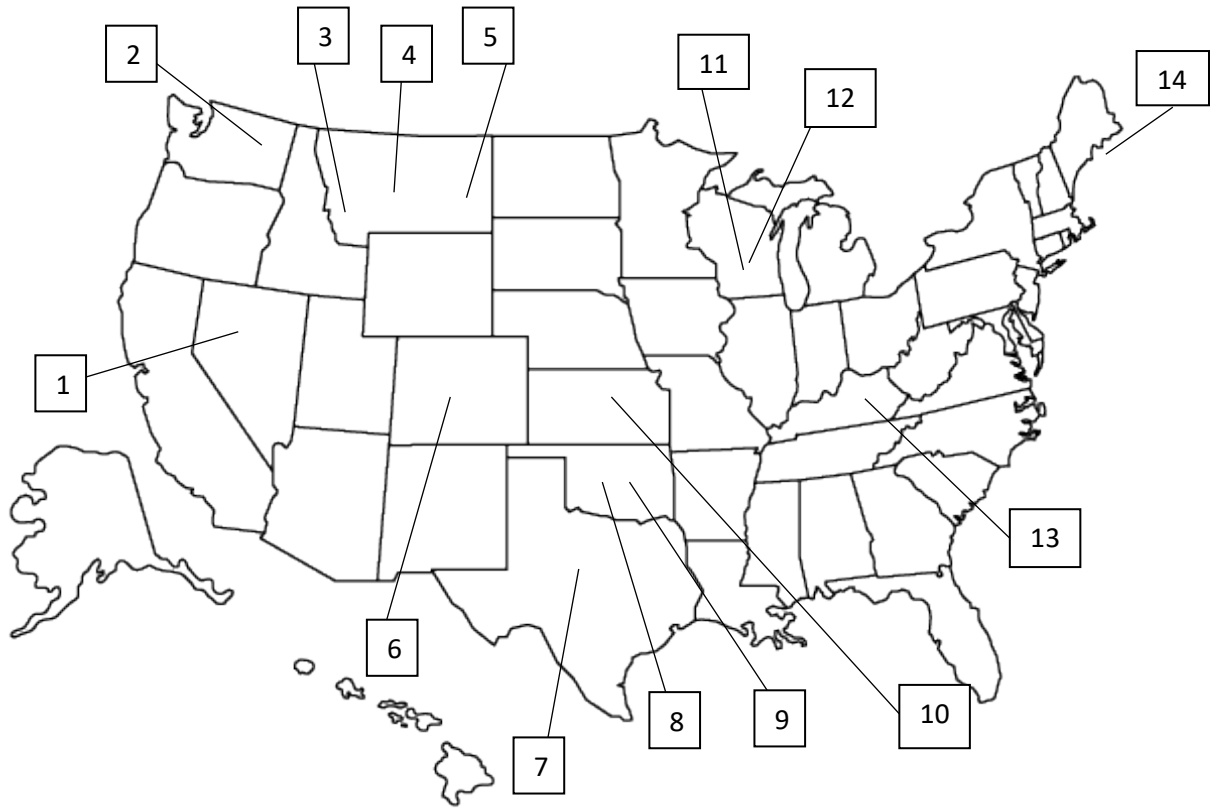
## Appendix A: List of Novels Surveyed

| <b>Title</b>                                           | <b>Author</b>        | <b>Year Published</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Bastard out of Carolina</i>                         | Dorothy Allison      | 1992                  |
| <i>Dead End in Norvelt</i>                             | Jack Gantos          | 2011                  |
| <i>Necessary Roughness</i>                             | Marie G. Lee         | 1991                  |
| <i>Only Love Can Break Your Heart</i>                  | Ed Tarkington        | 2016                  |
| <i>Hattie Big Sky</i>                                  | Kirby Larson         | 2006                  |
| <i>Bull Rider</i>                                      | Suzanne Williams     | 2009                  |
| <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> | Sherman Alexie       | 2007                  |
| <i>The Last Buffalo Hunter</i>                         | Jake Mosher          | 2000                  |
| <i>The Last Exit to Normal</i>                         | Michael Harmon       | 2008                  |
| <i>The Miseducation of Cameron Post</i>                | Emily Danforth       | 2012                  |
| <i>My Life with the Walter Boys</i>                    | Ali Novak            | 2014                  |
| <i>Schooled</i>                                        | Gordon Korman        | 2007                  |
| <i>Badd</i>                                            | Tim Tharp            | 2011                  |
| <i>Knights of Hill Country</i>                         | Tim Tharp            | 2006                  |
| <i>Far from Xanadu</i>                                 | Julie A. Peters      | 2005                  |
| <i>Dairy Queen</i>                                     | Catherine G. Murdock | 2006                  |
| <i>The Off Season</i>                                  | Catherine G. Murdock | 2008                  |
| <i>Front and Center</i>                                | Catherine G. Murdock | 2009                  |
| <i>Hope was Here</i>                                   | Joan Bauer           | 2000                  |
| <i>The Queen of Kentucky</i>                           | Alecia Whitaker      | 2012                  |
| <i>Touch Blue</i>                                      | Cynthia Lord         | 2010                  |

APPENDIX B

MAP OF SETTINGS OF 16 NOVELS WITH CONTEMPORARY RURAL SETTINGS

## Appendix B: Map of Settings of 16 Novels with Contemporary Rural Settings



| #  | Novel and Author                                                         | Setting                           |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1  | <i>Bull Rider</i> by Suzanne Williams                                    | Salt Lick, Nevada                 |
| 2  | <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie | Wellpinit and Reardan, Washington |
| 3  | <i>The Last Buffalo Hunter</i> by Jake Mosher                            | Mistake, Montana                  |
| 4  | <i>The Last Exit to Normal</i> by Michael Harmon                         | Rough Butte, Montana              |
| 5  | <i>The Miseducation of Cameron Post</i> by Emily Danforth                | Miles City and Promise, Montana   |
| 6  | <i>My Life with the Walter Boys</i> by Ali Novak                         | A horse farm in Colorado          |
| 7  | <i>Schooled</i> by Gordon Korman                                         | Unnamed city in Texas             |
| 8  | <i>Badd</i> by Tim Tharp                                                 | Knowles, Oklahoma                 |
| 9  | <i>Knights of Hill Country</i> by Tim Tharp                              | Kennisaw, Oklahoma                |
| 10 | <i>Far from Xanadu</i> by Julie A. Peters                                | Coalton, Kansas                   |
| 11 | <i>Dairy Queen</i> by Catherine G. Murdock                               | Red Bend, Wisconsin               |
| 11 | <i>The Off Season</i> by Catherine G. Murdock                            | Red Bend, Wisconsin               |
| 11 | <i>Front and Center</i> by Catherine G. Murdock                          | Red Bend, Wisconsin               |
| 12 | <i>Hope was Here</i> by Joan Bauer                                       | Mulhoney, Wisconsin               |
| 13 | <i>The Queen of Kentucky</i> by Alecia Whitaker                          | Breckenridge, Kentucky            |
| 14 | <i>Touch Blue</i> by Cynthia Lord                                        | Island off the coast of Maine     |

APPENDIX C

COMMON TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF RURALITY

### Appendix C: Common Textual Representations of Rurality

| Depiction of Rurality Found in Novels      | Explanation of Depiction                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Rural as deficient</b>                  | The deficiency of rural people and places is found in several categories such as: normativity, intelligence, wealth, success, and future. This depiction is constructed by both rural and urban characters' language usage, thoughts, actions and conversations. An urban character or urban space is present, sometimes only in abstract form, that sets the standard by which rurality is judged and found wanting. For example, rural characters often dress and act in ways that appear wild, different, and uncool in comparison to the behavior of urban characters. Rural characters speak in non-standard English, typically struggle in school or have no interest in it, and often identify as "stupid." Rural places are characterized by disrepair with little chance of a future.                                                                         |
| <b>Rural places and cultures are dying</b> | Rural places, particularly farms and small businesses, are portrayed as run-down. Frequently adult characters in the novels point to the need for finding a new way of life, as their current lifestyle (e.g. farming, ranching, lobster fishing) is out-dated and no longer sustainable. Farms and businesses that were successful in past generations struggle in the modern world. The cultures associated with the lifestyles are struggling as well, particularly since rural youth tend to have no interest in staying in the family business or the small town. Since a new generation is needed to continue the rural culture, the out-migration of rural youth leaves the place without a future. In some of the novels, older characters who epitomize the rural place/culture actually die, taking their knowledge and way of being with them to the grave. |
| <b>Rural as a place to escape</b>          | Rural youth do not typically see themselves living in their hometowns after graduation. There is a lot of concern about "getting stuck" and a focus on "getting out." Those who stay in small towns after high school are portrayed as losers, often struggling with substance abuse and monetary issues. For the youth that do leave, college and/or city living is the escape. In those places, rural youth will be able to make something better of themselves. In most cases, the youth inherently understand the need to leave, but if they are interested in remaining in their hometowns, the adults in their lives encourage them to get out.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

### Appendix C: Common Textual Representations of Rurality

| Depiction of Rurality Found in Novels                                        | Explanation of Depiction                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Rural people are unaccepting of those who don't fit their social norm</b> | This depiction is seen in rural peoples' interactions with a variety of "outsiders." Gay and non-white characters are shunned, mistreated, ridiculed, and in some cases, sent away because of their differences. People who don't adhere to the cultural norms of the community (e.g. skateboarder in a ranching community) are othered as well and pressured to conform.                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Rural communities as tightknit and supportive places</b>                  | Many of the conflicts faced by rural families end up causing massive amounts of property, monetary, and/or bodily damage. In these situations, rural communities come together to provide food, labor, money, etc. in order to support the struggling family. This depiction is also seen in the ways rural communities are involved in the activities of rural youth, particularly sports. The stands are always packed at the game.                                                                                              |
| <b>Movement from urban to rural is forced and often used as punishment</b>   | Urban youth do not go to rural areas by choice, and they are not happy about the relocation. They move for a variety of reasons, such as the death of family members or a foster care placement. Frequently, youth from urban areas are sent to rural areas because of behaviors that need to be rectified. The troubled youth are forced to live with extended family or others who can "fix" their issues.                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Rural women as masculine</b>                                              | Rural women are often characterized as masculine in their behaviors and appearances. They are tough and strong, dominating at sports and are often better than their male counterparts. Rural women are also fighters, not backing down from confrontation and going to blows if necessary. In a few instances, rural girls are so masculine that they are mistaken for boys. Typically, there is an urban girl present who embodies many feminine qualities that sharply contrast with the rural girl's behaviors and appearance. |
| <b>Rural people as hardworking</b>                                           | Rural people never stop working. They are usually short-handed and/or behind in whatever task they are attempting to accomplish, so there is always a sense of urgency and oppression with the work. Rural youth have long to-do lists juggling school, sports, work, and family obligations. Most rural youth have jobs, and some have multiple. In comparison to their urban peers, rural youth are established as admirable in their abilities to work hard.                                                                    |

### Appendix C: Common Textual Representations of Rurality

| Depiction of Rurality Found in Novels                                    | Explanation of Depiction                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Industrialization of farming has a negative impact on rural areas</b> | This depiction is typically seen in the conflicts within the novel. Industrial farms are depicted as an antagonist, driving family farmers to pursue new ways of living. Industrial farms are portrayed as heartless, money-driven places that contrast sharply with the humanness and grit of the family farm. The industrial farm has no connection or loyalty to the community.                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Sports are a vital piece of rural culture</b>                         | Sports are important for rural youth and adults alike. Whether the sport is football, basketball, softball, or rodeo, the town gets behind the sports teams. Rural youth are dedicated to their sports, and their lives revolve around their participation, and success, in the sport of choice. For many rural youth, sports are an avenue of escape from the community, since those who are talented can get the college scholarships they need and wouldn't receive based on their academic record. |

APPENDIX D

SUMMARY, DEPICTIONS, AND SETTINGS OF NOVELS READ WITH THE CRP

### Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP

| Novel & Author                                                              | Year Published | Setting                                                                           | Protagonist & Positionality                                                                      | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i><br>by Sherman Alexie | 2007           | Wellpinit, Washington (on the Spokane Indian Reservation) and Reardan, Washington | Arnold Spirit, Jr. (Junior); Spokane Indian male, rural, straight, athlete (basketball), student | Rural as deficient in wealth, success, and normativity; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture                                                                                             | Junior is a boy with big dreams, and he realizes that his poor school on the reservation is not the place to realize those dreams. So, he decides to attend a school off the reservation in the wealthy, white small town of Reardan. The book follows a year in Junior's life and all the trials he experiences, including losing his dog, his grandmother, and his sister. Junior's life is not easy, but he is determined to make a better way for himself and is committed to make the most of his schooling in Reardan.                                           |
| <i>Hope Was Here</i><br>by Joan Bauer                                       | 2000           | Mulhoney, Wisconsin                                                               | Hope; white female, urban, straight, waitress                                                    | Rural as deficient in normativity; Industrialization of farming has a negative impact on rural areas; Rural communities as tightknit and supportive places; Rural people as hardworking; Movement from urban to rural is forced and often used as a punishment | This novel tells the story of Hope, a girl who has been constantly on the move, following her aunt Addie from one diner to the next. Because of Addie's work in diners, Hope has learned to become a stellar waitress. This book starts with Hope and Addie's move from Brooklyn to Mulhoney, Wisconsin. Hope believes that she is a city person, so the change to rural living is difficult for her at first. However, she gets involved with a local political campaign for the mayoral race, finds friends, and makes a difference while learning to like Mulhoney. |

### Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP

| Novel & Author                                                | Year Published | Setting              | Protagonist & Positionality                                     | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The Last Exit to Normal</i><br>by Michael Harmon           | 2008           | Rough Butte, Montana | Ben; white male, urban, straight, skateboarder                  | Rural as deficient in normativity; Rural communities as tightknit and supportive places; Rural people are unaccepting of those who don't fit their social norm; Movement from urban to rural is forced and often used as a punishment; Rural women as masculine; Rural as a place to escape           | When Ben's father announces he is gay, Ben's family life falls apart. Ben is devastated and does everything imaginable to get back at his father, including doing drugs and getting arrested. Ben's father and his boyfriend move to a small town in Montana, taking Ben with them. Ben struggles to accept the new family dynamics and continues to act out. Ben discovers that the little boy next door is being abused and tries to do something about it.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>The Mis-education of Cameron Post</i><br>by Emily Danforth | 2012           | Miles City, Montana  | Cameron Post (Cam); white female, rural, gay, athlete (swimmer) | Rural as deficient in wealth, success, and normativity; Rural people are unaccepting of those who don't fit their social norm; Movement from urban to rural is forced and often used as a punishment; Rural women as masculine; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture | Cameron Post lost her parents when she was 12, on the day she kissed a girl for the first time. Cam struggles to figure out who she is throughout the book, experimenting sexually with both boys and girls, while coping with the death of her parents. She befriends a girl named Coley Taylor and eventually they become romantically involved. Coley feels guilty about their relationship though, so she turns Cam in to her pastor, and Cam ends up getting sent to live at Promise- a camp for "fixing" gay kids. Cam doesn't buy into Promise though and eventually runs away to find something different and better for her life. |

### Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP

| Novel & Author                                | Year Published | Setting                                                   | Protagonist & Positionality                                   | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                             | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The Last Buffalo Hunter</i> by Jack Mosher | 2000           | Mistake, Montana                                          | Kyle; white male, urban, straight                             | Rural as deficient in wealth, success, and normativity; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural people as hardworking; Rural as a place to escape | Kyle, who lives outside of Syracuse, has always dreamed of Montana; his father grew up there and his grandfather Cole still lives there in a little blip on the Big Hole River called Mistake. As a gift for his 14 <sup>th</sup> birthday, his parents send him to Mistake to spend the summer with Cole. Kyle is ecstatic but finds Montana to be much different than what he imagined. The book details the summer spent in Mistake and the variety of troubles Cole and Kyle find themselves in, including a wealthy rancher moving buffalo onto the property bordering Cole's, Cole cutting down a bunch of trees he wasn't supposed to, the mysterious presence in the woods, and Cole's eventual death. |
| <i>Schooled</i> by Gordon Korman              | 2007           | Claverage Middle School, an unnamed city, likely in Texas | Capricorn Anderson (Cap); white male, rural, straight, hippie | Rural as deficient in intelligence, wealth, success, and normativity; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural as a place to escape                | Cap finds himself suddenly jerked out of his life at a hippie commune when his grandmother Rain falls and breaks her hip, requiring surgery and a long recovery time. Cap ends up having to stay with a family in the city while Rain is healing. He has rarely been exposed to the world outside the Garland Farm, so he is unfamiliar with how to navigate social situations. Cap ends up in a middle school and immediately becomes the target of the bullies of the school who elect him as the 8 <sup>th</sup> grade class president as a joke. Because their bullying has no effect on him, Cap ends up being successful and making friends.                                                             |

### Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP

| Novel & Author                                                                      | Year Published | Setting             | Protagonist & Positionality                                                                                           | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Dairy Queen</i> by Catherine G. Murdock (Book 1 of <i>Dairy Queen</i> series)    | 2006           | Red Bend, Wisconsin | Darlene Joyce Schwenk (DJ); white female, rural, straight, athlete (volleyball, football, basketball), dairy farmer   | Rural as deficient in intelligence, wealth, success and normativity; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural people are unaccepting of those who don't fit their social norm; Rural communities are tightknit and supportive places; Rural people as hardworking; Rural women as masculine; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture                                                                     | At 15 years old, DJ is no stranger to hard work. Because of her father's injury, DJ does the majority of the work on her family's dairy farm. Since she works so hard, a family friend, who is also the football coach of Red Bend's rival Hawley, sends his quarterback Brian to DJ for training. With two older brothers who are star football players, DJ knows what she's talking about and makes Brian work hard. DJ realizes that she loves football. She tries-out for and makes Red Bend's football team.                                                                                                           |
| <i>The Off Season</i> by Catherine G. Murdock (Book 2 of <i>Dairy Queen</i> series) | 2008           | Red Bend, Wisconsin | Darlene Joyce Schwenk (D.J.); white female, rural, straight, athlete (volleyball, football, basketball), dairy farmer | Rural as deficient in intelligence, wealth, success, and normativity; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural people are unaccepting of those who don't fit their social norm; Rural communities are tightknit and supportive places; Rural people as hardworking; Rural women as masculine; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture; Industrialization of farming has a negative impact on rural areas | This is the second book of the <i>Dairy Queen</i> series. DJ is back and a star on the football team. Things are going really well for her; she's (sort of) dating Brian and enjoying her time on the football field. Then she ends up getting hurt in a game. She decides to quit football, so she can heal for basketball since there's a chance she could get a scholarship. DJ's brother Win gets severely hurt in a football game and ends up in the hospital. DJ has to take care of Win because her parents can't handle the stress. Win is in a wheel chair, and DJ works hard to make him believe he has a future. |

### Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP

| Novel & Author                                                                        | Year Published | Setting                       | Protagonist & Positionality                                                                                           | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Front and Center</i> by Catherine G. Murdock (Book 3 of <i>Dairy Queen</i> series) | 2009           | Red Bend, Wisconsin           | Darlene Joyce Schwenk (D.J.); white female, rural, straight, athlete (volleyball, football, basketball), dairy farmer | Rural as deficient in intelligence, wealth, success, and normativity; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural people are unaccepting of those who don't fit their social norm; Rural communities are tightknit and supportive places; Rural people as hardworking; Rural women as masculine; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture; Industrialization of farming has a negative impact on rural areas | This is the third book of the <i>Dairy Queen</i> series. DJ is back in Red Bend after taking care of Win, and basketball season is in full swing. Her injury from football has healed so she's okay to play. She struggles to decide what she wants to do with her future. She has plenty of schools that are interested in giving her a basketball scholarship. DJ feels a lot of responsibility for meeting the expectations of her town and her family. At the same time, she's afraid of doing something too big, something that she's not prepared for, such as DI basketball. |
| <i>Touch Blue</i> by Cynthia Lord                                                     | 2010           | Island off the coast of Maine | Tess; white female, rural, straight, lobster fisherman                                                                | Rural as deficient in wealth, success, and normativity; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural as a place to escape; Rural communities as tightknit and supportive places; Rural people as hardworking; Movement from urban to rural is forced and often used as a punishment                                                                                                                                                        | Tess loves her life on a small island off the coast of Maine. Her father is a lobster fisherman, and Tess wants to be just like him when she grows up. However, after a family moves away the small island school and town are struggling. In order to keep the school open, several of the families in town take in foster kids. Tess desperately wants to stay on the island, so she does everything she can to make her family's foster child want to stay.                                                                                                                      |

**Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP**

| Novel & Author                                   | Year Published | Setting                  | Protagonist & Positionality                                                               | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                                                                          | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>My Life with the Walter Boys</i> by Ali Novak | 2014           | A horse farm in Colorado | Jackie Howard; white female, urban, straight, student                                     | Rural as deficient in intelligence, wealth, success, and normativity; Rural women as masculine; Rural as a place to escape; Movement from urban to rural is forced and often used as a punishment | Jackie Howard is a very organized, school-oriented 16 year old, living in New York with her extremely wealthy family until one day her father, mother, and sister are all killed in a car accident. Because of the loss of her family, Jackie has to move across the country to a horse farm in Colorado to live with her mom's best friend and her eleven boys. Jackie has a crush on one of the oldest boys, but also likes one of the younger brothers. She struggles to choose between them while she's making an effort to adjust to the crazy, messy life in the country.                                                                             |
| <i>Queen of Kentucky</i> by Alecia Whitaker      | 2012           | Breckenridge, Kentucky   | Ricki Jo Winstead (Ericka); white female, straight, athlete (cheerleader), tobacco farmer | Rural as deficient in wealth, success, and normativity; Rural people as hardworking; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture   | Ricki Jo is starting high school and is ready to leave behind her country-self in order to become popular. She wants to be called Ericka, becomes a cheerleader, and buys a brand new wardrobe. She also pursues a new group of friends, much to the annoyance of her long-time best friend Luke. Ricki Jo makes a lot of changes in order to fit in but realizes that it's a lot harder to be popular than she thought. Reinventing herself doesn't buy her instant access into the popular crowd. Throughout the novel, Ricki learns that changing to become friends with people isn't the best decision and discovers what true friendship is all about. |

**Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP**

| Novel & Author                              | Year Published | Setting            | Protagonist & Positionality                                                          | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Knights of Hill Country</i> by Tim Tharp | 2006           | Kennisaw, Oklahoma | Hampton Green; white male, rural, straight, athlete (football)                       | Rural as deficient in intelligence and normativity; Rural communities are tightknit and supportive places; Rural as a place to escape; Rural people are unaccepting of those who don't fit their social norm; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture | Hampton Green has been best friends with Blaine Keller since 4 <sup>th</sup> grade, but during football season of their senior year, Blaine starts to change. Their team, the Kennisaw Knights, are hoping to go five straight seasons undefeated. Due to an injury, Blaine is no longer the star of the team, a role that Hampton is starting to fill. Hampton's success gets him recruited by Oklahoma University. Hampton also starts dating a girl who is unpopular and smart, something Blaine does not approve of. Blaine demands Hampton's loyalty in all things, even as Blaine is spiraling out of control.                            |
| <i>Bull Rider</i> by Suzanne Williams       | 2009           | Salt Lick, Nevada  | Cam O'Mara; white male, rural, straight, athlete (bull rider), skateboarder, rancher | Rural as deficient in wealth and success; Rural communities are tightknit and supportive places; Rural people as hardworking; Rural places and cultures are dying; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture                | Cam O'Mara's family is known for their ability to bull ride, and his older brother Ben is particularly good. Cam has no interest in being a bull rider though; he loves to skate board and hates that he gets teased for doing so. Ben enlists with the Marines, gets sent to Iraq, and ends up getting injured very badly while overseas. Once Ben gets hurt, Cam tries out bull riding as a sort of release. He ends up being pretty good. Ben's recovery is slow, and he's dealing with depression. Cam wants to do something to cheer him up, so Cam signs up to ride a bull that's never been ridden to show Ben that anything can happen. |

**Appendix D: Summary, Depictions, and Settings of Novels Read with the CRP**

| Novel & Author                            | Year Published | Setting           | Protagonist & Positionality                                                        | Rural Depictions Present                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Brief Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Far from Xanadu</i> by Julie A. Peters | 2005           | Coalton, Kansas   | Mary-Elizabeth Szabo (Mike); white female, rural, gay, athlete (softball), plumber | Rural as deficient in intelligence, wealth, success, and normativity; Rurality used as punishment; Rural communities are tightknit and supportive places; Rural people as hardworking; Movement from urban to rural is forced and often used as a punishment; Rural women as masculine; Rural as a place to escape; Sports are a vital piece of rural culture | Mike's father committed suicide a few years ago, causing the family to become even more dysfunctional than it already was. Mike's life changes completely when Xanadu, the most beautiful girl she's ever seen, moves to town. Mike becomes friends with Xanadu but wishes they could become more. However, Xanadu isn't interested in Mike. Mike begins taking plumbing clients and really enjoys the work. She feels she could have a future as a plumber. However, her softball coach tells her that softball is her ticket out of town and encourages her to attend a camp to gain a competitive edge. |
| <i>Badd</i> by Tim Tharp                  | 2011           | Knowles, Oklahoma | Ceejay; white female, rural, straight, tough girl, semi-outcast                    | Rural as deficient in success and normativity; Rural as a place to escape; Rural women as masculine                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Ceejay is tough and rebellious. She doesn't really fit in, and she's okay with that because her brother Bobby is loved by all. Bobby joins the military after getting in trouble in town and gets deployed to Iraq. He is dishonorably discharged for having drugs but doesn't tell his family when he returns to Knowles. Bobby is dealing with PTSD, but Ceejay doesn't know it. She can't figure out what is happening to Bobby. As she tries to help her brother, she begins to question her own understanding of what strength is.                                                                    |