

FROM TURNING AWAY TO LISTENING IN: INSTRUCTION TO FACILITATE
CIVIC DIALOGUE THROUGH REGIONAL LITERATURE

by

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge that Montana State University and the schools we work with are on the ancestral lands of American Indians, including the A'aninin (Gros Ventre), Amskapi/Piikani (Blackfeet), Annishinabe (Chippewa/Ojibway), Annishinabe/Métis (Little Shell Chippewa), Apsáalooke (Crow), Ktunaxa/Ksanka (Kootenai), Lakota, Dakota (Sioux), Nakoda (Assiniboine), Ne-i-yah-wahk (Plains Cree), Qiispé (Pend d'Oreille), Seliš (Salish), and Tsétsêhéstâhese/So'taahe (Northern Cheyenne). Through our work with Montana students and teachers we honor and respect these twelve tribal nations that call Montana home today by drawing inspiration from the stories of these communities whose oral histories embody this land.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how trauma-reducing student-centered instruction (TR-SCI) offers a solution to the cycle of traumatizing and retraumatizing student experiences within classroom environments. TR-SCI is a way to center the student experience and focuses on reducing trauma inducing practices in the classroom. I discuss what the classroom experience might entail then I explore why TR-SCI might allow for environments of trust and reciprocity which is needed to create civic dialogue.

Civic dialogue consists of conversations built upon reciprocity and respect, while listening across conflict toward understanding differences. Civic dialogue provides opportunity for students to step outside echo chambers and has the potential to widen students' view of the experiences of others. Critically exploring regionally relevant literature is a way to begin civic dialogue and has potential for students to find connections and disconnections that are situated within the context of their regional experiences.

I interject my own experiences as a mother, educator, student, community member, and researcher to explore why I think we need trauma-reducing classrooms that engage in civic dialogue by exemplifying, through writing and discussion, an attempt to connect personal and regional experience with author Ivan Doig's text and archives. I have written a series of letters to Ivan called "Dear Ivan" that exemplify my work to build connection with the author and archives. My hope is that discussions on TR-SCI, civic dialogue through regional literature, and my explorations with connecting to Ivan help to facilitate further conversations in these fields. I see the connections with these concepts and methods as potential for teacher education workshops and further qualitative research studies in classroom environments. It is not my purpose here to propose a solution but simply to begin dialogue toward relatable ways to build equity and inclusion within the classroom.

EXIGENCY

In April 2020, I was quarantined in a home with two disgruntled teenage daughters. It was one month into the Covid-19 pandemic and one semester into my graduate program in English Education. I began to manifest the complicated mappings of my work to explore how to create classroom settings that are trauma-reducing and to discuss how regional literature can be used to help students create dialogue that is inclusive and curious toward understanding personal and cultural differences. Books and essays lined every horizontal surface of my house, including much of the living room floor.

Then I began to map these connections in yellow and blue sticky notes across the newly painted wall of my apartment. Each little quote or note logged a stream of consciousness toward seminal scholars like Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Jean Piaget, and current pedagogical scholars such as Nicole Mirra, Antero Garcia, and Elizabeth Dutro. I saw so many connections between their critical ideas and theories, but I didn't understand how and why there were so many disconnections in what I have experienced as a mother, educator, and student within the American public education systems. Contemplating this, I sat on the floor among the books and papers, pencil in my mouth, hair undone, my daughters all the while, rolling their eyes at their finally gone-mad mother, but I was undaunted by their gestures as the web continued to grow.

As I leaned into critical pedagogies and the understanding that experiences are always socially situated, I wanted to explore ways in which educators could create environments that built connections. I was unsettled by the realization that so little had changed with issues of equity and social justice over the last 20 years. A few weeks later, on May 25th, 2020, George

Floyd was held down by a white Minnesota police officer until he could no longer breathe.

George was only three years older than I was and we shared the same birthday.

The last few months of 2020 consisted of riots, shootings, a continuing pandemic, and a storm of misinformation that mixed a perfect stew of distrust and division in every part of our lives. It seemed that fear was guiding emotions in our national and local discourses. Shouting matches and blame echoed in the halls of school board meetings. So many voices were yelling, and no one was listening.

I started to see that antiquated colonialist belief systems affect all of us, not just those who might fall into categories of risk or marginalization. It affects how children and adults engage with each other and within our communities. It affects our futures, how we understand our histories, and how we understand and define ourselves within our interpersonal, personal, and communal relationships.

Simultaneously, I saw the potential for literature to help start civic dialogue built in trust in reciprocity. Through my studies in critical place-based pedagogies, I knew that it was important to find regionally relevant points of interest to start civic dialogue. As I was searching for regional connections within texts I discovered Ivan Doig's memoir *This House of Sky* (1980). I had expected to be unimpressed. I expected that Ivan¹'s texts would be yet another example of the typical cowboy-up mentality: the John Wayne character immersed in tropes that objectify women and vilify the "other." I expected gun slinging and shootouts. The hero gets the girl. I expected Ivan's autobiography to be an idealized version of a Montanan immersed in

¹ Throughout this text, I refer to Ivan Doig informally as Ivan to disrupt the formalities and insinuate a casual, friendly relationship with Ivan Doig.

privilege. What I found was a perfect opportunity to open up and listen in. There are places in his works that elicit the male gaze and miss so much of the U.S.'s history with American Indian erasure. But these moments can offer talking points that are opportunities for discussion and investigation. That the Ivan Doig archives were on the Montana State campus allowed me to connect with Ivan through his written works. a. I situated myself as an apprentice to Ivan, to the civic issues ensuing around me, and into the Montana region which has been my home for 17 years.

GUIDING FRAMEWORK

When I imagine classroom environments that don't just focus on discipline and test scores but focus on building positive trusting experiences. I think of classroom environments built in trust and reciprocity that start with vulnerability and love (Dutro, 2019, p. 5). Doing this builds equity, community, student autonomy, and civic engagement by exemplifying cultures of humility, empathy, and compassion. This is ultimately humanizing because our schools can be places that can cause trauma or have the potential to retraumatize students, especially in our most vulnerable communities (Cantrell, 2021, para. 5). But our schools can have the potential to be places that reciprocate civic engagement and understanding and centering students as purveyors of knowledge.

Scholar Christine Stanton explains that “many of our students of color and from minoritized communities, are not bringing with them individual traumatic experiences. They’re bringing collective traumatic experiences-trauma experienced by whole communities-and bringing historical and intergenerational trauma as well” (Cantrell, 2021, para. 10). The combination of social and historical factors affects lived and perceived experiences; these *sociohistorical* experiences cannot be separated from a student’s classroom experience. With this in mind, I consider how to create classrooms that are trauma-reducing environments, where the process of learning becomes equitable and reciprocal.

Aligning with Nicolas Rink and Robert Petrone’s repositioning framework, which centers students as purveyors of knowledge, I am inspired by the “four Rs– Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Relationships” (McCarty & Lee, 2014; as cited in Rink & Petrone, 2020, p. 250) when considering how to conduct classroom environments that are trauma-reducing and

student centered. Petrone and Rink move from the four Rs to offer a repositioning pedagogy that “responds to the absence of youth voices in teacher education by centering youth and their perspectives in preservice teacher education” (2020, p. 243). Repositioning pedagogy works to disrupt power systems by centering youth by “listening to and learning from youth” (Petrone & Rink 2020, p. 243).

Also aligned with the four Rs, Stanton and Petrone’s “sociohistorical trauma-reducing” research suggests an approach to answer the questions, “What are the broader *sociohistorical* issues related to trauma pertinent to the community and school under examination? How might particular nuanced ways of understanding locally based, historicized traumas inform a *trauma-reducing approach*” (2021, p. 542). Stanton and Petrone discuss the potential shift from “the problem existing within individual students (and the solution within the school) to locating ‘the problem’—or at least an aspect of it—within the structure of schooling” (Petrone & Stanton, 2021, p. 542). By questioning how schools may be part of the problem and finding nuanced ways to facilitate classroom environments that are student-centered and trauma-reducing, we may begin to repair colonialist approaches that perpetuate traumatizing systems of power.

Considering the foundations of the four Rs, repositioning pedagogy, and trauma-reducing practices as framework, I move these concepts *forward* into classroom settings *toward* civic dialogue *through* regional literature. Using these seminal ideas as a framework, I inquire how trauma-reducing student-center instruction (TR-SCI) can help create classroom environments that are rooted in respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relationships.

Systems of power exist within our classroom ecosystems, and we are all either purveyors or subjects (or both) within those systems. TR-SCI supports recentering the classroom by

positioning the instructor as facilitator, instead of an all-knowing person of authority. Paulo Freire objects to the banking model of education, that children are mere vessels to be filled (Freire, 2018). Those that get to choose the content of the vessels are understood to possess knowledge. When educators reposition themselves as facilitators, it allows students² to become purveyors of personal truth by allowing the autonomy to explore these truths on their own. By incorporating such practices, educators can create classroom ecosystems that are trauma-reducing and humanizing.

Inequities are created when prioritizing colonialist euro-centric ideals based on supremacist policy, and literature. It is important to remember that we are not just addressing trauma for those who are marginalized; colonialist ideals subjectify and separate all and do not support humanizing approaches. Michel Foucault argued that knowledge and power are intimately bound and cannot be separated (1991). If those in power possess “knowledge” but said knowledge does not benefit humanity, it creates equity gaps, polarization, and oppression.

I am curious about what happens when we begin to even out hierarchical systems, to support student learning, when educators work as facilitators instead of dictators or “owners” of truth and knowledge. Educators may find that students are much more creative and curious when given the opportunity to take ownership over their learning process. They may find that when they remove the oppressing systems that traumatize students and shift their stance to facilitators it creates trust and allows space for personal truths. If educators keep in mind that many students

² A note about the term “students.” I use the word students broadly, including public and private education sectors of primary, secondary, and higher education students. I also conceive of educators and community members as possible students.

have been traumatized by our systems of power and therefore perpetuate them, it helps to create classroom environments that reflect the four Rs.

ENGAGING TR-SCI CLASSROOMS

TR-SCI classrooms consists of four principles that center students as purveyors of truth. TR-SCI classrooms recognize that classrooms can be places that are trauma-inducing or retraumatizing. TR-SCI classrooms exemplify and promote civic dialogue which includes listening toward understanding differences. They recognize students' sociohistorical, regional, and cultural experiences that affect the way they navigate the classroom and community environments.

Principle 1: TR-SCI centers students as purveyors of truth.

“Both agency and empowerment provide the ground to think strategically about how to live productively in the spaces young people occupy or to transform those spaces for the common good” (Greene et al. 2018, p. 845). By centering students, we move from a dehumanizing to humanizing spaces that may encourage agency and empowerment. In TR-SCI classrooms, educators become facilitators and participant-observers, centering student experiences and their learning process rather than considering students as empty vessels (Freire, 2018) to be filled by the 'all-knowing' teacher. It is important to recognize that educators do not empower our students but allow for this empowerment to happen. This humanization helps to create environments of trust and collaboration³.

Repositioning pedagogies (Petrone & Rink, 2020) help us think about how we can begin to recenter our classroom. To allow for students to choose their own topics and interests while

³ It is important that I recognize that many educators are already practicing facilitators and that those who don't aren't “wrong” but have different beliefs on best practices for engaging students to prepare for adulthood.

positioning teachers as facilitators and community builders who reduce trauma and work to encourage healing environments. Dutro explains that “Supporting children in the midst of challenging circumstances also means designing literacy curriculum and instructional practices that invite and value difficult experiences rather than silencing such experiences as inappropriate for school or rendering them invisible in the texts and talk of the classrooms” (Dutro, 2019, p. 5). Recentering the classroom by placing students at the forefront of the learning process instead of relying on the banking model of teaching (Freire, 2018) allows students autonomy and ownership of their educational experience. Building relationships of trust and safety between educators and students which can result in trauma-reducing experiences and can further enhance students’ ability to learn and grow into emotionally and intellectually aware adults who exemplify civic engagement and humanizing mentalities.

By creating trauma-reducing environments that place our students at the center of the classroom conversation and discussion, students can begin to explore their place in sociohistorical and regional environments in inquisitive ways. H. Richard Milner writes that “With appropriate tools, we as educators have an opportunity to not only build lessons that connect students’ interests, but perhaps shepherd them into becoming deeply engaged citizens who work against sexism, and other forms of discrimination” (Milner, 2019, para. 4). When we center our students as purveyors of their own truth, teachers become facilitators of knowledge and move from trauma-inducing dominant, Eurocentric, hegemonic positions of power to trauma-reducing practices that support the humanization of each student.

Principle 2: TR-SCI recognizes that classrooms can be places that are retraumatizing.

As complex as trauma is, teachers cannot be expected to be experts or therapists, yet they do need to recognize our systems of trauma and consider classrooms as places of potentially trauma-reducing humanizing experiences. Dr. Paul Gorski explains, “Treating individual traumas without naming systemic injustice means schools do not just risk leaving some traumas unrecognized; it means they risk retraumatizing students” (Gorski, 2020, pp. 14-19). Moreover, Alex Shevrin Venet explains (2020), in her book *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education* that in “equity-centered trauma-informed practice, the focus is on humanization, critical wellness, and community. Behavior modification, even when wrapped up in cute point systems and feel-good assemblies, is designed to enforce compliance (usually to white-centric, heteropatriarchal norms)” (p. 63). Trauma is not something that affects just a few of our students but all of them, directly or indirectly.

TR-SCI classrooms recognize that students cannot be separated from their sociohistorical trauma in order to “fit” into a classroom setting. Rather, educators create settings that understand that systemic trauma is valid creating a trauma-reducing environment. Trauma-reducing classrooms position students as civic actors and seekers of truth while recognizing that classroom environments *can* be places to reduce past traumas, including traumas that may have been inflicted directly by school policy, experiences, and systemic racism, hegemonic, euro-centric, homogeneous policies, and aggressions (Petroni & Stanton 2020; Venet 2020). If educators recognize that classrooms can be places to reduce past traumas, they help students to become civic actors because recognizing that classrooms can be both places to reduce traumas or to induce trauma is exemplary of civic action.

Principle 3: TR-SCI exemplifies and promote civic dialogue.

Stemming from the foundations of the four Rs (respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relationships) and aligned with concepts of Nicole Mirra's Critical Civic Empathy (2018), civic dialogue is a humanizing way of residing in a conversation that is vulnerable and inquisitive. Two primary outcomes could manifest from civic dialogue. First, educators help students embrace "a purpose to shape young adults who can step outside their personal experience to compassionately imagine the lives of others" and secondly, "act civically based upon those experiences" (Mirra, 2018, p. 3). Respect, relationship, responsibility are the cyclical parts of civic dialogue. Acting civically means that students situate themselves in ways that do not simply reflect their own interests but step outside themselves to consider another's perspective and interests as well. Reciprocity is a hopeful result of what happens when students exemplify this behavior and civic dialogue that could be contagious and humanizing.

The four Rs can also be guidelines for engagement. When students consider the way they engage in dialogue and move from respect and responsibility in conversations, it builds relationships that can become reciprocal. Inversely, when students build trusting relationships and focus on reciprocity, it can generate respect and responsibility. Mirra's third defining principle of Critical Civic Empathy (CCE) aligns with civic dialogue, Mirra explains that CCE "fosters democratic dialogue and civic action committed to equity and justice" (Mirra, 2018, p. 7). In this sense, civic dialogue is dialogue that engages students with civic action and democracy as a goal toward understanding differences and ultimately toward civic action.

Dialogue can be applied to the process of text analysis as students think critically about how the text applies to their personal and social experiences. If students explore and work to dissect power and position while moving toward civic engagement and curiosity, it can help

them explore perspectives in ways that are less black and white and more toward understanding whole systems instead of just the parts of a whole. Students can then ask critical questions about the text. How do they see themselves within the text? How does the text play into a larger sociohistorical view? How does it affect their everyday lives? Peering critically into the situatedness of environments, including classrooms and communities, helps students start to challenge the “givens” and preconceived notions that bind them to social positions.

Listening⁴ to another’s perspective is an important part of civic dialogue. Democratic listening is rooted in critical pedagogies as a pathway toward reciprocal dialogue. Freire believed that listening was an act of reciprocity and love (Freire, 2018). “The heart of this critical pedagogical method is to involve students in the process of learning, to listen to what they have to say” (Aronowitz, 2020, p. 114). Listening is not a passive act but an engagement in civic dialogue. It has the potential to bridge further polarization. “[Good democratic listening] ...is not focused on achieving a goal (e.g., listening in order to develop a rebuttal), but instead allows the listener to engage, to consider, and to connect with the speaker” (Dobson, 2012; as cited in Adolina & Conklin, 2021, pp. 390-417). It is a humanizing act, not toward a goal of winning but toward understanding and honoring multiple perspectives. Listening is a practice in understanding differences. The focus on exemplifying and facilitating listening skills within the classroom is a move toward equitable practices. To make the choice to listen is a democratic act of vulnerability.

⁴ “Listening” is also an act conducted in reading and research. To “listen” to something read means that instead of turning away from it because it is false or offensive, that one leans into the sociohistorical background of the text and/or authors to understand better why the author might have had that perspective when writing it. Research is also a way of listening because the research is seeking truth within the context of the research. Listening in research is a way for the research to dig deeper and let the material resonate before jumping to a conclusion.

Many scholars highlight the relationship between inequality and democratic listening: it is often the more powerful in societies who have the choice not to listen; yet choosing to listen actively and openly—particularly across difference—is a vulnerable yet vital act for improving democracy because it allows for a plurality of perspectives to inform the public realm (Bickford, 1996; Garrison, 1996; cited in Adolina & Conklin, 2021, pp. 390-417).

This “plurality of perspectives” is precisely what the practice of civic dialogue is meant to encompass and embrace. Listening is a purposeful, vulnerable act that has the potential to improve democracy. Listening “actively and openly” across differences is important in order to build relationships and reciprocity. Freire explains that “Learning how to listen and to disagree while also remaining open and humble about one’s position is an important part of the problematizing education” (Freire, 2018; as cited in Macrine, 2020, p. 143). When educators facilitate students to work openly and critically with *mis*understanding through listening, they allow opportunity for a plurality of perspectives.

Lipari states that “Language is speech-less speaking. It is the whole set of linguistic habits which allow an individual to understand and to be understood” (2014, p. ix). Listening then is a visceral experience in which the listener and the speaker are in reciprocal dialogue. When prepared to listen, there is awareness of the potential for conflict and an openness to it. If students allow space for a message to resonate and wash over them before becoming responsive and/or reactionary. To remain attentive and aware means that the listeners are not passive, but active participants of a conversation.

Kate Murphy (2019) explains that “Listening to the ‘other’ is what reminds us of our common human vulnerability and fragility, and it imposes the ethical imperative, or duty, to do no harm” (Murphy, 2019, p. 198; as cited in Adolina & Conklin, 2021, p. 394) even, or especially, in conflict. When civic dialogue includes listening skills toward understanding

differences it evolves into humanizing behavior. “Humanizing the other perspective so that people’s understandings grow more nuanced and so that difficult conversations can continue into the future is increasingly important in our polarized age where much of our communication takes place in online spaces” (VanDerHeide et al., 2020, p. 14). When we exemplify listening and offer opportunities for students to practice this skill, we help students move toward understanding. This helps students build trust with each other that is reciprocal and critical to civic dialogue.

Elizabeth Dutro’s (2019) three tenets of critical witness and testimony link TR-SCI constructs to literacies. She explains that “Tenet One: Testimony and Witness Are Reciprocal” (p. 24). Meaning that teachers must model vulnerability. Students then become the witness. “Tenet Two: Critical Witness Requires Action and Advocacy” (Dutro, 2019, p. 24), it then “involves actively working to engage in critical analyses of the deficit discourses surrounding many students and public education and taking steps to advocate for students and work toward social justice” (Dutro, 2019, p. 24). “Tenet Three: Testimony and Critical Witness to Trauma Are Woven into the Fabric of School Literacies” (Dutro, 2019, p. 24). Aligning with Dutro, I see the deep connection with literature to build environments of trust and reciprocity.

Principle 4: TR-SCI considers students' sociohistorical experiences.

When discussing trauma-reducing sociohistorical research practices Petrone and Stanton consider “What are the broader sociohistorical issues related to trauma pertinent to the community and school under examination? How might, nuanced ways of understanding locally based, historicized traumas inform a trauma-reducing approach.’ They explain that “Attuning to questions such as these can open up lines of inquiry that help illuminate institutional, social, historical, and political issues that simultaneously reveal underlying causes of and potential pathways to healing trauma and engendering academic success” (2021, p. 6). Educators can also consider such practices when implementing Trauma-Reducing Student-Centered Instruction.

Petrone and Stanton also consider how taking a sociohistorical approach (in their case to research) “might explore how marginalized youth, despite systemic oppression, are active agents in their educational experiences and bring to school with them knowledge, skills, and networks rooted in their families and cultural communities, to resist forms of subordination” (Petron & Stanton, 2021, p. 6). Aligned with the same curiosity, TR-SCI might also have the potential to help students become “active agents” and “resist forms of subordination” (Petrone & Rink, 2021).

When educators honor our students' sociohistorical experiences they exemplify trauma-reducing behavior. One of the ways in which educators can honor students' sociohistorical experience is by reading and analyzing regionally relevant text especially when practicing the listening skills within civic dialogue. Students can draw connections or disconnections to their lived and/or perceived experiences. They can relate to the characters in their chosen text and create discourse and personal voice through dialogue with peers and writing.

ENGAGING THE CLASSROOM THROUGH LITERATURE

Critically reading and discussing literature is an important element toward civic dialogue. I use the terms reading, writing, literature, and text to refer to the multitude of ways students read and write texts in multimodal formats such as storytelling, visual formats such as infographics and graphic presentations, film, and more. *Experience* text which includes the myriad of experiences that offer moments of reflection and contemplation while situated in a time and place.

Anne Lamott explains that “Books help us to understand who we are and how we are to behave. They show us what community and friendship mean; they show us how to live and die” (1995; via Mirra, 2018). In short, text and literature can be reflections of our lives and help us interpret the world. When ELA educators provide opportunities to critically inspect texts that bring students’ regional experiences to light, students start to explore their sociohistorical truths through reading, writing, and discussion. Through these intersections, students can draw connections to their lived and perceived experiences, relate to the characters within the texts, talk about differences, and create dialogue and personal voice. “Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading then becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books” (Bishop, 1990). Students begin to develop their personal and cultural identities which may ultimately connect them to their social and communal identities in deeper ways.

Freire explains that “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they* exist in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves”

(2018). Problem posing education offers students a “process of becoming” that situates students within their realities, physical or perceived, which they then can begin to challenge through dialogue and action. “A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as a historical reality susceptible of transformation” (Freire 2018). Within this context, we understand place as situated and situational for both students and educators.

Educator and scholar Noah Cho explains that “I [also] think it’s important that students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and students at other intersections see themselves in what they read. I do not want students to think they can’t be writers or engaged in literature simply because they don’t see themselves being portrayed in their coursework” (Cho, 2019, p. 195). Students can use literature as means to see the world. Literature can be a way for students to see themselves within the world; however, they need to be able to see themselves within the text as well. This connection affords an opportunity to investigate their learned experiences.

Jamila Lyiscott, Nicole Mirra, and Antero Garcia (2021) explain that “critically ‘reading the world’ (Freire & Macedo, 1987) means much more than critically exploring the content that is encountered via social media Rather, these platforms and their affordances...reinforces colonial, racialized power” (p. 3). When educators seek to connect literature to lived experiences by critically investigating text and when our students are afforded opportunities to be the purveyors of their own truths, they can start to think critically about their civic lives, not just in the classroom but in their homes and communities.

Piaget’s theory of cognitive development supports the notion that learners construct new understanding based on their learned experiences (Piaget, 1926; as cited in Torres & Ash, 2013, para. 3). Learners come into the classroom with knowledge based on their past including their

cultural backgrounds, social, political, and physical environments. Students come into the classroom with a set of tools that help them navigate the world around them. Each individual is different but connected (or disconnected) by their social and cultural lives. Understanding that students are unique, but part of a collective whole is an important discussion of place within the context of ELA education and place-based pedagogy. Educators must consider students' experiences as part of the set of tools, they bring to the classroom each day including the ways they engage with one another through civic dialogue in the context of ELA classrooms.

Regionality

By researching and reading regionally relevant texts students look for meaning and perspective within one's situatedness within their community and culture. It allows students to ask questions about their lived experiences while investigating how and why characters deliberately make choices within the text. It helps students to explore how we hold tension between realities and think critically and curiously about perceived worlds. Within this framework, students can explore, synthesize, and connect present issues with past events through writing and discussion.

As established, the tenets of critical witness and testimony (Dutro, 2019, p. 24), are "woven into the fabric of school literacies." Like Dutro (2019), I see ELA classrooms as an important pathway to civic dialogue. The TR-SCI principles help establish environments where these connections can occur; a trauma-reducing setting that focuses on the first three principles that 1) centers students, 2) recognizes that classrooms can be places that can cause trauma, 3) promotes civic dialogue. Principle 4 focuses on the consideration of students' sociohistorical experiences, and in this case through reading, analysis and discussion of regional literature.

Regional literature is a way to weave these experiences into ELA classrooms that are aligned with Dutro's tenets.

John Dewey explained that "The school is primarily a social institution," and "education . . . a social process" (1959, p. 22; as cited in Hayes, 2017, p. 76). Dewey (1959) supported that place-conscious types of "education could bring students out of the 'unconscious unity of social life so that they could analyze and understand the otherwise unseen forces shaping their experiences'" (p. 22; as cited in Hayes 2017, p. 76). Connections between place and experience are inseparable. How students are regionally situated is deeply rooted in their experiences (past and present). Understanding that location is both the situation and situated. Situated is defined, in this context, to *being* situated in a place-located. Situation is defined, in this context, as the experience- personal, social, political, cultural

Place-based pedagogy "is a theory of instruction that advocates situating schools and curriculums within their geographic, social, and cultural surroundings, as a means of improving both student learning and encouraging community sustainability" (Hayes, 2017, p. 75). When Barbara Comber reminds us that "'place' as culturally negotiated and as material (Sanchez, 2011) and to not take "space" for granted" (Comber, 2013 p. 370), she underscores the need for educators to "explicitly recognize that each school they work is located in a particular material place" (Thomson, 2002, p. 73; as cited in Comber, 2015, p. xviii). Comber (2015) also highlights that "Culturally inclusive curriculum and pedagogy attend to the embodied and situated nature of student's lives" (p.3).

David A. Gruenwald (2003) supports critical pedagogy of place that "ultimately encourages teachers and students to reinhabit their places, that is, to pursue the kind of social

action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future” (p. 7). Though more ecologically focused, this concept connects with Comber’s (2013) stance that “place is culturally negotiated” (p. 370), in that it defines critical pedagogy and place as an interwoven social construct in which students can understand their situatedness as an experience to critically inspect.

Considering this, regionally relevant text might help students create dialogue in which they can begin to investigate their material and communal place. When educators situate classrooms in regionally relevant texts, they help students see themselves critically within the text that are culturally inclusive and situated within their experiences. Once situated within trauma-reducing classrooms that reciprocate trusting environments that foster civic dialog, students can then discuss the points of connection and/or disconnection within the regionally relevant text. Reading and analyzing regionally relevant literature might allow students to ask rich questions about their lived experiences while investigating how and why characters deliberately make choices within the text. It may help students explore how we hold tension between realities and think critically and curiously about perceived worlds. Within the framework of regionality students can explore and synthesize present outcomes from past events and movements.

Literacy can be a force either for cultural reproduction, in which dominant discourses are reinscribed onto readers as passive objects or for cultural production, in which the readers become active subjects combing the texts for connections to their daily lives and experiences in order to forge individual and collective self-determination. (McLaren & Kincheloe, Morrell).

Investigating texts that are regionally relevant can help students move to civic dialogue because it situates them within their environments. This allows students multidimensional connections to personal and social truths. When situated within TR-SCI classrooms, students can

discuss the points of connection and/or disconnection within the regionally relevant text.

Offering regional texts as a catalyst toward deeper conversations about region, peoples, and histories creates civic dialogue rather than situating the author as all-knowing.

INTERSECTING TR-SCI AND REGIONAL LITERATURE

Ernest Morrell (2015) asked, “1) How do we get students excited about learning? 2) How do we develop students’ literal identities 3) How do we make reading instruction socially, culturally, and technologically relevant?” (p. 310). Though I focus on just one writer as an example here, student-centered instruction in TR-SCI helps students to develop literal identities by offering a variety of texts and topics and facilitating critical analysis through civic dialogue. By offering (regional) text variety, students have the opportunity to discover and to discuss this text in the safety of TR-SCI classrooms through civic dialogue. This supports literal identity. When educators offer multiple modalities from which to read, discover, and analyze, text also becomes technologically relevant.

Educators are the bridge to the past connecting generation to generation, story to story. When they are empathic and are respectful listeners of both student histories and futures, they can be the catalyst for change. Educators must be vulnerable enough to be examples. When educators are examples for their students, they can help students be examples for others. In this way, reciprocity is part of the learning process. “Each of us carries experiences across every threshold that impacts how we engage with the other bodies, the objects, and the stories around us” (Dutro, 2019, p. 2). Educators lean into these experiences, and listen across conflict toward civic dialogue. Dutro (2019) says “The hard stuff of life reverberates” (p. 1) and I agree. When teachers/leaders/role models exemplify the expression of their own experiences and the way they work through the hard stuff (Dutro, 2019) alongside their students, they move the classroom toward humility, compassion, and empathy. The way they exemplify listening in, the way they

engage in civic dialogue, and the way they engage with the four Rs, may help students feel self-actualized and respected.

If we take up a TR-SCI foundation and utilize regional literature, we create opportunities to invite students in. To listen in and to build trusting relationships. To sit with authors and experience place, their shared place, is important to build these trusting relationships. To shift their positionality and show up as fellow humans (empathy). All of this shifts the role of literature and the role of student. This also shifts the relationships between reader, writer, and self/writer by creating relationships with the reader and writer across time and space. As indicated throughout this piece, these shifts are important. Change in our public schools is necessary.

DOIG EXEMPLAR

If I have any creed that I wish you as readers, necessary accomplices in this flirtatious ceremony of writing and reading, will take with you from my pages, it'd be this belief of mine that writers of caliber can ground their work in specific land and lingo and yet be writing of that larger country: life.” (Ivan Doig, n.a.)

Throughout my research I have attempted to incorporate how Ivan Doig, a local writer, and Montana literary icon, might be a seminal voice for classroom discussions toward civic dialogue. I provide an example of a classroom application (see Appendix) for educators to explore (and improve) my Ivan discussions. Ivan is an example of how to *listen* through his examples in the archives that depict his careful research and documentation which also exemplifies writing-as-process. His situatedness within Montana through his text, depicts the hardships of the working class and the subjectification of the ruling class. In the Doig Exemplar, I provide a glimpse into some of my own experiences with Ivan.

I offer my exploration of Ivan Doig’s texts and archives as shared experiences to reach toward understanding my own personal and sociohistorical realities. My hope is that this is the start to many more conversations through exploring connections with regional literature, writing workshops, and collaboratives. The writing below is exploratory, purposefully raw to catch what inspirations and thoughts can come of Ivan’s work in a classroom workshop. I imagine that these “writing prompts” could become collaborative pieces, then possibly refined for future publication as an example of civic dialogue through regional literature. I start my dialogue with Ivan to exemplify this.

I am also interested in the *pressure points* that light up within my experience with researching Ivan’s non-fiction work and archives. These are humanizing points that can be fueled by great loss or tragedy often in solitude and silence. Recognizing these moments within our

writing and research experiences can allow for discussions. It also offers opportunity for discussion on whose experiences might or might not be represented and how this reflects erasure in the American West and in particular Montana. How can we inspect these moments with curiosity and understanding?

Kathleen Stewart describes pressure points as the affective moments that are “rooted not in fixed conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential...they can be seen as both the pressure points of events or banalities” (2007, p. 5). I see pressure points as moments of connection (or disconnection) through writing and the sharing of stories. Students can build connections and conversation through their regional experiences. This creates opportunity for reciprocity, discussion, and teaching moments. Offering students these moments to tune in to the feelings, emotions, and initial reactions of an experience while exploring regional texts, helps them find these pressure points and in turn seek to explore ways in which they can connect through conversations and writing with their peers; to listen-toward-understanding toward civic dialog.

Ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. They give circuits and flows the forms of a life. They can be experienced as a pleasure of a shock, as empty pause or a dragging undertow, as a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation...Rooted not in fixed conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential that a something coming together calls to mind and sets in motion, they can be seen as both the pressure points of events or banalities suffered... (Stewart, 2007, p. 2).

Throughout my letters to Ivan, I hope the reader can also touch upon these pressure points or at least see where I am attempting to highlight them within my own experiences. They are “lines of potential that a something coming together calls to mind” (Stewart, 2007, p. 2).

Ivan's work touches on the rawness of rurality, including access to information and goods, and silenced voices are reflected in Doig's work as part of his sociohistorical and regional experiences. How can students and community leaders use these examples to honor both the experience and hardships of the American Settler and well as the often-silenced stories of our American Indian communities? What does Ivan's work say about this land and place and the situatedness of its people?

Figure 1 illustrates the intersections between sociohistorical experiences, regional texts, TR-SCI classrooms, and civic dialogue. Though it is impossible to have perfect balance between these elements, intertwined they are reinforced by each other. I attempt to exemplify portions of each within my reading, research, and experiences with Ivan Doig texts and archives.

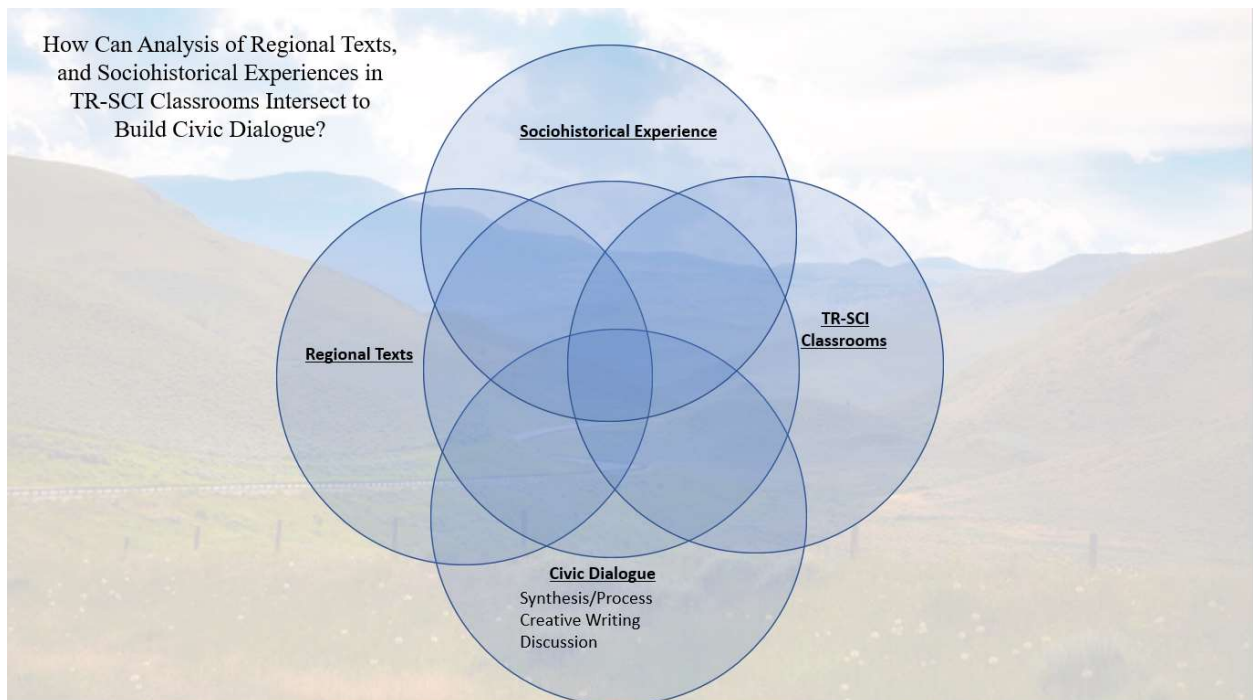


Figure 1 Intersecting Sociohistorical Experience, Regional Texts, TR-SCI Classrooms, and Civic Dialogue

The following letters, descriptions, and justifications are inspired by Ivan's text and archives and my research about Ivan. I try to intersect the elements in Table 1 in these letters but keeping in mind that I also wanted them to be in the moment and spontaneous. I think of them as civic dialogue with Ivan and myself and with you as the reader and wonder how they can be inspiration for other writers or expanded upon for future projects.

Letter 1

Letter 1 represents my resistance to engaging with another white male author in literature with whom I do not connect. But as I sat in the archives after having read *This House of Sky* (1980), I began to realize that I *could* see myself in Ivan's text, or if not myself, the generational parts of myself that have left their footprints on who I am.

Dear Ivan,

I didn't want to like you. I struggle and push against another cisgender white male telling our stories. Yet I resonate in the understanding that they are also my stories of the past that carry over into my stories of the present. Long strands of my generations will continue to carry out molecular remnants of our today which we're also caring out from our yesterdays, normalities of the past, reciprocated, regenerated, disseminating. There is a resonance in your work that throws effort into understanding. You understand that your voice is one that can be heard in the climate of heteronormativity, hegemony, and white supremacy and you try not to perpetuate that hierarchy of voices. You worked to listen in to the lives that you knew were hard, lives that held tangible meaning to your own histories and legacies of trauma. The burden of this white man here is not as a savior here, but as a megaphone to subjectification no matter how great one might fall short of actually doing right by it. This failure, however, is also a fail forward and forward to toward something. Your work is not a practice in bravado but an attempt at the opposite. Could I possibly call in an achievement toward humility on the grand spectrum of privilege? But I don't see privilege in your work, in your accounts of your family's struggles on the Western prairie. The Doigs and Ringers did not come from privilege and possibly found it only in the color of their skin.

In case you don't remember, Ivan, the Great Depression started early for Montanans, while the rest of the country was flourishing, Montanans were. Then in 1930, another drought, grasshopper swarms, plummeting copper, grain prices, and hot dry windstorms brought more despair to Montana workers, farmers, and homesteaders struggling (Montana Historical Society, p. 355). Life was not easy for the Ringers and Doigs. They were often surviving treacherous weather conditions, hunger, poverty, and illness. Yet I understand through your careful depiction of your family, that they (like so many others) had a nudging to keep going that is so much richer than 'grit'. I can relate to so many of these stories even sometimes when there's the slightest thread. Reading your memoirs and thumbing through old family photographs I see my own family. In times of struggle and in times of joy. I see my grandmother, the only girl in a family of 9. Her furled gaze, all of them perched outside their sharecropped shack. Hungry, poor, tired. I see her in later years, my grandparents together smiling, his Navy uniform still crisp. And though Ivan, you and I have different stories, there are threads of connection that help me understand your family's extraordinary struggles in our ordinary histories.

Montana still has homesteaders, farmers, ranch hands, sheep herders (though not nearly as many). Our rural communities have children whose grandparents went to the same school generation after generation. But these experiences are not just for those who connect with generational rurality because you dig into the humanity of so many of us. You do so by being vulnerable, humble, and empathic both to your characters and to your readers. You are meticulous about fact-checking having been a journalist and historian, and yet careful and sensitive to the ways in which you depict his characters (including himself). "I can pick out only two consistencies in that mad whirlwind of a summer: Carol perpetually taking photos to back up

my notecard descriptions of the places of the past and me perpetually going out of the apartment, tape recorder in hand and notebooks in pocket, like a door-to-door salesman. And the voices from the past began to form a summer chorus” (Doig Archives, Box 1, File 2602).

Thank you for listening, Ivan.

Best,

NjH

Letter 2

Letter 2 is about my trip to Ivan's birthday party in Dupuyer, MT. It depicts my "experience text" with settling building relationship with Ivan. It serves as a marker for my situatedness in a time and place in connection with Ivan. I was trying to simply be an observer but found myself as a participant. It touches on push back of Civic Empathy (even without the "critical" part) from a community member whose views might also reflect the views of others. It reflects the care and kindness I found in that little weekend town of Dupuyer.

Dear Ivan,

It's around noon on a sunny June Saturday in 2021. The sky is clear for the first time in months it seems. Snowmelt has left the rolling hills toward the Glaciers a perfect green, a breeze pushes the fine wheatgrass to a bow as my Hyundai Elantra purrs and banks as I downshift around another narrow foothill country road. I'm driving to a place you resided as a boy called Dupuyer for your birthday celebration, it's been about 6 years since you passed away. I'm listening to the abridged version of your autobiography *This House of Sky* narrated by you. I round a hill at the very moment that he begins to describe the valley that sets out against the sky just beyond Choteau, and those rolling hills that give way to rocky farmland toward the jagged teeth of the Glaciers. I feel split in two; in my little car on this windy mountain road in June 2021 and propelled back in time to a world whose legacies still hold purchase to this brutal land. Regardless of which reality I chose, I am here to listen in. To root myself into your world. To understand the romance, the connectedness, and passion that you held to this place and how I reach to connect with you now.

It is otherworldly. This perfect day in June. Your birthday is sandwiched between my daughters and my father's birthday. I better not forget to call my mother, Ivan. She'll be disappointed if I don't try to reach my dad on his birthday. She'll prop the phone to his ear and she might take a snapshot. Him smiling with that look on his face. Confusion and joy is the only way to describe it. The look of a baby just discovering the world. And then out of the blue he'll say something brilliant as if culled from the depths of his brain. Circuits cut disconnected and reconnected in ways no one understands. Was it the first stroke? The second? The third? That fused them in this way. Moments of perfect clarity mixed with moments of perfect baby bliss. He'll turn 75 tomorrow. You were 75 when you left this world. It's another rabbit hole I want to follow, Ivan, your slow decline, your commitment to documenting. A thing I imagine kept you alive just as much it honored your fading from this world.

Montana has its share of celebratory seasonal events. Every town from Broadus to Cutbank has a rodeo, a festival, a fair, or a small ski area in which the state coined a "hidden gem" in hopes that the name would attract more tourism (after all it is the treasure state). The American Legion Rodeo in Augusta in June is one of those events. I slow-roll through the main road that leads me past the tiny shops I imagine bank on this sort of weekend. Little red, white and blue flags shaped like pinwheels spin perfectly in the breeze. Trucks line the road on either side and men are already spilling out of the bar. There was a time I'd be surprised by this but since then, I've been there and know that a quick nap in the hotel room and a shot of whiskey will get them back on their toes in time for the bronc riding at 4p, you would know this too. Dupuyer rounds the corner. A sandwich board sign reads "Hard Ice Cream", a flag hangs outside the open door to the only bar/restaurant/hotel in town. I'm nervous. Legs shaky from the 3-hour

drive, all the sudden I feel very alone and out of place. I never know how to enter a place. Which door is it? Am I walking into some private party? I find my way and get the usual stares from the locals. I try to make myself look comfortable, slide up the to counter, and find my hotel concierge and waitress. Room isn't ready yet so I order a red beer and bean soup and set out to find the General Store that Mary had offered to sell me within a 20-minute introductory conversation- in which she also told me not to bring my dog because of the grizzlies- and I don't think she meant the ones from the University of Montana. She told me that even the "experts"



Dupuyer, Mt June 2021

Figure 2 Dupuyer downtown. Hotel and restaurant on the right. "Hard Ice Cream" sign in front

were having a problem with them lately, that the ranger was still recovering from his attack. I didn't need convincing. I think about

the polar bears in the arctic world and how they're becoming more and more dependent on the food sources of the surrounding human communities. I wonder though, if it's always been a thing. I don't recall too many grizzly encounters in Sky or anything else I've read. Too fantastical and over dramatic for you perhaps. Your birthday celebration in Dupuyer feels like the opposite of the Augusta rodeo. Dupuyer is quiet, small, and sleepy. I meet Mary's sister who also runs the sheep herd that makes the wool that they sell in the General Store. It also sells

vintage and antique items, candy bars, used and new books, some vintage clothing, and little wooden nic nacs that I may have heard someone's husband made but can't be sure.

Dupuyer takes its name from Dupuyer Creek, which borders the town. The Blackfeet called the creek Osaks itukai, "Back fat" (referring to buffalo; a delicacy). When French Canadian trappers came through the area, they translated it as Depouille, meaning "hide".

I read on a little laminated sheet of paper posted with a tack on a bookshelf. I want to buy something but I'm out of cash and I can't quite decide if there's anything worth it except the used copy Joy Harjo's book "Crazy Brave". I pick it up off the shelf and put it down again. I leave with a used Mary Englebright mug for three dollars that I think my mom would like but I will never actually send it.

The celebration is in the town hall. 10-15 rows of metal folding chairs. Gingham tablecloths a sheet cake with a superimposed picture of you. Carol and Marcella and the rest of the guests are cordial and gentle. Many of them joke about how they're aging when they get up to speak. Mary tells me that you used to babysit her when she was a girl. I think about what else you might have been put up to- the Adult that it seemed you were, even as a child. Older than your years, like my daughter who I've taken to calling Abuela. Wise and regimented but still 17.

A refurbished covered wagon used for sleeping, cooking, eating, perhaps some card playing, black and whites on tablecloth covered card tables, and a quilt collaboration with so many inspired characters of yours. I'm introduced to the crowd, and I feel like an imposter but when I say I'm here to research "Ivan and to bridge connections to Civic Empathy", Carol jumps up and yells "Yay! Civic Empathy!", and I am reassured that I'm in the right place. At intermission, a tall well-dressed woman approached me. Her blue eyes are intensely fixed, they seem to look through me as she approached. I'm flying high in my total acceptable from Carol.

The woman's dark hair drapes over her shoulders like a shawl. She is beautiful and ageless, I think. She says she want to talk to me about civic empathy. She says that she thinks the world has gotten off track with its priorities. I heartily agree. But she doesn't react. There is more she has to say staring through me. By the time I realize that she is not here to have a conversation but to tell me something, I can already feel my legs get heavy, my heart starts to thump. Everything goes quiet. I realize I'm in this moment. One I had anticipated yet did not prepare for. I bring myself back to listening. Trying to be present. Trying to do the thing that I've been talking so much about. To listen in. I do so just in time to hear her say "If people want to teach civic empathy, they should be posting the Ten Commandments on their walls". I draw in a breath. Prepare myself to test this moment toward my own civic understanding of her reality. But the moment doesn't come. Mary pulls me away. I think she knows the woman. Knows her stance. Your birthday intermission, cake, and ice cream was not the time nor place apparently.

Back at my seat I can feel the flush of my face. I'm removed somehow from the present. Left in that moment yet knowing I have to let it resonate. Confrontation will not fix the thing and that's exactly what I am scratching at. Where do we find moments of understanding other perspectives, of constructive civic dialogue? The problem seems so much bigger than my little answer. Listening toward understanding and civic dialogue- just words in an ocean of words. Idealistic and trite. I feel like a child, my bubble bursts. Before I leave Mary hands me the Joy Harjo book and hugs me goodbye.

Thank you for listening, Ivan.

Best,

NjH

Letter 3

In Letter 3, I work to build a connection between an excerpt of text from *This House of Sky*. In this excerpt, Ivan has decided to move from Montana to go to college. I'm building a relationship to the text and finding places where I explore my own truths. Though I had already read the book, I only took about 30 seconds to find a passage that spoke to me. I read it, let it resonate, and then began to write. Only minor editing was done for clarity and accuracy, I've purposefully kept it in its raw form to exemplify my train of thought free writing. I ended this letter with two reflective questions: How does positioning oneself in the moment help to create and share experience? How might sharing and collaborating further draw connections?

Dear Ivan,

I am drawn to one of your experts from *This House of Sky*. It calls upon me to reach back when I first moved to Montana with my tiny new family in tow. How we were leaving a somewhere and a something and family to become something somewhere else. As you recall, this is the part about your leaving Montana for an education and adventure somewhere else. How you too, had to pick up and leave in order to find yourself. I can sense your resistance here. Almost like you're trying to justify it and the tension you hold between your past, present and future. Forgive my tugging at that same line in order to reach back to a moment when I was also in three places but having already left and yet not completely to where I would reside. It also speaks to the pushing against our family's lines in order to find our own. It reflects my own pushing as well as my daughter's.

Even beyond the two of them, there were decades of effort of the other Doigs and Ringers, a weight of striving in these Montana hills and valleys and prairies which added up to the single great monument my family line would ever have. For me to go from this

would be a reverse trek, in a sense, from immigration which had borne my people into the high-mountain West. Yet they had sprung themselves free of the past when they felt they had to, and that was my own urge (This House of Sky, 1980, p. 236)

It's colder than I expected when I step out of the terminal. The air inside was heavy and hot and generally that's how I feel. Baby attached to me like a manufactured marsupial. She's irritated from the long hours on the plane and arching her back to move away from me but we're attached. To move her from the pouch now would only mean promises of a freedom we could not afford at the moment. There must be time for resilience now. Rental car, car seat, drive. It's dark and we don't know how to get where we're going. It's just the three of us. My husband, my attached infant, and I. We're disheveled and anxious for a landing. The sign says Yellowstone International Airport and it's romantic and terrifying. Too much heat for such a cold evening. We have no home anymore. We are gypsies (for me once again). I thrive in change but not in the unknown. We had built a tiny life with a garden in the wilderness. The mountain lioness and I living out our feral reproductive lives just windowpanes away. At night I could hear her screaming that sounded human. Part of me hoped it was, the other part not. I was safe inside, however. I wonder how long the cougar gestation period might be. The same as a human (it's mostly true for bovine species). And here I am, a kangaroo today. My little joey, aching for independence but there is no field to roam. Only the confinement of travel, destination somewhat known, a home to be determined. So fascinating how the unknown becomes the past so quickly. How the invisibility of it all either dissipates or becomes just a story or artifact in the hidden archives of our histories. I guess that's why the documentation. The constant picture taking, logging, and solidifying truths. To tell our stories so no one else can interpret them for us. What will they say then of me- a purposeful gypsy now turned maternal? Thrusting this little pack into

the forever further nothingness. Purposefully away from a divided family, purposefully away from the known unknown. The rental car smells of secrets and brake fluid. The tiny one fed up. The two of us adults live in (comfortable?) silence, situated as we are. We only speak in short sentences to navigate toward our landing. Are we in fact spring ourselves free of the past or simply running? I began to think of the tiny human we created and her springing. It settles inside me like a log (isn't that what they say). Her arching away and away. Each milestone is another step toward independence. And isn't that my job? To grow this little sapling into something whose roots take purchase. She writhes in her appropriately installed car seat, I in mine. We're both itching to be free.

Thank you for listening Ivan.

Best,

NjH

Letter 4

Ivan's archives offer a particular window into the process of a writer. Not only are his works an offering to the meticulous care Ivan took to be accurate in his depiction of character and place, but he went to great extents to document his process. A budding writer can reach into the archives and find Ivan's recorded interviews, notecards, diaries, journals, notes, and multiple manuscripts for each of his books. Though there are many archives that offer some of the documents from an author's writing process, none might be as in depth and extensive as Ivan's.

A researcher can follow Ivan's process from the very beginnings of notecards taken from conversations he's had or eavesdropped upon like the notes from his listening in on the "geezer's tables" (Doig Archives) in diners or an interview he recorded with his grandmother and follow it to the publishing of one of his memoirs or novels. So often young writers believe that authors create perfect works from a moment of divine intervention or believe that some authors are simply gifted but though that might be true for some, Ivan's collection shows so clearly how writing is so much about dedication and process and less about sheer talent. It is important for students, researchers, educators to lean into this concept in order to grasp the complexity in the process of writing.

I wrote the Letter 4 about process within the archives. Ivan's archives are rich with evidence of his writing process. I connect my writing process with Ivan's writing process and infer what he might say to me if I were his apprentice. This is a free-write, train of thought piece purposefully kept raw. Ivan's examples of his writing process is promising to young writers. The layers and layers of notes, revisions, and rewrites are parts students don't often see.

Letter 4:

Dear Ivan,

You are an intentional listener and observer. I see this even in your reflections of your younger self. As a child they may have called you an old soul, like my daughter whom I call Abuela because she is much older than her age and who also is a listener. She always wants to sit at the table with the adults because she wants to listen to us banter- her version of your Geezer's Table. She is interested and curious about the seemingly elusive world of adulthood. I wonder if your ability to listen in comes from so many nights you spent as a boy in the bar in White Sulfur Springs. They say that some of us have heightened mirror neurons because of how we learned to navigate the world as children. Whether children of alcoholics or narcissists, like myself, or just because we had to grow up too fast- to be adults too young. They say that privilege erodes empathy, which would also mean that under-privilege can build empathy. Abuela has been through a lot, watching her mother go through an abusive relationship, having to be the woman of the house when at her dad's, helping to raise her younger sister, struggling alongside the adults in her life, in some ways having to be the adult when her ADHD mother scatters her life along the walls and floors. Does adversity lead to strength; something greater than grit? And does it also lead us to be more sensitive to the needs of others while neglecting ourselves—because that's what we learned to do?

I feel like your part-time apprentice, Ivan. But instead of me living on location, close to you, you are living with me; pieces of you resting on my bookshelves, floors and countertops. You're on my mind and in my home. I consistently find ways in which you infiltrate my thoughts and investigations into critical theories and pedagogies. Especially because you have experienced the hardships and glory of Montana's harshness and beauty, your familial histories struggled alongside so many other working-class families. Always a struggle, sometimes a reward.

But you were much more meticulous and more organized than I. I wonder which one of you did the organizing and categorizing. Was it you, or Carol, or both of you that was so dedicated to documentation? Did Carol sweep your splatterings and rantings off the floor and revive them to create a unified piece? Today I'm struggling with my own process. I have a mixture of feelings that range from frustration to shame, to general depression about the things that I have created. I'm wanting a more solid stance on this body of work. In the past I've accurately named this conglomeration of ideas The Octopus because of its ability to take so many shapes.

I am both mad at myself and proud of doing the work. You have generously shown your own meanderings and tangents and yet have come out the other end seemingly flawless in your selections of words, phrases, and thoughts that offer the reader a clear and felt experience within your texts. Again, I wonder whose clarity sought those important moments in your first drafts. Who helped you decide on the darlings? Was it you that knew what to be kept and what discarded or was it Carol's clever eye toward what mattered, that helped keep your intentions clear? Did you ever defend a darling so passionately that it caused an argument?

I know that my work is also process and I have to be vulnerable enough to let my wonderings bleed upon the page and brave enough to allow the criticism that might come with it (otherwise they're eventually merely rantings from a dead old lady that some future grandchild stumbles upon in some dark and dank closet). Also, otherwise, I scrap up the whole mess and never attain my degree. It's always pushing forward and stepping backward. Where did I write that perfect this or that which supported the-thing-I'm-trying-to-say now.

I see you lean back in your chair, rest your elbows on the arms, clasp your hands together. Many have asked you these same questions over the years, I'm sure of it. You're listening to my frustrations, my doubt. You know that this is part of the process. The sickness in the gut that makes us writers, that shows we care.

Thank you for listening, Ivan.

Best,

NjH

Letter 5

In Letter 5 I wrestle with some of the ideas communicated throughout this paper: a polarized and polarizing society and how to build equity in schools. I'm making connections between my growing relationship with Ivan. I take an inquisitory stance here, wondering about the divisions of the working class and the ruling class while also interjecting my personal stance and experience. It contains my brainstorming on future projects and some commentary on turning away to listening in.

In many of Ivan's books, his characters fight against and sometimes fall victim to the "cowboy up" mentality. The ages old trope that "Men aren't supposed to cry". I see Ivan struggling with this in some of his diaries ([site Archive notebook here](#)), and yet there is a way he overcomes this urge at times. I see his vulnerability here. Not something that is consistent, but it comes in waves; the urge to turn away, the inability to turn away, the settling in grief, and then the turning away, repeat. One of the first instances of this occurs at the beginning of *This House of Sky* when Ivan's mother has just passed away.

The remembering begins out of that new silence. Though the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all (Doig, 1980, p. 1).

Here Ivan deals with the memory of his mother's death and describing the urge to not feel into the memory of it and yet he resists that urge and begins his story. Later in the story Ivan explains how father was in deep sadness for a long time over the death of his mother. And once was mad for years at a man who told him not to get too upset about "that sort of thing". "I was with him when he met a man in the street, backed away and stared the stranger out of sight in wordless hatred. The man had worked at the ranch where my mother died, and a few days after

her death told Dad bluffly: *Hell Charlie, you got to forget her...Don't let a thing like this count too much*" (Doig, 1980, p. 17).

Turning away or "not letting a thing like this count too much" can be a normality within out western discourse. But this wasn't the sentiment of Ivan's father. In this we see the listening in in multiple ways. That Charlie was rightly mourning the loss of his wife, that he was openly mad at someone who told him not to, and that he wasn't hiding it from his son. Perhaps this vulnerability is what allows Ivan to write through such things with an immense amount of empathy and love.

During a reflection his father makes about the couple's first summer herding sheep in the Bridger Range, Ivan writes his father's words, "Your mother...The pair of words would break him then, and fool that I could be, I would look aside from his struggling face." (1980, p. 5). Ivan then talks about his own struggle in later years, "In these afteryears, it is my turn for the struggle inside the eyes and along the drop of the throat, for I have the album pages of those campsites along the ridgelines and the swale meadows of their first summer mountain" (1980, p. 5). These moments of turning away, resisting the urge to, and feeling into the moment are humanizing moments. Moments where the reader can explore the rawness of emotions and allow myself to be vulnerable. Ivan displays this struggle and I mourn with him. I can see the pictures of his parents in the archives, appreciate the newness of their lives then, see the world that lies in front of them and yet I still know how their story ends. They are extraordinary relics of an ordinary past. These are examples of the humanizing and humble way that Ivan engages with the reader. Through this struggle turning away to listening in, readers can empathize with Ivan because of its

thick description, and because so many of us have experienced this phenomenon in our own lives, everyone experiences loss.

This way of turning away and listening in is felt in our Western American culture, Montana possibly more, especially during the grueling 1920's through 1950's while Ivan and his parents were young. This is especially true for the impoverished, the American Indians, the minorities, the migrant workers, the sharecroppers, and the immigrants. Doig's family was so many of these, and so were many of the families who moved west with the promise of better lives. *Heart Earth* touches on the "Western Civil War of Incorporation" (2016, p. 159), that "in the West, the incorporation trend resulted in what should at last be recognized as a civil war across the entire expanse of the West—one fought in many places and on many fronts in almost all the Western territories and states from 1860 and beyond" (Maxwell Brown, *Richard No Duty to Retreat*; as cited in Doig, 2016). Ivan's stance on the western corporation trend pushed the small farmers and businessmen out of the West. Corporations made it harder for independent farmers to maintain their crops, purchase affordable land and supplies, and find quality products.

Letter 5:

Dear Ivan,

I'm starting to enjoy this way of writing letters to you. I think I shall call it "Box 1: Letters to Ivan". I wonder if this is a project that can be shared. No one writes letters anymore. Not like they used to. Emails are too easy and mostly only briefings. During the holidays I get typed out copies of a generic letter updating me on general family matters that I would already know about if I have had any conversation with the person within the year. Usually, a family picture is included, everyone looking normalized and artificial. I especially like the ones where

everyone is dressed in matching white shirts and blue jeans. The boys with their hands in their pockets, girls with hands on their hips. I imagine the chaos that might have ensued before the gathering for the picture. There was most definitely crying. Whether it was mom trying to brush out the wild and tangled hair of her daughter, brush getting stuck in the rat's nest, the next thing you know one of them is crying. Seriously, it happens more than you know.

Somehow, it's a trigger for me so I refuse to brush my daughters' hair unless they explicitly ask otherwise, one of us is crying for sure. Maybe because I feel bad about the pulling, and it brings me back to when my mother would brush my mass of tangled locks. It felt like an act of violence. Like my whole self was being detangled, tamed and I didn't want to be. I wanted to be in the forest and fields, my little pack of dogs following me from adventure to adventure, finding a snake here, a rabbit's nest there, collecting tadpoles in the creek. Once I found thousands of baby toads and carried them home in the folds of my jeans. I imagine my mother's face when she found their little carcasses in the laundry hamper. There were few survivors.

So back to the pictures, Ivan. There's this weirdness about those pictures. How somehow our American family photographs have progressed (I'd suggest, regressed) into these artificial facades. When did people start smiling in pictures? It seems it started about the time that cars became commonplace. Both our families have those pictures. Young faces (usually) smiling, a row of young twenty-somethings or parents and kids, Mary janes, A-line skirts, hair pressed and curled, blue jeans, and cotton button-ups. All of them leaning up against a shiny Ford. But they're not plasticized like family photographs are now.

I was going through your photo album the other day. It sounds intrusive, I know. But you let me. It's all there like your attic was poured out on the second floor of the library at MSU. All

you have to do is schedule an appointment or go online. Your history is documented in snapshot fragments, suspended in time, traveling through time. It's your story. Not the generalized generic stories in our history books. Always narrowed to a single story. The view that the ruling class sees suited to whitewash. But our personal histories are not always situated in time and place, always situated within our relationships with others. I think you knew that. I think you knew that the idealized version of the American West was a fable. But you also saw romance in everything. The rust on the bindings of an old hay trailer, the decay on the bones of an old barn, the smell of old manure mixed with fresh feed. These were your versions of "ideal". The ugly truth beautifully laid out in the way time, weather, and good use could do.

I wonder what you thought of those holiday generic flyers from family members you don't talk to. Not the ones in Ringling or WSS but the distant ones. A distant uncle's grandchildren. Somehow, they have you on their mailing list and just print out the same old labels year after year. Carol posts them on the refrigerator. You notice while grabbing tea from that Tupperware pitcher you've had for years. You smile at it, think it's cute because you're supposed to. Our learned behavior to think that that clean little family, color-coordinated, is supposed to say something about the progression of family lineage about how far they've come. And it's not like you want to scowl at it or it's disturbing but there's also an unsettledness about it. Something that makes you a little uncomfortable and disconnected from it. You don't have that kind of legacy, yours takes a different shape.

I think mostly you think of the silliness of that family flyer. How it represents a life you have never had (nor wanted). It has that upper-middle-class aroma to it. Suburban, tacky-tack house, both parents made the "good" safe choices for their college majors. Accounting and

economics for one, nursing for the other. They both work long hours to keep up with the mortgage, the car payment, daycare, lawn maintenance, saving for that weeklong vacation to Hawaii with the kids once a year but the fence needs to be replaced and so maybe next year for Hawaii. They believe in the American dream but wonder why it's making them so unhappy and tired.

I see you scratching at that thing that keeps resurfacing in your dialogue with me. It's about the corporations and the ruling class and how the working class struggles while the wealthy and empowered continue to take. You think that the working-class story never gets to be told. Not in a way that's real. They like to keep things distant from the connected realities of the working class, the immigrants, the migrants, the people of color. That way we'll all keep busy fighting for the scraps while the big cats take all the good parts. The American dream played out over and over again and wool just keeps getting pulled.

It seems to be getting worse now, Ivan but I'm sure you saw it coming. You and Carol talking on the porch about the state of the world. You're wrapped in a blanket plain and woolen of course. She helped you outside to get some fresh air. You've become weaker and weaker and hardly eat these days but you still like your iced tea, even better when Carol plops in that little wedge of lemon. She reads you the headlines in the newspaper, you shake your head and you both sigh. It's late 2014 and there's already talk of the coming election in '16. You wonder who'll proceed, Obama, what will come next. You shift in the lodgepole rocker, back's hurting again. Carol tucks a lumbar pillow behind you so you're not so curved. The list of medications for pain, for nausea, for headaches, and stomachaches continues to grow. They'll call it polyneuropathy due to the drugs and give you more drugs for that. You scoff and shake your

head but take them anyway. Carol seems more nurse these days than all the other things she is to you, partner, friend, first-chair editor, researcher (along with Marcella), cook, accountant, archiver. You'll have surgery early next year to fix your fractured vertebrae. Carol will start the cranberry relish for Thanksgiving while you send another email to your doctor regarding your back pain and constipation.

Carol liked my research into Critical Civic Empathy (CCE), a thing a woman named Nicole Mirra wrote a book about. When I went to Dupuyer for your birthday I had to take off the "critical" part because eyebrows and hackles have been raised over this thing called Critical Race Theory which originally started as a pedagogical movement to tell the working-class stories- of racism and erasure- as part of our nation's history but things got out of control and now "critical" anything is under speculation. CCE is a lens that helps humanize and liberate our classrooms by helping students to see the sociohistorical experiences of their everyday lives. It focuses on moving to understand others' perspectives and trying to situation oneself into that perspective toward understanding. There are a couple of key elements, listening across conflict and civic dialog. I have included a roadmap and an infographic along with some more formal literature on it if you are interested.

These connected experiences are the things that I'm scratching at. Really digging into why we think the things we do, why we have biases, implicit and explicit, that have been trained into us and how it seems to become easier and easier to only see it one way. Why is that so and where did that information come from and why? When I was reading *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, you remember, the one about the two brothers taking a chance on America. The two brothers were given or purchased a brochure of America that had promised "free and undisturbed" land

for the taking. I looked up the brochure you most likely referenced, it looked like a perfect opportunity for those who wanted to resist colonialist rule. But that brochure didn't account for the erasure and genocide of millions.

The heartbreak of the love story of Montana reverberates. A woman named Elizabeth Dutro who is writing about how English Language Arts (ELA) can help reduce trauma in schools through exemplifying vulnerability and establishing reciprocal trust, say the hard stuff always does. Sounds of trauma, loss, objectification, and oppression resounding down the halls and into the classroom. So many of us struggle here. Those of us who live in the margins. The ones that set us apart from the middle class (whatever fable that is) and the ruling class. Those of us who work 5 or 6 jobs to pay the exorbitant rent, food prices, and daycare. So juxtaposed to the trust funders and dot-commers that bring the ridiculous prices with them from the coasts and cities of America's prominent ruling class. Our legacies of trauma packed in trash bags, or duffle bags, or Luis Vinton. I prefer to carry a backpack.

I wonder how these conversations can carry to our young writers. I'm positive you set it up this way on purpose. You opened up your life like all those books you've read and written over the years. Exposing yourself to criticism and scrutiny but also so that others could pick up where you left off. I imagine that our situatedness in our environments, our experiences here, is part of the reason why you and Carol chose MSU Bozeman as the final resting place for your archives. Yet they're not dead but still living. In the potential they have to be rediscovered like you discovered and become enveloped in the life and writings of your friend (Swan) from centuries ago in a dark archive at Washington state. Is it there you set your intentions to do this

for me? To reach from some distant yet familiar land and touch upon the very pulse of existence and legacy.

How should we go about cross sectioning these human experiences that go beyond our overgeneralized American history? You've mapped out where the treasures are and I'm trying to follow it. X marks the spot where we find the places where our stories intersect. Treasures buried deep within the hard dirt of the dry and rocky summer soils of Montana's high prairies, where wildflowers grow in colorful multitudes, surviving quietly, resiliently under feet of winter snow. Your work here supersedes mine and this is where I find possibilities for intersection. For ways young writers can hash out their own experience on the page to find you and to weave their situatedness into ours. I thank you for this and hope that you will receive many other thank you letters reaching out from our regional histories and futures.

Thank you for listening, Ivan.

Best,

NjH

End Note for Letters

Ivan's work provides beautiful insight and context that opened the door to a variety of topics for me such as place, experience, and process. His archives can offer students rich opportunity for research into multiple topics and interests and can create windows into the writing process through his archives. I have appreciated my experiences within Ivan's texts and archives and hope to continue that adventure onward. My ultimate hope is that someday communities and schools can use collaboratives to create something of a history book, sharing the true sociohistorical histories of the American West that are inclusive and multidimensional through regional literature.

CONCLUSION

As I wrap up this paper in April 2022, I am sitting on the third floor that the MSU library, the Ivan Doig archives directly below me on the second floor. I am compelled to think back to that time two short years ago when so much seemed to have been bubbling to the surface. I'd like to say that it's different today. That the world has beat a pandemic. That education systems are working toward equity and toward an understanding that colonialist belief systems are antiquated and traumatizing for our students. I'd like to say that the national and local discourse acknowledges the destructiveness of turning away from differences and have begun to listening in. But Montana recently passed legislation preventing the word "equity" in the teacher code of ethics due to concerns that it promoted a political agenda. Texas is threatening to pull tenure from professors who teach Critical Race Theory, and we are still in the midst of a pandemic.

What I can say is that this paper highlights so many scholars and educators that are still trying to figure out how to make our schools less traumatizing, to connect to students in holistic and meaningful ways of learning, and to move toward equitable practices that are respectful, responsible, relatable, and reciprocal. I stand alongside these scholars and continue to explore ways to bridge the gaps that seem, right now, to be ever polarizing.

I hope that my web of connections on blue and yellow sticky notes on my wall continues to grow (my daughters can continue to roll their eyes), that my research is allowed to move to qualitative research in communities and schools, my *Dear Ivan* letters form a collective that begins to fill the gaps in our sociohistorical histories, and that my single story (Adichie, 2019) becomes a multitude of voices. Ivan and I still have a long way to go together.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Classroom Application Exemplar:

Theme:

Multimodal/Multifaceted Voices in Regional Spaces-Montana's History of Land, Sky and People

Grade Level: 11/12

Lens- Reader Response Theory

Rationale for the full-text set:

The purpose of this text set is to meet Montana's common core standards ([RL.11-12.1](#) through [RL.11-12.7](#) particularly) through (critical) Reader Response lenses. The multimodal text sets (Lupo et.al) build interest and shape landscape and character for the target text *Whistling Season* by Ivan Doig. This text along with its archives located at Montana State University, Bozeman is important to Montana's secondary students for two main reasons. First, *The Whistling Season* offers students a chance to further explore Montana's rich literary history while drawing connections through themes and topics such as historical context (both through the novel and author's timeline), land, coming of age, school/education, identity, morality, gender, place, and the absence of voices. Second, the Ivan Doig archives offer deeper insight into the author's writing processes, motivations, personal history, and research practices. Visual, Informational, and Accessible text offer deeper insight into time and place the potential for rich discussion into racial and cultural voids within the target text.

Texts:

Note: The text set portion is heavily loaded to provide students the opportunity to pull in their interests and connections to the Target Texts. The intention is to kindle or re-kindle a passion and curiosity for knowledge and reading.

- Offer Book Talks (Kittle) and *Ruining History* Reports (a PG version of BuzzFeed's Ruining History series), and mock Middle Ground panels (like YouTube's MiddleGround series) from students within the context or themes of *Whistling Season*.

Target text: *The Whistling Season* by Ivan Doig

Visual text:

- The Big Burn (Themes: Land, Region, Racism, Perseverance, Historical)
- A Good Day to Die (Native American Experience)
- Online Interviews with Ivan Doig (Ivan Doig experience for New Historicism/Historicism)
- [The Danger of a Single Story](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Perspectives)
- Slideshows w/Videos

Experience Text (Options):

Note: In an ideal world (post-covid, plenty of time and money), students could explore some of Montana's historical sites to *experience* place. The places listed below can be reached and visited within a school day if in Gallatin County. This would have to be modified county by county. Focus on Chinese American Immigrants and Native American experience.

- MSU Library Archives (Librarians can showcase artifacts from Doig's archives etc).
- One Room Schoolhouse Bridger Canyon (or other).
- [Boarding School/Orphanage in Twin Bridges](#) Good one for student research. Who were its inhabitants? Why?
- Virginia City or Bannack, Mt (Ghost towns)
- Headwaters Three Forks, Mt (Site of ancient Native American paintings, settler grave site)
- Butte-Oldest Chinese restaurant in the U.S.
- Marias Massacre site
- Dupuyer

Informational texts (Jigsaw Options):

- *Dispossessing the Wilderness: The Preservationist Ideal, Indian Removal, and National Parks*
- *The Big Burn* (Historical, some racial context, land, sky, place)
- *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* (Indigenous Voices)
- Ivan Doig Archives-Journals from *Whistling Season*
- [Marias Massacre](#), or Bear River Massacre, (Regional-Marias Coulee in Doig's fiction *Whistling Season*)
- *This House of Sky-Chapter* (Autobiography of Ivan Doig)
- *All the Real Indians Died Off and 20 Other Myths About Native Americans-Chapter*
- *How the Morning and Evening Stars Came to Be-Excerpt* (Indigenous Voices)

Accessible texts (Jigsaw Options):

- Night Flying Woman (Indigenous Voices)
- My Side of the Mountain (Wilderness, survival, coming of age)
- Lasso the Wind (Chapters 9-11)
- Wild Montana.org (Resource starter)
- Breaking Clean (Memoir, Montana)
- The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee (Ingenious voices, MMA (Mixed Martial Arts), personal narrative)
- Montana The Magazine of Western History
- Copper Camp (Regional voices)
- Native American Boarding School Experiences in Memoirs and Fiction
- Fools Crow (James Welsh -Blackfoot and Jim Friend of Doig)
- Other-Students can suggest related reading and approve them through instructor

Salient Critical Lens:

(Critical) Reader Response: Though Reader Response Theory can get a bad rap for its potential to become too lackadaisical or might seem to ‘come apart at the seams’ when it comes to Literary Theory and Criticism, it holds great potential to grab the readers’ interest. Students can draw connections or disconnections to their lived and/or perceived experiences, relate to the characters in *Whistling Season*, and create discourse and personal voice around the experiences that are void within the text or cultural histories within the text or the situated author (am I back to New Historicism here!?). This is where the instructor and student work to find connections in a whole class read text instead of independent reading. This is how the student (or group of students) then work to find discourse, evidence, and related research and share these perspectives with the class.

Reader Response Theory is a relevant lens for *Whistling Season* as it combines critical thinking and student autonomy. Reader Response Theory requires the reader to look inward for meaning and perspective. It allows students to ask rich questions about their lived experiences while investigating how and why Doig and his characters deliberately make choices within the

text. It helps students to explore how we hold tension between realities and think critically and curiously about perceived worlds. Within this framework and timeline, students can explore and synthesize present outcomes from past events and movements such as Manifest Destiny, The White Man's Burden, Westward Expansion, Dawes Act, Gilded Age, etc.

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