

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTUAL COHERENCE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
INTERPRETATION IN TENTH GRADE LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS**

by

Vivian Mihalakis

BA, Allegheny College, 1992

MA in Education, Lehigh University, 1994

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
School of Education in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2010

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This dissertation was presented  
by

Vivian Mihalakis

It was defended on

June 16, 2010

and approved by

Jean Ferguson Carr, Associate Professor, Department of English

Anthony Petrosky, Professor, Departments of Instruction and Learning and English

Amanda Thein, Assistant Professor, Department of Instruction and Learning

Dissertation Advisor: Amanda Godley, Associate Professor, Department of Instruction and  
Learning

Copyright © by Vivian Mihalakis

2010

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTUAL COHERENCE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
INTERPRETATION IN TENTH GRADE LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS**

Vivian Mihalakis, Ph.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 2010

This dissertation reports on a study of the four most widely-used 10<sup>th</sup> grade literature textbooks in terms of the opportunities they provide for students to engage in coherent English language arts curricular units in which the texts, questions, and tasks provide opportunities for students to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments, engage in focused inquiry about individual texts, and build conceptual understanding of overarching unit or text-specific concepts/questions. Data included the texts, questions, and tasks in two units per textbook, a short story unit and persuasion unit. Data analysis focused on (a) how the texts, questions, and tasks in each unit were structured to provide coherent learning opportunities that allow for students to build conceptual understanding of unit and text-specific concepts/questions, and (b) the extent to which texts and post-reading questions and tasks provide opportunities for students to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments. The findings from this study show that despite all units including texts, questions, and tasks that cohere around overarching unit or text-specific concepts/questions, units are not structured to provide students with coherent learning opportunities that will allow them to build their conceptual understanding of unit or text-specific concepts/questions. This is due to the plethora of questions and tasks that are unrelated to the unit or text-specific concept/question or to each other. Additionally, findings show that many of the texts, especially in the persuasion units, do not provide opportunities for readers to develop multiple text-based interpretations and arguments about the ideas, arguments, characters, and events. Finally, findings show that the majority of post-reading questions in all four textbooks are recitation questions that have or assume one correct response.

The findings from this study suggest that preservice and inservice educators must prepare teachers to use and modify literature textbooks in ways that are shown to improve student learning. Moreover, time must be provided in schools for teachers to work with colleagues to design instructional units that modify rather than rely on textbook units. Finally, findings from this study suggest that research is needed on how teachers use and what teachers learn from textbooks.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	VISION OF AN EXEMPLAR LITERATURE TEXTBOOK UNIT OF STUDY.....	1
1.2	INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.3	NEED FOR THE STUDY.....	6
1.4	PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....	12
1.5	DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	13
<b>2.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	15
2.2	THE LITERATURE TEXTBOOK.....	18
2.2.1	Questions and tasks.....	20
2.2.2	Text selection.....	24
2.2.3	Curricular coherence.....	25
2.2.3.1	Text-level coherence.....	26
2.2.3.2	Unit and course-level coherence.....	27
2.3	SUMMARY.....	32
<b>3.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	33
3.2	SAMPLE.....	33
3.3	PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....	36

3.3.1	Phase 1: Conceptual coherence and potential to build conceptual understanding.....	36
3.3.1.1	Phase 1, Part A: Coherence—Text and unit or text-specific concept/question.....	36
3.3.1.2	Phase 1, Part B: Conceptual understanding—Texts and unit question.....	37
3.3.1.3	Phase 1, Part C: References to the unit concept/question and text-specific concept/question.....	39
3.3.2	Phase 2: Texts and post-reading questions and tasks.....	41
3.3.2.1	Phase 2, Part A: Texts and their potential for multiple interpretations.....	42
3.3.2.2	Phase 2, part B: Post-reading questions and tasks—Recitation, authentic nontext-based, or authentic text-based.....	44
3.3.2.3	Phase 2, part C: Sequencing of post-reading questions and tasks.....	46
3.4	SUMMARY.....	47
4.0	CHAPTER IV: CONCEPTUAL COHERENCE: UNIT QUESTION, TEXT-SPECIFIC QUESTION AND TEXTS.....	48
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	48
4.2	UNIT QUESTION AND TEXTS.....	49
4.2.1	Unit concept/question and text coherence.....	49
4.2.2	Unit concept/question and text incoherence.....	52
4.3	TEXT-SPECIFIC CONCEPT/QUESTION AND TEXTS.....	58
4.3.1	McDougal Littell’s and Holt’s text-specific concept/question and text.....	58
4.3.2	Glencoe: Text-specific question, unit concept/question, and text.....	62
4.4	SUMMARY.....	63

<b>5.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER V: CONCEPTUAL COHERENCE: QUESTIONS AND TASKS.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>UNIT FRAME: QUESTIONS/TASKS BEFORE AND AFTER UNIT</b>	
	<b>TEXTS.....</b>	<b>66</b>
	<b>5.2.1 Holt and Glencoe.....</b>	<b>67</b>
	<b>5.2.2 McDougal Littell.....</b>	<b>68</b>
	<b>5.2.3 Prentice Hall.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>TEXT-LEVEL WORK: PRE, DURING, AND POST-READING QUESTIONS....</b>	<b>71</b>
	<b>5.3.1 Prereading questions/tasks.....</b>	<b>72</b>
	<b>5.3.2 During-reading questions/tasks.....</b>	<b>82</b>
	<b>5.3.3 Post-reading questions/tasks.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>WRITING WORKSHOP.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER IV: POTENTIAL FOR INQUIRY.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>UNIT AND TEXT-SPECIFIC CONCEPT/QUESTION.....</b>	<b>93</b>
	<b>6.2.1 Unit question.....</b>	<b>94</b>
	<b>6.2.2 Text-specific concept/question.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>POST-READING QUESTIONS &amp; TASKS &amp; UNIT/TEXT-SPECIFIC</b>	
	<b>QUESTION.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>POST-READING QUESTIONS &amp; TEXTS.....</b>	<b>105</b>
	<b>6.4.1 Post-reading questions.....</b>	<b>106</b>
	<b>6.4.2 Texts and post-reading questions.....</b>	<b>111</b>
	<b>6.4.2.1 Short story.....</b>	<b>112</b>
	<b>6.4.2.2 Persuasion.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>6.5</b>	<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>119</b>



<b>7.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER VII: SEQUENCING.....</b>	<b>121</b>
7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	121
7.2	SEQUENCE OF POST-READING QUESTIONS AND TASKS.....	122
7.2.1	Post-reading questions: Short story.....	122
7.2.2	Post-reading questions: Persuasion.....	125
7.3	SUMMARY.....	126
<b>8.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>128</b>
8.1	INTRODUCTION.....	128
8.2	UNIT OR TEXT-SPECIFIC CONCEPT/QUESTION: COHERENCE, OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOCUSED INQUIRY, AND BUILDING CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING.....	129
8.2.1	Summary of findings.....	129
8.2.2	Opportunities to build conceptual understanding.....	131
8.3	TEXTS AND POST-READING QUESTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS AND FOCUSED INQUIRY.....	134
8.3.1	Summary of findings: Opportunities for multiple interpretations.....	134
8.4	HOW TEXTBOOKS PRESENT ELA TEACHING AND LEARNING.....	136
8.5	IMPLICATIONS.....	139
8.5.1	Implications for practice.....	139
8.5.2	Implications for future research.....	141
8.6	SUMMARY.....	142
	<b>APPENDIX A. CODES FOR PRE-, DURING, AND POST-READING QUESTIONS AND TASKS.....</b>	<b>143</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B. CODES FOR INTRODUCTORY AND CONCLUDING QUESTIONS AND TASKS.....</b>	<b>145</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>146</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Codes for Interpretive Potential in Short Story Units.....	43
Table 2: Codes for Interpretive Potential in Persuasion Units.....	43
Table 3: Short Story Unit Concepts/Questions.....	49
Table 4: Persuasion/nonfiction Unit Concepts/Questions.....	49
Table 5: Unit Concept/Question and Text: Coherence.....	50
Table 6: Unit Concept/Question and Text: Incoherence.....	53
Table 7: Multiple Perspective and Texts.....	55
Table 8: Holt Short Story Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question.....	59
Table 9: McDougal Littell Short Story Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question.....	59
Table 10: McDougal Littell Persuasion Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question.....	60
Table 11: Holt Persuasion Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question.....	61
Table 12: Glencoe Short Story Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question.....	62
Table 13: Glencoe Persuasion Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question.....	62
Table 14: Multiple Focuses for Reading One Text from Each Textbook.....	73
Table 15: Glencoe: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	74
Table 16: Holt: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	75
Table 17: McDougal Littell: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	76
Table 18: Prentice Hall: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	77
Table 19: Examples: Pre-reading Tasks, Unit or Text-Specific Concept/Question, and Text Coherence..	78
Table 20: Percentages of Post-reading Questions Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	83
Table 21: Writing Workshop and Unit Coherence.....	88

Table 22: Unit Questions for all Eight Units.....	94
Table 23: Examples: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question—Unambiguous.....	97
Table 24: Percentages of Short Story Post-reading Questions in Four Categories—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	99
Table 25: Percentages of Persuasion Post-reading Questions in Four Categories—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	100
Table 26: Examples: Authentic Text-based Post-reading Questions—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	100
Table 27: Examples: Recitation Post-reading Questions—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	102
Table 28: Examples: Authentic Nontext-based Post-reading Questions-Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question.....	103
Table 29: Percentages of Short Story and Persuasion Post-reading Questions in Four Categories.....	106
Table 30: Examples: Authentic Text-based Questions Treated as Recitation in Teacher’s Edition.....	107
Table 31: Examples: Recitations Questions.....	108
Table 32: Examples: Authentic Nontext-based Questions.....	109
Table 33: Examples: Authentic Text-based Questions.....	111
Table 34: Examples: Authentic Text-based Questions—Persuasion.....	116
Table 35: Holt Persuasion Unit Post-reading Questions.....	117
Table 36: Examples: Intertextual Persuasion Post-reading Questions.....	118

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 VISION OF AN EXEMPLAR LITERATURE TEXTBOOK UNIT OF STUDY

The opening page of the first of six units in a 10<sup>th</sup> grade literature textbook has the following unit question in bold across the top of the page: What makes us who we are? Beneath that question is a task that asks students to do a quick write to respond to the question by considering examples from their own background and experiences and the background and experiences of people they know. It is stated in the teacher's edition that this question is designed to activate students' prior knowledge on identity, a concept they will be introduced to following the completion of this task (Wells, 1995). The directions in the textbook instruct students to share this response with a peer, and to keep this response easily accessible as they will be revisiting and revising this response periodically throughout the course of this unit.

In this unit, students are asked to read a variety of texts – both fiction and nonfiction and a variety of genres – that provide multiple perspectives on the concept of identity in order for them to build their conceptual understanding of identity. Some of the texts included in the unit are: “Two Kinds,” a short story by Amy Tan; “How it Feels to be Colored Me,” an essay by Zora Neale Hurston; and “Shame,” a story from Dick Gregory's autobiography. There are also articles from two different magazines, *Time* and *Mental Floss*, about personality development, two poems, and two additional short stories. After reading each text, students are asked consider what the author and/or characters suggest about what makes us who we are. Periodically, students are asked to read and think across texts to consider, evaluate, compare, and/or synthesize the various perspectives they provide on identity. Each time students are asked to read

and think across texts, they are given the opportunity to revisit and revise their first quick write and their thinking on previously read texts in this unit given these new ideas and texts.

In addition to providing multiple perspectives on the concept of identity, the texts are also ones that are open to multiple interpretations of, for example, the ideas, events, characters, or arguments. Each text has enough ambiguity to provide opportunities for students to construct their own meanings based on stated and implied details in the text, and the questions and tasks that accompany the texts ask students to do just that (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). A couple of comprehension questions/tasks are provided for each text to determine that students grasp the main ideas, events, characters, or arguments, but the rest of the questions/tasks ask students to develop, support, and defend their own text-based interpretations and arguments. As such, there are always a variety of responses offered in the teacher's edition for each question. Additionally, the questions and tasks are sequenced so that students are able to engage in a focused inquiry about each the text rather than providing students with a plethora of discrete tasks that lead students to know a little about many different aspects of the text (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Lucking, 1976; Smith, 1985). Most of the questions and tasks are related to the concept of identity: what shapes it, how writers write about it, how it influences our lives. Some questions/tasks, however, are related to other ideas expressed in the texts and/or the author's craft. Below is a sequence of questions on "Two Kinds," by Amy Tan.

1. Check for comprehension:
  - a. Write a brief retelling of what happens in this story. Include some thoughts about the two or three events that you find most significant to the story, and explain why you find those events significant (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 2005)
  - b. Make a list of the major characters in story and what you know about each of the characters. Use evidence from the text to support your responses.
2. Write about a conflict between the mother and daughter:
  - a. What do you consider the most significant conflict the mother and daughter face? Explain why you see that conflict as significant. Use evidence from the text to support your response.
  - b. Who or what do you see as the primary source of the conflict? Why? Use evidence from the text to support your response.
  - c. Who ultimately emerges as the winner of the conflict? What makes you say so? Use evidence from the text to support your response.
3. Consider the author's craft:

- a. How does the author, Amy Tan, develop the conflicts in the story? What methods does she use? Find a few places in the story where you see the conflicts being developed and describe what Tan is doing.
  - b. Which method or methods for developing the conflicts do you find the most effective? Why?
4. Connect to Unit Question:
- a. How might the daughter in this story respond the question: What makes us who we are? Write her response.
  - b. Do you agree with her response? Why or why not? Write a response to the daughter.
  - c. How did this text add to your understanding of what makes us who we are? Explain. Revise your first quick write to reflect your new understanding.

Question one is designed to ensure that students have a basic understanding of the text, and although the questions call for literal details, both questions are open-ended and allow for multiple responses. Question two is designed for students to consider the conflicts between the mother and daughter. These characters have several conflicts. One could say the biggest conflict is that the mother wants the daughter to be obedient and the daughter wants to be her own person. Another significant conflict is that the mother wants the daughter to be a prodigy and the daughter feels like a failure and quits trying. Most conflicts boil down to differences between what the mother wants for her daughter and what the daughter wants for herself. The major source of their conflicts, however, is less clear. It could be seen as generational or cultural, caused by the mother's ego or daughter's stubbornness, a natural part of growing up, or something else entirely. Additionally, no clear winner emerges. For each of the questions listed for question number two, there is no one correct response, but there is evidence from the text to support multiple, varied responses. All questions require students to develop text-based interpretations and arguments and support them with evidence from the text (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997).

Question three builds from question two, and students are asked to consider how the author develops the conflicts and which of her methods they find most effective (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Lucking, 1976; Smith, 1985). Again, there are multiple, varied responses to this question using evidence from the text. Finally, students return to the unit question with question four to consider how this text adds to their understanding of identity.

At the end of the entire unit after all the texts have been read, students are asked to use what they learned from the texts, questions, tasks, and discussions with their peers to construct a final response to the question of what makes us who we are (Wells, 1995). The prompt for this writing assignment is:

For the last few weeks you have read, written about, and discussed a number of texts in terms of what they say about what makes us who we are. This assignment asks you to review your writings in your notebook, the class charts we've developed, and the texts we've read to write a final response to the question: What makes us who we are? You should discuss multiple perspectives on the question in addition to putting forth your own ideas. Be sure to support your ideas with evidence from the texts, class discussions, and your own lives.

Through engaging in this unit, students learn about identity; developing, supporting, and defending text-based interpretations and arguments; weighing and evaluating evidence and arguments; responding to open-ended questions and problems; synthesizing information across sources; and analyzing the methods author's use to express their ideas (i.e., author's craft).

The above description of an exemplar literature textbook unit was not taken from any literature textbook that is currently on the market. It was not written by looking at a textbook unit and describing its contents. In fact, prior research on literature textbooks shows that the exemplar unit described above is quite removed from the actual work provided in literature textbooks (Applebee, 1993a; Lynch & Evans, 1963; Rotta, 1998). However, standardized tests scores, reports on the skills and habits needed to be college and workforce ready, and research on effective English language arts (ELA) classrooms suggest that the above exemplar unit is exactly what is needed in literature textbooks today.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

“We shouldn't be satisfied with these results,” (US Department of Education, 2010) was the statement from Secretary of Education Arne Duncan when the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores were released in March 2010. While results in reading for eight graders increased one percentage point from 2007 to return to where they were in 2002, results for fourth graders were flat.

More disconcerting, however, is the low percentage of students who reach proficient or advanced levels. According to the 2009 NAEP scores, only 32% of eighth graders read at the proficient level and only three percent read at the advanced level. That means that more than two thirds of eighth graders are only able to “demonstrate a literal understanding of what they read and...make some interpretations” (National Assessment Governing Board, 2008, p. 45). According to the Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, students at the basic level are able to make “simple inferences” but likely lack the reading skills to interpret or “describe more abstract themes and ideas,” critically analyze or evaluate aspects of texts such as the author’s purpose or perspective, or analyze how the author’s use of literary devices shapes the meaning of the text (ibid). The 2009 NAEP results led Secretary Duncan to declare, “our students aren’t on a path to graduate high school ready to succeed in college and the workplace” (US Department of Education, 2010).

Secretary Duncan is not exaggerating the implications of the NAEP results as the skills students are lacking are precisely what is needed to be successful in postsecondary schools (Conley, 2007) and a global economy that demands more educated workers than ever before in history (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008). According to Conley (2007) in order to be “college ready,” that is, to succeed in entry-level courses without remediation, students need key cognitive strategies such as intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, analysis, reasoning/argumentation/proof, interpretation, precision and accuracy, and problem solving (p. 13-14). They need to be able to respond to complex and open-ended problems, use knowledge to think critically and innovatively, evaluate information to make judgments, communicate with others, and possess disciplinary knowledge (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008). In English class, that translates to students being able to do such things as read texts that are open to multiple interpretations; develop, support, and defend their own interpretations using appropriate evidence from the text; and make connections and synthesize information across texts (ACT & The Education Trust, 2004; Conley, 2007).



Prior research in ELA (Applebee et al., 2003; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) has shown that when students are given the opportunity to read texts that are open to multiple interpretations and are expected to develop their own interpretations, they learn to use knowledge in “creative and critical” ways (Langer, 2001, p. 872) to solve open-ended problems, develop and defend interpretations, and write their own texts. Additionally, since using textual evidence is a key component of the discipline of English studies, students are apprenticed to a way of thinking, writing about, and speaking about literature by actively participating in making meaning about a text rather than adopting the meaning that others, usually teachers, textbooks, and literary critics, have made. These experiences not only resulted in students who had higher levels of achievement on standardized tests (Applebee et al., 2003; Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerback, 1995; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997), but they also resulted in experiences that were more fun and engaging for students (Applebee, 1993b; Applebee, Burroughs, & Stevens, 1994; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Guthrie et al., 1995). Furthermore, when the texts students read and the intellectual work they engage in are centered around and provide multiple perspectives on central questions or concepts, the knowledge students gain is organized conceptually, leading to deeper understanding and the ability to use knowledge flexibly (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Unfortunately, prior studies of literature textbooks have shown that they do not promote approaches to studying literature that include helping students organize their knowledge conceptually or having students be active participants in making meaning about texts (Applebee, 1993a; Bird, 2005; Lynch and Evans, 1963).

### **1.3 NEED FOR THE STUDY**

Literature textbooks are central tools for ELA teachers (ACT & The Education Trust, 2004; Applebee, 1993a; Goodlad, 2004). This practice began in the late nineteenth century (Applebee, 1974) and continues today. Applebee (1991) wrote:

The literature anthology remains the central text in the majority of high school English classrooms. In a recent national study of literature instruction (Applebee, 1990), we found that fully 91% of a representative sample of public school teachers reported using a literature anthology, and 63% reported that the anthology was their primary source of materials. (p. 42)

Some (Guth, 1989; Zaharias, 1989) have argued that literature textbooks bear some responsibility for why students come to dislike literature after years of instruction and fail to perform well on standardized tests. Guth (1989) argued that literature textbooks are far from what research shows and successful teachers suggest about effective practice. Writing in response to Guth, Boyton (1989) argued that “the best-selling texts may perpetuate bad curriculum practices (since in most schools the textbook *is* the curriculum), but publishers can fairly argue that they spend a lot of time and money finding out what the schools really want” (p. 18). Prior reviews of textbooks have shown that they generally incorporate research-based practices, especially when these practices have been endorsed by school and district leaders, but they often do so by simply adding new practices without removing old or conflicting research-based practices (Appleby, Johnson, & Taylor, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991; Chall & Conrad, 1990; Elliott & Woodward, 1990). Although this results in textbooks that lack a coherent theoretical or pedagogical focus, it also broadens textbooks’ marketability, allowing groups with varying interests and theories about teaching and learning to find something that will appeal to them (Elliott & Woodward, 1990). Textbooks are politically and culturally constructed (Apple, 1992; Witherow, 1990; Woodward & Elliot, 1990), and publishing companies, which are profit-seeking industries, “try to fulfill the perceived needs of the marketplace, not necessarily the actual needs” (Young, 1990, p. 84) of teachers and students.

Whether literature textbooks determine or reflect the curriculum or are responsible for students’ lack of love or success is not clear. What is clear, however, is that the literature textbook is widely used in ELA classes. As such, it is important to analyze the content and approaches of current literature textbooks to determine if they incorporate research-based approaches to ELA instruction.

Most current literature textbooks are more than 1,000 pages and are comprised of several units of study. Units are typically organized by genre and unit concept or question. Generally, each unit includes: an introduction to the focus genre and unit concept/question; six to sixteen texts with accompanying art

work; questions and tasks before, during, and after reading each text that ask students about the ideas, characters, themes, arguments, grammar, and vocabulary; a Writing Workshop that is designed to lead students through the steps of the writing process in order to produce a final draft writing assignment; and standardized test practice passages and questions. In addition to the previously mentioned items, teacher's editions generally include: introductory material about how to use the textbooks; research on effective ELA instruction; scope and sequence charts for each unit, including suggestions for how much time to spend on each text; lexile scores for each text; and suggested responses for questions and tasks.

Considering textbooks' prevalence in ELA instruction, there have been relatively few studies of the questions and tasks in literature textbooks, and the results have been far from encouraging. Lynch and Evans (1963) conducted a large-scale analysis of the literature textbooks available to high school teachers in 1961 and found that the textbooks' questions and tasks were either asking for identification of insignificant textual details or were unrelated to the text under study. Applebee (1993a) found that 32% of the questions required that students recall or paraphrase information directly from the text, and 71% of the post-reading questions were ones that assumed one correct answer. He found relatively few questions that asked students to develop and defend interpretations to authentic text-based questions (i.e., questions that allow for multiple, varied possible responses based on textual evidence). Seven years later, Rotta reported in her study of ninth and eleventh grade textbooks published by three different companies that the questions and tasks that asked for recall of specific details of texts accounted for anywhere between 35 – 55% of the questions at ninth grade and 28 – 51% of the questions at 11<sup>th</sup> grade (1998). Recall of specific details allows no opportunity for students to develop and defend text-based interpretations and arguments or otherwise construct knowledge. Instead, recall questions ask students to simply find or remember information that was literally stated in the text. Answering these types of questions does not allow students to develop and practice key skills and habits that are important for the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as responding to complex and open-ended problems (i.e., authentic text-based questions) or using knowledge to think critically (Applebee et al., 2003; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997).

Although the questions and tasks in literature textbooks play a key role in what students will ultimately learn about and learn how to do, they cannot be analyzed independently of the texts that are provided for students to read. If it is important for students to develop their own interpretations to texts, then the texts must be ones in which aspects of the them such as the relationship between ideas or characters, causes of events, or character motivations are not explicit or explained (Fulcher, 1997; Langer, 2000; Oteiza, 2003; Sandora, Beck, & McKeown, 1999). In other words, the texts and the ideas they contain are not straightforward. Texts that are straightforward provide little opportunity for students to develop their own interpretations (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Langer, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) unless they are read through theoretical lenses (e.g., Marxist, feminist), a practice that is extremely rare in textbooks.

Several studies of textbooks have commented on the qualities of the texts without performing detailed analyses of the texts. For example, in 1963, Lynch and Evans declared that many of the texts provided in the literature textbooks they studied were lacking “vigor” (p. 41) and did not have enough substance to sustain deeper inquiry. Decades later, Applebee (1993a) stated that many of the texts were rich enough to allow for interpretation, but the tasks and questions that accompanied them did not call for interpretation. Neither the two previous studies nor any other studies of literature textbooks performed detailed analyses of the texts to determine if they can sustain authentic text-based questions that ask students to develop text-based interpretations and arguments. If the texts provided do not allow for multiple interpretations, then authentic text-based questions are unlikely. For example, it would be fruitless to ask students to explore multiple interpretations of a character’s actions if those actions are explained or implied. Such a question would be a recall or inferential question rather than an authentic text-based question.

Another aspect of literature textbooks that has not been studied is the coherence of their units of study. Coherent units of study are those in which the texts, questions, and tasks cohere around the big ideas and concepts under study. Coherent units organize learning experiences for students so that important ideas and knowledge build on and connect to each other. Organizing texts and tasks around big

concepts or focus questions is consistent with professional standards (IRA/NCTE, 1996; NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) and scholarship on effective curriculum (Applebee, 1993, 1996; Peters & Wixson, 2003). Both current and past literature textbooks are divided into units of study that are intended to deepen students' understanding of key concepts or skills by providing sustained engagement with those concepts or skills through the texts, tasks, and questions. A unit approach aligns with research and theory from cognitive science (DeGroot, 1965, as cited in Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Wineburg, 1991) about the importance of structuring learning experiences to allow students to explore concepts from a variety of perspectives to build their understanding of concepts. Research in cognitive studies has shown that what distinguishes experts from novices is not so much what they know, but how their knowledge is organized. Although experts have a great deal of content knowledge, what distinguishes them from novices is that their knowledge is organized conceptually around big ideas and topics in the discipline or domain (DeGroot, 1965, as cited in Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Wineburg, 1991). That allows them to easily retrieve information, understand and appreciate multiple perspectives, and understand implications in ways that novices cannot (DeGroot, 1965, as cited in Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Wineburg, 1991).

Previous studies of literature textbooks have commented on their organization, finding that literature textbooks are often organized by genre (Applebee, 1993a; Bird, 2005; Lynch & Evans, 1963); however, none have studied whether their units are structured to provide opportunities for students to develop their conceptual understanding of the overarching unit concepts. Part of this might be because the literature textbooks of the past have not marketed themselves as providing coherent units of study; however, current literature textbooks highlight the fact that their units are organized around “big ideas”/concepts (Glencoe, 2010; McDougal Littell, 2008) or questions (Beers, Jago, Appleman, Christenbury, Kajder, & Rief, 2009; Prentice Hall, 2010) that invite “inquiry” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T6) and “conversation” (Glencoe, 2010, p. T35), and that students will explore and deepen their understanding of these concepts or questions by engaging these units. Both Holt's *Elements of Literature* (Beers et al., 2009) and Prentice Hall's *Literature* (2010)—two of the four most widely-used literature

textbooks—stress that by engaging in their units, students will have opportunities to “stimulate rethinking” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T6), a key way students gain conceptual understanding (Vygotsky, 1986), of earlier ideas given new texts and experiences. It is clear that textbook publishers now market themselves as providing coherent units in which students will gain conceptual understanding of central questions or concepts.

A coherent unit of study that would provide students with opportunities to build their conceptual understanding of key questions or concepts would contain (1) a central question or concept, (2) texts that provide multiple, varied perspectives on that question or concept, (3) open-ended, text-based questions and tasks that ask students to explore that question or concept with each text and across texts, (4) sequenced questions and tasks that allow students to engage in focused inquiry on individual texts and (5) questions and tasks that ask students to revisit and revise their prior understandings related to the question or concept given new texts or ideas (Applebee, 1993, 1996; Athanases, 2003; Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007; Doll, 2004).

Applebee (1993a) studied one aspect of curricular coherence when he analyzed whether the questions and tasks on the texts in literature textbooks were constructed and sequenced so that students could come to a cumulative understanding of individual texts and see the interrelationships among texts. He found that the questions and tasks on individual selections were largely unrelated; in fact, 63% of the questions and tasks were unconnected to any other question or task on that same text. And, as far as helping students see the interrelationships among texts so that they can understand, for example, how concepts are explored or literary devices are used in different genre or time periods, Applebee found that only six percent of the questions/tasks on a given text referred to another text that was previously read. Applebee’s study is the only substantial study of curricular coherence in literature textbooks, and this study analyzed a small part of what makes curriculum coherent.

## 1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Hans Guth (1989) argued, “If a good teacher is the best curriculum, a bad textbook is the worst” (p. 14). Given the prevalence of the literature textbook in ELA classrooms, it is essential that the literature textbooks are based on what prior research suggests about effective ELA instruction and allow students to gain and use the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The purpose of this study is to describe and compare the four most widely used tenth grade literature textbooks in terms of the opportunities they provide for students to engage in coherent ELA curricular units in which the texts, questions, and tasks provide opportunities for students to develop their own text-based interpretation and arguments, engage in focused inquiry about individual texts, and build conceptual understanding of unit or text-specific concepts/questions. The findings of this study will be compared to previous studies of literature textbooks when appropriate.

The guiding research question for this study is: What opportunities exist in the most commonly adopted tenth grade literature textbooks for students to engage in coherent ELA curricular units in which the texts, questions, and tasks allow students to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments, engage in focused inquiry about individual texts, and build conceptual understanding of unit or text-specific concepts/questions? The following sub-questions are addressed in order to answer the larger guiding question:

- (1) How often and in what ways does the unit question or concept organize instruction, provide coherence across the unit, and provide opportunities for students to build conceptual understanding of the stated unit question?
- (2) How is each text in each unit related to the unit or text-specific concept/question?
- (3) How do the texts for each unit collectively provide a diversity of perspectives on the unit or text-specific concept/question?
- (4) How do individual texts and their corresponding post-reading questions and tasks allow student to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments?

- (5) How are the post-reading questions/tasks sequenced to build on each other in order to engage students in focused inquiry about each text?

## 1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Authentic nontext-based questions: questions that allow for multiple, varied responses but not based on evidence from texts. Instead, these questions ask students to use personal experience or values to justify a response, make personal connections to the text, or speculate about characters and events (Keefer, Zeitz, & Resnick, 2000).

Authentic text-based questions: questions that allow for multiple, varied responses based on textual evidence (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

Authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation questions in the teacher's edition (TE): questions that allow for multiple, varied responses based on textual evidence, but the teacher's edition assumes or provides one response (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

Interpretation: giving meaning to texts where meaning is ambiguous and debatable through making inferences, entertaining multiple perspectives on issues, events, ideas, characters, etc. and ultimately deciding on the one that is most compelling given the evidence in the text and the reader's perspective (IRA/NCTE, 1996).

Interpretive potential: the degree to which a text is open to multiple interpretations of the ideas, events, arguments, themes, conflicts, character motivations, etc.

Post-reading questions and tasks: questions and tasks that are posed for students to complete after reading the text. For this study, post-reading questions and tasks include all questions and tasks following the text except those specifically designed to build students' vocabulary and understanding of grammar.

Recitation questions: questions that have one correct response (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).



Text: “print communications in their varied forms; oral communication, including conversations, speeches, etc.; and visual communications such as film, video, and computer displays” (IRA/NCTE, 1996, p. 52).

## 2.0 CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2008, The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills released *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Education, & Competitiveness: A Resource and Policy Guide*. In this guide, they argue that the biggest need public education has is to “prepare citizens with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills they need to compete” (p. 1) in a global economy that requires “more educated workers with the ability to respond flexibly to complex problems, communicate effectively, manage information, work in teams and produce new knowledge” (p. 6). It is no longer enough, they say, for students to graduate from high school; what matters is that they learn to use knowledge to think critically, creatively, and innovatively; evaluate information to make judgments; solve open-ended problems; and communicate and collaborate with others with from diverse backgrounds (2008).

One year earlier, the National Center on Education and the Economy’s (NCEE) *Tough Choices or Tough Times* (2007) expressed similar sentiments. They argued that in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “comfort with ideas and abstractions is the passport to a good job” (p. 6 – 7) as many routine jobs will continue to become automatized. To compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century work force, workers will need strong skills in the core academic subjects as well as be “good at both analysis and synthesis, creative and innovative, self-disciplined and well organized, able to learn very quickly and work well as a member of a team and have the flexibility to adapt quickly to frequent changes” (p. 8).

Professional standards such as those published by The International Reading Association (IRA) and National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE) (1996) and National Governors Association

(NGA) and Council of Chief States School Offices (CCSSO) (2010a) also reflect the current focus on preparing students to be creative, critical, and independent thinkers. Released in 1996, the IRA/NCTE standards state that, “to participate fully in society and the workplace in 2020, citizens will need powerful literacy abilities that until now have been achieved by only a small percentage of the population” (p. 4). They stress the need for teachers to engage students in “authentic, open-ended learning experiences” (p. 6) that allow them to become “active, critical, and creative” users and producers of texts (p. 5). The standards highlight the importance of students learning how to articulate and negotiate meanings and “participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities” (1996, p. 31). One key way that students learn how to do these things is through interpreting, discussing, and debating literature. The NCTE/IRA standards state that, “one of the most important functions of English language arts education is to help students learn to interpret texts” (1996, p. 23). They stress that an English language arts education should ensure that students “discover the many ways in which a given text can be interpreted and the many ways in which their personal experiences and knowledge influence knowledge construction of meanings” (IRA/NCTE, 1996, p. 31).

Similarly, the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science* (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) stress the need for students to be able to “comprehend and evaluate complex texts...construct effective arguments and clearly convey intricate or multifaceted information” (p. 4). Students who reach the *Standards* are “engaged and open-minded—but discerning—readers and listeners” (p. 4) who “cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text” (p. 4).

The push for students to be active and creative thinkers who construct their own text-based interpretations and arguments has not always been a goal of English language arts instruction. For decades, English language arts instruction consisted of memorization or learning accepted interpretations of texts (Applebee, 1974; Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995). As such, students gained knowledge about literature rather than learning how to create their own knowledge from literature; the focus was on knowing rather than doing. Applebee (1996) refers to this distinction as “knowledge-out-of-context”

versus “knowledge-in-action” (p. 5). “Knowledge-out-of-context” refers to the passing on of knowledge others in the past have made. The emphasis is on learning about a discipline such as what makes a good interpretation or how others have interpreted texts without learning how to participate in the discipline and, for example, develop their own interpretations to texts. “Knowledge-in-action,” on the other hand, refers to the “ways of knowing and doing as well as characteristic content” of disciplines (p. 5). Knowledge-in-action entails learning about the discipline by participating in the discipline. In ELA, this means students learn the content of the discipline through interpreting texts, defending interpretations orally and in writing, and becoming “active, critical, and creative users and producers of text” (IRA/NCTE, 1996, p.5). Thus, students simultaneously learn both the content and ways of working in the discipline.

Although the calls for ELA instruction to consist of teaching students the content of the discipline by participating in the discipline have been heard for more than two decades, research and critical reviews on literature textbooks conducted prior to and within the last twenty years have criticized them for continuing to promote a passive, transmission approach to reading and studying literature (e.g., Applebee, 1993a; Appleby et al., 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991; Lynch & Evans, 1963). Additionally, literature textbooks have been criticized for not providing opportunities for students to build their understanding of big ideas and concepts through sustained engagement within and across texts, questions, and tasks (Applebee, 1993a). Sustained engagement with concepts through texts with multiple perspectives and tasks that prompt revisiting and revising prior understanding allows individuals to build conceptual knowledge, thus allowing them flexibility in their thinking (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007; Wells, 1995), a key attribute for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (NCEE, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008).

Because the literature textbook is the main tool for delivery of the literature curriculum (Applebee, 1993a; Lynch & Evans, 1963), it is crucial that this tool and the instructional approaches it promotes be examined to determine whether it provides opportunities for students to gain the knowledge and thinking skills they need to be successful in a workforce that requires them to think critically and flexibly, create and evaluate arguments, and solve open-ended problems.

This literature review provides a synthesis of previous research and critiques of literature textbooks related to (1) questions and tasks, (2) texts, and (3) curricular coherence. Also included are studies of English language arts classrooms and theoretical arguments that lay the foundation for particular curricular and instructional approaches.

## **2.2 THE LITERATURE TEXTBOOK**

Textbooks are politically and culturally constructed (Apple, 1992; Witherow, 1990; Woodward & Elliot, 1990), influenced by “complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender, and religious groups” (Apple, 1992, p. 4). An additional and powerful influence in textbooks’ construction is the demands of the marketplace (Elliot & Woodward, 1990). Textbook publishing is a profit-seeking industry that must attend to the demands of the marketplace (Westbury, 1990), keeping at the forefront the desires of diverse groups of teachers and districts (Boynton, 1989; Young, 1990). As such, textbooks are loaded with vast amounts of material, texts, and pedagogical approaches in an attempt to please as many groups as possible, often by disregarding the overall coherence of the intellectual work and pedagogical approaches (Appleby et al., 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991; Woodward & Elliot, 1990). One major selling point of textbooks is the list of authors or consultants, many of which are researchers and leaders in the discipline (Venezky, 1992). The list of author and consultant names is “as much a part of sales promotion as are the posters, brochures, and flyers and are chosen to reflect a desired image” (Venezky, 1992, p. 441). How much textbook authors and consultants contribute to their construction, however, is unclear (Appleby et al., 1989; Guth, 1989; Venezky, 1992). Some (Squire & Morgan, 1990) argue that contributing authors and consultants need to be held accountable for the products that are produced. One key researcher and critic of textbooks, Arthur Applebee, is listed as a senior program consultant on one of the textbooks that was analyzed as part of this study.

There is a long history of textbook research and critique. Some of the major critiques of textbooks include that they are poorly written (Woodward & Elliot, 1990); avoid controversy (Appleby et al, 1989; Banks, 2002; Witherow, 1999; Woodward & Elliot, 1990); incorporate new practices and theories without removing old ones so that revisions end up being “evolutionary” rather than “revolutionary” (Elliot & Woodward, 1990, p. 48); control students’ responses to literature (Zaharias, 1989); under represent or inaccurately represent diverse authors and characters (Appleby et al., 1990b; Banks, 2002; Hansen, 2005; Hartwood, 1993; Pace, 1992); promote low-level thinking (Applebee, 1993; Appleby et al., 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991); and lack an overall theoretical or pedagogical focus (Applebee, 1993; Appleby et al, 1989; Woodward & Elliot, 1990). Whether or not literature textbooks, or textbooks in general, should be responsible for constructing curriculum or accurately representing the discipline is debatable (Appleby et al., 1989; Boyton, 1989; Guth, 1989; Squire, 1989; Squire & Morgan, 1990), it is clear from the numbers of teachers who use the literature textbook, especially as their main source of material, that literature textbooks fulfill that purpose for many teachers and students. Literature textbooks continue to be central tools for secondary English language arts teachers (Applebee, 1993a). Using a representative sample of public school English language arts teachers, Applebee (1993a) found that 91% of teachers use the literature textbook, and 63% reported using the textbook as their primary source of materials. Goodlad (2004) found that textbooks consisted of the main sources of instruction for all grades and content areas, and the dependence on them increased with each grade. Additionally, most current literature textbooks market themselves as a comprehensive English language arts program complete with scope and sequence charts for courses of study (Beers et al., 2009) and pacing guides for daily lessons (Prentice Hall, 2010).

Although literacy textbooks of some kind have existed since the seventeenth century (Applebee, 1974), their content, focus, theoretical framing, and length have changed through the decades. Readers, textbooks that were specifically created to teach reading, in the nineteenth century (Carr, Carr, & Schultz, 2005) included beautiful sentences for memorization and full and excerpted texts that would instruct readers to behave and think as moral and ethical members of American society (Applebee, 1974; Carr et al., 2005). By the mid 1800s, some readers grew to six hundred pages (Carr et al., 2005). More than one

hundred and fifty years later, literature textbooks have grown to over 900 pages (Applebee, 1993a) and are teeming with such an enormous amount of instructional apparatus and pedagogical materials that they have been accused of trying to be teacher-proof (Appleby et al., 1990a).

### **2.2.1 Questions and tasks**

Textbooks have faced a great deal of criticism since their inception. Much of the criticism has been directed at the lack of diversity of the texts that are included (e.g., Apple, 1992; Applebee, 1993a; Bird, 2005; Lynch & Evans, 1963), but there has also been criticism focused on the questions and tasks that are asked of students before and after reading selections. The questions that are posed before and after texts impact what students learn about and learn how to do in English language arts classes (Applebee et al., 2003; Applebee et al., 1994, Langer 2000, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997; Wells, 1995).

In 1910, Dewey wrote that questions “force the mind to go wherever it is capable of going better than...the most ingenious pedagogical devices,” but only when the questions are ones that stem from or cause “genuine perplexity” (1910, p. 207). Yet, the questions that are asked most frequently of secondary students (Applebee et al., 2003; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997), recitation questions, provide little room for student exploration or interpretation. The student’s job is to provide correct information, usually information that has been provided or established earlier by the teacher, textbook, or some other outside source (Applebee et al., 1994). The knowledge that is generated from answering recitation questions is generally low-level, knowledge-out-of-context. Responding to these questions will not teach students critical 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as how to evaluate information in order to develop interpretations or solve open-ended problems. Conversely, answering and discussing authentic text-based questions—those questions that have multiple, varied responses and require students to construct and defend their own interpretations—has been linked to increased student achievement (Applebee et al., 2003; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) and engagement (Applebee, 1993; Applebee et al., 1994; Guthrie et al., 1995). Additionally, constructing and defending interpretations about texts with others is essential to

developing a deep understanding of reading and writing (Alvermann et al., 1996; Applebee et al., 2003; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Guthrie et al., 1995; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997).

In their two-year study of 58 eighth and 54 ninth grade English language arts classes, Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) found increased student achievement in classes that devoted time to discussion around authentic text-based questions. Although the amount of time spent in discussion was very low—about 50 seconds per class in eighth grade and less than 15 seconds per class in ninth grade—results showed strong, positive effects on spring achievement for both grades. There was no effect on spring performance on short answer recall questions that focused on superficial text details. Nystrand and Gamoran concluded that “what ultimately counts [in increasing students’ achievement] is *the extent to which instruction requires students to think, not just report someone else’s thinking*” (p. 72, italics in original).

Langer’s (2001) five year study in which she compared the classrooms of 44 English teachers from 25 schools in four states that have made unusual progress on standardized test scores in reading, writing, and English with those that have made more typical progress showed that the questions and tasks that were given to students in these classes differed. In higher performing schools, Langer found that the questions and tasks were ones that required students to do more than recall names, dates, and definitions; instead, they required students to engage in “quality, ‘minds-on’ activities” (p. 855) that deepened their understanding of the key concepts by building on the knowledge and skills students already possessed. In this way, the questions and tasks were “generative” and fostered knowledge-in-action.

Generative tasks were also found to increase students’ achievement in a study conducted by Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) of 64 middle and high school English classrooms from 20 urban and suburban schools in 5 states to determine the relationship between literacy performance and discussion-based approaches to literature study. Their results showed higher scores on a spring literacy performance in classrooms where teachers provided students with authentic text-based questions and tasks that allowed them to develop their own interpretations of texts and engage in discussion with their



peers that involved testing understandings, offering alternative points of view, and taking and defending positions.

Although at least twenty years of research exists regarding the benefits of having students engage with questions and tasks that invite them to develop text-based interpretations and arguments in response to authentic text-based questions, textbook questions and tasks are lacking these types of questions. Lynch and Evans (1963) found that many of the post-reading questions had little to do with the content of the texts; however, those that did encouraged “rote learning of fact and identification rather than challenging the imaginative and analytical faculties” (p. 202). More than twenty years later, Zaharias (1989) argued that literature textbooks available in the United States encourage bad instruction by promoting passive approaches to reading and controlling literary response. Appleby et al., (1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991) seconded Zaharias by criticizing literature textbooks for having a preponderance of recitation questions that provided little opportunity for interpretation or creative and critical thinking. They went so far as to accuse textbooks of a “lack of respect for students and their ideas about literature” (1990b, p. 89).

In his study of literature textbooks from seven different publishers available in 1989, Applebee (1993a) found that many of the selections seemed capable of supporting “worthwhile discussions” but that the questions and tasks accompanying the selections did not call for students to form their own interpretations or text-based arguments (1993a, p. 153). Using Nystrand and Gamoran’s (1991) categories for coding questions during class discussion, Applebee coded each question and task from a percentage of the texts in the literature textbooks for grades 8, 10, and 12 as either “authentic” (i.e., allowing for a variety of possible responses; without a prescribed answer), or “recitation” (i.e., seeking one correct answer). He used the wording of the questions and tasks, knowledge about the text, and possible responses given in the teacher’s edition to determine whether a question or task was authentic or recitation. For example, if a question appeared authentic, but there was one answer suggested in the teacher’s edition, the question was coded as recitation.

Applebee found that a full 71% of the post-reading questions/tasks were recitation, calling for either textual details or accepted interpretations (1993a). He concluded:

This overwhelming emphasis on recitation activities, leading to a single expected response, rather than on authentic activities in which responses may legitimately vary creates a consistent image of the reading of literature as a kind of puzzle to be solved, with a set of correct responses to be derived from the text and teacher. It is not, for the most part, a context for exploring ideas and defending alternative understandings. (1993a, p. 146)

Fourteen years after Applebee's study, Bird (2005) analyzed four textbook series adopted in the state of Texas in 2000. Bird studied 33% of the selections at each grade level (9-12) for each of the four series. Bird also coded the questions and tasks as recitation and authentic, although he had quite different results than Applebee. Unlike Applebee who found close to three quarters of the questions and tasks were recitation, Bird found that only between three and 35% of the questions were recitation. It is not clear, however, how Bird coded questions that were genuinely authentic (i.e., there were multiple possible responses that could be backed with evidence from the text) but were presented to students as recitation (i.e., the wording suggested one response and there was only one response listed in the teacher's edition). For instance, there are multiple, varied responses to a question such as: What is the theme of the story, "Everyday Use"? However, the way this question is worded assumes one valid response. Furthermore, the teacher's edition is likely to give only one response, which further emphasizes that this authentic question is posed as a recitation question. Applebee took the wording of questions and the teacher's edition into account when coding. Bird did not consult the teacher's editions and it is not clear if he took into account the wording of questions.

Another aspect of Bird's coding that is not clear is what percent of the questions or tasks that he coded as authentic were ones that required textual evidence to justify responses and what percent of the question did not. Justifying responses with textual evidence is different intellectual work than only using personal experience or opinion to justify a response. In fact, in their study of eighth and ninth grade English language arts classes, Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) found a negative effect on student achievement in classes that devoted time to authentic nontext-based questions. In other words, when

students spent time discussing open-ended questions that had little to do with the texts they were reading, or that did not require evidence from the texts to support a response, their achievement declined. When students use textual evidence, they are using the acknowledged ways of working in the discipline and learning to evaluate information in order to make an argument or solve an open-ended problem.

Applebee's definition of authentic and recitation clearly accounted for the text; however, it appears that Bird's did not. Bird defined an authentic question as one that "would require the reader to think beyond the text itself and would allow students to come up with multiple answers for the same question" (2005, p. 110). Coding all questions that allowed for multiple, varied responses as authentic whether or not they were text-based might account for the disparity between his and Applebee's results.

### **2.2.2 Text selection**

Many studies of literature textbooks have focused on the nature and range of the texts in terms of their inclusion of authors of diverse racial, ethnic, and/or gender groups (Applebee, 1993a; Bird, 2005; Hansen, 2005; Harwood, 1993; Pace, 1992), the text's accuracy (or lack thereof) in representing diverse characters (Hansen, 2005; Pace, 1992), and the date of authorship (Applebee, 1993a; Bird, 2005; Neel, 1954). One study, Lynch & Evans (1963), and a number of critical reviews by Appleby, Johnson, and Taylor (1989, 1990, 1990a, 1991) discussed the abundance of excerpted texts in literature textbooks. What has not been studied in depth concerns the nature of interpretive work that is possible given the texts included for study. Langer's (2000) study of classrooms in which students engaged in developing multiple interpretations of literature found that the text played a role in the quality of the discussion. The texts that were read and discussed were those that were open to multiple interpretations based on ambiguity of texts as opposed to reading the texts through theoretical lenses. Ambiguous texts are those in which aspects of them such as the ideas, arguments, themes, or character motivations are not explicit or implied. According to Langer, some texts were too simple and straightforward to prompt discussion. The question, then, is

what makes a text capable of supporting authentic text-based questions in which students are constructing interpretations to literature?

In a study comparing two discussion techniques, Questioning the Author and Junior Great Books, Sandora et al., (1999) found that both approaches were effective at helping students construct a deeper understanding of a text through discussions of authentic text-based questions. The texts these programs use provide insight into the types of texts that support multiple interpretations. In Questioning the Author, the texts are those that are “conceptually challenging enough to require grappling with ideas and taking an active stance toward constructing meaning” (Beck & McKeown, 2001, p. 10). Junior Great Books uses texts that are “rich in ideas, and in which the author’s meaning is not explicit” (p. 30). From these two instructional approaches, two characteristics of texts that support multiple interpretations emerge. They are texts in which the ideas and meaning are not explicit. Previous studies support these characteristics. Beck et al., (1995), Fulcher (1997) and Oteiza (2003) all maintain that the more implicit the relationships between ideas, the more texts allow for readers to create their own understandings and interpretations.

Although Applebee (1993a) said that many of the texts were capable of supporting discussions, he did not study or elaborate on the characteristics of those texts. Furthermore, neither Applebee nor Bird (2005) studied the relationship between the texts and tasks. In order for students to engage in constructing interpretations to literature through answering authentic text-based questions, the texts must be ones that include implicit relationships between ideas and thus support multiple, varied interpretations.

### **2.2.3 Curricular coherence**

Previous studies of literature textbooks have commented on their organization (Applebee, 1993a; Bird, 2005; Lynch & Evans, 1963), but none have analyzed whether the texts and tasks that comprised each “unit” was coherent. This might be due, in part, to the prior lack of explicit focus on the part of textbook publishers to create coherent units of study. That, however, is changing, and as discussed previously, most current literature textbooks market themselves as a comprehensive curriculum with complete scope

and sequence charts (Beers et al., 2009) and pacing guides (Prentice Hall, 2010). Many widely-used literature textbooks are organized by unit, with overarching questions or concepts to provide coherence for learning and instruction at both the text and unit level. It appears literature textbooks have embraced the current trend in curriculum design to organize learning experiences around “big” concepts and questions. In fact, Prentice Hall, one of the textbooks used for this study, lists Grant Wiggins, co-author of *Understanding by Design*, a very popular and widely used curriculum framework that utilizes “Essential Questions” to drive instruction, as one of the authors of their textbook.

### **2.2.3.1 Text-level curricular coherence**

Only Applebee’s (1993a) study of literature textbooks has studied text-level curricular coherence to determine whether the post-reading questions on the texts were sequenced to allow students to come to an increasingly more complete and cumulative understanding of the text. Applebee analyzed the questions and tasks posed for both pre- and post-reading for each text to determine the degree to which they were connected to other questions and tasks on the same text. He reasoned that if the purpose of pre- and post-reading questions and tasks on a given text is to help students come to a fuller and more coherent comprehension of the text, then the questions and tasks should lead students through a sequence that supports them to develop that understanding. Applebee coded each question and task as follows:

Discrete: question or task was unconnected to other questions and tasks accompanying the text

Part of a set: question or task was part of larger set that asked student to do similar things (e.g., identifying figures of speech); the questions and tasks, however, are not cumulative

Cumulative: question or tasks builds on an earlier question or task accompanying the text

Applebee found that only six percent of the questions and tasks built on previous ones; thirty-one percent were part of a similar set of questions, but the questions had no relationship to each other; and the remaining questions were discrete. Applebee stated that many of the questions could be “removed or reordered without affecting students’ ability to answer the others” (1993a, p. 149), providing little text-level coherence.

### **2.2.3.2 Unit and course-level curricular coherence**

While text-level coherence is important, it is not enough to ensure ongoing and coherent curricular experiences for students in which they develop conceptual understanding related to a unit question or concept. Without unit-level coherence, students are unlikely to develop conceptual understanding, limiting their ability to use knowledge creatively, critically, and flexibly.

In her study of high-performing classrooms, Langer (2001) found that the tasks and questions teachers gave students were designed to help them make connections among concepts within and across lessons and texts in addition to helping students make connections between in-school and out-of-school experiences. Teachers in higher performing schools “worked consciously to weave a web of connections” (2001, p. 863) so that students’ experiences became part of a larger curricular conversation (Applebee, 1996). Teachers in the typical schools only supported connections between in-school and out-of-school experiences.

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) confirmed Langer’s (2001) finding in their study of 64 middle and high school English classrooms from 20 urban and suburban schools in 5 states. They found that teachers whose students had higher scores on a spring literacy performance writing assessment provided them with tasks and questions that were connected to previous learning experiences, discussions, and texts and thus part of larger curricular conversations. The findings from these studies support research at the elementary level that shows that interconnections among tasks were characteristic in high-performing classrooms (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998) and classrooms with particularly effective teachers (Pressley et al., 1998).

Only one study researched the interconnections among tasks in literature textbooks. Applebee (1993a) coded the questions and tasks for their intertextuality and found that intertextual tasks are uncommon. Intertextual questions and tasks were those that made links to other literature either from the anthology or from students’ experiences outside of school. Applebee found that only six percent of

questions/tasks referred to a text that had been read previously. He concluded that what "all the [textbooks] lack is an integrated, cumulative, and coherent" focus (1993a, p. 153).

Interconnections, however, are only part of what it means to have a coherent curriculum or unit. Coherent curricular units organize learning experiences so that important ideas and knowledge build on and connect to each other, allowing students to engage in ongoing conversations about big concepts or focus questions (Applebee, 1996; Applebee et al., 1993; Athanases, 2003). Research in cognitive studies has shown that what distinguishes experts from novices is not so much what they know, but how their knowledge is organized. In addition to having a great deal of content knowledge, experts' knowledge is organized conceptually around big ideas and topics in the discipline or domain, which allows them to easily retrieve information, appreciate multiple perspectives, and understand implications in ways that novices cannot (DeGroot, 1965, as cited in Branford et al., 2000; Wineburg, 1991). As such, curricula should be organized in ways that promote students gaining knowledge and understanding around big ideas and concepts as opposed to a list of random facts.

In researching and writing about curriculum in English language arts, Applebee (1993b, 1994, 1996) and others (e.g., Oakeshott, 1991, Pinar, 2004, 2006) use the metaphor of conversation, as conversation implies active participants who engage in dialogue, debate, and deliberation. Additionally, using the metaphor of conversation to discuss entering disciplinary conversations suggests that disciplines are ongoing, "living traditions" (Applebee, 1996, p. 20) that are continually changing and have a focus on the present and future in addition to the past. Michael Oakeshott, an English philosopher, discussed the ongoing nature of conversation and curriculum as conversation in 1962. In his essay, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," Oakeshott wrote:

As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Of course there is argument and inquiry and information, but wherever these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation. . . Conversation is not an enterprise designed to yield an extrinsic profit, a contest where a winner gets a prize, nor is it an activity of exegesis; it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure. . . Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the

proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human activity and utterance. (Oakeshott, 1991, p. 490-491)

William Pinar (2004) also uses the metaphor of conversation for curriculum, although he takes issue with Applebee's use as it is focused on engaging students in disciplinary conversations, which Pinar views as "academic vocationalism" (2004, p. 191). Instead, Pinar believes curricular conversations should be "complicated conversations," which "require curricular innovation and experimentation, opportunities for students and faculty to articulate relations among school subjects, society, and self-formation" (2004, p. 191). Critical of Applebee's willingness to work in (rather than contest) the current structure of education with defined disciplines and little control for teachers, Pinar does concede, however, that "classroom conversation, within carefully bounded school-subject borders, is possible and, often, preferable to the lecture as an instructional strategy" (2004, p. 191).

Applebee, Burroughs, and Stevens (1994) undertook a two-year study of 19 high school English classes in two different schools taught by eight case study teachers to determine "the factors that furthered or hindered the development of coherent and engaging curricular conversations" (1994, p. 3). From this study, Applebee et al. found that an "integrated" structure was most effective at creating a sense of coherence and continuity to the unit and year-long classroom work. An integrated unit or course has a central focus or organizing topic; texts that provide multiple perspectives on the focus or topic; and open-ended, text-based questions and tasks that are interrelated, cohere around the central focus or organizing topic, and ask students to explore and rethink the central focus/topic with each text and across texts. The conversation in an integrated curriculum is ongoing and "involves a process of continuing reconstrual not only of what has just been introduced, but, in light of new ideas, everything that has come before" (Applebee, 1996, p. 77). This type of integration can occur at the unit level when students are given multiple perspectives on topics, themes or concepts and, for example, contrast the different voices, or it can happen on the whole course level in which students revisit previous texts and ideas in light of new texts and ideas. Applebee et al. (1994) found that this type of curriculum allowed for deep, ongoing



conversations, and the enthusiasm exhibited by both teachers and students was greater in classes with an integrated curriculum. Part of the enthusiasm Applebee et al. attributed to the issues and questions that organized the integrated curricular structure. The issues and questions were ones that were unresolved, timely, and interesting. The focus of the conversation was not on learning what others had said and done with regard to the central focus (i.e., knowledge-out-of-context); instead, the conversation encouraged students to explore issues, develop, discuss and defend interpretations, and engage in conversations around key ideas (i.e., knowledge-in-action). Applebee et al. (1994) found this curricular structure rare in high school English classes.

Applebee (1993b) distinguishes this type of curriculum from thematic units that are common in English language arts. While language activities in typical thematic units are also organized around a common theme or topic, Applebee (1993b) states that they often lack the depth and recursiveness of integrated units. According to Applebee (1996), the knowledge students develop in integrated curricula “will be richly contextualized knowledge-in-action, developed through sustained conversation about related ideas” (p. 78).

Organizing units and yearlong courses of study around overarching questions and concepts, and selecting texts and tasks because they are related to and provide multiple voices on the central topic/question allows students to organize knowledge conceptually. Additionally, these types of units or courses allow students to use what they already know either through outside experiences or previous texts, tasks, or units to develop progressively deeper knowledge (Athanasas, 2003). Learners develop knowledge about concepts by building on what they already know (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), and each text in an integrated unit adds to students’ background knowledge and allows them to access deeper, more difficult or nuanced texts and tasks. Each text, then, becomes a scaffold for the next. Additionally, by continually revisiting, revising, and deepening prior understanding and ideas with others and connecting them to other understandings and ideas, students begin to form fully developed concepts (Vygotsky, 1986).

Applebee (1993b) provided four principles that are essential to constructing a curriculum that is coherent, engaging, and allows for ongoing curricular conversations centered on co-constructing knowledge about overarching questions or concepts.

Quantity: There is enough material for the conversation to have depth and substance, and provide multiple perspectives on a central organizing topic or idea. However, there is not too much material that each text, for example, only gets a cursory glance.

Quality: The materials are high-quality, accurate, and worthy of study. The texts have enough substance and complexity to allow room for inquiry and the co-construction of ideas through discussion. Applebee says and previous studies confirm that texts are straightforward and shallow, the conversation that follows will be shallow as well (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Langer, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997).

Relatedness: The material is related to the central focus of the unit, and each text, question, and task allows students to further their study and investigate the new materials in relationship to previous material. There is a diversity of voices that allows for multiple perspectives on the ideas.

Manner: The curriculum is enacted in a way that supports students' learning. The tasks and questions that students are asked are authentic and text-based, appropriate, reflect a logical sequence, and allow for student ownership, collaboration, and control.

These four characteristics above are related to William Doll's (2004) four Rs of postmodern curriculum. Doll states that a quality curriculum has richness, recursion, relations, and rigor. Richness refers to a "curriculum's depth, to its layer of meaning, to its multiple possibilities or interpretations" (2004, p. 254). The curriculum's richness is what keeps the conversation ongoing. Recursion refers to the emphasis in the curriculum on returning to previous ideas to look at them again in a new light based on new learning. Relations refer to the process of continually adding connections to make the overall curriculum deeper and richer. Rigor refers to the freedom and precision required in engaging in the curriculum. It entails part precision and discipline, and part creativity and freedom.

Both Applebee and Doll echo the voices of earlier educational philosophers such as Whitehead (1997) who called for teachers to teach few things “thoroughly” (p. 262). “Let the main ideas which are introduced into a child’s education,” Whitehead wrote, “be few and important, and let them be thrown into every combination possible” (1997, p. 262-263).

The work in English language arts to date has outlined different types of unit design, but no studies have analyzed the units that are provided for students in literature textbooks. Because current textbooks promote this aspect of their product, it is crucial to study whether they are actually structured in ways that develop students’ developing conceptual understanding and engagement in ongoing curricular conversations.

### **2.3 SUMMARY**

Various studies have examined aspects of literature textbooks, but none has described or analyzed how the texts, tasks, and questions cohere to provide a unit of study in which students develop their conceptual understanding of key ideas in ways that prepare and equip them with the knowledge and skills they need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This review of literature delineates the importance of coherent curricular units in which the texts, questions, and tasks allow students to engage in authentic text-based discussions to deepen their understanding of individual texts and key ideas across texts. Additionally, it highlights the importance of ensuring that literature textbooks are written in ways that encourage these types of classrooms given teachers’ reliance on textbooks for what and how to teach.

### 3.0 CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the four most widely used tenth grade literature textbooks in terms of the opportunities they provide for students to engage in coherent ELA curricular units in which the texts, questions, and tasks allow students to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments, engage in focused inquiry about each text, and build conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. This chapter describes the methods that were used to conduct this study.

#### 3.2 SAMPLE

The literature textbooks that were used for this study were the most recent editions of the four most widely used tenth grade literature textbooks from the top three educational publishers. The literature textbooks are:

Beers, K., Jago, C., Appleman, D., Christenbury, L., Kajder, S., & Rief, L. (2009). *Elements of literature: Fourth course*. USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Glencoe. (2010). *Literature: Course 5*. USA: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

McDougal Littell. (2008). *Literature: Grade 10*. China: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Prentice Hall. (2010). *Literature: Grade 10*. USA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Textbooks written for tenth grade were chosen because they allowed for a comparison between the findings from this study and the findings from Applebee's (1993a) large-scale study of literature anthologies published in 1989. Furthermore, many students drop out of high school after tenth grade (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). While the reasons for dropping out vary, 47% of dropouts cited boring classes in which they learned very little, and 66% said they would have worked harder if the demands placed on them were greater (Bridgeland et al., 2006). As such, it is important to examine the work students are being asked to do in this crucial year of high school.

Two units per textbooks were chosen for analysis. A unit was defined as a set of texts and tasks organized around a focus concept and/or question (hereafter referred to as unit concept/question). Units were demarcated by the textbook publishers; each unit had an introductory page that displayed the unit question, signaling the start of one unit and the end of the previous unit.

All textbooks contained multiple units, each with its own unit concept/question. In three textbooks—Glencoe, Holt, and McDougal Littell—several units comprised larger collections, usually divided by genre. For example, the short story unit I studied from Glencoe was part of a short story collection that contained three units, each with its own unit concept/question. Prentice Hall was the only textbook that had standalone units, organized by unit questions and genre. Glencoe, Holt, and McDougal Littell were also organized by genre in addition to being organized by unit concept/question. Three of the four textbooks included texts beyond the genre focus.

In addition to the unit concept/question, three textbooks—Glencoe, Holt, and McDougal Littell—contained text-specific questions for each text or pair of texts. Text-specific concepts/questions were employed to organize the learning experiences on each text or pair of texts just as the unit concepts/questions were employed to organize the learning experiences of the unit.

For this study, I chose to study a short story unit from each textbook, a persuasion unit from Glencoe, Holt, and McDougal Littell, and a nonfiction unit from Prentice Hall. Prentice Hall did not have a standalone persuasion unit; however, their nonfiction unit included the study of persuasion and persuasive texts and was most similar to the other literature textbooks' persuasion units.

Short story units were chosen for this study because of the prominence the study of short story has in high school ELA classes. Approximately 25% of class time in grades nine and ten is devoted to short stories (Applebee, 1993a). Only the study of the novel accounted for more time. I chose to study persuasion because (1) three of the four literature textbooks had a unit that focused solely on persuasion; (2) persuasion is highlighted in the IRA/NCTE (1996) standards; and (3) the study of persuasion most closely resembles that of argumentation, a key focus of the Common Core State Standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a).

I worked primarily from the student's edition of the four literature textbooks because the focus of this study was on analyzing the texts and tasks for students rather than the materials for teachers. I did, however, consult the teacher's editions when coding post-reading questions (see section 3.3.2.2).

There were two different phases of analysis for this study. Phase 1 entailed an analysis of two units per literature textbook to determine how they were structured to provide coherent learning opportunities around the unit and text-specific concept/question and allowed for students to build conceptual understanding of the unit and text-specific concept/question. Phase 2 entailed an analysis of the: (a) texts in the Phase 1 units to determine to what extent they were open to multiple interpretations, (b) post-reading questions and tasks in the Phase 1 units to determine the extent to which they provided opportunities for students to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments about literature, and (c) post-reading questions and tasks to determine how they built on each other to allow students to engage in focused inquiry about the individual text. In the sections that follow, I describe each of the phases of data collection and analysis.

### 3.3 PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.3.1 Phase 1: Conceptual coherence and potential to build conceptual understanding

The purpose of Phase 1 was two-fold. One purpose was to analyze the conceptual coherence of the eight curricular units to determine how the texts, questions, and tasks cohered around the unit and text-specific concept/question. The second purpose was to analyze the unit and text-specific concepts/questions and texts to determine their potential to support the building of conceptual understanding. Phase 1 had three parts:

1. Analyzing the texts in each unit to determine how they cohered around the unit concept/question and, when applicable, the text-specific concept/question;
2. (a) Analyzing the unit and text-specific concepts/questions to determine how they supported multiple, varied perspectives and (b) analyzing the collection of texts to determine if they provided varied perspectives on the unit or text-specific concepts/questions;
3. Analyzing the questions and tasks in each unit that were designed to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question to determine how often and in what ways they contributed to unit coherence and provided opportunities for students to build conceptual understanding of the unit and text-specific concept/question.

##### 3.3.1.1 Phase 1, Part A: Coherence–Text and unit or text-specific concept/question

Part A of Phase 1 entailed analyzing the texts in each unit to determine how they cohered around the unit concept/question and, when applicable, the text-specific concept/question. Coherent units that are organized around unit and text specific concepts/questions contains texts that offer perspectives on the unit and text specific concepts/questions or texts that support students to construct their own perspectives given the ideas, arguments, events or characters in the texts (hereafter referred to as “texts that offer or support perspectives”) (Applebee, 1996; Applebee et al., 1994; Athanases, 2003).

To conduct this analysis, I created a spreadsheet for each unit that listed the unit and text-specific concepts/questions and texts. Then I read each print text (I did not have access to video texts) and described and recorded the various perspectives that it offered and supported readers to construct on the unit and text-specific concepts/questions. For example, using the unit question, “How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?” (Glencoe, 2010), as a lens for reading the short story, “Content’s of the Dead Man’s Pocket,” by Jack Finney, I listed that this text allowed readers to say that when people suddenly encounter the unexpected they (1) do foolish and dangerous things and (2) reevaluate their priorities. If texts did not offer or support perspectives, I made note of that as well.

### **3.3.1.2 Phase 1, Part B: Conceptual understanding—Texts and unit question**

Units that provide opportunities for students to build conceptual understanding of unit concepts/questions include: (1) unit questions that support multiple, varied perspectives (Applebee 1996; Applebee et al., 1994; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) and (2) a collection of texts that provide various perspectives on the unit concept/question (Applebee, 1996; Doll, 2004). Supporting a diversity of perspectives allows students to build conceptual understanding through tasks such as exploring and comparing perspectives on the unit concept/question, rethinking prior perspectives, and drawing conclusions or developing generalizations. These practices are critical in developing students’ conceptual understanding of the unit concept/question (Vygotsky, 1986).

Opportunities to build conceptual understanding of the *text*-specific concept/question are structured in similar ways. Similar to the unit concepts/questions, effective text-specific concept/question support multiple, varied perspectives; however, instead of the *collection* of texts providing multiple, varied perspectives on the unit question, *each* text (since there is generally only one text per text-specific concept/question) or pair of texts provides a diversity of perspectives on the unit concept/question in order for students to build conceptual understanding.

To analyze whether the unit and text-specific concepts/questions supported multiple, varied perspectives, I drew from the coding categories that Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) used to code questions



that teachers asked during class discussions. Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) coded questions as either “authentic” (i.e., allowing for a variety of possible responses), or as “recitation” (i.e., having or seeking one correct answer). I modified these categories as the unit and text-specific concepts/questions served larger purposes than questions teachers ask in class discussions. As stated in the teacher’s editions to the four literature textbooks, the unit and text-specific concepts/questions were intended to build conceptual understanding by guiding textual inquiry. As such, unit and text-specific concepts/questions must allow for a variety (more than two) of *perspectives* as opposed to *responses*. Variety of perspectives is important for guiding inquiry (Applebee, 1996; Wells, 1995; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) and building conceptual understanding (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

To analyze the unit and text-specific concepts/questions, I considered each unit and text-specific question individually to determine if it supported an exploration of multiple, varied perspectives. For example, I determined that the unit question, “What kind of knowledge changes our lives?” (Prentice Hall, 2010) supported multiple, varied perspectives as it is possible to explore various kinds of knowledge (e.g., historical, practical, trivial) to consider whether that knowledge changes people’s lives and then to generate some different theories about what makes knowledge life-changing. On the other hand, I determined that the unit question, “Can progress be made without conflict?” (Prentice Hall, 2010) did not allow for multiple, varied perspectives as this is a yes or no question.

After analyzing the unit and text-specific questions, I returned to my spreadsheet with descriptions of the perspectives that the texts offered or supported on the unit and text specific concepts/questions from Part A (section 3.3.1.1). For the unit questions, I analyzed whether the collection of texts provided a variety of perspectives (i.e., more than two) so as to afford opportunities to build conceptual understanding by exploring the unit question from a variety of angles. For the text-specific concepts/questions, I determined whether each text or pair of texts that shared a text-specific concept/question provided a variety of perspectives on the text-specific concept/question.

### **3.3.1.3 Phase 1, Part C: References to the unit concept/question and text-specific concept/question**

Part C entailed coding the questions and tasks in each unit that were designed to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question. The purpose was to determine how often and in what ways questions and tasks contributed to unit coherence and provided opportunities for students to build conceptual understanding of the unit and text-specific concept/question. Questions and tasks included any question or activity except those about vocabulary or grammar that could be assigned by a teacher or selected by students to be completed in preparation for or in response to the text or collection of texts.

I tracked and coded the questions and tasks designed to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question by individual text. For example, for the unit question “How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?” (Glencoe, 2010), I coded any question or task on each text that explicitly referenced the unit question (e.g., What does this text allow you to say about how people cope with the unexpected?) or implicitly referenced the unit question (e.g., Why do you think the character re-evaluates his priorities at the end of the story?). Coding by individual text allowed me to analyze how the unit and text-specific concept/question played a role in establishing coherence and building conceptual understanding for each unit text before considering its role across the collection of texts. Additionally, this allowed me the opportunity to see variations in questions and tasks by text (e.g., nonfiction, fiction, science fiction, texts that are open to multiple interpretations, etc.), and to discern any patterns to the variations.

Each question and task designed to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question was coded using the coding categories in Appendix A. The codes built from Applebee’s (1996) principles of the characteristics of effective curricular conversations, from themes that emerged in my preliminary reading of the textbooks, and from practices that build conceptual understanding (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). If there was no question/task designed to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question with a given text, I noted that as well. These questions and tasks that appeared after reading each text were also coded as recitation, authentic text-based, and authentic nontext-based. These categories are described as part of Phase 2.

In addition to coding by individual text as outlined above, I also coded questions and tasks to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question in the introductory pages to each unit (before any texts) and in the concluding pages of each unit (after all of the texts). Literature textbooks generally have a number of introductory pages at the start of every unit that provide an overview of the key concepts and literary terms to be encountered in the unit. For example, in Glencoe's *Literature*, there were ten pages of introductory material in the short story unit before the first short story was presented; the introductory pages included information about the elements that shape short stories, a model of how to read a short story, and text and pictures related to the unit question. Literature textbooks also generally have pages at the end of every unit to review the preceding work. In coherent units, questions and tasks to explore unit concepts/questions are provided at the start and close of units (Wells, 1995).

The coding categories in Appendix B were used to code the introductory and concluding questions and tasks. The codes built from Applebee's (1996) principles of effective curricular conversations, from themes that emerged during my preliminary reading of the textbooks, and from practices that build conceptual understanding (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). If there was no question or task to explore the unit concept/question in the introductory or concluding pages, I noted that as well.

Finally, I analyzed the Writing Workshops in each unit to determine their coherence with the unit or text-specific concepts/questions, texts, and genre. In coherent units, major writing assignments are reflective of the intellectual work of the unit (Peters & Wixson, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998), providing opportunities for students to engage with and extend the content and concepts they have had the opportunity to learn throughout the unit (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

All four textbooks included Writing Workshops that were intended to guide students through the stages of the writing progress in order to develop full-length, final-draft writing assignments. McDougal Littell and Prentice Hall included at least one Writing Workshop within each unit while the Writing Workshops in Glencoe and Holt spanned several units. For example, Glencoe's persuasion unit was one of three units in a nonfiction collection that had an overarching Writing Workshop. To analyze the

Writing Workshops, I looked for references to the texts, unit or text-specific concepts/questions, and connection to the focus genre of the unit.

The analyses described in Parts A, B, and C allowed me to look at the unit-level coherence by considering the relationship between the (a) texts, (b) unit concepts/questions, (c) questions and tasks before, during, and after individual texts, (d) questions and tasks before and after the entire collection of texts, and (e) Writing Workshops. Similarly, I was able to analyze text-level coherence by consider the relationship between the (a) texts, (b) text-specific concept/question, and (c) questions and tasks before, during, and after reading individual texts. Finally, the analyses allowed me to consider the textbooks' potential for developing conceptual understanding by considering (a) the multiple perspectives allowed by the unit and text-specific questions, (b) the variety of perspectives offered by the texts, and (c) the types of questions and tasks provided for students to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question and texts. I continue an analysis related to building conceptual understanding in Part 2 (section 3.3.2.2).

### **3.3.2 Phase 2: Texts and post-reading questions and tasks**

The purpose of Phase 2 was two-fold. One purpose was to determine how the texts and post-reading questions and tasks provided opportunities for students to construct knowledge to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments. The second purpose was to determine how the post-reading questions and tasks were sequenced to allow students to engage in focused inquiry about the texts.

The unit of analysis for Phase 2 of my analysis was each text in each of the two units and their corresponding post-reading questions and tasks. I analyzed the post-reading questions and tasks that immediately followed the texts. Some asked students to write about the texts or write in response to the texts. I did not conduct an analysis of the vocabulary or grammar tasks.

This phase of analysis had three parts:

- A. analyzing each text to determine the extent to which it supported multiple, varied interpretations;

- B. analyzing the post-reading questions and tasks for each text to determine the percentage that were authentic text-based questions and tasks that invite students to construct their own text-based interpretations and arguments; and
- C. analyzing the post-reading questions and tasks for each text to determine how they were sequenced to allow students to engage in focused inquiry about the text.

### **3.3.2.1 Phase 2, Part A: Texts and their potential for multiple interpretations**

Texts that are straightforward provide few opportunities for students to develop their own interpretations (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Langer, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). In order for students to develop their own interpretations of texts without applying critical lenses (e.g., feminist theory, Marxist theory), the texts must be ones in which aspects of them such as the relationship between ideas or characters, themes, meaning of quotations, causes of events or situations, and/or character motivations are not explicit or explained (Fulcher, 1997; Langer, 2000; Oteiza, 2003; Sandora et al., 1999). Generally, the complexity of the text’s topic or theme has little to do with whether it is able to support multiple interpretations. For instance, “Marigolds,” a frequently anthologized short story, centers on an incident in the life of a poor, African-American teenage girl living during the Great Depression. The adult narrator recounts the time she destroyed her neighbor’s marigolds after hearing her father crying about losing his job. The narrator described these marigolds as a “brilliant splash of sunny yellow against the dust” (Collier, 1993, p. 400) of her youth. There is a great deal to discuss based on the events and themes in this story, but there is little opportunity for multiple interpretations of the events, themes, character’s motivation, or conflicts without reading through critical lenses (e.g., Marxists theory, feminist theory). Collier, the author, explicitly details such things as the character’s motivation for destroying the flowers, how the act changed her, and what the flowers symbolized. The following paragraph is indicative of the level of explanation Collier gives:

I had indeed lost my mind, for all the smoldering emotions of that summer swelled in me and burst—the great need for my mother who was never there, the hopelessness of our poverty and degradation, the bewilderment of being neither child nor woman and yet both at once, the fear

unleashed by my father's tears. And these feelings combined in one great impulse toward destruction (1993, p. 405).

Had the author not included that level of explanation, the text would provide more opportunity for interpretation.

To determine the degree to which each text was open to multiple interpretations, I read each text and coded it using the coding schemes in Tables 1 and 2. The codes built from research on texts that are open to multiple interpretations (Fulcher, 1997; Oteiza, 2003), research that used texts that are open to multiple interpretations (Langer, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997; Sandora et al., 1999), the ACT criteria for complex texts (ACT, 2006), and my own reading of texts that are open to multiple interpretations. Codes were scaled: low, medium, and high. Separate codes were developed for narrative texts and persuasive texts. To establish reliability, a second person coded 50% of the texts. There was high interrater reliability (92%).

**Table 1: Codes for Interpretive Potential in Short Story Units**

<b>Codes for Interpretive Potential in Short Story Units</b>
Ambiguous ending or unresolved conflict
Ambiguous character motivations, beliefs, and goals
Ambiguous or highly complex relationships between characters
Ambiguous themes
Ambiguous language, vocabulary, literary devices
Debatable central conflict
Complex problems without clear right or wrong answers
Unconventional structure or use of genre conventions
Unconventional point of view
Ambiguous attitude of author toward characters/subject

**Table 2: Codes for Interpretive Potential in Persuasion Units**

<b>Codes for Interpretive Potential in Persuasion Units</b>
Ambiguous or datable central argument
Unique, conflicting, or unconventional perspectives on arguments, ideas, evidence or call to action
Ambiguous relationship among argument, ideas, and evidence
Author's purpose is debatable
Intended audience is far removed from contemporary adolescents

Unconventional structure or use of genre conventions
Ambiguous language, vocabulary, literary devices
Ambiguous attitude of author toward argument or topic

Analyzing the interpretive possibilities of the texts included in each textbook allowed me to determine opportunities they provided for students to develop, support, and defend their own text-based interpretations and arguments.

### **3.3.2.2 Phase 2, Part B: Post-reading questions and tasks—Recitation, authentic nontext-based, or authentic text-based**

Part B of the second stage of my analysis entailed analyzing the post-reading questions and tasks for each text to determine the percentage that were authentic text-based questions and tasks that invited students to develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments.

I built on the coding categories that Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) used to code questions that teachers asked during class discussions, and those that both Applebee (1993a) and Bird (2005) used to code questions in literature textbooks. All three studies coded questions as either “authentic” (i.e., allowing for multiple, varied responses; without a prescribed answer), or as “recitation” (i.e., seeking one correct answer). I refined the categories by further classifying an authentic question/task as either “text-based” or “nontext-based” (Keefer et al., 2000). Adding this distinction allowed me to distinguish between authentic questions/tasks that required textual evidence to support a response, a disciplinary practice in English language arts, and those that could be answered without textual evidence.

I supplemented my analysis of the questions and tasks as written in the student editions of the textbooks with an analysis of the suggested answers to each question in the teacher’s editions. This allowed me to distinguish between questions and tasks that were presented as authentic questions given their content and the text, but that were treated as recitation questions through the possible answers presented in the teacher’s editions. For example, there are multiple, possible responses to a question such as: In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which female character is most influential in Scout’s life? However, if the

teacher's edition provides only one possible response, this authentic text-based question is presented to teachers as a recitation question and was coded as such.

As with the coding in Phase A, I kept track of the coding of the questions and tasks by individual text. Below are the coding categories for the post-reading questions and tasks.

<b>Coding Category of Question or Task</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Examples using <i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i></b>
Recitation	Question with one correct response	How old was Scout when her mother died?
Authentic nontext-based	Question that allows for multiple, varied responses, but the responses cannot be supported with textual evidence. Instead, the question asks students to speculate about events or characters, use personal experience or values to justify a response, or make personal connections to the text.	Uncle Jack treats Scout unfairly when he accuses her of something she had not done. Have you ever been treated unfairly? How did you react? How do you think Scout's mom would have reacted to her cussing at the dinner table?
Authentic text-based	Question allows for multiple, varied responses based on textual evidence; TE provides more than one possible response or says states that answers will vary.	What is Mrs. Dubose's role in <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> ?
Authentic text-based treated as recitation in the TE	Question allows for multiple, varied responses based on textual evidence; however, the TE lists one possible response.	Which female character is most influential in Scout's life? Answer: Calpurnia is most influential because she takes care of Scout and teaches her to be a good person.

After coding each post-reading question and task, I calculated the percentage of questions in each of the four coding categories by individual text and then by unit. Once I had calculated percentages, I was able to do two things: First, I able to consider the relationship between the opportunities to develop multiple interpretations given the nature of the texts (Phase 2, Part B) and the percentages of questions that asked students to construct text-based interpretations and arguments. No previous studies of literature textbooks have analyzed the relationship between the interpretive quality of the texts and the percentage of authentic text-based questions offered by the textbook for each text. Secondly, I was able to return to my emerging analysis from Phase 1 (section 3.3.1.3) of the opportunities for students to build conceptual



understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions to consider what percentage of post-reading questions related to the unit or text-specific concept/question and provided opportunities for students to construct, support, develop, and defend their own text-based interpretations and arguments.

### **3.3.2.3 Phase 2, Part C: Sequencing of post-reading questions and tasks**

Part C of Phase 2 entailed analyzing the post-reading questions and tasks for each text to determine how they were sequenced to build upon each other to engage students in focused inquiry about each text.

Applebee's (1993a) study of post-reading questions revealed that the questions were largely unrelated to each other and could be "removed or reordered without affecting students' ability to answer the others" (p. 21). Ideally, post-reading questions on individual texts would be sequenced to engage students in a series of interrelated questions and tasks that would lead to coherent focused inquiry on the unit or text-specific concept/question or another conceptual idea that relates to the text. The questions and tasks would build on each so that answering earlier questions provides support for answering later questions (Cumming-Potsvin 2007; Lucking, 1976; Smith, 1985). For example, a question that asks which character ultimately wins a conflict might be followed by a question that asks how the author shows the evolving conflict. If the questions and tasks do not build on each other, students gain a shallow understanding about many discrete aspects of the text (Applebee et al., 1994).

I built from the categories that Applebee (1993a) used when he analyzed the questions and tasks on the texts in his study of literature textbook to determine "the degree of connectivity" (p. 148). The coding categories are as follows:

Discrete: unconnected to other questions and tasks accompanying the text

Part of a set: question or task is part of larger set that asks students to do similar things (e.g., identifying figures of speech) but not cumulative

Focused inquiry: question or task builds on an earlier question or task accompanying the text to provide a focused inquiry into an aspect of the text

As I was coding the post-reading questions, I realized that few were sequenced to engage in students in focused inquiry about each text. Instead, the post-reading questions were sequenced and clustered according to other progressions such as the chronological sequence of the text. Thus, after coding the post-reading questions according to the categories above, I returned to the post-reading questions to determine how they were sequenced, keeping the analysis open to ways of sequencing that existed rather than looking for a specific sequence.

### **3.4 SUMMARY**

This chapter described the two phases of analysis that were used to describe and compare how tenth grade literature textbooks offer opportunities for students to engage in coherent ELA curricular units in which the texts, questions, and tasks allow students to develop text-based interpretations and arguments, engage in focused inquiry about each individual text, and build conceptual understanding of unit and text-specific concepts/questions questions.

Phase 1 entailed (a) an analysis the conceptual coherence of the eight curricular units to determine how the texts, questions, and tasks cohered around the unit and text-specific concept/question, and (b) analyze the unit and text-specific concepts/questions and texts to determine their potential to support the building of conceptual understanding. Phase 2 entailed (a) an analysis of how the texts and post-reading questions and tasks provided opportunities for students to construct knowledge to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments, and (b) an analysis of how the post-reading questions and tasks were sequenced to allow students to engage in focused inquiry about the texts. Analyzing the units in the manner allowed for a determination of the extent to which current literature textbooks provide opportunities for students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, or whether they continue to promote a passive, transmission approach to English education.

## **4.0 CHAPTER IV: CONCEPTUAL COHERENCE: UNIT QUESTION, TEXT-SPECIFIC QUESTION AND TEXTS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Coherent units of study organize learning experiences for students so that important ideas and knowledge build on and connect to each other. They allow students to engage in ongoing “curricular conversations” (Applebee, 1996; Applebee et al., 1994) that are centered on big concepts or focus questions. Organizing texts and tasks around big concepts or focus questions is consistent with professional standards (IRA/NCTE, 1996; NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) and scholarship on effective curriculum in ELA (Applebee, 1993, 1996; Peters & Wixson, 2003).

A coherent unit that is organized around a central unit concept or question contains texts that offer various perspectives on the unit concept/question or texts that support students to construct their own perspectives given the ideas, arguments, events or characters in the texts (hereafter referred to as “texts that offer or support perspectives”). Additionally, coherent units contain questions and tasks that afford students opportunities to build their understanding of the unit concept/question with individual texts and across multiple texts with varying perspectives (Applebee, 1993b, 1996; Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007; Doll, 2004). In this chapter, I discuss the texts in the eight units I analyzed for this study in terms of whether or not they offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question. Because three textbook companies include text-specific focus questions in addition to unit questions, I discuss the text-specific questions and texts in these units as well.

## 4.2 UNIT QUESTION AND TEXTS

Tables 3 and 4 provide the unit question or unit concept by textbook for the short story and persuasion/nonfiction units.

**Table 3: Short Story Unit Concepts/Questions**

Textbook	Unit Concept/Question
Glencoe	“Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?”
Holt	“What common human experiences do we all share?”
McDougal Littell	“Which stories are worth reading?”
Prentice Hall	“Can progress be made without conflict?”

**Table 4: Persuasion/nonfiction Unit Concepts/Questions**

Textbook	Unit Concept/Question
Glencoe	“Keeping freedom alive: What does freedom mean to me, and what would I give up to keep it?”
Holt	“What do we believe in, and why?”
McDougal Littell	“Can you be persuaded?”
Prentice Hall	“What kind of knowledge changes our lives?”

In highly coherent units, all texts offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question given the ideas, arguments, characters, or events contained in the texts (Applebee, 1996; Applebee et al., 1994).

Because texts are the “resources that enable learners to make more comprehensive and coherent answers to the questions that drive their inquiries” (Wells, 1995, p. 251), coherence between unit concept/question and text is essential.

### 4.2.1 Unit concept/question and text coherence

Four of the eight units include texts that *all* offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question (see Table 5). The units are: (1) Glencoe’s short story unit, (2) McDougal Littell’s short story unit,

**Table 5: Unit Concept/Question and Text: Coherence**

Glencoe: Short story	McDougal Littell: Short story	McDougal Littell: Persuasion	Holt: Persuasion
“Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?”	“Which stories are worth reading?”	“Can you be persuaded?”	“What do we believe in and why?”
<p>“The Open Window” by Saki</p> <p>“The Californian’s Tale” by Mark Twain</p> <p>“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney</p> <p>“An Astrologer’s Day” by R. K. Narayan</p> <p>“Civil Peace” by Chinua Achebe</p> <p>“Masque of the Red Death” by Edgar Allan Poe</p>	<p>“Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.</p> <p>“Everyday Use” by Alice Walker</p> <p>“Searching for Summer” by Joan Aiken</p> <p>“To Build a Fire” by Jack London from <i>The Johnstown Flood</i> by David McCullough</p> <p>“The Race to Save Apollo 13” by Michael Useem</p> <p>“Exile” by Julia Alvarez</p> <p>“Crossing the Border” by Joy Harjo</p>	<p>“Doing Nothing is Doing Something” by Anna Quindlen</p> <p>“Abolishing the Penny Makes Good Sense” by Alan S. Blinder</p> <p>“On Nuclear Disarmament” by Carl Sagan</p> <p>“I Acknowledge Mine” by Jane Goodall</p> <p>“Use of Animals in Biomedical Research” by the American Medical Association (AMA)</p> <p>“A Chip of Ruby Glass” by Nadine Gordimer</p> <p>“How Much Land Does One Man Need?” by Leo Tolstoy <i>from</i> The New Testament</p>	<p>“There Comes a Time When People Get Tired” by Martin Luther King, Jr.</p> <p>“Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr.” by Robert F. Kennedy from <i>Silent Spring</i> by Rachel Carson</p> <p>“Kiss and Tell” by Judith Stone from <i>Cesar’s Way</i> by Cesar Milan</p> <p>“Pack of Lies” by Mark Derr</p> <p>“Target Real Violence, Not Video Games” by Robert D. Richard and Clay Calvert</p> <p>“Harmless Fun?” from Weekly Reader</p>

(3) McDougal Littell’s persuasion unit, and (4) Holt’s persuasion unit.

In the above units, the texts cohere around the unit questions, making the possibility for ongoing, coherent conversations about the unit question viable. Yet there are differences among the four units in how the texts cohere around the unit question. In Glencoe’s short story unit, characters are faced with unexpected situations and they all cope in different ways. As a result, each text offers a perspective on the unit concept/question, “Encountering the unexpected: How do people suddenly cope when they encounter the unexpected?” For example, in Achebe story, “Civil Peace,” the narrator faces numerous unexpected situations in post-civil war Nigeria and each time he focuses on the positive things in his life such as his health and family. In Finney’s “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket,” the narrator faces a situation in which he almost dies and he copes by reevaluating his priorities. In “An Astrologer’s Day,” the main character, an astrologer, unexpectedly encounters Nayak, a man he tried to kill years earlier. Nayak does not recognize the astrologer, and so the astrologer copes by lying to him, telling him that his palm reading reveals that he should go home immediately and never travel south again. Each text in this collection presents characters in unexpected situations, allowing for multiple perspectives about the concept of coping with the unexpected.

The texts in McDougal Littell’s short story unit cohere with the unit question, “Which stories are worth reading?” differently than texts and unit concept/question in Glencoe. McDougal Littell’s unit question is broad; as such, any story the writers chose to include in the unit could support students to construct a perspective on which stories are worth reading. Similarly, any persuasive text could support students to build a perspective on McDougal Littell’s persuasion unit question, “Can you be persuaded?” This point will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Although the texts in the McDougal Littell units cohere with the unit question, they do not offer specific perspectives on the unit question. For example, none of the texts focus on the characteristics of “worthwhile” stories. Instead, the texts support students to construct their own perspectives about the stories that are worth reading from reading the stories in this unit. After reading the collection of stories, students might say that the stories worth reading are those that teach us about our limitations (“To Build a

Fire”), encourage us to appreciate what we might otherwise take for granted (“Searching for Summer”), and enlighten us about true accounts of survival and heroism (excerpts from *The Johnstown Flood* and “The Race to Save Apollo 13”).

The texts in Holt’s persuasion unit both offer and support perspectives on the unit “What do we believe in, and why?” Like McDougal Littell’s questions, this unit question is broad, capable of being asked about virtually any text with an argument. After reading each text, students could discuss the author’s beliefs and the reasons for those beliefs as well ask their own beliefs on the author’s argument.

#### **4.2.2 Unit concept/question and text incoherence**

Four of the eight units include some–sometimes many–texts that do not offer or support perspectives unit question. This limits the potential coherence of the unit since those texts are likely to interrupt ongoing conversations about the unit question (Applebee, 1996). Furthermore, if teachers select a few texts from these units, they run the risk of selecting ones that will not contribute to students’ evolving understanding of the unit question.

The units that include texts that do not offer or support perspectives on the unit question are: (1) Holt’s short story unit, (2) Glencoe’s persuasion unit, (3) Prentice Hall short story unit, and (4) Prentice Hall’s nonfiction unit. Table 6 provides a list of the unit questions and texts in each unit. The texts that are in italics and starred (\*) are ones that do not offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question. Starring the texts distinguishes them from book excerpts, which are in italics as well.

**Table 6: Unit Concept/Question and Text: Incoherence**

Holt: Short Story	Glencoe: Persuasion	Prentice Hall: Short Story	Prentice Hall: Nonfiction
“What common human experiences do we all share?”	“Keeping freedom alive: What does freedom mean to me, and what would I give up to keep it?”	“Can progress be made without conflict?”	“What kind of knowledge changes our lives?”
<p>“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney</p> <p>“The Leap” by Louise Erdrich</p> <p>“The Trip” by Laila Lalami</p> <p>“By the Waters of Babylon” by Steven Vincent Benét</p> <p>*“Coyote Kills the Giant” retold by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz</p> <p>*from <i>In the Shadow of Man</i> by Jane Goodall</p> <p>*“What is Your Pet Thinking” by Sharon Begley</p>	<p>“On Women’s Right to Vote” by Susan B. Anthony</p> <p>“I’ve Been to the Mountain Top” by Martin Luther King, Jr.</p> <p>*“Not Just Comics” by Chester Brown</p> <p>*“‘Hamlet’ too Hard? Try a Comic Book” by Teresa Méndez</p> <p>*“The Graphic Novel Silver Anniversary” by Andrew Arnold</p> <p>“Address on the Anniversary of Lincoln’s Birth” by Carl Sandburg</p> <p>*“What I see in Lincoln’s Eyes” by Barack Obama</p> <p>“Cinderella’s Stepsisters” by Toni Morrison</p>	<p>*“A Visit to Grandmother” by William Melvin Kelley</p> <p>*“A Problem” by Anton Chekhov</p> <p>“The Streets of Cañon” by Josephina Niggli</p> <p>“There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury</p> <p>*“Tides” by Joseph D. Exline, Ed.D. and Jay M. Pasachott, Ph.D., et al.</p> <p>*“Black Water Turns the Tide on the Florida Coral” by NASA</p> <p>“One Thousand Dollars” by O. Henry</p> <p>“By the Waters of Babylon” by Steven Vincent Benét</p> <p>*“How Much Land Does One Man Need?” by Leo Tolstoy</p> <p>*“Civil Peace” by Chinua Achebe</p> <p>*“The Masque of the Red Death” by Edgar Allan Poe</p>	<p>“The Spider and The Wasp” by Alexander Petrunkevitch</p> <p>from <i>Longitude</i> by Dava Sobel</p> <p>“The Sun Parlor” by Dorothy West</p> <p>from <i>In Commemoration: One Million Volumes</i> by Rudolfo A. Anaya</p> <p>“How to Use a Compass” no author</p> <p>“GPS Quick-Start Guide” no author</p> <p>“A Toast to the Oldest Inhabitants” by Mark Twain</p> <p>“The Dog that Bit People” by James Thurber</p> <p>“Keep Memory Alive” by Elie Wiesel</p> <p>from “Nobel Lecture” by Alexander Solzhenitsyn</p> <p>“The American Idea” by Theodore H. White</p> <p>*“What Makes a Degas a Degas?” by Richard Mühlberger</p> <p>*“The History of the Guitar” by Thomas Hill</p>



		<p>“The Garden of Stubborn Cats” by Italo Calvino</p> <p>“Editorial on the Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall” no author</p> <p>“Voices from the Wall” by Marco Mielcare</p> <p>*“<i>The Censor</i>” by Luisa <i>Valenzuela</i></p> <p>“The Leader in the Mirror” by Pat Mora</p>	<p>*<i>CSU at Fullerton Course Catalog</i></p> <p>from <i>Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family</i> by Yoshiko Uchida</p> <p>from <i>The Way to Rainy Mountain</i> by N. Scott Momaday</p>
--	--	---	--

At least half of the texts in the units in Table 8 offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question. Table 7 provides examples from each of the units of the multiple perspectives the texts offer or support on the unit concept/question.

**Table 7: Multiple Perspectives and Texts**

Unit questions and publisher	Texts	Perspectives
“What common human experiences do we share?” Holt, Short story	“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket”	We all have experiences that prompt us to reevaluate our priorities.
	“By the Waters of Babylon”	We all have experiences that teach us that what we revered was not worth the reverence.
“Keeping freedom alive” Glencoe, Persuasion	“On Women’s Right to Vote” “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”	We keep freedom alive by remaining committed and encouraging others commit to the fight.
	“On the Anniversary of Lincoln’s Birth”	We keep freedom alive by honoring those who secured freedom.
	“Cinderella’s Stepsisters”	We keep freedom alive by ensuring that we do not oppress others.
“Can progress be made without conflict?” Prentice Hall, Short story	“The Leader in the Mirror” “Editorial on the Fall of the Berlin Wall”	No, progress cannot be made with conflict.
“What kind of knowledge changes our lives?” Prentice Hall, Nonfiction	from “Keep Memory Alive” from “Nobel Lecture”	Knowledge of the past on a global level changes our lives.
	“The American Idea”	Knowledge of the past on a national level changes our lives.
	From <i>The Way to Rainy Mountain</i>	Knowledge of the past on a personal level changes our lives.

The texts that offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question allow for ongoing conversations about the unit question; however, half of the texts in three units do not offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question (see Table 6). These texts will potentially cause ongoing conversations to fragment (Applebee, 1996) and limit opportunities for students to develop conceptual understanding of the unit questions.

Some of the texts exhibit *connections* to but not perspectives on the unit concept/question. For example, “What I See in Lincoln’s Eyes,” by Obama is from Glencoe’s (2010) persuasion unit, “Keeping freedom alive: What does freedom mean to me, and what would I give up to keep it?” While Lincoln is

often associated with freedom, this essay is not about Lincoln’s role in freeing slaves. In fact, Obama says he “cannot swallow whole the view of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator” (p. 440). Instead, this text is about the similarities Obama sees between his and Lincoln’s humble beginnings. Obama praises Lincoln’s “humor, ambiguity, complexity, compassion,” humility, and leadership; he does not, however, praise him for his role in obtaining or preserving freedom. This speech shares the same central *subject* as the text that precedes it—Sagan’s speech, “Address on the Anniversary of Lincoln’s Birth”—but that central subject is not the same as the unit question. This text has what Applebee, Adler, & Flihan (2007) refer to as a “strained or artificial connection” (p. 1035).

Prentice Hall’s persuasion unit has three texts with a “strained or artificial connection” to the unit question, “What kind of knowledge changes our lives?” Two texts are what Prentice Hall refers to as “Real Life Reading” texts. The texts are, “The History of the Guitar,” and an excerpt from the California State University (CSU) at Fullerton Course Catalog about their music degree. Both texts provide readers with knowledge; however, it is difficult to argue that it is the type of knowledge that would change most people’s lives. The CSU course catalog provides a short overview of their music program and a list of classes. While a career in music may change someone’s life, a course catalog like the one will most likely not. “The History Guitar” is a dull encyclopedia-type text that is void of life-changing information for most people. Someone who is passionate about guitars might find the information interesting but probably not life changing.

Holt’s short unit and Glencoe’s persuasion unit include texts that have no connections to the unit question, strained or otherwise. For example, Holt’s short story unit question is “What common human experiences do we share?” yet three of the texts are not about humans. Two are informational texts about animals and one is a Native American trickster tale about coyote. Similarly, Glencoe’s persuasion unit (Keeping freedom alive: What does freedom mean to me, and what would I give up to keep it?) includes three texts about graphic novels: “Not Just Comics,” “‘Hamlet’ too Hard? Try a Comic Book,” and “Graphic Novel Silver Anniversary.” The texts address mainstream culture’s lack of respect toward the genre of graphic novel, but lack of respect is not the same as lack of freedom. Since there is no movement

to ban graphic novels, these texts would most likely not allow for a conversation about the genre's role in preserving freedom.

Prentice Hall's short story unit exhibits significant incoherence between the unit question and the texts in the unit, limiting potential for conceptual coherence and opportunities for building conceptual understanding. Of the four textbook companies, Prentice Hall places the greatest emphasis on the unit question. The unit question and the "Big Question" icon appear on virtually every page of the units, and the teacher's edition offers multiple pages of introductory material about the unit question and how it provides the focus that "drive[s] instruction" (2010, p. xii). Furthermore, Grant Wiggins, one of the authors of *Understanding by Design*, a very popular and widely used framework for unit design that utilizes "Essential Questions" to drive instruction, is listed as one of the authors of this textbook. Yet, only eight of the 16 core texts offer or support perspectives on the unit question, "Can progress be made without conflict?"

Most of the texts in the unit present a conflict but no progress or debatable progress. For example, in the short story, "A Visit to Grandmother," a grown son visits his mother whom he has not seen since he left home as a teenager. The son, now a man with his own teenage son, confronts his mother for never loving him the way she loved his brother. The mother apologizes but the son does not accept her apology; instead, he tells her that her apology is thirty years too late. Then he bolts from the table as the "silverware and dishes [ring] and [jump]" (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 252). There is no indication at the end of the story that progress has been made in the man's relationship with his mother or in the man's effort to come to terms with his own internal feelings of neglect. In fact, one might argue that the end of the story indicates that the relationship is beyond repair.

Another text that does not offer or support perspectives on the unit question is an excerpt from a Prentice Hall science textbook about ocean tides and their causes. From this text, "Tides," the reader learns that "**Tides are caused by the interaction of Earth, the moon, and the sun**" (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 300, emphasis in original). As the preceding quote shows, Prentice Hall *science textbook* writers attribute the cause of tides to an "interaction"; however, Prentice Hall *literature textbook* writers label this

interaction a “conflict” (p. 302), presumably to make it relate to the unit question. Referring to the interaction of the Earth, moon and sun as conflict is inaccurate, as is labeling the resulting tide as “progress.” In this case, the effort to make the unit coherent detracts from the accuracy of it.

Texts that do not offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question limit teachers’ opportunities to design or engage students in high-quality, coherent units that could build conceptual understanding of the unit concept/question. These texts will interrupt ongoing conversation that might be established with texts that do offer or support perspectives, causing fruitful class discussions to fragment or start over each time with each new text (Applebee, 1996). Additionally, as we will see, the limited coherence between unit concept/question and texts impacts the coherence of other aspects of the units.

### **4.3 TEXT-SPECIFIC CONCEPT/QUESTION AND TEXTS**

In addition to the unit concept/question, three textbooks—Glencoe, Holt, and McDougal Littell—offer text-specific questions for each text or pair of texts. Glencoe’s text-specific questions provide a text-specific focus for the unit question and usually build coherence between unit concept/question, text-specific question, and text. The text-specific concepts/questions in McDougal Littell and Holt have no connections to the unit question. McDougal Littell and Holt writers use these text-specific questions rather than the unit question to organize and drive instruction on the texts.

#### **4.3.1 McDougal Littell’s and Holt’s text-specific concept/question and text**

Holt’s and McDougal Littell’s text-specific concept/question generally serves to bridge the stories and arguments in the texts with students’ experiences and opinions. In the short story units, the text-specific questions are thematic, and in persuasion units, they typically focus on authors’ central arguments.

McDougal Littell offers a text-level “concept” in addition to each text-specific question.

All the texts in Holt’s short story unit and McDougal Littell’s short story and persuasion units offer or support perspectives on their corresponding text-specific questions. Table 8 provides the texts and text-specific questions for Holt’s short story unit. And Tables 9 and 10 provide the texts, text-specific questions and text-specific concepts for McDougal Littell’s short story and persuasion units, respectively.

**Table 8: Holt Short Story Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question**

Text	Text-specific question
“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket”	“What values do you think are most important in people’s lives?”
“The Leap”	“When can taking risks help you do the right thing?”
“The Trip”	“Why are dangerous journeys sometimes necessary?”
“By the Waters of Babylon”	“What can we learn about ourselves and the world by going on a journey?”
“Coyote Kills the Giant”	
from <i>In the Shadow of Man</i>	“Are humans and animals all that different?”
“What is Your Pet Thinking”	

**Table 9: McDougal Littell Short Story Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question**

Text	Text-specific question	Text-specific concept
“Harrison Bergeron”	“What if everyone were the same?”	Average
“Everyday Use”	“What makes something valuable?”	Valuable
“Searching for Summer”	“What do you take for granted?”	Appreciation
“To Build a Fire”	“Should you trust your instincts?”	Instinct
from <i>The Johnstown Flood</i>	“Is survival a matter of chance?”	Survival
“The Race to Save Apollo 13”	“How can we achieve the impossible?”	Impossible
“Exile”	“What makes you feel like an outsider?”	Alienation
“Crossing the Border”		

**Table 10: McDougal Littell Persuasion Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Text-specific question</b>	<b>Text-specific concept</b>
“Doing Nothing is Doing Something”	“How should you spend your free time?”	Leisure
“Abolishing the Penny Makes Good Sense”	“Why keep what is no longer useful?”	Usefulness
“On Nuclear Disarmament”	“What would make the world safer?”	Security
“I Acknowledge Mine”	“Do animals have rights?”	Animal rights
“Use of Animals in Biomedical Research”	“Do the ends justify the means?”	Animal research
“A Chip of Ruby Glass”	“What would you sacrifice for justice?”	Sacrifice
“How Much Land Does One Man Need?” <i>from</i> The New Testament	“How important is wealth?”	Wealth

In every case, the texts in the above three units offer or support perspectives on their corresponding text-specific concepts/questions. As such, the text-specific concepts/questions have text-level coherence and provide focus for an inquiry into the texts. But the text-specific questions do not cohere around the unit question nor do they cohere with each other. Thus, they do not establish the basis for unit coherence and ongoing conversations about big ideas or concepts across texts (Applebee, 1996).

Holt’s persuasion unit is constructed differently than the units described above. In the units above, most texts have their own discrete text-specific concept/question. In Holt’s persuasion unit, however, texts are read in pairs, and each pair has a text-specific question. The text-specific questions are meant to reach across both texts, allowing for conversations across texts. Table 11 lists the texts and text-specific questions. The texts in italics and starred (\*) do not offer or support perspectives on the text-specific questions.

**Table 11: Holt Persuasion Unit: Texts and Text-Specific Concept/Question**

Text	Text-specific question
* <i>“There Comes a Time When People Get Tired”</i>	“How do our beliefs as a nation compare to those of fifty years ago?”
* <i>“Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr.”</i>	
from <i>Silent Spring</i>	“Do you believe people should do more to protect the environment?”
“Kiss and Tell”	
*from <i>Cesar’s Way</i>	“What do you believe our relationship with our pets can tell us about ourselves?”
* <i>“Pack of Lies”</i>	
“Target Real Violence, Not Video Games”	“Do you believe that violent video games lead to destructive behavior?”
“Harmless Fun?”	

Two pairs of texts offer or support perspectives on their corresponding text-specific questions. In these cases, the text-specific questions address the authors’ central arguments. Or, to put in another way, the texts “answer” the text-specific questions. For example, the authors of “Target Real Violence, Not Video Games” and “Harmless Fun?” provide arguments and evidence on the debate about whether violent video games lead to violent behavior. After reading these texts, students could discuss each author’s perspective, compare and contrast perspectives, and construct their own perspective given the arguments in the texts. This provides an opportunity for coherence and conversations across texts.

For the pairs of texts in italics in Table 11, the text-specific questions do not address the authors’ central arguments nor do the texts offer or support perspectives on their corresponding text-specific questions. For example, the excerpt from *Cesar’s Way*, by Cesar Milan, the world-famous dog training professional, and the op-ed article from the *New York Times*, “Pack of Lies,” by Mark Derr, tell little about what our relationships with our pets can tell us about ourselves. *Cesar’s Way* provides limited insight into what our relationship with our *dogs* can tell us about ourselves while “Pack of Lies” provides no insight into what our relationship with our dogs or any other pets can tell us about ourselves. Together, these two texts do not afford readers the opportunity to explore the authors’ perspectives or to construct their own perspectives on the text-specific question. As a result, students would find it difficult to have



conversations about these texts using the text-specific question. That said, teachers could establish conversations across the texts as they are topically related to each other.

#### 4.3.2 Glencoe: Text-specific question, unit concept/question, and text

Glencoe’s text-specific questions usually relate to both the individual texts and unit concept/question. Tables 12 and 13 provide the texts and text-specific questions in Glencoe’s short story and persuasion units, respectively. Texts and questions in italics and starred (\*) do not offer or support perspectives on the unit concept, Keeping freedom alive (see 4.2.2).

**Table 12: Glencoe Short Story Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Text-specific question</b>
“The Open Window”	“How does Saki use the twists and turns in the story to manipulate not only the story characters but his readers as well?”
“The Californian’s Tale”	“How does the unexpected affect the events of the story and the lives of the characters?”
“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket”	“How does the main character react when he encounters the unexpected?”
“An Astrologer’s Day”	“What is revealed when a man asks about his future?”
“Civil Peace”	“How does Jonathan Iwegbu experience both joy and sorrow in encountering unexpected events?”
“Masque of the Red Death”	“How does Poe use setting and plot twists to introduce unexpected events?”

**Table 13: Glencoe Persuasion Unit: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Text-specific question</b>
“On Women’s Right to Vote”	“How does Anthony define freedom?”
“I’ve Been to the Mountain Top”	“What arguments does King give to support his ideas?”
*“ <i>Not Just Comics</i> ”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “Should the graphic novel eventually earn a place of respect in the literary world?”</li> <li>2. “How does the use of the graphic novel play a role in preserving the freedom of expression?”</li> </ol>
*“‘ <i>Hamlet</i> ’ too Hard? Try a Comic Book”	
*“ <i>The Graphic Novel Silver Anniversary</i> ”	

“Address on the Anniversary of Lincoln’s Birth”	“How does Sandburg relate his impressions of Lincoln to the preservation of freedom and national unity?”
*“ <i>What I see in Lincoln’s Eyes</i> ”	<i>n/a</i>
“Cinderella’s Stepsisters”	“How does Morrison take a stand against selfish behavior and for freedom for women?”

In Glencoe’s short story unit, each text provides a response to its corresponding text-specific question. For example, responses to the text-specific question, “What is revealed when a man asks about his future?” for “An Astrologer’s Day,” might include (1) that the astrologer once tried to kill the man, (2) that the man is searching for the astrologer, and (3) that the man does not recognize the astrologer. This is not the case in Glencoe’s persuasion unit.

As the Table 13 shows, the three texts about graphic novels in Glencoe’s persuasion unit share two text-specific questions. As I discussed in section 4.2.2, these texts do not offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question. This creates incoherence between the text-specific questions, texts, and unit question. The first text-specific question is coherent with the texts but not the unit question; the second text-specific question is coherent with the unit question but not the texts. Ongoing conversations may be established with the other unit texts; however, they will likely be interrupted and fragmented with the texts on graphic novels. Additionally, if teachers use just this trio of texts as a mini-unit, as opposed to engaging students in the entire unit, they will have difficulty establishing coherent learning opportunities as the texts only offer or support perspectives on one of the two text-specific questions.

#### 4.4 SUMMARY

Four of the eight units are constructed so that all texts offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question. The coherence between the unit question and unit texts provide the foundation for a

coherent unit as all texts could contribute to ongoing curricular conversations about the unit question.

Four units include texts that do not offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question. These texts have the potential to interrupt ongoing curricular conversation and, as we shall in later chapters, influence the coherence of other aspects of the units.

Three units provide text-specific questions in addition to the unit question. When there is coherence between text-specific questions, unit question, and text, as in Glencoe, then the text-specific concept/question can provide a text-level focus for the unit question. In the case of McDougal Littell and Holt, where there is coherence between text-specific concept/question and text, but no coherence between text-specific concept/question and unit question or interrelationships between text-specific concepts/questions, then there is potential for text-level coherence but limited potential for unit coherence and conversations across texts.

## 5.0 CHAPTER V: CONCEPTUAL COHERENCE: QUESTIONS AND TASKS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the unit or text-specific concept/question and text is fundamental in establishing the building blocks for a coherent unit (Applebee, 1996; Athanases, 2003; Wells, 1995). However, additional features such as the questions and tasks on individual texts and across texts influence unit coherence as well (Applebee, 1996; Langer, 2001). Ideally, coherent units include questions before, during, and after reading individual texts, and before and after reading the entire collection of texts that provide opportunities for sustained engagement with the unit concept/question (Applebee, 1996; Applebee et al., 1994). For units that employ text-specific concepts/questions instead of unit-level ones, coherence entails questions before, after and during reading that provide opportunities to build conceptual understanding about the text-level question.

As I reported in chapter 4, not all texts in the eight units cohere around the unit or text-specific concept/question. In this chapter, I present my analysis of the question and tasks provided before, during, and after reading individual texts, and before and after reading the entire collection of texts. As you will see, the lack of coherence between the texts and the unit or text-specific concept/question influences the coherence that can potentially be established with the questions and tasks before, during, and after reading. My analysis of the pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading questions and tasks demonstrates varying levels of unit and text-level coherence by textbook and type of unit, short story or persuasion. In most cases, the level of coherence is related to the coherence between the text and the unit or text-specific concept/question. However, even when most or all of the texts offer or support

perspectives on the unit or text-specific concepts/questions, the questions and tasks often provide limited opportunities for students to engage in ongoing conversations about the unit or text-specific concept/question. Two factors account for this: (1) the infrequency of questions that ask for exploration of the unit or text-specific concept/question and (2) the plethora of questions and tasks that are unrelated to the unit or text-specific concept/question.

## **5.2 UNIT FRAME: QUESTIONS/TASKS BEFORE AND AFTER UNIT TEXTS**

The questions and tasks that introduce and conclude the work on the unit question are important in creating a sense of unit coherence (Wells, 1995). These tasks provide opportunities to frame the unit work so that students may explore their thinking about the unit concept/question before they read any texts and then articulate, make sense of, and reflect on their learning after they have read all the texts (Wells, 1995).

In coherent units, introductory activities provide tasks that afford students an opportunity to learn about and construct an initial response to the unit concept/question (Wells, 1995). If responses to the tasks are written, they can be revisited periodically throughout the unit as students learn more about the unit concept/question from reading and discussing unit texts. At the end of the unit, concluding tasks provide opportunities for students to use what they have learned to revisit, revise, and reflect on their learning.

The introductory and concluding unit tasks in Glencoe, Holt, and McDougal Littell fall far short of providing the level of conceptual coherence described above. These companies provide few introductory tasks and no concluding tasks. Prentice Hall, on the other hand, has rather extensive unit introductions and conclusions in which some introductory and concluding tasks provide opportunities for students to explore and reflect on their thinking.

### 5.2.1 Holt and Glencoe

Holt and Glencoe provide limited introductions to the unit concepts/questions. In Holt, the meagerness of the introduction signals the relative unimportance of the unit questions to the unit (see chapter 4). In Glencoe, however, this is more surprising, chiefly because the unit concepts/questions play a prominent role, especially visually, in the units. Glencoe displays the unit concept and big idea logo on virtually every unit page.

The introductory pages of both textbooks display the unit concept/question in large letters on the first page of the unit. Following the unit concept/question are photos or paintings that capture the unit concept/question visually. For example, to introduce the unit question, “What common human experiences do we all share?” Holt provides a photo of overlapping, semi-transparent images of people of diverse age, race, and sex. In addition to photos or paintings, Holt provides a quotation that captures the unit question and Glencoe provides a one-paragraph introduction to the unit concept/question. The quotation in Holt’s short story is by Willa Cather: “There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before” (Beers et al, 2009, p. 3). No tasks or questions are provided in Glencoe and Holt for students to explore the unit question. Teachers could, however, create tasks based on the paintings, photos, or quotations.

There are no concluding tasks in Holt and Glencoe that provide opportunities for students to articulate, synthesize, or reflect on what they have learned about the unit question. This is not surprising in Holt since text-specific questions, not unit questions, organize the work with texts. It does, however, appear unusual in Glencoe. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the unit concepts and big idea logos are ubiquitous in Glencoe’s units. They provide a sense of visual cohesion and signal the textbook writers’ attempts to establish a unit that at least appears coherent and cohesive. Yet, Glencoe provides no concluding tasks for students to articulate, synthesize, or reflect on what they learned about the unit question. Instead, work on the unit question ends with the final unit text.

### **5.2.2 McDougal Littell**

McDougal Littell provides slightly more opportunity for students to engage with the unit questions than Glencoe and Holt. Instead of just displaying the unit questions, McDougal Littell provides an opportunity for students to learn about and explore their initial understanding by writing and discussing their ideas. For example, at the start of the persuasion unit (“Can you be persuaded?”), students are provided with a task that asks them to work with a group of classmates to list the different kinds of persuasive messages they encounter in a day. Students are to rank the messages according to how effective they are and discuss why the effective ones work. Students are prompted to think about media, oral communication, and images, and the textbook authors supply examples of texts that are in each of the three categories.

The introductory task described above serves to access prior knowledge of persuasion and persuasive messages by having students consider what they find persuasive. Recording and ranking the effectiveness of the messages provides students with a written record of their thinking before reading any of the unit texts. If carried throughout the unit, this list could serve as a dynamic record of students’ thinking and learning throughout the unit. Students could review and revise the list as they progress through the unit and encounter the persuasive messages of the texts. However, this list is never revisited, and the unit question is never referred to again, even in the list of 17 unit goals.

### **5.2.3 Prentice Hall**

Prentice Hall provides the most extensive introductions and conclusions to the unit questions. Students are presented with two pages of introductory and concluding tasks that offer the opportunity for them to explore their thinking at the start of the unit and reflect on how it has changed at the end of the unit. The tasks provide a level of coherence to the work in the nonfiction unit, primarily because most of the texts offer or support perspectives on the unit question. In the short story unit, however, where half of the texts do not offer or support perspectives on the unit question, the tasks add to the level of unit

incoherence, primarily because the textbook writers shift the focus of the unit question in the concluding tasks, presumably to encompass more of unit texts. The result is a series of tasks that ask for ideas that are different from the unit question.

The introductory pages of the short story unit provide three tasks to access students' prior knowledge on the unit question, "Can progress be made without conflict?" The first task asks students to provide an example from their own or other's lives when progress arose from various circumstances such as an argument or an internal conflict. The directions ask students to discuss their responses with a partner before completing three sentence starters to synthesize what they learned from the first task about what leads to progress. One sentence starter is "People can make positive changes after an argument by \_\_\_\_\_" (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 223). Students are again directed to share their responses with a partner. The final task asks students to generate an initial opinion about whether they believe (1) progress can be made without conflict or (2) progress cannot be made without conflict. At the bottom of the page there is a paragraph that connects the ideas students have explored in the preceding tasks to the unit texts, stating that each text will provide students with "insight" (ibid) into the unit question. This, however, is not the case as I have already discussed. Finally, students are told that at the end of the unit they will have the opportunity to see how their ideas "have grown and changed" (ibid).

The introductory pages could provide some unit coherence, at least among the texts that offer or support perspectives on the unit question. The writing that is generated from these introductory tasks has the potential to provide an anchor for ongoing conversations about the unit questions; however, ongoing conversations would be interrupted when students encounter texts that are unrelated to the unit question.

At the conclusion of Prentice Hall's short story unit, students are provided three tasks that afford them the opportunity to reflect on what they learned about the unit question. These tasks, however, shift the focus of the unit question, thus changing the relationship between progress and conflict that students had been asked to consider in the introductory tasks and throughout the unit. The first task consists of a chart in which students are to record what they know about conflict and progress by providing an example from one unit text, from science, from social studies, and from their lives. The chart has five columns: (1)



example conflict, (2) who won or lost the conflict, (3) whether progress was made, (4) if the conflict contributed to the progress, and (5) what students learned. The paragraph that introduces this task reads:

To consider the relationship between conflict and progress, think about what you have read in this unit and what you know from your other classes and from your own experiences. Copy the chart below to apply what you have learned about how progress is made. (2010, p. 428)

This task changes the relationship between progress and conflict from that presented on nearly every page by the repetition of the unit question: “Can progress be made without conflict?” The final task asks students to explore the *relationship* between conflict and progress, not *whether* progress requires conflict. Admittedly, the inquiry encouraged by the final task is more fruitful and representative of the 16 unit texts (see section 4.2.2) than the unit question; however, the inquiry shifts the unit question and has the potential to leave students confused about the intended learning of the unit.

The second concluding task in the Prentice Hall short story unit asks students to form groups and consider the role of conflict in making progress by discussing examples from their conflict charts (post-reading task 1). Again, students are to focus on the relationship between conflict and progress, not whether progress requires conflict (i.e., the unit question). The final task reverts back to the unit question and provides students with the opportunity to reflect on how their understanding of the unit question has changed from the beginning of the unit. Students are presented with the same two statements they were presented with at the start of the unit: (1) progress can be made without conflict and (2) progress cannot be made without conflict, and they are to check the box that corresponds to their opinion. Although this final task is identical to the one presented in the unit introduction, students are not prompted to reread their writing to see how their understanding has grown or shifted, thus limiting opportunities for students to be aware of their own conceptual learning.

The introductory and concluding tasks described above could provide a coherent frame for a unit where the texts and unit question are coherent. This is not, however, the case in Prentice Hall’s short story unit. To compensate for lack of coherence between the texts and unit question, the writers shift the unit question here and elsewhere in the unit, impacting the conceptual coherence and thus the learning potential of the unit.

### 5.3 TEXT-LEVEL WORK: PRE, DURING, AND POST-READING QUESTIONS

In coherent units where the unit or text-specific concept/question drive the intellectual work, the majority of questions before, during, and after reading texts provide opportunities for students to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question given the ideas, arguments, characters, and events in each individual text and across texts. The questions help students see the interrelationships between texts and ideas, and build students' conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concept/question by exploring it from multiple angles with a variety of texts (Applebee, 1996; Applebee et al. 1994; Athanases, 2003; Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007).

Each textbook has prereading, during-reading, and post-reading questions and tasks; however, too often, especially in short story units, the questions and tasks do not provide opportunities to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question within and across texts. Instead the majority of questions, especially during-reading and post-reading questions, ask students to explore aspects of texts that are unrelated to the unit or text-specific concept/question. This limits the conceptual understanding that students can potentially build about the unit or text-specific concept/question. Furthermore, the abundance of unrelated questions and tasks detracts from the coherence of the text and unit-level work, presenting learning opportunities that are fragmented. In sum, instead of providing a driving force for unit or text-level instruction, the unit and text-specific concept/question is layered on top of other work and often appears an afterthought.

Before presenting my analysis of the prereading, during-reading, and post-reading questions, I provide a brief overview of how the textbooks focus the work on individual texts.

In addition to the unit or text-specific concepts/questions, all four textbooks have two additional focuses for each text. The additional focuses are provided in the introductory pages to each text. One focus is a "literary" focus, usually centered on literary elements or devices, and the other is a reading strategy focus,

which consists of such things as drawing conclusions, making inferences, distinguishing between fact and opinion. Sometimes questions, tasks, or graphic organizers are provided for one or more of the focuses. Most of the time, the focuses are not interrelated. Table 14 provides an example of the three focuses for one text from each textbook's short story unit and begins to demonstrate that the unit or text-specific concept/question is one layer of work for each text rather than a driver of the work as the textbook introductions suggest.

### **5.3.1 Prereading questions/tasks**

In coherent units, prereading tasks provide opportunities for students' to access and explore their prior knowledge of the unit or text-specific concept/question in ways that prepare them for the text. Additionally, prereading tasks often build on ideas about the unit or text-specific concept/question from other unit texts (Applebee, 1993). Finally, prereading tasks are often written so as to provide a record of initial thoughts to be revisited and revisited after reading, helping students become more aware of their own thinking and learning.

Most of the time, prereading tasks in the four textbooks provide students with opportunities to access and explore their prior knowledge of the unit or text-specific concept/question in ways that would prepare them for the text. As expected, this occurs with texts that offer or support perspectives on the unit or text-specific concept/question. When texts do not offer or support perspectives, prereading tasks either (1) access students' prior knowledge on concepts in the texts that are not related to the unit or text-specific concept/question, or (2) access students prior knowledge on the unit or text-specific concept/question, ignoring the content of the texts. The latter typically occurs when textbook writers attempt to maintain rhetorical cohesion with the unit or text-specific concept/question. Tables 15, 16, 17, and 18 detail the texts that have prereading tasks that access students' prior knowledge on the unit or text-specific concept/question-specific concept/question and texts. The texts that are in italics and starred (\*) do not offer or support perspectives on the unit or text-specific concept/question.

**Table 14: Multiple Focuses for Reading One Text from Each Textbook**

Text and textbook	Unit or text-specific concept/question	Literary focus	Reading Strategy focus
<p>“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pockets”</p> <p>Glencoe (2010)</p>	<p>“Encountering the Unexpected: How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?”</p> <p>“How does the main character react when he encounters the unexpected?” (p. 34).</p>	<p><u>Conflict</u>: “As you read, ask yourself, Which type of conflict does Tom experience in this story?” (p. 34).</p>	<p><u>Responding to Characters</u>: “As you read..., ask yourself, How does Tom make you feel?” (p. 34).</p>
<p>“The Leap”</p> <p>Holt (Beers et al., 2009)</p>	<p>“When can taking risks help you do the right thing?” (p. 36).</p>	<p><u>Flashback</u> (p. 37).</p>	<p><u>Making Predictions</u>: “As you read, note the details and events that help you predict what is going to happen next” (p. 37).</p>
<p>from <i>The Johnstown Flood</i></p> <p>McDougal Littell (2008)</p>	<p>“Is survival a matter of chance?” (p. 100).</p>	<p><u>Mood</u>: “As you read, look for descriptions of what Johnstown was like on the day of the flood and what Gertrude Quinn and her family saw, heard, and said” (p. 101).</p>	<p><u>Analyze Chronological Order</u>: “As you read, look for signal words and use them to record major events in the order that they occurred on a timeline” (p. 101).</p>
<p>“There Will Come Soft Rains”</p> <p>Prentice Hall (2010)</p>	<p>“Can progress be made without conflict?”</p> <p>“Notice what technology allows the house to do during the course of one day. Then, determine if these advances are positive or negative” (270).</p>	<p><u>Setting</u>: “As you read...consider the way the setting of the story reflects the time period in which it was written” (p. 269).</p>	<p><u>Make Inferences</u> (p. 269).</p>

**Table 15: Glencoe: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

Short Story		Persuasion	
Text	Prereading questions are related to unit concept/question and text	Text	Prereading questions are related to unit concept/question and text
“The Open Window”	√	“On Women’s Right to Vote”	√
“The Californian’s Tale”		“I’ve Been to the Mountain Top”	√
“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket”		*“ <i>Not Just Comics</i> ”	
“An Astrologer’s Day”		*“ <i>‘Hamlet’ too Hard? Try a Comic Book</i> ”	
“Civil Peace”		*“ <i>The Graphic Novel Silver Anniversary</i> ”	
“Masque of the Red Death”		“Address on the Anniversary of Lincoln’s Birth”	
		*“ <i>What I see in Lincoln’s Eyes</i> ”	n/a
		“Cinderella’s Stepsisters”	

**Table 16: Holt: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

Short Story		Persuasion	
Text	Prereading questions are related to text-specific concept/question and text	Text	Prereading questions are related to text-specific concept/question and text
“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket”	√	*“ <i>There Comes a Time When People Get Tired</i> ”	
“The Leap”	√	*“ <i>Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr.</i> ”	
“The Trip”	√	from <i>Silent Spring</i>	√
“By the Waters of Babylon”	√	“Kiss and Tell”	
“Coyote Kills the Giant”	√	* <i>from Cesar’s Way</i>	
from <i>In the Shadow of Man</i>	√	*“ <i>Pack of Lies</i> ”	
“What is Your Pet Thinking”	√	“Target Real Violence, Not Video Games”	√
		“Harmless Fun?”	

**Table 17: McDougal Littell: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

Short Story		Persuasion	
Text	Prereading questions are related to the text-specific question and text		Prereading questions are related to the text-specific question and text
“Harrison Bergeron”	√	“Doing Nothing is Doing Something”	√
“Everyday Use”	√	“Abolishing the Penny Makes Good Sense”	√
“Searching for Summer”	√	“On Nuclear Disarmament”	√
“To Build a Fire”	√	“I Acknowledge Mine”	√
from <i>The Johnstown Flood</i>	√	“Use of Animals in Biomedical Research”	√
“The Race to Save Apollo 13”	√	“A Chip of Ruby Glass”	√
“Exile”	√	“How Much Land Does One Man Need?”	√
“Crossing the Border”			

**Table 18: Prentice Hall: Prereading Tasks, Texts, and Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

Short Story		Nonfiction	
Text	Prereading questions are related to unit concept/question and text	Text	Prereading questions are related to unit concept/question and text
* <i>"A Visit to Grandmother"</i>		"The Spider and The Wasp"	√
* <i>"A Problem"</i>		from <i>Longitude</i>	√
"The Streets of Cañon"	√	"The Sun Parlor"	√
"There Will Come Soft Rains"	√	from <i>In Commemoration: One Million Volumes</i>	√
* <i>"Tides"</i>	n/a	"How to Use a Compass"	n/a
* <i>"Black Water Turns the Tide on the Florida Coral"</i>		"GPS Quick-Start Guide"	n/a
"One Thousand Dollars"	√	"A Toast to the Oldest Inhabitants"	√
"By the Waters of Babylon"		"The Dog that Bit People"	
* <i>"How Much Land Does One Man Need?"</i>		"Keep Memory Alive"	√
* <i>"Civil Peace"</i>		from "Nobel Lecture"	
* <i>"The Masque of the Red Death"</i>		"The American Idea"	√
"The Garden of Stubborn Cats"	√	* <i>"What Makes a Degas a Degas?"</i>	
"Editorial on the Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall"	n/a	* <i>"The History of the Guitar"</i>	n/a
"Voices from the Wall"		* <i>CSU at Fullerton Course Catalog</i>	n/a
* <i>"The Censor"</i>	√	from <i>Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family</i>	√
"The Leader in the Mirror"		from <i>The Way to Rainy Mountain</i>	



In most cases, when there is coherence between texts and unit or text-specific concepts/questions, prereading tasks provide opportunities for students to explore their thinking about the unit or text-specific concept/question as it relates to the text by considering their lives, people they know, or characters from movies and books. Table 19 provides three examples of prereading tasks that establish coherence between the unit or text-specific concept/question and text.

**Table 19: Examples: Pre-reading Tasks, Unit or Text-Specific Concept/Question, and Text Coherence**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Unit or text-specific concept/question</b>	<b>Prereading task</b>
“Searching for Summer”	“Appreciation: What do you take for granted?”	“Conduct an informal class survey, asking each person to name an everyday thing that is taken for granted. Choose the item mentioned most often, and as a class, discuss what you would do if this things were suddenly gone or in short supply” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 60).
“The Open Window”	“Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?”	“Has your first impression turned out to be wrong? Freewrite for a few minutes about a time when you were mistaken about a first impression” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 11).
“Target Real Violence, Not Video Games” “Harmless Fun?”	“Do you believe violent video games lead to destructive behavior?”	“With a small group of your classmates, discuss your opinions about video games. How can video games be beneficial? How can they be harmful? What effects do they have on teenagers?” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 608).

As the examples illustrate, prereading tasks generally provide opportunities for students to explore their thinking about the unit or text-specific concepts/questions in ways that prepare them to access key concepts, events, or arguments in the texts. The tasks typically build from students’ lives and experiences outside of school, potentially bridging students’ out-of-school and in-school knowledge and experiences. The tasks are often oral; however, students could be prompted to create written records of their discussions that could be revisited and revised after reading. Revision might include incorporating new ideas from texts, comparing characters’ or authors’ perspectives to their own, or reflecting on how their thinking about the prereading task did or did not change. Revising these tasks would further add

coherence to the text or unit-level work and students' evolving understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions.

Occasionally, prereading tasks do not provide opportunities to access prior knowledge on unit or text-specific concepts/questions even though the texts provide perspectives on the concepts/questions. This happens most frequently in Glencoe where few of the prereading tasks ask students to engage with the unit or text-specific concept/question even though many of the texts offer or support perspectives on the concept/question. Typically when this happens, the prereading tasks focus on ideas or arguments in the texts, ignoring the unit or text-specific concept/question. For example, the prereading task for Sandburg's "Address on the Anniversary of Lincoln's Birth" asks students to list the qualities they admire in a national leader. The task prepares students for Sandburg's speech, as he discusses qualities he admires in Lincoln, but it does not focus students' reading on the unit concept, Keeping freedom alive. Sometimes, however, prereading tasks access prior knowledge on ideas that are only peripherally related to the text and not at all related to the unit or text-specific concept/question. For example, before reading Twain's "The Californian's Tale" about a miner who refuses to accept his wife's death nineteen years earlier, students are asked: "How important is it to have people care about you? Write a journal entry about one person you care about in which you explain why that person is important to you" (Glencoe, 2010, p. 18). This task is unrelated to the unit concept/question, "Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when suddenly encountering the unexpected," and it is only peripherally related to the text as this text is not about how much the miner cares about wife, but rather how he cannot accept her death.

When texts do not offer or support perspectives on the unit or text-specific concept/question, prereading tasks often maintain coherence to unit or text-specific concept/question by neglecting the content of the texts. For example, the prereading task for the excerpt from *Cesar's Way* and "Pack of Lies" is: "List the ways in which relationships between people are similar to and different from the relationships between people and their pets" (Glencoe, 2010, p. 592). Then students are to answer the following question: "What lessons might we learn from our pets about how we should interact with other people?" (ibid). This prereading task provides an opportunity to explore the text-specific

concept/question, “What do you believe our relationships with our pets can tell us about ourselves?” (ibid); however, it disregards the content of the texts. The texts are focused on people’s relationships with their pets, not other people. Furthermore, neither author suggests approaching relationships with people the same way they approach relationships with dogs. Milan stresses the need for dog owners to be in complete control of the dynamics of the relationship at all times. It is not clear from the text that Milan would encourage this type of dominance when approaching human relationships. This task exhibits coherence to the text-specific concept/question but not to the text.

Prentice Hall maintains visual cohesion with its unit question even when prereading tasks are not coherent with the unit question or texts. For example, the prereading task for “A Visit to Grandmother” consists of the following sentence starters: “When people experience a misunderstanding, a confrontation may be helpful because \_\_\_\_\_. Following a conflict, relationships might change because \_\_\_\_\_.” (p. 240). The unit question for the above text is “Can progress be made without conflict?” As I discussed in chapter 4, the confrontation between mother and son in this story is neither helpful nor results in a change that can be considered “progress.” Despite that, the prereading task is labeled with the unit question and big idea logo.

Another way Prentice Hall writers maintain surface-level cohesion in spite of limited intellectual coherence is by manipulating the wording of the unit question (as we saw in section 5.2.3) or using key words from the unit question in prereading tasks and introductions to texts. For example, the two texts about ocean tides have no prereading task, but are preceded by an introduction to the texts that attempts to explain how these texts cohere with the unit question. As I discussed in chapter 4, “Tides,” informs readers that ocean tides are the result of the “interaction” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 300) of Earth, the moon, and the sun. “Tides” is paired with “Black Water Turns the Tides on Florida Coral,” a NASA press release about a red tide off the coast of Florida that resulted in severe stress and death to coral reefs. The introduction to this pair of texts is: “Nature is constantly in conflict. These clashes perpetuate cycles that living things need to survive. As you read, consider the perspective each author has on ‘tidal battles’– the natural forces that cause and affect tides” (p. 298). Prentice Hall writers attempt to establish coherence

between texts and unit question by labeling the scientific phenomena (i.e., interactions) in the texts as “conflict” and a “tidal battle,” a phrase that none of the authors use. The textbook writers attempt to mend the incoherence between texts and unit question by manipulating language in ways that result in scientific inaccuracies.

Applebee (1993a) declared the prereading tasks in the literature textbooks he analyzed to be “curiously detached from the selections that followed” (p. 16). My analysis shows that this is not usually the case. Generally, when the texts offer or support perspectives on the unit or text-specific concept/question, prereading tasks provide opportunities for students to access and explore their prior knowledge on the unit or text-specific concept/question in ways that prepare them to read the subsequent text. The tasks typically build from students’ lives and experiences outside of school, potentially bridging between students’ out-of-school and in-school knowledge and experiences. Prereading tasks never, however, provide opportunities for students to build on what they have learned from *other* unit texts. Prereading tasks are isolated from other tasks and texts, limiting opportunities to explore and build on prior knowledge and see the interrelationships between texts and concepts (Applebee, 1993a). Furthermore, students are never prompted to revisit prereading tasks after reading to revise ideas or reflect on how their ideas have grown or changed. In the nearly 20 years since Applebee’s study, prereading questions have improved in their connection to the texts. However, they are still not integrated in a focused study of the texts that includes thinking, rethinking, and revising understanding.

My analysis of the prereading tasks also reveals the importance of coherence between texts and unit or text-specific questions. As this section shows, when texts do not offer or support perspectives on the unit or text-specific concept/question, textbook writers end up choosing between coherence to the unit or text-specific concept/question or coherence to the text. Neither choice is ideal. The former choice can result in inadequate or inaccurate preparation for the text, while the latter choice can detract from the unit or text-specific concept/question.

### 5.3.2 During-reading questions and tasks

Posing during-reading questions that ask students to consider ideas, arguments, or events in the texts as they relate to the unit or text-specific concept/question is another way to maintain coherence, integrate conceptual work, and provide opportunities to build conceptual understanding.

All textbooks pose during-reading questions, but only Glencoe poses ones that relate to the unit or text-specific concept/question. Holt, McDougal, and Prentice Hall's during-reading questions correspond to "literary" and "reading strategy" focuses (see section 5.3) in addition to grammar and visuals that may accompany the text; Glencoe poses those questions as well. All companies designate a color for each focus that they use to code the during-reading questions. Glencoe extends the color-coding to highlight passages where responses to the during-reading questions can be found. Color-coding the questions allows teachers and students to easily distinguish among the different focuses. Since the focuses are rarely interrelated, teachers and students could engage in during-reading questions on only one focus.

Depending on length, Glencoe (2010) provides between zero and 19 during-reading questions per text. The questions are divided unequally among the three focuses for the text. Typically, 25% to 30% of during-reading questions correspond to the unit or text-specific question. Most ask students to answer an aspect of the unit or text-specific question based the unfolding events or arguments. Below, I present the during-reading questions for "Contents of the Dead Man's Pocket," a short story about a man who goes on the ledge outside his 11<sup>th</sup> floor apartment to retrieve an important piece of paper. The unit concept/question is, "Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?" and text-specific question is, "How does the main character react when he encounters the unexpected?"

How has the unexpected experience of dropping the yellow paper affected the author [of the paper] so far? (p. 38)

How does Tom try to combat his fear of falling? (p. 38)

What other unexpected experience does Tom have once he is on the ledge? (p. 41)

What does Tom do on the ledge to regain his composure? (p. 45)

What other unexpected experiences do you think Tom will face in the future? (p. 47)

How might Tom be about to take a leap in the unknown? (p. 47)

During-reading questions are typically recitation and test students’ understanding of the unfolding events or arguments as they relate to the unit or text-specific concept/question. While not particularly rigorous, Glencoe’s during-reading signal the textbook authors’ attempt to integrate work with the unit or text-specific concept/question in ways that mirror the work on other focuses (i.e., literary and reading strategies). The absence of during-reading questions in Holt, McDougal Littell, and Prentice Hall adds to the impression that the unit or text-specific concept/question is simply another layer—as opposed to a driving force—of the text or unit-level work.

### 5.3.3 Post-reading questions and tasks

In coherent units, where unit or text concept/question drive unit or text-level work, the majority of post-reading questions provide opportunities for students to delve into the unit or text-specific concept/question within and across texts by exploring and comparing authors’ and characters’ perspectives; analyzing how perspectives are represented, supported, and developed in and across texts; and developing and revising larger generalizations about the concepts using evidence from texts (Athanases, 2003). In coherent units, work with unit or text-specific concept/question is integrated into text-level work so that even when students are analyzing literary elements, for example, they do so in order to understand how authors use those elements to represent the unit or text-specific concepts.

Table 20 provides the percentages of post-reading questions from each short story or persuasion unit that provide opportunities to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question.

**Table 20: Percentages of Post-reading Questions Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

<b>Textbook</b>	<b>Short story</b>	<b>Persuasion</b>
Glencoe	12%	25%
Holt	15%	17%
McDougal Littell	17%	57%
Prentice Hall	7%	14%

The percentages of post-reading questions that pertain to the unit or text-specific concept/question show how infrequently questions are posed that ask students to think about and work with these concepts. In most cases, less than 20% of post-reading questions provide opportunities for students to explore the unit or text-specific concepts/questions given the ideas, arguments, events, or characters in and across texts. McDougal Littell's and Glencoe's persuasion units, which will be described below, are the exceptions. What's more, as we shall see in chapter 6, many of the questions are ones that either have one correct response or ask students to generate ideas without considering the texts at all. Simply put, the percentages in Table 20 demonstrate that despite what is written in the introductory material to the textbooks, the unit or text-specific concepts/questions are not designed to drive or focus instruction. Instead, they are presented as one of many layers of the text or unit-level work.

Every textbook has higher percentages of persuasion post-reading questions that ask students to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question. The difference for Holt is slight, but Glencoe and Prentice Hall each have twice as many post-reading questions focused on the unit or text-specific concept/question in their persuasion units as in their short story units. McDougal Littell has a 30% difference between the units (17% for short story and 57% for persuasion). For the most part, the reason for these differences further highlights the fundamental importance of coherence between texts and unit or text-specific concept/question; the more texts that are coherent with the unit or text-specific concept/question *and* the more conceptually coherent the texts and unit or text-specific concept/question are, the more post-reading questions also align with the text and unit or text-specific concept/question. In McDougal Littell, however, the difference can be attributed to variations between the study of persuasion and short story. I will explain both reasons in the paragraphs that follow.

Prentice Hall provides the clearest case to illustrate the fundamental importance of coherence between texts and unit or text-specific concept/question. In Prentice Hall's short story unit, half of the texts offer or support perspectives on the unit question, corresponding to the low percentage (7%) of post-reading questions that link to the text and unit questions. In the Prentice Hall nonfiction unit, however, 13 of the 16 texts offer or support perspectives on the unit question, increasing the percentage of post-

reading questions that cohere around the unit question to 14%. More aligned texts generally equals more aligned questions. Yet, Glencoe's persuasion unit offers an exception to the more-is-more case we see with Prentice Hall.

Glencoe offers fewer texts in the persuasion unit that offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question than the short story unit, yet the percentage of post-reading questions that ask students to explore the unit concept/question is higher in persuasion. This apparent incongruity demonstrates that the strength of conceptual coherence between the texts and unit concept/question also matters. In Glencoe's short story unit, all texts offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question, "Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?" However, encountering and coping with the unexpected is not a central concept or theme in any of the texts. Often, the unexpected is simply an event that furthers plot development. Thus, a couple questions on a text may explore how characters cope with the unexpected or how writers write about the unexpected, but the amount of exploration is restricted due to lack of prominence in the texts. In persuasion, on the other hand, the unit concept, keeping freedom alive, plays a central role in four of the eight texts. Consequently, discussing the concept is central to discussing the authors' ideas. For example, more than a quarter of the post-reading questions on "Cinderella's Stepsister's" relate to the unit concept, keeping freedom alive, as Morrison speaks directly about how to do that. In sum, although fewer texts in Glencoe's persuasion unit offer or support perspectives on the unit concept/question, the unit concept/question plays a central role in the texts that do.

For McDougal Littell, differences between persuasion (57%) and short story (17%) post-reading questions that explore text-specific big concepts/questions can be attributed to variations in the study of texts in persuasion and short story. As I discussed in chapter 4, text-specific big concepts/questions in the short story unit focus on a central theme in the texts; however, post-reading questions ask about much more than the central theme. They ask about plot, setting, conflict, mood, characterization, suspense, and other aspects of author's craft in ways that are detached from how authors use those devices to develop themes. In persuasion, however, text-specific concepts/questions center on authors' central arguments, as



do many of the post-reading questions. In other words, the post-reading questions in McDougal Littell's persuasion unit tend to cohere around a text's central argument (i.e., text-specific concept/question) whereas post-reading questions in the short story unit do not cohere around a text's themes.

We can see the differences discussed in the previous paragraph at work in the two short stories that are included in McDougal Littell's persuasion unit. One of the stories, "How Much Land Does One Man Need?" is read as an argument against striving for wealth. As such, the post-reading questions focus on the argument (i.e., text-specific concept/question) and how it unfolds through the use of various literary devices. A full 80% of the post-reading questions ask students to explore the text-specific concept/question ("How important is wealth?"). The other short story in the persuasion unit, "A Chip of Ruby Glass," is read as story stories are read in the short story unit with many post-reading questions about aspects of the texts that are unrelated to the text-specific concept/question. As a result, only 29% of the post-reading questions ask students to answer or explore the text-specific question.

Very few post-reading questions in all units provide opportunities for students to work across texts. This is especially true in the short story units where only three questions (two in McDougal Littell and one in Holt) from all four textbooks offer intertextual tasks that ask students to do such things as compare several texts to draw conclusions about unit or text-specific concept/question or how authors write about the these concepts/questions. So, while some texts in every short story unit cohere around similar ideas and could support intertextual conversations, few of the post-reading questions ever engage students in those conversations. Admittedly, this makes it easier for teachers to pick and choose a few texts to read with students rather than having to engage in the entire unit; however, if textbooks market themselves as building students' conceptual understanding, they will need to include more of these types of tasks. This is an idea that will be discussed in chapter 8.

Intertextual tasks are more prevalent in the persuasion units; however, they still appear infrequently. For example, although four of the eight texts in Glencoe cohere around the unit concept, keeping freedom alive, only one post-reading question asks students to compare how different authors support their arguments for freedom. In McDougal Littell, three post-reading questions ask students to

work across two texts to compare authors' positions or how they support their positions on their central arguments (i.e., text-specific concept/question). Holt has the highest number (6/12) of intertextual questions that are related to the text-specific question. This is because the texts in Holt's persuasion unit are paired and each pair shares a text-specific question. Most of the intertextual questions ask students to come to some conclusions related to the text-specific concept/question after reading pairs of text. For example, after reading the two texts on video games, students are asked to state whether or not they believe that violent video games increase the level of violence in society. Prentice Hall offers no intertextual post-reading questions that are related to the unit question. Although some of the texts in Prentice Hall's persuasion unit are paired, the pairing is based on similarities in craft rather than ideas about the unit question.

#### **5.4 WRITING WORKSHOP**

In coherent units, major writing assignments are reflective of the intellectual work of the unit (Peters & Wixson, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). They provide opportunities for students to engage with and extend the content and concepts they have had the opportunity to learn throughout the unit (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). As such, they cohere with several unit elements. Ideally, major writing assignments are coherent with unit or text-specific concept/question, asking students to extend curricular conversations (Peters & Wixson, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). For genre-based units, major writing assignments cohere with the genre under study (Peters & Wixson, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Students might be asked to write in or about the focus genre or mode. Finally, major writing assignments cohere with the unit texts by referring to the texts, suggesting them as models for writing, or asking students to reference them in their own writing. Simply put, in coherent units, major writing assignments engage students in using and extending their conceptual understanding and their understanding of the focus genre (Peters & Wixson, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

All four textbooks include Writing Workshops that are intended to guide students through the stages of the writing progress in order to develop full-length, final-draft writing assignments. McDougal Littell and Prentice Hall includes at least one Writing Workshop within each unit while the Writing Workshops in Glencoe and Holt span several units. For example, Glencoe’s persuasion unit is one of three units in a nonfiction collection that has an overarching Writing Workshop.

None of Writing Workshops come close to establishing the level of coherence described above. Six of the Writing Workshops exhibit some coherence (see Table 21), primarily at the genre-level. Beyond that, most Writing Workshops appear conceptually, visually, or rhetorically disconnected from the units.

**Table 21: Writing Workshop and Unit Coherence**

	<b>Glencoe</b>	<b>Holt</b>	<b>McDougal Littell</b>	<b>Prentice Hall</b>
High Coherence				
Medium Coherence		autobiographical narrative (short story)  persuasive essay (persuasion)	interpretive essay (short story)  editorial (persuasion)	short story (short story)  persuasive essay (nonfiction)
Low Coherence	literary criticism–historical or biographical analysis (short story)  biographical narrative (persuasion)			problem-and-solution essay (short story)  editorial (nonfiction)

Six Writing Workshops provide opportunities for students to write in or about the primary genre of the unit texts. McDougal Littell’s short story Writing Workshop assignment is an interpretive essay in which students “[look] closely at a story and [find] the meaning in it” (2008, p. 142). One of Prentice Hall’s two short story Writing Workshops is to write a short story. In these Writing Workshops, students have the opportunity to use and extend the work with unit texts and tasks about the focus genre as they

write in or about the genre. The Writing Workshops, however, rarely reference unit texts and never reference tasks or unit or text-specific concepts/questions, even when opportunities seem obvious and beneficial. For example, the intellectual work required to write an interpretive essay (McDougal Littell's Writing Work) parallels much of the work in the unit; students read a text and analyze what the texts says and means by considering the plot, characters, themes, and other devices that they were asked to consider with the unit texts and tasks. However, the textbook writers never make this connection. For example, students are not reminded of thematic text-specific concepts/questions or post-reading questions they may have answered about themes. And in units where the assignment is to write in the genre or mode of the unit texts, students are never prompted to revisit texts to use them as models for their own writing. Providing these connections would add coherence to the unit by encouraging students to take advantage of the intellectual work they may have already done to support the assignment.

One of Prentice Hall's nonfiction unit Writing Workshops exhibits genre-level coherence; however, the Writing Workshop is placed before students have studied the genre. The assignment is to write a letter to the editor using "persuasive techniques" (2010, p. 532), but the Writing Workshop precedes rather than follows the study of persuasion. Although it is likely that students would have studied persuasive techniques in earlier grades, students whose teachers use this textbook as curriculum would not have been provided that opportunity yet. Thus, the placement of this Writing Workshop could mean that students are asked to use techniques with which they are unfamiliar.

Three Writing Workshops appear to have been written by people with limited knowledge of the units. One of those is Glencoe's short story Writing Workshop, which appears more than 150 pages after the conclusion of the unit I analyzed. The assignment is to analyze a text from a historical or biographical perspective. Yet, at no time in the unit I studied or the collection of units that comprise this Writing Workshop are students offered the opportunity to analyze texts from historical or biographical perspectives.

Another example of low unit-level coherence is one of Prentice Hall's short story unit Writing Workshops. The assignment asks students to write a problem-and-solution essay; however no unit texts or

tasks provide support for this. In other words, the intellectual work required to write this type of essay has little relationship to the intellectual work involved in reading and analyzing short stories (i.e., the instruction in the unit). Moreover, there is no attempt to connect the assignment to the unit question, “Can conflict be made without progress?” by establish a bridge between the words “problem” and “conflict” or between “solution” and “progress,” for example. Creating this connection could provide students with support for selecting a topic.

Finally, none of the Writing Workshops establishes visual cohesion to the work of the units. This is most noticeable in Prentice Hall and Glencoe. Unlike the units, where the unit question and logo maintain visual cohesion, the unit question and logo are noticeably absent from the Writing Workshop pages, which further separate the Writing Workshops from the rest of the unit.

There are, of course, advantages to Writing Workshops that have limited coherence to the work of the units. The primary advantage is that it allows teachers to engage students in the Writing Workshops without engaging them in the unit work. One might argue that teachers who have engaged their students in the units will find ways to make the connections that the textbook writers do not. For some units, such as McDougal Littell’s interpretive essay or Prentice Hall’s short story, making those connections could seem natural since the Writing Workshops ask students to engage in intellectual work that is similar to the intellectual work of the units. However, some Writing Workshops – the problem-and-solution essay and analyzing a short story from an historical or biographical perspective – are so far removed from the unit work that it would be nearly impossible to make any connections.

## 5.5 SUMMARY

As we saw in this chapter, the relationship between the texts and unit or text-specific concept/question is fundamental in establishing coherent units (Applebee, 1996; Wells, 1995). In most cases, units that exhibit strong coherence between the texts and unit or text-specific concept/question have more questions

and tasks that provide opportunities for engagement with the unit or text-specific question. Nevertheless, even in units in which most or all of the texts offer and/or support perspectives, there are few questions and tasks that are designed to engage students in ongoing conversations about the unit or text-specific concept/question.

At the unit level, only Prentice Hall provides students the opportunity to learn about and construct an initial response to the unit question before reading the unit texts and to reflect on the unit question after reading all the texts. However, because half of the texts in the short story unit do not offer or support perspectives on the unit question, the concluding tasks shift the focus away from the unit question, which limits the learning potential of the tasks. The other three textbooks provide an introduction to the unit question but do not provide the opportunity for students to reflect on their learning at the conclusion of the units. As such, there is no opportunity for students to synthesize and reflect on what they have learned or consider the larger implications of their learning.

At the text-level, all companies pose prereading, during-reading, and post-reading questions, but few questions, especially during-reading and post-reading, ask students to explore the unit or text-specific concept/question given the ideas, arguments, or events in the texts. With the exception of Glencoe, all during-reading questions are posed about other focuses on the texts, relegating the unit or text-specific concept/question to something that is explored only before and after reading. Apart from McDougal Littell's persuasion unit, less than one quarter of the post-reading questions ask students to consider the unit or text-specific concept/question. Furthermore, post-reading questions rarely ask students to think across multiple texts to consider ideas or arguments related to the unit or text-specific concept/question.

Finally, Writing Workshops leave the unit or text-specific concepts/questions behind completely, even when connections to them might support students' thinking and writing. In general, Writing Workshops are rather removed from the unit work.

In sum, my analysis shows that questions and tasks on the unit or text-specific concept/question demonstrate some unit and text-level coherence; however, they are not often integrated into the other work on the texts and are rarely conducive to building students' conceptual understanding.

## 6.0 CHAPTER VI: POTENTIAL FOR INQUIRY

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The questions most frequently asked of secondary ELA students by teachers (Applebee et al., 2003; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) and textbooks (Applebee, 1993a; Lynch and Evans, 1963; Rotta, 1998) are recitation questions that ask for recall of textual details or accepted interpretations of texts. However, prior research in ELA (Applebee et al., 2003; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) has shown that when students are provided texts and questions that offer opportunities to develop, support, and defend their own text-based interpretations and arguments, they learn to use knowledge in “creative and critical” ways (Langer, 2001, p. 872) to solve open-ended problems, develop and defend interpretations, and learn disciplinary ways of making and supporting arguments. Furthermore, students who engage in these practices have higher levels of achievement on standardized tests (Applebee et al., 2003; Guthrie et al., 1995; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) and find their experiences more fun and engaging (Applebee, 1993b; Applebee et al., 1994; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Guthrie et al., 1995).

In this chapter, I present my analysis of the opportunities provided by the four literature textbooks for students to engage with texts and questions that invite exploration, inquiry, and the creation of text-based interpretations and arguments. First, I discuss the unit and text-specific questions in terms of their potential to “drive” (Glencoe, 2010, p. xii) and “sustain” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T71) inquiry and text-based explorations. Then, I present my analysis of the post-reading questions to discuss the opportunities they provide for students to develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments related to the unit or text-specific concept/question. Finally, I turn to an analysis of the post-reading questions

and texts more broadly (i.e., not related to the unit or text-specific concept/question) to analyze the opportunities they provide for students to develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments.

## **6.2 UNIT AND TEXT-SPECIFIC CONCEPTS/QUESTIONS**

According to the four textbooks, the unit or text-specific concept/question is intended to provoke inquiry about “significant” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 3) or “big” (Glencoe, 2010, p. T35) ideas and “critical issues” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T22). The goal is for students to explore the issues raised by the unit or text-specific question through the texts and tasks in order to foster “deep understanding” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T6) and inspire rethinking (Beers et al., 2009; Prentice Hall, 2010). Organizing texts and tasks around big ideas and focus questions is consistent with professional standards (IRA/NCTE, 1996; NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) and scholarship on effective curriculum in ELA (Applebee, 1993b, 1994; Peters & Wixson, 2003).

The nature of a unit or text-specific concept/question encourages or discourages ongoing conversations and sustained inquiry about conceptual ideas (Applebee, 1996). Unit and text-specific concepts/questions that provoke inquiry are genuine, thought provoking, and open-ended (Applebee et al., 1994; Applebee, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). They are sufficiently broad so as to sustain inquiry, stimulate rethinking, and prompt reflection; however, they are not overly broad so as to allow any text to be part of the conversations (Applebee, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Effective unit and text-specific concepts/questions invite multiple, varied perspectives that can be explored through the unit texts (Applebee, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

The short story and persuasion unit and text-specific concepts/questions vary in their potential to promote and sustain inquiry. As you will see in the following sections, the majority of questions are either too broad or too narrow to support ongoing conversations and text-based explorations of ideas.



I begin my analysis with the unit questions for all eight units. Although I focus primarily on the unit questions’ potential to promote inquiry, I occasionally discuss the texts and tasks provided for the unit question, as they are the resources that feed the inquiry. As such, they have the potential to fuel, derail, or change the conversation that was intended by the unit or text-specific concept/question. As I have discussed previously, neither Holt nor McDougal Littell provides opportunities for students to engage with the unit questions after the introduction to the unit; however, teachers could decide to use the unit question without prompting from the textbook, especially given the popularity of *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) and other curriculum frameworks that encourage the use of “big” or “essential” questions to organize learning experiences. Furthermore, the questions in textbooks provide models for teachers (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Woodward and Elliot, 1990). Thus, it is fitting to analyze McDougal Littell’s and Holt’s unit questions despite their limited use in the textbooks.

### 6.2.1 Unit question

Table 22 provides the unit questions for all eight units.

**Table 22: Unit Questions for all Eight Units**

<b>Textbook</b>	<b>Short story</b>	<b>Persuasion</b>
Glencoe	“Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when they suddenly encounter the unexpected?”	“Keeping freedom alive: What does freedom mean to me, and what would I give up to keep it?”
Holt	“What common human experiences do we share?”	“What do we believe in, and why?”
McDougal Littell	“Which stories are worth reading?”	“Can you be persuaded?”
Prentice Hall	“Can progress be made without conflict?”	“What kind of knowledge changes our lives?”

Most of the unit questions do not match the characteristics presented in the opening paragraph of this section, being either too broad or too narrow to focus sustained inquiry. Glencoe's unit questions are the only ones that have the potential to engage students in extended explorations of key concepts, as the questions are genuine, open-ended, and invite multiple text-based perspectives. In Glencoe's persuasion unit, the accompanying unit concept serves to ground the inquiry in larger, universal concepts beyond students' personal opinions. The collection of texts in the short story unit and most of the collection in persuasion (see chapter four) offer or permit multiple perspectives on the unit question.

Prentice Hall's unit questions are too narrow to promote sustained inquiry. The short story unit question, "Can progress be made without conflict?" is a closed, yes or no question. Since the question does not provide for a range of perspectives, potential for inquiry is limited (Athanases, 2003). Furthermore, the eight (of 16) texts that offer a perspective on the unit question all offer the same perspective: progress cannot be made without conflict.

Prentice Hall's persuasion unit question is broad enough to sustain inquiry; however, the texts and tasks that are included in the unit inhibit inquiry. As written, the unit question, "What kind of knowledge changes our lives?" provides an opportunity to explore various types of knowledge to discover and debate which knowledge changes our lives. One could imagine a range of texts that contain different kinds of knowledge (e.g., historical knowledge, practical knowledge) and discussions about whether the knowledge in the texts "changes our lives" or is simply knowledge that saves time or money. Yet, the tasks in this unit do not provide opportunities for students to discuss and debate different kinds of knowledge. Instead, they ask students to articulate how the knowledge in the unit texts changes people's lives. As such, this inquiry as designed could result in a laundry list of knowledge that the textbook authors believe changes our lives. The unit question as *written* provokes inquiry but the tasks as designed constrain inquiry.

Unlike Prentice Hall's unit questions that are too narrow to provoke sustained inquiry, Holt's and McDougal Littell's unit questions are too broad and generic to focus learning. For example, McDougal Littell's short story unit question, and Holt's and McDougal Littell's persuasion unit questions are broad,

genre-based questions that can be asked of any collection of stories or arguments. While genre is a common organizing structure in ELA (Applebee, 1993a), it is not one that typically lends itself to ongoing curricular conversations given that the texts often have little in common besides being part of a “set” (Applebee, 1993b, 1996; Applebee et al, 1994). Broad unit questions tend to impede rather than stimulate curricular conversations (Applebee, 1996).

Holt’s short story unit question, “What common human experiences do we share?” is also broad, capable of being asked of any text that centers on human experiences. However, this question has additional issues that limit its potential as a vehicle for inquiry. The wording of the question—asking “what” as in “*What* common human do we all share?”—lends itself to generating a list rather than an inquiry into the concept of human similarities despite differences in gender, race, religion, or geography. Furthermore, asking for “common” human experiences encourages students to focus on similarities as opposed to encouraging them to “develop an understanding of and respect for diversity” (IRA/NCTE, 1996, p. 3) and “broaden their perspective” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 1).

### **6.2.2 Text-specific concept/question**

As vehicles to provoke and guide inquiry, effective text-specific questions call for the same characteristics as unit questions. However, because text-specific questions generally correspond to only one text, *each* text—as opposed to the collection of texts—in an effective unit provides multiple, varied perspectives on the text-specific concept/question. If not, text-based inquiry is limited. For example, the text-specific question for “The Trip” is, “Why are dangerous journeys sometimes necessary?” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 46). In this short story, the main character journeys from Morocco to Spain with thirty people in a boat made for eight in order to illegally immigrate and secure a better life for himself. “The Trip” provides only one plot-based, response to the text-specific concept/question, thus limiting students’ potential for inquiry.

All of the text-specific questions in Holt’s short story unit, McDougal Littell’s persuasion unit, and Glencoe’s short story and persuasion units have unambiguous responses based on evidence from the text or the perspectives of the characters’ or authors’. Table 23 provides examples from each textbook.

**Table 23: Examples: Texts and Text-specific Concept/Question—Unambiguous**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Text-specific question</b>	<b>Response based on textual evidence</b>
“An Astrologer’s Day”	“What is revealed when a man asks about his future?” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 55).	It is revealed that the astrologer tried to kill a man and now the man is seeking revenge.
“By the Water of Babylon”	“What can we learn about ourselves and the world by going on a trip” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 60).	We learn that we are capable of taking care our ourselves and that we have misconceptions of the past.
“The Race to Save Apollo 13”	“How can we achieve the impossible?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 112).	We achieve the impossible by being level headed in times of stress.
“On Nuclear Disarmament”	“What would make the world safer?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 592).	The world would be safer if we destroyed nuclear weapons.

As Table 23 demonstrates, each text provides just one unambiguous response to the text-specific question. In fact, Glencoe’s text-specific questions often have answers that are directly stated in the texts, limiting their effectiveness as questions that provoke inquiry (see chapter 4). Holt’s and McDougal Littell’s questions, on the other hand, leave room for students to discuss and compare their own perspectives to those of authors’ or their peers’. This opens up inquiry, although not necessarily text-based inquiry.

The text-specific questions that have the most potential to provoke inquiry and allow for multiple text-based responses based on the texts with which they correspond are three questions from McDougal Littell’s short story unit and two questions from Holt’s persuasion unit. The questions from McDougal Littell (2008) are:

<b>Text</b>	<b>Text-specific concept/question</b>
“Everyday Use”	“What makes something valuable?” (p. 44)
“To Build a Fire”	“Should you trust your instincts?” (p. 74)
from <i>The Johnstown Flood</i>	“Is survival a matter of chance?” (p. 100)

And the questions from Holt (Beers et al., 2009) are:

Text	Text-specific concept/question
from <i>Silent Spring</i> “Kiss and Tell”	“Do you believe people should do more to protect the environment?” (p. 582)
“Target Real Violence, Not Video Games” “Harmless Fun?”	“Do you believe violent video games lead to destructive behavior?” (p. 608)

The text-specific concepts/questions from McDougal Littell offer opportunities for students to do such things as explore and compare the perspectives of characters and authors, as well as their own perspectives; analyze how authors portray multiple perspectives; and consider reasons for different perspectives. For example, the text-specific question for “Everyday Use” would prompt varied text-based responses if answered from the perspectives of Mama, Dee, Maggie, Alice Walker and readers themselves. The two questions from Holt’s persuasion unit can also provoke inquiry, primarily because the questions cross two texts. While each author provides an unambiguous and unequivocal perspective on the text-specific question, there are at least two perspectives to explore across the two texts.

### 6.3 POST-READING QUESTIONS & TASKS & UNIT/TEXT-SPECIFIC QUESTION

In chapter 5, I presented the percentages of post-reading questions in the short story and persuasion units that provide opportunities for students to engage with the unit or text-specific concepts/questions within and across texts. As we saw, those post-reading questions account for less than 25% of the total number of post-reading questions. In this section, I discuss the nature of the post-reading questions in terms their affordances for students to engage in tasks that allow them to construct text-based understandings and develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments.

Coherent units designed to provoke and sustain inquiry contain post-reading questions that offer opportunities for students to explore, construct, and develop an understanding of the unit or text-specific

concept/question within and across texts. Ideally, the majority of post-reading questions are authentic text-based questions, allowing for conversations that move beyond literal details and instead focus on the construction of ideas, interpretations, and text-based arguments (Applebee, 1993b; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Effective post-reading questions provide students with opportunities to build increasingly complex and nuanced understandings of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions by exploring various perspectives, revisiting and revising earlier thinking, and synthesizing learning to develop text-based generalizations and theories. In sum, effective post-reading questions provide opportunities for students to learn more about the texts, unit or text-specific concepts/questions, themselves, and their world (Athanases, 2003; Applebee, 1993b, Doll, 2004).

Table 24 and 25 present the percentages of post-reading questions in the short story and persuasion units, respectively, that provide opportunities to engage with the unit or text-specific concept/question in each of the following four categories: (1) recitation, (2) authentic text-based treated that are treated as recitation in the teacher’s edition (TE), (3) authentic text-based questions, and (4) authentic nontext-based questions. Column one provides the total percentage of post-reading questions (from chapter 5) that provide opportunities to engage with the unit or text-specific concept/question.

**Table 24: Percentages of Short Story Post-reading Questions in Four Categories—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

	<b>Total percent</b>	<b>Recitation</b>	<b>Authentic text-based treated as recitation in TE</b>	<b>Authentic text-based</b>	<b>Authentic nontext-based</b>
Glencoe	<b>12%</b>	67%	7%	13%	13%
Holt	<b>15%</b>	50%	0	7%	43%
McDougal Littell	<b>17%</b>	41%	18%	29%	12%
Prentice Hall	<b>7%</b>	57%	14%	0	29%

**Table 25: Percentages of Persuasion Post-reading Questions in Four Categories—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

	<b>Total percent</b>	<b>Recitation</b>	<b>Authentic text-based treated as recitation in TE</b>	<b>Authentic text-based</b>	<b>Authentic nontext-based</b>
Glencoe	<b>25%</b>	54%	12%	17%	17%
Holt	<b>17%</b>	42%	0	25%	33%
McDougal Littell	<b>57%</b>	60%	10%	17%	13%
Prentice Hall	<b>14%</b>	67%	11%	7%	15%

As Tables 24 and 25 demonstrate, except for McDougal Littell’s short story unit, between seven and 29% of post-reading questions are authentic text-based questions, questions that provide opportunities for students to develop, support, and defend their own text-based interpretations and arguments. Often the teacher’s edition provides one possible response to these questions, treating them as recitation; however, if teachers do not use the answers in the teacher’s edition, these questions can allow students opportunities to explore, construct, and extend their knowledge and ideas about the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. Table 26 provides examples of authentic text-based post-reading questions that are related to the unit or text-specific concept/question.

**Table 26: Examples: Authentic Text-based Post-reading Questions—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Unit or text-specific concept/question</b>	<b>Post-reading question</b>
“A Chip of Ruby Glass”	“Sacrifice: What would you sacrifice for justice?”	“Mrs. Bamjee’s family makes sacrifices as a result of the government’s actions against her. Should she have avoided political activity out of concern for their welfare?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 641).
“Harrison Bergeron”	“What if everyone were the same?”	“Think about the criticism of society made in ‘Harrison Bergeron.’ What aspects of today’s society seem open to Vonnegut’s criticism?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 41).
“I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”	“Keeping freedom alive: What does freedom mean to me, and	“If King were alive today, what issues do you think he might be addressing? Why?” (Glencoe,

	what would I give up to keep it?"	2010, p. 413).
from <i>Silent Spring</i> and "Kiss and Tell"	"Do you believe people should do more to protect the environment?"	"What steps should people take to protect the environment? Why?" (Beers et al., p. 591).
from <i>The Johnstown Flood</i>	"Survival: Is survival a matter of chance?"	"What most accounts for Gertrude's miraculous survival—sheer luck, Gertrude's own actions, or others?" (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 109).

Each question above provides an opportunity for students to explore issues and ideas that are related to the unit or text-specific concept/question given the ideas, events, or arguments in the texts. For example, the first question on "A Chip of Ruby Glass" provides an opportunity for students to explore the concept of sacrifice by considering the relationship between sacrifice and cost. The question is open to multiple interpretations and provides an opportunity for students to consider the text along with their own experiences and knowledge about sacrifice to develop, support, and defend a text-based interpretation. Similarly, the last question on *Silent Spring* and "Kiss and Tell," two texts about why people should do more to protect the environment and how they might go about doing so, provides an opportunity for students to work across two texts to develop their own arguments about the steps people should take to protect the environment. The question allows students to extend their thinking about the text-specific concept/question, using the texts as "data" so that their arguments are grounded in logic and evidence. Although intertextual questions related to the unit or text-specific concept/question are rare (see chapter 5), they are typically authentic text-based questions. This idea will be discussed in greater depth in section 6.4.1.

As Tables 24 and 25 demonstrate, in most cases, at least 50% of the post-reading questions are recitation questions, questions that have one response based on evidence from the text. Recitation questions inhibit authentic inquiry and the construction of ideas related to the unit or text-specific concept/question. Below are examples of recitation questions that are posed about the text or unit question.



**Table 27: Examples: Recitation Post-reading Questions—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Unit or text-specific concept/question</b>	<b>Post-reading question</b>
“Voices from the Wall”	“Can progress be made without conflict?”	“What conflicts did the author witness as the results of the Berlin Wall? What progress did the author witness after the Berlin Wall came down?” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 404).
“One Thousand Dollars”	“Can progress be made without conflict?”	“Bobby Gillian deals with the conflict of being in love with Miss Hayden, who does not return his affections. (a) How does Gillian address this conflict? (b) Does dealing with this conflict help him to grow as a person?” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 313).
“The Open Window”	“Encountering the unexpected: How do people cope when suddenly encountering the unexpected?”	“How does Saki employ [a surprise reversal of events] in ‘The Open Window’?” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 15).
from <i>In the Shadow of Man</i>	“Are humans and animals all that different?”	“What aspects of chimpanzee behavior are similar to those of humans?” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 85).
“Use of Animals in Biomedical Research”	“Do the ends justify the means?”	“What values have influenced the AMA’s position on animal research?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 625).

The questions above contain correct responses that can be found in or inferred from the texts. The first set of questions on “Voices from the Wall” would require students to simply return to the text to locate the conflicts the author witnessed (paragraph two) and the progress he saw (final three paragraphs). The last question on “The Use of Animals in Biomedical Research” requires some inferential thinking, but various statements such as, “research involving animals is absolutely essential to maintaining and improving the health of the American people,” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 624) provide a fairly clear indication that the American Medical Association values human life above animal life. Both questions relate to their respective unit or text-specific concept/question, but neither provides an opportunity for students to construct knowledge or explore information to create text-based interpretations and arguments. Instead, responding to the questions above, and other recitation questions like them, requires “a process of merely locating...rather than exploring what [the unit or text-specific concept/question] all [adds] up to”

(Athanases, 2002, p. 116). Large percentages of recitation questions related to the unit or text-specific concepts/questions suggests that these units vary little from traditional fact-based curricula (Athanases, 2002). In other words, instead of being vehicles that provoke inquiry and the construction of conceptual understanding, the unit or text-specific concepts/questions become simply “organizers of information” (Athanases, 2002).

In addition to large percentage of recitation questions, the textbook companies, especially Holt and Prentice Hall, have large percentages of authentic nontext-based questions about the unit or text-specific concept/question. Authentic nontext-based questions generally ask students to construct responses about ideas that are related—sometimes peripherally—to unit or text-specific concept/question by speculating about individuals, groups, or policies. What makes these questions authentic is that they are genuinely open to multiple, varied perspectives; however, they are nontext-based as the texts provide little or no information from which to construct a response (Keefer et al., 2000). Table 28 provides examples of authentic nontext-based questions.

**Table 28: Examples: Authentic Nontext-based Post-reading Questions—Related to Unit or Text-specific Concept/Question**

Text	Unit or text-specific concept/question	Post-reading question
“Cinderella’s Stepsisters”	“Keeping freedom alive: What does freedom mean to me, and what would I give up to keep it?”	“Think of women who are in positions of power in the world today. In your opinion, do those women try to help other women, or do they ‘participate in the oppression of [their] sisters?’” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 44).
“The Leap”	“When can taking risks help you do the right thing?”	“Would most people take risks to save a child?” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 45).
“On Nuclear Disarmament”	“What would make the world safer?”	“There are often disagreements about the best ways to maintain national and international security. Explain your own view on this topic” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 602).

The questions above appear to be attempts to prompt students to extend their thinking about the unit or text-specific concept/question and to connect the unit or text-specific concept/question to students’ lives,

out-of-school experiences, or world. Although this goal makes sense given that building conceptual understanding entails building on prior knowledge, looking at concepts from multiple perspectives, and using knowledge to construct generalization and theories (Vygotsky, 1986), the texts do not provide enough (or any) “data” for students to do so. For example, in “The Leap,” by Louise Erdrich, the narrator shares stories about her mother, a former circus trapeze artist, and the various literal and metaphorical leaps she has taken in her life, including the time her mother leaped into their burning house to save her. The post-reading question is, “Would most people take risks to save a child?” (p. 45). The question relates to the text-specific question; however, the text provides no evidence to construct a response. Furthermore, there is no way for students to know if most people would take risks to save a child without evidence from other sources (especially since few tenth graders are likely to be parents, themselves). Thus, students are left to speculate and support their response with only their opinions and experiences.

Sometimes, authentic nontext-based questions ask students’ opinions on matters that appear so far removed from most 10<sup>th</sup> graders’ experiences that the value of answering these questions without engaging in outside research is dubious. For example, after reading Sagan’s speech, “On Nuclear Disarmament,” students are asked their opinion on the best ways to maintain national and international security. Without research, it seems unlikely that the arguments most students can create will be well-developed and supported.

Authentic nontext-based questions such as the ones described in the previous paragraphs could connect to students’ lives and provide opportunities to engage class discussions, but they also encourage arguments that are not grounded in evidence or logic. Rather than providing opportunities for students to extend their thinking using what they have learned from texts, authentic nontext-based questions ask students to share their opinions without the necessity of support. Furthermore, these questions have been shown to have a negative effect on students’ achievement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). Most of the authentic nontext-based questions in the four textbooks could, however, provide opportunities for students to engage in research related to the unit or text-specific concept/question. This would allow

students to extend their thinking and provide opportunities to develop, support, and defend their interpretations and arguments with evidence.

In the beginning of this section and throughout this dissertation, I have provided a vision of coherent units that engage students in ongoing conversations about the conceptual ideas that guide unit-level or text-level work. The post-reading questions are an essential piece of that vision. As we saw in chapter five, except for McDougal Littell's persuasion unit, 25% or less of post-reading questions in the units I analyzed ask about ideas that are related to the unit or text-specific concept/question. As we see in this chapter, the majority of the questions are recitation questions, asking for students to locate rather than construct ideas. Additionally, students are rarely asked to work across texts. Instead, each text or pair of texts is typically discussed in isolation, providing limited opportunities for ongoing conversations, revisiting previous texts or ideas based on new ones, or making connections and synthesizing information across texts, two key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (ACT & The Education Trust, 2004; Conley, 2007; IRA/NCTE, 1996). Despite what is promised in the introductory pages of the units, the questions rarely "stimulate vital, on-going rethinking of big ideas, assumptions, and prior lessons" (Wiggins in Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T71).

#### **6.4 POST-READING QUESTIONS & TEXTS**

Thus far I have discussed the questions and texts in the eight units in terms of conceptual coherence and potential for inquiry with regard to the unit or text-specific concept/question. I now turn to an analysis of the post-reading questions and texts more broadly (as opposed to focusing on those related to unit or text-specific concepts/questions) to analyze whether they provide opportunities for students to develop, support, and defend multiple text-based interpretations and arguments. Research tells us that teachers frequently use textbooks as sources of texts and questions rather than engaging in units as designed (Applebee, 1993a). In such cases, whether or not the texts and tasks provide opportunities for students to

engage in authentic text-based work matters more than conceptual coherence to the unit or text-specific concept/question.

I begin with an analysis of the post-reading questions in the short story and persuasion units to discuss the opportunities they provide for students to develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments. Then I discuss the short story and persuasion units separately, focusing on the relationships between the interpretive potential of the texts (i.e., the degree to which a text is open to multiple interpretations) and nature of post-reading questions that are posed.

### 6.4.1 Post-reading questions

Table 29 provides the percentages of short story and persuasion post-reading question for each textbook in each of the four categories of questions: (1) recitation, (2) authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation in the TE, (3) authentic text-based questions, and (4) authentic nontext-based questions.

**Table 29: Percentages of Short Story and Persuasion Post-reading Questions in Four Categories**

	<b>Recitation</b>	<b>Authentic Text-based Treated as Recitation in TE</b>	<b>Authentic Text-based</b>	<b>Authentic Nontext-Based</b>
<b>Glencoe</b>				
Short story	57%	8%	15%	20%
Persuasion	50%	11%	15%	24%
<b>Holt</b>				
Short story	54%	11%	16%	19%
Persuasion	54%	16%	14.5%	15.5%
<b>McDougal Littell</b>				
Short story	65%	11%	16%	7%
Persuasion	63%	10%	15%	12%
<b>Prentice Hall</b>				
Short story	53%	13%	13.5%	20.5%
Persuasion	61%	12%	8%	19%

As Table 29 shows, recitation questions account for 50% or more of the post-reading questions in all eight textbooks. At first glance, this analysis appears to show a decrease in recitation post-reading

questions since Applebee’s (1993a) study almost twenty years ago. In his study of grade 8, 10, and 12 literature textbooks, Applebee found that 71% of the post-reading questions were recitation, calling for either textual details or accepted interpretations. While this analysis shows fewer recitations questions, the percentage of recitation questions climbs to over 70% for four textbooks when they are combined with the percentage of authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation in the teacher’s edition (column 2). Authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation are open to multiple, varied text-based interpretations; however, the teacher’s edition provides only one possible response. Thus, if teachers use the teacher’s edition as their source for “correct” responses, then the percentage of recitation questions increases to over 60% for four units and over 70% for another four. Applebee did not make a distinction between recitation questions and questions that are treated as recitation in the teacher’s edition. Table 30 provides examples of authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation questions in the teacher’s edition.

**Table 30: Examples: Authentic Text-based Questions Treated as Recitation in TE**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer in TE</b>
“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket”	“Was the resolution of the story credible? Did you find Tom’s actions believable? Why or why not?”	“The resolution of the story was credible. Tom’s actions are believable because the danger of the situation he goes through makes it reasonable that his outlook would change” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 33).
from <i>The Johnstown Flood</i>	“David McCullough has said that in his writing he tries to make history “as interesting and human as it really was.” Do you think he succeeds in doing so...?”	“McCullough makes history interesting and human by allowing readers to feel what those living that history felt and giving descriptive historical details about the flood” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 109).
from <i>Silent Spring</i> “Kiss and Tell”	“Which selection did you find more persuasive? Why?”	“Stone’s essay is more persuasive than Carson’s because Carson’s essay does not include a direct argument” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 591).

Many authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation in the teacher’s edition ask for students’ opinions about the effectiveness of an author’s writing. The questions are open to multiple, varied

responses, yet the teacher’s edition provides one possible response that reflects the textbook writers’ bias. The answers in the teacher’s edition demonstrate a school-based bias as to the qualities of effective texts and appear to be an attempt to socialize teachers and students to appreciating particular kinds of texts. For example, the answer to the last question on *Silent Spring* and “Kiss and Tell” places a value on persuasive texts that have direct statements of the argument without accounting for various factors that shape the writing and effectiveness of texts such as purpose, audience, and occasion.

As I stated at the start of this section, recitation questions account for the majority of the questions in all textbooks. The questions, however, are not always literal comprehension questions. Table 31 provides examples of recitation questions that ask students to go beyond recalling literal details.

**Table 31: Examples: Recitations Questions**

Text	Recitation question
“Harrison Bergeron”	“What overall conclusions can you draw about the society depicted in the story?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 41).
“The Trip”	“What theme, or insight about life, do you think Lalami conveys with this story?” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 57).
“Address on the Anniversary of Lincoln’s Birth”	“According to Sandburg, what makes people everywhere feel that Lincoln is ‘their own’? What does this comment suggest about how Sandburg viewed the lives of people everywhere?” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 437).
“Keep Memory Alive”	“What does the boy Wiesel ask the adult Wiesel? What do his questions imply about Wiesel’s adult responsibilities?” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 544).

The recitation questions above necessitate students making inferences from the texts. For example, to answer the first question on “Harrison Bergeron,” students may have to reread sections of the text, especially those that illuminate society’s laws and how they affect the characters, in order to draw conclusions about the society and what is considered normal. This question requires more than literal comprehension; however, it has correct responses based on textual evidence. The answers may be multiple, but they are not varied. Students would not, for example, be able to support responses that claim that the society is supportive or allows people to be individuals. Furthermore, because this text is not

particularly complex (e.g., the structure is conventional, the language is contemporary and grade appropriate) or ambiguous, the level of inference required to answer the question is low.

Answering inferential questions provides practice with reading texts closely to draw inferences and conclusions, which are worthy, standards-based skills (IRA/NCTE, 1996; NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) that will prepare students for multiple-choice assessments (Applebee, 1996); however, these tasks will not provide students with practice weighing evidence to explore, develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments or solve open-ended problems, key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills students need to be successful in college and the workforce (Conley, 2007; NCEE, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008). Furthermore, because few of the texts are complex or ambiguous, a point that will be explored further in section 6.4.2, inferential questions are rarely challenging or require higher levels of inference.

Depending on the textbook and type of unit, authentic nontext-based questions account for between 7-25% of the post-reading questions. The range is slightly higher in the persuasion units (11%-25%) than the short story units (7%-20%). However, these percentages are below—sometimes far below—the percentage of authentic nontext-based questions about the unit or text-specific concept/question as shown in section 6.3. Table 32 provides examples of authentic nontext-based questions from the short story and persuasion units.

**Table 32: Examples: Authentic Nontext-based Questions**

Text	Question
“A Visit to Grandmother”	“What might Charles’s relationship with his mother be like in the future?” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 252).
“Civil Peace”	“How might Jonathan’s life have changed [had he not experienced] the conflicts [in this story]?” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 365).
“The Race to Save Apollo 13”	“How might the space program have been affected if NASA had failed to rescue the astronauts aboard <i>Apollo 13</i> ?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 127).
“Cinderella’s Stepsisters”	“Think of women who are in positions of power in the world today. In your opinion, do those women try to help other women, or do they “participate in the oppression of [their] sisters?” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 446).
“On Women’s Right to Vote”	“Why do you think it took so long for the law [forbidding women to vote] to change?” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 398).



As I discussed in section 6.3, authentic nontext-based questions ask students to speculate about events or characters or use their own personal experience as evidence. Despite the similarity in percentages of authentic text-based questions between the short story and persuasion units, the questions differ and speak to issues of access and equity. Short story authentic nontext-based questions generally ask students to speculate about characters' motivations or future for which there exists no textual evidence. To answer these questions, students are likely to draw on their own experiences or the experiences of people they know. As such, all students are mostly equally positioned to answer and discuss responses, as no responses are likely to be more valid or valued than others. For persuasive and nonfiction texts, however, many of the authentic nontext-based questions require background knowledge that is not presented in the texts to construct a response. If students possess the requisite background knowledge, then the questions afford them the opportunity to create arguments grounded in knowledge from, for example, history or current events. Without such knowledge, however, responses would be speculative and, depending on the question, based in stereotypes. For example, the question on Morrison's speech, "Cinderella's Stepsisters," asks students to think of women who are in positions of power in the world and state whether they think these women try to help or oppress other women. In order to respond to the question, students would need to know about current female leaders and their governing styles. If they know this, they can engage in this task and use their background to create, support, and debate text-based arguments. If they do not, their responses are likely to be based in stereotypes and hearsay, and they could have less opportunity to access the conversation.

Authentic questions—those questions that afford students the opportunity to develop, support, and defend their own interpretations to literature—account for between 8% to 30% of the questions across the eight units, depending on how teachers use the responses in the teacher's edition. Table 33 provides examples of authentic text-based questions from the short story and persuasion units.

**Table 33: Examples: Authentic Text-based Questions**

Text	Authentic text-based question
“To Build a Fire”	“Who do you blame most for the man’s fate?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 92).
“A Visit to Grandmother”	“Describe Mama’s approach to raising her children. Is her approach sound?” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 252).
“Exile” “Crossing the Border”	“Which poem more effectively tells a story? Which poem is more successful at creating mood?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 141).
“Not Just Comics” “‘Hamlet’ too hard? Try a Comic Book” “The Graphic Novel Silver Anniversary”	“What current events do you think might belong in a graphic novel? Explain.” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 429).

As the examples demonstrate, authentic text-based questions vary in content. Oftentimes, authentic text-based questions about short stories ask student to critique characters’ actions based on evidence from the text and students’ own opinions (“A Visit to Grandmother”). Equally often, authentic text-based questions in short story and persuasion ask student whether they find authors’ techniques and arguments effective (“Exile” and “Crossing the Border”). The questions are similar to the examples I presented at the beginning of this section of authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation in the teacher’s edition. The only difference between the two types of questions is the responses that are provided in the teacher’s edition. Occasionally, questions ask students to extend what they know about authors, or in the case of the example above, genres, to extend their thinking about the texts.

#### **6.4.2 Texts and post-reading questions**

In the following sections, I present my analysis of the relationship between the texts and post-reading questions in the short story and persuasion units. The purpose of this analysis was to determine if the low percentages of authentic text-based questions were the result of texts that are straightforward and unambiguous. I separate the discussions of the relationship between the texts and post-reading questions in the short story and persuasion units as the relationships are different. In the short story units, texts that

offer limited opportunities for multiple interpretations because they are straightforward and unambiguous nature (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Langer, 2000; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) enerally have high percentages of recitation questions asked of them. In the persuasion units, the relationship between the texts and post-reading questions reveals more about the types of questions textbooks ask about persuasive texts than it does about the texts they provide.

First, I present my analysis of the relationship between the text and post-reading questions in the short story units. Then I present my analysis of the relationship between the persuasion unit texts and questions.

#### **6.4.2.1 Short story**

None of the texts in any of the four short story units is highly or holistically ambiguous, although there are texts in all units that have some—at times very limited—ambiguity for authentic text-based work. The texts that have the least potential for developing multiple interpretations are the expository/informational texts and science fiction stories. These are also the texts that have the highest percentages of recitation questions, especially when the texts are read separately rather than paired with other texts. The expository/informational texts in all four units are much more straightforward than the narrative fiction and nonfiction texts. The four expository/informational texts in Prentice Hall’s short story unit leave little opportunity for students to develop multiple interpretations based on evidence from the text. Each text has a central argument that is either directly stated or implied and a clear relationship between the main ideas and evidence. Additionally, all texts adhere to genre conventions and use straightforward and unambiguous language. Furthermore, the author’s purpose in each text is clear. For example, the language, structure, and format of the expository text, “Tides,” clearly signals that the purpose of this text is to teach readers about ocean tides: words and phrases that present the main ideas are boldfaced, diagrams and charts illustrate key information, and headings such as “What Causes Tides?” and “The Daily Tide Cycle,” separate sections of text. Because of the limited opportunity for multiple interpretations in this and the other three expository/informational texts Prentice Hall’s short story unit,

all post-reading questions on these texts are recitation. However, when the post-reading questions ask students to do intertextual work, the majority of the questions are authentic text-based questions. For example, after reading “Tides” and “Black Water Turns the Tide on Florida Coral,” another straightforward, unambiguous expository/information text, students are asked to compare the texts to determine which one offers better support for the main ideas. This question allows students to develop, support, and defend text-based arguments on texts that have limited opportunity for authentic text-based questions individually.

McDougal Littell includes an expository/informational text, “Deep Survival,” in their short story unit. As with the expository/informational texts in Prentice Hall, “Deep Survival” is straightforward and unambiguous. The text is a nonfiction survival guide in which the author provides 12 patterns of behavior of survivors of major disasters. Each pattern of behavior is numbered and the sentence that states the behavior is boldfaced. This text is read as a companion to “To Build a Fire,” a core unit text. The majority of the post-reading questions on this text are recitation and authentic nontext-based questions, except for one authentic text-based intertextual question that asks students use the patterns of behavior to evaluate the man’s actions.

Science fiction texts also have fewer authentic text-based questions than other genres. There are two science fiction texts in Prentice Hall’s short story unit: “There Will Come Soft Rains” and “By the Waters of Babylon.” Next to the nonfiction expository/informational texts, these texts have the lowest percentage of authentic text-based questions of all other texts in the unit. “By the Waters of Babylon” is also included in Holt, and like Prentice Hall, this text has the lowest percentage of authentic text-based questions of all other texts except the two nonfiction expository/informational texts. And finally, “Harrison Bergeron” is in McDougal Littell, and it, too, has the lowest percentage of authentic text-based questions of all other texts except the one nonfiction expository/informational text.

As with the expository/informational texts, the science fiction texts are mostly straightforward and explicit. The themes are obvious, the central conflict is clear, and the character motivations are apparent. All authors adhere to genre conventions and none uses language or literary devices in

particularly complex or unconventional ways. As a result, the textbook authors ask more recitation and authentic nontext-based questions of these texts because there is little opportunity for authentic text-based work.

Excepting the science fiction stories, the short stories and poems included in the short story units provide some opportunities for multiple text-based interpretations. In most cases, textbook writers take advantage of ambiguities to ask authentic text-based questions. For example, the two narrative poems in McDougal Littell—"Exile" and "Crossing the Border"—are open to multiple interpretations. Both poems have unresolved endings, and the motivation for the character in "Crossing the Border" is mildly ambiguous (i.e., there are two different motives one might ascribe to his actions). Additionally, in "Exile," the image of Jesus on the cross and the metaphor of swimming provide opportunities for readers to develop multiple interpretations. McDougal Littell writers take advantage of these ambiguities by asking a relatively high percentage (31%) of authentic text-based questions. "The Leap," a short story in Holt, also provides the opportunity for multiple interpretations due to the various literal and metaphorical leaps in the story, the central metaphor of blindness, and a debatable central conflict. This story also has one the highest percentages of authentic text-based questions (35%) asked of it.

My analysis shows that when the texts provide opportunities for readers to develop multiple interpretations, the textbooks provide more authentic text-based questions. However, too few texts are open to multiple interpretations. Furthermore, none of the texts is highly or holistically ambiguous. For example, none of the texts have ambiguous central themes; multiple, embedded and complex conflicts; or characters whose beliefs and goals are ambiguous. Specific and localized moments are open to multiple interpretations—the meaning of a symbol or metaphor—but those moments do not require students to use evidence from across the text to support a response. In fact, I imagine such texts are intentionally excluded from textbooks as they are difficult, require stamina and perseverance, and would not easily lend themselves to questions that prepare students for standardized tests.

### 6.4.2.2 Persuasion

Unlike the short story units where there is a close relationship between the interpretive potential of the texts and the types of questions that are provided, the persuasion units do not exhibit that same relationship. Very few texts in the persuasion units are open to multiple interpretations; however, every persuasion text in every unit includes at least one authentic text-based question. The reason for this rests with the kinds of questions that are asked about persuasive texts.

Similar to the texts in the short story units, none of the texts in the persuasion units is highly or holistically ambiguous. This is most likely because the texts serve as vehicles to teach students about effective persuasive arguments, and generally speaking, effective persuasive arguments are not ambiguous nor do they typically provide opportunities for readers or listeners to construct multiple interpretations of authors' arguments. Since the texts in the units were presumably chosen for their effectiveness, few of them have central arguments or controlling ideas that are ambiguous or debatable. In some texts, the central argument is stated in the title (e.g., "Target Real Violence, Not Video Games," and "Doing Nothing is Doing Something") while in others the central argument is explicitly stated in the text (e.g., "Cinderella's Stepsisters": "I want not to *ask* you but to *tell* you not to participate in the oppression of your sisters" (Glencoe, 2010, p.445)). Furthermore, the arguments, ideas, and claims the authors make are generally well crafted, supported, and developed. Holt writers include two persuasive texts that have unsupported claims and faulty reasoning, "Target Real Violence, Not Video Games," and "Harmless Fun?" and use these texts as opportunities to ask about generalizations and faulty reasoning. They do so, however, by posing multiple-choice questions, so even then, students are not provided an opportunity to develop, support, and defend their own text-based interpretations or arguments. Lastly, because the texts are meant to be representative of the genre, none veers significantly from genre conventions. The text that is most unlike a typical persuasive text is the excerpt from *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson, which begins with a fable of a beautiful and bountiful town that is destroyed by humans. Despite the unconventional beginning, Carson presents a fairly clear statement of her central argument at the end of the fable. This text provides an opportunity to ask an authentic text-based question about the effectiveness of this

introduction, but there is little opportunity for multiple interpretations regarding her purpose for using this technique.

Although few texts in the four units has enough ambiguity to provide opportunities for students to develop, support, and defend multiple interpretations about aspects of the texts such as the central argument, purpose or audience, or author’s attitude toward the topic, not all of the texts are easily comprehensible. A number of texts could be difficult for students to comprehend because of the background knowledge they require (e.g., “On Nuclear Disarmament,” “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” and “On Women’s Right to Vote”), the vocabulary or sophisticated use of language (“Address on the Anniversary of Lincoln’s Birth), and the remoteness of the topic (e.g., “Nobel Lecture,” “On Women’s Right to Vote,” and “The American Idea”). Difficult, however, is not the same as open to multiple interpretations. While these texts could provide a challenge, they would not provide opportunities to develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments.

Despite the limited opportunities for authentic text-based work given the explicitness of the texts, every text in the four units has at least one authentic text-based question asked of it. Unlike the short story units where authentic text-based questions often take advantages of ambiguities in the texts, authentic text-based questions on persuasive texts typically ask students to evaluate the effectiveness of authors’ arguments or use of rhetorical devices. Below are examples of authentic text-based questions.

**Table 34: Examples: Authentic Text-based Questions—Persuasion**

Text	Post-reading question
“I Acknowledge Mine”	“Does Goodall use emotional appeals appropriately in her argument, or are these appeals exaggerated or excessive?” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 615).
<i>Cesar’s Way</i>	“Do you find [Milan’s] argument convincing? Why or why not?” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 602).
“Pack of Lies”	“Do you think Derr’s tone supports or detracts from his purpose in this article? Explain.” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 606).
“The History of the Guitar”	Write a letter to the author of the research source in which you comment on “The History of the Guitar” and the sequence of the information presented. Mention whether the order made it easier or more difficult to understand the text. Explain and support your comments with relevant details from the text” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. 583).

Posing questions about the effectiveness of authors' arguments or use of rhetorical devices provides opportunities to create text-based arguments about texts that are not open to multiple interpretations; however, the arguments readers can make will be limited because of the limited number of perspectives that can be developed and the amount of textual support that can be used as evidence. For example, the third question asks about the effectiveness of Derr's tone in his article, "Pack of Lies." Derr's tone is sarcastic; he calls Cesar Milan a "one man wrecking-ball" (Beers et al., 2009, p. 604) whose dog training method is a "pastiche of animal behaviorism and pop psychology" (p. 603). Readers who find sarcasm effective will probably argue that Derr's tone furthers his argument by spotlighting the absurdity of Milan's methods. On the other hand, readers who find sarcasm ineffective will probably argue the opposing point of view. The scope of the argument is limited because there are only two sides. Furthermore, both arguments will likely use the same evidence as support; the only thing that will separate the arguments will be readers' preferences. Thus, despite being an authentic text-based question, the potential to create well developed and supported positions is limited. Incidentally, the teacher's edition argues that Derr's sarcasm detracts from his argument; I disagree.

High percentages of authentic post-reading questions are found when students are asked to compare texts. Holt's unit provides an example of this (see Table 35). In this unit, post-reading questions are posed about each text individually before being posed about each set of texts.

**Table 35: Holt Persuasion Unit Post-reading Questions**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Recitation</b>	<b>Authentic text-based treated as recitation in TE</b>	<b>Authentic text-based</b>	<b>Authentic nontext-based</b>
"There Comes a Time When People Get Tired"	60%	40%	0%	0%
"Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr."	71%	29%	0%	0%
Questions on both texts	17%	17%	50%	17%
from <i>Silent Spring</i>	100%	0%	0%	0%
"Kiss & Tell"	67%	0%	0%	0%
Questions on both texts	14%	43%	0%	43%
from <i>Cesar's Way</i>	64%	14%	0%	21%
"Pack of Lies"	71%	7%	14%	7%
Questions on both texts	0%	0%	60%	40%



“Target Real Violence, Not Video Games”	100%	0%	0%	0%
“Harmless Fun?”	100%	0%	0%	0%
Questions on both texts	33%	0%	67%	0%

As Table 35 shows, a high percentage of post-reading questions about each text are recitation questions; the questions ask students to do such things as identify and trace authors’ arguments and evidence. However, when texts are compared, the majority of the questions are authentic text-based questions. Since Holt does more comparison work than the other textbooks, they have the highest combined percentage of authentic text-based questions. If teachers ignore the responses in the teacher’s edition then 30% of post-reading questions will provide students the opportunity to develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations or arguments. This is 10% more than the other three textbooks. Yet, the texts in Holt’s persuasion unit are no more complex or open to multiple interpretations than texts in the other units.

Comparison question typically ask students to compare writers’ arguments and persuasive techniques, or evaluate which of two texts has a more convincing argument or uses persuasive techniques more effectively. Table 36 provides examples of intertextual authentic text-based questions:

**Table 36: Examples: Intertextual Persuasion Post-reading Questions**

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Intertextual Questions</b>
“There Comes a Time When People Get Tired” “Eulogy for Martin Luther King, Jr.”	“Which speech do you find more persuasive? Why?” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 579).
<i>Cesar’s Way</i> “Pack of Lies”	“Compare and contrast [Milan and Derr’s] arguments and explain whose argument you find more credible.” (Beers et al., 2009, p. 607).
“I Acknowledge Mine” “Use of Animals in Biomedical Research”	“The AMA’s position on animal research differs greatly from the views expressed by Jane Goodall in ‘I Acknowledge Mine.’ Compare and contrast the techniques that the AMA and Goodall use to persuade readers.” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 625).
“Not Just Comics” “‘Hamlet’ too hard? Try a Comic Book” “The Graphic Novel Silver Anniversary”	“Which of the selections, in your opinion, presents the strongest argument about the role of the graphic novel in modern culture? Support your answer with passages from the selections.” (Glencoe, 2010, p. 430).

Since students will need to work across texts, comparison questions are likely permit more developed arguments than questions on individual texts that ask about the effectiveness of an author's argument or use of persuasive techniques.

My analysis of the relationship between the post-reading questions and texts in the persuasion units demonstrates how little the questions rely on the texts. Many of the authentic text-based questions are fairly generic and can be asked of any persuasive texts that include emotional appeals or a sarcastic tone, for example. The persuasive texts in the four units provide well-written models of effective persuasive texts, and as such, provide little opportunities for authentic text-based questions besides ones that ask for such things as students' opinions about rhetorical devices or more effective uses of evidence.

## 6.5 SUMMARY

As we saw in this chapter, there are some opportunities across the four textbooks for students to engage with questions and task that invite the creation of text-based interpretations and arguments; however, there are far more opportunities for students to engage with questions that have correct responses that can be found in or inferred from the texts.

Most of the unit and text-specific concepts/questions from all four textbooks are too narrow to provoke inquiry and text-based explorations of conceptual ideas. As such, the majority of the post-reading questions that are related to the unit or text-specific concept/question are recitation questions, asking students to locate ideas that are related to the unit or text-specific concept/question. Rather than driving instruction and providing the basis for ongoing conversations, the unit or text-specific concept/question supplies another layer work that is neither well-integrated nor particularly inquiry-based. While there are questions in every unit that ask students to develop, support, and defend text-based arguments related to the unit or text-specific concepts/questions based on ideas in the texts, in some units there are more questions that ask students to do those same things without the support of textual evidence.

My analysis of the entire collection of post-reading questions in each unit (as opposed to those that are focused on the unit or text-specific concept/question) demonstrate how little has changed since Applebee's study almost 20 years ago. Recitations questions predominate, asking students to locate or infer correct responses. More than ten percent of the questions in seven of the eight units are ones that have multiple, varied responses with only one possible response in the teacher's edition.

My analysis of the questions and the texts in the short story units shows that there is a relationship between the nature of the texts and types of questions that are asked. Generally, texts that have potential for multiple interpretations contain higher percentages of authentic text-based questions. None of the texts, however, are holistically ambiguous.

Finally, the persuasion texts provide models of the genre. As such, most are straightforward and unambiguous. The authentic text-based questions on these texts provide opportunities to evaluate and compare authors' arguments, use of evidence, and rhetorical devices.

In sum, although there are opportunities across the four textbooks for students to engage with questions and task that invite the creation of text-based interpretations and arguments, they are not frequent enough. Too few questions are ones that have been proven to increase students' problem-solving and interpretations skills, standardized test scores, and engagement with literature.

## 7.0 CHAPTER VII: SEQUENCING

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapters four and five centered on an analysis of the unit and text-level work in terms of coherence to the unit or text-specific big concept/question. Chapter six provided an analysis of the opportunities for students to engage with texts, questions, and tasks that allow them to develop, support, and defend text-based interpretations and arguments. In this chapter, I present my analysis of the post-reading questions to determine if they are sequenced to engage students in coherent, focused inquiry on individual texts.

Applebee's (1993a) study of post-reading questions in literature textbooks revealed that the questions were largely unrelated to each other and could be "removed or reordered without affecting students' ability to answer the others" (p. 149). In coherent units that are designed to build students' conceptual understanding of unit or text-specific concepts/questions, post-reading questions on individual texts would be sequenced to engage students in focused inquiry about the unit or text-specific concept/question as it relates to the text. We know already from the results presented in chapters five and six that this type of sequencing is not present in the literature textbooks given the low percentages of post-reading questions that relate to the unit or text-specific concept/question. Thus, this analysis of post-reading questions looks beyond the unit or text-specific concept/question to determine if the post-reading questions have any sequenced conceptual focus. In this case, post-reading questions on individual texts would be sequenced to engage students in a series of interrelated questions and tasks that would lead to coherent, focused inquiry on a conceptual idea that relates to the text (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Lucking, 1976; Smith, 1985). The questions and tasks would build on each other so that answering earlier

questions provides support for answering later questions (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Lucking, 1976; Smith, 1985).

## 7.2 SEQUENCE OF POST-READING QUESTIONS AND TASKS

The post-reading questions in the four textbooks are sequenced in a number of ways. Typically, they are sequenced to lead students from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking (Bloom, 1956). Often, the post-reading questions are additionally sequenced to follow the chronology of the story or unfolding of the text. Sometimes, two or three questions build on each other so that answering earlier questions provides support to answer later questions. However, despite these various sequencing methods, there exists no overall sense of focused inquiry in any of the four textbooks.

To demonstrate my findings, I will share the post-reading questions from one short story, “Contents of a Dead Man’s Pocket,” and one persuasive text, “Pack of Lies.” These sequences of questions are representative of the sequences of questions for most of the texts in the eight units I analyzed.

### 7.2.1 Post-reading questions: Short story

Below are the post-reading questions from “Contents of a Dead Man’s Pocket” (Glencoe, 2010)

#### **Respond and Interpret**

1. Which part of the story did you react to most strongly? Explain?
2. (a) After Tom begins work, what happens to interrupt him, and what does he decide to do? (b) What rules does he make for himself, and why?
3. (a) Briefly summarize Tom’s risky adventure. (b) What lessons does this adventure teach him?

#### **Analyze and Evaluate**

4. (a) At the beginning of the story, what did Tom do that might lead someone to judge him as untruthful? (b) What might he have done to be more honest and fair?
5. (a) Do you think his decision is realistic or does the author create an unbelievable situation? (b) What inferences can you draw about Tom, based on his decision to retrieve the paper? Explain?

**Connect**

6. **Big Idea: Encountering the Unexpected** What message is the author presenting about the unexpected situation that Tom finds himself in? Do you agree with the message? Explain.
7. **Connect to the Author** Finney was interested in writing suspenseful stories. Do you think he does a good job of using suspense and holding the reader’s attention while Tom is out on the ledge? Give details from the story to support your response.

**Literary Element: Conflict**

8. Is Tom’s conflict at the company where he works internal, external, or both? Cite evidence from the text to support your response.
9. When Tom is on the window ledge struggling to survive, how are his conflicts both internal and external? Provide reasons and examples to support your response.

**Foreshadowing**

10. Complete the following [chart].

Hint	Later Event
Tom has a guilty conscience	
Tom stares out the window at Lexington Avenue eleven stories below.	
Tom needs to use force to open the apartment window.	

**Reading Strategy: Respond to Characters**

11. How did you feel about Tom Benecke at the beginning of the story?
12. Were you surprised by Tom Benecke’s decision to go after the yellow piece of paper? Explain.
13. How did you feel about Tom Benecke at the end of the story? Did your opinion of him change?  
(Glencoe, 2010, p. 49)

Before discussing the sequencing of the post-reading questions, I would like to point out the organization and labeling of the post-reading questions. The post-reading questions above are organized by reading strategy and literary device, suggesting their importance to the act of reading. This organization and labeling privileges reading as a way to practice reading strategies as opposed to reading for enjoyment, content or conceptual learning, or to engage in discussions with peers.

The prereading questions above embody four distinct sets of questions. They are:

1. Questions 2 – 7: a hodge-podge of questions about the plot, characters, and author. This set includes Unit Question focus.
2. Questions 8 and 9: “Literary Element Focus” (conflict)
3. Question 10: “Reading Strategy Focus” from previous text (foreshadowing)
4. Questions 11 to 13: “Reading Strategy Focus” (responding to characters)

The first set of question, questions two to seven, are sequenced in several ways. First, they are sequenced from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking: questions two and three are comprehension questions while questions seven and eight require analysis and evaluation. Second, two pairs of questions—two and three, and four and five—are sequenced chronologically. For example, Tom’s paper flies out of the room and rests on the window ledge and Tom decides to retrieve it (2a); when Tom is on the ledge he tells himself not to look down (2b). On the ledge, Tom’s almost falls, tries to get people’s attention, and smashes the window (3a); this experience teaches Tom not to risk his life for work (3b). Finally, two pairs of questions build on each so that answering earlier questions provide support for answering later questions. For example, evaluating Tom’s decision to go on the ledge (5a) supports creating inferences about him (5b). And considering the lessons Tom learns (3b) provides support for considering the author’s message (6).

The second set of questions, eight and nine, correspond to the “Literary Element” focus, conflict. The questions are sequenced chronologically, but they do not build on each or move from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking. In fact, question eight, which requires developing and supporting an interpretation, is more challenging than question nine, which requires identifying textual evidence to support another’s interpretation.

Finally, the third and fourth sets of questions are both sequenced chronologically to follow the unfolding of the plot. Set three—question 10—is a foreshadowing chart. The “hints” on the chart are chronological. Set four—questions 11-13—correspond to the “Reading Strategy” focus, “responding to characters” (p. 34). Questions are posed about Tom at the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

The four sets of questions that comprise the collection of post-reading questions on “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” have multiple, distinct focuses that include plot, character, suspense, theme, conflict, and foreshadowing. Thus, instead of interrelated tasks that lead students in focused inquiry on a conceptual question, the collection of post-reading questions contain a mix of different sets of tasks that primarily test students’ understanding of the story. There is no overall conceptual focus for the post-reading questions.

## 7.2.2 Post-reading questions: Persuasion

The sequencing of post-reading questions in the persuasion units is similar to that in the short story units.

Below are the post-reading questions for Derr's editorial, "Pack of Lies" (Beers et al., 2009).

### Quick Check

1. Why does Derr think that rewards-based training programs are effective?
2. How does Derr describe the differences between wolves and dogs?
3. According to Derr, what are some possible causes of misbehavior in dogs?

### Read with a Purpose

4. Which of Milan's dog-training methods does Derr criticize? Why? What does Derr see as the potential negative effects of Milan's methods?

*Questions 5, 6, and 7 are vocabulary questions that ask students to match the vocabulary word that was defined prior to reading the selection with its correct definition.*

### Literary Analysis

8. According to Derr's statements, how have the media and Milan himself promoted his dog-training methods? What is Derr's attitude toward these promotional efforts? Support your response with evidence from the article.
9. What tone does Derr adopt when discussing Milan's philosophy and methods? Do you think Derr's tone supports or detracts from his purpose in the article? Explain.

### Literary Skills: Argument

10. What is Derr's claim in this article? Explain the flaws he sees in Milan's philosophy.
11. What types of logical and emotional appeals does Derr present to undermine Milan's credibility? Explain whether you think Derr's argument is convincing.

### Literary Skills Review: Title

12. The title of a work can serve several purposes. Explain the **pun**, or play on multiple meaning words, in the title "Pack of Lies." What purposes does Derr achieve by using this title?

### What do you think now?

13. In what ways might Milan's and Derr's ideas about dogs help people change their behavior toward each other?

(Beers et al., 2009, p. 606)

Overall, the post-reading questions above are sequenced from lower-order thinking to higher-level thinking: questions 1-4 ask for literal recall and questions 11, 12 and 13 ask for inference, analysis, and evaluation. Within that overall sequence, there are several different sets of questions and methods of sequencing. They are:

1. Questions 1-3: questions about literal details in the text
2. Question 4: questions about the central argument



3. Questions 8 and 9: “Literary Focus” (tone)
4. Questions 10 and 11: “Literary Focus” (logical and emotional appeals, credibility)

The first set of questions—one to three—asks for literal details and follows the unfolding of the text. The questions are not connected to each other, but they ask for similar intellectual work.

The second, third, and fourth sets of questions are sequenced so that the questions within each set build on each other. Answering earlier questions in each set support answering later questions in that set. For example, identifying Milan’s methods that Derr criticizes (4a) supports students to state what Derr finds problematic about these methods (4b) and what he sees as potential affects of these methods (4c). Each set of questions has a different focus that all cohere are the central argument, but the focuses are not interrelated.

In addition to the sets of questions already discussed, there are two questions—questions 12 and 13—that are discrete. These questions are unrelated to each other and other post-reading questions. Question 12 asks about the title of the text. This question is a vehicle for teaching students about pun. Question 13 corresponds to the text-specific question. Since the text-specific question is not integrated in the work on this text, question 13 is unconnected to other questions and tasks.

### 7.3 SUMMARY

The post-reading questions in all four textbooks have several noticeable sequences. First, most post-reading questions are sequenced from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking. Additionally, many questions, especially in the short story units, follow the chronology or unfolding of the text. Finally, sets of questions are sequenced so that earlier questions provide the support for answering later questions. Yet, because each text has multiple, unrelated focuses, the collection of post-reading questions on a text does not result in focused inquiry on a conceptual idea or question. Instead, the post-reading questions provide

a mix of unconnected tasks. The results from this study echo Applebee's (1993a) conclusion that the post-reading questions approach texts "as a series of unrelated 'puzzles' to be solved" (p. 152).

## **8.0 CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION**

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the four most widely used tenth grade literature textbooks in terms of the opportunities they provide for students to engage in coherent ELA curricular units in which the texts, questions, and tasks allow them to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments, engage in focused inquiry about individual texts, and build conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions.

There are several parts to this concluding chapter. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the intellectual work pertaining to unit and text-specific concepts/questions. I provide a summary of my findings on unit and text-level coherence and opportunities for students to develop their own text-based interpretations and arguments as they relate to the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. I also provide a summary of my findings on the sequencing of the post-reading questions on each text. Then, I use those findings to consider the opportunities for students to build conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. In the second part of this chapter, I present my findings on the post-reading questions and texts more broadly (as opposed to those related to unit or text-specific questions) in terms of the affordance they provide for students to develop, support, and defend multiple text-based interpretations and arguments. Finally, in the third part of this chapter I present an analysis of how textbooks present ELA teaching and learning and discuss implications of my findings for practice and research.

## **8.2 UNIT OR TEXT-SPECIFIC CONCEPT/QUESTION: COHERENCE, OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOCUSED INQUIRY, AND BUILDING CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

According to the four textbooks, the unit or text-specific concept/question is intended to provoke inquiry about “significant” (McDougal Littell, 2008, p. 3) or “big” (Glencoe, 2010, p. T35) ideas and “critical issues” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T22). The goal is for students to explore the issues raised by the unit or text-specific question through the texts and tasks in order to foster “deep understanding” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T6) and inspire rethinking (Beers et al., 2009; Prentice Hall, 2010). Organizing texts and tasks around big ideas and focus questions is consistent with professional standards (IRA/NCTE, 1996; NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) and scholarship on effective curriculum in ELA (Applebee, 1993b, 1994; Peters & Wixson, 2003). When texts and tasks are centered around and provide multiple perspectives on central questions or concepts, the knowledge students gain is organized conceptually, which leads to deeper understandings and the ability to use knowledge flexibly (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Flexibility of knowledge use is a key 21<sup>st</sup> century skill students need to do such things as interpret and analyze complex issues and solve open-ended problems (NCEE, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008).

Several important findings emerged from this study about how the textbooks I studied are designed to engage students in inquiry-based learning experiences to build their conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. These findings are also relevant for curriculum design.

### **8.2.1 Summary of findings**

First, this study showed that the relationship between the unit or text-specific concept/question and text is fundamental in establishing the building blocks for a coherent unit. This finding aligns with scholarship (Applebee, 1996; Wells, 1995), research (Applebee et al., 1994; Athanases, 2003), and practice-based writing (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) on curriculum that is organized around big ideas and questions. In most cases, units in which most or all of the texts cohere around the unit or text-specific concept/question

provide more questions and tasks that offer opportunities for engagement with the unit and text-specific concept/question. However, this study also showed that strength of conceptual coherence between text and unit or text-specific concept/question matters as well. Fewer texts in Glencoe's persuasion unit offer or support perspectives on the unit concept than in their short story unit; however, the unit concept in persuasion, keeping freedom alive, plays a central role in the texts that do. Thus, more questions and tasks can be asked of the texts in the persuasion unit because the strength of conceptual coherence between text and unit concept/question is greater.

This study also showed that some unit and text-level coherence is established in all eight units as a result of the unit or text-specific concept/question. Yet, despite that, neither the unit-level work nor the text-level work is particularly coherent; this is due to the plethora of work that is unrelated to the unit or text-specific concept/question. In several units, many of the texts, questions, and tasks cohere around the unit or text-specific concepts/questions; however, that work accounts for only a fraction of the work on each text or across the unit. For example, each text in every unit has two additional focuses that are unrelated to the unit or text-specific concept/question and unrelated to each other. These additional focuses account for all of the during-reading questions in Holt, McDougal Littell, and Prentice Hall, and many of the post-reading questions in all four textbooks. Additionally, the Writing Workshop in most units exhibits little coherence to the unit or text-specific concept/question or other unit work such as analyzing texts or building an understanding of genre. The unrelated work will likely inhibit opportunities to establish coherent learning experiences and ongoing conversations around the unit or text-specific concepts/questions (Applebee, 1996; Athanases, 2003).

Additionally, this study showed that despite the rhetoric in the four textbooks about the intent of the unit or text-specific concept/question, the unit or text-specific concepts/questions do not provoke inquiry, foster "deep understanding" (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T6), or inspire rethinking (Beers et al., 2009; Prentice Hall, 2010). There are two reasons for this. One reason is due to the nature of the unit or text-specific concept/question and the texts. Most of the unit questions are too broad or too narrow to provoke inquiry. The text-specific concepts/questions for Holt and McDougal Littell could provoke inquiry, but

they are paired with texts that are too limited in the perspectives they offer or support on the text-specific concept/question to fuel the inquiry.

The second reason is the result of how the unit or text-specific concepts/questions are used. The majority of the post-reading questions that are related to the unit or text-specific concept/question are recitation questions. Thus, rather than provoking inquiry, fostering “deep understanding,” or inspiring rethinking, the unit or text-specific concepts/questions mostly provide another vehicle for asking questions that require students to recall or identify details from the texts. While there are questions in every unit that ask students to develop, support, and defend interpretations, arguments, and generalizations about unit or text-specific concepts/questions based on ideas in the texts, in several units there are often as many or more questions that ask students to do those same things without the support of textual evidence. Such questions encourage students to develop arguments that are not grounded in evidence and have been shown to have a negative effect on students’ achievement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997). Furthermore, the post-reading questions never ask students to return to their prereading or any other previous assignments to rethink earlier ideas about the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. Lastly few questions ask students to think across texts about the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. The majority of intertextual tasks in all eight units are reserved for questions about author’s craft, not unit or text-specific concept/question.

In short, despite providing some unit and text-level coherence, the unit and text-specific concepts/questions do not drive the work in the units. Instead, they provide another layer of work that is neither integrated, inquiry-based, nor, as I will describe below, conducive to building conceptual understanding.

### **8.2.2 Opportunities to build conceptual understanding**

Conceptual understanding entails gaining complex, flexible, and abstracted understanding of concepts that is transferable to novel situations (Vygotsky, 1986). Conceptual understanding allows for flexible and

creative use of knowledge, two cognitive skills students need to be college and workforce ready and participate in the 21 century global economy that demands more educated workers than ever before in history (Conley, 2007; NCEE, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008).

We develop conceptual understanding by engaging in coherent, focused learning experiences designed around concepts or conceptual questions. The learning experiences consist of exploring and comparing various perspectives on the focus concept, analyzing and synthesizing perspectives, developing generalizations and theories, and applying our understanding to novel situations (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007; Vygotsky, 1986). These are many of the same practices that students need to participate in college and the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce (Conley, 2007; NCEE, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008).

Coherent ELA units that provide opportunities for students to develop conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concept/question include multiple texts with varied perspectives on the unit or text-specific concept/question (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007). Additionally, they have questions and tasks that provide opportunities for students to construct their own text-based understandings, interpretations, and arguments about the unit or text-specific concepts/questions with individual texts and across texts. The questions and tasks on each text are sequenced and focused so that later questions build on earlier questions, providing opportunities for students to engage in coherent, focused inquiry. Furthermore, students have opportunities to synthesize their ideas to develop generalizations across texts and apply their knowledge to create new texts.

The eight units I analyzed provide few opportunities for students to construct conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions. In McDougal Littell and Holt, the use of *text-specific* concepts/questions rather than *unit* questions essentially precludes building conceptual understanding unless the text or pair of texts that correspond to the text-specific concept/question provide multiple, varied perspectives on the text-specific question, which is not generally the case. One or two texts will not typically provide students with sufficient conceptual representations and perspectives to build conceptual understanding (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007) of the text-specific concept/question. Although I

did not study opportunities to build conceptual understanding of concepts other than the unit or text-specific concept/question, the findings from my analysis of the sequencing of post-reading questions suggests that it is unlikely that those opportunities exist either. The post-reading questions on individual texts have noticeable sequences, but none are sequenced so that students engage in focused inquiry to develop conceptual understanding on other concepts that might be in the texts beyond the text-specific concept/question.

In units that contain unit concepts/questions and include texts that provide multiple, varied perspectives on the unit concept/question such as Glencoe's short story and persuasion units, post-reading questions and tasks are not ones that would likely provide opportunities to build conceptual understanding. First, the post-reading questions are neither focused on the unit concept/question nor sequenced to build on each other in order to engage students in a focused inquiry on the unit concept/question or any other conceptual idea related to the texts. Instead, the post-reading questions provide a mix of unconnected tasks. Additionally, the majority of the questions and tasks are recitation questions, which are not particularly conducive to building conceptual understanding as they provide limited opportunities for exploration or multiple perspectives. Furthermore, no questions in Glencoe's short story unit and only one in Glencoe's persuasion unit provide the opportunity for students to work across texts to compare, contrast, or synthesize ideas related to the unit concept questions. In addition to limiting students' opportunities to build conceptual understanding, the absence of these tasks also limits their practice with the key skills and habits they will need to be successful in college and the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce (ACT & The Education Trust, 2004; Conley, 2007; NCEE, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008). Finally, students are not asked to use ideas that are related to the unit or text-specific concepts/questions in any concluding tasks including the Writing Workshops. As such, students are not provided the opportunity to use their understanding in new situations.

Although the questions and tasks in Glencoe's short story and persuasion units are not designed to build students' conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concept/question, teachers could construct tasks that provide those opportunities. The fact that most of the texts cohere around the unit



concept/question and that the collections of texts provide multiple, varied perspectives establishes the building blocks for a unit in which students could have opportunities to build their conceptual understanding. None of the other textbook units provide that opportunity.

### **8.3 TEXTS AND POST-READING QUESTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS**

#### **8.3.1 Summary of findings: Opportunities for multiple interpretations**

Prior research (Applebee, 1993a; Lynch and Evans, 1963; Rotta, 1998) has shown that recitation questions account for the majority of questions in secondary ELA textbooks. The findings from this study reveal that this trend persists despite the many studies (e.g., Applebee et al., 2003; Guthrie et al., 1995; Langer, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) that have demonstrated the benefits of authentic text-based questions that ask students to develop, support, and defend their own text-based interpretations and arguments. Recitation questions account for 50% or more of the post-reading questions in all eight textbooks *if* teachers do not use the responses in the teacher's edition as their source for correct answers. If they do, then the percentage of recitation questions increases to over 60% for four units and over 70% for another four units due to the many authentic text-based post-reading questions for which there is only one response provided in the teacher's edition. Many of the recitation questions are inferential questions that might require students to revisit the texts, but because none of the texts are particularly complex, the level of inference required of most recitation questions is low.

The findings from this study suggest that there is a relationship between the nature of the texts and types of questions that are asked in the short story units. Texts in the short story units that are straightforward and unambiguous such as the science fiction stories and expository nonfiction texts have far more recitation questions than texts that contain some moments of ambiguity. This demonstrates that

the textbook authors generally take advantage of ambiguities in the texts. The problem, however, is that none of the texts is highly or holistically ambiguous. Instead, the ambiguity is typically local—the meaning of a metaphor or the motivations behind a character’s remark. While these ambiguous moments permit multiple interpretations, they do not permit the construction of interpretations that require students to use evidence from across the text to develop, support, and defend responses.

This study suggests that there is a weaker relationship between texts and post-reading questions in the persuasion units. Few texts in any persuasion unit demonstrate any ambiguity, probably due to the nature of the genre (i.e., effective persuasive texts are rarely ambiguous) and the purpose for reading these texts (i.e., to teach students about effective persuasive texts). Yet, there are as many authentic text-based questions in the persuasion units as the short story units. This shows a difference in the types of questions that are asked in the persuasion units. Rather than interpreting moments of ambiguity, authentic text-based questions in the persuasion units generally provide opportunities for students to generate text-based arguments about whether they found aspects of the text such as the author’s argument or use of evidence effective. This line of questioning provides opportunities for text-based work on texts that are limited in their interpretive potential; however, the inclusion of texts with complex and deeply embedded arguments could make these tasks more rigorous and authentic.

For the most part, the texts in all the textbook units, but especially in the persuasion units, appear to have been chosen because they provide models of the genre that are easy to access and contain various literary or rhetorical devices that students can identify and critique. The texts do not appear to have been chosen because they have something to say or because they “open up the familiar world and make it puzzling, rich, and problematic” (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 2005, p. vi). Additionally, few texts are complex, offering limited opportunities for students to engage in standards-based tasks such as analyzing complex plot structures, evaluating intricate arguments, and analyzing implicit premises (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a).

#### 8.4 HOW TEXTBOOKS PRESENT ELA TEACHING AND LEARNING

Research in ELA and other disciplines shows that many teachers (e.g., Applebee, 1993; Goodlad, 1984; Woodward & Elliot, 1990), especially new teachers, use textbooks for guidance in what and how to teach (Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988; Grossman & Thompson, 2004). As such, textbooks are sources of learning for teachers (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Woodward and Elliot, 1990) as well as for students. For many, textbooks represent the discipline, supplying what it means to “do” ELA. Looking across the findings from this study provides insight into several positions on English teaching and learning literature textbooks promote through their questions, tasks, and texts.

First, post-reading questions and tasks promote the idea that readers gain an understanding of texts by recalling individual details and inferring an author’s meaning about varied aspects of texts. As I have discussed in this chapter and elsewhere, the majority of post-reading questions in all four textbooks are recitation questions. These questions advance the notion that a key aspect of being a good reader is the ability to recall literal and implied textual details. Furthermore, post-reading questions are not sequenced so that later questions build on earlier questions in order to engage students in focused inquiry about a text. Instead, the questions are clustered around several unrelated focuses for reading. The emphasis on recitation questions about discrete or unrelated aspects of texts promotes the idea that reading for understanding does not necessitate readers coming to a coherent and cumulative understanding about a text.

Similarly, the high percentage of recitation questions and low percentage of authentic text-based questions supports a position that developing and supporting text-based interpretations and arguments is a relatively small part of the work of ELA. Instead, textbooks advance the notion that the work of ELA consists primarily of correctly determining what the text says explicitly and implicitly. Developing and supporting text-based interpretations and arguments is presented as a fraction of the work of ELA, as evidenced by the percentage of authentic text-based questions that have more than one possible response listed in the teacher’s edition. Authentic text-based questions that are treated as recitation questions in the

teacher's edition turns the work of ELA into ensuring that students learn to think and reason according to school-based notions of effective texts.

Third, some questions and tasks in current literature textbooks, especially those that relate to the unit or text-specific concept/question, suggest that developing and supporting an argument in ELA does not always require textual evidence or other data. The majority of authentic nontext-based questions encourage students to develop and support arguments based on their own opinions or experiences without regard to textual evidence or data that may be gathered from other sources beyond the texts in the textbooks. In addition to contradicting the Common Core State Standards, which assert that students who are college and career ready value evidence, citing "specific evidence when offering an interpretation of a text...and us[ing] relevant evidence when supporting their own points" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 7), this practice also misrepresents the discipline of ELA, suggesting that arguments in ELA are not rigorous.

Fourth, the limited opportunities students have to build conceptual understanding of the unit or text-specific concepts/questions promotes the notion that writers do not "speak" to each other or about universal ideas and themes. In current literature textbooks, most texts are intended to be read, analyzed, and discussed in isolation, as evidenced by the small numbers of intertextual tasks. This suggests that texts and authors do not contribute to larger ongoing conversations about conceptual ideas. Additionally, it suggests that ELA teaching and learning is not focused on building students' understanding of ideas and concepts.

Through their text selection, literature textbooks promote the notion that quality texts are those in which the author's meaning and purpose are clear. As discussed in this chapter and elsewhere, the short story and persuasive texts included in the textbooks units are ones whose central themes and arguments, as well as their development through ideas, examples, characters, or events, are neither ambiguous nor difficult to trace. This suggests that quality texts are those that do not demand much work on the part of readers. Additionally, it suggests to teachers that the texts they read with students should not be ones that are complex or difficult.

Textbooks also seem to suggest that reading texts in their entirety is unnecessary to gaining a complete understanding of the arguments, ideas, themes or characters. All textbooks include texts that are excerpted from larger works such as a section from a book (i.e., excerpt from Cesar's Way) or several paragraphs from a speech (i.e., "Keep Memory Alive," paragraphs from Elie Wiesel's Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech). They also include texts such as magazines articles that have been adapted to remove sections that portray individuals, groups, or corporations in a negative light. For example, a section from "Pack of Lies," in which Derr claims that Cesar Milan is showing himself to be sexist when he suggests that women are not good dog owners because they are too loving, is removed. Finally, all textbook units include texts that have been edited to remove words or behaviors that some might find offensive. For example, in Prentice Hall, all references to cigarettes or smoking are removed from O'Henry's short story "One Thousand Dollars." Excerpting, adapting, and editing texts has been a consistent practice of ELA textbooks (Apple, 1992; Applebee, 1974, 1993; Appleby et al., 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991; Carr et al., 2005; Lynch & Evans, 1961); current textbooks continue that tradition. This practice promotes the notion that texts can be altered without affecting author's meaning, or readers' understanding or ability for analysis. Additionally, it suggests that texts for adolescents should be void of ideas that might be considered controversial or sensitive.

Finally, ELA teaching and learning is represented as atheoretical. Although current literature textbooks embody various, often competing, theories, they do not apprise students or teachers of these theories. For example, new critical approaches to interpreting literature are evident in post-reading questions that ask students to engage in close textual analysis without regard for author's lives or backgrounds; similarly, reader response approaches are evident in post-reading questions that ask students to make personal connections to the texts. We can also see that multiculturalism has informed literature anthologies insofar as anthologies include many more nonwhite and women authors than they did in Lynch and Evans (1961) study of textbooks. Yet, students are never presented with any information about various theories or ways of interpreting literature. In fact, there's no acknowledgement that different theories of interpreting literature exist. In addition to lacking a coherent theory to guide text selection and

question and task design, textbooks also fail to teach students about theories, thus omitting an essential part of the discipline of ELA.

## **8.5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.5.1 Implications for practice**

If teachers use the textbooks I studied for this dissertation as curriculum, it is highly unlikely that NAEP scores will increase or that students will leave high school prepared to be successful in college and the workforce. Yet, unless something dramatically changes, textbooks will remain one of the central tools for teachers. Thus, preservice and inservice educators have a responsibility to prepare teachers to use literature textbooks in ways that can improve student learning. Teacher education programs tend to dismiss textbooks, giving preservice teachers the impression that only bad teachers use the textbook (Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988). However, research shows that many teachers (e.g., Applebee, 1993; Goodlad, 1984; Woodward & Elliot, 1990), especially new teachers, use textbooks for guidance in what and how to teach (Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988; Grossman & Thompson, 2004). As such, preservice and inservice educators must provide guidance to help teachers discern what in textbooks is worthwhile, what can be adapted, and what should be ignored. Instead of leaving textbooks at the door of teacher education courses and professional development sessions, preservice and inservice educators would be wise to teach teachers how to analyze textbook units of study, select complex texts that are open to multiple interpretations, make decisions about which of the many focuses on each text they might use, and analyze and adapt questions and tasks to provide learning opportunities in which students are actively constructing knowledge and developing, supporting, and defending text-based interpretations and arguments.

In order to prepare students for college and the workforce, teachers will need to design instructional units that modify rather than rely on the those provided by textbooks. That means making sure all texts cohere around the unit question; selecting additional texts than the ones provided in textbooks to give students access to more complex texts that are open to multiple interpretations; modifying, developing, and sequencing questions for writing and discussion that provide opportunities for students to develop text-based interpretations and arguments within and across texts; and discussing and reflecting on students' learning as evidenced by the work they produce in order to refine instruction. Some of this collaboration can occur as part of inservice time, but that time is generally too infrequent and short, and often usurped by other matters. Instead, teachers need regular opportunities to meet with their colleagues to share rich texts, develop and test authentic text-based questions, and collaboratively design learning experiences for students in which they are able to build their conceptual understanding through rich texts and tasks.

Finally, educators that are listed as textbook authors and consultants need to be held responsible for the content of the textbooks to which they contribute their name and expertise. The list of author and consultant names help sell textbooks by projecting the image that the textbooks are research-based and reflect the authors and consultants ideas and knowledge about best practices (Venezky, 1992). Yet, few traces of what particular authors and consults research and write about effective English language arts instruction are evident in the literature textbooks. As I mentioned previously, the unit questions in Prentice Hall's short story and persuasion units do not reflect what Grant Wiggins, contributing author of Prentice Hall's literature textbook and co-author of *Understanding by Design*, has written about effective unit or "big" question. Similarly, McDougal Littell's literature textbook does not reflect the research, writing, and suggestions that Arthur Applebee has completed on ELA curriculum and ELA textbooks. If noted scholars allow their names to sell textbooks then they need to be held accountable for the content and approaches in them.

### 8.5.2 Implications for future research

This study was a study of “possibilities” and “opportunities,” with reality depending largely on how teachers use textbooks. A direction for future research is to study how teachers use textbooks. The sheer enormity of literature textbooks precludes teachers from covering everything in the more than 1000 pages that comprise each of the four textbooks I studied. We have evidence that teachers use the textbook (e.g., Applebee, 1993; Goodlad, 1984; Woodward & Elliot, 1990), but we have little evidence on *how* they use it. Some avenues of research might focus on how teachers make decisions about what units or texts to teach; how they decide between the many, unrelated focuses on each text; how they use the post-reading questions and answers in the teacher’s edition; and how they modify textbooks to provide coherent learning experiences for students. This research would provide valuable information for those who teach preservice and inservice teachers, offering insight into textbook use and the decision-making of teachers. Knowing the factors that are behind teachers’ decision-making allows for more focused preservice and inservice education.

An additional but related direction for future research is to study what teachers learn from textbooks. Similarities exist between the questions in textbooks and the types of questions that teachers ask of students, both groups relying heavily on recitation questions. We know that textbooks are sources of learning for teachers (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Woodward and Elliot, 1990). We also know that textbooks spend great amount of money finding out what teachers want and tailoring textbooks to meet their needs (Guth, 1989). What is less clear in ELA (than in math or science) is how teachers and textbooks influence each other. Do teachers teach the way textbooks suggest, or are textbooks constructed the way they are because that is what teachers demand? Presumably, the answer is somewhere in-between, but where? A study of what teachers learn from textbooks and how that influences their beliefs and practice would provide insight into the relationship between teacher and textbook and the role that curriculum materials have in influencing teacher learning.



Finally, another direction for future research might include a study of two classrooms in which one teacher teaches a textbook unit as written—using the texts, tasks, and question without modification—while the other teacher provides some modifications that include (a) replacing the most straightforward and unambiguous texts with ones that provide opportunities for multiple interpretations and (b) designing authentic text-based questions on those texts. Although there are many critiques of textbooks (e.g., Apple, 1992; Appleby 1989; Boyton, 1989; Guth, 1989) and several research studies like this one that study opportunities and possibilities (Applebee, 1993a; Lynch & Evans, 1961; Rotta, 1998), I know of no studies of their use in classrooms in terms of student learning. A study such as this one could provide information that would validate or void previous critiques and studies, and help teachers know how to modify textbooks in order to maximize student learning.

## 8.6 SUMMARY

Since the late nineteenth century (Applebee, 1974), literature textbooks have been central tools for ELA teachers (ACT & The Education Trust, 2004; Applebee, 1993a; Goodlad, 2004), and their presence and influence in ELA classrooms shows no signs of waning. The findings from this study show that despite how they are marketed, current 10<sup>th</sup> grade literature textbooks do not provide students with conceptually coherent units of study that invite “inquiry” (Glencoe, 2010, p. T35) and “stimulate rethinking” (Prentice Hall, 2010, p. T6). Unit and text-specific concepts/questions provides some coherence, but units do not cohere around those concepts/questions. Additionally, students have limited opportunities to engage in inquiry-based tasks with complex texts. This study suggests that unless textbook companies significantly revise their texts, tasks, and questions, they will not provide the learning opportunities students require to meet and exceed the new *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science* and be college and workforce ready.

## APPENDIX A

### CODES FOR PRE-, DURING-, AND POST-READING QUESTIONS AND TASKS

<b>Question/task appears <u>before</u> text to</b>
Access prior knowledge of unit or text-specific concept/question as it relates to the text
Build on or reinforce earlier ideas about unit or text-specific concept/question from previous unit text to make connections to following text
Connect unit or text-specific concept/question as it relates to the text to students' experiences outside of school
<b>Question/task appears next to text and is meant to be answered <u>during</u> reading to</b>
Explore ideas related to unit or text-specific concept/question based on events, ideas, arguments, or themes in text
Explore author's or characters' perspectives on unit or text-specific concept/question
Evaluate how author reveals, develops, supports, or prepares readers for his/her own or characters' perspective on unit or text-specific concept/question
Compare students' perspectives on unit or text-specific concept/question with author's or characters' perspectives
<b>Question/task appears <u>after</u> text to</b>
Revise or reevaluate ideas about unit or text-specific concept/question-specific concept/question that were generated before reading text
Explore unit or text-specific concept/question based on events, ideas, characters, arguments or themes
Explore unit or text-specific concept/question based on readers' personal experience or opinion (no references to text)
Explore the author's or characters' perspective on unit or text-specific concept/question
Explore reasons behind the author's perspective on unit or text-specific concept/question

Explore how author reveals, supports, develops, or prepares readers for his/her own or characters' perspective on unit or text-specific concept/question
Connect unit or text-specific concept/question as it relates to events, ideas, characters, arguments, or themes in text to students' beliefs, lives, and/or experiences outside of school
Connect unit or text-specific concept/question as it relates to events, ideas, characters, arguments, or themes to current events, policies, and/or societal trends
Apply ideas about unit or text-specific concept/question to new situations
Make a comparison between this text and other unit texts with regard to authors', characters', or texts' perspective on unit or text-specific concept/question
Make a comparison between this text and other unit texts to draw conclusions or make generalizations about unit or text-specific concept/question
Make a comparison between this text and other unit texts to revise or reevaluate previous ideas or thoughts about unit or text-specific concept/question
Make a comparison between this text and other unit texts to explore how the author reveals, develops, and supports his/her own or the characters' perspective on unit or text-specific concept/question

## APPENDIX B

### CODES FOR INTRODUCTORY AND CONCLUDING QUESTIONS AND TASKS

<b>Introductory questions and tasks</b>
Access prior knowledge of the unit concept/question
Generate initial theories about the unit concept/question
<b>Concluding questions and tasks</b>
Compare authors', characters', or texts' perspective on the unit concept/question
Draw conclusions or make generalizations related to the unit concept/question
Revise or reevaluate previous ideas or thoughts related to the unit concept/question
Apply ideas about the unit concept/question to new situations (including Writing Workshop)
Reflect on learning about the unit concept/question

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACT. (2006). *Reading between the lines: What the ACT reveals about college readiness in reading*. ACT.
- ACT & The Education Trust. (2004). *On course for success: A close look at selected high school courses that prepare all students for college and work*. Washington, DC: author.
- Alvermann, D. E., Young, J. P., Weaver, D., Hinchman, K. A., Moore, D. W., Phelps, S. F. et al. (1996). Middle and high school students' perceptions of how they experience text-based discussions: A multicase study. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31(3), 244-267.
- Apple, M. W. (1992). The text and cultural politics. *Educational Researcher*, 21(7), 4-19.
- Applebee, A. N. (1974). *Tradition and reform in the teaching of English: A history*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Applebee, A. N. (1991). *A study of high school literature anthologies* (Report 1.5). NY: Center on English Learning & Achievement.
- Applebee, A. N. (1993a). *Literature in the secondary school: Studies of curriculum and instruction in the United States*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Applebee, A. N. (1993b). *Beyond the lesson: Reconstructing curriculum as domain for culturally significant conversations* (Report 1.7). Albany, NY: National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning.
- Applebee, A. N. (1996). *Curriculum as conversation*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Applebee, A. N., Adler, M. & Flihan, S. (2007). Interdisciplinary curricula in middle and high school classrooms: Case studies of approaches to curriculum and instruction. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), 1002-1039.
- Applebee, A. N., Burroughs, R., & Stevens, A. S. (1994). *Shaping conversations: A study of continuity and coherence in high school literature curricula* (Report Series 1.11). Albany, NY: National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning.
- Applebee, A. N., Langer, J. A., Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: Classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40 (3), 685-730.
- Appleby, B. Johnson, G., & Taylor, R.M. (1989). A hefty new literature series: Something for everyone? *English Journal*, 78(6), 77-80.

- Appleby, B. Johnson, G., & Taylor, R.M. (1990a). Another hefty literature series: Counting the cost. *English Journal*, 79(4), 92-96.
- Appleby, B. Johnson, G., & Taylor, R.M. (1990b). An old standard: Scott, Foresman's *America Reads* series. *English Journal*, 79(6), 86-90.
- Appleby, B. Johnson, G., & Taylor, R.M. (1991). Yet another old standard: HBJ's 'Adventures' Series. *English Journal*, 79(6), 86-90.
- Athanases, S. Z. (2003). Thematic study of literature: Middle school teachers, professional development, and educational reform. *English Education*, 35(2), 107-121.
- Ball, D. L. & Cohen, D. K. (1996). Reform by the book: what is – or might be – the role of curriculum materials in teacher learning and instructional reform? *Educational Researcher*, 25(9), 6 - 8, 14.
- Ball, D. L. & Feiman-Nemser, S. (1988). Using textbooks and teachers' guides: A dilemma for beginning teachers and teacher educators. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 18(4), 401-423)
- Banks, J. A. (2002). *An introduction to multicultural education (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bartholomae, D. & Petrosky, A (2005). *Ways of Reading (7<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Beck, I. L., & McKeown, M. G. (2001). Text talk: Capturing the benefits of read-aloud experiences for young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(1), 10–20.
- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Gromoll, E. W. (1989). Learning from social studies texts. *Cognition and Instruction*, 6(2), 99-158.
- Beers, K., Jago, C., Appleman, D., Christenbury, L., Kajder, S., & Rief, L. (2009). *Elements of literature: Fourth course*. USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bird, S. D. (2005). *A content analysis of the most commonly adopted high school literature anthologies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Houston, Houston.
- Bloom B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay Co Inc.
- Boynton, R. (1989). The textbook gap: A teacher-author-publisher dialogue. *English Journal*, 78(6), 17-20.
- Bransford, J., Brown, A., & Cocking, R. (2002). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J., & Morison, K. B. (2006). *The Silent Epidemic*. Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprise, LLC.
- Carr, J. F., Carr, S. L., & Schultz, L. M. (2005). *Archives of Instruction: Nineteen-century rhetorics, readers, and composition books in the United States*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Chall, J. S. & Conrad, S. S. (1990). Textbooks and challenge: The influence of educational research. In D. L. Elliot and A. Woodward (Eds.) *Textbooks and schooling in the United States* (pp. 61-65). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Christoph, J. N., & Nystrand, M. (2001). Taking risks, negotiating relationships: One teacher's transition toward a dialogic classroom. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 36, 249-286.
- Collier, E. (1993). Marigolds. In McDougal Littell, *Responding to literature: Multicultural perspectives* (pp. 399-407). Evanston, IL: McDougal, Littell & Company.
- Conley, D. T. (2007). *Toward a more comprehensive conception of college readiness*. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center.
- Cummings-Potvin, W. (2007). Scaffolding, multiliteracies, and reading circles. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30(2), 483-507.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. Boston, MA: D. C. Heath and Company.
- Doll, W. E. (2004). The four R's—An alternative to the Tyler Rationale. In D. J. Flinders & S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *Curriculum Studies Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 253-260). New York: Taylor & Francis Books, Inc.
- Eeds, M., & Wells, D. (1989). Grand conversations: An exploration of meaning construction in literature study groups. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 23(1), 4-29.
- Elliott, D.L., & Woodward, A. (1990). *Textbooks and schooling in the United States*. 89th Yearbook the National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Fulcher, G. (1997). Text difficulty and accessibility: Reading formulae and expert judgment. *System*, 25(4), 497-513.
- Glencoe. (2010). *Literature: Course 5*. USA: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Goodlad, J. (2004). *A place called school: Twentieth anniversary edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Grossman, P., & Thompson, C. (2004). *Curriculum materials: Scaffolds for new teacher learning?* Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy and Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA).
- Guth, H. (1989). The textbook gap: A teacher-author-publisher dialogue. *English Journal*, 78(6) 14-17.
- Guthrie, J. T., Schafer, W., Wang, Y. Y. & Afflerback, P. (1995). Relationship of instruction to amount of reading: An exploration of social, cognitive, and instructional connections. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30(1), 8-25.
- Hansen, A. L. (2005). *Multiculturalism, public policy, and the high school United States and American literature canon: A content analysis of textbooks adopted in the state of Florida in 1991 and 2003*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Florida, Tampa.

- Harwood, J. D. T. (1993). *A content analysis of the presentation of American Indians in high school American literature anthology textbooks*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Norman.
- Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (1987). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English. (1996). *Standards for the English Language Arts*. United States: International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English.
- Keefer, M. W., Zeitz, C. M, & Resnick, L. B. (2000). Judging the quality of peer-led dialogues. *Cognition and Instruction, 18*(1), 53-81.
- Langer, J. A. (2000). *Literary understanding and literature instruction* (Report 2.11). Albany, NY: National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning.
- Langer, J. A. (2001). Beating the odds: Teaching middle and high school students to read and write well. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 837-880.
- Lucking, R. A. (1976). A study of the effects of a hierarchically-ordered questioning technique on adolescents' responses to short stories. *Research in the Teaching of English, 10*(3), 269-276.
- Lynch, J. J., & Evans, B. (1963). *High school English textbooks: A critical examination*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.
- Marshall, J. D., Smagorinsky, P., & Smith, M. W. (1995). *The language of interpretation: Patterns of discourse in discussions of literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- McDougal Littell. (2008). *Literature: Grade 10*. China: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- National Center for Education and the Economy. (2007). *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The report of the New Commission on the Skills of American Workforce*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Assessment Governing Board. (2008). *Reading framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress*. U.S. Department of Education.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010a). *Common core state standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies & science*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org>
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010b). The common core state standards initiative: A state-led effort to create shared high standards to make sure all American students are ready for college and work. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org>
- Neel, H. M. (1954). *An analysis of history of English literature textbooks used in American secondary schools before 1900*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh.
- Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. (1991). Instructional discourse, student engagement, and literature achievement. *Research in the Teaching of English, 25*(3), 261-290.



- Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. (1997). The big picture: The language of learning in dozens of English lessons. In M. Nystrand (Ed.), *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Oakeshott, M. (1991). *Rationalism and other essays: New and expanded edition*. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc.
- Oteiza, T. (2003). How contemporary history is presented in Chilean middle school textbooks. *Discourse & Society*, 14(5), 639-660.
- Pace, B. G. (1992). The textbook canon: Genre, gender, and race in US literature anthologies. *English Journal*, 81(5), 33-38.
- Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. (2008). *21<sup>st</sup> century skills, education & competitiveness: A resource and policy guide*. Tucson, AZ: Author.
- Peters, C. W. & Wixson, K. K. (2003). Unifying the domain of K-12 English language arts curriculum. In D. Lapp & J. Flood (Eds.), *Handbook of English Language Arts. Second Edition*, pp. 573-589. NJ: Erlbaum.
- Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Prentice Hall. (2010). *Literature: Grade 10*. USA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Pressley, M., Allington, R., Morrow, L., Baker, K., Nelson, E., Wharton-McDonald, R., Block, C., Tracey, D., Brooks, G., Cronin, J., & Woo, D. (1998). *The nature of effective first-grade reading instruction* (Report No. 11007). Albany, NY: Center on English Learning & Achievement.
- Rotta, L. M. (1998). *A content analysis of critical thinking activities in secondary literature anthologies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University, Mississippi.
- Sandora, C, Beck, I., & McKeown, M. (1999). A comparison of two discussion strategies on students' comprehension and interpretation of complex literature. *Journal of Reading Psychology*, 20, 177-212.
- Smith, L. R. (1985). The effects of lesson structure and cognitive level of questions on student achievement. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 54(1), 44-49.
- Squire, J. (1989). The textbook gap: A teacher-author-publisher dialogue. *English Journal*, 78(6), 20-21.
- Squire, J. R. & Morgan, R. T. (1990). The elementary and high school textbook market today. In D. L. Elliot and A. Woodward (Eds.) *Textbooks and schooling in the United States* (pp. 107-126). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- The Great Books Foundation, (1999). *An introduction to shared inquiry*. Chicago, IL: The Great Books Foundation.
- U. S. Department of Education. (2010, March 24). *Education Secretary Duncan issues statement on The Nation's Report Card in reading for 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> graders*. Press release. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education.

- Venezky, R. L. (1992). Textbooks in school and society. In P. W. Jackson (Ed.). *A handbook of research on curriculum* (pp. 436-457). New York: MacMillan.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wells, G. (1995). Language and the inquiry-oriented curriculum. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 25(3), 233-269.
- Westbury, I. (1990). Textbook, textbook publishers, and the quality of schooling. In D. L. Elliott & A. Woodward (Eds.). *Textbooks and schooling in the United States: Eighty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 1-22). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Wharton-McDonald, R., Pressley, M., & Hampston, J. (1998). Literacy instruction in nine first-grade classrooms: Teacher characteristics and student achievement. *Elementary School Journal*, 99, 102-119.
- Whitehead, A. N. (1997). The aims of education and other essays. In S. M. Cahn (Ed.), *Classic and contemporary readings in the philosophy of education* (pp. 261-273). New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wineburg, S. S. (1991). On the reading of historical texts: Notes on the breach between school and the academy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 28(3), 495-519.
- Witherow, J. D. (1999). *Moving toward diversity in the American literature textbook cannon*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
- Woodward, A. & Elliott, D. L. (1990). Textbooks: Consensus and controversy. In D. L. Elliott & A. Woodward (Eds.). *Textbooks and schooling in the United States: Eighty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 146-161). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Young, M. J. (1990). Writing and editing textbooks. In D. L. Elliott & A. Woodward (Eds.). *Textbooks and schooling in the United States: Eighty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 71-85). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Zaharias, J. A. (1989). Literature anthologies in the US: Impediment to good teaching practice. *English Journal*, 78(6), 22-27.