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Multiple Perspectives through Critical Literacy Discussions in a Fifth-Grade Classroom

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in Elementary Education

Bridgewater State University

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## Exploring the First Encounters of Native Americans and European Explorers/Settlers from Multiple Perspectives through Critical Literacy Discussions in a Fifth-Grade Classroom

### **Review of Literature**

Fifth-grade students are required by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks to learn about the first encounters between the Native Americans and European explorers/settlers, such as Columbus and the colonists. Often times, students learn about first encounters in textbooks. Textbooks have been criticized as being poorly written, poorly organized, lacking different and multiple perspectives, and not appealing to young readers (George & Stix, 2000). In contrast, children's literature offers students a greater depth of content and multiple perspectives of a historical event. These books also contain current information, engaging writing styles, personal voices, options for varied reading levels, rich language, and interesting formats and structures (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2000). Instead of focusing on the textbook as the foundation for the curriculum, using it as one of many tools in the classroom can be more beneficial to the students. Students can use the textbook as a reference to provide an overview of the time period.

### **Integrating Children's Literature into the Social Studies Curriculum**

Integrating children's literature into the social studies curriculum allows students to make more connections to the historical content and develop a better understanding of the time period from different perspectives (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2000). When integrating children's literature into the classroom, students will be more interested in the lesson and find the topics more enjoyable and relevant than when learning from textbook (George & Stix 2000). The "first encounter" occurring between Native Americans and European explorers/settlers was more than

one instance in history but occurred numerous times through many different encounters.

Through the use of children's literature, students will begin to understand these historical events from multiple perspectives rather than from the perspective that is provided in textbooks.

### **Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy challenges students to expand their thinking and discover diverse beliefs, positions, and understandings (McLaughlin, 2004). Critical literacy helps students become active participants in the reading process and encourages them to push past the notion of accepting everything they read on the page. It invites them to question, examine, or dispute what the author has written for the reader to believe (Freire, 1970). Many times, students will take what they have read as a fact and not think twice about it. Critical literacy helps students examine the text, including its problems and complexity. Critical literacy encourages students to examine texts from multiple perspectives which then promotes reflection, transformation, and action (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). When students question what they read, it gives insight to new possibilities and expands the knowledge of the young readers and writers (McDaniel, 2004).

Social studies text sets allow students to juxtapose texts and clarify perspectives involved in a particular time period. A text set is a collection of 20-25 children's books on a particular topic. The reading of multiple texts provides a more well-rounded view of this historical time period and the creation of a complete understanding of what actually happened. Critical literacy discussions in the classroom allow for students to openly discuss and question texts with the support and ideas of their peers. Students can share ideas and different questions they have about

the events and the author. Critical literacy discussions allow for the questioning of who is writing the text and what perspective they are writing from (Comber, 2001).

Critical literacy encourages students to look at texts through different lenses and become text critics in order to develop a greater understanding of the text. The author has the power to create the message passed onto the reader, but the reader has the power to read, analyze, and question the text (McLaughlin & DeVood, 2004). Conversations within the classroom help integrate critical literacy into everyday practice for students. After reading a text, students are engaged in actively thinking about what they read and have the opportunity to agree or disagree with the message they received through critical literacy discussions. For instance, students can think about the missing voices and consider how the text may change if shared through the missing voice (Luke & Freebody, 1997). This will engage students in the classroom, and can be practiced at home when reading or viewing texts including social media, magazines, media, and newspapers (McLaughlin & DeVood, 2004). Critical literacy brings students' life experiences into the discussions which strengthens their opportunity to engage in conversation, particularly in higher levels of discussion, and understand the power of the author's message (Soares & Wood, 2010).

Presenting material to students using direct instruction and lecturing about a topic can become difficult and uninteresting to the students. Rather, allowing them to become critical thinkers and helping them become strategic learners will benefit them greatly (Collison, 1993, p.79). "Building a self-extending system [is] one of the central concepts" (Clay, 1993a).

Encouraging the student to construct their knowledge, rather than being handed the information, allows for a more in-depth understanding of the topic. The student will be more accepting of the information if they are able to construct it themselves. “The most important lesson I learned in the Literacy Lab was the power of individual instruction and the move to independence,” as Lyons, Pinnell, and DeFord (Lyons et al., 1993) describe, ‘the difficulty of change I’ve come to realize not only is it hard for the system to change but individual teachers as well’ (p.196).

Although it may be difficult to change the way one teaches, in the long run it becomes beneficial to both the educator and the student. “The most difficult change for me was moving from being in constant control of the teaching as well as the learning: in other words, moving from “delivering” the curriculum to “constructing” the curriculum with my students” (Collison, 1993, p.79). Students holding the power to create and develop ideas from texts that they read and investigate will greatly improve their literacy skills in a way that will stick with them. “As teachers we are frequently told we need to do *more*. Well, I have learned, in a sense, to do less – less jumping in, less “helping,” less controlling both the teaching and the learning. This is truly a time when less is more” (Collison, 1993, p.81). A teacher guiding students in the direction of critical thinking and giving the students the power of knowledge is a great tool for success.

While research has been done regarding the ways to present the content to the students and ways to guide students to the content goals, which are both crucial to successful teaching and learning within a classroom I wanted to know more. I was interested in developing a deeper understanding of how reading and critically discussing quality children’s literature about the first encounters influenced students’ understanding of this historical time period.

## Methodology

This naturalistic, descriptive study was conducted in a fifth-grade classroom in a suburban elementary school in Southeastern Massachusetts. Various forms of data were collected including participant observations, field notes, pre/post assessments, digital recordings of classroom discussions, which I transcribed verbatim, and semi-structured interviews with the students.

Before I started my study I gave the classroom teacher a text set of multiple perspective books on the first encounters between the natives and settlers (see figure 1) This text set was developed by carefully selecting books that are as historically accurate as possible and culturally authentic. The books are from the perspective of the natives, settlers, and Columbus. The teacher then developed lessons based on how she would typically teach the lesson. She read some of the books aloud, took passages out of the books for students to read and analyze, had the students do picture walks to examine the illustrations, compared different perspectives, and allowed some of the books to be read in free time. She incorporated many ways to have the students critically analyze the texts to accommodate for all learners.

I visited the classroom ten times from May to June in order to collect my data. While I was there I audio taped each lesson, and I took notes on whole class discussions, as well as small group discussions. I was also able to ask students questions and speak with the teacher at various occasions. From these observations and collected data, I was able to obtain a substantial amount of information to help me better understand how students learn by reading a variety of multiple perspective books in a text set of the first encounters through critical literacy discussions.

After recording and analyzing the conversations that were held in the classroom, I coded my data into categories: connecting literacy experiences, connecting outside experiences, utilizing texts to create own perspective, examining a text's purpose, connecting background knowledge, identifying text features, acknowledging, building the whole picture, referencing own work, questioning text, discovering together, defining, collaborating, activating mind, teacher as learner, reading to learn, and students hold knowledge. All of these categories help view what happened in the classroom and how the students were able to be critical thinkers when reading the books, passages, and pictures.

Once I collected all of my data I listened to the tape recordings and transcribed them verbatim. Once this was completed I was able to develop a coding system of the discussions. I created categories and find the major elements that led students to a better understanding of the subject matter. I created charts, lists, and graphs to categorize the data. I then went back through the transcriptions and coded each conversation and put it into a category. For example if the students were questioning an author's credibility, I would put that part of the conversation under the heading "questioning a text". This helped to develop a better understanding of how the students used critical literacy to better understand the events of the first encounters.

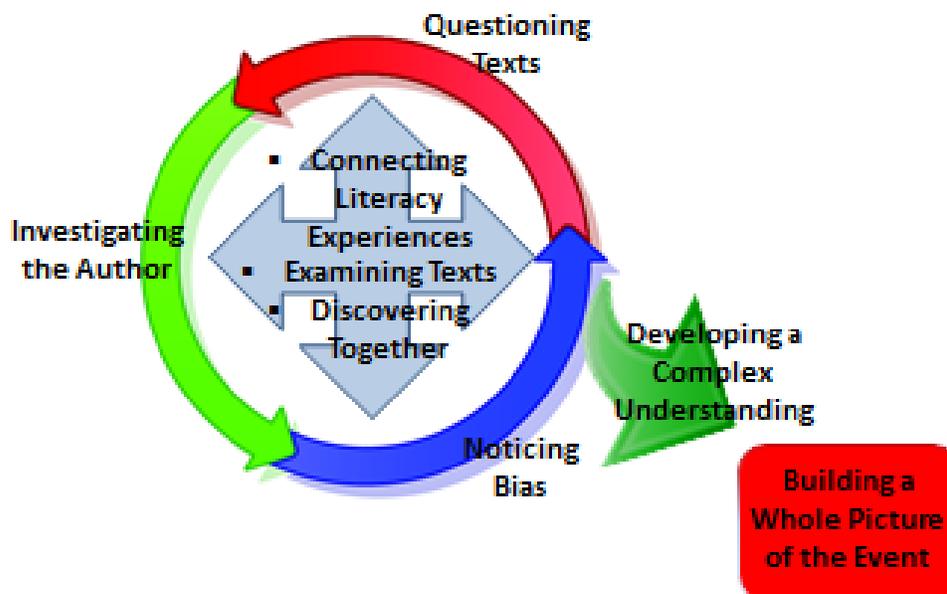
BOOKS ABOUT THE FIRST ENCOUNTERS	
Text Sets:	Book Titles
Columbus 1492-1619	<i>A Coyote Columbus Story</i> (King) <i>Morning Girl</i> (Dorris)
Mayflower – English Settlers who established Plymouth 1620	<i>Thunder from the Clear Sky</i> (Seawall) <i>Dear America: The Diary of Remember Patience Whippie</i> (Laksy)
Native/Colonial Encounters – Interactions between Native Americans and English Settlers during the first two years of settling Plymouth during the first “Thanksgiving” 1620-1621	<i>1621 A New Look at Thanksgiving</i> (Bruchac) <i>Giving Thanks: The 1621 Harvest Fest</i> (Waters) <i>Guests</i> (Dorris) <i>Squanto’s Journey</i> (Bruchac) <i>Thanksgiving: The True Story</i> (Coleman)
Native American Tribes of New England – An overview of prominent Native American Tribes living in the New England Region	<i>Tapenum’s Day: A Wampanoug Indian Boy in Pilgrim Times</i> (Waters) <i>The Pequot Tribe</i> (Lassieur) <i>Malian’s Song</i> (Bruchac) <i>The Wampanoag of Massachusetts and Rhode Island</i> (Levy)
Rising Tensions between Natives and Colonists – Coverage of the Pequot War and King Philip’s War including cause(s) & effect(s)	<i>King Philip’s War: The Conflict over New England</i> (Mandell)
First Encounters across North America – Encompasses a broad spectrum of different Native American/Settler interactions NOT specific to the New England Region	<i>1607: A New Look at Jamestown</i> (Lange) <i>Black Elk’s Vision: A Lakota Story</i> (Nelson) <i>The People Shall Continue</i> (Ortiz)

Figure 1

### Findings

Analysis of my data allowed for me to find many enlightening facts about students’ growth in knowledge when examining multiple perspective texts through a critical lens. Students began to critically evaluate the texts about the First Encounters. Students learned how to question the texts, notice biases, investigate the background of the author of the text, and question what voices may have been missing from the text. Students also were able to develop a complex understanding of the First Encounters. Students developed an understanding of the complex nature of the interactions between the Wampanoag and Settlers. Students initially viewed the

first encounters from the settlers' perspective and thought of the Natives as the antagonists. As the unit progressed, the students viewed the first encounters from multiple perspectives. Finally, the students built a whole picture of the event. Students are now able to see both sides of the first encounters and understand that historical events must be viewed from multiple perspectives in order to fully understand. Below is a diagram of my findings, showing critical literacy experiences, examining texts, and discovering are all portrayed through continuous cycle of questioning texts, investigating the author, and noticing bias. This all leads the students to develop a complex understanding in order to build a whole picture of the event from multiple perspectives.



## Developed a Complex Understanding of the First Encounters

By analyzing the classroom discussions that I observed and recorded verbatim, I found that the students were able to understand the multiple perspectives of the first encounters more accurately through the use of critical literacy. The students initially viewed the first encounters from the settlers' perspective and thought that the Natives were the antagonists:

Teacher – You came to fifth grade with knowledge of Christopher Columbus, what he's done in the past, and what I want to know, is that now that we have learned a little bit more, has your attitude towards him changed? So talk about that with the people you are sitting with. *Students all say yes, then turn and talk to their peers...* We need some evidence to back up our claims...Gianna?

Gianna – Um, well I thought he was like, nice.

Teacher– Who was nice?

Gianna – Christopher Columbus

Teacher– Why? Why'd you think that?

Gianna – Because of all the things we heard in other grades, but we learned he kidnapped the Natives.

Teacher – So your evidence to support that your attitudes changed is that he has captured Native Americans. And what was he doing with these Native Americans.

Gianna – Um, making them slaves.

Teacher – anybody else have something similar? Anthony?

Andrew – Um, the Indians are trying to be nice, but he was real mean to them. He captured them and in worst cases he just killed them.

Teacher – So has your attitude changed?

Andrew– Yes.

Teacher – What was your attitude before?

Andrew – Um, I thought he was a good explorer and he, when he went to America; he explored and didn't hurt Indians.

As the study progressed the students learned how to question the texts, investigate the background of the author of the text, and question what voices may have been missing. At the end of the unit, students developed an understanding of the complex nature of the interactions between the Wampanoag and Settlers; that they both collided with each other causing moments of tension on both sides and also times of peace. In an excerpt from an interview with a student:

KM – What have you learned about the natives and settlers during this unit? How has your knowledge about these groups changed since the beginning of this unit?

Sonia – I learned that the natives actually weren't the bad guys. Columbus, people like Columbus were because they invaded their land.

Students were able to change their ideas about what happened during the first encounters and allow bias to be overcome. As seen in this interview, the students were open to accepting new evidence showing that there are multiple perspectives and that everything they have previously learned is not 100% accurate.

The teacher encouraged the students to question every text they explored and to decipher which perspective and point of view it was from. The students became engaged in discovering the truths about the first encounters with their teacher through their constant interaction with the texts. They often became experts in certain passages and had the role of presenting that perspective or section to the class in order for all of the students to have an understanding of all sides and stories. During this unit the students learned the perspectives of both the Natives and

Settlers, causing them to be frustrated at having only learned the perspective of the Settlers in earlier grades. During a one-on-one interview with one of the students she expressed her frustration about not having learned the full story:

KM –What have you learned that you didn't know about before?

Sophia – It surprised me that they didn't tell us stuff in the second grade books because I feel like we could have handled it in the second grade...in the younger grades they don't want to horrify you so they don't tell you the whole story but they just sugar coat it for you instead.

This caused students to have great questions as to why some texts only offer the Settlers perspective. Some students came to the conclusion that the “winners” get to tell their story and then began to sympathize with the Natives. Having never heard the Natives' perspective, and now hearing their side of the story, the students felt as though the settlers were actually the ‘mean’ people.

One day the teacher handed out a passage from a book to all students and had each student read it independently to themselves. Without the students knowing, she handed out different passages; half the class had a passage told through the settlers' perspective and the other half had the Wampanoag perspective. She paired students with different passages and had them compare answers to a set of questions. The students were still unaware of the different passages until they began comparing answers and noticed that they had slightly different answers. The students would go back into the text and show their partner the evidence they used to back up their claim. When both students did this, a couple of groups came to the realization that they had different passages. As they examined the text more closely, they concluded that

one of them had the Wampanoag perspective, based on how the story was told, and the other had the settlers' perspective. This brought a great discussion to the classroom when the class came back together as a whole. They commented on how events can be viewed differently by different people, causing there to be two different stories to one event. The teacher guided them in the notion of how important it is to always analyze a text and to think critically about it. The students were able to juxtapose these two texts in their partner groups and discuss the differences in the stories. While some aspects were similar, the death of a settler was told in two different ways. The students were able to come to the conclusion that the Natives and settlers viewed the death with different points of view and that maybe both stories had some truths to them. During a whole class discussion after reading two different passages about one event the class had a lot of thoughts about different perspectives:

Teacher – Okay, so you are thinking that the story is different when the Natives describe it versus when the Settlers describe it. Cameron?

Cameron– they have different perspectives.

Teacher – Different perspectives. Who can add?

Raelynn – they have different ways of telling it.

Gianna – Their point of view

Teacher – their point of view is different. Great discussions that we are having. So do you think I did this on purpose?

Students – YES!

Teacher – Why are we reading two different passages? Why would I have you correct answers together when you don't have the same passage. Why would we be doing this?

Sophia – So we can learn what it's like from the Natives and Settlers. We learn both sides.

The students were able to put the pieces together of different stories and understand that different groups of people have different views of the same events. Questioning the author and speaker in the text is important for the students' comprehension of a subject matter. In order to understand the events between the natives and settlers, all perspectives are needed. By learning to think critically about the stories and question the stories, the students can create a whole picture and understand the full story.

### **Building a Whole Picture of the Historical Event**

Once an event is critically evaluated, questioned, and examined the students were able to put together the pieces. In the paragraph above, the students were given two passages about the same event, different perspective. By juxtaposing these and examining them through a critical lens, the students were able to build a more complete picture of what actually happened. In an excerpt from day six the class had a great discussion about questioning which perspective was true.

Teacher – Okay, who is telling the truth? Who can share their discussion?

Student – Both.

Teacher – Why?

Student – Because there are two different stories and both of them could have the right information.

Students were beginning to understand that two stories can have true parts and together they create a full story. They were acknowledging that it was not sufficient enough to read one book or passage and accept it as true, they needed more information and evidence to prove something true.

The teacher led the students in discovering how to build a whole picture by introducing the concept of a jig-saw puzzle. Viewing multiple perspective text sets is similar to piecing a jigsaw puzzle together because the students have to take events and stories from different perspectives and put them together in order to understand what actually happened.

Teacher - Even if you are still taking notes getting ready for our Jig Saw...What is a jig saw puzzle?

Student – A puzzle

Teacher – Give me more...

Student – A lot of pieces

Teacher - Okay, so a lot of pieces and all of those pieces are broken up. What happens? What do you do with all of the pieces? ....Sonya?

Sonya– You connect them.

Teacher – Okay, so you connect them. What else do you do with the jig saw puzzle pieces Jake?

Jake – You try and figure out what the figure or shape is.

Teacher – SO you're taking puzzles pieces and put them into a shape. What else, Andrew?

Andrew – Um, you put it all together as one.

Teacher – Yes! Putting it all together to make one big picture. SO as of right now, your small groups are the different pieces to our puzzle.

Guiding the students to connect the idea of a jig-saw puzzle to the natives and settlers was vital to their critical thinking. Viewing all the literature they were introduced to and being able to combine all of the information and stories into one, helped the students build a whole picture of the actual events that occurred. This helped the students use multiple perspective texts along with critical literacy to understand the actual events of the first encounters.

Another activity that the class participated in was a picture walk where the teacher placed pictures from various books in the text set around the classroom. She placed the students in groups of two or three and gave them a paper to fill in. She had the students think about who was in the picture, who was missing from the picture, and what might have been going on. Once the groups completed looking at each picture and commenting, they gathered as a whole class on the rug area. As a class they went through each picture and discussed the questions that were posed before the picture walk began:

Teacher – Who is not pictured in this photo?

Students – the Natives, Christopher Columbus.

Teacher – the Native Americans are not in this photo. Christopher Columbus is not in this photo. Let's look at photo three... talk about it, what's happening here? What's the mood?

*Students talk - Settling, sad faces, peace treaty*

Teacher – What could they be signing? Talk about it

Teacher – Who has an idea? Who can make an inference? What are they signing here? Mike?

Mike – A peace treaty, so maybe to make some more, so to make it so the colonists can have the land.

Different pictures were from different perspectives, allowing the students to view what an event might look like through the settlers' perspective and the natives' perspective. Since there were no words, the students were able to label the pictures as they went along. Thinking critically about pictures, was just as important as the text, the pictures in the book told so much. The students were able to think critically about the pictures and note who was present and who was missing. This led the students to realize depending on which point of view, the story could change. They also began to learn how to decipher photos and interpret what was going happening.

Throughout the unit it was important for the students to make literary connections across different texts. During a read aloud of Coyote by King, the teacher encouraged the class to think about connections they could make as she read. She often paused and asked the student what they noticed, and if they were able to find any connections so far in the text.

Teacher – Are we finding any connections yet?

Class – No

Teacher – who could predict how this could connect to Christopher Columbus? Sophia?

Lexi – The Coyote tries to tell everyone what to do.

Teacher – So how can we connect that to Christopher Columbus?

Lexi – Well Christopher Columbus came and told the Natives what to do.

Teacher – Ooh so maybe making the connection that Christopher Columbus came and told people what to do. Mike?

Mike – The coyote is telling the animals what to do

The teacher tried to guide the students to make connections, once she mentioned Christopher Columbus during the whole class discussion, the students immediately made the connection that both the coyote and Columbus came and started to tell the Natives what to do and how to live. This fiction story contained facts about the first encounters that helped the students view the events through a less serious manner in order to understand how Columbus came and took charge of the Natives. Before reading the text, the teacher did not give the students any clues to what the book was about or related to, she instead wanted the students to use their critical thinking skills and come to the conclusions on their own. As she read, the students were able to connect the fiction story, to the nonfiction events they had been learning about. Throughout the reading of the book, the teacher often paused at the illustrations and asked questions to guide the students to think critically about the illustrations and not just the text. The illustrations are a vital part of the text, especially for the students to learn how to analyze the pictures and gain valuable information from them.

Teacher – Look at this picture. What’s happening, who is in this picture? What kind of facial expressions? Mood/tone/emotions?

Students – there are the boats

Teacher – But what about the people? What does it seem Christopher Columbus is feeling?

Students – Happy!

Teacher– What is he doing? Clapping, rubbing hands together. Money, money. How about the other people, how about the natives in this picture?

Students – scared, tied up, worried, sad, mad

Through a book's illustrations, students can gain knowledge about the text that they otherwise might not know because it is not explicitly said in the text. Questioning the illustrations and how the expressions and tone are conveyed is important to the full understanding and comprehension of a text. The teacher guided the class to think about the illustrations rather than use them as purely entertainment.

While reading another one of the texts, *Tapenum's Day: A Wampanouog Indian Boy in Pilgrim Times* (Waters), as a whole class, the students were to think about the two different narrators and what they represented. The text showed the perspective of a young pilgrim boy and of a young native boy, the differences in the retelling of the events was obvious and as the class read, they were able to distinguish the perspectives and why they were told a certain way.

Teacher –We have Dancing Moccasins and Resolved. We have heard those words, but they are actually not just words, what are they? Anthony? Let's go back here. Who can make a connection?

Bella – They're like different groups.

Teacher – Different groups, okay, Nick?

Nick – Dancing Moccasin is blue and then Resolved is red.

Teacher– Right and I am going to show you here, it says, that these stories were told of what might have happened by little boys.

Tyler – Um, it's kind of like set up like the passage that we had for homework. Um like the Dancing Moccasin as they called them in the story, the red men, and then the Resolved were the white men.

Teacher – Okay, so tell me more about the two different people? What do you think is happening here? Because I am noticing that they talk about “my” and “our”. Senya, what do you think is happening?

Senya – Different perspectives, ones from the Natives and ones from the Pilgrims.

Teacher – Okay let's think about that as we move forward in our reading and think if we can confirm Senya's prediction that these are maybe different perspectives and points of views.

The students were able to distinguish that Dancing Moccasin was the native boy and Resolved was the pilgrim boy. The students thought critically about the text and used their background knowledge to separate the two stories. The teacher allowed for the students to make these predictions and come to conclusions on their own. She often guided them in the right direction, but never told them the answer. She played the role of a learner along with her students as they read and discovered the texts together. This text allowed for the students to see two different perspectives juxtaposed which presented the students with both perspectives to a particular event. This then offered the students the opportunity to create a whole picture of the event and to think critically about the possibilities of what happened by viewing both the Natives and settlers perspectives through the literature read.

### **Critically Evaluated Texts**

A student being able to acknowledge that a perspective can change the way an event is perceived is vital to their critical thinking skills because this leads to their understanding that not

everything they read is true. The students began acknowledging that one event can have two stories in this conversation between the teacher and a student:

Andrew –Perspective can change everything.

Teacher – Yes, perspective can change everything/ whether you are telling it from the Wampanoag point of view or whether you are telling it from the settlers' point of view. These events change, and are different based off of who is telling the story.

Once the students were able to grasp the concept that a perspective can change everything they began questioning who wrote the texts and if they were a credible source. This was first brought to their attention during an activity at the beginning of the unit when the teacher had the students search the text book for the authors, publishers, etc. This forced the students to think about who actually wrote the textbook and if they were sharing the full story. The class then used this to begin questioning other texts that they read and if the information is accurate:

Teacher – alright so you guys have summarized Christopher Columbus. My question to you is how do we know that this is true?

Students – We don't have any evidence.

Kim – It's in a book! It has to be true.

Teacher –I want to hear how we know this is true. Kyle?

Kyle– You don't actually know who write it.

Kyle – Well it's from not from his point of view and Christopher Columbus didn't write it.

Teacher – Alright, so it is from the textbook, and it wasn't from his point of view. What else did you discuss? Sofia?

Abbie – We said the ship logs would be true because they were written while on the ship.

Teacher – So you're saying these ship logs might have evidence in them? Might provide evidence. Why did you bring up the ship logs?

Abbie – because the ship logs are what were written on the journey.

Teacher – What else? How do we know this is true? Do we know this is true?

Tim – We don't because how we discussed that we learned last year that he thought the world was flat. We don't know how they got the information.

Teacher – What so these books, how are they getting their information? Yes, Jake?

Jake – No one that lives now lived in the time of Christopher Columbus, so there is not really any evidence that all that is actually true.

Teacher – so whoever wrote these books or this textbook weren't there so we don't know if they know the truth. So who wrote all the stories we read yesterday? How do we find out who the author is? One person from each group come get a book and find out who wrote it. I want to know who they are! Who wrote this book?! Who has some ideas? Who knows who wrote it?

Having the critical thinking skills to question the author and their credibility will help these students broaden their knowledge in this unit and every unit. Having multiple perspectives help students understand that not every story might be exactly what happened because the author was not there and therefore could have some false information. These are some of the conclusions the students came to in their discussions. They knew Christopher Columbus did not write the text; therefore it may not be all true. The students struggled a bit with the concept that everything they are reading may not be exactly what happened because up until this point, they have always

taken what they were told or read for fact. The students began to question everything they read and felt betrayed by the texts and past teachers for not exposing the whole story.

On the final days of the unit, the teacher presented the students with a creative activity in order to create their own perspective of the first encounters.

Teacher - You are going to be pretending you are a Wampanoag or a Pilgrim. Your choice. You are going to be writing from the perspective of a child living in Early America. What is life like for you? What do you eat? Where do you sleep? Who are your family members? What do you do for fun? We are going to be writing a letter to your diary. So the children here were writing from the perspective of either a Wampanoag or Pilgrim. Telling about the average day in your life, regular old day. You obviously don't go to the amusement park, you don't want T.V. anymore, and you don't play video games. What do you do?

The students chose whether they wanted to write about the Wampanoag experience or the Pilgrim experience. From there they had full range to include anything they learned throughout the unit. They had to keep the same year and had to use at least three texts they read and discovered information through. Only two of the eighteen students chose to pretend they were a pilgrim child, the rest chose to be a Wampanoag child. This was interesting yet expected after hearing the students' discussions. Most students, by the end of the unit, sympathized with the Wampanoag people because they had never heard their story before. The following is an example of the final activity for this unit:

August, 22, 1675

Dear Diary,

Today was a very tiring day of work and orders from Chief Massasoit. In the morning, I dreadfully lifted myself off the ground. I was starving but I knew as a Nampunog child I still needed to go hunting while my family made a fire for the day. I left for hunting and after a few hours I shot a deer. Dragging the dead deer back to my village I moaned and groaned but was excited to have some venison! Finally, I reached the fire that my mother, Sienna and my dad, Skanto had made. Next, I put the deer down and watched my dad clean and cook it. My sister, Sinco was helping mother prepare for the cold by sewing the leftover beaver skins. Tomorrow, would be another long day of work. Sincerely,

By the end of the unit, some students felt as though they knew the whole story of the first encounters, while others believed there was still more to be discovered. In two separate student interviews I asked, “Do you feel like you know the “whole story” of the first encounters between the natives and settlers *now*?” Zach explained, “I do because we read all of, not all of them, but books that told us mostly what happened back then and now we know that it’s called the first encounter instead of just saying the pilgrims.” While Kevin stated, “No because umm probably some of the facts are wrong and there are probably still more facts in books I haven’t read.” Both of these students were in the same class, learning from the same books, with the same critical

literacy discussions. These students ended the unit with different perspectives on the information they received, both of which they developed with critical thinking.

### **Conclusion**

Using a text set containing books from both the Wampanoag and Settler perspectives was greatly beneficial to the students' ability to comprehend the events that occurred during the multiple first encounters. Rather than reading the text book which is told from one perspective and contains only a brief overview of the events, the text set allowed for a greater range of experiences. The students were able to explore these texts using a critical lens to decipher the events and which were true. The class worked through the text and illustrations to question and combined the information to clarify their questions and doubts. The students became 'experts' in passages by reading, exploring, and answering questions about them. They then shared their wealth of knowledge with others. These texts opened the students' minds to the possibilities of multiple perspectives and how one event can be perceived in many ways. At the end of the unit, the class no longer viewed the first encounters in one way, they had many different stories that they built upon and constructed a new view. The students may now take this new ability they developed while exploring these texts, to view other texts with a critical lens in order to always be striving to obtain the most clear and true story behind all events since they can all be viewed from multiple perspectives. This tool is not only for books, but a tool that can be used in science, math, and in their daily lives.

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