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## Interpreter of Maladies: Analyzing Current Young Adult Indo-Caribbean Literature for Inclusion in Today's High School Canon

Reshma Ramkellawan

*University of Central Florida*, rramkell@gmail.com

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**"Interpreter of Maladies": Analyzing Current Young Adult  
Indo-Caribbean Literature for Inclusion in Today's High  
School Canon.**

by

RESHMA RAMKELLAWAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Education  
in the College of Education  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Sherron Killingsworth Roberts, Ed.D.



## ABSTRACT

The high school English Language Arts curricula of Central Florida has faced increasing scrutiny during the past decade under often conflicting influences such as a rapidly diversifying student population, activism for and against multicultural curriculum reform, and pressure to streamline curricula and make it conform to state testing standards. Against this social backdrop, the question of how to introduce Indo-Caribbean literature at the secondary level presents unique intellectual and political challenges. On the one hand, first and second generation Indo-Caribbean migrants make up an increasingly significant percentage of Florida's student population. Like other first and second generation Caribbean migrants, Indo-Caribbean students must straddle between their modern Caribbean traditions, juxtaposed with North American societal values; however, their East Indian heritage is rarely reflected in those Caribbean texts that do make it into secondary language arts reading lists. In my thesis, I will explore some of the demographic shifts in Central Florida, consider the extent to which Indo-Caribbean texts might be regarded as representative expressions of Caribbean experience, and suggest how the inclusion of Indo-Caribbean literature in the canon might provide a model for similar curriculum reform in the state of Florida.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>WITH THE DEEPEST GRATITUDE.....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND RATIONALE.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: INDO-CARIBBEAN CULTURE AND HISTORY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Arrival of Indians in the Caribbean .....	7
Conflicts with Afro-Caribbeans.....	10
Creation of the Indo-Caribbean Culture .....	14
Indo-Caribbean Americans.....	16
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FLORIDA’S HIGH SCHOOL CANON .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: LITERARY ENGAGEMENT .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Reader Response .....	29
Structuralism.....	32
Relevancy to Indo-Caribbean American Students and Literature.....	34
<b>CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Method of Literary Analysis .....	39
Explication de texte:.....	39
<b>CHAPTER 7: ANALYSES OF INDIAN, CARIBBEAN AND INDO-CARIBBEAN NOVELS .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Introduction.....	41
Indian Young Adult Novels.....	41
Thematic Elements of Each Novel.....	48
Caribbean Novels.....	49



Analyses of Caribbean Novels.....	50
Indo-Caribbean Pieces.....	53
Comparing Indian and Caribbean Pieces.....	57
Infusing Indo-Caribbean Young Adult Literature into the Existing Canon .....	63
<b>APPENDIX A: FLORIDA LEGISLATION REGARDING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: DEFINITION OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: MODIFIED EXPLICATION DE TEXTE DATA SHEETS.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: LIST OF INDIAN TEXTS .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: LIST OF CARIBBEAN TEXTS* -INDICATES A NOVEL THAT HAS A YOUNG ADULT PROTAGONIST .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>* -INDICATES A NOVEL THAT HAS A YOUNG ADULT PROTAGONIST .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: <i>BORN CONFUSED</i>.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>APPENDIX G: <i>KOYAL DARK AND MANGO SWEET</i>.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>APPENDIX H: <i>THE NOT SO STAR SPANGLED LIFE OF SUNITA SEN</i> .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>APPENDIX I: “MRS. SEN” FROM <i>INTERPRETER OF MALADIES</i> .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>APPENDIX J: <i>BURNT BREAD AND CHUTNEY</i> .....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>APPENDIX K: <i>ANNIE JOHN</i>.....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>APPENDIX L: <i>KRIK? KRAK!</i> .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>APPENDIX M: <i>LUCY</i>.....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>APPENDIX N: “BARRED” FROM <i>GREEN CANE AND JUICY FLOTSAM</i> ....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>APPENDIX O: <i>MIGUEL STREET</i>.....</b>	<b>199</b>

APPENDIX P: <i>A BRIGHTER SUN</i> .....	218
WORKS READ AND REFERENCED .....	237



## **DEDICATIONS**

To Mommy, Daddy and Cindy who help to keep my Guyanese pride alive. To  
Dr. Roberts for being my BIGGEST cheerleader. And for all of my wandering Indo-  
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## Chapter One: Statement of Problem and Rationale

*“But we do not face a language barrier. What need is there for an interpreter?”* (Lahiri, 2003, p.65).

This quote from Jhumpa Lahiri’s (2003) *Interpreter of Maladies* seeks to show the reader that the concept of an interpreter has not only a literal denotation but rather a figurative connotation. Traditionally, an interpreter is referred to solely in the means of translating between two foreign and very distinct languages. The result is a manner of communicating between two languages, ultimately providing a much more in-depth understanding for the perspective of the other. Interpreters, however, do much more than straddle between two languages. They serve as a bridge for connecting two very different cultures, allowing individuals to travel between them and grow because of their experiences. In terms of this thesis, the interpreters are the many young adult novels that illustrate a deeper understanding for cultures that are underrepresented in both society and schools. One such underrepresented culture is that which belongs to Indo-Caribbean Americans.

The interpreter that this thesis hopes to provide presents itself in the form of a re-evaluation of the Florida high school English Language Arts canon that may allow the voices of Indo-Caribbean American students to be heard. Indo-Caribbean American students are themselves interpreters as they translate the cultures of India, the Caribbean and America as well as its ensuing concepts, such as socio-familial and religious traditions. Not only must these students translate the aforementioned three cultures in order to unify them into their own personality constructs, but they must also find a way to present themselves as an ambassador of the Indo-Caribbean ethnicity to an often unaware



American society. This arduous process of finding ourselves and understanding our identities is relevant to all minority students. The interpreter that can possibly help to ease these lines of cross-cultural communication for Indo-Caribbean American students is the introduction of Indo-Caribbean literature into Florida English Language Arts classrooms and canons. The history of Indo-Caribbeans, including the creation of such an ethnicity, the Florida high school canon, and the potential effects of literary engagement will be discussed throughout this thesis in order to fully explain the role and attributes of an Indo-Caribbean American interpreter.

## **Chapter Two: Statement of Purpose**

This study attempts to assess the question of what would be the best manner of introducing Indo-Caribbean literature at the secondary level, including a potential canon curricula revision. The primary reasoning for undertaking such a task is to create an environment where Indo-Caribbean American students, whether they are first or second generation American immigrants, will have the opportunity to read works that represent the three cultures that they straddle – East Indian, Caribbean and American. One may wonder as to why Indo-Caribbean American literature is analyzed within this thesis. Aside from my personal connection to the topic, in Orange County, Florida alone the population of West Indians/Indo-Caribbeans is 56,144 (Persaud, 2006). If one looks closely, Route 50 or Colonial Drive mirrors New York's Liberty Avenue, another mecca for Indo-Caribbeans regardless of generational or immigration status. On both Colonial Drive and Liberty Ave, Indo-Caribbeans and their Indo-Caribbean American descendents are able to have a taste of home with ethnically rich products and foods.

My opinion is, however, that this cultural representation does not extend beyond these physical locales into the schools of these physical boundaries. Indo-Caribbean American students are present within the classroom, although one may suspect that culturally representative works are not. While there is a possibility that Caribbean literature is included on some high school reading lists, my experience is that the East Indian ancestral aspect of being Indo-Caribbean American is rarely reflected. In addition to the traditional and heritage-based complexes that high school Indo-Caribbean students face are the situations that arise when these cultural facets are juxtaposed to North American societal values. Indo-Caribbean American students are expected to prioritize



their lives in order to accommodate their families at all times. A continuous pull, Indo-Caribbean American students are forced to choose between their social lives and their families. Even though cultural values such as religious beliefs and philanthropic philosophies are a part of the North American societal norm, the beliefs held by Western societies do not correspond or correlate to those of Indo-Caribbean culture. Indo-Caribbean American students deserve to have a voice, and this thesis attempts to provide them with one.

The format of research for my thesis will closely correspond with the chapters. The following research represents my explorations related to this study and will include discussions of Indo-Caribbean culture and history, the Florida high school canon and eventually the impact of these aforementioned topics upon Indo-Caribbean American students' literary engagement. Each chapter hopefully will lead to the creation of a plausible solution. Coupled with this possibility will be a content analysis of Indian and Caribbean young adult literary pieces as detailed within the methods of research. Ultimately, by analyzing these subjects, it will be possible to formulate a theory solution will do justice to Indo-Caribbean American students and the adversity they face.



### **Chapter Three: Indo-Caribbean Culture and History**

The concept of being a Caribbean is highly complex, including the cultures of indigenous peoples (Amerindians). Claiming a Caribbean heritage, whether it is Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, Chinese-Caribbean or Hispanic-Caribbean includes the concepts of slavery and indentured servitude. Many of these ethnicities arrived in the West Indies with the assistance of forced British imperialism and through generational lineage evolved into the contemporary cultures that exist (Ramdin, 2000). These aforementioned ethnicities straddle two cultures; that of being from the Caribbean and the culture that is derived from the ancestral place of origin. In essence, to be Caribbean is to toggle, adapt, and even mold ideas across at least two cultures.

Specifically, what does it mean to be Indo-Caribbean? It is the union of both Indian and Caribbean cultures into an ethnicity that does not exactly mirror either one of the two. Indo-Caribbean's history

in the Caribbean begins with the official abolition of slavery in 1838 when a second wave of 'voluntary immigration' was mobilized from India in the form of the indentured labour trade. European sugar-plantation owners still needed a cheap and industrious agricultural workforce that was familiar with the vagaries of tropical plantation cultivation...The contracted labour trade brought thousands of Indians to the French-and British-controlled sugar plantations in the Caribbean, South Africa, Fiji and the islands of the Indian Ocean. However the majority found themselves transported to the alien Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Guyana (Mehta, 2004, p. 2).

Trinidadians and Guyanese peoples, of which I am the latter, compose the major percentage of the world's Indo-Caribbean population. But these people are neither Indian nor Caribbean (Ramdin, 2000). Indo-Caribbean American and Indo-Caribbean students

are products of creolization, a synthesizing of cultures that forces its victims to adapt and adopt a new and unique cultural methodology.

The significance of the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora to this thesis as briefly touched upon is to bring attention to students of Indo-Caribbean American descent and the literature that describes who they are by examining Indian and Caribbean literature. Indo-Caribbean students deserve to have a voice within the classroom as well as be represented in texts that are culturally relevant to the struggles that they face. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be an enormous amount of Indo-Caribbean young adult literature, and even less Indo-Caribbean American literature, and therefore the literature read and studied in this thesis is divided into the columns of Indian and Caribbean. However, very often, the Caribbean pieces will deal with aspects of Afro-Caribbean cultures as well as the perspective that Afro-Caribbeans had and perhaps even have towards Indo-Caribbeans. No doubt, these same cultures are relevant to Indo-Caribbeans because of their influences as Indo-Caribbeans have adopted many Afro-Caribbean cultural facets into their Diaspora and vice versa.

With young adult literary pieces that are culturally relevant to Indo-Caribbean American students, even if these works are separated into the columns of Indian and Caribbean pieces, the content should be relevant enough to increase Indo-Caribbean American students' literacy engagement. The voices within these pieces should represent the cultural challenges that they face, such as assimilation into Western society, originating from a Post-Colonial country and finding an outlet to represent who they are. And yet one can suspect that works by authors of both Indian and Caribbean descent and works that authentically describe these cultures, are not present in our high school



English Language Arts classrooms. The literature of Indo-Caribbean American students that could be included in Florida's high school canons might assist in creating relevant and relatable English Language Arts classroom environments for these same students as well as provide their classmates with a better awareness of the Indo-Caribbean identity. The remainder of this chapter will serve to provide a more in-depth analysis of the culture that is Indo-Caribbean.

### **Arrival of Indians in the Caribbean**

"There is an ignorance of the Indian community not only from without but also from within. Indians here...know little of the many things that have made them...I think we have to consider the culture from which we have come...We forget; we have no idea of our past; it is part of the trouble"

- V.S. Naipaul, 'Introduction', *East Indians in the Caribbean: Colonialism and the Struggle for Identity*

The territories of the Caribbean were originally populated with indigenous people and African slaves. While it is debatable as to whether or not Great Britain held the majority of the imperialistic power throughout the Caribbean and perhaps still maintains that power by the means of its Commonwealth, considering the British implemented indentured servitude system in India that directly influences Indo-Caribbeans. Britain initially populated the Caribbean with African slaves to supply the growing economical need for sugar. Working on Caribbean plantations was an arduous and toil-ridden process and therefore it is little wonder as to why freed African slaves refused to return to plantation life after their emancipation in 1838 (Ramdin, 2000, p. 6). West Indian plantation owners and "planters who had reaped such fabulous profits from slave-grown sugar, especially in the eighteenth century, had already begun to complain long before the

Slave Trade was abolished” about the potential effects of a diminished “low-cost and easily controlled” labor (Ramdin, 2002, p.6). With African slavery and “slavery” as a whole no longer an option, Great Britain “sought permission to introduce Chinese ‘coolies’” to West Indian plantation life. Although it was initially a good idea,

the long journey across the Pacific Ocean to California and Peru, and over the Indian and Atlantic Oceans to the West Indies (the middle passage of the Chinese ‘coolies’) was fraught with difficulties and danger. To begin with, fraudulent methods were used to recruit the laborers, and on the voyages a shortage of food and water combined with ill-treatment inflicted by some of the ships’ captains and crew members tended to result in riot and death (Ramdin, 2000, p.8).

Legislators, planters and British West Indian officials thence turned their attention to India, another colony under the British crown. Indians were enticed by the prospect of acquiring money; becoming kings and returning to India with their riches. Unfortunately Indians were not aware of the realities of indentured servitude as the government termed their migration as “not the movement of free people for bettering their conditions but rather the export of indentured workers demanded by planters to satisfy their alleged dire need for plantation labor in the post-slavery period” (Ramdin, 2000, p.18).

East Indian immigration began around the year 1836 with the creation of five year contracts by which indentured servants were forced to abide. The exact specifications of the contracts depended upon the employer often ranging from a weekly salary to a lump sum salary upon the completion of his or her five years. The justification of such a contract was perceived by the Great Britain’s legislature as

irresistible claims upon the composition of the people of this country and who would receive as wages for one day’s labour in British Guiana, fully more than they receive as wages for a whole year in India. In behalf of these perishing outcasts, who are a quiet,



sober and industrious as well as an obedient race, we earnestly implore the kind

interposition of the British Parliament (Ramdin, 2000, p. 11).

Kindness or not, the treatment of East Indian indentured servants across their perilous middle passage was cruel and unwarranted to the point where the British Parliament forced the temporary closure of immigration. Re-institutionalized in the late 1850s, immigration laws managed to somewhat protect the rights of indentured Indians until the close of the indentured servitude system in 1917. By the end of the indentured servitude system, the following numbers, as retrieved from ship logs, represent the amount of East Indians that settled in the Caribbean: British Guiana – 238,909; Trinidad and Tobago – 143,939; Jamaica – 36,412; Grenada – 3,200; St. Vincent – 2,472; St. Lucia – 4,354 (Ramdin, 2000, p. 16).

Diseases, malnutrition, and extremely poor socio-economical positions greeted the East Indian upon his or her arrival in the Caribbean. Despite these trials and tribulations, they steadfastly clung to the cultures they brought with them from India as they sought to adjust. The predominant influence upon the lives of the Indian indentured servants was their religion whether it be Hinduism or Islam. Christianity came by means of conversions several decades later and only affected a small portion of the population.

Primary documentation of East Indian settlers in the Caribbean observed that

in this country, [they] do not see the streets and estates crowded with temples of all descriptions; we do not see parties of Brahmins and others in procession with drums and music celebrating some particular holiday; we do not meet with troops of yogis or penitents and religious meditants on the roads, journeying to some sacred river to wash away their sins by bathing in it; [they] do not see in this colony the Hindu going to Gaya to perform the obsequies of his ancestors...Although we do not witness these things yet their religion exercises prodigious influence over the people (Ramdin, 2002, p. 187-8)



Colonial accounts of Indian adjustments to the Caribbean tend to include the Hindu perspective, marginalizing the importance of other religious denominations. The Caribbean peoples did and still do exercise many of the aforementioned cultural practices. They may not have the physical reminders of their cultural heritage, such as the temples, rivers or other terrain, but they still continued to practice their. Using Hinduism as an example, religion defined every aspect of the Indian indentured servant's life. The caste system, Hindu in origin, was a social hierarchy of one's religious status with Brahmins being the ultimate tier. In India, People were born into their particular caste. However, once the coercive labor process began, people's caste became obsolete as all indentured servants were lumped together in confined positions. Muslim, Jain and other Indian religious sects compose a significant amount of the religious demographics of Indo-Caribbeans. However Hinduism overshadows these other religions as stereotypically, the "brown" skin color is associated with Hinduism. Overall, Indo-Caribbeans still maintain the lives they have led since emigrating from India; their cultural beliefs remain although altered and adjusted by generational differences, population growth, and societal acclimation.

### **Conflicts with Afro-Caribbeans**

Few individuals unfamiliar with Caribbean culture, recognize that a distinction exists between Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbeans. Even Indo-Caribbean American students are often unaware of the conflicts that exist between Indo-Caribbeans and Afro-Caribbeans. As an Indo-Caribbean American child, I can recall several instances where "Black People" are referred to in a highly negative light. A tumultuous history of

violence and racial segregation exists between Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbeans in most of the Caribbean cultures. The sectarian violence at times mimics the Afro-American struggle for civil rights where a minority is fighting for equal representation. However, in this case both ethnic groups are vying for equal recognition and political influence. When introducing Indo-Caribbean literature to students, this cultural aspect must be mentioned given that every Indo-Caribbean piece in this thesis addresses the history of hatred between these two races.

The emergence of Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean arose alongside the abolishment of slavery in the Caribbean. Afro-Caribbeans were initially African slaves transported to the Caribbean from Africa; a slave system that the America's eventually mimicked. Given the population, however, Afro-Caribbeans outnumbered the British plantation owners and were able to acquire their freedom. Not allowing a revolution to hinder plantation profits, the British sought to implement another form of cheap labor. Unfortunately, this meant that the newly liberated Afro-Caribbeans were forced to compete with cheap and accessible labor. The Indian indentured servants were

opposed not only by the Black (African) and coloured middle classes, but more importantly by working class Blacks and the Black peasantry that had emerged. The Indians were, in the main, derided by Blacks for their strange dress habits and religion, and the fact that as cheap indentured labour, they had a depressing effect on the bargaining value of free Black labour. Thus they appeared to many as strangers; an unwelcome reminder not only of the Blacks' slave past, but more immediately and threateningly as competitors (Ramdin, 2000, p. 54).

The Indian indentured servants were viewed with disdain by Afro-Caribbeans. According to the mentality of Afro-Caribbeans, these "others" invaded the land that rightfully belonged to them as they cultivated the swampy and tropical terrain to grow for decades



before the indentured servitude system; and yet they were denied the opportunity to make their own wages and be their own masters. Ironically enough, one would expect the Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans to have some form of camaraderie as

at all levels they share the same language, the same ambitions...and increasingly, the same pleasures. Their interests don't clash. The Negro is a town-dweller; the Indian is an agriculturist. The Negro with a good handwriting and a head for intrigue goes into civil service; the Indian similarly equipped goes into business. Both go into the professions (Brathwaite, 1985, p. 49).

However, there is an underlying desire for both races to hold positions of superiority, subjugating the other race in the hopes of acquiescing to the British influences. As

the Negro has a deep contempt, as has been said, for all that is not white; his values are the values of white imperialism at its most bigoted. The Indian despises the Negro for not being an Indian; he has in addition, taken over all the white prejudices against the negro and with the convert's zeal regards as Negro everyone who has any tincture of Negro blood (Brathwaite, 1985, p. 49).

Furthermore, the Indo-Caribbean initially society lived together as an enclave; not allowing others to enter the community or leave it for that matter. They tended to live in isolation away from the other ethnicities within the Caribbean and the interactions they had were sparse and few, at least until very recently. Resulting from this is the fact that

Few non-Indians know much about the Indians, except that they live in the country, work on the land, are rich, fond of litigation and violence...nothing is known about Hinduism or Islam...and the Negro makes less effort than the average English person to pronounce Indian names correctly (Brathwaite, 2000, p.49).

Economic disparities and the eventual social ignorance on both the parts of Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans led to the animosity that continues to fuel political turmoil in both Trinidad and Guyana. These ethnicities had and still have the capabilities to create a

unified front in order to solidify the stability of their country and yet refuse to do so because of rivalries that are centuries old. Using the political atmosphere of Guyana as an example, there is a pendulous system of unity and reform that exists. The Enmore massacre of the mid to late 1940's is one of the many examples of unity that go unnoticed by those advocating segregation. At this particular incident, Indo and Afro-Caribbeans banded together against plantation owners in an attempt to garner better wages and compensation. Although the leaders of this revolt were murdered, the common cause of better rights and equal labor representation represents the commonality of each race's socio-economic situation. Politically speaking, Guyana's current prime minister Bharat Jagdeo is a child of strife much like his Afro-Guyanese counterpart Forbes Burnham. Each respective prime minister encouraged and encourages violence against the other race propelling the country away from unification and maintaining the imperialism based segregation. Guyana's first prime minister, Cheddi Jagan as well as Martin Carter and Walter Rodney, fought for Guyana's independence and were purveyors of unification, socially, economically and racially speaking. Unfortunately many of the above unifiers, especially Jagan were removed by the imperialistic powers citing Jagan et al to be Communists.

There is not enough time or space within this thesis to fully delve into the complex intricacies of Indo-Caribbean politics. However, it is my purpose to demonstrate that there have been many attempts at unification despite the fact that throughout the last fifteen years in Guyana, there has been a tumultuous uproar of the Afro-Caribbean population resulting in mass murders of Indo-Caribbeans in an attempt to garner political



support. No matter who is in power, the powerful tend to alienate and disenfranchise the powerless. Progress is noted, but it is slow in forthcoming.

### **Creation of the Indo-Caribbean Culture**

As previously mentioned, Indo-Caribbeans lived and still continue to live in an enclave, separated from Afro-Caribbeans and the other ethnicities within the Caribbean. Personally speaking, my mother is a native of Enmore Village along the East Bank of the Demerara River and my father hails from Alexander Village in Georgetown. Both of these areas are prime examples of the separated society that still exists among Indo-Caribbeans as neither one of my parents can recall Afro-Caribbeans living within the nearby vicinity. Two towns that exist where there is a significant Afro-Caribbean population are All Boys Town and Buxton, Guyana. While the younger generations are willing to cross-culturally communicate, they are still conditioned by parents and grandparents with the notion that Indo-Caribbeans belong together and should not separate. As mentioned earlier, powerful political leaders and parties forge or break the bridges of unification between these races. As mentioned earlier, powerful political leaders and parties forge and break the bridges of unification between these two races.

Historically, this separation was in actuality the very intention of the British, considering that

from the beginning the Indians were set apart from the wider society, a deliberate policy of the Colonial Government and plantocracy. The geographical containment of the Indians on the estates and control of their movements, ensured their separateness; and of course, this exclusion from the rest of society helped the Indians to practice their religions and generally maintain their culture. In Jamaica and Grenada, where there was



less land and fewer Indians than in Trinidad and British Guiana, the incoming emigrants lived and worked closely with the rest of the labouring population, and with time, not only became acculturated, but through inter-marriage, they were assimilated to a considerable extent. In British Guiana and Trinidad, the historical and ecological conditions were more conducive to a retention of Indian culture (Ramdin, 2000, p. 176).

While this separation allowed Indian indentured servants the opportunity to form a community that best represented their cultural heritage, it also served as a key means of isolation; not allowing the Indians to assimilate into the Caribbean society that labeled them as outsiders. Unfortunately, these same Indians were and still are perceived by native East Indians as not being authentic or mere replicas of an antiquated culture. Indo-Caribbeans often find themselves in a sense of limbo, unable to fully relate to the motherland that is India and finding that their socio-cultural practices are deemed antiquated or trivial.

For the vast majority of Hindu Indians, who had made the voyage to British Guiana, religion played a key role in their social life. Inescapably, before they left India (as part of their heritage), religion sanctioned caste upon which social status, marriages, eating arrangements and occupations were based. In the main, adherents of the Hindu religion in India tended to accept the rigidities of caste. But unlike other immigrants in British Guiana, the Indians faced a much more severe social and personal dislocation to their lives, almost from the moment they had reached the Emigration Depot. Once they had left their villages and towns, the process of change had begun, forcing them to adapt to circumstances outside their experience and the accepted way of life in India. For example, caste distinctions were necessarily modified first, at the Emigration Depots, on the ships, and thereafter on the plantation in British Guiana. Imposed upon all the Indian indentured immigrants were new arrangements in their relations with each other, at work and in marriage new approaches, which Hindus, especially perceived as a threat to dislocate religion from the central place it held in their social life (Ramdin, 2002, p.71).

Generationally speaking, the Indo-Caribbean culture has evolved into a complete entity of its own, still maintaining visible ties with India's socio-cultural systems. Indo-Caribbeans are leading the change within the Indian Diaspora, albeit it is often miniscule in size, as far as gender relationships are concerned. More and more women are presented with opportunities to engage in activities that were typically limited to men and perhaps still are prohibited in India. The forthcoming generation of native Indo-Caribbeans are instigating a wave of change among the culture in regards to gender, age, familial and religious relationships are concerned.

### **Indo-Caribbean Americans**

Indo-Caribbean Americans are any individuals whose parents emigrated from the Caribbean and relocated elsewhere in the world. A significant population of these Indo-Caribbean immigrants found themselves in areas such as New York, New Jersey, or South and Central Florida. Their offspring constitute the ethnicity "Indo-Caribbean American." My sister and I are both first generation Indo-Caribbean Americans and like most immigrants, our parents journeyed to the United States in order to acquire a better life for themselves. Often financially impoverished, Indo-Caribbeans have intriguing stories that chronicle the years of tribulation that preceded their successes. Personally speaking, my father always tells my sister and me the story of how he arrived in New York's John F. Kennedy Airport with only twenty dollars in his pocket and the clothes on his back. In other instances, Indo-Caribbeans emigrated from the Caribbean to escape religious and socio-political persecution. During the late 1990s, a significant uprising



began where Afro-Caribbeans continuously massacred, robbed and tortured Indo-Caribbeans. Regardless of their reasons for emigrating, the underlying belief that here in America, it is possible to accomplish one's life ambitions still remains.

Parallels are instantaneously drawn considering that Indo-Caribbeans emigrated from the Caribbean to seek a better life in America just as East Indian indentured servants sought a higher socio-economic status in the Caribbean. However, just as the East Indians were unable to continue their cultural practices to the extent they did in their homeland, Indo-Caribbeans find limitations here within the United States and it is their children who are uncertain as to what exactly is their culture.

Comparatively the socio-cultural history of African Americans mirrors that of the Indo-Caribbeans as they too were taken from their native lands and forced to adapt to the American sphere of life. The generation of African Americans that arose during the Civil Rights Era as well as in the decades succeeding the Civil War found themselves faced with a loss of an identity; they were unable to relate to any socio-cultural group considering that they were no longer fully African, but not entirely American either. W. E. B. DuBois eloquently examines this paradigm in his theory of double consciousness, stating that

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,

two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (DuBois, 2006, p.262).

Personal perspective aside, the children of all immigrants regardless of ethnicity feel this dichotomy within themselves. They are two halves of a whole, their ethnic culture and the socio-cultural atmosphere of America, that must somehow fuse together in order to form a whole. Whether or not this fusion is possible is debatable, but many people, students especially, often feel compelled to choose a side as opposed to straddling both cultures. Indo-Caribbean American students, it can be said, have a triple-consciousness. They are forced to straddle, navigate, and balance three cultures; Indian, Caribbean and American. Keeping DuBois in mind, differential consciousnesses as coined by Chela Sandoval refers to the multiple lenses individuals are forced to use in order to view their world. It is an individual's perspective on life as well as his or her own world view. Indo-Caribbean American young women for example, are forced to view the world through a feminine, Indian, Caribbean and American lens. Each of these four lenses entail their own set of complications and social boundaries that overlap with each other at times. Simultaneously, each lens empowers the seer, allowing him or her to take pride in personal and communal accomplishments. These are three "warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois, 2006, p.262).

As an educator, it is imperative to comprehend the ordeal of these students and the immense balancing acts that they must do: appease their parents, appease their friends, and find pride in the culture from which they originate. Unfortunately, many individuals whose parents may not be immigrants, do not understand the tripartite opposition that exists within Indo-Caribbean Americans. They are unaware of the vast



and startlingly similar history of Indo-Caribbeans and the commonalities that can be found in Caribbean literature.

Even so, despite apparent differences, the literature of the Indo-Caribbean ethnicity does exemplify the human condition and the basic human desires that all people share. In an increasingly diversifying world, this body of literature also satisfies the needs for a greater awareness of cultures that are ordinarily not recognized by most people. The following chapters will outline the existing canon in order to explore Indo-Caribbean literature possibilities.

## **Chapter Four: Florida's High School Canon**

Since the Civil Rights era, the high school literary canon has continuously been under debate (Hipple, 1974). The battle wages between individuals who believe that the high school canon should remain a solidly accepted list of classics as required readings and individuals who see an imperative need for inclusiveness or a widening of the classical list, especially in regards to other cultures. In surveys and studies conducted by Brown (2006), Greenbaum (1994) and Readings (1989), the belief that the canon should expand in order to be more inclusive, is examined. A mind frame exists that "the fact that a novel has been taught for decades does not guarantee that students will appreciate its value. Conversely, simply because a novel has never been taught before does not mean it will not be popular among students, nor does a contemporary status imply that it lacks "literary merit" (Withers 1999 p. 62). Arguments within the canon or at least on the concept of it entails conservatives arguing

for the closure of the established canon, while liberals assert that the canon is open-ended, necessarily subject to revision. Its defenders define the canon's interiority either idealistically, as a matter of incarnate transcendental values and truths, or culturally, as the organic accretion of the texts of a culture into a whole greater than the sum of its parts, a collective identity" (Readings, 1989, p.149).

Regardless of perspective, the canon represents the human condition, which consists of emotions, sentiments, and experiences that are produced and received across ethnicities and cultures.

One important reason to undertake this thesis is to provide a rationale and a means of making the canon more inclusive. According to Greenbaum's (1994) national study, the majority of the books that many high school students read include:



*To Kill a Mockingbird* (1988) by Harper Lee  
*Lord of the Flies* (1999) by William Golding,  
*Catcher in the Rye* (2001) by J.D. Salinger,  
*The Great Gatsby* (1999) by F. Scott Fitzgerald,  
*The Glass Menagerie* (1999) by Tennessee Williams ...  
*The Odyssey* (2006) by Homer,  
*The Scarlet Letter* (2002) by Nathaniel Hawthorne,  
*A Separate Peace* (2003) by John Knowles,  
*Huckleberry Finn* (1981) by Mark Twain, ...  
 Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1987)  
 and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (2004) (Greenbaum, 1994, p.36).

Quite obviously, judging from the above list of works, these pieces were written by dead European Caucasian and have Caucasian protagonists. Only within the last few decades have minority works begun to be included and even then these pieces are included they are "taught separately...[and] denied its historical, generic and thematic aspects, these having been subsumed. The focus begins and remains on [race], not on literature" (Hippole, 1974, p.9).

However, these inclusions appear sparse and few with the following examples as derived from a nationwide survey of English Language Arts Literature as present in the canon:

*Bless Me, Ultima* (1999) by Rudolfo Anaya  
*If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) (and *Giovanni's Room*) by James Baldwin (also a gay author)  
*Donald Duk* (1991) by Frank Chin  
*The House on Mango Street* (1991) by Sandra Cisneros  
*A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* (1987) by Michael Dorris

*Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) by Laura Esquivel  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston  
*Typical American* (1992) by Gish Jen  
*Animal Dreams* (1990) by Barbara Kingsolver  
*House Made of Dawn* (1966) by N. Scott Momaday  
*The Bluest Eye* (1970) (and other works) by Toni Morrison  
*Turning Japanese* (1968) by David Mura  
*for colored girls who contemplate suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* (1997) by Ntozake  
 Shange  
*Ceremony* (2006) by Leslie Marmon Silko  
*The Joy Luck Club* (1990) by Amy Tan  
*La Maravilla* (1994) by Alfredo Vea  
*The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker (this also qualifies as a lesbian novel)  
*Black Boy* (1998) by Richard Wright

Although a significant amount of minority works are now present within the above list, still hundreds of other pieces worth reading could be included as well. Furthermore, it is evident that Indo-Caribbean pieces are not mentioned in the above list. Overall, the canon tends to remain the same, despite recent inclusions of some minority pieces.

One of the primary reasons as to why canonical works are continuously relied upon is that “English departments... know that the canon helps them to maintain continuity among their courses and programs of study” (Weixlmann, 1988, p. 278). Arguably, the canon is a fool-proof plan for the high school English classroom. Indo-Caribbean American students are constantly interacting with literary works with protagonists that do not share any of their cultural similarities. For a better example, one can take a closer look at the summer “recommended” reading list for high school students as suggested by the Florida State Education Department. A significant amount of young



adult pieces on this list include Laurie Halse Anderson's (2005) *Prom*, Dyan Sheldon's (2002) *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen* and David Lubar's (2005) *Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie* (Florida Department of Education, 2006). The currentness, themes, and scenarios within each one of these novels most certainly relate to today's young adults. However, the protagonists of each in these novels are notably Caucasian.

Among the eighteen books listed on the Florida Board of Education website (2006) that fit the definitions of young adult literature, only three pieces are written by minority writers and contain minority protagonists. These works are *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1991), *Monster* by Walter Dean Meyers (2001), and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston (1937) (Florida Department of Education, 2006). These works detail the lives and cultures of Hispanics or of African Americans. However, YA novels by Indo-Caribbean authors and about Indo-Caribbean culture, such as *Born Confused* (Hidier, 2003) or *Miguel Street* (V.S. Naipual, 2002), are nowhere to be seen on most high school reading lists. Addressing the lack of both a common knowledge or availability of East Indian or Caribbean literature in the secondary classroom could provide positive benefits for students of similar cultural backgrounds. This research project should provide teachers and administrators with that common knowledge of quality literature for an Indo-Caribbean American population of students.

In today's schools, at least a few books reflect African American and Latino/a works are read throughout the high school canon. These two ethnicities have grown to possess literary representation in the classroom, and compose a growing and significant portion of the student body according to the demographics of Osceola County Schools. These percentages are 13.7% Black/Non-Hispanic and 47.1% Hispanic (Osceola County

School District, 2006). Notably, 9.9% ethnicities fall into the racial category of “Other” and one of those “Other” are Indo-Caribbean students.

Often, Latino/Latina and African-American students are provided with texts that represent and relate to their cultures. Although these books are sometimes few in number, it is still a step in the socio-educational advancement of these ethnic groups. In addition, “multiculturalism, we would argue, has to do with working closely with schools and teachers and K-12 students to promote respect, understanding, and empathy as a means of preparing children to live and work successfully in an increasingly diverse society” (Bryson, 2005, p.811). However, as much as Indo-Caribbean American students can identify with and understand the content of slavery and racial prejudices, I suspect they are rarely provided with literature written by authors of their same ethnicity. Coupled with these situations, is the fact that Indo-Caribbean American “students, like African-American students are typically attending segregated, urban schools with limited resources, characterized by violence problems and teachers’ as well as school counselors’ apathy” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 209). Indo-Caribbean American students or all students for that matter

... do not benefit from teachers ignoring Milton’s or Chaucer’s sexism, Twain’s apparent (if unintended) racism, Hemingway’s homophobia, and the like. And students certainly need to be exposed to the more subtle slights that occur in text after canonical text, such as the figuration of members of racial minorities and women as completely or relatively absent (Weixlmann, 1988, p. 279).

Once again, it is worth noting that many Indo-Caribbean novels share the archetypes and themes surrounding the human condition such as death, racism, sexism, homophobia, social dynamics and political perspectives so as to render them relevant and meaningful



to all cultures throughout the world. Unfortunately, most students are only provided with literature that represents the Eurocentric perspective on the human condition, not allowing students to grasp the idea a few differences exist among viewpoints of most humans.

Occasionally a teacher or a district will incorporate one or two texts by or about women or people of color, but these token inclusions serve mainly to reinforce the dichotomy between 'us and the other' which results from the predominantly white male reading list. This is why the canon needs expanding; an inclusive reading list will begin to allow the growing numbers of students who are not white or male to feel the curriculum belongs to everyone (Greenbaum, 1994, p. 38)

Many educators continue to encourage this dichotomy between "Whites" and "Others" with their obstinate refusal to incorporate more than the required token minority piece into the canon.

Ironically, all educators are under the Florida State Statue 1003.42

(2) Members of the instructional staff of the public schools, subject to the rules of the State Board of Education and the district school board, shall teach efficiently and faithfully, using the books and materials required that meet the highest standards for professionalism and historic accuracy, following the prescribed courses of study, and employing approved methods of instruction, the following...

(f) The history of the United States, including the period of discovery, early colonies, the War for Independence, the Civil War, the expansion of the United States to its present boundaries, the World Wars, and the Civil Rights movement to the present. American history shall be viewed as factual, not as constructed, shall be viewed as knowable, teachable, and testable, and shall be defined as the creation of a new nation based largely on the universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence.

(g) The history of the Holocaust (1933-1945), the systematic, planned annihilation of European Jews and other groups by Nazi Germany, a watershed event in the history of humanity, to be taught in a manner that leads to an investigation of human behavior, an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectable person, for the purposes of encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions.

(h) The history of African Americans, including the history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America, the enslavement experience, abolition and the contribution of African Americans to society.

(p) The study of Hispanic contributions to the United States.

(q) The study of women's contributions to the United States (Florida Statutes, 2006).

The state of Florida mandates that educators address the various socio-historical aspects of slavery, the Holocaust, and Latino/Latina culture. Unfortunately many more cultures that can be included and try to lend a hand in the creation of the typical English Language Arts classroom are not present. What of Asian or Haitian or Pacific literature? Are these ethnicities to be excluded because they do not fall within the state guidelines? No. And of course, what of Indo-Caribbean literature? How does one expect to increase cultural awareness if our students are not aware of the plethora of cultures that exist?

Indo-Caribbean American students, as mentioned in the previous chapter, straddle three ethnicities. They are the representatives of their culture and the embodiment of their literature. In addition to and alongside other minority literary pieces, Indo-Caribbean pieces merit a place within the canon. These pieces describe the human condition and are



vivid appellations to students of all creeds, ages or sizes. Further analysis within this thesis will illustrate this ideal. The next chapter introduces literary devices that are used in the analyses of any literary text and are pertinent to this thesis.

## Chapter Five: Literary Engagement

For the purposes of this thesis and proposal, literacy engagement is the “reading and writing ...practices occurring in a social context, guided by intention, laden with values and taking on forms and functions that differ according to time and place” (Weber, 1994, p.14). Literary engagement, which stems from literacy engagement, is the manner in which students are able to analyze, comprehend and synthesize literary texts. While literacy and literary engagement are related, it is my intention to focus predominantly upon literary theories and engagement, while keeping in mind that literacy shapes literary patterns.

Research provided in Marks (2000) article entitled “Student engagement in instructional activity: Patterns in the elementary, middle, and high school years,” makes the claim that

how children and adolescents choose to allocate their attention depends on the interaction of several factors: their natural inclinations, the satisfaction they have derived from paying attention in other settings, and the value they attach to the activity based on its relevance to a future they anticipate (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). [sic] Children learn by paying attention to other people, events, and aspects of their surroundings that they find meaningful and enjoyable (Bonfenbrenner, 1979) [sic] (Marks, 2000, p.155).

The classics are have withstood the test of time and lasted through generations because they are wonderful to read. Many of the pieces that are present within the traditional canon such as *Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1981) and *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 2002), do speak to and describe the human condition through literary means and possess transferability (Goebel, 1995).



Students whose families have emigrated from another country are dealing with several cultural diversions. The need to fit in at school is as strong as the need to maintain their culture and, of course, the ever-present issues that arise with adolescence. Ultimately, I feel Indo-Caribbean students could benefit from being exposed to literature that expresses the elements of the human condition in a cultural context with which they can relate. Minority literature, as a whole “is a dialectic between the cultural fabric of a country and its people... [it provides a] glimpse of politics, arts, religion, geography, media, history and economics” that students, who are not United States natives, are proud of (Crowe, 1998, p. 125). Within this section, the theories Reader Response and Structuralism will be discussed, illustrating two relevant means of literary criticism that students may use to interpret Indo-Caribbean literature.

### **Reader Response**

With her book *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978), Louise Rosenblatt revolutionized critical reading and coined the following terms, efferent reading and aesthetic reading. Efferent reading entails reading for instructional purposes, i.e. a textbook or cooking directions. Aesthetic reading occurs when the reader is experiencing the text and notating “every word, its sounds, its patterns and so on” (Bressler, 2003, p.60). Many theorists as well as educators are aware of the fact that students enjoy aesthetic reading instead of efferent reading. If students read for their own recreational purposes or at the very least find relatability within the text then they are more likely to synthesize the information and remember it. Reader Response recognizes the aforementioned concept in the development of its literary theory.

Reader Response theory came from the *Transactional Theory of Literature* (Rosenblatt, 1978) and is simply what its name implies: readers responding personally to the text at hand. Those who utilize Reader Response in their literary analyses perceive an overall textual unity...that the text is autonomous; it must interpret itself with little or no help from historical, societal, or any other extrinsic factors, with all its parts relating back to its central theme (Bressler, 2003, p. 57).

As opposed to an authoritative figure, by means of transactional literary criticism dictating the meaning of the text, “the poem itself contains all the necessary information to arrive at the right or more adequate interpretation” and “by so doing, the reader is no longer the passive receiver of knowledge but an active participant in the creation of a text’s meaning” (Bressler, 2003, p. 59). Furthermore

the reader and the text participate in or share a transactional experience: the text acts as a stimulus for eliciting various past experiences thoughts, and ideas from the reader, those found in both our everyday existence and in past reading experiences. Simultaneously the text shapes the reader’s experiences by functioning as a blueprint, selecting, limiting and ordering those ideas that best conform to the text” (Bressler, 2003, p. 60).

The transactional experience that the reader experiences, transforms his or her perception of the text as they do not solely rely upon the text itself, but rather their world view or personal experiences. As a result, the meaning derived from the text should be uniquely personal.

The following three bullets best summarize the facets of Reader Response theory:

- The reader – including his or her view of the world, background, purpose for reading, knowledge of the world, knowledge of words, and other such factors.
- The text, with all its various linguistic elements; and
- Meaning, or how the text and the reader interact or transact so that the reader can make sense of the printed material (Bressler, 2003, p. 60).



The rationale for Rosenblatt's theory is to provide the reader with his or her rightful credence as it is the reader who provides the most meaning to the text or poem.

"The long history of the theory of literature, from Plato to the present, records certain well-known shifts of emphasis. In surveying these changes, I find it helpful to visualize a little scene: on a darkened stage I see the figures of the author and the reader, with the book--the text of the poem or play or novel--between them. The spotlight focuses on one of them so brightly that the others fade into practical invisibility. Throughout the centuries, it becomes apparent, usually either the book or the author has received major illumination. The reader has tended to remain in shadow, taken for granted, to all intents and purposes invisible" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 1).

Rosenblatt's reader response theory is perfect for this thesis as it legitimizes Indo-Caribbean American students with the power to make their own meaning. Indo-Caribbean American students will be given the credit they deserve in regards to the transactional experience that will occur between themselves and the Indian, Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean texts. Furthermore, students of other ethnicities are offered the opportunity to include their previous experiences and apply it to the overall meaning of the text. The world view of the reader will only stimulate and improve the transaction between the text and the reader, ultimately providing a better learning environment for all English Language Arts students.

The ideal of a reader interacting with his or her text in order to deduce its meaning creates a perspective educators must take into consideration when introducing new pieces into the classroom. Indo-Caribbean Americans will most certainly identify with texts that are relevant to their cultural and socio-familial heritage. However, noting that most texts have elements of the human condition that are relevant across ethnicities, all students in an English Language Arts classroom can certainly bring their world views to the

interpretations of new and unique texts, i.e. Indo-Caribbean pieces. The meaning and newfound experiences for each student that are derived are filled with massive amounts of potential.

## **Structuralism**

The literary theory of Structuralism, as founded by Ferdinand de Saussure (1907), “is an approach to literary analysis grounded in structural linguistics, the science of language. By utilizing the techniques, methodologies, and vocabulary of linguistics, structuralism offers a scientific view of how we achieve meaning not only in literary works but also in every form of communication and social behavior” (Bressler, 2003, p.76).

Structuralism strives to find significance not necessarily through extrinsic means nor through the transactional experiences of a reader and the text. Structuralism more or less posits that words are linguistic signs, composed of two parts; “the signifier (a written or spoken mark) and a signified (a concept)” (Bressler, 2003, p.81). Binary oppositions or the “comparing and contrasting one sign with other signs...distinguish[es] each individual sign” (Bressler, 2003, p.81). The meaning of a text is found through analyzing binary oppositions according to Structuralism.

“In general, the signifier and the signified are the components of the sign, itself formed by the associative link between the signifier and signified. Even with these two components, however, signs can exist only in opposition to other signs. That is, signs are created by their value relationships with other signs. The contrasts that form between signs of the same nature in a network of relationships is how signs derive their meaning” (Saussure, 1911, p. 10).



Signs or these binary oppositions are only able to establish meaning through the direct contradiction of the other. Similar to paradoxes, the relationship between the oppositions within the text expresses the meaning. For example, in the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Lee, 1981) binary oppositions would include ignorance and knowledge, hatred and acceptance. The aforementioned binaries illustrate the main concept of the novel, which is overcoming segregation and racism. However, the driving conflict or conflicts of the novels are presented when using binaries thereby allowing for a more conducive interaction between the reader and the text. In terms of Indo-Caribbean American students, the binary opposition is often found within themselves given the opposing feelings or sentiments they are filled with. By reconciling these binaries and finding a place for themselves, they are able to conquer their inner conflicts.

Using the concepts of dark and light as an example, dark often implies evil or a foreboding stance against all that is right whereas light entails goodness, righteousness or even purity – the complete opposite of dark. If these two signs are found within a text, the reader would perceive that these two were in binary opposition to each other, therefore signifying a battle between good and evil.

By finding other binary oppositions within the text and showing how these oppositions interrelate, the structuralist can then decode the text, thereby explaining its meaning”  
(Bressler, 2003, p.86).

With Structuralist literary theory, it is “how a text convenes meaning rather than what meaning is conveyed [that] is at the center of their interpretative methodology – that is how a symbol or a metaphor, for example, imparts meaning” (Bressler, 2003, p.83). The reader must identify these oppositions to fully comprehend the meaning of the text.

Finally, Structuralism also posits that there are mythemes, which are prevalent throughout literature, regardless of the time period or socio-cultural situations.

Mythemes, as defined by Saussure himself, are themes which “transcend culture and time, speaking directly to the minds and hearts of all people” (Bressler, 2003, p.85).

Mythemes are the elements of the human condition that are applicable to all humans and the narratives they may tell. With these two things in mind, a discussion of the applications of Structuralism and Reader Response Theory to Indo-Caribbean American literature and its readers is now appropriate.

### **Relevancy to Indo-Caribbean American Students and Literature**

The information on Reader Response and Structuralism is important to an English Language Arts classroom. What does it mean to this thesis and more importantly Indo-Caribbean American students? As mentioned earlier, Reader Response is a form of literary analysis where the reader is interacting with the text. Coupled with Structuralism and the idea of mythemes, it is feasible to say Indo-Caribbean texts have mythemes or elements of the human condition that are applicable to all students despite his or her ethnicity, religion or creed. Student readers can read Indo-Caribbean pieces, especially the ones analyzed within this thesis, and find scenarios that relate to their lives. In addition, many of the pieces that are discussed in the following chapters are paired with works that are considered “classics.” By creating a pair of contemporary and classical pieces, the readers are able to see that mythemes surpass cultural boundaries.

The novels in this thesis are devoted primarily to Indo-Caribbean American students, but are relevant to all students as most young adults deal with the oppositions of



society versus family, self-identity versus the expectations of others, just to name a few. Furthermore, within the Indo-Caribbean pieces, the common theme of opposition exists. Several binary perhaps even tripartite oppositions propel the plot line and the meaning of the text. These oppositions do not solely exist within the novel, but also within the students themselves. Thematically speaking, several tropes exist across cultures and are relevant to all members of this generation. The generations that are currently entering and leaving middle school must comprehend as well as adjust to single parent homes, rape, incest, chauvinism, racism, human triumph and loss, and, most importantly, the prevalence of the human spirit.

Future research will entail surveying students and specifically Indo-Caribbean students in order to gain a grasp for their literary analytical techniques. However, attempting to create a niche for works that represent Indo-Caribbean American students and all students for that matter, is a step in the right direction.

## **Chapter Six: Research Methodology**

A scarcity of Indo-Caribbean American young adult fictional pieces written with a relevant cultural context exists in today's publishing world (Bryson, 2005). In order to study Indo-Caribbean culture, this study was forced to look at separate Indian and Caribbean YA books because only three Indo-Caribbean young adult books could be identified. Both Indian and Caribbean cultural texts can help to define the traditions, trials, and tribulations that Indo-Caribbean students must face. While an Indo-Caribbean American student might seek out Indo-Caribbean literature, a cadre of young adult books does not yet exist.

Therefore, the novels that I read were compiled primarily from the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database as well as from personal knowledge. Although the search results returned approximately 130 books, a significant amount of those young adult/fictional novels examined aspects of the surface culture that is perceived by Western society in the form of a stereotype, i.e. "Pirates of the Caribbean" or "Bollywood Babes" (CLCD, 2006). In addition, young adult literature begins with protagonists that are fourteen years of age and older. This study focused on books that are appropriate for all high school students. The age range of the protagonists should be between 14 to 18 years of age in order to correspond with the selected age group of this thesis. These pieces are written from a Western point of view. The Western point of view more or less typifies the exotic stereotype in regards to the Caribbean or India. Any character or cultural trend is scrutinized as being foreign and unable to meet Western "normal standards." Based on reading the abstracts of these 130 books, the selection process included the following criteria:



1. Books selected must be fictional in nature and can be either a complete novel or short story.
2. The original criteria included books with publication date ranges of 1996-2006. If there were pieces whose publication dates fall in years prior to 1996 by the span of one to two years and other criteria were met, then those works may be included.
3. It is expected that the majority of the pieces selected will have the thematic element of “cultures clashing.” The pieces will demonstrate the juxtaposition of the native cultures with the values of American society. I had hoped to find works that captured the voice of Indian and/or Caribbean culture as opposed to solely the theme of cultures in juxtaposition to each other. Providing an annotated list of books that represent both Indian and Caribbean cultures should prove to be very effective for my classroom and for other teachers. This initial and final reading list can be found in Appendix D.

After the above criteria were implemented, the following questions were used to further refine the reading list: What role does identity formation have in regards to the protagonist balancing between his or her culture? How does the novel represent classroom dynamics in Western schools after immigration from a post-colonial society? How might such a novel may affect the Western classroom dynamics? How verifiable is the juxtaposition between Western societies and Indo-Caribbean cultural traditions? Will this piece have a voice that resonates to all ethnicities? After this process 11 books, 5

East Indian, 3 Caribbean and 3 Indo-Caribbean books were decided upon for further analyses.

Using a modified explication de texte to analyze the books from each culture, these pieces may mirror many of the issues that Indo-Caribbean students face today. The explication de texte, sometimes known as close reading, can be seen below and is a systematic approach to literary analyses. While sections a through h and l are provided to assist with finding or selecting these novels, sections i, j and k are the crux of the aforementioned questions. Each of the selected novels speaks to the angst young adults and specifically Indo-Caribbean American students. By pinpointing the possible stereotypes, themes, and applications to Indo-Caribbean American students, later analyses may offer a clear pattern of similarities. Please see Appendices F through P for detailed analyses per explication de texte of these novels.

Further, I will seek to pair these contemporary young adult books with a classic in the hopes of increasing the literary engagement of Indo-Caribbean students. In this way, the classics are not ignored or bumped, but rather themes can be expanded upon through Indo-Caribbean young adult novels. The second portion will be literary analyses of the pairs which will include the following questions: Is it feasible to pair one of these books with a classic? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? What potential do these paired books have to be successful? Why would these books be successful? From there, it will be possible to create a complementary pairing of a classical novel and one of the suggested Indian/Caribbean titles.



## **Method of Literary Analysis**

The manner in which an individual reads is highly subjective, in terms of the process of choosing the pieces read to the ultimate derivation of themes or ideas. The selection of literary works for this thesis has been explained thus far. However, the process of reading them has yet to be explained. Each Indian, Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean novel was read arbitrarily. While they did not follow the strict order as presented in Appendices D and E, the Indian novels were read together, with ample spacing to provide for retrospective and comparative analyses. The same format is noted for the Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean novels as well. Overall, this process lasted approximately six months from August 2006 to January 2007. None of the novels were re-read due to time constraints with the exception of *Interpreter of Maladies*, which was initially read for recreational purposes. While reading the literary pieces, Post It notes were placed on various passages and or pages to indicate any aspect of the novel that best represented the attributes as described in the above paragraphs. Thematically, these notes served as guide posts for the retrospective analyses, many paragraphs of which were transcribed into the novel summaries of the later appendices.

### **Explication de texte:**

- a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity
- b. Publication Date and Country
- c. Readability
- d. Age Recommendations
- e. Gender of Protagonist

- f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)
- g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)
- h. Availability (checked with Amazon)
- i. Stereotypes
- j. Themes/Patterns
- k. Applications to Indo-Caribbean American students
- l. Synopsis



## **Chapter 7: Analyses of Indian, Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean Novels**

### **Introduction**

Synthesizing the eleven novels that were analyzed throughout this thesis, this chapter provides discussion in regard to the patterns detected during the analyses as well as the manner of infusing these pieces into the classroom as well and the plausible long-term effects. While it is nearly impossible to discuss the minute details of each novel's explication de text, the relevant characteristics such as setting, themes and character development will be discussed across the pieces. Certainly, commonalities exist among all of these novels in terms of the aforementioned characteristics. These commonalities, as one will see, reinforces the notion of the human condition, a concept that is simultaneously presented in the traditional English Language Arts canon. At the crux of my thesis, this chapter systematically presents the results of my analyses with a more complete, steadfast rationale for canon revision. First, Indian novels analyzed will be presented along with Caribbean novels and Indo-Caribbean novels. The discussions of these novels will examine their respective common characteristics as well as their place in juxtaposition to the traditional English Language Arts canon.

### **Indian Young Adult Novels**

All of the novels read for the Indian section of this thesis are young adult pieces that followed a conventional young adult format as indicated in Appendix B. The only two exceptions to this format are Carmit Delman's *Burnt Bread and Chutney* and Jhumpa Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's." "Mrs. Sen's" is a short story from *Interpreter of Maladies* with an omniscient narrator. However, the story revolves around a young boy and his experiences

with his babysitter, Mrs. Sen. Carmit Delman's piece can be considered an exclusion to the young adult format given that Delman retrospectively examines her adolescent years. *Burnt Bread and Chutney* recalls Delman's teenage years up until the end of college, with a notable maturity and sense of wisdom that one acquires through the growth process.

The five novels and their setting locations are as follows:

*Born Confused* (Hidier, 2002) – New Jersey

*Burnt Bread and Chutney* (Delman, 2003) – India, Jerusalem and New York

*Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet* (Sheth, 2006)– India

"Mrs. Sen's" from *The Interpreter of Maladies* (Lahiri, 1999) – Seattle,  
Washington

*The Not So Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* (Perkins, 2005) – San Francisco,  
California

Because of the transition between culture and contemporary society, setting plays an important role in the plot structure of each piece. Albeit the majority of these novels take place in various American cities, two remain that have locations in India and Israel and these two locations are worth discussing. Western society most certainly has an effect upon the ideological developments of first or second generation immigrants and their children. The offspring of these immigrants are straddling two cultures, so they must adapt and adhere to social expectations while balancing their primary ethnic cultures.

What makes *Koyal Dark and Mango Sweet* interesting is that the novel is set in India and yet the female protagonist exudes Western ideals and notions, including feminism because of her contrasting societal beliefs. Realistically speaking, the feminist movement still has a long way to go in India in order to see parallel changes, pushing for



ideals such as women no longer being set on fire for dowry compensation. Regardless, placing a strong female character in such a situation is avant-garde and presents the reader with a basic construct of the tensions within traditional and modern Indian society.

Young adult female protagonists dominate four of these five novels and despite the differences in locations, all of the Indian novels share the commonality of an underrepresented voice. In examining characterization, the exception to these protagonists is of course the omniscient narrator of “Mrs. Sen’s” who while female is not young. Each narrator struggles against an antagonist that exemplified all of the stereotypes or socio-personal issues she may face. Whether or not the antagonist is in the form of an actual character depends upon the novel, but overwhelmingly the source of internal conflict for the female protagonist is a clashing of ideals. Referring to the concept of triple consciousness as mentioned in earlier chapters, the protagonists must endure the strives of being a woman with a liberal mind frame in a conservative Indian society. Despite the positive attributes of the aforementioned gender, race and social roles, there are still many conflicts that overlap and cause extensive tension as the plot progresses. Each protagonist knows what is expected of her traditionally and yet cannot adhere to “classical” traditions because of contemporary movements. Specifically speaking, the gender role debate is noted in all of the novels, with a pre-established notion that women are to cater to the men in their households. Carmit Delman in *Burnt Bread and Chutney* (2005) addresses this issue when she recounts an argument with her grandmother

“...What if I offered up Gertie? She was older than me, fit, strong willed, skilled at folding, maybe a laundry prodigy. A very reasonable option. ‘What about Gertie?’ I asked decidedly, certain I had hit upon something. ‘What can’t she fold the clothes?’

‘She is arranging all the beds upstairs. Ad then she is going to come down here and wash the pots and pans.’ Gertie had already been put to work, my plan was ruined.

‘What about Tzvi then?’ I suggested, trying to pin it on my younger brother.

‘He is outside playing.’

‘Playing? Why does he get to play and I have to work?’ I asked, indignant, but I already knew the answer.

With a firm splat of dough to wooden board, Nana-bai said matter-of-factly, ‘He’s the boy.’

‘That’s so unfair. All these clothes in here, they’re his clothes too.’

‘But you’re his sister. You should respect him and do things for him.’

No matter how many times I heard this, still my mind reeled with its injustice. ‘This isn’t India,’ I said angrily. ‘Things are different here in America. Just ‘cause he’s a boy, it doesn’t make him better. It doesn’t mean I have to be his slave.’ In the good ol’ U.S.-of-A. – world outside our house, women expected to be every bit as powerful as men. So I knew that all of American ideology backed me up at this point. And I held it over her, feeling myself to be an angry ambassador” (Delman, 2002, p.45).

These women are in fact modern-day ambassadors for social change and act as representatives of their respective cultures also presenting a paradox between conservative and liberal cultural ideology. All female protagonists are binary oppositions struggling to find meanings among their conservative traditions and liberal manner of thinking. While Delman is able to reconcile her warring selves, the continual struggle is self-evident throughout the text. Delman is a prime example of the triple consciousness that Indo-Caribbean American students experience; she is Indian, Jewish and American much like Indo-Caribbean Americans who are Indian, Caribbean and American. Each



one of these differential consciousnesses are binary and tripartite oppositions in and of themselves as they are continuously at odds within the individual as he or she struggles to identify their ethnic selves. The younger generation of women fight against their parents seeking to establish their identities and personalities as a separate entity from all familial ties. Dimple, Sunita, and Jeeta respectively of *Born Confused*, (Hidier, 2003) *The Not So Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen*, (Perkins, 2005) and *Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet* (Sheth, 2006) are headstrong and steadfast in their initial disdain of Indian culture especially the chauvinistic treatment of women. Jeeta is openly critical of the arranged marriage system within India and even the United States and this is her driving angst throughout the novel. She even questions the validity of the bride selection process:

“All the boys want a pretty wife with a perfect set of teeth, who is about three inches shorter and three years younger than him and comes from a rich family. And has a whitish, or at least a wheatish complexion.

‘That’s not true.’

‘Really? Find me one boy that doesn’t want a perfect girl. Remember Rita living in the next building? Three boys rejected her because she has a slightly crooked smile.’

...

I wondered why the girl always had to be perfect. A boy could be dark and handsome, so why couldn’t a girl be dark and beautiful?” (Sheth, 2006, p.4).

Each of the five characters realizes the double standards that exist in their societies and vehemently rallies against them. The concept of a double standard, preaching one ideal and practicing another, is one of the many mythemes that are applicable even to Western society. Female protagonists, such as Jeeta, who fight for recognition in a male dominated society are also a mytheme amongst feminist novels. They are often successful given that by the end of the novel, they have managed to

reconcile their split halves into a unified cultured being; they acknowledge and accept the fact that they are both Indian and American or in the case of Jeeta, a modern Indian woman and even Jewish–Indian, as in the case of Carmit Delman. The reconciliation that each protagonist experiences involves the acceptance of the differences that exist between her ethnicity and its cultural values and the expectations of Western society. Furthermore, each protagonist achieves the realization that her personality defines who she is and that although ethnicity is a significant part of this construct, it is quite marginal in comparison to how she acts and presents her mannerisms.

Carmit Delman's *Burnt Bread and Chutney* (2005) however, is unique in a variety of ways as the piece exposes life in an Jewish-Indian community and more importantly the amount of intrapersonal opposition the protagonist experiences as she attempts to balance three cultures. Delman's novel travels from India, home of Bene Israel as a result of a shipwreck, to Jerusalem and then New York. Delman's family has occupied each one of these locations, adapting various facets of the socio-cultural structure into their already intricate ethnic construct. Delman relates how her Indian "brown" skin does grant her acceptance in the "white" Jewish community and alienates her from Western society. Delman's triple consciousness allows her to see the differences in the way "pure" and "false" Jews are treated. She is a tripartite construct, three parts creating a whole, a scenario that is very similar to the plight of Indo-Caribbean Americans. Delman beautifully expresses this conflict throughout her novel, especially when she says:

"Maybe if we had connected deeply to the general Indian community, our family identity might have been more straightforward, a clear cut piece of Indian immigration. But we were Jewish also and general Indian culture was another sphere entirely. For a while, I studied traditional Indian folk dance. In that time, the rhythm of



the dances, the shared sweat and practice seemed to be a bond between me, the one Jewish girl, and all other Hindu girls. In an old studio room, we learned to fold our palms, to fan our fingers, to widen our eyes dramatically and pound our heels in rhythm. And I felt myself to be just as one of the others, dark-skinned, reaching far back into the music and stumbling forward into grace.

At the holiday party though, when families came together in the studio to exchange presents and wish each other happy holiday, I was suddenly aware that none of the other Indians in that room would have guessed what holiday I celebrated when I went home. I stood around the others, eating pink glitter cookies, fidgety for not dancing. And suddenly it seemed the connection to just India was not enough to stand alone between shy girls. How could I explain to them all I learned in Torah class? They had never even heard of Indian Jews” (Delman, 2002, p. 59).

Indo-Caribbean American students who choose to read *Burnt Bread and Chutney* will feel the pull of Delman’s narration as they consider they are neither Indian, Caribbean nor American. As in the case of Delman’s protagonist, students cannot completely relate to their fellow Indians as their ancestors left India decades ago, their Indian customs are considered out of place in a Creole Caribbean society and Americans perceive them as Indians, not accounting for their complex history. Indo-Caribbeans can most certainly understand the pull of Delman’s novel as they are treated as miscreant outcasts; their creolized culture accepted by neither Afro-Caribbeans, East Indians nor Americans. Unlike the history of Indo-Caribbeans, Jewish-Indians were not coerced into manual labor, but rather placed there by accident. Nevertheless, a process of creolization and adaptation is noted within both cultures.

## **Thematic Elements of Each Novel**

Retrospectively, each novel touches the surface culture of Indo-Caribbean American students as they examine the shared traditions and familial values. The majority of the holidays, religious activities and even food in each novel are most certainly a facet of Indo-Caribbean American culture. Thematically speaking, the specific themes of cultural identifications and the creation of a community are a part of every human condition. There is a commonality of shared experiences that are retold in various ways. These shared experiences are retold as mythemes in various languages, stories, or literary pieces. Literary works with appellations to a specific crowd, ethnicity or race, are common to all canons, especially the high school English Language Arts canon.

In addition to the need of belonging, or at least feeling some semblance of a community, the intrapersonal conflicts and developments that each character experiences are also a significant aspect of being a young adult. As a supplement to one's ethnicity, students are transitioning between different stages of life and need to identify who they are. As seen in all five novels, cultural values often complicate these transitions creating additional confusion and chaos, regardless of age as seen in the case of Mrs. Sen's. Ultimately, each of the books' resolutions allow the characters to reconcile the family, cultural and personal conflicts that create the binary opposition within them. While the protagonists know they will never fully reconcile their warring selves, they all tend to allow their personalities to compensate for perceived cultural differences as they realize that personality creates culture and not solely culture.



## Caribbean Novels

Each of the three Caribbean pieces read for this thesis are unique in terms of their syntax, structure and thematic elements. Comparatively speaking, these novels are significantly different from the Indian young adult pieces. Keeping in mind the paucity of Caribbean young adult novels, the three novels do not completely meet the seven standards of the young adult genre, as outlined in Appendix B. The attributes of a young adult novel that each Caribbean piece adheres to are “Providing ample opportunities for the young adult to establish his or her claim in the world,” “Fast-Paced,” the “Inclusion of a variety of genres and subjects” and most importantly “Stories about characters from many different and ethnic cultural groups” (Donelson and Nilsen, 2005, p.28-35).

In addition, each novel read has a young adult protagonist, an important aspect of any young adult novel. The young adult narrates each piece and although their sufferings and plights are described with an immense use of figurative language, these novels strongly illustrate a coming of age in the Caribbean. Without marginalizing the quality of any young adult novels, these Caribbean pieces further stimulate the higher thinking skills of any reader, as the reader is offered the dichotomies of cultures throughout each piece. The pieces analyzed are as follows: *Annie John* (Kincaid, 1997), *Lucy* (Kincaid, 2002) and *Krik? Krak!* (Danticat, 1997).

During the analyses of these respective pieces, the stereotypical notions that Western society holds in regards to Caribbean culture and lifestyles were present. Westernized views of the Caribbean were present in two of the three novels and include speaking with an accent, steel bands and port dockings for major cruise lines. Using the keywords Caribbean in conjunction with the young adult genre in order to conduct a book

search, results in additional titles such as *Tropical Kiss* (Hawthorne, 2004) that were not included in the study. These novels were completely unrelated to actual Caribbean culture. All students, not solely Indo-Caribbean American students, should be aware of the conundrum of offering literature that contains more than Caribbean stereotypes. These three novels are the first steps to rectifying this overlooked mistake. Western countries cannot continue in their ignorant notions in regard to misrepresenting the culture of Caribbean countries as these cultures have been alive and vibrant well before America garnered its independence. Additionally, the literary elements of character development, setting and thematic influences will be analyzed within each Caribbean novel.

### **Analyses of Caribbean Novels**

The settings of each novel, as mentioned earlier, are solely restricted to the Caribbean with very little migration to Western portions of the world. The locales for each novel are as follows:

*Annie John* (Kincaid, 1997) – Antigua

*Krik?, Krak!* (Danticat, 1997) – Haiti

*Lucy* (Kincaid, 2002) - Antigua/United States

*Lucy*, which is Jamaica Kincaid's sequel to *Annie John* is noteworthy in regards to Caribbean and Western societal juxtaposition. *Lucy* illustrates how migration from a Western colony to the "mother" country can affect personality development and even more profoundly the sense of one's cultural self.

"...I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which the letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the



letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face?" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 31).

The letter, of which Lucy speaks, is a notice from her mother informing her of her father's death. However, Lucy's tension is apparent as she struggles with her comfort in Western civilization in juxtaposition to her Caribbean lineage. She cannot abandon herself to the United States and its societal values without feeling the pull of her native Antigua.

Lucy's attachment to Antigua is personified in the form of her mother, as she left Antigua to escape her mother's shadow and discover her own identity. While she is able to mature in the United States, the nagging of her mother forces her to recognize the binary oppositions that construct her being. She is able to adopt the Western lifestyle and yet knows that the West once enslaved her people. At one point within *Annie John*, Lucy vehemently declares her dislike for the Americans. Furthermore, Lucy desperately desires to not feel remorse in terms of her not living up to her mother's expectations. Yet, she is obviously cynical at her abilities to do so as well as estrange herself from her mother, a prime example of the binary opposition that constructs this character. Notably, this angst creates all of the conflict throughout the piece as Lucy struggles to accept her Caribbean lineage. Lucy is able to physically escape Antigua and adopt a Western lifestyle, but she cannot marginalize her Caribbean roots.

Edwidge Danticat's novel *Krik? Krak!* (1995) also presents the binary oppositions that exist within those individuals who migrate to America. Although only one of the vignettes are set in America, this particular piece beautifully expresses the triumphs and struggles of differing generations of Haitian immigrants and their inability to fully erase their original history. The majority of Danticat's pieces are set in Haiti during Papa Doc's

reign of terror. With her gruesome yet true-to-life descriptions of violence, she creates characters filled with oppositional feelings; they straddle societal expectations, familial values, and the pure instinct of survival.

“People are just too hopeful, and sometimes hope is the biggest weapon of all to use against us. People will believe anything. They will claim to see Christ return and march on the cross backwards if there is enough hope” (Danticat, 1995, p. 18-19).

Ethnicity aside, the succinct human sentiments and emotions evoked as the reader recants tales of rape, incest, murder, and pure despair are the founding commonalities of the human condition. The selection of Danticat’s novel, as highlighted and analyzed in Appendix K also relates these acts of violence, presenting the reader with an unbiased perspective as exemplified within the following quote:

“Everyone smells so bad. They get into arguments and they say to one another, ‘It’s my misfortune that would lump me together with an indigent like you.’ Think of it. They are fighting about being superior when we all might drown like straw” (Danticat, 1995, p. 21).

Danticat presents the reader with a stark situation, a series of refugees grasping for life on a raft. These refugees forget that they are merely human and share the same destiny, a mytheme that is relevant to all oppressed peoples. They are each escaping a dictator, who has little regard for the value of human life, on a raft that is barely keeping out water. Their future is uncertain and yet despite all of these commonalities, they continue to fight. A quote or passage such as this one, only serves to reiterate the human condition that is relevant to all cultures and literary pieces. The reader leaves Danticat’s text with a great appreciation for the Caribbean, specifically Haiti, and those who proudly wear its ethnicity.



Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat's novels are subtle in their descriptions of the Caribbean as well as the Caribbean manner of living. Unlike the Indian young adult novels, the reader must search for artifacts of Caribbean culture; a plethora of which are readily available. With the assistance of *Annie John* (Kincaid, 1997), *Lucy* (Kincaid, 2002), *Krik? Krak!* (Danticat, 1995), readers are able to comprehend the effect of British imperialism upon Caribbean society, the cultural dynamics that exist among each race and the intricate history of violence, redemption and hope. In essence, these novels speak to the human condition, appealing to an audience that is much greater than the divisions of Asian, Afro- or Indo-Caribbean. Familial dynamics, human nature and emotions, and most certainly interpersonal relationships are highly relevant to all readers and should be taken into consideration as a supplement to the canon.

### **Indo-Caribbean Pieces**

"Even brown wasn't merely brown" (Hidier, 2002, p. 484).

Most, if not all Indo-Caribbean students can relate to the above quote from *Born Confused* (Hidier, 2002). Indo-Caribbean students experience displacement when questioned on their ethnicities, as strangers perceive skin tone to be an indicator of culture. Most Americans or Westerners are unaware of the diversity that exists within the Indian Diaspora. One purpose of this thesis thus far is to establish a voice for Indo-Caribbean American students within the high school classroom with the assistance of literary texts leading to the prevention of ethnic mis-identification. The intersection of Indian and Caribbean young adult novels illustrates the intricate complexes that these

students experience, including the tendency of their American peers to categorize them according to race. In addition to the Indian and Caribbean young adult pieces, the three Indo-Caribbean young adult pieces, create the center piece of this thesis. The three Indo-Caribbean young adult pieces are unfortunately significantly dated with copyright dates of 1952, 2002 and 1987 and are lacking in relevancy to contemporary culture.

Regardless, these pieces do have some timeless qualities in terms of the human condition and the constructs of Indo-Caribbean society.

Each of the Indo-Caribbean novels have settings within Indo-Caribbean enclaves of Trinidad. While there are at least three other countries in the Caribbean with a significant Indo-Caribbean population, the customs, values, experiences and creolization are still the same across the waters. Novels such as *A Brighter Sun* by Sam Selvon and *Miguel Street* by V.S. Naipaul as well as the short story "Barred" (Espinete, 1987), provide Indo-Caribbean American students with a means for explaining their ethnicities as well as introducing a unique and diverse culture to other students.

"I am Indian, plain and simple, not East nor West, just an Indian. I live in the West. My travel across the water to this land has not been easy and many a time I have squatted in the dirt of this or that lepaved hut, a few coins knotted in the corner of my ohrni, waiting, waiting-waiting to make the next move. There is fear, poverty and sometimes a heavy hand striking at night. The enemy waits outside" (Espinete, 1987, p. 81-81).

While Indo-Caribbean American students are cognizant of their ancestral history, they have very little to almost no primary experiences with their homeland. Furthermore, Indo-Caribbean American students have a difficult time explaining their ethnic backgrounds, often not knowing how to explain their complex histories. The concept of being West Indian is misconstrued by individuals who



are not aware of its vast meaning. As the above quote implies, the first generation of Indo-Caribbeans also straddle two opposing cultures; they were forced to adhere to native Indian cultures or fully submerge themselves in the Caribbean manner of living. However, these peoples have simply established themselves as being a part of the Indian Diaspora. Indo-Caribbeans, according to Espinet's above quote, are Indian; there is no need to differentiate between native-Indian or Caribbean – Indian.

Indo-Caribbean American students, much like their ancestors, are lost in the grand scheme of binary opposition. There are pulls and struggles between oppositional cultures which include contemporary ideologies, Indian and Caribbean ethnical demographics as well as familial obligations. Familial obligations aside however, Indo-Caribbean American students are often lost as they attempt to straddle the intrapersonal cultural war; they fight to discern whether or not they are Indian, Caribbean or American just as their ancestors did many years ago.

In addition to the aforementioned oppositions, Indo-Caribbean American students may feel lost in a new environment that does not exemplify any semblance to their culture. Displacement is not uncommon to any ethnicity known for migration to different parts of the world. Indians migrated from India to the Caribbean, all the while feeling profound isolation.

"We are lost here, have not found the words to utter our newness, our strangeness, our unfound being. Our clothes are strange, our food is strange, our names are strange. And it is not possible for anyone to coax or help us. Our utterance can only come roaring out of our mouths when it is ready, set and can go" (Espinet, 1987, p. 83).

Indo-Caribbean American may students feel the very same way as their parents have immigrated from the Caribbean to America believing that the U.S. will provide a better life.

“Yes, boy, dis land too hard. Plenty money in de States. If ever Ah come back, Ah go be ah rich man” (Selvon, 1952, p. 213).

The ideal of attaining a better life is what prompts all humans to risk life-changing migrations. Specifically, it is what forced Indians to leave India in the first place as Sam Selvon mentions in his novel, *A Brighter Sun*.

“Sookdeo...had come from India to work as an indentured laborer on the white man’s plantations. He liked to talk about how it was with him, about the old days. How he had worked himself to the bone. How he used to seduce girls in the cane fields. How he had lived in San Juan when the land was planted with cane, and not as it was today, with houses and streets” (Selvon, 1952, p. 65).

As beneficial as attaining riches and a better life can be, there are also the potential ramifications of cultural identity loss as experienced by the first generations of Indian immigrants and Indo-Caribbean Americans. Complete upheaval from a particular country means that the roots are no longer planted in that country; the roots are traveling with its owner to be planted elsewhere and adapt the to the lifestyles there.

As Espinet beautifully articulates

“The mango tree is heavily fruited at this time of the year. I think: this is the land that spawned me, far from the continent of my origin. Can an island be someone’s home, I wonder? My ancestral roots are far from here and I don’t even know really, what they are” (Espinete, 1987, p. 81).

The impossibility of creating a home from such an isolated locale appear daunting to any immigrant, considering the severed cultural ties. Indo-Caribbean American students are



well aware of this, as in Central Florida there is a significant Caribbean population growth that is directly tied to nationwide mobility. However, it is not such a grand scale and vast task to maintain one's culture given the enclave that Indo-Caribbeans maintain upon immigration to the Caribbean and even to America and England. Yet understandably so, future generations become more distant and detached from their ancestral roots, creating a extensive gap between having an ethnicity and understanding the complex nature of said culture's history. Introducing literature that is directly related to the plight of Indo-Caribbean American students can assist in reconcile the distance between cultural knowledge and simply accepting race as a descriptor of one's ethnicity.

### **Comparing Indian and Caribbean Pieces**

Eleven novels were read for this thesis, with the inclusion of one short story. Five of those novels are Indian young adult pieces, three are Caribbean young adult pieces and the final three are Indo-Caribbean young adult pieces. The Indo-Caribbean pieces directly correlate to Indo-Caribbean culture and society simultaneously exhibiting characteristics of young adult novels. However, these novels are dated and may not have as much relevancy to contemporary middle and high school students as any of the Indian or Caribbean young adult pieces, as the Indian and Caribbean pieces are written within the latter half of the last decade. Therefore, the Indian and Caribbean young adult novels, when paired together, create an environment where students can learn of Indo-Caribbean society in conjunction with the three Indo-Caribbean pieces. However, the pairing of the Indian and Caribbean young adult pieces will provide a notable difference in relevant examples.

Of course, the Indian and Caribbean pieces, if fused together, cannot establish an accurate description of Indo-Caribbean society hence the reason why they are paired with these three Indo-Caribbean pieces. In addition, the Indian and Caribbean pieces are filled with dichotomies relating to the angst of the human condition. While socio-politically, there remains a division amongst Afro and Indo-Caribbean cultures, there have been attempts to reconcile the two, as mentioned earlier. However, the socio-cultural differences of each group are distinctive. There are constant conflicts and an overwhelming struggle to find oneself. In fact, the motivating conflict for each novel is self-discovery in juxtaposition to societal expectations. Reverting to the concept of Indo-Caribbean American students, having separate columns for each ethnic novel is in actuality a binary opposition. Indo-Caribbean American students as mentioned earlier have the following oppositional forces: Indian versus Caribbean versus American. Side by side literary comparisons allows for the comprehension of these cultures by students of all ethnicities. Furthermore, each novel in the Indian, Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean genre is filled with angst elements of the human condition. Each protagonist expresses the sentiments that are applicable to all humans regardless of their ethnicity.

A dominant theme throughout all of the novels is the sense of loss or an inability to fully affiliate with a group or culture. A functional personality component is missing. There are various manners of establishing the sense of inadequacy as experienced by the protagonist. However the primary means of doing so is tracing the protagonist's or the protagonist's family's migration from another country. Each protagonist feels as though he or she cannot fully assimilate into their new environments thus resulting in the ensuing binary oppositions.



“Oversensitive at the inequalities between us and them, we also felt certain that in a small community, nothing could remain a secret for long. Our financial situation was embarrassingly apparent from the fact that we did not have enough money to pay hundreds of dollars for seats at high holiday services...We felt we were obvious, in that our rusty old station wagon sat in the parking lot near their shiny new imported cars. And in that we did not frequent their polished hairdressers, country clubs, gyms and restaurants” (Delman, 2002, p. 149).

Eliminating ethnicity, the above quote exemplifies the inequalities that exist in society. Socioeconomic statuses are applicable to all readers, especially those students who are in a situation that is similar to the protagonist's. Another facet of the human condition that is applicable to all ethnicities is the tendency to group all races under one category. Indo-Caribbean American students aside, most Caucasian, Latino/Latina, African-American, African and Asian students despise mass categorization. Individuality is lost in the process.

“Many people did not know about our history. And when we explained it all to them, they were delighted and fascinated and thrilled. They embraced us as if we were their own and long lost. But a few people were outright cruel to us because of the differences, and these were the ones who branded our minds. They offered cool disinterested small talk and barbed comments, passing by quickly as if we had somehow offended them. At first, we lived in fear of their behavior, so far away from our world of gentleness, of eagerness to please. Eventually, however, we became scornful of them, because they thought we could not see through their poor offerings. They thought we were grateful for their morsels of condescension. These were individuals who could not accept Jews who were not part of an elite, plastic formula. To them we were poor oddities, variations of the truth, and exotic in a way that recalled colonial ideas of Orientalism...souvenirs of some vacation abroad” (Delman, 2002, p. 152).

In order to comprehend the diversity that exists within the classroom, one must remember that ethnicities are not cookie cut shapes; humans are not molded in a mass reproduction process.

As mentioned earlier, immigration influences the protagonist's perspectives on his or her societal value. Each novel deals with immigration in some form or the other. Indo-Caribbean American students are well aware of the immigration process as their parents or even they have emigrated from the Caribbean. Homesickness, which results from immigration, affects the protagonist's abilities to function. Students with a high transience rate can relate to the inconsistencies and instability of constant movements. In the case of most immigrants, there is a desperate need for establishing a better life.

“‘Send pictures, they write. Send pictures of your new life. What picture can I send?’ She sat, exhausted, at the edge of her bed, where there was now barely room for her. ‘They think I live the life of a Queen, Eliot.’ She looked around the blank walls of the room. ‘They think I press buttons and the house is clean. They think I live in a palace’” (Lahiri, 1999, p.126).

As Jhumpa Lahiri examines in her *Interpreter of Maladies*, life is not necessarily better on the other side. If Maslow's basic needs are not met, it is impossible for any immigrant to experience self-fulfillment.

“By then Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables. He thought of his own home, just five miles away, and the young married couple who waved from time to time as they jogged at sunset along the shore” (Lahiri, 1999, p. 117).

In the case of the two above quotes, the fundamental need of family and to feel affection or love, diminishes the ability to assimilate into Western society. Familial remorse and



loss can impact the perspective immigrants have in regards to starting a new life in another hemisphere.

Referring to the previously mentioned concept of creating a new life, one of the societal “norms” that many immigrants are not aware of is racism. Life in their native country is more likely than not oppressive, given the in state government’s whims and wishes. Citizenry of countries that were once under an imperialistic rule or that are still ruled by another power, perceive that life in America is much better than in their native country. Life is most certainly better in America than in these other countries, considering the technological and socio-economic advances. Unfortunately disheartening racism and ignorance that pervades American society tends to greet those who are struggling to create a new life for themselves and their families.

“A fellar was telling me the other day he would prefer to live under the Star and Stripes than the British Bulldog. He say how much things the Yankee do for this country since they come, look how much modern machinery they have, look how much more money they paying me.

‘Don’t worry wid he. He ain’t tell yuh bout how dey does kick nigger over dere in American, and how dey does kill dem and shoot dem down like dog. He ain’t tell yuh bout dat? Bout how dey have big notice in de road saying: Nigger keep out. He ain’t tell yuh dat nigger does catch dey royal arse in de States? De Yankee dollar folling a lot ah dem. Boy, Ah don’t like the British, but if it come to de worse, Ah radder stay wid dem any day dan live under American rule!’ (Selvon, 1952, p. 196).

Racism and ignorance dominate society regardless of the nation or “majority.” Modern young adults are bombarded with these hate filled messages, believing that they are incapable of effecting change. Perhaps the illustrations of hate as presented in these novels will prompt students to effect change. The demographics of Central Florida, as

previously mentioned, reflect the continuous growth of all minorities, all of whom will experience hate at one point or another. Despite one's birth or citizenship status, all students should be aware of the hatred that exists across the board. This awareness is a vital element of the human condition.

Without the intention of appearing redundant, this thesis strives to create a place for Indo-Caribbean American students in the high school English language arts canon. Indo-Caribbean Americans students have a complex and unique history. As a result, they are unable to identify their actual homeland. Are they Indian, Caribbean or American?

"I looked at a map. An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not go back" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 10).

Historically speaking, these students can say that they are descendants of Indians, or they could say that they are Caribbeans or even Americans. However, each term has a distinct connotation and denotation that even the most brilliant of high school minds have trouble identifying. Simply put, these students are Indo-Caribbean Americans.

"In this period of my life, moved by the vastness of civilizations as I had never been moved before, I rediscovered India. Since my brief flirtation with traditional Indian dance as a child, my interaction with Indian culture was limited to how it played out in the small Indian Jewish community. But in college, surrounded by Indians of all kinds, I was surprised to find I longed to connect with them and the larger Indian culture. People who in skin resembled me, who others likened to me. People who grew up on the same foods I grew up on, and for whom the temperaments, philosophies, and sensibilities that formed them were birthed in the same landscape as those that formed me" (Delman, 2002, p. 189).



Indo-Caribbean Americans are Caribbeans whose ancestors arrived from India decades ago and are descendants of immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua, Surinam, French Guyana and Jamaica. While the essence of Indo-Caribbean culture is derived from native Indian customs and traditions, the Caribbean flavor and Creole intermingles with this “Indian-ness” to create a culture that is wholly and amazingly different. The binary oppositions that are at play within every Indo-Caribbean American student are expressed throughout the novels discussed. Keeping Carmit Delman’s quote in mind, the nucleus of any human being is not the ethnicity with which he or she is raised but rather the way they were raised. The thousands of ethnicities in the world are filled with dissimilarities, but above all they are similar when considering the core values and experiences of the human condition.

### **Infusing Indo-Caribbean Young Adult Literature into the Existing Canon**

Proponents of the traditional canon argue for the cessation of multicultural literary integration. Keeping in mind the rationale for canon stability, one goal of this thesis was that each novel in this thesis is paired with a classic. I was unable to pair only three books do not have a partner because they did not have a clear complement. With complementary pairings, even the staunchest critics would be hard pressed to object to using at least one of these novels in the classroom. The motivation for each pairing is carefully explained in the respective appendices in addition to three classroom lesson plans for each complement. Despite the fact these lessons have not been implemented in the classroom as of yet, success is a

high probability. The content of these contemporary young adult novels may perhaps pique the interests of all students, especially Indo-Caribbean ones.

<b>Novel</b>	<b>Complementary Pairing</b>
<i>Born Confused</i> (Hidier, 2003)	<i>The Odyssey</i> (Homer)
<i>Burnt Bread and Chutney</i> (Delman, 2002)	None at the moment
“Mrs. Sen’s” (Lahiri, 1999)	“The Road Not Taken” (Robert Frost)
<i>The Not So Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen</i> (Perkins, 2006)	<i>The Great Gatsby</i> (Fitzgerald, 1935)
<i>Annie John</i> (Kincaid, 1985)	<i>Lucy</i> (Kincaid, 1990) and <i>Tess of the D’Urbervilles</i> (Hardy, 2000).
<i>Lucy</i> (Kincaid, 1990)	<i>Tess of the D’Urbervilles</i> (Hardy, 2000)
<i>Krik? Krak!</i> (Danticat, 1995)	<i>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</i> (Crane, 1893)
“Barred” (Espinet, 1987)	“A New England Nun” (Freeman, 1891)
<i>Miguel Street</i> (Naipaul, 2002)	“The Lady and the Dog” (Chekhov, 1912)
<i>A Brighter Sun</i> (Selvon, 1952)	None at the moment

In addition, if this thesis is only able to assist with the incorporation of one or two Indo-Caribbean novels into even one classroom then my original goal is accomplished. I believe all students, regardless of ethnicity will benefit from this diversity initiative. My hopes for this thesis were to give teachers and students who need and deserve racial equality a more responsive and engaged literary experience. Despite living in a society where separate is still considered equal, change begins with the very same students who



sit in our classrooms. These students who manifest an appreciation for other cultures are truly the *interpreters* of tomorrow.

## **Appendix A: Florida Legislation Regarding Multicultural Literature**



**1003.42 Required instruction.--**

(1) Each district school board shall provide all courses required for middle grades promotion, high school graduation, and appropriate instruction designed to ensure that students meet State Board of Education adopted standards in the following subject areas: reading and other language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages, health and physical education, and the arts.

(2) Members of the instructional staff of the public schools, subject to the rules of the State Board of Education and the district school board, shall teach efficiently and faithfully, using the books and materials required that meet the highest standards for professionalism and historic accuracy, following the prescribed courses of study, and employing approved methods of instruction, the following:

(a) The history and content of the Declaration of Independence, including national sovereignty, natural law, self-evident truth, equality of all persons, limited government, popular sovereignty, and inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property, and how they form the philosophical foundation of our government.

(b) The history, meaning, significance, and effect of the provisions of the Constitution of the United States and amendments thereto, with emphasis on each of the 10 amendments that make up the Bill of Rights and how the constitution provides the structure of our

government.

(c) The arguments in support of adopting our republican form of government, as they are embodied in the most important of the Federalist Papers.

(d) Flag education, including proper flag display and flag salute.

(e) The elements of civil government, including the primary functions of and interrelationships between the Federal Government, the state, and its counties, municipalities, school districts, and special districts.

(f) The history of the United States, including the period of discovery, early colonies, the War for Independence, the Civil War, the expansion of the United States to its present boundaries, the world wars, and the civil rights movement to the present. American history shall be viewed as factual, not as constructed, shall be viewed as knowable, teachable, and testable, and shall be defined as the creation of a new nation based largely on the universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence.

(g) The history of the Holocaust (1933-1945), the systematic, planned annihilation of European Jews and other groups by Nazi Germany, a watershed event in the history of humanity, to be taught in a manner that leads to an investigation of human behavior, an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectful person, for the purposes of encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions.



- (h) The history of African Americans, including the history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America, the enslavement experience, abolition, and the contributions of African Americans to society.
- (i) The elementary principles of agriculture.
- (j) The true effects of all alcoholic and intoxicating liquors and beverages and narcotics upon the human body and mind.
- (k) Kindness to animals.
- (l) The history of the state.
- (m) The conservation of natural resources.
- (n) Comprehensive health education that addresses concepts of community health; consumer health; environmental health; family life, including an awareness of the benefits of sexual abstinence as the expected standard and the consequences of teenage pregnancy; mental and emotional health; injury prevention and safety; nutrition; personal health; prevention and control of disease; and substance use and abuse.
- (o) Such additional materials, subjects, courses, or fields in such grades as are prescribed by law or by rules of the State Board of Education and the district school board in fulfilling the requirements of law.
- (p) The study of Hispanic contributions to the United States.

(q) The study of women's contributions to the United States.

(r) The nature and importance of free enterprise to the United States economy.

(s) A character-development program in the elementary schools, similar to Character First or Character Counts, which is secular in nature. Beginning in school year 2004-2005, the character-development program shall be required in kindergarten through grade 12. Each district school board shall develop or adopt a curriculum for the character-development program that shall be submitted to the department for approval. The character-development curriculum shall stress the qualities of patriotism; responsibility; citizenship; kindness; respect for authority, life, liberty, and personal property; honesty; charity; self-control; racial, ethnic, and religious tolerance; and cooperation.

(t) In order to encourage patriotism, the sacrifices that veterans have made in serving our country and protecting democratic values worldwide. Such instruction must occur on or before Veterans' Day and Memorial Day. Members of the instructional staff are encouraged to use the assistance of local veterans when practicable.

The State Board of Education is encouraged to adopt standards and pursue assessment of the requirements of this subsection.

(3) Any student whose parent makes written request to the school principal shall be exempted from the teaching of reproductive health or any disease, including HIV/AIDS, its symptoms, development, and treatment. A student so exempted may not be penalized by reason of that exemption. Course descriptions for comprehensive health education shall not



interfere with the local determination of appropriate curriculum which reflects local values and concerns.

**History.**--s. 131, ch. 2002-387; s. 22, ch. 2006-74.

## **Appendix B: Definition of Young Adult Literature**



## **Definition of Young Adult Literature**

Seven characteristics define the young adult genre according Kenneth Donelson and Allen Nilsen (2005). In terms of this thesis, the definition is relevant to all of the novels read as the novels were selected based upon whether or not they were classifiably young adult pieces. Several of the novels in this thesis, especially the Caribbean pieces, did not fit the young adult mold and adhered only to five of the seven characteristics.

Nevertheless, they are still considered young adult novels because of their young adult protagonist.

All of the information below can be found in *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (Donelson and Nilsen, 2005) between pages 28-35.

### **1. Young authors write from the viewpoint of young people**

An important facet of every young adult novel, especially those in this thesis, is a young adult protagonist. Relevancy aside, a young adult book is not a young adult book without an authenticating voice. A thirty-year-old man cannot narrate a story with contents such as puberty, boys, rape, or incest. The validity is simply not there. Furthermore, a young adult narrator and his or her experiences are relative to the reader's world view or prior knowledge. Young adult novels are written to provide young adults with a voice; it is only logical to have a young adult narrator.

### **2. Young Adult Protagonist desires to prove self**

Adolescence is noted for the estrangement that occurs between young adults and their parents. There are binary oppositions within this relationship, among which

is the young adult's desire to prove their self-worth without his or her parent's assistance while simultaneously garnering his or her parent's approval. There is also the desire to formulate an identity that is much different from parental expectations and yet and hope to maintain an inkling of parental likeness. Most young adult novels maintain the aforementioned characteristics, often positioning the parents as a main source of conflict.

### **3. Young adult literature is fast-paced**

Young adult literature is tied to the speed of the novel's setting. Society plays a huge role in young adult novels as they provide an angst filled environment for most teens. Contemporary society is also high-speed and exudes instant gratification. Therefore, it only makes sense to create young adult novels that are high-paced, action packed and with a seemingly quick pay off in the end. Most publishers assume, however, that students between the ages of 12 to 18 are unable to read extensive novels with complex plots.

### **4. Young adult literature includes a variety of genres and subjects**

There are certain expectations of young adult novels. The infamous *Harry Potter* series is a prime example of this as Harry fights against the Dark Lord, undergoes puberty, struggles to pass his classes and yes, gain the affections of his crush. Most readers expect the novels to follow a pre-established format that notably includes a troubled and rebellious teen. Admittedly, most young adult novels present plots that centralize a young adult protagonist who is struggling with a plethora of issues. However, young adult pieces are not restricted to having a young adult protagonist rebel, accept and move on. Young adult novels can have



these young adult narrators experience life changes in outer space, on another side of the world or even in an alternate universe.

**5. The body of work includes stories about characters from many different ethnic and cultural groups**

The heart of this thesis: multicultural young adult novels. All educators know that their classroom populations are not replicated middle-class Caucasian students from perfect families. There is a range of diversity that surpasses racial borders, delving into the unknown territories of divorce, sex, substance abuse, domestic and spousal violence and even socio-economic discrimination. Successful multicultural young adult novels keep in mind these concepts while not resolving these complex issues with “happily ever after” endings. Publishers who present successful and diverse young adult pieces always keep in mind the distinct characteristics of their audience members.

**6. Young adult books are basically optimistic, with characters making worthy accomplishments**

Forging through adolescence invokes an acquiescence of maturity that is applicable to all young adults. Young adults will readily admit that they are wiser today than they were yesterday and the primary reason for this newfound adult-like tendency is their own selves. Young adults, especially young adult protagonists, bask in the glory of achieving maturity without the help of their elders or parents. While most young adult novels end on a positive note, even the less optimistic pieces conclude with the narrator readily admitting to his or her shortcomings and attempting to rectify previous indiscretions.

## **7. Successful young adult novels deal with emotions that are important to young adults**

Eight emotions are relevant to every published young adult novel. These emotions are as follows:

1. "Acquiring more social skills
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine sex role
3. Accepting the changes in one's body, using the body effectively and accepting one's physique
4. Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults
5. Preparation for sex, marriage and parenthood
6. Selecting and preparing for an occupation
7. Developing a personal ideology and ethical standards
8. Assuming membership in the larger community" (Donelson and Nilsen, 2005, p. 35).

Tied to adolescent psychological well being, these eight characteristics articulate the transitional emotions as experienced by the average young adult. Similar to Maslow's hierarchy, a healthy young adult has achieved each of the above characteristics and has thereby achieved the maturity necessary to progress into adulthood. Comparatively, a young adult novel resolves itself with the resolution of each of the above emotions.



## **Appendix C: Modified Explication de texte Data Sheets**

- a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity
- b. Publication Date and Country
- c. Readability
- d. Age Recommendations
- e. Gender of Protagonist
- f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)
- g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)
- h. Availability (checked with Amazon)
- i. Stereotypes
- j. Themes/Patterns
- k. Synopsis
- l. Applications to Indo-Caribbeans

## Part II – Classroom Connections

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?



**Appendix D: List of Indian Texts**

**Appendix E: List of Caribbean Texts**

\* -Indicates a novel that has a young adult protagonist

If a novel and its author are bolded, then this piece will be included as a part of my research. (My basis for this further narrowing is the best exemplification of cultural paradoxes that are mentioned within my thesis. I believe that 5 books/stories on both sides are more than enough material for me to read – especially at this particular stage of my collegiate career.)

### Indian Pieces

<b>Novels</b>	<b>Author</b>
<i>Serving Crazy with Curry*</i>	Amulya Malladi
<b><i>Burnt Bread and Chutney*</i></b>	<b>Carmit Delman</b>
<b><i>Born Confused*</i></b>	<b>Tanuja Desai Hidier</b>
<b><i>Interpreter of Maladies</i></b>  The short story “Mrs. Sen” has a young adult protagonist. This is the only story that is read from this novel.	<b>Jhumpa Lahiri</b>
<i>Dahling if you luv me, Would you please, please smile?</i>	Rukhsana Khan
<b><i>The not so star spangled life of Sunita Sen*</i></b>	<b>Mitali Perkins</b>
<b><i>Koyal dark, mango sweet*</i></b>	<b>Kashmira Sheth</b>
<i>Love Stars and All That*</i>	Kirin Narayan
<i>Monsoon Summer*</i>	Mitali Perkins
<b><i>Imaginary Men</i></b>  The protagonist of this novel is well in her thirties, even though she deals with the cultural paradoxes that most young adult	Anjali Banerjee



novels exemplify.	
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\* -Indicates a novel that has a young adult protagonist

If a novel and its author are bolded, then this piece will be included as a part of my research. (My basis for this further narrowing is the best exemplification of cultural paradoxes that are mentioned within my thesis. I believe that 5 books/stories on both sides are more than enough material for me to read – especially at this particular stage of my collegiate career.)

### Caribbean/Indo-Caribbean Pieces

Novels	Author
<b><i>Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam</i></b> (Indo-Caribbean) The short story “Barred,” by Ramabai Espinet does not provide the reader with the protagonist’s age. However, it is assumed that she is young. In addition, this piece illustrates the complexities of initial indentured servitude and the Indo-Caribbean conflicts.	Carmen C. Esteves and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert
<i>Every time a rainbow dies*</i>	Rita Williams-Garcia
<i>A boy named Ossie*</i>	Earl Mckenzie
<b><i>Krik? Krak!*</i></b>	<b>Edwidge Danticat</b>
<b><i>Miguel Street*</i></b> (Indo-Caribbean)	<b>V.S. Naipaul</b>
<b><i>Lucy</i></b> The protagonist is 19, but she recounts her childhood in the Caribbean.	<b>Jamaica Kincaid</b>
<b><i>Annie John*</i></b>	<b>Jamaica Kincaid</b>
<i>Crick, Crack Monkey*</i>	Merle Hodges
<i>Brown girl, Brownstones*</i>	Paul Marshall
<b><i>A Brighter Sun*</i></b> (Indo-Caribbean) The protagonist transitions into adulthood, but the reader is able to identify the young adult complexities in juxtaposition to cultural paradoxes.	<b>Sam Selvon</b>



## **Appendix F: *Born Confused***

## **Indian Piece: *Born Confused***

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

- *Born Confused* by Tanuja Desai Hidier; Hidier is of Indian descent

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 2002

#### **c. Readability**

- The readability level of this novel is fairly advanced. While a middle school student would be able to read the novel, students of high school junior or senior status would better appreciate the protagonist's complex. Dimple is a high school student dealing with issues that relate to her identity formation, the future of her life and of course the emotional complexes that come with relationships. While middle school students do experience these aforementioned aspects to some extent, they may not possess the maturity to relate to her character as well as the knowledge to comprehend Hidier's syntactical structure.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- This novel is best suited for students ages 15 and up. Dimple, our protagonist, is 17 years old, with a beginning transition from 16.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**



- Dimple Rohitbhai Lala is the female protagonist of this novel.

**f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- The novel takes place in Springfield, New Jersey with frequent trips across the Hudson River to downtown New York City. Dimple's visits to NYC are prompted by her cousin Kavita, a South Asian Studies student at New York University. The reader is exposed to the vast and strong South Asian population at NYU as well as the events that they sponsor. At these events and alongside her many co-conspirators, Dimple begins to form an identity as well as accept her Indian heritage that she has rejected for so long. She juxtaposes her experiences at the South Asian mixers and Diaspora Conferences to her quintessential suburban high school life.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- This is a young adult piece. Dimple is a high school rising senior, and by the definitions of a young adult piece, this is a primary factor. In addition Dimple's emotions are the same emotions that many young adults must face – angst, anxiety and self identity formation in relation to his or her cultural background.

**h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 178 copies of this novel available on Amazon.com, with 88 of them being sold at \$2.24 and up.

**i. Stereotypes**

- Dimple, as she does have a significant amount of apathy towards her culture, stereotypes her family as well as fellow Indian students. She does not wish to acknowledge her warring triple consciousness like most Indo-Caribbean American students. She wishes to focus all of her energies on the “American” or her Indo-American self.

“Fortunately I have this gift for invisibility, which comes in handy when you’re trying to take sneaky peeks at other people’s lives, and which is odd considering I’m one of only two Indians in the whole school. The other being ...Jimmy (Trilok) Singh, who wore his ethnicity so brazenly, in the form of that pupil-shrinking turban and the silver kada bangle on his wrist, I got the feeling that many people had stopped noticing that I had hailed originally from the same general hood...The day I wore my hair in braids everyone yelled *Hey, Pocahontas* and did that ahh-baah-baah-baah lip slap at recess. You would have gotten a perm soon after as well” (Hidier, 2002, p. 3-4).

- While Dimple does utilize all of the stereotypes that Western society familiarizes with South Asian culture, she is still embarrassed by Trilok’s eating samosas for lunch with his turban, she still allows Gwyn (her best friend) to mock her parents’ accent and she refers to the people who are trying to arranged her marriage as “The Marriage Mafia.” Dimple herself is even stereotyped by Julian, an American blind date. Atypical notions by the part of Westerners in this book in regards to Indian culture are mirrored in the experiences of Indo-Caribbean American students.

“- Indians don’t have sex, I whispered back.



- Oh I know that, said Julian. They don't have mere sex. They have a kamasutronic experience – which is like God or...or ODing and surviving! And you want to know what I think?

I shook my head side to side and then back and forth, unsure.

- I think you're just born with it in India.

-I was born in the USA, I said.

-It doesn't matter. Its genetic. It's coded in your DNA: You know how to please a man"

(Hidier, 2002 p. 59).

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- There are several patterns that are worth noting. Hidier does not allow her characters to speak in the normal conventions of a novel's dialogue. She has her characters speak in turns, as indicated by a hyphen. She also spends a great deal of time on descriptive details. A plethora of metaphors and figurative devices are used to describe Dimple's complex emotions.
- Thematically speaking, there are several themes that repeat themselves.
  - o Dimple is constantly in a paradox. She loves her parents, but they represent a culture that she does not feel she is a part of. In fact, she is unable to find her culture within her own identity and wishes to live like any other "American girl." Indo-Caribbean American students struggle to establish an identity for themselves as they cannot reconcile their warring tripartite selves.

"So not quite Indian, and not quite American. Usually I felt more along the lines of Alien (however legal, as my Jersey birth certificate attests to). The only time I retreated to one or the other description were when my peers didn't understand me (then I figured it was because I was too Indian) or when my family didn't get it (clearly because I was too

American). And in India. Sometimes I was too Indian in America, yes, but in India, I was definitely not Indian enough” (Hidier, 2002, p. 13).

- Dimple’s camera plays an important role throughout the novel. As Dimple is socially awkward, partly due to Gwyn’s constant need for attention, she captures how she feels through her photographs. Her Grandfather, or Dadaji, shared and even inspired this artistic love hence the reason as why she associates it with him despite the fact that he is deceased. Dadaji marks the epitome of Dimple’s loss of regard towards India’s culture.
- Tension rules the friendship of Gwyn and Dimple. Although situations do arise where the girls appear to be in competition to each other as opposed to being supportive, it is their deep love for each other that helps them transgress these situations.
- A few generalized themes are:
  - o Self-acceptance for oneself and others
  - o Homosexuality/Transvestitism
  - o Sexuality/Romance
  - o Friendships
  - o Rebuilding of parental connections

**k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- Indo-Caribbean students find that the majority of their culture, including religious beliefs, stem from their ancestral ties to India. Hence, at least fifty percent of the customs that Indo-Caribbean



students practice are also practiced by students who are South Asian. Arranged marriages are still the norm in Indo-Caribbean countries and even here in the United States. Below are several quotes from the novel that exemplify this concept.

“- Dimple, she said. –You are a beautiful girl. You have hips. They’re not going anywhere. This is the Indian body. We are not like these straight curveless Americans

- Mom, I am American.

- Dimple, no matter how much you try you cannot change your bones. Your body is your temple; your body is your home. It tells you where you are from” (Hidier, 2002, p. 25).

“Rakhis are these bracelets that usually consist of colored thread adorned with red and pink and ornage woven flowers set in metallic foil leaves. They’re used for Rakshabandan, the holiday where sisters celebrate their brothers; the sister ties a rakhi on her brother’s wrist and in return the brother offers to protect her forever, which nowadays often amounts to his handing her anywhere from one to one hundred and one dollars” (Hidier, 2002, p.37).

“Even brown wasn’t merely brown” (Hidier, 2002, p.484).

- A personal favorite, this quote eloquently describes the complexities of the Indian diaspora that Indo-Caribbean American students are a part of.

“The two gazed at me now not only approvingly but adoringly. I realized then that my father’s complement coupled with this outfit, had transformed me in their eyes. They weren’t seeing the hungover bad girl who felt dressed like a circus attraction; before them was the good Indian daughter, kheer saver and homely girl, demurely previewing her wedding day duds. In other words they weren’t seeing me at all” (Hidier, 2002, p. 86).

“Classically trained? The next thing you knew he’d be telling us he listened to Lata Mangeshkar! She was this really annoying Indian singer with a voice so shrill it could double-pierce your ears and leave hoops hanging” (Hidier, 2002, p. 135).

Most Indo-Caribbeans enjoy Lata Mangeshkar’s music as she does the musical voice over in Bollywood films. Indo-Caribbeans and Indo-Caribbean Americans maintain ties with the motherland through movies and music; Lata Mangeshkar’s is a personal favorite.

### **I. Synopsis**

Dimple Rohitbhai Lala is your ABCD (American Born Confused Desi...E through Z are also provided). She is searching for an identity and it doesn’t help to have her opposing cultures personified in the form of three very significant people. Gwyn Sexton is Dimple’s best friend from childhood. Gwyn is all for promiscuity and following the latest trends in society. Dimple’s parents on the other hand would much rather see their daughter embrace her heritage and be proud of her Indian roots. It is not until Dimple makes a few mistakes, including becoming inebriated on the night before her birthday, that her parents decide to introduce her to a suitable boy for marriage. This “suitable boy,” or Karsh, is the complete antithesis to all that Dimple finds attractive and yet she ends up falling in love with him. Complications ensue as Gwyn also becomes attracted to Karsh. Now Dimple must find her niche, salvage her friendship with Gwyn (if possible), appease her parents, and shed the title of being an ABCD.



## Part II

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

While it is possible to pair *Born Confused* with a classic that shares its themes, the best match for this novel would have to be *The Odyssey*. Homer's epic recounts the voyage of Odysseus as he returns to Greece after the Trojan War. There are a plethora of obstacles that disturb his return and even challenge the fidelity that he has for his wife, shipmates and country. By all appearances, it would seem as though these two pieces are highly incompatible. What would an ancient Greek epic have to do with an Indian young adult novel? However, what one forgets is that Dimple is also on an odyssey of her own. She is struggling to find herself, her own identity while staying faithful to all those who depend upon her. She is entrusted with making the right decisions. If anything, *Born Confused* is a contemporary Eastern version of *The Odyssey*. *Born Confused* has the relatability that *The Odyssey* does not. Yes, *The Odyssey* is a wonderful piece of literature, but what is its relevance to today's students?

A few ideas for the classroom:

1. Students can chart the adventures of both Odysseus and Dimple. They can create visual representations of the obstacles that they both encounter, as well as textual evidence to supplement their visual interpretations. There can be a before "the

odyssey” rendering of Dimple and Odysseus as well as an after in order to demonstrate how much they have both changed.

2. Students can rewrite the voyage of Dimple and Odysseus from the perspective of a supplementary character.
3. Students can have a debate as to which protagonist had the more difficult of the two journeys. Seemingly simple, as one can say that Odysseus endured harsh physical labors and therefore his journey was much more difficult. But what of Dimple? She is very much so like young adults today. She had overcome mental challenges in order to be the person that she was at the end of the novel.



**Appendix G: *Koyal Dark and Mango Sweet***

**Indian Piece:** *Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet*

**Part I**

**a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

- *Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet* by Kashmira Sheth; Sheth is of Indian descent

**b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 2006

**c. Readability**

- When initially reading the novel, one would assume that its readability is limited to middle school students; the language is simple and straightforward. However, considering the age of the protagonist and the situations she encounters, the readability spans across the middle and high school English Language Arts classroom. As previously mentioned, the language is simple and students of most if not all reading levels can read the text and comprehend its contents.

**d. Age Recommendations**

- This novel is best suited for students ages 14 and up. Jeeta, the protagonist is approximately 19 years old. However considering the scenarios and plot line, the novel's relevancy can be pin pointed to the age of 14 and up.

**e. Gender of Protagonist**

- Jeeta is the female protagonist of this novel.

**f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**



- The novel takes place in the Gujarat province of India, a locale often known for its conservative ideology in regards to religion, women and social infrastructure. The location is used quite well and to the benefit of the plot line within this novel as its protagonist is a rebellious young woman fighting against her family and social expectations. It's almost as if Jeeta is attempting to take on the whole of Gujarat with her actions. Ultimately, it is her family that is effectively changed for better, but not before tumultuous battles and debates.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- This piece most certainly falls within the genre of being a YA novel as the protagonist is a teenager. Furthermore, the protagonist tackles many of the issues that are relevant to young adults, including finding one's place in society, familial turmoil, friendships and romantic relationships.

**h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are three copies currently available starting from \$10.82.

**i. Stereotypes**

- The novel's setting affects many of the stereotypes that are present within the novel and therefore there is a scarcity of American-perceived ideals. However, this does allow the reader to gain another perspective on the stereotypes that exist within a culture as opposed to an American based negative vantage point.
- Most of the stereotypes within the novel are related to women as they are still viewed as the "inferior" species. Indo-Caribbean

society allows for the chauvinistic treatment of women. Indo-Caribbean American women are not ignorant of this attitude as they themselves are victims.

“All the boys want a pretty wife with a perfect set of teeth, who is about three inches shorter and three years younger than him and comes from a rich family. And has a whitish, or at least a wheatish complexion.

‘That’s not true.’

‘Really? Find me one boy that doesn’t want a perfect girl. Remember Rita living in the next building? Three boys rejected her because she has a slightly crooked smile.’

...

I wondered why the girl always had to be perfect. A boy could be dark and handsome, so why couldn’t a girl be dark and beautiful?” (Sheth, 2006, p.4).

“Chiraj and Vivek were never around the kitchen, If I asked Chiraj to help with cleaning and cutting spinach or dicing potatoes, he always laughed and said ‘I’m not a girl. I don’t braid my hair and I don’t dice potatoes.’ Mummy never asked him to help or expected him to serve a glass of water to a guest, so why would he listen to me?” (Sheth, 2006, p.29).

“I smiled to myself, thinking it was very unlikely that a cobra would cross Kirti Auntie’s path. There were no cobras in Mumbai except for the ones that the snake charmers carried in their baskets” (Sheth, 2006, p. 40).

“On the way, Nimita explained what had happened. Girishji was supposed to get off work at eleven, and then after an early lunch he planned to bring Nimita to the theater. Instead of coming home he called and told Nimita that his boss had asked him to do some extra work and that he wouldn’t be home until two o’clock. When



Nimita asked him if she could go to the movie by herself, he said 'What about my lunch?'

'I'll take out a *thali* and keep it covered,' she said to him.

'I don't like eating cold food alone. You can see a movie next Saturday or the Saturday after that,' he said, and hung up before she could say another word" (Sheth, 2006, p.50).

" 'Cooking isn't so bad. I wish we could travel like her.'

'What's wrong with Mumbai?'

'Oh Mohini, you should have seen the pictures of her other family in America. It looked so different from anything we could ever imagine. A bird called a cardinal was the color of red oleander, and the grass looked like someone had spread a green sari on the ground. And her two sisters had hair the color of a lion's mane.'

'Her sisters? I wouldn't want to call some strange girls my sisters, would you? That's not her real family. Are they from her caste or Gujarati or even Indian? How could she make them her sisters?'" (Sheth, 2006, p. 86).

- Indo-Caribbean families are close knit and inter-communal; while progressivism allows for the movement towards social expansion and inclusion of all "non-Indians" into the Indo-Caribbean community, it is still a relatively taboo topic.

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- The themes of Sheth's novel are consistent throughout the novel. Sheth places her protagonist in complete opposition to her surrounding environment hence the reason as to why the plot is as it is. The spirit of a

rebellious teen coupled with the surrounding standardized societal values create a series of binary oppositions.

- These oppositions are: Jeeta/Gujarati Society, Jeeta/Mother Relationship, Jeeta/Sisters Relationship and finally Jeeta's inner conflict with herself to be the perfect Indian daughter while maintaining her individuality.
- There also exist the themes that are relevant to young adults and Indo-Caribbean Americans.
  - Relationships – Jeeta and Neel
  - Friendship – Jeeta and Sarina
  - Coming of Age – Jeeta develops a personality that is comfortable with
  - Familial dynamics in juxtaposition to societal perspectives

"I asked 'Do you know how much we spent on the wedding?'"

'A lot.'

'We must have. All the saris and jewelry we bought, and the hall rentals and food must have cost thousands of rupees.'

'Yes.'

I watched her divide up the dough into small balls. As she took a piece and began rolling it, I could see her brow arching and bunching up. I knew she was having a deep troubling thought.

'Why did we have to do so much?' I asked.

'It's the custom.'

'Does that mean we have to spend more than we can afford? Who cares about a stupid custom anyway?' I said dumping a spoonful of black mustard seeds into the hot oil.

'People care. Didn't you see how many relatives and friends came to admire all the things we gave Nimita?'



‘What about you? They’re talking about your marriage now. I heard Foi saying that a few people have approached with marriage offers for you.’

‘Have they?’ Mohini said, with such urgency in her voice that I couldn’t resist teasing her.

‘You paraded enough at Nimita’s wedding; you should be expecting it.’

‘Expecting what?’

‘What do people do when they gather around? They talk and look for a boy or a girl for whoever is single. That’s why Mummy and Foi had you all dressed up and prancing like a peacock in a monsoon. They wanted you to be seen’” (Sheth, 2006, p.29-30).

“For years there had been an unspoken rivalry between Mohini and Jayshree, who were only two months apart in age. They both had skin the color of sandalwood. Jayshree had a round face, with eyes that looked like they might roll off her face. Her nose was flat in the front, with tiny nostrils. A large black mole on her chin was striking though and transformed her ordinary face into a pretty one.

Mohini had an oval face, with curly lashes and a nose as straight as a candle’s flame. She had no beauty mole, but her soft wispy hair always kissed her forehead.

Kirti Auntie had never considered me pretty. She used to refer to me as the one with *bhine-vaan*, a wet complexion. When I was little I didn’t understand what it meant. One day when I was about eight years old, I figured out that she meant dark-complexioned, like when a cloth is wet and it looks much darker than it does dry. So when she called me *bhine-vaan* I said ‘It’s not as bad as *bhine-saan*, soggy sensibility, is it?’

After that day she stopped calling me *bhine-vaan*” (Sheth, 2006, p. 36-37)

“ ‘Is it bad luck to eat at your own daughter’s house?’ I asked.

‘No, its not bad luck.’

‘Then why don’t you?’

‘Why do you eat my head with senseless questions?’

‘I don’t understand why you won’t eat at Nimita’s house,’ I said.

‘Don’t you see? Nimita belongs to Girishji now. I won’t take from her.’

‘Will you take from Chiraj and Vivek after they get married?’ Of course she would take from them. I knew that, but sometimes I pretended that I didn’t. Mummy knew what I was doing and was furious.

‘*Choop ker*. You’re a *pagel*. Don’t you see any difference between a son and a daughter? A son keeps his family’s name and he belongs to his family forever. People pray to have sons. Who takes care of us while we are alive and cremates us when we die? Our sons do. Tomorrow all of you girls will take new names, but not my Chiraj and Vivek.’

‘We learned in science that both boys and girls get genes from their mother and father. They should be treated the same.’

‘This is not a science class.’ Mummy said, closing her eyes.

‘In some parts of the world the women carry the family name; they’re called matriarchal societies. In some places right here in India, it’s like that. Do you suppose they aren’t allowed to take from their son’s houses?’” (Sheth, 2006, p. 62-63).

- These aspects of chauvinism are mirrored in Indo-Caribbean society.

#### **k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- As previously stated in other chapters, the Indo-Caribbean culture and experience exists as a tangent to the Indian subcontinent’s culture. Indo-Caribbeans maintained many of their cultural facets as native Indians. However regardless of cultural similarities or differences, there still exist the common themes that are related to the human condition and young adults.

“Papa was tired after a long day of work, so I brought him tea. He took a sip and said,

‘Jeeta, I hope you find your fellow to marry.’



For this, Mummy was not ready. 'Have your sense sunk? If she finds her own match, what would people say? What would we do?'

'She'd have a groom ready and we wouldn't have to do anything.'

'What groom? What does she know about marriage and commitment? What about his caste? I don't want her marrying any useless fellow, a *hali-mavali* off the street.' Then she turned to me. 'Don't listen to your pappa. If you as much as go near a boy, I'll strip your skin off. We womenfolk have our reputations to protect. We're not brass pots that if dropped can be picked up and shined. We are earthen pots – once broken never mended'" (Sheth, 2006, p.40).

- American society allows for dating, a process Indo-Caribbean American students are involved with. Women, unfortunately, are still placed on a pedestal and having multiple boyfriends automatically denotes promiscuity.

"I'd seen the billboard from a distance earlier in the week. In the photo, the hero and the heroine were holding each other. The couple was draped in billowy white clothes against a pinkish-beige morning sky, as if they were floating down from their beautiful bungalow in the clouds. Her hands were around his waist and his hands were cupping his face. Their lips were slightly parted, ready to be united. The flow of her dark hair and his dark head added vivid contrast to the rosy clouds. It was perfect.

Now looking up from right below it, the picture had changed. The background was patchy and the faces were distorted and blurred. The parted lips of the couple had turned into seashells, and the heroine's hair into kelp" (Sheth, 2006, p.46-47).

"Mohini and I were absorbed in looking at the saris while Mummy talked to the salesman. 'The girls don't listen to us anymore.' Mummy sighed. 'It was different in our

time. When I got married I didn't buy one single new sari. My mother had collected saris over a period of two years, and that's what I got. Fashion, bashion – it didn't matter. I was glad to have those saris. Nowadays children are so fussy.'

'We didn't dare ask about anything of our choice,' he replied. 'Not even who we married. If we did, we got our ears twisted so hard that we forgot what we wanted.'

I asked him, 'Uncle, in the very old times, women like Damyanti and Kunit in the Mahabharat chose their own husbands. Don't you think we should go back to that tradition?'

I'd trapped him. He shook his head as if to break loose (Sheth, 2006, p. 146).

"For the first few days after Mohini returned from America, she was happy to be back, but occasionally she wondered if coming back was the right thing to do. Wasn't an Indian girl supposed to stay with her husband no matter what? Wasn't running away from trouble the cowardly thing to do? I assured her that no one deserved to be abused. That in coming home she showed a lot more courage than if she had stayed with Anoop" (Sheth, 2006, p.230).

## **I. Synopsis**

Jeeta is an 18 year old student whose stubborn ways often tend to land her in a heap of trouble. Living in the conservative Gujarati province of India, Jeeta finds that her liberal, women first perspective is not well received. However with the assistance of her friend Sarina, Jeeta realizes that there is more to life besides an arranged marriage and several male children. She learns to find confidence in herself, stand up to her domineering mother and even engage in the taboo practice of dating.



## Part II

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

Jeeta's free spirit and resistance to societal standards are reminiscent of Victorian age novels or at least those novels as written by female writers. As similar to the majority of the female protagonists in Victorian prose, Jeeta attempts to defy the socio-economic norms and escape her destiny. However unlike most Victorian protagonists, Jeeta is able to escape her destiny and even transform the minds of a few individuals around her. As difficult a decision as it is to choose which Victorian novel best suits *Koyal Dark*, *Mango Sweet*, my choice is *Wuthering Heights*.

Emily Bronte's novel explores the deepest and perhaps even darkest aspects of humanity in juxtaposition to Catherine's entangled love story and her plight for self-preservation and representation. The darkest moment within Sheth's novel is perhaps the instance where Mohini is brutally beaten by her husband. Despite these apparent differences which are results of the respective times in which they were written, the main female character struggles to marginalize society's impact upon her life. Catherine, unfortunately, succumbs to societal pressure and dies an adulteress. Jeeta on the other hand establishes herself away from expectations and even garners the somewhat miniscule assistance of her mother.

Regardless of time period or cultural difference, the common female based literary qualities are prevalent throughout both of these novels hence the reason as to why I believe they will create an excellent pairing.

#### Classroom Ideas:

1. By now, the students should be well aware of the societal constructs of both Victorian age Britain and India as they are closely interconnected. They should also be aware of the fact that these societies were and perhaps still are patriarchal societies before the creation of women's rights. The task at hand for this particular assignment is to have students create a male protagonist that narrates each tale and to then switch these protagonists. Although the protagonists will retain their personality constructs, they must adapt and adhere to the storyline. This task may be repetitive as I've mentioned it in several other novel summaries, but I feel as though it is challenging as well as capable of providing a more insightful learning environment.
2. This task asks students to transform these stories into comic strips. Students must pay attention to the key elements that are involved with the creation of any story, i.e. plot, theme, character, descriptions. They are to create a comic strip that represents the significant moments within each text as well as the moments that are comparable within each novel. Once they have completed this task, they can then switch the comic frames of each story to create a completely new story that still maintains the concurrent themes.
3. This particular activity is designed to engage all students, but specifically the boys. Using arts and crafts, carpentry tools or anything along the lines of



engineering techniques, students are to design houses that best represent one of their favorite characters within the novels. They may work individually or in groups.

**Appendix H: *The Not So Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen***



## **Indian Piece: The Not So Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen**

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

*The Not So Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* is written by Mitali Perkins; Perkins is of Indian descent.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

This novel was published in New York City during the year of 2005.

#### **c. Readability**

The linguistic content of the book is fairly simple. The language flows and the reader is not present with difficult or complex words. Although this may be a double edged sword, the reader will find that he or she will complete the novel in a significantly short amount of time. The book itself is predominantly designed for early high school and late middle school students, as the protagonist is 13 years old. However, readers/students who are older than the above ages will have little to no difficulty at all with reading this piece.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

The age recommendation for this novel is between the ages of twelve to fourteen. As previously mentioned the protagonist is thirteen and therefore readers within this age group will be able understand the language of the novel as well as the socio-cultural content.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**

Sunita Sen is the protagonist of this novel, and she is a young lady. She is the youngest of three siblings.

#### **f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

Sunita's life is displayed within the suburbs of San Francisco. It just so happens that her maternal grandparents are visiting from India ultimately bringing with them the culture from which Sunita feels alienated. San Francisco is representative of Sunita's all American lifestyle – with her pizza, jeans and American friends. She doesn't need to worry about or understand her culture. But with a tiny portion of India living with her, she must learn to confront these fears, juxtaposed with her daily American norms.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

Without much of a doubt, this novel is a prime example of young adult literature. This piece exemplifies the seven criteria for young adult literature. Please reference the appendices for further details.

**h. Availability (checked with Amazon)**

There are approximately 85 copies available on Amazon.com.

**i. Stereotypes**

Sunita is uncomfortable with her heritage and illustrates her disdain by mocking her family. In addition, there are her classmates who patronize her customs forcing Sunita to despise her ethnic roots more so than before.

“Together, Sunita's, Ilana's and Kevin's tacks represent two-thirds of the world's population,” he told the class. “Despite what we see in our neighborhood, most of the world does not have white skin and European roots” (Perkins, 2005, p. 9).

- As an educator and student, it is a personal desire for all students to recognize this fact.



It had been like scene from a bad movie. The whole family – Sunita, her parents, Geetie and Ajit, or A.J., who'd driven to the airport from Sanford University – watched and waved from behind the glass that overlooked the international arrivals and customs area. Her grandfather wore a traditional white dhoti - a long piece of cotton cloth wrapped around his waist and legs. Her grandmother clutched mangoes with the other. Mangoes were her son-in-law's favorite fruit. The customs officer patiently, and then not so patiently explained why she couldn't bring fresh fruit from another country into America.

Finally they got through customs. And sometime during all the tears and embracing, Mom had stopped being her mother and had changed into being their daughter right in front of Sunita's eyes (Perkins, 2005, p. 10).

You could smell the spices sizzling as soon as you walked in - garlic and cumin, onion and turmeric. When Michael visited over the summer, Sunita hurried him downstairs before his nose had a chance to get assaulted. Liz on the other hand, started sniffing like a puppy and followed the smells into the kitchen (Perkins, 2005, p. 18).

“Do you have to wear that dumb dot on the middle of your forehead, Mom? And what is that red stuff on your head? It looks just like blood!” (Perkins, 2005, p. 21).

- Indo-Caribbeans' customs were and still are regarded in a condescending manner, especially after initial immigration from India. The same can be said in regards to the experiences of Indo-Caribbean Americans as their culture is subject to ridicule due to Indian stereotypes.

“Check it out – the colored girls stick together” (Perkins, 2005, p. 79).

Sunita watched them disappear into the crowd of people milling around the plaza. She felt a pang of envy. African on the outside and African on the inside. Nice and simple. Like Liz and Michael. And LeAnn. White – oops, she meant Euro-American – on the outside, and Euro-American on the inside (Perkins, 2005, p. 95).

- The immense irony in this statement is that no descendant of any immigrant ethnicity, including European Americans have clear cut conceptions of themselves. Their personalities and values create opposition which ultimately conjoin to establish meaning.

Geetie had lectured the whole family one day, reminding them that American and white were not the same thing. “We’ve decide to use the term Euro-American,” she announced (Perkins, 2005, p. 127).

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

The overlapping theme throughout the novel is the conflict that Sunita has with her family and culture. Of course, there are generalized themes, but I believe that this one specific idea is tantamount to the piece’s meaning. Perkins fleshes out this idea of conflict through the physical and emotional battle that Sunita wages against her mother. Sunita becomes the rebellious daughter, pushing her mother to surpass the stereotypical view of an Indian female and revert into the mother that she knows; a woman who is not afraid of what others think and acts in accordance with her personality. Indian cultural and of course Indo-Caribbean/Indo-Caribbean American students are well aware of the inequalities in regards to women’s education. Sunita’s mother passes on the offer to be a professor in order to appease her traditional parents and husband. Undoubtedly, this causes immense problems with Sunita and her mother’s relationship as she cannot forgive



her mother for adhering to antiquated standards and abandoning her dream. Indian/Indo-Caribbean women are well aware of the attempts by patriarchal societies to marginalize their education and self-worth. Sunita herself however must learn that not all foreign cultures and traditions are alien, especially if they encompass one's ethnic background. This concept of growth and self-acceptance propels the novel further, creating a Sunita Sen that did not exist on page one.

A few generalized themes:

- Friendships
- Relationships (Boy/Girl – Romance or otherwise)
- Familial bonds and learning to accept them
- Engaging in Ethnic/Cultural self-discovery
- Becoming comfortable in one's skin

**k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

As previously mentioned, it is the conflicts that Sunita Sen experiences that drive the novel's plot line. However, these same conflicts create the material that is relevant, relatable and realistic for Indo-Caribbean American students.

Was there a correct term for someone like Sunita Sen? On the outside an Indian girl dressed in American clothes. On the inside, total confusion (Perkins, 2005, p. 127).

- Pointedly, Indo-Caribbean American students experience this paradigm continuously, never knowing how to explain their heritage without sounding repetitive or redundant.

“For what? So that Ranee Sen, the Ideal Indian Woman, Untouched by Western sin, can spend all her waking hours waiting on her family hand and foot?” (Perkins, 2005, p. 149).

Sunita...loved having her birthday so close to Christmas. It was a great time for a party, with so many people celebrating peace and love and brotherhood and all that wonderful stuff. This year would seem empty without one. But she certainly couldn't make it through a party that included friends from school, Sunita Sen *and* her grandparents. She pictured Dadu interrupting a steamy rock video to deliver a lecture on the evils of the American entertainment industry. She imagined her classmates politely trying to dance to sitar music with Didu watching, beaming, and tapping her foot. She'd never make it alive through an evening like that (Perkins, 2005, p. 160).

“Sarees are very comfortable,” her mom had continued. “Besdies, it makes your grandparents happy to see that I haven't changed much, and I think it makes your old fashioned dad happy too.”

- Enforcing gender roles, Sunita's mother seeks to appease her father and husband, the two dominant males in her life.

“There is nothing as lovely and graceful on a woman as a saree,” her dad said, peering over his newspaper to admire the green silk one his wife was wearing.



Sunita sighed. Dad was hopelessly stuck in his ways. But she'd expected more from Mom. When Michael had begun to come over in the summer, Mom hadn't once called Sunita by her pet name. She and Michael would play ping pong downstairs, and Mom would bring them a plate of cookies. And then she'd leave, after just the amount of small talk, carefully calling her daughter Sunita the whole time... She was mad at Mom for being so wishy-washy, but at the same time she was secretly relieved. Her grandmother and grandfather were so...different. And Michael was so...well, so *normal* (Perkins, 2005, p. 13-14).

How could she ever have imagined that someone like Michael Morrison could ever understand her dilemma? People like the Morrison and Schaeffers were made of apple pie and country clubs and stained glass windows and pot roast. The Sens were made of chicken curry and sarees and sitar music and incense. Michael was even a Boy Scout, for heaven's sake (Perkins, 2005, p. 83).

- Many immigrant students and descendants of immigrants have a “grass is greener” perspective in regards to the “majority.” In reality, most American born or immigrants grow to realize that assimilation and cultural comfort are relative.

## **I. Synopsis**

Sunita or Sunni Sen is the average teenage girl. She has a huge crush on her best friend Michael, loves to play tennis and can repeatedly watch *Casablanca*. But when her maternal grandparents decide to visit their daughter for a year, Sunita's life becomes thrown upside down. Sunita must learn to adapt, much less like, the culture that she refers to as being so weird or strange in order to peacefully co-exist with her family.

Simultaneously, Sunita finds her voice in the cultural hubbub just as her mother is losing hers.

## **Part II**

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

Although there are many books that can complement *The Not So Star Spangled Life of Sunita Sen*, I believe that the best option would have to be *The Great Gatsby*. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel that recalls the roaring twenties and the interchangeable lives of six people. However, these people including Nick the protagonist and Jay Gatsby himself, are all drawn to the lives they lead because of its reminiscence of the past. They cannot learn from their mistakes and move on. Sunita Sen is a complete paradox of this concept. Sunita often finds herself resigned to fate and the way things were; especially in regards to her mother attempting to please her parents. But Sunita is not happy about this outcome and manipulates the situation to her favor while learning how to move forward and not dwell on the past or pre-grandparents' visit. The fact that these two pieces do not share a plethora of obvious similarities only furthers the potential correlation that students can find.

A few classroom suggestions:



1. Fashion Vista – This assignment asks students to analyze the clothing worn by all of the characters within the novels as well as the functionality of these articles within the context of the piece. Students can design the articles of clothing that are described within each text, create a fashion show and then compare and contrast the functionality within an essay. Students can then discuss/debate the main ideas of each piece in juxtaposition to the pieces of clothing.
2. Casablanca – Sunni's favorite movie is *Casablanca*. *Casablanca* ironically enough occurs within the era of *The Great Gatsby*. Students can create a movie that resembles the plot line of *Casablanca* but with the events of both Sunni and Jay Gatsby's respective narratives. In essence, this assignment would ask students to focus upon events and concepts that are relevant to the main idea of each piece and then to fuse those ideas into a screen play. The screen play can be performed if the students so desire.
3. Age Swap – One of the primary differences between the main characters of both pieces is the age difference. Sunita is a teenager whereas Jay Gatsby is an adult. An activity that can be completed is to have students re-write *The Great Gatsby* from the perspective of Sunita, i.e. her culture and social issues. The students are not to place Sunita in the time frame of *The Great Gatsby*. Simply, *The Great Gatsby* is to be re-written as if it has an Indo-American male as its protagonist. Contrastingly, the same can be done for Sunita's story. It may be written from the perspective of Jay Gatsby.

**Appendix I: “Mrs. Sen” from *Interpreter of Maladies***



## **Indian Piece: *Interpreter of Maladies*: “Mrs. Sen’s”**

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author’s Ethnicity**

- The short story “Mrs. Sen’s” is from Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*; Lahiri is of East Indian descent.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 1999

#### **c. Readability**

- The language that Lahiri uses throughout her short stories is simple. She does not ornately phrase her syntax in order to convey the text’s message. Readers, primarily high school-ers and up, will be able to read the text and comprehend it. The text itself is relatively short, spanning twenty-four pages. However, it is imperative to remember that simplicity should not be mistaken for a literary analysis at face value. Students should be able to read the text, the first time around, and grasp an understanding as to what Lahiri implies. The second time, students should be able to analyze Lahiri’s theme of cultures clashing as well as the concept of being a “foreigner.” It is my suggestion that students in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades should read this short story.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- The age recommendation for this text is age 15 and up.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**

- There is an omniscient narrator. Mrs. Sen and Eliot are the two main characters in the short story. However, the narrator tends to focus a lot of attention on Eliot as well as the relationship that he has to his surroundings.

**f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- As previously mentioned, the short story has two main characters; Eliot and Mrs. Sen. The setting has an effect upon both characters. The majority of the story revolves around the time that is spent in Mrs. Sen's apartment. The exact location of the apartment is unknown; Lahiri does not specify where the Sens live aside from it being in the United States. Mrs. Sen is a recent immigrant from Calcutta and has a significant amount of difficulty acclimating herself to American society. She is isolated and alone, unable to grasp the cold walls of her apartment and the new world outside of her. Eliot is a young boy, approximately eleven years old, and is forced into independence by his divorcee mother. Eliot does not receive nurturing and tender feelings from his mother and is therefore unable to comprehend the world from which Mrs. Sen hails. Eliot, however, finds a calming routine in Mrs. Sen's world despite the fact that they are both foreigners to each other.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- This piece is a short story. While the protagonist is not necessarily a young adult, it is arguable that this piece can fit into the young adult literary genre. Eliot, around whom the majority of the piece revolves, experiences



the eccentricities of Mrs. Sen as he is a foreigner in her world. He juxtaposes his experiences with Mrs. Sen to those of his life with his mother.

#### **h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 90 copies of this novel available on Amazon.com; the lowest price is \$0.90.

#### **i. Stereotypes**

- There aren't many stereotypes, if any at all, that are presented in "Mrs. Sen's." The culture clash between Eliot and Mrs. Sen's world creates a sense of tension on the part of Mrs. Sen and an awakening for Eliot.

"She was about thirty. She had a small gap between her teeth and faded pockmarks on her chin, yet her eyes were beautiful, with thick flaring eyebrows and liquid flourishes that extended beyond the natural width of the lids. She wore a shimmering white sari patterned with orange paisleys, more suitable for an evening affair than for that quiet, faintly drizzling August afternoon. Her lips were coated in a complementary coral gloss and a bit of the color had strayed beyond the borders.

Yet it was his mother, Eliot had thought, in her cuffed beige shorts and rope soled shoes, who looked odd. Her cropped hair, a shade similar to her shorts, seemed too lank and sensible, and in that room where all things were so carefully covered, her shaved knees and thighs too exposed. She refused a biscuit each time Mrs. Sen extended the plate in her direction and asked a long series of questions, the answers to which she recorded on a steno pad" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 113).

- The perfect example of binary oppositions, in the above quote you have the clash of cultures with Mrs. Sen's traditional Indian customs and manners of dress in juxtaposition to Eliot's mother's

sensible American outfit. Although Eliot's mother is the one who appears to be the outcast, she still holds the power as she diligently records Mrs. Sen's answers.

"From where Eliot sat on the sofa, he could detect her curious scent of mothballs and cumin, and he could see the perfectly centered part in her braided hair, which was shaded with crushed vermilion and therefore appeared to be blushing. At first Eliot had wondered if she had cut her scalp, or if something had bitten her there. But then one day he saw her standing before a bathroom mirror, solemnly applying, with the head of a thumbtack, a fresh stroke of scarlet powder, which she stored in a small jam jar. A few grains of the powder fell onto the bridge of her nose as she used the thumbtack to stamp a dot above her eyebrows. 'I must wear the powder everyday,' she explained when Eliot asked her what it was for, 'for the rest of the days that I am married.'

'Like a wedding ring you mean?'

'Exactly, Eliot, exactly like a wedding ring. Only with no fear of losing it in the dishwasher'" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 177).

"Two things, Eliot learned, made Mrs. Sen happy. One was the arrival of a letter from her family. It was her custom to check the mailbox after driving practice. She would unlock the box, but she would ask Eliot to reach inside, telling him what to look for, and she would shut her eyes and shield them with her hands while he shuffled through the bills and magazines that came in Mr. Sen's name. At first Eliot found Mrs. Sen's anxiety incomprehensible; his mother had a p.o. box in town and she collected mail so infrequently that once their electricity was cut off for three days" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 121).

- Mail serves as the only attachment for Mrs. Sen to the motherland as the same can be said for the ancestors of Indo-Caribbeans and Indo-



Caribbeans themselves. Severing ties with the homeland denotes a loss of community and given aforementioned analyses of Indo-Caribbean culture, a loss of self.

- The above quotes illustrate the new found knowledge that Eliot has gained throughout his experiences with Mrs. Sen. Eliot does not stereotype Mrs. Sen. Rather, he questions her to obtain answers.
- The following quotes exemplify the misguided perceptions of Mrs. Sen and her family. Mrs. Sen's disdain for America becomes obvious as the reader progresses throughout the story. She is homesick and unable to adapt; therefore she unleashes her frustrations upon things that are "American."

"‘Send pictures, they write. Send pictures of your new life. What picture can I send?’ She sat, exhausted, at the edge of her bed, where there was now barely room for her. ‘They think I live the life of a Queen, Eliot.’ She looked around the blank walls of the room. ‘They think I press buttons and the house is clean. They think I live in a palace’” (Lahiri, 1999, p.126).

- Indo-Caribbean ancestors immigrated in the hopes of a better life, only to find lies and betrayal after crossing the Atlantic. They presented false images of prosperity in an attempt not to lose face in light of their mistake. Admittedly, many Indo-Caribbeans had good lives upon immigrating to the Caribbean, but the majority of these ancestors faced great adversity.

“ ‘Eliot,’ Mrs. Sen asked him while they were sitting on the bus, ‘will you put your mother in a nursing home when she is old?’

‘Maybe,’ he said. ‘But I would visit everyday.’

‘You say that now, but you will see, when you are a man your life will be in places you cannot know now.’ She counted on her fingers: ‘You will have a wife, and children of your own, and they will want to be driven to different places at the same time. No matter how kind they are, one day they will complain about visiting your mother, and you will get tired of it too, Eliot. You will miss one day, and another, and then she will have to drag herself onto a bus just to get herself a bag of lozenges’” (Lahiri, 1999, p. 131-132).

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- The driving theme within Lahiri’s piece is the sense of estrangement from home, or at least the incomprehension of the concept “home.” Coupled with this is the culture clash, a classic binary opposition with two differing cultures, thrown together in the hopes of finding a deeper meaning. Unfortunately, it is these ideas that torment, even aggravate Mrs. Sen’s homesickness. Eliot, although not explicitly stated, does not know what it means to have a home. He is lost in the daily grand scheme of things and forced to mature at too young of an age.

“ ‘Eliot, if I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come?’

‘Mrs. Sen, what’s wrong?’

‘Nothing. I am only asking if someone would come.’

Eliot shrugged. ‘Maybe.’

‘At home, that is all that you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone. But just raise your voice a little bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole



neighborhood and half of another of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with the arrangements.'

By then Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables. He thought of his own home, just five miles away, and the young married couple who waved from time to time as they jogged at sunset along the shore. On Labor Day they'd had a party. People were piled up on the deck, eating, drinking, the sound of their laughter rising above the weary sigh of the waves. Eliot and his mother weren't invited. It was one of the rare days his mother had off, but they didn't go anywhere. She did the laundry and balanced the checkbook, and, with Eliot's help vacuumed the inside of the car. Eliot had suggested that they go through the car wash a few miles down the road as they did every now and then, so that they could sit inside, safe and dry, as soap and water and a circle of giant canvas ribbons slapped the windshield, but his mother said she was too tired, and sprayed the car with a hose. When by evening, the crowd on the neighbor's deck began dancing, she looked up their number in the phone book and asked them to keep it down.

'They might call you,' Eliot said eventually to Mrs. Sen. 'But they might complain that you were making too much noise'' (Lahiri, 1999, p. 117).

- As previously mentioned, community plays a significant role in regards to self-identification as well as social and gender roles. To lose this community is equitable to losing a family member.

"Then the road was just a road, the other cars merely a part of the scenery. But when he sat with Mrs. Sen, under an autumn sun that glowed without warmth throughout the trees, he saw how the same stream of cars made her knuckles pale, her wrists tremble, and her English falter.

'Everyone, this people, too much in their world'' (Lahiri, 1999, p. 121).

**k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- As previously mentioned, Mrs. Sen feels an intense agony at having left her family and life behind and therefore, it is feasible to note parallels between her fictional experiences and the struggles of the Indo-Caribbean population. Indo-Caribbeans uprooted themselves from India in the hopes of acquiring a better life. Instead, they found isolation and homesickness. Even Indo-Caribbeans who uproot themselves from the Caribbean feel the same angst's and pains. Personally speaking, I know of several family members who were desperate to return to Guyana after their immigration; the change in lifestyle was immensely difficult. They are now settled here in America, but have not resigned themselves to living here for the rest of their lives.

"She had brought the blade from India, where apparently there was at least one in every household. 'Whenever there is a wedding in the family,' she told Eliot one day, 'or a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night.' Her profile hovered protectively over her work, a confetti of cucumber, eggplant, and onion skins heaped around her. 'It is impossible to fall asleep those nights listening to their chatter.' She paused to look at a pine tree framed by the living room window. 'Here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence'" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 115).



“Eliot learned to remove his sneakers first thing in Mrs. Sen’s doorway, and to place them on the bookcase next to a row of Mrs. Sen’s slippers, each a different color, with soles as flat as cardboard and a ring of leather to hold her big toe” (Lahiri, 1999, p. 114).

## **I. Synopsis**

Mr. and Mrs. Sen are recent Indian immigrants to America. Mr. Sen accepted a teaching position at the local university, leaving Mrs. Sen at home. Mrs. Sen, in an attempt to diffuse her depression and homesickness, begins babysitting Eliot. Eliot’s mother is a divorcee workaholic, often forgetting to make time for her son. Eliot and Mrs. Sen originate from drastically different cultures with Mrs. Sen often perceiving Eliot’s American culture in a negative light. However, they are able to co-exist and Eliot forms an attachment to Mrs. Sen as she does to him. Seemingly simplistic, Lahiri’s short story delves into the elements of human nature that are cross-cultural; isolation and the need to feel loved.

## **Part II**

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

While it is not impossible to pair “Mrs. Sen’s” with a novel, I believe that the best analyses are done with a piece that is of a similar length. In this case, it is of my opinion that the best pairing of “Mrs. Sen’s” is with Robert Frost’s poetry. Stylistically speaking, Frost’s poetry does not use ornate language to express his sentimental value, as Lahiri’s

text is not filled with superfluous language. Both Lahiri and Frost have a musical quality to their pieces; a musical quality that allows the reader to envision the situation that is described and perhaps then some. As far as the content is concerned, Frost's pieces often touch the core of human emotions and even the very facets of human nature. Lahiri's short stories, in addition to focusing upon being a foreigner in a new or distant climate, discusses, dissects and explores through personification the elements that make us human, emotionally speaking at least. In addition, Lahiri's work is often referred to as poetry in prose format. It is only fair to pair a short story, such as "Mrs. Sen's" with poetry that is similar in nature.

A few classroom ideas:

1. Taking into consideration that Lahiri's prose has a poetic melody, students can swap one of Frost's poems with Lahiri's short story. Students can select one of their favorite Frost poems and stretch the poem into a short story, creating a main character(s), theme and plot. Conversely, students will take "Mrs. Sen's" and convert it into a poem that follows Frost's rhyme scheme. If students are interested in presenting their pieces, there is the option of creating a "Def Poetry Jam" session.
2. Both Lahiri and Frost incorporate a significant amount of descriptive imagery into their respective pieces. Students are to attempt the emulation of both Lahiri and Frost's writing style. They may even fuse the two together, if they wish. Before beginning the writing assignment, as a class the students must brainstorm concepts that describe the elements of human nature and the human condition.



Students will then choose one of the ideas that they brainstormed and create either a Frost or Lahiri styled piece.

3. Although this idea is typical for an English Language Arts classroom, students can create a comparative essay to find any themes or concepts that they may share. After the students have completed their essays, they are then to create an abstract piece of art (sculpture, collage, etc.) that represents the thesis of their essay.

## **Appendix J: *Burnt Bread and Chutney***



## **Indian Piece: *Burnt Bread and Chutney***

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

- *Burnt Bread and Chutney* by Carmit Delman; Delman is of Indo-Jewish descent

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 2002

#### **c. Readability**

- *Burnt Bread and Chutney* has a readability that extends beyond a high school context. Personally, I can foresee this text read within a college composition classroom as well. However, as far as a high school classroom is concerned, it is probable that this novel is best suited for advanced placement students who often demonstrate a higher capability for the amount of literary engagement that is required of a piece such as this. That is not to say, that students in normal English classrooms will not appreciate this novel. It is just a personal perspective that *Burnt Bread and Chutney* should be read within AP classes.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- As this is a memoir, Delman recounts her adolescence and initial college years in a non-linear format. Therefore, the age recommendation is for students who are sixteen and up, despite the fact that Delman's recollections begin at a much younger age.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**

- Carmit Delman is the female protagonist of this memoir.

**f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- Delman's memoir takes place in several locations. Delman recounts her own life in various suburbia of New York and the kibbutz of Israel. However, when focusing upon her grandmother's life she refers to the Bene Israel settlement in India. Delman's memoir is highly complex and to attempt simplifying the locales in this piece, into categories does not do it justice. New York, or at least Delman's life while living in New York exemplifies the complex juxtaposition that she has in regards to being a Jewish Indian as opposed to a Jewish European. Through her experiences within the American Hassidic culture, Delman learns about social status, class and perception. While living in Israel, Delman experiences a sense of equality that is obviously lacking within the United States. She lives in simplicity and does not feel compelled in continuously justifying her existence. As for India, Delman uses her grandmother's story to provide the reader with the awareness of India's social impact upon Judaism and ultimately its impact upon Delman and her family.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- There is a young adult narrator during several chapters of this memoir. Generically speaking, this piece falls into the category of an autobiographical memoir.

**h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 14 copies of this novel available with the lowest price of \$3.52.



## i. Stereotypes

- There is a significant amount of stereotypes within this culture. Delman stereotypes her Indo-Jewish culture, American culture, Indian culture and Jewish culture (as separate entities, of course). The stereotypes, usually negative in nature, are symbolic as they represent Delman's inability to find herself in her culture's grand scheme.

"...What if I offered up Gertie? She was older than me, fit, strong willed, skilled at folding, maybe a laundry prodigy. A very reasonable option. 'What about Gertie?' I asked decidedly, certain I had hit upon something. 'What can't she fold the clothes?'

'She is arranging all the beds upstairs. And then she is going to come down here and wash the pots and pans.' Gertie had already been put to work, my plan was ruined.

'What about Tzvi then?' I suggested, trying to pin it on my younger brother.

'He is outside playing.'

'Playing? Why does he get to play and I have to work?' I asked, indignant, but I already knew the answer.

With a firm splat of dough to wooden board, Nana-bai said matter-of-factly, 'He's the boy.'

'That's so unfair. All these clothes in here, they're his clothes too.'

'But you're his sister. You should respect him and do things for him.'

No matter how many times I heard this, still my mind reeled with its injustice. 'This isn't India,' I said angrily. 'Things are different here in America. Just 'cause he's a boy, it doesn't make him better. It doesn't mean I have to be his slave.' In the good ol' U.S.-of-A. – world outside our house, women expected to be every bit as powerful as men. So I knew that all of American ideology backed me up at this point. And I held it over her, feeling myself to be an angry ambassador" (Delman, 2002, p.45).

- Referring to the concept of being an ambassador or interpreter, Delman's young adult self must navigate both contemporary and traditional values, maintain these beliefs and still be true to herself and what she thinks is best.

"...For me, with my own particular shy chemistry and relationship to the world, I grew up understanding myself firstly by the traditional, often backward difference between girls and boys. Boys could make the decisions. Girls could only support these decisions. Boys could wander around in public, meeting lots of people. Girls had to stay safely and modestly in the house. Boys could fart and burp. Girls couldn't; they had to be dainty. Boys could whistle. Girls shouldn't because if they did, I was told, they would grow a mustache. Boys were loud. Girls must be quiet. Just to be near boys or men was inherently dangerous. Women who were violated had often brought it upon themselves from that sort of thing, from going somewhere alone at night with a man, from laughing too freely" (Delman, 2002, p. 49).

"...For awhile they would ride along with us, clicking their boots to the music, passing around a pipe, joining in for a chorus or two. I would look out the window. And with a belly full of Burger King, with the visions of green hills and storefronts and bridges flicking by, I felt graced by such company. Because in those moments, there was no passing of time, no differentiation. The wagon trails of the pioneers, the tarred up highways rolling by, and even the barefoot pilgrim's paths in India and Israel and we were all one long delicious genetic road. And my family in our station wagon was as American as any other out there.

These were proven Americans. And I still felt more so myself from just rubbing elbows with them. I felt this even though I was told to love all that made me out of the ordinary here. The color of my skin. The continual touches of other lands and beliefs in



me. I felt this because there was still sometimes a need to be simply ordinary. To not have to explain what it means to be an Indian Jew, or who came where, and when, and why” (Delman, 2002, p. 67).

- A beautiful quote, Delman articulates the desire of many Indo-Caribbean American students to be simply American without having to explain the complex history of their people.

“When we explained there that we were the mixture of an Indian Jew and an Eastern European Jew, people automatically identified us by the brownness and what made us nonwhite. Their assumptions drew a distinct line between us and them. ‘So’ they said after hearing about the thousands of years of history, ‘I guess generations ago, the Jews in India must have intermarried with the Hindus. That’s how you have that beautiful brown color.’ They said this theoretically, as though they were students of human civilization figuring out how white Jews evolved into brown. They even said this admiringly as though they were envious of our tan. But in making such a statement, they – the people who even believed in the same G-d we believed in were even pointing to us as the others and claiming, the skin says it all. We, Ashkenazi Jews, are the pure originals. You, Indian Jews, are mixed products” (Delman, 2002, 151).

- Indo-Caribbean American students are still labeled as Indian, much to their chagrin. The desire to classify all of the “strangers” or “others” into an identifiable category marginalizes the importance of each culture’s diversity.

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- There are several generic themes throughout this novel. Some of which are:

- Human sexuality/Sexual Awakenings
- Patriarchal Society
- Familial Obligations
- Familial Tensions and Relationships
- Social Inadequacies
- Friendships

However the one theme that I believe is the most prevalent is this fragmentation of self that Delman continuously refers to throughout the text. She is neither Indian nor Jewish but rather the infusion of them both. She is the epitome of most Indo-Caribbean Americans, as she struggles to straddle her ethnic culture and the socio-cultural expectations of America. However, because of her family's dislocation, Delman must first understand what her ethnic culture is before tackling the other aspects of her personality identification.

“Though they adopted the local language, Marathi, and manners of dress like the sari, along with some of the other Indian customs, the Bene Israel kept mostly to themselves. They maintained the few Jewish rituals that could be passed on, such as the Sabbath day or Shabbat, circumcision, basic prayers, and laws of kosher food. They were skilled in oil pressing and the community grew throughout the generations, even building up its own stock of folklore and customs. The Judaism absorbed an Indian essence which emerged in the prayer melodies and rituals, the fasting, pilgrimages, and caste like patterns that distinguished full-blooded Bene Israel from those who were products of mixed unions” (Delman, 2002, p. xii).



- A prime example of this is in Indo-Caribbean American culture is “matikore.” Matikore is a pre-wedding ceremony conducted by matriarchs celebrating human sexuality and wedding night expectations. Completely unlike Indian customs, it was invented by Indo-Caribbeans and although it maintains many facets of the Hindu wedding, there are a plethora of cultural adaptations.

“Anna and Eliza came from different climates, different prejudices. They had different animals and colors and people populating their stories. Had they known about the joint destiny of their descendants, they might have been frightened by the foreignness. In her Russian village, Anna might have wrinkled her nose at the smell of India heat. In her Bombay home, Eliza would have raised an eyebrow at the Ashkenazi gefilte fish and herring. One outlandish, the other too proper, they certainly would have disagreed with each other’s story telling methods” (Delman, 2002, p. 32).

“Maybe if we had connected deeply to the general Indian community, our family identity might have been more straightforward, a clear cut piece of Indian immigration. But we were Jewish also and general Indian culture was another sphere entirely. For a while, I studied traditional Indian folk dance. In that time, the rhythm of the dances, the shared sweat and practice seemed to be a bond between me, the one Jewish girl, and all other Hindu girls. In an old studio room, we learned to fold our palms, to fan our fingers, to widen our eyes dramatically and pound our heels in rhythm. And I felt myself to be just as one of the others, dark-skinned, reaching far back into the music and stumbling forward into grace.

At the holiday party though, when families came together in the studio to exchange presents and wish each other happy holiday, I was suddenly aware that none of the other Indians in that room would have guessed what holiday I celebrated when I went home. I stood around the others, eating pink glitter cookies, fidgety for not dancing. And suddenly it seemed the connection to just India was not enough to stand alone between shy girls. How could I explain to them all I learned in Torah class? They had never even heard of Indian Jews” (Delman, 2002, p. 59).

- How can an Indo-Caribbean American girl explain the dutty wine to their Indian-American counterparts? While a connection to the Indian community is feasible, the creolization that resulted in the Indo-Caribbean American culture leads to more segregation than community.

“For me, a traditional Shabbat meal had always been elaborate Indian dishes” (Delman, 2002, p.64).

“I was antagonistic and cryptic, poking at those closest to me, and fighting with my siblings and parents. Most all, I wanted to get far away from everything that was Indian or Jewish because these were the things that I felt branded me as the uncomfortable stranger. They made up the core of my vulnerability. I knew that the curry smell seeped from my very pores, alerting those around me like the musk of a fearful animal” (Delman, 2002, p. 120).

“Oversensitive at the inequalities between us and them, we also felt certain that in a small community, nothing could remain a secret for long. Our financial situation was embarrassingly apparent from the fact that we did not have enough money to pay hundreds of dollars for seats at high holiday services... We felt we were obvious, in that our rusty old station wagon sat in the parking lot near their shiny new imported cars. And in that we did not frequent their polished hairdressers, country clubs, gyms and restaurants” (Delman, 2002, p. 149).

“Many people did not know about our history. And when we explained it all to them, they were delighted and fascinated and thrilled. They embraced us as if we were their own and long lost. But a few people were outright cruel to us because of the differences, and these were the ones who branded our minds. They offered cool disinterested small talk and barbed comments, passing by quickly as if we had somehow offended them. At first, we lived in fear of their behavior, so far away from our world of gentleness, of eagerness to please. Eventually, however, we became scornful of them, because they thought we could not see through their poor offerings. They thought we were grateful for their morsels of



condescension. These were individuals who could not accept Jews who were not part of an elite, plastic formula. To them we were poor oddities, variations of the truth, and exotic in a way that recalled colonial ideas of Orientalism...souvenirs of some vacation abroad” (Delman, 2002, p. 152).

- This very orientalism that Delman speaks of is tied directly to colonial perspectives; if someone or something is from a foreign land, he or she is considered to be exotic or new. Automatically, they are treated as a trinket or oddity that cannot be explained.

“In this period of my life, moved by the vastness of civilizations as I had never been moved before, I rediscovered India. Since my brief flirtation with traditional Indian dance as a child, my interaction with Indian culture was limited to how it played out in the small Indian Jewish community. But in college, surrounded by Indians of all kinds, I was surprised to find I longed to connect with them and the larger Indian culture. People who in skin resembled me, who others likened to me. People who grew up on the same foods I grew up on, and for whom the temperaments, philosophies, and sensibilities that formed them were birthed in the same landscape as those that formed me” (Delman, 2002, p. 189).

“An Indian restaurant would not have been my first choice for a date. It raised all sorts of complications. If noting my mix of facial features, the busboy eyed me curiously and asked, ‘Are you Indian?’ I would hesitate, tense. How to explain it all as he pours us glasses of water – Jewish, Indian, American and Israeli? So I might just tell the busboy no, to be done with it. And yet, still, I would feel the need, the pride, to explain our family history to my date and to inform him that I had not yet found a curry as delicious as my mother’s. I wanted to be able to stake a claim in India, but I could not yet easily let it stake a claim in me” (Delman, 2002, p. 221).

#### **k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

As mentioned before, Delman's memoir presents the reader with situations that are highly relevant to Indo-Caribbean American students. Like Delman's narrator, Indo-Caribbean Americans must straddle their ancestral culture, India, the infused culture of the Caribbean and the social expectations within America. Many of the emotions and sentiments that Delman express are relevant to Indo-Caribbean Americans.

Below is a quote regarding arranged marriages. Arranged marriages were and still are popular in Indo-Caribbean societies.

"...A small man with weak arms and an unusually large stomach, when the matchmaker walked through the streets he knew very well he looked awkward, even ugly. But in discussing brides and dowries at the center of every transaction, he was exactly in his element, and appeared, he imagined so, to be powerful and calculating.

But now he was not dealing with just any family. And as papa cleared his throat, the matchmaker saw that already he had been silent too long. He straightened up in his seat a little bit. 'Sir. Your daughter is blessed to come from such a respected family. Everyone in this city admires you, sir, for your prosperity in the printing press, for your generosity towards the synagogue, for quietly taking so many orphans from the Bene Israel community to be your own adopted children. From all of my heart, I believe she will be a lucky bride for the right man.' He looked around him at the sprawling house, and at their automobile – yes, an automobile, when even in Britain such a thing was a rarity.

Mama saw with disgust the way his eyes roved over their richness. She cringed at his sniveling mannerisms and greediness. But the matchmaker was required, to make a marriage sound. There had to be ceremony in everything of course, but especially for something as serious as this. Mama had heard of two Jews from somewhere in Pune who



married without a formal matching. It had been decided upon – if such a thing were possible – by just the young man and woman. There had been no matchmaker. The parents themselves were barely involved. Good G-d, that kind of thing was not even really a marriage. The entire family was shamed because of it. And Mama only shook her head sadly when she heard of this, because she knew no one from a good family would ever marry the children from that union” (Delman, 2002, p.5).

The typical Indo-Caribbean family is laborious and stoic.

“A home’s set of rules will sometimes go as far as to dictate and nurture specific responses to pleasure and pain. The mix of cultures in our house deemed that a degree of hearty stoicism, both to pleasure and pain alike, was the true test of one’s self. My parents had learned from the generations before them to sacrifice and toil feverishly until the end, without luxurious 401 (k) plans and early retirement. And this was what they passed on. ‘Work hard and don’t complain about the small things,’ we were always told (Delman, 2002, p. 15).

“As part of our preparation, ours was not a family of conveniences. We did not own appliances like hairdryers, dishwashers, air-conditioning. When we traveled, we never bothered with the excessive luxury of public transportation. Instead we drove our own clunky car cross-country, waving off the flu or the chicken pox. Then we cramped six people, plus Nana-bai sometimes, onto one king size bed in a motel room. Why buy a box of tissues, special, when you could just stuff a wad of clean toilet paper into your pocket? Why take a cab ride when you could easily walk twenty wintry city blocks? When there was work to be done around the house, we never hired anyone to help us unless the plumbing or electricity breaks were life-threatening. Why pay some one to mow the lawn or wash the car or move heavy furniture when there were plenty of strong souls in the family who could do it? We did this work, not for an allowance as other children might have done, but from the expectations of family duty and for the ethic of getting our hands dirty” (Delman, 2002, p. 17).

## **I. Synopsis**

Carmit Delman is the protagonist of *Burnt Bread and Chutney*; a memoir that recounts her struggles with being of Indian-Jewish descent. Delman is unable to acclimate herself to her ancestral Jewish culture and fellow Jewish Americans primarily because of her Indian lineage. Delman is neither able to accept the Indian culture of Bene Israel due to her self-inflicted detachment from the culture. She grapples with the concept of being one or the other and yet not finding a perfect niche within the cultural grand scheme of things. Alongside this overwhelming complexity, Delman recounts her family's financial woes, the security she finds while living in an Israeli kibbutz and her inability to fully comprehend her familial structure. She juxtaposes her story to that of her grandmother, finding comparisons, allusions and overall strength.

## **Part II**

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works are paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

*Burnt Bread and Chutney* is a relatively complex novel and therefore attempting to pair it with a classic that does not have any relevance does not do it or the classic justice.

However, the novel is filled with elements of the human condition and its ensuing complexities. Therefore, the themes discussed are applicable, cross-canonically speaking. Below are a few lesson ideas that can be used to illustrate the above concept to students.



1. One of the prevalent themes throughout the novel is racism and sexism. These are two of the worst “isms” during the 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Working in groups, the first requirement of the students is to identify stages within the text where racism and sexism affect the narrator’s personality development. What are the effects of these changes? Secondly what are some of other books that have had similar themes? (Students should immediately list *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Othello*) Students are then to find similar moments within these texts. A text can be assigned to individual groups or each student can choose a novel to browse through. After the students have compiled their list of page numbers and descriptions, they will place themselves into these characters shoes. Writing a reactionary piece, students will respond to the idea “What if I were discriminated against,” using the found pages and paragraphs as a reference.
2. Delman is extensive in her descriptive details throughout the novel. The students are to create a collage of contemporary magazine cutouts that describes all of the descriptors within a chapter. Each student can be assigned a chapter, or students may work in groups. Students cannot use any image that directly describes the images presented within the novel. This lesson forces students to think in the abstract. Afterwards, students are to create a brief presentation describing their collage, which they will discuss in small groups.
3. Delman is an infusion of three different and unique cultures. She finds that she is not able to fit into one without alienating another. As opposed to creating a character illustration, students will create an illustration that demonstrates the infusion of all three locales into one. Delman provides a significant amount of

descriptions in regards to her places of habitat. Delman has lived in both America and Israel, hailing from an Indo-Jewish American descent. Create a drawing that infuses Delman's descriptors of these places into a sole place or location. In other words, students will draw an illustration of a place that has aspects of India, America and Israel within it.



**Appendix K: *Annie John***

## **Caribbean Piece: *Annie John***

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

- *Annie John* is written by Jamaica Kincaid; Kincaid is of Afro-Caribbean descent.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 1985

#### **c. Readability**

- Kincaid's novel is dense with figurative language and yet easy to navigate. The reader must be a student who is a junior or senior in high school. He or she must be able to understand the literary devices that Kincaid uses as well as their purposes to the overall idea of the piece. Regardless, Kincaid's language is vivid, succinct and comprehensible to all readers.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- This novel is best suited for students ages 16 and up. The novel itself should be restricted to honors classes or advanced classes, considering the content matter.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**

- Annie John is the protagonist of this novel. Kincaid uses Annie John's story as an allegorical account of her own life.

#### **f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**



- Annie's narrative occurs on the tiny Caribbean island of Antigua. The narrator has very little experience, if any at all with the cultural environments outside of Antigua. The setting as well as Annie's interactions with it allow the reader to experience life in the Caribbean regardless of ethnicity.

#### **g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- While this novel does not follow the pre-designed format of a young adult novel, the protagonist is a young woman attending an all girls school. Despite this, the protagonist of *Annie John* deals with issues that are highly relevant to young adults, including alienation from one's parents. Therefore, I believe that *Annie John* is a young adult novel, despite its digression from the norm.

#### **h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 1600 copies of this novel available, from \$9.60 and up.

#### **i. Stereotypes**

- The protagonist of *Annie John* does not provide Western based stereotypes as the narrator lives solely in Antigua. However, there are stereotypes that are present within the Antiguan socio-economic system. The protagonist often defies the gender stereotypes that are placed upon her by her mother and questions pre-conceived notions.
- "When we went to market, if that day she wanted to buy some crabs she would inquire from the person selling them if they came from near Parham, and if the

person said yes my mother did not buy the crabs. In Parham was the leper colony, and my mother was convinced that the crabs ate nothing but the food from the leper's own plates. If we were then to eat the crabs, it wouldn't be long before we were lepers ourselves and living unhappily in the leper colony" (Kincaid, 1985, p. 15).

- Similar to the Hindu caste system, lepers were considered to be untouchable and should be avoided at all costs.
- "All my free time became devoted to games of marbles. And how I won! From the day I went to school with the three gifts from the Red Girl and came home that same day with twenty – enough to fill an old one-pound tin. Everyone attributed my talent to my long arms and my steady gaze. What a surprise it was to me – something about myself I had not known. Perhaps it had stuck in my mind that once my mother had said to me, 'I am so glad you are not one of those girls who like to play marbles,' and perhaps because I had to do exactly the opposite of whatever she desired of me, I now played and played at marbles in a way that I had never done anything" (Kincaid, 1985, p. 61).
- Annie John enjoys antagonizing her mother and seeks to do so any chance that she can. This is similar to the angst filled relationship that most teens have with their parents.
- "Ruth had come all the way from England. Perhaps she did not want to be in the West Indies at all. Perhaps she wanted to be in England where no one would remind her of the terrible things her ancestors had done; perhaps she had felt even worse when her father was a missionary in Africa. I could see how Ruth felt from looking at her face. Her ancestors had been the masters while ours had been the slaves. She had such a lot to be ashamed of, and by being with us everyday she was always being reminded. We could look everybody in the eye ,



for our ancestors had done nothing wrong except just sit somewhere defenseless” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 76).

- Annie John tackles the issues of colonialism and its impact upon all of the involved ethnicities. While she describes the Afro-Caribbean experience, the same can be said for Indo-Caribbeans and the manner in which they are viewed and view their captors.

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- The overlying theme of *Annie John* is the dynamic relationship that exists between the protagonist and her mother. There is a significant love-hate sentiment that drives the protagonist’s inner conflict as well as the manner in which she interacts with her environment. Furthermore, the socio-economic and even political scenario of the novel increases this present theme of confusion and alienation.
- A few generalized themes are:
  - Adolescence
  - Friendship
  - Lesbianism/Exploration of Human Sexuality
  - Maternal Guidance/Angst
  - Transitional stages between age gaps
  - Freudian Psychoanalytical perspectives of Annie’s relationship with her parents
  - Cultural Norms and Paradoxes

- “As we sat in this bath, my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself. We took these baths after my mother had consulted with her obeah woman, and with her mother and a trusted friend, and all three of them had confirmed that from the look of things around our house – the way a small scratch on my instep had turned into a small sore, then a large sore, and how long it had taken to heal; the way a dog she knew, and a friendly dog at that, suddenly turned and bit her; how a porcelain bowl she had carried from one eternity and hoped to carry into the next suddenly slipped out of her capable hands and broke into pieces the size of grains of sand; how words she spoke in jest to a friend had been completely misunderstood – one of the many women my father had loved , had never married, but with whom he had had children was trying to harm my mother and me by setting bad spirits on us (Kincaid, 1985, p. 14).
- “But actually, the past year saw me launched into young-ladyness and when I told my mother of my dream – my nightmare, really – I was greeted with a turned back and a warning against certain kinds of fruit in an unripe state just before going to bed. I placed the old days’ version before people who hardly knew her. But the real truth was that I couldn’t bear to have anyone see how deep in disfavor I was with my mother” (Kincaid, 1985, p.45).
- “In all the games we played I was always given the lesser part. If we played knight and dragon, I was the dragon; if we played discovering Africa, he discovered Africa; he was also the leader of the tribes that tried to get in the way of the discovery, and I played his servant, and not a very bright servant at that; if we played prodigal son and the prodiga; son’s father and the jealous brother, while I played a person who fetched things” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 96).
- “Out of the corner of my eye, I could see my mother. Out of the corner of the other eye, I could see her shadow on the wall, cast there by the lamplight. It was a big and solid shadow and it looked so much like my mother that I became frightened. For I could not be sure whether for the rest of my life I would be able to tell when it was really my



mother and when it was really her shadow standing between me and the rest of the world” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 107).

- The protagonist’s desire to escape the shadow of her mother is one of the many elements of the human condition as her mother’s shadow is a metaphor for the colonialism that continues to resound in Antiguan culture.

#### **k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- The novel does not contain explicit comparisons between Indo and Afro-Caribbean cultures. Despite the inability to find the surface values of these cultures within the text, it is feasible to deduce the elements that extend beyond creed, race and ethnicity and into the deeper facets of being human. One theme in particular, as touched upon in the previous section, is the relationship between a mother and her daughter. Many Indo-Caribbean American girls have had tumultuous experiences with their mothers as well as endured the desperation of segregating themselves from this maternal bond. This struggle, however, is not limited to Indo-Caribbean Americans but rather all ethnicities.
- “When my mother, at sixteen, after quarreling with her father, left his house on Dominica and came to Antigua where she packed all her belongings in an enormous wooden trunk that she had bought in Roseau for almost six shillings. She painted the trunk yellow and green outside, and she lined the inside with wallpaper that had a cream background with pink roses printed all over it. Two day’s after she left her father’s house, she boarded a boat and sailed for Antigua. It was a small boat and the trip would have taken a day and a half ordinarily, but a hurricane blew up and the boat was lost at sea for almost five days.

But the time it got to Antigua, the boat was practically in splinters, and though two or three of the passengers were lost overboard along with some of the cargo, my mother along with her trunk were safe. Now twenty-four years later, this trunk was kept under my bed and in it were things that had belonged to me, starting from just before I was born” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 19-20).

- This trunk represents a matriarchal legacy of breaking away from patriarchal tendencies and subjugation. The trunk serves as a reminder to Annie and her mother in regards to the dominating influences of the male household.
- “My so recently much-hated body now became a plus” I excelled at games and was named captain of a volleyball team. As I was favored by my classmates inside and outside the classroom, so was I favored by my teachers – though only inside the classroom, for I had become notorious for doing forbidden things. If sometimes I stood away from myself and looked at who I had become, I couldn’t be more surprised at what I saw. But since who I had become earned me the love and devotion of Gwen and the other girls, I was only egged on to find new ways to entertain them” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 49).
- “When she was a girl, it was her duty to accompany her father up to ground on Saturdays. When they got there, her father would check on the plantain and banana trees, the grapefruit and lime and lemon trees, and check the mongoose traps. Before returning they would harvest some food for the family to eat in the coming week: plantains, green figs, grapefruit, limes, lemons, coffee beans, coco beans, almonds, nutmegs, cloves, dasheen, cassavas, all depending on what was ripe to be harvested. On one particular day after they had loaded up the donkeys with the provisions, there was an extra bunch of green figs, and my mother was to carry it on her head. She and her father started off for their home, and they walked my mother noticed that the bunch of figs grew heavier and heavier – much heavier than any bunch of figs she had carried before. She ached from the



top of her neck to the base of her spine. The weight of the green figs caused her to walk slowly, and sometimes she lost sight of her father. She was alone on the road and she heard all sorts of sounds that she had never heard before and sounds that she could not account for. Full of fright and in pain, she walked into her yard. She no sooner had taken the load from her head when out of it crawled a very long black snake” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 69).

- “The dunce cap was in the shape of a coronet, with an adjustable opening in the back, so that it could fit any head. It was made of cardboard with a shiny gold paper covering and the word ‘DUNCE’ in shiny red paper on the front. When the sun shone on it, the dunce cap was all aglitter, almost as if you were being tricked into thinking it a desirable thing to wear” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 74-75).
- “Not long before I had seen a picture of a painting entitled *The Young Lucifer*. It showed Satan just recently cast out of heaven for his bad deeds, and he was standing on a black rock all alone and naked. Everything around him was charred and black, as if a great fire had just roared through. His skin was coarse and so were all his features. His hair was made up of live snakes, and they were in a position to strike. Satan was wearing a smile, but it was one of those smiles you could see through, one of those smiles that make you know the person is putting up a good front. At heart, you could see he was really lonely and miserable at the way things turned out. I was standing there surprised at this change in myself when all this came to mind, and suddenly I felt so sorry for myself that I was about to sit down on the sidewalk and weep, already tasting the salty bitterness of my tears” (Kincaid, 1985, p. 95).
- While Annie is not directly compared to Lucifer, she feels as though she has been cast out of heaven and her mother’s favor. She is no longer good or considers herself to be good enough for her culture or perhaps even her family.

## I. Synopsis

*Annie John* is the autobiography of acclaimed Afro-Caribbean writer Jamaica Kincaid. The novel has an expansive layers of plots and subtexts, with the overlying theme being Annie's inability to neither acquiesce to her mother's desires nor create a distinctive filial separation. Throughout Annie's turbulent narration, the reader witnesses her sexual experimentations, academic fervor and socio-economic perspective. However each one of these aforementioned instances are directly or indirectly related to the initial intrinsic conflict that motivates Annie's actions, in regards to her mother. Eventually Annie is presented with a means for leaving Antigua and experiencing life outside her childhood and mother controlled domain.

## Part II

How well can these books are paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

As previously mentioned, this novel has elements that are applicable to the human condition. The protagonist learns to adapt to her environment while simultaneously struggling to find an identity. While it is feasible to match this novel to one of the many pieces within the canon, I do not believe it will be fair to do so. Without the intention of delineating the themes or content of other canonical pieces, I do not feel that students could decipher, comprehend and apply the works of a canonical piece and *Annie John* while simultaneously being able to enjoy them. *Annie John* is a separate entity that



deserves to have the themes and ideals explored to its maximum potential. The only pairing I would suggest is with its sequel, *Lucy*. However this option will be discussed in the novel summary of *Lucy*.

A few ideas for the classroom:

4. Annie John, the narrator of this piece, provides the reader with ample descriptions. Many of her descriptions describe her manner of living in Antigua. With this particular activity, students can pinpoint specific passages where Annie mentions facets of her day to day life. Students can then research what other cultures or countries engage in these particular practices as well as the variations that may exist. After they have done so, this exercise should come full circle by asking the students to examine activities that they have in their daily lives as well as how these activities compare to those across the globe.
5. Annie John is a highly complex character. The motivation behind many of her actions is to displease her mother. In this activity, students will pinpoint instances where Annie acts disapprovingly and discuss whether Annie's actions are directly related to her hatred for her mother or a phase of her adolescent life. The discussion format will not be forum based but rather in groups of two. In each group of two, the students will posit a perspective, whether or not Annie's actions are a result of her teenage angst or a direct link to the relationship with her mother. Once each individual pair has met and discussed their assigned perspectives, they will then form a larger group that shares the perspective they were assigned. The class should then be divided into two groups. Each group

must have textual evidence to support their claim and knowledge of the possible rebuttals that the opposing sides may use. After the debate is over, students are to write a brief paragraph stating the perspective that they agree with as well as why they agree with it.

6. This classroom suggestion asks students to envision the world of Annie through the medium of art. Keeping in mind the abstract philosophies of the modernist era and Pablo Picasso, students will find pictures of fine art pieces that are world renowned. Once these pieces are collected, the students will then create a collage that best describes the main idea of *Annie John*. The only catch is that the students must create an art piece that looks like a young girl while maintaining the embodiment of the main idea of the novel.



## **Appendix L: *Krik? Krak!***

## **Caribbean Piece: *Krik? Krak!*: “Children of the Sea”**

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author’s Ethnicity**

- The short story “Children of the Sea” is from Edwidge Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!*; Danticat is of Haitian descent.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 1995

#### **c. Readability**

- Danticat’s novel is beautifully written and eloquently articulates the common history of Haitians everywhere. Aside from a few historical, colloquial and “patois” terms, the language that Danticat uses is concise and riveting. Her use of figurative language enhances the contents of the texts and is easy to decipher while maintaining multitudes of meanings and their respective layers. The contents in several of her stories are powerful and often difficult to read. Yet, it is feasible to navigate these stories and gain a greater awareness of the human condition. The appropriate grade level for this novel is 9<sup>th</sup> grade and older. I believe that these students can read, understand and deeply value the poetic prose within this novel.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- The age recommendation for this text is age 13-14 and up.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**



- As this novel is a series of short stories, the narrators or protagonists tend to change. For the story that will be analyzed, there is both a male and female narrator. They are approximately 17 to 18 years of age or perhaps even a little bit older, as it mentions how they just passed their university exams.

**f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- There are two settings in “Children of the Sea” as the story is composed of a boyfriend and girlfriend writing letters back and forth to each other. Neither narrator has a name. The boyfriend is in a boat in the middle of the Atlantic whereas his girlfriend is at home in Haiti. The historical background, which is not explicitly provided throughout the novel or any of the following stories, is the revolution of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, where “Papa Doc” Duvalier assumed a life long presidency thereby inducing his reign of terror. The boyfriend is forced to escape on this ship in order to spare his life as it has been ordered that all dissidents be eradicated. His girlfriend eagerly awaits him at home while simultaneously being aware of the atrocities that are committed outside her door. Regardless of their distance, they are still tied to each other as they write letters that neither one of them will ever have the opportunity to read. Despite this, the sentiments that are expressed demonstrate a sense of hope that they share, even though the world around them is morbid.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- The majority of the short stories in this novel have protagonists that are young adolescent women or men. The situations that they are faced with are typical to those of an ordinary young adult novel and yet there are significant differences when considering that these same adolescents have the turmoil of a civil war in addition to ordinary young adult angst. Danticat does write novels that are specifically geared towards young adults and there is a young adult voice within *Krik? Krak!*. However, I cannot label the entire novel as falling within the young adult genre. The short story that is up for analysis, most certainly is a young adult piece.

#### **h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 97 copies of this novel available on Amazon.com; the lowest price is \$3.95.

#### **i. Stereotypes**

- There aren't many stereotypes presented within this novel, unless they are socially inverted. If anything, there appear to be more socio-economic stereotypes towards their fellow Haitians than generalizations towards other ethnicities or individuals. Women are also perceived in a negative light, as their roles in society is delineated and marginalized.
- "Your father will probably marry you off now, since I am gone. Whatever you do, please don't marry a soldier. They're almost not human" (Danticat, 1995, p. 4).
- "You probably do not know much about this, because you have always been so closely watched by your father in that well-guarded house with your genteel



mother. No, I am not making fun of you for this. If anything, I am jealous. If I was a girl, maybe I would have been at home and not out politicking and getting myself into something like this. Once you have been at sea for a couple of days, it smells like every fish you have ever eaten, every crab you have ever caught, every jellyfish that has ever bitten your leg” (Danticat, 1995, p. 9-10).

- The gender role presented here is similar to the social expectations of Indo-Caribbean girls. It is assumed that being born a girl will entail an easier life when in reality nothing could be further from the truth.
- “Papa found your tapes. He started yelling at me, asking if I was crazy keeping them. He is just waiting for the gasoline ban to be lifted so we can get out of the city. He is always pestering me these days because he cannot go out driving his van. All the American factories are closed. He kept yelling at me about the tapes. He called me selfish, and he asked if I hadn’t seen or heard what was happening to man-crazy whores like me. I shouted that I wasn’t a whore. He had no business calling me that. He pushed me against the wall for disrespecting him. He spat in my face. I wish those macoutes would kill him. I wish he would catch a bullet so we could see how scared he really is. He said to me, I didn’t send your stupid little trouble maker away. I started yelling at him. Yes, you did. Yes, you did. Yes, you did, you pig peasant. I don’t know why I said that. He slapped me and kept slapping me really hard until manman came and grabbed me away from him. I wish one of those bullets would hit me” (Danticat, 1995, p. 11).
- “Yes, I am finally and African. I am even darker than your father” (Danticat, 1995, p.11).
- There are many connotations to this novel. In the context of this novel, the narrator is referring to her girlfriend’s ancestral heritage.

Technically, most Haitian citizens are descendants of African slaves. Perhaps he implies an inability to reunite his native African self with the creole that has evolved from his ancestors.

- “You escaped and took a boat to heaven knows where. She said, he was going to make a good man, that boy. Sharp, like a needle point, that boy, he took the university exams a year before everyone else in this area. Manman has respect for people with ambitions. She said papa did not want you for me because it did not seem as though you were going to do any better than he and manman could. He wants me to find a man who will do me some good. Someone who will make sure that I have more than I have now. It is not enough for a girl to be just pretty anymore. We are not that well connected in society. The kind of man that papa wants for me would never have anything to do with me. All anyone can hope for is just a tiny bit of love, manman says, like a drop in a cup if you can get it, or a waterfall, a flood, if you can get that too. We do not have all that many high-up connections, she says, but you are an educated girl. What she counts for educated is not much to anyone but us anyway. They should be announcing the university exams on the radio next week. Then I will know if you passed. I will listen for your name” (Danticat, 1995, p. 14).
- “Maybe we will go to Guinin, to live with the spirits, to be with everyone who has come and has died before us. They would probably turn us away from there too. Someone has a transistor and sometimes we listen to radio from the Bahamas. They treat Haitians like dogs in the Bahamas, a woman says. To them we are not human. Even though their music sounds like ours. Their people look like ours. Even though we had the same African fathers who probably crossed these same seas together” (Danticat, 1995, p. 14).
- The racism that the narrator speaks of is most certainly based upon reality. However in terms of Indo-Caribbean/Indo-Caribbean



Americans, the animosity that exists between them, Indians, Afro-Caribbeans and other Caribbean groups is preposterous considering the shared lineage and history.

- “Celianne’s child is a beautiful child...She still hasn’t cried. There is gossip circulating about how Celianne became pregnant. Some people are saying that she had an affair with a married man and her parents threw her out. Gossip spreads here like everywhere else” (Danticat, 1995, p. 20).
- “Everyone smells so bad. They get into arguments and they say to one another, ‘It’s my misfortune that would lump me together with an indigent like you.’ Think of it. They are fighting about being superior when we all might drown like straw” (Danticat, 1995, p. 21).
- This quote speaks to the human condition. Humans allow trivial issues such as race, religion and ethnicity to segregate themselves and breed hate. The reality is that we all have the same needs and desires.

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- There are several themes within this short story, which are also found within the other pieces. The predominant theme is this inability to find oneself in the grand scheme of things. The tumultuous socio-political environment complicates the sense of self that each person has. However, they are able to garner strength and hope from loved ones. The cyclic sense of loss and rebirth drives the story and creates a genuinely strong emotional attachment on the part of the reader.
- A few general themes are:

- Life and death
- Rape/Sexual Abuse/ Forced Incest
- Discovery of the sexual self and the sexual identity
- Love
- Family dynamic –Relationship between parents and children and vice versa
- Relationships between couples
- Political upheaval
- Immigration to another country – Hope for a new life
- Hope

“All the other youth federation members have disappeared. No one has heard from them. I think they might all be in prison. Maybe they’re all dead. Papa worries a little about you. He doesn’t hate you as much as you think. The other day I heard him asking manman, do you think the boy is dead? Manman said she didn’t know. I think he regrets being so mean to you. I don’t sketch my butterflies anymore because I don’t even like seeing the sun. Besides, manman says that butterflies can bring news. The bright ones bring happy news and the black ones warn us of deaths. We have our whole lives ahead of us. You used to say that, remember? But then again things were so very different then” (Danticat, 1995, p. 5).

“You have a name. You have a reputation. A lot of people think you are dead like the others. They want the bodies turned over to the families. This afternoon, the army finally did give some bodies back. They told the families to go collect them at the rooms for indigents at the morgue. Our neighbor madan roger came home with her son’s head and not much else. At the morgue, they saw a car ran over him and took the head off his body. When madan roger went to the morgue, they gave her the head. By the time we saw her,



she had been carrying the head all over port-au-prince. Just to show what's been done to her son. The macoutes by the house were laughing at her. They asked her if that was her dinner. It took ten people to hold her back from jumping on them. They would have killed her, the dogs" (Danticat, 1995, p. 8).

"Madan roger finally shouts, yes, he was one! He belonged to that group. He was son the radio. He was on the streets at these demonstrations. He hated you like I hate you criminals. You killed him. They start to pound at her. You can hear it. You can hear the guns coming down on her head. It sounds like that are cracking all the bones in her body. Manman whispers to papa, you can't just let them kill her. Go and give them some money like you gave them for your daughter. Papa says, the only money I have left is to get us out of here tomorrow. Manman starts moving lik she is going out the door. Papa grabs her neck and pins her to the latrine wall. Tomorrow we are going to Ville Rose, he says. You will not spoil that for the family. You will not put us in that situation. You will not get us killed" (Danticat, 1995, p. 16-17).

"People are just too hopeful, and sometimes hope is the biggest weapon of all to use against us. People will believe anything. They will claim to see Christ return and march on the cross backwards if there is enough hope" (Danticat, 1995, p. 18-19).

"The soldiers held a gun to Lionel's head and ordered him to lie down and become intimate with his mother. Lionel reused. Their mother told him to go ahead and obey the soldiers because she was afraid that they would kill Lionel on the spot if he put up more of a fight. Lionel did as his mother told him, crying as the soldiers laughed at him, pressing the gun barrels farther and farther into his neck" (Danticat, 1995, p. 23).

**k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- While there are no explicit references to Indo-Caribbeans or the Indo-Caribbean culture within this text, it is feasible to say that the experiences of the two main characters in “Children of the Sea” are highly relevant to the ancestral history of Indo-Caribbeans. Indo-Caribbeans traversed the dangerous Atlantic in an attempt to escape socio-economic persecution. Many of these people did not survive the perilous *kala pani*, just as the male narrator did not make it to Miami. Indo-Caribbean women were treated and perhaps are still treated in the same manner as the female narrator; abused and labeled as incapable of maintaining the same social status as men. The tumultuous political environment mirrors the racial tensions that exist in the countries that have a significant Indo-Caribbean population, specifically Guyana.

“There are a lot of Protestants on this boat. A lot of them see themselves as Job or the children of Israel. I think some of them are hoping something will plunge down from the sky and part the sea for us. They say the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. I have never been given very much. What was there to take away?” (Danticat, 1995, p. 7).

“During the day it can be so hot. At night, it is so cold. Since there are no mirrors, we look at each other’s faces to see just how frail and sick we are starting to look” (Danticat, 1995, p.9).

“Maybe we will go to Guinin, to live with the spirits, to be with everyone who has come and has died before us. They would probably turn us away from there too. Someone has a transistor and sometimes we listen to radio from the Bahamas. They treat Haitians like dogs in the Bahamas, a woman says. To them we are not human. Even though their music



sounds like ours. Their people look like ours. Even though we had the same African fathers who probably crossed these same seas together” (Danticat, 1995, p. 14).

“I am scared to think of what would happen if we had to choose among ourselves who would stay on the boat and who should die. Given the choice to make a decision like that, we would all act like vultures, including me” (Danticat, 1995, p. 18).

## **I. Synopsis**

Danticat’s novel *Krik? Krak!* is a series of intertwined short stories that narrate the lineage of women. While this connection is not directly made until the very end of the novel, Danticat provides a series of bread crumbs for the reader, illustrating that whether or not these men and women are blood related, they still share the common history of pain, adversity, turmoil and hope. Set during “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s reign of terror, each story describes the socio-economic atmosphere and its individual impact upon the populace. Despite the political backdrop of the novel, each narrator has a unique vignette that speaks of the human condition and is applicable to all peoples.

## **Part II**

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

As *Krik? Krak!* is a series of short vignettes, I believe that it is only fair to match Danticat’s piece with an author who is also known for the creation of vignettes. While there are many authors who create a plethora of vignettes that tell the stories of individual

lives, Stephen Crane is perhaps the best canonical author to pair with this novel. Stephen Crane, aside from being a personal favorite, is known for his depth analysis of people, specifically New Yorkers, and the lives that they lead. He focused upon the poor and the lifestyles they lead as well as the cyclic chain which inhibits their ability to rise in socio-economic status. The time periods in which Danticat and Crane's novels are set are different, but they still deal with the basic issues that comprise the human condition, regardless of ethnicity. Crane's naturalist perspective is realistic and it shines throughout his pieces. Crane's objective and yet candid notes on the human condition can beautifully match those of Danticat's.

A few classroom ideas:

1. As a first time reader of Danticat's novel, one might not be aware of the socio-political climate that has pervaded Haitian history. Before reading the novel, have the students do a quick Google search of Haiti as well as the socio-economic environment of New York in Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Please be sure to emphasize the cultural differences and to have the students take note of these differences. Students can create a KWL chart, if hoping to ensure that they actually complete the research. After they have done so, they are to compare the two environments and note any similarities or differences. This is the first step. The final portion of this classroom suggestion is to have the students paint a collage of the merger of these two cities. They are to incorporate both the differences and similarities onto the mural. Abstract concepts can be used, if it makes the transferring process easier.



2. This second classroom suggestion asks students to create a new story from the merger of two previous ones. Students can choose one of the short stories from Danticat's novel, and one of Crane's pieces to use for this assignment. However, the stories must share a protagonist that has the same gender and approximate age. The stories must also share at least two common themes. Students are then given the next portion of the assignment. The two characters that they chose are stranded together on a deserted island. The only supplies that they have are a piece of paper, a bottle, a pen, some rope and a few random pieces of fruit. In an attempt to contact the mainland, both narrators have to write a message in a bottle. There should be two letters in each bottle. The letters must remain in character and yet talk of life on the deserted island alongside the other character. Once the assignment is due, the teacher will randomly read some of the messages in the bottle. Assignments are graded based upon creativity.
3. Stephen Crane believed in the naturalist perspective. He thought that all humans are pre-destined to remain as they are, as they act accordingly to their socio-economic status. While Danticat does explore this theme within her piece, it is feasible to say that she did not believe humans subjected themselves to their deplorable conditions. Her novel expresses hope for the future of humans. Obviously there is a significant difference between the two. Based upon these two perspectives and the discussions in class, students are to write a short op-ed piece on which author has more validity to their theory. They are allowed to use colloquial language but the language must be relevant to the time period of the piece they are discussing. Contextual clues must be used as well.

**Appendix M: *Lucy***



## **Caribbean Piece: *Lucy***

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

- *Lucy* is written by Jamaica Kincaid; Kincaid is of Afro-Caribbean descent.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 1990

#### **c. Readability**

- *Lucy* is the sequel to Kincaid's first novel *Annie John*. Stylistically speaking, there are notable differences between the two novels. *Lucy* is direct and straightforward. However, Kincaid's intricate use of figurative language and thematic elements remain the same and represent her growth as a writer. Furthermore, *Lucy* follows a much more consistent time frame whereas *Annie John* tends to leave the reader confused as to where the protagonist is, relative to the novel's time line. Overall the novel is easy to navigate; the language is simple and yet simultaneously densely rich. Most high school students should be able to decipher Kincaid's thought process.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- This novel is best suited for students ages 15-16 and up. Students in advanced placement and high school honors classes would be able to read this novel with very little to no difficulties at all. However it can also be said that students in all English classes would be able to read this piece and comprehend the driving conflict of the protagonist.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**

- Lucy, the protagonist of the novel, is a young girl approximately 19 or 20 years of age.

#### **f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- The end of *Annie John* finds its protagonist venturing across the pond to attain a nursing degree in the United States. *Lucy* picks up where *Annie John* left off, providing the reader with a glimpse as to what life in the United States is for an immigrant. The majority of the novel revolves around Lucy's experiences as an au pair as well as her interactions with the family. Yet it is these interactions that provide the context for a cross-cultural analysis and the conflicts that arise when placed in an unfamiliar environment. Lucy's experiences, in regards to cultural adjustments and social adaptation are similar to those of any individual or group of people who are transplanted from one area to another. In terms of Indo-Caribbeans, Lucy is displaced from her native Antigua just as most Indians were displaced, culturally and socially speaking upon immigrating to the Caribbean.

#### **g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- *Lucy* may be closer to the format of a young adult novel than *Annie John*, but it still does not follow the pre-established format that is typical of the genre. Lucy is the young adult protagonist struggling to find her place in the world. Along the way she learns how to establish life long relationships, navigate intra-personal tensions and discovering the essence



of one's personality and yet unlike the ending that is relevant to young adult pieces, Lucy does not return to her family, roots or attempt to make amends for her prior actions. While she does not explicitly state the lessons learnt, the reader is aware of the changes that have occurred within the protagonist both emotionally and physically speaking since her immigration from Antigua to the United States.

#### **h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 76 copies of this novel available, from \$4.94 and up.

#### **i. Stereotypes**

- The protagonist provides the reader with ample stereotypes as perceived by her benefactress and herself. Lucy often regards her charges as frivolous and foolish and typifies all Europeans based upon her experiences with them. Lucy's mistress has had very little to no experience with the world outside of Europe and delineates Lucy's culture as being "quaint" or "abnormal."

"At dinner, when we sat down at the table – and did not have to say grace (such a relief; as if they believed in a God that did not have to be thanked every time you turned around) – they said such nice things to each other and were so happy. They would spill their food or not eat any of it at all, or make up rhymes about it that ended with the words 'smelt bad.' How they made me laugh and I wondered what sort of parents I must have had, for even to think of such words in their presence I would have been scolded severely, and I vowed that if I ever had children I would make sure that the first words out of their mouths were bad ones" (Kincaid, 1990, p.13).

“When Lewis finished telling his story, I told them my dream. When I finished, they both fell silent. Then they looked at me and Mariah cleared her throat, but it was obvious from the way she did it that her throat did not need clearing at all. Their two yellow heads swam towards each other and in unison bobbed up and down. Lewis made a clucking noise then said, Poor, poor Visitor. And Mariah said Dr. Freud for Visitor, and I wondered why she said that for I did not know who Dr. Freud was. Then they laughed in a soft kind way. I had meant by telling them my dream that I had taken them in, because only people who were very important to me had ever showed up in my dreams. I did not know if they understood that” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 14-15).

- The dreams that Lucy speak of are of course culturally relevant.

However the family that she is living with fail to understand the symbolism that is hidden there; there is a cultural disconnect and of course Lucy is considered strange because of her dreams.

Cultural facets such as this are often frowned upon by Western society and considered to be Oriental or foreign.

“Mariah said to me, ‘I love you.’ And again she said it clearly and sincerely, without confidence or doubt. I believed her for if anyone could love a young woman who had come from half way around the world to help her take care of her children, it was Mariah. She looked so beautiful standing there in the middle of the kitchen. The yellow light from the sun came in through a window and fell on the pale-yellow linoleum tiles of the floor, and on the walls of the kitchen, which were painted yet another shade of pale yellow, and Mariah, with her pale yellow skin and pale yellow hair, stood still in this almost celestial light, and she looked blessed, no blemish or mark of any kind on her cheek or anywhere else, as if she had never quarreled with anyone over a man or over anything, would never have to quarrel at all, had never done anything wrong and had



never been to jail, had never had to leave anywhere for any reason other than a feeling that had come over her. She had washed her hair that morning and from where I stood I could smell the residue of the perfume from the shampoo in her hair. Then underneath that I could smell Mariah herself. The smell of Mariah was pleasant. Just that – pleasant. And I thought, but that's the trouble with Mariah - she smells pleasant. By then I already knew I wanted to have a powerful odor and would not care if it gave offense" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 26-27).

"We went to the dining car to eat our dinner. We sat at tables – the children by themselves. They had demanded that, and had said to Mariah they would behave , even though it was well known that they always did. The other people sitting down to dinner looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on them looked like mine. The people who looked like my relatives were all older men and very dignified, as if they were just emerging from a church after Sunday service. On closer observation, they were not at all like my relatives; they only looked like them. My relatives always gave back chat" (Kincaid, 1990, p.32).

- Kincaid is making a racial jab at the socio-economic culture of the United States. She note how perfect white families are while the one who look like her relatives are "poor" and "unhappy."

"I did not like the kind of women Dinah reminded me of. She was very beautiful and it mattered a great deal to her. Among the beliefs I held about the world was that being beautiful should not matter to a woman, because it was one of those things that would go away – your beauty would go away, and there wouldn't be anything you could do to bring it back. I could see that Dinah was attached to her beauty: she stroked her hair, from the crown of her head all the way down, constantly; she would put her hands to her mouth, not in modesty but in a gesture to draw attention to her lips, which were perfectly shaped, the sort of lips used in advertisements for lipstick. I did not like this kind of

woman, but it only showed what a superior woman Mariah was that she saw in Dinah not a woman who envied her but a friend full of goodness and love” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 57).

“Now I knew, for these people, all standing there, holding drinks in their hands, reminded me of the catalogue; their clothes, their features, the manner in which they carried themselves were the example all the world should copy. They had names like Peters, Smith, Jones, and Richards – names that were easy on the tongue, names that made the world spin. They had somehow all been to the islands – by that, they meant the place that I was from – and had fun there. I decided not like them just on that basis; I wished once again that I came from a place where no one wanted to go, a place that was filled with slag and unexpectedly erupting volcanoes, or where a visitor was turned into a pebble on setting foot there; somehow it made me ashamed to come from a place where the only thing to be said about it was ‘I had fun when I was there’” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 64 – 65).

- A pet peeve to all West Indians is to have someone visit the islands by means of a vacation only to declare how great of an island it is. Exploring, examining and appreciating a Caribbean island and its respective culture does not entail sight seeing or snorkeling. There is more to be seen and had than the obvious.

“Mariah decided to write and illustrate a book on these vanishing things and give any money made to an organization devoted to saving them. Like her, all of the members of this organization were well off but they made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them. I could have told them a thing or two about it. I could have told them how nice it was to see them get a sip of their own bad medicine” (Kincaid, 1990, p.72).

“As a child in school, I had learned how the earth tilts away from the sun and how that causes the different seasons; even though I was quite young when I learned about this, I



had noticed that all the prosperous (and so, certainly, happy) people inhabited the parts of the earth where the year, all three hundred and sixty-five days of it, was divided into four distinct seasons. I was born and grew up in a place that did not seem to be influenced by the tilt of the earth at all; it had only one season – sunny, drought ridden. And what was the effect on me of growing up in such a place? I did not have a sunny disposition, and as for actual happiness, I had been experiencing a long drought” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 86).

“They were artists. I had heard of people in this position that allowed for irresponsibility, so perhaps it was much better suited to men – like the man whose paintings hung in the museum I liked to visit. Yes, I had heard of these people: they died insane, they died paupers, no one liked them much except other people like themselves. And I thought of all the people in the world I had known who went insane and died, and who drank too much rum and then died, and who were paupers and died, and I wondered if there were artists among them” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 98).

“I was an only child until I was nine years old, and then in the space of five years my mother had three male children; each time a new child was born, my mother and father announced to each other with great seriousness that the new child would go to university in England and study to become a doctor or lawyer or someone who would occupy an important and influential position in society. I did not mind my father saying these things about his sons, his own kind, and leaving me out. My father did not know me at all; I did not expect him to imagine a life for me filled with excitement and triumph. But my mother knew me well, as well as she knew herself: I, at the time even thought of us as identical; and whenever I saw her eyes fill up with tears at the thought of how proud she would be at some deed her sons had accomplished, I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 130).

## **j. Themes/Patterns**

- The antagonistic relationship that exists between the protagonist and her mother is still a driving factor within this piece. However, this thematic element is supplemented with the tensions of the narrator's experiences in her English home.
- The following general themes/patterns are also noted
  - Friendships
  - Romantic relationships and sexual experimentation
  - Loss of innocence
  - Search for a new maternal figure
  - Amending maternal relationships
  - Finding a home/Traveling from one place to another on a quest
  - Discovering the self

"I was no longer in a tropical zone and I felt cold inside and out, the first time such a sensation had come over me" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 6).

"In books I had read – from time to time, when the plot called for it – someone would suffer from homesickness. A person would leave a not very nice situation and go somewhere else, somewhere a lot better, and then long to go back where it was not very nice. How impatient I would become with such a person, for I would feel that I was in a not very nice situation myself, and how I wanted to go somewhere else. But now I, too felt that I wanted to be back where I came from. I understood it, I knew where I stood there. If I had had to draw a picture of my future then, it would have been a large gray patch surrounded by black, blacker and blackest" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 6).

- Homesickness is relevant to any individual, from the college student attending school elsewhere to a family relocation and most



importantly in terms of immigrating to another country. Indo-Caribbeans most certainly experienced these feelings upon their immigration to the United States and even their ancestor's immigration to the Caribbean. While degrees of isolation and loneliness are relative, they are experienced by all those who travel to another country.

"When they were away, I studied my books, and at night I went to school. I was unhappy. I looked at a map. An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not go back" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 10).

"The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events mentioned in her letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which the letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face?" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 31).

- A pertinent quote in regards to the novel as well as in regards to the life of Indo-Caribbean American students, no matter how one may try, it is nearly impossible to escape one's heritage and ancestry, including all of the events that transpired to create said culture.

"I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone. That was not a figure of speech. Those thoughts would have come as a complete surprise to my mother for in her life she had found that her ways were the best ways to have, and she would have been mystified as to how someone who came from inside her would want to be anyone

different from her. I did not have an answer to this myself. But there it was. Thoughts like these had brought me to be sitting on the edge of a Great Lake with a woman who wanted to show me her world and hoped that I would like it, too. Sometimes there is no escape, but often the effort of trying will do quite nicely for a while” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 36-37).

“When I was at home, in my parents’ house, I used to make a list of all the things that I was quite sure would not follow me if only I could cross the vast ocean that lay before me; I used to think that just a change in venue would banish forever from my life the things I most despised. But that was not to be so. As each day unfolded before me, I could see the present take a shape – the shape of my past” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 90).

“How I envied the contempt of her voice, for I could see that her family held no magic over her....I had come to see the sameness in things that appeared to be different. I had experienced moments of great happiness and a desire to imagine my own future, and at the same time I had had a great disillusionment. But was this not what life should be – some ups and downs instead of a constant dangerous undertow, capable of pulling you under for good?” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 91-92).

“I had long ago grown to despise her, and so as soon as my mother finished singing this long Psalm of Maude, I burst out, ‘When I turn nineteen I will be living at home only if I drop dead.’ This made my mother fall into a silence – a sadness, really for she didn’t know what to do. It was the beginning of my expressing hatred, hostility, anger towards my parents, sometimes with words, sometimes with deeds. And now it was true, but not true enough to suit me: at nineteen, I was not dead, and I was not living in the home I grew up in. I was living in a home, thought and it was not my own” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 112).



"I wrote my mother a letter; it was a cold letter. It matched my heart. It amazed even me, but I sent it all the same. In the letter I asked my mother how she could have married a man who would die and leave her in debt even for his own burial. I pointed out the ways she had betrayed herself. I said I believed she had betrayed me also, and that I knew it to be true even if I couldn't find a concrete example right then. I said that she had acted like a saint, but that since I was living in this real world I had really wanted just a mother. I reminded her that my whole upbringing had been devoted to preventing me from becoming a slut; I then gave a brief description of my personal life, offering each detail as evidence that my upbringing had been a failure and that, in fact, life as a slut was quite enjoyable, thank you very much. I would not come home now, I said. I would not come home ever.

To all this the saint replied that she would always love me, she would always be my mother, my home would never be anywhere but with her. I burned this letter, along with all the others I had tied up in a neat little bundle that had been resting on my dresser, in Lewis and Mariah's fireplace" (Kincaid, 1990, p.127-128).

- Kincaid uses the protagonist's matriarchal relationship to represent indomitable ties to the ethnic motherland. The protagonist desperately tries to escape her mother/cultural influences and yet cannot do so because of the culture that composes several aspects of her personality.

"I had been a girl of whom certain things were expected, none of them too bad: a career as a nurse, for example; a sense of duty to my parents; obedience to the law and worship of convention. But in one year of being away from home, that girl had gone out of existence" (Kincaid, 1990, p. 133).

“It was Peggy who had found the apartment. We were then still best friends. We had nothing in common except that we felt at ease in each other’s company. From the moment we had met, we recognized in each other the same restlessness, the same dissatisfaction with our surroundings, the same skin-doesn’t-fit-ness. That was as far as it went. We had accepted each other’s short comings and differences; then just when we began to feel the yoke of each other’s companionship, just when we began to feel the beginnings of what might eventually lead to life-long loathing, we decided to move in together. It could have been worse. People marry at times likes that; they have ten children, live under the same roof for years and years, eventually die and arranged to be buried side by side. We only signed our names to a two-year lease” (Kincaid, 1990, p.145).

“I was twenty years old – not a long time to be alive – and yet there was not an ounce of innocence on my face. If I did not know everything yet, I would not be afraid to know *everything* as it came up. That life might be cold and hard would not surprise me”(Kincaid, 1990, p.153).

**k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- As the same with *Annie John*, this novel does not explicitly mention any facets of the Indo-Caribbean culture. However, the dominant relevance that exists within the novel that Indo-Caribbean American students can appreciate is the loss of identity that arises with migration. Coupled with this loss of identity are feelings of inadequacy when the dominant culture becomes a minority with the perception of inferiority.



“Mariah, mistaking what was happening to me for joy at seeing daffodils for the first time, reached out to hug me, but I moved away, and in doing that seemed to get my voice back. I said, ‘Mariah, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?’” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 30).

“I was staring at some plants that were growing in pots on a windowsill, plants I knew by the names of cassy and dagger. The cassy I used to eat with funky and salt fish; it was said to be a vegetable good for cleaning out a persons’ insides. The dagger we used to pound with a stone until it became string like and then plait so that it resembled a long braid of hair; at Christmas time it became part of a clown’s costume and would be lashed in the air to make a sound frightening to children. These two plants grew so plentifully where I came from that sometimes they were regarded as a nuisance, weeds and were dug up and thrown in the rubbish. And now here they were, treasured, sitting in a prominent place in a beautiful room, a special blue light trained on them” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 99).

“I was born on an island, a very small island, twelve miles long and eight miles wide; yet when I left it at nineteen years of age I had never set foot on three-quarters of it. I had recently met someone who was born on the other side of the world from me but had visited this island on which my family had lived for generations; this person, a woman, had said to me, ‘What a beautiful place,’ and she named a village by the sea and then went on to describe a view that was unknown to me. At the time I was so ashamed that I could hardly make a reply, for I had come to believe that people in my position in the world should know everything about the place they are from. I know this: it was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493; Columbus never set foot there but only named it in passing, after a church in Spain. He could not have known that he would have so many things to name and I imagine how hard he had to rack his brain after he ran out of names honoring his benefactors, the saints he cherished, events important to him. A

task like that would have killed a thoughtful person, but he went on to live a very long life” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 134-135).

“I had realized that the origin of my presence on the island – my ancestral history – was the result of a foul deed; but that was not what made me, at fourteen or so, stand up in school choir practice and say that I did not wish to sing ‘Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves; Britons never, never shall be slaves,’ that I was not a Briton and that until not too long ago I would have been a slave. My action did not create a scandal; instead my choir mistress only wondered if all their efforts to civilize me over the years would come to nothing in the end. At the time, my reasons were quite straightforward: I disliked the descendants of Britons for being un-beautiful, for not cooking food well, for wearing ugly clothes, for not liking to really dance, and for not liking real music. If only we had been ruled by the French: they were prettier, much happier in appearance, so much more like the kind of people I would have enjoyed being around. I once had a pen pal on a neighboring island, a French island, and even though I could see her island from mine, when we sent correspondence to each other it had to go to the ruler country, thousands of miles away, before reaching its destination. The stamps on her letter were always cancelled with the French words for liberty, equality and fraternity; on mine there were no such words, only the image of a stony-face, sour-mouth woman. I understand the situation better now; I understand that in spite of those words, my pen pal and I were in the same boat; but still I think those words have a better ring to them than the image of a stony-face, sour-mouth woman” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 135-136).

“I had begun to see the past like this: there is a line; you can draw it yourself, or sometimes it gets drawn for you; either way there it is, your past, a collection of people you used to be and things you need to do. Your past is the person you no longer are, the situations you are no longer in” (Kincaid, 1990, p. 137).



## I. Synopsis

*Lucy* is the sequel to Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Annie John*. This novel finds the protagonist as she is leaving Antigua and acquainting herself with the lives of white English men and women. The cultural paradoxes and tensions serve to develop the protagonist's personality as well as the perspective she has on life and the human condition. More often than not, the narrator is an objective voice on human interactions, or at the very least, the interactions of her benefactors' seemingly perfect life and society. However, the reader is still able to note the protagonist's growth - personally, emotionally and physically from the prequel *Annie John*.

## Part II

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

As mentioned in the previous novel summary, I believe that *Annie John* and *Lucy* should be paired together when completing an analysis. The primary reasoning as to why this is the case is that *Lucy* marks the growth of the protagonist from her humble beginnings in *Annie John*. As readers and critical thinkers, we are able to establish continuity between the two novels as well as how the changes or even lack thereof, has affected the protagonist's mind frame. In essence, without these two pairings, it would be significantly more difficult to note the author's main idea and thematic purpose.

In regards to a classical complement, I believe that Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* would be an excellent pairing with this duo of novels. The reiterated theme throughout both pieces is this sense of being unable to escape one's destiny. In the case of Lucy or Annie, depending upon the novel, she desperately sought to escape her mother's grasp as well the expectations that were placed upon her head while simultaneously coming to terms with her shortcomings. Hardy's protagonist, Tess, is faced with the very same fate as she too struggles to escape her socio-economic situation and not succumb to her pre-destined life as an unwed mother. However both Lucy/Annie and Tess still manage to fall into the cycles that are pre-established for them despite their attempts at otherwise escaping.

Below are a few ideas for the classroom:

1. The ideal of femininity is portrayed in both of these pieces. However, there are noteworthy differences amongst the two pieces such as time period, social setting, and country. Regardless of these differences, it is still feasible to create a strong comparative analysis between the two female protagonists. Students will first create a chart that answers the following questions about each woman:

Name

Age(s)

Ethnicity

Siblings

Relationship with parents

Expectations of Self



## Social Expectations

Expectations/Roles for women as a whole

End result of protagonist

Students are to use textual evidence to support their answers. After they have done so, they are to compare these standards to those of contemporary society by answering the same questions; the only catch is that they will be analyzing themselves. At the end of the exercise, the students are to ask themselves whether or not society has changed and are different cultures really different when considering their core values?

2. Stereotypes are often directly tied to the cyclic patterns of life. When a particular gender or ethnicity is stereotype, the people who create said race or gender often tend to believe the stereotypes thereby engaging in its perpetuation. By thoroughly search each novel, students are to identify the stereotypes that exist and use contextual clues to determine whether or not the protagonist perpetuated these generalization. Finally, students are to identify which of these stereotypes continue to exist in contemporary society. They are to create a visual representation of the modern perception of their chosen stereotype. The representation must also illustrate, without words, whether or not this stereotype has a negative or positive connotation.
3. In Jamaica Kincaid's novels as well as Thomas Hardy's piece, mothers play a significant role in the formation of their daughters' identities. Students are to first establish whether or not the absence of a father figure contributes to the lives that these women lead. After a consensus has been reached by the class, students are

then divided into 2 large groups – Lucy/Annie’s mother and Tess’s mother. The students will then agree amongst themselves whether or not these mothers were good mother or seriously misguided in their beliefs. Once they have done so, they are to work together creating a slogan, no more than 15 words, that identifies the essence of their designated mother. The slogan must be printed on banner paper and decorated accordingly in order to receive full credit.

4. The poem “Daffodils” as mentioned within the text, was written by Wordsworth and judging from the text itself is a major source of irritation for the protagonist. Have the students read the poem and then re-read the snippet from the text. Encourage a debate amongst the students as to why the protagonist has the reaction that she does. If possible, allow students to examine the structure of a daffodil and compare the daffodil itself to both pieces. See if there are any similarities or differences. Students are to then create a poem that best exemplifies the essence of both pieces as well as the daffodil.



**Appendix N: “Barred” from *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam***

## **Caribbean Piece: *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam*: “Barred”**

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author’s Ethnicity**

- The short story “Bared” is from the collected works *Green Cane Juicy Flotsam*; the author is Ramabai Espinet. Espinet is Indo-Caribbean; she was born in Trinidad.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 1991  
Espinet’s piece was published in Trinidad, 1987.

#### **c. Readability**

- The format of “Barred” is intricate in its construction and yet the stories within this short story describe the plight of the Indo-Caribbean people. Espinet’s morpho-syntactical structure is dense and requires several readings in order to fully comprehend the depth of its meaning. There are a plethora of descriptive tools and figurative language, yet the texts are written in a concise and sufficient manner. I would not recommend this short story being taught to students who are not in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grades. While I believe most high school students can read the text, I think it may be more of a challenge for the underclassmen, as they more than likely have not developed the necessary critical thinking tools.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- The age recommendation for this text is age 17 and up.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**



- As there are several short narratives within this one particular short story, there is a multitude of protagonists. The protagonists are all women, but they range from the newly married to entrepreneurs to an omniscient narrator that is defensive and fiercely proud of her ethnicity. The age of each narrator is relatively unknown, as the vignettes are so short, but one can assume that these women are very young.

**f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- Espinet wrote this particular short story to represent her native Trinidadian Indo-Caribbean society and therefore it takes place in Trinidad. However, Espinet does not explicitly state that these short stories occur in Trinidad and can therefore be applied to other countries where there is a significant Indo-Caribbean population. Also worth noting is that Espinet's individual pieces occur at various stages of the creolization and immigration process. One story occurs at the port where Indians arrive, in a local Trinidadian village as well as in Canada, each locale representing a different stage of the creolization process. These stories speak of an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora, the basic roots of being from both India and the Caribbean as well as the adversity that Indo-Caribbeans continue to face. By having these stories set in Trinidad, it provides the reader with a much more realistic perspective on how the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora originated as well as how it continues to revolutionize itself.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- “Barred” is a short story that is difficult to place in a specific genre.

Unfortunately, it does not fall into the genre of a young adult piece, as it does not meet the criterion that is atypical to said genre as seen in Appendix B. If anything, this piece would be more along the lines of drama given the plot line of each short story. “Barred” is a necessary portion of this thesis as it provides a significantly insightful perspective on Indo-Caribbean culture and eloquently accompanies the other novels that have been analyzed thus far.

#### **h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 49 copies of this novel available, with the lowest price being \$3.05.

#### **i. Stereotypes**

- There are not many stereotypes in this particular short story. The only stereotypes that may exist are socio-economic or gender. The Indo-Caribbean culture is noted for holding a chauvinistic view of women and their respective rights. Furthermore, it is only until recently that women are allowed to choose their own suitors or act in a manner that will is not considered socially unacceptable. Concerning socio-economics, many Indo-Caribbeans live in strained economic positions and those Indo-Caribbeans who are more affluent tend to hold prejudices against those that are less fortunate.
- “Who is the enemy? Is it rum? The boy I married turns into a strange man who hits and curses at night. I bear much and one night I squat in the dirt waiting, the



night black and quiet with only frogs singing in the bush where we live. I hear him coming home, drunk again, falling and cursing. The baby sleeping, the night quiet quiet. It is dark. I should move to go and light the lamp. But I don't move, I stay crouching on the dirt. After he is inside the house and stumbling around, then I follow and light the lamp. He is hungry" (Espinet, 1987, p. 82).

- This quote describes a common trend among Indo-Caribbean men; they are abusive alcoholics. Adding to the mental abuse, men opt for demeaning their wives through physical degradation. Indo-Caribbean/Indo-Caribbean American students are well aware of this trend, as they know at least one victim.
- "Indians ain't have no backbone, no stamina. You ain't see how at the slightest sign of stress they does run and drink Indian tonic? (Boy meets and loves girl but the arranged marriage gets in the way. Boy and girl drink GRAMAZONE and perish together – desire literally burning a hole through their bowels.) Indians ain't afraid to die. They does kill easy too. Is because they believe in reincarnation, don't doubt it. If you look in the hospitals, is mostly Indians you go see. They there for accident, chopping and poor guts. Is all the dhal and bhaji they does eat. And all the time the bitches and them have all kinda money hide up and save up. Yuh see all them saddhu and babu all yuh see walking the streets. Them is millionaires, man, ,millionaires. How yuh think Indians have so much business in this country? Them controlling the business community, you know, is only me and you stupid enough to think is white people. We born yesterday, we can't see what in front we eye. Them controlling ninety-five percent of the business in this country. They smart too bad. And all they children does do in school is study, study. I went to school with plenty Cramlal Booksingh and them yuh hear. And when they can't get in the good schools they does bribe man, bribe. Even in university they does buy the test paper. Is true

they don't have no big job and money but them people low, they ain't bong for that. They ain't know how to live, they don't even spend money on food. Is only dhal and bhaji day and night" (Espinet, 1987, p. 83-84),

- These are all of the typical stereotypes that are held against Indo-Caribbeans. Whether or not they are true is relative to the person. However the animosity is self-evident as this is an Afro-Caribbean perspective on Indo-Caribbean lifestyle.

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- The overwhelming theme of this piece is oppression. There are cultural, spousal, socio-economic and gender-based oppression and liberation. Although these stories are fictional, the truth that exists within each narrative is tantamount to the identity of the Indo-Caribbean people and ultimately one of construction blocks of the Indo-Caribbean American binary.
- These are some of the general themes that can be found across the piece:
  - o Robbery
  - o Shelter/Home-Space
  - o Mental Anxiety/ One's place in the world
  - o Motherhood – The power that is derived from it
  - o Spousal abuse
  - o Chauvinistic tendencies on behalf of the patriarchal society
  - o Murder
  - o Pride in oneself and ethnicity



“All of this because I lost my keys a few days ago. That and my wallet. All of my life I have flirted with the fantasy of losing these two things – a fantasy of being locked out and thrown absolutely upon my own primary resources. I remember standing above the Hastings Bridge in Vancouver, many years ago, high over the cold water and suddenly finding myself possessed by the mad urge to fling all valuables down. The valuables were pretty meager: a bit of makeup, a few dollars, the key to a shabby room in a little hotel. But what would I have done without them?” (Espinete, 1987, p. 80).

“And in between the waiting and his forced entry, I might die before the night is out of nerve-racking loneliness and anguish. All of my loves, fights, anxieties, and fears have crystallized into this mournful night where I am reduced to a purple jelly-fish like consistency. I can’t sleep. And then I rise and throw open the doors to my balcony high above the ground. I look up at the peaks of the Northern Range – Morne Wash and El Tucuche. Unto the hills around do I lift up my longing eyes. Only I have to no idea what I’m longing for, or if I do, it’s still only an apprehension of something. I’m trying to approach closure, which for me is a completion of the whatever which is necessary for living and which remains like a door perpetually, uneasily left ajar” (Espinete, 1987, p. 81).

“The night is dark and is only me and he and the baby in all this bush. He reach the bed and then he fall down near it. Where he going? Where the arse he think he going? He getting up, then he creaking again straight on the new Slumberking. The springs start creaking again, he getting up. The baby bawling now and he getting up...

The cutlass by the fire, I chop some wood up this evening to cook the food. He on the bed and quick quick I chop him two, three times, me ain’t know how hard... They say the man dead” (Espinete, 1987, p. 82-83).

- The narrator is giving birth to a new life through the means of murdering her husband. Figuratively speaking, many Indo-Caribbean women eliminate the dominating male figure by divorcing or leaving their homes. They overthrow the oppressor to gain a life that is rightfully theirs.

“All around us the cane fires are burning - rising and falling smoke and soot. Nothing on earth has the live smell of burning cane. And when the cane-sugar boils in the vats the smell is like all the holidays rolled into one fragrant ball – amber and crystalline on the outside and full of honeyed liquid in the center. We bought those balls at Ramdillah, later corrected to Ramleela. Which one is right, what the books now say or what we uttered in the peasant newness of this settlement” (Espinet, 1987, p. 83).

#### **k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- The better answer to this question would be how is this piece not relevant to Indo-Caribbean students. “Barred” provides the reader with a broad spectrum of Indo-Caribbean life without the use of many pages. One is able to garner information about the *kala pani*, or middle passage of Indo-Caribbean ancestors, the living conditions that are available to Indo-Caribbeans, and the cultural adaptations that arose. Espinet’s prose-poetry beautifully narrates the lives of Indo-Caribbeans.

“The mango tree is heavily fruited at this time of the year. I think: this is the land that spawned me, far from the continent of my origin. Can an island be someone’s home, I wonder? My ancestral roots are far from here and I don’t even know really, what they are” (Espinet, 1987, p. 81).



"I am Indian, plain and simple, not East nor West, just an Indian. I live in the West. My travel across the water to this land has not been easy and many a time I have squatted in the dirt of this or that lepayed hut, a few coins knotted in the corner of my ohnri, waiting, waiting-waiting to make the next move. There is fear, poverty and sometimes a heavy hand striking at night. The enemy waits outside" (Espinete, 1987, p. 81-81).

"We are lost here, have not found the words to utter our newness, our strangeness, our unfound being. Our clothes are strange, our food is strange, our names are strange. And it is not possible for anyone to coax or help us. Our utterance can only come roaring out of our mouths when it is ready, set and can go" (Espinete, 1987, p. 83).

"Some time after Dass helped me build a wooden counter just underneath the window. Later we put up a Coca-Cola sign, a Solo sign, and a newspaper sign. People came and bought in my little parlour. And only when Dass and his brother saw how I was making my way, they put together and we started the shop" (Espinete, 1987, p. 83-84).

- The above four quotes were selected in conjunction with each other to demonstrate the confusion that arises from dislocation. Indo-Caribbeans are not aware of what their roots are considering the acculturation process that occurs over time. Furthermore they require a great amount of time before finding comfort in this creole cultural construct.

## **I. Synopsis**

Ramabai Espinete's "Barred" is a series of short stories within a short story that describe the lives of several Trinidadian Indo-Caribbean women. Whether or not the lives of these women are intertwined, is unknown. Yet, each story tells a tale of survival and hope and the complications of immigrating to another country. Espinete's piece appears in the

anthology of short fiction by Caribbean women writers, *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam*. Each piece in the novel is written by a woman and shares the commonality of oppression, victimization and voicelessness. Adding to the already potent impact of *Green Cane* is the fact that there are at least five different countries represented in this novel. Regardless of the ethnic or linguistic barriers, the message is still the same.

## **Part II**

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

“Barred” describes the ascent of Indo-Caribbeans in Trinidad as well as other parts of the Caribbean. A piece such as this is already quite profound and yet the women narrators provide another perspective on life in the Caribbean and how they helped to shape socio-cultural standards, despite the deceptively insignificant appearance. The two canonical authors that are best adaptable with “Barred” are Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “A New England Nun” and “The Revolt of Mother.” Freeman wrote of the late 1800’s and the role of women during those times. A regionalist and emerging naturalist author, she sought to illustrate the quintessential manners of living in suburban areas. “A New England Nun” and “The Revolt of Mother” share female protagonists who have experienced oppression on behalf of their male counterparts or societal standards. Lily and Mrs. Penn are able to stage a small revolution, with one woman choosing never to marry and the other blatantly demanding a better life from her defiant husband, threatening him if her needs are not



met. While setting these precedents, Freeman's work illustrated the arrival of a new culture; that of a rural America. By examining these aforementioned pairings, it is feasible to note why they would make a good pairing.

A few classroom ideas:

1. This classroom suggestion asks students to create a book talk for Freeman and Espinet's piece. Students are to choose a pivotal scene from "Barred" and "A New England Nun" or "The Revolt of Mother." They cannot randomly select scenes, the scenes must have at least two themes in common. Students will present their book talk, but they must create an explanation of the themes and commonalities on a small piece of oak tag. The explanation must be vibrant and artful. For the actual book talk, students must have an object that represents both stories and the themes examined. Students will set up a booth at desks across the room. They will then circulate and answer a handout that is filled with questions about each book talk. They must make the connection between the book talk item and the explanation on the oak tag. Students are graded upon the success of their peer's observations.
2. Thus far, there have been a series of classics and their complements that analyze the role of women in society. Before beginning the next classroom suggestion, students should retrace their literary steps and ask themselves "How has each female protagonist been treated by her family and society? Are there changes depending upon the time period?" Once they have written a brief paragraph on this, they are to work in groups of two. Students must be comfortable with their

**Appendix O: *Miguel Street***



partner as they will be tracing their body outline on several pieces of paper. After they have done so, they are to find quotes from all of the novels read that they feel best describe their ideal image of themselves. If stumped, students can ask themselves, "If I read a book, what quotes best describe who I am or who I would like to be?" They are to use these quotes to fill up the interior of the outline.

3. Given the amount of novels that have been paired and analyzed, it is necessary at this point to ascertain how much students understand about the Indo-Caribbean culture. Students are to bring in a picture from home; the picture must contain the person as well as someone or something that is close to them. They will tape the picture onto the middle of a rectangular piece of construction paper. After they have done so, the students will write down which aspects of Indian, Caribbean and Canonical literature reflect the lives that they lead. They cannot use direct quotations, but must indirectly apply the learned themes and newfound cultural awareness to the picture.

## **Indo-Caribbean Piece: *Miguel Street***

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

- The novel *Miguel Street* is written by V.S. Naipaul; Naipaul is of Indo-Caribbean descent and was born in Trinidad.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United States (New York), 1987

#### **c. Readability**

- Naipaul's novel is not complex, semantically speaking, aside from the dialectical influences. Naipaul does an excellent job of capturing the Indo-Caribbean Creole without marginalizing readers who may not be familiar with this manner of speaking. Simultaneously, a plethora of figurative language is noted throughout the text as evidenced by the characters' actions, ramifications and personality development in juxtaposition to the environment that is Miguel Street. Most high school students should be able to read this novel and comprehend the author's main ideas as well as the philosophies he espouses.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- The age recommendation for this text is age 14 and up.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**

- While the protagonist is never identified, the reader is aware that the omniscient narrator is a young adult male, probably fifteen years of age.

#### **f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**



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- While the protagonist is never identified, the reader is aware that the omniscient narrator is a young adult male, probably fifteen years of age.

#### **f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- The novel takes place on Miguel Street located in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Miguel Street is not too far away from the busy hubbub of Trinidad's capital and the novel accurately reflects the socio-economic changes that arise and infiltrate their way into the countryside. The protagonist observes the lives of Miguel Street's residents and their inability to escape their cultural past and even the island of Trinidad. Furthermore, Miguel Street is a diversified street as there are plethoras of ethnicities that interact with and segregate from each other. Generally speaking, Miguel Street allows readers to experience Indo-Caribbean Trinidadian life where it originates from. The reader gains a better awareness of the Indo-Caribbean culture and why this culture has become what it is today. Underlying this first hand experience is the young adult perspective of Indo-Caribbean life.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- While this novel does not fit the typical format of a young adult piece, it still qualifies as a young adult piece. To begin, the protagonist is a young adult who attends school and has a close-knit group of friends. His friends define who he is as a person as well as the decisions he makes. There is a driving tension that exists between his elders and himself ultimately forging the person he evolves into. In comparison to American young adult novels, this novel would not be given a chance in the young adult



genre. However considering the cultural differences and paradigms, *Miguel Street* deserves a slot in the young adult genre.

#### **h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 55 copies of this novel available on Amazon.com; the lowest price is \$2.77.

#### **i. Stereotypes**

- There is a bountiful supply of stereotypes, many of which are prevalent in contemporary Indo-Caribbean societies. The stereotypes are of course directed towards women and Afro-Caribbeans. Women are perceived in a chauvinistic manner and Afro-Caribbeans epitomize the qualities that Indo-Caribbeans loathe. However, a surprising stereotype that presented itself is the view Trinidadians held in regards to the Americans who occupied the military bases. The Americans are characterized as rich, prosperous and opportunistic. Trinidadian Indo-Caribbeans' beliefs systems do not stray from the belief systems of modern Indo-Caribbean familial structures.

"Popo never made any money. His wife used to go out and work, and this was easy because they had no children. Popo said, 'Women and them like work. Man not make for work.'

Haf said, 'Popo is a man-woman. Not a proper man'" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 19).

- Gender roles indicate that men should be the primary care giver, to have a woman work in his stead minimizes his masculinity.

"A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say 'Slum!' because he could see no more. But we who lived there saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else. Man-Man was mad; George was stupid; Big Foot was a bully; Hat was an adventurer; Popo was philosopher; and Morgan was our comedian" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 79).

- In short, this quote represents the concept that appearances are deceiving, especially any atypical Caribbean village.

"But what really sickened us was his attitude to women. We were none of us chivalrous, but Nathaniel had a contempt for women which we couldn't like. He would make rude remarks when women passed.

Nathaniel would say, 'Women just like cows. Cow and they is same thing.'

And when Miss Ricaud, the welfare woman, passed, Nathaniel would say, Look at that big cow.'

Which wasn't in good taste, for we all thought that Miss Ricaud was too fat to be laughed at, and ought instead to be pitied.

Nathaniel, in the early stages, tried to make us believe that he knew how to keep Laura in her place. He hinted that he used to beat her. He used to say 'Woman and them like a good dose of blows, you know. You know the calypso:

*Every now and then just knock them down.*

*Every now and then just throw them down.*

*Black up their eye and bruise up their knee*

*And then they love you eternally.*

is gospel truth about woman.'

Hat said, 'Woman is a funny thing, for truth, though. I don't know what a woman like Laura see in Nathaniel.'

Eddoes said, 'I know a helluva a lot about woman. I think Nathaniel lying like hell. I think when he with Laura he got his tail between his legs all the time.'



We used to hear fights and hear the children screaming all over the place, and when we saw Nathaniel, he would just say, 'Just been beating some sense into that woman.'

Hat said, 'Is a funny thing. Laura don't look any sadder.'

Nathaniel said, 'Is only blows she really want to keep she happy.'

Nathaniel was lying of course. It wasn't he who was giving she blows, it was Laura. That came out the day when Nathaniel tried to wear a hat to cover up a beaten eye" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 111-112).

- Another atypical gender role is the expectation of men to be dominating at all times and never lose the machismo façade in front of anyone. In this case, Nathaniel was continuously beaten by his wife, where as "normal" gender roles are the opposite.

"Laura said, 'What sort of luck you think I have? It looks like I really blight. Is another girl. I just thought I would let you know, that's all. Well, I got to go now. I have to do some sewing" (Naipaul, 1987, p.112-113).

"Hat asked again, 'You sure this baby is for you, and not for nobody else? It have some woman making a living this way, you know.'

Eddoes said, 'Is true she have other baby, but I in trouble.'

Hat said, 'She is like Laura?'

Eddoes said, 'Nah, Laura does only have one baby for one man. This girl does have two three...

Hat said, 'The calypsonian was right, you hear.

*Man centipede bad.*

*Woman centipede more than bad.*

I know the sort of woman. She have a lot of baby, take the baby by the fathers, and get the fathers to pay money. By the time she thirty thirty-five, she getting so much money

from so much man, and she ain't got no baby to look after and no responsibility. I know the thing'" (Naipaul, 1987, p.126).

"At first my mother was being excessively refined with the woman, bringing out all her fancy words and fancy pronunciations, pronouncing comfortable as cum-fought-able, and making war rhyme with bar, and promising that everything was deffy-nightly going to be all right. Normally my mother referred to males as man, but with this woman she began speaking about the ways of mens and them, citing my dead father as a typical example" (Naipaul, 1987, p.134).

"Hat said, 'Is a good thing for a man to beat his woman every now and then, but this man does do it like exercise, man'" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 136).

"Bhacku said to Mrs. Bhacku, 'Why you don't shut your mouth up?'

Mrs. Bhacku said, 'But how you want me to shut my mouth up? You is my husband, and I have to stand up for you.'

Bhacku said very sternly, 'You only stand up for me when I tell you, you hear?'" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 153).

"Bolo said, 'You see how black people is. They only quick to take, take. They don't want to give. That is why black people never get on'" (Naipaul, 1987, p.174).

## **j. Themes/Patterns**

- As the novel is a continuous series of short stories, the thematic elements of the overall novel can be noted in each piece. Naipaul wants to capture the essence of a Caribbean society and the manner in which they think. There is an apparent binary opposition of each character in their respective short stories as to what they want to do and what society expects from them. More often than not



conflicted, the characters, including the omniscient protagonist tend to succumb to societal expectations. Another strong theme throughout the piece is the affect of the American presence in Trinidad. The novel takes place during the Second World War and the Americans have a strategic base on the island. However the American lifestyle does have a significant affect upon the people of Miguel Street, resulting in oppositional tension to the Western influences.

- A few general themes are as follows:
  - Treatment of Women – Men and Society
  - Societal expectations of gender and age
  - Mother-Son Relationship
  - Friendship and Camaraderie
  - The search for oneself / Identity formation
  - Escaping self made prisons – Figuratively and Literally speaking

“It was something of mystery why he was called Bogart; but I suspect that it was Hat who gave him the name. I don’t know if you remember the year the film Casablanca was made. That was the year when Bogart’s fame spread like fire through Port of Spain and hundreds of men began adapting the hardboiled Bogartian attitude” (Naipaul, 1987, p. 9).

“Hat and his friends began using Bogart’s room as their club house. They played wapee and drank rum and smoked and sometimes brought the odd stray woman to the room. Hat

was presently involves with the police for gambling and sponsoring cock-fighting; and he had to spend a lot of money to bribe his way out of trouble” (Naipaul, 1987, p. 12).

“He had got a job on a ship and had gone to British Guiana. There he had deserted, and gone into the interior. He became a cowboy on the Rupununi, smuggled things (he didn’t say what) into Brazil, and had gathered some girls from Brazil and taken them into Georgetown. He was running the best brothel in town when the police treacherously took his bribes and arrested him” (Naipaul, 1987, p.14).

“ ‘You see,’ Hat said on the pavement that evening, ‘the man leave his first wife in Tunapuna and come to Port of Spain. They couldn’t have children. He remain here feeling sad and small. He go away, find a girl in Caroni they don’t make a joke about that sort of thing and Bogart had to get married to the girl’” (Naipaul, 1987, p.16).

“I thought Popo was a much nicer man than Bogart. Bogart said little to me, but Popo was always ready to talk. He talked about serious things. Like life and death and work, and I felt he really liked talking to me” (Naipaul, 1987, p. 19).

“It was a fantastic story. Popo had been stealing things left and right. All the new furniture’s, as Hat called them, hadn’t been made by Popo. He had stolen things and simply remodeled them. he had stolen too much, as a matter of fact, and had had to sell the things he didn’t want. That was how he had been caught. And we understand now why the vans were always outside Popo’s house. Even the paint and the brushes with which he had redecorated the house had been stolen” (Naipaul, 1987, p. 24).

“Elias would say, ‘It is all God work’” (Naipaul, 1987, p.28).



“One day George was on the pavement as I was passing and I heard him mumbling. I heard him mumble again that afternoon and again the following day. He was saying ‘Horse-face!’

Sometimes he said, ‘Like it only have horse face people living in this place.’

Sometimes he said, ‘Short-arse!’

And, ‘But how it have people so short-arse in the world?’

I pretended not to hear, of course, but after a week or so I was almost in tears whenever George mumbled these things” (Naipaul, 1987, p.28-29).

“The pink house, almost overnight became a full and noisy place. There were many women about, talking loudly and not paying too much attention to the way they dressed. And whenever I passed the pink house, these women shouted abusive remarks at me; and some of them did things with their mouths, inviting me to ‘come to mooma.’ And there were not only these new women. Many American soldiers drove up in jeeps, and Miguel Street became full of laughter and shrieks” (Naipaul, 1987, p.32).

“He shook his head sadly. He said, ‘That’s what I do, I just watch. I can watch ants for days. Have you ever watched ants? And scorpions, and centipedes, and congorees – have you watched those?

I shook my head.

I said, ‘What you does do mister?’

He got up and said, ‘I am a poet.’

‘What our name, mister?’

‘B. Wordsworth.’

‘B for Bill?’

‘Black. Black Wordsworth. White Wordsworth was my brother was” (Naipaul, 1987, p.57-58).

- This quote has multiple levels of irony, the primary of which is the fact that the speaker addresses himself as “black” Wordsworth.

Here is an Afro-Caribbean man who is well versed in Wordsworth with similar ideologies and yet is considered by his fellow countrymen as being a drunk or dunce.

“He said, ‘Listen, and I will tell you a story. Once upon a time a boy and a girl fell in love. They loved each other so much they got married. They were both poets. He loved words. She loved grass and flowers and trees. They lived happily in a single room, and then one day the girl poet said to the boy poet, “We are going to have another poet in the family.” But this poet was never born because the girl died, and the young poet died with her, inside her. And the girl’s husband was very sad, and he said he would never touch a thing in the girl’s garden. And so the garden remained, and grew high and wild”’  
(Naipaul, 1987, p. 61).

“I walked along Alberto Street a year later, but I could find no sign of the poet’s house. It hadn’t vanished, just like that. It had been pulled down, and a big two storied building had taken its place. The mango tree and the plum tree and the coconut tree had all been cut down, and there was brick and concrete everywhere” (Naipaul, 1987, p. 65).

- Continuity and change are two dynamics in Naipaul’s poetry as well as elements of the human condition. The mango tree, which the narrator observes, has disappeared only to be replaced by something new which in turn will be replaced by something else that is contemporary.

“The Americans were crawling all over Port of Spain in those days, making the city really hot. Children didn’t take long to find out that they were easy people, always ready to give with both hands. Hat began working a small racket. He had five of us going all over the district begging for gum and chocolate. For every packet of chewing gum we gave him a cent. Sometimes I made as much as twelve cents a day. Some boy told me



later that Hat was selling the gum for six cents a packet, but I didn't believe it" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 69).

"Titus Hoyt rushed up and said, 'Silence. I just been thinking. Look, boys, it every strike you that the world not real at all? It ever strike you that we have the only mind in the world and thinking up you people here, thinking up the war and all the house and the ships and them in the harbour. That ever cross your mind?" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 100).

"And, in truth he had a nasty skin. It was yellow and pink and white, with brown and black spots. The skin above his left eye had the raw pink look of scalded flesh.

But the strange thing I noticed was that if you just looked at Toni's hands and saw how thin and wrinkled they were, you felt sorry for him, not disgusted" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 137).

"Lord Invader made a hit with his calypso:

*I was living with decent and contented wife*

*Until the soldiers came and broke up my life...*

*Father mother and daughter*

*Working for the Yankee dollar!*

*Money in the land!*

*The Yankee dollar, oh!"* (Naipaul, 1987, p.185).

"I was fifteen when Hat went to jail and eighteen when he came out. A lot happened in those three years. I left school and I began workin in the customs. I was no longer a boy. I was a man, earning money" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 213).

- For Indo-Caribbean men, education is dispensable although they are expected to be smarter than women. The narrator's behavior is

expected for the gender as men are expected to dislike school and prefer money.

**k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- Considering that the novel was written by an Indo-Caribbean author and analyzes the Indo-Caribbean infrastructure, it is hard to separate this portion from the entirety of the novel. For Indo-Caribbean students, especially Indo-Caribbean Trinidadian students, this novel is a boost of pride. Within this piece, there is evidence of their culture and societal values, many of which have transcended these pages and even an ocean to settle within the United States. Each short story exudes a relevance to Indo-Caribbean students and even more importantly to students of all ethnicities that speaks of the human condition. Students can understand why a wealthy and prosperous woman would leave her husband for love, or why a carpenter insists upon building the “thing without a name” simultaneously neglecting his life.

“Popo’s workshop no longer sounded with hammering and sawing. The sawdust no longer smelled fresh, and became black, almost like dirt. Popo began drinking a lot, and I didn’t like him when he was drunk. He smelled of rum, and he used to cry and then grow angry and want to beat up everybody. That made him an accepted member of the gang. Hat said, ‘We was wrong about Popo. He is a man, like any of we’ (Naipaul, 1987, p. 21).



“Like Popo, George was happy to let his wife do all the work in the house and the yard. They kept cows, and again I hated George for that. Because the water from his pens made the gutters stink, and when we were playing cricket on the pavement, the ball often got wet in the gutter. Boyee and Errol used to wet the ball deliberately in the stinking gutter. They wanted to make it shoot” (Naipaul, 1987, 27).

- By contemporary Western standards, such behavior is perceived as being obnoxious, crude and not civilized. However, by Indo-Caribbean gender benchmarks, each one of the aforementioned character traits are lauded and revered.

“George never became one of the gang in Miguel Street. He didn’t seem to mind. He had his wife and daughter and his son. He beat them all. And when the boy Elias grew too big, George beat his daughter and his wife more than ever. The blows didn’t appear to do the mother an good. She just grew thinner and thinner; but the daughter, Dolly, thrived on it. She grew fatter and fatter, and giggle more and more every year. Elias the son, grew more and more stern, but he never spoke a hard word to his father” (Naipaul, 1987, p.27).

“Elias said, ‘Boy my father is a funny man. But you must forgive him. What he say don’t matter. He old. He have life hard. He not educated like we here. He have a soul just like any of we, too besides’” (Naipaul, 1987, p.29).

“There was certainly a glamour to driving the blue carts. The men were aristocrats. They worked early in the morning and had the rest of the day free. And then they were always going on strike. They didn’t strike for much. They struck for things like a cent more a day; they struck if someone was laid off. They struck when the war began; they struck when the war ended. They struck when India got Independence. They struck when Gandhi died.

Eddoes, who was a driver was admired the most of the boys. He said his father was the best cart-driver of his day, and he told us great stories of the old man's skill. Eddoes came from a low Hindu caste, and there was a lot of truth in what he said. His skill was a sort of family skill, passing from father to son" (Naipaul, 1987, p.36).

"Hat used to say, 'And it ain't only that he got brains. The boy Elias have nice ways too'" (Naipaul, 1987, p.42).

- Corporal punishment is not unheard of in Indo-Caribbean households. The punishment that native Indo-Caribbeans received and the amount inflicted upon their offspring are much different with the latter receiving the mild version.

"My mother said when I got home, 'Where you was? You think you is a man now and could go all over the place? Go cut a whip for me'" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 59).

"Titus Hoyt said, 'You see, you people don't care about your country. How many of you know about Fort George? Not one of you here know about the place. But is history, man, is your history, and you must learn about things like that. You must remember that the boys and girls of today are the men and women of tomorrow. The old Romans had a saying, you know. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. I think we will make the walk to Fort George'" (Naipaul, 1987, p. 103).

- Titus Hoyt strived to be an educator. His success is limited as his pupils refused to learn. However analyzing this text outside the confines of the novel, it can be said that most Indo-Caribbeans do not know of their history.

"My mother said, 'But what I saying at all? You sure Bhacku know the *Ramayana*?"

'I sure sure.'



‘My mother said, ‘Well, it easy easy. He is a Brahmin, he know the *Ramayana*, and he have a car. Is easy for him to become a pundit, a real proper pundit’” (Naipaul, 1987, 164).

- A personal joke amongst my family, we believe that there are so many priests that anyone can become one in the Indo-Caribbean community, so long as they speak Hindi.

“Hat said, ‘Edward you talking as if Trinidad is England. You ever hear the truth in Trinidad and get away? In Trinidad the more you innocent, the more they throw you injail, and the more bribe you got to hand out. You got to bribe the magistrate. You got to give them fowl, big big leghorn hen, and you got to give them money. You got to bribe the inspectors. By the time you finish bribing it would be better if you did take your jail quiet quiet’” (Naipaul, 1987, p. 205).

- Corruption is not unknown to Indo-Caribbean politics. Money holds sway and it is very often cause for racial tensions and violence as evidenced in Guyana.

## I. Synopsis

*Miguel Street*'s main character is never identified, but based upon contextual clues and first person narration, it is obvious to note that the main character is a young boy. This young boy is highly perceptive of his neighborhood and the happenings of its citizenry. Each neighbor's tale is told in short stories that manage to remain intricately interconnected, representing the complex lives of Miguel Street's inhabitants. Naipaul's protagonist often remains an aloof observer, but the reader becomes aware of Miguel's Street effect upon him towards the end of the novel. Miguel Street is the soul of Trinidad, according to Naipaul and the human condition here is universal.

## Part II

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

V.S. Naipaul finds himself ranked amongst Western canonical writers such as Anton Chekhov and even Emily Dickinson. Therefore, it would be best to pair this novel with Anton Chekhov's vignette *The Lady and the Dog*. Naipaul's novel, aside from providing the reader with an astute perspective on Indo-Caribbean society, keenly examines the functioning of individual lives in juxtaposition to those around them. He merits, weighs and probes the rationale of their decisions and whether or not these decisions are affected by the pulls of culture, society and Miguel Street. Chekhov's works, including *The Lady and the Dog*, are noted for examining reality within a fictional setting. To briefly summarize *The Lady and the Dog*, a young woman goes on vacation hoping to find refreshment and repose after being forced to care for her ill husband. There, while walking her dog, she meets a gentleman with whom she begins a clandestine affair. Despite their feelings for each other, they both decide to return to their significant others, as it is the right thing to do. Many years later, they meet at an opera house and are pleased to know that their decisions had a positive result. Yet there is still some semblance of longing between them.

Plot wise, these two pieces have very few similarities. Content and thematically speaking they are similar as they both examine the realities that lie behind decisions and the impact



of those decisions upon oneself and those around them. Culturally, these two pieces are as diverse as possible and yet this pairing allows readers to see the broad spectrum of the human condition and its relevance to others.

A few classroom ideas:

1. The majority of the main characters in *Miguel Street* are men. For this particular exercise, students are asked to examine whether or not gender roles have an effect upon the way these characters act. As previously noted, men dominate the avenue that is Miguel Street and there are several instances where peer pressure forces them to engage in peculiar activities. The man and woman of *The Lady and the Dog* behave according to decorum and of course, societal expectations. Students will role play the characters from both of these pieces. Instead of transcribing the plotline of each story, students must first analyze the characters and decide what is their respective motivation. As *Miguel Street* is filled with a bountiful amount of characters, students should limit their selections to five characters, including the protagonist. Students should create a paragraph that first presents the character's motivation. After this has been established, students will create scenarios or scenes that are not included in both stories. These scenes must be completely different from those of both stories. In other words, students should change the plot, setting and mood of each piece. Students are to then sketch or write a brief play that tests the character's motivation within each context. Afterwards, they

will reflect on whether or not they have accordingly describe the character's motivation.

2. Naipaul and Chekhov use an omniscient narrator in both of their pieces. The reader is vaguely familiar with these protagonists and yet they can assume the speaker is the author himself. This activity asks the students to decipher whether or not the narrator is reliable. Is it possible to trust these narrators considering that they could plausibly be the authors? Taking on the form of a scavenger hunt, students will find clues that are strategically placed around the classroom, combine these clues and assess whether or not the narrators are in fact the authors. The clues are factoids about the authors' lives. These factoids however are related to *Miguel Street* and *The Lady and the Dog*. After combining all of the clues, students will find clues within the text that supports or disproves the idea that the authors are the narrators. Finally, they will discuss whether or not the narrators can be considered reliable.
3. With this final activity, students are to rummage through the novels and find noteworthy quotes. They should also mark the context and page number of each quote. The students will then choose two quotes from each novel. Students are limited to one quote from each piece. Then these quotes will be swapped from their respective texts. Students must find an appropriate position within the new text for each quote and re-write the content so that it fits the original meaning.



**Appendix P: *A Brighter Sun***

## **Indo-Caribbean Piece: *A Brighter Sun***

### **Part I**

#### **a. Title/Author/Author's Ethnicity**

- The novel *A Brighter Sun* is written by Sam Selvon; Selvon is of Indo-Caribbean descent and was born in Trinidad.

#### **b. Publication Date and Country**

- United Kingdom (London), 1952

#### **c. Readability**

- Selvon's novel is easy to navigate and comprehend. The only instances where the text's readability may be affected are when Selvon implements the use of Trinidadian Creole. Fortunately, the editors provided a dictionary that allows readers to comprehend what the characters are saying to each other. In addition, Selvon slows down and phonetically transcribes the Trinidadian Creole marginalizing and confusion that the reader may experience. While Selvon's novel is by no means simplistic, the manner in which he tells his tale lays the piece's main ideas out without the imperative need for in depth analysis. Selvon does integrate figurative language, but his metaphors, similes and personifications are easy to decipher. Considering that this novel will more likely than not be read by high school students, these readability traits are to their benefit.

#### **d. Age Recommendations**

- The age recommendation for this text is age 15 and up.

#### **e. Gender of Protagonist**



- Tiger, the protagonist is a young man who is married to his wife when he is 16.

**f. Setting of the novel (and influence of setting)**

- Trinidad is the setting of Selvon's novel. The local village where the majority of the novel takes place is Barataria. The village itself is approximately a few hours drive from Port of Spain, which is the capital of Trinidad. Selvon's use of this setting allows the reader to gain another perspective of Indo-Caribbean life. Tiger and his wife Urmilla are middle class farmers whose families have recently immigrated to Trinidad. In fact, Tiger was just a baby when his family arrived in the country. The ancestral and cultural ties are still fresh in the minds of this young couple but they struggle to maintain their beliefs in a changing city and environment. Selvon's vivid illustrations of local Trinidadian life and the internal conflicts of the city's natives demonstrates the paradoxes that many Indo-Caribbean American students face today.

**g. Genre (young adult, prose, verse, etc.)**

- Many of the pieces that hail from the Caribbean are very rarely designed specifically for young adults. As mentioned earlier within this thesis, the genre of young adult Indo-Caribbean fiction does not exist. However this novel, despite its datedness, is a young adult piece. The protagonist is barely 16 years of age at the novel's beginning and has yet to descend into his twenties by the end of it. He deals with issues that are relevant to young adults and are atypical of the genre itself, such as relationships,

family values, societal expectations and internal personality development.

Selvon beautifully pairs these issues with the Indo-Caribbean cultural backdrop, solidifying the validity of this piece.

#### **h. Availability (checked with Amazon.com)**

- There are approximately 55 copies of this novel available on Amazon.com; the lowest price is \$2.77.

#### **i. Stereotypes**

- There is a bounty of stereotypes within this novel, especially considering that this novel documents the beginnings of the Indo-Caribbean experience in the Caribbean. The stereotypes that stand out the most amongst the rest are the chauvinistic attitude of men and the racial tensions between each race. Tiger is the personification of stereotypes as he continuously stereotypes himself as being a “young boy” and not a “grown man,” without fully comprehending what are the differences between the two.

“During the day, Rita would stand by the fence and gossip to Urmilla as she swept the mango leaves from the yard. ‘Ah never see a man so in me born days,’ she said, ‘ah fuss he bad! He like to drink rumm too bad. Why we creole can’t live like India, quiet and nice’

Urmilla was embarrassed. She knew from experience that Indians fought and quarreled just as much. Didn’t she have a mark on her shoulder where an empty tin had struck her when her own father and mother were fighting? It was the same thing all over. Only white people. If they could only be like white people!” (Selvon, 1952, p. 31).

- The life of Europeans is projected unto all victims of colonization as the ideal life to live. This pattern or trend continues as Indo-



Caribbeans migrate to the United States. Unfortunately, Indo-Caribbeans fail to realize the effect of imperialism upon social, economic and political relationships with other people.

“So what de arse we have to do wid dat? Dem Indian people does have plenty money hide away. Why Tiger don’t buy ah bed for he wife?” (Selvon, 1952, p. 39).

“Is only nigger friend you makeam since you come? His *bap* asked. ‘Plenty Indian liveam dis side. Is true them is good neighbour, but you must look for Indian friend, like you and you wife. Indian must keep together.’

‘Is I who pinch him, that is why he cry,’ Urmilla’s mother said. ‘Nigger boy put he black hand in my *betah* baby face! He too fast again!’

‘But *mai*, these people good to us; we is friends. I does get little things from she, and sometimes she does borrow little things from me. They is not bad people” (Selvon, 1952, p. 47).

- Tiger and Joe’s relationship exemplifies the unification process that has occurred on several occasions in the West Indies.

Unfortunately, conservative perspectives adhere to traditional beliefs or “sticking to one’s own kind.”

“And as the car drove off the old woman poked her head out of the window and shouted ‘Yuh nasty coolie! I smelling of fish, but what you smelling of?’ The rest of her words were inaudible as the car swung into George Street” (Selvon, 1952, p. 87).

“Tiger was impressed with the Red House, but Boysie was more interested in the Central Police Station opposite. ‘Boy, de most ignorant police in de world is de Trinidad police. A fuss dey stupid! Man, dey don’t even know how to talk to people properly, dey like beast. But if yuh white, or if yuh have money, is all right. Ah know plenty people who

does do all kind of scheme, but because they have money de police don't do dem nutting. Is only poor people does catch dey arse" (Selvon, 1952, p. 89).

"She dispatched a customer and returned. 'One time an old Indian went in Canning's and ask to see ham. So Carl – Daisy's boy friend, nar – showed him one. He say it too small. So Carl bring a bigger one. He still say it small. Well Carl show him all de ham in the grocery, and still the coolie man ain't satisfy. So at last Carl, tinkin de man want to buy bout twenty ham one time, bring the biggest one it had – a York ham – and tell him that is the best they have. The coolie lift it up, yuh know, and it feel good, and he say - yuh know what he say? – he say, 'Dis good one. Giveam twelve cents' worth!'" (Selvon, 1952, p. 94).

"Listen, is one ting yuh have to learn quick, and dat is dat wite people is God in dis country, boy. Was de same ting when I uses to work in de grocery. Was always wite people first. Black people like we don't stand a chance" (Selvon, 1952, p. 94-95).

"But Sookdeo only snatched the cutlass from his hand and stabbed it in the earth, and the labourers gathered around him, joking about how Indian people like to bury their money, they were sure he had some under the tree" (Selvon, 1952, p. 150).

"Tiger laughed bitterly. 'I beg your pardon! You know all the pretty words, but I shame of all Trinidad doctor. You know what happen last night? Let me tell you. Don't go yet' – holding on to his arm – 'you talking like a social man, well you don't know is manners to listen when somebody talking to you? Let me tell you. First, I went to a coolie doctor. Yes, a coolie like myself. You know what he do? He out the light in my face. Then I come by you. You don't want me to tell you what you do! You know that for yourself! But you know who I get eventually? You know? You don't know? Is a wite man! Yes, a wite doctor from England, who don't even belong to this country! Is he who come, quite



from Port of Spain, to see my wife. All you ain't shame? You own people you doing that to? And I say again, man, look who it is that come? A big wite man!" (Selvon, 1952, p.188).

"The season of mangoes came and the rose mango tree in the yard bloomed, and Tiger knew it was all going to happen again, another child, another night of thought. He didn't bother to pray for a boy child. He wasn't very enthusiastic whether it was a boy or a girl. What had to happen, had to happen.

But it mattered a great deal to Urmilla. Only a boy child could bring Tiger back to her as he used to be. A boy child would change him, they would be happy again as the first time, and the family would come from Chaguanas and they would celebrate" (Selvon, 1952, p. 190).

"A fellar was telling me the other day he would prefer to live under the Star and Stripes than the British Bulldog. He say how much things the Yankee do for this country since they come, look how much modern machinery they have, look how much more money they paying me.

'Don't worry wid he. He ain't tell yuh bout how dey does kick nigger over dere in American, and how dey does kill dem and shoot dem down like dog. He ain't tell yuh bout dat? Bout how dey have big notice in de road saying: Nigger keep out. He ain't tell yuh dat nigger does catch dey royal arse in de States? De Yankee dollar folling a lot ah dem. Boy, Ah don't like the British, but if it come to de worse, Ah radder stay wid dem any day dan live under American rule!" (Selvon, 1952, p. 196).

- A common element of the human element is the cliché "the grass is greener on the other side." The same can be said for this quote. Many Indo-Caribbeans perceive that life is better in the United States, and it is in many respects. However the racial tensions that

are prevalent in the Indo-Caribbean nations are most certainly noted in the past and contemporary United States.

#### **j. Themes/Patterns**

- Selvon's novel marks the growth of a young man into an adult after he is thrust into the adult world. Tiger's rite of passage tests his abilities to understand the world around him as well as the vast amount of change that he encounters. Tiger, however, is in opposition to what society expects from him and what he believes.
- A few general themes are:
  - Manhood vs. Boyhood
  - The role of women in society and their relationship to their significant others
  - Friendships vs. Business relationship
  - Indo-Caribbeans vs. Afro-Caribbeans vs. Asian-Caribbeans
  - The arrival of the Americans in Trinidad
  - The Second World War and its socio-economic impact
  - Family dynamics and parental expectations.

"Tiger didn't think that he would have to look at that face for the rest of his life. The whole affair had been arranged for him; he didn't have anything to do with it. He wondered if she could cook, but he didn't ask himself if she knew anything about what boys and girls did when they got married, because he didn't know either. He was aware of a painful exhilaration; painful because neither of them understood, exhilarating because it was something different in his monotonous life" (Selvon, 1952, p. 5).



“Tiger had never smoked. He had only seen his father and the others. But he had decided that he was not going to appear a small boy before his wife. Men smoked: he would smoke. He would drink rum, curse, swear, bully the life out of her if she did not obey him. Hadn’t he seen when his father did that? And didn’t he know what to do when they went to bed? But he refused to think about much later, in the bed. Unknowingness folded about him so he couldn’t breathe. He was afraid” (Selvon, 1952, p. 13).

- Selvon’s protagonist transitions from boyhood into manhood, a catalytic change resulting from his arranged marriage. He is, however, only sixteen and unaware of what it means to be a teenager, much less a man. However, he acts in accordance with expected gender roles and “bullies” his child bride while simultaneously smoking.

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“In the night, there is the smell of stale food and rubbish piled high near the pavements. Slinking, mangy dogs sniff and explore the debris for something to eat. Shrunken old people, wrapped in old newspapers and bags crouch in doorways and on the cold concrete sidewalks. In George street, most anything lies in the drains – coconut shells, tattered clothing, broken bottles from an early battle, empty tin cans, dead dogs ... On a Saturday night especially some middle – and upper class- families like their souse and

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black pudding and delegate a member of the family to make the purchase as inconspicuously as possible" (Selvon, 1952, p. 21).

"Things always happened to other people, but nothing happened to him. Only big responsibility. He was disappointed. He had expected that as soon as Sookdeo explained things, the knowledge would put him right. But the more he listened - and Sookdeo flavoured the facts with his own opinion - the more perplexed he became" (Selvon, 1952, p. 76).

"Sometimes a heart-slowng homesickness came over him, and he wanted to run back into his life as a boy in the canefields, with no thoughts to worry him, with parents to give him food and occasionally short khaki pants to wear" (Selvon, 1952, p. 81).

"Look Mr. Tiger coming in he new car! He come back from England as a big lawyer, boy. He have plenty money, boy. 'Good morning Mr. Tiger! Good morning, chief!' He would stand them all drinks. Not because he was big shot he would ignore them. He would give a feast for the poor. He would have office in Port of Spain, and a secretary, like Mr. Rodriguez, the landowner in San Juan. This time so, the girls wild about him. He wouldn't let his father fix no marriage for him. He would pick the girl himself and married for him. He would pick the girl himself and married in the church in the city, not in a bamboo tent. Hear the wedding bells ringing... This time so, everybody know him for the smartest lawyer in town - it reach a time when he even have to refuse case! He have to expand the office, and now about three secretary working for him" (Selvon, 1952, p. 96-97).

"He had learned nothing at all. It was only now he was learning. He remembered the man he had seen in the valley below. He put himself in the place of the reader and turned a page. But that was all he could do. He could say it was a pretty book, or the pages were

thick, or he might even be able to count them all, one by one, but all the knowledge written there – thousands and thousands of words, answering all of his questions, and he could only stare” (Selvon, 1952, p. 99-100).

- As mentioned earlier, boys were expected to abandon school in order to provide for the rest of the household. This marginalization of the impact of education is one of the main reasons for the very high illiteracy amongst Indo-Caribbean males.

“He cleared his throat. ‘Well, as you could see for yourself, the Americans and them going to build a road right by here. The notice from the estate people. It say that we will me com-pen-sated by the estate company. I don’t know what the word mean, but the sense is that we will get money for whatever we lose. It say we have two weeks to clear out” (Selvon, 1952, p. 105).

“Well, like you never had boy days! Wen yuh break buisse is wen yuh run away from school and go dancing top or pitching marble or teefing mango in people garden, or going down by de sea to bade. Regular, I used to break buisse ... All right den. Ah grow up big, having experience. Ah screw so much woman dat I can’t even remember dem. Ah tief. Ah go hungry. Ah drink rum. Ah smoke. Ah play card ...

‘You mean to say Joes, that you never had ambition to go to college or get a goof office job?’

‘But why papa? Ah man cud live happy without all dem tings” (Selvon, 1952, p. 111).

- Survival is instinctual hence the reason for not needing much of an education. In the Caribbean, monetary value and the primal need of placing food on the table surpasses the value of education, hence the reason for the above statement.



“Mr. Bunsee... like the Indians in Port of Spain was completely westernized and tolerated their ceremonies and feasts with a faint amusement. Perhaps after this job of assessing the gardens he would get a rise and move into the city. He would speak to Mr. Rodriguez about it. He was in love with a Portuguese-Indian girl who lived in Laventille. Like him, she was very modern; it was a joke with them when they talked about marrying. She would say, ‘Look Carl, we ain’t getting married under bamboo you know! No Indian wedding for we in no tent! Is de Roman Catholic church in Port of Spain!’ That was always a quarrel with his mother and father, who were staunch Hindus and disliked the girl, saying she was the cause of him forgetting the habits and customs of his people” (Selvon, 1952, p. 120).

- Creolization has many degrees; there is the creolization of an indigenous population, i.e. indentured Indians becoming Indo-Caribbean and there is the evolution of the Indo-Caribbean who seeks to adopt Western perspectives as these are the pre-supposed epitomes of perfection.

“When we get house, that will be big thing! A piano, a big table – everything big, because is only when you small you does have small thing and when you poor” (Selvon, 1952, p. 133).

“Well yuh know how he have ah good work wid de Yankees? People from all about going for work in de base, because de Yankee paying plenty money. American people not cheap like British people, gul! From de time people hear about Yankee work dey leaving everyting else, post office and treasury and government work, because they getting more money than de government cuh pay. So wat yuh tink happen? De government say, ‘Eh-eh! Is so?’ And now dey pass a new rule, telling de Americans dey can’t pay so much money to de poor people, dat it upsetting ‘conomy and society!’” (Selvon, 1952, p. 135)

“And I mean, things like wife and children and a place to live, and some food in his belly, is enough for the time being. He shouldn’t want to do big things right away, he should take time, he should for chances and opportunities. He should be grateful for what he have, don’t mind it small. I mean, if you have something small, you neighbour does always have something smaller, so you see, you all right! You know, Joe, the main thing is to be happy. But if even you could read and write, if even you have plenty money, big car, big house, big-shot friends, all of that don’t matter if you not happy, not true Joe?” (Selvon, 1952, p. 194).

“You don’t start over things in life, he said wisely, you just have to go on from where you stop. It is not as if you born all over again. Is the same life” (Selvon, 1952, p. 209).

- The above quotes are beautiful in tat they describe two elements of the human condition. They speak of change and continuity as well as the ability to find happiness, even in the most dark situations.

#### **k. Indo-Caribbean Applications (How is this novel relevant to Indo-Caribbean students?)**

- *A Brighter Sun* explains the male Indo-Caribbean experience. While society places a significant demand upon women, men are just as pressured into their expected roles and mocked if they are not fulfilled. Selvon’s piece allows the reader to understand the plight of the young Indo-Caribbean and even Indo-Caribbean boy. Tiger’s struggle for acceptance and personal security or self-worth are elements of the human condition and not applicable to solely Indo-Caribbeans.



- Within this novel are also cultural aspects of Indo-Caribbean society as well as the transition stages between the immigration from India to the Caribbean. The reader is able to identify the creolization process.

"But he knew a little about weddings, that Indians were married at an early age, and that after the ceremony friends and relatives would bring him gifts until he began to eat; only then would they stop the offerings.

Every night and ever morning for a week close relatives came and rubbed him down to prepare his body for married life. On the morning of the wedding he bathed. They dressed him in the wedding gown and put a crown on his head. His father said, 'Boy dese people not so rich, so don't stayam too long to eat'" (Selvon, 1952, p. 5).

"You gettam house which side Barataria, gettam land, cow – well you go live dat side. Haveam plenty boy chile – girl chile no good, only bring trouble on yuh head" (Selvon, 1952, p. 7).

- Again, this gender role and chauvinist perspective is passed on from generation to generation.

"There were two chairs, a small table, and some cooking utensils. The hut was one room. The floor and walls were sooth mud. The roof was thatched with palm leaves. The kitchen was behind and separated from the hut. It was, in fact, a miniature of the hut except that there wan an earthen fireplace, dug into the ground. And it was in a dilapidated condition, leaning to one side" (Selvon, 1952, p. 11).

"Tiger drank tea from a large enamel cup. ... 'Don't think I don't know. You must remember, first thing is that I is the man in the house and you have to obey me" (Selvon, 1952, p. 13).

- Irony in so many ways, Tiger is not much older than Urmilla and yet because gender roles decree this, he must declare authority and rule his wife.

"Urmilla came and sat down beside him. She too watched the dark and the stars in the sky. She guessed what her husband was thinking, and she would have liked to talk it over with him, but she knew that Indian women just kept the house and saw after the children and didn't worry their men. But she wanted it to be different with them, that they could talk and laugh together, and share worries. Would Tiger stop her from talking to Rita? If he did, she would have to obey. It would be lonely with no one to share gossip" (Selvon, 1952, p. 49).

- Urmilla is progressive in her thinking, like so many Indo-Caribbean women. The bonds of Indo-Caribbean societal perspectives keep her in bondage, forcing her to obey instincts rather than changing the cyclic behaviors of male dominance.

"Sookdeo...had come from India to work as an indentured laborer on the white man's plantations. He liked to talk about how it was with him, about the old days. How he had worked himself to the bone. How he used to seduce girls in the cane fields. How he had lived in San Juan when the land was planted with cane, and not as it was today, with houses and streets" (Selvon, 1952, p. 65).

"Boysie was a handsome Indian, strong, straight and popular with the girls...He didn't like the slow Indian ways of life he saw around him in the village, and lately he had been thinking seriously of going away to America or England and turn over a new leaf...Boysie was mixed up good and proper with the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city and was at home with anybody. The few Indian friends he had were men; he didn't like Indian girls, he said they were too passive in love making, that the best women he



had ever had was a creole. For this reason he was not liked by the elderly Indians in the village, but Boysie didn't care. He used to say that all this business about colour and nationality was balls, that as long as a man was happy that was all that mattered" (Selvon, 1952, p. 78-79).

"Don't mind everybody laugh at yuh. Everybody say, 'But look at Tiger, nar! He playing scholar! He learning to read and write!' But yuh right. Yuh want to come man like me? Go in de city, don't stay this side. Get a work wid wite people in office. If you stay here, wat? Digging hole in ground. Rainy season come. Tomatoes come. Sell, buy same ting dis side" (Selvon, 1952, p. 116).

"To hell with them! They don't have nothing to do with it! You think is all my life I go let them tell me what to do? From the time I small, they doing everything for me. They married me to you, and I didn't even now you or where you come from. Up to now I don't know what sort of woman you really is! All now so, I could have been man, and I would have meet a girl I love and get married to she when I could have afford it. You think they give me anything? They give me a cow and this old mud hut in Barataria, and they give me you. Look at you. You ain't have no sense, you ain't even pretty. Deen have a pretty wife. Boysie have a pretty girl in Port of Spain, don't mind she creole, he show me she photo" (Selvon, 1952, p. 141).

"Yes, boy, dis land too hard. Plenty money in de States. If ever Ah come back, Ah go be ah rich man" (Selvon, 1952, p. 213).

- Many Indo-Caribbeans return to their native countries after accumulating riches. They may not have been as wealthy in the United States, but in the Caribbean even the lowest middle class man can be considered a millionaire.

## I. Synopsis

Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* chronicles the life of Tiger. After an arranged marriage at the age of 16, Tiger finds that he must learn how to adapt to his new lifestyle as well as learn how to become a man. Unfortunately, Tiger is completely unaware of the attributes of a man and ends up more confused and insecure than he was at the start of his marriage. Eventually, Tiger grows into his own and learns to accept his life for what it is. He begins to understand that being a man is not what society expects of you, but the acceptance and understanding of one's exterior and interior worlds.

## Part II

How well can these books be paired to the classics? What are some suggestions or lesson plans that would work well if these works were paired with the classics? Why would these books be successful?

Within the literary sphere, plethora's of novels chronicle the transition from adolescence into adulthood. Each novel brings with it the respective cultures and atmospheres that are directly related to the protagonist of the piece. While it may be beneficial to pair *A Brighter Sun* with a Western piece that matches its content, Selvon's novel contains a wealth of information that may be lost if paired with another work. A novel such as Selvon's, an Indo-Caribbean young adult piece, is a rarity in and of itself, hence the emphasis on a solitary analysis. Furthermore, this novel is one, which every high school student should be able to relate to, regardless of the specific content such as the arranged



marriage or living in a mud hut. The relationships between people and the themes as previously discussed are applicable across genders, races and more importantly ethnicities.

Here are a few ideas for the classroom:

1. Tiger believes that upon his marriage, he should automatically become a man. By the end of the novel, the reader is able to judge whether he has become a man. For this particular activity, students will chart the growth of Tiger as a man and if he fulfilled societal expectations by the end of the novel. The first step to this assignment asks students to identify quotes from the text that establishes the differences between a man and a boy. These quotes will be placed in a column format and as the students progress through the novel, they will check off whether or not Tiger has completed these requirements. On a separate piece of paper, students will identify what Tiger believes is the difference between manhood and boyhood. Students will follow the same procedure as the first checklist. At the very end of the novel, students will assess if Tiger fulfilled his own expectations or those of society. They will then write a reactionary essay in response to the validity of Tiger's manhood.
2. Selvon explores the theme of American imperialism or the expansion of American ideas or concepts into other countries. Students should first pinpoint the scenarios within the text where the American spheres of influence are self-evident. Each quote should be identified as having either a positive or a negative

effect upon Trinidadians. How does the arrival of the Americans affect Tiger and his family? Afterwards, students will create a chart that compares the pro's and con's of America invading a country. Students will then work in groups to complete an analysis of other U.S. invasions and the effect upon the invaded country's socio-economic structure. Students will present their findings in the form of a role-playing activity. They should create a skit, monologue or dialogue to the class.

3. One of the many positive attributes of Selvon's novel is the male oriented dynamics of the novel. Very rarely are novels written from the male perspective and yet Selvon does an exceptional job. Unfortunately, the reader is unable to fully connect with Tiger's wife, Urmilla and the only times the reader encounters this character are when she's engaged in stereotypical gender roles. She is expected to cook, clean, bear children and occasionally expect domestic abuse. For this activity, students are to understand the role of the Indo-Caribbean woman in juxtaposition to other societies. Students must first find quotes from the novel that create the character that is Urmilla. Once they have done this, they will then visually create a character that looks like Urmilla and place the quotes that describe her alongside the outline of her profile. Students will then choose another culture that has the same belief system in regards to women as the Indo-Caribbeans and read a novel that has a female character. Students will then repeat the process for this female character as they did with Urmilla. Once both portraits are done, they should be placed side by side around the classroom. No two students should have the same culture.



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