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Using Everyday Language to Support Students in Constructing Thematic Interpretations

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Research in literary response indicates that in classroom contexts, high school students have difficulty constructing thematic interpretations of literary texts, tending instead to summarize or build happiness-bound morals that ignore a text's potentially negative tones. However, studies in out-of-school contexts show students building thematic interpretations that include positive and negative elements. These conflicting findings suggest that some challenges of thematic interpretation lie not in students' interpretive limitations but in school-based discourses that define thematic interpretation. In this study, students constructed thematic interpretations with sentence stems using everyday interpretive language, such as "Reading this story suggests the world can be a place where _____." With no additional instruction, experimental groups constructed more thematic interpretations and made fewer happiness-bound interpretations than a comparison group. Results suggest that students are more capable of thematic interpretation than some research indicates and that everyday interpretive language may help disrupt students' school-based framing of thematic interpretation.

In U.S. high schools, thematic interpretation is often represented as a reductive exercise in summarizing a literary text or identifying a single lesson or positive moral embedded therein. However, constructing thematic interpretations can and should be a rich, rewarding personal exploration that allows students to "interrogate conundrums of the human experience" (Lee, Goldman, Levine, & Magliano, 2016, p. 172). Why are students not experiencing that kind of reading in their classrooms?

Research in thematic interpretation offers at least two explanations. First, studies of literary processing point to the complex cognitive demands of thematic interpretation, which include integrating conflicting features of a story; finding relationships between a story's plot, conflict, and ending; identifying interpretively salient concrete details in a text; attempting to map those details to some set of related abstract connotations; interpreting tone; mind-reading the intentions and desires of characters; and tracking potentially meaningful authorial moves (Holyoak, 1982; Magliano, Trabasso, & Graesser, 1999; Zunshine, 2006). Faced with these cognitive challenges, the studies suggest, students resort to summarizing plotlines or ascribing positive, "happiness-bound" morals that are "often of dubious relevance to the story at hand" (Dimino, Gersten, Carnine, & Blake, 1990, p. 30).

A second body of research, grounded in sociocultural context and an interest in students' everyday interpretive resources, draws different conclusions. When students are asked to think about literature in out-of-school contexts, they move beyond summarizing and moralizing to articulate thematic interpretations that take into account both positive and negative aspects of a text and that reflect on personal and textual worlds (Alvermann et al., 2012; Kinloch, 2012; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005).

These conflicting findings suggest that some of the challenges of thematic interpretation lie not in students' cognitive or interpretive limitations but in the school-based contexts in which students make those interpretations and the ways in which both teachers and researchers have led students to frame the process of thematic interpretation. Perhaps school-based language serves to constrain students' understanding of thematic interpretation, and perhaps everyday language leads students to a different framing of that process.

This study explored this hypothesis by comparing the effects of disciplinary and everyday language on students' thematic interpretations. Two groups of students were asked to build thematic responses to a short story by completing sentence stems (also called *sentence starters* or *templates*) that used everyday language to talk about texts, as in the sentence stem "Reading this story suggests the world can be a place where ____." A comparison group was asked to build thematic responses with a sentence stem that used the disciplinary term *theme*. The stems afforded an opportunity to examine the extent to which modest changes in discourse—in particular, moves toward everyday interpretive language—might support students in constructing rich thematic interpretations.

DEFINITIONS OF THEME AND THEORIES OF SITUATED INTERPRETATION

Defining Theme Through a Transactional Lens

Since the emergence of English language arts (ELA) as a high school subject, definitions of theme and thematic interpretation have been subject to debate, mostly based on differing ideas about the extent of a reader's interpretive authority (Fish, 1980). In the 1900s, a theme was a composition commenting on the uplifting truths of a classical text (Graff, 2008). Currently, some educators define theme as a literary element along with setting and symbol; others have defined it as a *product* of literary elements. In one ELA textbook, theme is both a concept (e.g., ambition) and a judgment about a concept (e.g., "Ambition is destructive"; *Holt McDougal Literature*, 2011).

Broadly speaking, *thematic interpretation* is defined in terms of "comments about either society, human nature, or the human condition" (Lukens, cited in Lehr, 1988, p. 339). The question under debate is generally "*Whose* comments?" This study responds to that question by drawing on transactional theories of literary reading (Dewey, 1934; Rosenblatt, 1982), which argue that comments about human nature are not embedded in a text but instead are created by each reader as he or she contributes to and experiences the world of a text. Readers are still accountable to the text and responsible for trying to understand the potential expectations of an author (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998), but at the same time readers' interwoven personal and cultural histories, goals, and discourse communities necessarily influence their meaning making. Thus, as researchers have found, readers of different cultures, classes, ages, or discourse communities might agree on a summary of a text but make varying interpretations of thematic meaning and might find different aspects of the text to be salient to those interpretations (Galda & Beach, 2001; Kurtz & Schober, 2001).

This study views thematic interpretation through a transactional lens, defining it as a reader's experience of textual worlds and attitudes about the human condition. This kind of transactional thematic interpretation can be a rich and fulfilling part of literary reading and response. At its most generative, a reader's thematic interpretation is a realization of "an inclusive human verity," as when a reader talked about striking passages from Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (Kuiken, 2004, p. 191). That reader experienced "the emotion of being alone in the dark" and later articulated this thematic interpretation: "There's no point in trying to get away from it, it's your fate ... a reminder that everybody dies" (Kuiken, 2004, p. 190).

The Discourses of Thematic Interpretation

At the same time, in many ELA classrooms, the process of thematic interpretation is still too often a reductive exercise in plot summary or “easy-to-formulate tags” that act as “the end of reading” (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014, p. 20) or a rote ascription of aphorisms that may or may not be accountable to the text. Studies of classroom discussion have found that teachers introduce the process of literary interpretation as a matter of “right or wrong” (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003, p. 711), guiding students, especially those in lower tracked classes, toward an “official textbook interpretation” (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, p. 240). ELA textbooks tend to represent literary reading as summary or a search for one right answer (Mihalakis, 2010), and popular classroom guides offer lists of positive themes that students can match to different stories, such as “the importance of family” (see, e.g., “Story Teaching Guide,” “Finding the Theme,” and “Teacher Ideas” on Scholastic.com, n.d.). Current tests, generally aligned with the Common Core State Standards, still use multiple-choice questions to ask students to identify a central idea in the text, implying that only one central idea can exist. Note that this focus on literal understanding and one-right-answer approaches to literary interpretation is particularly concentrated in lower tracked ELA classes, where students are even less likely to be engaged in discussions about literature (Applebee et al., 2003) or to construct critical written responses (Oakes, 2005; Watanabe, 2008).

Sociocultural theories of discourse and framing argue that school discourses—the cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary expectations communicated through classroom discussions, textbooks, teaching guides, and exams—lie at the heart of students’ general understandings of how to be literate in school (Gee, 2001; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2004). These school discourses directly influence the way in which students frame, or make sense of, what is going on in particular moments (Goffman, 1974), with some research showing that a teacher’s word choice or even gestures can lead students to reframe their understanding of a task (Berland & Hammer, 2012). This study takes up these theories about the power of discourses and framing to explore the concern that in U.S. high schools, the language and practices used to characterize thematic interpretation may constrain students’ engagement and transaction with literary texts.

CONFLICTING FINDINGS ABOUT STUDENTS’ THEMATIC INTERPRETATIONS

This concern derives from two bodies of research that offer contradictory conclusions about students’ capacity for transactional thematic interpretations. For the most part, cognitively oriented research asking students to generate thematic

interpretations concludes that students cannot or do not construct transactional thematic interpretations. In contrast, socioculturally grounded research offers many examples of students doing just that. If cognitive complexity is a major obstacle to student interpretation both in and out of school, then teachers should focus on a particular set of interpretive skills in the classroom. However, if students struggle in school but not beyond it, then educators must move toward reflecting on and disrupting traditional classroom discourses.

Taking up the arguments of discourse and framing theory, this study looked not only at each body of research but at the language and accompanying assumptions of each set of research.

Cognitively Oriented Studies

One body of research includes both instructional interventions and expert–novice analyses. As a group, these studies indicate that when asked to make thematic interpretations, high school students tend to respond in one of two ways: summarizing or moralizing.

Summarizing

A set of expert–novice studies compared high school students (the novices) to undergraduate or graduate English majors or high school English teachers (the experts; Dimino et al., 1990; Harker, 1994; Janssen, Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, & van den Bergh, 2012; Levine & Horton, 2015; Peskin, 1998). These studies gave students general prompts (e.g., “What is your overall sense of the poem?” or “What might be some of the underlying meanings of this text?”) as opposed to content-specific prompts (e.g., “What does ‘The Ancient Mariner’ suggest about death and loss?”). These studies consistently found that students tended to focus on concrete details or paraphrase the plot as opposed to constructing connotations or thematic inferences.

Studies of high-achieving high school students similarly found a tendency to engage in “plain sense” or plot-driven readings of literary texts as opposed to interpretations (Harker, 1994, p. 207; Janssen et al., 2012). With a few exceptions (see McCarthy & Goldman, 2015), studies at the college level found that non-English majors or nonavid readers tended toward summary or story as opposed to interpretive reading (Andringa, 1995; Dorfman, 1996; Earthman, 1992; Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Hunt & Vipond, 1985).

Happiness-Bound Moralizing

A related group of studies reported another trend: when students did move beyond literal sense making, a number of their responses took the form of uplifting clichés or morals, even when the texts included significant negatively

valenced events and language (Cruz, Jordan, Melendez, & Ostrowski, 2013; Levine, 2014). After reading “The Scarlet Ibis,” a story suffused with guilt and regret, students responded with inspirational aphorisms, such as “[The story] teaches the theme ‘never give up’” (Olson, Land, Anselmi, & AuBuchon, 2010, p. 246).

When researchers asked students about specific themes, students were more likely to respond interpretively (Burkett & Goldman, 2016; Zeitz, 1994). However, those studies still showed evidence of happiness-bound tendencies in student readers. For example, Zeitz (1994, p. 286) asked high schoolers and English doctoral students to read Merrill’s poem “The World and the Child,” which critics describe as a complex poem of love, loss, and sadness. Zeitz asked a content-specific thematic question: “Regarding [the poem], in what sense is wisdom allowed to be the whole of love?” All respondents gave interpretive—as opposed to literal—responses. However, most expert readers identified both negative and positive elements in their thematic interpretations, whereas most novices did not account for negative aspects of the text.

Squire (1964) called such interpretations “happiness bound.” His influential study found that high school students searched for “fairy tale solutions” (p. 41), or positively valenced predictions about and interpretations of literary texts, even when such interpretations had little textual support. Other work suggests that such happiness-bound tendencies begin at least as far back as elementary school, when young students have been found to prefer and sometimes impose moralistic or happy endings on texts that offered little evidence for such outcomes (Jose & Brewer, 1984; Lehr, 1988; Williams, 1993).

Discourse of One Right Answer in Cognitive Research

What of the language used by the researchers in these studies? An examination of the researchers’ questions and prompts shows that they defined theme with what might be called school-based discourses, asking students to think about “points,” “messages,” “lessons,” and “solutions.” For example, Dimino et al. (1990) asked students, “What is the author trying to say?” and instructed them “to find a theme, review the problem [of the story], use the character information and the character’s reactions to the problem; and review how the problem was solved” (p. 24). Similarly, Olson et al. (2010) explained in a pretest: “The theme of a literary work is the writer’s message or main idea. The theme is what the writer wants you to remember most” (p. 247). That pretest also offered a happiness-bound example of theme from *Charlotte’s Web*: “Friendship is one of the most satisfying things in the world” (p. 247) These definitions and instructions belong to the discourse of one right answer and theme as uplifting moral and thus may have invited students to consider themes to be platitudes. In short, such studies may

underestimate students' capacity for constructing transactional thematic interpretations.

Socioculturally Oriented Studies

A smaller body of research, much of it by scholars interested in sociocultural context and recognizing and leveraging students' everyday resources (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), contradicts the conclusion that novice student readers struggle to construct transactional thematic interpretations.

Transactional Thematic Interpretations

Students' practices were examined in out-of-school settings (Alvermann et al., 2012; Kinloch, 2012; Luttrell & Parker, 2001) or in-school settings where students could choose their own literary texts (such as hip-hop songs) or attend to their own affective or emotional responses (Eva-Wood, 2004; Lee, 2007; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Although only a few of these studies focused specifically on thematic interpretation, each offered examples of students creating such interpretations.

For instance, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2005) designed an instructional intervention that integrated interpretation of hip-hop songs and poetry from the Western canon. Although the study took place in a classroom, an attempt was made to disrupt conventional expectations through attitudes, practices, and decorations to "imbue [the classroom] with a spirit and culture that stands in direct opposition to many of the school's other constraints" (p. 256). Students made incisive thematic interpretations, as when one student explored snake imagery in a Nas song, ultimately building a thematic interpretation that transcended cliché: "Snakes represent ... society in general.... It's like society will hold you and strike like a cobra.... That's the way the world is now, but that's not the way [Nas] wants it to be" (pp. 260–261). Here the student engaged in a transactional thematic interpretation, drawing from the author's textual world but using his own language to express his experience of engaging that world.

Disrupting the One-Right-Answer Discourse

Unlike in the more cognitively oriented research, students in this set of studies were not asked to offer a message, moral, deeper meaning, or big idea. Several instructional interventions (Eva-Wood, 2004; Levine & Horton, 2015) explicitly encouraged students in experimental groups to consider their affective or emotional responses to poetry. In Eva-Wood's study, students were told:

Poetry isn't just a fact-finding mission, but an experience with language that involves feelings and associations.... Pay special attention to feelings you have as

they connect to words, phrases, and lines. Turn up the volume on all these feelings as you explore meanings in the poem. (p. 184)

The experimental group was more likely to construct transactional thematic interpretations of a poem than the comparison group. For instance, students responded to “Away!” by Robert Frost, in which the speaker talks about what it means to die. One student made this transactional thematic response:

It’s happy ... even though you wouldn’t think of it because [the speaker] is talking about dying. But ... it’s the natural course of things: “I’ll find out what happens, and I have to leave you behind, but this is the way it is. I have to obey it. This is how life works.” (p. 188)

Like the student in Morrell and Duncan-Andrade’s (2005) study, this student created a personal articulation of his or her transaction with a text. The student took up the speaker’s attitude toward life and death, synthesizing the complexity and conflicting features of the text in a transactional thematic interpretation. These studies arguably disrupted the discourse of one right answer, instead using the everyday language of feelings, experiences, attitudes, and worldviews when prompting students to talk about texts. Students in these studies seemed to frame the process of thematic interpretation as an articulation of their own experience of the world of a text and its attitudes toward life.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Sentence Stems Using Everyday Language to Support Thematic Interpretation

This study focused on the language used to prompt students to discuss thematic interpretations. The study hypothesized that if students drew on everyday interpretive discourses to build thematic interpretations, they would be less likely to summarize or to create happiness-bound responses. To test the hypothesis, I compared sentence stems that used the disciplinary term *theme* with stems that framed interpretation in more everyday, non-school-based terms. The study asked the following questions:

1. When students use sentence stems that define thematic interpretation in everyday interpretive language, are they more likely to construct thematic interpretations of a story as opposed to literal paraphrase or summary?
2. If such students do make thematic interpretations, are they less likely to be happiness bound?

Everyday Interpretive Language

Everyday interpretive language takes many forms. For this study, I focused on language of worlds and attitudes because those terms played significant roles in the socioculturally oriented studies discussed earlier. In addition, these terms come up in surveys and interviews of students' motivations for reading outside of school (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Wilhelm, Smith, & Fransen, 2013). Using such everyday language might allow students to draw on their everyday interpretive practices, as suggested in other studies of school disciplines (Moll et al., 1992; Nasir, Rosebery, Warren, & Lee, 2006).

Text worlds, tone, and mood are also important concepts in writers' and theorists' framing of literary creation and response. For instance, novelists such as Toni Morrison (2007) talk about their work in terms of fictional worlds and the emotional impact they hope to create. Theorists such as Rosenblatt (1982) and Booth (1983) discuss the importance of attention to attitudes, empathy, and literary worlds that readers can explore. Booth argued that the positive and negative emotions and judgments about people, events, and language in a literary world help readers clarify their judgments in their own worlds. Empirical researchers have also framed literary reading in terms of the relationship readers create between fictional and real worlds (e.g., Beach & Phinney, 1997) and how readers draw on affective and emotional responses to shape literary and thematic interpretation (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Miall & Kuiken, 1994).

Sentence Stems

The study asked students to complete sentence stems that framed thematic interpretation in terms of the interpretation of fictional worlds or textual attitudes. Differences in responses could offer insight into the potential power of modest shifts in interpretive discourses.

Sentence stems are already in wide use. A Google search yields hundreds of personal and commercial sites that claim to assist students with a range of academic literacy tasks. Some are fill-in-the-blank stems for kindergartners learning to write their first sentences ("Today is _____"; "Interactive Writing," n.d.). Others are designed to help older students organize expository or argumentative writing. Perhaps best known in secondary schools are Graff and Birkenstein's (2014) templates for academic writing, which include stems for interpretive writing. For example, one reads, "It might be argued that in the clash between characters X and Y, the author wants us to favor character A. I contend, however _____" (p. 191).

However, sentence stems are not yet widely researched. In a few studies, general sentence stems were incorporated into interventions aimed at helping students develop literary interpretations, but the potential role of such stems was not isolated (Echevarria & Vogt, 2010; Levine, 2014; Olson et al., 2010; Zwiers & Crawford, 2009). For example, at the high school level, sheltered instruction

observation protocol, an instructional model designed for English learners, used sentence stems to help students identify salient parts of stories (Echevarria & Vogt, 2010). One read, “ _____ was important to this story because _____” (Echevarria & Vogt, 2010, p. 9). Although gains in interpretive talk or writing were reported, again, it is difficult to know what role the language of the stems played or how they might compare to other types of stems.

In the current study, the first experimental stem represented thematic interpretation as a consideration of text worlds: “Reading this story suggests that the world can be a place where _____.” The second stem represented thematic interpretation as a consideration of textual tone and attitude, offering a choice of valence: “By the end, this story seems to have a mostly positive outlook on life, because it suggests _____” or “By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that _____.” In contrast, a comparison group was given stems that merely asked for an identification of themes: “Some of my interpretations of themes in this story are _____.”

METHOD

Participants and Setting

This study took place at one urban and two suburban public schools in and around a large Midwestern city, with 185 students participating. I used snowball sampling to contact 20 middle and high school teachers at area schools. Eight teachers expressed interest in the study; three were ultimately given administrative permission to participate.

Students came from eighth-, ninth-, and 11th-grade classes, each grade from a different school (see Figure 1). Most participants were in 11th grade (60%) or eighth grade (31%). Students were from a range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds and from both honors and regular ELA classes. The diversity of this group allowed for exploration of possible effects of age and track on thematic interpretation.

The majority of participants ($n = 168$) were from the two suburban schools, whereas the 17 ninth graders were from the urban high school. The initial number of students from that school stood at about 50, but the consent forms were sent to the wrong address, and I was able to get new forms signed by only 17 students before the end of the year. Because the number of ninth graders was much lower than the numbers of students in the other grades, and because the demographics of the school were different from those of the suburban schools, I ultimately ran two analyses of the data, one including and one excluding the ninth-grade group. The pattern of results was the same.

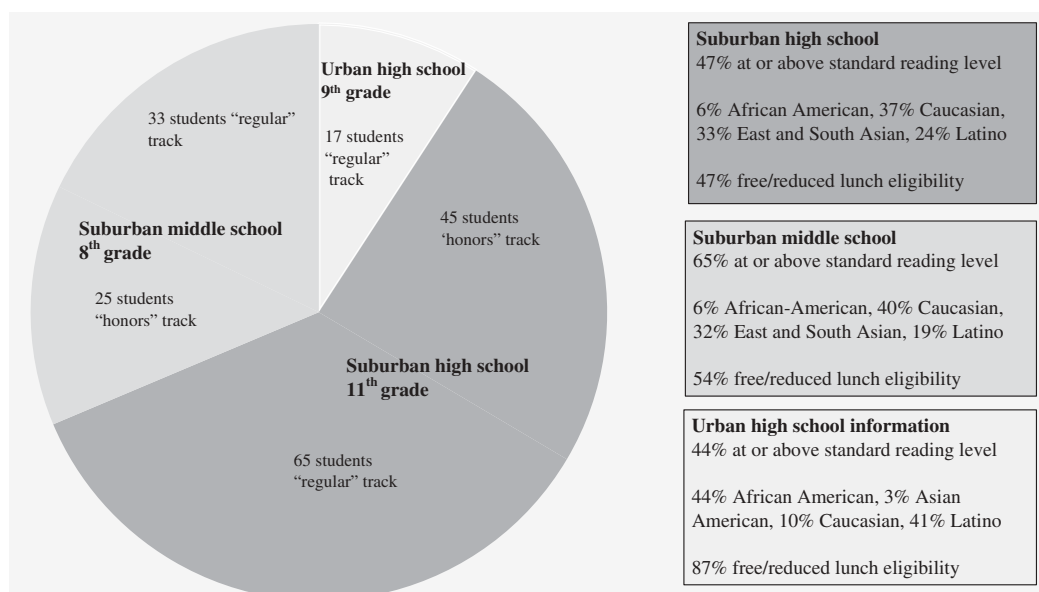


FIGURE 1 Descriptions of the participating students and schools.

Materials

Literary Text

The students read a 1-page excerpt from the novel *Prisoner's Dilemma* (Powers, 1996) that also works as a stand-alone short story and has been used as such on an International Baccalaureate literature exam (see [Appendix A](#)). The text was shortened slightly, and several potentially unfamiliar words were replaced by more common ones. The amended story had a Flesch-Kincaid reading ease score of 70, indicating a seventh-grade reading level. All participating teachers judged it to be accessible to their students.

In the story, several children and their father look at the constellations on a cold winter's night. The father quizzes the children about distance and space but seems not to notice the children's desire for closeness and warmth. The children attempt to answer their father's questions but never ask their own. As a stand-alone story, the ending is ambiguous: Perhaps the father has died or has simply become so involved in his own thoughts that he does not respond to his children. The narrator's last lines read, "I pull closer to my father, but something is wrong. He has thought himself into another place. He has already left us. He is no longer warm" (p. 13).

Worksheet

Depending on condition, students received one of three worksheets (see [Appendix B](#) for the comparison condition worksheet).

Story. Each worksheet was 2 pages; the first page was the same for all conditions. It asked students to “Please read the following story. After reading, you will do some writing about what you think happened in this story, and your interpretations of this story.” Then students read the story.

Summary. After reading, the students turned to the second page of the worksheet. To prevent students from conflating summary and theme, the worksheet asked students to summarize the story before it asked about interpretation.

Thematic Statement and Supporting Paragraph. Although all students had studied theme and been asked to engage in thematic interpretation, it was important to provide a definition of theme to all students, and it seemed necessary to use the word *theme* to do so, despite the hypothesis of the study. All worksheets thus included the same definition: “Themes are your interpretations of a story’s big ideas and underlying meanings.” I produced this definition by combining the language that the participating teachers used in class when they discussed theme. Although I used the disciplinary term *theme*, I chose to define themes and ideas as plural and did not include words like *lesson* or *point* in order to avoid a one-right-answer framing of thematic interpretation.

Then the worksheet prompted students to “discuss your interpretations of some of the themes in the story you just read. Please use the sentence starter below to begin your writing.”

Each student’s worksheet presented one of the following sentence stems:

1. *Comparison condition:* “Some of my interpretations of themes in this story are _____.”
2. *World condition:* “Reading this story suggests that the world can be a place where _____.”
3. *Tone condition:* Students were asked to choose only one of the following sentence stems to begin their writing: (a) “By the end, this story seems to have a mostly positive outlook on life, because it suggests that _____” or (b) “By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that _____.”

The tone condition asked students to consider broadly and choose whether they found the text to be ultimately optimistic or pessimistic, thus guiding students to build their interpretation of the text’s overarching tone. Although the stem was itself admittedly reductive, it explicitly invited students to consider happiness-bound or not-happiness-bound interpretations, thus allowing for an exploration students’ tendencies toward such responses.

Paragraph. To have more opportunity to build interpretations, students were then asked to write a paragraph or more to “support or explain the interpretations you just wrote about.”

Administration of the Writing Task

Each teacher administered the task to his or her participating classes at the beginning of the spring quarter. About one third of the students in each classroom were randomly assigned to each condition. The teachers told the students that they, the teachers, wanted to better understand students’ thinking about literature and that all students would receive participation credit, but not a grade, for the in-class writing. Students had 45 min to read *Prisoner’s Dilemma* and respond to the worksheet questions. Students could read the story as many times as they wished and write on it whenever and however they wished.

Responses were deidentified and typed into an Excel spreadsheet.

Analytic Methods

Summary

An independent rater and I, blind to condition, examined each student’s summary to ensure basic understanding of plot. All but two students appeared to have constructed similar models of the action and setting; that is, they identified that the father and children were outside, looking at the stars, and that something seemed to happen to the father at the end of the story. Many students guessed that the father died.

Literal and Interpretive Responses

Each student’s response to the prompt and accompanying paragraph were considered together in order to increase the opportunities to see interpretive responses. To begin the analysis of the literal or interpretive nature of student responses, two undergraduate English majors (not informed of the study’s hypothesis) and I examined responses of 20 high school students who participated in a pilot version of the task. Using a priori codes adapted from research on students’ responses to literature (Lehr, 1988; Svensson, 1987), we characterized responses as either literal or interpretive. In a literal response, students summarized the plot or restated details from the story; literal responses did not leave the “overt topic domain of the text” (Holyoak, 1982, p. 108). In contrast, interpretive responses moved beyond the domain of the text; they might have included judgment, interpretation of connotation or symbolic meaning, local inferences about character, or global inferences about human nature (see Table 1).

Several students quoted story excerpts that were richly symbolic in the context of the story but for which the students offered no additional interpretation. This

TABLE 1
Examples of Literal and Interpretive Theme Statements From Each Sentence Stem Condition.

<i>Code</i>	<i>Comparison Condition</i>	<i>World Condition</i>	<i>Tone Condition</i>
Literal	<i>“Some of my interpretations of themes in this story are his father asking questions, looking at the sky in to space.”</i>	<i>“Reading this story helps us see that the world can be a place where you can learn the constellations.”</i>	<i>“By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that the boy can’t see certain things in space. The boy feels colder than the night’s temperature. I guess his dad is dead.”</i>
Interpretive	<i>“Some of my interpretations of themes in this story are discovering and learning things are valuable in life. Especially with your family or friend that spends great time together. When you have the chance, don’t hold back or it’ll be too late.”</i>	<i>“Reading this story helps us see that the world can be a place where it’s cold and lonely when that important person is not in your life. All you could do is have memory on that important person and see what he did for you in your life.”</i>	<i>“By the end, this story seems to have a mostly positive outlook on life, because it suggests that we should all appreciate our time with others because we never know if we will or will not see them again, so we should cherish it!”</i>

Note. The sentence stems are in italics.

literal response from a student in the tone condition is an example of such a response: *“By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that the boy can’t see certain things in space. The boy ‘feels colder than the night’s temperature.’ I guess his dad is dead.”* (Sentence stems in student responses appear in italics throughout.) Although “cold” could be interpreted as connoting distance or lack of familial closeness, the student did not build such interpretations. Such responses were coded as literal.

After coding the pilot responses, the two undergraduate raters independently coded the responses of all study participants. Responses were coded as interpretive if they included interpretation in the sentence stem response, the supporting paragraph, or both. Otherwise they were coded as literal. Raters had high levels of agreement (Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .79$) and resolved disagreements through discussion.

Happiness-Bound Responses

The study also explored whether students in any condition would be less likely than others to construct happiness-bound responses and more likely to attend to negative aspects of the story and build on those aspects when making thematic interpretations.

To explore potential happiness-bound tendencies, the raters set aside all literal responses, because by definition students' literal responses did not include students' appraisals of textual valence. I then asked the undergraduate raters to examine all interpretive responses for patterns relating to students' evaluations of the overall valence of the story. Again, the raters were not aware of the study's research questions or hypotheses. The raters used collaborative coding (Smagorinsky, 2008) for this smaller body of data so that they could discuss and build codes together if in fact they identified valence-related trends. The raters ultimately found three general patterns in the responses, all based on students' evaluations of the affective impact of the story.

The first set of students interpreted *Prisoner's Dilemma* as a purely positive life lesson that encouraged its audience to "treasure every moment with your family" or "always learn new things." These responses were categorized as happiness bound.

A second set of students interpreted the text as both negative and positive, with two subpatterns emerging: In almost every case in which students incorporated both negative and positive interpretations, they created a sentence that began with a concessive clause (e.g., "Even though ...," "Just because ...") and ended with an independent clause that made a definitive move toward an interpretation of positive or negative affect. For example, one student noted that although the story presented people in trouble, it was ultimately optimistic: "Even when you are feeling isolated, you can still have love around you." Other students made a final move toward a negative interpretation: "Even though you can be surrounded by people, you will still feel alone."

A third set of students constructed interpretations that were entirely negative, such as "*Reading this story suggests that the world can be a place where we are trapped and alone and can't escape where we are.*"

Any response that recognized and incorporated interpretations of negative valence (either mixed with positive or purely negative) was categorized as not happiness bound. Table 2 offers examples from each category.

RESULTS

This study investigated the degree to which sentence stems that characterized themes with everyday interpretive language might support students in (a) constructing thematic interpretations and (b) moving beyond happiness-bound responses to more nuanced interpretations that took into account negative aspects of a text.

Thematic Interpretations

The results showed that students who used the world and tone sentence stems were more likely than the comparison group to construct thematic interpretations of *Prisoner's Dilemma* (see Figure 2).

TABLE 2
Examples of Happiness-Bound and Not-Happiness-Bound Interpretive Theme Statements.

<i>Happiness Bound</i>		<i>Not Happiness Bound</i>	
<i>Positive Comparison</i>	<i>Negative to Positive</i>	<i>Positive to Negative</i>	<i>Negative World condition:</i>
<i>condition: "Some of my interpretations of themes in this story are you can always learn new things.... The kid is remembering the amazing things his father taught him."</i>	<i>Tone condition: "By the end, this story seems to have a mostly positive outlook on life, because it suggests that even if you have lost someone, they will always be with you in your memories. You will always have memories of their love."</i>	<i>Tone condition: "By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that even though you can be surrounded by people, you will still feel alone."</i>	<i>"Reading this story suggests that the world can be a place where we are trapped and alone. Due to the fact that the narrator has to imagine his/her mother to prevent them from "giving in" hints that the narrator feels depressed, like a prisoner, trapped."</i>

Note. The sentence stems are in italics.

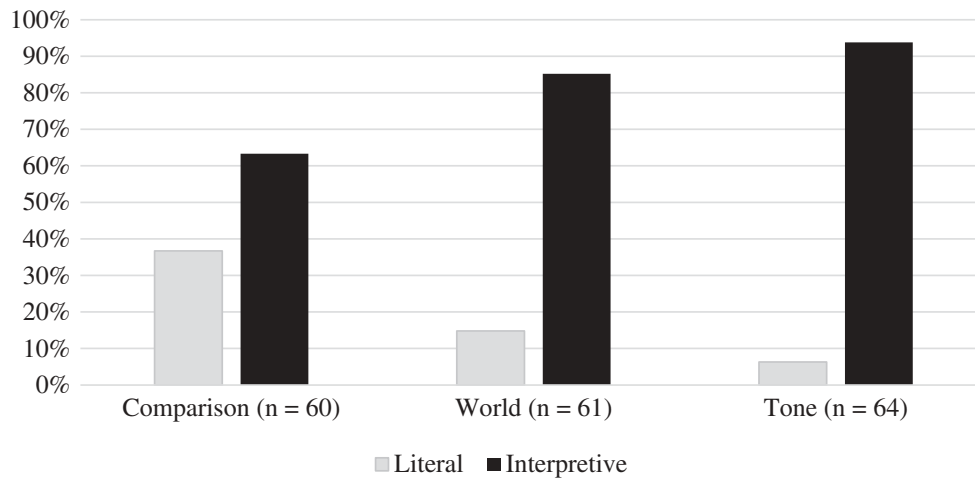


FIGURE 2 Frequency and percentage of literal and interpretive responses by condition.

A logistic regression analysis was performed on literal and interpretive responses and three predictors: condition, grade, and academic track. A test of the full model with all three predictors against a constant-only model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors, as a set, reliably distinguished between literal and interpretive responses of students. Table 3 includes relevant statistics for each of the three predictors.

TABLE 3
 Logistic Regression Analysis of Literal and Interpretive Responses as a Function of Condition, Grade, Track, and Framing of Statement ($N = 185$)

Variable	B	SE	Wald χ^2	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
Condition: World vs. comparison	1.21**	0.46	6.99	3.35	1.37	8.21
Condition: Tone vs. comparison	2.18***	0.61	12.76	8.81	2.67	29.09
Condition: World vs. tone	-0.97	0.65	2.21	0.38	0.11	1.36
Grade: 9th vs. 8th	0.73	0.79	0.84	2.07	0.44	9.75
Grade: 11th vs. 8th	0.50	0.44	1.29	1.65	0.70	3.90
Grade: 9th vs. 11th	0.23	0.75	0.09	1.25	0.29	5.44
Track: Regular vs. honors	-0.85	0.49	3.01	0.43	0.16	1.12
Self-rating (1-6)	0.09	0.20	0.21	1.10	0.74	1.63
Constant	0.49	0.94	0.28	1.64		

Note. Condition overall, $\chi^2(2, N = 185) = 15.70, p < .001$. Grade overall, $\chi^2(2, N = 185) = 1.57, p = .456$. Constant is displayed for the model with the following reference groups: comparison condition, eighth grade, regular track, and framed nonuniversally. CI = confidence interval.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As Table 3 indicates, both experimental groups were significantly more likely than the comparison group to construct thematic interpretations. The experimental groups were not different from each other. Grade and track, considered separately, were nonsignificant. However, another regression analysis that explored interaction effects between grade and condition as well as interaction effects between academic track and condition showed an increased proportion of interpretive responses in the two experimental conditions, especially among the honors students.

Happiness-Bound Responses

Again, the following data refer only to each group's interpretive responses—the literal responses were set aside because they did not include appraisals of valence. Both the world and tone groups integrated negative valence into their interpretations significantly more than the comparison group. The tone students showed the largest proportion of negative interpretations, with about 82% of all interpretive responses coded as including some acknowledgment of negative aspects of the text (see Figure 3).

One set of tone responses seemed to find the father's death most salient to thematic interpretations, as in this student's response: "By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that the people who

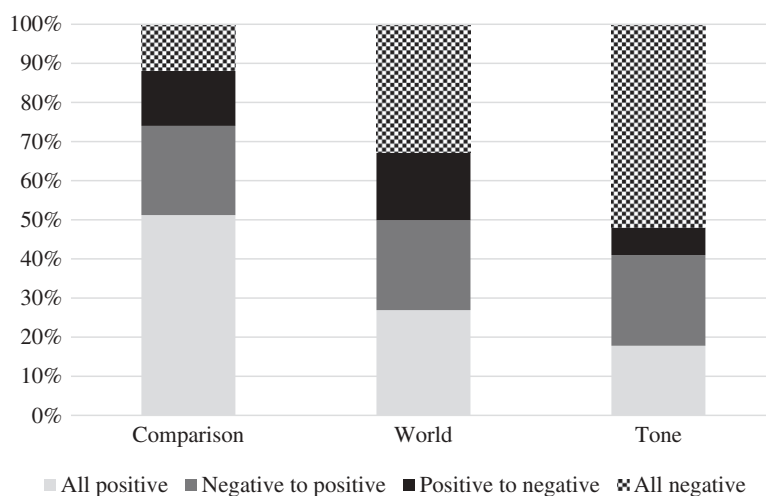


FIGURE 3 Proportion of categories of happiness-bound thematic interpretations by condition.

teach us the best will be the people we lose.” This student’s supporting paragraph went on to explain the sadness of the children’s loss. Another set of interpretations focused on more general existential isolation, as in this response: “*By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that there are all these emotions of anxiety about a world where being alone requires knowledge and being able to survive,*” or simply “We are alone in the universe.”¹

About 73% of the world group made negative interpretations. Their responses also focused on the loss of family or more broadly nihilistic themes, as in “The world is cold and hard and there is nothing we can do about it” or the following:

Reading this story helps us see that the world can be a place where everyone is left alone and you need to find your own road to success and your own way to live life. No one is going to help you.

Positive responses often focused on family and the value of knowledge, as in the following:

Reading this story helps us see that the world can be a place where many questions can be asked, and the more answers we obtain, the more it can help us in the long run. So when you struggle in hard times, you will already know the answer.

The comparison group differed in its responses. A little less than half (49%) of that group made negative interpretive responses, seeing in the story a message of encouragement, forbearance, or celebration of family: “*Some of my*

¹Each quoted response comes from an individual student.

TABLE 4
 Logistic Regression Analysis of Happiness-Bound Responses as a Function of Condition,
 Grade, and Track ($N = 143$)

Variable	B	SE	Wald χ^2	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
Condition: World vs. comparison	-1.15*	0.47	-2.43	0.49	0.24	0.97
Condition: Tone vs. comparison	-1.56***	0.49	3.16	4.78	1.85	13.03
Condition: World vs. tone	0.41	0.48	0.85	0.66	0.25	1.69
Grade: 8th vs. 9th	0.73	0.83	0.88	2.07	0.44	11.86
Grade: 8th vs. 11th	-0.03	0.43	-0.07	0.97	0.39	2.33
Grade: 9th vs. 11th	0.76	0.76	1	0.47	0.09	1.9
Track: Regular vs. honors	-0.79	0.41	-1.83	0.45	0.19	1.04

Note. Condition overall, $\chi^2(2, N = 142) = 16.43, p < .01$. Grade overall, $\chi^2(2, N = 142) = 0.48, p > .10$. McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = .048$. CI = confidence interval.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

interpretations of themes in this story are family ties will keep you grounded” or “There is nothing better than a love for your father.”

A logistic regression of students’ interpretation of affective impact with the three predictors condition, grade, and academic track against a constant-only model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(5, N = 135) = 15.51, p = .0008$. This indicated that the predictors, as a set, reliably distinguished between happiness-bound and not-happiness-bound responses. Table 4 shows the relevant data for each predictor. According to the Wald criterion, condition reliably predicted the affective evaluation of statements, $\chi^2(2, N = 143) = 10.90, p = .004$.

Both the world and tone conditions were significantly less likely than the comparison condition to produce solely positive, happiness-bound interpretations, even after I used Bonferroni’s adjustment for multiple tests. The world and tone conditions were not statistically significantly different from each other, although it is worth noting that the students in the tone condition had a higher proportion of all negative interpretations compared to the world group (52% vs. 33%, respectively). Another regression analysis, this time including interaction effects between grade and condition as well as academic track and condition, found no significant differences across grade or track.

Looking at individual responses further revealed that the experimental groups were likely to focus on images in the story’s setting—particularly descriptions of dark and

cold—and interpret such images as metaphors for sadness, death, or emotional distance, as in these abridged responses made by students in the tone condition:

By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests how it is a sad world when everything is not perfect. The family is not very happy because the last paragraph describes a cold night, so I felt like there is sadness between the family.

By the end, this story seems to have a mostly negative outlook on life, because it suggests that the warmth of life has left the children ... without even saying goodbye. Her father has left without her. I think this is showing a bigger picture, our loved ones leave us, and leave us cold.

In contrast, students in the comparison group tended to write about cold and dark as physical, not emotional, properties, as in this response:

Some of my interpretations of themes in this story are that they are running away from something. They ask “What are we running from?” At the end, when the father is done teaching, he dies. At last, when the father is done asking questions, he passes away and the author feels his/her father get cold.

DISCUSSION

This study was motivated by a tension between the results of two sets of research. One cognitively oriented set of studies using school-based discourse found that high school and even college students generally do not construct thematic interpretations of literary texts but instead summarize or ascribe generally positive aphorisms to texts regardless of the content or potential negative tones and moods (Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Harker, 1994; Hunt & Vipond, 1985; Jose & Brewer, 1984; Peskin, 1998; Zeitz, 1994). A smaller set of studies investigated students’ interactions with literature in settings where school-based discourses were arguably disrupted. Students in these studies tended to make more nuanced, seemingly transactional thematic interpretations of literary texts (Alvermann et al., 2012; Kinloch, 2012; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005). I hypothesized that the tension between these sets of findings might be explained not by students’ interpretive limitations but instead by the limitations of school-based discourse.

The findings support the hypothesis. When students used sentence stems with everyday language to articulate their responses to a short story, they were more likely to construct interpretations rather than literal responses, and their interpretations were more likely to reflect the story’s negative tones and moods.

The primary implication of these findings for both teaching and research is that a very modest shift in language—in this case, asking students to frame the process of thematic interpretation as an exploration of text worlds or attitudes—supported students’ construction of transactional thematic interpretations. These findings offer an alternative account of high school students’ struggles with thematic interpretation, suggesting that students at varying developmental and academic levels are more prepared for interpretive work than some teachers and researchers might think and that at least one obstacle to students’ interpretation is difficulty not with an answer but instead with the implications of the question.

Explanations of Findings From Theoretical and Literary Processing Perspectives

Sociocultural and Literary Theory

Why might these small changes in language have resulted in relatively large shifts in student responses? To answer this question, I revisit socioculturally grounded theories about the institutionally embedded power of classroom discourses and the situated nature of interpretation. Bakhtin & Holquist (1981) argued that “all words have the ‘taste’ of a profession” (p. 293); I am arguing that students may discern theme to be a product of academic reading and “doing school” (Pope, 2001) and thus frame thematic interpretation as an exercise in summarizing or moralizing because that is the way teachers and students have framed it for generations.

Other explanations derive from the ideas of literary theorists, critics, and writers who see literary reading as explorations of worlds, emotions, and judgments, arguing that stories offer readers precisely rendered other worlds that help them clarify the complexities of their own (Bruner, 1991; Morrison, 2007; Shklovsky, 1991). Frye (1964) asserted that through literature, readers are compelled to examine more ideal or more tragic worlds than those they actually live in and compare them to their own: “There are two halves to literary experience ... both a better and a worse world than the one we usually live with, and demands that we keep looking steadily at them both” (p. 58). Likewise, researchers who examine literary engagement and processing consistently refer to story worlds and narrative worlds to describe the place to which readers may be transported (Gerrig, 1993) or to examine how readers move from individual stories in fictional worlds (e.g., one woman is robbed at one mall) to more universal understandings that apply to our own world (the world is unjust; Green & Brock, 2000).

Although I cannot claim that students in this study experienced transportation to a narrative world during their 45-min reading task, these theories suggest that everyday language describing a text as a world or as expressing a set of attitudes about life could make transactional thematic interpretation more accessible to

readers. Such language might also allow students to draw on their everyday funds of knowledge of evaluation and judgment.

Literary Processing Models

One might think that when inexperienced literary readers are invited to explore the world of a text, they would be more likely, not less, to talk about the text in terms of its concrete details, as worlds are made of tangible people, places, and things. However, in this study, 85% of students using the world sentence stem considered *Prisoner's Dilemma* interpretively, not literally. It seems possible that when students were prompted to consider the story as world, they considered the particular events of the story in global terms, connecting concrete details to form a more general, second-order model (Zeitz, 1994; Zwaan, Radvansky, & Whitten, 2002).

The world sentence stem also seemed to support students in recognizing negative as well as positive aspects of the fictional world, even though the stem did not prompt for evaluative language or interpretation. It may be that there is an inherent evaluative element in describing, in general terms, the kind of world one lives in.

For students using the tone sentence stem, the move from literal comprehension to interpretive sense making seems straightforward: Students were essentially asked to evaluate the story's global attitudes, and evaluative moves automatically moved students beyond summary, as shown in other studies (Eva-Wood, 2004; Levine, 2014; Levine & Horton, 2015). The greater proportion of not-happiness-bound interpretations is less straightforward. Given that this group was offered the choice of evaluating the tone of the text as mostly positive or negative, why did this group not choose the positive sentence stem as frequently as the negative one?

One possible answer comes from research indicating that readers have strong affective responses to literary language such as metaphor or imagery (van Peer, Hakemulder, & Zyngier, 2007) and that affective response may help readers construct connections between disparate parts of a text (De Vega, 1996; van den Broek, Rapp, & Kendeou, 2005). It may be that reflecting on the story through the lens of valence helped students focus on the repeated figurative descriptions of cold, dark, and distance in the text. The common Western connotations of those images skew negative, so students may have been moved toward evaluations of the overall tone of the text as negative.

A return to frames and the situated nature of interpretation provides another set of explanations. Perhaps being given the option of interpreting the story's tones as negative allowed students to reframe the process of thematic interpretation so that their schema for interpretation expanded to include that possibility.

The prompt's language essentially gave students permission to articulate interpretations of negative effects.

Implications for Teaching

On the whole, these results suggest that teachers and students could benefit from reframing literary reading in general as the process of exploring literary worlds and could further benefit from simply jettisoning the framing of theme as message or moral or even "What was the author trying to say?" Reading *Prisoner's Dilemma* as a message that "Being united is important" or "You can always learn new things" is not incorrect, but it short-circuits the complexity and contradiction of the world of that story. Characterizing thematic interpretation as an evaluation of that world seemed to help students consider some of that complexity.

Moving to classroom discourses that frame literary reading as world exploration might more generally support literary reading, response, interpretation, and analysis. For example, students could reflect on the physical characteristics of a text world (e.g., the stars and the cold in *Prisoner's Dilemma*) and consider, as explorers of that story world, their personal reactions. They could also step outside the story world to consider the kinds of work those physical characteristics do in building their response to the story. Likewise, students could examine a text world through a range of critical lenses, asking questions such as "Who runs this world? What are its borders? Who *don't* you see in the world, and what does that mean?"

Implications for Research

Further research could look to the power of interpretive discourses in several ways. First, researchers should consider the degree to which the language of a study accepts the terms of conventional discourses, thereby inadvertently constraining students' responses. Second, research should explore the effects of other powerful literary discourses that transcend school-based conventions. For example, literature scholars have characterized literary reading in terms of paradox, puzzles, and new ways of seeing (Fahnestock & Secor, 1991; Rainey, 2016). What might be the results of students considering texts in those terms (e.g., "This text made me see _____ in a different way; for example, _____")? Likewise, what if teachers drew from an experiential or phenomenological understanding of literary reading (Fialho, Miall, & Zyngier, 2012), giving their students stems such as "Reading this text is like ..." or "Being in the world of this text reminds me of ..."? Similarly, a stem that draws on the everyday language of criticism (e.g., "Ultimately, this story is not worth your time, because/unless _____," or "This author is one of my favorites, because _____") seems likely to generate

definitions of literary value as well as the kind of aesthetic critique that is part of the pleasure and challenge of reading literature.

The notion of theme and the framing of thematic interpretation is only one area that may impose constraints on students' opportunities for rich literary reading. Consider, for example, the convention of "pretended distance" in literary writing, in which students avoid use of the first person or pretend that their audience has no knowledge of the book they have both read (Snow & Uccelli, 2009, p. 113). Consider also the conventional use of the first-person plural (which this study's sentence stems are guilty of using) to describe an unbounded population of identically responding readers, as in "We feel joy when the protagonist wins the race." Such discourses may be especially constraining for English learners or students deemed struggling readers, who have less exposure to reading and speaking in those discourses and may be less frequently asked to use them in their writing (Valdes, 2004). Students and teachers alike would profit from research into the potentially constraining effects of other aspects of school-based ELA discourses.

This study's results also invite further investigation of the benefits and potential drawbacks of teaching students to engage in disciplinary thinking with respect to ELA and literary interpretation. Many researchers have made persuasive arguments about the importance of helping students think like disciplinary experts by joining those discourse communities (e.g., Rainey & Moje, 2012). However, literary interpretation is not just the domain of disciplinary experts, and, as in some other disciplines (see Wineburg, 1991, for a discussion of the discourses of history classes), school-based discourse does not necessarily coincide with that of expert *or* the everyday reader.

Limitations

It is important to note a confounding variable in the tone sentence stem results that arose from its wording. The stem included the phrase "by the end," which might have been responsible for prompting negative interpretations. The end of *Prisoner's Dilemma* arguably communicates more negative valence than other parts of the story. It is likely that readers generate understandings of goal outcomes, consequences, and interpretations of tone after reading as opposed to during reading (Gerrig, 2004; Graesser, Singer, & Trabasso, 1994). Literary theory, too, argues that endings are powerful for author and reader (Kermode, 2000; Rabinowitz, 1987). Students may have focused on the story's conclusion and therefore were more likely to build interpretations that accounted for negative affective impact.

Although the sentence stem's reference to the story's end is a confound for this study, it provides useful information for teachers. Teachers and students

should pay particular attention to their interpretations of the affective impact of the end of a text, as much of a text's thematic power may lie there.

Another aspect of this study is useful for the research but perhaps not as useful for teachers. The results suggest that because the tone condition's binary choice between "mostly positive" and "mostly negative" helped students articulate negative interpretations of the text, using an affect-based scale is a useful jumping-off point for students' literary interpretations. In the classroom, however, a teacher would want to make sure that students understand that affective evaluation exists on a continuum and that most texts invite a range of positive and negative emotions.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the distance between interpretive discourses in and out of the conventional school setting. It suggests that the ELA classroom may be enmeshed in a unidirectional framing of thematic interpretation, whereas everyday literary reading in the world outside the classroom can and should be a transactional experience. The discourse of the ELA classroom needs to evolve in that direction.

Finally, this study is an examination of just one part of a complex and multilayered approach to disrupting conventional classroom discourses and helping students reframe their understanding of thematic interpretation using language from beyond the classroom. It is an open question as to whether using general sentence stems like the ones in this study could lead to any enduring epistemological change or disruption of disciplinary schemas for students or teachers. The study does, however, invite educators to continue to consider not just the way students answer but the way teachers (and researchers) ask.

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT WORKSHEET: STORY

Please read the following story. After reading, you will do some writing about what you think happened in this story, and your interpretations of this story.

Prisoner's Dilemma

Richard Powers, 1988

Somewhere, my father is teaching us the names of the constellations. We lie in the cold, out in the dark backyard, on our backs against the hard November ground. We children distribute ourselves over his enormous body like so many spare handkerchiefs. He does not feel our weight. My father points a cheap flashlight at the holes in the enclosing black shell. We lie on the frozen earth while all in front of us spreads the illustrated textbook of winter sky. The six-volt beam creates the one weak warm spot in the entire world.

My father is doing what he does best, doing the only thing he knew how to do in this life. He is quizzing us, plaguing his kids with questions. Where is the belt of Orion in the constellations? What is the English for Ursa Major? How big is a magnitude? He talks to us only in riddles.

He points his way with the flashlight, although the beam travels only a few feet before it is swallowed up in the general black. Still, my father waves the pointer around the sky map as if the light goes all the way out to the stars themselves. "There," he says to us, to himself, to the empty night. "Up there." We have to follow him, find the picture by telepathy. We are all already expert at second-guessing. We lie all together for once, learning to see the constellations Taurus and Leo as if our survival depends on it.

"Here; that dim line up there. Imagine a serpent, a dragon: can you all see it?" My older sister says she can, but the rest of us suspect she is lying. I can see the Dipper, the big one, the obvious one.

And I think I can make out the Milky Way. The rest is a blur, a rich, confusing picture book of too many possibilities. But even if we can't see the clusters of stars, all of us, even my little brother, can hear in my father's quizzes the main reason for his taking us out under the winter lights: "If there is one thing the universe excels at, it's empty space." We are out here alone, on a sliver of rock under the black vacuum, with nothing but his riddles for our thin atmosphere. He seems to tell us that the more we know, the less we can be hurt. But he leaves the all-important corollary, the how-to-get-there, up to us, the students, as an exercise.

We have a few questions of our own to ask him in return before he flicks off the beam. What are we running from? How do we get back? Why are you leaving us? What happens to students who fail? But I have already learned, by example, to keep the real questions for later. I hold them until it's too late.

I feel cold, colder than the night's temperature, a cold that carries easily across the following years. Only the sight of my mother in the close glow of kitchen window, the imagined smell of cocoa, blankets, and hot lemon dish soap, keeps me from going stiff and giving in. I pull closer to my father, but something is wrong. He has thought himself into another place. He has already left us. He is no longer warm.

APPENDIX B: STUDENT WORKSHEET-COMPARISON CONDITION

A. Please summarize the important events in this story.

B. Themes are your interpretation of a story's messages, big ideas, or underlying meanings. Below, please discuss your interpretation of some of the themes in the story you just read. Please use the sentence starter below to begin your writing.

Some of my interpretations of themes in this story are _____

C. Now, please support or explain the interpretations you just wrote about. Please write at least a paragraph to help support your interpretation.
