Preparing for and Engaging Middle School Students in Read-Alouds of Expository Texts

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Preparing for and Engaging Middle School Students in Read-Alouds of Expository Texts

Kari L. Allsup

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Preparing for and Engaging Middle School Students in Read-Alouds of Expository Texts

Kari L. Allsup
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Master of Arts

As most classroom teachers primarily select narrative texts for interactive read-alouds, there is a lack of research that explores interactive read-alouds of expository texts. To address the call for greater equity between narrative and expository texts in curriculum, the purpose of this study was to examine how a seventh-grade English language arts teacher prepared for and engaged students in interactive read-alouds using expository texts. Using a self-study methodology, data were collected in three ways: field notes that captured preparation, video recordings that captured the read-alouds, and post read-aloud reflections that captured impressions following the read-alouds. Findings are organized into two categories—planning read-alouds and engaging in read-alouds. Findings from the first category indicate that the importance of finding enjoyment in expository texts, the balance between entertainer and educator, and charting possible courses are significant parts of preparation for interactive read-alouds. Findings from the second category show that the importance of tapping in and building schemas, cultivating aesthetic experiences in efferent spaces, and engaging as thinkers and knowers are important factors for engaging adolescent readers in expository texts. Though this study highlights only one English Language Arts teacher’s experience preparing for and presenting read-alouds with expository texts, this research suggests that others may wish to embrace the messiness of planning to expand their read-aloud practices, and that read-alouds with expository texts may be particularly beneficial to adolescents because of their unique developmental needs.

Keywords: read-aloud, expository nonfiction, middle school, interactive read-aloud
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When I was a child, my father told stories. We often gathered to hear stories around the campfire, but just as often we gathered in the backyard under a huge walnut tree where we could lie on a blanket, look up at the stars and listen. He was such a good storyteller that it was hard to doubt the validity of his stories, many of them frightening campfire tales. His stories allowed us to explore our fears with his comforting presence nearby. Following a particularly frightening story, I or one of my brothers would inevitably ask, “Is that true?” We asked to feel safe again after a deliciously frightening journey. His reply was always the same. “It’s true to fiction,” he would say. I think his standard reply was a clever way to say it was just a story no matter how true it felt.

Now a middle school teacher, his answer is more significant to me as I consider the line between fiction and nonfiction, where I try to create a similar space for telling stories and reading aloud to my students. For example, the “truth” of fiction comes up when I read aloud from Christopher Paul Curtis’ novel (1995) The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963. The novel tells the story of a fictional family who travels to Birmingham, Alabama, during the summer the 16th Street church was bombed by White segregationists. In the aftermath of the bombing, Curtis describes the moment two little girls are carried from the rubble, one in red and one in blue. The 10-year-old protagonist notes that if his little sister was placed beside them, they would make the colors of the American flag—a poignant and moving commentary on the equality and freedom denied Black Americans. Reading this scene often evokes a similar question to the one I asked as a child—Is this true? Curtis’ novel is certainly true to fiction, but as a work of historical fiction where does the truth lie? This is a question with a complex answer.
More importantly for my purposes, the question has caused me to wonder what my students are really asking when this scene evokes the question—Is this true? Maybe, quite literally, they just want to know if the event we’re reading about happened in real life. Maybe my students are experiencing the frightening reality that humans can and sometimes will do unspeakable things to each other and are thus seeking reassurance that they are safe. Or maybe it is as Ricks (2018) suggests: their question represents a healthy skepticism that will help them be critical readers of their world. Regardless of the answer, the question—Is this true?—gets at something that I feel is lacking in my classroom, a gap between the teacher I am and the teacher I want to be.

I rarely read aloud expository texts, those texts we traditionally accept as true because all “[t]he information contained in [them] is verifiable (the key word in defining nonfiction) in published sources such as books or magazines, in original sources such as letters and journals, or from firsthand, observable facts” (Young et al., 2020, p. 206). Perhaps my preference for fiction stems from the aforementioned childhood experiences. Whatever the reason, I recognize the importance of expository nonfiction in the development of literacy, and I believe that many of my students deeply engage with this genre and possibly even prefer expository nonfiction. I worry that my preference for fiction might be hindering their development as readers. Additionally, I wonder if my preference for storytelling makes it seem like expository nonfiction, that which “informs or explains and is written in an expository text structure” (Young et al., 2020, p. 206), is less important/engaging than texts that follow a narrative structure.

Statement of the Problem

Read-alouds are a staple in many early elementary classrooms. In a classroom read-aloud, the text is read out loud by a teacher or more expert other, allowing readers/listeners to
participate in the reading without individually doing all the work of decoding (Ricks & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). The texts in a read-aloud are often more challenging than those students can read independently (Fisher et al., 2004). In an interactive read-aloud, Lennox (2013) explains that the reader/listener is invited to respond before, during, and after the reading. Thus defined, an effective interactive read-aloud allows students to access more difficult texts with the support of a teacher and their peers to co-construct meaning from the reading through dialogic discourse (Kesler et al., 2020; Ricks & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021).

Read-alouds occur much less frequently as students progress into the upper grades (International Literacy Association, 2018), and yet many scholars advocate for their inclusion in secondary classrooms because they argue that read-alouds can benefit older students as well as younger students (Laminack, 2017; Layne, 2015; Young, 2006). Read-alouds help build relationships (Young, 2006; Trelease, 2019), provide targeted instruction (Hurst & Griffity, 2015; Laminack, 2017), engage readers’ interest, aid comprehension, motivate reading (De Lin Du Bois, 1986), promote higher order thinking (Albright, 2002), and provide a space for productive, collective struggles with challenging concepts (Ricks & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). In my own classroom, I use read-alouds as a tool for instruction, as prompts or mentor texts for my students’ writing, to model reading strategies, to introduce text suggestions for independent reading, and to differentiate instruction based on students’ reading abilities. Though the benefits of reading aloud to older learners have been cited in a few studies, the main body of research focuses on the primary grades. More research is needed on classroom read-alouds in secondary settings.

Typically, narrative texts, those which tell a story, are the primary source material for classroom read-alouds (Conradi Smith et al., 2022), however, current scholarship emphasizes the
importance of making nonfiction a prominent part of the secondary curriculum (Coombs, 2013; Gallagher, 2009). Though traditionally nonfiction is separated into the subgenres of informational texts and biographies, Stewart and Correia (2021) explain the need to further categorize nonfiction according to its two major text structures—narrative and expository. As stated previously, narrative nonfiction follows a story structure, whereas expository nonfiction is “writing that explains, describes, or informs with ‘superior or lasting artistic merit’ (Stewart & Young, 2018, p. 13). Much of today’s expository nonfiction is well-written and highly engaging, and there is a host of expository nonfiction written especially for adolescents (Hayn et al., 2015).

Expository texts, well written as they may be, can be difficult for adolescent readers to navigate, thus, the International Literacy Association (2018) argues that “teachers must intentionally read aloud from expository texts” to support students’ literacies with expository texts (p. 3). However, little research on the subject of interactive read-aloud with expository texts exists.

**Statement of Purpose**

Read-alouds with expository literature may be one way to assist students as they learn to navigate these important texts. Currently, research on read-alouds with expository literature is in its infancy, but its potential as an instructional strategy and a socially mediated learning activity has been suggested by what little research there is on the topic. The National Council of Teachers of English’s (NCTE) position statement on nonfiction declares that nonfiction has “much to offer young people as readers and thinkers, and nonfiction should play a far more robust role in the reading and learning lives of young people” (2023). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the potential of interactive read-alouds using expository texts with middle school participants.
Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question:

How do I prepare for and engage my seventh-grade students in read-alouds of expository texts?
CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The benefits of reading aloud are well documented (Layne, 2015; Lennox, 2013; Trelease, 2013; Wan, 2000). In their seminal study, Anderson et al. (1985) formed a commission that examined research on reading and instruction. They were aware of the gaps in reading ability, especially among children living in poverty, but they were also confident the research would offer solutions to the literacy problem. Among the many instructional practices they found as possible solutions to enhancing students’ reading, they identified that the “single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (p. 23). However, teachers who read aloud to older students are often called on to justify spending valuable instructional time on this practice.

In Trelease’s (2013) practitioner-friendly text, The Read-Aloud Handbook, he outlined a broad array of benefits readers of all ages can gain from read-aloud activities. He noted reading aloud can build vocabulary, schema, motivation to read, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and relationships between adults and children. Additionally, read-alouds can provide children with models of fluent reading and opportunities for critical conversations around difficult topics. Though read-alouds occur across a wide range of settings (e.g., Benedictine monks reading to each other as part of their nightly meals; “lectores” [readers] reading to coworkers in Cuban cigar factories), most of the scholarship has explored the ways read-alouds unfold in the home and the classroom. For example, Wan (2000) reviewed read-aloud research in both settings from early in the 19th century through the 1990s. The research showed how early literacy was supported by read-aloud in the home and at school, synthesizing
the benefits of adults reading to children. Wan concluded that there is “a strong body of research supporting the significance of reading aloud to children” (p. 157).

More recently, Lennox (2013) conducted a review of research on interactive read-alouds within school settings. The review suggested reading aloud is a meaningful, intentional strategy for instruction. The practice develops vocabulary, higher-order thinking, and offers opportunities for critical discussion. Lennox concluded, “There is little doubt about the value of well-planned, engaging interactive read-alouds as one key avenue for supporting young children’s language for thinking and understanding” (p. 387). Together, these reviews emphasize the positive impact of read-aloud on the development of literacy skills.

**Benefits for Young Children**

In the late 20th century, read-aloud research tended to focus on what makes read-alouds effective for young children. For example, Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) reviewed research on reading aloud to preschool children to critically examine the findings of these studies that influenced educators’ use of read-aloud at this time. They suggested that while the research showed read-alouds to have a positive effect on language and literacy development, more research was needed to explore which aspects of shared reading produce the most benefit.

Sipe (2000) responded to this call for more research with his seminal study on young children’s responses to the written text and illustrations during read-alouds. In the study, first- and second-grade children participated in interactive discussions as the teacher read a picture book aloud. The children’s responses revealed five conceptual categories in which the children analyzed the text, made connections to other texts, made connections to their own lives, demonstrated immersive participation in the text, and used the text as a springboard for their own creative purposes. The findings indicated that first- and second-grade children were capable of
critical literary engagement, thus dialogic interaction with the text was the focus of much of the research that followed.

One branch of read-aloud research centers on children’s responses to texts, and like Sipe (2000), Beck and McKeown (2001) examined young children’s responses to explore what makes read-alouds effective in developing children’s language skills. Their work demonstrated how focusing talk about the text supports language development/vocabulary acquisition. Later, Sipe (2002) expanded his earlier study by discussing young children’s expressive engagement with texts. He found that young children demonstrated deep understanding through performative responses to texts and that such responses can and should be encouraged.

Sipe and Brightman (2009) looked even further at the ways young children make meaning by focusing on the page breaks of picture books as spaces for dialogic response. The children’s responses demonstrated how speculation allowed them to create coherent narratives from the text. Maloch and Beutel (2010) extended Sipe’s work, examining children’s spontaneous responses to a teacher read-aloud of fiction and nonfiction texts. Their study suggested that read-alouds are a valuable way for children to socially construct meaning around a text. In summary, the work of these scholars shows how dialogically engaging with texts develops young children’s language abilities and literary understanding.

Also prompted by Sipe’s work, there is a branch of research that considers the teacher’s role in facilitating dialogic interactions when reading aloud to achieve the greatest benefits. For example, Hansen (2004) expounded on Sipe’s work with a study of how teachers facilitated effective discussions during a picture book read-aloud. She found that young children’s comprehension and literary understanding grow when teachers intentionally facilitate discussions through their participation. Hoffman (2011) added to this with an exploration of higher-level
literacy instructional supports a novice teacher provided. The findings suggested that instructional support fosters co-constructed interpretive meanings even in young children.

Bringing both branches of research together, Worthy et al. (2012) explored both the teachers’ facilitation and the children’s responses in which they found high levels of engagement, intertextual connections, and shared meaning being produced by the children. In short, the academic, social, and personal benefits for young children demonstrate that reading aloud is not merely an enriching, but rather an essential classroom practice. Moreover, the previously mentioned studies highlight the teacher’s role in supporting the dialogic interaction which supports the academic growth of young learners.

Critical Conversations

Read-aloud research has also been concerned with developing the critical literacies of children. Shannon’s (2002) work demonstrated the complex themes depicted in picture books. All texts, including children’s texts, contain ideologies, and Shannon argued that teachers should help their students discuss and critique texts’ obvious and less obvious messages. Kesler et al. (2020) offers a rationale and framework for read-alouds that address issues of social justice in which readers are encouraged to think deeply about social themes texts may present in order to critically and civically engage in the world. In arguing for interactive read-alouds that address themes of social justice, he offers a literature-based curriculum that privileges the development of students’ critical literacies alongside other literacy skills.

Wilkins et al. (2016) identified constraining forces in their study of the responses of third- and fourth-grade children to texts depicting characters with disabilities. They found that societal expectations and the teacher’s responses to a right answer can constrain critical conversations. In contrast, Labadie et al. (2013) identified forces that afford critical discussion in
their study on kindergarten students’ responses to read-alouds with picture books themed by issues of social class. Their findings demonstrate the important role the teacher plays in cultivating deep thinking during critical conversations. In short, reading picture books themed by social justice is not enough; rather, teachers must cultivate the powerful potential in themed literature to strengthen students’ critical literacies.

Another area of research on critical literacy is concerned with the language development of bilingual students through critical conversations that occur during read-alouds. Kim’s (2016) case study examined the possibilities and challenges of critical literacy practices with bilingual preschool children. Though Kim identified that there was a lack of models for critical literacy approaches with bilingual children, the study showed that this approach gave children opportunities to explore diverse perspectives, examine gender roles in children’s literature, and expand their language abilities.

Worthy et al. (2013) found similar possibilities in their study of critical conversations during a read-aloud with bilingual students in middle school. By providing a space to critically examine the literature, language skills in both languages were strengthened. In summary, strengthening students’ critical literacy skills invites deeper thinking, supports the development of language, and encourages their engagement with the world around them.

**Teacher Moves**

As has been noted, the teacher plays an essential role in the interactive read-aloud, thus some research focuses on how preservice teachers learn to conduct read-alouds for their future classrooms. For example, Kerry-Moran (2016) focused on how preservice teachers’ expression during read-alouds could be developed. Outlining the ways teacher preparation programs may help preservice teachers develop this skill, she concluded that as literacy models, good
expression is an entry point for children to attain the literacy benefits from reading aloud.

Likewise, Pendergast et al. (2015) explored the development of teacher moves with preservice teachers learning to conduct interactive read-alouds. They found preservice teachers developed responsive practices such as capitalizing on teachable moments that strengthen vocabulary, consideration of pacing and wait time for reader responses, the need to limit teacher talk, engaging students through comments rather than questions, and consideration of voice qualities.

The teacher’s role was further emphasized in studies of in-service teachers who used read-aloud to strengthen literacy. Exploring read-aloud discussions of children’s literature in a third-grade classroom, Serafini and Ladd (2008) found most student responses to literature were on the literal level. However, their research showed that when teachers employed the right kinds of teacher moves (e.g., open-ended questioning) they opened spaces for deeper, interpretive responses. Expanding this research, Burke (2017) studied a practicing teacher’s moves during a read-aloud in a third-grade classroom. The teacher’s use of revoicing to hold up students’ ideas for consideration, to extend students’ thinking by offering more to think about, and to extend the discussion helped the teacher position students as active participants.

Benefits for Older Readers

A number of researchers posit that reading texts aloud is powerful regardless of age. For example, Giorgis (1999) argued that “picture books can and should be shared in secondary classrooms” (p. 51). She added, compellingly, that picture books offer more opportunities to make meaning for students who are growing up in an increasingly visual world. Some of the research on older readers depicts contexts in which reading aloud occurs and the benefits that stem from the practice. Beginning with adults, Duncan and Freeman (2020) surveyed adults in Britain to explore how and why they read aloud. They found reading aloud among adults
occurred frequently and that adults read a variety of text types. Importantly, their findings indicate that reading aloud is more than just a literacy practice for younger readers since in all settings where adults read aloud the practice connected adult readers to their group identities and fostered cultural belonging.

Also with adult readers, reading aloud supports dialogic interactions and growth. In research that focused on the pedagogical moves made during an interactive read-aloud, Ricks and Yenika-Agbaw (2021) explored how preservice teachers and their professor navigated tensions that arose during interactive read-alouds. Navigating these tensions, they found that a teacher’s willingness to “take risks by revealing their discomfort and uncertainty” (p. 10) led others to follow as they co-created meaning from children’s texts. They further found that the tensions older readers experience during a read-aloud (e.g., difficulty sustaining conversations about race and class) can constrain or encourage conversation. However, as participants engaged with the tensions, there was great potential for growth. Their findings indicate a value, even for adult learners, in collaboratively engaging with texts through read-alouds.

Focusing on adolescent readers, Albright and Ariail (2005) surveyed middle school teachers’ read-aloud practices. They found a large percentage of middle school teachers read aloud to their students from a variety of texts. Purposes for reading aloud included modeling, making texts accessible, supporting comprehension, reinforcing content knowledge, and managing student behavior. Expanding on this survey, Ariail and Albright (2005) surveyed a wider audience of middle school teachers’ read-aloud practices with similar results. The most often cited objectives for a read-aloud included encouraging a love of reading and strengthening comprehension. They also found that read-alouds are most often followed by a discussion. They
therefore suggested that to reach the goals teachers identified and benefit adolescent readers, classroom read-alouds should be paired with engaging and varied opportunities for response.

Like research with younger readers, scholarship on interactive read-alouds for older audiences shows that they can foster active engagement with texts. Clark and Andreasen (2014) studied the engagement of sixth-grade students and their understanding of the educational benefits read-alouds provide. Their findings indicated that students enjoy read-aloud time, though their reasons for enjoyment varied. For some, read-aloud time was a time to relax and as such engagement was not as high as teachers hoped. They concluded that while older students can identify the instructional benefits of a classroom read-aloud, for students to access these benefits they must be actively engaged in the reading rather than just passively listening.

There are also a handful of studies that consider using classroom read-alouds to instruct secondary students in content areas such as science and social studies. For example, in a seventh-grade science classroom, Hurst and Griffity (2015) explored students’ attitudes toward teacher read-alouds and considered their effects as an instructional strategy in a secondary setting. After reading aloud the content they wanted students to learn, they found that a majority of the students held favorable attitudes toward the read-aloud, concluding reading aloud as a valid instructional strategy. In a similar manner, De Lin Du Bois and McIntosh (1986) explored reasons for reading aloud in a secondary history class. They explained that read-alouds may be used to pique students’ interest in a topic, aid comprehension of both concepts and textbook format, strengthen language skills, motivate reading, and affect students’ social attitudes.

Also in a social studies setting, but with middle school students, Albright (2002) offered a rationale for reading aloud picture books to introduce and engage students in the content. Through dialogic interactions with the text, Albright found that a read-aloud was an effective
instructional strategy, enhancing students’ engagement with and the learning of class content. She determined that successful read-alouds in content areas should enrich content knowledge, promote higher order thinking, invite aesthetic response, support collaborative talk, and use pictures and illustrations to construct meaning. This research demonstrates how read-aloud may be used as an instructional strategy in content areas and suggests the importance of supporting older students’ comprehension of expository texts.

**Read-Alouds with Expository Nonfiction**

The use of expository nonfiction in read-alouds with older learners is almost nonexistent. Many scholars urge the inclusion of more expository literature in curriculum. NCTE’s (2023) position statement on the role of nonfiction literature outlines the importance of nonfiction in English language arts curriculum. They describe reading nonfiction as “a deeply enriching aesthetic experience” (Introduction section), and they argue that nonfiction has much to offer young people as readers and thinkers.

Researchers have taken up the task of expanding the use of expository nonfiction in the classroom in a variety of ways. Conradi Smith et al. (2022) explored what types of texts teachers in elementary read aloud and why. Their study revealed the predominance of fiction and that the books tended to be older titles. Decisions about what to read were influenced by affective, contextual (i.e., students’ interpersonal needs), and instructional factors. When expository literature was used, titles were often science focused and more current. They therefore conclude with a call for greater textual diversity, specifically for the inclusion of more expository literature.

Other scholarship has focused on students’ genre preferences. Stewart and Correia’s (2021) practitioner-focused text reports that many students have a strong preference for
expository texts. Adding to the understanding of genre preferences, Ives et al. (2020) were interested in the validity of the SRQ-RM, a measure of students’ reading motivation for sixth-grade students. Of importance to my work, they also explored which genres students were reading and how those preferences connected to their motivation to read. They found the SRQ-RM to be a valid measure and that certain genre preferences strongly correlated with reading motivation and the general amount of time spent reading. One significant finding was that a preference for expository nonfiction was comparable to a preference for fiction among their upper elementary participants.

In a practitioner-friendly book targeting Grades 3–8, Young (2006) discusses the importance of variety in the materials teachers read aloud. He argues that the benefits of reading expository nonfiction are many. Some of these include engaging students in real-world topics, building background knowledge and vocabulary, and supporting comprehension of expository text structures. Considering the importance of expository texts in reading development, Hall et al. (2005) studied the benefits of providing second-grade students with a strategy for comprehending expository literature. They found that providing instruction in expository text structure was an effective strategy for improving reading comprehension.

When considered together, the aforementioned scholarship suggests that teachers should focus more intentionally on expository literature. One way this might be addressed is through interactive read-alouds. However, only a few studies have addressed the use of expository texts during read-alouds, and they have primarily focused on read-alouds with younger children. For example, Robinson (2020) examined pre-school teachers’ purposes for reading aloud expository texts and students’ responses to said texts. Framed by Rosenblatt’s (2005) transactional theory, Robinson (2020) studied the teachers’ and children’s stances toward expository texts. They
found that teachers’ stances were efferent as they sought to introduce new vocabulary and expose students to new facts. In contrast, children’s stances were more flexible, often responding aesthetically to the ideas and images presented by the books. Students demonstrated empathy as they engaged in perspective taking and demonstrating emotions as they dramatized their reactions to the information. This work suggests the rich potential for readers to transact with expository texts.

In addition to fostering readers’ transactions, expository texts can position students as thinkers and knowers. Oyler (1996) was interested in unveiling the untapped potential of expository nonfiction as a read-aloud. Her work focused on the space expository texts could open for sharing classroom authority. Tracking student initiations during classroom read-alouds with expository texts, she found five types of initiations that allowed students to share authority with the teacher. Children offered comments to direct the reading process, question the text to increase their understanding, express understanding, share personal experiences, make intertextual links, make claims of expertise on the topic of a text, and share affective responses. Significantly, many of the initiations Oyler noted occurred only with expository texts, suggesting the potential of expository texts to invite student initiations.

Engagements with expository texts can also nurture curiosity. Stead (2014) encouraged the use of expository texts in a read-aloud by offering guidelines for using expository text in read-alouds such as selecting texts that connect to students’ interests, prioritizing time for students to talk about the text, reading with expression, and making illustrations visible for all participants. Stead’s main claim is that expository literature nurtures student inquiry. Working with fourth- and fifth-grade students, he sought to develop students’ critical thinking through questioning. To do this, they used the Reading and Analyzing Nonfiction Strategy (RAN). The
RAN strategy scaffolds higher level questioning as students consider five areas: (a) what they think they know about a topic, (b) what knowledge is confirmed during the reading, (c) what thinking changed as they read, (d) what new information was learned, and, most significant for nurturing curiosity, (e) what wonderings they had at the end of the reading. Using this strategy, they found students engaged deeply with expository texts through higher order questioning. This work suggests the importance of both expository texts and encouraging student questioning to develop higher order thinking.

With the development of higher order thinking in mind, expository texts can also develop critical reading abilities. McClure and Fullerton (2017) examined how interactive read-alouds with expository texts support reading development. They provided a description of planning for and conducting an interactive read-aloud with expository picture books. This process begins with selecting texts with students’ needs in mind. The chosen text should require students to infer the author’s purpose and demonstrate how expository texts are written from a specific perspective to develop critical reading abilities. The teacher then selects strategies that support inference, synthesis, analysis, and critique and identifies places to model the strategies by thinking aloud. Through the interactive read-aloud, readers discuss the text before, during, and after the reading which allows multiple opportunities to practice more sophisticated thinking. One significant conclusion they share is the importance of helping students view expository texts critically. They posit that students’ critical abilities are strengthened by working with their teacher and their peers to critique expository texts.

In an argument framed by the need for more culturally relevant pedagogy, May and Bingham (2015) argue for the use of expository texts in interactive read-alouds. Their work outlines guiding questions that support text selections and the practices that make a read-aloud
culturally relevant. They explain both the texts selected and the questions teachers ask may positively influence the cultural relevance of an interactive read-aloud, and they further emphasize the importance of holding high expectations for students to productively engage during read-alouds and contribute to academic conversations while allowing space for students to question information and propose other possibilities as a means of more culturally relevant pedagogy.

Most recently, Young et al. (2023) advocate specifically for the use of nonfiction books that employ expository text structures for interactive read-alouds. Their work offers ideas for interactive read-alouds for enjoyment, to teach text structures, to teach text features, to read longform expository nonfiction, and to select texts. They conclude that more equitable access to expository texts in interactive read-alouds will benefit all children, especially honoring the interests of fact-loving students which are most often neglected during interactive read-alouds.

Summary

Without diminishing the importance of narrative literature in English language arts curricula, it has been suggested that English language arts teachers are ideally positioned to provide instruction on expository literature (Layne, 2015; Young et al., 2023). Moreover, reading aloud positively impacts the skills necessary for reading development. Among these skills are vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and higher order thinking. The development of these skills is supported by well-planned dialogic interactions that occur during interactive read-alouds. Such interactions are supported by teachers who have developed responsive practices that encourage and support more student talk about texts. With older learners, read-alouds provide a space for adolescents to grow as readers and thinkers.
Using expository texts in interactive read-alouds may be used to position students as knowers, nurture curiosity, provide instruction, and develop critical thinking, but studies of read-alouds with expository nonfiction are almost nonexistent with adolescent learners. As such, using expository texts as the subject of interactive read-alouds is a space ripe with potential for growing adolescents’ critical reading abilities, but little is known about how secondary teachers facilitate read-alouds. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how I prepared for and engaged my students in interactive read-alouds of expository nonfiction.
CHAPTER 3

Method

This chapter outlines the conceptual frameworks, design, and specific methodology of this study which explored how I, a seventh-grade English language arts teacher, prepared for and engaged in interactive read-alouds with my students. In what follows, I first provide a brief overview of the conceptual frameworks for this study. I then discuss the study’s design and methodology. I conclude by explaining my process of data analysis.

Conceptual Frameworks

This study is framed by two major theoretical perspectives: (a) the transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 2005), and (b) socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Though each of these theories have their own focus and uses, they overlap in important ways. In this study which examines my preparations and read-aloud discussions of expository texts with my seventh-grade students, the following material briefly reviews these theories to demonstrate how individual reader’s transactions may be developed and deepened through collaboration.

The Transactional Theory of Reading

The transactional theory explains the reading process of individual readers. Drawing on Dewey and Bentley’s work regarding the relationship between the knower and the known, Rosenblatt (2005) posed that reading is a transaction between the reader and a text wherein “the ‘meaning’ does not reside ready-made ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but happens or comes into being during a transaction between the reader and the text” (p. 7). Rosenblatt explains further that as the reading event unfolds,

newly evoked symbolizations are tested for whether they can be fitted into the tentative meanings already constructed for the preceding portion of the text. Each additional
choice will signal certain options and exclude others, so that even as the meaning evolves, the selecting, synthesizing impulse is itself constantly shaped and tested. (p. 9)

Making meaning through the reading transaction is an ongoing selection process as meaning is constructed, tested, deconstructed, and reconstructed to be tested again as the reading continues.

Readers’ responses reflect their stances toward a text and thus the meaning they make. In the transactional theory, Rosenblatt (2005) describes two stances—the efferent stance and the aesthetic stance. The efferent stance focuses on obtaining information the reader will take away from the text while the aesthetic focuses on the reader’s emotional response to the text; the efferent and aesthetic do not oppose one another but instead cover two sides of a continuum. Significantly, texts do not determine the reader’s stance; a reader’s stance influences the responses readers offer up during an interactive read-aloud. Rosenblatt posits that any text can be read either efferently or aesthetically.

The idea that readers adopt their own stances matters in interactive read-alouds with expository nonfiction, since it is often assumed that expository texts have an efferent purpose. However, responses can be efferent or aesthetic, either of which may be held up for further inquiry to develop deeper, more critical thinking (Cai, 2008). Holding responses up for further inquiry is part of what occurs in an interactive read-aloud as a text is read and discussed. For this reason, I posit that individual readers’ transactions—starting places for making meaning—may be strengthened by social collaboration.

**Socio-Cultural Theory**

Socio-cultural theory is a theory of psychological development that has been applied to education. In this theory, all learning is socially situated. Vygotsky (1978) explains, “human learning presupposes a certain social nature and a process by which children grow into the
intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). This suggests that students grow into their intellectual abilities through social interaction. Though social interaction takes many forms, the dialogue in a discussion during a read-aloud helps students grow into their critical abilities.

Miller (2003) claims that through discussion students will see what they can do together, and theoretically, this is more than what they can do alone. During an interactive read-aloud, as texts are discussed in collaboration with teacher and peers, students’ intellectual abilities may be developed further.

The text, the teacher, and the group of peers mediate the learning in an interactive read-aloud. For Vygotsky (1978), learning is mediated through a zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is described as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). In classrooms, this definition is often interpreted as a space in which students can learn if they are supported. Individual readers’ transactions can then be supported and deepened in an interactive read-aloud where readers collectively grapple with meaning by sharing their responses to a text in dialogue with teacher and peers. This may be especially important when reading aloud expository nonfiction since many students lack experience with such texts.

**Study Design**

The methodology of this study is qualitative Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practice (S-STTEP). This methodology examines the self in context with others in a teaching practice, and as the inquirer I have a special stake in understanding and improving my own practice along with the relationships within that practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Thus, through self-study I examined my process for selecting expository texts, planning lessons
for the texts, and my pedagogy as I presented the texts in interactive read-alouds in the context of my classroom.

**Context and Participants**

The study took place at a secondary charter school in the Mountain West, and participants were selected from one of my seventh-grade language arts classes. Students were referred to by pseudonyms in this study. After obtaining IRB approval and having signed consent and assent forms, students were reminded of the safeguards to protect identity before the study began (see Appendix A for the IRB approval letter). This was an ideal setting for the study since read-alouds are a regular practice in my classroom. Students were already familiar with the format of an interactive read-aloud from read-alouds previously conducted with narrative texts.

My question focused on both teachers’ and students’ navigation of expository texts during read-alouds. I have been teaching English language arts to seventh-grade students for the past 6 years. I have sought greater expertise in reading instruction through professional literature, and I have honed my ability to effectively read aloud through consistent practice. Since I gave regular time to interactive read-alouds of narrative texts, I felt that I was well prepared to expand my practice to include expository texts.

**Data Sources**

The data sources for this study include preparation field notes, video recordings of the read-alouds, and post read-aloud reflections. The S-STTEP methodology proffers an opportunity to “acknowledge and interrogate the often hidden contributions and constraints of our practice” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 106). These data sources helped me to acknowledge and interrogate my processes of planning, teaching, and reflecting in my practice. In what follows, the data sources will be described in greater detail.
**Preparation Field Notes.** The first data source was preparation field notes. In a self-study, the researcher selects data sources that capture learning as we are in the process of learning (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). For this reason, the preparation field notes served the purpose of capturing how I worked through the planning processes for an interactive read-aloud. My notes included discussions with my committee chair who acted as a critical other (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), which helped me to further refine my thinking during the planning process. The preparation field notes had two parts. Initially, the field notes unveiled my learning in the process of text selection. I wrote informal notes by hand about each text as I read it. I then read over these notes, refining my thinking as I typed them in my formal field notes.

Journaling also unveiled the process of lesson planning for each read-aloud. Prior to each read-aloud, I recorded my thinking as I re-read the selected text and consulted my field notes on the text to plan each read-aloud. Expository texts may be read in small stand-alone sections (Stewart & Correia, 2021). As such, the field notes recorded my thinking as I selected pages and my purpose for selecting them, the questions or observations I planned to facilitate the interactive read-aloud with, and any reservations or hopes I held for the read-aloud. After conducting each read-aloud, plans for the upcoming read-aloud were revisited and usually revised. For example, I used Kesler et al.’s (2020) planning template to prepare for the first two read-alouds, but later I simplified the process by recording plans for the read-aloud on sticky notes which I placed inside each text.

**Video Recordings.** The second data source was video recordings of the read-aloud events in class. I recorded five separate read-alouds. The recordings allowed me to capture the interactive context of a read-aloud my other sources would likely miss (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) making my pedagogy during an interactive read-aloud visible. Each read-aloud event was
recorded by a 360-degree camera placed near the center of the room. I hoped this would allow me to capture both my contributions and the students’ contributions to the read-aloud. However, there was an instance where the recording failed. Because of this, I was unable to review one of the read-alouds. Researchers wishing to replicate these methods might consider using a second camera to record the lessons to prevent such a failure.

**Post Read-Aloud Reflection.** The third data source was a post-read-aloud reflection. At the end of each day, I described the context of the read-aloud, reflected on my presentation, and recorded my impressions on the students’ engagement in the text. The post read-aloud reflection built on my regular practice of post-lesson reflection. In writing, this data source used a reflective “dialogue as a process of coming to know” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 106) my practice better. I found the reflection process to be recursive. As I reflected on each read-aloud, additional insights into what occurred during a previous read-aloud often emerged. When this happened, I returned to my previous reflections to add these new insights to the reflection.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation were often recursive. Once texts had been selected, I found myself going back and forth between data sources as my study progressed. I consulted my field notes on the expository texts to inform my lesson plans for the read-alouds. Once I began video-recording the read-alouds, my post read-aloud reflections prompted me to return to my planning notes to make revisions for the coming lesson. The cursory analysis of my data helped, as Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) suggest, to capture my learning as it occurred. For example, though I found Kesler et al.’s (2020) template useful in a critical examination of an expository text, I soon found that the simple process of re-reading
selected pages and recording questions for the interactive read-aloud on sticky notes to be more helpful to the planning.

When all data (i.e., planning field notes, video recordings, and post read-aloud reflections) were collected, I began a process of formally reviewing the data. First, I watched each read-aloud recording in its entirety. I paused the recording three times to record what I was thinking or noticing as I watched. From this initial pass I was able to select three of the five recordings to examine more closely: one read-aloud that I felt went well, one read-aloud that I was uncertain about, and one read-aloud that I thought went poorly. This I hoped would allow me to see a more complete picture of what happened during my read-alouds of expository texts.

Next, I read through my planning field notes and post read-aloud reflections, pausing to analyze how what I had planned played out in the read-alouds. In reflecting on what these notes did for me at the time, I found myself noticing how my expectations compared to what happened. I was also made more aware of unplanned moments that went beyond my expectations. Often, there were more ideas and possibilities recorded in the planning field notes than actually played out in the read-alouds themselves. However, as I followed the same pattern to examine my post read-aloud reflection, I noticed that my post read-aloud reflections were complementary in examining how what I had planned became reality in the read-alouds.

Next, I viewed and transcribed the three video recordings into a chart that included these categories: the time, the speaker, the text location, any gestures noted. A fifth column was left empty for later coding. (See appendix B). I also wrote reflective memos to record my thoughts during the transcription. In the memos, I was often critical of my own performance and aware that I felt highly engaged by the ways the students were participating. Despite the tendency to be critical of my own performance, transcribing the recordings unveiled my highly positive
interactions with students and our engagement with the expository texts. I also noted a tension between the way I felt during the read-aloud and the emotion I presented. This will be addressed in greater detail in my findings.

Next, my committee chair, acting as a critical friend (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), worked with me to analyze the data. We watched the first read-aloud together, and we paused regularly to talk about what was noticed in the read-aloud. Analyzing the recording together helped me to be less critical of my own performance. Here, too, I experienced a kind of validation as the recordings revealed the teacher I wanted to be—a teacher who expresses sincere delight in interacting with students and the pleasure of sharing an excellent text.

Finally, I reviewed each data source and did a preliminary coding of the data. As I reviewed my data, I used labels to name my preparations in the field notes. I also used labels to name the things I did to invite or support engagement as well as the things students did to demonstrate or support engagement during the read-alouds. The preliminary coding allowed me to group similar codes within my data into themes.

My data analysis yielded six themes which I grouped into two categories: themes around planning as captured in my preparation field notes and themes around engagement as captured in video recordings. In the following chapter I will outline these themes and provide examples for each of these findings. Students whose comments are used in the examples will be referred to by pseudonyms.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

In this chapter I share the findings from my research. I first discuss the three themes on planning and preparation for interactive read-alouds with expository texts. I then describe the three themes on the ways I engaged my students in expository texts and what I learned from their efforts to engage.

Themes in Planning

Reviewing the preparation field notes as a self-study researcher allowed me to unveil how I prepared for interactive read-alouds with expository texts. Within this findings section, field notes will be cited by the date they were recorded. The three overarching themes within my preparations are finding enjoyment in text selection, balancing between entertainer and educator, and charting possible courses.

Finding Enjoyment in Text Selection

We should take the time to enjoy the texts we intend to share in our classrooms. Part of the joy of reading aloud in my classroom is sharing beautiful literature with young people I am invested in, so my students and their needs were never far from my mind. However, I found in preparing to read aloud expository texts that I needed to enjoy the texts I chose because my enjoyment of the texts would fuel energy behind my presentation. Throughout the text selection process, I described in my field notes the enjoyment I found exploring expository texts, reading as a reader first and taking an aesthetic stance toward the texts; I did this by reading with the purpose of having “a pleasurable, interesting experience for its own sake” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 83). I noted that expository texts provide readers with information; however, neither the text nor my role as teacher–researcher dictated my approach or my response to the texts. Ultimately, I
selected texts that I enjoyed reading, as I believe sharing texts we enjoy is one of the ways read-alouds might build relationships between teachers and students as Trelease (2013) suggests. As such, I noted that enjoying the texts I selected was—first and foremost—important to me in preparing for read-alouds with expository texts.

The theme of finding enjoyment in text selection was exemplified when I persisted in reading as a reader encountering the texts for the first time. Because I love to read, I look for deeply emotional experiences with texts, and I therefore approach the texts I use in my classroom as a reader first and a teacher second. In other words, true to my reader identity, I seek to enjoy a text, be it narrative or expository, in its entirety before I plan to teach from it.

Scholars on read-alouds with younger readers have suggested that expository texts do not have to be read in their entirety during a read-aloud (Stead, 2014; Young et al., 2023). The idea that I would have to choose specific pages after I selected texts put reading as a reader in tension with reading as a teacher; however, I resisted the urge to cut my reading short. My field notes recorded how I felt I had to read it all because “that’s the way I read for pleasure—and reading is such a pleasure to me” (July 25, 2023). Acknowledging my process of reading texts first for pleasure matters because, similar to my processes for selecting narrative texts, I found that I needed to enjoy the texts before I could teach from them. Even so, I worried about taking too much time to read them in full, feeling pressed to select not only the texts but also the pages I would use in the read-alouds.

The theme of finding enjoyment in text selection was also exemplified by moments I intentionally took an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 2005) toward expository texts. My field notes during text selection indicated that “I’m looking for aesthetic experiences because that’s what I value about reading” (August 7, 2023). I also reflected near the end of text selection about the
emotional reason I chose *How We Got to the Moon: The People, Technology, and Daring Feats of Science Behind Humanity’s Greatest Adventure* (Rocco, 2020):

Awe has been on my mind because of a keynote speech given by Deborah Dean at a conference I recently attended. She talked about [how] the awe we feel for certain topics can serve to inspire our students . . . There was a solar eclipse today and I think this combination [Dr. Dean’s keynote and the eclipse] prompted memories of my own awe of space during my middle school years. . . .This is probably why *How We Got to the Moon* appealed to me so much—nostalgia, awe. I hope this awe comes through and impacts someone (October 14, 2023).

This reflection identifies my aesthetic responses to Rocco’s text as the reason I selected it, thus naming aesthetic experiences and my desire to share these experiences with my students as a criterion for the texts I selected. Though it’s likely some might put pressure on my choice to select books I enjoyed, urging teachers to select books primarily with students’ needs in mind (McClure & Fullerton, 2017), I do not think my students’ needs to enjoy a text are that different from my own. This led me to conclude, students would likely enjoy these books as much as I did.

Finding pleasure in expository texts by reading as a reader and taking an aesthetic stance mattered to my text selection process because I believe my engagement in a text is foundational for my students’ engagement. Robinson (2020) suggests teachers should share their own engagement with expository texts to give students “a more immersive reading experience” (p. 273). An immersive experience with expository texts allows space for responses that range across the efferent–aesthetic continuum (Rosenblatt, 2005) which include responses that summarize what has been learned as well as more emotive responses such as perspective taking
and even dramatic enactments which Sipe’s (2002) work suggests are one indication of deep textual understanding. Therefore, I sought to give students this more immersive experience by intentionally selecting texts that evoked my emotional responses with the hope they would evoke students’ emotive responses as well. Barrentine (1996) also notes the importance of choosing books one personally connects with in order to share that enthusiasm with one’s students. This resonates deeply with me as I choose—both at the beginning of this study and now—to share texts with my students that I personally find enjoyable.

**Balancing Between Entertainer and Educator**

We need be intentional in our preparations to engage students, considering both the necessity of engaging students’ attention and their intellects. The balance between entertainer and educator appears in my preparation field notes and post read-aloud reflections. For me, the tension between entertainer and educator is about balancing between preparing to engage seventh-grade students in expository texts and improving my read-aloud practice. It is bringing the performative aspects of reading aloud together with the pedagogical aspects of developing students’ literacies through whole-class engagements with expository literature. My collaborating professor offered the term “edutain” to describe this balance in our discussions of my preparations. Underlying the tension between entertainer and educator was my fear that reading expository texts aloud would not be as fun as reading narratives had been, and this theme continued to develop as I wrestled between thinking about engagement and thinking about strengthening the educational moments in my read-alouds.

The tension was obvious as I anguished over establishing my purpose for each read-aloud. Kari the educator was concerned with establishing a purpose “beyond just engaging [students] in expository texts” (July 25, 2023), while Kari, the entertainer, wondered if there “are
certain purposes that lend themselves more to engagement than others” (August 2, 2023). At various moments, the balance shifted toward Kari the educator as I reflected on my practice more in conversation with the literature. I wrote about how I had employed the components of an effective read-aloud “to varying degrees in my classroom read-alouds, but my hope is that I can become much better at making read-alouds a more connected component of literacy instruction” (August 19, 2023). Much has been said about the literacy benefits of read-aloud, particularly the way it helps strengthen literacies through the social construction of meaning (Maloch & Beutel, 2010; Young et al., 2023). So, leaning toward my role as an educator, my hope helped me identify a purpose beyond engaging students in expository texts. By naming a goal, making read-alouds a more connected component of literacy instruction, I gave myself a direction. With this in mind, I began a focused critique of my practice in which I regularly considered my developing ability to support students’ literacy during their whole-group transactions with texts.

The tension remained, however, as I continued to wrestle with purpose during my preparations. Kari the educator wondered how much time should be given to discussing expository text structures, while Kari the entertainer determined that while text structure may be something readers notice, “the focus should be engaging students in expository texts” (August 28, 2023). Affirming this focus shifted the balance toward Kari the entertainer. Shortly after this in my field notes I predicted “students might surprise me with their engagement in expository texts like this one because it seems that students in the past have been captivated when the talk gets real” (August 30, 2023). This acknowledgement nods to previous experiences when I knew certain information was engaging to my students, and scholars have also affirmed that many students prefer expository nonfiction (Repaskey et al., 2017). Armed with this promise, focusing
on engaging students in discussions about expository texts, and trusting my lived experience helped me to set aside my fear that expository texts would not be as fun to read aloud.

Striking a balance between entertainer and educator for me means sometimes the educator drives preparation and sometimes the entertainer drives preparation. Even so, there were key moments in which I felt balanced. As I became more familiar with the preparation process, I wrote, “I think it’s okay just to enjoy reading a text with my students some of the time, but I want my read-alouds to do more to support literacy [too], and to do that I have to be more than a performer. I have to be a teacher as well” (September 21, 2023). The entertainer may be thinking about just enjoying reading a text together, and the educator may be thinking about doing more to support literacy. However, I now feel that my job is to be both and keep them in a healthy balance. Indeed, scholarship of effective read-alouds suggests the importance of engaging students with expressive reading (Fisher et al., 2004; Kerry-Moran, 2016), as well as responsive practices that develop literacy (Barrentine, 1996; Burke, 2017; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Pendergast et al., 2015; Serafini & Ladd, 2008). At times, I may lean more toward the performative in my pedagogy and at other times I may lean more toward the educative in my pedagogy, but both entertainer and educator will be used harmoniously to cultivate engaging, impactful read-alouds.

**Charting Possible Courses**

Preparing for something new can be difficult, but it’s important to trust yourself and trust the process of learning through the experience. I described it this way in my post read-aloud reflections: “I feel like such a novice. It’s a vulnerable place to be, but I have to begin where I am to get better at this” (October 23, 2023). Trusting the process and trusting myself mattered because the messiness helped me confront my perfectionist tendencies and stretch beyond my
comfort zone so I could grow. The theme of charting possible courses took up a disproportionate amount of my preparation field notes. I had copious amounts of data that considered the courses the read-alouds might take. As I wrestled to clarify this theme, I recognized my struggle to select pages, ask good questions, and plan the lessons. I also wondered if my wrestling represented a productive struggle or simply a waste of valuable time. However, the thinking I did to plan the read-alouds was a necessary, though difficult, preparatory period that ultimately helped me to expand my read-aloud practice.

Charting the course for each interactive read-aloud included a prewriting phase, a drafting phase, and a revising phase of planning. The prewriting phase was characterized by a free-flowing recording of my thoughts during text selection. For example, one day I was thinking about how my students might respond to Johnson’s (2013) *Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature’s Undead* when I observed: “I was thinking a lot about how my students might react to this text as I read…. Some of my students will probably have the same aesthetic responses I did” (July 17, 2023). On another day, I was thinking about a text’s possibilities for discussion such as when I identified the problem–solution text structure in sections of Rocco’s (2020) *How We Got to the Moon: The People, Technology, and Daring Feats of Science Behind Humanity’s Greatest Adventure*. I simply wrote, “These pages might be a cool way to prompt a discussion on problem solving in the classroom” (August 2, 2023). And on yet another day, I was brainstorming possible extensions of the read-alouds when I recorded: “I like the idea of assigning simple journaling or prompted journaling. Low-stakes writing is a really nice way to extend the read-aloud” (August 19, 2023). These examples of the prewriting phase demonstrate several things I was thinking about during text selection and that my thoughts were recorded as they occurred to me. It also demonstrates how my study of the literature was influencing my preparation, such as
the value of aesthetic experiences (NCTE, 2023), the importance of expository text structures (Hall et al., 2005; Young et al., 2023), the possibilities for discussion (McClure & Fullerton, 2017), and the need to extend opportunities for response after read-alouds (Ariail & Albright, 2005). Though there was little focus or organization in my text selection notes, charting possible courses in these examples captured my initial thoughts about some of the possibilities expository texts offer for interactive read-alouds.

While the possibilities were still wide open, prewriting pointed me toward lesson planning as my free-flowing thoughts occasionally took shape. One way in which my thoughts began to take shape was around page selection. In my text selection notes, I wrote about a vignette that described Ramon L. Alonso, an Argentinian immigrant who used his experience as a language learner to come up with an innovative idea for the interface of the Apollo Guidance Computer. I selected this specific vignette to read aloud because many of my students are multilingual learners. I wondered if they might connect to the text by sharing their own experiences immigrating to the United States and learning English. In this instance, thinking about my students—their specific cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds—guided me to select pages that aligned with their lived experiences. Much of the literature directs teachers to select texts based on students’ needs and interests (Barrentine, 1996; Fisher et al., 2004; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Stead, 2014.) Scholarship also emphasizes how recognizing diversity in text selection develops students’ critical literacies (Kim, 2016; Worthy et al., 2013), demonstrating further how the literature was informing my planning. Nevertheless, though I felt confident about the texts themselves, I still struggled to feel confident about my own page selections.

Combing through my preparation notes during analysis, I struggled to pinpoint how my thoughts during text selection informed my preparations, but there was one unifying expression
throughout my considerations of possible courses that helped me identify why the prewriting phase in planning the read-alouds mattered to me. I often felt uncertain during the drafting phase of my preparations, however, pre-writing possible courses provided me with a touchstone, a place to return to when I was feeling uncertain, and “I often went back to the journaling” (September 23, 2023) to make and support my instructional decisions.

Once the texts had been selected, the drafting phase began as I planned the lessons. In this phase, the free-flowing thoughts were organized into structured lesson plans. Using Kesler et al.’s (2020) template, I planned the first two read-alouds. My planning notes described how it was helpful in “guiding me through all the considerations in my planning” (September 23, 2023). Such considerations helped me think about how I would introduce the texts, which pages I would select, which questions I would ask, and which extension activities I would choose. Even though the aforementioned template was helpful, I worried I was “relying too much on” others’ designs and not on “my own knowledge” (September 23, 2023). Despite this worry, using the planning template from the literature organized my thoughts about the texts into clearer before, during, and after categories of an interactive read-aloud.

Even as lesson plans began to take shape, I continued to feel uncertainty as I charted courses for the read-alouds. Often during planning, I recorded this uncertainty in the form of questions. I wondered if students would make inferences, predictions, or connections to the texts we were reading. I wondered if they would be sufficiently engaged that they would want to read more than I had planned and/or how much I should be prepared to read.

I also struggled to feel confident in my instructional choices. This was due in part to my insecurities and in part because of scholarly emphasis on the ways teachers might afford or constrain conversations (Kesler et al., 2020; Labadie et al., 2013; Wilkins et al., 2016). I wrote
frequently about my struggle with page selection, explaining how I tried to resolve it by returning to the books to “read and make notes about the possibilities of each page” (September 28, 2023), returning to my text selection notes, and discussing my uncertainty with my collaborating professor. After one discussion, I concluded: “There are many choices I might make. My path forward is to make a choice, justify that choice, and acknowledge other paths I might have taken” (September 28, 2023), thus the drafting phase mattered because it helped me select a course amidst the many possibilities. As a teacher, I have often wrestled with this kind of insecurity about my instructional choices, though I recognize the necessity of going forward amidst the uncertainty.

Finally, the revision phase consisted of adjusting possible courses in favor of new, hopefully improved, courses. Sometimes the revision phase occurred after an initial draft of a lesson, and at other times it occurred after I presented the read-alouds. In one instance during lesson planning, I recorded in my planning notes my uncertainty wondering “about reordering or revising questions” and wondering if I had “gotten at the social justice aspects” of a text (September 23, 2023). My wonderings led to revisions of my lesson plans. Since I was charting new territory, questions like these helped me to self-assess my work and refine my thinking before I presented a read-aloud. During the 8 years I have been a classroom teacher, I have engaged in daily critical reflection on my practice. Because I am a reflective practitioner, I think this helped me to assess my work to the best of my ability while I gained experience preparing for read-alouds with expository texts.

During the first read-alouds, I tested lessons I had drafted on my audience, and our interactions gave me feedback that prompted further adjustments to engage my students more fully. In my post read-aloud notes, I reflected that during the read-alouds “sometimes I make the
wrong judgement call when I select activities or push something a little too long” (October 16, 2023). My memos make it clear that reading too many pages in one read-aloud is what I meant by pushing things a little too long. Such experiences prompted the following thought about needed revision: “My gut instinct right now is—simplify” (October 16, 2023), meaning simplify the lesson plan. I followed that instinct, setting aside Kesler et al.’s (2020) template in favor of the simpler process of recording questions on sticky notes which I placed inside the book to guide our discussion. Though the template had laid the foundation of my interactive read-alouds—discussion before, during, and after the reading—lived experience helped me refine what worked for me to chart the course of each read-loud. Yet, even as I acted on my own reflections after the various read-alouds, I wondered how accurate my reflections really were.

In the revision phase, the recursive aspects of planning—reflecting on my lived experiences during a read-aloud to make additional revisions to the lesson plans—were emphasized as I began to go back and forth between planning to read-aloud and back to planning. Once the read-alouds began, my experience informed my smaller preparations, those done the morning prior to each read-aloud. I knew that I could not fully script the ways I would respond to students, but the following examples from my post read-aloud reflections illustrate how I used these reflections to chart future courses.

Following the first read-aloud I noted “that I am not responsive enough to students’ comments” (October 16, 2023). The importance of developing responsive practices that can deepen students’ thinking has been emphasized by many scholars (e.g., Barrentine, 1996; Burke, 2017; Hansen, 2004; Serafini & Ladd, 2008). Prior to beginning the next read-aloud I recorded: “I’m thinking about being more responsive to students’ comments by asking them to elaborate on ideas they offer that aren’t fully formed” (October 17, 2023). Following this read-aloud I
recorded my success in this effort. Even in what I termed a success I continued to “think about the need to be responsive to students’ comments, pushing them to develop their own ideas through the talk and inviting them to explore each other’s comments” (October 18, 2023) in the next read-aloud. Pendergast et al. (2015) support the idea that responsive practices such as using students’ comments to guide discussion grows as teachers gain experience guiding read-alouds, so though my responsiveness to students was seldom executed perfectly, reflection about my developing ability was a key for me to revise and prepare for improved interactions that could not be scripted as the read-alouds continued and I believe responsive practices will be key for the future read-alouds in my practice.

In writing about this theme, it may seem to the reader that I flowed easily from one phase into the next while the self-doubt and wrestling underneath the work is less visible. Even as what began as a flood of thoughts on the possibilities gradually became a more focused lesson plan, I found planning was messy and fraught with uncertainty. However, like composing a piece of writing, the read-alouds were not possible without the first tentative efforts to put unvarnished thoughts to paper, testing and reflecting on those thoughts, and then revising as needed to compose an engaging lesson plan for the read-alouds.

**Themes Around Engagement**

Examining video recordings of the read-alouds as a self-study researcher provided me with an opportunity to uncover how I engaged seventh-grade students during interactive read-alouds and to discover the exciting ways students did engage in expository texts. The three themes of engagement are tapping in and building schema, finding aesthetic moments in efferent spaces, and engaging as thinkers and knowers. As will be seen, each of these themes plays an important role in the engagement of my seventh-grade students in expository texts.
**Tapping In and Building Schema**

Engagement in expository texts begins with students’ schemas, and if I want read-alouds with expository nonfiction to be successful, I need to be aware of what my students bring to the conversations. In each of the read-alouds, I informally assessed students’ background knowledge primarily before and occasionally during the read-alouds. This theme seemed somewhat unique to reading aloud expository texts because when I read a narrative text, I do little to lay groundwork for the story. Other than perhaps establishing a purpose for the read-aloud, I simply begin. However, when reading expository texts aloud, I found that I took time to assess whether students’ knowledge could serve as entry points into the texts or as a signal of possible barriers to their comprehension of the information presented.

In each read-aloud, I addressed background knowledge to introduce the text. With some read-alouds, I intentionally planned to use students’ knowledge to help them access the texts. For example, to introduce Johnson’s (2013) *Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature’s Undead*, I asked students to compile their own lists of zombie characteristics. Before I showed them the text, students shared zombie characteristics in rapid fire. The list we compiled indicated collectively that students knew a lot about pop culture versions of zombies.

During the introductory activity, one student took control of the discussion. Effectively transitioning into the text, Carl said, “I think the closest thing we have to zombies at the moment is rabies.” Assessing background knowledge revealed to me that some students had expert knowledge to contribute. Oyler’s (1996) observation that students often act as experts during read-alouds with expository texts helped me recognize when students offered expert knowledge to the conversation. These moments indicated that what students know serves as an entry point
into expository texts, and so for me, addressing background knowledge is a way of tapping into students’ expertise to engage students in expository texts.

Addressing background knowledge to introduce some read-alouds also unveiled misunderstandings or gaps in students’ knowledge. Predicting where some of these gaps might be, I planned to assess students’ schemas. For example, before reading aloud Rocco’s (2020) *How We Got to the Moon: The People, Technology, and Daring Feats of Science Behind Humanity’s Greatest Adventure*, I presented students with three concepts—NASA, the space race, and the Cold War. At one point I asked, “What do we know about the Cold War?” A student who rarely participates in class discussions explained the Cold War in terms of the Call of Duty video game based on the Cold War. The response revealed to me that the historical significance of the Cold War had been shaped by his experience with popular media, and it prompted me to build on this popular schema to help students engage with the text. In this instance, addressing schema required me to recognize students’ misunderstandings as gaps in their background knowledge that needed to be filled (Albright, 2002), and doing so helped me to correct misunderstandings and provide a foundation that might assist students’ comprehension of the text.

Most often, I addressed background knowledge as our read-aloud discussions began, however, some read-alouds required unplanned, in-the-moment attention to schema. During a read-aloud with Albee’s (2017) *Poison: Deadly Deeds, Perilous Professions, Murderous Medicines*, I suddenly realized that a question I had planned might require certain background knowledge to support comprehension. The text indirectly introduces the idea of mob mentality, and I had planned to initiate some discussion around this idea. Before I could pose the question I had planned, I felt that I had to assess what students knew about mob mentality.
Going off script, I began with the question, “Have you heard of the term mob mentality?” One student hesitantly indicated she had heard of it, but my wait time produced mostly silence. The silence, like the misunderstanding about Call of Duty, indicated to me a need to build background knowledge. After explaining mob mentality, I posed my original question and unlike the silence that met my first question, students were able to engage in a productive discussion of the text. This exemplified for me the importance of assessing and building students’ schemas in the moment to support engaging discussions.

Understanding what students were thinking provided valuable information about their readiness to engage in a discussion about a text. The literature affirms that students’ responses are valuable glimpses into what students think (Barrentine, 1996), helping teachers understand what students know. The literature also affirms that what students do not know can serve as a barrier to comprehending expository texts, and these gaps in understanding therefore need to be filled (Albright, 2002; Kesler et al., 2020). Though I did not always do this effectively (i.e., providing students with a clarifying example of blaming others for our misfortunes that didn’t make sense), I learned addressing schema is a necessity when engaging seventh-grade readers in expository texts.

**Finding Aesthetic Moments in Efferent Spaces**

Expository literature can be highly engaging as a read-aloud, and aesthetic responses can be used to invite and maintain students’ engagement. The theme of aesthetic moments in efferent spaces is characterized by moments I observed a conspiratorial tone or an emotional response to the text. Many may assume that expository texts will help students learn information, though Rosenblatt (2005) explained any text can be read either efferently or aesthetically and that it is the reader that determines the stance toward a text. Since Rosenblatt’s work supports whichever
stances I or my students might take, in planning, I predicted that many students would have the same aesthetic responses I did, which was sometimes true. Though aesthetic moments can be found in any of the interactive read-alouds, they were particularly prevalent when we read *Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature’s Undead* (Johnson, 2013).

Reviewing the recordings of each read-aloud, I noted a conspiratorial tone whenever I read aloud information that I responded to aesthetically or posed questions that invite similar reactions. During the reading of the previously mentioned text, I read: “The fly grips tightly with its legs to hang on. It spreads its wings. It raises its belly or abdomen which is swollen from the growing mass inside” (Johnson, 2013, p. 8). My memos during transcription noted the smile and conspiratorial tone as I read about the fly’s grotesquely swollen abdomen, indicating my delight in sharing the text. Initially, I worried expository texts would not be as fun, which is undoubtedly a bias I brought to the read-aloud experiences, however, as previously noted, read-aloud scholarship names performative qualities (i.e. reading with animation, facial expression, and gestures) an element of effective read-alouds (Fisher et al., 2004). This is something I learned to do reading narratives aloud. Importantly, Kerry-Moran (2016) adds that good expression in a read-aloud is an entry point to the benefits read-alouds offer students. My use of tone aligns with this, suggesting performative qualities do much to initiate engagement. Further, the significance of my conspiratorial tone is that I use the same tone when I read stories aloud—especially scary stories—which unveiled to me that I can cultivate aesthetic engagement regardless of the text’s genre.

Often, students responded emotionally to the texts, exhibiting their engagement through exclamations and/or facial expressions. One page in *Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature’s Undead* (Johnson, 2013) describes the larva stage where a young jewel wasp feasts on the
cockroach’s insides. During the reading, students’ uttered exclamations such as “ewwww” and “hah” providing verbal cues that revealed to me the aesthetic nature of their responses to the information. Once when this occurred, I stopped reading to dig into their responses.

Teacher: Ana, what are you thinking?
Ana: So, I think it’s disgusting like when, when like its larvae, like a worm, and when it put its like pupae in the cockroach and [it’s] like eating it.
Teacher: Why do you think that’s disgusting?
Ana: Because it’s going inside [the cockroach].

Ana’s emotional response, evident in the facial expression she wore, was disgust. When pressed to explain her response, she summarized the information she was responding to, an efferent response which significantly, “gives evidence of what has caught [her] attention,” and stirred “pleasant or unpleasant reactions” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 84). In connecting her emotional response directly to the text, she affirms her engagement in it. As Pendergast et al. (2015) noted, one element of responsiveness is the ability to use students’ comments to guide the read-aloud discussion. This exchange references my growing awareness of moments when students’ responses could be used to initiate the discussion, underscoring for me the importance of allowing students aesthetic reactions to initiate discussion.

Addressing the same moment during our reading, another student’s facial expression provided a nonverbal cue which prompted me to pause and invite responses.

Teacher: Okay, I’m seeing these horrified expressions on some faces. What are we thinking? What disgusts you about this? Okay, Breanna?
Breanna: How the cockroach stays alive ‘til the very end, so [I’m] thinking how this is so painful, and how can it survive, and gross.
Breanna’s facial expression suggested she wanted to recoil, but her interest was evident in her
smile and in the tone she had adopted, a tone similar to my own, to explain her thoughts.
Interestingly, Breanna took the cockroach’s perspective by expressing empathy for the pain the
experience might cause which demonstrates a “spontaneous verbal expression” of what has been
“lived through” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 85). She was not merely interested in the text, she was
living through, imagining how it might feel to be in the cockroach’s place, thereby indicating her
high engagement. Immersive participation, like Breanna’s perspective taking, during a read-
aloud has been observed by other scholars (Robinson, 2020; Sipe, 2000), but most significant to
my experience was the use of open-ended questioning to invite the more interpretive responses
described by Serafini and Ladd (2008). Not only was I using students’ responses as initiations to
discussion, I was also using the right kind of questions to encourage deeper responses. Though I
frequently worried about achieving the kind of flexible responsiveness the literature had
described, I began to see in the video recordings that I was better at it than my more critical post
read-aloud reflections had expressed.

NCTE (2023) has argued that reading nonfiction is a “deeply aesthetic experience”
(Introduction section) as it was for us. Interestingly, the fact that students had aesthetic moments
in efferent spaces, spaces where it is assumed students will glean information rather than respond
emotionally, was not entirely unexpected, as some scholarship has demonstrated that children’s
responses to expository texts are often aesthetic (Oyler, 1996; Robinson, 2020). However, what
was significant to me was my enjoyment. I experienced the same delight reading aloud
expository texts that I have enjoyed reading narratives.

When reading narrative texts, Sipe (2002) posited that emotive responses express deep
understanding. So, adding to what may be evidenced by students’ emotive responses, these
examples also highlight how aesthetic responses demonstrate deep understanding and high engagement with expository texts. Indeed, Albright (2002) also found that aesthetic responses during interactive read-alouds mattered to understanding and engagement with nonfiction literature. Though some might argue emotional responses are less concrete evidence of text comprehension than the ability to summarize textual information, for me, our affective responses were evidence of immersive engagement in and an understanding of an expository text.

**Constructing Engagement as Thinking and Knowing**

Part of what made read-alouds with expository literature engaging was students’ thinking and knowing, and students thinking and knowing should be validated because without students being seen and heard teacher’s responses may constrain students’ voices (Wilkins et al., 2016). During read-alouds, students engaged in the interactive discussions as thinkers and knowers. At times, the prompting to engage was minimal while at other times engagement was teacher initiated. Together collaborative thinking and knowing constructed a picture of engagement during read-alouds of expository texts.

Engagement included teacher initiations that invited and supported students’ engagement with the texts, meaning I made certain instructional moves that encouraged students’ active participation as thinkers and knowers. I initiated students’ engagement using open-ended questions, directing focus, and inviting wonderings. These instructional choices represented my efforts to invite and support engagement with the text.

I know from experience that open-ended questions expand opportunities for discussion, therefore, I often initiated discussions by positioning students as thinkers and knowers through the use of open-ended questions such as “what do you think” or “what do you know?” For
example, the following exchange occurred after we read a passage from *Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature’s Undead* (Johnson, 2013):

Teacher: What do you think? What are you thinking about?

Breanna: The fungus is gonna slowly … eat it.

Teacher: Okay, a prediction. The fungus is gonna slowly eat it.

Like my lived teaching experience, the literature has demonstrated, open-ended questions such as these create space for more thoughtful responses (Serafini & Ladd, 2008), but watching myself repeat students’ responses during read-alouds, I worried that I was making their comments redundant. However, I later considered that perhaps the importance of this move is because, as my post read-aloud reflection notes, “I want [students] to hear and value each other’s contributions” (October 17, 2023). This caused me to wonder if my repetition of their responses gave value to their responses, thereby elevating what had been offered and supporting students’ engagement in thinking about the texts. This conclusion was supported by my collaborating professor in a memo I recorded during data analysis where he noted that revoicing elevates students’ comments.

Next, I invited discussion by directing students to focus on specific aspects of the text. Reading the first page of *How We Got to the Moon: The People, Technology, and Daring Feats of Science Behind Humanity’s Greatest Adventure* (Rocco, 2020), I pointed out how Rocco uses the word “we” repeatedly. This was the basis for a question I asked multiple times to invite engagement. After we collaboratively analyzed the pictures and read a second page spread near the middle of the text we discussed:

Teacher: How does this page help us understand what Rocco means by “we”? What do you think?
Ana: They all did like a part—like they all helped—like—I don’t know. They all worked together to like make—do something.

Teacher: You’re describing the word collaboration. They all worked together to make this happen.

Scholars have identified the benefits of focusing talk on the text (Beck & McKeown, 2001) and the importance of the teacher’s intentional facilitation during discussion (Hansen, 2004; Hoffman, 2011). Among these benefits are the high levels of engagement possible with teacher support (Worthy et al., 2012). By directing focus to the language of the text, I invited engagement, and by naming and rephrasing Ana’s response, I affirmed thinking as knowing, thereby elevating her thinking to knowing. As previously mentioned, I initially thought this habit of validating by repeating students’ responses was ineffective, but in it, I began to see a pattern in my intentional facilitation of students’ engagement during read-alouds with expository texts, specifically the pattern of teacher asks a question, student responds, teacher offers validation.

Third, I invited wonderings to support engagement in thinking and knowing. One such invitation prompted a student to pose a question of her own that resulted in an explosion of thinking and knowing as students sought to make sense of the text together.

Teacher: Thoughts? What are you thinking? What are you wondering?

Holly: Why a—why did the rabies want the a—want the animal to bite other things?

Teacher: That’s a great question. Do you guys have any ideas why the virus would lead the animal to wanna bite other animals or other people?

Breanna: Maybe because it makes them think it will go away for them. So maybe it’s like, if I bite them the virus will go to them, and I’ll be okay. And I don’t have to go crazy anymore. I can just be normal again.
Teacher: So, you’re describing what the animal thinks or what the virus is causing it to do?

Breanna: Causing it to do or maybe it just … just spreads more …

Teacher: Okay.

Jane: How does the bat get it?

Teacher: Probably he was bitten too. What do you guys think?

Melody: Yeah, that’s how rabies spreads.

Carrie: Bats carry tons of diseases like rabies, but it doesn’t affect the bat.

Teacher: Hmmm? I wonder though if it did affect the bat because remember it’s what bit the raccoon…

This discussion demonstrates how in an interactive read-aloud learning is mediated by the teacher and a group of peers as Vygotsky (1978) has posited. By inviting students to share their wonderings, I positioned them as co-collaborators who encourage others to think and thereby engage in the discussion.

As before, I validated Holly’s offering by revoicing the question she posed. Burke (2017) has shown that revoicing students’ responses positions students as agents. When positioned as agents, revoicing students’ comments or questions encourages them to extend their thinking during read-alouds. In this example, I did not just repeat to validate. In repeating Holly’s question, I held it up to extend students thinking. Moments like these when students posed their own questions were some of the most exciting moments in my study, and initially, I identified them only as moments of engagement, moments where students took agentive ownership of the conversation, however, I now recognize these moments as evidence of my growing responsive
practices, allowing students questions to direct the discussion and holding students’ questions up to extend thinking.

Scholarship has suggested the teacher’s facilitation is key to high levels of engagement in effective read-alouds (Serafini & Ladd, 2008; Worthy et al., 2012). Because of this, I was especially concerned about the ways I responded to students during read-alouds, and initially I felt that I had failed to meet the standard of responsiveness I had set for myself. However, in analyzing the read-alouds, I found a pattern of initiating questions and the validation of students that framed students’ thinking and knowing as my primary way of inviting and supporting engagement. May and Bingham (2015) argue that teachers’ responses to students’ offerings “should serve to clarify, verify, and correct rather than simply evaluate” (p. 23), and I feel that I clarified, verified, and corrected students’ comments in the examples above, most often by validating their responses, repeating them for others to hear and revoicing questions to extend thinking. Moreover, I would add that engaging my seventh-grade students in expository texts was largely tied to responsive actions that positioned students as thinkers and knowers which served as evidence of their engagement in the texts.

Engagement also included students’ seemingly spontaneous responses. Students offered expert knowledge, and at times their offerings directed the focus of our interactions with the text. For example, with a page from Poison: Deadly Deeds, Perilous Professions, and Murderous Medicines (Albee, 2017) projected behind me, before I could even read a word, a student called out:

Ana: That’s not how you spell serial killer!

Teacher: That’s not how you spell serial?

Ana: Yeah, that’s cereal killer.
When Ana shared her observation, in this case her knowledge of the two homophones serial and cereal, she initiated our engagement in the text by directing our focus to the author’s choice of words. Ana’s comment directed our reading of the text. Oyler (1996) suggested initiations like Ana’s indicate authority is shared with students, a characteristic unique to read-alouds with expository texts. For me, this engagement exhibited through ownership of the reading was rewarding. Though the literature describes student initiations like this one, I didn’t know if seventh-grade students would respond in similar ways, but this moment demonstrated to me that they do engage with expository texts as thinkers and knowers, similar to the ways younger students have been shown to do.

Students also made text-to-text connections, demonstrating more personal engagement. The following exchange occurred at one point in our reading of Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature’s Undead (Johnson, 2013):

Teacher: “But are there … things … that can take over bodies and brains of innocent creatures? Turn them to senseless slaves? Force them to create new zombies so the zombie makers can spread? Absolutely” (p. 3).

As soon as I finished reading, two comments were volunteered, almost at the same moment though I had not asked any questions.

Melody: There’s like a fungus at least that when an ant touches it—it turns into a zombie.

Andres: Like The Last of Us.

Melody made a connection to a popular documentary produced by National Geographic, while at almost the same moment, Andres made a connection to a popular Amazon series. I believe Andres and Melody engaged with this text as thinkers and knowers in part because they were able to connect it to other media they knew. Worthy et al. (2012) observed that when readers
make intertextual connections during a read-aloud, it serves as one evidence of high engagement. This reinforced for me how students’ connections can produce engagement. Indeed, my field notes before the read-alouds began captured the idea that students needed “to connect to the text in some way in order to be engaged” (August 24, 2023). In this exchange, I recognized a missed opportunity to invite students to clarify what prompted the text-to-text connections they made, but perhaps the fact that older students do in fact engage in expository texts through intertextual connections will be a catalyst for me in future read-alouds to pause and invite students to extend their thinking by making their connections more explicit.

Students also exhibited authentic curiosity when they asked questions to expand their understanding. For example, after finishing the reading about a fungus that turns flies into mindless zombies, I asked students what they found interesting. A couple of students shared ideas. Then Breanna’s authentic curiosity introduced a turn in the conversation:

Breanna: I have a question. Can it go—like—catch to people?

Teacher: Can it catch to people? That’s a good question.

Enzo: No, they can’t.

Teacher: I don’t know the answer to that, but I don’t think so. What do you guys think?

Breanna’s question had an aesthetic quality, a tonal hint that she was concerned by the possibility that people could become infected by the fungus we just read about. Nevertheless, Breanna’s question was an attempt to expand her understanding, and it showed me how students’ questions might deepen engagement in a text. Similarly, Stead (2014) has emphasized the great potential in expository nonfiction to nurture students’ curiosity and therefore engagement. For me, moments of authentic curiosity were some of the most exciting ways students engaged in the read-alouds. My reflections post read-aloud captured this excitement when I wrote: “I saw engagement in the
curiosity that evoked questions. I’ve tried teaching my students to ask [good] questions before and it’s like pulling teeth. These questions were authentic because they came from the student’s own curiosity and not a contrived space” (October 18, 2023). This was significant because in my previous experience, teaching students to ask critical questions had not been effective. However, moments like this emphasized for me the powerful potential of expository texts to evoke questions which may lead to more student-directed discussions.

While I was not able to directly map my experience reading aloud narrative texts onto read-alouds of expository texts, there were patterns in my pedagogy that informed my presentation. These moves included expressive reading (Kerry-Moran, 2016), open-ended questions (Serafini & Ladd, 2008), and repeating students’ responses (Burke, 2017). Recognizing these patterns in my pedagogy helped me to see the many ways I was already responsive as well as developing my responsive practices. There were also things I learned about engaging students during read-alouds that were more unique to expository texts such as addressing background knowledge before and during the read-aloud (Albright, 2002) or using student initiations to guide the discussion (Pendergast et al., 2015). Combined, these moves outline much of what I learned about engaging students in expository texts.

Further, it helped me discover the exciting ways students engaged in expository literature such as the way students shared expert knowledge as Oyler (1996) has observed or the way expository texts nurtured curiosity in my students as Stead (2014) has suggested. Most significant to me were students’ initiations, moments where they directed our focus during discussion, because their responses illustrated how thinking and knowing represent active engagement during a read-aloud of expository texts. Clark and Andreasen (2014) have demonstrated just how crucial active engagement like this is for older readers to reap the benefits
of a read-aloud. Chief among these benefits for me is still the pleasure of reading a text to my students which Young et al. (2023) note is a valid purpose. Together, these findings construct a picture of engagement in expository texts which demonstrates to me that reading aloud expository texts is an enriching experience for middle school teachers and students.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This study examined my experiences as a seventh-grade English language arts teacher as I prepared and presented interactive read-alouds of expository texts to my students. I knew read-aloud scholarship and my previous experiences reading aloud narrative texts could provide some guidance, however, I lacked explicit understanding of how preparing expository texts for read-alouds may differ from or be similar to narrative texts. There is also little research that explores how teachers engage middle school students during interactive read-alouds especially with expository texts. Current research suggests read-alouds with expository texts are a valid instructional strategy (Albright, 2002; Ariail & Albright, 2005; De Lin Du Bois & McIntosh, 1986; Hurst & Griffity, 2015). It also suggests students enjoy and benefit from engagement in expository texts (NCTE, 2023; Young, 2006) and that teachers who read aloud expository texts provide unique opportunities for students to engage (May & Bingham, 2015; Oyler, 1996; Robinson, 2020; Stead, 2014). Therefore, my study sought to improve my understanding of how to prepare for and engage middle school students in read-alouds of expository texts so that I might provide these opportunities for my students. In this section, I discuss what I learned preparing for and engaging middle school students in expository texts, share implications of my findings, address my study’s limitations, and suggest possibilities for future research.

Preparation to Presentation

Having analyzed the data and reflected upon their meanings for me personally, I now see that it is imperative that teachers share texts they actually enjoy reading. Connecting preparation and presentation expanded my understanding of the ways preparation impacted our engagement in expository texts. As noted, I took an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 2005) toward expository
texts during text selection, and my enjoyment of the texts was apparent in my presentation. For example, I used a conspiratorial tone to invite engagement. One of the things I value about read-alouds is the pleasure I find in sharing a text with my students, so when I began this study, I was worried that reading aloud expository texts would not be as fun as narrative texts had been. Perhaps this worry was influenced by the more efferent purposes we assume expository texts have but watching myself engage students through the same performative practices I use with narrative, I both saw and felt the same delight sharing expository texts.

The relationship between my enjoyment of expository texts in preparation and the performative practices I used to invite aesthetic engagement during the read-alouds supports my conclusion that effective read-alouds incorporate performative practices. Because I enjoyed the texts I chose, I encouraged aesthetic engagement using tone and voice. Fisher et al. (2004) and Kerry-Moran (2016) have both argued expressive reading is a characteristic of an effective read-aloud. As previously noted, this performative practice unveiled my aesthetic stance toward the texts we read aloud, but more importantly it unveiled to me what I already knew about the performative aspects of cultivating engaging read-alouds also applied to expository texts.

Additionally, it is likely that taking an aesthetic stance toward expository texts positively influenced students’ engagement. Rosenblatt (2005) affirms a teacher’s important role in creating an atmosphere where students feel free to adopt aesthetic stances. So, by taking an aesthetic stance, I made space for students to respond aesthetically to the texts. It was clear during the read-alouds that my students felt comfortable responding emotionally to the information like when Ana expressed disgust or when Breanna took the roach’s perspective. These responses were evidence of their interest in the text. Rosenblatt supports this idea positing that aesthetic responses are evidence of a reader’s engagement in a text. For me, making space for aesthetic
stances in both preparation and presentation is one way to facilitate students’ engagement in expository texts.

I found to improve my practice, I had to be willing to let things get a little messy, occasionally abandoning my well laid plans, allowing myself to be flexible and often vulnerable. The uncertainty was the space where growth occurred. My findings regarding preparation illustrate the messiness of planning read-alouds, particularly with expository texts where I needed to develop a confidence in my page selections and address my wonderings about how discussion questions might differ from those I might use with narrative texts. In planning read-alouds with expository texts I was guided by the literature for frameworks of effective practices (Barrentine, 1996; Fisher et al., 2004), planning templates (Kesler et al., 2020; Young et al., 2023), and instructional strategies (McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Stead, 2014). These sources presented me with a well-curated glimpse of what interactive read-aloud could be, and though I aspired to pattern my read-alouds after their work, I found it difficult to attain.

Despite my many uncertainties during planning, connecting preparation and presentation also expanded my understanding of how the choices I made during planning had an important impact on presentation. For example, though I eventually set Kesler et al.’s (2020) planning template aside in favor of my own simplified process, the template greatly influenced my decision to introduce each text by addressing students’ background knowledge, and my findings indicate that teachers set the stage for engagement with expository texts by assessing students’ background knowledge. My students’ responses revealed what they knew and what they did not yet know about a topic which served as either an access point or a barrier to text comprehension. When students’ offerings revealed their expert knowledge, I knew students were ready to dive into a text, but when students’ offerings revealed their lack of knowledge or misunderstandings, I
knew students needed additional information before they were ready to engage in a text. Though this finding relates specifically to my experience, Albright’s (2002) work supports the necessity of addressing gaps in background knowledge to facilitate engagement with expository texts. As noted in my findings, I did little to address background knowledge with the narrative texts I read aloud, thus I discovered that for me assessing my students’ knowledge of various topics prior to a read-aloud is a significant part of engaging my middle school students in read-alouds of expository texts.

There were many moments where this approach paid off by supporting students’ comprehension of the texts we read, but perhaps somewhat unique to my study is what addressing background knowledge revealed about how students’ expert knowledge contributed to engagement. Oyler (1996) demonstrated how read-alouds of expository texts prompted students to share expertise on the topic. My findings agreed with Oyler’s work, as many students contributed expert knowledge on the topics we read about. However, like aesthetic engagement, my findings also revealed to me that students’ expert knowledge could direct our discussion, such as when Carl volunteered his knowledge of rabies, effectively transitioning us from the introduction to engage us in the text, or the moment Ana’s knowledge of the homophones cereal and serial engaged us in the text. Moments where students directed our engagement in the text affirmed my belief in creating socially mediated learning experiences like read-alouds which is supported by Vygotsky’s (1978) Socio-cultural theory. I saw the truth of Miller’s (2003) claim that through discussion we see that what we can do together is more than what we can do alone, and so through experiences like these where students’ knowledge fostered engagement, I came to understand how engagement is collaboratively constructed.
Engaging With Scholarship

External perspectives support the effective critique and improvement of a teaching practice. We see our teaching practice up close and as such we do not always see it clearly. Outside perspectives help us take the necessary step back and see the strengths and weaknesses of our practice, thereby helping identify spaces for growth. My findings support the idea that engaging with the scholarship improved my understanding of effective read-aloud practices and helped me focus on improving my practice. First, we all have spaces where our practice can improve, and this was never more apparent than when I realized my reading preferences dominated my curriculum. My examination of the literature highlighted the imbalance between narrative and expository literature in my curriculum. Read-aloud scholarship has emphasized teachers’ preference for narrative texts (Conradi Smith et al., 2022) in contrast with many students’ preference for expository literature (Ives et al., 2020; Stewart & Correia, 2021). I felt a need to address this imbalance, and so I determined to explore expository texts as read-alouds. Next, scholars have particularly addressed the importance of selecting quality expository texts for read-alouds (McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Stead, 2014; Young et al., 2020; Young et al., 2023). I acknowledge that I was influenced by those I perceived as experts. This was evidenced by the decision I made during text selection to examine expository texts that were recommended in Young et al.’s (2020) Children’s Literature, Briefly. Making this choice allowed me to choose those texts I enjoyed from a host of excellent expository texts. My engagement with the scholarly literature directed my first steps in the improvement of my practice and guided me in the texts I chose.

Second, teaching experience naturally develops many effective practices. In the day-to-day successes and failures that are part of teaching, we come to recognize practices that work,
but we don’t always know why they work. In studying my own practice, my knowledge of effective instructional moves became more explicit (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009); and engaging with the literature deepened my understanding of my practice by unveiling the effective instructional moves that were already part of my practice. I encouraged engagement through specific instructional practices like open-ended questions and revoicing students’ comments. In planning, open-ended questions were recorded on sticky notes prior to each read-aloud and used to guide discussion. Serafini and Ladd (2008) discussed how the use of open-ended questions invites more thoughtful responses, and their scholarship aided me in noticing my intentional pattern of using open-ended questions to invite engagement during presentation. In my study, the thoughtful responses students offered during our read-alouds included inferences, perspective taking, critical questions, and expert knowledge to name a few which to me served as evidence of their engagement. Thus, engaging with read-aloud scholarship helped me recognize that the use of open-ended questions was already a part of my pedagogy, an effective practice I employed to encourage deeper engagement with expository texts.

Another way the literature deepened my understanding of my practice was in helping me recognize how repeating students’ comments positively impacted engagement. To illustrate, I noticed my consistent tendency to repeat students’ comments during discussions. Revoicing students’ comments, as Burke (2017) terms it, is another instructional practice I used to facilitate engagement. Combining the use of open-ended questions and revoicing students’ comments, I noticed a pattern in my facilitation that began with open-ended questions. Then following responses, students were validated either by my revoicing of their idea or by my naming what had been offered thereby labeling it meaningful knowledge. My pattern of facilitation differs from the typical patterns that have been observed in classrooms (i.e., question, answer, evaluate).
However, May and Bingham (2015) have indicated that teachers’ responses when reading aloud expository texts should serve to clarify, verify, and when necessary correct. As my responses to students’ transactions focused most often on verifying or clarifying what had been offered, I might frame my intentional revoicing as a validation that fostered my students’ engagement in expository texts. This too helped me unveil effective practices that were already part of my read-aloud practice.

Most teachers have had the experience of attending a conference and coming away with wholesale plans to revamp their entire practice, however, to succeed, the improvement of one’s practice needs a limited focus. A significant way in which my practice improved through engagement with the literature was the way it focused my improvement on the responsive practices scholars outlined. Read-aloud scholarship emphasized the importance of teachers’ intentional facilitation during read-alouds (Hansen, 2004; Hoffman, 2011; Labadie et al., 2013; Ricks & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021; Wilkins et al., 2016). Intentional facilitation includes those moves that support collaborative dialogue, press students to critique and analyze rather than merely observe, and use student comments to guide the read-aloud discussion. Without this intentional facilitation, reading aloud is less effective as an instructional practice. Before the read-alouds, I did my best to select interesting texts, choose the right pages, and plan questions that could spark discussion, but it was not possible to script all the ways my students might respond. Though there were many positive moments of responsiveness, my findings most frequently noted my developing ability to use students’ responses to guide our discussion of the texts.

Reflection is a meaningful part of improvement because it helps us analyze our instructional choices and identify skills that need further development. For example, following
the first read-aloud I noticed “I needed to talk less and encourage more student talk” (October 16, 2023). Though it frequently mirrored the messiness of planning, discussed earlier, my post read-aloud reflections helped me monitor my developing ability to foster more student talk. Following each read-aloud, my reflections both critiqued my lack of responsiveness and focused me on further developing the instructional flexibility described by the literature on interactive read-aloud. After the first read-aloud, my micro-preparations in almost every read-aloud that followed revealed that I prepared to facilitate engagement in part by thinking about the “need to be responsive to students’ comments” (October 18, 2023); and my reflections post read-aloud identified the ways I had been or failed to be responsive. These reflections captured my growing ability to facilitate engagement through a greater responsiveness to students’ comments, but even more so they highlighted the way my engagement with read-aloud scholarship improved my ability to maintain engagement in expository texts, thereby improving my practice.

Implications

This study has some meaningful implications for my practice. First, I learned expository texts carry the same potential for engagement as narrative texts in interactive read-alouds. Indeed, expository literature had much to offer us as readers and thinkers (NCTE, 2023). This potential was evidenced in my work through the delight we experienced during our interactions with expository texts. Next, the ways in which my students engaged with expository texts suggests to me that secondary students experience similar benefits when reading aloud expository texts as those that have been observed with young learners (Oyler, 1996; Robinson, 2020; Stead, 2014; Young, 2006). Also, maintaining the performative (i.e., expressive reading) and instructional practices (i.e., addressing background knowledge and responsive practices) in my pedagogy fostered aesthetic and intellectual engagement with expository texts. Finally,
expanding my read-aloud practice to include expository texts was a messier process for me than the research literature led me to expect. However, it emphasized the importance of allowing my learning to be messy as I improved my practice through experience and reflection. Further, by engaging with the literature I was able to make explicit the things I already knew about cultivating an engaging read-aloud and begin developing new skills that improved my practice.

**Future Research**

Through this study I addressed my lack of knowledge and the scarcity of research on preparing and engaging secondary students in interactive read-alouds of expository texts. Additional research focused on the preparation and presentation of read-alouds with expository texts in secondary settings is needed considering the NCTE’s (2023) call for a greater balance of fiction and nonfiction texts in our curriculums. For example, I might further refine my understanding of preparing and engaging in read-alouds of expository texts by exploring how the various purposes for read-alouds might engage middle school students and teachers. These purposes could include read-alouds to teach text structures and text features (Young et al., 2023), to develop a more culturally relevant pedagogy (May & Bingham, 2015), or to further develop reading skills (McClure & Fullerton, 2017).

I might also consider addressing some of the questions that arose during my research. For example, during data analysis I often noticed the moments in which I failed to press students to expound upon their ideas. I wondered how my ability to effectively facilitate interactive read-alouds might improve by studying these moments. Finally, this study relates to only one teacher’s experience. This study could be replicated by other English language arts or other content area teachers in the upper grades to expand our understanding of the ways teachers prepare for and engage students in read-alouds of expository texts. Each of these possibilities
would add to the findings from this study and to the literature on interactive read-alouds with expository literature.

**Limitations**

This study meant to contribute to existing research on interactive read-alouds of expository texts. While this study has implications for my practice using expository literature as a read-aloud to improve literacy instruction, it is not without limitations. Limitations were considered and addressed in the design of this study. First, this study used a self-study methodology, which comes with certain limitations. Using these methods, I served as both the researcher as well as a participant, and as such there may be questions about my subjectivity. However, self-study also includes our relationships with others in our practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), so data sources were selected that included recordings that captured my interactions with students for the purpose of improving my practice. I further addressed this concern working with my collaborating professor who acted as a critical friend, challenging and thereby assisting the development of a more subjective analysis of the collected data.

Another limitation is the focus on me and my specific experiences preparing for and presenting interactive read-alouds. This study cannot speak for all secondary English Language Arts teachers. However, the findings of this study are conversation with the literature that involves interactive read-alouds of expository texts in elementary settings. It is also in conversation with literature which has outlined the characteristics of effective read-alouds (Fisher et al., 2004), described considerations for planning read-alouds (Barrentine, 1996; McClure & Fullerton, 2017), shared planning templates (Kesler et al., 2020; Stead, 2014; Young et al., 2023), and the descriptions of effective facilitation during read-alouds (Burke, 2017; Hansen, 2004; Hoffman, 2011; Kerry-Moran, 2016; Labadie et al., 2013; Pendergast et al., 2015;
Serafini & Ladd, 2008; Worthy et al., 2012). My preparations and presentation were benefited by the existing literature on interactive read-alouds. A related limitation is the limited number of read-alouds that were presented in this study. This study’s findings are based on just three interactive read-alouds with expository texts. However, my findings on read-alouds with expository texts were supported by the findings of research with younger students (Oyler, 1996; Robinson, 2020; Stead, 2014). This research provided me with support during the analysis and the articulation of my findings.

Conclusion

Learning to prepare for and present expository texts during interactive read-alouds proved to be a challenging though rewarding and delightful experience for me. Dividing my findings into two categories allowed me to examine the links between preparation and presentation and the growth of my read-aloud practice. It is important to note that when I took an aesthetic stance toward expository texts it had a positive impact on preparation and presentation, specifically enjoyment and thereby engagement with texts for me as well as my students.

Since preparing to present expository texts differs from preparing to present narrative texts, planning introductions that address background knowledge, selecting pages, and crafting discussion questions can be messy. This all charted a course for engagement that was further honed through my reflections and revisions which was grounded as I gained more experience. It is also important to understand when I validated students’ thinking and knowing, it helped me foster active engagement with texts. Implications for my practice include expository nonfiction’s great potential for the enjoyment and engagement of all readers, the potential of academic benefits for students who participate in these read-alouds, maintaining a balance between performative and instructional practices, and allowing myself time to cultivate improved
practices. The choice to include expository texts offers my students a more equitable curriculum (Young et al., 2023) and more opportunities to discuss texts from different perspectives (May & Bingham, 2015). Tracking my own experience as I learned to present read-alouds using expository texts helped me more fully honor the interests of all readers in my classroom. As I continue this practice, I have great hopes that my read-aloud practice will become a more connected component of my literacy instruction.
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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Memorandum

To: Paul Ricks
Department: BYU - EDUC - Teacher Education
From: Sandee Aina, MPA, HRPP Associate Director
        Wayne Larsen, MAcc, IRB Administrator
        Bob Riddle, Ph.D., IRB Chair
Date: September 20, 2023
IRB#: IRB2023-254
Title: Facilitating Interactive Read-Alouds in Middle School with Expository Texts

Brigham Young University’s IRB has approved the research study referenced in the subject heading as expedited level, categories 6 and 7. This study does not require an annual continuing review. Each year near the anniversary of the approval date, you will receive an email reminding you of your obligations as a researcher. The email will also request the status of the study. You will receive this email each year until you close the study.

The IRB may re-evaluate its continuing review decision for this decision depending on the type of change(s) proposed in an amendment (e.g., protocol change that increases subject risk), or as an outcome of the IRB’s review of adverse events or problems.

The study is approved as of 09/20/2023. Please reference your assigned IRB identification number in any correspondence with the IRB.

Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements:

1. A copy of the approved informed consent statement and associated recruiting documents (if applicable) can be accessed in IRIS. No other consent statement should be used. Each research subject must be provided with a copy or a way to access the consent statement.
2. Any modifications to the approved protocol must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the IRB before modifications are incorporated into the study.
3. All recruiting tools must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to use.
4. All data, as well as the investigator’s copies of the signed consent forms, must be retained for a period of at least three years following the termination of the study.
5. In addition, serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately, with a written report by the PI within 24 hours of the PI’s becoming aware of the event. Serious adverse events are (1) the death of a research participant; or (2) serious injury to a research participant.
6. All other non-serious unanticipated problems should be reported to the IRB within 2 weeks of the first awareness of the problem by the PI. Prompt reporting is important, as unanticipated problems often require some modification of study procedures, protocols, and/or informed consent processes. Such modifications require the review and approval of the IRB.
# APPENDIX B

## Template for Transcription

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Gestures</th>
<th>Codes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:59</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>p. 56-57</td>
<td>Okay—what are you noticing about this page? (Someone singing: bum,bump-a-lum) Anything and everything?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inviting Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:06</td>
<td>Andres</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lots of people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:07</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>Repeating; Lots of people!</td>
<td></td>
<td>Validating Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:08</td>
<td>Enzo</td>
<td></td>
<td>People that are old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:10</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rephrasing: They look old. What makes them look old Baylie?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Validating Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:13</td>
<td>Andres</td>
<td></td>
<td>Most of them look like they have like…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:14</td>
<td>Breanna</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning is undecipherable (Anthony and others talking above her)…or…and something that…about like…live in the past…like back in the day…(Teacher: okay.)…and stuff.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative Sensemaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:32</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>Okay. (Quiet chatter) Do you notice anything about</td>
<td></td>
<td>Redirecting/Directing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Interaction Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:39</td>
<td>Breanna</td>
<td>Martin Luther King</td>
<td>Revealing, Misunderstanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:41</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Does it look like Martin Luther King?</td>
<td>Accepting/Questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anthony: Like)</td>
<td>Responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Text Selections

The first text selected was *How We Got to the Moon: The People, Technology, and Daring Feats of Science Behind Humanity’s Greatest Adventure* (Rocco, 2020). This text describes the people who developed the technology and explains the process of designing the technology that took us to the moon. Significantly, this book suggests the importance of collaboration when it comes to problem solving. It also addresses the importance of diversity as people tackle big problems. A primary reason for the selection of this text is the increasing diversity of classrooms in America and my belief that students should be able to see individuals like themselves in the texts we read. Pages selected for reading aloud emphasize these topics.

The second text selected was *The Book of Heroines: Tales of History’s Gutsiest Gals* (Drimmer, 2016). Organized by topic, the text describes the notable accomplishments of women in various arenas such as politics, sports, and business as well as others. This text emphasizes that women can do and have done remarkable things in the world. I selected this book because these things are not always recognized or known and because the books content and format (e.g. vignettes about notable men paired with full page spreads about notable women) offer interesting opportunities for discussion. The pages selected were chosen to encourage discussion through comparison.

The next text selected was *Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature’s Undead* (Johnson, 2013). This text uses zombie traits, a popular culture connection, to build on reader’s background knowledge in order to introduce elements of the natural world and its processes. It describes various fungi, parasites, viruses that take over other creatures’ brains and bodies for their own reproductive purposes. The text evokes a strong aesthetic reaction to engage readers. As this text
differs from the types of texts I usually select for read-alouds and from my other selections for this study, it is an important choice. I selected pages that I thought could invite aesthetic responses (Rosenblatt, 2005) to information about the natural world.

Similarly, I selected *Rotten: Vultures, Beetles, Slime, and Nature’s Other Decomposers* (Sanchez, 2019). This text explains the how and why of decomposition along with living things that help decomposition occur. Cartoon-like pictures offer readers an engaging backdrop to the expository information. I thought it might also invite aesthetic responses, and the selected pages would build on information we learned from *Zombie Makers* (Johnson, 2013).

My final selection was *Poison: Deadly Deeds, Perilous Professions, and Murderous Medicines* (Albee, 2017). The back matter of the text emphasizes “this is not a How-To Book.” Instead, it provides factual information about various poisons from a historical perspective in an expository style. The text is organized into informative passages paired with text boxes that provide specialized information in connection with chapters or chapter headings. Another interesting feature is the parenthetical citations that direct readers to other pages for more information. I initially selected this book because of its connection to a curricular unit on short stories I currently include in my 7th grade classes. However, examining the book further I noted how the parenthetical citations offer interesting opportunities to show readers how an expository text can be read differently than a narrative text. The reader may use the parenthetical citations to hop from one section to another indulging their curiosity about the topic. Pages selected model this way of reading.