**Kathleen Childress**

**RE 5040 Reading Evaluations**

**Title**: *Chains*

**Author**: Laurie Halse Anderson

**Publisher**: Simon & Schuster; New York, NY 2008

**Summary:** Isabel and her baby sister Ruth are slave girls to Miss Mary Finch. Their momma has been dead for one year a victim of smallpox. The girls have been left to continue their work for Miss Mary Finch. Their momma had told them that Miss Mary has promised to free them when she passes away. Isabel and Ruth are now getting ready to bury Miss Mary and Isabel is planning a free life for her and her sister. There is only one problem, Miss Mary’s nephew Robert. He decides there has been no such agreement and claims the girls with the rest of Miss Mary’s property. Mr. Robert sells the girls to the rich Lockton family. The Lockton’s are British loyalists. They take the girls to their home in New York City. Isabel’s first day in New York City she meets Curzon a slave to a patriot. Curzon convinces Isabel to spy on her loyalist masters. He makes her believe that if she does this and delivers information that would benefit the Patriots that they would in return help her and her sister to escape. When Isabel delivers important information concerning an assassination attempt being planned on General Washington she is sure she will receive freedom in return. The Patriots however do not provide her with the assistance she needs. Isabel continues to serve the Lockton’s however she never loses her hope of freedom. When Madam is suddenly benevolent on one occasion to Isabel by offering her milk and cake Isabel’s life is turned upside down. The next morning when Isabel awakes from a deep sleep she is unable to find her sister. She discovers Becky the Lockton’s cook crying and Isabel discovers Madam has sold Ruth. Isabel is enraged and confronts Madam and they have an argument. Isabel runs to the Patriot camp for help. The Patriots once again do not help her and she is imprisoned and then branded on the cheek. Isabel wakes up at Lady Seymour’s, Master Lockton’s elderly aunt. Lady Seymour is sympathetic to Isabel’s situation but cannot help her because Madam continues want to control Isabel. When the British enter New York City’s harbor life will change for everyone. The Lockton home among others becomes a home for British military men and their wives. Isabel is sent to Lady Seymour to help with the crowd there until there is a fire in the city. Isabel saves a picture that is very important to Lady Seymour. Curzon and other patriots are imprisoned. Isabel begins to visiting the prison. Then on the evening of a great party to celebrate Queen Charlotte’s birthday Isabel visits the prison, loads Curzon in a wheelbarrow and heads for the river and she rows her way to freedom.

**Personal Response**: The story is full of historical facts from the Revolutionary period of the United States. I was unaware how involved New York was in the fight for independence. Isabel is a strong young lady who never gives up on her dream of freedom for her and her sister Ruth. Isabel develops a friendship with Curzon a slave to a patriot. He tries to convince Isabel to spy for the patriotic cause. Isabel has the opportunity to do just that when Mr. Lockton returns home and begins to entertain other British loyalists. She is able to foil an assassination attempt on planned on General Washington. She took a great risk to do this and was hoping this would be her ticket to freedom. Unfortunately the patriots let her down. I feel so sorry for her and Ruth. Madam Lockton rules the house with an iron hand and is especially hard on Isabel. I don’t like the ending of the story. There are too many questions left unanswered.

**Evaluative Comments**: The author has taken a great deal of time and used many resources to ensure the accuracy of the Revolutionary period of the United States in the book. The choice the author made to use New York City as a setting for the book highlights the historical relevance of slavery in the north rather than in the south which is an area one thinks of pertaining to slavery. New York City is also depicted as a city of people; loyalist one day, patriot the next.

Curzon tells Isabel on p. 38 “Lockton is a dirty loyalist.”

p. 39 Curzon again, “My master and those he serves, the rebels, the Congress. We’re fighting for freedom from people like Lockton.”

p. 51 “This is New York, the rules are different, everything is different.”

p. 60 “Compliments of his majesty, gentlemen. There’s enough money here to bribe half of the rebel army.”

New York City also provided the proximity to General Washington allowing for the plot of his assassination by the loyalists. Washington is mentioned several times in the text.

p. 49 “A few times, she and her husband conversated fast and quiet about Mr. Washington and when the king’s shops would arrive for the invasion.”

p. 88 “The news from Philadelphia is that Congress is close to declaring Independence.”

p. 90 “We must kill their Commander, with Washington gone the revolution will collapse.

The author also gives us a hint of foreshadowing at the very beginning of the book when Isabel first meets Curzon and he is trying to convince her to spy on her loyalist master.

p. 41 “I touched my cheek, I couldn’t, I shouldn’t.”

It is later that Isabel’s cheek is branded with the letter I.

Also, the title is important to the story, *Chains*, What type of chains?; physical chains, emotional chains?

**Title**: *Immigrant Kids*

**Author**: Russell Freedman

**Publisher**: Penguin Books; New York, NY. 1980

**Summary:** A photographic look at life for early immigrants to the United States of America. The reader learns how people came to this country and the conditions they endured to get here. Once in America they began learning to be American. They lived in crowded neighborhoods with many people from their own country. The tenements were very crowded and the one luxury it appeared these people had was running water inside the building. Immigrants worked long hours; many times seven days a week and ten hours a day. The children attended school. School was difficult for students who did not speak English and many times older non-English speaking children were placed in a younger classroom. Children were also expected to work; work could be running errands, caring for younger siblings or actually going to a place of employment. Since there were no neighborhood playgrounds, children were left to their imaginations to invent games to play in the streets. They also played America’s favorite game baseball.

**Personal Response**: *Immigrant Kids*, reminds me of the many photographs I have seen in my own family. The talk of the “old country” and how hard it was to come to America brought happiness to people in my family. Reading this book gave me an idea of how it actually might have been like for my grandparents when they were children. Seeing the photos of the printing class was interesting since I had two great uncles that became printers.

It is sad that the children of this time became Americanized and began to turn their back on the old customs; so much of these customs were lost because they wanted to be considered Americans. The parents did cling to what they knew best and that were the ways of the people of their country. I think society pressured these kids to feel this way. When people came to America they did gravitate to others from their country.

**Evaluative Comments**: The photographs and short narratives are a great source of information about the life of immigrant children who came to America in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. The chapters of the book are titled in a way as to take us through the life of a child. For example on page 4, this is titled Coming Over, and shows how the immigrants came to America, the continue, At Home, At School, At Work, At Play. At home gives good examples of the living conditions in the tenement apartments. They were usually crowded and a lot of times one room was used for many things, such as on p. 18. It also shows conveniences available to immigrants that they did not have in the old country such as indoor running water, p.20. At School shows us the overcrowded school classroom, p. 30, where instructions emphasized the three Rs, American history and geography, penmanship and spelling. At Work shows the families working together for a better life, p. 44-45 shows how reach member of the family has a job to do. At Play shows how immigrant children played in the streets, p. 50, taking up America’s game of baseball.

Title: *Locomotion*  Title: *Jazmin’s Notebook*

Author: Jacqueline Woodson Author: Nikki Grimes

Publisher: Penguin;New York, NY;2003 Publisher: Dial Books; New York, NY: 1998

Summary: *Locomotion* is about a young boy name Lonnie Collins Motion. Lonnie documents the events in his life through poetry. Lonnie lives with his foster mother, Miss Edna. He has a sister named Lili who lives in another foster home. Lonnie shares his thoughts and memories about how he and his sister happened to be in two separate homes. He has vivid memories of his mother smelling like honeysuckle because this is the powder she would wear. He also reveals his nickname Locomotion, which he references to a song that was a favorite of his mother.

# Jazmin’s Notebook is about a young adolescent girl living with her sister CeCe, and dealing with her mother’s addiction to drugs and men. Jazmin documents her life in a journal. Jazmin’s notebook paints a vivid picture of her life in the city. Jazmin is struggling with her mother’s illness and the absence of her father. The love she has for her sister and her sister has for her is apparent throughout her writing. Jazmin is a determined adolescent who has goals for a bright future.

Personal Response: These two reading assignments complement each other. We see life perspectives from an adolescent boy and girl living through difficult circumstances. Each one deals with their hardships through written expression. Lonnie and Jazmin are dealing with the absence of their parents. Lonnie’s parents have passed away in a fire while he and his sister Lili were at another home spending the night. Lonnie is living in a foster and so is his sister Lili. Jazmin has lost her parents but in a different way. She struggled as she watched her father die from injuries he sustained in a car accident. She must also endure watching her mother slowly die from an addiction she cannot control. Jazmin differs from Lonnie because she does have the love and protection of her older sister with whom she lives. Lonnie is on his own with his foster mom while his younger sister is in another foster home across town. Even though Lonnie and Lili are separated you can still see the love between them. I feel that this makes both of these characters strong and determined to survive and they use writing as their outlet.

Evaluative Comments: The authors use first person point of view in both of these books. Lonnie and Jazmin are telling their story as it unfolds before them. This makes it a personal experience for the reader, as we get involved in the lives of these characters.

Nikki Grimes uses symbolism in *Jazmin’s Notebook* by naming the bar down the street the Garden of Eden. Their sign reads, “ Come on in we will sell you a pint of paradise.”

Jazmin’s words are painting the picture of her childhood since there are no photographs.

Chavonne had a name as smooth as a hundred dollar bill.

The place smelled of money. The dress was so red it burned her fingers.

Jaqueline Woodsen connects the sad look on Lonnie’s face in the last family photo taken to the tragedy that is about to unfold in his life. He states that he probably knows that they won’t be a happy family long. He remembers his mom telling him how he struggled when he was born, fighting for his life at two months old and already a survivor.

**Title**: *Looking Back: A Book of Memories*

**Author**: Lois Lowry

**Publisher**: Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston, MA; 1998.

**Summary:** Lois Lowry shares details of her life in her book through short written passages that are accompanied by photographs. The memories she has of her childhood are entertaining as she tells the reader what she was thinking.

She includes quotes from the books she has written.

One of my favorite photos is when she is about three and she is sitting with her sister Helen. They are playing school and Helen gets to be the teacher. Lois is sitting very still so she can listen to the story and see the pictures. She makes us aware this is the reason she is sitting not the fact that her dad is taking the picture. She also says all the while she is trying to figure out how to read so she could be the teacher.

I also like how she compares events and photos of her childhood to photos of her own children when they were young.

Her story of the little mouse she thought was sleeping and cold. She brought him in her jacket to keep him warm and then carefully put him in the oven as she set the temperature to warm and forgot about him until much later when her mother discovered him. Lois claims her mother overreacted to the situation.

She also alternates photos of herself with photos of her mother at approximately the same age. When she is eighteen she has a conversation with her mother who is eighteen.

The death of her son had a profound impact on her life.

**Personal Response**: It is interesting this book is a book of memories since in the *Giver* memories have been stored to spare the community from pain. *Looking Back* is a great book to gain insight into the life of this highly recognized author. I love the pictures and the stories that are written to go with them. I can see how some future characters are being formed as Ms. Lowry grows up and she tells of them throughout this book. I love her dead rat story and the story of the shirt her dad bought her that she wore, and wore, and wore. It is also interesting how she shows herself at 12 and her mother at 12 and compares the similarities. I think she really is paying a tribute to her mother.

**Evaluative Comments**: The use of photographs help the readers see into the life of the author. The autobiographical details are true to that genre as it is sprinkled with the memories of a young girl’s perspective as well as the grown up Lois.

**Title**: *Rules*

**Author**: Cynthia Lord

**Publisher**: Scholastic; New York, NY, 2008.

**Summary:** David makes life complicated for his twelve year old sister Catherine. Catherine wishes one day David would wake-up and be normal. David’s autism forces Catherine to deal with being different and she doesn’t like it. In order to help David cope with life Catherine begins to make him a book of rules. Life in her house seems to continuously revolve around David and his needs. Dad is busy with work at the pharmacy and mom is busy trying to balance taking care of David and a home business. Mom and Dad’s pre-occupation with their own jobs force the responsibility of David on Catherine. The summer a new girl, Kristi, moves next door Catherine must begin a journey of self-acceptance and reflection. She also develops a friendship with Jason, a young man she meets at David’s OT appointments. Jason is confined to a wheelchair and cannot speak. He communicates through a book of words. Catherine begins making words to put in Jason’s book. A true friendship develops between Catherine and Jason. It is Jason who eventually teaches Catherine that sometimes RULES are stupid. Catherine realizes she has been dishonest with her friends and herself.

**Personal Response**: Catherine is a typical twelve year old, self conscious about herself and wanted to be most of all accepted by her peers. She doesn’t like being different. It amazed me how deeply her friendship developed with Jason. He became a true friend to her and she to him. The new neighbor, Kristi, I do not see as a true friend but I think Kristi was also having a hard time dealing with her mom and dad’s separation. Catherine was so pre-occupied with David making her family so different she didn’t realize Kristi was different too. When Catherine begins to make word cards for Jason, the words were focused more on Catherine than Jason. This seemed like a therapeutic way for Catherine to deal with the abnormalities in her life.

**Evaluative Comments**: The book shows us how Catherine grows and changes from the beginning to the end of the book. In the beginning Catherine is having trouble dealing with how her autistic brother David made her family different. She doesn’t like how David’s uncontrollable outbursts call attention to them. She will decline trips to the video store with dad because David has to watch all the previews, flips the boxes over to read the parental advisory and rating.

“Rated PG-thirteen for language and some violence! Crude Humor !” p. 2.

When Catherine reminds David sometimes Dad is late, “David shrieks, “Five o’clock!” “ Shh!” I scan the yard around us to see if anyone heard, and my stomach flips.” p. 3

. The first time Catherine meets Jason in February all she could do was look at his feet. “That day I didn’t know where to look, so I looked at his feet on his wheelchair footrests.” p. 18. As their friendship develops Catherine discovers she can be honest with Jason at least about most of her feelings. She uses the word TORN. “I feel like I’m ripping in half. One half wanting to run away and be a regular person with my friends, but my other half scared to leave David because he can’t make it on his own.” P.118. At the end Catherine invites Jason to the community center dance. He convinces her to break her dance rule and she dances. This appears to demonstrate a new freedom of spirit she did not have before. The next trip to the clinic she doesn’t take her own words.

“And on Tuesday, I’m not bringing my backpack to the clinic, only me. If Jason needs a word I will make it, but I’ll wait for him to ask.” p. 198.

We also see a change in Jason from the beginning to the end of the book. In the beginning he was sitting in his wheelchair, when Catherine begins to make cards for him he seems to come alive. One day he arrives at the clinic with a motorized wheelchair.

“He never wanted a motorized chair before.” Mrs. Morehouse smiles at mom. “But lately he wants to do lots of things for himself. He’s even doing his hand exercises again.” p. 146.

**Title**: *The Fighting Ground*

**Author**: Avi

**Publisher**: Harper Collins; New York, NY. 1984

**Summary:** Jonathan is a thirteen year old boy with a patriotic spirit. He dreams of becoming a soldier in the revolutionary war to fight the British and Hessians. Jonathan’s ideas about war are filled with fantasy rather than reality. Jonathan’s father knows all too well the hard reality of war and continues to deny his son the opportunity to join the army. The day the bell began to toll changed everything for Jonathan. It is on this day Jonathan and his father are in the fields working when the bell begins to ring. The bell tolling was a call to the men at arms. Jonathan is sent back to the house by his father to see if anyone came from town with a message. When Jonathan gets back to the house he manages to get his mother to permit him to go to town to see what is happening. Jonathan arrives in town and gets caught up in the organization of the militia. Jonathan volunteers himself, lies about permission from his father, borrows a gun from the tavern owner and is off with the other men to fight the unknown. The men are led by the Corporal; a man that is a soldier to the core. The men begin their journey down the road and eventually begin to hear a fife and drum. As the sound gets closer Jonathan prepares to enter his first battle as a soldier. He soon discovers being a soldier is not what he thought. Jonathan is captured by three Hessian soldiers. The soldiers tie Jonathan with a rope but do not harm him in any way. Jonathan goes through many emotions while he is in the captivity of the three soldiers. He becomes angry at them and then at himself for not thinking about escape. Jonathan then seems to become fond of the soldiers appearing to want to believe they are not the monsters they have been made out to be by the revolutionaries. They journey through a heavy fog following the sound of what Jonathan describes as the call of a cow in distress. This leads them to a farmhouse and cow that is in need of milking. Jonathan begins to look for a bucket to use to milk the cow which leads him to the barn. When Jonathan opens the barn door he is surprised to see a small boy sitting there. Eventually Jonathan reveals the boy to the soldiers only to them discover the boy’s parents have been killed. Jonathan assumes by the attitudes of the soldiers that they are responsible for the deaths of the mother and father. When the soldiers fall asleep Jonathan plans to escape. He feels it is his duty as a soldier to kill the soldiers. He tries but cannot make himself pull the trigger; this angers him because he feels it is his duty as a soldier. Jonathon and the boy escape when the soldiers fall asleep. Jonathan carries the boy until they find the men Jonathan fought with earlier in the day. The men plan to return to the farmhouse to kill the Hessians. Jonathan goes along part of the plan. He tries to get the soldiers to surrender but they fight and ultimately die. Jonathan returns home with a different picture of war.

**Personal Response**: Jonathan appears to be a typical thirteen year old boy. He thinks his father doesn’t understand his feelings about wanting to be a soldier. Jonathan has glamorized the status of solider and war in his mind. His father had been injured and talked only of the gruesome parts of war. He discourages Jonathan from fighting by telling him he needs his help on the farm. When Jonathan sneaks off with the men I felt angry at him for not listening to his father. He learned the hard way that war is not black and white. The Hessian soldiers were good to him causing him to feel sympathy for them. Jonathan tries his best to get the soldiers to surrender but they are soldiers; a state of mind that Jonathan has not developed and being soldiers they fight rather than surrender.

**Evaluative Comments**: Time is one element that is documented throughout the book. The moments in the day of a young boy is documented in roughly 15 to 30 minute increments. This could be used as a writing activity for students to document their lives for a day or two. Tension and suspense if another element throughout this book, the sound of the bell ringing at the beginning of the book, the fife and drum played by the Hessians, p. 35, “ It was then Jonathan first heard the distant tapping of the drum.” ; “ They just stood there listening to the drum. It came lound and regular, like an angry clock. Then slyly, the fife music slid into a playful tune.”p. 35; “Only then did Jonathan realize how much closer was the sound of the fife and drum.” p. 40.

After the battle when Jonathan gathers his senses, “ Jonathan watched intently from behind the bush, certain the soldier was looking for him.” p. 57

Jonathan is captured by the soldiers and they are traveling in a heavy fog. They hear a cow calling, as they move closer, to the sound the fog begins to lift. The soldiers have muskets ready. As the fog continues to lift the cow is revealed and beyond the cow a dark house. P. 75

There are other examples of this throughout the book. It would be great to document predictions. Another interesting activity might be to try to figure out what the Hessians are saying to Jonathan by looking at the context of the conversation and then looking in the back of the book where the author so graciously put the translations. “O Gott!” cried the tall soldier, flinging up an arm to stop them. p. 72. “Los !” he said, pushing him (Jonathan) forward. “Mach die Tur auf.” p. 77 “approaching the door , he reached out a hand, withdrew it, and gazed back toward the soldiers. “Los!” came the impatient, whispered command. p. 77

Characters are another interesting element, the only one with a name is Jonathan, everyone else is described by position or appearance; Father, the tavern owner, the Corporal, the Frenchman, the friend of my father, the Hessian soldiers; the old one, the tall one, the young one, the boy.

**Title**: *The Giver*

**Author**: Lois Lowry

**Publisher**: Bantam Doubleday Dell; New York, NY; 1993.

**Summary:** Jonas lives in a community in which there is sameness. The community is governed by a panel of elders. These individuals maintain the sameness and order within the community. The residents are spared the chaos that could be caused by an individual’s free will. Free will is not permitted in this community. Those who cannot abide by the laws of the community as well as the old are scheduled for release. Jonas is awaiting the celebration of the twelves. During this time he will receive his career assignment. These assignments are determined by the elders after they have observed the lives of each child. When the celebration of the tweleves arrives Jonas is passed over for an assignment. He sits in disbelief and horror thinking that a mistake has been made and wondering what he has done that has prevented him from receiving his assignment. Jonas discovers he has not be assigned but selected to the high honor of Receiver. Jonas will learn from the current Receiver. Jonas learns that position of Receiver is a painful and enlightening experience. The Receiver is in charge of all memories of the past that have all been chosen by the community to eliminate. The Receiver holds all these memories so the residents do not experience feelings, they do not see color, and they live in an ordered society of sameness. During Jonas training he begins to refer to the old Receiver as the Giver; the Giver of the memories. The more Jonas learns the less he likes living in the sameness. When he witnesses firsthand the release of a newborn child Jonas decides something must be done. He and the Giver devise a plan that will change the community. Jonas bravely departs from the sameness into the unknown.

**Personal Response**: I have to say this was quite an unusual book. It would frustrate me how mechanical the characters were in their everyday life. There were no choices. People just did what they were supposed to do in the most precise and efficient means possible. I would not like to live in such a place. I wonder how the community came to be this way? I realize they wanted to control things in a way that would seem to make it better for people to survive but in the effort to spare pain and suffering they lost who they were. It is hard for me to imagine not knowing sunshine and snow or the colors of the rainbow. The release process was rather surprising although I had suspected it would be gruesome. Jonas father took the little baby’s life like it was nothing but then again to him it was nothing since I am sure he did not know or have the feelings associated with death.

**Evaluative Comments**: The characters Jonas and the Giver were essential to this book. Jonas developed into a strong character. Jonas struggles in the beginning to find the precise language when he speaks as it is required by the community. The author uses this precise language to specifically identify objects in the book, such as, comfort object, sleeping room, family unit. Jonas seems to fit into his family unit but as we learn more about him his character begins to grow. He begins to see things others do not. He also seems to have deep feelings although he does not know what feelings are until he begins his training with the Giver. As Jonas becomes the Receiver of memories and begins his work with The Giver his character becomes aware of the injustice the community has caused by its laws of sameness. The day Jonas father brings Gabe home the first thing Jonas notices is his pale eyes. This is very interesting since a point is made that most everyone has dark eyes except for Jonas, this new baby, Gabe and a female five. This forms a connection between Jonas and Gabe. When Jonas then meets the Giver, he also has pale eyes. Memory or the lack of it is a recurring issue throughout the book. The population of the community does not have memories therefore they have spared themselves pain. A theme of free will comes to my mind. There are no choices so there can be no mistakes. People live an uncomplicated life that is planned for them from birth.

**Title**: *The Tiger Rising*

**Author**: Kate DiCamillio

**Publisher**: Candlewick Press. Cambridge, MA, 2001.

**Summary:** The story of twelve year of Rob Horton. Rob and his father have moved from their home in Jacksonville, Florida to Lister, Florida. Rob finds a caged tiger way out in the woods behind the Kentucky Star Motel. Rob lives there with his day. Rob’s dad also works at the Kentucky Star. When Rob first finds the tiger he thinks it is some sort of magic trick. The tiger becomes a distraction for Rob. It helps take his mind off the loneliness he feels about losing his mother six months ago. Rob also suffers from a rash on his legs. Willie May the motel housekeeper tells rob he is keeping all his sadness down low in his legs and this is causing this rash. Rob also meets Sistine a new girl who is angry at the world. Sistine is named after the Sistine Chapel, and she is proud to tell everyone that fact about her. Sistine’s anger comes from the absence of her father in her life. She is determined her father will come to Lister and save her. Rob and Sistine become friends and share the secret of the caged tiger. Rob eventually discovers the tiger belongs to Beauchamp, his dad’s boss. Beauchamp makes an agreement with Rob to keep the tiger a secret. When Rob and Sistine share their secret with Willie May Rob is finally set free from his loneliness.

**Personal Response**: This book was rather depressing; all the characters were suffering from some type of loss. Rob’s sadness was especially bad it was so deep inside of him that it manifested itself as a rash on his legs. Sistine is full of displaced anger at her mother and her new school. She is convinced her father is coming but deep down she knows he is not. Rob’s dad is trying to be strong for Rob and by doing so he is also suffering from the inability to express his feelings about his wife’s death and how much he cares for Rob.

**Evaluative Comments**:

The author does a great job presenting Rob’s situation and how he has his feelings packed up tight in his suitcase. Rob imagined himself as a suitcase that was too full, (p. 3). Willie May tells Rob he has to let his sadness rise up. You keeping all that sadness down low, in your legs. You not letting it get up to your heart, where it belongs. You got to let that sadness rise on up (p. 37). The caged tiger is a representation of these bottled up feelings, when the tiger is set free and then killed by Rob’s dad, it allows Rob to let his feelings out.

Rob’s character also changes from the beginning of the book to the end. Rob makes friends with Sistine. The friendship with her seems to make Rob open his suitcase and really talk about things he usually keeps packed up. “Immediately, he regretted saying it. It was his policy not to say thins, but it was a policy he was having a hard time maintaining around Sistine., p. 23 Rob also tells Sistine about his mother. Rob is actually beginning to feel happiness. Then Rob remembered the name of the feeling that was pushing up inside him, filling him full to overflowing. It was happiness. P.52. Rob is finally able to say his mother’s name; “Caroline,” rob whispered into the darkness. “Caroline. Caroline. Caroline.” The word was as sweet as forbidden candy on his tongue. P. 60. Rob finally is able to stand up to Sistine and tell her what she has known all along; her father is not coming back.

**Title**: *The Watson’s Go To Birmingham*

**Author**: Christopher Paul Curtis

**Publisher**: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell ; New York, NY. 1995

**Summary:** The story of the Watson family living in Flint, Michigan in 1963. Momma (Wilona) is from Birmingham, Alabama. Momma isn’t used to the cold winters of Flint, Michigan even after being there for twelve years. Momma refers to Michigan as a giant icebox. Kenny is the ten year old middle child and we see life with the “weird Watsons” through his eyes. Then there is thirteen year old brother Byron, who thinks he is one cool dude, but his family thinks he is a juvenile delinquent. There is also, little sister Joetta, Joey for short. Momma is so worried about the cold she makes Kenny and Joey wear layers and layers of clothes to keep warm. Kenny says they are like mummies. Byron is referred to as the god of the school since he is the biggest and the strongest. Kenny is convinced it is because of Byron he is treated in a more lenient manner by some of the other school bullies. Byron gets in his share of trouble which provides for some of the humor in the book. It is because of Byron’s attitude and disobedience that Momma and Daddy plan a trip to Birmingham, Alabama to visit Momma’s mother, Grandma Sands. They plan to leave Byron with Grandma Sands until his behavior shows some improvement. So the family begins preparing the “brown bomber” for the trip. Daddy comes home with a surprise for them, the ultra glide, a phonograph for the car. Momma begins to plan every detail of the trip in her notebook but there is something about the trip Daddy forgets to tell her; he is planning on driving through to Alabama. Kenny is surprised when he meets Grandma Sands for the first time. She is nothing like he has her pictured in his mind; a troll, bigger than dad, probably foaming at the mouth and using a cane as big as a tree trunk with crows, owls and lizards living in it. He describes Grandma Sands actually appearance by comparing her to his mom. If you shrunk his mom five sizes and sucked all the juice out of her that is Grandma Sands. When they get to Grandma Sands life is definitely different. It is hot as an oven. Kenny makes a bad decision and disobeys Grandma Sands about swimming. Kenny meets Winnie the Pooh’s evil twin, the Wool Pooh while he is swimming and one more time at Joey’s church. The family returns to Flint, but Kenny has a hard time with the last encounter of the Wool Pooh. It is up to his older brother, Byron to get him back into life with the family.

**Personal Response**: There are so many laugh out loud moments with the Weird Watsons. I think what I enjoyed the most was the family experience they shared. They were a family that loved each other. This does not mean they got along all the time. I love the relationship between momma and daddy, between the parents and the children, and between the children. The big delinquent brother who is “too cool for school” really has a heart of gold for both Kenny and Joey. Kenny is self conscious about his lazy eye but when Rufus moves to his school he has high hopes that the new southern kid, is going to be his personal saver. Momma trying to teach Byron a lesson about setting things on fire by burning his fingers, however, like any good mother she is prepared with the Vaseline to mend his burns. The Vaseline made me laugh on a personal note because my grandmother was convinced Vaseline could cure almost anything. Joey is always trying to save Byron from his punishments. The love they have for each shines through when Kenny meets the Wool Pooh at Colliers Landing. He sees Joey as an angel trying to save him and then Byron, who fights the Wool Pooh and does save him. Then later when the church is bombed, Joey tells Kenny it is because of him she was not in the church. She saw him calling to her so she chased him down the street. This made me feel the deep family bond they had to each other.

**Evaluative Comments**: The author shows definite contrast between life in Flint and Birmingham. Flint is so cold that it is described as a giant icebox. When they get to Birmingham the heat is unbelievable, “Birmingham was like an oven.” p. 162. Racisim is another contrast between Flint and Birmingham. Attitudes toward African Americans are different in Birmingham; segregation is still an issue and there is a lot of hatred for colored people. We catch a glimpse of this at the very beginning of the book when Daddy is mocking Hambone Henderson. While momma is defending Birmingham by describing the lifestyle as slower and the people friendlier than Flint, daddy adds “ there a laugh a minute down there. Let’s see where was that “coloreds only” bathroom downtown?” p. 5. When the family is preparing for the trip momma is careful to plan places they can stop and packs plenty of food . Kenny asks momma why they can’t just drive until dad gets tired his dad adds, “ Cuz, boy, this he-uh is the deep South you-all is gonna be drivin’ thoo. Y’all collored folks cain’t be jes’ pullin’ up tuh any ol’ way-uh an be ‘spectin’ tuh get no room uh food, yuh heah, boy? I said yuh heah what I’m sayin’, boy?’ p. 132. “Y’all didn’t, know that,boy? Whas a matta wit’ choo, you thank this he-uh is Uhmurica?”

When Kenny and By used the bathroom in the woods in Tennesee, Kenny ask Byron if he is afraid of snkes. Byron’s reply scared Kenny. “Snakes? I ain’t worried about no damn snake, it’s the people I’m worried about.” Kenny asks him “What people?” Byron says “Momma said this was Appalachia, Man they got crackers and rednecks up here that ain’t never seen no Negroes before. If they caught your ass out here they’d hang you know and eat you later.” p. 146. The most dramatic event of racism was the bombing of the church. Two white men had either thrown a bomb or hidden one in the church and set it to go off during Sunday School. It killed four little girls. p. 191.

**Title**: *Three Cups of Tea*

**Author**: Greg Mortenson and Davie Oliver Relin

**Publisher**: Penguin Young Reader’s Group; New York, NY. 2009

**Summary:** Greg Mortenson was on a journey to climb K2 in honor of his sister when things did not go as planned. The result was Mortenson losing his way on the trail as he descended the mountain. When all seemed hopeless he was reunited with his guide,Mouzafer, who also was carrying most of Mortenson’s equipment. The plan was to then get to a nearby town. Once again Mortenson loses his way and he and Mouzafer are separated. Mortenson arrives at the small village of Korphe where he is greeted by the village chief Haji Ali. This wrong turn leads Mortenson on a new path in his life. The people of Korphe are very kind to Mortenson. He feels indebted to them. When he discovers the children do not have decent school he makes a commitment to them to build them a new school. This path will be met with many obstacles but Mortenson will not give up on providing a better life for the children of Pakistan. He is determined to provide the much needed schools for these children. The philosophy he lives by is education will change lives. The fight on terror should be done with books not bombs.

**Personal Response**: The book *Three Cups of Tea* is filled with the struggles of a regular man who was determined to accomplish an expedition to the summit of K2 in order to leave his deceased sister’s necklace as a way of honoring her memory. It is amazing how we seem so determined about the goals we have set for our life and circumstances beyond our control can change us forever. While Greg Mortenson was on his expedition circumstances caused him to change his plans and he was forced to make a descent from the mountain. This would be a defining moment in Mortenson’s life; a moment that will allow him to honor the memory of his sister a monumental way.

It is amazing how Mortenson touched the lives of the Pakistan people. He was able to cross boundaries many people would be afraid to cross; boundaries between countries and genders. It is not common for young women to receive an education however, because of Dr. Greg, the girls of these villages were also included in the planning of schools.

**Evaluative Comments**: The text told from third person view however, it includes quotes from the characters. These characters include personal relationships with Greg as well as Greg’s thoughts of the events to build the schools. The text also has vocabulary in bold texts, which are words that are found in the glossary at the back of the book. This is helpful to the reader to help them understand difficult vocabulary. The author also includes a personal perspective of Greg’s daughter as she answers questions about her dad and his experiences building these schools. Also helpful is the timeline feature at the back of the book. This helps the reader gain a better understanding of the sequence of events that occurred in order to accomplish Greg’s goal.