

---

# *Journeying Through Life and Literature*

---

by Mary Fahrenbruck, University of Arizona;  
Janine Schall, University of Texas-Pan American;  
Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona;  
Tracy Smiles, Western Oregon University; and  
Monique Storie, Richard Flores Taitano Micronesia Area Research Center

“When will my apprenticeship begin, sir?”

“It has begun,” said Ogion.

There was a silence, as if Ged was keeping back something he had to say. Then he said it: “But I haven’t learned anything yet!”

“Because you haven’t found out what I’m teaching...”  
*A Wizard of Earthsea* (17)

Ursula Le Guin’s description of the impatient student and seemingly elusive teacher mirrors a drama that unfolds each time we begin a new semester of teaching children’s literature to preservice teachers. Many are eager to teach children to read and want to find “cute” books that children will enjoy. In contrast, we encourage preservice teachers to become readers who think critically in order to effectively engage children with literature and literacy. We also believe that preservice teachers need to grapple with books that raise difficult issues to challenge their perceptions of what is appropriate for children. Like Ged’s inexperience with the art of wizardry and his eagerness to know the secrets of the craft, these differing goals lead to uncertainty and frustration. Preservice teachers want to know the agenda and expectations for the course, the best methods of evaluating a book for its moral attributes, and how to assign a reading level to books. They are much more comfortable providing a summary of a book than responding to a book and assume that we have the “correct” interpretation, just as their teachers have had in the past. We, like Ogion, who is careful to share his knowledge with Ged in meaningful ways, want to engage our students in reading, sharing, and reflecting on literature in hopes of deepening interpretations

and evoking stronger personal connections to literature. We want them to broaden their perceptions of children’s literature as well as awaken to the profound possibilities for using that literature with children.

When Tracy’s class read Le Guin’s *A Wizard of Earthsea* at the beginning of the semester, their journal responses reflect some of the limited ways that preservice teachers initially perceive children’s literature and themselves as readers:

- *A Wizard of Earthsea* is a good book for children because all in all it has a good message.
- I could not get away from the Harry Potter comparisons.
- To be honest, it took me a while to get into this book. I usually don’t go for the whole witch and wizard thing. It had the common storyline for these kinds of books—good/evil, light/dark, yin/yang. There’s always some equilibrium to maintain. And long descriptions of nature bore me.
- First, who exactly was the shadow? What was the Court of Terrenon and who was the woman he encountered there?

These responses focus on literal interpretations of the text, ways to use the text with children, and features of fantasy they appreciate or dislike. Fantasy, in particular, was a genre that the majority rejected based on their previous reading experiences and interests.

Our desire to encourage preservice teachers to respond personally and critically to literature created the tensions that led to the curricular explorations discussed in this article. We first provide a description of the course context and our

curricular and theoretical frame for inquiry through literature. In particular, we highlight the use of a broad theme, Journeys, to provide coherence and connection across course experiences and to move to a conceptually-based course framework. We then describe the specific course engagements, highlighting the responses to *A Wizard of Earthsea* to demonstrate some of the ways in which this broad theme framed the thinking of the preservice teachers in our course.

### **Our Curricular and Theoretical Context**

At our university we teach a survey course on children's literature that is taken by elementary preservice teachers. They enroll in the course early in their education program, usually right after admission into the College of Education in their junior year. Most are female, white, and twenty to twenty-five years old. Although this course is not considered a methods course, the preservice teachers "live the methods," that is, they learn instructional strategies by being immersed in browsing high quality books, discussing in small group literature circles, and participating in response engagements during class, along with reading broadly from many different children's books outside of class. We want them to develop an understanding of literary analysis and genre as tools for evaluating books as well as a knowledge of authors, illustrators, poets, and reference sources, but our primary focus is personal response and critical dialogue. Rosenblatt argues that readers need to first share their thoughts, feelings, and connections from their individual transactions with a text. This personal response is essential, but not sufficient, so that readers need to go on to analyze their responses through group discussion and critique. They learn to take intellectual responsibility for their interpretations and to support their responses by referencing the text and their lives. Freire points out that critical response also involves using dialogue to move beyond individual interests to larger systems of meaning and power that connect the personal with the political.

The curricular frame for the course is inquiry. Short and Harste argue that inquiry begins with learners exploring connections to their own life experiences. Learners build from these life connections by immersing themselves in engagements to expand their knowledge and perspectives. These invitations to expand their knowledge lead to tensions and compelling questions that matter to the learner and so lead to investigation. Inquiry engages learners as problem-posers based on Freire's notion that they do not just solve problems that instructors pose but also search out issues that are significant to them. Curriculum thus becomes a process of collaborative negotiation between teachers and students. Typically, children's literature courses are organized around genre, a focus that helps preservice teachers develop evaluation criteria and broaden their reading beyond personal

taste. The limitation of this approach is that genre is not how most teachers organize literature in their classrooms, nor is it a compelling connection for children to think about their lives and to learn about the world. A genre organization keeps the course focused around information and topics that do not necessarily lead to critical understandings. Since our goal is for preservice teachers to develop strategies for thinking about conceptual issues within and across literature and their lives in addition to learning knowledge about genre, authors, and books, we have explored organizing the course around broad themes.

The shift from topic-based to conceptually-based teaching is a move to creating a metacognitive study of strategies for thinking about ideas within and across literature and life. Wiggins and McTighe argue that conceptual understandings provide a structure for the exploration of significant content and a way of thinking that transfers across contexts. Our focus is on providing a context within which preservice teachers develop strategies for thinking that allow them to create their own understandings from literature. They still learn information about literature and genre but within the conceptual frame of bigger ideas and strategies that Erickson argues can be taken into new contexts and transferred across time and space. These bigger ideas form the basis for deeper understandings about literary knowledge and for a more critical and conceptual basis for their teaching with literature. As they later work with children, hopefully they will see how they can develop what Stott calls literary competencies within the context of meaningful experiences.

To provide this conceptual frame for our teaching, we have explored the use of a broad theme or big idea, such as Change, Sense of Place, Culture or Community, to frame the experiences within the course. We want a theme that provides coherence to course engagements but remains broad enough that preservice teachers can find and define their own issues. We integrate genre connections within these explorations of the theme. The broad theme provides a point of connection and a focus for course experiences without restricting the issues and connections that preservice teachers can explore based on their life experiences and transactions with literature. This theme must be broad enough to provide space for participants to dialogue about their and our view of the world, instead of our view being imposed on them. Freire argues that this type of "generative theme" is the starting point for organizing the content of an educational program. He says that a theme is generative if it contains the possibility of unfolding into many themes and of introducing a critical exploration of the participants' world. The theme is based on the relationship of the participants to their world, and so investigating a generative theme involves

investigating “people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality, which is their praxis” (87).

Within our course, the broad theme provides connections across various engagements and topics and encourages readers to go beyond book summaries and literal connections across books (e.g. “these are all books about dogs”). Preservice teachers come into the course considering books in isolation from each other. We encourage intertextualizing across books, believing that if they can learn to look for connections across books at a deeper thematic and conceptual level, then they will also learn to think more critically about these books. We encourage them to initially experience the books for themselves as readers, rather than as teachers. We found that when preservice teachers focused on the implied reader (the child) during their initial reading experiences, this frame guided them to materials that supported their worldviews rather than to materials that offered the potential for them to be transformed by their reading experiences. We see the broad theme as supporting preservice teachers in exploring the broader sociopolitical issues that emerge from their experiences within the literature and the context for dialogue that we create within the course.

We focus here on a particular semester when we chose *Journeys* as the broad theme because of connections to the lives of the preservice teachers and to our course. The theme *Journeys* fits with the life struggles of preservice teachers in moving from childhood to adulthood and from thinking as students to thinking as teachers. In addition, the quest motif is a strong part of high fantasy and of Ursula Le Guin’s novels, especially her *Earthsea* books. We planned to highlight *A Wizard of Earthsea* and were struck by Ged’s quest and how choice and responsibility for his actions play out within his journey as well as within the life journeys of preservice teachers. We also chose *Journeys* because it allowed us to include learning experiences outside the classroom, particularly our annual children’s literature conference where the keynote speakers would focus on the connections between their life journeys and their writing and illustrating, thus providing a different perspective on intertextuality.

We decided to integrate *Journeys* into the course in a more extensive and systematic way. Each instructor created her own experiences but there were several common experiences across the classes. Mary, Janine, Monique, and Tracy were each teaching a section of the course and met once a week with Kathy, who serves as a mentor for those teaching this course. We invite you on a journey through the course as we reflect on how the theme of *Journeys* played out in the class experiences and in responses to *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

### **Grounding Our Course in Personal and Social Knowing**

While past experiences teaching the course led us to believe that the use of broad themes facilitates deeper interpretations of, and broader connections with, children’s literature, we felt tension about how to integrate the theme in meaningful and enduring ways. Responses from previous semesters suggested that some preservice teachers saw the broad theme as merely an activity to complete, rather than a generative experience worth further ongoing exploration and revision in their thinking, and so we discussed how to facilitate experiences to maintain generative connections with the theme. Because we believe that all learning begins with the personal and social knowing of the learner, we reflected on how we might change our frame for the initial course experiences. Dewey taught us that, “the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility” (56). Rather than finding a new set of activities to maintain the momentum of a literature theme study, we decided to spend more time building a community founded in the personal and social knowing of our class members, one in which everyone had an opportunity to contribute meaningfully.

We began the semester with a focus on building community as opposed to jumping directly into reading a particular novel. We felt that in order to learn about how preservice teachers initially connected their own experiences with the broad theme of *Journeys* and to create an environment where they felt they could contribute and share in meaning making, we needed to tap into their personal and social ways of knowing. We wanted to facilitate experiences whereby preservice teachers could express their histories, cultures, routines, and interests.

One of the engagements we used was a Museum, where we invited the preservice teachers to bring in three to five artifacts related to a particular focus. Since we would be looking at *Journeys*, we asked them to bring in artifacts that best represented the significant journeys of their lives. An artifact could be anything—a photo, a piece of artwork, a book, or an object—that symbolically represented a memory or characteristic of their life journeys. We limited the number of artifacts to five because we felt that broader thinking about the theme could evolve through making selective choices. The preservice teachers also created information plates for their chosen pieces that were similar to what a visitor might encounter in a museum. These information plates could provide details of the significance of a particular artifact or be more abstract, teasing the audience with a thought—provoking statement.

While soft music played, the preservice teachers floated around the room reading their classmates' museum displays, noting commonalities, surprises, patterns, and questions in these diverse interpretations of the significant journeys in their lives. Afterwards, they did freewrites for ten-fifteen about their own display and their observations across the other displays in the museum. In addition, each class created concept webs of possible subthemes within the theme of Journeys. In examining these freewrites and webs, we noticed that many of the preservice teachers viewed the significant journeys of their lives as accomplishments, religious experiences, overcoming adversity, physical journeys such as moving and travel, milestones like graduations, and rites of passage like confirmation or bat mitzvahs.

Because we wanted to challenge the preservice teachers to dig more deeply into their connections with the theme of Journey, we used an engagement, Generative Theme Connections, adapted from Freire. This engagement helps class members clarify their own stance toward a course of study in which they are involved, develop a sense of community within the class, and participate in shaping the direction of the course. The preservice teachers had five minutes to individually list all the words they associated with Journeys and then chose three to five of the most significant words to write on the board. Once everyone's words were listed, they worked individually to group related words in categories that reflected their personal understandings and definitions of Journeys. The preservice teachers then met with two or three others to share their groupings and to compose concept webs of seven to eight broad categories that represented their group's

thinking about Journeys. As each group presented their web, their categories were compiled on a large class web. This web was then revised to create a web of seven to eight subthemes of Journeys that reflected everyone's thinking about the broad theme. This class web became the foundation for a theme exploration of Journeys through children's literature. Figure 1 is a composite web that indicates the major subthemes that emerged across all four sections of the course.

### Literary Experiences and Responses to Journeys

As we explored Journeys, each class was involved in literature discussions and response engagements. The preservice teachers were exposed to a range of perspectives on Journeys through book browsing, usually with picture books. During the book browse, the instructor displayed a set of thirty to sixty books that related to a specific subtheme. The preservice teachers moved about the room looking at the books for fifteen to twenty minutes during the class session. In addition, each class read two or three shared books that were chosen by the instructor. While all of the classes read *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the other shared titles differed across the classes and included *Gathering Blue*, *Loser*, and *Esperanza Rising*. These books gave each class an in-depth shared experience from which to explore the Journeys theme.

Each class also discussed text sets in literature circles with each small group reading a different set. The text sets contained five-seven conceptually related picture books or novels that provided a range of cultural perspectives and ways of looking at Journeys. These text sets encouraged the preservice teachers to make connections and also challenged them to stretch their conceptions of the theme. Text sets included fantasy as a genre, author sets, and sets based on Journey subthemes that the preservice teachers had identified, such as personal journeys and crossing borders (see Figure 2).

As the preservice teachers read the shared books and text sets, they used a range of response engagements to identify and discuss the issues they found compelling within these books. These engagements were adapted from Short and Harste and included Sketch to Stretch, Consensus Boards, Collage Reading, Story Rays, and Save the Last Word for Me. They also participated in our annual children's literature conference by working in small groups to create and display text sets based on the Journey subthemes they had identified, an experience that pushed their understandings of the subthemes. During the conference, they listened to the presentations of the keynote speakers, Lois Lowry and Joe Cepeda, who shared how their writing and illustrating connects to their personal life journeys. These presentations had a powerful effect in expanding their thinking from literal to conceptual interpretations of Journeys.

Figure 1. Concept Web of Journeys

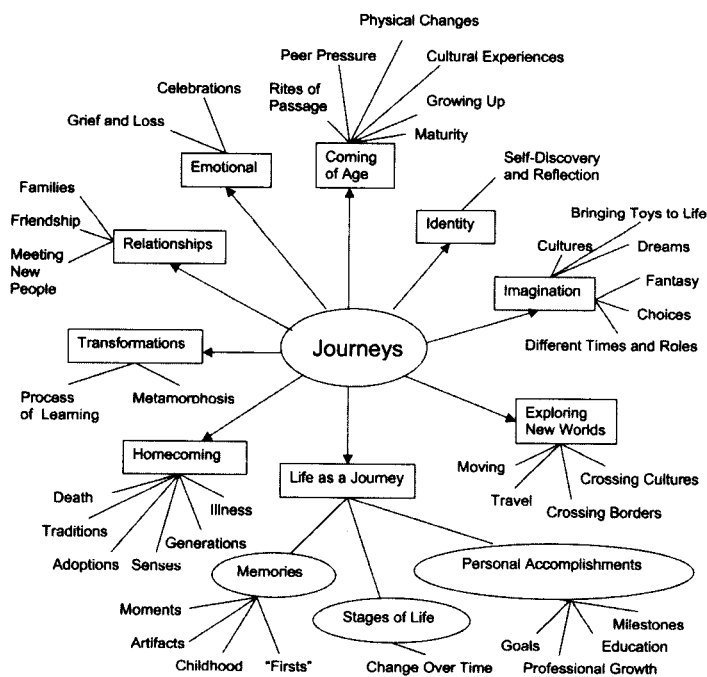


Figure 2. Crossing Borders Text

Theme: Crossing Borders	
Picture Books	Chapter Books
<i>My Great Aunt Arizona</i> by Gloria Houston	<i>Toning the Sweep</i> by Angela Johnson
<i>My Place</i> by Nadia Wheatley	<i>Seedfolk</i> by Paul Fleischman
<i>The Journey of the Mary Celeste</i> by Jane Yolen	<i>A Summer to Die</i> by Lois Lowry
<i>Pink and Say</i> by Patricia Polacco	<i>Missing May</i> by Cynthia Rylant
<i>Shark God</i> by Rafe Martin	<i>Love that Dog</i> by Sharon Creech
<i>The Golden Sandal</i> by Rebecca Hickox	

### Course Experiences and Responses to *A Wizard of Earthsea*

In three of the classes, the preservice teachers read *A Wizard of Earthsea* in the second half of the semester, after experiencing the theme of Journeys through course experiences, text sets, and the children’s literature conference. Many would not have read this book on their own and some were concerned about the book’s density. Even after many literary experiences, their lack of connection to fantasy as a genre was apparent, as one remarked, “I didn’t like *A Wizard of Earthsea* until I got into the discussion.” Class members read the book and responded in their reflection journals to prepare for discussion. These entries could take any form, but most were written reflections with some use of sketches, webs, or maps. The preservice teachers recorded their thoughts and reactions to the book, including connections, tensions, and questions. Most wrote about personal connections to the story.

In Janine’s class, class members met in small groups to discuss the book and then moved into whole class discussions as well as a range of response engagements. They first responded through an engagement called Save the Last Word for Me. They identified three quotations or passages from the text that caught their attention because the quotations were interesting, powerful, confusing, or contradictory. They copied a quotation on the front of an index card and wrote the reason for choosing that particular quotation on the back. For example, one preservice teacher wrote the quote, “Estariol,” he said, “my name is Ged.” On the back, she explained, “Telling your true name was rare and sacred. This showed Vetch and Sparrowhawk’s closeness, friendship.” In small groups one person read aloud a quotation and then remained silent while the rest of the group briefly discussed their responses to that quotation. After each had a chance to share, the person who originally chose the quotation flipped over the card and told why it was selected—thereby having the last word. They continued in this manner until all quotations were shared, thus highlighting multiple interpretations of the book.

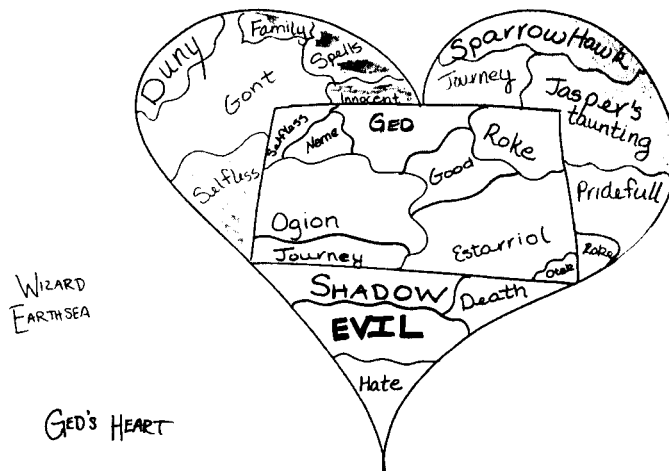
This small group discussion was followed by a whole class discussion about the book—what the preservice teachers liked and did not like, their connections, questions, and so forth. Each group then chose one of the subthemes from the Journeys web that they thought was relevant to *A Wizard of Earthsea* and webbed the connections between the book and the subtheme.

Another response engagement focused on the characterization of Ged. The preservice teachers constructed a heart or brain map that reflected Ged’s values and beliefs and the people or events important to him. They mapped these onto a heart or brain shape on a large sheet of paper, using spatial relationships, color, and size to show the relative importance of each idea and the relationship between ideas (Figure 3).

In Monique’s class, the preservice teachers webbed and discussed themes they found compelling from *Wizard*. Monique then read aloud *Sissy Duckling* by Fierstein, an amusing picture book about a young duck whose behaviors differ from the other male ducks, but who is comfortable with himself until he faces his father’s disapproval. Class members compared the main protagonists in the two books as a strategy for thinking more deeply about Ged’s actions and motivations.

In Mary’s class, the preservice teachers initially created a Sketch to Stretch from the book. Students made a sketch, a quick graphic/symbolic drawing, of what the story meant to them; the sketch emphasized personal meaning, rather than a story illustration. In small groups, each person in turn showed his/her sketch, inviting other group members to interpret the sketch before the sketcher shared. The group then discussed ideas raised by the sketches. Many of the sketches reflected themes, such as good vs evil, balance in one’s life, and Ged confronting the shadow.

Figure 3. Heart and Brain Maps of Ged



To deepen their thinking, the preservice teachers were asked to name the shadow and explain their reasons for the name. After writing their thoughts on an index card, they participated in a Tea Party as described by Christensen, where they walked around the room sharing and discussing their chosen name for the shadow and their thoughts about the shadow. They then added information to their cards. They were also given the option to change the name on their cards as a result of the Tea Party conversations. Their reflections conveyed a deeper personal connection to the story as well as to other classmates' responses. Their comments included:

I named the shadow 'Fear of Self-Discovery' because as Ged traveled on his journey, he was forced to encounter and face his own creations and develop a deeper understanding of himself. I think all of us have this fear to some extent because, as other classmates noted, recognizing ourselves on a deeper level forces us to recognize both the good aspects and the bad aspects of our personality. (Rachel)

He was afraid of what he could do. Everyone had been talking about him being one of the great ones. He knew he had this power but what was going to be asked of him? He also feared not being the best and would do anything to prove he was. I feel we are all afraid of the unknown or the powers we may possess. We have all done something we didn't think was possible and it amazed us or scared us. (Rebecca)

The preservice teachers noted that the Tea Party allowed them to make more connections to the story and Ged and to understand more than when they had first read the book.

As a final experience, class members selected an option from a list of writing, art, drama, and music response suggestions to express their thinking about *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Some selected meaningful passages from the book and told why they were meaningful. Others drew portraits of the main characters and created word collages to give a feeling for the book.

To examine the preservice teachers' thinking during these response engagements, we analyzed their written and oral comments about *A Wizard of Earthsea*. We wanted to see if their responses indicated a move away from the more limited ways of thinking about a book that we had seen evidenced in all of the classes at the beginning of the semester. The categories that emerged from this analysis included personal connections, intertextuality, and evaluation.

### Personal Connections

Personal connections included comments where preservice

teachers made connections to their own lives and experiences, including experiences within the course. It also included comments where they used their knowledge of life to understand or make meaning of the book.

Some preservice teachers made connections that allowed them to reconsider childhood experiences:

I think my connection to fantasy is a direct result of my childhood. I didn't have siblings to play with, so it was pretty much up to me to make up games and such to keep occupied. In a way, my childhood was a fantasy. (Libby)

This book brings me back to my childhood days with my brother. When we were younger we used to pretend to do magic and were infatuated with the magic tricks that were for sale at the toy stores. We used to play jokes and put on performances for our family and friends. I wish that I had read a book like *A Wizard of Earthsea* because it would have allowed me to go into a secondary world where I could use my magical powers through my imagination. (Susie)

Others made connections that allowed them to think more broadly about how their beliefs affect their views of themselves and the world:

I have had many things come up in my life that have distracted me just like Ged had, but I overcame and am still overcoming them. I use them as progressive learning targets to remind myself of the advantages and disadvantages of having blocked obstacles. (Crystal)

This book made me think about my career as a teacher and my life as a Christian. I kept thinking, 'Would I want my kids reading this?' I'm not quite sure I've come to a concrete decision. From my beliefs, sorcery is 'evil,' or of the devil, and it's not taken so lightly that you should read about it for 'fun.' (Bethany)

I have changed my thinking of *Journeys* as just a physical path that one takes.... I have realized through this class and through *Journeys* and all my experiences that I don't want to be a teacher anymore. I have been going through my personal journey through reading books and personal experiences. I have been looking within myself and I don't know what I want anymore." (Inez)

### Intertextuality

Intertextual responses highlight connections between *A Wizard of Earthsea* and other texts, such as a piece of literature, a film, or a piece of art. Many of the preservice teachers connected the book to the *Harry Potter* series and to the *Lord of the Rings*:

I related Ged to Harry Potter and the surrounding magic world. Frodo from The Lord of the Rings trilogy also came to mind because of the journey that Ged took to search for his meaning. Ogion reminded me of Gandalf and Ged's shadow was the Lord of the Rings eye. (Crystal)

When the preservice teachers connected the book with Harry Potter, they discussed how the stories were different experiences, even though some elements were similar:

Being a huge fan of Harry Potter, I was reluctant to start reading *A Wizard of Earthsea* because I did not want to know if the Harry Potter books were original. I found only a few similarities between the two stories. The main similarities being that a young man with exceptional powers attends a school in which he learns the craft of wizardry. Also, the main character in each story has something evil hunting him. Beyond those, I believe that both stories stand on their own. (Anne)

Many connected the book to Lois Lowry's fantasy trilogy. James commented on the significance of naming to the characters' sense of identity within fantasy, "I wonder about the connection between the assigning of syllables for names in *Gathering Blue* and the importance of true names and their meanings in *A Wizard of Earthsea*."

### Evaluation

Evaluative responses included statements of opinion that express some type of judgment about the book. In particular, the preservice teachers stated their opinions about particular literary elements such as theme, imagery, symbolism, setting, and character. We were particularly interested in these responses because many had resisted stating their opinions about books at the beginning of the semester and we saw the willingness to take and support a position as essential to critical thinking.

Many of their evaluative comments related to the various themes they identified within the book. They clearly struggled with these themes and wrote long entries reflecting on coming of age, responsibility, power, and truth. Juan explained,

*A Wizard of Earthsea* is a beautifully crafted coming of age story.... Ged learns that by unleashing the evil in his magical world, it is he who has the responsibility to capture it and send it back from where it came. This is an important lesson that most learn throughout life—responsibility for one's own actions.

Focusing on the theme of responsibility and power in her reflection, Chris noted that,

Ged is a young boy highly gifted in the arts of magic and naively convinced that once he has mastered his skill he

will be in complete control of his life, to do as he pleases. He doesn't understand the restraint of the powerful mages he has met, and their foolish words about balance and the pattern of life. Only after the dark experience with his shadow does Ged learn that the greatest power of a wizard calls for greater responsibility, a hard lesson that will cost him many tortured days and months trying to rectify the mistake. The folly of reckless use of power is demonstrated again and again in the novel as LeGuin shows us the dark trap that the witch of Re'Albi tries to lay for Ged and its heavy consequences later in life when Ged uses those words to summon his shadow, or as she takes us to the hazy halls of the Courts of Torrence, where the people have unwittingly enslaved themselves to great evil for the sake of unlimited power. Ged's story argues that those who use power will use it wisely and for good purpose.

Chris went on within her reflection to explore how power is intertwined with truth. She believed that truth was a wizard's source of ability and power and that "only when Ged discovers the truth of the shadow does he have the power to defeat it."

The preservice teachers explored themes within the book by thinking about how the book connected to the class web of Journeys:

Sandy: But aren't most fantasy books like that? Don't they all cross borders, and all that?

Marisa: I also think another major theme is identity and how he is made up of the people around him and of the shadow too.

Sandy: Truth.

Anne: Which brings us to the bigger metaphor. I mean, the bigger idea that "truth conquers all."

Marco: I think that kind of goes with the shadow. Like the difference between the journey and the I found it hard to decipher between the two.

Anne: When I think of the quest, I think of actual physical movement and the journey was all internal for him. Because Ged's conquering that shadow—he could have done it anywhere. He could have just stood there and waited for it to come to him. But it would have still been a journey because he would've had to go through the emotions before he would have conquered it. He didn't realize it was a part of him until.... Journey and quest

go hand in hand. Because without the quest, he wouldn't have figured out himself.

Not surprisingly, the preservice teachers discussed imagery and symbolism, especially as related to the shadow. In one discussion, a group debated the role of the shadow in creating suspense. Sandy, who struggled with the book, began the discussion with her statement that the shadow did not have the high impact that she expected for an action sequence.

Sandy: With the shadow chasing him, it isn't exciting a lot of times. They don't have sword fights and stuff like that. ... It's very slow and there isn't a lot of high dramatic action.

Marco: It wasn't slow for me at all. I thought it was very intense. I mean, even though he was walking from island to island the whole thing of the shadow was always there, over your shoulder, there was always an edge.

Sandy: But it was a shadow! I mean, it's not like a monster with sharp teeth. It's like a... shadow.

Marco: That's the cool thing about it because... it's Ged.

Anne: I thought it was a cool thing that this shadow started to change shape and became him.

Others: Yea.

Sandy: I did like that scene where he did choose. Instead of running away from it, he decides to turn around and start chasing it. I think it was the first time he sees it again. He feels like he has power over it. He has some control over it and the shadow is actually afraid of him now. That whole turn of emotions in the book, even as you're reading where you feel like he's becoming the chaser, the hunter. He's the hunter now. It changes the whole feeling of the book, of the quest.

Anne: Because it's like a spirit in his body but then he gets strong enough to get it. Because when he's holding on to the gebit, the shadow somehow tried to enter his body but then Ged was too powerful so it went out.

Marco: This is my opinion on the whole shadow thing. I don't think the shadow ever left him. ... I don't think it ever left him because a shadow is a mirror image of himself. And so, that's why I think he couldn't use his magical powers with the shadow because he couldn't use magical powers on himself. Sure he did chase it and it chased him but it was more symbolic than anything else. Finding the truth in himself or realizing who he was. But the shadow was always there no matter what. And that's why Ged always felt it.

The preservice teachers also discussed setting. Monica explained that although she found it difficult to follow the book at first because of "all the different weird names," she enjoyed the rich descriptions. She said:

There were a few times when I felt as if I was there watching these different events occur. I liked how descriptive all the significant events throughout the book were. I personally feel this is the type of book that can take you to places you have never been and never will be. I got to see things, such as the concept of reality, in a whole new way, such as when Ged and the shadow are standing on the side of the living and the dead.

Of course, many made evaluative statements about character. Marco raved about Le Guin's development of Ged as a character:

What made this book seem true to me was the character of Ged and how amongst all that trickery and magic he was so uniquely human. His anger, his pride, his arrogance, his humbleness—all these factors made him into a very believable character, someone who I'm sure I know in my life, someone like me.

Autumn reflected on how the character of Ged evolved throughout the book:

I really liked the way Ursula Le Guin shapes the characters, especially Sparrowhawk's character. In the beginning it was obvious that he was very gifted; his powers are not hidden from the reader. However, he also seemed a bit rough around the edges—he was proud and somewhat conceited and definitely argumentative. As the story progressed, however, and he learned his real name, Ged, he became a much more refined character. I personally like the fact that Le Guin took him through remorse and self-examination before turning him into a man strong enough to win the difficult battles he was faced with. I think that's very true in real life, when someone is scarred, especially mentally, it tends to make them a stronger person. Aside from Ged's character, I really liked the way Le Guin developed



the relationships between all the characters. I think it's important not to neglect those who play a smaller role in the story just because they aren't as important to the story line. After all, it's all the characters that make the book what it is.

An essential experience in deepening the evaluative thinking of these preservice teachers was discussing a book worth the effort of close examination. The richness and complexity of this novel provided many different levels for exploration, and each time the preservice teachers returned to the book they found more connections and ideas to consider. As Bethany noted, "This book was coming of age; it was crossing borders; it was transformation; it was everything. I was like 'Whoa! This is awesome!'"

### Conclusions

These responses reflect the shift of the preservice teachers away from literal interpretations and book summaries to the thoughtful consideration of larger themes and broader connections within a piece of literature. Instead of merely summarizing the plot of a book and staying safely within what they thought might be the teacher's perspective, they made personal connections and stated their own opinions and evaluations of the book. The theme supported them in exploring intertextual connections between dissimilar pieces of literature, a literary competency that will be of value to them as readers and teachers. In examining their comments about *A Wizard of Earthsea* along with their responses to the other novels, their Journey webs, and text sets, we saw evidence that their intertextual connections across books were based on deeper and more critical issues rather than only on the surface-level topic connections that we saw early in the semester. Their ability to intertextualize at a conceptual and critical level was often demonstrated in statements that directly referenced themes and issues related to Journeys.

By focusing on the preservice teachers' stories of their lives at the beginning of the course, we signaled that the broad theme incorporated not just the stories captured in books but those that remain untold in the mind of readers. Just as Hade and Stott sought to develop meaningful experiences and literary competencies, we used a theme to encourage class members to consider literature in new ways as readers. Their ability to make connections between the story and their personal lives is evidenced in the Tea Party responses as well as in Bethany's consideration of how her personal beliefs influenced her reading experiences. While we began the semester with ideas about the connections and significant content that might be explored, that meaning was stretched as the preservice teachers identified themes within Journeys. They considered

their own significant contents, becoming problem-posers as evidenced in Marco's and Anne's discussion on the difference between a journey and a quest within fantasy.

The focus on Journeys also supported their reconsideration of fantasy as a genre, although many continued to struggle because of their previous experiences. It was clear that they would not have chosen fantasy before these engagements, either for themselves personally or to read with children. Even though they remained uncertain about fantasy, they were more willing to consider the genre. Many of their comments included statements such as, "I didn't think I'd like this book, but...." Even if they didn't embrace fantasy, they found that this genre offered them new perspectives on their lives and challenged them to expand their understandings of journeys and of life as a quest.

As we reflected on the semester and what was significant for us as teacher educators in using a broad theme to frame our teaching, we shared both possibilities and lingering questions. We found that we were able to use a wider range of children's books in more meaningful ways because we had a way to connect the books to each other and to larger issues. Without the theme, browsing through the many children's books available in a class session was often a "shopping" experience where preservice teachers tried on titles, instead of living within a story world, reflecting Rosenblatt's distinction between efferent and aesthetic stances. We also noted that the framework encouraged their transformation into engaged readers who made connections between books and their personal lives. Their attitudes about themselves as readers changed and they actively sought out reading because it added something to their lives. This sense of connection carried over into their perspectives on the course, so that they were much more likely to complete the experiences and assignments in ways that were purposeful and useful. They read books because they wanted to, searched for titles because of a classmate's recommendation, discussed books passionately with others, and challenged themselves to think about difficult social issues. And they did so, not only because of course expectations, but because their expectations of themselves as readers and thinkers were changing.

Of course, there were definite differences across the preservice teachers in their movement to becoming more critical and engaged readers, but there was movement for everyone in some way. Our lingering tension is whether that movement will continue. We are aware that the context of inquiry and critical issues that formed the basis of our course does not characterize their teacher education program or the scripted reading programs they will encounter in schools. The age-old tension of whether teacher preparation actually makes a

difference in how teachers teach is a constant concern for us. Our hope is that by encouraging preservice teachers to develop new habits of mind about literature, not just knowledge of books and teaching resources, that we may have taken a step towards making teacher education more transformative.

### Works Cited

Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2002.

Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1938.

Erickson, H. Lynn. *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 1938.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.

Hade, Daniel. "This is a Good Lesson for Kids to Learn." *CLA Bulletin*. 19.1 (1993): 2-9.

Rosenblatt, Louise. *Literature as Exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association, 1938.

Short, Kathy G., and Jerome Harste, with Carolyn Burke. *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.

Stott, Jon. "Making Stories Mean; Making Meaning from Stories: The Value of Literature for Children." *Children's Literature in Education*. 25.4 (1994): 243-253.

Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005.

### Children's Literature Cited

Creech, Sharon. *Love that Dog*. New York: Scholastic, 2001.

Fierstein, Harvey. *Sissy Duckling*. Illus. Henry Cole. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

Fleischman, Paul. *Seedfolks*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

Hickox, Rebecca. *Golden Sandal*. Illus. Will Hillenbrand. New York: Holiday House, 1998.

Houston, Gloria. *My Great-Aunt Arizona*. Illus. Susan C. Lamb. New York: Scholastic, 1992.

Johnson, Angela. *Toning the Sweep*. New York: Scholastic, 1993.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. New York: Bantam, 1968.

Lowry, Lois. *A Summer to Die*. New York: Bantam, 1977.

Lowry, Lois. *Gathering Blue*. New York: Laurel Leaf, 2000.

Martin, Rafe. *Shark God*. Illus. David Shannon. New York: Scholastic, 2001.

Polacco, Patricia. *Pink and Say*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic, 2000.

Rylant, Cynthia. *Missing May*. New York: Dell, 1992.

Spinelli, Jerry. *Loser*. New York: Scholastic, 2002.

Wheatley, Nadia. *My Place*. Illus. Donna Rawlins. New York: Kane/Miller, 1994.

Yolen, Jane. *The Mary Celeste: An Unsolved Mystery from History*. Illus. Roger Roth. New York: Scholastic, 1998.

**Mary Fahrenbruck, graduate student at the University of Arizona, teaches a survey course on children's literature to preservice teachers. Janine Schall, assistant professor at the University of Texas-Pan American, researches integrating children's literature in the content areas and using literature to explore cultural issues. Kathy G. Short, professor at University of Arizona, focuses her work on critical dialogue about literature, inquiry-based curriculum, and international children's and adolescent literature. Tracy Smiles, assistant professor at Western Oregon University, teaches courses in early childhood and elementary literacy. Monique Storie, librarian at the Richard Flores Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center, focuses her research on issues related to children's literature in the Micronesian region.**

A vertical bar on the left side of the page, consisting of a series of horizontal segments in shades of yellow and orange, with a small red diamond at the top.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: Journeying Through Life and Literature  
SOURCE: Journal of Children's Literature 32 no1 Spr 2006  
PAGE(S): 27-36  
WN: 0610507255012

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:  
<http://www.uta.edu/soe/CLA/index.html>

Copyright 1982-2006 The H.W. Wilson Company. All rights reserved.