

Cultivating Fluent & Meaningful Writing through Empathy-Centered Texts in the Third Grade Classroom

Presented by:

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(Mentored by Professor Amanda Deliman)

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Utah State University



School of Teacher Education & Leadership



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WHY DISCUSS EMPATHY & WRITING FLUENCY TOGETHER?

- COVID-19 Backdrop
- Political turmoil; safe space is needed
- Opportunities for Racial Healing
- Tremendous anxiety; chance to address
- Empathy has always mattered.
- Misunderstandings about how writing should be taught.
- Interconnectedness of reading and writing research has not reached all classrooms.
- Very little preparation in writing pedagogy in teacher-education programs
- Our country's writing skills are suffering.

"I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn."--**Anne Frank**

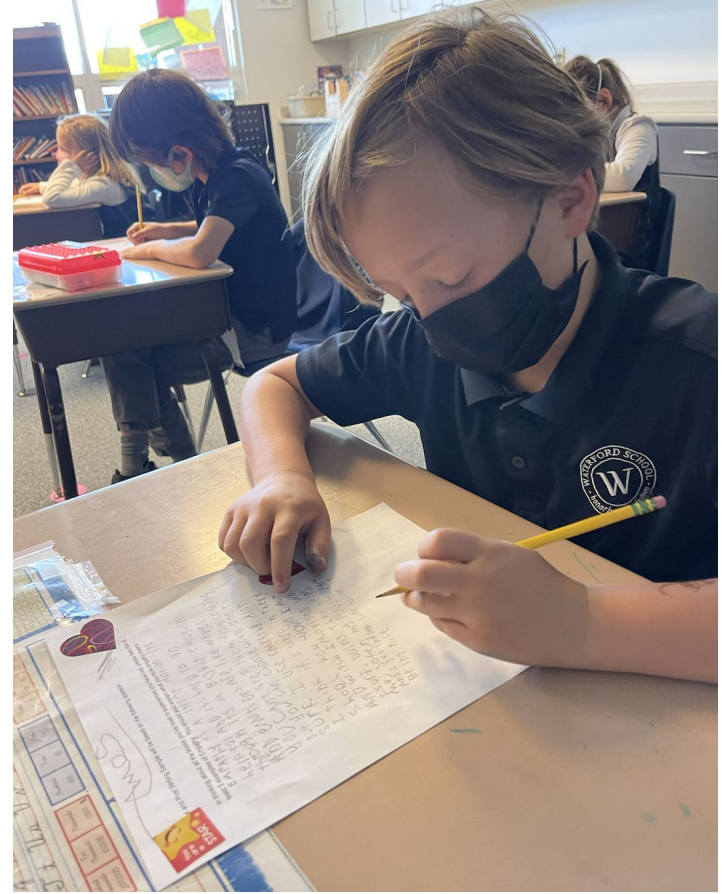
"You can make anything by writing."--**C.S. Lewis**

"A word after a word after a word is power."--**Margaret Atwood**

"Empathy is something like a muscle: left unused, it atrophies; put to work, it grows."
-**Emil Zaki**

Learning to stand in somebody else's shoes, to see through their eyes, that's how peace begins. And it's up to you to make that happen. Empathy is a quality of character that can change the world. -**Barack Obama**

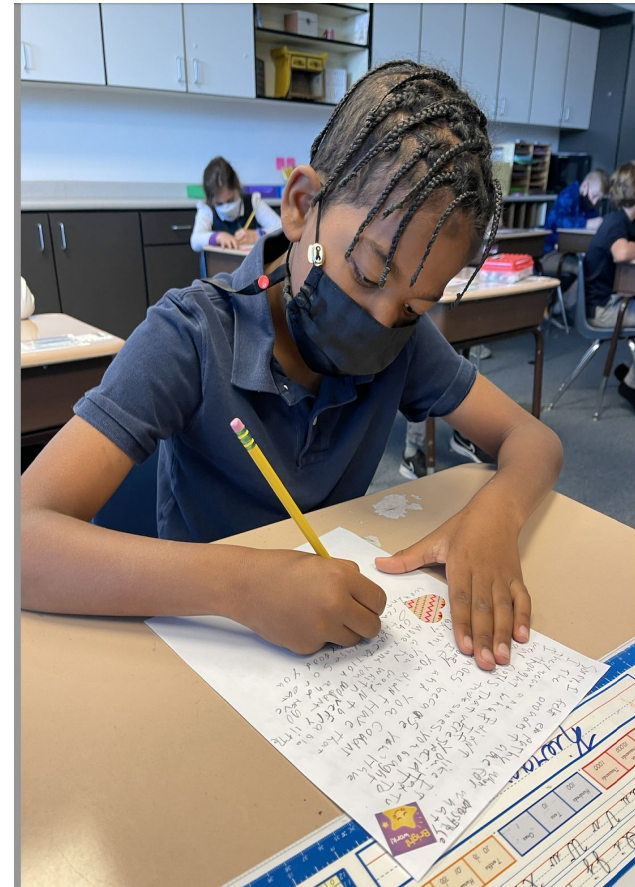
“Now more than ever, with so much stress and anxiety about countless issues, whether a pandemic, social illnesses, or the pressures of being nine years old, there is a greater need to examine the benefits of using more thoughtful, empathy-based resources in our classrooms.” (Qian, 2020)

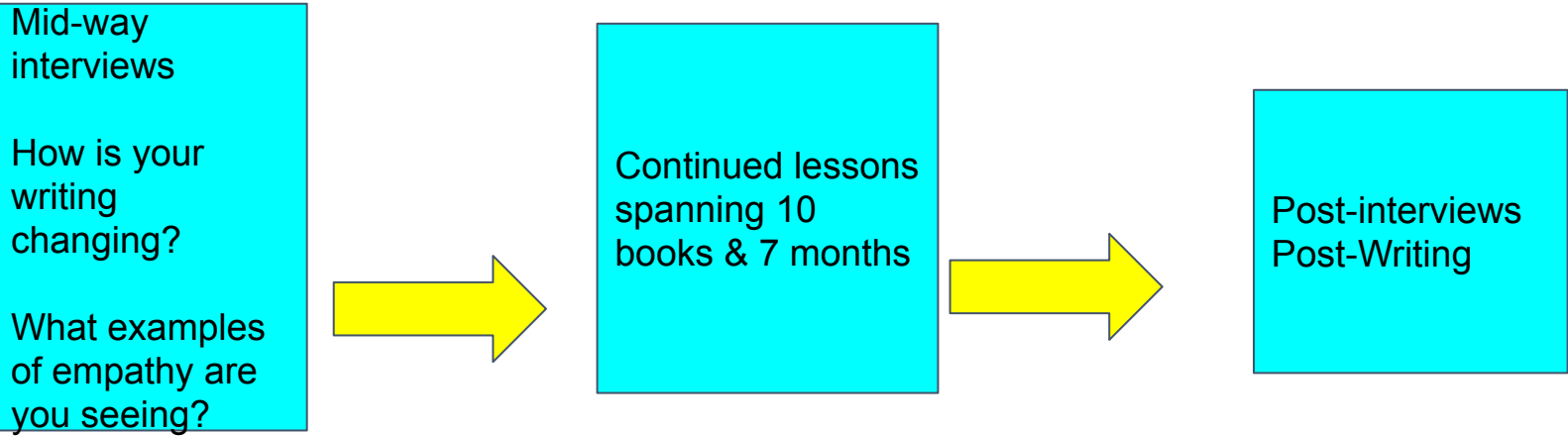
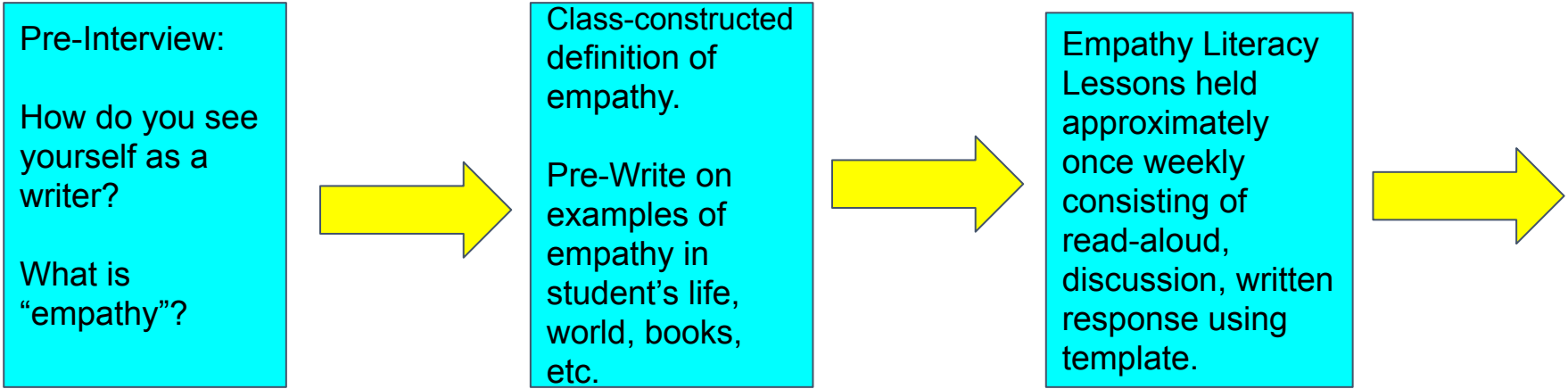


RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What impact do the use of empathy-based texts, and associated learning engagements, have on students' writing fluency and on their overall engagement?

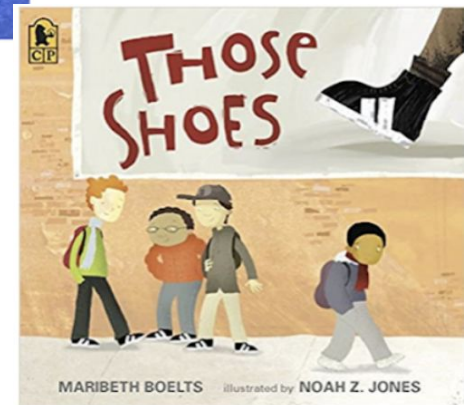
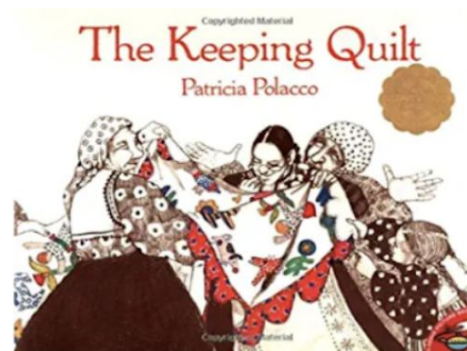
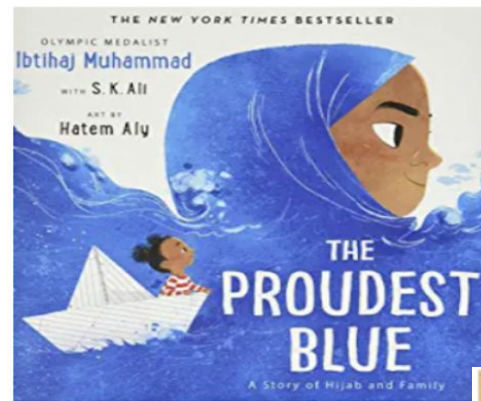
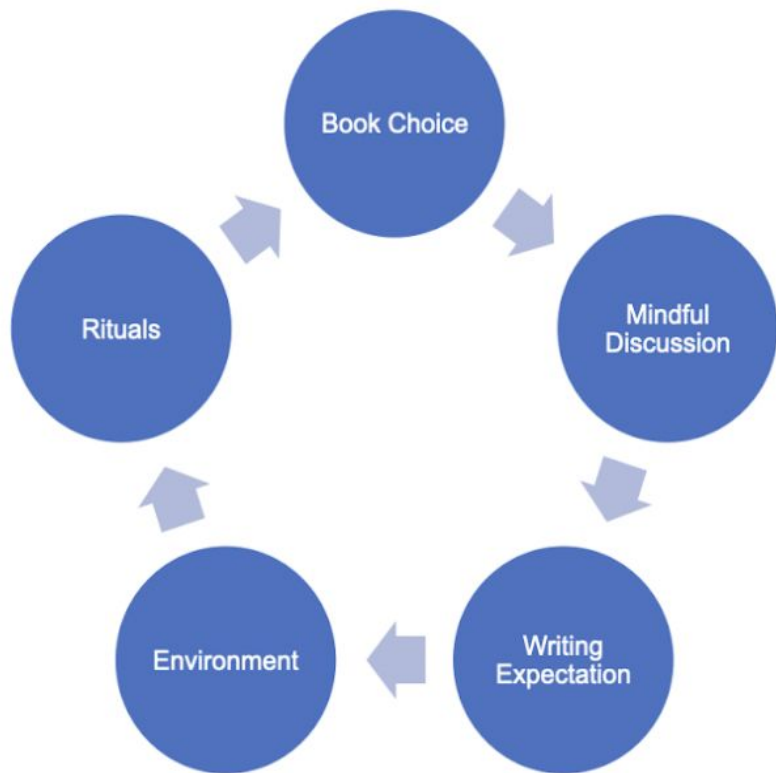
What strategies and approaches help strengthen student writing when using empathy-based texts as read-alouds in conjunction with other literacy engagements?





CONTEXT: Setting and Participants

- Independent, tuition-based Liberal Arts school; suburbs of Salt Lake City
- Demographic of school: 58% Caucasian, 32% identifying as Asian, Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, or Middle Eastern, or Multi-racial.
- 1000 students pre-K to 12
- 3 third grade classes with approximately 20 students in each. The class where the study took place had 19 participants: 10 boys, 9 girls.



What spaces remain unexplored for cultivating our own and each other's sueños and bringing them to the light (Franquiz, 2022)?"

"I like how the mom said those mean words don't belong to us, so don't keep them. The mean words belong to the people who used them." (Adam)

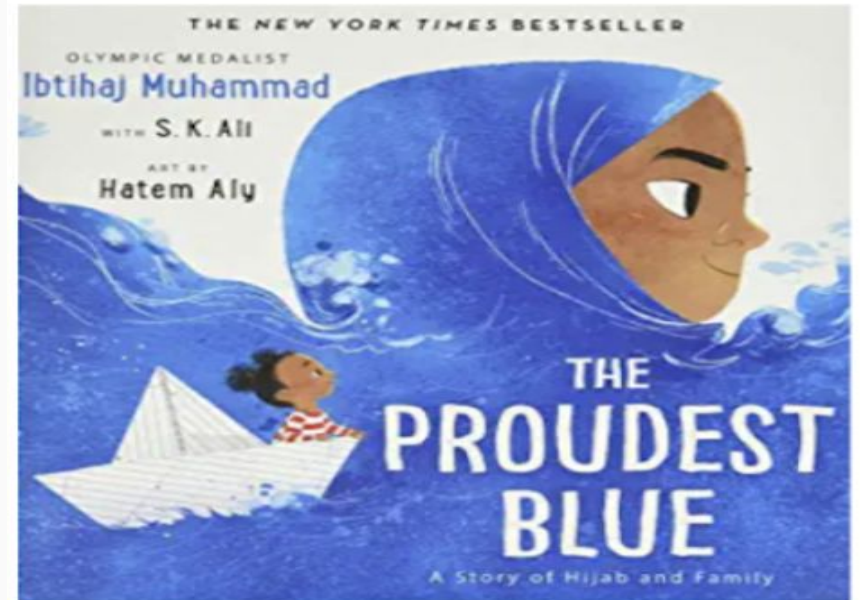


Student Samples: **The Proudest Blue**

"I like how the Mom was so strong. She taught her daughters to be strong too." (Nicole)

"The girl was confident because she walked away and didn't say things back when the boys made fun of her." (Sonya)

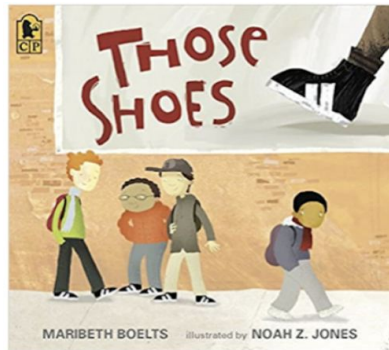
"The little sister kept thinking about her big sister and she saw blue everywhere because she was proud of her sister and her sister's hijab."
(Ariel)



He wants a pair of shoes
'be their poor. Everybody
has the shoes but he
doesent. I feel empathy. He
finally got a pair but
it did not fit
but he bought
with his own money
anyway. He was
desperate but in
the end it turned
winner.

Brian

some one might not
have enough money or
they don't fit lots
of people don't have
enough money maybe
they have a bad job.



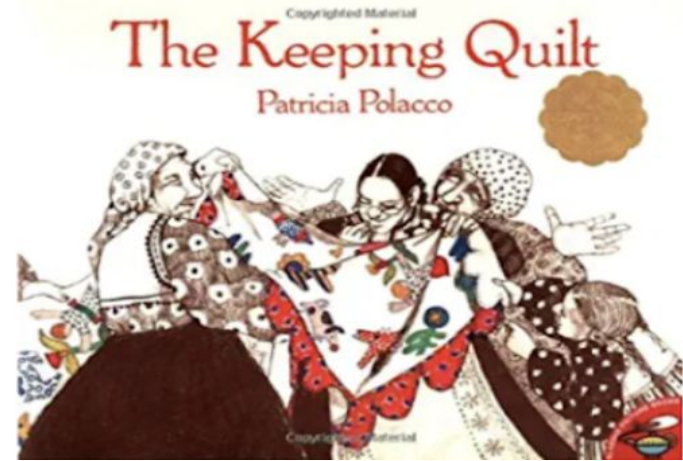
Kayden

“He was desperate!”

Noting larger social constructs
and repositioning empathy within
the larger socio-political context
of poverty.

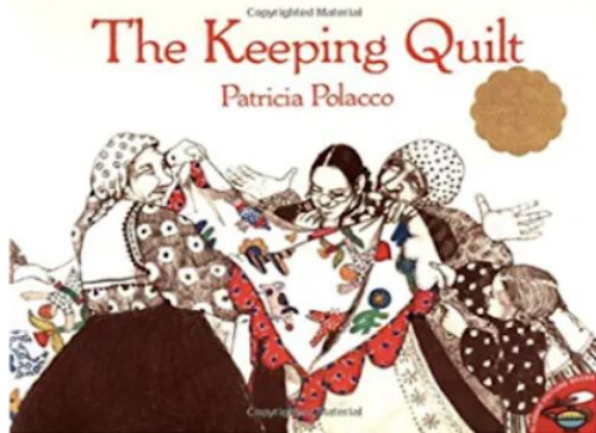
The book is called
the Keeping Quilt.
~~They are change~~ This
reminds me of when
I moved to Utah from
Georgia and I brought
rocks from different
places. This reminds
me also of my stuffed
animals. The reason
why brought is because
other places and
used them

for different things
like something, crying, or
being and sleeping. Toys,
blankets, clothing, food,
pictures, costumes,
and more I could
list but one thing
in particular I
think is similar. I
clothes. When my
cousins, brothers, and
parents were little
and got older
they didn't get rid
of their clothes.




Raymond makes very personal connections with the text and has taken agency with his learning. This text is now about his experience, as well. This makes him excited and confident to write.

“They treated the quilt like family.”

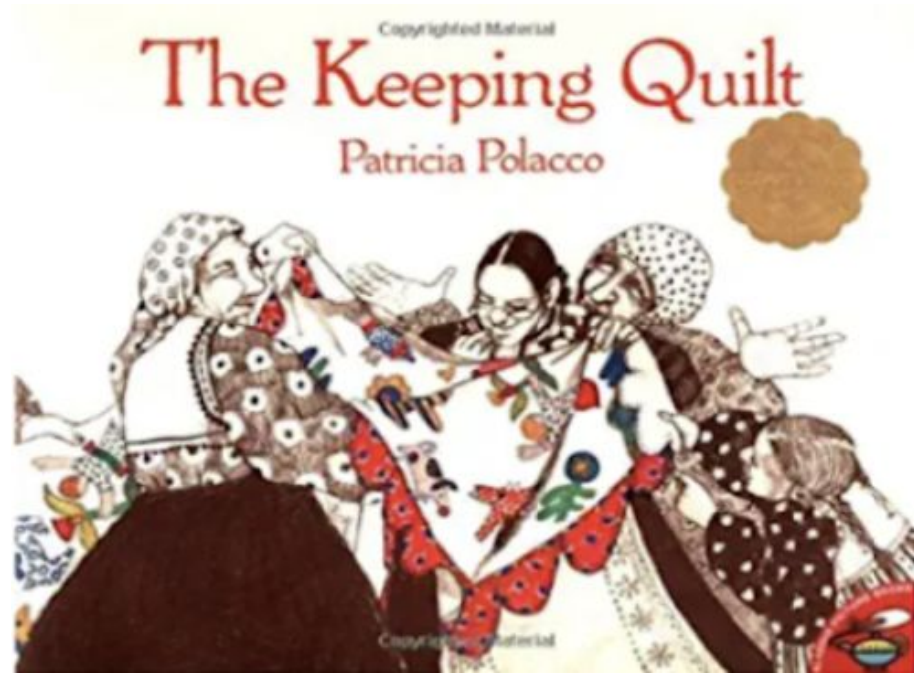


The quilt has such a history
wedding, holding babies,
table cloth and blanket
and memories. The family
has such a really

interesting history 
over a quilt. The family
carried the quilt through
hard times and sad moments
and happy moments.
They treated it like
family. Every family
member was carrying
loving. The quilt had many
owners. When someone died
they'll pray for them to go
to Heaven.

Samantha

“The quilt reminds me of generations and time that passed. The quilt is the main character in the book, and it made me start thinking. I wonder what my future life will be. Like will I have a family and will I be a mom and what will the generations be like? -Dana



*“An enemy of writing fluency is perfectionism. If I can’t produce something perfect – that won’t embarrass me – I can’t possibly write.” Concerns about handwriting and spelling may limit fluency. Many kids hesitate when they come to a word that they think they can’t spell, or they engage in wasteful mental gymnastics trying to avoid expressing ideas that would require those words. That’s why **taking the pressure off handwriting and spelling quality during drafting can support fluency.**”*

-Tim Shanahan, PhD (2022)

Building Empathy & Encouraging Writing:

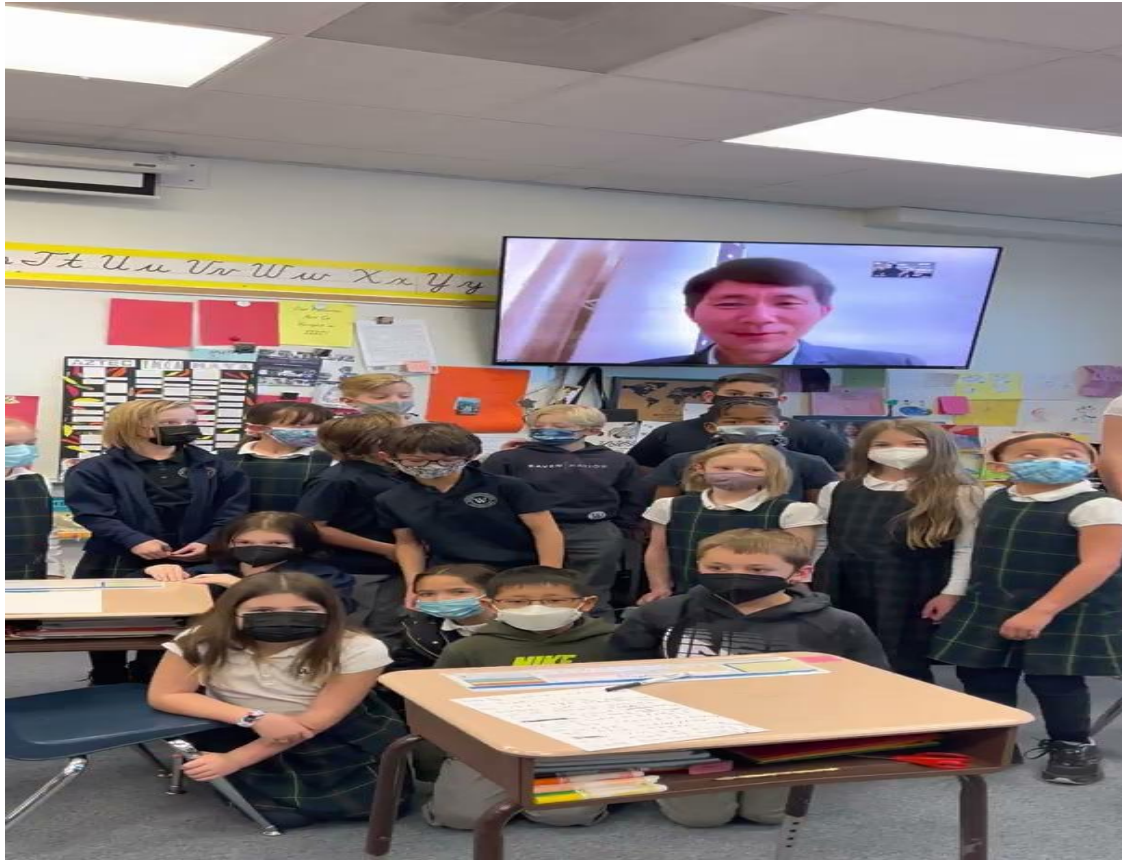
“Well, we talked about the real stuff about the books.”

“You said writing helped with your feelings, like with Mr. Qian.” Dana

“I liked that you wrote with us.” -Shane

“It’s cool that you wrote a book but if if you didn’t you still wrote with us and that’s the good thing.” -Devon

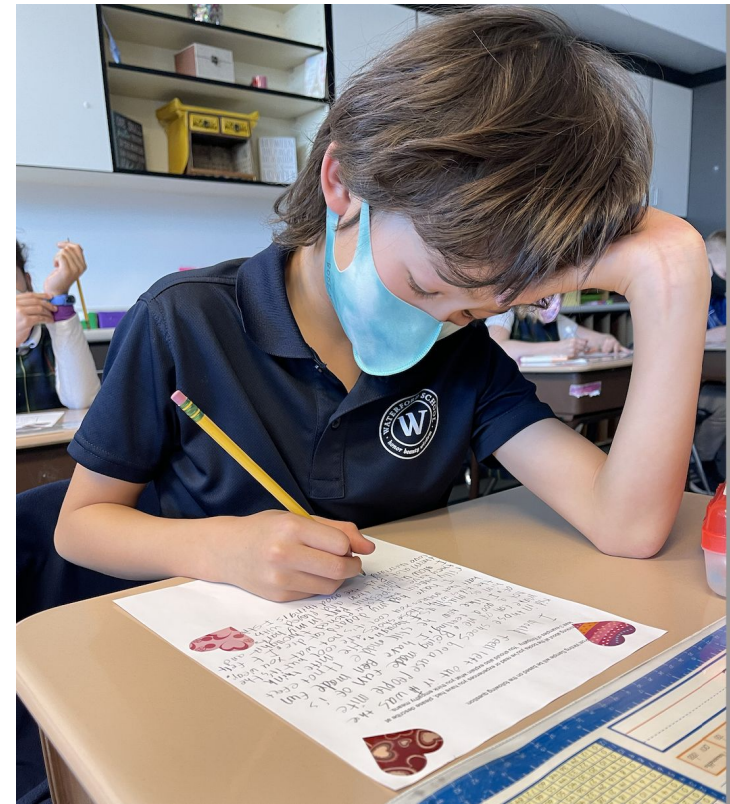
“We could write about stuff that we actually cared about.” -Brian



Interviewing Mr. Qian in Guangzhou, China. Learning about the situation with Covid, life for his parents in Wuhan and travel restrictions, as well as Chinese New Year traditions.

It takes informed literacy educators to help schools to use their literacy lessons to do more than reading and writing alone.

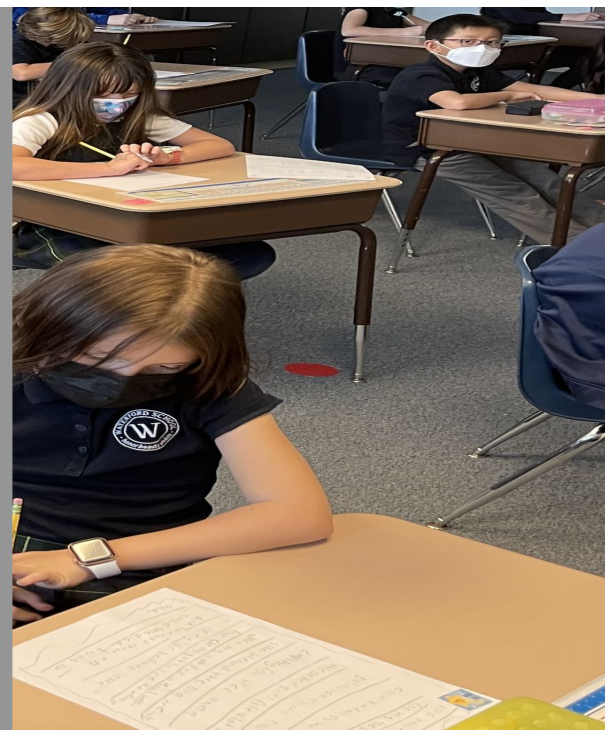
Research continues to demonstrate that we can grow our empathy and that literature is one way to accomplish this.



Thinking about all the books you've read or experiences you've had, please describe at least 3 examples of Empathy. You should also explain what you think empathy means.

EMPATHY IS A strong emotion its helpful AND its hard to go through its A BIGBIG emotion AND emotions are like waves YOU CANT STOP them from coming BUT you can choose wich one to SURF. I use EMPATHY ALOT I think if I were in there SHOOS how would I Act AND witch EMOTIONS would I surf. Doing that helps me soften my ROUGH PARTS AND I get through life easier BY being nice. AND heres the secret the nicer you are the more popular you get BUT I WASNT popular 1st or 2nd so next time you see someone SAD OR MAD just think empathy AND it will get you ALONG WAY





By using thoughtful empathy-based, culturally-responsive read-aloud texts in our classrooms, this is one way in which we can "*support our students out of the moment of darkness to the light of another moment.*" (Conference Theme 2022)

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*What better time is there for looking at the **power of literature** combined with writing capability and **increased confidence**, all within the context of cultivating empathy?* (Qian, 2021)



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CONTEXT: Timeline

- Spring 2021: Completed pilot study on empathy literacy in grade 3 classroom.
- May 2021: Applied for IRB approval to conduct full-length study on writing and empathy.
- August 2021: Received approval
- September 2021: Completed recruiting, parent approval, and preparation.
- October 2021: Began official study (Did Pre-write and Pre-interviews)
- January 2022: Conducted Mid-point interviews and writing samples
- May 2022: Completed classroom study (interviews and writing sample)