

Research on Diversity in Youth Literature

Volume 4
Issue 1 *Representations of Education in Youth
Literature*

Article 8

October 2021

There Are No Rewards for Girls Who Are Too Spirited': Schools as Gaslighting Mechanisms in Girls with Sharp Sticks

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Recommended Citation

Colantonio-Yurko, Kathleen; Boehm, Shelby; and Olmstead, Kathleen (2021) "There Are No Rewards for Girls Who Are Too Spirited': Schools as Gaslighting Mechanisms in Girls with Sharp Sticks," *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/rdyl/vol4/iss1/8>

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Gaslighting is now a ubiquitous term, moving beyond the field of psychology and into the vernacular (Williams) to name the systematic, manipulative behavior meant to make someone question themselves instead of the perpetrator (Manne). At the tap of our computer touchpads, we encounter news story headlines about a former president notorious for lying (Sarkis), podcasts on surviving narcissism (Martinez-Lewi), and self-help books promising a break from emotional abuse (Marlow-MaCoy). Gaslighting is both a constellation of manipulations (Hightower) and a technique of violence (Ruiz). Some reports suggest up to 95% of the victims of gaslighting are women, though anyone can be a target of gaslighting (Walsh). While gaslighting is a prevalent issue today, many young women do not realize they are being emotionally abused and experiencing gaslighting in their relationships at the time of the relationship (De Jesus). Teachers and teacher educators should consider the ways that gaslighting can be examined in young adult literature (YAL) to bring awareness to this type of emotional violence. By defining, naming, and deconstructing the issue through text, students can begin to become advocates in classrooms to fight this type of violence.

In this paper, we focus specifically on gaslighting, the significant “emotional manipulation” (Abramson 2) the characters within the school community experience in the novel *Girls with Sharp Sticks* (Young). We see gaslighting as an oppressive force that “robs the victim of the ability to name the harm done to her— and, equally, who did it.” (Manne 138-39). Our analysis of the book *Girls with Sharp Sticks* was guided by the following question: in what ways do schools gaslight young women? While *Girls with Sharp Sticks* provides ample opportunity to investigate gaslighting in schools, we also selected this book to center girls’ empowerment in a science-fiction text, a genre typically dominated by male protagonists (Huskins) and, as some suggest, a genre steeped in sexism (Lutgendorff). *Girls with Sharp Sticks* enables teachers to

create spaces to amplify the voices of women in the classroom, ultimately providing students with opportunities to engage with complex characters who are adolescent girls in a science-fiction work. Like other children's and young adult (YA) literature, *Girls with Sharp Sticks* is a useful tool for engaging in social justice work in the classroom (Vasquez).

Girls with Sharp Sticks focuses on the happenings at Innovations Academy, which is a prestigious all-girls private school that has “wonderful men” (Young 45) to guide the girls in their obedience and impulse control while enabling them to “manage their emotions” (27). While the novel has a variety of characters, the author chooses to center the cisgender protagonist, a white woman named Mena.

In the novel, the school personnel gaslight the girls into believing their “opinions are irrelevant” (25), that “beauty is our [their] greatest asset” (42), and that being both pretty and amenable will make them “a fine addition to any household” (37). The Innovations Academy girls grow increasingly disturbed by the gaslighting, both the verbal manipulation and physical violence inflicted upon them. Protagonist Mena leads a resistance against the lies and controlling men of the school and helps empower the girls to “embrace their inner voices” (382) to fight for freedom and their release from the oppressive academy. At the culmination of this science-fiction novel, the girls are shocked to learn that they are in fact the technological creations of the men ruling the academy. The girls were produced with artificially grown, human-like skin and organs, then paired with an artificial intelligence “brain” and programmed to fulfill the desires of the men in power.

Our Positionalities

The authors are three white cisgender women. Kate Yurko and Kathy Olmstead are professors at the same small public university, and Shelby Boehm is a PhD student at another

institution. All three authors have been public school teachers. These identities inform our connections to this work because we have been both students and employees of institutions that have policies that uphold male dominance and provide environments ripe for gaslighting. Additionally, as Kuby notes, it is important to be aware of one's identity, particularly as white teachers, and how one's experiences and teaching choices are positioned within whiteness (Chiariello). Important to our scholarship on gaslighting is the acknowledgement that the gaslighting discussed in this paper focuses mostly on the experiences of a white protagonist. Further, the history of gaslighting in mainstream media often positions gaslighting victims as white women (Wolstenholme). However, we recognize, as white researchers, that racial gaslighting is also prevalent in society, and often perpetuated by white women (Wolstenholme). We understand the gravity of making changes in schooling spaces that promote equity in education, and are aware that white women are often roadblocks for such change.

Relevant Literature

Defining Gaslighting

The term gaslighting originates from the 1938 stage play *Gas Light* (and 1944 film adaptation by the same name), in which a male character attempts to manipulate his wife into submission by systematically manipulating her sense of reality (Abramson; Manne). The concept of gaslighting has since evolved into the mainstream beyond popular culture depictions of domestic abuse. In the political sphere, former President Donald Trump was accused of gaslighting America during his presidential campaign by criticizing other politicians as liars while utilizing deception himself as supposed evidence of media bias (Duca). As a result, Duca argues that, "At the hands of Trump, facts have become interchangeable with opinions, blinding

us into arguing amongst ourselves as our very reality is called into question.” Further, gaslighting has appeared in contemporary popular culture, such as the T.V. series based on Liane Moriarty’s best-selling book *Big Little Lies* and popular music act The Chicks, whose hit 2020 single and album was titled *Gaslighter*.

Although experiences of gaslighting in mainstream media show white women as victims (Phipps), white women have also been perpetrators of gaslighting. For example, white women have been involved in racial gaslighting which occurs due to “pro-white/anti-black” ideologies which “are part of the ingrained culture of the United States” (Wolstenholme). These episodes of racial gaslighting inflict psychological harm to those who experience this systemic gaslighting (Wolstenholme). Perhaps one of the most well-known episodes of recent racial gaslighting was perpetrated by a white woman known as the “Central Park Karen.” This entitled white woman called police to report a Black man whom she suggested was threatening her life, while in actuality she was in the wrong for having an unleashed dog in the park disrupting early morning bird watching activities (Eustachewich). In our attempt to disrupt gaslighting in our work and this manuscript, we aim to continuously examine our own and each other’s suppositions to avoid intentional or other manipulations (Wolstenholme). An aspect of this form of gaslighting can include “white-lady tears,” which is when white women use emotional manipulation to garner sympathy for egregious acts, particularly around racism (Phipps). Additionally, this centering of white women victimization through mainstream feminism has excluded the stories and experiences of women of color (Phipps). Gaslighting can happen in any relationship where a power imbalance is present. Overall, gaslighting as a concept has utility in broader society; however, because gaslighting deals with psychological manipulation, recognizing, naming, and

denouncing gaslighting behavior is still a contemporary concern for educators interested in making society more equitable.

In this paper, we focus our analysis on white girl characters who are gaslit by their school. We use the term women (and the term girls as young women) over female to align with the complex way gender and gender identity are constructed both in society and within the novel around expected social and political behaviors and characteristics (“Sex and Gender Identity”). While the girls in the novel are robots, their gender identity and expression is meant to embody the stereotypical characteristics and behaviors of cisheterosexual women. *Girls with Sharp Sticks* provides teachers and students with an example of how sexist gaslighting can function through male violence in schools, but it is important to note that gaslighting can take the form of racist gaslighting (Davis and Ernst; Tobias and Joseph) as well as homophobic and transphobic gaslighting (Kellermeyer; Tsipursky). Again, gaslighting can occur in any context where power differences exist. For example, white women have utilized their racial privilege to gaslight women of color (Berenstain; McKinnon). Because individuals with one marginalized identity (e.g., gender for white women) can still gaslight individuals with less social power, an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw) is necessary to consider gaslighting as a multi-layered form of oppression. Like Manne’s work defining the epistemology of misogyny, we can consider gaslighting in a similar manner to understand how a person’s identity impacts their experiences with gaslighting: “The claim that a certain woman is subject to [gaslighting] can be demonstrated by showing that her male counterpart in an otherwise comparable social position (so holding fixed, e.g., race, class, sexuality, cis/trans status, disability, age, and so on) wouldn’t plausibly be subject to such hostility” (69-70). These different forms of gaslighting as violence should be

noted and discussed in classrooms to push the naming of gaslighting beyond the context of domestic abuse, which is most common in mainstream recognition (Manne).

Gaslighting in Schools

While gaslighting has predominantly been researched by psychologists, Sweet argues that research needs to broaden into sociology as well, as gaslighting originates in social inequities. In this sense, sociology is necessary for theorizing gaslighting as a form of oppression furthered by feminization. Gender is an important consideration when understanding gaslighting as it disproportionately happens to women by perpetrators who are men (Abramson; Manne; Sweet). Sweet's developed theoretical framework suggests that "gaslighting is rooted in power-laden intimate relationships, creates a sense of surreality, and mobilizes gender-based stereotypes, intersecting inequalities, and institutional vulnerabilities against victims" (869). This framework is useful for considering schools as sites of gaslighting, where inequities continue to persist due to the feminization of teaching, power hierarchies rooted in sexism, and heteronormative school culture, among other reasons.

Yet, considering gaslighting in schools is still an emerging area of research, possibly due to the complexity of recognizing and naming the phenomenon. Describing her experiences being gaslit as a queer teacher of color, Wozolek theorizes gaslighting as "an assemblage of violence" which captures "the multiple forms of violence that are enmeshed in an assemblage through individual, group, sociopolitical and historical interactions that impact ways of being, knowing, and doing" (320). To this end, Wozolek's framing of gaslighting accounts for multiple layers of gaslighting (e.g., individual, group, sociopolitical, historical) that are useful for critiquing how schools gaslight on institutional and personal levels. In this sense, we focus our analysis of

gaslighting in schools to understand “both the system that propagates the context of gaslighting and the local actors at play in the process” (Wozolek 323).

Analyzing Violence Against Women in Young Adult Literature

There exists a longstanding tradition of critical readings of YA, where scholars have examined gendered power in literature as it relates to gender roles, sexual assault, and other socio-political realities for women (Alsup; Boehm et al.; Colantonio-Yurko et al.; Varga-Dobai). Recently, research examining how YA characters experience sexism has expanded to include a more expansive view that accounts for various layers of oppression (Baer and Glasgow; Hubler; Swartz), possibly as a result of shifting perspectives of feminism influenced by Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality. For example, Hubler calls on critical analyses of YA literature to account for the intersection of racism and sexism. Further, education scholars have considered expansive feminist approaches for teaching young adult literature (Beach et al., *Teaching Literature*; Garcia; Priske and Amato). To this end, we situate our analysis of gaslighting in schools through a critical approach to examining and teaching young adult literature, as we see gaslighting as a gendered, multilayered form of both systemic and local oppression (Wozolek). Because educators are positioned to encourage reflection and critique through curriculum and pedagogical approaches, educators should consider conversations on gaslighting in schools as part of the broader work of making schools more equitable. Using critical literacy and YA literature as a vehicle to discuss gaslighting is one method toward pursuing the larger goal of listening to survivors, learning from their experiences, and enacting social change.

Theoretical Framework

Defining Critical Literacy

In this paper, we consider how critical literacy can support understanding of texts, specifically, how institutional power in the novel *Girls with Sharp Sticks* results in gaslighting of students who are women by the fictional school, teachers, and administrators. Critical literacy provides teachers and students with a lens from which they can consider their own thinking around social issues in texts (Vasquez). Further, it is a framework through which teachers can raise issues of equity and justice through texts and challenge the status quo; however, critical literacy also requires students to “develop a social conscience served by a critical imagination for redesign” (Janks 350). Thus, an ultimate goal within critical literacy is for students to critically examine and understand issues in the world and strive to make change. There are many ways that teachers and researchers can engage in critical literacy with students; for example, critical literacy inquiries can arise through addressing power, language, the everyday world around us, and even the artifacts we encounter in our daily lives (Janks et al.; Vasquez).

We position critical literacy as the way to understand how power operates and functions so that the school could engage in systematic gaslighting of characters. Critical literacy encourages the use of questions that address representation, goals, and perspectives in texts (Janks; Janks et al.; Vasquez). Additionally, critical literacy provides a lens for examining who texts are written for by asking questions like: *How are characters represented? Whose voices are amplified and whose voices are silenced?* By engaging in such questioning, students and teachers can begin to unravel why and how the school in *Girls with Sharp Sticks* developed its rules and how male dominance is perpetuated and sustained in the novel. Understanding the landscape of power is an important first step in analyzing gaslighting in text. As noted by Wozolek, gaslighting “is an attention to both the system that propagates the context of gaslighting and the

local actors at play in the process" (323). Thus, we must engage in critical questioning to understand the context of the gaslighting and the "actors" in the novel.

In our analysis, we use critical literacy questions to consider and interrogate how rules are constructed and cultural norms sustained in the fictional school. Stevens and Bean note that engaging in critical literacy questioning can "go to the heart of understanding" (26) and can support students' and teachers' work to illuminate injustices in young adult literature. Simmons notes that key plot elements in young adult literature can lead to questioning of problematic "power structures" and "inequities" (26). As such, critical literacy provides an avenue to illuminate inequity in *Girls with Sharp Sticks* through the use of critical questioning that gets at the heart of power structure in the novel. Gaslighting is directly related to cultivating and maintaining power over others, and as noted above, is typically gendered with women more often than not being the victims of this form of abuse and domination. Thus, it is through critical literacy that readers are able to see and examine these power dynamics in schools and schooling systems.

Methods

This study involved a critical content analysis (Krippendorff; White and Marsh) of the YA novel *Girls with Sharp Sticks*. Critical content analysis is a useful methodology for questioning what a text is about through the lens of a theoretical perspective (Krippendorff; White and Marsh). Beach, et al. suggest critical content analysis for researchers who wish to understand the "cultural, social, political, and economic contexts of children's texts and the ways

in which these texts shape how children view and interact within the social world” (“Exploring” 142). Along with critical content analysis, a critical literacy lens (Janks; Vasquez) was used as a theoretical perspective to explore sexist gaslighting as enacted through the school in *Girls with Sharp Sticks*. This theoretical perspective centered power as seen through male dominance in our analysis, while also positioning books as cultural objects that inform and perpetuate dominant ideologies.

Coding was conducted using a phronetic iterative approach (Tracy) that focused on our specific interest in sexist gaslighting in schools supported by our understanding of current literature around male dominance and theoretical knowledge of critical literacy (Janks; Vasquez). Each author individually coded manually for descriptive primary-cycle codes that described the who, what, where, and when of sexism in *Girls with Sharp Sticks*. After this primary-cycle coding, we reworked our research question to focus specifically on sexist gaslighting in schools, further investigating current research on how gaslighting has been considered in school contexts to inform our next round of coding. Then, through multiple rounds of collaborative analysis, we developed secondary-cycle coding based on Manne’s definition of gaslighting in order to synthesize our primary-cycle coding into interpretations (e.g., physical abuse, emotional abuse, male dominance). This led to hierarchal codes that informed our conceptual understanding of three areas where sexist gaslighting appears in the school in *Girls with Sharp Sticks*: 1) school leaders, 2) curriculum, and 3) school culture. We discuss our findings below.

Findings

In the following section, we detail three ways in which the school, Innovation Academy, and its faculty gaslight student characters who are young women in the novel, *Girls with Sharp*

Sticks. As noted above, findings were developed through a phronetic iterative process (Tracy) in which we first used critical literacy as a framework for understanding power dynamics in the novel and then addressed those ideas through critical content analysis (Krippendorff; White and Marsh) of sexist gaslighting in the novel.

School Leaders as Gaslighters

Perhaps the most obvious answer to how schools gaslight characters who are women is through the work of “local actors” (Wozolek 323), who are individuals in positions of power such as administrators, teachers, or other educational stakeholders, that subscribe to oppressive systems through the institution (i.e., schools). In *Girls with Sharp Sticks*, the young girls are manipulated and abused, both physically and emotionally, by teachers and school leaders who use the school as a system for upholding patriarchal values such as heteronormativity, gender stereotyping, and the overall view that women exist to serve men. During a typical lesson in the novel, a professor asks the young girls, ““But you will take pride in your appearance at all times. No exceptions. And why is that?”” (Young 42). The students’ responses emphasize the extent of the psychological impacts of gaslighting: ““Because beauty is our greatest asset’ we say in unison knowing the appropriate response. Knowing we’d be graded on it” (42). In fact, the sexist school culture is so embedded and employed through gaslighting by school leaders that students who are women question their own reactions to abuse: ““We’re not supposed to anger the men taking care of us... It was selfish of me to not listen immediately” (23).

Also, teachers repeatedly gaslight the young girls by weaponizing their previous compliant behaviors in an attempt to make them obedient and question their sense of reality. In fact, the headmaster of the school is called “the Guardian,” a name that portrays him as the students’ protector. Yet, when students don’t follow directions, the Guardian and other teachers

at the school rely on abusive tactics presented as treatment the students deserve, like when the Guardian tells a student, Valentine, “You’ve just earned yourself impulse control therapy” after she did not comply with directions (26). Following an interaction between the Guardian and the protagonist Philomena, another professor taunts Philomena’s behavior and overall sense of self by saying, “That’s not like you Philomena, The girl I know would never misbehave” (35).

Further, school leaders gaslight students by alluding to expectations beyond their classroom. For example, a professor at the school instructs the students that “compliance is an appealing quality...Hold your tongue and listen. It’s a good lesson for all young women” (43). In the same way that secondary teachers often reference expectations from a fictitious future boss or college professor as a method for enforcing student compliance, the school leaders in *Girls with Sharp Sticks* gaslight students into following sexist expectations for their behavior and appearance.

Curriculum as Gaslighter

Another way that schools gaslight characters who are women is through the prescribed curriculum. Indeed, curriculum choices have long had the power to shape schools and societies (Anyon; Neuman and Celano). What’s included in the curriculum, what’s left out, how materials are presented, and how curricula are framed enable those who create and share the curriculum control of the narratives. For example, predominantly white historians and textbook authors have shaped what Serwer calls America’s “national identity.” This identity was formed by an incomplete and inaccurate “history” of slavery and a noticeable absence of the accomplishments of African Americans. Yet, it was a curriculum fed to generations of Americans in public schools across the country—one recently brought to public consciousness by *The New York Times 1619 Project* and fittingly deemed “educational malpractice” by Times reporter Nikita Stewart (see “The 1619 Project”).

Similarly, in Young's novel, we see another example of educational malpractice targeted at the marginalization of women in this work of science-fiction. In *Girls with Sharp Sticks*, curricular mandates at Innovations Academy result in additional "layers of gaslighting" (Wozolek) for students. For instance, as a group, the girls are inculcated in the required "academics" of the school which include the following content areas as part of the curriculum: *Modesty and Decorum*, *Social Graces Etiquette*, *Modern Manners*, *Plant Design and Development*, and *Running Course* (i.e. exercise to maintain one's physical appearance) all of which, without choice and a broader selection of courses, reinforce gender stereotypes and perpetuate male dominance. A gender stereotype has been defined as "a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by women and men" and is detrimental when these stereotypes infringe upon a person's ability to make choices about their life or pursue personalized life pathways and careers due to their gender ("Gender Stereotyping").

Indeed, the girls at Innovations Academy are upset by their lack of freedom as they are barred from studying math, science, English, and other subjects; the girls are disturbed that they are not permitted to pursue their own interests. However, it is important to note, the academic content offered to the girls, largely related to domesticity, may be viewed mainly as a traditional home economics curriculum. Historically, it has been argued that home economics curricula can perpetuate "traditional models of sex roles and family life" and promote a conservative agenda (Heggestad).

Through the curricular gaslighting, male dominance is upheld as girls are taught they have no power. Additionally, through gaslighting, the girls are manipulated into believing that thinking is bad for their complexions and that their opinions are not valued at school nor are they

valued in the larger society. Innovations Academy also gaslights girls through the assessment process at the school as the girls are judged and receive grades on the conduct they display, the desired outcome of their curriculum. Through the assessment process, the girls are manipulated into believing *compliance, beauty, manners, and poise* along with a *cooperative* nature and the ability to be a *good listener* are the only traits to be valued in women, after all, they are frequently told “there are no rewards for girls who are too spirited” (Young 5). The girls’ enculturation into the Academy’s imposed conduct perpetuates gender stereotyping, marginalizing students who are women and enabling the widespread male dominance at the institution.

School Culture as Gaslighter

We see school culture as the beliefs, understandings, and assumptions that teachers and administrators share (ASCD). A positive school climate and school culture promote students' ability to learn. The school culture at Innovation Academy is maintained through careful order and rules. We see school culture as reflective of the institution's role in cultural hegemony where, as Delpit suggests, “the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have the power” (25). As an institution with power, schools function as gaslighters through systemic rules that ensure students are consistently redirected when they question or wonder about ideas beyond what the schools tell them. For example, when students who are women are perceived to get out of line the institution directs them to engage in impulse control therapy. When one character expresses emotions a male teacher directs her to therapy, “He said I was too responsive and that impulse control therapy would help me manage my emotions” (Young 27). Such therapy and the school’s messaging around having questions, feelings, or

intense emotions cultivate a culture of fear and shame. Such an atmosphere allows the school to gaslight students when they question or even consider questioning authority.

Similar ideas are supported in classes and help build the intricate web of control perpetuated by the school. Students must attend Social Graces Etiquette and are told “only beautiful things have value” (80). When one student’s skirt is the required length, and the student knows she is not breaking rules, a teacher still tells her: “if my skirt was any shorter, a man would expect me to behave improperly” (59), gaslighting the student into thinking her skirt does not meet the rules and that she is intentionally acting out. One professor, Slowski, uses his words to attempt to prevent girls from questioning by stating each week: “Too much thinking is bad for your looks” (82). These small moments are ways for the school to lay the groundwork to perpetually gaslight students and uphold systems of male dominance and reinforce the worth of women. Such messaging is even sent through what the girls can physically consume as the school regulates the students’ food, “They’ve announced we’ve had too many calories this week. Now it’s salad and juice cleanses until next weigh-in” (46).

Innovation Academy even has iron gates surrounding the property to keep girls in. However, a professor explains the gates’ purpose by stating, “It is dangerous to leave girls unprotected...especially pretty girls like you.” (28). Students reside in a space of fear that is reinforced by the lessons in classes, the procedures around mandated “therapy,” and the barriers in place to keep students in and the world out. By doing so, they carefully construct a school culture that clearly plays a role in Wozolek’s notion that gaslighting is “an assemblage of violence” (320). We see that the school culture itself consistently rewrites, redirects, and physically alters girls’ perceptions of the world by gaslighting them when they question or act out.

In Innovation Academy, school leaders, curriculum, and school culture construct the “assemblage of violence” (Wozolek). Considering these three contexts as gaslighters in *Girls with Sharp Sticks* provides insight into how multiple structures effectuate emotional violence against the girls of Innovations Academy. The layers of gaslighting create significant challenges for the girls which were illuminated in our reading of the text through a critical literacy lens (Janks; Vasquez). This theoretical perspective called attention to the sexist gaslighting as imposed by Innovation Academy by perpetuating dominant ideologies.

For English and Literacy Teachers

As seen through mainstream conversations about gaslighting (Williams), this phenomenon is not only relegated to contemporary literature like the examples of sexist gaslighting discussed previously in *Girls with Sharp Sticks*. Importantly, critical literacy can be used to address complex social topics like power, male dominance, and violence in YAL (Boehm et al., Simmons). In the following section, we discuss the ways that critical literacy can be used to understand gaslighting in the novel.

Gaslighting, Critical Literacy, and Girls with Sharp Sticks

In critical literacy, Janks suggests that teachers first name the issue when approaching text, and this critical literacy approach can also be used in young adult literature (Boehm et al.). In the novel, *Girls with Sharp Sticks*, we suggest that teachers examine gaslighting in broader society to address what it means. One valuable “before reading” tool that we used in our courses to get students to begin to understand concepts like male dominance, sexism, and patriarchy was Knowledge Mapping (Buehl). In essence, students create a concept map, or a bubble with a key idea in it, and then write what they believe and know about the idea. These maps can then be

shared through discussion to help students problematize the sociopolitical landscape to understand how gaslighting can take place. Students can use these broader brainstorming discussions to begin to consider the broader implications of power and gaslighting. Once students begin to understand key concepts that surround gaslighting, they can engage in other strategies, like Talk-Throughs (Brozo). The Talk-Through strategy encourages students to make sense of complex ideas on their own. First, students use index cards to organize thoughts. Next, they independently practice speaking through ideas aloud. Finally, students share ideas with peers (Brozo 368). Talk-Throughs enable students to verbally articulate their understanding of key concepts needed to deconstruct gaslighting in texts. These two strategies can be used for students to address power dynamics, a key aspect of critical literacy teaching (Janks, Vasquez) in order to understand how gaslighting operates in broader society before engaging directly with *Girls with Sharp Sticks*.

Once students and teachers have named the issues (Janks) and are aware of gaslighting, they can begin to examine *Girls with Sharp Sticks* and identify the ways characters, institutions, and other entities engage in or support gaslighting. Through our analysis of *Girls with Sharp Sticks*, we realized the significance of empowering our students to recognize and disrupt gaslighting in the texts they consume. Through the use of a critical literacy framework, we can encourage students to consider power relations when reading *Girls With Sharp Sticks*. First, students can deconstruct the novel to answer critical questions specifically related to gaslighting in the novel. For example, teachers might pose the following critical literacy based (Janks, Vasquez), questions to students: 1) Who is doing the gaslighting and why? 2) In what ways do the victims experience the emotional manipulation of gaslighting? 3) How is gaslighting systemic in the school and how does it occur on individual levels? 4) How is gaslighting related

to power? 5) What are some of the consequences of gaslighting for the girls at Innovations Academy? 6) In what ways do the girls work to disrupt gaslighting practices? 7) What was Young's (the author's) intent in writing this book? 8) How do the gaslighting experiences of Mena and her peers compare to your own experiences in schools or in your community? Explain. 9) How has reading *Girls with Sharp Sticks* impacted your thinking? and finally 10) How might you and your peers work to disrupt gaslighting in your school, community, or society? Using critical literacy questions (Janks, Vasquez) can bring students to deeper understandings of structural power and its influence on gaslighting in the novel.

Gaslighting and Canonical Texts

Outside of *Girls with Sharp Sticks*, we suggest that teachers and researchers consider canonical texts as well. In reviewing some canonical texts, we find gaslighting is prevalent in a variety of classically taught literature. For example, plays like *The Taming of the Shrew* and novels like *The Great Gatsby* both include instances of gaslighting. Kate used to teach *The Taming of the Shrew* in her tenth-grade ELA course during a unit that focused on gender equity. In retrospect, this unit could be rewritten to consider the ways that characters create a web of gaslighting to “break” Katherine as they attempt to make her conform to Elizabethan expectations of womanhood. Additionally, Shelby taught Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as part of her mandated district curriculum for tenth-grade ELA. This novel could be used to examine how male dominance impacts the experiences of women in the novel, particularly as related to their social freedom. Specifically, gaslighting could be useful for understanding how Daisy's character was manipulated by male characters in the novel. It is important to note that the gaslighting addressed in these examples is similar to *Girls With Sharp Sticks*, as the gaslit individuals are white women, which reflects the predominance of white characters in the canon

(Spampinato). Teachers can also strive to support students to question racial hierarchies in the canon by problematizing the idea that “high style” is affiliated with white characters which further perpetuates white supremacist ideology (Cothren). Further, teachers can “foreground” their reading and viewing activities with students by explicitly addressing whiteness and power in the canonical and popular texts alike (Johnston).

Final Thoughts

There are many books that feature gaslighting but they are not necessarily tied to gaslighting in school contexts or by schools. While our research paper mainly focuses on cisgender adolescent white women who experience gaslighting in their school community, we encourage other teachers and scholars to address gaslighting in other forms and texts. We encourage teachers and students to look at the world around them and critically analyze interactions. In what spaces do students see violence through gaslighting? How do we see gaslighting in texts? By naming and shedding light on gaslighting we can begin to recognize this form of emotional violence and work to enact change.

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