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Message and Meaning: Media Literacy and Racial Literacy Among Secondary-School Students

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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Warren Hynes has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Spring** Semester, 2023.

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The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.

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Dedication

I would like to first dedicate this to my parents, Thomas and Dawn Hynes. They taught me how to be a student and a lifelong learner, and I have followed their lead in striving for excellence in my education and profession. Dad, you knew I was pursuing this goal and I am sure you would have been quite proud had you seen me make it this far. I think of you every day and I thank you for modeling a life of integrity. Mom, you were a teacher for 35 years, and you advised me against following in your footsteps. You told me I'd be underpaid, underappreciated and undervalued. Of course, I had gone to school with you many times and had recognized that education would also leave me deeply fulfilled every day. Thank you for modeling this for me. I know your memory loss leaves you unable to read this dissertation, but your love, pride and faith in me remain guiding lights every day.

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the ways in which student use of media literacy tools and different media source materials can influence the conclusions students draw about race in the United States. The author visited eighth-grade social studies students in two different schools (one more economically advantaged; one more economically disadvantaged) for six visits apiece. During these visits, students engaged with several media sources (controlling for bias) covering two issues related to race (housing and immigration). The goal was to determine how the overall use of media literacy tools and the different types of source materials can influence the ways in which students view a difficult topic such as that of race in the United States. Students engaged in student-centered inquiry with these sources, and they shared their responses through discourse analysis featuring surveys, free-writes, small-group discussions, large-group discussions and individual interviews, all conducted in the classroom. The results of this study suggest that media literacy tools can have a profound impact on students' analysis and critical thinking when they are engaging with media messages on tough topics such as race. As for the various media source materials explored, students responded most strongly to visual sources and to personal-experience sources about race. Hard-data sources, while not universally appealing to students, held significant influence among those who connected with telling the story of race in the U.S. through numbers. Students presented a clear desire to learn more about race, and to engage with more source materials in school to deepen their examination of this ever-challenging topic. They responded positively to the connection between the practices of media literacy and student-centered inquiry.

Keywords: media literacy, media sources, racial literacy, visual literacy, student-centered inquiry, data literacy

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

We are living through a digital revolution, with our means of communication changing dramatically across the planet. In the classroom, teachers who grew up without search engines, smartphones or social media are charged with educating teens who carry pocket-size computers with them all the time and communicate through media outlets so new we don't yet understand their full capabilities. Our teens use these digital devices and software to communicate with one another and with the outside world during most of their waking hours. A 2018 Pew Research Center study found that 95 percent of teens had access to a smartphone at home, and nearly half of teens reported being online on a near-constant basis (Anderson & Jiang, 2018, para. 2). And that was five years ago: A 2022 Common Sense media survey found that media use by both teens and tweens had grown by 17 percent between 2019 and 2021, with daily average media use hitting 8 hours, 39 minutes for teens and 5 hours, 33 minutes for tweens (Rideout et al., 2022, Key Findings section, para. 1). Changes as dynamic as these can be difficult to navigate: For instance, a recent UNICEF-Gallup study spanning 21 countries found that 15-to-24-year-olds turn to social media for current events information three times as often as they turn to any other source. Yet at the same time, teens trust social media less than any other source of information (UNICEF & Gallup, 2021, Is Scrolling Believing? section, question 1). With the avenues for communication and education shifting so quickly, we as educators must decide what level of responsibility we shoulder in supporting student navigation of these fast-paced changes, which are clearly impacting their lives nearly every minute of the day. In a recent position statement on media education, the National Council of Teachers of English stated:

> Everyone in our society now needs the ability to assess the widely varying quality of the information, entertainment, and persuasion that surrounds them, to evaluate the veracity and validity of claims, and to debunk misinformation when necessary … As society and technology change, so too does literacy. (National Council of Teachers of English, 2022, paras. 6, 7)

Like many educators, I find these changes to be deeply important. As a school administrator, former English and journalism teacher and former newspaper reporter, I follow developments in both media and society closely. I have surveyed students and staff about media use, and have organized professional development curricular work on media literacy, in which staff members have created unit and lesson plans and shared them with colleagues. Others have done the same in schools across the U.S. (Rainey, 2022, para. 9). As our nation engages in a relentless debate over the very definition of truth, some educators view an effective navigation of media as an essential component to the modern U.S. educational system. This view responds to "the urgent need for our schools to provide civic and media education that prepares young people for responsible citizenship in a sharply divided and media-saturated society" (Mirra et al., 2022, para. 1). Media literacy interventions have been found to positively affect such outcomes as media knowledge, criticism, attitudes and behavior, spanning age groups and settings (Jeong et al., 2012, p. 454).

And yet, the majority of states in this country do not have educational standards specific to media literacy (Media Literacy Now, 2022, Putting Media Literacy on the Public Policy Agenda section). We are living through a seismic change in communication throughout our world, likely the largest we've ever witnessed since the perfection of the printing press. Yet we as educators are not actively teaching our students how to navigate this altered state. As

educators, it is essential for us to consider our responsibilities in helping our students engage with this new world.

Of course, the digital revolution is by no means the only challenge facing our students today. There are scores of environmental crises, there is economic strife, we've been living through a global health emergency, we're enduring electoral divisions unlike any seen in the U.S. in more than 200 years, and we are witnessing violence at the national and international levels. And on top of all that, we are engaged in a widespread, at times contentious dialogue about one of the United States' most enduring topics of discussion, division and dialogue: race. The murder of George Floyd in May 2020, followed by nationwide protests in the weeks and months that followed, opened up a variety of conversations about this topic, from government chambers and boardrooms to social media venues, living rooms, and, yes, classrooms. By the summer and fall of 2020, widespread engagement on race was visible through our book selections: On July 5 of that year, the top 10 paperback nonfiction bestsellers on *The New York Times'* weekly list all addressed race, as did several other books on the hardcover nonfiction, hardcover fiction, young adult and children's picture book lists (*The New York Times*, 2020, *The New York Times* Best Sellers section). As racial dialogues and curriculum planning took place throughout the summer of 2020, there seemed to be a shift in language, with certain terms such as "antiracist," "white supremacy" and "white privilege" being used much more commonly than in any previous era in U.S. history, including by authority figures. In addition, discussions of racism included frequent references to four different levels of racism: internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural or systemic (City of Seattle, 2021, Race and Social Justice Initiative section). Was it possible that, in the midst of so many worldwide crises, the United States was

finding some genuine consensus in describing the history and present status of one such crisis, that of race in America?

As we made our way into a contentious election season in the fall of 2020 followed by an even more contentious post-election winter, the discussions about race continued, but with a noticeable pushback. Those summer of 2020 conversations about race, which seemed to echo the words of scholars and writers such as Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo, Ta-Nehisi Coates and Nikole Hannah-Jones, were now being met by fierce opposition to what was being termed "critical race theory." The scholars who coined the original concept of critical race theory decades ago did so to try and verbalize the "historical patterns of racism" that are "ingrained in law and other modern institutions" (Jackson, 2021, para. 3). This concept argued that there is a through-line traveling from slavery to Jim Crow to segregation to redlining to mass incarceration, and that it presents "an uneven playing field for Black people and other people of color" through a form of racism that is "systemic" (Jackson, 2021, para. 3). The summer of 2020 had presented the possibility that perhaps many Americans had come to an agreement on what has happened and is happening with regard to race in America. But by the fall and winter, it was clear that there was no such consensus. This pushback presented an argument that systemic racism and white supremacy are not uncontested facts, and that there is no path toward reconciliation by arguing that all white people experience privilege and that many Americans engage in oppression through implicit bias and inaction. Since January 2021, 44 states have introduced bills or taken other steps to "restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism," with 18 of those states imposing bans or restrictions "through legislation or other avenues" (Schwartz, 2022, para. 5).

Problem Statement

So as the decade unfolds, it's clear that educators and Americans in general have not arrived at a place where they agree on the language to describe what has happened and what is happening with regard to race in the United States. There is no clear consensus – among students, educators or parents – about how to address the history and reality of race in our classrooms. There is no full agreement on whether systemic racism is an established part of our nation's fabric. There is no widely accepted explanation of the role white supremacy has played in determining how our country operates. There is no collaboration in deciding what it means to be racist or antiracist (Sharpe, 2022, para. 2).

We as educators take these perspectives into the curricula we draft and into the instruction we provide, which in turn impact the education of our students. One method through which we provide this instruction is, of course, through the media sources we offer our students, and the ways in which we frame those sources as tools for educational exploration and discovery. With so many schools and states lacking guidelines on media literacy, many of our students do not yet possess the skills needed to critically analyze the messages, perspectives, and agendas of the media sources they consume. When it comes to current news media, it's easy to find persuasive stories arguing for and against critical race theory, and primers to help one try and navigate the debate. Yet, learners often are left to their own devices to choose which media they will consume and how it will add to their points of view on race. As a result, we often lack a complete discussion of the specific ways in which race is actually being taught in classrooms, particularly with regard to source materials at the secondary-school level. As students grow and engage with more complex curriculum, the selection and use of source materials are essential to supporting their self-directed examination of race in America.

Purpose of this Study

This dissertation explores how student-centered inquiry using media literacy tools, featuring a variety of media source materials, can influence the conclusions students draw about race in the U.S. At a time when educators often state the need for both media literacy and racial literacy, there is much to gain from looking at ways in which the interweaving of both can influence student growth. It is time to let students tell us, through a media literacy lens, how varied source materials are influencing the development of their own racial literacy sensibilities. It's important to note that this is not a study of media bias. Each media literacy source presented to students for this study will present a similar argument, but will do so through a different type of media source. The goal here is not to explore the opinions that students form based on opposing media arguments; instead, the goal is to explore students' reactions to different media presentation formats and to the use of media literacy tools in general. If we are to take steps toward speaking the same language on a critical issue such as race, we as educators may find it valuable to understand the ways in which our overall use of media literacy and our selection of media sources serve to influence our processes of critical thinking, analysis and dialogue. Once students deepen their own media literacy, it is natural that they will deepen their information literacy as well:

> Someone who is information literate knows how to determine when information is needed, access information using a range of tools, evaluate the information through critical thinking and analysis, and incorporate information into something new through a synthesis of materials. These competencies require individuals to understand and use information based on critical reading and writing. (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011, p. 70)

This study is intended to give us a stronger sense of how students engage with various

media sources, so that when they make decisions to access and evaluate information, they are better equipped to understand how that type of source tends to impact their own critical thinking.

Rationale / Significance

This study is designed to deepen our discussion of media literacy and racial literacy beyond the theoretical and into the actual classroom. Students engage with many different types of media, and many educators offer lessons on how to engage with those sources critically. But when it comes to developing social and political positions on critical issues of the day – in areas such as race, class, religion, identity and climate change – we as educators do not often find ourselves studying the ways in which different source formats influence students, and in what ways. We also do not find ourselves gauging the use of media literacy tools in helping students arrive at conclusions. The potential benefits to studying these competencies stretch beyond race and into other often-divisive topics such as those listed above. However, there is perhaps no area more vital to helping us understand the influence of media literacy on critical thinking than an exploration into that intersection of media and race.

Theoretical Framework and Key Definitions

Theoretically, this study will cover the basics of what media literacy is, including its evolution as a field of study. The study will explore the ways in which the field has broadened from media literacy to critical media literacy to critical race media literacy, depending on who the researcher is and what approach they are using. The National Association for Media Literacy Education has established its "Core Principles of Media Literacy in the United States," which some states and districts have used as the structural framework of media literacy standards. These principles include "active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create," as well as an expansion of literacy to include all forms of media. These principles

recognize that media are “agents of socialization,” and that individuals use their own “individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.” These principles also posit that media literacy education helps to develop “informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society” (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2007, pp. 3-5).

As for racial literacy, one study defines it as a theoretical framework whose goal is to “develop a set of social proficiencies that attempt to make sense of the discursive and performative systems of race” (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014, p. 84). There are published academic studies on media literacy and others on racial literacy, but not many covering how the two engage with each other. This study will combine these two areas of literacy and allow students to deepen their understanding of source material and of race itself through the interweaving of both skills. This study of media literacy and racial literacy uses established media literacy principles and offers students a variety of media sources, then allows them to identify what meanings they make from these messages. This study also brings in the theory of critical media literacy, in which the question is raised as to whose voices are heard and whose voices are absent in the media messages we consume (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14).

A word on language: Throughout this paper, the word “race” is used to describe “a socially constructed concept” that is “relational and establishes levels of privilege and power for people in particular settings” (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014, p. 84). As race is addressed, it will typically be in reference to what we know as racism. Sometimes, however, the term may refer more to race relations. Either way, its use will always engage with issues of power. “Racial literacy emphasizes the relationship between race and power. Racial literacy reads race in its psychological, interpersonal, and structural dimensions” (Guinier, 2004, p. 115).

Designing a study on race with the goal of bringing all individuals together toward agreed-upon conclusions can be tempting. While that is a valuable long-term goal, this approach is not realistic with this study. This approach is also not part of the nature of media literacy or racial literacy, both of which are grounded in critical thinking and student-centered inquiry. The goal here is to gain a deeper understanding of how students make meaning of race based on the types of media sources they are consuming and their use of media literacy concepts as a whole. This approach also removes the educator's potential biases in order to give students the freedom and space to make their own decisions – which ultimately offers the potential for future research. This research focuses on the student's interactions with the source material, not on the teacher's perceived opinions of that material.

Media literacy's focus on digital citizenship includes other areas that are not present in this study, such as identifying and navigating bias, identifying misleading sources, comparing source materials to vet information, and understanding the degrees of privacy present (or absent) in media consumption. In addition, media literacy's focus on design and innovation includes an emphasis on supporting student creation of media content that is reputable and creative. Media literacy has many branches to its tree, and all of these areas are worth significant time and research. Those areas of media literacy absent from this study are missing only because the research goals here can only accommodate certain branches of the tree at one time. The media literacy branches most present within this study all connect with the creation and consumption of messages, particularly in relation to message construction, perception, purpose, representation, power and fairness.

Research Questions

The research questions for this dissertation are as follows:

- In what ways do media literacy tools, implemented in a process of student-centered inquiry, influence the conclusions that secondary-school students make about race in the U.S.?
- In what ways do differing media source materials influence secondary-school students' conclusions about race in the United States, when controlling for bias?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources, and why?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary among students who enter the study with different pre-existing perspectives on race, and why?

Research Design

This phenomenological qualitative study explores the ways in which student media literacy can influence student racial literacy, and it involves interviews with two groups of secondary-school students over several sessions. During these sessions, I presented the students with various media sources addressing race and asked them to use established media literacy questions to study the sources and respond to them in the context of student-centered inquiry. I used discourse analysis to gather data from these students in a variety of ways: through surveys, reflections, small-group discussions, large-group discussions, and individual interviews. These varied approaches made space for the different ways in which students engage with media materials. Students were presented with two issues related to race (housing and immigration), and for each issue they examined five different media sources: (1) a textbook chapter (print-based media); (2) a secondary source specific to the issue and grounded in research (print-based media); (3) an opinion-based source (visual media); (4) a personal-experience source (visual media); and (5) a hard-data source (print-based and visual media). All of the sources were

controlled for bias, in that the sources for each issue all presented the same argument. While bias is most definitely an aspect of media literacy, it is not the focus of this study. This study is more interested in the process of media literacy and the influence that different primary and secondary sources have on student thought.

The study covers two groups of eighth-grade students in the northern half of New Jersey – one a suburban school whose students are mostly economically advantaged, and one an urban school whose students are mostly economically disadvantaged. After visiting them and documenting their engagement with the media source materials, I coded their responses through the survey, reflection, discussion, and interview discourse materials, and used the resulting data to identify common themes and trends within their answers. These themes and trends supported a follow-up visit to each class for each of the racial topics, intended to probe more deeply into the themes found in the research. Students and staff at both schools were eager to engage in this work and to collaborate in gaining a deeper understanding of both media and racial literacy.

Organization of the Study

This study follows the traditional dissertation structure. Chapter 1 introduces the topic at hand and presents the context and overview of the problem, purpose, rationale, theory, design and framework of the study. Chapter 2 delves into the literature most relevant to the overall themes of media literacy and racial literacy. The different forms of media literacy that have evolved over time are discussed, as are the connections between media literacy and student-centered inquiry. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study including the research design, participants and sampling, data sources and collection, data analysis, methods used for validity and reliability, and limitations. Chapter 4 outlines the study results, focusing on major thematic

trends and findings. Finally, Chapter 5 includes the researcher's own interpretations and conclusions, as well as any recommendations for further research.

Before moving into Chapter 2, I did want to state that these past several years have clearly presented educators with a seemingly endless number of critical issues to address. In selecting a topic for study, it's worth noting that I believe race merits our full focus in all the ways we can address it, even when there are other crises at hand as well. When leaders in this country have taken their eyes off the ball on issues of race due to other challenges (such as during the Great Depression and during the major wars of the 20th century) there has always been a decrease in equity, justice and progress. At this time, during this moment, we owe it to our students and ourselves to keep the conversation going in whatever ways we can.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of the Review

The sources researched in this literature review support the study of student media literacy and the influence it can have on the conclusions students draw about race in the United States. Many of the sources will address various forms of literacy, starting more broadly and narrowing the scope as we go. In addition, research is included on the kinds of student engagement addressed in this study.

The research questions, again, are as follows:

- In what ways do media literacy tools, implemented in a process of student-centered inquiry, influence the conclusions that secondary-school students make about race in the U.S.?
- In what ways do differing media source materials influence secondary-school students' conclusions about race in the United States, when controlling for bias?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources, and why?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary among students who enter the study with different pre-existing perspectives on race, and why?

Literacy

From the moment they enter school, students begin developing their various literacies. To become literate is to do more than learn how to read and write; it is to gain "knowledge of or training in a particular subject or area of activity" (Dennis, 2004, p. 203). Literacy "comprises gaining competencies involved in effectively learning and using socially constructed forms of

communication and representation" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 369). Literacy is "a collection of communicative and sociocultural practices shared among communities" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2019, para. 2). The kinds of literacies we engage in "evolve and shift" depending on the cultural and social changes we experience (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 5). In recent years, we have added phrases such as "financial literacy," "technological literacy" and "environmental literacy" to our cultural lexicon based on societal developments and needs. For this reason, the American Library Association's Committee on Literacy developed the following definition in 2016: "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society." (American Library Association, 2022, para. 2). To be literate means to comprehend and engage with certain aspects of life that we view as vital to our participation in the world (Apkon, 2013, p. 37). Literacy includes language and form, but it also expands to whatever the "text of the moment" or "prevailing mode of expression" is for a society and its needs (Apkon, 2013, p. 38). Effective literacy requires four basic roles: for the learner to "break the code" of the context or subject at hand; for the learner to "participate in understanding and composing" for that subject; for the learner to "use texts functionally" within that topic; and for the learner to "critically analyze and transform texts" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 9)

Media Literacy

Throughout 21st-century education research and pedagogy, media literacy has surfaced repeatedly as an essential component of teaching and learning. Researchers have argued for a "reconstruction of education" that creates the space for students to "discern the nature and effects

of media culture" by developing their ability "to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, to use media intelligently, and to construct alternative media" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 4). The "central assumption" in media literacy programs has been that "all students need media literacy to cope effectively in an information-dense society," but that many corners of our educational networks lack a commitment to a "systematic understanding of media in all their forms" (Dennis, 2004, p. 205). The classroom has often been a place for studying the school-based curriculum, but media literacy expands into the "societal curriculum," where media messages "serve as pervasive, relentless, lifelong educators" that are shaping our beliefs, attitudes, values, perception and knowledge (Yosso, 2002, p. 52).

National media literacy organizations have provided some structure in the teaching of this discipline. First, the Center for Media Literacy has identified five key words for media literacy: "Authorship (or constructedness), format, audience, content (or message), and purpose (or motive)" (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, CML's Five Key Words section). In addition, the center has established five media literacy process skills: "Access, analyze, evaluate, participate, and create" (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, Media Literacy Process Skills section). Another researcher identified a slightly different media literacy skill list: "Access, analyze & evaluate, create, reflect, and act" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 19). The Center for Media Literacy also has established five key questions and five core concepts for media literacy; they go hand in hand, and are listed side by side below:

1. Who created this message? / All media messages are constructed.
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? / Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

3. How might different people understand this message differently? / Different people experience the same media message differently.

4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? / Media have embedded values and points of view.

5. Why is this message being sent? / Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, CML's Five Core Concepts and Key Questions section)

In his media literacy guide to political campaigns and political advertising, media literacy educator and author Frank W. Baker broke the media literacy concepts and questions down in more detail:

- Industry: Who's in charge?
  What do they want of me, and why?
  What else do they want?
  How do I know?
- Product: What kind of text is this?
  Are conventions followed or broken?
  How is this message constructed?
  How do I know?
- Audience: Who is this intended for?
  What assumptions does the text make about the audience?
  Who am I supposed to be in relation to this text?
  How do I know?
- Values: How real is this text?
  How/where do I find the meaning?
  What values are presented?
  What is the commercial message?
  What is the ideology of this text?
  What social/artistic/political messages does the text contain?
  How do I know?
- Predisposition: Do I agree with (assent to) this text's message?
  Do I disagree with (resist) this text's message?
  Do I argue/negotiate with the message of this text?
  How do I know?
- Perception: How does the text fit my personal values/beliefs/ideology?
  How does the text relate to my personal needs/hopes/fears/experiences?

How do I know?

- Skills: What skills do I need to apply to this text?
  How do I deconstruct/reconstruct this text?
  What new skills does this text demand of me?
  How do I know?
- Receiver: What does all this mean in the end?
  How do I know? (Baker, 2009, pp. 6-7)

The National Association for Media Literacy Education has provided several core principles of media literacy education in the United States. They are listed below:

- Media Literacy Education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create;
- Media Literacy Education expands the concept of literacy to include all forms of media (i.e., reading and writing);
- Media Literacy Education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice;
- Media Literacy Education develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society;
- Media Literacy Education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization;
- Media Literacy Education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages. (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2007, pp. 3-5)

In sum, these media literacy questions, concepts and principles are designed to help a student understand how forms of media work, how they make meaning, how they organize themselves, and how they can be used wisely. "The media-literate person is proficient in describing the role media plays in her life, she can distinguish the basic conventions of various media, and she enjoys her use of media with mature awareness" (De Abreu, 2019, p. 104)

Media literacy instructional materials have grown in number during the past decade, with many offering teachers guidelines for navigating this field. Teachers are encouraged to take some of the following steps in their instruction:

- Help students to seek out various sources of information, and to ask questions of all forms of media;
- Use multiple forms of media, featuring various points of view;
- Avoid making declarations about what the teacher thinks is true;

- Encourage students to engage with media through their own experiences, and to focus on the media source's significance, rather than whether it's "good" or "bad";
- Require students to engage in rich readings of media texts, justify their opinions with evidence, and move beyond anger and cynicism about media, and toward reflection and action;
- Consider the ways in which media structures (such as ownership, sponsorship and distribution) affect the meaning-making process; and
- Ask these questions while both using and making media. (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012, pp. 217-218)

Many educators propose media literacy as a means toward helping students deepen their inquiry, expression and citizenship (De Abreu, 2019, p. xiii). Critical thinking is an essential component of media literacy, with educators encouraging an "active involvement" with the ways in which "we perceive, discuss or consider the media we consume and use" (De Abreu, 2019, p. 3). The questions and concepts listed above focus largely on analysis skills in relation to media content. "As pupils increase their experience with media literacy they will demonstrate greater capability in media analysis and critical thinking skills" (Feuerstein, 1999, p. 52).

This critical thinking also must consist of tools for comprehension, rather than a mere dictation of the comprehension itself. "Media literacy is about teaching *how* to think, not *what* to think" (De Abreu, 2019, p. 31). Researchers have found a statistical association between student engagement in media literacy and students' civic engagement (Martens & Hobbs, 2015, p. 133). This supports the development of students who can "ask good questions, seek out information on relevant issues, evaluate the quality of information available, and engage in dialogue with others to form coalitions" (Martens & Hobbs, 2015, 122).

Student-Centered Inquiry

This focus on how to think rather than what to think is the focus of student-centered inquiry, in which students work together to examine the curriculum through a "pedagogy of inquiry" (Hobbs, 1998, p. 27). This is grounded in the concept of systematic information

processing, in which students put in great cognitive effort in trying to comprehend, evaluate and assess the arguments in a message (Chaiken, 1980, p. 752). In contrast, heuristic processing sees students put little effort into judging how valid a message is (Chaiken, 1980, p. 752). In systematic learning, learners "spent more time reading the message, more time thinking about the argument … and had more message-oriented thoughts" (Chaiken, 1980, p. 762). In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire compared the more passive heuristic approach to the "banking" concept of education, in which "education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In extending this metaphor, Freire describes teachers who issue commands and make "deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In contrast, a scenario in which students are "co-investigators in dialogue with a teacher" allows for an "emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality," as opposed to a "submersion of consciousness" (Freire, 1970, p. 81). Freire advises teachers to view themselves not as teachers but as "teacher learners" (Freire, 1985, p. 16). In the classroom, students and teachers can work together on reading words in order to read the world, and on allowing the learning to come "from the kids' ideas and not from the teacher's reading book" (Freire, 1985, p. 19).

Freire's words, when echoed today, still constitute a "radical act" of shifting our schooling away from providing answers and more "toward the analysis and creation of messages" and of "asking questions" (Hobbs, 1998, p. 27). When addressing controversial topics, this approach can be even more valuable, for when teachers facilitate instead of instruct they increase the likelihood "that students will view the discussions as their own forum" (Hess, 2009, p. 75).

When the National Council for the Social Studies issued a position statement on media literacy in 2016, it was as much a statement on student-centered inquiry as it was on the topic at hand. The NCSS wrote that 21st-century changes in technology and communication have "necessitated a change in … pedagogical orientation," in which the focus had shifted "more on teaching students to analyze and evaluate information rather than to remember it" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2016, p. 183). The NCSS stated that this involved a move "to teaching critical thinking skills, including the abilities to ask key questions, compare competing claims, assess credibility, and reflect on one's own process of reasoning" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2016, p. 183). The NCSS statement added that 21st-century social studies requires a media literacy lens on history, economics and civics, expanding traditional literacy concepts "to include the forms of communication that dominate the lives of our students" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2016, p. 183). Once more, though, this statement returns to the *how* behind media literacy instruction: a "more inquiry-based and constructivist" approach that emphasizes "the teaching of critical thinking using texts" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2016, p. 183). As the NCSS described media literacy instruction, it was as though Freire – who had passed away nearly 20 years earlier – was dictating the language to connect this field to dismantling the banking concept of education.

The National Council of Teachers of English has been studying media literacy since 1970, when the NCTE issued a resolution promising to "explore more vigorously the relationship of the learning and teaching of media literacy to other concerns of English instruction" (National Council of Teachers of English, 1970, para. 2). Fifty-two years later, the NCTE released its latest position statement revision on media education, emphasizing that English teachers have a "professional responsibility" to prepare students for "work, life, and citizenship," which requires

the incorporation of media education (National Council of Teachers of English, 2022, para. 8). The NCTE went as far as stating that "the time has come to decenter book reading and essay writing as the pinnacles of English language arts education" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2022, para. 12). The organization promoted more "student-initiated conversations" related to the "media texts of everyday life," in order to "generate critical thinking and rich inquiry on big topics," thus inviting students in "as co-creators of the curriculum by acknowledging their unique lived experience, pleasures, and preferences in the selection of texts and learning activities" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2022, paras. 27, 29).

Critical Media Literacy

Social studies and English are not the only disciplines engaged in media literacy; many educators, in fact, have urged that media literacy instruction take place across disciplines (Share et al., 2019, p. 5). Whatever the discipline, some scholars have argued that standard media literacy sells itself short by focusing on media analysis without a social component. Media literacy scholar Renee Hobbs presents this as one of the seven "great debates" in media literacy, posing the question as such: "Should media literacy have a more explicit political and ideological agenda?" (Hobbs, 1998, p. 22). In the quarter-century since Hobbs posed this question, many scholars have answered that question in the affirmative. They have argued that standard media literacy sources "reflect a significant blind spot in the field as a whole; they lack an intentional and explicit integration of a justice, identity politics or antiracist frame" (Trope et al., 2021, p. 45).

This argument calls for a more critical approach to media literacy beyond those presented in the Center for Media Literacy's third and fourth key questions ("How might different people understand this message differently? What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented

in, or omitted from, this message?") (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, Five Key Questions section). Critical media literacy is designed to "critically use media, technology, and popular culture for social and environmental justice" (Share et. al., 2019, p. 5). Critical media literacy has been defined as "a progressive educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies and also deepens literacy education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information, and power" (Garcia et al., 2013, p. 111). The field keeps its focus on analyzing media representation and voice, particularly of historically disenfranchised groups (Trope et al., 2021, p. 45). Critical media literacy emphasizes "the struggle for social and educational justice," with the goal of encouraging students to consider the role that media play in "shaping social thought" (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139). This approach posits that students who can "contextualize the social, economic and historical conditions in which media messages are created and circulated" can gain increased awareness "of the social, political, and economic contexts in which such texts are produced and disseminated" (Bergstrom et al., 2018, pp. 115-116).

The critical media literacy approach takes its cues in many ways from Paulo Freire, who theorized that the "pedagogy of the oppressed" was a means for discovering that the oppressed and oppressors in society were both "manifestations of dehumanization" (Freire, 1970, p. 48). When the majority of a society is denied its right "to participate in history as subjects … they become dominated and alienated" (Freire, 1970, p. 130). The solution to this state was for the oppressed to shed light on this oppression and commit to "its transformation" (Freire, 1970, p. 48). This transformation takes away the oppressors' power to dominate, which leads both to the liberation of the oppressed and the restored humanity of the oppressors (Freire, 1970, p. 56). All of this takes place under the process of Conscientização, a term Freire uses to describe the

process of learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970, pp. 35-36).

Freire would note that those who consider concepts like Critical Race Theory to be indoctrination are neglecting the vast history of education, in which students have instead been indoctrinated to accept systems of oppression (Freire, 1970, p. 78). Critical media literacy scholars argue that media messages "create specific identities through repetition of depictions associated with particular identities, which then become part of a society's social norm" (Erba et al., 2019, p. 5). If these messages are presented with the intent of maintaining systems of power and control, and of domination and subordination, then students need tools to "challenge assumptions and recognize structures of power and control" (Joanou, 2017, p. 41). Critical media literacy scholars Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share argue that teachers have a responsibility to "make visible the power structure of knowledge and how it benefits some more than others" (Kellner & Share, 2005, pp. 370-371). They argue that students have a right to ask questions of their media such as "Whose voice is heard? Who is silenced? Whose reality is presented? Whose reality is ignored? Who is advantaged? Who is disadvantaged?" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14). The argument that "education is by its very nature a political act" supports the study of power structures, social strata, and dominant ideologies (Garcia et al., 2013, p. 111).

Critical media literacy has been described as a form of "intellectual self-defense" for those whose stories are not being presented in media (Torres & Mercado, 2006, p. 279). Indeed, the idea of critical media literacy as counter-narrative presents this approach as a means for all students to reflect their own realities and to challenge society's dominant media narratives (Share et al., 2019, p. 17). This "counter-storytelling" can give students an entry point toward critically examining their own beliefs and exploring how they engage with the media, exploring the "often

untold stories" in the world around them (Riley et al., 2021, pp. 133-134). This development of "multiple perspectives on issues and phenomena that appear as common sense" offer us the chance to understand phenomena from the standpoint of marginalized groups (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 11).

Critical media literacy scholars also argue that this field is an essential component for citizenship, as it supports democratization, participation, self-expression, and social progress (Kellner & Share, 2005, pp. 372-373). The disruption of normalized knowledge structures offers students the kind of agency and activism that allows for greater civic engagement with societal issues (Marlatt, 2020, p. 94). The Critical Media Project, an educational resource for educators and students, identifies itself as sitting "precisely at the juncture of social justice and media literacy" (Trope et al., 2021, p. 45). The project and website engage in the areas of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, religion, ability, and age (Trope et al., 2021, p. 47). Initiatives such as this are designed to help students connect media with civic engagement and social justice (Trope et al., 2021, p. 50). As students engage with critical media literacy, they explore the question of who in society gets to tell their stories (Share et al., 2019, p. 19). Critical media literacy presents the idea "that no media message is neutral" and therefore all media messages must be examined critically for essential and responsible "participation in civic life" (Bass et al., 2022, p. 85).

Critical Race Media Literacy

Critical media literacy's exploration of representation in media has paved the way for the field to broaden to individual social groups. Critical race media literacy has been defined as media literacy that "(a) focuses on race, (b) challenges deficit or negative stereotypical racial representations, and (c) promotes critical social consciousness among students" (Agodzo, 2016,

p. 27). Like critical media literacy, it examines media stereotypes and representations of those who are marginalized, underrepresented and oppressed (Murray-Everett & Harrison, 2021, p. 3). Unlike critical media literacy, it focuses specifically on race, inviting educators to engage with students about media "in order to examine problematic representations of race/ism and people of color" (Hawkman & Shear, 2020, p. 2).

Critical race media literacy posits that media are "shaped by a set of rules grounded in whiteness," which lead to misrepresentations and misunderstandings with regard to identity (Hawkman & Shear, 2020, p. 2). Some scholars argue that mainstream media reinforces "white supremacy, which leads to anti-blackness" (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, p. 132). Some findings suggest that a single media literacy intervention in which students are asked to identify and deconstruct racial stereotypes can serve to enhance students' degree of positive attitudes "toward Blacks and Latinos" (Erba et al., 2019, p. 16). Critical race media literacy, also called "anti-racist media education" by some scholars, has the same elements as media literacy and critical media literacy – student-centered inquiry, critical thinking, student voice, student empowerment, and diverse points of view – but with the additional goal of helping students of color "feel safe, comfortable, and accepted in the classroom" (Romero Walker, 2021, p. 92). Noted critical race media literacy scholar Tara J. Yosso identifies three future directions for critical race media literacy: "the intentionality of racial imagery, and recognition of media as pedagogy; the role of history and the continuities of racial scripts applied against different groups; and contestations of majoritarian narratives across generations" (Yosso, 2020, pp. 7-8). Yosso, who has studied the impact of critical race media literacy curricula on Chicana/o students, argues that "critical media literacy must be centered on the lived experiences of People of Color" in order to challenge dominant deficit discourses in society (Yosso, 2002, p. 60).

Different forms of critical media literacy can expand exponentially from here, each focusing on a specific area of representation. Anticolonial media literacy, for example, supports the critical reading and countering of Eurocentric and colonizing texts and discourse (Cordes & Sabzalian, 2020, p. 184). This form of media literacy encourages students to recognize and deconstruct dehumanizing messages through an exploration of media and societal power structures. Critical media ecoliteracy, as another example, supports the critical reading of media messages related to the environment and social justice (Bass et al., 2022, p. 90). Some view these as natural extensions, in that critical race media literacy offers a lens "through which teachers and students can confront racist, colonial, classist, ableist, and heteronormative representations in media" and can examine, interrogate and "navigate the complexities of representation" in all of those messages (Hawkman & Shear, 2020, p. 2).

Visual Literacy

Visual literacy is an often-overlooked aspect of media literacy, but it plays a major role in how we analyze messages and it also plays a significant role in this study. In short, visual literacy is the ability to read, write and create visual images (Romero Walker, 2021, p. 243). To be more precise, visual literacy promotes the idea that comprehending what we see in media such as photos, videos and movies are as vital a skill as reading written sentences, for this skill allows us to "interpret the visible actions, objects … and symbols" we encounter (Apkon, 2013, p. 32). Some categorize media as either "hot" or "cool," meaning that "hot media" invite a more passive response since they feature more sensory information, while "cool media" require more cognitive participation because there is less sensory information provided (Apkon, 2013, p. 34). Visual literacy recognizes that the "hot" components to most visual media do not let viewers off the hook. In reality, we process images very quickly in the brain, which means that images

impact us more quickly than words do (Apkon, 2013, pp. 75-76). However, studies suggest that we process visual messages better when those images are tied to narratives, as "we're hardwired to want to learn about the world in the form of stories" (Apkon, 2013, pp. 85-86). This makes visual literacy far more challenging than it might seem at first, as it asks us to navigate these dueling instincts of responding quickly and more passively to visual messages, yet also seeking out story connections to the visuals. "Visual media are redefining what it means to develop the tools of literacy to understand a changing world" (Apkon, 2013, p. 9). The idea of visual literacy as a "primary text" (Apkon, 2013, p. 249) is central to the argument that schools include more visual literacy in instruction and learning, to prepare learners for the varied message interpretations they will encounter day after day. "It is vital that students learn how to read, engage with, and analyze images that they see to recognize how ideologies find their way into, and are represented through, images" (Romero Walker, 2021, p. 243).

Racial Literacy

The media messages presented to students in this study connect directly to race, as I am gauging the degree to which the messages influence students' levels of racial literacy. Racial literacy is defined as "an understanding of the powerful and complex ways in which race influences the social, economic, political, and educational experiences of individuals and groups" (Skerrett, 2011, p. 314). Racial literacy focuses on the relationship between race and power, and it explores the interactions between race and other areas such as class, gender, and geography (Guinier, 2004, p. 115). Racial literacy focuses on "learning rather than knowing," and is an "interactive process" in which race is a tool for "diagnosis, feedback, and assessment" as part of a "dynamic framework for understanding American racism" (Guinier, 2004, pp. 114-115). A person versed in racial literacy is able to explore the psychological, interpersonal, and structural

dimensions of race, and is able to examine institutional and environmental factors as well (Skerrett, 2011, p. 314). Racial literacy asks participants to listen, appreciate different experiences, ask questions, view race through a critical lens, and talk about race, even when the conversations are awkward or difficult (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014, p. 84). The racially literate individual situates debates about race in a democratic context, and looks to problem-solving as a community responsibility (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014, p. 84).

In schools, the conversations teachers have with students about difference, race, and racism are essential components of racial literacy instruction (Skerrett, 2011, p. 323). In a study featuring three 11th-grade students engaged in small-group discussions about race, Vetter and Hungerford-Kressor found that racial literacy dialogue engaged students in social justice as it helped them think about the social, cultural and political aspects of their experiences with regard to race (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014, p. 83). A lack of such dialogue, the authors write, "leaves assumptions unexamined" (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014, p. 83). The authors argue that racial literacy "is something that students must practice through constant conversation" in order to build the social justice capacity of their schools" (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014, p. 97). In schools, teachers who have used a "sustained and strategic" approach to racial literacy instruction were able to make race a "diagnostic tool" to guide their "curriculum and instructional philosophies and practices" (Skerrett, 2011, p. 324).

Racial literacy can be supported through the tools of media literacy. There is evidence that "media literacy education can promote an understanding of the systemic and structural conditions that shape racial conditions in society" (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015, p. 178). Research indicates that students as young as 12 can recognize the limits in media treatment of race and ethnicity and the harm that this can bring to members of such groups, while also

recognizing white individuals' perceptions and interactions with these groups (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015, p. 183). This suggests that media literacy efforts with young people can help address prejudice and racial bias and promote more appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015, p. 183). With sufficient professional development, teachers can provide a "unified discourse" for students as they engage in racial literacy, supporting "a culture where teachers and students feel empowered to develop the knowledge and skills to talk, teach, and learn about race" (Skerrett, 2011, pp. 327-328).

Student Engagement with Media Literacy

The research on media literacy, visual literacy, and racial literacy continues to grow, with many papers focusing on theoretical and pedagogical grounds. There are numerous studies and books about the values of media literacy, critical media literacy, and critical race media literacy, and racial literacy. At the same time, there are also many studies addressing student engagement with media literacy. In a 2003 study that identified itself as "the first large-scale empirical work measuring the acquisition of media-literacy skills in the United States," the researchers measured student comprehension and message-analysis skills in response to a print newsmagazine article, an audio news commentary, and a television news segment (Hobbs & Frost, 2003, pp. 340, 352). The study found "suggestive evidence that incorporating the analysis of media messages into the English language arts curriculum at the high school level can enhance literacy skills development" (Hobbs & Frost, 2003, p. 352). In another study, researchers were invited to collect survey data from a high school that had implemented a new media literacy program in 2009. This study developed the following findings: Differences in students' media literacy skills were associated with students' academic levels; student media literacy skills were associated with civic engagement; and, in general, media literacy programs showed "the potential to support

the development of news analysis skills, built background knowledge of media institutions, audiences, messages and effects" (Martens & Hobbs, 2015, pp. 130-133). Another study found that a media literacy program for students showed stronger student gains in media analysis, overall analysis and critical thinking (Feuerstein, 1999, p. 52). One study found that student engagement and student media literacy were strengthened when the teacher used multiple pedagogies, which in this case included lectures, small- and large-group discussions, videos, and other practices (Brooks & Ward, 2007, pp. 244, 252). Another study found that students gained a deeper understanding of media's role in their lives when offered holistic media literacy education (Duran et al., 2008 p. 66). A meta-analysis of media literacy interventions found that these interventions were "generally effective," although they appear to have a stronger impact on inducing critical thinking about media than on inducing behavioral or attitudinal change. The study also found that these interventions are more likely to succeed when reinforced through multiple sessions, but with fewer components to avoid information overload (Jeong et al., 2012, pp. 464-465).

Some studies have explored a specific area of media literacy in the classroom. One focused on digital media literacy in a sports, popular culture, and literature course at the high school level and found that these "non-traditional" areas of literacy could actually support overall advancement in student literacy levels (Fortuna, 2015, pp. 87-88). Another studied middle-school students' exploration of political memes and found that critical media literacy skills could be introduced effectively through this entry point, particularly in the areas of false binaries, sociopolitical discourse, group identities, and the strategies behind visual arrangements (Elmore & Coleman, 2019, pp. 35, 39). An influential study presented community college students of Chicana/o descent with film stereotypes of Chicanas/os as well as lessons featuring

the historical context of Chicana/o stereotypes in media. The study found that students shifted from desensitization to anger upon gaining this historical context, and they expressed a desire to use media to tell their own stories (Yosso, 2002, pp. 56, 58).

Other studies also have examined the interaction of media literacy on student behavior patterns. One study found that when students were given a media literacy intervention designed to reduce the negative effects of media violence, those who engaged in a cognitive activity afterward (writing a reflection paragraph and reading it aloud while being videotaped) showed a reduced willingness to use aggression. However, those who did not receive the cognitive activity reported being more likely to use aggression after the media literacy lesson (Byrne, 2009, p. 11). Another study found that a media literacy program stimulated students' critical thinking about media violence (Scharrer, 2006, p. 81). On the topic of body image, another study found that even a simple media literacy intervention can effectively help women think more critically about media images that reflect a thin ideal of beauty (Irving & Berel, 2001, pp. 109-110). On the topic of sex, another study found that a peer-led program using media literacy to present information on abstinence and sexual health had a strong influence on students. The results suggest that students respond positively to "a less-idealized and more fact-based understanding of how media operate and the ways in which media outlets use sex and sexual imagery to promote their own ends" (Pinkleton et al., 2008, p. 469).

Some studies have explored the interaction between media consumption and family impact. A 1994 study found that while perceptions of alcohol use on TV exert "a powerful effect on expectancies and intentions for drinking among early drinkers or children of pre-drinking age," children also make "selective use" of information gathered from both TV and home in determining their intentions to drink. The authors concluded that "children interpreting messages

seen on television do so by looking at real life" (Austin & Meili, 1994, pp. 428, 430). A more recent study looked at the degree to which entertainment media, in this case the superhero films *Black Panther* and *Wonder Woman*, can support important conversations between parents and their children about issues of race and gender. The study also explored the ways in which the racial and gender identification of parents, and the media literacy skills of parents, are related to conversations about such films (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2022, p. 1). The authors found that parental race was related to a likelihood of having conversations about race with children only after seeing *Black Panther*, and Black parents were more likely than white parents to recall discussing race after the movie. No significant results for either film were found for parental gender (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2022, p. 8). Another key finding from this study was that related to media literacy: A significant correlation was found between parental media literacy scores and their active discussions with children about the films, no matter the race or gender of the parent. The authors found that "media literacy, to some degree, enables parents to discuss issues of race and gender with their children through media they consume together" (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2022, pp. 8, 10)

Some studies also have explored the intersection of media literacy and racial literacy. One study found that while media literacy seems to "enhance students' attitudes toward Blacks and Latinos," these more favorable racial attitudes remained in place much longer when students engaged in identifying and deconstructing stereotypes than when they analyzed and thought about critical media literacy (Erba et al., 2019, p. 13). In a college course on race, gender and class in media, students grew more confident in critiquing the accuracy of reporting on and describing minority groups, and gained increased awareness and sensitivity "to the too-often inhumane depictions of minority groups" (Jones, 2011, p. 63).

Summary

This literature review examined the many different areas of research that provide a sturdy background for a study of media literacy's influence on racial literacy. The chapter looked at the concept of literacy itself; the basics of media literacy; the process of student-centered inquiry; the fields of critical media literacy and critical race media literacy; the concept of visual literacy; the key components of racial literacy; and the various studies exploring student engagement with media literacy. This review shows clearly that media literacy has grown in scope and purpose, and has the capacity to address any social issue under the sun.

While the studies addressed in this chapter are essential components to the growing field of media literacy research, there also is room for much more. In particular, there is room for research addressing the ways in which students respond to varied sources of media. Some such studies might expose students to sources with varied degrees of bias, while others might focus on different types of rhetoric, and still others might focus on different types of media sources. There is also room for much more research on how media literacy supports student engagement with controversial issues. How does a media literacy approach influence the reflection, critical thinking and overall discourse on topics that have divided so many humans? In terms of race, there is a need for much more information on how engagement with media literacy influences a student's racial literacy. Media sources on race are abundant, but there is a need for more research on the varied meanings students make about race while interacting with different forms of media. This requires time spent in the classroom, engaging with students in an exploration of media sources about race.

Chapter 3 will outline the methods developed in this study for secondary-school students to interact with media literacy tools and various media sources while exploring racial literacy. This involved multiple visits to middle-school classrooms, and plenty of dialogue with students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Review of Research Purpose and Research Questions

The methods used in this phenomenological study were designed to shed light on the ways in which student media literacy influences the conclusions students draw about race in the United States. Media literacy pedagogy is not widespread in our schools, and we as educators have much to gain from studying the ways in which media literacy can influence the decisions students make about difficult topics. In this case, the use of media literacy was designed to assess student engagement with their own racial literacy.

The research questions, again, are as follows:

- In what ways do media literacy tools, implemented in a process of student-centered inquiry, influence the conclusions that secondary-school students make about race in the U.S.?
- In what ways do differing media source materials influence secondary-school students' conclusions about race in the United States, when controlling for bias?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources, and why?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary among students who enter the study with different pre-existing perspectives on race, and why?

Research Design and Rationale

The overall research design involved interviewing two groups of secondary-school students over several sessions, presenting them with various media sources related to race, and asking them to use established media literacy questions to study the sources and respond to them

in the context of student-centered inquiry. I used discourse analysis to gather data from these students, in order to allow them the space to communicate their thoughts in a variety of ways. I gathered and prepared sources ahead of time and controlled all sources for bias. While bias is definitely an aspect of media literacy, it is not the focus of this study. This study is more interested in the process of media literacy itself and the influence that different primary and secondary sources have on student thought.

Participants and Sampling

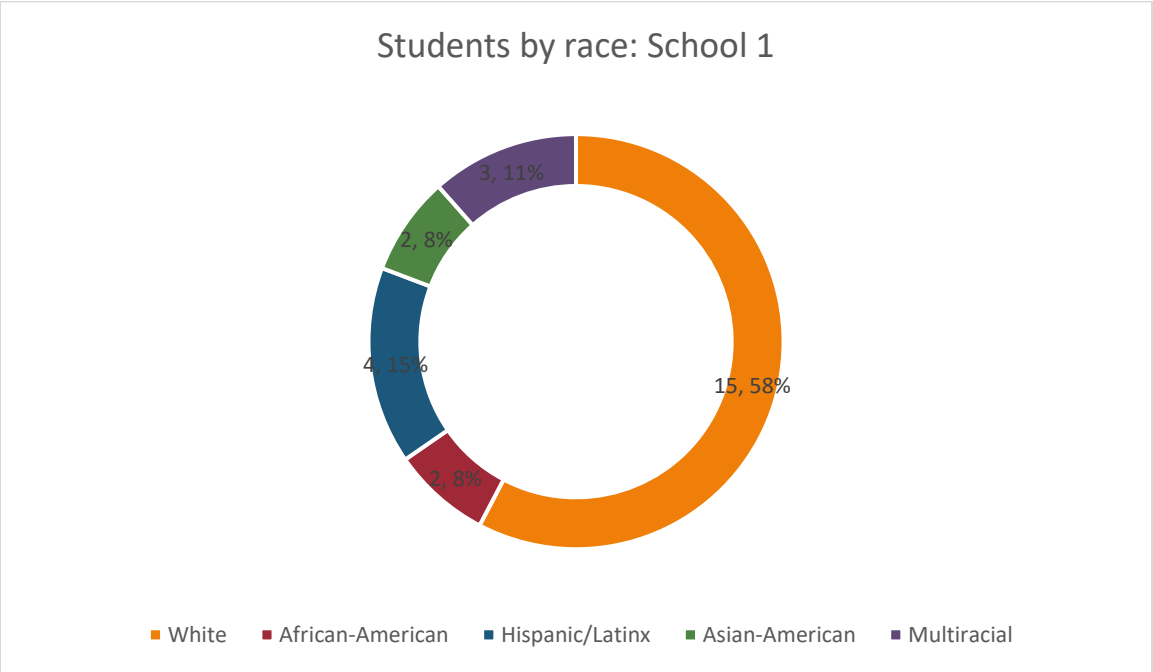
I visited two eighth-grade classes in the northern half of New Jersey – one from a more economically advantaged suburban charter school, and one from a more economically disadvantaged urban charter school. I wrote to the boards of education for both schools to obtain tentative approval, then submitted an application to the Seton Hall Institutional Review Board (IRB). After obtaining IRB approval, I submitted an introductory letter and a "parent consent with child assent" form to each school. When the schools were ready for me to visit, I conferred with the classroom teachers via phone, video chat and email to ensure that I knew more about each classroom community and about the differences among students in terms of overall learning styles and English-language-learning levels. This allowed me to ensure that my presentation of material was differentiated so that all students felt comfortable engaging with it in our work together. Teachers arranged for those students whose parents had not consented to their students taking part in this work to join other grade-level students in another classroom during my visits.

The two differing schools offered the potential for more variety in pre-existing perspectives on the topic at hand. The more economically advantaged group, which I will identify in this dissertation as "School 1," consisted of between 26-28 eighth-graders (depending on attendance each week) from a school featuring 46 percent white students and 54 percent

students of color, with less than 15 percent students of economic disadvantage. The racial breakdown of the eighth-grade group I interviewed was as follows:

Figure 1

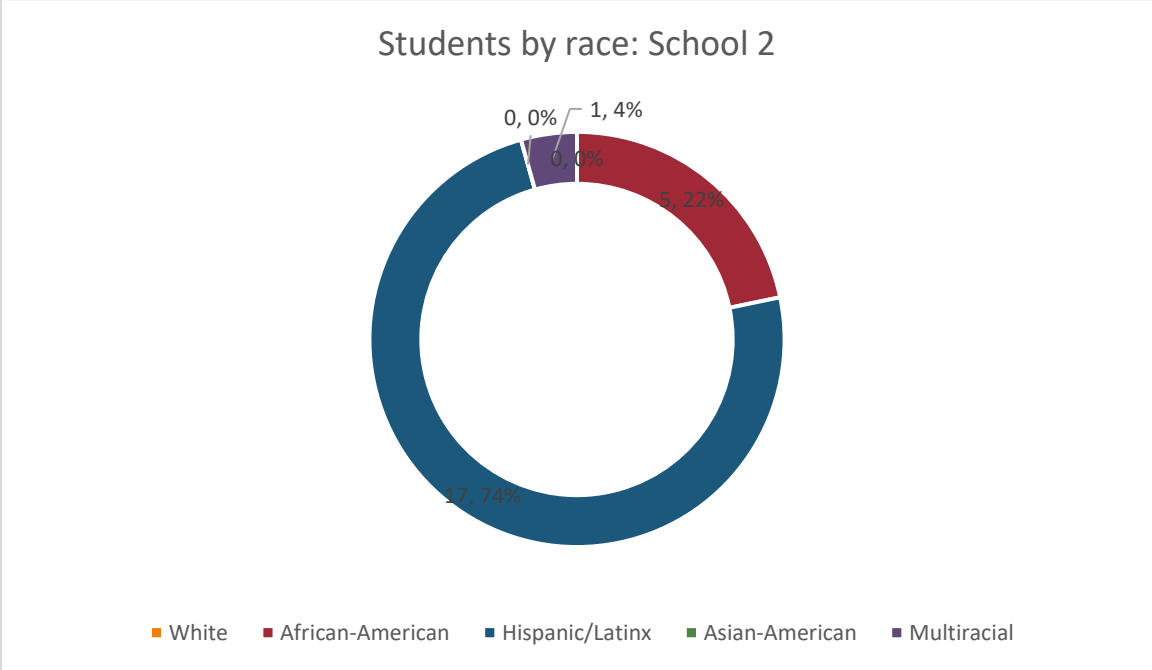
Students by Race: School 1



The more economically disadvantaged group, which I will identify in the dissertation as "School 2," consisted of between 20-22 eighth-graders (depending on attendance each week) from a school featuring less than 1 percent white students and more than 99 percent students of color, with more than 63 percent students of economic disadvantage. The racial breakdown of the eighth-grade group I interviewed was as follows:

Figure 2

Students by Race: School 2



The selection of eighth-grade students held the promise of assessing students who have the critical thinking skills of adolescents, but also the "blank slate" approach of students who have not been through the more rigorous curricula of high schools. I presented the material and conducted the research, and did not ask for teachers in the school to do any of the work for me, other than posting surveys and links on Google Classroom. Of course, the teachers of these social studies classes were present while I was in the classroom and were very supportive of the research. Overall, I wanted to control the messaging as much as possible to support more consistency in the data collected from students.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout this work, I followed the guidelines provided by Seton Hall regarding research conducted on human subjects. After a successful dissertation proposal, I completed all of the required paperwork for the Seton Hall Institutional Review Board, which was approved.

This included the parental assent with child consent form, which was given to families well in advance of my visits. Early on in process of preparing my research methods, I reviewed the steps with colleagues who provided essential feedback.

I conducted these interviews in districts to which I had no employment connections, so that the students and staff felt no obligations to respond in any specific way. I also presented the material without telegraphing any biases in favor of any expected answers. The triangulation of this study also allowed for students to respond in a number of different ways, thus providing me with checks and balances within the data collected. In addition, the separation of visits over time allowed me to avoid jamming too much material into any one session; instead, I had the time to connect with students and listen to their words.

I also ensured all students that pseudonyms would be used and that their identities would be protected within this dissertation. I offered students the opportunity to choose a pseudonym, and if they chose one that was both appropriate and not connected with any other student's real name at either school, then I used their choice. The remaining pseudonyms were generated by using a list of common baby names from the mom.com website, with students receiving pseudonyms connected with the most popular baby names of 2020.

Positionality

I worked full-time as a newspaper reporter and columnist for five years, then transitioned over to teaching, where I was an English and journalism teacher for 19 years. In so doing, I served as adviser of school newspapers in three different school districts, taught a course on media literacy, and taught four levels of journalism courses. In five years as an administrator, I have led a professional learning community on media literacy, in which teachers designed lesson and unit plans on areas of media literacy for their peers to utilize. I've presented workshops on

media literacy at professional development sessions and have counseled teachers on media literacy. I have surveyed students, parents and staff on media use and media literacy instruction, and have shared the results of these surveys with my school community. Throughout my time as an educator, I have recognized that media literacy is a topic of the utmost importance for all learners and citizens in today's world.

That said, I've avoided any semblance of indoctrination when teaching about this topic. For instance, I often presented students with the Columbia Journalism Review's "Who Owns What" web page, in which they could explore the various media outlets that each media company owns (Columbia Journalism Review, 2022, Who Owns What section). As students learned the sheer size of modern media conglomerates, I did not steer them toward deciding that this was bad or wrong. I simply helped them identify what a company like Walt Disney or Comcast can do with all of those holdings, then asked critical-thinking questions about what this means for each of us. Some of my students left those lessons with a wide-eyed, somewhat angry awakening to the consolidation of media messages; others left with a desire to join that world and add their own input to the work of large media companies. I have had students who found this material to be among the most important things they learned with me; this would not have been possible had I presented the material and told students how to feel about it all.

In this study, I found it equally essential to avoid any semblances of indoctrination. There are questions to which I sought answers, but I could only gain valid student responses by withholding my own particular viewpoints. My goals, therefore, remained focused: I wanted to know if the media literacy process helps students deepen their reflection and critical thinking about essential issues, and I wanted to know whether certain types of sources supported that critical thinking more than others. Beyond that, I was ready for whatever the students gave me.

In choosing to connect media literacy to race, I selected a topic that I do believe is essential for students to discuss openly and thoughtfully. From state to district to school mandates and missions, my job as a public-school educator involves engaging students in discussions on race. As a white male who has never experienced discrimination based on the color of my skin, I have always felt a deep responsibility to deepen my own racial literacy, and to engage in meaningful dialogue and learning about race relations. I aspire to help students build the tools to engage in difficult conversations about topics that have often produced disagreement and divide. "Schools have not just the right, but also the obligation, to create an atmosphere of intellectual and political freedom that uses genuine public controversies to help students discuss and envision political possibilities" (Hess, 2009, p. 6). Of course, one of the most important questions for educators to ask is how we ended up deciding whether an issue is controversial to begin with, and how we defined the criteria to determine that (Hess, 2005, p. 47). In the case of race, I have determined it to be controversial because there are both empirical and policy divisions over this topic (Richardson, 2017-18, pp. 16-17). Specifically, many Americans do not yet agree on how to describe what has happened with regard to race in this country or on what should be done going forward. Studies have found that students find particular engagement and political value in controversial discussions when these discussions take place in heterogeneous classes where students have ideological differences that teachers support through development of classroom discourse (Hess, 2008, p. 134). In this sense, the nationwide divide we see between districts with active diversity initiatives and others with increased restrictions on discussing race does not benefit the growth of students as engaged citizens. While the factors preventing schools from experiencing heterogeneous classrooms make up another dissertation entirely, the need for discussing issues such as this remain present and essential either way.

In my work as a reporter, I was amazed every day by the number of individuals in this world whose stories have never been told in the public sphere. There are so many voices, experiences and perspectives in this world, and to avoid learning more about them is to ignore the opportunities we have to understand and grow from one another. Discussing public controversies helps all of us with our decision-making by "ensuring that multiple and competing views about controversial political issues are aired, fairly considered, and critically evaluated" (Hess, 2009, p. 6).

Data Sources and Data Collection

During my visits, students engaged with several media sources covering two issues related to race (housing and immigration). The study documented the different responses they had for each source. Each of the source materials listed below were used for both race-related topics. They included:

(1) a textbook chapter (print-based media)

(2) a secondary source specific to the issue and grounded in research (print-based media)

(3) an opinion-based source (visual media)

(4) a personal-experience source (visual media)

(5) a hard-data source (print-based and visual media)

These source selections were designed to engage students with the different types of nonfiction media sources they might encounter in learning about a topic such as this. In addition, the portions of each reading, video and interactive source were carefully curated to be age-appropriate for eighth-grade students. *First,* we have the traditional passage in a textbook. *Second,* we have the more in-depth secondary source, which a teacher might bring in as a supplemental text. *Third,* we have a persuasive piece in which someone shares their own point of

view on the topic, taken from social media. *Fourth*, we have a first-person account featuring an individual's experience, presented via video. And *fifth*, we have the numbers. Two of these sources were print, two were visual, and the hard data was a combination of print and visual, but interactive in that students could navigate the source themselves. This allowed students to engage with sources that offered variety in both content and presentation.

The sources selected for each of the two race-related topics were an essential component of this work, as the information gathered hinged on the effectiveness of these source materials. In controlling for bias, this study did not present source materials with differing arguments. The overall material was similar from source to source, each falling in line with the following arguments:

Race and housing: The discriminatory housing policies in 20th-century U.S. real estate helped produce significant wealth disparities between white and Black Americans.

Race and immigration: Past and present U.S. immigration policies often have evolved to exclude individuals considered to be of certain races.

By presenting documents with similar arguments, this study did not ask students to compare the differing biases of various sources. They may very well have noticed biases within the sources they studied, but they were not engaged in a study of ideologies. They focused on the degree to which each source opened up the material for them and engaged them in reflecting, considering, re-considering, and forming opinions on issues of race. The students taking part in this study did not walk away with a deeper awareness of the difference between Fox and MSNBC; instead, they gained a deeper understanding of media literacy tools and of the different ways in which various media sources can open up their minds to thinking more deeply about a vital societal issue such as race.

The sources used in this study are listed and summarized below.

Race and Housing Sources

Textbook: Passage on housing discrimination (Kennedy & Cohen, 2020, pp. 845-850)

Secondary source: Passage from *The Color of Law* on Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans (Rothstein, 2017, pp. 63-66)

Opinion-based source: Instagram video post about redlining (Black Kids Books & Videos, 2022)

Personal-experience source: CBS news interview with the daughter of a couple who were denied housing in Bergen County, N.J. (Dokoupil, 2021)

Hard-data source: Redlined maps from the "Mapping Inequality" project made up of collaborations among the University of Richmond, Virginia Tech, University of Maryland, and Johns Hopkins University (*Mapping Inequality*, 2016)

Race and Immigration Sources

Textbook: Passage on the Chinese Exclusion Act (Henretta et al., 2014, pp. 560-564).

Secondary source: Passage from *America for Americans* on 20th-century immigration policies against Mexican individuals (Lee, 2019, pp. 147-149).

Opinion-based source: Instagram post about racism in U.S. immigration policy (Mic, 2018).

Personal-experience source: Author and activist Jose Antonio Vargas on being Asian and undocumented (Vargas, 2018).

Hard-data source: Interactive data on U.S. immigration from different regions and countries by decade from 1820 to 2013 (Chang, 2017).

I used discourse analysis as a means of collecting the data. Discourse itself is "a regulated system of writing, speaking, and ultimately, producing knowledge about the world" (Brooks & Ward, 2007, p. 256). Discourse analysis involves paying close attention to what students say, how they say it, and in what context (Brooks & Ward, 2007, p, 248). Discourse analysis supports the work of listening to one another more than once and thinking "more deeply about the meanings we give people's words so as to make ourselves better, more humane people and the world a better, more humane place" (Gee, 2005, p. xii). The idea of sustained dialogue posits that thinking with one another instead of apart is "revolutionary" in that "human beings in communion liberate each other" (Freire, 1970, p. 133).

This discourse analysis included varied components for collecting student data. Before any media sources were presented, I administered a pre-survey to learn more about each student's pre-existing perspectives on the topics at hand, while also gathering some demographic information. I also clarified the purpose of this study, and reviewed any pertinent definitions with students. Once we began engaging with sources, I collected information from them through written reflections on the media sources, through small- and large-group discussions, and through exit surveys. After that, I coded and analyzed their responses, then returned with more probing questions for students, conducted through individual interviews and through small- and large-group discussions. I went through this process twice with each group, once for each of the topics. The triangulation inherent within the discourse analysis allowed for cross-checking and corroborating the evidence collected.

I presented the same sources and material to each of the two groups, so that there was no divergence between the two in terms of research material. As for the element of time, there was

obviously a limit to how many visits I could make at each school. In anticipation of such limits, I visited each class six times over the course of six weeks, with each visit covering a specific goal:

(1) Introduce myself, conduct the pre-survey and review definitions;

(2) Engage in discourse analysis on the first topic and sources based on the media literacy-based questions;

(3) Probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis I'd conducted since that last visit;

(4) Engage in discourse analysis on the second topic and sources based on the media literacy-based questions;

(5) Probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis I'd conducted since that last visit;

(6) Gather summative reflections, surveys and interviews.

The pre-survey helped clarify for me the groups of students I was working with in these sessions. The pre-survey is included as Appendix A, and the content is listed below as well.

Table 1

Pre-Survey: Media and Racial Literacy

Pre-Survey: Media and Racial Literacy
Your school: What race/races do you identify with? - White - African-American / Black - Hispanic / Latinx - Asian-American / Pacific Islander - Native American / Alaska Native - Multiracial - Other

(Table 1 cont.)

On the average day, how often do you engage with the following forms of media outside of school homework? (for each form of media, students are asked to check one of the following five choices: Not at all, Less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 4 hours or more) - Book-reading - News-reading - Watching TV shows - Watching YouTube videos - Social media - Music-listening - Watching movies - Video games - Other If you listed "other" above, please explain what it is. What form(s) of media listed above do you wish you used more, and why? Would you say you prefer print media or visual media? Why? What are your initial thoughts about race, racism and the overall impact race has on life in the United States? Where have you learned the most about race during your life so far? What more do you want to learn about race? Why?

The information students gave during this pre-survey provided me with information about their own media use and thoughts about race. In terms of daily media use, the two figures below offer different views of combined trends between students in both schools.

Figure 3

Student Media Use: Both Schools by Time Frame

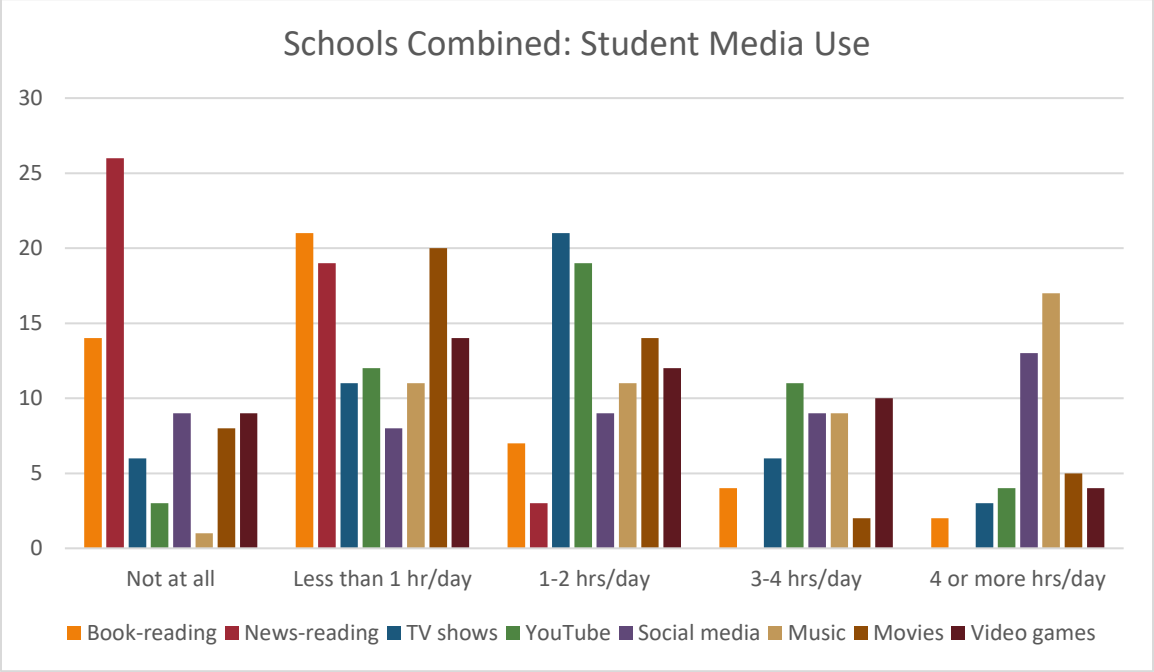
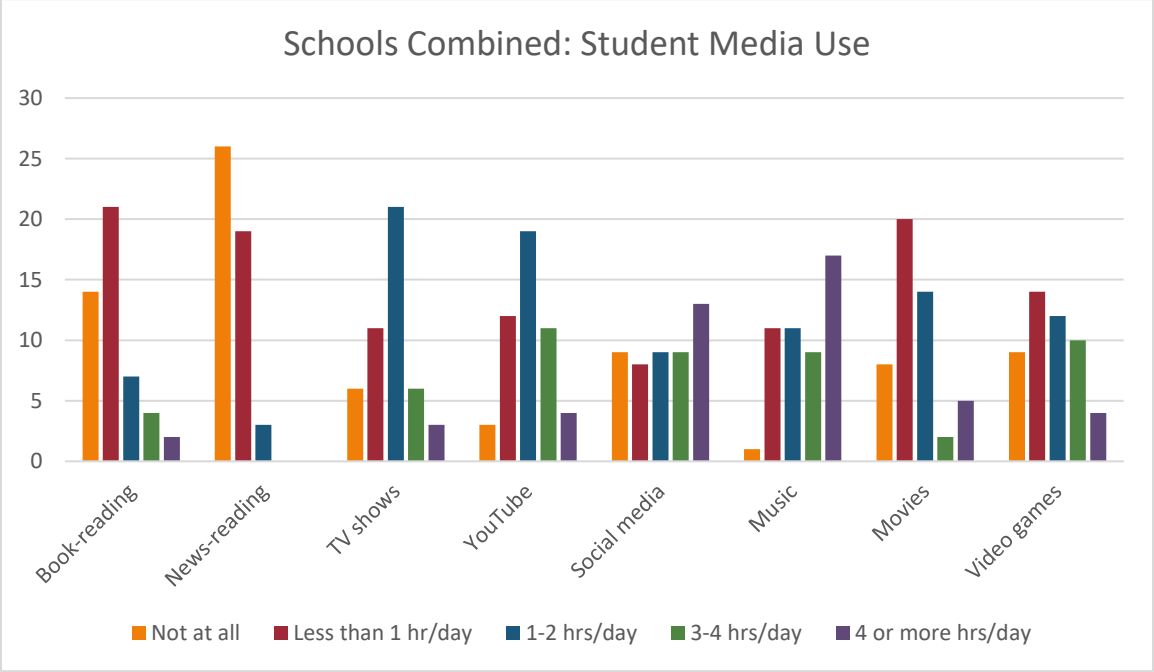


Figure 4

Student Media Use: Both Schools by Form of Media



When viewing Figure 3, we can see that social media and music are the only forms of media that larger numbers of students report using for four hours or more per day. We also can see that YouTube, social media, music and video games have significant numbers of students reporting 3-4 hours of use per day. On the other extreme, we see that book-reading and news-reading have lower numbers of self-reported use than other forms of media. As for Figure 4, we gain another means of seeing that social media and music are the two forms of media for which we see rising numbers as the amount of time per day increases.

Figures 5 and 6 offer a closer look at two ends of this media-use spectrum. Figure 5 shows us that 73 percent of students from both schools combined engage in book-reading for less than one hour per day. Figure 6 shows us that 46 percent of students from both schools engage in social media use for 3 or more hours per day, and 65 percent engage in social media use for 1 or more hour per day.

Figure 5

Book-reading: Both Schools Combined

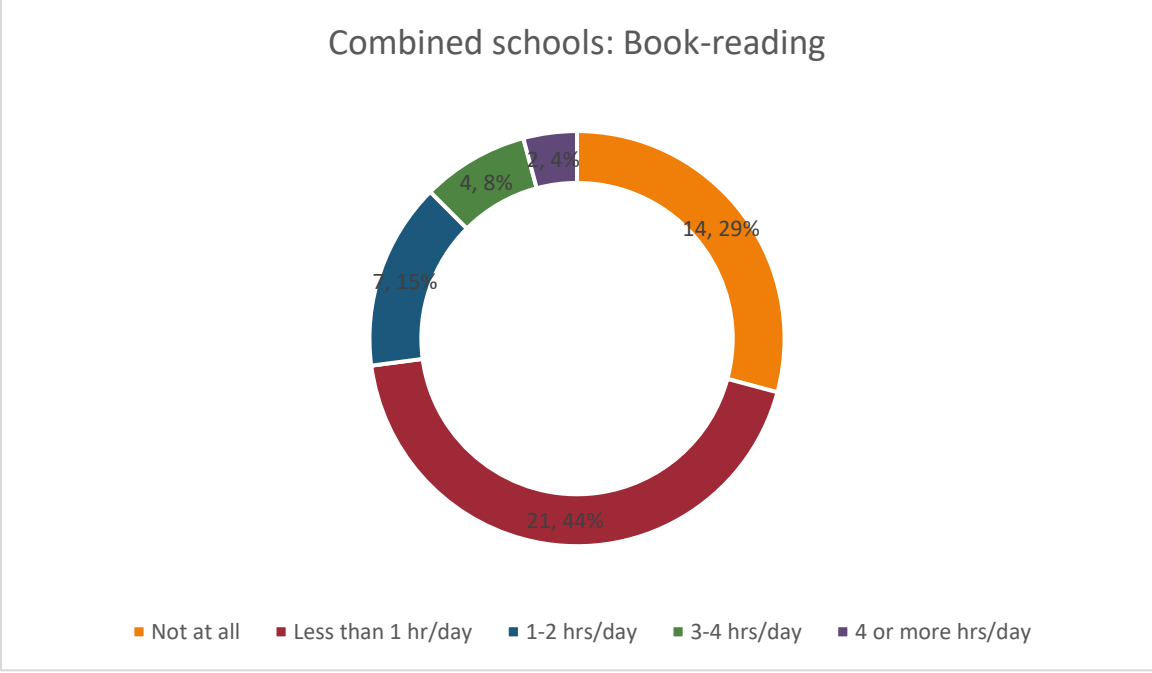
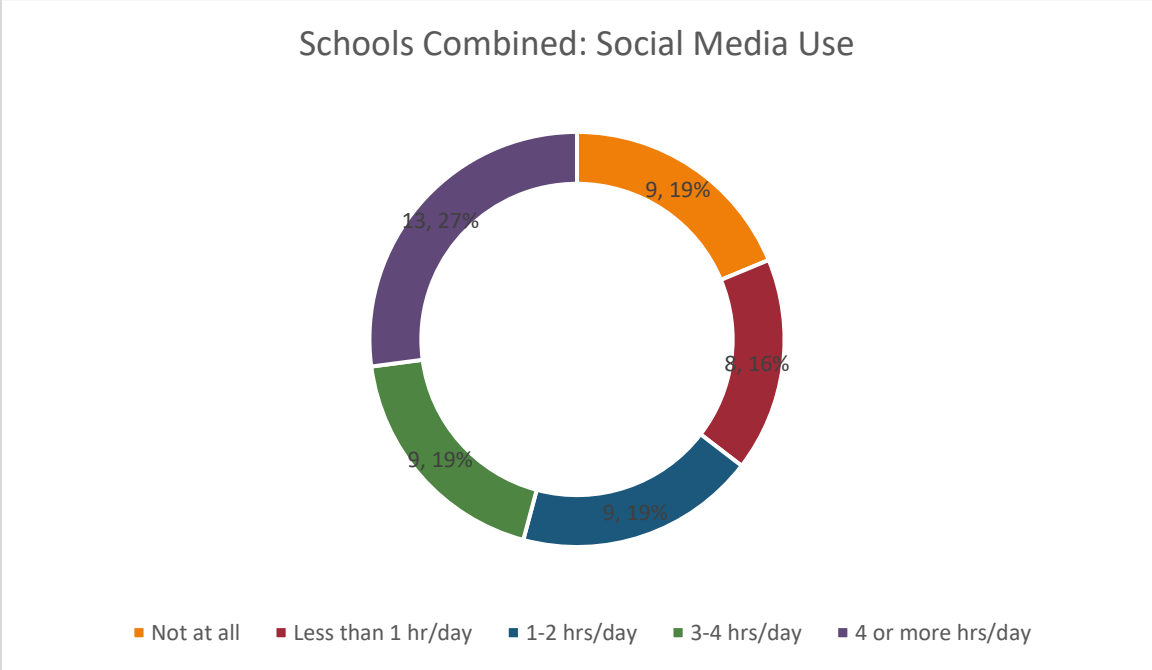


Figure 6

Social Media Use: Both Schools Combined



The next two figures break down the student media use by schools. While both schools show low numbers of students engaged in book-reading and news-reading, there are slight differences in the more heavily used forms of media. School 1 (the more economically advantaged school) features more students engaged in 1-2 hours per day of YouTube videos, while School 2 (the more economically disadvantaged school) features more students engaged in 3-4 hours of YouTube per day. School 1 has slightly more students off of social media entirely than using it 4 or more hours per day, while School 2 has its largest contingent of students using social media 4 or more hours per day. School 1 has far more students listening to 4 or more hours of music per day than School 2, and slightly more playing video games 1 or more hours per day. School 2 has more students engaged in 1 or more hours of movie-watching per day than School 1 does.

Figure 7

Student Media Use: School 1

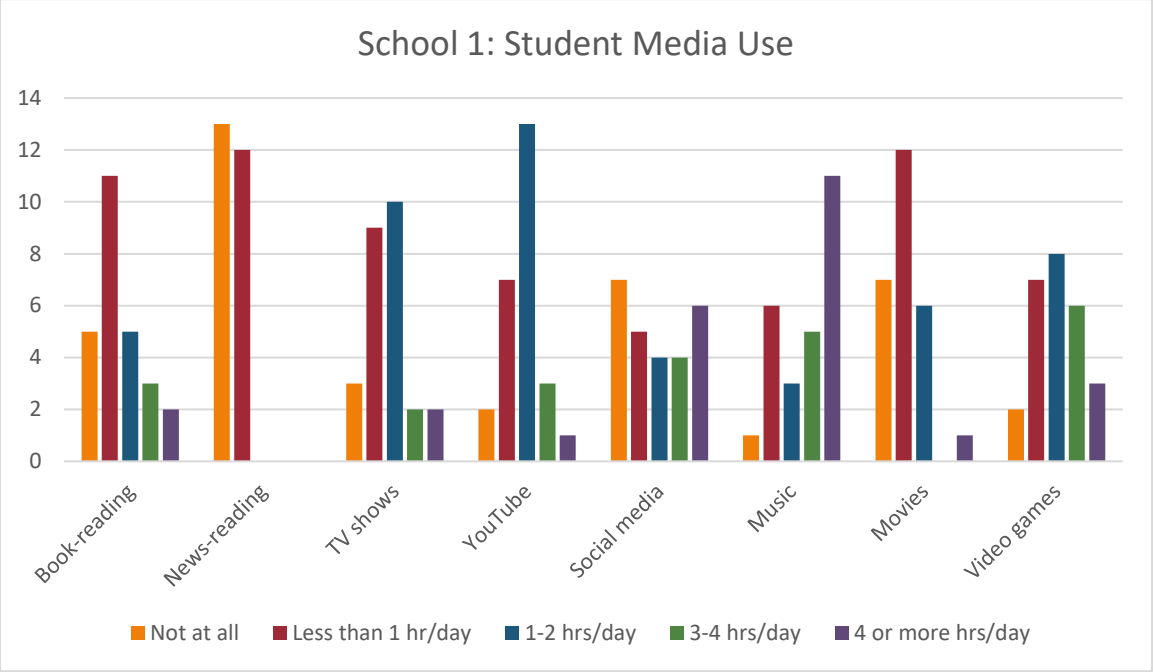
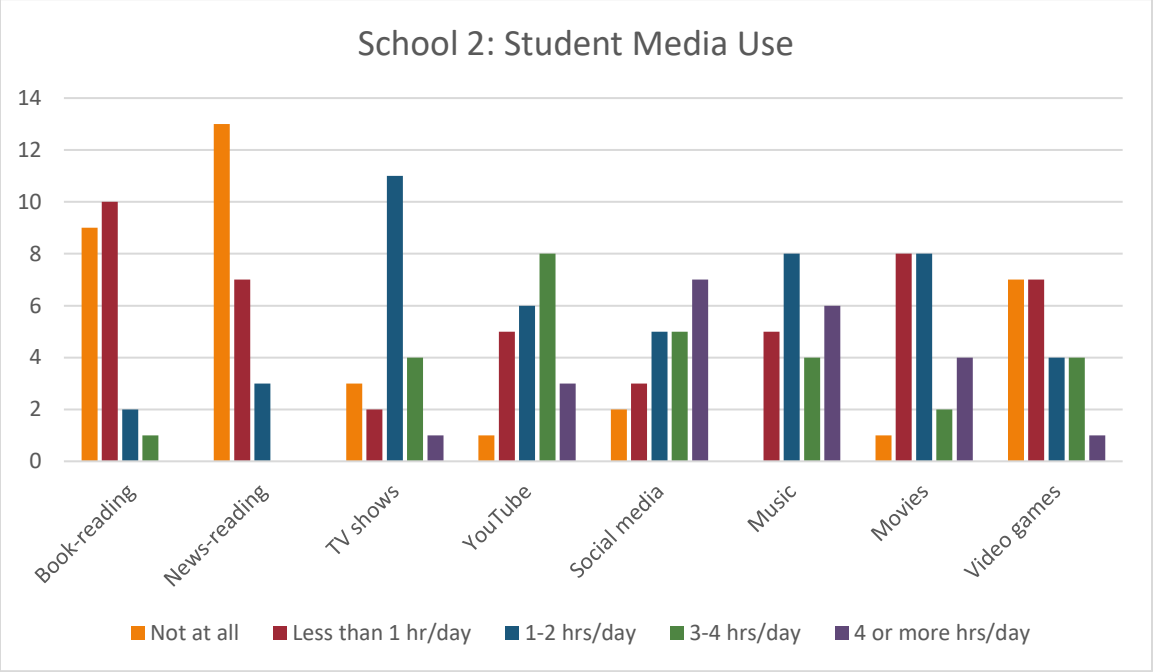


Figure 8

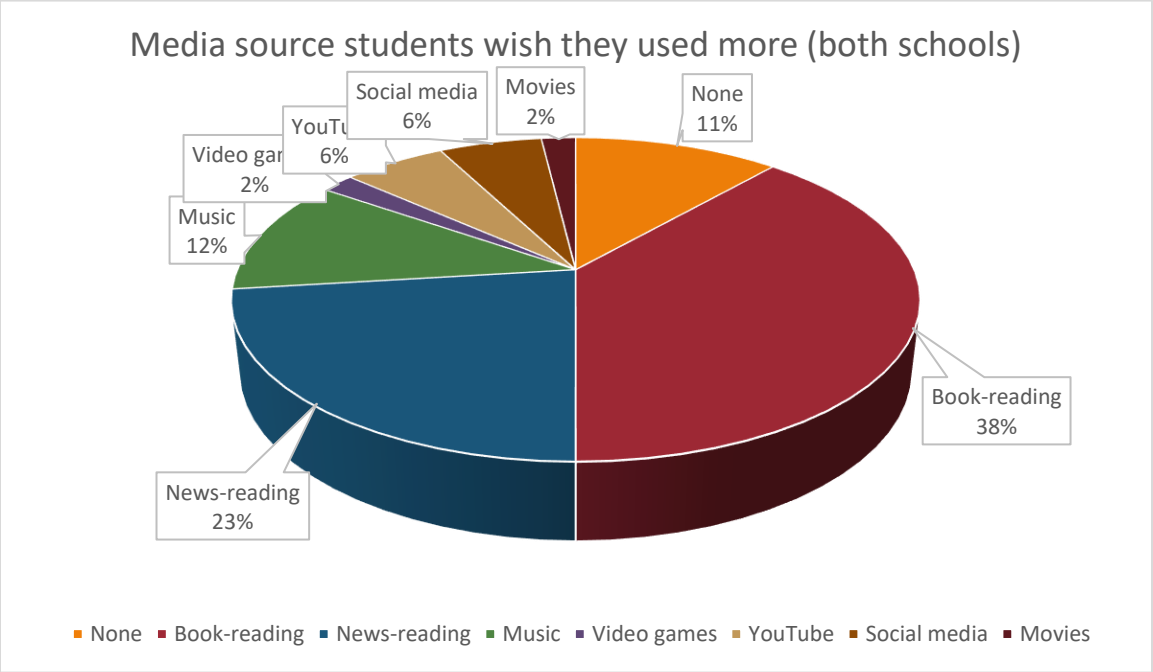
Student Media Use: School 2



The next question asked students what media source they wished they used more. The data in Figure 9 show quite clearly that more than 60 percent of students from both schools combined wish they were reading more. More than a third of students named book-reading as the media they wished they used more, and almost a quarter of students identified news-reading.

Figure 9

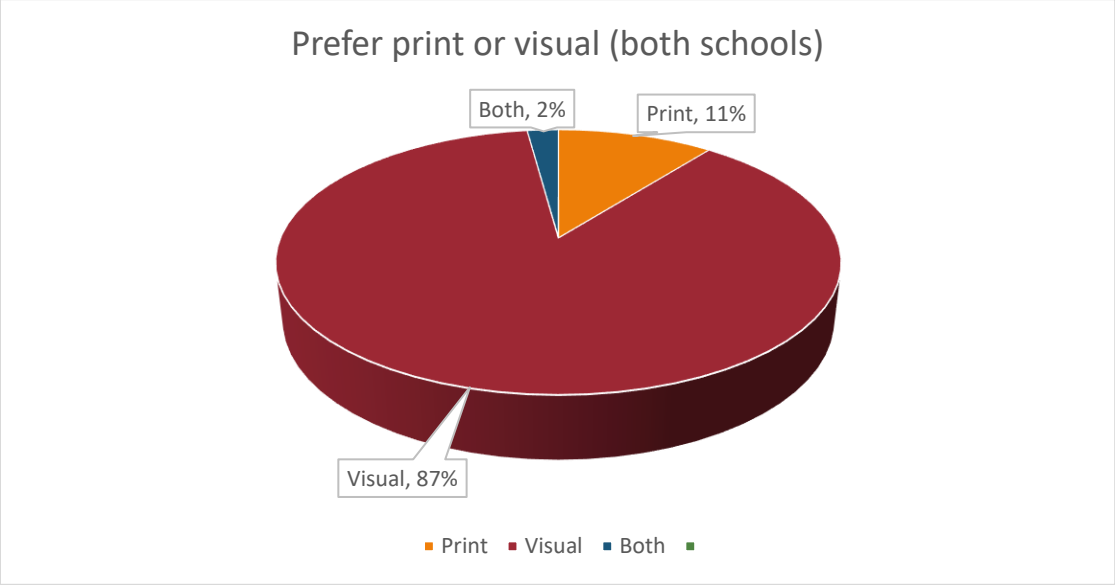
Media Source Students Wished They Used More (Both Schools Combined)



The next question directly addressed my third research question by asking students whether they had a preference between print or visual media. The answer here was overwhelming: Almost 9 out of 10 students said they prefer visual media to print. Slightly more than 1 in 10 said they prefer print.

Figure 10

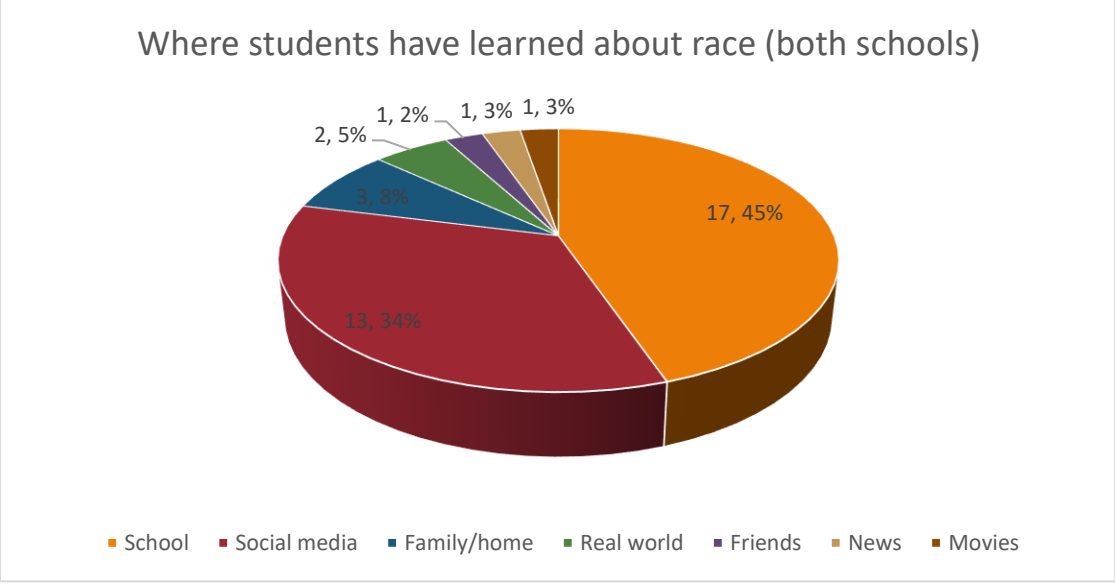
Print or Visual Media Preference (Both Schools Combined)



The remaining questions in the pre-survey focused on race. Figure 11 shows responses from the two schools combined when asked where they have learned the most about race so far in their lives.

Figure 11

Where Students Have Learned the Most About Race (Both Schools Combined)

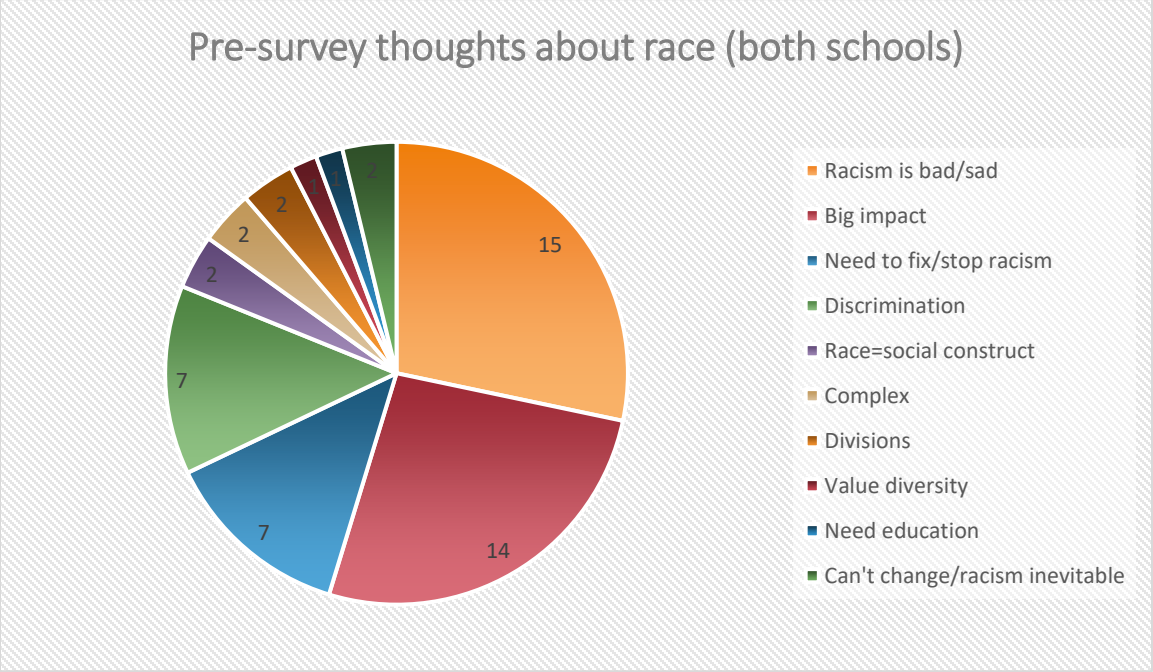


We see from this chart that almost 80 percent of students said they learned the most about race from either school or social media. School was named by 45 percent of students, while social media was named by another 34 percent. Just 8 percent of students said they'd learned the most about race at home, while another 5 percent said they'd learned the most in the real world. This did indicate that most students seemed to be ready for the nature of this study, which involved engaging with media sources about race in school.

In the pre-survey, I also asked students for their overall thoughts about race and/or racism in the United States. In analyzing the answers to this question, I engaged in data reduction, which is the "process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Data reduction is part of analysis, as "the researcher's decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which patterns best summarize a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell – are all analytic choices" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). In this case, I synthesized the themes present in student responses to this question in order to provide a clearer sense of the dominant themes in their answers, as depicted in Figure 12 (depicted on following page).

Figure 12

Pre-Survey Thoughts about Race (Both Schools Combined)

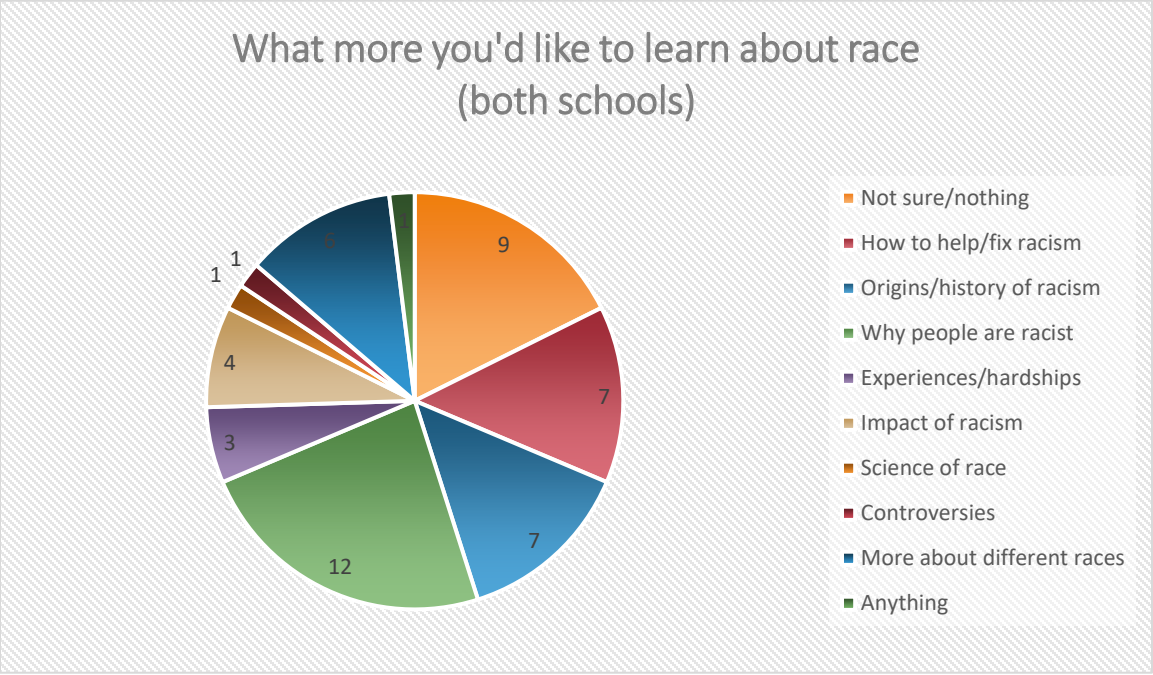


The largest contingent of responses to this question consisted of some reference to racism being either a bad or sad aspect of U.S. society. The next-largest response addressed the large impact that race has in this country. The "bad/sad" response was more emotional in tone, while the "impact" response was more factual. Combined, these two made up more than half of student responses. Another pair of responses equally comprised another quarter of the total: either a statement that racism needs to be stopped or fixed, or a statement about discrimination in general. The remaining responses were shared either once or twice, and they consisted of the following: race is a social construct; racism is complex; race produces divisions; diversity should be valued; education on race is needed, and racism cannot be altered, as it is inevitable. In reference to the fourth research question about pre-existing thoughts about race, there were no significant differences in pre-survey statements about race between the two schools, despite their socioeconomic differences.

The final pre-survey question asked students what more they would like to learn about race. Again, there were no significant differences in answers between the two schools, but there was more variety in the answers. The most common answer, coming from nearly a quarter of students from the two schools combined, addressed the question of why people are racist. Four additional responses each drew between 12 and 18 percent of the overall responses: How to help or fix racism; the origins/history of racism; more about different races; and not sure/nothing. Another two responses drew between 6 and 8 percent of the overall answers: The impact of racism, and experiences/hardships of those who have experienced racism. Three individual students offered additional responses: One wished to know more about the science of race, another wanted to know more about racial controversies, and yet another said they were open to learning "anything" more about race.

Figure 13

What More Students Would Like to Learn about Race (Both Schools Combined)



After the pre-survey, I made sure students had key definitions that were essential for them in understanding what our work together was designed to accomplish. The definitions that were covered are listed in the table below.

Table 2

Media Literacy and Racial Literacy Definitions

Media Literacy and Racial Literacy Definitions	
Media	Vehicles that convey messages
Mass Media	Sources of information that reach and influence large numbers of people (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d., Dictionaries section)
Literacy	Knowledge of or training in a particular subject or area of activity (Dennis, 2004, p. 203)
Media Literacy	The ability to understand how different forms of mass media work, how they produce meanings, how they are organized, and how to use them wisely (De Abreu, 2019, p. 104)
Racial Literacy	An understanding of the powerful and complex ways in which race influences the social, economic, political, and educational experiences of individuals and groups (Skerrett, 2011, p. 314)

With each of the two topics on race, students read or viewed each source and then engaged in writing and talking about the sources, and about media literacy use in general. For the print sources, I read the sources aloud while students read along on a handout given to them. For the social media opinion videos, students watched twice together via the class projector, as the videos were both about one minute long. For the personal-experience videos, students watched

each video once via the class projector. For the hard-data sources, students engaged with them on their own devices. The "Mapping Inequality" site allowed students to click on different cities and counties to see the redlined maps created by employees of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation during the late 1930s. The interactive data site on immigration allowed students to select a decade to see how many legal immigrants had arrived to the U.S. from each continent during that time period. The site also allowed them to click on different continents and countries to get a snapshot of historical trends in legal immigration to the U.S. from each location.

When leading discussions on media literacy and measuring the value of media literacy competencies, I utilized media literacy tools that are widely accepted and used. Therefore, in prompting conversations and reflections on the sources and topics, I used the Center for Media Literacy's five core concepts & five key questions on media literacy (each numbered question is associated with the same numbered concept), along with one question from the growing field of Critical Media Literacy:

1. Who created this message? / All media messages are constructed.

2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? / Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

3. How might different people understand this message differently? / Different people experience the same media message differently.

4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? / Media have embedded values and points of view.

5. Why is this message being sent? / Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, Five Key Questions / Five Core Concepts section)

6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013, paras. 5, 6) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)

Putting this all together, I posted these six questions to guide and support student reflections, small-group discussions and large-group discussions. I also tweaked the wording to fit the vocabulary of eighth-graders a bit more accurately.

Table 3

Media Literacy Guiding Questions

Media Literacy Guiding Questions
1. Who do you think created this message? 2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention? 3. How might different people understand this message differently? 4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message? 5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, Five Key Questions section). 6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013, paras. 5, 6) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)

During my first visit, I provided the students with a practice run of using these six guiding questions. I presented them with two print advertisements – one for Nike and one for Brandy Melville – and gave students time to discuss the ads in small groups and as a full class using the media literacy questions. After reviewing these ads, students seemed comfortable with using these questions in my follow-up visits.

During my second and fourth visits, students read, viewed and discussed the five sources related to each topic on race. We dubbed these sessions the "taste tests," as students were sampling a number of media sources each time. They wrote reflections on each source, addressing how engaging they found the source to be, as well as what thoughts they were having after connecting with this source, and whether it was shifting their thoughts about race in any way. I closed out these "taste test" sessions by asking some additional survey questions to gather information about the various sources we had studied together. The exit ticket is included as Appendix B, and the content is listed below as well.

Table 4

Questions on Media Literacy Use and Sources

Exit Ticket Questions on Media Literacy Use and Sources
1. After reading and viewing these sources, what thoughts are you having about race? Explain. 2. Did any of the sources influence you more than others? If so, please list them and explain how they influenced your thoughts about race. 3. For each source, please select one of the following: - This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways - This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful ways. - This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much. - This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race. 4. Were there reasons why some sources influenced you more than others? If so, explain.

Having accumulated all of this data, I returned for a follow-up during visits 3 and 5 to probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the data from the prior visit to guide the follow-up questions I had. Effective interviews always require follow-up questions. These follow-ups took the form of individual interviews as well as small- and large-group discussions, as I asked questions to clarify points made in the previous visit's discussions, write-ups and surveys. These visits produced detailed responses on why certain sources had resonated with students, and how those sources and the use of media literacy tools had served to challenge students' prior perceptions on race. While asking follow-up questions in individual interviews, I also engaged in member-checking to ensure that student responses were accurately documented.

This process took place twice for each class, once to cover the sources on race and housing, and once to cover the sources on race and immigration. After I'd gone through this process for both sets of sources, I returned to each school for a sixth and final visit to cover summative reflections, surveys and interviews. During this visit, I engaged students in thinking big-picture about what they had gained in studying media literacy and comparing media sources, all of it connected to the vital topic of race.

Data Analysis, Additional Data Collection

During visits 1-5, I collected and coded student responses for each of the different forms of discourse: pre-survey, written reflections, small-group discussions, large-group discussions, individual interviews, and exit survey. I used the coding to clarify dominant themes, utilizing the support of ATLAS.ti to refine the data and assist with the coding. The coding focused on the research questions as they related to racial literacy: (1) student responses on the use of media literacy; (2) student responses on the differences between sources; (3) student responses on the differences between print and visual sources; (4) and student responses in comparison to their

pre-existing perspectives on race. As the dominant themes surfaced in relation to each of those four research questions, I looked for trends and documented those trends. When using Atlas.ti with written reflections, the coding software helped identify particular terms from students' writing and helped identify dominant themes within student answers.

While I compiled written answers directly from student reflection sheets and exit surveys, I needed to transcribe the student quotes from individual interviews and class discussions. For this work, I used the iPhone SE Voice Memo feature and transcribed all quotes directly onto Microsoft Word. My skills as a former newspaper reporter and school newspaper adviser allowed me to transcribe the many quotes I had gathered from the varied forms of student discourse.

During the final, sixth visit, I provided students with a summative exit ticket in which they offered their closing reflections for the study. I also engaged in additional small-group and large-group discussions with students following the themes within the four research questions. The summative survey is included as Appendix C, and the content is listed below as well.

Table 5

Summative Survey

Summative Survey
- How do you define media literacy? - In what ways did the use of the media literacy questions affect your thought process about the sources and about race? When you are asked to break down the source material like that, what does it do for your critical thinking? - What kinds of sources do you find to be most valuable for this kind of work?

(Table 5 cont.)

- Can you think of other issues that could also work well with a media literacy approach? - Are you thinking about any things differently due to the media sources and discourse we held? If so, discuss. - What further questions do you have about this topic and this work?

After the final visit, I continued the process of transcribing and coding, and continued the processes of data reduction and inductive coding. The hard-copy research materials are stored in a lockbox, and the Microsoft Word files are encrypted and accessible via a password-protected computer. All Google forms are password-protected as well, and all of the dissertation data is backed up on a memory key that is also stored in the lockbox.

Validity and Reliability

Controlling for bias allowed this study to focus on the ways in which different forms of media influence student-centered inquiry. I presented sources within each topic that argued the same point, so that students could assess the media literacy process and the differences between sources apart from whether or not they agreed with a particular point of view. In studying housing, the overall argument stated that redlining led to a reduction in wealth between white and African-American families over time. Each source supported that point, but presented its evidence in different ways based on the type of source it was. Students then evaluated the ways in which they had responded to the content and presentation of each source.

The decision to focus on two groups should be addressed here. While one class in one school would have allowed for a more streamlined study, the use of classes in two separate

schools offered space for more variety in student responses. Two schools, each with a different percentage of economically disadvantaged students, made room for potential differences in students' pre-existing perspectives on race, thus offering more validity than one school could provide. In addition, the research between both groups was conducted with consistency, transparency, precision, peer review and an audit trail, so that the results that were gathered could be compared with confidence.

Limitations

There are many limitations to a study with as much ambition as this one. For one, students may have felt differently about one race-related topic than another, so the topics chosen may not have reflected students' complete perspectives about race as a whole. In addition, students in eighth grade likely responded differently than students in other grades would have. On top of that, eighth-graders are by no means expected to develop fully-formed position statements on difficult topics such as this one. Of course, two groups of more than 20 middle-school students from one U.S. state are not representative of all students. In addition, teachers are not a direct part of this study, so they were not measured within it. The study also did not measure the degree of media literacy that students may have engaged in with those teachers during the course of the year. Also, student-centered inquiry is used here but not measured directly, although it is measured indirectly as a part of the media-literacy process.

The decision to control for bias has a valid reason within this study, but it does also remove a critical aspect of media literacy that other studies have addressed. There also is a limit to the number of sources I could present for each study, so there are types of media sources that were naturally left out. For instance, I presented all nonfiction sources, leaving fiction out of the study. I also presented print and visual sources, leaving audio sources (such as podcasts) out of

the study. I also have two moving targets here: type of media source and type of message, or rhetoric. A video personal-experience account is different from a print personal-experience account, just as a video personal-experience account is different from a video opinion-based piece. There are many lessons to be learned from this study, but the research also opens up many avenues for additional methods of comparing the influence that source materials can have on students, including the use of narrower lenses that involve fewer variables in flux among the sources.

Lastly, I did select the source material, which thus included my own selection bias into the study in some way. My hope, of course, is that the source choices did nothing but help students tackle the research questions at hand, but I did have choices to make in the research design, and I made them. My bias in choosing the sources may make the results of this study difficult for others to replicate using different types of media.

Chapter 4 will review the results and findings from my trips to the two schools. The findings will cover each of the research questions and will include both text and data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study was designed to understand the ways in which student media literacy tools and sources can influence the conclusions students draw about race in the United States. The research questions, again, are as follows:

- In what ways do media literacy tools, implemented in a process of student-centered inquiry, influence the conclusions that secondary-school students make about race in the U.S.?
- In what ways do differing media source materials influence secondary-school students' conclusions about race in the United States, when controlling for bias?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources, and why?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary among students who enter the study with different pre-existing perspectives on race, and why?

Throughout my visits, I was continuously gathering information from students related to all four of these questions. We read, viewed and interacted with sources together, and we communicated through free-writes, surveys, small-group discussions, full-class conversations, and individual interviews. We covered all four research questions throughout my visits, and my visits and questions became a routine that students seemed to enjoy and commit themselves to throughout our six weeks together. For consistency's sake, the explanation of findings will follow the order of research questions listed above. This will at times bring us to different places along the chronology of my visits, but this order will offer organization in addressing each question one at a time.

Major Findings: Media Literacy Tools

During my visits to each school, students engaged with five different types of media sources for each of the two topics connected to race in America (housing and immigration). As they did so, they explored the ways in which the use of media literacy tools differed from reading or viewing a source and hearing the simple question, "What did you think?" I had given students a copy of the six media literacy questions addressed in Table 3, and they kept those copies and referred to them during the visits. Those questions are repeated again here in Table 6.

Table 6

Media Literacy Guiding Questions

Media Literacy Guiding Questions
1. Who do you think created this message? 2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention? 3. How might different people understand this message differently? 4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message? 5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008, Five Key Questions section). 6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013, paras. 5, 6) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)

This section of findings will include student quotes, coded charts and overall themes from student responses to the specific media literacy questions and to the use of these tools as a whole. To start us off, we turn to Hannah of School 1, who explained the difference between using these

tools and not using them: “If you say, ‘Oh, what do you think about it?’ people won’t really think about it. But then if you ask questions like this, they’re going to have to think about it.”

We’ll begin with some snapshot quotes students provided when reviewing the different media literacy questions, then shift to overall feedback on the use of media literacy tools.

Question 1: Who do you think created this message?

While question 1 is an essential component to media literacy, it did not require extensive discussion during this study, as the source authors were identified in each case. The only time in which this question was genuinely addressed was when a student from School 1 noted that states can ask textbook companies to include or omit certain content based on state standards. Therefore, while textbook companies are identified as the authors of textbook content, this student noted the message is not always directed by the textbook company.

Question 2: How does the author of this message try to attract your attention?

Students noted a number of ways in which media sources presented information. In School 2, Isabella noted that the introductory paragraph to a history book passage featured an anecdote about oppressive actions against immigrants. “When we’re writing something, we’re told to add a hook,” she said. “You’re supposed to make people want to read it.” Later in that same discussion, Isabella also noted that a hard-data source grabbed her attention because it was interactive. Another School 2 student, Luna, noted that a video about redlining got her attention because it presented the personal story of a family denied housing, which engaged her with a true, lived experience.

Question 3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Isabella from School 2 noted that every source has a message, yet “people don’t see things the same way as everyone else. You can both read something and see different things.”

Gianna from School 2 said that teachers might be looking at sources on race differently based on what they are hoping to learn about their students from these sources.

Question 4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message?

Joe from School 1 noted that textbooks make choices when covering the entire history of a country. He asked to review the physical textbooks for both rounds of sources during our small-group discussions. He noted that both books, featuring more than 1,000 pages apiece, did not address race in America as much as he would expect to see. Oliver added that textbooks can't go deeply into core issues when there is so much content that it "feels like they're trying to throw stuff out there." Both Elijah from School 1 and Isabella from School 2 suggested the practice of reviewing other sources to determine the accuracy and overall depth of the original source. "You should look at one textbook, and then look at a second textbook to compare them," Elijah said. I shared with both students that they were describing the process of lateral reading, in which one leaves the original source and moves over to other sources, both to search for information about the original source and to verify the overall content, just like a fact-checker (McGrew & Byrne, 2022, p. 2). Evelyn of School 2 mentioned that each source has a limited number of experiences shared within it, and this leaves her eager to learn about how race affected more individuals than those included in the source. Jackson of School 2 added that each source has a hierarchy of sorts, in that the author decides who and what is included and what is left out. This gatekeeping role of the message's author is one that leaves us as readers wondering what else there is to know.

Question 5: Why do you think this message is being sent?

Mia of School 2 said she finds that messages about race are sent out because the author wants us to know how different individuals have managed their challenges and experiences. Mia

added that such authors "want us to get more invested in it," perhaps to the point of seeking change. Levi of School 2 added that messages about race and racism are often produced to increase awareness:

> They're sending these messages out because they want to try to get the information out there, because most people aren't aware of these problems or think they're not as bad as it seems. So the reason these messages are sent out is to make them realize that it's actually really bad or to inform them if they didn't know about it already.

Question 6: What does this message say about power and fairness?

Considering that these sources all addressed race, there was plenty to be found about power and fairness. Isabella of School 2 mentioned the importance of seeing individuals who use their power and privilege to lift up less privileged individuals, as one teacher did in a personal-experience video we watched. Jackson of School 2 mentioned the clarity he saw in regard to fairness when engaging with numbers through hard data. The interactive data source on immigration, for instance, told him that the U.S. has embraced European immigrants much more fully than it has Mexican immigrants. Jackson also referred to an immigration raid against Mexican immigrants, documented in a history-book source we reviewed, as evidence of both unfairness and absence of power for some racial groups.

Influence of Media Literacy Tools

During my final visit, I asked students the following question about media literacy tools on their summative exit tickets:

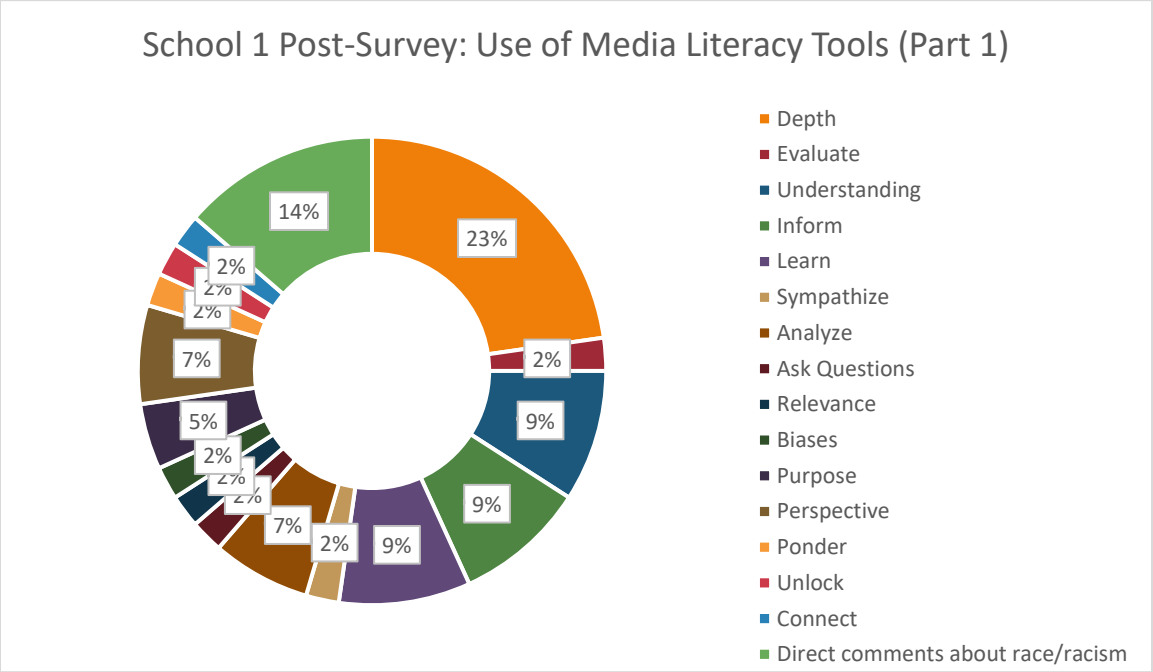
> How did our use of media literacy tools influence your conclusions about race in the U.S.? In what ways did the use of the media literacy questions affect your thought

process about the sources and about race? When you are asked to break down the source material like that, what does it do for your critical thinking?

I reviewed and coded their responses using Atlas.ti, and what follows is a compilation of charts that chronicle the terms appearing most in student responses to this question, along with student quotes to follow up on those responses. We'll begin with School 1.

Figure 14

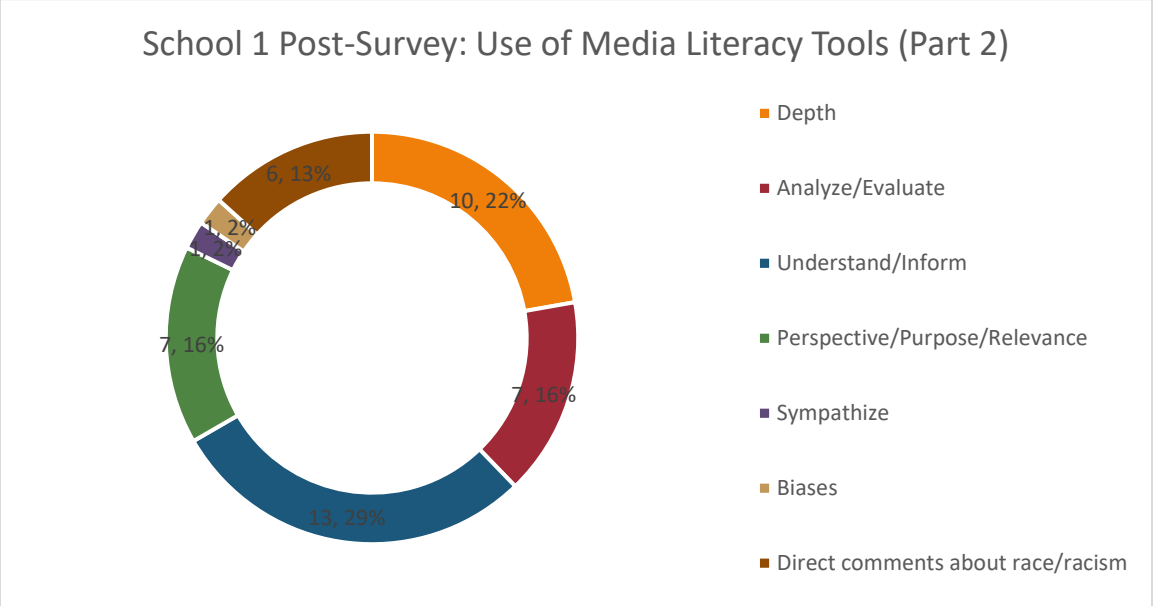
Use of Media Literacy Tools: School 1 (Part 1)



School 1 provided a large number of terms in response to what media literacy tools can do. After I used data reduction to synthesize the data, I combined terms to show the dominant themes present in School 1's responses.

Figure 15

Use of Media Literacy Tools: School 1 (Part 2)



This second chart shows that School 1 honed in on the areas of depth, understanding, analysis and perspective offered through use of media literacy tools. The exit tickets were anonymous, so I selected a few that spoke to some of these themes. One student wrote, "The specific media literacy questions made me take the time to really think about the purpose of the sources and what effect they have on the reader." Another student wrote, "When analyzing media, I don't go in depth, but this helped me go in depth and gain a better understanding on controversial issues." Still another wrote, "When we were able to break down the source with the questions, I found that I was able to have longer and more meaningful discussions with my table."

Other students expanded on the way these tools helped them pay closer attention to their sources. "It made me think more about everything I see," one student wrote. "It is more effective than just looking at something and believing it right away." Another added, "We had to think very deeply about the source and what it means." Another put it bluntly: "You should always ask

questions about the source." A final quote from the exit ticket addressed most of the themes in Figure 15:

> The media literacy tools allowed me to learn more about the topic of race in the U.S. as a whole. Not only did it allow me to break down sources easier, it also helped me stay focused, eager to answer all of the questions on the sheet. When analyzing a text using media literacy tools, our critical thinking skills improve. They improve because not only does it allow us to view all perspectives of a source, but it also lets us use these questions with other sources as well.

Now we'll turn to some individual quotes taken from full-class conversations about media tools in School 1. John spoke to both depth and perspective by sharing, "I think these questions may help us think deeper about this stuff, from different people's perspectives. Maybe those perspectives might be different for everybody." James added that these media literacy questions allow us to "go more in-depth into our answers, and get a different kind of view from it." Joe added that the questions go further than asking us to reiterate what we've read or heard. In doing this, Joe said, "You think deeper and you think more meaningfully."

As students shared their thoughts, I asked if these media literacy questions helped break down for them what it means to "analyze" a message. Oliver answered in the affirmative, stating, "When teachers say to just analyze this article or this video, it always seems very difficult, because it's not telling you what to analyze for. These show you what different things to look for in your analysis." Ben added that media literacy tools provide a road map of sorts for analysis: "It just gives you the step-by-step on how to analyze the text."

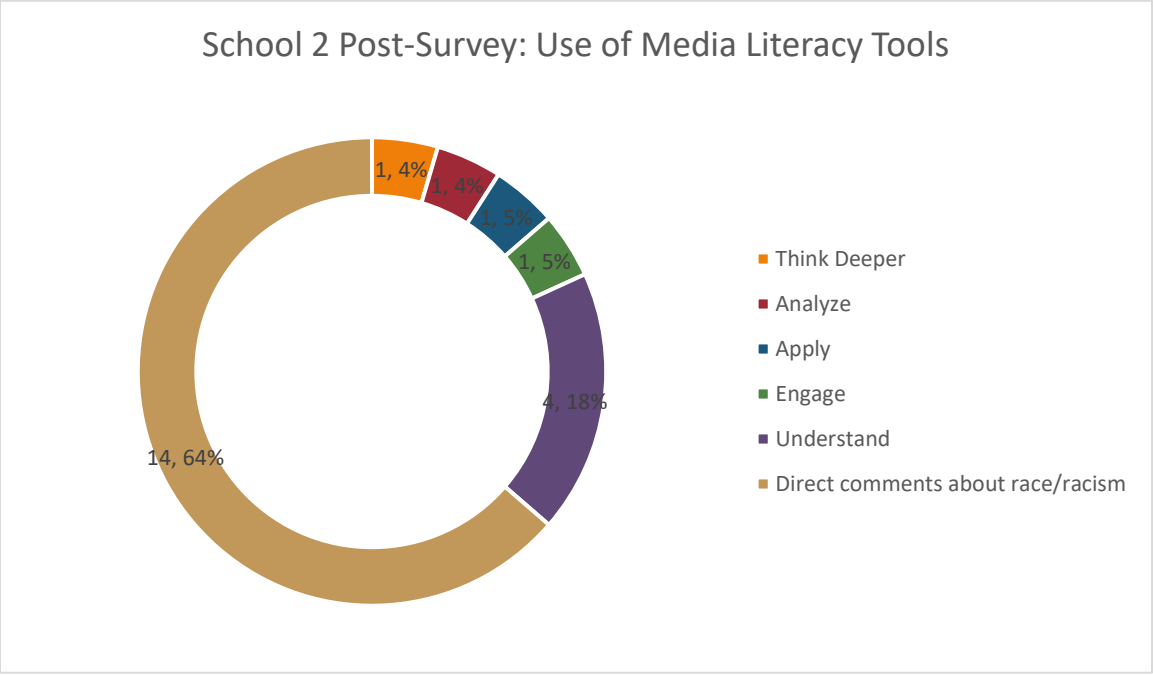
Oliver shared that since he'd begun studying sources with these media literacy questions in mind, he'd readjusted his approach to the media messages he consumes outside of school.

Since we've done this, as I've been watching YouTube shorts, I am looking, and I'll see a video talking about how Laos still today remains the most bombed country ever, and that they find a new bomb dropped during the Vietnam War every 30 seconds, and so I think of that, and I immediately went to those questions and I was like, "Why are they telling me this? What's the purpose behind it? What's the bias?" And so I'm thinking of all these things, and then when I go to the comments, I see most people clearly do not think of these things because they either don't have an understanding of the subject, or the video works well enough to influence them so heavily.

Now we'll turn to School 2. In reviewing and coding the responses using Atlas.ti, I was able to identify key themes related to student use of media tools in School 2 without needing any data reduction. Here are the results.

Figure 16

Use of Media Literacy Tools: School 2



The biggest difference here is that while just 13 percent of School 1 students made direct comments about race and/or racism in response to this question, nearly two-thirds of School 2 students did so. In their anonymous exit-ticket responses, many students honed in on the themes of power and fairness addressed in the sixth media literacy question. One student wrote that the media literacy tools showed "the unfairness and difference among power within society." Another student wrote, "I kept wondering why this was happening in the world." Another wrote that media literacy tools combined with race helped to "see it differently." The student added, "It makes me think much more."

Other students elaborated on the ways in which these tools deepened their understanding. "The media literacy questions help me figure out details from the sources and it shows me the main cause on why the author wrote it," one student stated. Another wrote that media literacy tools help to "think past" what's directly stated "and apply it to where I could see those issues." A common refrain about media literacy from School 2 was an impetus to keep learning. "When I think of these questions it makes me want to discover more and more of the topic," a student wrote. "My critical thinking was trying to keep learning more."

In full-class discussions, Jackson noted that whenever we used these questions, "It helps us more deeply understand the source." Rakeem spoke to the reality that media literacy cannot work if someone does not put in the effort to give their full attention to a message and its meaning. More often than not, though, School 2 students referred back to the issues of power and fairness. Jackson spoke to a source that showed him that "there's, like, no power" for some groups in the U.S.

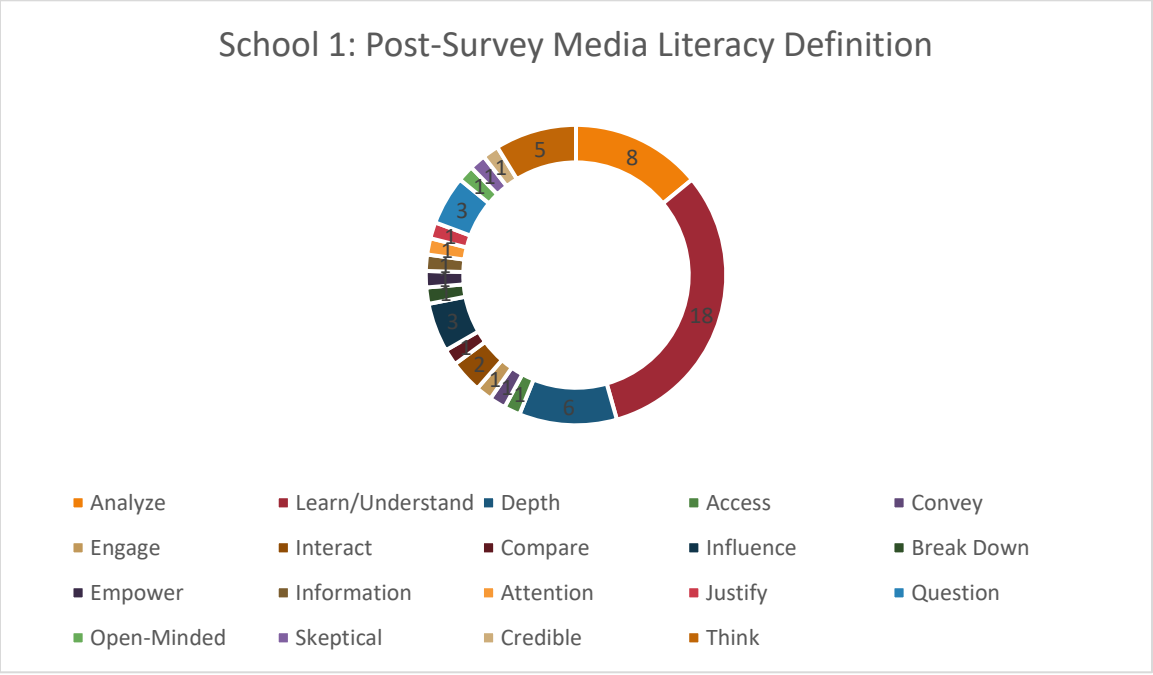
In sum, 100 percent of student survey responses spoke positively about the influence of media literacy tools, with zero percent speaking negatively about their influence.

Definition of Media Literacy

During my first visit, I gathered that students from the two schools had not engaged with the term "media literacy" much before. As we began our work together, I gave all students the same definition of media literacy: "The ability to understand how different forms of mass media work, how they produce meanings, how they are organized, and how to use them wisely." After the students had spent time with 10 different sources and six media literacy guiding questions over six sessions, I asked them in their summative exit tickets to define media literacy. They could have referred back to their definition sheets, but I encouraged them to describe media literacy as they understood it. After reviewing their answers, I reviewed and coded their responses using Atlas.ti, and what follows are charts that chronicle those verbs, nouns and adjectives used in student definitions. In this case, I will not engage in data reduction, as specific words matter when dealing with definitions.

Figure 17

Media Literacy Definition: School 1

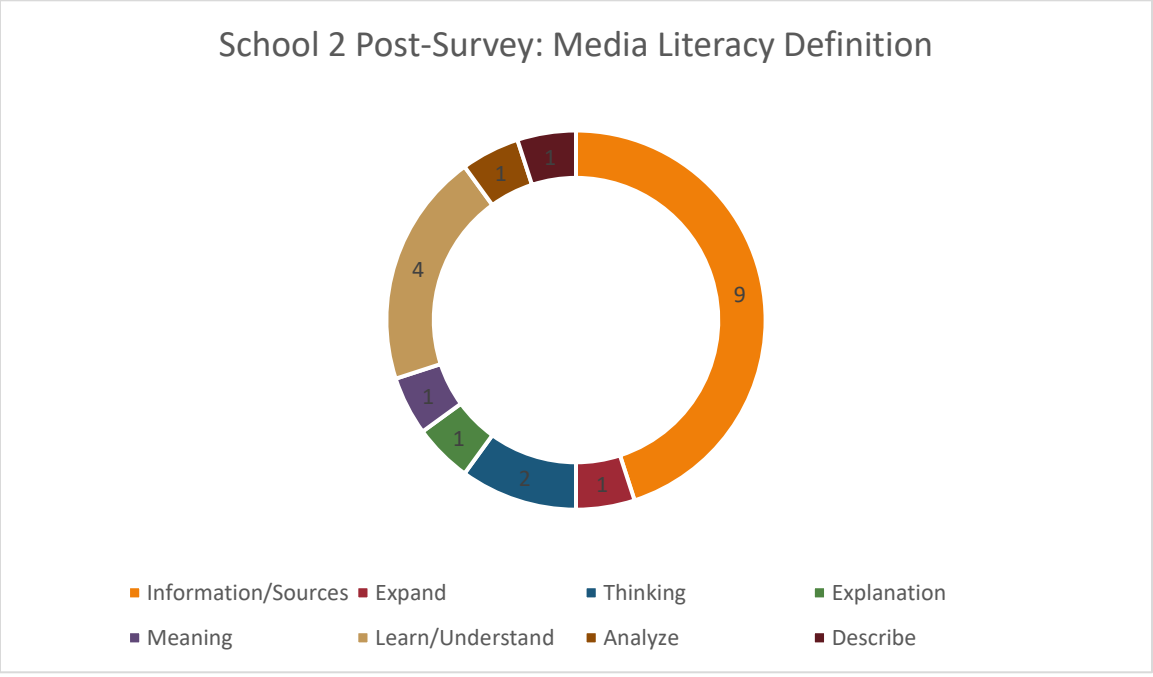


Students used some variation of the words “learn” or “understand” 18 times in School 1 definitions, while the word “analyze” came up eight times, and the words “depth” and “think” both appeared five or more times. The words “influence” and “question” also were mentioned three times, and various other words were mentioned once or twice, from “justify” to “empower” to “interact.” Students from School 1 elaborated in their anonymous exit-ticket definitions. One wrote, “A person who has good media literacy takes the extra minute to think about how the source interacts with the reader.” Another wrote, “It allows you to focus on all aspects of the text rather than just a few.”

Another student broke media literacy into two steps taken with each source: “The first part is what you think of it in the beginning and the second part is when you use these questions to analyze it deeper.” An additional student wrote that media literacy helps us “get into deeper conversations,” adding that “when you ask deeper questions, you get meaningful answers.”

Figure 18

Media Literacy Definition: School 2



School 2 students used some variation of "information" or "sources" nine times in their media literacy definitions, and they used some variation of "learn" or "understand" four times. The remaining words that appeared once or twice apiece were "expand," "thinking," "explanation," "meaning," "analyze" and "describe."

In their written responses, students elaborated on the themes of using information to learn more. "Media literacy is a way to expand your thinking on a topic," one student wrote. "Media literacy is trying to figure out the message of different sources that are given to us," another wrote. Another added that media literacy asks us to describe how the source material affects the reader, while also analyzing the text itself. Yet another student added that media literacy helps us to "understand different topics using either visual or print versions of things."

Media Literacy Approach

Across the two schools, students spoke highly of the process of using media literacy tools to explore a tough topic like race. "I now use the questions way more and it makes me think way more deeply," a School 1 student wrote in the summative exit ticket. "It shows me how to expand my view and opinion," a School 2 student wrote. Another School 2 student added, "Now when I see a media source I start to actually try and understand the source in order to develop my thoughts about it." One other School 2 student also wrote, "Now I know that when you are analyzing a paper, you can use questions to help you." Back at School 1, a student wrote, "I'm sort of thinking about how people should wonder where the media they're consuming is coming from, and why. You can't just believe everything everyone tells you, so you need to have an understanding of that." Another School 1 student added, "Media literacy allows me to view a text from every angle and point of view. These media literacy tools help me think about who is

writing this, why they are writing this, and what message they are trying to instill in the reader's head."

The process was not without some criticism, as one student wrote in the exit ticket definition of media literacy that the process of media literacy is "not boring but not fun." However, when given the space to engage with sources using these guiding questions, students responded positively to the experience. I asked if they could think of any other tough topics that could be explored using a media literacy approach. Students mentioned several issues: social inequalities and discrimination, the Second Amendment and school shootings, the environment and climate change, gender and sexism, hunger, and colorism, to name a few. Some students said that any political topics and any controversial topics would fit fine with this approach. One student pushed beyond the media literacy guiding questions I had used, asking, "What other questions could we use to analyze different sources?" Another looked in the opposite direction, asking, "Are there ways to teach media literacy without these questions?" Still another asked, "Why is it helpful to use questions to analyze?" These students were exploring metacognition to consider alternate ways to engage in media literacy to analyze tough sources and tough topics.

Major Findings: Media Source Materials

During my visits to each school, students took part in two rounds of media literacy and racial literacy exploration. In each round, they engaged with five different types of media sources for each of the two topics connected to race in America (housing and immigration). They were asked to consider the ways in which each source influenced their conclusions about race in the U.S. As stated earlier, all of the sources in each round presented the same argument, thus controlling for bias. The arguments and sources are listed again below, this time including more detail and the links to web sources and appendix labels for the print sources.

Race and Housing Argument:

The discriminatory housing policies in 20th-century U.S. real estate helped produce significant wealth disparities between white and Black Americans.

Race and Housing Sources

Textbook passage: Passage on housing discrimination (Kennedy & Cohen, 2020, pp. 845-850). This passage, titled "The Rush to the Suburbs," explains in four paragraphs how the federal government encouraged Americans to move into suburbs after World War II, while at the same time permitting and creating policies that led to racial segregation.

History book passage: Passage from *The Color of Law* on HOLC and FHA loans (Rothstein, 2017, pp. 63-66). This passage, from a book written entirely about the subject of housing discrimination, explains in seven paragraphs the ways in which the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) created policy to foster racial segregation in housing. The final paragraph gives a specific example from Fanwood, N.J., and presents statistics on housing by race in that town to this day.

Opinion-based video: Instagram video post about redlining (Black Kids Books & Videos, 2022). This social media video post is slightly less than one minute long and consists of an African-American teenager asking and answering questions about redlining and its impact on generational wealth. The video begins with the question, "Hey, what's the cost of being black?" before explaining how redlining affected African-American wealth. The opinion-based video concludes with a suggestion to read *The Color of Law*. The video's link is https://www.instagram.com/tv/CZ-wg06g57f/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D.

Personal-experience video: CBS news interview with the daughter of a couple who were denied housing in Bergen County, N.J. (Dokoupil, 2021). This five-minute video is hosted by

CBS News anchor Tony Dokoupil, and it tells the housing story of Corbet and Sallye Rachal, showing hidden camera footage taken in the 1960s as they were denied access to buying a home in Bergen County, N.J., due to their race, while also interviewing their daughter nearly 60 years later. Dokoupil also explains how his grandparents, who were white, were able to buy in that same county, and how much the increased value of that home impacted his family's history. The video's link is https://www.cbsnews.com/news/real-estate-housing-discrimination/.

Hard-data source: Redlined maps from the "Mapping Inequality" project made up of collaborations among the University of Richmond, Virginia Tech, University of Maryland, and Johns Hopkins University (*Mapping Inequality*, 2016). This joint collaboration among colleges allows the user to click on redlined maps created by the HOLC and view the color-coding down to each street and block. The link for this interactive source is https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=11/40.666/-74.5.

Race and Immigration Argument:

Past and present U.S. immigration policies often have evolved to exclude individuals considered to be of certain races.

Race and Immigration Sources

Textbook passage: Passage on the Chinese Exclusion Act (Henretta et al., 2014, pp. 560-564). This passage, titled "Asian Americans and Exclusion," explains in five paragraphs how Asian immigrants faced fierce backlash in the U.S., culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which provided legal justification for additional exclusionary immigration policies that followed in the years to come.

History book passage: Passage from *America for Americans* on immigration policies against Mexican individuals (Lee, 2019, pp. 147-149). This passage comes from the beginning of

a chapter titled “Getting Rid of the Mexicans,” and it focuses on the shift within the U.S. from gladly accepting migrant laborers from Mexico to targeting both Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans for mass deportation. The book itself focuses on the full history of immigration backlash in the U.S.; the book’s subtitle is “A History of Xenophobia in the United States.”

Opinion-based video: Instagram post about racism in U.S. immigration policy (Mic, 2018). This one-minute video comes from the internet and media company Mic, and the host is Mic opinion writer Brittany Packnett. After beginning with the line “Separating families of color is as American as apple pie,” Packnett draws a through line from Native Americans to African slaves to Japanese immigrants to Chinese immigrants to Latinx immigrants. She argues that all of these groups have faced inhumane discrimination in the U.S. The link for this video is https://www.instagram.com/p/BkQA3pfnUoF/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D.

Personal-experience video: Author and activist Jose Antonio Vargas on being Asian and undocumented (Vargas, 2018). In this 4½-minute video, Vargas tells the story of how he learned, upon trying to get his driver’s license, that he was an undocumented immigrant, and how that surprising fact affected his life. He shares the challenges and support he received along the way, and invites the viewer to engage in conversation about this vital issue. This video’s link is https://immigrantsrising.org/jose-antonio-reads-his-new-memoir-on-9-29/.

Hard-data source: Interactive data on U.S. immigration from different regions and countries by decade from 1820 to 2013. (Chang, 2017). This Vox Media data page, titled “Watch how immigration in America has changed in the last 200 years,” allows the reader to explore the number of immigrants accepted legally into the U.S. from each continent during every decade from 1820 through 2010, while also showing the numbers for 2011, 2012 and 2013. The page

also allows the reader to select specific countries to see how many legal immigrants were accepted into the U.S. from those countries during the 193 years that this data set covers. This source link is https://www.vox.com/2016/1/4/10709366/immigration-america-200-years.

This section will explore student responses to these 10 different sources that they examined, both through their "taste test" survey responses featuring initial responses on engagement, understanding and critical thinking, and through their written and spoken explanations of the ways in which each source influenced their thoughts about race. The "taste test" exercises asked them to write initial thoughts about the degree of engagement, understanding and critical thinking they experienced as they consumed each source, then asked them to complete survey responses on the sources. This exercise connected with the idea that "each of us likes and dislikes many different elements of media," and the point here was to understand "why the content in question" makes sense to the students (De Abreu, 2019, p. 34).

The "taste test" surveys for both rounds asked students to choose one of four options for each source:

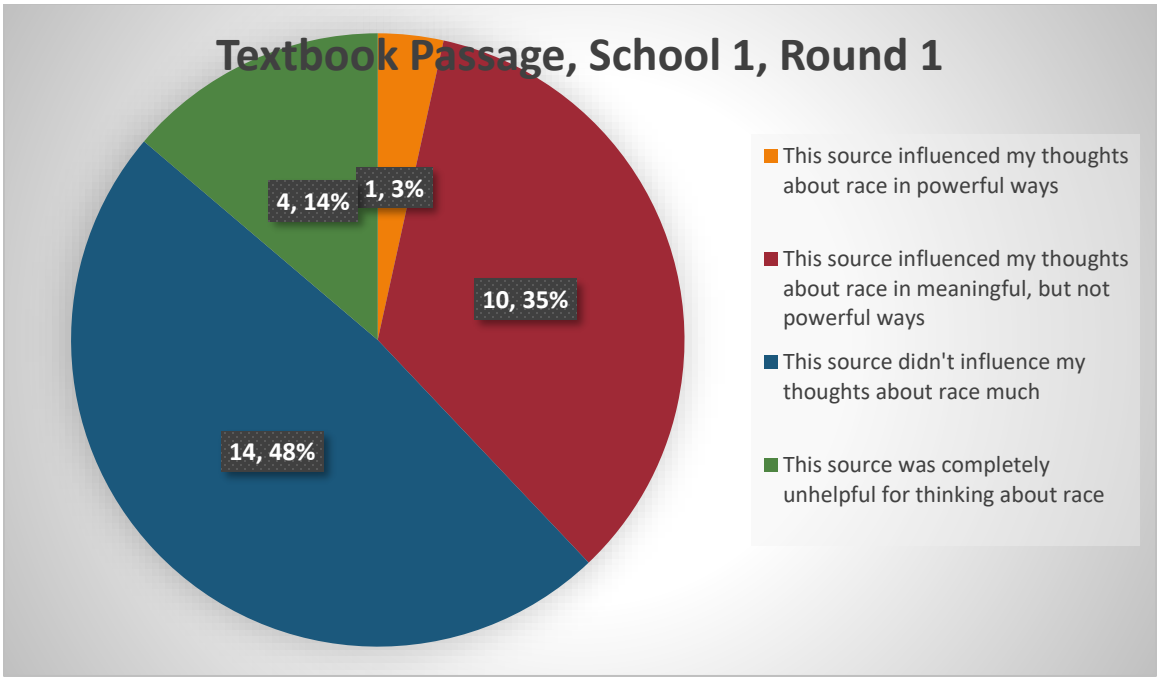
- This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways;
- This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful ways;
- This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much;
- This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race.

The charts below will remain consistent in color-coding, with the first choice (powerful influence) colored orange, the second choice (meaningful-but-not-powerful influence) coded red, the third choice (not much influence) colored blue, and the fourth choice (unhelpful) colored green. We will explore student responses by school and source, starting off with one school and source at a time before showing data for combined schools and combined sources. As a

reminder, School 1 features a student body of mostly economic advantage, while School 2 features a student body of mostly economic disadvantage. We begin with School 1, Round 1: Race and Housing. I will present the five charts before sharing student quotes.

Figure 19

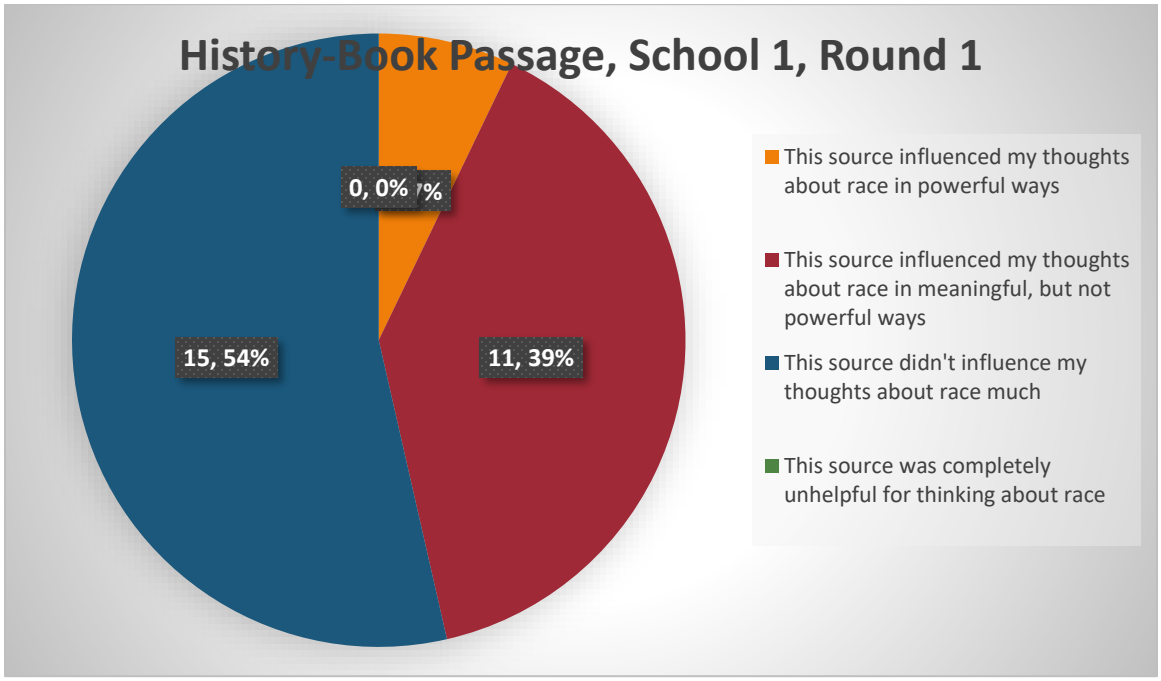
Textbook Passage, School 1 (Race and Housing)



For this source, 38 percent of students shared that the source influenced their thoughts about race in either powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful ways. Almost two-thirds of the students in School 1 said this source either didn't influence their thoughts much or was completely unhelpful.

Figure 20

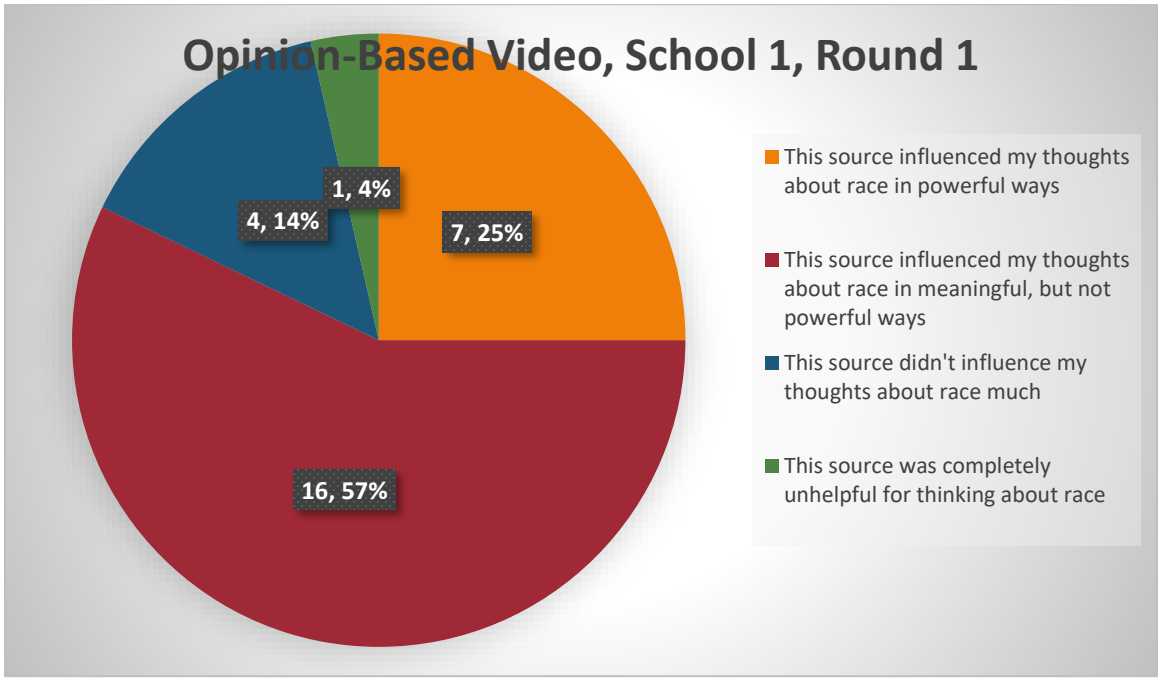
History-Book Passage, School 1 (Race and Housing)



For this source, almost half of School 1 students found the passage from Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law* to be helpful in some way, while slightly more than half found it to not influence their thoughts about race much. None of the students found this book to be completely unhelpful.

Figure 21

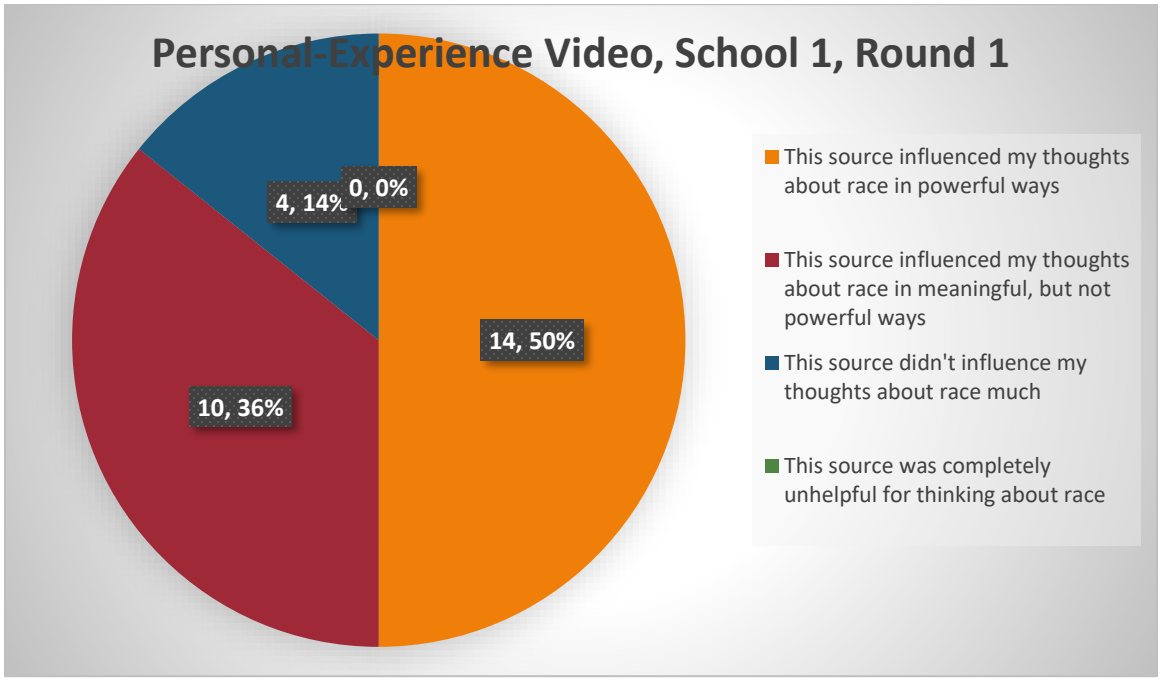
Opinion-Based Video, School 1 (Race and Housing)



The numbers tell a different story with this source. More than 80 percent of students in School 1 found this brief Instagram opinion video to be influential in either powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful ways. Just 18 percent found the source to be uninfluential or unhelpful.

Figure 22

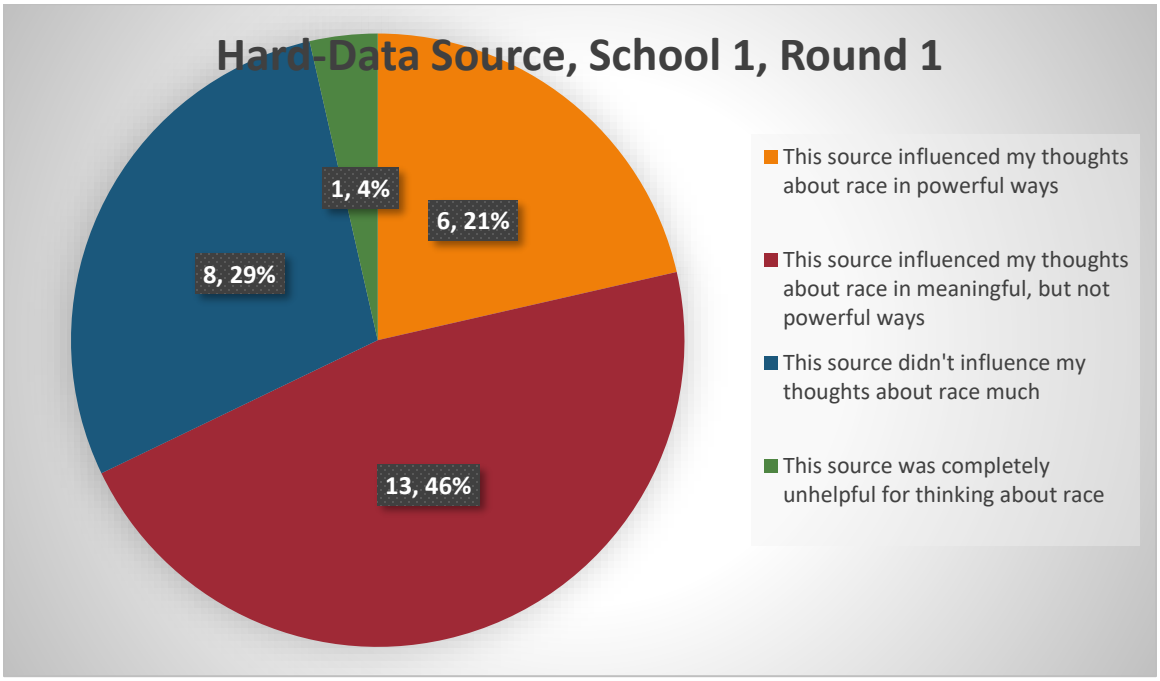
Personal-Experience Video, School 1 (Race and Housing)



Compared to the previous source, a slightly larger percentage of School 1 students found this personal-experience video to be either powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful. Out of the 86 percent who found the video helpful, 50 percent rated it to be a powerful influence – twice the total given to the opinion-based video.

Figure 23

Hard-Data Source, School 1 (Race and Housing)



The hard-data source also gathered high numbers, with two-thirds of School 1 students rating it either powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful. A third of students found the data-based source to be uninfluential or unhelpful.

As one can imagine, several of the quotes commented on the visual sources. In anonymous exit-ticket quotes, one student mentioned that the personal-experience video showed how racism directly affected someone. Another student mentioned that the opinion-based video was engaging because it was short and presented by a teenager. In class discussions, Lucas said he's a "visual learner," thus making the videos a better fit for him. Harper mentioned that videos offered the chance to be "less lost in my own thoughts." Alexander said, "It's easier to understand if you can visually see it and get a good representation of it." Rose added that the videos were "better explained." Michael mentioned that the personal story of a family being denied housing was something to which he could directly relate. "This happened with my mom's

friend," Michael said. "The man showing houses showed houses that were in poorer neighborhoods because she's black. It's horrible and rude in so many ways." Another student wrote in an exit-ticket comment that this personal story was quite influential in thinking about race. "It made me think that there could have been millions of eligible buyers turned down for THE AMOUNT OF MELATONIN IN THEIR SKIN!" (caps are the student's)

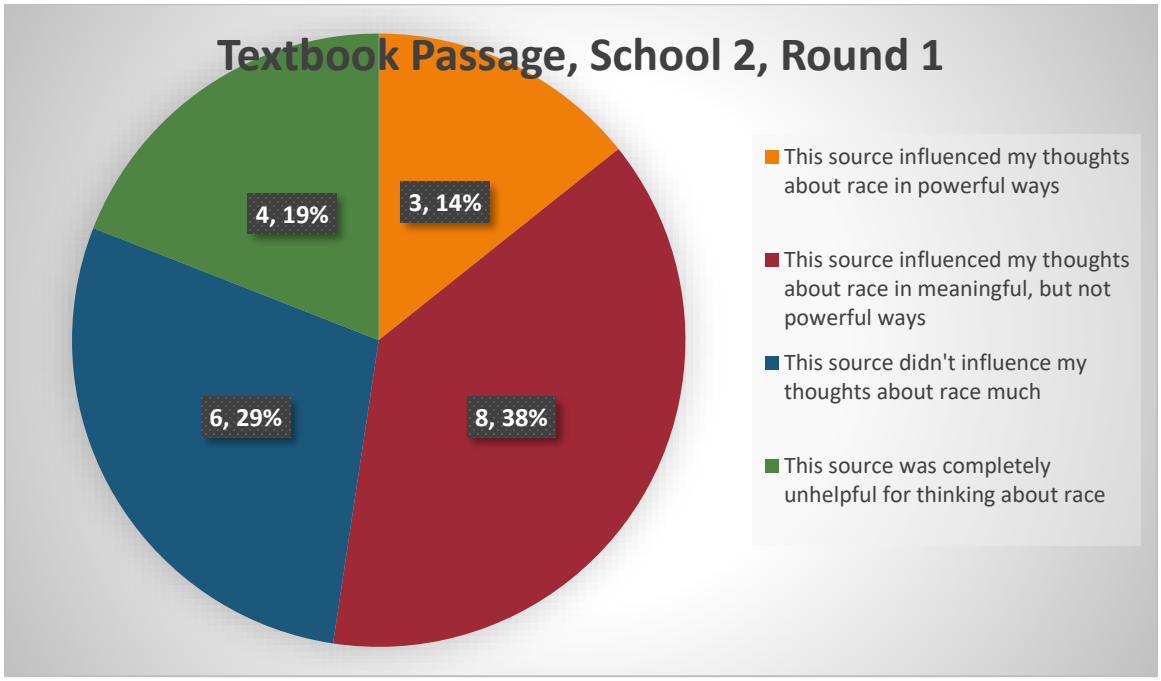
Some students certainly spoke or wrote about the other sources. One student wrote in the exit-ticket survey that the history book excerpt was the most influential because of its depth. Another wrote that the interactive map was best because one could "play around with it." Still another spoke to the value of all five sources, and why the videos tend to resonate most:

> All these sources put the same or similar information in different formats. The videos and maps were certainly more interesting to me because I am a visual learner and like to see pictures and visuals. I think in today's day and age the Instagram post would influence our generation the most because social media is such a prominent thing in the lives of teens today. The sources were all easy to understand, but the videos were better. These sources made me see how your race could impact your income and living conditions.

We now move over to School 2, Round 1: Race and Housing. I will again present the five charts before sharing student quotes.

Figure 24

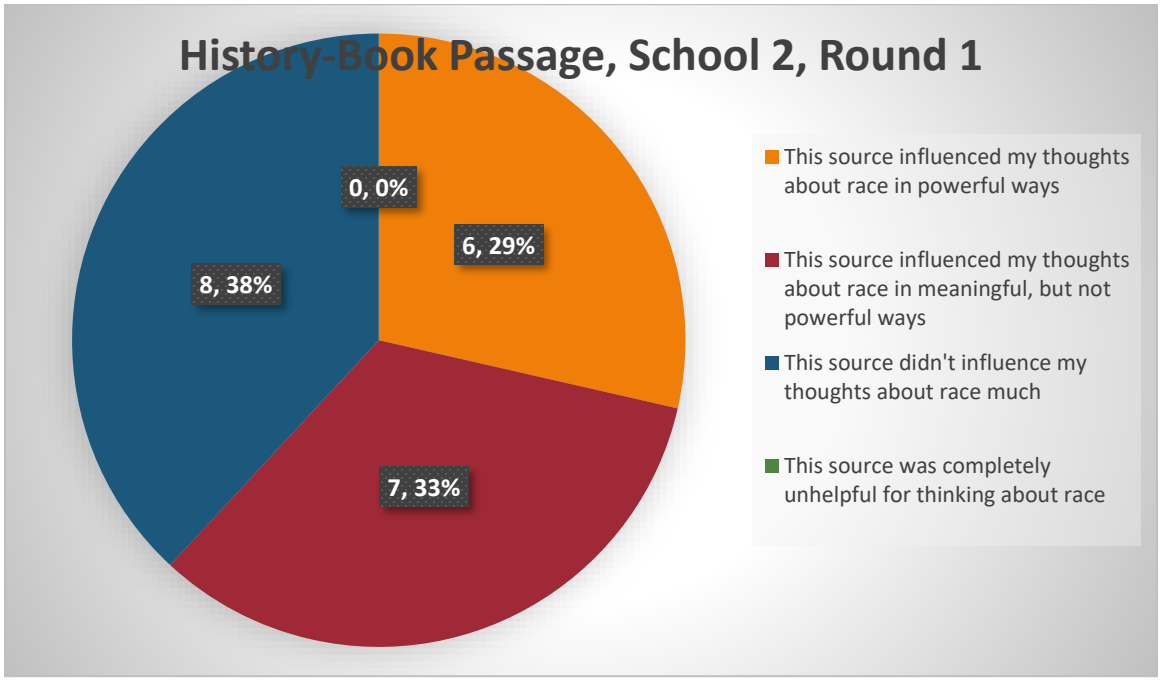
Textbook Passage, School 2 (Race and Housing)



For this source, we see that more than 50 percent of School 2 students found the textbook source to be influential in powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful ways, while slightly less than 50 percent found it to be uninfluential or unhelpful.

Figure 25

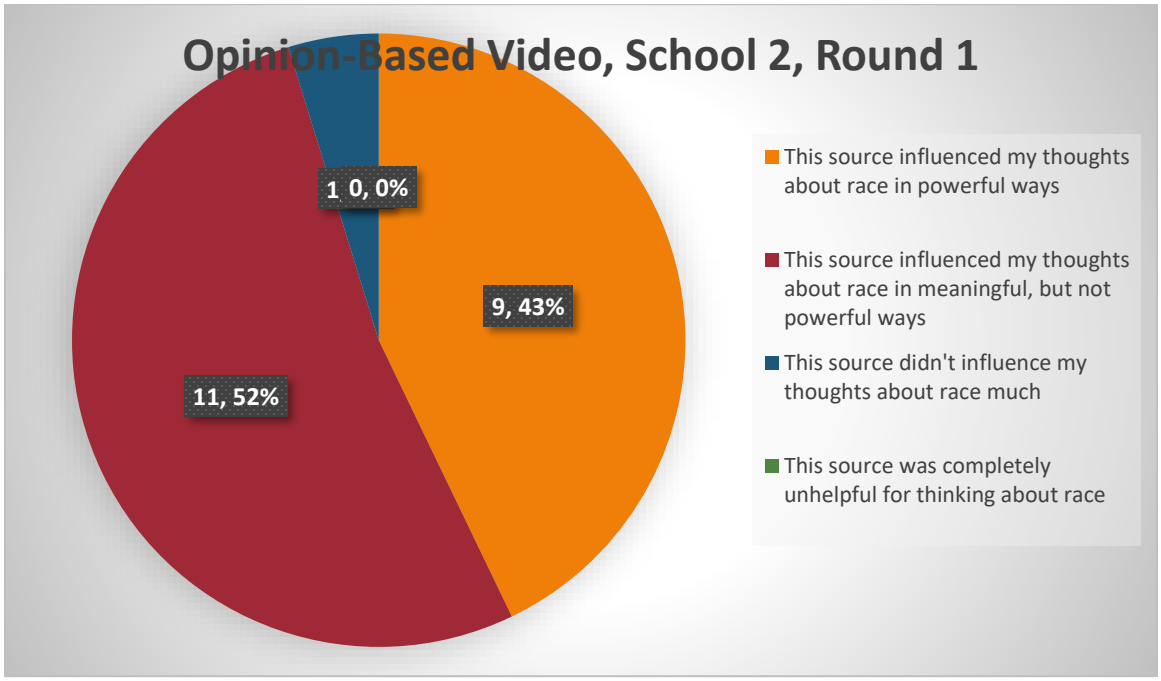
History-Book Passage, School 2 (Race and Housing)



More than 60 percent of School 2 students found the *Color of Law* passage to be powerfully or meaningfully influential, with less than 40 percent finding it not as influential, and no students finding it to be completely unhelpful.

Figure 26

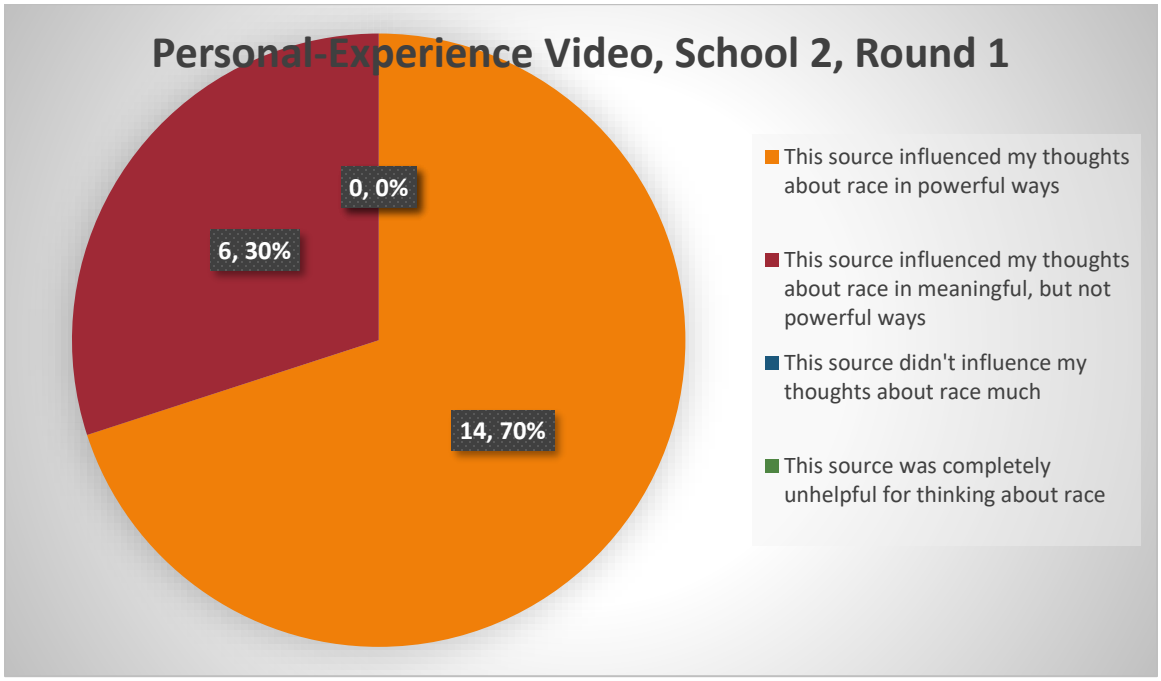
Opinion-Based Video, School 2 (Race and Housing)



For the social media-based opinion video, 95 percent of School 2 students found the source to be influential in powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful ways. Just 5 percent found it to be uninfluential.

Figure 27

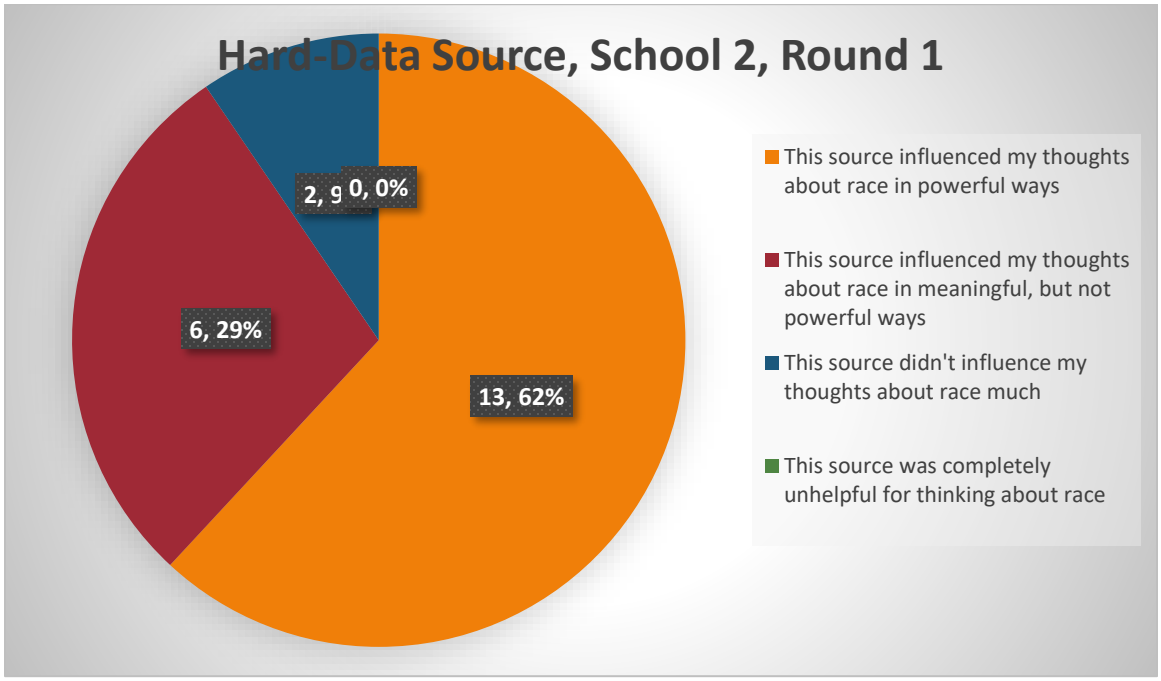
Personal-Experience Video, School 2 (Race and Housing)



Every student surveyed in School 2 found the personal-experience video to be influential, with 70 percent finding it to be powerful and another 30 percent finding it to be meaningful-but-not-powerful.

Figure 28

Hard-Data Source, School 2 (Race and Housing)



More than 90 percent of School 2 students found the interactive data site on redlining to be influential in either powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful ways. While the hard-data source gathered slightly lower numbers than the opinion-based video in overall influence, it had higher numbers than the opinion video in terms of powerful influence.

In their exit-ticket quotes, School 2 students wrote about the impact of the visual sources. Several students wrote about the ways in which the personal-experience video offered them the direct perspective of someone who had experienced racism in housing. “I just got to experience their true feelings and emotions,” one student wrote. In our class discussion, Gianna said the personal-experience video offered her “undeniable evidence” of housing segregation. She added that “when you just see it, you don’t have to put all of the pieces together.” Jackson added that this video proof shocked him by presenting exactly what the Rachal family had gone through. “That’s what really stands out to me, knowing that there is no doubt that it happened,” he added.

“I’m more of an evidence person. I said, ‘Wow, these people’s lives could have been really different.’ ” Mia said the personal story video showed her that “this can happen everywhere.” She added that her own cousin had faced similar discrimination in a Florida mall when he was trying to buy something for his girlfriend, and the store employees didn’t think he had enough money.

Students spoke highly of the opinion video as well, with one student writing, “I learn better when listening to people explain something in their own words.” Jackson added that the inclusion of teens and social media attracted him to this source. Another student wrote that this minute-long video was engaging “because I didn’t have to stay still for an eon and a half, and because there wasn’t anything to distract me. Just information being given out in a summed-up and swift manner.”

As for the hard-data source, one student wrote that the maps offered clarity. Luna also spoke about the clarity, sharing that the “facts” and “details” in the maps allowed her to make meaning of the map quickly. Larry shared that the maps made segregation evident, and “to see areas red just because black people lived there – that’s bad.” Larry added that he would be angry if he saw that kind of map today.

In comparing the two schools for round 1, we see that School 2 students gave every source more “powerful influence” ratings than School 1 did. In particular, the hard-data source saw the biggest bump, and clearly stood out more to School 2 students. Overall, 41 percent more School 2 students rated it a powerful influence than School 1 students did. In addition, both books received higher positive ratings from School 2 students. I will now show five charts that combine both schools for this first round of sources covering race and housing.

Figure 29

Textbook Passage, Both Schools (Race and Housing)

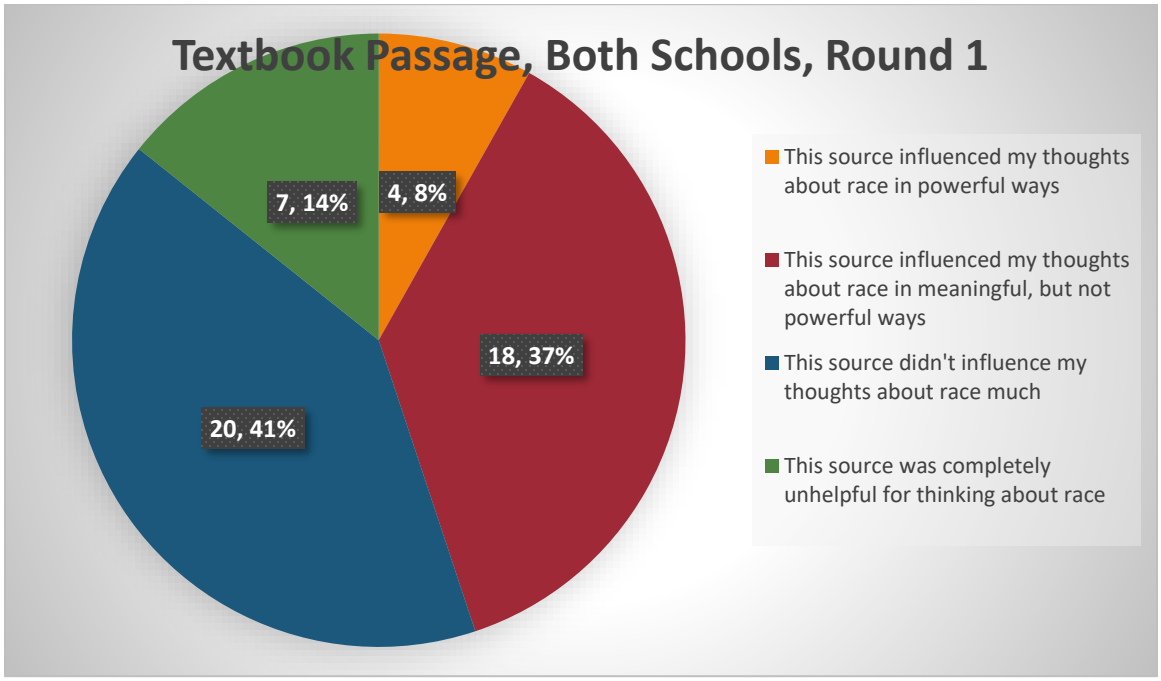


Figure 30

History-Book Passage, Both Schools (Race and Housing)

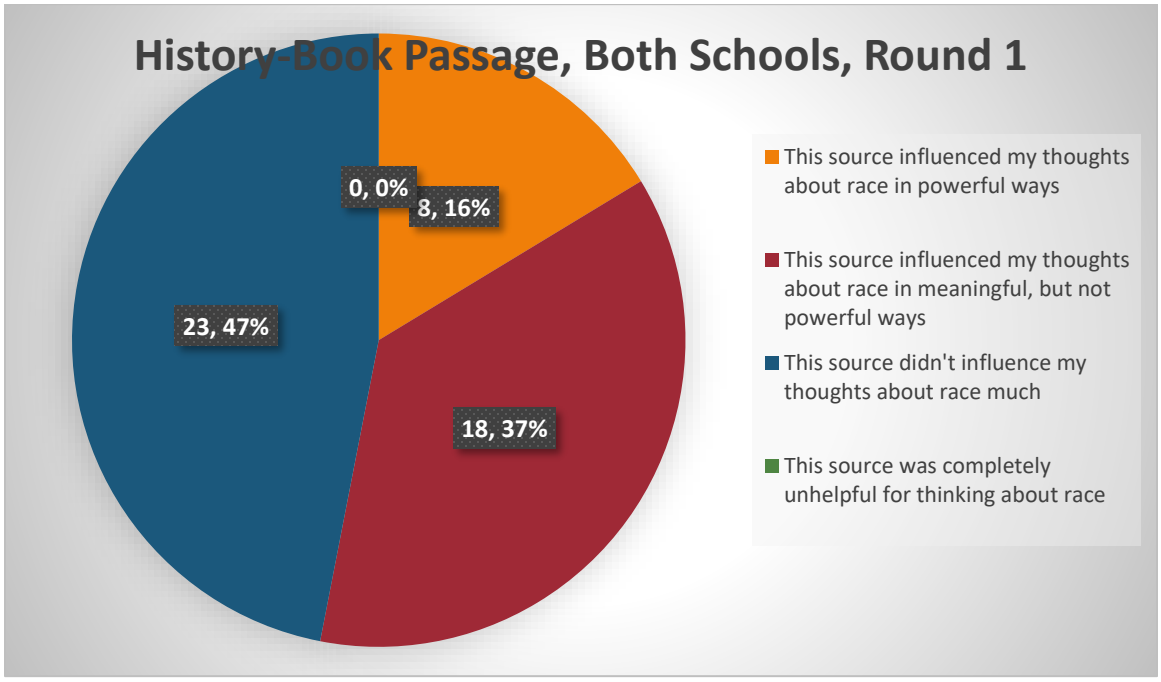


Figure 31

Opinion-Based Video, Both Schools (Race and Housing)

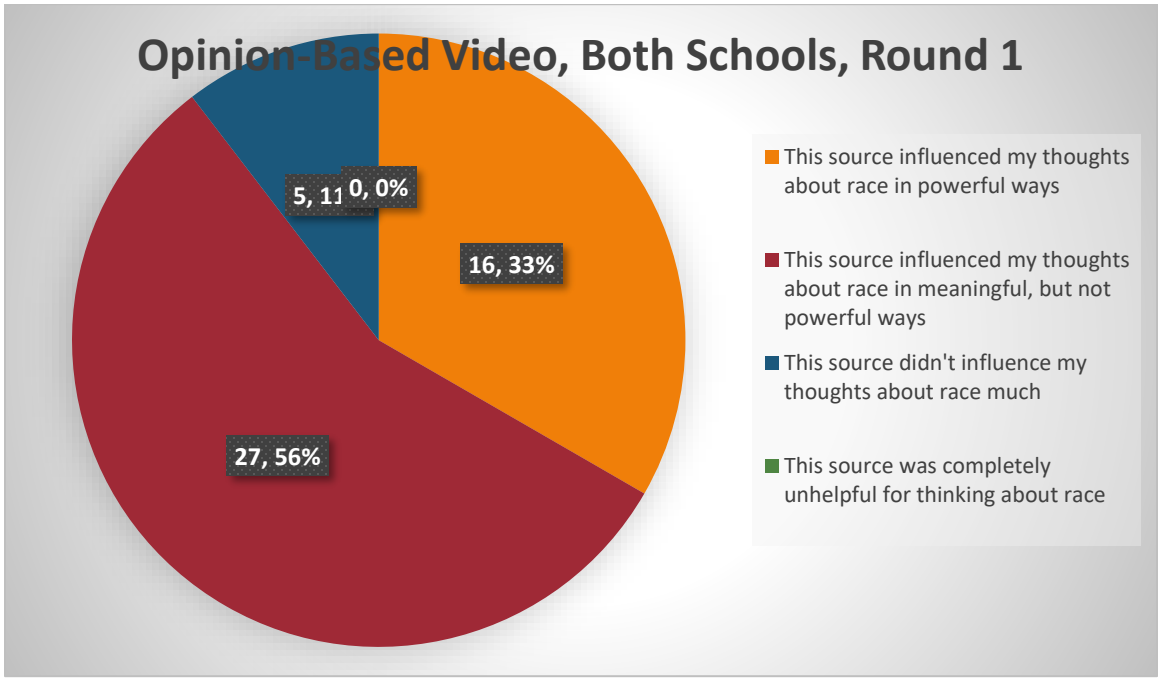


Figure 32

Personal-Experience Video, Both Schools (Race and Housing)

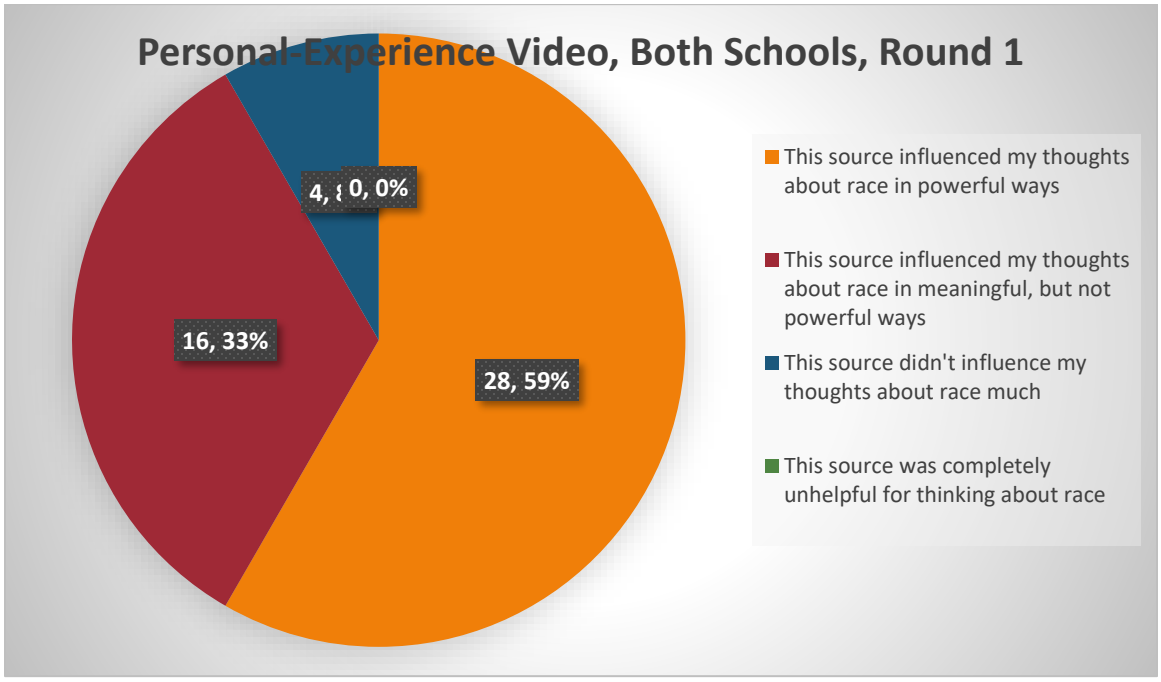
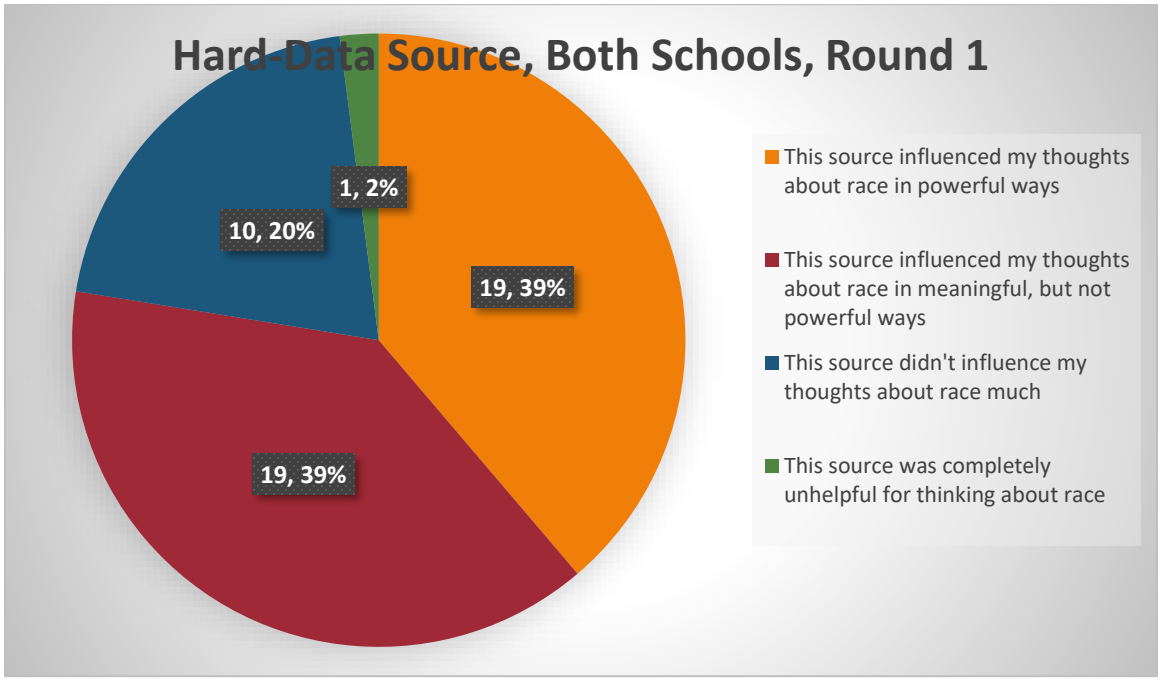


Figure 33

Hard-Data Source, Both Schools (Race and Housing)

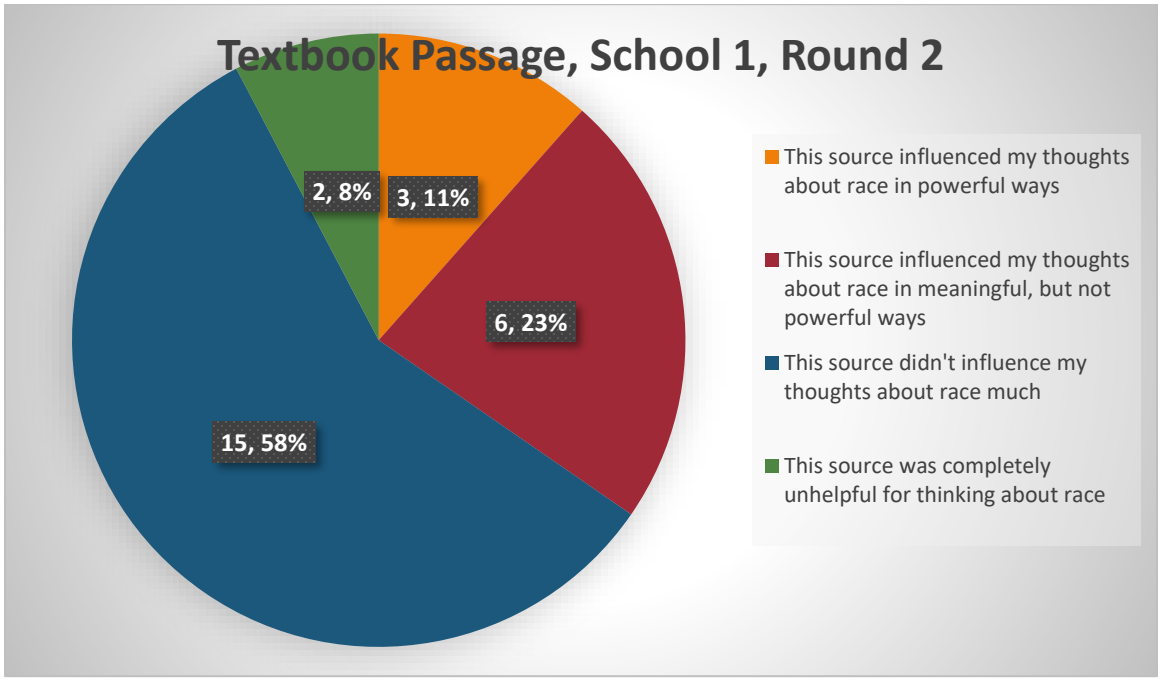


When combining both schools' ratings, we see that slightly less than 50 percent of all students found the textbook passage to be positive in its influence, and slightly more than 50 percent found the history book passage to be positive. As for the two video sources and the hard-data source, more than three-quarters of all students found all three to be positive influences. As for the highest rating of being a powerful influence, nothing approached the personal-experience video, which had 59 percent of the students in both schools rating it to be a powerful influence.

In order to add more balance to the student source responses connected to this second research question, it was important that I gave students another round of five sources, this time connected to a different race-related topic: immigration. Again, students encountered the same types of sources in the same order, presented in the same manner. We begin with School 1, Round 2: Race and Immigration. I will present the five charts before sharing student quotes.

Figure 34

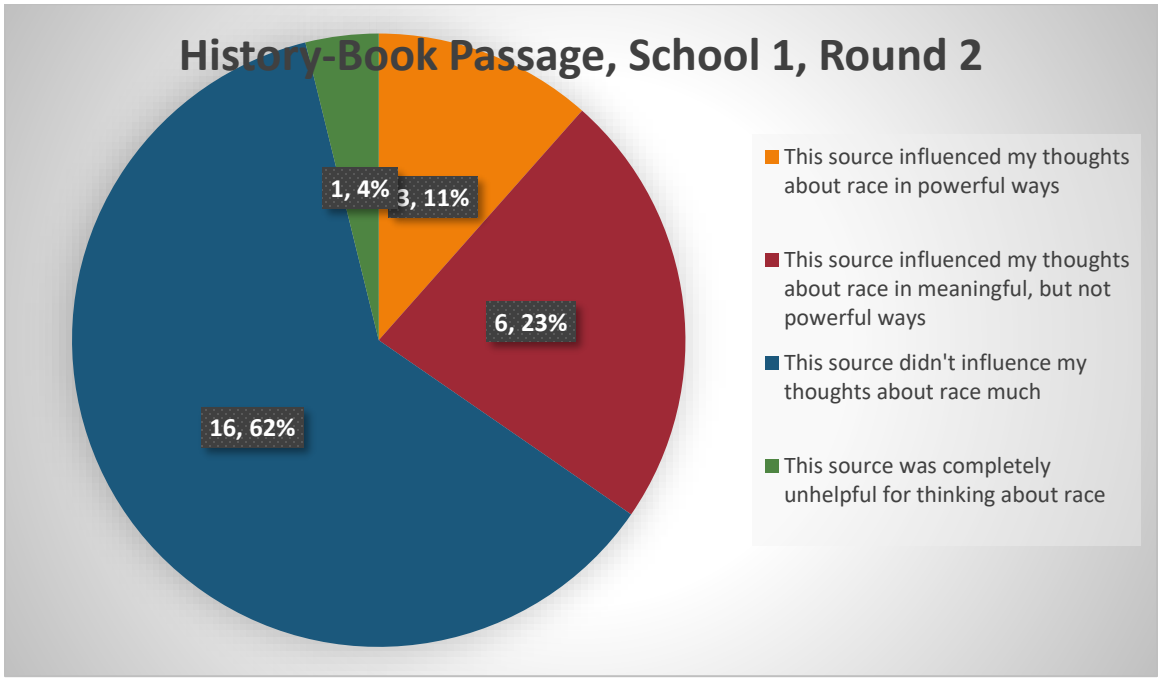
Textbook Passage, School 1 (Race and Immigration)



A total of 34 percent of School 1 students found the immigration-focused textbook passage to offer a powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful influence, compared to 38 percent combined for the previous round's housing-based textbook passage.

Figure 35

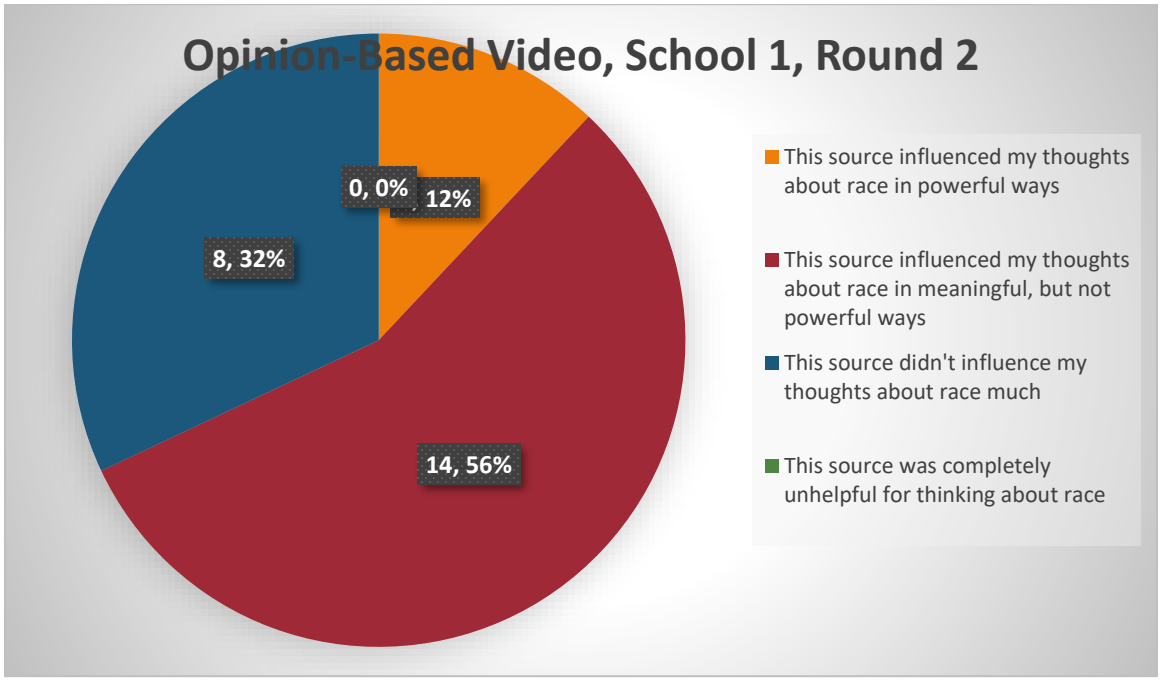
History-Book Passage, School 1 (Race and Immigration)



A combined 34 percent of School 1 students found the *America for Americans* passage to hold a powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful influence, which was a slight drop from the 46 percent who found the passage from *The Color of Law* to be a positive influence in the previous round.

Figure 36

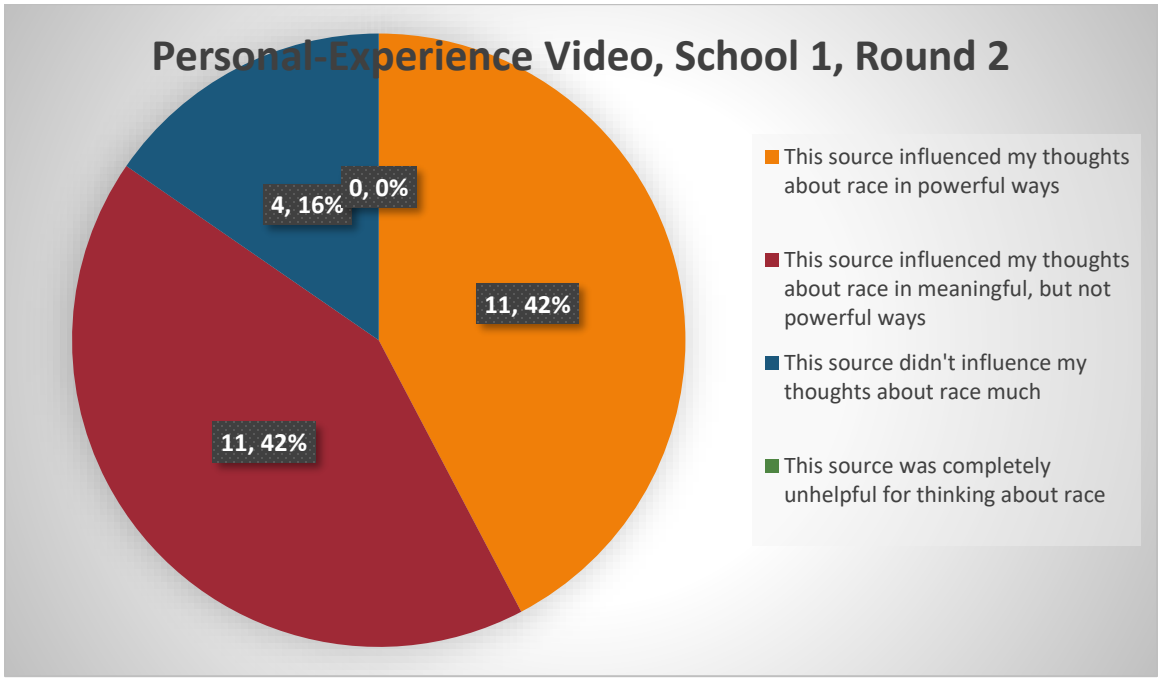
Opinion-Based Video, School 2 (Race and Immigration)



A combined 68 percent of School 1 students found the opinion-based social media post to be a positive influence, also a drop from the 82 percent from this school who found the same type of source to be a positive influence in the race and housing round.

Figure 37

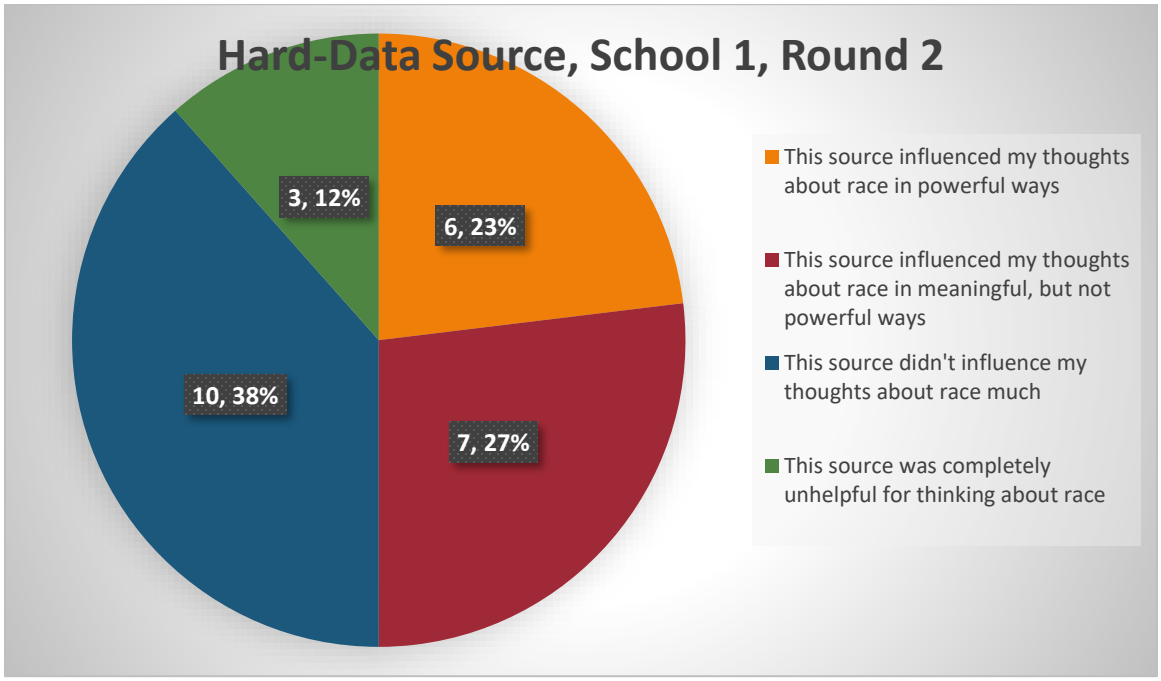
Personal-Experience Video, School 1 (Race and Immigration)



For this source, 84 percent of School 1 students found the personal-experience video to be either powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful. This was almost identical to the 86 percent who found the personal experience video to be a positive influence in the previous round.

Figure 38

Hard-Data Source, School 1 (Race and Immigration)



Half of School 1 students found the interactive, data-based source to be positive in its influence, compared to 67 percent in the previous round. However, just as many students found the data source to hold a powerful influence as in the previous round, with fewer choosing the meaningful-but-not-powerful rating.

In our class discussions and interviews, students from School 1 spoke at length about the influence that the visual sources had on them in round 2. Mila spoke about the ways in which videos pull her in. “When there’s a video, it’s easier to understand what people might have been going through because of the way people portray different thoughts and emotions through their voice, the tone, and how they speak,” she said. Ben spoke specifically about the way in which the opinion-based video spoke to the viewer’s feelings:

They also opened up the emotions of the consumer by saying, “How would you feel if you were separated from your family?” This emotional aspect of the video may change people’s points of view on the racial injustices of this country.

Lucas elaborated on the difference between the print and visual sources:

These [print] sources are very fact-based. They’re great for information, but they just give you facts. They don’t really give you emotions. The videos were personal accounts and opinions, which are … probably easier to get emotion out of them. I’m pretty drawn to emotion.

Emma said the opinion-based video made her think “a little harder about race,” and she found herself wondering why some immigrants have been treated so harshly when this country’s Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal.” She added, ‘It was kind of ironic to me because they say that all men are created equal, but it didn’t really show that.” Charlotte added that Packnett’s statement that separating families of color was “as American as apple pie” kind of stopped her cold. “That kind of caught me off-guard,” Charlotte said, “because it did really seem like it was.”

Amelia said she preferred the shorter “quick and easy” opinion video. “Give me something visual or interactive, or just something that doesn’t take long,” she said. “Like for the text, it was just so long and it was so boring.” Even the 4½-minute personal story video lost Amelia at some point. “The other video was kind of long, so I kind of got bored,” she said.

The personal-experience video engaged several School 1 students, particularly when the narrator shared his life’s turning point of learning that he was undocumented. Mason said that once he learned that Vargas was undocumented, “everything changed about that video.” Olivia

added that “there’s many people who may not know their history because maybe their parents didn’t tell them or they’re not into it.” Hannah shared that this part also pulled her in:

> It was just interesting to listen to his story. I feel like that partly because I kind of relate to him. My parents are also immigrants. It was just really sad to see how he thought he belonged in America, when this whole time he was illegal.

Some of the School 1 students spoke positively about the print sources. Ava said the specific anecdotes of xenophobia stood out to her in the *America for Americans* book. In her analysis, Ava used similar words in describing the book as some of her classmates had used in describing the personal story video:

> I’m more of a visual learner, and I can imagine what’s happening when I hear a personal story and it helps me focus more. But when it’s just facts, it’s not attention-grabbing, so I’m more drawn to someone’s story.

John put the power of Lee’s history book bluntly: “This one made me rethink something.” Joe elaborated on his specific thoughts about oppression as he read about the pushback against Mexican immigrants:

> America is getting rid of a lot of races just because they don’t like them. That is what Hitler did. He got rid of races just because he didn’t like them. The Nazis wanted the Jews out. They didn’t want them anymore, because they thought they caused a lot of bad things. But then America wants immigrants and other races out, because they think they’re doing bad things by coming here. It’s kind of the same thing.

Mason said he was quite engaged by the textbook passage about the Chinese Exclusion Act. “My perspective of race has changed, seeing how so many people try to get into the U.S.,” he said. Mason added that he’d always heard of illegal Mexican immigrants, but not illegal Asian

immigrants. “It was really surprising to me how they were trying to come into America, and they were treated worse than other immigrants,” he said. I asked Mason what the most important tool is for gaining his attention on a topic like this. Is it to teach him something new? “Yeah, probably,” he said. “If you catch me off-guard with something and surprise me.”

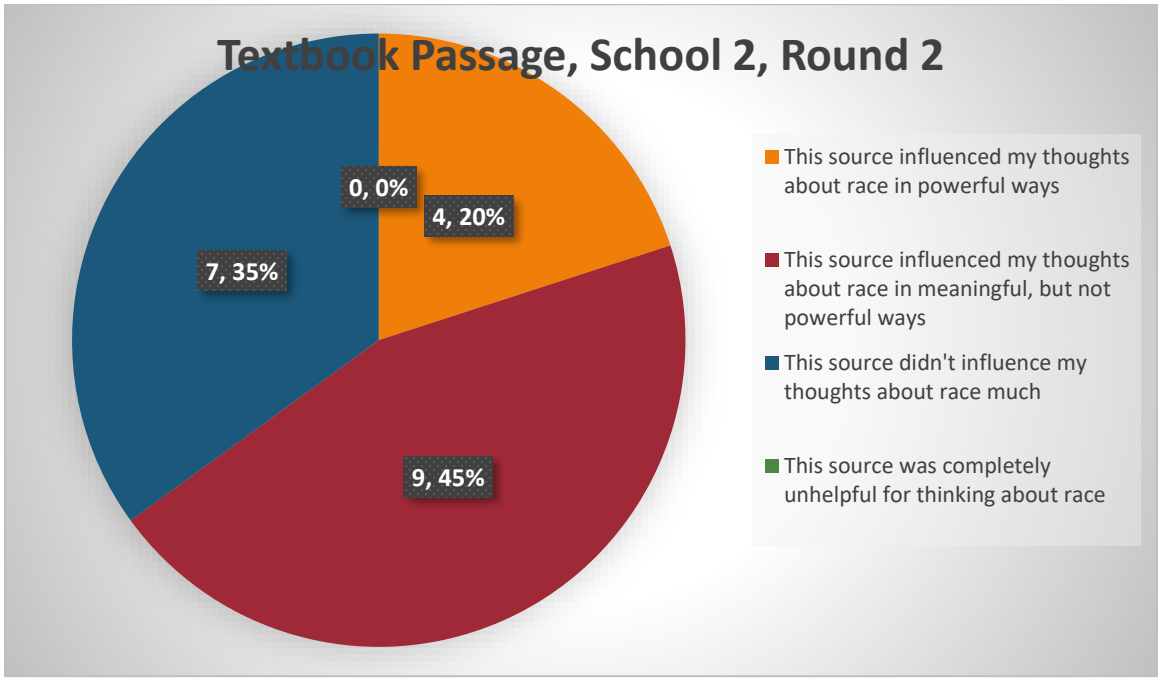
Harper shared that the hard-data source was the best in this round. “It was more interesting to me,” Harper said, adding that the key for this source was the way in which it paired data with text. Harper added that “visual helps,” but it’s not always the number-one thing.

A couple of School 1 students had praise for all five sources. “I think that all of them kind of taught me something new,” Olivia said. “They had different meanings behind them, but they all combined into one thing.” Olivia said that while the sources all presented the same argument, “it was interesting to see everyone’s stories and what they’ve gone through.” Rose shared that the print sources explained the facts more clearly, including how immigration segregation “evolved over time.” The videos complemented this, she added, because “you can really see with the videos how it affects people and how far back this has been going on.”

We’ll now shift again to School 2, Round 2: Race and Immigration. I will again present the five charts before sharing student quotes.

Figure 39

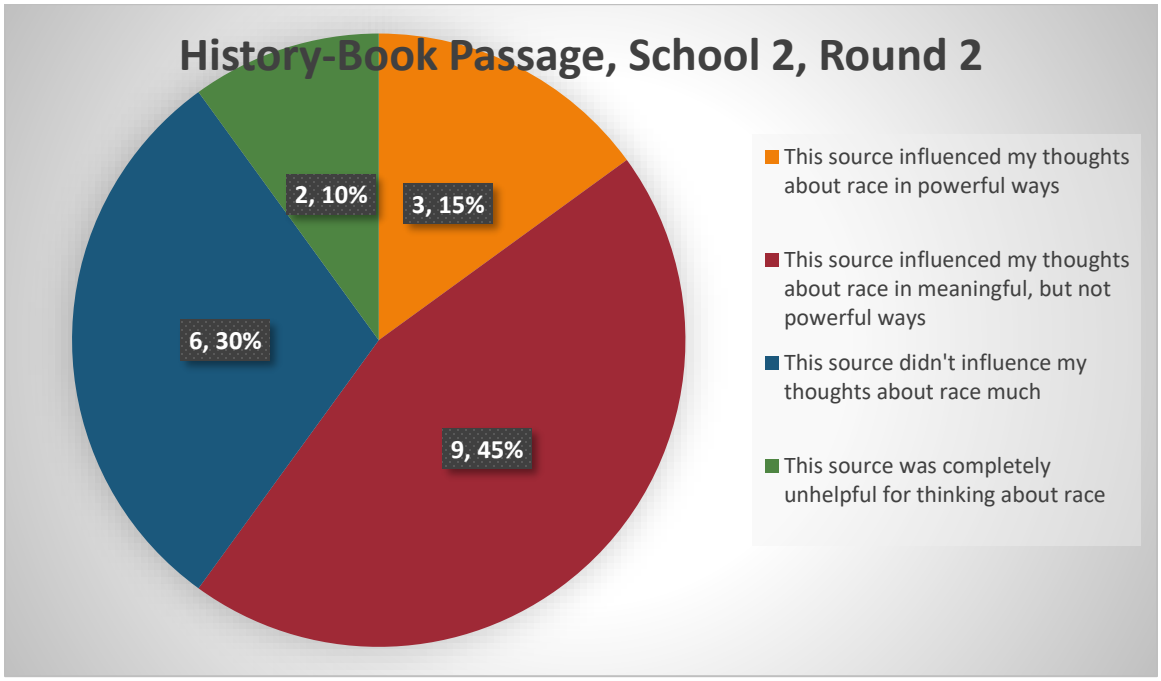
Textbook Passage, School 2 (Race and Immigration)



For the textbook source, 65 percent of School 2 students found it to be influential in either powerful or meaning-but-not-powerful ways. This was a 13-percent increase in positive ratings from the textbook source in the previous round.

Figure 40

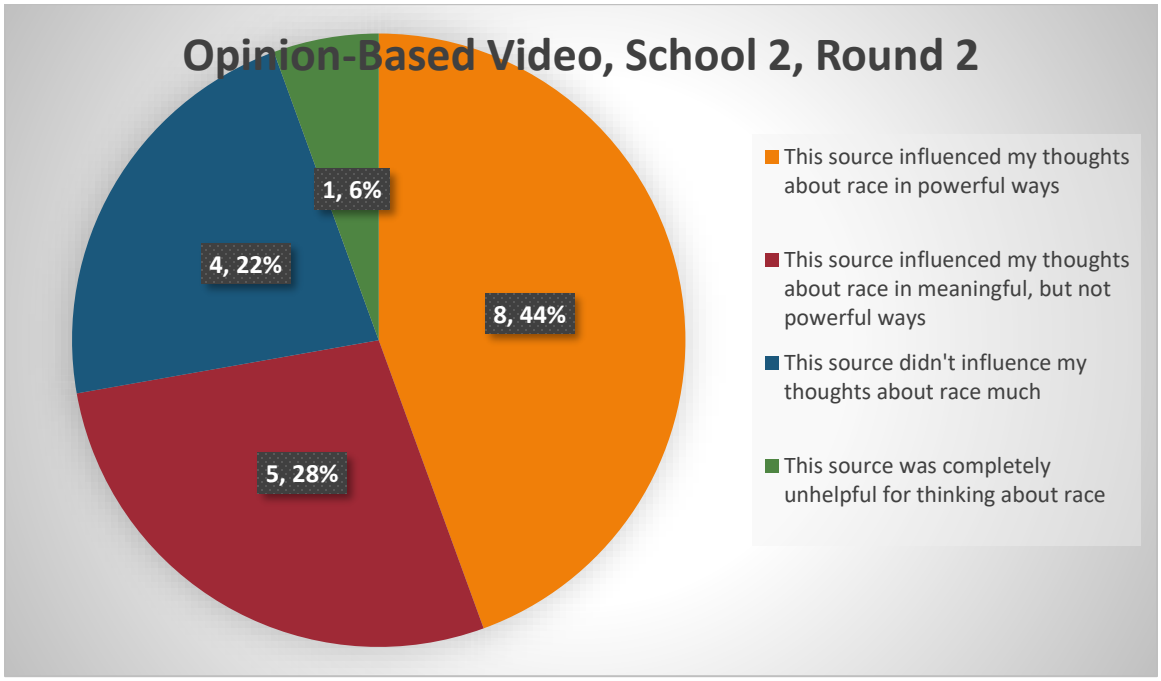
History-Book Passage, School 2 (Race and Immigration)



Sixty percent of School 2 students found the history book passage to be influential in either powerful or meaning-but-not-powerful ways. This was just a two-percent drop from the percent who gave the history book a positive rating in round one.

Figure 41

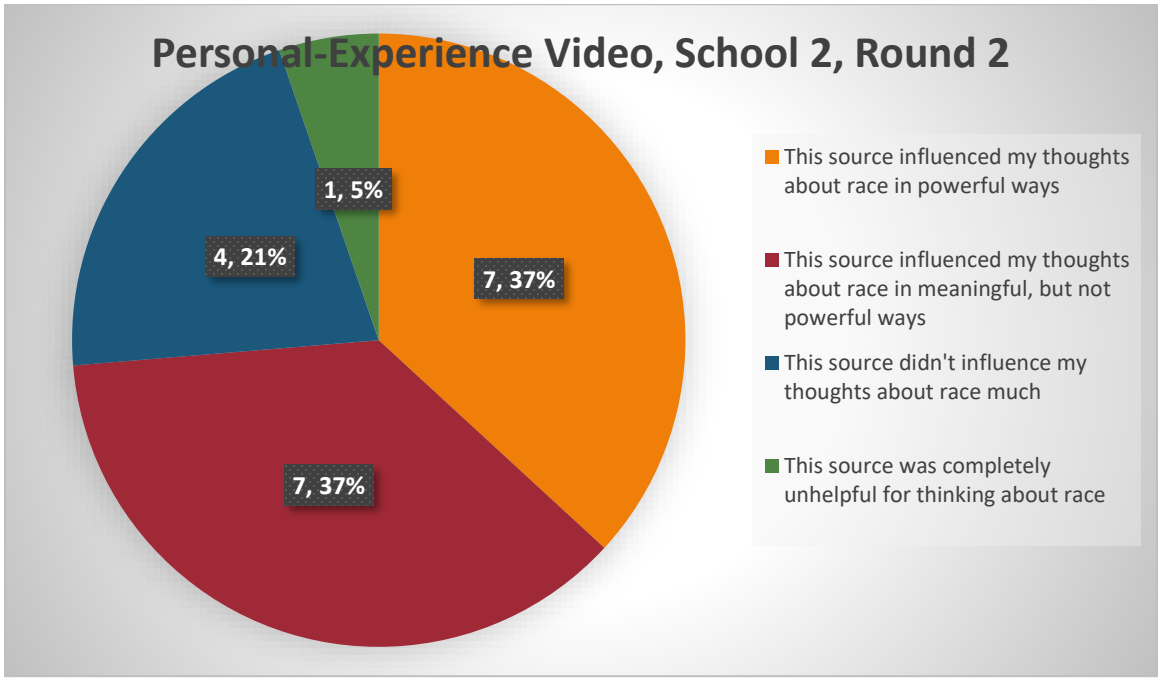
Opinion-Based Video, School 2 (Race and Immigration)



For the opinion-based video, 72 percent of School 2 students found the source to be positive in its influence, a significant drop from the 95 percent who found the opinion video to be positive in the previous round on race and housing. However, the percentage of students who found the opinion-based video to be a powerful influence was nearly the same as in the previous round (44 percent compared to 43 percent). The percent who found it to be a meaningful-but-not-powerful source dropped significantly (from 52 to 28 percent), and the percent who found that it did not influence their thoughts about race much increased (from 5 percent to 22 percent).

Figure 42

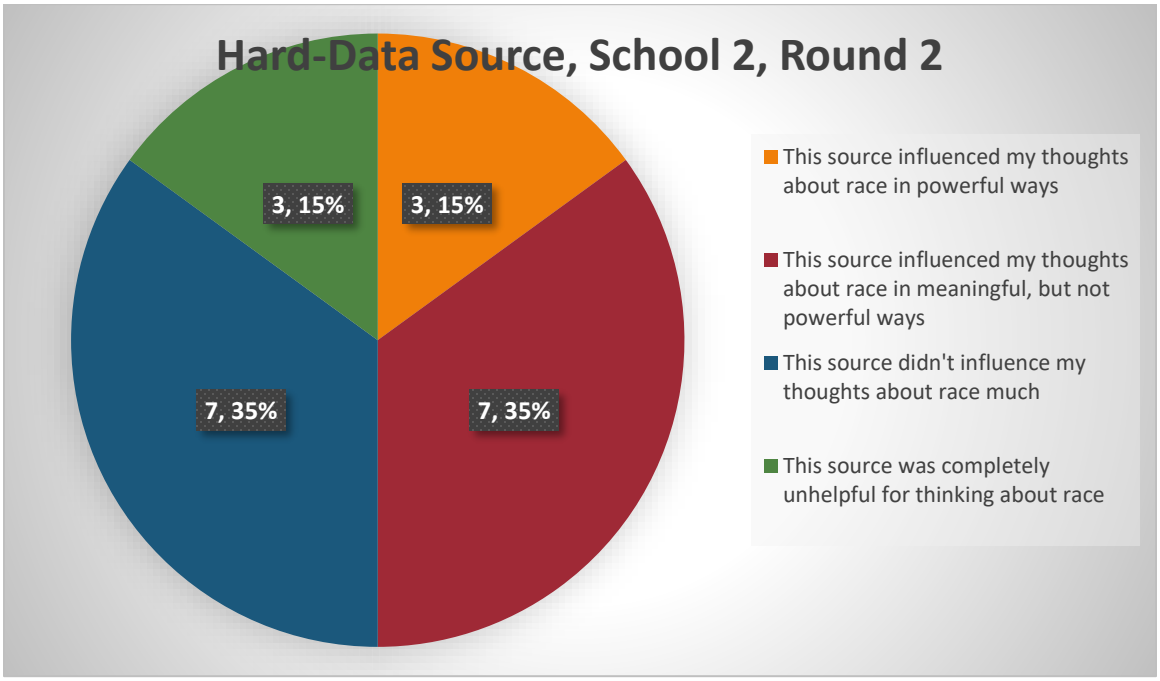
Personal-Experience Video, School 2 (Race and Immigration)



A total of 74 percent of School 2 students found the personal story video to be a powerful or meaning-but-not-powerful influence, which was a drop from the 100 percent who found the personal story video to be a positive influence in round 1. The percentage who found this second video to be meaning-but-not-powerful actually increased, from 30 percent to 37 percent, but the percentage who found this one to be a powerful influence nearly halved, from 70 percent to 37 percent.

Figure 43

Hard-Data Source, School 2 (Race and Immigration)



Half of School 2 students found the hard-data source on immigration to be a positive influence, while half found it to be neutral or negative in its influence. This was a big drop from the 91 percent who gave the hard-data source positive ratings in the previous round. The drop-off was located within the "powerful influence" rating, which dropped from 62 percent to 15 percent for this hard-data source.

Once again, no source produced less than 50 percent positive influence for School 2 students. Their quotes spanned all sources. Some spoke highly about the videos, with Evelyn sharing, "It's better for me to hear it and just watch it," as she doesn't always pay attention when reading. Camila shared that the personal-experience video gave a clear account of what Vargas had gone through and how he had received help. "My family, they come from a different country," Camila said. "To hear about what someone has gone through, that's different than just knowing about it. It hit me."

Mateo shared that with the personal-experience video, he was "able to hear and see what happened to Jose." Mateo added that he prefers "watching someone's point of view, what they went through." He shared that this affects his ability to visualize the story. "When I read it, I don't imagine it," he said. I asked what happens when he sees the source, and he responded, "I get an imagination about it."

Some students spoke highly of the textbook and history-book passages. Larry shared that both print sources "were interesting, and I kept reading." Larry added that with the print sources, he could re-read what he wanted, giving him more control over the source in this situation, since he didn't have access to rewinding the videos that were projected for the full class. Jackson shared that while he is usually more attracted to visual sources, "sometimes the reading gives you more information. That's what I like. I like evidence and information."

Still others in School 2 spoke highly of the hard-data source. "It's better than all, honestly, because it had a map and its own colors, and showed it better in the timeline," Mia said. Owen added that the data source caught his attention when it showed the different types of races that were allowed to immigrate legally to the U.S. "Every time I would click on a specific country, it would show a little amount, and I would be surprised," Owen said. He also preferred having control over the pace of his source exploration. "I could just take my own time," he said. Theo shared that while he doesn't consider himself a "math guy," he found the data source interesting. "I like doing things more hands-on," he said. "I find that more interesting. I understand it more than just viewing it or listening to it."

Some School 2 students spoke highly of all the sources in round two. "Each one brought out a different perspective," Gianna said. "The first video was more forward and argumentative, and the second video was a personal experience. Every source brought something different."

Elizabeth said all of the sources were helpful to her, so long as they equipped her to help others on the tough issues. “First I want to learn about racism, and then help others,” she said.

In comparing the two schools for round 2, we see a couple of interesting differences. For one, the opinion-based video drew far more “powerful influence” ratings from School 2 students than it did from School 1. In addition, both print sources drew more overall positive ratings, either powerful or meaning-but-not-powerful, from School 2. The personal story video drew slightly higher influence ratings from School 1, and both schools had similar mixed results for the hard-data source. In School 1, however, almost twice as many students cited the data source as a powerful influence than the opinion-based video. I will now show five charts that combine both schools for this second round of sources covering race and housing.

Figure 44

Textbook Passage, Both Schools (Race and Immigration)

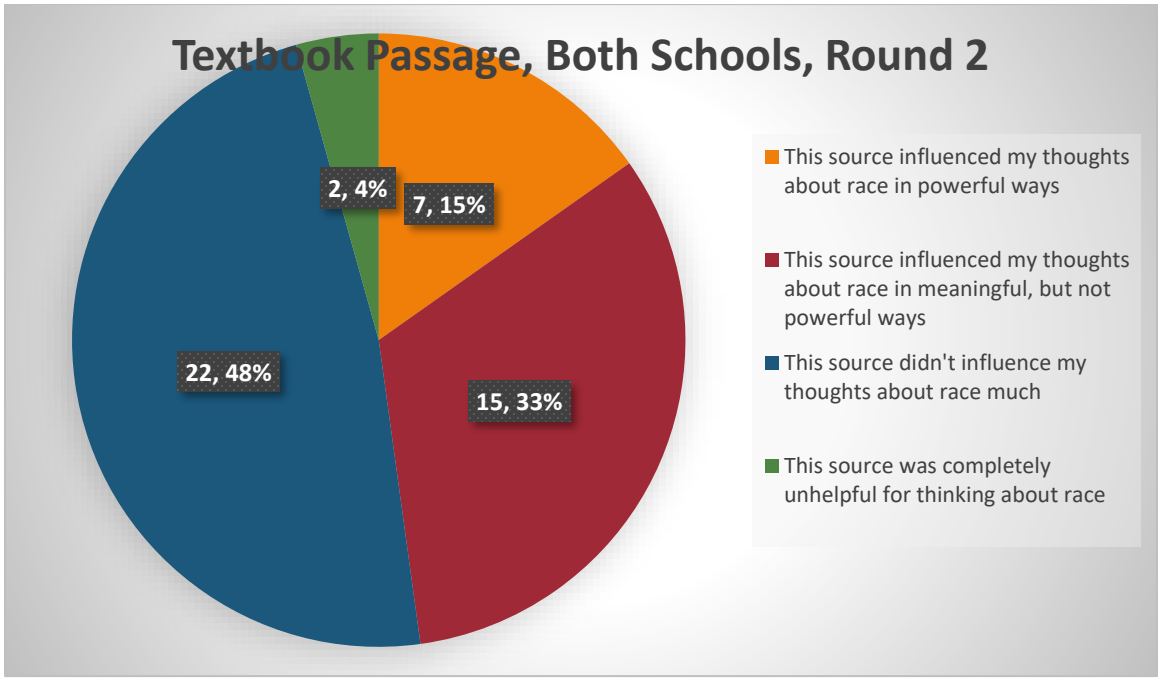


Figure 45

History-Book Passage, Both Schools (Race and Immigration)

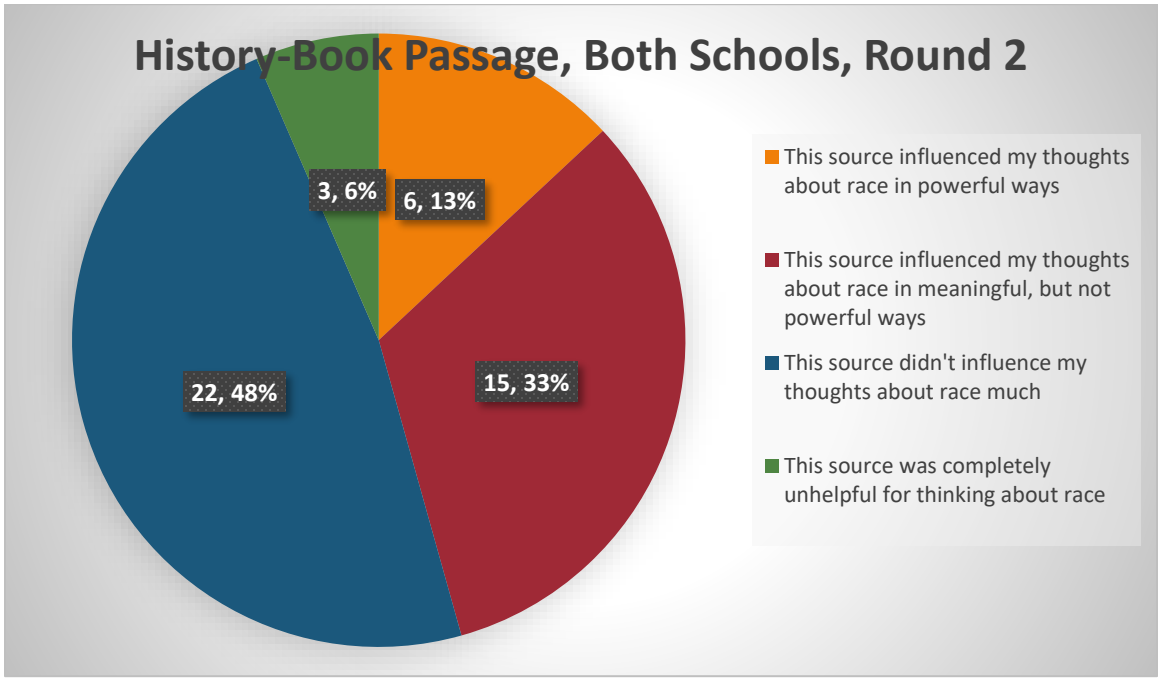


Figure 46

Opinion-Based Video, Both Schools (Race and Immigration)

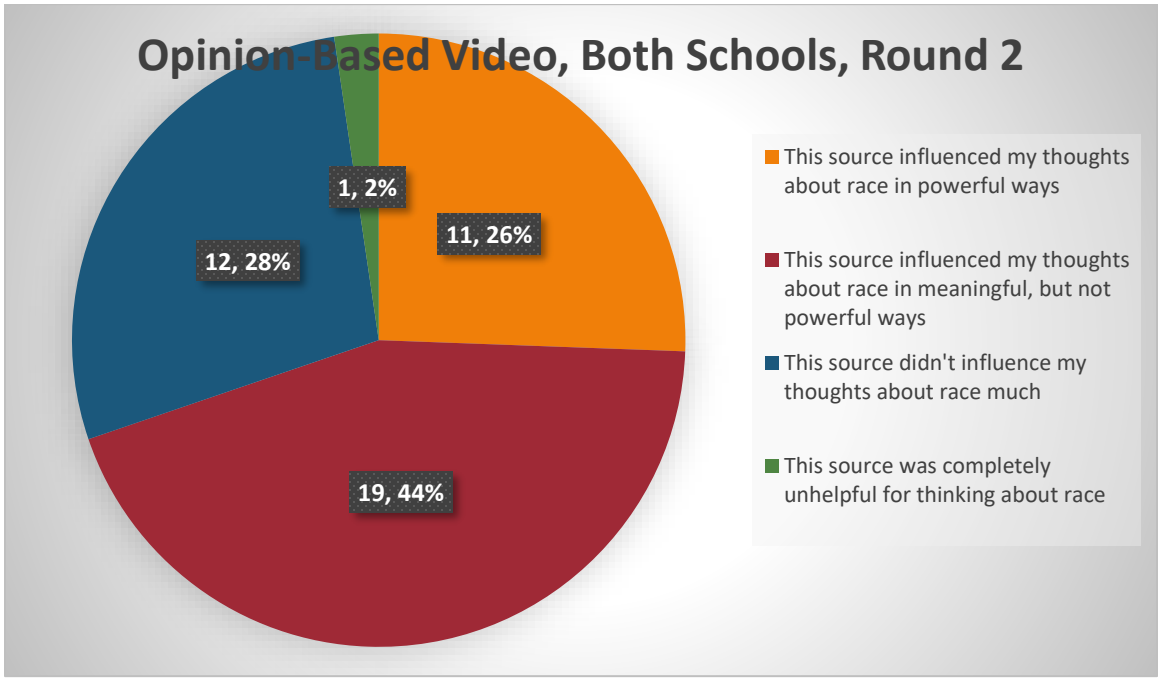


Figure 47

Personal-Experience Video, Both Schools (Race and Immigration)

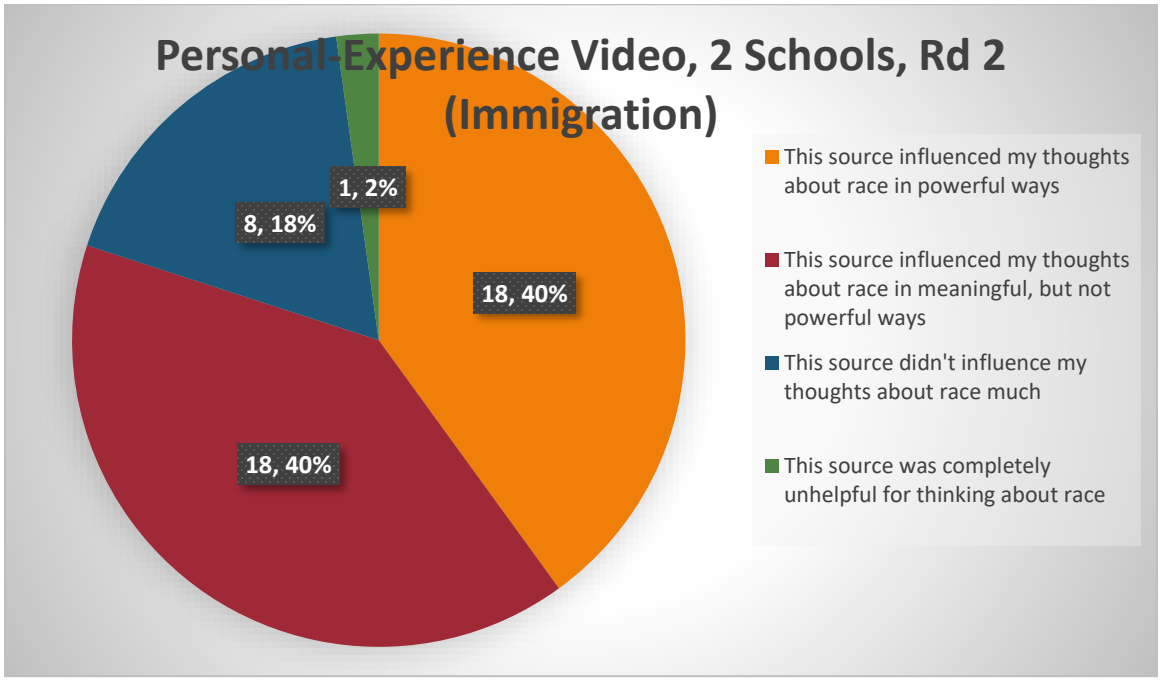
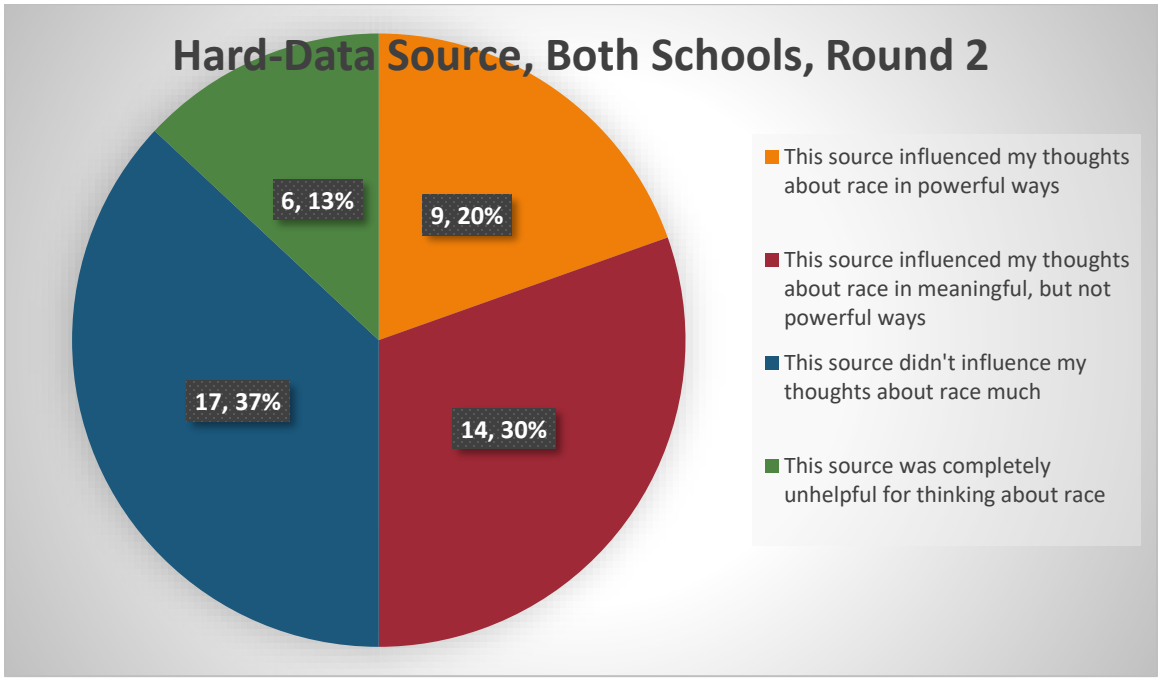


Figure 48

Hard-Data Source, Both Schools (Race and Immigration)



When combining both schools' ratings, we see a general decline in sources that are rated positively for this round, with all but the textbook source seeing a decline between rounds one and two in the percentage of students who rated it as powerful and in the combined percentage of powerful and meaningful-but-not-powerful votes. That said, we see that the personal-experience video again stands out as the most influential source, and the opinion-based video comes in a strong second. The hard-data source was again third, but with lower numbers this time around. The two print sources were in a similar place for this round, again featuring slightly less than 50 percent of students finding both sources to be positive in their influence.

We will now look at the totals for both sources combined. We'll start with School 1.

Figure 49

Textbook Passage, School 1, Both Rounds

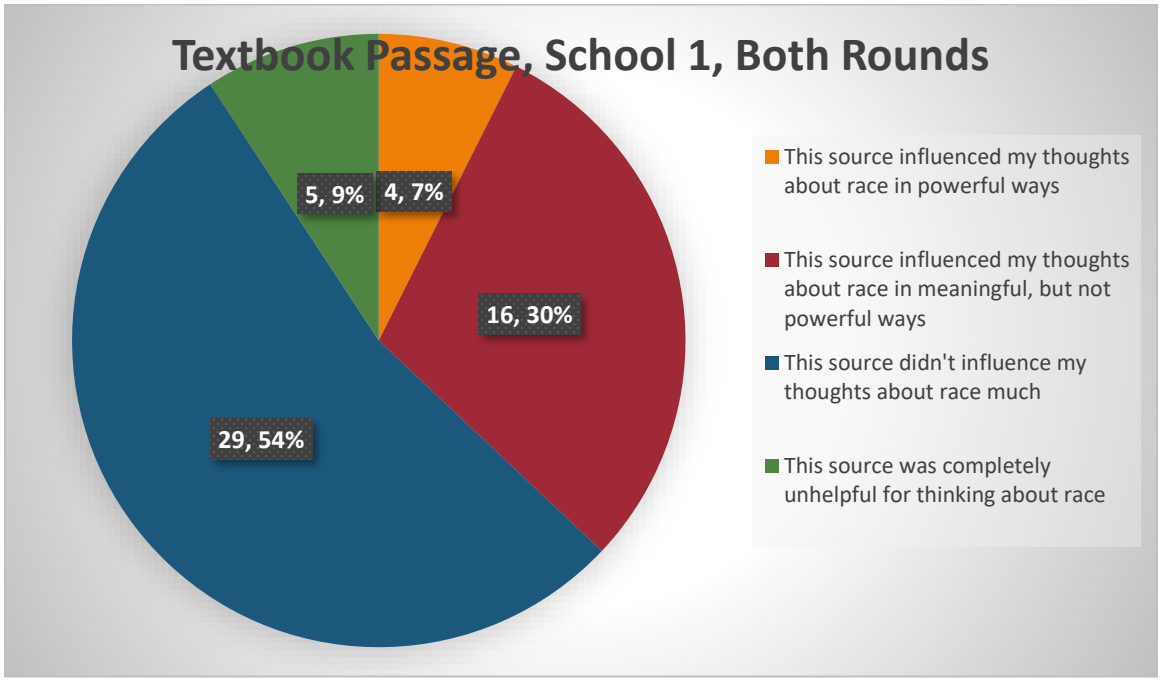


Figure 50

History-Book Passage, School 1, Both Rounds

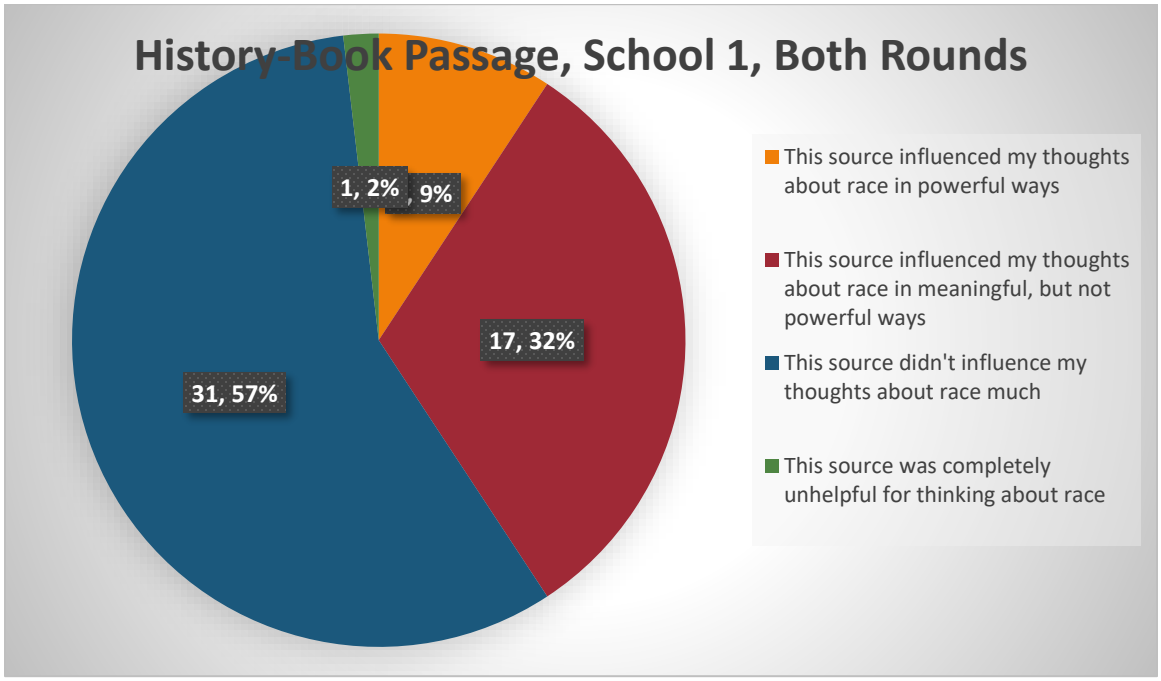


Figure 51

Opinion-Based Video, School 1, Both Rounds

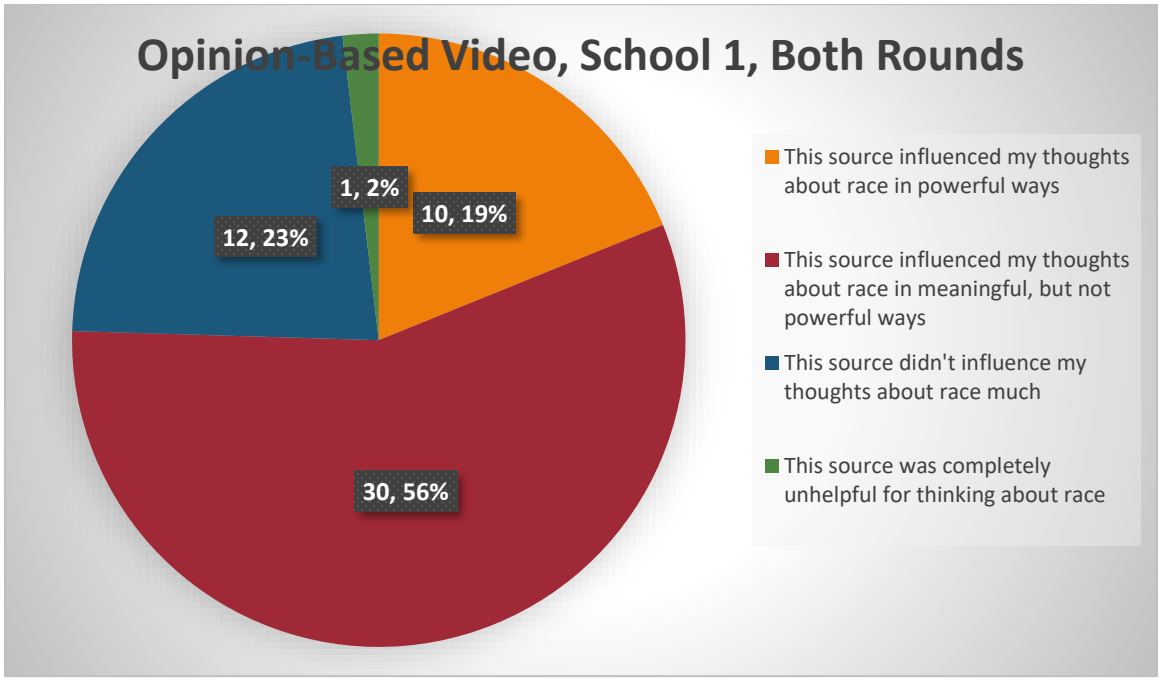


Figure 52

Personal-Experience Video, School 1, Both Rounds

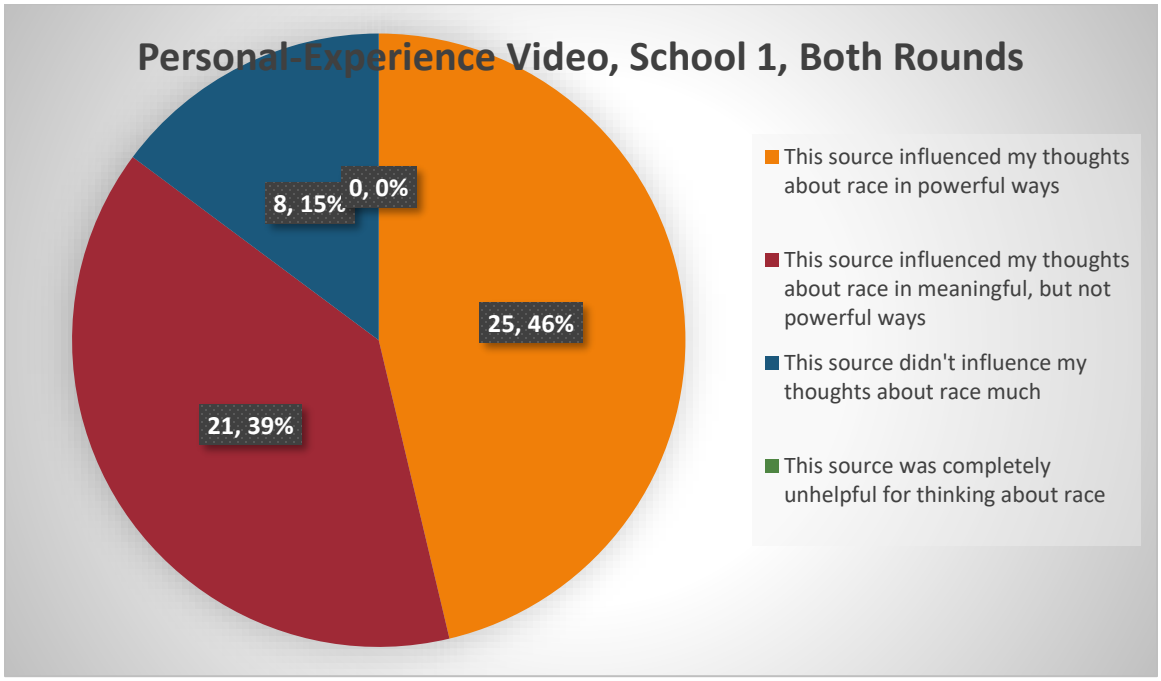
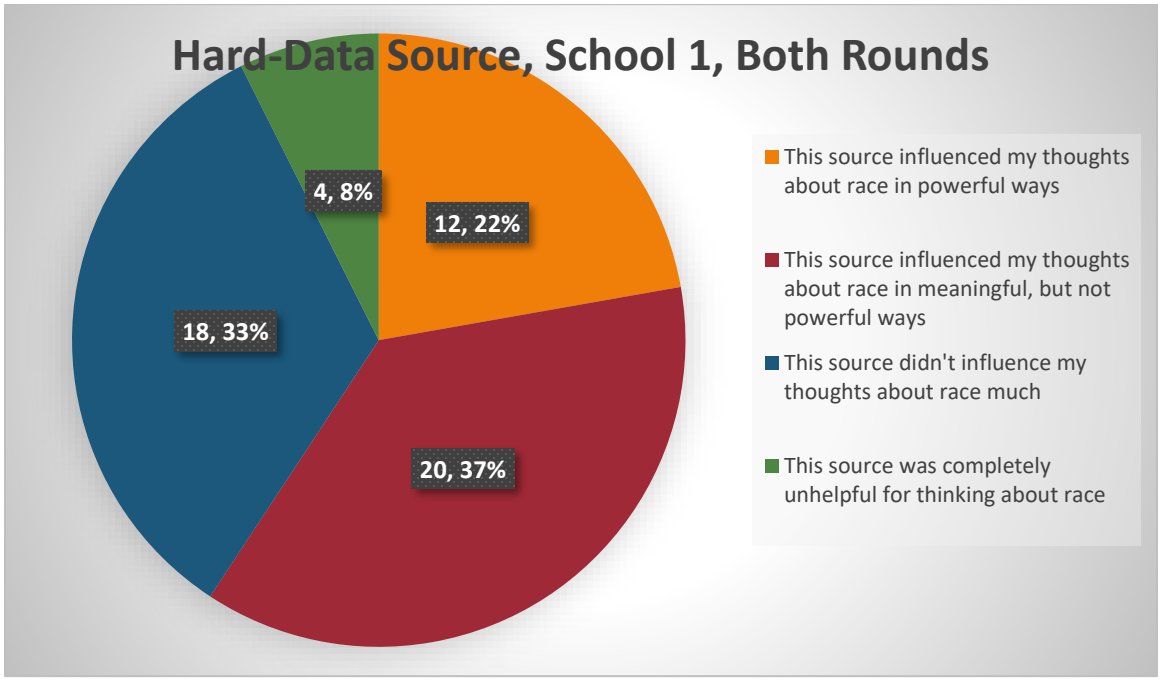


Figure 53

Hard-Data Source, School 1, Both Rounds



The totals for both rounds reveal a clear preference among School 1 students for personal experiences and for visual sources when studying sources on race. Print sources landed mostly in the neutral zone in terms of influence, while the two video sources had 75 and 85 percent positive influence scores. The hard-data source had a positive influence overall, but not at the same level as the videos.

Now we'll switch over to School 2 and the the totals for both sources combined.

Figure 54

Textbook Passage, School 2, Both Rounds

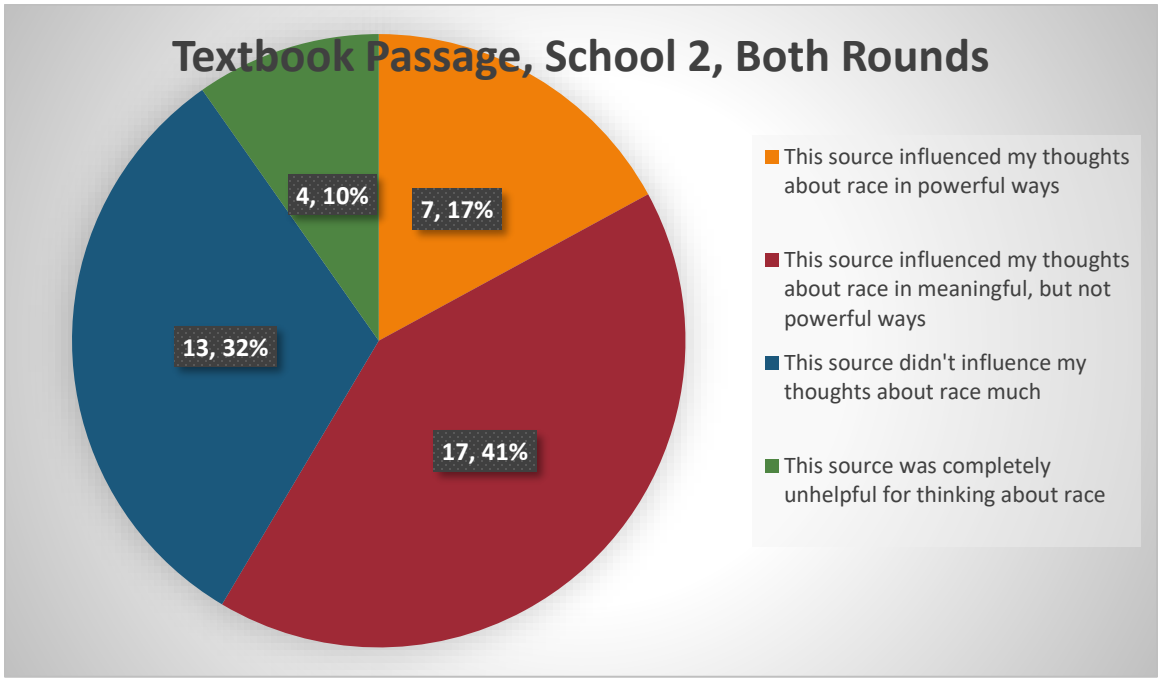


Figure 55

History-Book Passage, School 2, Both Rounds

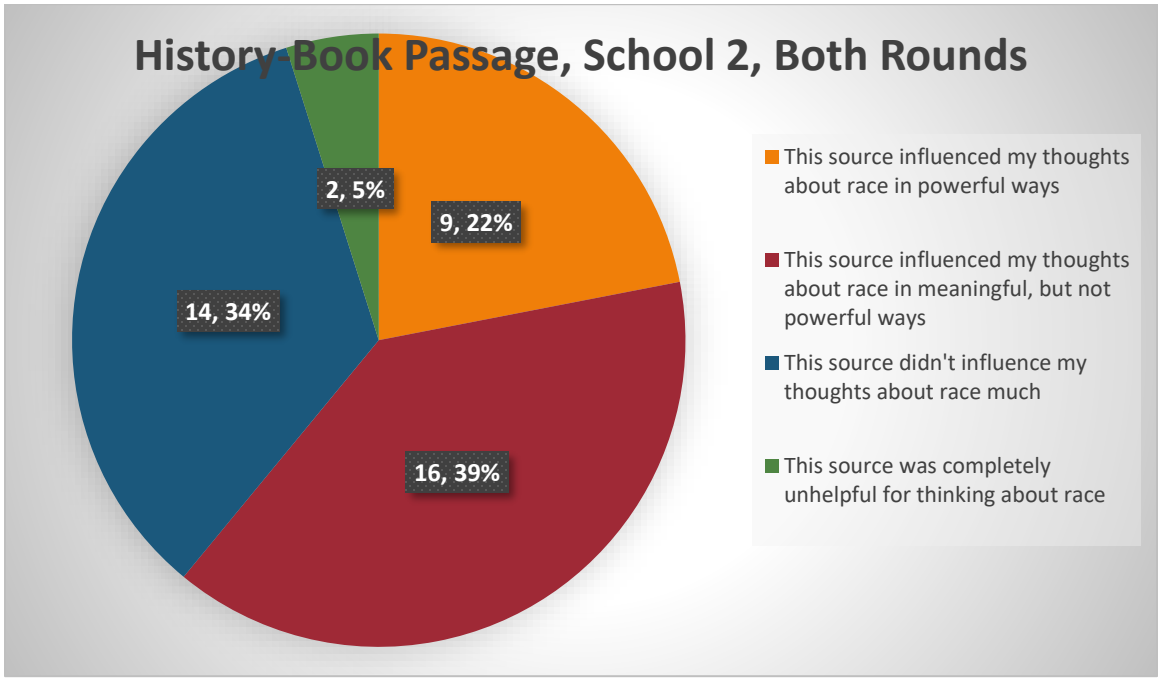


Figure 56

Opinion-Based Video, School 2, Both Rounds

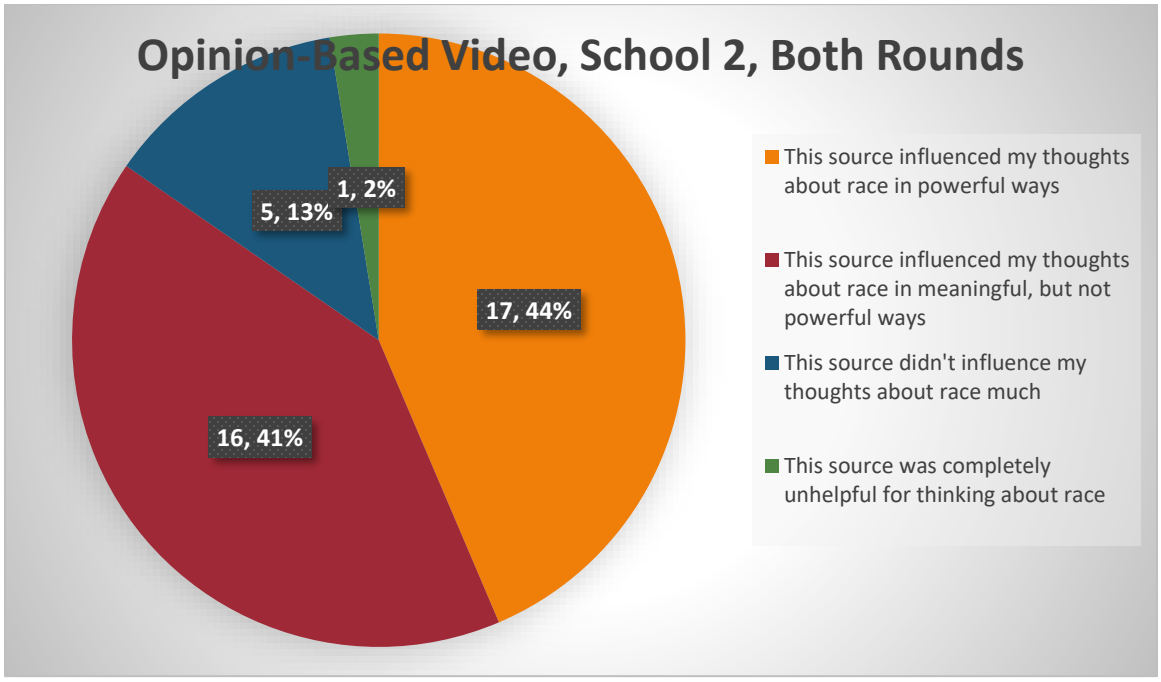


Figure 57

Personal-Experience Video, School 2, Both Rounds

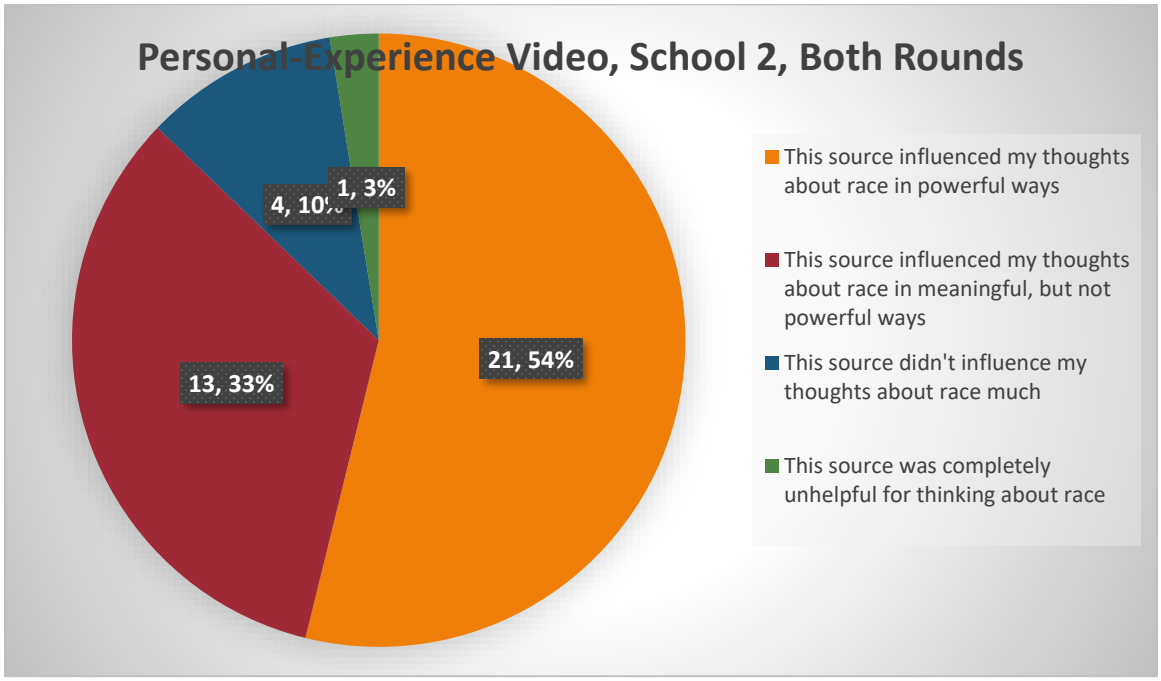
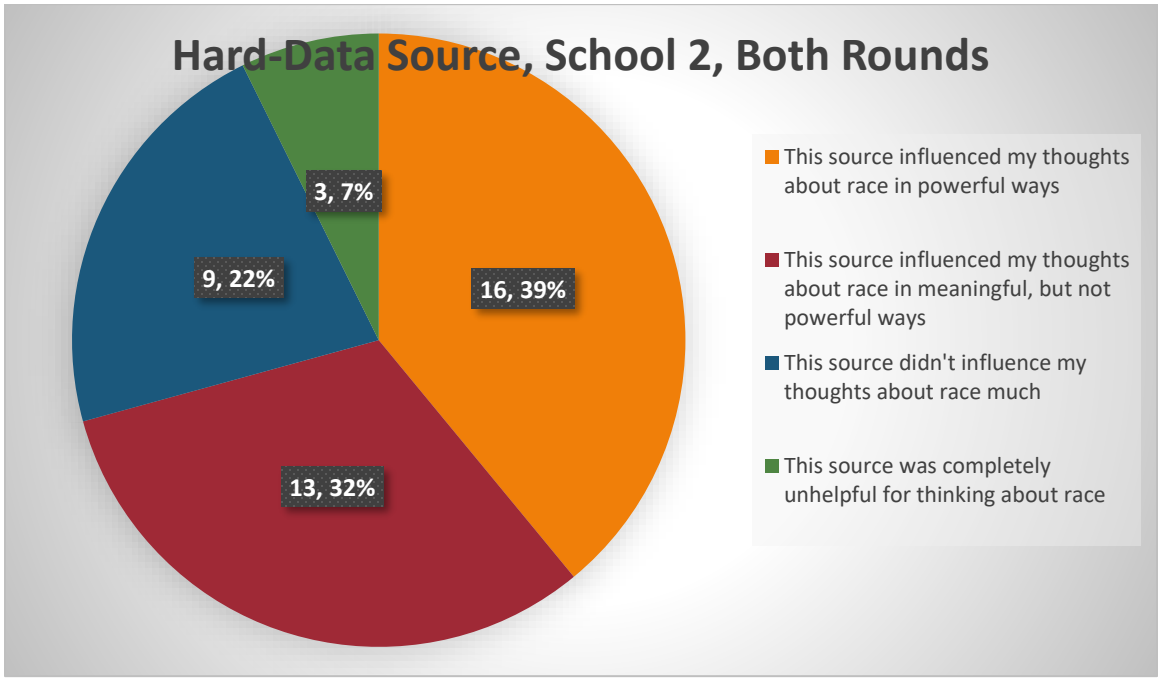


Figure 58

Hard-Data Source, School 2, Both Rounds



School 2 had a strong preference for the video sources, as both finished with 85 percent or higher positive ratings across the two rounds. School 2 also offered positive ratings for the three other sources, with the hard-data source rated positively by more than 70 percent of School 2 students, and with both print sources in the neighborhood of 60 percent positive influence ratings.

With School 2, we see that all five sources had a higher percentage of "powerful influence" ratings than School 1, with three of the sources holding more than twice the percentage of powerful ratings (textbook, history book and opinion-based video), and another featuring close to twice the percentage of powerful ratings (hard data). Clearly, School 2 presented itself as more impressed as a whole with the sources. That said, the order of highest-rated sources was the same for both schools:

1. Personal-experience video
2. Opinion-based video
3. Hard-data source
4. History-book passage
5. Textbook passage

We'll now show how both schools and rounds come together in our final series of pie charts on media sources.

Figure 59

Textbook Passage, Both Schools, Both Rounds

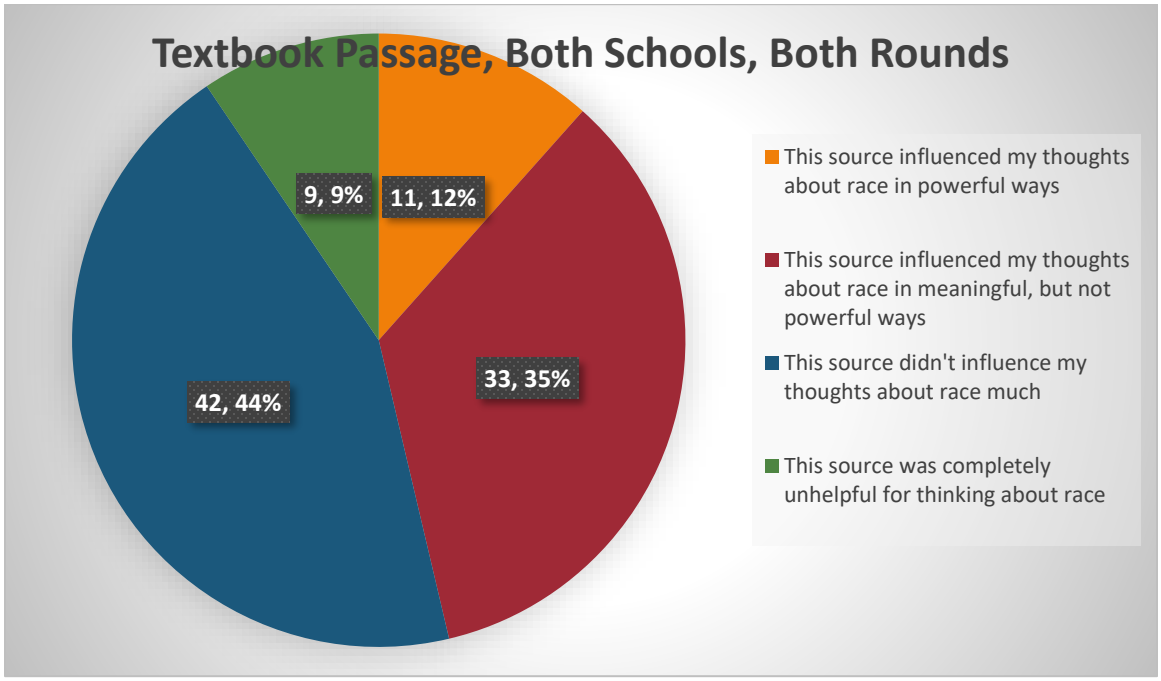


Figure 60

History-Book Passage, Both Schools, Both Rounds

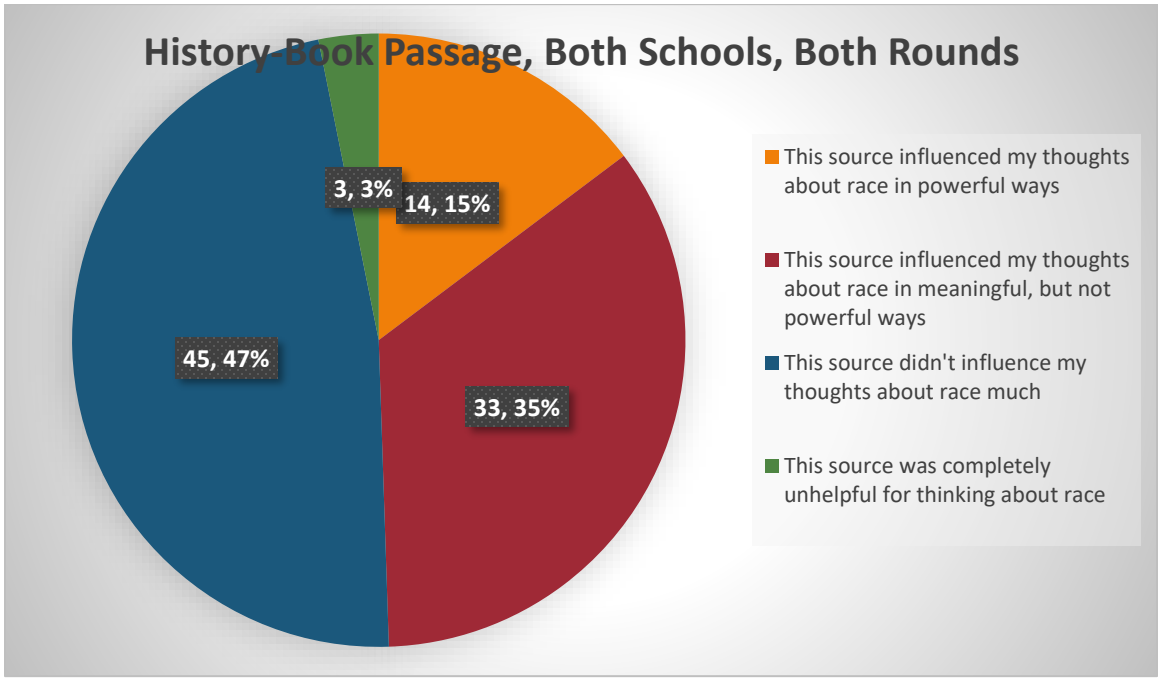


Figure 61

Opinion-Based Video, Both Schools, Both Rounds

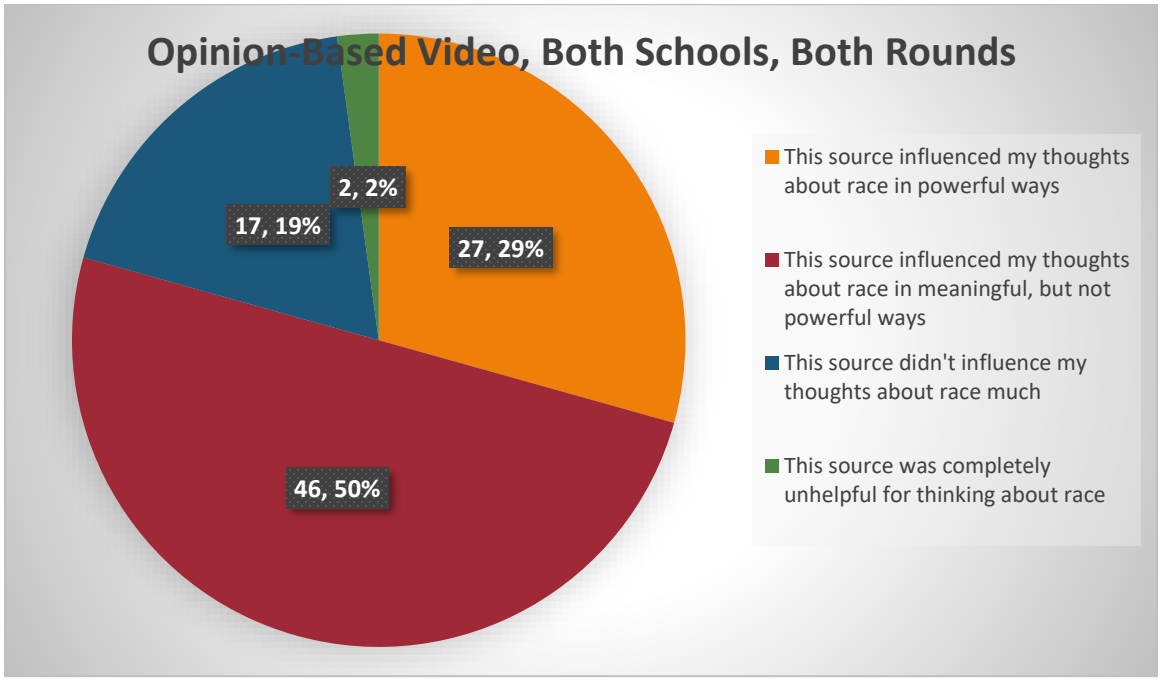


Figure 62

Personal-Experience Video, Both Schools, Both Rounds

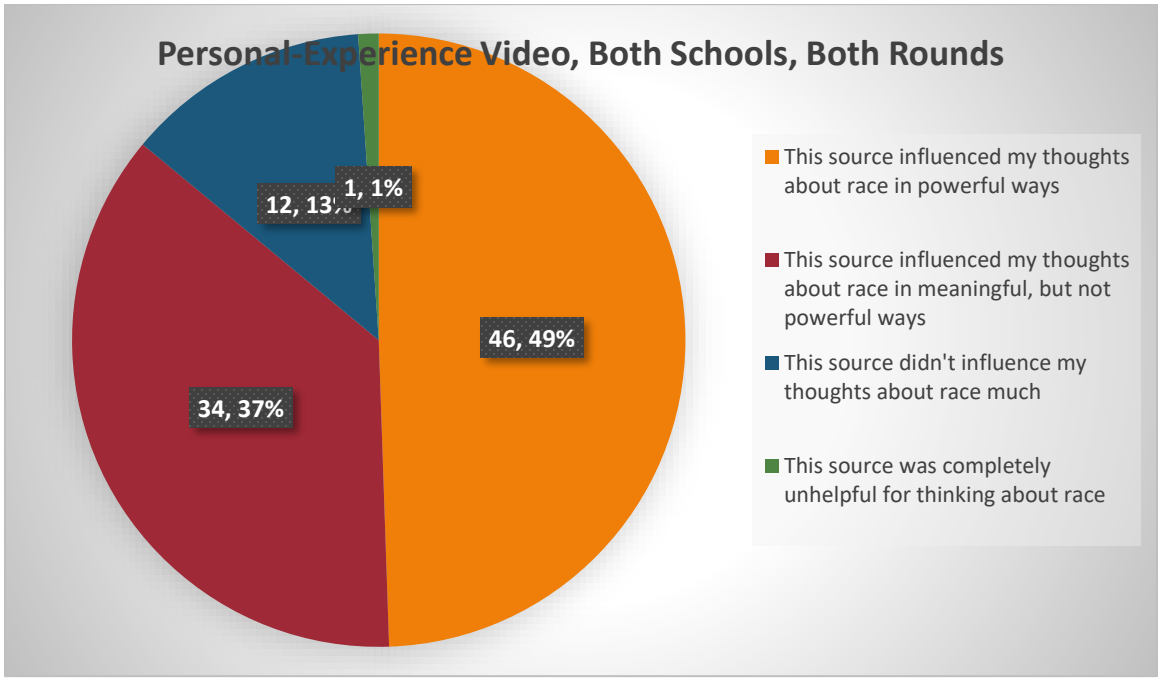
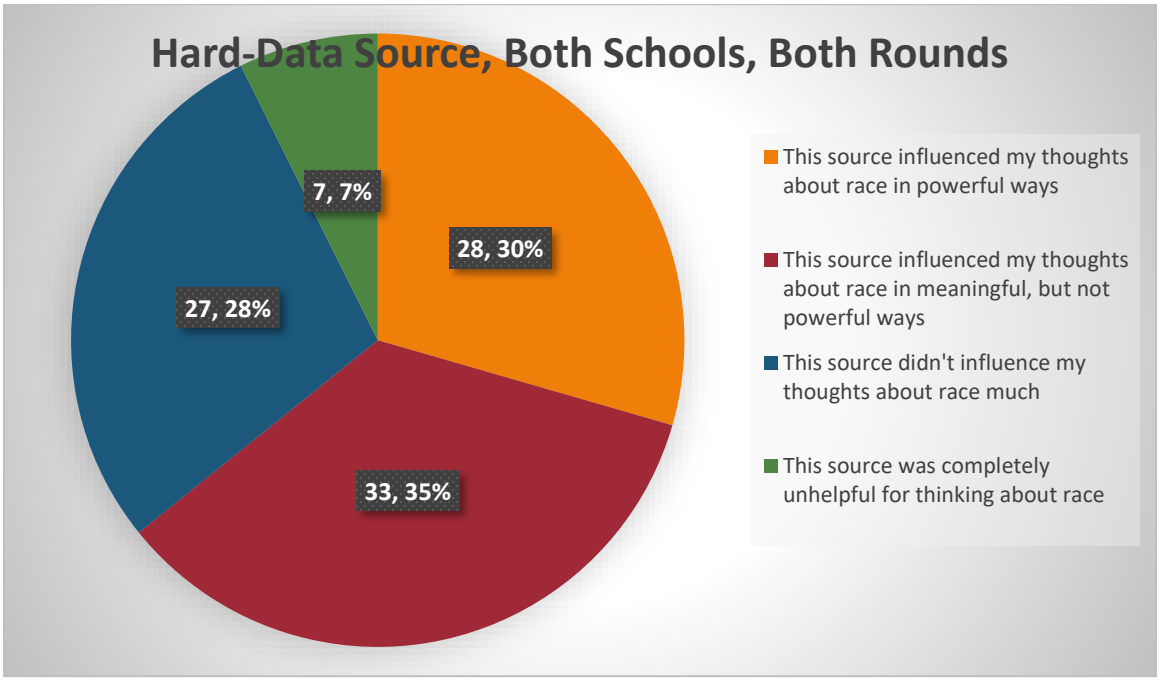


Figure 63

Hard-Data Source, Both Schools, Both Rounds



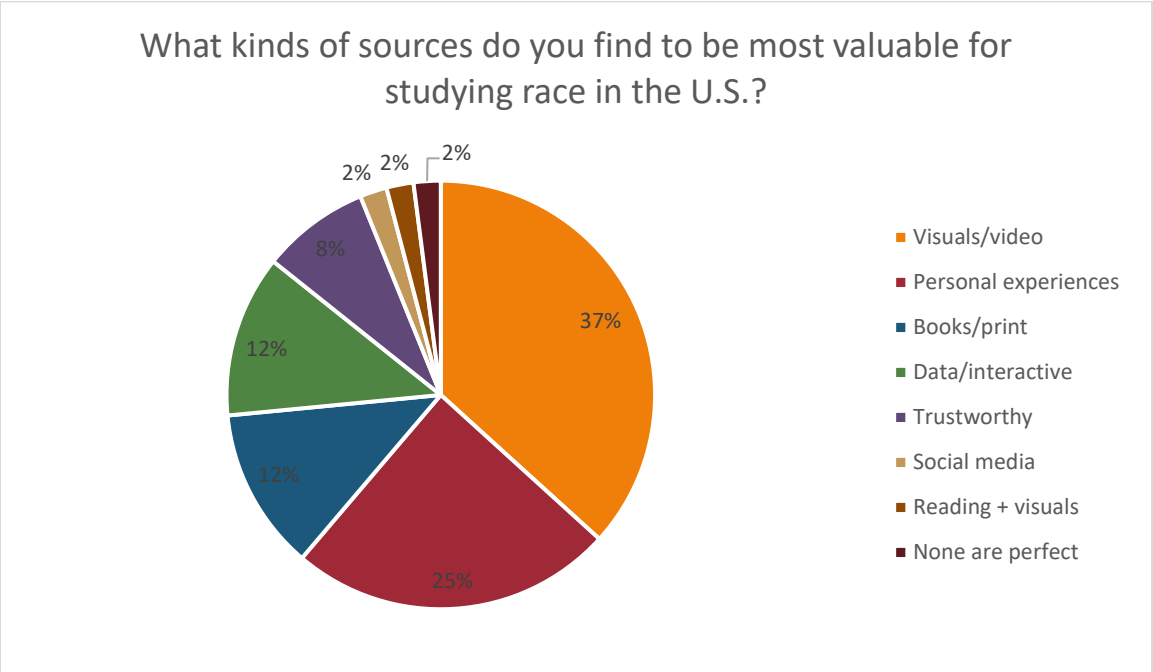
The final charts show that when combining the two schools and rounds, the personal-experience video was considered a powerful influence on thinking about race much more than the other sources. We also see that the opinion-based video had a higher percentage of overall positive ratings than the hard-data source, yet the hard-data source had a slightly higher percentage of "powerful influence" ratings than the opinion video held. We also see that both print sources hovered around the 50-percent range in terms of positive influences in thinking about race.

In their summative exit tickets, students received an open-ended question asking, "What kinds of sources do you find to be most valuable for studying race in the U.S., and why?" For each school, the words "videos" or "visual" came up nine times in student answers, and the word "personal" was mentioned six times. For School 1, the words "data" or "interactive" came up six

times as well. The following figure addresses the words mentioned in the answers to this question.

Figure 64

Sources Most Valuable for Studying Race in U.S., Both Schools



To triangulate the research findings, I used Atlas.ti to code the themes present in students' free-write responses to each source in each round of source exploration. Based on the answers present above, I would expect to see terms such as "engaging," "unengaging," "visual," "personal experience" and "interactive." The following two treemap charts present the results of this coding from both schools.

Figure 65

Free-Write Responses, School 1, All Sources, Both Rounds

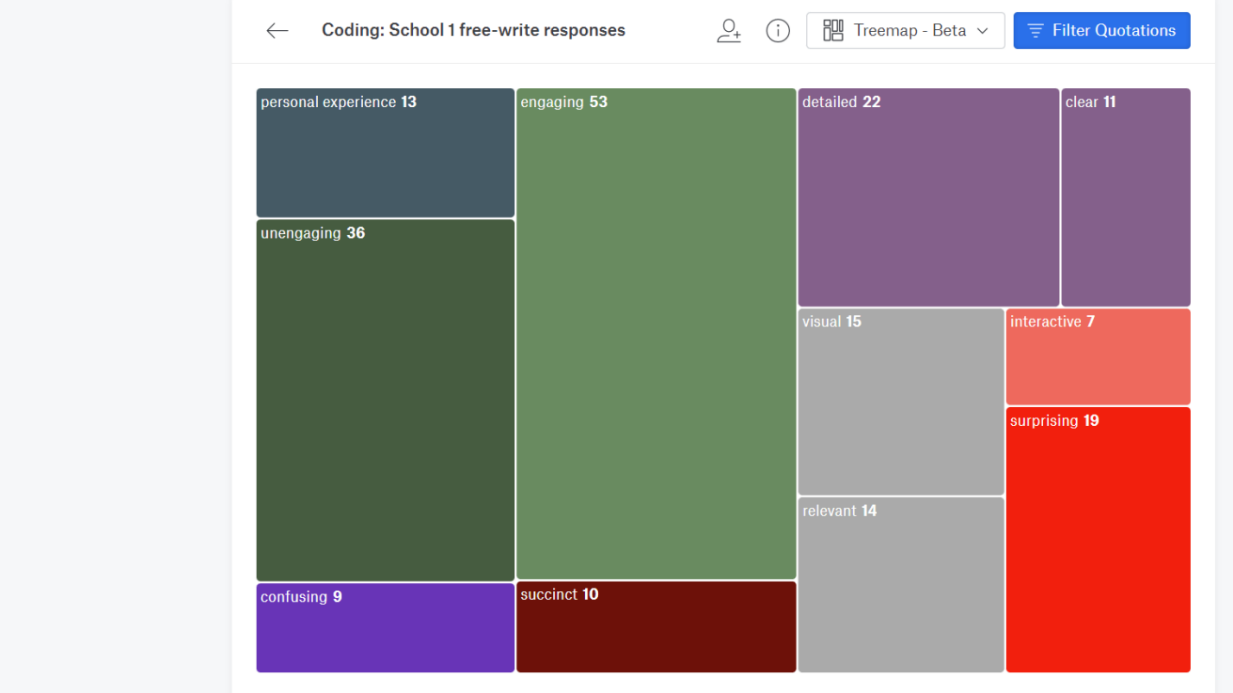
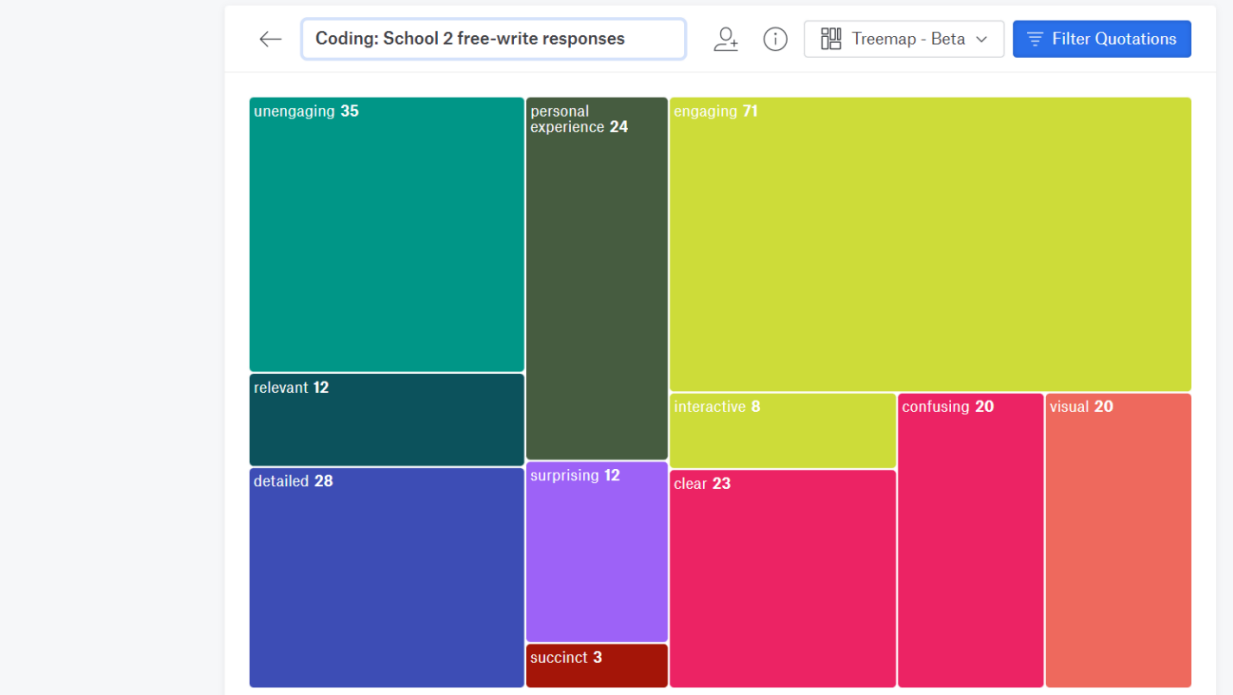


Figure 66

Free-Write Responses, School 2, All Sources, Both Rounds



The treemaps reveal the terms I had anticipated, with “engaging” being the most prominent term addressed in both schools’ answers. In addition to “unengaging,” “visual,” “personal experience” and “interactive,” we also see the terms “detailed” and “relevant” used by multiple students from both schools. In addition, several students from both schools used the terms “clear” and “confusing.” Lastly, the term “surprising” appeared numerous times from both schools. A few students from both schools also made note of the term “succinct.”

In a School 1 summative discussion, Lucas said that he trusts the print sources more, but he is more engaged by the visual. Sophia added that it was harder to stay focused during the text reading, and the videos were simply more entertaining. Hannah shared that the visual sources were “easier to understand.”

James preferred the hard data because “instead of just getting information thrown at you, you actually engaged with it.” Aiden had similar thoughts about the interactive data sources: “If you just read a book, it can get fairly boring. Just looking at a book, and looking at words – kinda boring. But looking at graphs, you can actually see the data and see what it means.”

Oliver added that he was more engaged by the visual, but actually learned more from the hard data. He elaborated:

> The personal stories definitely remained on my mind the most, but the ones with hard data had the most influence over my opinion. The personal stories felt like they were trying to take me from A to Z very quickly in forming my opinion, but the fact-based sources felt like they were just giving me a baseline to form my own opinion on.

Major Findings: Print vs. Visual

Mia of School 2 shared in a discussion that "it's better to show instead of tell." She added that the visual sources tell her "more about how it happened. When I read something, I have to re-read until I get it. When I see or watch something, it gives me the five W's."

Mia's words have surely been shared in various ways so far in Chapter 4. The third research question of this dissertation asked how student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources. The pre-survey asked students whether they prefer print or visual media, and 89 percent said they prefer visual. The media source questions asked students which sources were influencing their thoughts about race, and student responses leaned heavily toward visual sources. In our discussions and individual interviews, I asked students more questions about this subject.

> Levi of School 2 said that visuals are stronger tools for understanding. He elaborated:
>
> Especially in the times that we're in right now, people tend to pay less attention to print than they do to anything visually-related, because of print just being words and people having short attention spans because of technology nowadays. So if you use visuals like pictures or just a person verbally speaking, then they're going to absorb the information a lot more because it's in a format that's familiar to them already.

Several students spoke of the ways they feel that phones and social media have led to a stronger preference for the visual message. Elijah of School 1 spoke about shorter attention spans, and used his brother as an example. "We share a room, and I'll walk in, and he'll have a computer on one side of him, phone in hand, and on a call with the friend. They can't have meaningful conversations without having some sort of stimuli." Elijah added that on these

phones, teens get "lost in the rabbit holes" and lose track of time with constant stimuli. "And you go back on your phone, you go back on the apps, and it repeats," he said.

Logan of School 1 said that while books and movies might build slowly to a climax, the short videos that dominate social media do the opposite:

> Everyone who is on the social media apps just want it to be like "Go, go, go, go, go." They want everything to be right there and they can't actually sit and watch or read a book. A lot of people don't have good attention spans.

Luna of School 2 noted that this reliance on phones was exacerbated by the Covid-19 Pandemic, when students were isolated and were required to be on their devices in order to attend school virtually. Rakeem of School 2 added that many students have come to appreciate the benefits of visual sources. "People are used to visual," he said. "You can interact, and can take the time and break down points."

I asked students how they engage with print sources when their preference is for visual. Amelia of School 1 said she selects "the interesting books" to read. I asked her what makes a book interesting to her. She said she prefers fictional books with lots of imagery. "If there's a lot of imagery, I'll probably like it," she said. Mila of School 1 said she likes books that are read aloud, and that feature a personal account. Mila said she prefers print sources "based on people's stories" instead of facts.

Charlotte of School 1 said it's not so much print versus visual for her, but whether the source has new information. "For me it's more of if I hear something, if there's a certain piece of information that catches my eye that either I haven't heard of before or I didn't know about, I focus on that," she said. Ella of School 2 had similar thoughts, adding, "I go both ways. Sometimes visual explains better to me, but sometimes a book has new information." Sebastian

of School 2 said it's all about "how it engages" him, adding that he focuses on two questions with a source: Is it interesting? and Did he learn from it? Gianna of School 2 said that while "most people think reading can be boring," it's clear to her that "it can still touch you either way." Gianna added that print sources produce their own visuals:

> When it comes to reading, you don't have images or pictures. It's really how you imagine the situation. So if you were to ask for a personal interpretation, you really get that from how you view the source. With a visual, everything is laid out for you, and you just have to take it in. With reading, you might have to go back and make certain connections.

Oliver of School 1 said he enjoys realistic fiction, as it allows him to read while also "getting the engaging aspect of the story." Oliver said that for a topic like the one we explored together, he's less focused on the visual and more interested in "being able to form emotional connections or having a meaningful story to pair with the data."

In conversation with the students in School 2, I shared that teachers want them to feel excited about searching for the answers to hard questions. With that in mind, if they had another tough topic and were to explore sources on that topic, what approach would they take? "If you're taking ownership and doing research on your own, are there certain ways you tend to go to get the information you want to get?" I asked. "Where do you go first?"

Emily said the video sources would get her started, and then, "when you're going deeper into the topic, the text will probably show you more details than the video would." Luna added that she too would start with the visual. "You want to learn more about it, then read the text that's attached to it to see if you want to learn more about it," she said. Jackson elaborated on this pattern of visual, then print:

> I'd rather go through the visual first, because I feel like the visual is more like a simplified version to see if you genuinely like that topic or dislike it. So then if I want to go deeper into that topic, then I would switch over to the reading, and you're able to personally understand that and get your own image so you can develop your thoughts off of that.

During a one-on-one interview, I was talking with Harper of School 1 about what kinds of sources resonate most with them. Throughout the two rounds, Harper had been cagey in their answers, indicating an appreciation for the visual sources but not a full need for visuals to guide their research. I asked Harper, "If you had someone who was trying to convince you of something, and they were like, 'How do I give you the message?' do you have advice for them?"

Harper's response took us away from print versus visual, and back to the origins of human communication. "They could just talk to me," Harper said. "I'm all right with a conversation."

Major Findings: Pre-Existing Perspectives on Race

In establishing the research methods for this dissertation, I selected two schools: one middle school with a largely economically advantaged student body, and one middle school with a largely economically disadvantaged student body. In doing so, I wanted to make sure that the things I learned about media literacy and racial literacy featured a balance of results gained from different socioeconomic groups. The students I met with from the two schools also had different racial backgrounds, with almost 60 percent of the students in the more economically advantaged school (School 1) identifying as white and almost all of the students in the more economically disadvantaged school (School 2) identifying as students of color.

That said, there were no discernible differences in the pre-survey student responses related to race. All of the students in both schools identified race as a vital topic well worth studying and well worth learning more about. The findings in this research revealed a continued prioritization among students in learning about race, with slight variations between the schools.

In the major findings on media literacy tools, I shared in Figures 14-16 that numbers of students in both schools answered my summative survey question about the use of media literacy tools with direct comments about race and racism, rather than comments about media literacy and race or about media literacy alone. Most of these comments had to do with learning more about race in some key way. At this point I will share some of those comments.

In School 1, many students wrote that their opinions about race were more or less unchanged after this media literacy exercise, but that they had learned more about the story of race in the United States. One student wrote of the media literacy tools: "They helped me sympathize more deeply with people who experience racism every day because I didn't know the full extent of what people went through." Another student wrote specifically about learning more about racism against Asian-Americans. "You never really hear about that stuff, or at least I don't," the student wrote. An additional School 1 student wrote that the media literacy tools "made me think about what others go through in other places less fortunate." Still another wrote that these sources and tools uncovered more about "the deeper dungeons in the U.S.," and how "the U.S. covers up a lot of problems they caused." A fellow School 1 student made note of the fact that some of these sources revealed discrimination while others revealed allyship. "It shows how sometimes people are ignorant or very attentive," this student wrote.

In School 2, students wrote extensively about things they had learned from these sources. One student wrote that "the media tools make me think that race is one of the biggest problems

in the United States." Another student wrote that the specificity of these sources helped show racism not just as it seems to be, "but how it actually is." Another wrote that these media sources "helped us understand the things that happen around us that involve racism."

One student wrote that the racist actions conveyed through these sources showed how racism goes beyond actions of violence:

> They made me realize race discrimination wasn't just physical assault. Black people couldn't buy houses, they couldn't be in the same area as whites, they could barely TALK to whites. It makes my thinking change heavily because it makes me think more about different things when it comes to discrimination, like economic exclusion. (caps are the student's).

Another School 2 student shared the mixture of hope and despair that many of us have come to associate with racism: "The world can be racist but it can be changed if people allow it to be. It changed my view on how different people see the problem. It confuses me because it's too much to process."

When asked in their summative surveys, "Are you thinking about any things differently due to the media sources and discourse we held?" students expanded more on the degree to which their understanding of race had deepened. Some of the students in School 1 were thinking a lot about the personal-experience videos and the anecdotes from print sources. "I still remember the personal stories," one student wrote. "I guess it gives me a different point of view from someone who experiences this on a daily basis." Another added, "I think I have become a lot more inquisitive about what others are going through when it comes to race." A School 1 student added, "I feel more sympathetic to some hardships I might have dismissed in the past."

Another student wrote, “I think of people less fortunate than me from long ago and how I take everything for granted.”

Some of the students in School 2 responded that their thinking had expanded to understanding more fully the extent of racism’s impact. “I think more about how race impacted my local area and how race could change it in the future,” one student wrote. Another wrote, “I can see that it’s a big, unhealthy problem around the world and it should be stopped in an instant.” Another student added that individuals “do not have to discriminate against people because of how they are and without knowing them.”

Throughout their engagement with these messages, students showed a continuous interest in the fact that these sources had expanded their understanding of the depth of racism in U.S. history. Whether it was in understanding how economics intertwines with racism (as seen in round 1), or whether it was in understanding just how many different races have faced discrimination through immigration policy (as seen in round 2), students shared repeatedly that they were learning things they did not know. Of course, the introduction of new learning material was not a defined research question for this dissertation. However, some of the conclusions students drew about race in this study were connected to the idea of simply not knowing something that they felt they should have known. After reading the sources on race and housing, one School 2 student wrote, “Minorities are poor just because of how they were treated nearly a century ago. It’s simply insane how terrible racism rocked society, that there are still ‘aftershocks’ occurring nowadays.” This student provided vital feedback on media literacy and racial literacy, but at the same time also offered feedback on the importance of continuing to tell the full story about race in the United States.

Summary of Findings

The research conducted with eighth-grade students from these two middle schools produced several clear findings. For one, the students found the use of media literacy tools to be a valuable asset to their depth of inquiry into race. In addition, there was a clear preference for both visual and personal-experience stories in studying race in the U.S. There also was evidence of the value that interactive, data-based sources can have for certain students. And there was not a dismissal of print sources for studying the tough topics – just a clear desire for more than print, with visual sources used in collaboration with print sources. There also was evidence of a deep interest in continuing to learn more about race through media literacy, and a strong element of surprise with regard to just how much students have not yet learned about race in the U.S.

Chapter 5 will present interpretations and recommendations based on the major findings in this study. The chapter will cover conclusions, implications, steps for school and district leaders, and future research.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretations

This study was designed to understand the ways in which student media literacy tools and sources can influence the conclusions students draw about race in the United States. The research questions, again, are as follows:

- In what ways do media literacy tools, implemented in a process of student-centered inquiry, influence the conclusions that secondary-school students make about race in the U.S.?
- In what ways do differing media source materials influence secondary-school students' conclusions about race in the United States, when controlling for bias?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources, and why?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary among students who enter the study with different pre-existing perspectives on race, and why?

According to all of the students surveyed in this study, media literacy tools can offer significant support in engaging with sources. Students reported that the use of media literacy guiding questions helped them engage more deeply with media sources, and also helped them to analyze those sources more thoroughly. The media literacy tools supported students in understanding the sources more clearly, while also offering stronger perspective on the topic at hand. Overall, students indicated that the media literacy tools engaged them in thinking more deeply about the sources and the topic of race. Students also spoke to the value they found in studying a variety of sources on a tough topic such as race.

As they reviewed different source materials about race, students expressed a clear preference for both visual sources and personal stories. The personal-experience videos were most engaging for students, as nearly half of students found these videos to hold a powerful influence on the conclusions they drew about race. Both the personal-experience videos and opinion-based videos provided positive influences for more than three-quarters of students. Hard-data sources held a positive influence for nearly two-thirds of students and had a powerful influence for nearly a third of students. Both the textbook and history-book sources appealed positively to approximately half of the students. All five of these sources were seen as unhelpful by less than 10 percent of students, indicating that very few were dismissed outright.

The engagement with visual sources fit with the pre-survey results showing that nearly 9 out of 10 students in the survey preferred visual sources before the research was conducted. The results fit with that preference, but the student quotes revealed a desire to use visual along with print rather than instead of it. Students did not express a desire to get rid of print sources entirely when studying tough topics, but to start with the visual and work into the print.

Students also expressed a strong desire to keep learning about race and to deepen their understanding and perspective on this topic of longstanding division. Students were caught "off-guard," as a couple of them put it, by information that they were completely unaware of, and they wanted more. This runs counter to the dialogue we hear in many parts of the country regarding education and race. According to a UCLA School of Law study, there were 563 anti-"Critical Race Theory" measures introduced throughout the U.S. between January 2021 and December 2022, with 241 of those measures enacted or adopted (Alexander et al., 2023, p. 4). The students I spoke with for this study wanted to keep learning, and they wanted the opportunity to explore more on their own as well. As students shared the ways in which they

were using media literacy tools while watching social-media videos at home, and as they described their interest in interacting with texts at their own pace, they presented a strong preference for student-centered inquiry, in which students make their own discoveries on critical issues in education.

Conclusions

The most prominent conclusion from this study, when combining all four research questions together, is the simple fact that the students were all in for studious engagement on a controversial issue such as race. They would concur with the argument that controversial topics are at the heart of democratic education, and would agree with Diane E. Hess as she writes:

> Democratic education without controversial issues discussions would be like a forest without trees, or an ocean without fish, or a symphony without sound. Why? Because controversies about the nature of the public good and how to achieve it, along with how to mediate among competing democratic values, are intrinsic parts of democracy. If there is no controversy, there is no democracy. It is as simple as that. (Hess, 2009, p. 162)

The students in this study clearly relished the opportunity to delve deeply into the controversial issue of race in the United States. They found media literacy tools to be a vital partner in that exploration, as the media literacy questions allowed them to think about their sources much more fully. They considered the authors of each message, including the authors' motives and methods. They reflected on the values and points of view present in and absent from each message. They thought about the audience and how each reader or viewer might understand a message differently. They also considered the ways in which each message addressed power and fairness. In doing so, the students addressed each media message with a depth of exploration that strengthened their own understanding and analysis.

These students also appreciated the opportunity to share their varied responses in engaging with different types of media source materials. They expressed a strong preference for visual sources, with all three visual sources receiving between 65 and 86 percent positive engagement ratings from the students in both schools. Videos in particular were the most-preferred source, with more than three-quarters of students from the two schools rating both types of video sources as powerful or meaningful-but-not-powerful influences on their thought processes. To delve a little deeper into the numbers, almost twice as many students gave positive ratings to personal-experience videos than they did to textbook passages. In addition, hard-data sources had a loyal following: Although data sources had fewer overall positive ratings than opinion-based videos, the data sources had more students rating them as powerful influences than did the opinion videos. In fact, only personal-experience videos had more "powerful" ratings than the hard-data sources.

Students also expressed a strong desire to learn new things and to delve deeper into the tough topics using media literacy. They were, in some ways, just getting started with media literacy as we concluded our six weeks together. One wrote, "Are you giving us the full stories of these people?" which expressed a genuine desire for lateral reading. Another asked if I had statistics on how much media literacy helps students to learn. This student clearly was ready to join me in the dissertation-research process.

Implications

This study offers perspectives and conclusions that can be added to existing research on media literacy, racial literacy and visual literacy. The extensive information in this study can be used to support superintendents, directors of curriculum and instruction, content supervisors,

building administrators, teachers, library media specialists, university leadership programs, aspiring educators, parents, and students themselves.

Media Literacy Instruction

The results of this study fully endorse the value of media literacy in supporting secondary students' engagement with difficult topics. The results complemented prior research findings that media literacy can lead to student gains in media analysis, overall analysis and critical thinking (Feuerstein, 1999, p. 52). This study also supported the research finding that media literacy interventions are aided by multiple sessions, featuring fewer components to avoid an overload of information (Jeong et al., 2012, pp. 464-465). In addition, the research supported the core principles of media literacy, as defined by the National Association for Media Literacy. These principles, when enacted in the classroom, include: engaging in active inquiry and critical thinking about media messages; expanding the concept of literacy to include all forms of media; reinforcing media literacy skills for all learners; developing informed, reflective and engaged media literacy participation; recognizing the role media play in our culture; and affirming that we all use our skills, beliefs and experiences to make meaning of media messages (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2007, pp. 3-5).

The argument for increased media literacy in the classroom has been a consistent part of educational research and scholarship for decades now, as described in Chapter 2 of this paper. The research in this paper adds to evidence supporting the ways in which media literacy principles, as described above, can bolster students' education. In many ways, media literacy involves a concession that schools are "only part of education" and that alongside schools exists a "parallel educational system" known as the "societal curriculum" (Cortés, 1992, p. 75). The societal curriculum features our families, neighborhoods, churches, friends, and all the other

societal forces that educate us. Included in these societal forces are the various sources of media, which "serve as pervasive, relentless, lifelong educators" (Cortés, 1992, p. 75). When we are no longer students in schools, we are still learning through media. "To prepare students for this eventuality, schools need to develop their media analytical literacy" (Cortés, 1992, p. 75).

This research also supports the value of critical media literacy in using media to address issues of representation, power, fairness and social justice. There was clear evidence that media literacy education "can promote an understanding of the systemic and structural conditions that shape racial conditions in society" (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015, p. 178). The research in this study indicated that general media literacy skills were essential for student development, but so were those critical media literacy skills that allow for the "rigorous examination of the politics of representation" and an exploration "of how historically disenfranchised social groups are represented in media" (Share et al., 2019, p. 18).

Media literacy is an essential component of a 21st-century education, and the results of this study correspond with the robust body of research indicating that a more media-literate society and student body will be much more equipped to understand the many messages of the moment. Through media literacy, we are better equipped to meet the educational needs of the moment.

Visual Literacy

The students in this research study clarified that they truly value visual sources in their learning. During most of our humanities-based education in the United States, we engage with print source material, both for informational and narrative texts. Many of the students in this study shared that they are drawn to the visual, and they appreciate visual media source materials in addition to – and sometimes in place of – print sources. And yet, schools often hold back on a

full embrace of this step. Visual literacy, or the "evaluation, creation, interpretation, and articulation of visual images," was found in a survey of English language arts teachers to be lowest in educational importance and frequency of use compared to other "critical evaluation strategies" (Korona & Hathaway, 2021, pp. 534-535). This fits with a decades-long debate over whether visual literacy "merits the kind of full-fledged academic and curricular accreditation that incorporating it into state and local standards would grant it" (Shifrin, 2009, p. 106).

And yet, a study exploring the influence of a visual literacy unit on K-12 teachers' instructional practice found that teachers who took part in the unit responded positively to the ways in which visual literacy lessons could help them "become more aware of strategies to evaluate online images (Korona & Hathaway, 2021, p. 549). These teachers shared that their definition of literacy itself had shifted after this unit, as it no longer focused on traditional reading and writing but also included the practice of making meaning from visual images as a form of literacy (Korona & Hathaway, 2021, p. 550). Those teachers involved in this visual literacy study felt more confident teaching visual literacy and incorporating it into their content-learning goals (Korona & Hathaway, 2021, p. 553).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the National Council of Teachers of English fully supports this transition toward more visual literacy in teachers' curricula and instruction. "We no longer live in a print-dominant, text-only world," the NCTE stated in its position statement on media education. "ELA educators are responsible for preparing students for a future with an evolving media landscape" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2022, paras. 5, 6). The NCTE added that with so many professions valuing media literacy, "it behooves our profession, as stewards of the communication arts, to confront and challenge the tacit and implicit ways in which print

media is valorized above the full range of literacy competencies students should master" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2022, para. 12).

From a historical perspective, visual literacy is our oldest form of documented media. The cave paintings and rock carvings that harken back tens of thousands of years reveal that "we are physiologically constructed to consume and find meaning from images in a way that transcends other forms of communication" (Apkon, 2013, p. 13). When humans developed the alphabet and began communicating through written words, there was pushback to that. A recorded communication between Socrates and the philosopher Phaedrus from about 370 B.C. reveals Socrates worrying about the impact of writing on the oral storytelling tradition. "Writing would never replace the experience of listening to 'the living, breathing discourse of a man who knows, of which the written one can be fairly called an image' " (Apkon, 2013, p. 49). The bias of many educators toward print over visual is similar to Socrates' preference for oral over print. And yet, as language, text and technology evolve, humans continue to strive for "this ideal of unmediated communication" in which we "express ourselves more fully and more emotionally" (Apkon, 2013, p. 39). Many of the students in this dissertation study were describing a fuller and more emotional draw to the visual story.

This study supports the research on the power of visual literacy for a deeper instruction of message and meaning, and the study also complements the suggestions that increased visual literacy instruction will support the needs of our students. This begins with teacher education in schools of education. "Teacher education programs must prioritize educating teachers to teach and apply these strategies to promote relevant, real-world visual literacy instruction within the content classroom" (Korona & Hathaway, 2021, p. 555). This includes not only an embrace of the visual image as a dominant form of educational media messaging, but also a thorough

exploration of the ways in which visual images can be used "as powerful tools of cognitive manipulation." A closer look at the nefarious intents behind some visual images allows the student and teacher to address the power these images hold "to elicit an emotional response, alter memories, influence civic decisions, and provide a false sense of authenticity" (Korona & Hathaway, 2021, p. 534). There is much work to be done in deepening our visual literacy instruction in the classroom, to help our students prepare for the many ways in which they will study and engage with visual images throughout the entirety of their lives.

Personal-Experience Sources

The students in this study also emphasized that personal stories resonated with them. They reaffirmed the value that the personal-experience story can play in helping students gain a fuller understanding of their history. "There is no historical reality which is not human. There is no history *without* humankind, and no history *for* human beings; there is only history *of* humanity, made by *people* and … in turn making them" (Freire, 1970, p. 130). The philosopher and educator Maxine Greene wrote that humans see things or people "small" and "big." When viewing things small, one looks at behaviors "from the perspective of a system" in connection with trends and tendencies. When viewing things big, one looks at humans as more than objects but views them "in their integrity and particularity instead" (Greene, 1995, p. 10). Students were deeply interested in seeing people "big" and learning about race through the individual stories of human beings.

The study presented personal stories to students through various media outlets, and some students shared that they had learned a great deal from personal stories regardless of whether these stories were visual or print in nature. Some shared that they could see aspects of their own lives and family histories through these sources. "If we are critically conscious, we will see

ourselves in the story of others, which in turn enables us to see beyond abstractions of humanity into the lived experience of others" (Lake, 2010, p. 43). The personal-experience source allows us to encounter unique stories, but also to experience the ways in which those unique stories are "universal in terms of sharing human life" (Lake, 2010, p. 43). There is also a listening component to our engagement with the personal story, in which we are asked "to treat others' personal stories with openness and respect," thereby putting us "in tune with the voice of others" (Lake, 2010, p. 45). The students I worked with definitely were paying attention, evidenced by their specific recall of numerous specific details in the personal stories we studied together.

Most of these personal-experience sources were counter stories, which serve to reveal "the falsity of hidden and accepted majority discourses" and show "how and why racist hierarchies are constructed" (Warner, 2021, pp. 1149-1150). Counter stories are often told by "outgroups" as a way of responding to the "ingroup" stories told by dominant groups (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). When students shared with me that family members had experienced racism in ways similar to those described in some of our personal-experience sources, they were connecting with the power of the counter story. Historically oppressed groups have found counter stories to offer tools for survival, liberation, healing, and mental health. "Storytelling emboldens the hearer, who may have had the same thoughts and experiences the storyteller describes, but hesitated to give them voice. Having heard another express them, he or she realizes, I am not alone" (Delgado, 1989, pp. 2436-2437).

Counter stories also offer us the chance to learn from individuals with experiences different from our own. By sharing and hearing stories that cross boundaries, we "deepen and humanize ourselves" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2440). The students in this study expressed a strong desire to cross those boundaries and continue engaging with media sources that deepen their

racial literacy through the form of the personal story. Educators can take from this a strong desire among students to move beyond the facts when studying race, and into the specific experiences that reveal what humans have lived through, and how this has affected their lives and perspectives. There is much to gain from additional professional development for educators on ways to incorporate personal stories, including counter stories, into explorations of race and of all the challenging topics within our society.

Data Literacy

The study revealed a variety of opinions about hard-data sources, but among those who engaged with the data sources, there was a strong connection to the use of data. As our world becomes more and more data-centered, the tool of data literacy is increasingly viewed as essential for learning (Makar et al., 2022, p. 1). Data literacy involves the ability "to interpret, assess, and communicate understandings of data from our everyday lives" (Louie et al., 2022, p. 142). One study found that when elementary-school students engaged with data science in studying the topic of cyberspace, they learned more about citizenship, and the "data science fluidly lends itself to integration across content areas" (Makar et al., 2022, p. 12). Another study found that high school students who engaged in data analysis of social injustices were able to increase both their proficiency in data literacy and their understanding of social-justice issues (Louie et a., 2022, p. 143).

There is much more to data-literacy instruction than we encountered in this study. In this case, students studied two data-based sources as part of their racial literacy exploration. A true data-literacy unit would engage students in formulating questions that can be answered with data, gathering the data to answer those questions, using statistics and other tools to analyze the data, and interpreting the results (Louie et al., 2022, p. 142). Most of our secondary-school educators

are not trained to teach data literacy unless they are statistics teachers. However, one study found that secondary math teachers were able to implement an effective data literacy lesson with less than two days of professional development (Louie et al., 2022, p. 143). Educators can explore the ways in which we can deepen our students' data-literacy skills across disciplines, and how this data work can help students gain a clearer understanding of social-justice issues.

Student-Centered Inquiry

As students engaged with media literacy and racial literacy in this study, they were always given the time and space to engage with sources independently and in groups. Media literacy offers students the chance to "incorporate their own understanding and interpretations of what they have seen, heard, read, and watched while at the same time taking into account why it is that they find pleasure in particular forms of media" (De Abreu, 2019, p. 34).

This study reinforced the value of a student-centered learning environment. The students in both schools engaged in student-centered learning in the sense that our sessions were "driven by questions or problems" and were "based on the process of constructing knowledge and new understanding" through a process of "learning by doing" and "self-directed learning" (Griebling et al., 2021, p. 70). As students took increased responsibility for their learning, I was able to play the role of facilitator rather than deliverer of information (Griebling et al., 2021, p. 70). Student-centered learning can be conducted in a variety of ways, from structured to guided to open in nature. Research suggests that student-centered learning offers positive benefits for all students, including those struggling with school (Griebling et al., 2021, pp. 69-70). Some of the students in both of the schools I visited struggled a bit more with understanding the material, but all showed more engagement and motivation when given the space to interact with material on their own.

Some in particular preferred the hard-data sources because the entire reading process for these sources was on their own timelines.

Research suggests that student-centered learning can help students so much with understanding that it can even serve "as an intervention for struggling students" (Griebling et al., 2021, p. 82). There are many educators and schools placing premium value on student-centered learning, but there are still many others relying on the banking theory of education, with information deposited through lectures and Power Points. This study reinforced the effectiveness of students receiving the freedom to explore sources and tough topics independently:

> No teacher … can simply lecture youngsters on playing basketball or writing poetry or experimenting with metals in a chemistry lab and expect them to meet the requirements or standards she or he had in mind for that activity. Teachers must communicate modes of proceeding, ways of complying with rules and norms … so that learners can put into practice in their own fashion what they need to join a game, shape a sonnet, or devise a chemical test. (Greene, 1995, p. 14)

Racial Literacy

> When teachers feel discomfort or fear to talk and teach about race, their opportunities, and their students' opportunities, to develop racial literacy knowledge and skills are restricted. Moreover, if there are few official curriculum texts that require or authorize teachers to teach about race, teachers' racial literacy practice, and their students' growth, are likewise curtailed. (Skerrett, 2011, p. 319)

This study examined students from two different schools who were equally interested in deepening their own racial literacy. They were not opposed to engaging in the difficult conversations, and they explored a variety of source materials to facilitate that engagement.

There was no fear among these students of controversy; they simply wanted to learn more. When two students in School 1 disagreed over an aspect of immigration, Mason discussed this afterward in a full-class dialogue:

> When I asked [Oliver,] [Oliver] had some very strong views on this. And then when I asked [Alexander], [Alexander] had like the complete opposite. And they're both great students and they're both good people, but they both had completely different answers. [Oliver] was saying more that immigration policy should be easier so that more people could come, and [Alexander] was saying, "No, they shouldn't make it easier. We don't want it to be too easy because then we might have bad people coming in."

The dialogue could have continued from there, perhaps with Mason asking Alexander if he would argue differently depending on where the immigrants were coming from, and what their race might be. Mason could ask Oliver to expand on how his pro-immigration views correspond with race and ethnicity. The student-centered inquiry would have expanded, had I not called the students together to share their discussions with the full group. This is, in many ways, democratic American education at its finest: Two students engaging with sources and with one another about a difficult topic with no easy answers, and with issues of justice, equity and fairness hanging in the balance. This is why we study and learn and engage in difficult topics together. This is why we are well-served to address our most controversial of American topics – that of race – without fear. This fostering of engagement helps our students develop the capacity to seek a better world for themselves and for others.

> Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within

> a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (Freire, 1970, p. 81)

School and District Leadership

So if you're a district or building leader and you've read this far, you may be looking for some suggested action steps. The steps that follow offer direct suggestions toward building secondary-school curriculum and instruction that combine media literacy and racial literacy in ways that fit with the findings of this study.

Step 1: Don't shy away from the controversial topics.

In fact, students want it. The students I interviewed didn't flinch at the idea of researching and discussing race directly in class. They expressed a desire to learn more at every stage of this study, and they were clear in sharing when they had learned something that they didn't know. These students didn't enter the study with as many varying opinions about race, so this study didn't change minds as much as it deepened understanding and awareness about issues of race in the United States. When I asked what other controversial issues we could address with media literacy, the students shared many more topics they'd be willing to explore as well.

In order to provide this to students, districts can establish controversial issues policies that respect the autonomy of educators' choices. Districts must allow educators to select source materials that present opposing arguments with assurances that the district will have teachers' backs. The remaining steps in this section will ring hollow if educators are left uncertain as to whether they should step into the arena of controversial topics with their students. A clear, defined policy that respects and invites student-centered engagement on controversial issues

provides the reassurance educators need and the fuel for discussion that students crave. With that permission to engage with varied media sources on the tough topics, students will have the chance to draw their own conclusions through inquiry into the sources and through dialogue with one another.

Step 2: Establish a media literacy curriculum across grade levels and disciplines.

I visited social studies classes for this study, but media literacy is by no means limited to this subject. All school districts could use established media literacy policies that allow for curricula to be established across grade levels and disciplines. As this study has suggested, such curricula can go far beyond discussing how to handle the aspects of media that many find worrisome, such as fictional news accounts, AI-generated texts and polarizing bias. Media literacy can delve deeply into establishing tools that are useful for studying sources of all kinds. Simply comparing the message of a textbook to a social media video can lead to rich discussions, as this paper has suggested. Districts and schools can create curricula that formulate how media literacy will be taught across disciplines. In doing this, districts can place library media specialists front and center in leading this work along with supervisors and administrators, since librarians are our chief instructors for source exploration. Media literacy curricula can include rubrics that are tied to the media literacy guiding questions, thereby providing teachers with guidance as to how they can assess media literacy among students.

Step 3: Establish media literacy professional development.

Once a district or school has crafted a media literacy curriculum, that district or school can provide all staff with professional development on using the media literacy principles and guiding questions to help students through the analysis of sources, with a focus on critical thinking. A media literacy leadership team can support this, with staff members from each

discipline on the team. These educators can learn from the library media specialists and supervisors and then turnkey that material to the staff in their departments. The assessment rubrics can be an essential component of this PD, so that teachers are comfortable adding media literacy to an assignment in any discipline. This professional development also can grow outward to include conversations among teachers who have been engaging in media literacy for years, as well as support from veteran media literacy educators to newer media literacy teachers.

Step 4: We must include critical media literacy as well.

In this study, I used the Center for Media Literacy's five key questions for media literacy to guide student discussions, but I included a sixth guiding question taken from the growing field of critical media literacy. This question, like that field, focused on power and fairness. This study would not have been the same without that question, as students constantly addressed it when discussing these sources on race. There is no question that any study of media messages is far better when it includes an exploration of representation in those messages, paying close attention to whose voices are – and are not – being heard.

Step 5: Establish visual literacy professional development.

The students in this survey, like most students in the world today, thrive on visual messages. The time has come for us to do much more in clarifying how we will teach visual literacy skills to our students. They could use guidance on how to do more than merely watch a video, and how to explore visual sources with the rigor we commonly use to study print sources. As the National Council of Teachers of English has stated, it is long past time for educators to accept where we are at in the evolution of media, and to use our visual sources diligently, including as an entry point into print sources.

Step 6: Deepen our use of personal-experience stories.

Students are looking for the hook in the media messages they consume, just as they have been taught to do when creating a message. They are particularly hooked by stories of other human beings. They will take these stories through videos, through books, through audio stories, and through real-life guest speakers. Personal stories allow students to connect more deeply with the events and themes being addressed in a unit or lesson. As this study suggested, those personal stories can be studied effectively using media literacy tools.

Step 7: Make abundant use of counter stories.

As we use personal-experience stories to explore tough topics, and as we consider issues of representation and fairness, we can include the stories of those whose voices have typically not been heard in our society and throughout our history. In studying media messages on race, we owe it to our students to present counter stories in which individuals share experiences that rival the dominant messages that have been presented throughout our society and our history.

Step 8: We can't avoid teaching data literacy.

There is no question that the study of data is essential to a full exploration of our current world and our full history. Many districts and schools could use guidelines on how to incorporate data across disciplines and grade levels, and many educators could use professional development on effective ways to incorporate data into studying the narratives of our present and past. This offers great potential for bringing math and science educators together with more humanities-based educators in order to craft curriculum and instruction tools that work across all disciplines.

Step 9: This work always comes back to student-centered inquiry.

Our students are not interested in lectures anymore. They want to engage directly with their learning, and they will be able to form more thoughtful conclusions about a difficult topic like race if they are given the structured time and space to engage with the material on their own and in groups. Every school has teachers whose classrooms are filled with high-level student-centered learning. Schools can turn those teachers into coaches and master teachers for the full staff, supported by district and building goals that establish student-centered learning as a foundation of each student's education.

Step 10: Racial literacy thrives when students are given various methods of engagement.

This study suggested that students are very willing to receive and study new sources on race, and to use their media literacy tools to explore the sources for new insight. They don't need convincing that racial literacy is worth their time; what they need are a variety of methods for engaging in the work. Small groups work well, but so does journaling. Full-group discussions work also, but then again so do pair-shares. Exit tickets are helpful, and so are annotations. When teachers provide a variety of entry points into the exploration and discussion of race, students are much more likely to find a way of discussing the topic that is comfortable for them. If we want students to engage in the tough topics, we may want to acknowledge that they all find their voices in different ways.

Step 11: Keep tabs on the societal curriculum.

As our communication revolution carries on, the media messages students consume and create continue to evolve. As educators, we can pay close attention to the societal curriculum and bring it inside the walls of our classrooms, so that when we ask students to discuss a topic like race, they will not hesitate to share what they have learned from any kind of source or message.

We also can survey our students regularly in order to clarify the ways in which they are learning, both about race and about all topics of interest to the work of education.

Step 12: Listen.

One thing I absolutely had to get right with my classroom research was to present myself as someone who was truly listening to the students I visited. If they did not perceive me as being present with them and paying attention to their thoughts, words and ideas, then they would have shut down. If we are going to ask students to be vulnerable in discussing and considering some of the most difficult topics we encounter in this world, we must pay close attention to their engagement with us. This attention will pay rich dividends, as it will likely lead students toward greater comfort in taking risks and in sharing their honest thoughts. When we listen to our students, we also model for them the ways in which they can listen to one another and to those outside the classroom. Discussions of race require this kind of respect and attentiveness in order to advance our collective education and in order to further the greater good.

Future Research

There are so many areas for future research on this topic. For one, most of the published studies on media literacy in secondary-school classes have been conducted in English or social studies classes (this one included). We could use more studies of media literacy in other disciplines, from science to health education to business education. Media messages are not confined to the humanities, but are present in all of our communication and learning. Controversial issues also are not confined to the humanities.

There are more media sources than those included in this study, some of which would provide different insights into student responses to media messages. For instance, Socrates' argument for oral storytelling could be put to the test by including podcasts as a media source. In

addition, fictional sources provide a different perspective, particularly in asking whether a story that is not entirely true could present universal truths that are more powerful than those included in some nonfiction sources.

There also are ways to go deeper into some of the conclusions drawn from this study by using a narrower lens to study sources. For instance, visual sources could be studied using variables such as length of video or connection to social media, in order to go deeper into the types of visuals students prefer. As for personal-experience sources, more depth of research could be done on student engagement with print narratives versus visual ones. In terms of personal-experience sources, more research could be conducted on student engagement with in-person sources, where they have the chance to meet individuals and learn directly from their stories in person. As for data, there are many different kinds of data apart from the ones I presented in this study, some of which are far more visually engaging than those used here and could be used to delve deeper into what it is about data sources that engage some students. Overall, this study explored different formats for media messages (textbook, history book, video and data chart), while also studying different types of messages (expository, personal opinion, narrative, and hard data). Each of these formats and messages could be explored more thoroughly independent of other variables. For instance, one could study which types of visual messages resonate with students most on a controversial issue (opinion, personal experience, news-oriented, satire, etc.). In addition, one could study which types of formats resonate most with students who are studying a personal-opinion message (newspaper column, blog post, social-media video, meme, podcast, etc.). The more we delve deeper into the different formats and messages in our media world, the more we can learn about what is resonating most with our students, and why.

This particular study was conducted among eighth-graders, and we might see some interesting differences if the same research was conducted using a different age group. In addition, the students in this study did not differ much in their pre-existing opinions about race. Another study could identify students with more clearly defined differences and study their conclusions after engaging with media and racial literacy. In addition, further research projects could do more to document and assess the amount of media literacy and racial literacy each student possesses before the study itself. While this research had a full pre-survey, there could be a deeper dive into identifying where students stand on their understanding of media and of race before they engage with the sources.

Two topics related to race were selected for this study – housing and immigration. There are obviously many more to choose from, some of which might be even more controversial in certain schools, thereby testing the tools of media literacy even more. In addition, the study of race stretches beyond understanding what has happened, into what we should do about the problem itself. A media literacy/racial literacy study could shift more into the realm of solutions rather than of historical content. This also would test the capacity of media literacy tools.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the element of bias was absent from this study, as all of the sources presented the same argument. A study that incorporates different biases would test media literacy in ways that differ from this study, and that are equally vital. In addition, I vetted the sources for this study, thereby removing the aspect of determining whether the sources were relevant or reliable. This is another critical component of media literacy, and additional research can ask more students to determine how relevant and reliable different sources are.

Beyond consuming the media sources that are handed to them, students also can select their own sources. The addition of student-source selection can be studied further, to explore

what students choose and why. In addition, students can move beyond media consumption and into media creation. Further research can explore the ways in which students show an understanding of media literacy and racial literacy through the creation of media content.

I'd like to share one other area of future research that I witnessed in School 2. As I shared in Chapter 3, nearly three-quarters of the students I worked with in School 2 identified as Hispanic/Latinx. Two of the immigration sources in Round 2 directly addressed the U.S. pushback against Mexican immigrants, and these sources moved several students in the class. The teacher in School 2 asked me if he could look at the book while we were addressing it. This moment brought to light the value in continuing to study the ways in which media sources help our students understand their own histories and communities. As they do, they gain greater context over the lives they are living.

All of these future research possibilities connect with the reality that student ownership over the learning process, coupled with a commitment to tackling the tough topics, offer a genuine path toward lifelong learning. At various times throughout this study, students were genuinely having fun exploring the material. On the summative exit ticket, one student responded to my request for further questions with a simple one:

"Can I do this again?"

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Appendix A

Pre-Survey

Pre-Survey - Media & Racial Literacy

Please answer the questions below and submit - thank you!
- Mr. Hynes

1. Your school

_____

2. What race/races do you identify with?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] White
- [ ] African-American / Black
- [ ] Hispanic / Latinx
- [ ] Asian-American / Pacific Islander
- [ ] Native American / Alaska Native
- [ ] Multiracial
- [ ] Other: _____

3. On an average day, how often do you engage with the following forms of media outside of school homework?

Mark only one oval per row.

	Not at all	Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	3-4 hours	4 hours or more
Book-reading	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
News-reading	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
TV shows	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
YouTube	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Social media	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Music	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Movies	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Video games	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

4. If you listed "other" above, please explain what it is below.

_____

5. What form(s) of media listed above do you wish you used more, and why?

6. Would you say you prefer print media or visual media? Why?

7. What are your initial thoughts about race, racism and the overall impact race has on life in the United States?

8. Where have you learned the most about race during your life so far?

9. What more do you want to learn about race? Why?

Appendix B

Exit Ticket Survey on Media Literacy Use and Sources

Exit Ticket on Media Literacy Use and Sources

Please answer the questions below. Thank you!

1. After reading and viewing these sources, what thoughts are you having about race?

   Explain.

2. Did any of the sources influence you more than others? If so, please list them and explain how they influenced your thoughts about race.

3. For the textbook passage, please choose which answer applies best:

Mark only one oval.

- This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways.
- This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful ways
.
- This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much.
- This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race.
- Other: _____

4. For the research-based history book, please choose which answer applies best:

Mark only one oval.

- This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways.
- This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful

- This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much.
- This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race.
- Other: _____

5. For the opinion-based video, please choose which answer applies best:

Mark only one oval.

- This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways.
- This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful

- This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much.
- This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race.
- Other: _____

6. For the personal experience video, please choose which answer applies best:

Mark only one oval.

- This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways.
- This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful
- This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much.
- This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race.
- Other: _____

7. For the data-based source, please choose which answer applies best:

Mark only one oval.

- This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways.
- This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful
- This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much.
- This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race.
- Other: _____

8. Were there reasons why some sources influenced you more than others? If so, explain.

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C

Summative Survey

Summative Survey

Thanks so much for taking part in this work! Here is a survey to conclude our work together.

1. After our work together, how do you define media literacy?

2. How did our use of media literacy tools influence your conclusions about race in the U.S.? In what ways did the use of the media literacy questions affect your thought process about the sources and about race? When you are asked to break down the source material like that, what does it do for your critical thinking?

3. What kinds of sources do you find to be most valuable for studying race in the U.S., and why?

4. Can you think of other issues that could also work well with a media literacy approach? Please explain why.

5. Are you thinking about any things differently due to the media sources and discourse we held? If so, please explain.

6. What further questions do you have about this topic and this work?

Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Approval

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
1 8 5 6

February 21, 2023

Warren Hynes
Seton Hall University

Re: Study ID# 2023-410

Dear Warren,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled "Message and Meaning: Media Literacy and Racial Literacy Among Secondary-School Students" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form and recruitment flyer. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Phyllis Hansell

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN
Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

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Appendix E

Parental Consent with Child Assent

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY 1856

Parent Consent with Child Assent

Title of Research Study: "Message and meaning: Media literacy and racial literacy among secondary-school students"

Principal Investigator: Warren Hynes, Doctoral Student

Department Affiliation: Seton Hall University, Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy

Sponsor: This research is supported by Seton Hall's Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy.

Brief summary about this research study:

The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether or not you and child want to be a part of this research study.

The purpose of this study is to explore how student-centered inquiry using media literacy tools, featuring a variety of media source materials, can influence the conclusions students draw about race in the U.S.

Your child will be asked to review various media sources and use media literacy tools to identify the ways in which each source influences their own perspectives on race. Students will be asked to respond through a variety of ways, including surveys, written reflections, small-group discussions, full-group discussions and individual interviews.

We expect that your child will be in this research study for six sessions of approximately one hour apiece.

Potential risks in this study: Breach of confidentiality is a risk in terms of someone gaining access to the data, but I will be countering this through use of pseudonyms for all students, as well as through file encryption and password-protection. In addition, some participants could potentially experience some level of discomfort from encountering sources that address race and racism in the United States. However, all sources have been carefully vetted to avoid any graphic details, and students will be encountering these sources after significant preparatory discussion to put all materials in the context of media and racial literacy.

The primary benefit of participation is for both students and researcher to gain a deeper understanding of ways in which media literacy can influence students' racial literacy.

Purpose of the research study:

Your child is being asked to take part in this research study because we are planning to visit two eighth-grade social studies classes in different schools in central New Jersey. This is one of the schools. Only students who have completed this "parental consent with student assent" form will be included in the study.

We expect that your child will be in this research study for six one-hour sessions.

Including you and your child, we expect 61 people to be in this research study, consisting of two classes of approximately 30 students apiece and one researcher. Staff at both schools will be present at all times to supervise the research.

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What you will be asked to do:

Your child's participation in this research study will include various steps, which we will summarize and then outline here. The study examines the impact of media literacy tools and sources on the racial literacy of students. The overall research design involves interviewing two groups of eighth-grade students over six sessions, presenting them with various media sources related to race, and asking them to use established media literacy questions to study the sources and respond to them in the context of student-centered inquiry. We will provide students with different source materials and ask them to provide feedback through surveys, written reflections, small-group and full-class discussions, and individual interviews.

The project's research questions are as follows:

- In what ways do media literacy tools, implemented in a process of student-centered inquiry, influence the conclusions that secondary-school students make about race in the U.S.?
- In what ways do differing media source materials influence secondary-school students' conclusions about race in the United States, when controlling for bias?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources, and why?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary among students who enter the study with different pre-existing perspectives on race, and why?

For two different issues related to race (housing and immigration), students will examine five different media sources, all of them controlled for bias:

(1) a textbook chapter (print-based media);
(2) a secondary source specific to the issue and grounded in research (print-based media);
(3) a personal opinion piece (visual media);
(4) a personal anecdote (visual media); and
(5) hard data (print-based and visual media).

For each of the two race-related topics, we will visit the classes and document their engagement with the media source materials. After the visit, we, will code their responses through the survey, reflection, discussion, and interview discourse materials. We will then use the resulting data to identify common themes and trends in their answers, and use those to guide a follow-up visit intended to probe more deeply into the research themes.

We plan to visit each class six times with the following steps planned:

(1st visit) Researcher introduces self, conducts the pre-survey and reviews definitions;

(2nd visit) Students engage in discourse analysis on the first topic and sources, using media literacy-based questions;

(3rd visit) Researcher and students delve more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis conducted since that last visit;

(4th visit) Students engage in discourse analysis on the second topic and sources, using media literacy-based questions;

(5th visit) Researcher and students delve more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis conducted since that last visit;

(6th visit) Researcher gathers summative reflections, surveys and interviews.

The pre-survey will help clarify the groups of students we are working with in these sessions. After the pre-survey, we will make sure students have key definitions that are essential for them in understanding what our work together is designed to accomplish. We will review the definitions to

terms such as: media, mass media, literacy, media literacy, and racial literacy. When leading discussions on media literacy and measuring the value of media literacy competencies, we will use media literacy tools that are widely accepted and used. Therefore, in prompting conversations and reflections on the sources and topics, we will use the Center for Media Literacy's five key questions on media literacy, along with one question from the growing field of Critical Media Literacy:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?
6. What does this message say about power and fairness?

As students read, view and discuss the six sources related to each topic on race, we will take detailed notes on their small-group and large-group conversations, and will collect their written reflections. We will then close out this session by asking some additional questions in survey form, to gather information about media literacy tools and the various sources we have studied together. Having accumulated all of this data and analyzed it, we will return for a follow-up visit to the class to probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis we will have conducted since that last visit. These follow-ups will take the form of more individual interviews, as we will have specific questions for certain students in order to clarify points made in their discussions, write-ups and surveys. We also will hold some brief discussions with the full class, and ask some final reflection questions on this topic.

This entire process will take place twice for each class, once to cover the sources on race and housing, and a second time to cover the sources on race and immigration. After we've gone through this process for both sets of sources, a final visit will cover summative reflections, surveys and interviews. During this visit, we will engage students in thinking big-picture about what they have gained in studying media literacy and comparing media sources, all of it connected to the vital topic of race. We will provide students with a final exit ticket for their closing reflections for the study.

The sources used in this study are listed and summarized below:

Race and Housing Sources

Textbook: Passage on housing discrimination (Kennedy & Cohen, 2020, pp. 845-850)

Secondary source: Passage from *The Color of Law* on HOLC and FHA loans (Rothstein, 2017, pp. 63-66)

Personal opinion piece: Instagram video post about redlining (Black Kids Books & Videos, 2022) https://www.instagram.com/tv/CZ-wg06g57f/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D

Personal anecdote: CBS news interview with daughter of a couple who were denied housing in Bergen County, N.J. (Dokoupil, 2021) https://www.cbsnews.com/news/real-estate-housing-discrimination/

Hard data: Redlined maps from the "Mapping Inequality" project made up of collaborations from the University of Richmond, Virginia Tech, University of Maryland, and Johns Hopkins University (*Mapping Inequality*, 2016) https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=11/40.666/-74.5

Race and Immigration Sources

Textbook: Passage on the Chinese Exclusion Act (Henretta et al., 2014, pp. 560-564).

Secondary source: Passage from *America for Americans* on immigration policies against Mexican individuals (Lee, 2019, pp. 147-149).

Personal opinion piece: Instagram post about racism in U.S. immigration policy (Mic, 2018) https://www.instagram.com/p/BkQA3pfnUoF/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY%3D

Personal anecdote: Author and activist Jose Antonio Vargas on being Asian and

undocumented (Vargas, 2018) https://immigrantsrising.org/jose-antonio-reads-his-new-memoir-on-9-29/

Hard data: Interactive data on U.S. immigration from different regions and countries by decade from 1820 to 2013. (Chang, 2017) https://www.vox.com/2016/1/4/10709366/immigration-america-200-years

Questions from pre-survey (in Visit #1)

- Your school:
- What race/races do you identify with?
- On the average day, how often do you engage with the following forms of media outside of school homework? (for each form of media, students are asked to check one of the following five choices: Not at all, Less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 4 hours or more)
  - Book-reading
  - News-reading
  - Watching TV shows
  - Watching YouTube videos
  - Social media
  - Music-listening
  - Watching movies
  - Video games
  - Other
- If you listed "other" above, please explain what it is.
- What form(s) of media listed above do you wish you used more, and why?
- Would you say you prefer print media or visual media? Why?
- What are your initial thoughts about race, racism and the overall impact race has on life in the United States?
- Where have you learned the most about race during your life so far?
- What more do you want to learn about race? Why?

Media Literacy and Racial Literacy Definitions (Visit #1)

Media	Vehicles that convey messages
Mass Media	Sources of information that reach and influence large numbers of people (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.)
Literacy	Knowledge of or training in a particular subject or area of activity (Dennis, 2004, p. 203)
Media Literacy	The ability to understand how different forms of mass media work, how they produce meanings, how they are organized, and how to use them wisely (De Abreu, 2019, p. 104)
Racial Literacy	An understanding of the powerful and complex ways in which race influences the social, economic, political, and educational experiences of individuals and groups (Skerrett, 2011, p. 314)

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Exit Ticket Questions on Media Literacy Use and Sources (Visits #2, 4)

1. After reading and viewing these sources, what thoughts are you having about race? Explain.
2. Did any of the sources influence you more than others? If so, please list them and explain how they influenced your thoughts about race.
3. For each source, please select one of the following:
   - This source influenced my thoughts about race in powerful ways
   - This source influenced my thoughts about race in meaningful, but not powerful ways.
   - This source didn't influence my thoughts about race much.
   - This source was completely unhelpful for thinking about race.
   - Other…
4. Were there reasons why some sources influenced you more than others? If so, explain.
5. In what ways did the use of the media literacy questions influence your thought process about the sources and about race? When you are asked to break down the source material like that, what does it do for your critical thinking?

Summative Survey (Visit #6)

- How do you define media literacy?
- How does media literacy influence your study of race in the U.S.?
- What kinds of sources do you find to be most valuable for this kind of work?
- Can you think of other issues that could also work well with a media literacy approach?
- Are you thinking about any things differently due to the media sources and discourse we held? If so, discuss.
- What further questions do you have about this topic and this work?

Your rights to participate, say no or withdraw:

Participation in research is voluntary. You can decide to participate or not to participate. You can choose to participate in the research study now and then leave the research at any time. Your choice or that of your child will not be held against you.

The person in charge of the research study can remove your child from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include non-compliance with the study procedures.

Potential benefits: There may be no direct benefit to you or your child from this study. However, possible benefits may include a growth in understanding and appreciation of the topics researched in this project, and a deeper understanding of thorough, peer-reviewed research methods.

Potential risks:

The risks associated with this study are minimal in nature, and are countered vigorously, as mentioned earlier with regard to confidentiality and response to source content.

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Confidentiality and privacy:

Any written summary of this research will avoid any unique identification of student names, staff, campus or the schools themselves. Efforts will be made to limit the use or disclosure of your child's personal information. This information may include the research study documents used for the purpose of conducting the study. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Some organizations that oversee the safe and ethical conduct of research studies may review, inspect and copy the study documents. These organizations may include the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") and other representatives of this university.

All survey data will be hosted by Google Forms and involves a secure connection. Terms of service, addressing confidentiality, may be viewed at https://www.google.com/forms/about/#security. Upon reviewing the results of any surveys, all possible identifiers will be deleted by the investigator. Each student will be identified by a unique pseudonym. All information will be kept on a password-protected computer only accessible by the researcher. The results of the research study may be published, but no student or school name will be used at any point. All study materials will be retained for three years before being destroyed, unless this research is published, in which case I would keep the materials for three years after publication in a peer-reviewed journal (or longer, if the publication requires it).

Data Sharing:

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance knowledge. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you or your child before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you or your child from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your child's personal data.

Cost and compensation:

You will not be responsible for any of the costs or expenses associated with your participation in this study. There is no payment for you or your child's time to participate in this study.

Parents please be aware that under the Protection of Pupils Right Act 20 U.S.C. Section 1232 (c)(1)(A), you have the right to review a copy of any other materials that will be used with your child for this study. If you would like to do so, you should contact Warren Hynes at warren.hynes@student.shu.edu to obtain a copy of the materials.

Conflict of interest disclosure:

The principal investigator and members of the study team have no financial conflicts of interest to report.

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Parent Consent with Child Assent

Contact information:

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, you can contact the principal investigator, Warren Hynes, at warren.hynes@student.shu.edu or (908) 917-8923 or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") at (973) 761-9334 or irb@shu.edu.

Optional Elements:

The following research activities are part of the research study. Please indicate your permission for your child to participate in these activities by placing your initials next to each activity. Your child will have the opportunity to agree or disagree with the same elements after you have indicated what you are willing to give permission for:

Parent:

I agree	I disagree	
_____	_____	The researcher may audio record my child to aid with data analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team.

I hereby grant permission for my child to participate in this research study/

_____
Printed name of child

_____ _____
Printed name of parent [ ] or individual legally authorized [ ] providing consent to participate and permission for the child to participate — Date

_____ _____
Signature of parent [ ] or individual legally authorized [ ] providing consent to participate and permission for the child to participate — Date

_____ _____
Signature of person obtaining parent permission — Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining parent permission

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Warren Hynes
Seton Hall University
Message and meaning: Media literacy and racial literacy among secondary-school students

Interview Protocol

Overall Dissertation Research Questions

- In what ways do media literacy tools, implemented in a process of student-centered inquiry, influence the conclusions that secondary-school students make about race in the U.S.?
- In what ways do differing media source materials influence secondary-school students' conclusions about race in the United States, when controlling for bias?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary between print-based media sources and visual media sources, and why?
- In what ways do student conclusions vary among students who enter the study with different pre-existing perspectives on race, and why?

***Discourse Analysis Elements*:**

- Surveys
  - Pre-survey before students engage with sources
  - Exit ticket after engagement with sources
  - Post-survey at conclusion of our work together
- Small-Group Discussions
- Full-Class Discussions
- Written Reflections
- Individual Interviews

Six Visits Per School:

1. Introduce myself, conduct the pre-survey and review definitions;
2. Engage in discourse analysis on the first topic and sources based on the media literacy-based questions;
3. Probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis I've conducted since that last visit;
4. Engage in discourse analysis on the second topic and sources based on the media literacy-based questions;
5. Probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis I've conducted since that last visit;
6. Gather summative reflections, surveys and interviews.

Introductory Questions About Media and Racial Literacy

1. What forms of media do you engage with the most?
2. What forms of media do you wish you used more, and why?
3. Would you say you prefer print media or visual media? Why?
4. What are your initial thoughts about race, racism and the overall impact race has on life in the United States?
5. Where have you learned the most about race during your life so far?

6. What more do you want to learn about race? Why?

Media Source Questions (used with each source material to guide student responses)

1. Who do you think created this message?
2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message?
5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008).
6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)

Source-Response Questions Derived from Overall Research Questions

1. After reading and viewing these sources, what thoughts are you having about race?
2. Did any of the sources influence you more than others? If so, please explain.
3. Were there reasons why some sources influenced you more than others? If so, explain.
4. In what ways is the use of media literacy tools influencing your thought process about the sources and about race? When you are asked to break down the source material like that, what does it do for your critical thinking?

Concluding Questions About Media and Racial Literacy

1. What kinds of sources do you find to be most valuable for studying race in the U.S., and why?
2. Can you think of other issues that could also work well with a media literacy approach? Please explain why.
3. Are you thinking about any things differently due to the media sources and discourse we held? If so, please explain.
4. What further questions do you have about this topic and this work?

Interview Sequence:

- Main questions and sub-questions (surveys, written reflections, large- and small-group discussions)
- Follow-up questions (Large- and small-group discussions, individual interviews)
- Probing questions (Individual interviews)

Appendix G

Lesson Plans for School Visits

Warren Hynes
Seton Hall University
Message and meaning: Media literacy and racial literacy among secondary-school students

Lesson Plans for School Visits

Visit #1
Overall Objective: To introduce myself, conduct the pre-survey and review definitions
Activities:

- Introductions, explain who I am, why I'm here, and engage with students
- Key definitions
  - Media
  - Mass Media
  - Literacy
  - Media Literacy
  - Racial Literacy
  - Information Literacy
  - Six media literacy questions we will use during each session
- Pre-Survey
  - What forms of media do you engage with the most?
  - What forms of media do you wish you used more, and why?
  - Would you say you prefer print media or visual media? Why?
  - What are your initial thoughts about race, racism and the overall impact race has on life in the United States?
  - Where have you learned the most about race during your life so far?
  - What more do you want to learn about race? Why?

Visit #2
Overall Objective: To engage in discourse analysis on the first topic (race and housing) and sources, using media literacy-based questions
Activities:

- Greet students / check-in
- Post our six media-source questions to guide interactions with the five sources
  1. Who do you think created this message?
  2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention?
  3. How might different people understand this message differently?
  4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message?
  5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008).
  6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)
- For each of our five sources:
  1. Read or watch together
  2. Offer students a few minutes to free-write some thoughts on this source
- After the five sources are read and viewed:

- Small-group discussions
- Brief large-group talk
- Exit ticket featuring the following questions:
    - After reading and viewing these sources, what thoughts are you having about race?
    - Did any of the sources influence you more than others? If so, please explain.
    - Were there reasons why some sources influenced you more than others? If so, explain.
    - In what ways is the use of media literacy tools influencing your thought process about the sources and about race? When you are asked to break down the source material like that, what does it do for your critical thinking?

Visit #3

Overall Objective: To probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis I've conducted since that last visit.

Activities:

- Greet students / check-in
- Re-post our six media-source questions to guide interactions with the five sources
  1. Who do you think created this message?
  2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention?
  3. How might different people understand this message differently?
  4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message?
  5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008).
  6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)
- Ask students to free-write any additional thoughts they have about sources since last visit
- Conduct group and individual interviews featuring follow-up questions based on the transcriptions, notes, coding and analysis from previous visit
- Full-group discussion for any additional questions

Visit #4

Overall Objective: To engage in discourse analysis on the second topic (race and immigration) and sources, using media literacy-based questions

Activities:

- Greet students / check-in
- Re-post our six media-source questions to guide interactions with the five sources
  1. Who do you think created this message?
  2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention?
  3. How might different people understand this message differently?
  4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message?

5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008).
6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)

- For each of our five sources:
  1. Read or watch together
  2. Offer students a few minutes to free-write some thoughts on this source
- After the five sources are read and viewed:
  - Small-group discussions
  - Brief large-group talk
  - Exit ticket featuring the following questions:
    - After reading and viewing these sources, what thoughts are you having about race?
    - Did any of the sources influence you more than others? If so, please explain.
    - Were there reasons why some sources influenced you more than others? If so, explain.
    - In what ways is the use of media literacy tools influencing your thought process about the sources and about race? When you are asked to break down the source material like that, what does it do for your critical thinking?

Visit #5

Overall Objective: To probe more deeply into the answers from the previous visit, using the transcriptions, coding and analysis I've conducted since that last visit.

Activities:

- Greet students / check-in
- Re-post our six media-source questions to guide interactions with the five sources
  1. Who do you think created this message?
  2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention?
  3. How might different people understand this message differently?
  4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message?
  5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008).
  6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)
- Ask students to free-write any additional thoughts they have about sources since last visit
- Conduct group and individual interviews featuring follow-up questions based on the transcriptions, notes, coding and analysis from previous visit
- Full-group discussion for any additional questions

Visit #6

Overall Objective: Gather summative reflections, surveys and interviews

Activities:

- Greet students / check-in
- Re-post our six media-source questions to guide interactions with the five sources
  1. Who do you think created this message?
  2. How does the author of this message try to attract your attention?
  3. How might different people understand this message differently?
  4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are present in, or absent from, this message?
  5. Why do you think this message is being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2008).
  6. What does this message say about power and fairness? (Garcia et al., 2013) (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, pp. 138-139) (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 14)
- Some time to write additional ideas and thoughts as we conclude this work
- Full-group discussion on what we have learned together
- Form featuring concluding questions about media and racial literacy
  - What kinds of sources do you find to be most valuable for studying race in the U.S., and why?
  - Can you think of other issues that could also work well with a media literacy approach? Please explain why.
  - Are you thinking about any things differently due to the media sources and discourse we held? If so, please explain.
  - What further questions do you have about this topic and this work?
- Follow-up questions related to any written or spoken comments from earlier in this session
- Ask for any student advice for me as researcher
- Thanks to all students