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# Culturally Aware Teaching: A Supplemental Reference Guide for Intermediate Secondary School English Language Learners

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University of San Francisco

**Culturally Aware Teaching:  
A Supplemental Reference Guide  
for Intermediate Secondary School English Language Learners**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

By  
Jessica McCrane  
May 2016

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## **Abstract**

This project takes a critical eye at the cultural biases in place in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) curriculum and the New York State (NYS) English Regents examination currently being used in the state of New York. Taking into account the diverse population of students currently attending secondary school in NYS, more culturally diverse lesson activities have been created. These activities take the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis (Whorf, Lee, Levinson, & Carroll, 2012) and interlanguage pragmatics (Martínez Flor & Alcón Soler, 2008) into consideration to help English language learners (ELLs) learn the language in a manner that lowers anxiety and is effective in acquiring the language. Plus, through current English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers' firsthand experiences with the CCSS curriculum, in the areas of Long Island, New York City, and downstate New York, a questionnaire was completed to better gauge progress in the classroom. It allowed for insight into the effects of the CCSS curriculum and performance of ELLs at the secondary level. It was discovered that although there are biases in this curriculum, it does not need to be completely rewritten. Many teachers compensate for a lack of cultural diversity in lessons by creating their own. This creates inconsistencies throughout the state and can have a negative impact on state testing scores. Instead, a supplementary reference guide has been developed to fit the needs of the diverse population of ELLs while allowing educators to learn more about their students. It allows for greater learning and understanding by giving culture consideration in core curriculum.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Graduation is a rite of passage all high school students are entitled to. However, according to Harris (2016), "Statewide, only 34 percent of [English language learners] graduate on time, less than half the rate for those who already speak the language" (para no. 6). Since the approval of the Common Core State Standards, "the percentage of 3rd grade ELLs who were proficient dropped by nearly one half, compared to their [English language proficient] counterparts whose proficiency dropped by only one quarter," with a similar decline seen in 8<sup>th</sup> grade (English Language Learners in NY, 2011, p.4). One challenge facing many high school ELLs is passing the English Regents examination for New York State (NYS), especially since the arrival of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This project will explore the NYS English Regents examination for both native English speakers and English language learners before and after the CCSS arrival. Furthermore, this project will show a decline in testing scores, especially among ELLs, due to test and curriculum biases as a result of insufficient cultural knowledge necessary for success. Finally, a supplemental reference guide will be developed in order to best assist students and educators to fit the needs of the culturally diverse ELLs in New York today.

#### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to inform educators about the biases English language learners face due to the launch of the Common Core State Standards and to institute more culturally diverse materials into everyday learning. The CCSS curriculum dictates the specific materials used in the classroom with disregard to the ELL population. In a recent study done by NYSESLAT 2015: New York State ELL Demographics (2015), it was found that 8.9% of public

school students were ELLs, encompassing a variety of cultures with the majority being Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Bengali, Haitian Creole, Russian, and Urdu (“NYSESLAT 2015: New York State ELL Demographics,” 2015). Of these ELLs, 63.3% of students were new to the United States, most residing in New York City (“NYSESLAT 2015: New York State ELL Demographics,” 2015). The CCSS fail to represent these cultures and leave ELLs at a disadvantage when dealing with the cultural norms. Language, however, goes well beyond the spoken word. The CCSS is too focused on standardized testing and results, causing Rakow (2012), along with many others, to feel “we may find ourselves so standards- and test-driven that all the activities we use to develop healthy, balanced... students are eliminated” (para no. 9). Plus, according to Fenner and Segota (n.d.), in order to be successful in the classroom, ELLs must be proficient in “the social and intercultural competence of using English in the classroom” (para no. 3). Thus, without adequate unbiased cultural instruction in the classroom, ELLs will not be truly proficient in the language and will fall short on standardized testing, like the NYS English Regents.

I chose this project because it speaks closely to my heart. As a native New Yorker, I intend to return to teaching in my home state as a TESOL instructor. I will be dealing first hand with these students, cultures, and curriculum. In order to be an effective educator, I need to provide these students with ample opportunities for success. Thus, the CCSS must be remodeled into an unbiased curriculum with regard for the ELL population.

This project is intended for teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers. Through this project, the negative effects of using a biased curriculum and state assessment will be clearly seen alongside the decline of progress in ELLs. Teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers will be made aware of these hardships and discover that the CCSS are unsuccessful.

As a result, teachers will be able to shape their lessons to better fit their diverse population of students. Likewise, administrators and curriculum developers can begin to construct a successful, unbiased curriculum and state assessment to achieve English language proficient students and true proficiency scores.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theoretical areas of note in this project deal with the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis, derived from studies done by Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir in the 1940s (Whorf, Lee, Levinson, & Carroll, 2012), and pragmatics in second language learning, better known as interlanguage pragmatics (Martínez Flor & Alcón Soler, 2008). These areas contribute to the biases in the CCSS and result in poor testing of ELLs during the NYS English Regents examination.

Firstly, the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis states that a language structure shapes our views and determines our cognitive functions. It is believed that language affects how we form ideas and impressions, dictating our behavior and thought ("Language and thought," 2012). Sapir stated in a 1939 article that:

"Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the word of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society... The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation" (Whorf et. al., 2012, p.173).

Sapir felt very strongly that language, on an unconscious level, dictates our behavior and actions

as humans.

Likewise, from Whorf's 1942 essay, *Language, Mind, and Reality*, he stated, "Every language and every well-knit technical sublanguage incorporates certain points of view and certain patterned resistances to widely divergent points of view" (Whorf et. al., 2012, p.316). He felt that language does not only affect our behavior, but also the way we think. He gave an example using the word 'space,' saying that the word has very different meanings according to a psychologist and a physicist. Moreover, "Englishmen could use in English the word 'sentiment' in the meanings which the similarly but functionally different French utterance *le sentiment* has in its native English" (Whorf et. al., 2012, p.316). He showed that people of different languages, cultures, and races think differently and have different meanings for similar words. Thus, according to this hypothesis, ELLs will view a phrase or gesture differently than a native English speaker. The vernacular used throughout the NYS English Regents is developed for native English speaking students, leaving the ELLs at a notable disadvantage.

Furthermore, pragmatics is the social aspect of language and dictates what to say and when to say it ("Social language use (Pragmatics)," 2016). Interlanguage pragmatics deals with second language acquisition and "focuses mainly on the investigation of speech acts, conversational structure and conversational implicature" (Martínez Flor & Alcón Soler, 2008, p.3). Bachman, in 1990, found that pragmatic competence is achieved when certain utterances are acted out appropriately (Martínez Flor & Alcón Soler, 2008). Therefore, learning a second language is more than just learning the words of the language. Students need to understand why the words are being said and the emotional attachment these words carry. Without a proper understanding of the language, speakers can become confused or communication can breakdown all together. For each language and culture, the pragmatics vary. In a study done by Roever,



Wang, and Brophy (2014), 229 ELL and native English speakers were given a pragmatics tests. They looked at a number of background factors that dictate pragmatics and affect proficiency levels and found a direct correlation between the two. Thus, due to the aforementioned biases in state testing and the variations in pragmatics, ELLs are once again left at a disadvantage.

These theories are reflected in this project by the creation of a more culturally aware curriculum. Without proper education of interlanguage pragmatics and the affect the native language has on the subconscious mind, students will inevitably be left behind and deprived of true second language acquisition. By showing educators how and when to introduce new cultural aspects into a lesson will help ELLs to understand the subtle nuances of language, resulting in better preparation for state testing in English.

### **Limitations of the Project**

This field project contains some limitations. First, it is intended for intermediate ESL students in the state of New York currently using the CCSS curriculum. As a result, it may not be suitable for students of lower skill level or schools that do not currently follow the CCSS curriculum. In addition, only a small number of secondary ESL teachers were surveyed in regards to his or her students and the curriculum. It is possible that with a larger scope results may have differed.

### **Significance of the Project**

This project offers a sample of a culturally diverse supplemental reference guide that can be incorporated into a high school ESL classroom in New York. Educators will be able to see how incorporating various cultural aspects can enhance the learning process and reduce student anxiety. Consequently, this will positively affect proficiency levels and test scores, especially for ELLs in the NYS English Regents examination. Additionally, educators will be made aware of

the biases in the CCSS and be able to take positive steps to improve the learning experience. By instituting the culturally diverse supplemental reference guide provided through this project, educators can develop unbiased lessons, activities, and projects for the diverse ELL population today.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Regents Examination:** A cumulative state mandated assessment in the core classes, English, math, science, and social studies, given in the state of New York.

**Common Core State Standards (CCSS):** A math and English curriculum instituted throughout the United States for students in grades K-12 designed to prepare students for life after grade school.

**Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis:** A theory developed by two linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, where language influences behavior and cognition (“Language and thought,” 2012).

**Self-esteem:** Is the confidence a student has and how they project themselves in the world.

**Testing anxiety:** Is stress caused from test taking and the fear of failure, due to factors such as unfamiliar material, difficult tasks, stress induced illness, and negative testing experiences (“Test anxiety,” 2016).

**Curriculum:** Is a set of unit and lesson plans that plot out the standards and learning outcomes for a specific course and its students.

**English language learners (ELLs):** Are students considered not proficient in the English language.

**Interlanguage Pragmatics:** Are the social aspect to language use, regarding the social norms of when to speak and what to say (“Social language use (Pragmatics),” 2016) with a special focus on second language acquisition.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

From the following research, there is a notable gap in the literature around the topic of English language learners' (ELLs) lack of success due to biases in curriculum and testing. There is hardly mention of ELLs in the high school, adolescent range; most is based around university level adults and a few studies done using elementary school children. Likewise, there is little focus on the New York State (NYS) English Regents examination. It is the goal of this paper to shed light on the biases that high school level ELLs face when dealing with curriculum and testing, as seen in the NYS English Regents, before and after the institution of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

In order to fully understand the hardships ELLs face as a result of the CCSS, four categories have been constructed: The Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis, interlanguage pragmatics, test biases, and testing anxiety. The first category, the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis, contains three studies that analyze the manner in which language influences cognition. These studies include a variety of ELLs and show the importance of understanding the thought processes that are key for second language acquisition. Similarly, the next theme involves interlanguage pragmatics. The four studies provided show how large an impact an ELL's background can influence social behavior and positive assimilation. Afterward, the third category delves into several studies dealing with test biases. Since it is the view of this author that the CCSS and the NYS English Regents examination are biased towards ELLs, this theme exemplifies how these biases can negatively affect ELL test results. Finally, the fourth category covers testing anxiety. Not only do ELLs

struggle with predispositions to language learning, but like most students, they have anxiety and stress towards standardized tests that negatively affect their performance.

Taking all of these studies and research into account, one can better understand the plight of the ELL. By focusing on high school level students taking the NYS English Regents, an unbiased supplemental reference guide will be developed that enhances the learning process and aids in successful language acquisition. Also, from this research, more culturally aware lessons and activities will be readily available for educators to use in the classroom.

### **Language's Influence on Cognition**

The Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis states that language influences cognition. This hypothesis is a theoretical framework that has been applied to language teaching since the mid-1700s. From Whorf's 1942 essay from *Language, Mind, and Reality*, he feels this idea "is older than Plato, and at the same time as new as our most revolutionary thinkers" (Whorf, Lee, Levinson, & Carroll, 2012, p. 317). Hussein (2012) feels that even today there is still controversy around the accurateness of this theory, but believes Whorf is correct in his views. He believes this theory "implies that the speakers of different languages think and perceive reality in different ways and that each language has its own world view" (Hussein, 2012, p.642). Though Whorf takes a more deterministic approach to this theory, he does state that language does not completely determine the world view but plays a large role in it. Thus, speakers of other languages view the world in different ways. However, according to Athanasopoulos, Damjanovic, Burnand, & Bylund (2015), when looking at this theory in terms of second language acquisition, they found world views can be changed over time. In their study, they looked at the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis and the effect it has on university level native English speakers learning German as a second language with a

focus on motion event cognition. The German language focuses on endpoints whereas the English language focuses on motion. At the end of a semester learning German, they set out to see if the speakers adopted endpoints or motion when using the new language; if their English worldview overruled what they have learned in German.

In order to complete this study, Athanasopoulos et. al. (2015) used fourteen English speakers, fourteen German speakers, and 76 native English speakers learning German as a second language. They asked students how they felt their proficiency was on a scale of 1, poor, to 4, advanced, in six different categories; speaking, reading, writing, grammar, comprehension, and pronunciation. Then, the students watched thirty-one video clips in German exemplifying the endpoints in speech. After, they were given a similar yet different test to figure out if they acquired new speech patterns. It was concluded that the students' thought patterns were altered due to the exposure to the new language being learned. However, they did note that it takes a lot of exposure and time to reach this point. Their concern with language classes today being “cognitive restructuring will remain a significant challenge for the L2 [second language] classroom learner” (Athanasopoulos, et. al., 2015, p.151).

Alongside the lack of adequate time and exposure in the school setting to allow for cognitive change, Burdern, Columna, Hodge, & Martínez de la Vega Mansilla (2013) looked at the ethnolinguistics aspect of second language acquisition. They state that the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis is “foundational to the development of ethnolinguistics” (Burden et. al., 2013, p.170). In their opinion, teachers are not being properly trained to deal with the growing number of ELLs in the United States. Currently, there are communication barriers between mainstream teachers, especially physical education teachers, and ELLs due to a lack of teacher preparation in

cultural and linguistic, or ethnolinguistic, aspects of teaching. In their research they look at past studies and research to create strategies that can be implemented to aid in ELL awareness for physical education teachers with the end goal being to create more culturally aware teachers. It is felt that with these strategies in place, teachers in training will be better suited to successfully teach K-12 grade ELLs in a physical education setting. The strategies derived include a positive attitude and disposition when dealing with a diverse population of students, an increase of knowledge dealing with different cultures, and, finally, to implement this positive attitude and knowledge successfully into the classroom.

However, Burden et. al., have not yet tested their strategies in the real world. It is difficult to say how effective they will be without this crucial research to back up their claims. Still, all teachers can benefit from ethnolinguistic training as a result of an ever-expanding number of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Moreover, since time and exposure are large factors in fully acquiring a second language, then having all teachers prepared to take on this challenge can only aid in success.

Ethnolinguistics and the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis are reflected in this project by creating a supplemental reference guide that allows for ample time and exposure to the English language. It provides unbiased activities and lessons that all English language arts (ELA) teachers with classes that contain ELLs can use. With teachers following this supplemental reference guide, students and teachers will become culturally aware, which will ease ELLs into language learning. As stated by Athanasopoulos et. al. (2015), this will help to create new world views that can be connected to the English language, which will in turn allow for ELLs to assimilate smoothly.

### **Language's Influence on Social Norms**

Much like the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis, pragmatics plays a large role in language acquisition, which “is both social and mental; both are required and both depend on the other” (Martínez Flor & Alcón Soler, 2008, p.26). Interlanguage pragmatics deal with second language learning and a students' ability to hold a coherent conversation in this new language. If language shapes our thoughts and world views, then it is safe to say language influences our social behavior. Pragmatic competence allows for ELLs to appropriately interact with others and share a common understanding of the words and utterances being used. Yet, for ELLs, depending on their cultures, the social norms will be different to those of English. Unfortunately, these differences can have a negative impact on how well they learn and interact with others.

Roever, Wang, and Brophy (2014) set out to determine just how much these differences can impact an ELL's education as well as how they learn interlanguage pragmatics. In their study 229 English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) students in the United States and Germany, respectfully, were tested using a web-based pragmatics test which consisted of twelve different items. They used Poisson regression to determine the effect of proficiency, length of residence, gender, and comprehension in order to discover their pragmatic competence in English. This study had a large range of participants, with ages ranging from twelve to sixty, and an even distribution of males and females. After the tests were finished, Roever et. al. (2014) concluded that proficiency had a large impact on pragmatic competence, with the higher the proficiency level the higher the pragmatic competence. It was also discovered that knowing multiple languages and gender did not affect pragmatic competence in English.

Additionally, Taguchi, Naganuma, and Budding (2015) delved deeper into the question of

pragmatic competence by examining explicit interlanguage pragmatic instruction and the effects it has on learning English as a second language. Taguchi et. al. (2015) used an old study done by herself in 2012 with the added addition of the explicit instruction of pragmatics. Twenty-three university level Japanese students, with an average of six years of English study, were used as participants. Their progress was monitored in the English classes, which focused on reading, writing, and speaking, all being received twice a week with an additional 360 minutes of extra study time per week. Specifically looking at how students made requests, their scores were compared to the 2012 study to see if students benefited from the explicit pragmatics instruction. As a result of this study, the students not only had a higher pragmatic competence when dealing with requests, but retained the information a full year after classes had concluded.

Moreover, Hirata, Kelly, Huang, and Manansala (2014) studied the teaching of pragmatics, but with the influence of movement. They set out to find if “hand gestures influence[d] auditory learning of an L2 [second language] at the segmental phonology level” (Hirata et. al., 2014, p.2090). In their quest to find out, eighty-eight university level native English speakers were given an auditory test with a focus on the learning of different phonemic vowels in Japanese, a language they had no prior knowledge of. The participants were divided into four groups; group one watched an instructor on video speaking while making gestures, group two made the gestures along with the videoed instructor, group three watched an instructor in person while making gestures, and group four made the gestures along with the present instructor. Participants were given five days of instruction and had ten participants per group. Participants were then given a Japanese test, using new words and instructors. The results were generated using ANOVA, which concluded that all groups saw improvement in their listening



test scores. Though the results are sound, the researchers should complete this trial again with the addition of a control group that listened to the Japanese words without the use of any hand gestures, by participants or instructors, to truly see how much information was gained.

Overall, interlanguage pragmatic instruction has been shown to be useful in the classroom, but without interest from the students, lack of motivation to learn will hold many students back. Yuan, Tangen, Mills, and Lidstone (2015) examined the perceptions of Chinese ELLs and their view of interlanguage pragmatics in the classroom. The goal was to show that not only are interlanguage pragmatics useful in the classroom, but welcomed by teachers and students alike. For this study, 237 first-year native Chinese speaking EFL college students were given a questionnaire and participated in focus group interviews in order to collect data about their views on English pragmatics while learning the language. The questionnaire contained five multiple choice, ten Likert scale, and two open-ended questions. Based on their findings, it was concluded that these participants felt a desire to explicitly learn pragmatics in the classroom to be more proficient in the language and adapt better to social situations with native English speakers. Though the results of this study are beneficial for teachers and students, it has two flaws. Out of the 237 participants only twenty-four were females, leaving a large gap in this study. Likewise, since students were asked questions and relied on honest answers, it is possible that all students did not answer truthfully, but instead answered as to how they felt the interviewee wanted.

The importance of explicit interlanguage pragmatic teaching in the classroom is reflected in this project by the specific lessons and activities designed. Positive results and reactions to pragmatic teaching were shown in the aforementioned studies. This explicit instruction helps students to gain pragmatic competence and to be successful in second language acquisition,

which is the primary goal of any language teacher. According to Yuan, et. al. (2015), students want to learn pragmatics to better fit in with their native English speaking peers. Not only will pragmatic instruction help improve language skills but will ease ELLs into the surrounding society. Finally, by feeling comfort in this new culture and having a stronger handle on the language, ELLs can become more successful in the classroom and improve performance on state wide testing.

### **Biases Found in Testing**

The first step to increasing ELL proficiency and improving class and test performance is through the use of an unbiased curriculum. Next, state examinations need to be evaluated with ELLs in consideration due to the current biases in place. Initially, it is important to look at the test accommodations that are currently provided for ELLs. Li and Suen (2012) analyzed current test accommodations for ELLs to determine if they provide an unfair advantage. In order to conduct their study, Li and Suen (2012) looked at native English speakers and ELLs completing the same tests with the same accommodations, mainly through the use of dictionaries, visual support, and extra time allowed. Then a meta-analysis using a hierarchical linear model was completed to determine if native speakers' scores improve by using these test accommodations. After the twenty-one tests were finished, Li and Suen (2012) viewed the results and concluded that native speakers' test scores did not drastically change. They found that the current test accommodations are valid and do not give ELLs an unfair advantage.

Furthermore, Koo, Becker, and Kim (2014) analyzed a Florida state reading assessment for third and tenth graders, for both ELLs and native English speakers, to determine if it is biased. In this study, native English speakers were used as the constant and ELLs as the focal

group. In third grade there was a total of 173,737 students tested with 5,288 being ELLs. In 10th grade, 160,391 total students were evaluated with 4,293 being ELLs. Koo et. al. (2014) used a standard reading test given in Florida public schools, the 2009 Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test, to determine their results. To calculate the scores, they used differential item functioning. From these results, it was found that third grade ELLs had more trouble with vocabulary knowledge and phrases than native speakers. Similarly, in tenth grade, native English speakers performed better with one exception; ELLs performed better on evaluative items, perhaps due to prior education in their native homes. It was also concluded that even when ELLs become proficient in English they still need ample assistance in the classroom. Although this test is only given in Florida, it is similar to others given in the United States showing that certain exams are in fact biased towards ELLs due to gaps in their knowledge.

Likewise, Wolf, Wang, Blood, & Huang (2014) evaluated the biases in the CCSS ELA test. In this study, the language demands of the CCSS ELA test were compared to other common ELA tests, those in California, Florida, and New Jersey. Specifically, for these states they “computed the percentage of CCSS-derived language skills and tasks that were covered by that state’s ELA... standards in Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, and Language” (Wolf et. al., 2014, p.43). Interviews were also conducted using middle school teachers to gain their perspectives on the CCSS and its impact on ELLs. The middle school students were divided into groups based on their proficiency levels; early advanced, advanced, and bridging levels. The researchers found that there was some overlap between standards, but it was low. The CCSS contain a large number of standards, many of which are higher order, and different from older ELA curriculum. Having a vast number of standards was found to be daunting for teachers and

students. From the interviews, teachers shared mixed feelings about the CCSS. One complaint was that some language used was very vague and that beginner ELLs in eighth grade were “learning to read” whereas mainstream eighth graders were “reading to learn,” leaving ELLs at a notable disadvantage (Wolf et. al., 2014, p.48). Thus, when completing state required tests, such as the NYS English Regents, ELLs have a harder time completing the exams successfully.

ELLs of low socioeconomic status, and those with language impairments, are also further disadvantaged from the CCSS. Roseberry-McKibbon (2015) analyzed the standards set forth by the CCSS and its impact on these ELLs. She focused on factors such as vocabulary terms, stating that “between first and 12th grade, children need to learn approximately 36,000 spoken words. They still need 55,000 words for printed school English” (Roseberry-McKibbon, 2015, p.8). Therefore, when ELLs enter the school system after first grade, they have a shorter period of time to learn these words deemed necessary for success, causing unfair circumstances for these ELLs. Plus, those with low socioeconomic status or language impairments face extra disadvantages that need to be accounted for in curriculum development. Ukrainetz (as cited in Roseberry-McKibbon, 2015) states, “These 'at risk' students often face substantial challenges in achieving the high level of performance called for by the CCSS. This is especially true at the secondary level” (p.5). She gives several strategies to help aid these students in improving reading comprehension skills, revolving around vocabulary and “morphological awareness skills” (Roseberry-McKibbon, 2015, p. 1). This research is reflected in this project by accounting for ELLs with low socioeconomic status and those with language impairments. By instituting some of these strategies, and incorporating differentiated lessons, many ELLs will have better opportunities for success.

Test biases affect most students, but especially ELLs. These studies and findings are reflected in this project by creating a new set of evaluations that are produced to take the current ELL population into account. By aligning these evaluations with the unbiased lesson activities and curriculum, the new tests can be more reflective of what is genuinely learned. These tests will still continue to allow fair and valid testing accommodations while taking out the cultural biases; mainly removing vague and biased vocabulary and phrases that are too far advanced and uncommonly used. As a result, educators can accurately see an ELL's performance and proficiency level to better educate these students.

### **Effects of Testing Anxiety**

Even when the curriculum and exams line up, are unbiased, and are capable of producing accurate scores, testing anxiety can cause negative results. Ahangary and Sharifi (2015) explain that testing anxiety “is a common phenomenon, with some degree of evaluative anxiety being experienced by most people in modern society” (p.375). These researchers felt there was a correlation between how a student feels about a test and their performance, specifically foreign language tests. In this study, they took 120 university level Iranian EFL learners and gave them two types of questionnaires: ten minutes to complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and fifteen minutes to complete Sarason's Test Anxiety Scale, which uses Likert scale questions. After calculating the students' scores, it was concluded that the higher a student's self-esteem the lower their test anxiety is. When a student goes into a test feeling confident they perform better. By having ELLs comfortable with the material in the classroom they will have more confidence and higher self-esteem when taking an exam.

Similarly, Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015) investigated other reasons for testing anxiety in

students; the relationship between second language learning anxiety and achievement on tests. In their study, 258 freshmen medical majors in Iran were given two questionnaires: The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, containing thirty-three Likert scale questions given during the semester, and an achievement test given at the conclusion of the semester, focusing on English vocabulary, grammar, translation, and reading comprehension. From these tests, a negative correlation was found between test anxiety and their scores. The more anxiety produced the poorer the test scores were. An additional conclusion found was that females tended to have more anxiety than males. Alongside this, Salehi and Marefat (2014) looked at foreign language learning and foreign language tests and the anxiety associated with it. In this study, 200 pre-intermediate EFL students at the Iranian Language Institute were given two questionnaires to determine anxiety levels: The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and the Test Anxiety Scale. These scores were also compared to the final exam scores at the end of the semester. Much like the other findings, it was concluded that the higher the test anxiety the lower the test performance. Showing once again that test anxiety is a large factor that needs to be taken into account when creating and delivering any exam.

Finally, Aydin (2013) researched the correlation between test anxiety and test performance among elementary and middle school EFL learners. She took gender, age, grade, achievement level, and economic background into consideration when compiling results. In this study, 477 EFL learners from five elementary schools in Turkey were used as participants. A background questionnaire and the Test Anxiety Scale were used to collect data. Students were in grades four through eight, averaging eleven years old. It was concluded that young learners did not have as much test anxiety, but some of the background areas still had a negative effect on

achievement. This study was very insightful in that it used a large number of students, with varying backgrounds, to get a more accurate result. Also, the use of younger students provides beneficial information for the creation of this project's supplemental reference guide. Though there are limited informational studies done with high school adolescents in mind, by looking at children and adults one can deduce anxiety levels accordingly.

After viewing all of these studies on testing anxiety, it is clear to see that as students age anxiety levels increase. Plus, regardless of the testing being done, students tend to feel anxious during any test, foreign language tests included. This is especially true if their self-esteem is low and they lack confidence in themselves. These findings are reflected in my project by creating useful, low-anxiety lesson activities that will boost a student's confidence and alleviate second language learning stress.

### **Summary**

Due to test and curriculum biases present in New York State, ELLs face many hardships when trying to successfully acquire the new language. The Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis informed about the way in which speakers of other languages think differently than those who are native English speakers. Likewise, by looking into interlanguage pragmatics, it can be seen that certain background factors affect the way in which ELLs behave and understand the new language. These factors are innate in most ELLs and must be taken into account when creating a curriculum and testing materials. By using vague language and phrases, not using culturally relevant items, and not accounting for their gap in knowledge, will only lead failure. These test biases are present today and can be seen in the NYS English Regents examination and the CCSS curriculum. As a result, many ELLs are failing to perform at their true level during testing and

their proficiency is lagging behind.

Knowing that these lessons and exams are designed for native English speakers only causes more stress and anxiety for students. It was shown that regardless of major or institution, testing anxiety has a strong effect on ELLs, even when the testing material is unbiased. It is the goal of this project to alleviate this stress by taking in the background factors and eliminating the current testing biases in order to create a more culturally aware supplemental reference guide. Educators will be able to use these materials to better assist the growing number of ELLs in New York schools. Plus, ELLs will be better prepared to take these tests, which will accurately show the knowledge they have gained. Finally, with this focus on high school students, this project also helps to close the gap on missing literature so future educators and researchers can best assist this important age group.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Description of the Project**

Through this project, a questionnaire has been developed to provide better instruction for English language learners (ELLs). It has been developed to help facilitate discussion about the cultural biases in place today when referring to assessments and examinations. This study will be completed by English as a second language (ESL) teachers at the secondary school level to determine the areas in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) curriculum that need improvement. Afterwards, a supplemental reference guide will be designed for intermediate ESL secondary school classes in the state of New York with these results in consideration. The activities are intended to create lifelong English language users while celebrating the cultural diversity present in the classroom today. By using activities that students can relate to they can learn the language in a low-anxiety environment, which will in return assist in better test performance during the New York State (NYS) English Regents.

#### **Development of the Project**

My goal as an educator has always been to embolden students to perform at their best. As a language teacher, this generally translates into having the students be able to use the language outside the classroom. However, after three years of teaching Spanish, I found that learning another language was difficult for many students. Moreover, I feel that having to learn a new language in a new country surrounded by a different culture can seem like a daunting task. Thus, over the past two years, I have been working towards my degree in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL) at the University of San Francisco. Here I have spent my time

studying second language acquisition alongside the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis and how language affects thoughts and behavior. This topic sparked my interest. I was curious as to how students felt and thought while learning English in the United States. While researching this topic, I also became interested in interlanguage pragmatics and saw that a lack of classroom instruction in this area was a possible reason for why students struggle with language learning.

When I decided to return home to New York, this time teaching ESL, I was curious as to how the CCSS was affecting the students. I began researching the new curriculum and ESL class performance in New York Public Schools. I found mixed opinions ranging from teachers wanting a drastic change in curriculum to teachers feeling comfortable with the new material, but many signs pointed to a lack of adequate instruction for people of various cultures. With the diverse population of New York, a curriculum that celebrates diversity is not only beneficial for students to feel comfortable in their new surroundings, but to lessen their anxiety towards language learning.

Since I had yet to use the curriculum in the classroom, I wanted to get the perspectives and opinions of current teachers. Several ESL teachers from Long Island, New York City, and downstate New York completed a questionnaire to help assist me in creating culturally relevant activities to add into the current curriculum. With these first hand perspectives, my collected research in the field, and previous studies done in the area of second language acquisition practices in the classroom, I created this supplemental resource guide to better fit the needs of ELLs in New York. It takes into account the diverse population as well as beneficial learning styles and teaching approaches to help students to be as successful as possible. It is the goal of this project to develop English proficient students so that they can not only graduate with a

Regents diploma but to also obtain a worthwhile career they will love and excel at.

### Overview

#### Questionnaire Matrix

Research Question	Methodology	Statistical Analysis
Personal information questions	Personal Observation	Coding Multivariate analysis
Close-ended questions #1, 2, 4	Questionnaire Personal Observation	Frequency Percentage
Open-ended questions #3, 5	Questionnaire Personal Observation	Coding Multivariate
Likert Scale questions #6-11	Questionnaire	Frequency Percentage
Personal reflection question #12	Personal Observation	Coding Multivariate analysis

#### Project Matrix

	Activity #1	Activity #2	Activity #3	Activity #4
Topic	Interview	Blog	Poem	Song
CCSS Objectives	SL.9-10.4 SL.9-10.6	RI.9-10.2 RI.9-10.4 RI.9-10.6	W.9-10.1.D W.9-10.4 W.9-10.10	SL.9-10.3 W.9-10.1.A W.9-10.1.B
Language Objectives/ Discourse	Students will focus on speaking and practice being active listeners.	Students will focus on reading, identifying and using the phrasal verb <i>fall + preposition</i> and recalling information in his or her own words.	Students will focus on writing and be able to share personal information in a creative, organized manner.	Students will focus on listening and be able to make suggestions, problem solve and work cooperatively.

Activity Objectives	Students will be able to obtain information from a partner through the use of question words and sequence in order to discover the partner's home life.	Students will be able to correctly identify and form the phrasal verb <i>fall + preposition</i> in order to communicate in an informal fashion through writing and speaking.	Students will be able to use descriptive adjectives in order to complete a poem and share personal information about themselves.	Students will be able to identify environmental vocabulary from a song in order to discuss and propose changes to aid in climate change.
Grammar	Question words and question formatting	Phrasal verbs beginning with <i>fall</i>	Descriptive adjectives	Imperative tense
Vocabulary	The home, family, and hobbies	School and relationships	Adjectives and personal life	Environment
Materials	Paper and pen.	Computer/tablet (or printed out version of blog), paper, and pen.	Paper, pen, markers if desired.	CD player, paper, pen.
Assessment	<i>Informal:</i> Assess questions and answers while students are completing interview task. <i>Formal:</i> Collect finish interview papers and check for quality of work through a rubric.	<i>Informal:</i> Ask students at random comprehension questions about the blog. <i>Formal:</i> Have students answer written comprehension questions to be collected.	<i>Informal:</i> Circulate room and check for accuracy while poems are being completed. <i>Formal:</i> Collect completed poems and check for quality of work through a rubric.	<i>Informal:</i> Orally ask students pertinent questions about the environment after listening to the song. <i>Formal:</i> Collect imperative papers dealing with climate change and check for grammatical accuracy.

## Findings

### Participants

Five participants were used in this study. They are all currently teaching ESL at the secondary school level in Long Island, New York City, and downstate New York. Their names

and school districts have been kept confidential. They are between the ages of thirty to fifty, with seven to sixteen years of teaching experience in this field. The students they work with are eleven to nineteen years of age and come from a variety of backgrounds. Many students are native to Central America with other students hailing from Haiti, Hong Kong, Russia, France, Korea, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. These students are currently in both mainstream and inclusion classes throughout the day.

### **Research Questions**

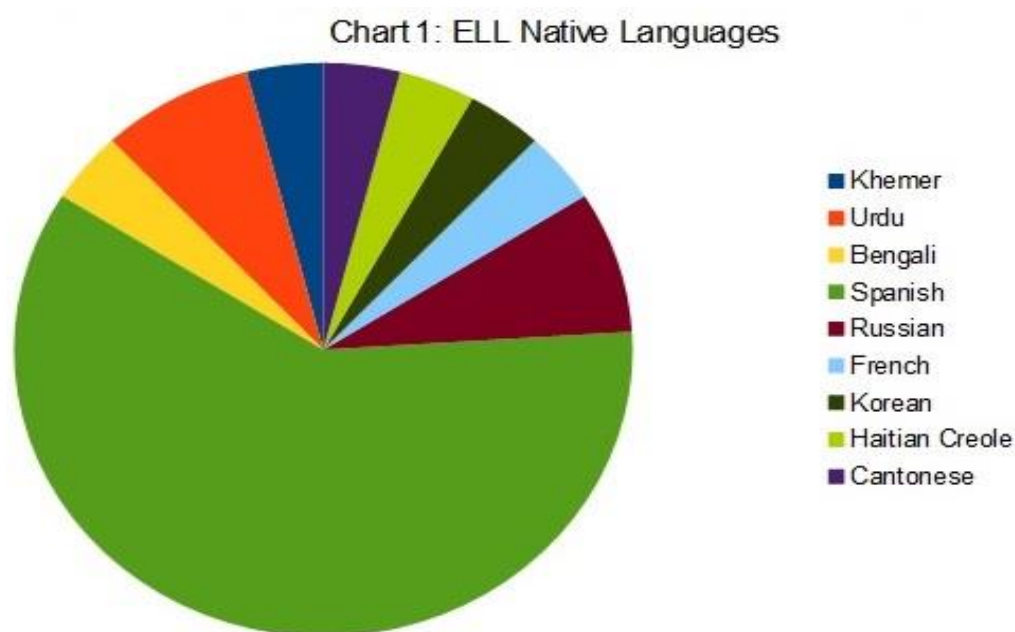
This questionnaire (see Appendix A) was completed online at the discretion of the participant. They received a consent form (see Appendix B) and a Subject Bill of Rights that they could print out if they chose. The research questions were designed to discover ways to better aid ELLs in the classroom. The CCSS was looked upon with a critical eye as well as materials used, classroom settings, support for students, and performance on the NYS English Regents. The results are used to assist in the accompanying resource guide to provide the most useful and beneficial activities for ELLs. Through these results, better materials and lessons can be developed to optimize the learning in ESL classrooms throughout New York.

### **Results**

These results have been taken into consideration in the following materials and activities present in the accompanying resource guide. These four activities include culturally relevant materials, including ample ways to share personal information and unique cultural insights, while learning the English language. The most significant findings of this questionnaire was that most teachers felt that their student performance had improved since the arrival of the CCSS. However, most teachers found this curriculum to be biased towards ELLs. These results are the

reason for the development of a research guide to be used in conjunction with the CCSS and not a complete re-write of the current curriculum.

In chart 1, it can be seen that in the southern part of New York State Spanish is the most commonly spoken language ESL teachers interact with. It can also be noted that there is a significant number of other native languages that need to be taken into consideration when developing materials and lessons for ESL classrooms. Regardless of a student's background, it is still important for students to learn about their peer's native cultures.

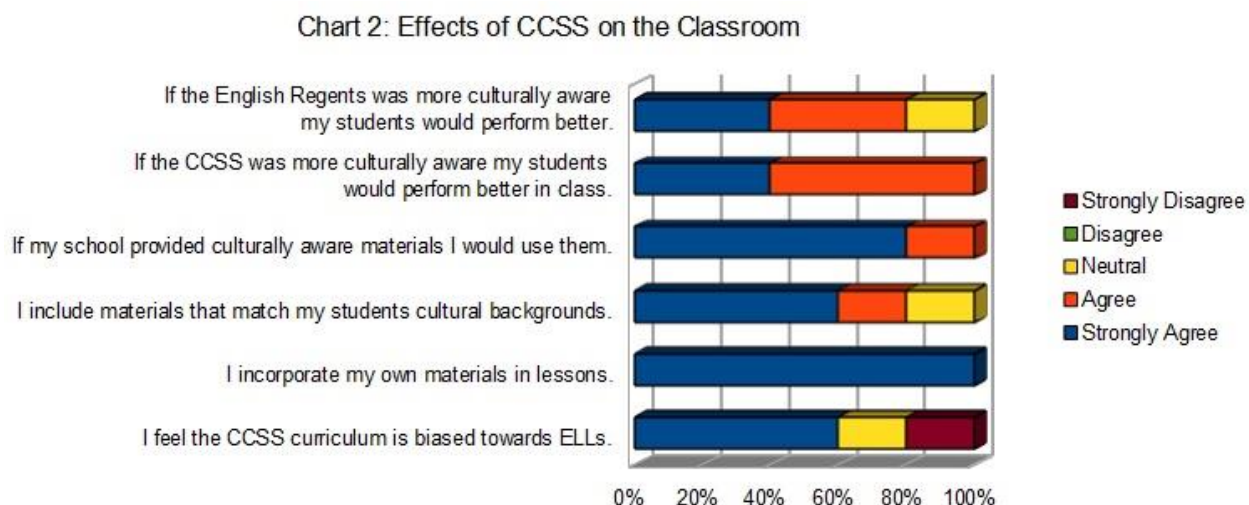


McCrane (2016)

From the five, open- and close-ended questions a variety of responses were gathered. All participants had students that were enrolled in both mainstream and inclusion classes throughout the day. They felt that most of their student's performance has improved since the arrival of the CCSS, but still only around fifty percent of ELLs are passing the NYS English Regents. When asked about support for the students, the majority of participants felt that the administration was

supportive but there was a significant lack of parental support.

In the last section of the survey, participants responded to six Likert questions, which can be seen in chart 2. The overall results of this section show that there is still some controversy over whether the CCSS is truly biased or not. Nonetheless, it can be seen that most participants created their own classroom materials that involved the cultures and heritages of their students. A conclusion can thus be drawn stating that the CCSS does contain biases towards ELLs otherwise teachers would place less time in creating culturally relevant materials for their students.



McCrane (2016)

### The Project

Creating unbiased, culturally aware lesson activities are not only beneficial for ELLs but for all students. It teaches tolerance, can expand a student's mind, and create a strong sense of community. Unfortunately, the CCSS curriculum that is used in NYS falls short when it comes to this area. They lack the adequate cultural diversity among its lessons and activities. As a result, many ELLs feel detached from the material, fall behind in class, and do poorly on the NYS

English Regents examination leaving them to graduate without a Regents Diploma, a requirement in NYS.

This project is intended to act as a supplemental resource guide for the CCSS, but can be used in association with any intermediate ESL curriculum in the secondary school setting. The resource guide highlights how each language skill, speaking, reading, writing, and listening, can be transformed to celebrate the various cultures and heritages of all students. It covers pertinent grammar and vocabulary in a low anxiety, high growth manner. Likewise, these activities include pragmatic instruction to help in understanding the subtle nuances of the English language. By focusing on specific speech acts, asking questions and making assertions, students can communicate more effectively with their native English peers. Although this is English specific instruction, there is still ample opportunity to share and celebrate individual cultures in each of these activities.

### **Activity #1**

#### **Classroom Questions**

- Common Core State Standards:
  - *SL.9-10.4:* Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.
  - *SL.9-10.6:* Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- Language Objectives: Students will focus on speaking and practice being active listeners.



- Activity Objective: Students will be able to obtain information from a partner through the use of question words and sequence in order to discover the partner's home life.
- Time Frame: 30 minutes.
- Materials: Questions chart and pen.
- Background Knowledge: How to form questions and record responses.
- Rationale: Through this activity, students can ask and answer questions, practice how to hold a conversation, and actively listen. It allows for the celebration of different backgrounds and cultures of students. They will be able to see what they have in common with others in their class, creating a closer sense of community. Also, students can receive direct pragmatic instruction, such as active listening, how to make requests, and accurate intonation for orally forming questions. These skills can assist students in the future when interviewing for jobs and at universities. Plus, it will help prepare students for the listening portion of the NYS English Regents examination.

Before activity suggestions:	Prior to completing this activity, the teacher can ask various students basic questions to trigger their background knowledge. These questions can be written on the board so students have a reference during the activity. This can help to prepare students to think of their own unique questions to add to the blank boxes in the chart. Also, students can practice asking and answering basic questions with a partner as a warm-up.
Activity:	To begin, students will receive the Questions Chart worksheet (see

Appendix C attachment 1.1) with half the boxes containing questions already. The other half of the chart contains blank boxes for the students to fill in with their own unique questions. Depending on skill level, time, or individual needs, the chart can be fully filled in or completely empty. Time may be provided for students to work in pairs and create questions together, approximately 10 minutes. These questions can be reviewed as a whole class or the teacher can circulate around the room and correct errors as he or she moves from pair to pair.

Next, the students will then take their completed charts and circulate around the room asking multiple students their questions, approximately 15 minutes. When the student finds another student that the question applies to they will write his or her name in the box. For instance, student A will ask *Do you have an older sister?* If student B does have an older sister he or she will respond *Yes, I have an older sister* and student A will write student B's name in the corresponding box. During this time, the teacher should also be circulating around the room informally assessing student progress. They may fill in a chart along with the students so they can also ask and answer questions with the class if desired.

Afterwards, the class will go over select questions and answers, which can be ones the teacher noticed the students having trouble with or all the questions, depending on time, approximately 5 minutes. The objectives will be

	met when the questions are asked correctly and fully understood. The charts can be collected for formal grading if desired by the teacher.
Follow-up activity suggestions:	This activity can be the opening for an interview research project where students interview a family member and create a presentation for the class to view. Also, the activity can lead into a lesson on pragmatics with a focus on politeness, where students go over which questions are appropriate for what type of individual; friend, parent, teacher, or boss.
Assessments:	<i>Informal:</i> Teachers will evaluate progress during partnered activities as well as whole class participation in the completion of the Questions Chart worksheet. <i>Formal:</i> Teachers can collect the Questions Chart worksheet and use the corresponding rubric (see Appendix C attachment 1.2) to evaluate performance during the activity.

## Activity #2

### Fall into Blogging

- Common Core State Standards:
  - *RI.9-10.2:* Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
  - *RI.9-10.4:* Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative

impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

- *RI.9-10.6*: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
- Language Objectives: Students will focus on reading, identifying and using the phrasal verb *fall + preposition*, and recalling information in his or her own words.
- Activity Objective: Students will be able to correctly identify and form the phrasal verb *fall + preposition* in order to communicate in an informal fashion through writing and speaking.
- Time Frame: 35 minutes
- Materials: Computer/tablet (or printed version of blog), semantic web, paper, and pen.
- Background Knowledge: Previous phrasal verbs such as *work out*, *wake up*, *move in/out*, and *deal with*.
- Rationale: Through this activity, students can practice reading an informal text in a format that they may be familiar with. Due to the familiarity of the writing style, students will have lower anxiety towards the task. Plus, students can better relate to the story since the writing revolves around an adolescent student in Iran. Iranian students can share their knowledge with the class, if applicable, to help give a first-hand account of his or her culture. Additionally, students can compare and contrast their native school and home life with the girl in the blog, celebrating the similarities and differences among cultures

throughout the world. Finally, it allows students to practice reading for comprehension, a large component of the NYS Regents examination.

<p>Before activity suggestions:</p>	<p>Prior to beginning the activity, the teacher can ask questions about the current school environment, class schedules, and classroom activities. This will allow students to get in the right mindset for the reading as well as activate their background knowledge.</p>
<p>Activity:</p>	<p>For step one, the teacher will read the blog post (see Appendix C attachment 2.1) out loud while the students follow along, either on the computer, tablet, or a printed version depending on materials available, approximately 5 minutes.</p> <p>The students will be listening for the main topic of the blog, which will then be written on the board. Next, the students will get into pairs and read a paragraph out loud to each other. They will come up with the main point of that specific paragraph, which will also be written on the board to create a small summary of the blog, approximately 7 minutes. After, the teacher can have the students choral read to practice pronunciation of the words and intonation, approximately 5 minutes. One suggestion can be to read as a whole group in a chant while clapping hands to stress the syllables to aid in intonation practice.</p> <p>Then, the teacher can ask questions to compare and contrast student lives to Maryam, such as <i>Do you take theology class in this school? Did you in your homeland?</i> or <i>Does her school start earlier or later than our school?</i></p> <p>Afterwards, the students will individually answer comprehension questions (see</p>

	<p>Appendix C attachment 2.2) about the reading to ensure they understand what they have read. Answers can either be reviewed as a whole class or individually while the teacher circulates around the room, approximately 5 minutes.</p> <p>For step two, the class will go over what a phrasal verb is and provide examples, approximately 3 minutes. Next, the students will look through the blog and pick out the phrasal verbs. When the first student picks out a phrasal verb with <i>fall</i>, the teacher can clarify that past tense of <i>fall</i> is <i>fell</i> so that they can find the verbs easier. The students will then go through the blog and look for all of those verbs specifically, approximately 5 minutes. The students will fill in the semantic web (see Appendix C attachment 2.3) with all the variations to fall found and repeat them as a class. The students will then work with their partner to come up with a personal sentence using the phrasal verbs. For example, using the phrasal verb <i>fall off</i> a sentence can be <i>I fell off the ladder</i> or <i>I fell off the stage</i>. Finally, students can share their sentences with the class, approximately 5 minutes.</p>
Follow-up activity suggestions:	<p>This activity can be the warm up for students to create their own blog. They can utilize the grammar and vocabulary learned in class, while creating unique and personal posts that can be shared with classmates for additional reading practice. Also, students can learn about and practice other phrasal verbs using any of the language skills.</p>
Assessments:	<p><i>Informal:</i> Ask random students comprehension questions about the blog and</p>

check work while circulating the room.
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<i>Formal:</i> Have students answer written comprehension questions for collection.
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### Activity #3

#### I Am Poetry

- Common Core State Standards:
  - *W.9-10.1.D:* Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
  - *W.9-10.4:* Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)
  - *W.9-10.10:* Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- Language Objectives: Students will focus on writing and be able to share personal information in a creative, organized manner.
- Activity Objective: Students will be able to use descriptive adjectives in order to complete a poem and share personal information about themselves.
- Time Frame: 20 minutes
- Materials: Paper and pen (construction paper and markers if desired).
- Background Knowledge: Basic descriptive adjectives.

- Rationale: Through this activity, students will practice writing in a different format, which can benefit traditional essay writing. By using the poem format, students can feel as if they are writing less than a typical essay, thus leading them to have lower anxiety towards the task. Plus, this activity can help prepare students for the writing portion of the NYS English Regents examination. Moreover, since the poem is about the individual, it allows for students to share who they are and celebrate the cultural diversity of the class. Students can also see the similarities and differences among their peers in a positive, uplifting fashion.

<p>Before activity suggestions:</p>	<p>Prior to the activity, the teacher can hold up the illustration of five different people (see Appendix C attachment 3.1) and ask the class to describe what they see. This can help to active the students' knowledge of descriptive adjectives, which will be used during the poem writing exercise. Also, if more words are needed for review, the class can use choral repetition while pointing to that aspect in the illustration.</p>
<p>Activity:</p>	<p>To begin, the teacher will explain the format of an I Am Poem (see Appendix C attachment 3.2) and why they will be working on it so the students will be aware of what is expected of them. The teacher can share an example they have prepared ahead of time. Next, the students will break into pairs and brainstorm descriptive adjectives and other words that relate to the individual that they feel can best be used in their poem to show who they are. The students can then share their words with the whole class to spark student's knowledge,</p>



	<p>approximately 5 minutes.</p> <p>Then the students will begin working on their poem, following the instructions provided. The teacher will circulate around the room giving feedback as preferred, approximately 10 minutes. Once the poems are complete, the students can exchange papers with a new partner in order to read and check their peer's poem, approximately 5 minutes. If possible and time permitting, the teacher can ask for volunteers to read their poem, or part, to the class.</p>
<p>Follow-up activity suggestions:</p>	<p>Depending on time, students can use construction paper, markers, and cut-outs to decorate their poem in a unique way. They can then hang their completed poem up around the room. The students can walk around the room and read the other students' poems, or a certain number of poems, like five, if the class is too large. Then the students can choose who they feel had the best, most original, or creative poem. Plus, students can practice writing other poems, such as acrostic or rhyming schemes. Finally, students can read classic poems, as found the NYS English Regents examination, through choral repetition and chanting in order to practice listening, reading, syllable stress, and intonation.</p>
<p>Assessments:</p>	<p><i>Informal:</i> The teacher can listen to student responses and circulate around the room while they are in pairs.</p> <p><i>Formal:</i> Teachers can collect the completed poems and use the rubric for grading (see Appendix C attachment 3.3).</p>

## Activity #4

### Environmental Song

- Common Core State Standards:
  - *SL.9-10.3:* Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.
  - *W.9-10.1.A:* Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
  - *W.9-10.1.B:* Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.
- Language Objectives: Students will focus on listening and be able to make suggestions, problem solve, and work cooperatively.
- Activity Objective: Students will be able to identify environmental vocabulary from a song in order to discuss and propose changes to aid in climate change.
- *Time Frame:* 43 minutes
- *Materials:* CD player (or computer if watching the music video), visuals, song lyrics, Venn diagram, and pen.
- *Background Knowledge:* Basic weather and geography vocabulary.
- *Rationale:* Through this activity, students can hear the English language in a different medium. Also, students can compare environmental issues found around the world by

sharing their own personal experience with the class. Climate change is an issue that affects the world as a whole. By creating a plan to solve the problem, students can connect to one another despite a difference in culture or race. This activity will allow students to practice problem solving and cooperative learning. Finally, it will help to prepare students for the listening portion of the NYS English Regents. Likewise, it will help prepare students for the writing portion, specifically the writing dealing with supporting his or her own opinion.

Before activity suggestions:	Prior to this activity, the class can review weather and environmental vocabulary and phrases they have gone over in the past through the use of visuals and repetition.
Activity:	<p>To begin this activity, the teacher will read the song title to the class and have the students guess what the song's main topic will be about, approximately 2 minutes. Then the students will listen to the song without lyrics to figure out the meaning, listening for words or phrases that describe the songs main topic. Then they will go over their previous guess and see how accurate they were, approximately 7. Next, the students will be given a copy of the lyrics (see Appendix C attachment 4.1) with several words omitted. They will follow along with the song and try to fill in the missing words as best they can, approximately 6 minutes.</p> <p>Next, the teacher will go over the omitted words with the class. Since these will be new words for the students, as a class they will use visuals (see</p>

	<p>Appendix C attachment 4.2) and choral repetition to practice pronunciation. Students can fill in the new words, as well as definitions if desired, with the corresponding image on the paper provided (see Appendix C attachment 4.2), approximately 4 minutes. After that, the teacher can hand out smaller versions of the visuals on the board and play the song one more time. When the students hear the word they will hold up the corresponding picture, approximately 6 minutes. Finally, depending on student progress, they can either listen to the song one last time or go right into completing the accompanying questions (see Appendix C attachment 4.3), approximately 4 minutes.</p> <p>After going over the questions, the teacher can make a Venn diagram (see Appendix C attachment 4.4) on the board; on the left students will write in the environmental issues described in the song and on the right they will fill in the environment issues they experienced from their native home. Then they will write the repeated issues into the center area in order to see the similarities around the world, approximately 4 minutes. Afterwards, students can break into groups and brainstorm ideas and suggestions for fixing these environmental issues found around the world, approximately 10 minutes.</p>
Follow-up activity suggestions:	<p>This activity can be a warm up for students to being a project on environmental issues. They can discuss how climate change is affecting their native home vs their home now, or how both are affected equally, as well as take an in depth look at ways to fix these issues. This may be presented to the class if desired.</p>

Assessments:	<p><i>Informal:</i> Orally ask students pertinent questions about the environment after listening to the song.</p> <p><i>Formal:</i> Collect imperative papers dealing with climate change and check for grammatical accuracy.</p>
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### Summary

There are many possibilities for greater learning and understanding by giving culture consideration in core curriculum. Thus, these four activities are designed to work with ELLs as well as native English speakers. Likewise, the activities are designed with the CCSS curriculum in mind, but can also be adapted into curricula throughout the country. Each activity shows how different cultures can be incorporated into any lesson while focusing on the main language skills speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Celebrating cultural diversity is a necessary aspect, especially in New York where the diverse population is increasing every year. The implementation of a more culturally aware, unbiased curriculum grows at the same rate. It is important to accommodate these cultures and students so that everyone can have an opportunity to be successful in the classroom.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Conclusion**

Through this project, it can be seen that more must be done in the area of cultural competence for English language learners (ELLs). As of 2015, 8.9% of all public school students were English Language Learners (“NYSESLAT 2015: New York State ELL Demographics,” 2015). The majority of these students were currently residing in New York City, Long Island, and downstate New York. Although many educators are aware of the growing population, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) curriculum fails to adequately accommodate the variety of diverse cultures present in public schools today. As a result, ELLs face more hardships on their paths to becoming proficient English language users as well as struggling to pass the New York State (NYS) English Regents Examination. Teachers are constantly striving to help their students to achieve success in and out of the classroom. Yet, this cannot be accomplished solely through the CCSS curriculum in its current format, which has been found to be biased and unable to accommodate the variety of cultures present in NYS public schools today.

The purpose of this project was to inform educators about the current biases ELLs face through the CCSS curriculum. By analyzing the results of the questionnaire, it is clear to see that many teachers are aware of this issue. To overcome these biases, some teachers create their own materials to add into the curriculum. Although a good practice, it can, however, result in inconsistencies throughout the state. The resource guide provided through this project addresses the lack of cultural awareness and knowledge present in public schools today. It provides the

missing cultural aspects in the CCSS curriculum through a variety of activities incorporating the four language skills, speaking, reading, writing, and listening. By implementing these activities into New York, teachers across the state can be consistent in their teachings while celebrating the different cultures present in the classroom. Plus, through these activities, ELLs can become proficient in the English language while maintaining their heritage.

These activities were designed with the intermediate skill level and prior research in mind. Whorf and Sapir (Whorf, Lee, Levinson, & Carroll, 2012) spoke about how language affects thought and behavior in the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis. Likewise, interlanguage pragmatics (Martínez Flor & Alcón Soler, 2008) dealt with the social aspects of a language, including the social norms present in all conversations. Many believe that social norms are a frozen, stagnant aspect of a language. Yet, in reality, social norms are fluid, constantly changing and being renewed with the community. When the student population changes, it also alters the social norms of the language. By teaching about different cultures and creating more lessons that celebrate cultural diversity, one can better teach about social norms as well as understand how students of varying backgrounds view the new language; why they do the things they do. Furthermore, this creates an appropriate opportunity to address the social norms of the English language in order to provide ELLs with a better understanding of the language they are learning. In Taguchi, Naganuma, and Budding's (2015) study, it was shown that explicitly teaching pragmatics was not only beneficial but desired by the students. The activities created for this reference guide takes this research into account. The activities include explicit pragmatic instruction such as how to ask and answer questions, politeness, and making suggestions.

Additionally, test biases and testing anxiety were taken into account for the creation of this resource guide. Often times students become anxious over tests that are unfamiliar or seen as overly difficult. Without the proper instruction, students will no doubt have to experience these anxieties causing an unnecessary decline in scores. By introducing stress free activities into a lesson, these students can become more comfortable with the material and, thus, perform better on exams, until the exams are constructed to exclude these test biases.

Finally, it can be seen through this project that administrators, teachers, and students alike must improve their cultural competence. By doing so, cultural tolerance can be taught and practiced alongside the English language. The challenge of creating unbiased activities, lessons, and curricula is far from over. It is an arduous process that requires the support of all involved; students, teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers. Opening up the doors to cultural tolerance is the first step of many in creating a truly unbiased curriculum and perhaps a more tolerant and peaceful world.

### **Recommendations**

Though all aspects of the CCSS curriculum are not addressed in this project, it opens the door for discussion in this area. It can be agreed upon that the ESL classroom needs to be more prevalent in the school curriculum, one that takes cultural diversity into account. It is the hope of this researcher that through this project school districts, not only in NY, but around the country, will reevaluate their current curriculum and state testing to better accommodate those who are not native English speakers. It is recommended that this supplemental resource guide not be used



as a stand-alone curriculum. It instead should be used as additional activities to current lessons to provide more opportunities for cultural diversity in the classroom.

In addition to this supplemental reference guide, it is recommended that all educators be provided with professional development in the area of cultural awareness. If the materials are not used properly or are not fully understood, then there is reason to believe that the desired effect will not be present. Instead, by completing professional development in the area of cultural diversity, educators will increase their cultural competence and be better prepared to teach students of a variety of backgrounds as well as native English speakers. During these meetings, educators can learn more about the students in their district, including heritage, culture, and traditions as well as how to better accommodate ELLs in mainstream classrooms. These developmental meetings should provide teachers with ample ways to aid in better classroom performance, higher test scores, and increase classroom participation for all ELLs.

Next, this reference guide works as an example to show how cultural diversity can be easily implemented into the classroom. It is the recommendation of this researcher that a more extensive guide be developed with a variety of cultures involved. This way, educators will have more lesson activities to choose from while still maintaining the goals and standards of the CCSS. Plus, teachers throughout the state can be consistent with one another while remaining on task. In the same vein, each year it should be reevaluated and added to depending on the population of students, the changes in the communities, and the needs of the current students. Since people of different backgrounds come to the country regularly, the variety of cultural

backgrounds may increase or decrease. It would be beneficial to all students to have cultural activities that reflect the current population of students at the time for that school year.

Moreover, these activities are intended for all students with a special focus on ELLs either in inclusion or mainstream classrooms. After much research and teacher feedback, it is recommended that more reading materials be added into the curriculum and the school library. Ample reading materials that are a variety of skill levels as well as culturally relevant can not only aid in developing ELL reading comprehensions skills but also for native English speakers. Though many schools contain libraries, materials for ELLs are very limited or missing all together. It is essential to incorporate culturally aware and skill level appropriate readings into these libraries so students can also practice reading outside of the classroom. Plus, by using culturally relevant texts, ELLs can feel a greater connection to the language and help reduce anxiety levels so more knowledge can be absorbed. This can also lead to more confidence during the reading comprehension portions of state tests like the NYS English Regents examination. With this confidence, they can begin to read for fun and even become lifelong readers.

Additionally, to best aid in student success, it is recommended that parent support be a more significant part of an ELL's life. It was seen through the teacher questionnaire that not all students had support at home. A number of factors are involved such as the parents do not speak English, they do not have internet access at home, or, based on the cultural background of these families, they do not view their child's education as a top priority. For some parents and in some cultures it is viewed as more important to obtain a job than remain in school at the secondary level. Plus, for some cultures, like in the Middle East, education is seen as unnecessary for girls.

As a result, some parents will not support or show concern for their daughters' school career resulting in a lack of interest from these students in the classroom. It is important to involve these parents and show them the importance of education at all levels. Though much more in-depth research is needed in this area, the first step to improvement involves more parent-teacher meetings. Also, free time at the school libraries before or after school with access to the internet as well as providing pamphlets in a variety of languages for parents can be significantly useful and beneficial for all people involved. With this support at home students will have a stronger desire to do well in class, learn the language, and attend college. They can envision a brighter future for themselves and succeed.

Parents can also get involved in their students' education by becoming part of the assignment. More projects can be done that involve interviewing family members or researching family histories for class. This will not only get the family involved in the school process but also allow for a celebration of cultures. Depending on the school or class abilities, family members can also be invited in to view these projects or help to give insight about their cultures and homelands to the class or school. By involving family members at this level, they can become interested in their child's work and help to push them to perform at their best. Plus, they can see what their child typically goes through on a daily basis and better support them at home.

The final recommendation falls into the category of state testing. Creating a lower anxiety, culturally aware classroom environment can help to create successful lifelong learners. Yet, to get these students to move on to the college level or obtain their dream career, testing scores are often a focal point. It is recommended that state tests, such as the NYS English

Regents examination, be reviewed and up-dated to better incorporate people of various backgrounds. This can involve removing unnecessary native phrases and slang terms or adding more culturally diverse reading excerpts. With these changes in place and the test biases removed, students can feel more confident going into a test and perform better. Ultimately leading to higher scores so that they can be accepted into colleges, obtain their dream career, and live a long successful life.

These recommendations are put forth to show what changes still need to be made in the CCSS curriculum and throughout the state of New York. These changes clearly cannot be made over night, but instead will take time to fully form. The sooner a small change is made the sooner all changes can be implemented. Then students can truly begin to learn and grow to their full potential while celebrating the diverse range of cultures present in this state. It is a hope of this researcher that after these changes are in place, and the success rates of not only ELLs but all students increase, then other states can see these positive actions and take these changes to their own school districts. When every student has a fair chance to succeed then the field of education can truly strive in our country.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Consent Form**

# **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

### **Purpose and Background**

Ms. Jessica McCrane, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on the ways to reduce biases towards English Language Learners (ELLs) in the current curriculum. For many years ELLs have lacked adequate consideration when it comes to English Language Arts curriculum, but they have faced an increasing number of biases since the Common Core State Standards has been instituted. The researcher is attempting to pin point the areas that are unfair/biased and create more culturally aware assignments and lessons that take New York's diverse population of students into account.

I am being asked to participate because I am a secondary school teacher in New York that deals directly with ELLs.

### **Procedures**

If I agree to be a participant in this study, I will complete a short questionnaire giving basic information about me, including age, gender, and job history. I will complete a survey about curriculum biases with honest answers based on my knowledge and experience.

### **Risks and Discomforts**

1. It is possible that some of the questions on the survey may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. The files will be kept with the researcher until coded and then promptly disposed of.
3. No identifying information will be transcribed. Subject identities will be coded. Any other entities mentioned in the survey, whether individual, groups, or organizations, will be assigned fictitious names.
4. The survey is designed to last for 15 minutes and will run longer if I wish to continue.

5. There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the biases found in current curriculum towards ELLs.

6. There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study. I will not gain financially from participation in this study.

### Questions

I have talked to Ms. McCrane about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (631) 241-0220 and email her at [jmccrane@usfca.edu](mailto:jmccrane@usfca.edu) or call Dr. Brad Washington at (415) 422-2062.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researchers. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing [IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu), or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

### Consent

I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it, at any point. I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights." My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions about English Language Learners and the Common Core State Standards to the best of your ability and with honesty. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grades taught/Student Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Students' native homes: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of teaching: \_\_\_\_\_ Students' native languages: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are your students in inclusion ESL classes or in mainstream English classes?
2. Have your students' performance declined or improved since the CCSS arrival?
3. What is the percentage of your ELLs that pass the NYS English Regents?
4. Does the school administration support ELLs?
5. Is there adequate parent support in home for your students?

Mark the box that best reflects your thoughts and feelings:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I feel the CCSS curriculum is biased towards ELLs.					
7. I incorporate my own materials in lessons.					
8. I include materials that match my students' cultural backgrounds.					
9. If my school provided culturally aware materials I would use them.					
10. If the CCSS was more culturally aware my students would perform better in class.					
11. If the English Regents was more culturally aware my students would perform better.					

12. Suggestions for improving the current curriculum/ what is missing in the current curriculum that you would like to see.

APPENDIX C

Attachment 1.1

Questions Chart

Directions: Fill in the blank boxes with relevant questions. Then, go around the room and ask other students the questions. If it applies to them, write his or her name in the box.

Do you have a pet?	Do you have an older sister?	Can you sing well?	Do you play a sport?
Can you drive a car?	Do you miss your hometown?	Can you bake cookies?	Do you have an after school job?

### Attachment 1.2

#### Speaking Rubric

	3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
Grammar	Grammar is accurate and appropriate.	Only a few minor errors.	Many errors occur.	Student did not complete assignment.
Vocabulary	Vocabulary is accurate and appropriate.	Only a few minor errors.	Many errors occur.	Student did not complete assignment.
Discourse	Speech is fluent and appropriate.	Speech is broken up but on task.	Hard to understand what is being asked.	Student did not complete assignment.
Participation	Student engages several students and circulates around room.	Students moves minimally and only speaks to a few students.	Student stay in one spot and only speaks to one other student.	Student did not complete assignment.

McCrane (2016)

## Attachment 2.1

### Blog Post

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#)

## MY CRAZY SCHOOL DAY

*April 15, 2016*

Hi I'm Maryam from Iran and I'm fifteen years old. I have to tell you about yesterday at school, it was crazy!! To start, on Monday, I was late to school because I fell over my backpack while walking out the door. I got to school at 7:45 in the morning. Mrs. Hosseini was mad. She told me if I made a habit out of arriving late I would fall behind in my studies. It was one time! But I'll make sure to not fall over my backpack again.

Then I had to sit through work and technology class. I was hoping the one computer we have would fall apart so we could do other work, but no such luck. That class went on for forever! Then I got to theology class and had to take a pop quiz. After that I had math. I noticed my water bottle leaked in my bag and when I pulled my notebook out it fell apart! This day was going terribly.

Luckily, I have art after with my best friends, Fatemeh and Sarah. We are always making jokes and laughing. One day Sarah laughed so hard she fell out of her chair! It was so funny, we laughed even harder. Today, Mrs. Yekta was in a bad mood so there was no laughing. Instead I told my friends about the boy I fell for, Ali. He is so cute and so nice; I like him a lot. We were supposed to have a date last week, but it fell through. We plan to have another date this Friday and it better not fall through! Fatemeh told me that if it does, I should make a date with Mohammad to fall back on. You know, like a plan B, just in case it doesn't work out with Ali. She's always saying things like this.

So then we made it to the end of the day. Finally! I was walking home with Nasrin, since she lives next door to me. She was telling me about how she was sitting on her roof Sunday afternoon when she stood up too fast and fell off! I didn't believe her at first because she had no cuts or bruises, but she assured me she fell down, all the way down to the ground. I told her that if I ever fall off a roof I won't be going to school the next day. Can you believe all this happened in one day? Crazy!

### LEAVE A REPLY

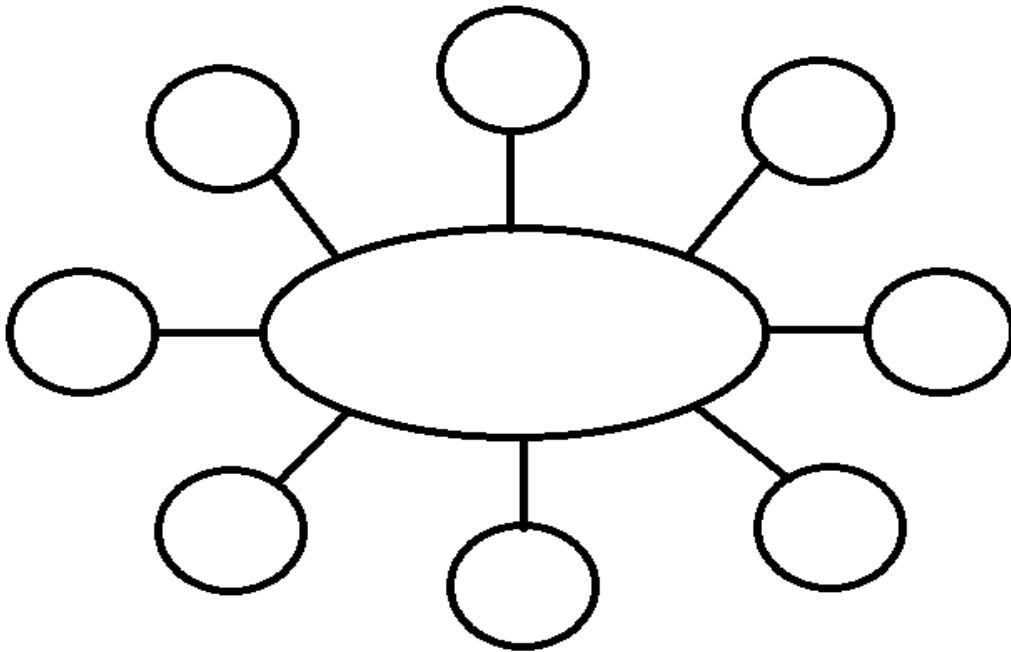
Enter your comment here...

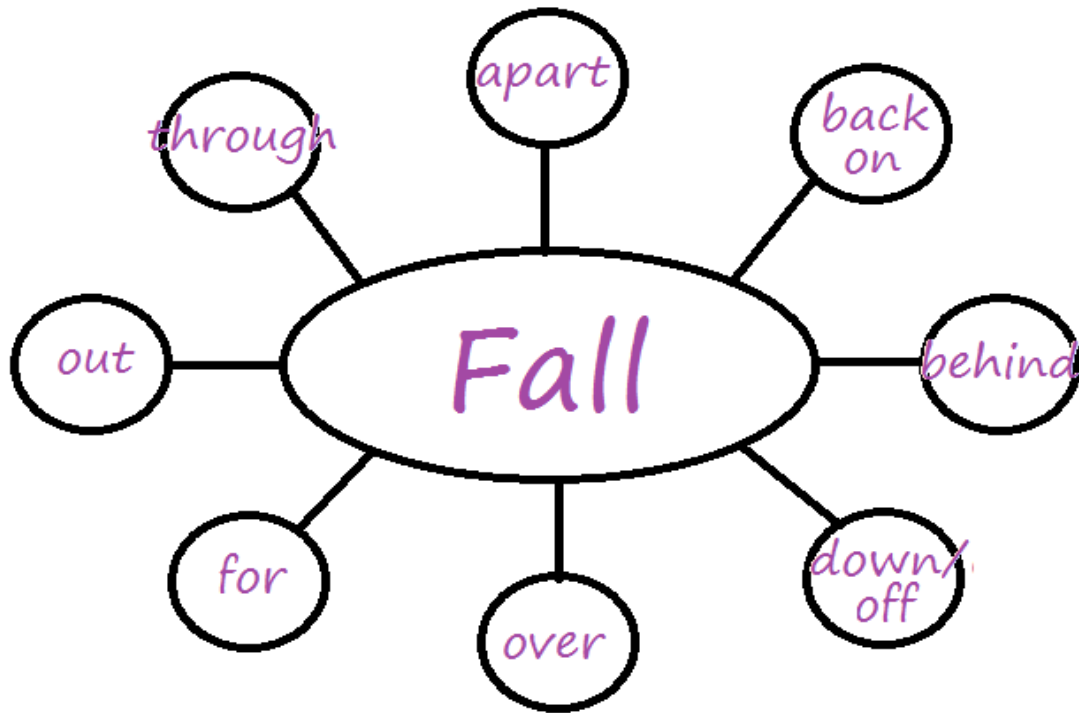
**Attachment 2.2****Blog Comprehension Questions**

Directions: Based on the following blog, answer the following questions.

1. What does Maryam fall over? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Who are her friends? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Which class is her least favorite? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Who does she fall for? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What happens to Nasrin? \_\_\_\_\_

McCrane (2016)

**Attachment 2.3***Fall + preposition* Semantic Web



McCrane (2016)

### Attachment 3.1

Visual for Descriptions



A diversity cartoon [Online image] (2012)



### Attachment 3.2

#### I Am Poem

##### FIRST STANZA

I am (2 special characteristics you have)	I am _____
I wonder (something of curiosity)	I wonder _____
I hear (an imaginary sound)	I hear _____
I see (an imaginary sight)	I see _____
I want (an actual desire)	I want _____
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)	I am _____

##### SECOND STANZA

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)	I pretend _____
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)	I feel _____
I touch (an imaginary touch)	I touch _____
I worry (something that bothers you)	I worry _____
I cry (something that makes you sad)	I cry _____
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)	I am _____

##### THIRD STANZA

I understand (something that is true)	I understand _____
I say (something you believe in)	I say _____
I dream (something you dream about)	I dream _____
I try (something you really make an effort for)	I try _____
I hope (something you actually hope for)	I hope _____
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)	I am _____

## "Earth Song"

by Michael Jackson

<p>What about sunrise</p> <p>What about _____ (<i>rain</i>)</p> <p>What about all the things</p> <p>That you said we were to gain...</p> <p>What about killing _____ (<i>fields</i>)</p> <p>Is there a time</p> <p>What about all the things</p> <p>That you said was yours and mine...</p> <p>Did you ever stop to notice</p> <p>All the blood we've shed before</p> <p>Did you ever stop to notice</p> <p>The crying Earth the _____ ?                               (<i>weeping</i>)     (<i>shores</i>)</p> <p>Aaaaaaaaah Ooooooooooh x2</p>  <p>What have we done to the world</p> <p>Look what we've done</p>	<p>Aaaaaaaaah Ooooooooooh x4</p> <p>Hey, what about yesterday (What about us)</p> <p>What about the seas (What about us)</p> <p>The heavens are falling down (What about us)</p> <p>I can't even breathe (What about us)</p> <p>What about _____ (<i>apathy</i>) (What about us)</p> <p>I need you (What about us)</p> <p>What about nature's worth (Ooo, ooo)</p> <p>It's our planet's womb (What about us)</p> <p>What about _____ (<i>animals</i>) (What about it)</p> <p>We've turned kingdoms to dust (What about us)</p> <p>What about elephants (What about us)</p> <p>Have we lost their trust (What about us)</p> <p>What about crying whales (What about us)</p> <p>We're ravaging the seas (What about us)</p> <p>What about _____ (<i>forest trails</i>) (Ooo, ooo)</p>
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**Attachment 4.3**

Song Comprehension Questions

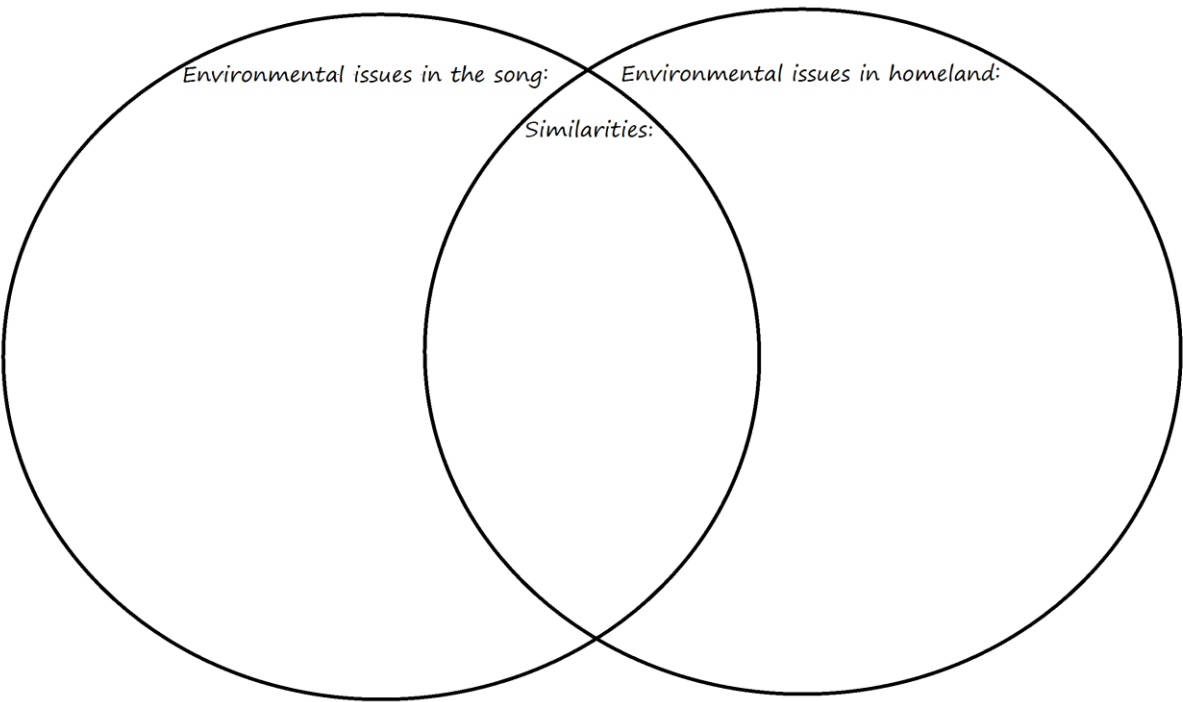
Directions: Based on the following song lyrics, answer the following questions.

- 1. How does Michael Jackson feel about the world today? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Do you agree with his opinion? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. What are some things (land, people, animals) he mentions that need improvement? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

McCrane (2016)

**Attachment 4.4**

Venn Diagram



McCrane (2016)