

***From Roshar to the Classroom: Embracing Fantasy as an
Educational Tool for Retrospective Reflection***

by

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Introduction

California secondary public school English curriculums have the opportunity to more actively engage students by utilizing fantasy literature in the classroom. Books like *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Metamorphosis*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Fahrenheit 451* are all valuable texts, though many of the suggested reading books from the Common Core curriculum, the learning standards adopted by over 40 states including California since 2010, center around adult characters and issues. This makes it difficult for students to become invested in the story and motivated to conduct analysis and reflection on the text. While it is important for students to learn how to navigate challenging academic language and for them to be exposed to other life experiences, students often spend most of their mental energy trying to understand the text rather than reflecting on the themes and ideas explored in text. Some English classrooms offer non-traditional curriculum genres as independent reading material, though these books are never used as the central text for instruction in a unit. What if students got to reflect complex themes, story structure, and narrative devices through characters they can better relate to?

In this essay, I argue that the California public school English curriculum has the opportunity to more actively engage students in literary analysis by using the fantasy genre as an educational tool capable of creating a unique reflective space for students to wrestle with complex societal issues. I accomplish this by drawing parallels between real-world systems of oppression to recreated versions of these systems within Brandon Sanderson's work. I begin by reviewing literature which explores how the fantasy genre can be better utilized as an educational tool. Second, I explain the unique properties of the fantasy genre and how the genre can be used as a powerful mode of reflection. Third, I establish Brandon Sanderson's credibility as one of the most prominent fantasy authors of this generation. Lastly, I demonstrate how the fantasy genre

can be used as an educational tool in the California secondary public school English curriculum through the reflective properties of Brandon Sanderson's *The Stormlight Archives*.

Reception of Fantasy Literature

The ongoing discourse surrounding the academic merit of the fantasy genre reveals a persistent tension between those who champion its educational value and those who dismiss it as a mere form of escapism. Fantasy authors and scholars have continuously unsheathed their metaphorical swords to defend fantasy from critics who would deem it a sub-literary genre. J.R.R. Tolkien, considered the father of modern fantasy, explains the unique engagement factor of the genre through his essay titled "On Fairy Stories," where he argues "Fairy-stories were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened desire, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded" (Tolkien, 1947). In 1975, twenty-eight years later, Robert Crossley, a literary critic and English faculty member at the University of Massachusetts, reinvigorates the defense of the fantasy genre by describing it as an agent of education that has the power to "renew and refresh what is inertly familiar, creating an *activity* of mind whose enemies are habitual *states* of mind." In 2003, another twenty-eight years later, Melissa Thomas, an educator and fantasy author, further explores what establishes fantasy, specifically, as such an effective educational tool: "what is most important about fantasy, what separates and frees it from the boundaries of other genres, is that it is an undistilled version of human imagination-momentary worlds and magic that may be at odds with the rational truth, yet continue to reflect our culture and times." And in 2023, just twenty years later, Karimova Go'zal Ikhtiyorovna, a faculty member at Asia International University, explores fantasy's unique reflective properties that allow readers to wrestle with complex real-world issues: "Fantastical elements are used as a metaphor for real world issues, allowing authors to address societal,

political, and philosophical concepts in an allegorical and thought provoking manner. The genre offers an opportunity for readers to engage with themes of power, destiny, good versus evil, and the human condition, providing a unique lens through which to view and understand the complexities of life” (p. 545). The merit of the fantasy genre has been continuously and firmly defended by authors and scholars for decades, therefore, any further defense of the fantasy genre is beyond the scope of this paper.

Despite this continued defense of the fantasy genre, the mainstream-cultural reception of fantasy as a more child-like and unserious genre has translated into American educational values. Current Common Core curriculums do not incorporate fantasy literature into secondary education in favor of books that encompass both American history and textbook literary techniques. However, fantasy literature is equally as capable of providing powerful academic enrichment to students in secondary English classrooms through the unique reflective experience the fantasy genre creates.

Reflective Properties of Fantasy

Part of the fantasy genre’s educational value comes from the process called retrospective reflection, a theory posed by Anne Hamby, David Brinberg, and Kim Daniloski. Retrospective reflection is defined as “the recall of self or other-relevant memories evoked by transportation into a story, which validate and extend story-implied beliefs into the reader's world...A process to create meaning” (Hamby et. al., 2017). In other words, stories of hobbits on a quest to save the world, or of a young mortal boy discovering he is a wizard, have more to offer readers than just an exciting story; they are a vessel by which the author conveys a message that encourages readers to reflect on real world issues and what it means to be human. This act of reflection is made possible through a process called narrative transportation: When individuals are absorbed

into a story or transported into a narrative world, and show effects of the story on their real-world beliefs (Green and Brock, 2000). The act of narrative transportation is not exclusive to the fantasy genre, however the fantasy genre is more conducive to this process because the reader is immersed in a world that is completely unknown and unfamiliar from their reality. There are three main outcomes to narrative transportation that complete the process of extracting ideas from a text and implanting those ideas into the real world.

The first outcome of narrative transportation is the loss of real world limitations that could potentially affect a reader's suspension of disbelief:

The reader loses access to some real-world facts in favor of accepting the narrative world that the author has created. This loss of access may occur on a physical level--a transported reader may not notice others entering the room, for example--or, more importantly, on a psychological level, a subjective distancing from reality. While the person is immersed in the story, he or she may be less aware of real-world facts that contradict assertions made in the narrative (Green and Brock, 2000).

This characteristic of narrative transportation is especially important; the idea that there is a deliberate leaving behind of real world facts, opinions, biases for the sake of fully immersing oneself in the story. This not only enhances the reading experience, but it also prepares the reader to reflect on ideas in a much more open minded state because the types of worlds the fantasy genre creates are, on the surface, so drastically different from our reality. It is this confrontation with drastic otherness that forces the reader to re-examine themselves and what they consider familiar. This complete embrace of the strange and new and the removal from real-world people, facts, and events creates a uniquely free learning environment for students to develop literary

analysis skills because the pressure for them to know the right answer or to not sound “stupid” gets taken away.

The second outcome of narrative transportation is the trigger of an emotional response: “Transported readers may experience strong emotions and motivations, even when they know the events in the story are not real (see Gerrig, 1993, pp.179-191). For example, when transported into narratives with unhappy endings, transported individuals are likely to engage in what Gerrig (1993) termed anomalous replotting: “actively thinking about what could have happened to change an outcome” (Green and Brock, 2000). This emotional response is critical to inciting a genuine act of reflection on the part of the reader. This outcome of narrative transportation reintroduces real world ideas, views, biases, etc. into the narrative world, but in a limited new form that does not disrupt the ideas or messaging presented in the narrative. This step calls for the reflection of events strictly within the narrative to fully understand the message of the story. It is the stepping stone towards migrating the act of reflection from within the narrative to the real world.

Once the reader has had time to digest and understand the message of a narrative, the reader then decides how that message will impact their ideas, emotions, behaviors, and real world beliefs. This is the final step of narrative transportation; the resulting change of the transportation experience. So what? Why is all of this important? Retrospective reflection and narrative transportation not only combat this idea that fantasy’s function is limited to entertainment value, but also allows readers, who exist in an increasingly polarized social and political climate, to reflect on complex issues free of real-world political biases.

But what makes fantasy literature, specifically, more conducive to retrospective reflection for secondary students? That is the question I keep trying to answer as I walk through the table

groups of my 8th grade students. As a student teacher, I have watched the secondary public school literature education system in action, and in the process of teaching them I have become a part of it myself. My very first day, a student named Zyla with an extremely cool dragon embroidered on her sweater sleeve came up to complement my dagger earrings. I knew right away we had a shared love of fantasy, and that we would have loads to discuss. She often eats lunch in our room and fantasy consistently comes up in our discussions. One day at lunch while having a conversation about death and souls through the concept of dementors in *Harry Potter*, she said “It’s a fun read even if it’s serious topics.” This was a brilliant line I just had to write down because it summarizes the core of my argument as to why fantasy literature should be utilized more as a reflective tool for students in secondary classrooms.

When Zyla says the word *fun*, the word *engaging* can accurately be used as a synonym. In other conversations about our love of fantasy, Zyla expressed how much she enjoys getting to experience the characters advance in their magical ability. While Zyla may not know it, she is accurately identifying the satisfaction of the apprentice plot, a trope that is essential to the fantasy genre. Jed Heren, a published fantasy author and writing coach Youtuber, dedicated a video to the importance of tropes when structuring a fantasy novel:

When it comes to fantasy novels, there are some tropes that just seem to work every single time I read them... The storytelling pattern of a young character discovering they have this magical ability and then setting off on an adventure to conquer a dangerous foe and grow in their own maturity and understanding of the world, that is a pattern that applies to everything from *Harry Potter*, to *Star Wars*, to *Lord of the Rings*, to a thousand other stories out there. (Heren, 2023)

While the apprentice trope does appear in other genres, it has become a predictable staple of the fantasy genre. I argue that fantasy is especially effective for secondary students because of its reliance on the apprentice trope, which places the protagonist in the position of a student. This plot structure is immediately engaging to young readers because the learning experiences and emotional reactions to growth and change that the characters face often parallel the same learning experiences and emotional reactions to growth and change that secondary students are currently navigating; in other words, students are apprentices. This relatability produces engagement and engagement is key for secondary students to deeply reflect on the themes and life experiences presented in the text, because often one must be removed from reality in order to more closely examine it.

Why Brandon Sanderson?

While Brandon Sanderson is a relatively new fantasy author, having published his first book *Elantris* in 2005, he has become one of the most prominent and successful fantasy authors of this generation. His typical yearly revenue equates to 10 million dollars and with the additional publication of four secret novels, which he wrote during Covid-19, his yearly revenue in 2023 increased to 55 million dollars. Over his 19 year long career, he has published 71 books and is still one of the most active authors on the market. While many different stories have the potential to create a unique reflective space, Sanderson consistently writes narratives conducive to retrospective reflection that encourage the “critical reflection on contemporary material reality,” a process that Sheryll Vint, faculty at the University of Riverside, explores in her book *Science Fiction. A Guide for the Perplexed.* (Vint, 2014, p.53) through his epic world building and compelling characters. It is important to note that Brandon Sanderson is not a children’s author. In fact, many of the novels he books are considered high fantasy. Yet despite his diverse

reading demographic, his stories are still extremely accessible to secondary students due to the engagement factor of the fantasy genre itself. This paper will use *The Stormlight Archives* as a case study to demonstrate how the fantasy genre can be used as a reflective educational tool to explore complex societal issues in secondary classrooms. *The Stormlight Archives* explores complicated themes of socioeconomic disparity and racial tensions that leaves the reader pensive and hungry to insight change. The following literary analysis represents a proof of concept for the potential to create opportunities for reading cultural relatability and narrative transportation in Sanderson's *The Stormlight Archive*.

Systems of Oppression

Sanderson's recreated systems of racial oppression illustrate how fantasy can be used as a unique reflective tool to contemplate complex societal issues. In order to create a space conducive for retrospective reflection, Sanderson must first design a world that does not outwardly resemble reality, yet still functions similarly to real-world systems of power.

Brandon Sanderson fashions Alethkar, the prominent kingdom of the series, after medieval societies organized by a caste system defined by eye color, where the lighteyes are set up to succeed and the darkeyes are set up to fail. The sons of lighteyes, the bourgeoisie class, train from birth to become warriors. Within this militant society, combat ability directly correlates to the prestige of their title and the wealth of their families. lighteyes have an extreme economic advantage due to their exclusive access to Sharedplates and blades, the armor and weapons of Roshar. Unlike traditional battle arms, Shardplates and blades cannot be manufactured, making them extremely rare, functional artifacts passed down through families or obtained through one-on-one combat. Shardblades and Plates are powered through a substance called Stormlight, which is stored in gems that function as the main form of currency in Roshar.

By powering Shardplates and blades with Stormlight, and through their connection to the upper class, Sanderson creates a direct connection between weaponry and economic power.

Alethkar's militant hierarchical society is an oppressive socio-economic system designed to keep darkeyes, the proletariat class, in positions of labor and service. Darkeyes are not given access to armor and weaponry or proper training to be able to survive and advance in a combat driven society. Shardplates and blades, however, offer a slim chance of social mobility to darkeyes: "Even a slave could become a lighteyes if he won a Shardblade." (Sanderson, 2010, p. 413). In this way, Shardplates and blades are comparable to education in the real world, acting as the great equalizer that has the power to bridge socioeconomic gaps. A Shardplate or blade not only grants the user superhuman strength, it grants the invisible armor of financial security and social power. By introducing the reader to an historically oppressive system, Sanderson primes his readers to reflect profoundly on the later destruction of that system.

While Sanderson does not reference any specific real-world oppressive system within his narrative, his imaginative oppressive social hierarchy creates a unique frame for the reflection process that allows the reader to indirectly ponder real-world societal issues through an immersive fantasy journey. For example, this system offers the reader opportunities to reflect on the parallels between the lighteye elites' access to armor and weaponry and the oppressive systems that also result in resource or educational disparities. Educational resource disparity falls under the umbrella of the term "opportunity gap," which can be defined as "the ways in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations, or other factors contribute to or perpetuate lower educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups of students" according to the Glossary of Educational Reform. In other words, the opportunity gap addresses the effects of unequal resource distributions to

schools from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Within this educational system, the school districts and students who have access to vital resources are set up to succeed, while those who do not are set up to fail.

In his book *Shame of a Nation*, American writer, progressive activist, and educator Jonathan Kozol highlights the devastating effects of educational resource disparity and how unequal access to school resources, including quality teachers, contributes to the ever-widening divide in academic preparation for higher education and future careers between students of different socio-economic classes. For example, Fremont High School, a low income school in Los Angeles, lacked the funding to provide multiple sections of an AP course. The only other electives offered at this school were cosmetics courses. While cosmetic courses are not inherently negative, the lack of opportunities for low income students to engage in academically challenging courses hinders their education and makes them less competitive for colleges, and consequently, higher paying jobs. Mireya, a student who attended Fremont High School and attempted to enroll in an AP class before it became unavailable, shed light on the fears of not receiving a competitive education: “I don’t want to take hairdressing. I didn’t need sewing either. I knew how to sew. My mother is a seamstress in a factory. I’m trying to go to college. I don’t need to sew to get to college. My mother sews. I hoped for something else” (Kozol, 2005, p. 591). Without a proper education, students from low income families are not given the same opportunities to succeed and break the cycle of poverty as their peers from higher income households and districts. Much like darkeyes are not given access to armor and weaponry or proper training to be able to survive and advance in a combat driven society, students from low income districts are not given the proper resources to succeed academically. Besides providing a narrative frame that creates a unique space for the reflection process, the fantasy genre also

enhances the quality of that reflection through the characters' exploration of that unfamiliar world.

The characters of the story are the vessels by which readers experience the journey of narrative transportation, and whose point of views guide their retrospective reflection. Kaladin Stormblessed, a central protagonist to the series, is Sanderson's main tool of societal disruption. Kaladin is a darkeyes who grew up in an impoverished community in Alethkar. It is through Kaladin's perspective that the reader experiences and comes to understand the oppressive structures that make up his society. It is made clear that from a young age, darkeyes are made to feel inferior to their lighteye counterparts. Readers get a glimpse of this internalized classism during an interaction Kaladin has with his childhood love Loral, a lighteyes girl whose family lived as the governing house in their village: "If he went to war, however, he would have a place. Maybe he could even do the nearly unthinkable, win a Shardblade and become a true lighteyes. Then he could marry Loral and not have to be her inferior" (Sanderson, 2010, p. 611). This passage both conditions the reader to experience the events of the story through the perspective of the disadvantaged, which is vital for creating the emotional response needed in the process of retrospective reflection, and reemphasises the socioeconomic value of shardblades within this combat driven society.

As Kaladin grows up, his perspective, and therefore the reader's perspective, on Shardblades and the lighteye elites begins to change. Kaladin comes to resent the lighteyes, as many darkeyes do, with an almost eat-the-rich mentality, resembling a similar disdain towards the upper classes that follows trends in American culture as seen in blockbuster movies such as *The Menu*, and *Parasite*. His disdain for the lighteyes only grows when he joins the army as a spearman footsoldier. In the army, Kaladin learns the basics of combat, though soon his natural

talent with the spear earns him the nickname Stormblessed and the respect of his fellow soldiers. In Alethi combat culture, it is considered strategic to sacrifice thousands of partially trained, darkeyed soldiers in battle to tire out the enemy before sending in the professionally trained lighteyed soldiers. Kaladin separates himself from his light eye counterparts and his Alethi combat culture by fighting to protect the weaker and more defenseless soldiers. During a battle, Kaladin does the impossible and kills a Shardbearer, granting him the opportunity to claim the blade and become a lighteyes. Yet he refuses the blade, a decision fueled by his disdain for the lighteyes and the hatred of their system:

If he took that Blade, he'd become one of them. His eyes would even change, if the stories were right. Though the Blade glistened in the light, clean of the murders it had performed, for a moment it seemed red to him. Stained with Dallet's blood. Toorim's blood. The blood of the men who had been alive just moments before. It was a treasure. Men traded kingdoms for Shardblades. The handful of darkeyed men who had won them lived forever in song and story. But the thought of touching that Blade sickened him. It represented everything he'd come to hate about the lighteyes, and it had just slaughtered men he loved dearly. He could not become a legend because of something like that. He looked at his reflection in the Blade's pitiless metal, then lowered his hand and turned away. (Sanderson, 2010, p. 1134-1135)

This rejection of power is a key moment in the story, not just for Kaladin's character but for the reader's reflective experience. This rejection of power, via the rejection of the Shardblade, acts as a shocking and powerful acknowledgment of the oppressive nature of Alethkar's socioeconomic system. Kaladin's refusal to participate forces the reader through the experience of acknowledging and pushing back against systems of oppression, which sparks an emotional

response that will help the reader begin subconsciously reflecting on oppressive systems in the real world that must be questioned. Through the act of questioning, the reader's mind is encouraged to think of a better and more just system alongside Kaladin, urging readers to be active participants in the reimagining of a more ideal society.

Sanderson's narrative offers a satisfying opportunity for readers to experience drastic social change in real-time. Kaladin becomes one of the first Knights Radiants in more than a thousand years. Knights Radiants were an order of warriors that fought for and maintained peace. They operated under strict codes of conduct to ensure that order and honor were maintained by every soldier in their organization. Anyone, no matter their gender or eye color, had the opportunity to become a Radiant if they spoke *the words*, a moral code followed every Radiant. They fought for each other, they fought to protect, they did not fight for glory. Every Radiant was equipped with full Shardplate and a Shardblade, indicating a sense of economic abundance and equality through the widespread access of this valuable resource. Knights Radiants are able to create their own Shard armor, which in turn shatters the societal and economic divisions between Alethkar's social classes and diminishes the power of the lighteye elites. Beyond subverting the need for Shardblades and plates, the Knights Radiants begin reintroducing long-forgotten chivalric values to their socioeconomic system, creating opportunities for people of all classes to not only advance socially and financially, but to re-examine and fundamentally reshape their culture. The rebirth of the Knights Radiants is a key step in Sanderson's subversion of an oppressive economic system by creating social and economic opportunities for people of all social classes to advance and by reintegrating long forgotten codes of honor back into the military, and subsequently their government. While this level of grand scale social change is

often not experienced in a single lifetime, experiencing this phenomena within the narrative leaves readers with the message of hope that change is possible.

Systematic Racism

Sanderson further creates opportunities for readers to reflect on systems of oppression by incorporating negative stereotypes, racial prejudices, and systematic racism within his narrative. Systematically oppressive power structures are present in parts of American infrastructure, workforce, education, culture, and politics, which has left a lasting impact on American society today. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer and activist, discusses the dangers of stereotypes in her TedTalk “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009). In her speech she describes the danger of a single story as the continued presentation of a single story again and again until that is all a specific people group becomes in public perception. To illustrate, Adichie uses the example of immigration tensions in America during recent decades between the U.S and Mexico, admitting that she bought into the single story that Mexican people were dangerous individuals who take advantage of the healthcare system and steal American jobs. It was not until she visited Mexico herself that the single story version melted away and she could appreciate Mexican culture for all the beauty it had to offer.

In order to begin exploring complex issues of race within his narrative, Sanderson must first design a social system that does not outwardly resemble reality, yet still functions similarly to real-world systems of racial oppression. Sanderson does this through the creation of a sapient race known as the Parshendi, a species that has been largely enslaved by the Alethi. The Parashendi, later known in the series as the Singers, are beings that exist in extremely unique physical form. Each Parshendi form serves a specific function, though all forms have some variation of red and black swirling skin. In Roshar, most Parshendi were captured and forced into

slaveform (dullform), transforming their bodies to be more suited for labor, though they are still quite small and weak in this form, and dulling their minds to be more obedient. It is in this slave form that readers are first introduced to the Parshendi. Once transformed, Parshendi are bought and sold across Alethkar to lighteyes and are often valued more than human slaves for their calm and obedient demeanor. While this slave system is not directly tied to any specific real-world slave system, the similarities draw enough cultural comparisons for the reader to imagine the life experiences of the Parshendi.

The Alethi people, and therefore the readers, know very little about the Parshendi. As a result, the readers and the characters easily fall for the single narrative that paints the Parshendi as a dull and inferior species. This ignorance is an important factor to include in the structural makeup of this society in order to recreate real-world conditions of racial tensions. The readers, at this point in the story, are still experiencing Sanderson's world through the perspective of Alethi characters, like Kaladin. This limited perspective of the Parshendi people places the reader in the position of the privileged race within the world of the story. The Parshendi's physical state in slaveform becomes the only version of the Parshedi people that the Alethi understand. The reader begins to understand more about the Parshendi people as Kaladin gains more experience with them at the war front on the Shattered Plains. Here, the Parshendi wear a form known as warform which Kaladin describes as "muscle and built like a Horneater, easily as tall as Kaladin and far broader at the shoulders. While both had the marbled skin, the Parshendi had those strange red-orange growths of armor on the head, chest, arms, and legs" (Sanderson, 2010, p. 1294). The physical state of Parshendi warform is accompanied by a keener mind, designed for war strategy and combat. As mentioned in previous sections, armor and combat ability are the main sources of power in Roshar's combat driven society. In

salveform, the Parshendi are not able to interact with the Alethi because they lacked the equalizing power of armor and weaponry. In warform, however, the Parshendi are able to defend and fight back using the same language of combat. The armor that grows from their skin is almost symbolic of the inner strength of their people.

The reader's perception of the Parshendi continues to change as Kaladin discovers more about warform from Parshendi corpses. While looking through the dead for supplies, Kaladin and his men find an intricately decorated dagger on the corpse of a fallen Parshendi. While examining the blade, Kaladin makes an important observation that will eventually begin to change his view, and subsequently the reader's view, on the Parshendi people: "The Parshendi out here are supposed to be barbarians," Kaladin said. "Without culture. Where did they get knives like these?" (Sanderson, 2010, p.667). This passage both acknowledges the negative and harmful stereotypes the Alethi view the Parshendi through and introduces the possibility that the Parshendi are more than what Alethi society claims them to be. Like Kaladin's rejection of the blade, this moment of questioning is vital to the reader's reflective experience as it forces the reader to acknowledge that the character's perception, and therefore their own perception, of the Parshendi is flawed.

The Parshendi's new access to armor and weaponry through warform has uncovered their own unique combat driven culture. During battle, Kaladin comes face to face with the Parshendi's combat culture and is again surprised out of his primitive preconceived image of their way of life:

Their attacks were careful and controlled, and each pair fought as a team. They seemed to respect him for his skill. Most telling, they seemed to back away from fighting Skar or Teft, who were wounded, instead focusing on Kaladin, Moash, and the other spearmen

who showed the most skill. These were not the wild, uncultured savages he had been led to expect. These were professional soldiers who held to an honorable battlefield ethic he had found absent in most of the Alethi. In them, he found what he'd always hoped he would find in the soldiers of the Shattered Plains. That realization rocked him. He found himself respecting the Parshendi as he killed them. (Sanderson, 2010, p.1537)

This passage highlights various key observations that forever change the way Kaladin, and therefore the readers, think of the Parshendi. First, Kaladin observes that the Parshendi fight in organized groups, disproving the misconception that the Parshendi are a barbaric and primitive race. Second, Kaladin observes that the Parshendi engage in ethical combat, a cultural practice that even the Alethi do not value in their own combat driven society. Third, Kaladin makes the shocking discovery within himself, he has come to respect the Parshendi. No longer are the Parsheni a primitive race, but equals to the Alethi in the art of combat and war. It is important to reflect back on where Kaladin, and the reader's, perspective on the Parshendi began, and what those perspectives are now. The reader, through Kaladin, has gone through the experience of completely misunderstanding and dehumanizing the other, recognizing the fault in their thinking, actively working towards better understanding the other, and coming to respect the other. This mental exercise of breaking down prejudices and actively working to understand the Parshendi within *the Stormlight Archives* will help the reader begin subconsciously reflecting on other prejudices in the real world that must be questioned and torn down in order to build a more ideal society.

For secondary students, learning how to conduct social and literary analysis and the process of retrospective reflection is often taught with difficult or socially complicated and mature texts such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Of Mice and Men*, or *The Scarlet Letter*. Where a student

may struggle with comprehension or feel discouraged to participate in classroom conversation due to their fear of sharing an incorrect answer about real-world, intense topics—for example, analyzing the literary tools Melba Patillo Beals uses to share her life experiences as a member of the Little Rock Nine in her Civil Rights novel *Warriors Don't Cry*—students may feel more encouraged to participate in class conversation if analyzing the same literary tools within a narrative that is completely disconnected from our reality.

Conclusion

Fantasy literature is equally capable of providing powerful academic enrichment to students in secondary English classrooms due to the powerful reflective properties of the genre. Fantasy can be a powerful engagement tool at the beginning of the learning process to help increase student participation and help students better learn foundational literary analysis skills in a less pressured environment. To begin generating data on the effectiveness of the fantasy genre on the development of secondary students' literary analysis skills, I suggest that English curriculums substitute texts that are repeated in multiple grades with a grade-level fantasy novel. It is important to note that I am not arguing for a complete replacement of all canonical texts in English secondary curriculums. I suggest that educators and curriculum designers consider teaching a fantasy novel as the first text of the year to: 1) generate excitement for literary analysis at the beginning of the year 2) get students comfortable with voicing their analysis and opinions in class because the subject matter of the book is completely disconnected from real-world biases and tensions 3) increase student engagement of grade-level literary analysis by using a text that is considered fun, different, and more relatable to secondary students.

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