Analyses of Stories to Deepen Social Understanding:

The Art and Science of Using Humanistic Tales Across Media

"Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale, / Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man."

William Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John* (Act 3, scene 4)

Storytelling is a universally shared human tool, a natural impulse, instinctual across cultures, social classes, and histories. Ideally, with selective practices and tutoring, we can experience humanistic stories from aesthetic, academic, and ethical perspectives that, when taken together, help us to build emotional, intellectual, and empathetic bonds with others as well as ourselves.

Stories are ubiquitous in education already. In language and literacy programs, they serve as the context for initial reading as well as later for reading comprehension. In teaching science and math, brief narratives provide frames for understanding abstract concepts and practical applications. In history, civics and social science, brief narratives become the focus of inquiry and analysis. However, traditional methods of using story in the classroom often focus on one telling -– usually in print form and either ignore or subjugate a film (or other media adaptation) to be treated as entertainment only or judged on the merit of its' adherence to the text depiction of characters and plotline.

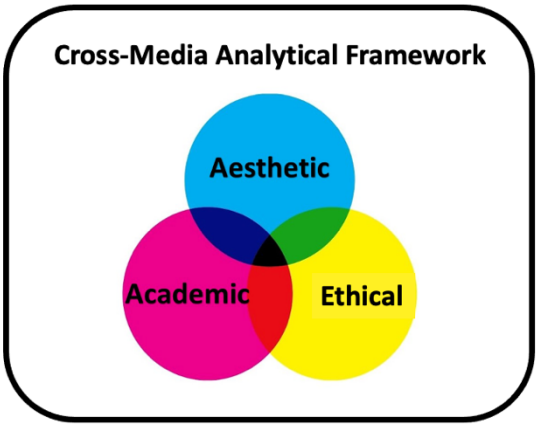
Our claim in this essay is that discrepancies between versions of a story can be a good thing when they generate questions unlikely to emerge in a single media version in education as well as entertainment. With twice-told stories, questions are raised surfacing a variety of perspectives, polarities of opinions, and critical analyses that serve as mechanisms for deeper understanding through engaged comparisons beyond the glib or trivial. Twice-told stories also set the stage for more equitable discussions in contrast to a commonplace technique whereby teachers ask students to relate something in their own personal experience to the one-telling of a story. Students without a personal connection to the themes/plotline in that story are then at a disadvantage-left with nothing to compare the story to. Contrary, in part then to Shakespeare who bemoans the monotony of a twice-told tale, in today's classrooms, from pre-K through secondary grades, and higher education, a twice-told tale, e.g., one told through two different media formats, has the potential to cultivate empathy and social understanding.

Having made these assertions based on our teaching experience and research observations, we also appreciate the challenges teachers face introducing stories that address controversial or sensitive topics into their practice. Concerns about the content of stories and their reinterpretations in new media/art forms make it challenging for educators to select and bring engaging stories to their classrooms.

Just as students' time spent online/viewing media has increased exponentially in recent years, as reported by Common Sense Media[1] (and many others) so have the number of books, graphic novels, or historic events been retold in films, streaming, and other media. Thus, how might educators uncover and seize the educational opportunity in this cultural phenomenon and maximize the benefits of using stories across media in everyday classrooms? What if such stories are shared with, analyzed, and closely compared by students, along with their teachers, across media, not only to deliver knowledge but to spark conversations or debates on important and controversial social topics? Might these high-quality twice-told tales be the better option as educational resources to promote literacy, teach history, increase knowledge about society, and nourish humanistic values?

For instance, when youth meet these stories, twice-told, that is e.g., by reading them in print and watching them in film, there is an opportunity for educators to facilitate youthful learners' educational development broadly defined to include aesthetic, academic, and ethical understanding. To that end, we suggest fostering these three epistemic lenses for understanding the message(s) of a twice told story—(1) a student's deep comprehension of the ***academic*** content associated with domains of knowledge and affiliated with or embedded within the twice-told story; (2) a student's interpretations, comparisons, and judgements of the story's ***aesthetic*** expressions across media that may serve to engage, inform, illuminate or even dis-engage the student as a reader or viewer with regard to the media's depiction of characters or narrative.; (3) a student's informed personal and social reflection of the ***ethical*** dilemmas and choices embedded in or associated with the way the story is told. In so doing, there is potential for the student to position oneself in the larger social and historical context where the story is located; For traditional educational purposes—- we begin with the non-traditional aesthetic lens, which invites student engagement through the story's artistic expression across media. Ultimately, each of these analytic lenses intersects with one another for understanding, comprehending, and reinterpreting humanistic stories. That is, aesthetically, academically, and ethically distinct perspectives are related forms of epistemically understanding (Elgin, 2006, 2017) the social world utilizing the framework portrayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The analytical framework comprised of three epistemic lenses to illuminate a story in an educational context.



[1] Common Sense Media (2022). *The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Teens and Tweens 2021*

But what are the criteria by which we select such stories? And how, are we going to bring these stories into everyday classrooms, and support teachers in best exploring and utilizing the educative moments that a high-quality humanistic story twice-told might promote? These are the questions we address in this paper. We do so through a particularly apt example of a twice-told tale and explaining how we use this story in our graduate school courses (Section 1), our research (Section 2), and our educational practice (Section 3).

1.The Application of Twice-Told Tales in Education

Our case: Making Meaning of a Story about Social Exclusion using Cross Media Analyses

Wonder, authored by R.J. Palacio, was first published by Knopf in 2012, and released as a film adaptation by Lionsgate in November of 2017. Palacio wrote the story after her own five-year-old became visibly upset upon seeing another child in an ice-cream store whose facial features were so physically distorted from the norm that her own child started to scream in fright and tried to run out the store. It turns out the facial distortions this other child had were due to a genetic disorder, the under-development of the facial bones and tissues that occur in utero. The medical name for this genetic abnormality is *Treacher-Collins* syndrome. It is a rare disorder, often requiring many surgical operations just to keep the child alive. Today, with advances in medical and surgical procedures, many children born with this abnormality can lead a long and productive life, but seldom can the surgery fully repair the child's facial features so that the child looks "normal."

Wonder tells the fictional story of August Pullman (Auggie), a ten-year-old boy born with this disorder. The story begins with his parents' decision to send Auggie to a private middle school. Although his parents are aware that being home-schooled may have protected him from the "flight reactions" of young children like that of Palacio's own five-year-old, or the "fight response" of older children, i.e., with meanness, aggression, taunting, teasing, etc., the parents conclude that, overall, being friendless is not a good thing for Auggie. It is not good for either his social development or his mental wellbeing.

> *And so, with many doubts and fears, but knowing he has the support of a loving family, including his 14-year-old sister, Via, Auggie bravely prepares himself to enroll at the start of the new school year in the fifth grade at a traditional private school in New York City where one might expect, with its small classes, and high ratio of adults to children, that Auggie would be somewhat protected from the cruelty that comes, normatively speaking, of looking so "different." (NPR Staff, 2012, March 26).*

The book, Wonder, now translated into more than 30 languages, is widely read in elementary and middle schools. The film adaptation has been viewed by legions of schoolchildren and adults worldwide, who have also read and loved the book.

We have used the story Wonder, as told in book and film, as a case study in our graduate course, Trans-Media Literacy, Humanistic Storytelling, and the Promotion of Social Awareness. Here, the class discusses important social and cultural topics, such as educational stakeholders' perspectives about a school-bullying situation in an elite private school in United States, or the implications of the variations in meaning and culture in the story as presented in book and film. These discussions are initiated using prompts that compare different narration by which the story is told and encourage our class members to identify their instinctive/intuitive reactions, examine their feelings, question their prior knowledge, consider differing perspectives, and deepen their comprehension.

The Aesthetic Lens

There are multiple ways to introduce the story to students, and to begin to understand Auggie's experiences. To unpack the educational opportunities and ethically rich messages in the *Wonder story*, we start by reflecting on one's own emotional responses to the book and film then begin to compare the aesthetics of each narrative treatment.

Arguably, of the three epistemic lenses, perhaps the aesthetic comparison of *Wonder* in book and film is the most accessible way to prepare students to deeply understand the story's academic and ethical implications comparatively. For example, there's a pivotal scene during a Halloween party at school, that's an early "turning point" in the story. Auggie overhears his classmate (and only new friend, Jack Will), confiding to other boys in a closely- knit group that 'he isn't really friends with the new-comer, Auggie… the principal of the school forced him to hang out with him'. Jack goes on to say: If I looked like him (Auggie), I think I would kill myself'. He is unaware that Auggie, is within earshot, disguised in his Halloween costume and mask. The scene is short, yet the impact is intense, immediate, and critically important for readers/viewers to emotionally bond with the story, both in print and in film.

In the film, Auggie is momentarily frozen after entering the classroom (Figure 2) as he hears Jack's chilling declaration, then voices become distant, music becomes subdued, as he trudges down the hallway. Even though we do not see his face behind his mask or hear his internal voice, the cross-cut camera shots, shifts in point of view, and changes in music deliver Auggie's emotional response. In the book, after Via narrates her experience of Halloween, Auggie's devasting day is revealed when she gets him to explain why he unexpectedly left school on his favorite day of the year. We can easily understand in both tellings that Auggie, the newcomer, is shocked in this social situation.

Figure 2. Auggie, Halloween scene in the *Wonder* film

The narrators in the book and film each bring nuanced and different emphasis to elements of telling the story in sequence/by chapters offering a rich basis for comparison. In the book, there is a distinct narrator for each chapter whereas in the film a combination of dialog and narrative voiceovers reveal the feelings and perspectives of characters as the story unfolds. For example, during the Halloween scene (Table 1.), how do readers/viewers come to understand the characters' feelings and the events surrounding them?

Table 1. Depiction of the Halloween scene as told in the film and book.

Film Script:	Book Text:
Auggie walks into homeroom to find Julian is in a Darth Sidious outfit, he's talking to two Mummies. ***JULIAN**: If I looked like him, I'd put a hood on my face.* ***MUMMY2 (Jack Will)**: If I looked like him, I'd kill myself* ***JULIAN**: Then why do you hang out with him, Jack?* Jack Will looks back to the classroom doorway and turns back to Julian and the other boys. ***MUMMY2 (Jack Will)**: I don't know, Tushman asked me to be his welcome buddy*	I was going to go in and sit at my usual desk, but for some reason. I don't know why I found myself walking over to a desk near them, and I could hear them talking . . . "I thought about this a lot," said the second mummy "I really think … if I looked like him, seriously, I think that I'd kill myself." … I knew the voice. I knew I wanted to run out of the class right then and there. But I stood where I was and listened to Jack Will finish what he was saying… "Just ditch him," said Julian. I don't know what Jack answered because I walked out of the class without anyone knowing I had been there.
Thorne, J., Conrad, S., Chbosky, S. (2017) Wonder, Directed by Stephen Chbosky, Lionsgate	**Palacio, R. J., (2012) Wonder. Random House Children's Books. Kindle Edition.p.25**

How do readers/viewers experience each telling similarly and differently? Discussions may evolve to address a myriad of questions. What is the impact of the choices made by the author to engage readers through vivid but sparse descriptions of characters/settings, the first and third person narratives, and the use of alternating perspectives in chapters to reveal character's feelings/dilemmas and advance the plot of the story? What is the impact of choices made by the director to engage viewers through multiple senses using varying camera angles and scene length/pacing, symbolic costumes, evocative settings, character dialog, voiceover narrations, music, sound effects- even silence to reveal the characters and move the story forward?

Beginning with the aesthetic lens lays the groundwork to be able to scaffold analysis and discussions of the story's *academic* content and *ethical* messages and values, especially on the "what" question— what are the personal, social, and cultural meanings behind the aesthetic choices made by the author of book and director of the film in presenting the story?

The Academic Lens

The academic lens is the most traditional approach to the use of narratives for learning. When we ask what kind of learning opportunities might promote students' understanding of word meaning and inference, we are looking at the two "tellings" with an *academic* eye, which focuses on a range of core school-based disciplinary content and skills, e.g., academic vocabulary, deep comprehension, and complex reasoning skills. Within the academic realm of knowing, activities might involve vocabulary comprehension and application and rewriting scenes, which focus on the quality of students' writing skills. This provides engaging opportunities for eliciting the nuances of meanings that these work choices represent.

We believe that the transition from once-told to twice-told stories in the academic domain is a natural evolution in teaching practice, and therefore warrants less detailed demonstration here. By doing so, we don't mean to dismiss the potential for acquiring domain -specific knowledge or deeper comprehension in language & literacy, history, or the sciences. In fact, the opposite is true. For example, using a piece of historical fiction, we can easily deduce how the close-comparison of a book and film with historical records and other sources can fuel thoughtful and lively debate of fact *versus* fiction and yield expansive and nuanced domain-specific knowledge.

The Ethical Lens

The ethical lens helps to uncover the implicit and explicit values embedded in the telling and experience of the story from personal and societal perspectives. As the story unfolds, revealing the viewpoints and actions of multiple characters, we begin to construct perceptions of self and others.

For instance, in the Halloween party scene discussed above, we encounter Jack's ethical dilemmas and conflicting personal relationships. The newcomer, Auggie is someone he admires but who is ostracized by other students. Julian is someone he dislikes but who is popular and ringleader among his peers. There are subtle indications that socio-economic status plays a role influencing the boys' behavior. Jack is from a lower-middle class income family; his parents work in meaningful but lower paying jobs as teacher and social worker. He attends an elite private school that his parents could never afford, on scholarship and wants to fit in. At school, Jack is neither the academically gifted student nor a celebrity among his peers. Julian, the ringleader, has no trouble fitting in. He appears to have a privileged life and his wealthy parents are influential donors at the school, accustomed to getting what they want. What does the decision to badmouth Auggie to Julian and his friends mean to Jack? How might he feel about his words and actions under different conditions?

As the reader and viewer, we notice that Jack's feelings and struggles-are handled differently in the book and film. In the book, the Halloween scene is described through Auggie's point of view. His narration leaves Jack's feelings unaddressed. Readers come to understand Jack's repentance only after Auggie stops talking to him. In contrast, the film producers use a medium close-up camera shot (Figure 3) to convey Jack's feelings after he betrayed Auggie. Jack's unkindness is portrayed in the social context, alluding to the need to belong and lengths to which someone may go to fit in. Julian and his friends, Auggie's antagonists are complicit, laughing

together at Jack's cruel remark: "If I were him (Auggie), I'd kill myself." Jack, then turns his back on the laughing boys with regret visible- and searches for Auggie. The film's soundtrack reinforces the shift in mood from joyful at the outset (with the Monster Mash song playing loudly in the background) to somber as Auggie, the outcast, hears the cruel remarks and trudges away. Laughter echoes in the hallways; the music is muted and indistinct.

As noted by book reviewers on the Goodreads website,[2] Auggie's experiences may be sugarcoated and too ideal to connect with. However, Jack, another central character, is eager to fit in with his peers and feel like he belongs. As a scholarship student, his family's lower income status makes him feel like an outsider at his school, albeit for different reasons than Auggie. The desire to belong and ethical choices related to identity and peer pressure make this an adolescent development story that readers can readily relate to, whether by book or film.

Therefore, we begin to understand the ethical impact of Wonder for readers/viewers by asking, how do we feel about Jack's personal dilemma and decisions as portrayed in each media? How might Jack's family circumstances influence reader/viewer judgements and moral reasoning about Jack's betrayal of Auggie, the beleaguered protagonist, and alliance with Julian, the privileged white antagonist? The book and film communicate Jack's behavior, ethical struggles, and estrangement from Auggie differently. Viewers witness Jack's regret and hesitation on screen in the moment. Readers learn much later about Jack's remorse and 'punishment'. First, we must experience Auggie's anguish through his first-person account of the day. Then several book chapters focus on life through Via's narration then shifts to the viewpoint of Summer (another classmate of Auggie's) and her critical role revealing to Jack the cause of his estrangement from Auggie. How, might these contrasting aesthetic experiences in book and film affect readers'/viewers' perceptions of Jack's character and behavior?

Figure 3. Jack, Halloween scene in the Wonder film

[2] https://www.goodreads.com/

As the perspectives of characters are revealed, readers/viewers explore the ethical values embedded in the story through the cross-media comparison. For instance, the social economic status of Jack's family is made explicit in both the book and film. We asked, why would both the author and movie producer emphasize details about Jack's family background in constructing this character? Reflecting on the story, Jack admired Auggie and wanted to be friends with him. However, Jack betrayed his friendship or perhaps acquiesced to social ambition with the antagonist, Julian. The book offers additional insights about Julian's struggles and the early trauma that contributed to his bullying behaviors—- the film makes no mention of them. What impact does that have? How might the choices made by the author and film producer be a projection of their own values, convey empathy for the underprivileged or serve as a critique of the power dynamics and inequities perpetuated by social hierarchy based on socio-economic status? How does social bias and peer pressure effect friendships between adolescents from diverse backgrounds and circumstances? Especially for normative purposes, the ethical lens shines a light on developing an open-minded perspective.[3] There's abundant potential for rich and varied discussions (about these and other themes) that can inspire new insights and introspection and warrant the teacher's careful consideration.

Close comparisons can reveal consequential choices by the storytellers in each media, encourage examination of the meaning behind such choices and represent multiple points of view. Thus, through the enriched experience of twice-told humanistic stories, students may gain new insights and build emotional, intellectual, and empathetic bonds with others.

II. Exploratory Research on how audiences make meaning of a story's multi-personal narration

"The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way. There is no good asking first whether the work before you deserves such a surrender, for until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out."

C. S. Lewis, An *Experiment in Criticism,* 1961

In an interview with a reporter from the *Berklee Groove*[4], Palacio is asked: How does the film differ from the book and vice versa, in terms of how the story is told? As the author of the book and a co-scriptwriter of the film, R.J. Palacio, responds:

> *"Two ways: I would say the movie tells a couple of stories that aren't in the book. We see more of the parents in the film, where in the book we only see the parents from the kids' point of view, so we only know what their lives are like through the filter of their kids. The parents are central to the story, but are in the background, whereas in the movie, they're central to the story and more complex. The second difference is related to the overarching*

[3] See *Educator Resource for Wonder*, 2019, (https://xmedia.gse.harvard.edu/).
[4] The *Berklee Groove* was a students' online newspaper at the Berklee School of Music until 2020.

theme of the book, kindness, and how they beautifully echoed and enhanced that theme through the movie. You leave the movie feeling good, really good, and certainly given the times we're living in now, that's something really great." (Murray, 2017)

Due to Wonder's worldwide popularity, an abundance of resources and reader/viewer commentary about the story are easily accessible online. We are curious about the story's impact on readers of the book and viewers of the film. Do they connect with the story and receive the messages in the way that R.J. Palacio intended? To make a more thorough case for cross-media analyses using the three epistemic lenses, requires us to study how readers/viewers understand both the book and film.

And so, we have made use of comments (data) from the many digital website platforms that carry book and film reviews written by professional/published reviewers and amateur/general public reviewers. We asked research questions about the reviewers' perspectives on the story's *aesthetic* appeal, the perceived struggle(s) of the main characters in the story (Tan et al, 2020), and the story's perceived societal impact. We've used qualitative data and analytic methods to generate new insights as we've undertaken several preliminary analyses. See Surrain et al[5] for another example of the use of narrative in research. For more recent approaches utilizing narrative in research see also the edited book by Veneziano and Nicolopoulou [6]. These analyses, given the sources of data available to us, are primarily epistemic clarifications, and not advanced research analyses targeted to our "cross media" component. Such work may be found in the future. Here are two examples of explorations utilizing data generated from book/film reviewers' commentary.

Exploration into the Aesthetic: Perspectives on the appeal of the "Story" to the book's everyday reviewers

How do everyday reviewers who post on-line comments about the stories experience and judge the quality of the overall story and its intended message? In essence, how do they judge the quality of the story aesthetically speaking? As *Wonder* has been touted an inspirational book for readers of all ages, we investigated what aspects of the story that reviewers talk about when reacting positively or negatively to the book. The reviews (N=26) we analyzed were drawn from English language online book review platforms i.e., *Amazon (3), Goodreads (10), and Common-Sense Media* (13), including both children's and adults' reviews of the book.

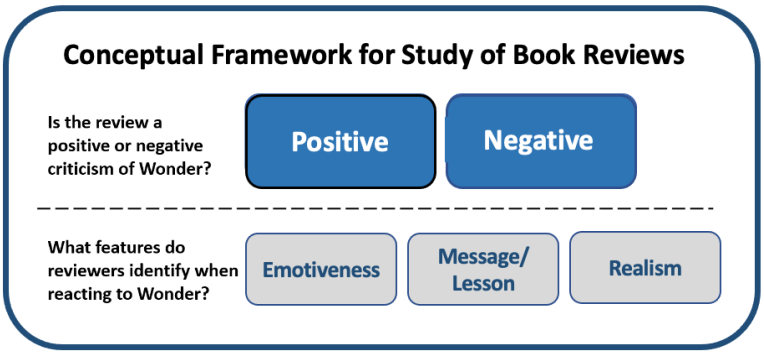
In developing the conceptual framework for this study, we implemented two (iterative) readings of the comments, so as to generate two layers of themes. The first layer classifies each whole review as primarily **positive** or **negative** evaluation of the story by readers' attitudes rather than by book rating.[7] The second reading of the comments seeks to classify the reviewers' primary reasons for their over-arching evaluations. Three major justifications codes emerged separate from the positive or negative label for each full comment at the first reading. Comments were *thematically coded* (tagged) as **Emotiveness** when the reviewer primarily referenced the strong

[5] Surrain, S., Duhaylongsod, L., Selman, R., & Snow, C. (2019). Using narrative thinking in argumentative writing.
[6] Veneziano, E., Nicolopoulou, A. (Eds.), *Narrative, Literacy and Other Skills: Studies in intervention.* Philadelphia, PA: Joh Benjamins. https://www.benjamins.com/catalog/sin.25
[7] Mixed reviews exist as well.

feelings the story engendered, as **"Lessons Learned"** when the reviewer stated the primary importance of the central message, lesson, or takeaway of the story, and as **Realism**, when the reviewer made a comparative comment that located the fictional story in connection to or with the reviewer's own experiences in the social world.

In general, the codes within the first layer of the conceptual framework capture how the readers/reviewers connected to the book (or film) aesthetically in terms of their positive and negative feelings and attitudes to the story, while the second layer of the framework further described the readers/reviewers' understanding the story's emotional effects and ethics, their reflection on the story, and their perception of its' resemblance to "reality." (Figure 4)

Figure 4. The "general" conceptual framework for the study of online book reviews.



Most reviewers responded positively to the story in print (for examples, see Table 1 in the Appendix). Within the "Positive" reviews on *Wonder*, commenters tended to discuss the story's "Realism" regarding the story's aesthetic structure. For example:

> *"the story Wonder, the novel, is told from different characters' POV (point of view). I like that because it gives a more realistic rendering of the story."*

Although there were both positive and negative reviews addressing each of the three themes, a far greater percentage of negatively coded comments were voiced under the theme "Realism." Often, when the "Realism" theme was invoked to justify a negative review, the commenters mostly criticized the book because the characters were not seen as realistic or the story (plot) was "sugarcoating" the reality, for instance, the following somewhat mixed review basically focused on the story's negative aspects:

> *"I feel a bit like a cold-hearted snob for giving this book two stars" before acknowledging that the book is "an uplifting story definitely worth being told (and read)" It was too sweet, too nice, too unreal. because Auggie's story is supposed to feel real, not like he lives in a magic castle and has just defeated a dark wizard. It was too perfect to believe in."*

Exploration into the Ethics: According to professional reviewers, perspectives on the lessons that might be learned by "The Society".

R. J. Palacio tells us that by writing this story she set out to make a difference in our society.

> *"It seems like a chance for me to do over that one unfortunate situation… There's a certain act of atonement here, and the fact that maybe I'm helping this little girl, without her knowing, in some way because of Wonder… that is pretty special for me" (NPR, 2012).*

The theme of atonement is carried forward from both behind and through the story. Behind the story, R. J. Palacio atoned for her son's reaction to the girl's face in an ice-cream store and so was motivated to create the story to support, among others, children who suffer from craniofacial deformation. In the arc of the story proper, Auggie's friend, Jack Will atones for things he said about Auggie behind his back when he decides to defend Auggie against Julian and embrace their friendship.

If within these real-life and fictional stories, people and story characters are motivated by their own context and experiences, can storytelling be used as a tool to significantly alter the attitudes and intended behaviors of children or adults (Cameron & Rutland, 2006)? Can it serve to prevent psychological trauma such as the kind that might affect Auggie? The hard evidence in response to questions such as these is sparse. We asked—what were not just the lessons but also the actions these reviewers could take? [8]

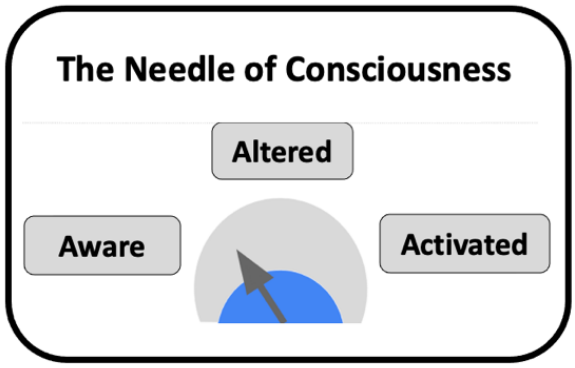
We approached these questions by beginning with a search for the views espoused by professional reviewers on what kinds of influence the story might have. For this sample, we chose professional reviews and opinion editorials (N = 26) published through online outlets with high viewership (Klein, A. 2017). Many readers look to these outlets and their reviewing staff to be informed by what they think, and therefore these reviews may carry more "cultural weight" than the opinions of laypersons. Interestingly, when the research question focuses on the reviewers' *ethical response* to the book or movie, the picture becomes not only much more complex but also much more polarizing.

Considering the ways that themes emerged from the reviews sampled and our interest in the *variety* in which the tale was "twice-told," we used reviews of both the book and the film to address the following research question: Can we reliably infer from these reviews how we, as a society, treat and discuss a protagonist who has a visible difference that marks that person negatively, that stigmatizes him or herself?

Such a question is more about our culture than about each of us as individuals. Nevertheless, by using similar qualitative analytic methods as for our first study, we found that regardless of the media reviewed (movie or novel), the ethical *impact* of the story on individual reviewers could be classified into three levels of "engaged consciousness": *gains in informational awareness; changes in personal development,* as in altered social or self-awareness, and/or *behaviorally activated social conscience.* These are organized in relation to one another as the conceptual framework in Figure 5.

[8] Papers on these analyses were undertaken and presented by three students and presented at a student research conference sponsored by the university

Figure 5. Conceptual framework for the study of professional book/film reviews.



- **AWARE-** Acts of Awareness as Increased Knowledge expressed: These are comments that mentioned what the story brings to readers throughout their full reviews, for example, the awareness of the main character's physical condition and his lived (although fictional) experiences. Facts about craniofacial differences, i.e., terminology, bullying, and the experience of being bullied are emphasized in the review.

  "The hero, known as Auggie, is such a marvelous (sic) character. He's smart, funny, and courageous. What marks him out is a terrible facial abnormality, caused by a mutant gene, which has resulted in him having 27 operations."

- **ALTERED-** Acts of Altered Consciousness expressed: These reviewer comments gave the impression that either the reviewers had reported selves being changed, or they perceived a change in the way individuals who might read the book would most likely treat another person or group. One example was provided from a review that quoted a father, who noted:

  "*other children were reacting differently to my daughter, who has a speech impediment and I believed it was due to her class reading* Wonder. *I began to realize that Auggie notes the way people react upon first seeing his face. They look away, or stare, or smile extra big. Toddlers sometimes cry in fear and confusion. Auggie hates this, steeling himself for any situation (like the first day in his new school) where there will be lots of people who have never seen him before. But underneath his pain and exasperation is a trace of empathy. He understands that a face so unusual will attract attention, that people will wonder why he looks the way he does."*

- **ACTIVATED**- Acts of Activated Social Conscience expressed: These reviewers' comments appeared to insist upon a call to action at the societal or public level. For example:

  "Society needs to change and reading Wonder is a first step, more teachers should become involved in Palacio's anti-bullying campaign."

"In Wonder, Auggie needs to be used as a prop to teach those around him about acceptance and compassion. The official movie description deems him "the most unlikely of heroes." But what is he a hero for, exactly? For living with a disfigured face? For not getting angry when he's subjected to cruel and intense bullying on a daily basis? For going through traumatic medical procedures? Something needs to change in our society."

Here we see the research designed and the research question weighted, not so much to aesthetics, but to ethical values, the worth of the story. For instance, when the research question is, "Can we tell from these reviews how we, as a society, discuss and might treat a protagonist who has a visible difference that marks that person negatively?", a different conceptual framework emerges. Negative reviewer reactions to the story emerged most often in some, but importantly not all, of the comments coded as: **Awareness as Activated Social Conscience expressed.** In the sample from this analysis, reviews of this kind are much more polarized, and some are much more *critical,* both in the everyday sense of that term, and often in the sense that the focus of the criticism is not simply the movie, but the cultural context in which the movie is located. The comment below is paradigmatic:

"Disabled people do not need a medal for being disabled. *Frankly, I thought this book was condescending. It actually made me feel uncomfortable. I kept thinking about that video of the disabled woman telling the public that as a disabled person, she didn't want to become anyone's "inspiration" or "hero" just for simply living her day-to-day life. She exposed society's tendency to put disabled persons on a pedestal, when goodness gracious, they're just normal people like us. (albeit, they have to do things differently than all of us) But worse still, Auggie isn't even disabled in the least. He's just a regular guy, but with a different face. I don't know which was worse, the group of people bullying him, or babying him because of that. I felt as if the majority of love and recognition Auggie got throughout the story came only because of his disfigurement. And let's not even mention the insinuation that the people who did befriend Auggie are just saints. I don't even want to get into that."*

I felt like this book was just pure "inspiration porn". At best, I'm very uncomfortable with its message, and at worst, I'm just infuriated.

The Transition from Conceptual Frameworks to Normative Arguments: Four Tiers.

To be of practical use, descriptive research-based theoretical comparisons need to be incorporated in the context of the development of a pedagogical conceptual framework; to inform knowledge, educational practice also needs to be grounded in science and adopt the macro view of culture. In this section, we will illustrate the relationship between the approaches and agents and theoretical model that has four major—**but non-hierarchical—**enterprises or tiers of activity, represented in Figure 5:

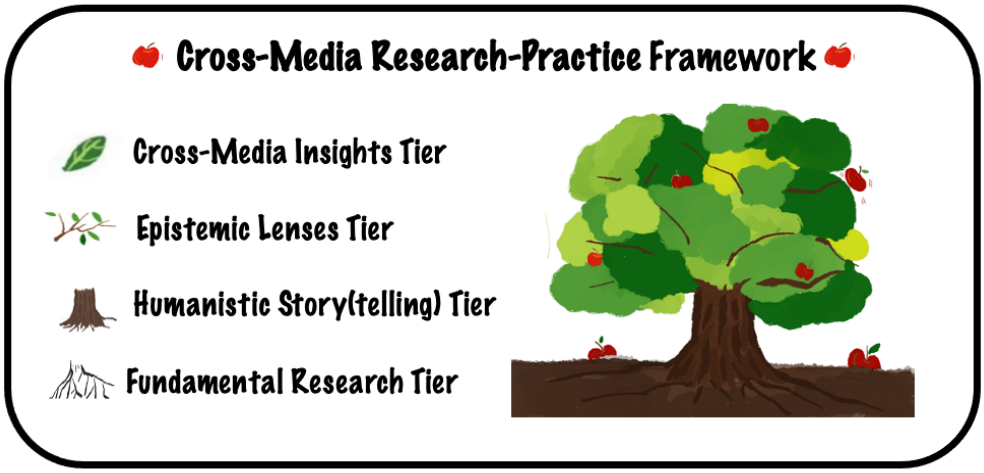
- The Cross-Media Insights Tier: Generates critical insights by unearthing the narrative variations and the individual or group interpretations of a story when told across media renditions, that is, the use of cross media analytics as both a research method and a pedagogical practice

- The Epistemic Lenses Tier: Designs pedagogical activities that are based on and promote the use of three overlapping, yet also distinct perspectives: academic, ethical, and aesthetic ways to know the story and the social world

- The Story (and its telling) Tier: Selects stories that are told in multiple media forms (*variety*)and deemed provocative and engaging for youth/anyone to express diverse attitudes and opinions related to their humanistic and social experiences (*polarity*), and eventually facilitate one's own self and social awareness (*criticality*).

- The Fundamental Research Tier: Makes use of conceptual frameworks and research methods to analyze both the common and diverse interpretations individuals make of humanistic stories

Figure 6. A Theory of Potential Change supporting research and practice



Within this research-practice framework, the four tiers are interconnected by the purposes and emphases of the users. In our research-practice case, this framework serves as a "non-linear" (i.e., non-causal) Theory of Potential Change. Each tier has its approach and output that informs the other tiers. In common, each tier utilizes and illuminates the value of stories and their telling—to generate cross media comparisons focused on *variety, polarity,* and *criticality* values within the Humanistic Story through use of tiers as the mechanisms of choice.

To illustrate the relationship between the four tiers in our application, we use the eco-system of a growing tree as a metaphor. That is, metaphorically speaking, the Humanistic Story Tier is the trunk of the tree—- the story serves as the catalyst for engagement and inquiry. Above the trunk emerge the Epistemic Lenses (aesthetic, academic, and ethical) which provide branches for exploration. The Cross-Media Insights Tier, i.e., the leaves, represent the *pedagogical methods* and *analytical tools* used to compare different media renditions of the story. These yield new insights and reflections on self and society, thus inspiring diverse perspectives and

reinterpretations of the story and its' related themes. The Fundamental Research Tier explores the nature and impact of storytelling. In our case, the research[9] uncovers and interprets thematically the meanings derived by members of the audience.

III. From Descriptive Evidence to Practical Implications: "variability, polarity, and criticality" uncover 'the story's crucial characteristics.

The evidence presented above is just a start to an argument/proposal: when taken together, cross-media close comparisons of humanistic stories utilizing the three epistemic lenses have the power to promote deeper comprehension, empathy, and social awareness. However, there remains much work to do in the Fundamental research Tier. And, we have provided little in the way of evidence of the effectiveness of the cross-media model. At a philosophical level, we need to clarify why and under what conditions this approach would have the most impact.

What are the criteria for "good" stories within this conceptual framework? In an earlier section of this essay, we demonstrated the potential learning opportunities that high-quality humanistic stories told twice might promote through taking multi-perspectives (story characters, narrators, and audiences) with the aesthetic, academic, and ethical lenses. The mechanisms that most visibly enables and promotes these story comparisons across media are the *Variety* whereby a diversity of public opinions demonstrates the value of examining story, *Polarity* of opinions on the same plot or theme, and *Criticality* in social discourse about the story, i.e. in a societal framing.

As revealed by our empirical research, online commenters are polarized in their judgements about the "goodness" of *Wonder.* These anonymous online commenters respond along a continuum, either on one end "love" this story, praising it as "the best adolescents' novel" to promote empathy, or at the other, "disdain" *Wonder*, blaming it as an "inspirational porn" that abuses the struggles of children suffering from Treacher Collin syndrome. Whether individuals perceive *Wonder* as a good or bad story depends in part on the readers'/audiences' emotional bonds with the story, their interpretations of the messages of the story, and perceptions on whether the story is reflecting reality fairly. These "subjectivities" vary by individuals' real-life experiences, expectations of the story, and aesthetic tastes.

Needless to say, in the context of this discussion, educators individually or as a collective, will differ in their opinions of stories, especially on the meanings and worth, largely based on their own educational constraints, goals, beliefs, and experiences.

However, for teachers who are selecting stories with educational purposes, we argue that the quality of a story depends to a great extent on how *story comparison* is used and whether it supports educators in achieving their educational goals. For example, even though *Wonder* is labeled as 'adolescent literature,' it is a good story in our graduate school classroom as it satisfies our need to use it as an example to deliver the meaning of our Theory of Change. But it could be a "bad" story if it is used as a model to demonstrate advanced academic language in a senior high school classroom

[9] Within the Research Tier, the roots, can also serve other functions, e.g., evaluation, etc.

since the story in print is narrated in oral expressions of 11-years-olds. Movies and text can play important roles here.

Therefore, we suggest, to best implement the 4-tiers conceptual framework, a "good" story should be told in multiple media renditions (*variety*), related to themes or conflicts that are controversial (*polarity*), and include critical and reflective voices (e.g., author(s), director, producers, actors, reviewers) on cultural and social phenomenon (*criticality*). Variety, polarity, and criticality emerge then as the criteria for a "good" story that supports the application of our research-practice framework. We also argue that these three characteristics of stories are also the mechanisms that inform the pedagogical approaches of utilizing stories in classrooms.

- **Variety** in the telling and comparison of the twice-told story, in particular its aesthetic aspects which are in effect engaging to the readers/viewers, and variation among its narrations that create space for comparison across media, which promotes discussion for deeper subtextual meaning of the story.

- **Polarity t**akes advantage of the inclination of members of the audience (i.e., readers/viewers) to disagree about aspects of the story. Educationally speaking, this force works best in a school setting that provides a safe context for students to discuss and debate. Research informs us of the topics and themes about which the reviewers were most likely to express positions in strong disagreement with one another, which in return might support educators in designing classroom debate by selecting the controversial topic in the story.

- **Criticality** makes the case for choosing stories of social, cultural, and moral relevance that engage students in meaningful reflection and facilitate deeper comprehension of matters pertaining to personal identity, human relationships, current events, or civil society.

Can cross-media analysis end the animosity between entertainment and education?

All this suggests, if we wish to properly use these conceptual tools educationally, we need to apply the three criteria to the selection of stories. In that sense, today and into the future, the educator's lament is starting to change, away from "the book is so much better than the film." Educators' time, of course, is indeed constrained. However, as Brook Barnes noted earlier, the long-promised streaming revolution is the next great leap in how the world gets its entertainment. It may also be a great leap in the way the world gets its education—if educators *open their minds* to explore how, when framed in aesthetic, academic, and ethical perspectives— twice-told humanistic stories across media have, not just entertainment value but also—great educational value.

As with the question of how to select stories, we also wonder what preparation, then, do educators need to make a close, cross-media comparison of a story before bringing it to the attention of their students? The epistemic approach to illuminating humanistic story is not only a pedagogical framework to be situated in the classroom for students, but also a way to support

educational practitioners in best understanding thus utilizing stories to improve their practices. For teachers, the application of pedagogical framework that focuses on the aesthetic, ethical, and academic content of a story to their own analyses, beliefs and practices will help educators locate why they are taking the time to do their own close cross-media comparison of a story.

Cross-media analysis, as previously discussed, is not the multitudinous, superficial comparison of what was kept, what was left out or what was changed in the crossing from books to films. Rather, it is both the individual reflections and group discussion of choices made by authors, directors, producers, and actors that enrich and expand the experience of the twice-told story.

When studied using the three epistemic lenses, the humanistic stories that we operationalize in curriculum and instruction, encourage students to become more discerning readers/viewers and enable educators across domains (education, law, medicine, etc.) to embrace popular as well as canonical stories as allies to serve in the best interest of their students' development.

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Appendix

Table 1. Examples for each of the three codes

Code	Emotiveness
Example	"This is one of those special books that touches the heart and leaves a mark there forever. It's difficult to believe that this is a debut book from this author it is so incredibly well written and developed. There were moments in the book that caused me to laugh, and moments where I cried. The range of emotions this book pulls from the reader is vast."

Code	Lesson Learned
Example	"The best part of the book for me was the overall message it sends to its readers, be kind always, no excuses. "This book really inspires me to be brave, kind and love. most important love urself (sic)."

Code	Realism
Positive Example	"This book is almost like a case study in what would happen if you put a deformed child in a school with other children, would they accept him or reject him? Almost every character behaved how the reader thought they would, and every scenario in the book completely realistic and believable."
Negative Example	*It was too sweet, too nice, too unreal. because Auggie's story is supposed to feel real, not like he lives in a magic castle and has just defeated a dark wizard. It was too perfect to believe in.*