

## Allegory Encourages Self-reflection and Multi-cultural Understanding in a College Communications Course

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### ABSTRACT

Urban college students (n=179) from diverse cultural backgrounds and regions received instruction in the writing of short narratives, or allegories, to express generalizations about human behavior. At the beginning of the three-month semester students were given samples of allegories concluding with a lesson and then were asked to create an original allegory. These original narratives were analyzed and their conclusions categorized. Students' allegories expressed diverse cultural values although there were cross-cultural similarities. Findings indicated Asian students expressed significant interest in attaining wisdom and a balanced life over time. Latinx emphasized attaining self-respect, love, loyalty and fair treatment. Eastern Europeans were concerned over breaking a trust. Being deceived by appearances was a mutual concern for North Americans, Latinx and Europeans. At the semester's end a survey of student reactions indicated students gained increased cultural understanding from sharing their work. Implications are that allegory may be used as a literary device to achieve self-reflection and understanding of other cultures.

### INTRODUCTION

The students in a college basic communications course from different cultures and regions of origin are sometimes hesitant about communicating verbally with those from other cultures. The students in this study were at a large university setting in the United States (U.S.A.), came from diverse backgrounds, and 49.7% were born outside of the U.S.A. They were in introductory college communications courses, and they represented a range of levels in their command of Standard American English. Culture is defined in the study as the characteristics of certain groups of people which differed from others and was determined by a combination of factors from language, food, religion, music, arts and social customs (Zimmermann, 2017).

In this study allegories are considered to be stories about people or animals that dealt with generally held truths about human nature and concluded with various lessons about life. They were intended to represent abstract ideas or principles using characters, figures or events in narrative form ("Literary Devices, Allegory," 2013). Examples were provided to the students from often cited fabulists such as Aesop (2016a b; Henry, 2012; La Fontaine, 2014).

### Research Problem

The problem posed was that in prior courses, the professor who was the researcher noted that the students were more inhibited about expressing themselves orally than they were in their written work. In their writing assignments and in their use of allegory they appeared to be free to express the goals, values or the lessons about life that were important to them. There is anonymity in allegory writing where one can write one's feelings from the perspective of another person or animal. Therefore, the researcher hypothesized that students might learn more about one another and the different cultures represented if they were encouraged to discuss their original allegories with each other. While engaged in this process it was thought that students might have the opportunity to reflect upon their own values.

### Aim and Goals

The ultimate goal of the study was to have the students gain insight and knowledge about the values of people from various backgrounds. After initial instruction students were then asked to write allegories that ended with a lesson or value

statement. The overall objectives of the study were to use this literary form of a short narrative as a means to achieve self-reflection and self-expression and as an instrument to increase understanding between individuals from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures.

These aims are reflected in the research questions as follows:

1. Can the use of short narratives, or allegories, assist students to express their cultural values and to communicate these values to their classmates in a multi-cultural classroom?
2. Did the students written narratives, or allegories, appear to be influenced by their culture or region of origin?
3. Did students indicate they learned something new about their classmates or about themselves after they completed their short narrative or allegory exercises?

### Theoretical Review

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the research of the critical pedagogues (Freire, 1973; 2018; Giroux, 2011; Luke, 2017) and the ethnic epistemologists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Paris, 2012; Rodriguez, 2010). Freire (2018), and the critical pedagogues maintain that education should function as an instrument to provide all people with the ability to critically evaluate themselves and their relationships. Ethnic epistemology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Rodriguez, 2010) also influences the study and this philosophy promotes self-awareness and a vision of education in which individuals use the knowledge of their culture as a foundation upon which to reflect upon the culture of others (Rodriguez, 2010; Sell, 2017). Classroom exercises that are culturally relevant to the students and connect to their own expressed interests are thought to be an ideal vehicle to be used in a literary medium (Paris, 2012). The study also reflects theories of social constructivists (Bruner, 2004; Mulcahy-Ernt, & Calvery, 2009) who argue that literacy is enhanced by building upon prior knowledge and that understanding of past experience and heritage may be used in a positive way to create new knowledge. Researchers maintain that students who have been marginalized benefit from articulating events from their own cultural heritage and that all individuals must acquire understanding of their own worth before they can achieve a genuine empathy for others (Sell, 2017; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Sell (2017) asserts that storytelling reflects a great deal about a person's cultural identity and that sharing stories in an intercultural context can be used to promote intercultural understanding. From their study of group dynamics, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) believed that small group interaction among peoples of diverse cultural heritage increases mutual understanding and cooperation.

This study is affected by the work of the psychologist Rokeach (1973) as he developed a value system that reflects some of the goals individuals would like to achieve during their lifetime. These goals, the values they represent, and the ways in which students wished to obtain them are categorized in the study. Narratives expressing personal values while making analogies are also considered to promote self-reflection and understanding and to enhance the ability

to see relationships and draw inferences (Aldridge, 1997; Mayo, 2001; Sommer, Ward, & Scofield, 2010).

### Literature Review

The research of Hofstede (2001) on his cultural dimensions reviews the theories he first chronicled in 1967 to 1973 when he worked on a study of employee values for IBM, the well-known international computer and business management company. After using factor analysis of employees of 50 countries he developed a theory of five possible personality tendencies (or dimensions) of individuals according to their culture. His research on the values of individuals has impacted many fields and has been a source of analysis for much of the research of cross-cultural values and employee management. The results of the research of this present study support some of his cross-cultural findings although his purposes were to apply some of the characteristics he discusses to the nuances of global employment and advertising strategies.

The value system designed by Rokeach (1973) and used as a basis for categorizing student personality was created to reflect 18 instrumental values and 18 terminal values with the terminal values being considered as desirable end-states of existence and the instrumental values to be preferable types of behavior. Although all value or personality categorizing systems are controversial (Gibbins & Walker, 1993), the Rokeach model has been relied upon over the years to study personality psychology, social structure and cross-cultural studies (Musil, Rus, & Musek (2009). The present study used the Rokeach value system model as a basis for categorizing the general themes and values provided by the students in this study.

Past studies on the use of allegory in the college curriculum appear to be slim. Previous studies in the literary field of allegory included related literary devices such as the study of proverbs, fables, analogies and the use of metaphor. The literature reviewed by the researcher pertains to the discussion of these literary devices. Lauhakangas (2007, p. 81) discusses how the philosophy revealed in proverbs reflects topics that are of concern to the people from that period. Lauhakangas believes that users of proverbs have a convincing way of selecting suitable proverbs to reinforce ideas that they already have formulated, and the proverbs themselves can be used for support in argumentation. Aldridge (1997) uses proverbs and allegories as a form of exercise in teaching college students how to draw inferences and to further develop their critical thinking skills. She instructs students with existing allegories and proverbs and asks college freshmen in English skills courses to interpret the meaning of the proverb. Aldridge maintains these exercises aid students in the development of analytical skills that assist them in their understanding of traditions and sayings originating from various cultures. Rodriguez (2010) deals with college Latina females and engages them in storytelling as an approach to gain greater information from this population in a non-threatening way. In her study with college students, Murray (2013) asks students to write their own personal fables and to end them with a moral or lesson that reflects the point they are trying to express in the fable.

## METHOD

Participants' characteristics and their relationship to research design

The participants of the study directed the vision of the research and the approaches used to analyze student reactions to their work on allegory. Participants were all students in required freshmen or early sophomore communication courses over a period of two years. Each course was over the period of a three-month semester, and students were divided into a total of eight sections of the course. Approximately 92% of the students received financial aid, 60% were female, and 85% were first-generation college students. Of the diverse population in the study (n.179) many countries and cultures were represented. (Appendix A). The population recorded from North America represented students born in the United States of America (U.S.A.). Students from the other countries were in the U.S.A. for less than seven years, and for the majority of them, English was not their primary language.

The researcher, who was the professor, taught in the communications program of the university and worked with two assistants. One assistant was head of the reading laboratory at the university and the other was an adjunct professor in the department. The professor and her two assistants were each of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They observed that the class makeup was very diverse, and students of one cultural heritage tended to sit only with people of their same background. It was decided to separate classmates by mixing numbers in a hat and having students work in small groups together to create their own short narratives or allegories ending with a lesson or value statement. At the end of the exercise, they were to share their narratives with each other and try to guess what the lesson of the other students' allegories might be. The purpose of this exercise and discussion was to promote individual self-reflection and a mutual understanding between students of different backgrounds. Students were placed in small, culturally diversified groups to attempt to achieve cross cultural exposure and understanding (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

## Research Design

A survey was distributed to the students asking basic demographic questions which related to their country of birth, primary language, and amount of time spent in the United States. A chart was created stating the cultural identity of each student and the general region or country from which they came (Appendix A).

The professor reviewed the characteristics of the forms of short narratives and allegory (Kimbell-Lopez, 1999) with the students and gave examples of the genre using short stories (Henry, 2012), myths (Leeming, 2005), fables (Aesop, 2016a,b; La Fontaine, 2014), parables from the Bible and those based on nature (Gatty, 2010). The professor pointed out to the students some of the similarities and differences in style in these narratives. Portions of several class periods were then spent interpreting existing allegories from numerous countries, discussing the characteristics of the genre and interpreting examples. Students were asked to write a short

original allegory ending in a lesson reflecting a value that they wished to impart to the reader. Samples of student allegories are shown in Appendix B. In order to attain greater objectivity the researcher and her two assistants individually reviewed the topics and values expressed in the student narratives. If the same value judgment occurred a minimum of three times, it was noted. Then researcher and her assistants categorized these results into general themes based on the original value studies of Rokeach (1973). These results can be seen in Table 1. After discussing the values used by students, the researcher and her assistants jointly achieved a high level of objectivity (90%) when evaluating and categorizing the values expressed. During the study, students worked with one another in small groups discussing their work with one another. These groupings of students were formed by the researcher and were culturally mixed following the contact theory of Pettigrew and Tropp (2006). Students presented their short narratives, or allegories, orally to the entire class towards the end of the semester and displayed their work in written form. At the end of the semester, a short questionnaire was administered which asked students their anonymous reflections upon their work on creative allegories (Appendix C).

## Data Sources

Firstly, sources of data were obtained through the demographic survey distributed at the beginning of the study (Appendix A). Secondly, the allegories produced by the students provided themes that were categorized into their general values and the ways in which students might achieve these values or terminal goals (Appendix B). Thirdly, a tally was made of students' values and correlated with students' self-described cultural heritage or countries and regions of origin (Table 1). Although the Latinx students came from various regions, they all chose to describe themselves as either Latina/o or Hispanic perhaps due to their common language, Spanish, and some cultural connections. Lastly, student comments on the questionnaire administered to them were noted and classified according to their reactions to the allegory exercise and their insights about themselves or their classmates (Appendix C). Students choice of value or lesson were analyzed from each allegory through the use of data gathered from the demographic survey distributed to students at the beginning of the semester and the review of student allegories that indicated their particular choice of value or lesson. Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) was used to conduct frequency analyses, and Chi-square tests were used to examine research questions one and two (Table 1). Research question three was addressed in a separate and final questionnaire (Appendix C). The initial research questions can be reviewed at the end of the introduction sections of this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the values, or ideal goals, described by the students that they decided to convey in their choice of allegory lesson and the frequency and percentage of students from each cultural group who conveyed different values with their

**Table 1.** Goals and values interpretations from student allegories based on the Rokeach value survey, 1973

Allegory values	NA <sup>†</sup>	AS <sup>†</sup>	LAT <sup>†</sup>	EUR <sup>†</sup>	AF <sup>†</sup>	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	( <i>n</i> =90)	( <i>n</i> =40)	( <i>n</i> =35)	( <i>n</i> =10)	( <i>n</i> =4)		
	<i>n</i> (%)	( <i>df</i> =4)					
<b>Achieving justice</b>							
Students who wrote about revenge or retaliation as a means of achieving justice	11 (12.2)	4 (10.0)	4 (11.4)	2 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	1.33	0.86
Students who valued treating people fairly and being equitable in their judgment wrote about:							
Prejudice	8 (8.8)	1 (2.5)	12 (34.2)	1 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	20.84	<0.001*
Discrimination	6 (6.6)	0 (0.0)	3 (8.5)	1 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	3.76	0.44
Poverty	10 (11.1)	1 (2.5)	1 (2.8)	1 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	4.76	0.31
Descriptions of power struggles for equity or fairness	11 (12.2)	4 (10.0)	5 (14.2)	1 (10.0)	2 (50.0)	5.39	0.25
<b>Achieving goals over a period of time</b>							
Accomplishments achieved over a period of time	18 (20.0)	17 (42.5)	3 (8.5)	2 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	14.66	0.005*
The value of gaining a mature understanding of life over time	4 (4.4)	4 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	7.95	0.09
<b>Achieving Inner Harmony</b>							
The difficulties of making decisions	14 (15.5)	8 (20.0)	3 (8.5)	2 (20.0)	1 (25.0)	2.31	0.68
Concerns dealing with death as a result of poor decisions, violent, or stupid actions	6 (6.6)	6 (15.0)	4 (11.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.02	0.40
Resolving problems of materialism, excesses of ambition or lack of ambition	8 (8.8)	3 (7.5)	3 (8.5)	2 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	2.00	0.74
<b>Achieving security for family or the individual self</b>							
Issues with and concerns for themselves or their family	19 (21.0)	7 (17.5)	8 (22.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (25.0)	2.99	0.56
Negative results of bad influences on themselves or their family	10 (11.1)	0 (0.0)	10 (28.5)	0 (0.0)	1 (25.0)	16.94	0.002*
<b>Allegory Theme</b>	<b><i>n</i> (%)</b>	<b>(<i>df</i>=4)</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>				
<b>Achieving Freedom through Independence and Free Choice</b>							
Being unique or individualistic	3 (3.3)	3 (7.5)	2 (5.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1.92	0.75
<b>Achieving self-respect (self-esteem)</b>							
Having too much confidence or too little confidence	17 (18.8)	4 (10.0)	5 (14.2)	2 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	2.62	0.62
A sense of accomplishment and gaining a sense of self-worth	1 (1.1)	2 (5.0)	9 (25.7)	0 (0.0)	1 (25.0)	25.71	<0.001*
<b>Achieving Understanding: Sincere evaluation of others and acts of kindness</b>							
Being fooled by appearances and not evaluating other people properly	33 (36.6)	5 (12.5)	11 (31.4)	3 (30.0)	0 (0.0)	9.59	0.047*
Acts of kindness and forgiveness towards others	10 (11.1)	6 (15.0)	5 (14.2)	3 (30.0)	0 (0.0)	3.51	0.48
<b>Achieving true love or friendship</b>							
The importance of love, loyalty, and close companionship	4 (4.4)	4 (10.0)	17 (48.5)	3 (30.0)	1 (25.0)	38.94	<0.001*

(Contd...)

**Table 1.** (Continued)

Allegory values	NA <sup>†</sup>	AS <sup>†</sup>	LAT <sup>†</sup>	EUR <sup>†</sup>	AF <sup>†</sup>	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	( <i>n</i> =90)	( <i>n</i> =40)	( <i>n</i> =35)	( <i>n</i> =10)	( <i>n</i> =4)		
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	( <i>df</i> =4)	
Achieving Wisdom							
The importance of intelligent, sensible behavior and acting responsibly to achieve a reasonable, balanced life	2 (2.2)	11 (27.5)	1 (2.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	27.78	<0.001*
Achieving a world of trust, free of conflict							
The importance of trust and the consequences of breaking a trust	5 (5.5)	6 (15.0)	1 (2.8)	5 (50.0)	1 (25.0)	23.73	<0.001*
Appreciating a world of beauty							
The virtues of nature, serenity, and beauty	1 (1.1)	7 (17.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	20.58	<0.001*
Achieving a comfortable life							
The merits of hard work	19 (21.1)	8 (20.0)	3 (8.5)	1 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	4.19	0.38

Indicates statistical significance at  $p=0.05$  or less. NA=North Americans, AS=Asians, LAT=Latinx, E=European, AF=Africans

allegories. Several expressed values showed significant differences between students' cultural heritage based on their regions of origin grouping according to Chi-square analyses.

Students from diverse cultures expressed many common goals and values. It was evident from looking at the categorization of values that the students, in general, were concerned about achieving what they believed to be justice. It was interesting to observe that some students from several cultures and regions represented believed that revenge or retaliation was a factor in the obtainment of justice. These sentiments were not noted as significant for any one group. However, the topic of revenge bears further investigation as it is not considered a socially acceptable coping skill by many for an act of injustice (Bates, 2010). Rosenbaum (2013, p.6), a professor of law at Fordham, disagrees and says that the distinction between revenge and justice is false. He describes revenge as a healthy emotion and that religions and governments have tried unsuccessfully to eradicate these sentiments from human experience. Although we speak of vengeance as morally unsuitable, films about revenge remain extremely popular (Rosenbaum).

It was interesting to note that Latinx students in the study expressed a significantly greater emphasis on the problems dealing with prejudice (34.2%;  $p < .001$ ) than did other groups. This aspect of the study was supported by research of Murray (2013) who analyzed the fables of English Language Learners in a college English course in which the Latinx population expressed concerns with prejudice. In Murray's study there is a connection between certain cultural groups and the values they tend to express.

The author's research on students also indicated they were willing to talk about themselves and express fears of racism within the context of a narrative. It is possible that concerns over prejudice in this study as consistently and frequently expressed by the Latinx population reflect the general apprehension over immigration and illegal status in the United States. Reports from the Pew Research Center (Krogstad & Lopez, 2016) indicate that half of the Latinx immigrants to the United States say they have experienced problems with prejudice and discrimination. Apprehension about the immigration agenda from various immigrant groups is presently

at an all-time high (Brodey, 2017; Collette & Lewis, 2017). The theory that story telling can be used as a successful tool for self-expression was supported by the research of Rodriguez (2010) who found that student narratives were used as a literary device for college Latina female students to express their concerns about racism.

The Asian students were most likely to write about the importance of achieving goals over a period of time, statistically more than other groups (42.5%;  $p = .005$ ). In this study, due to the high number of Chinese students, it is likely that this group played a dominant role when analyzing the Asian culture. Researchers Ng (2007) and Ngo (2008) concur that the Far Eastern civilization generally finds it to be more acceptable to reflect upon situations over a period of time and that great accomplishments may occur only after many years. Although Ngo (2008) maintains that the new group of Eastern immigrants to the West may eventually carve out their own identity and that the encounter between the two cultures should not be over simplified and viewed consistently as a "culture clash." It is generally agreed upon, however, that greater emphasis is placed on long-term decisions in the Asian cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Minkov, 2012; Ng, 2007). Hofstede originally discussed his theories of culture related values in his book *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values* (1984) and further expanded on this research in 2001. In this lengthy review of his research, Hofstede (2001) elaborates upon his work measuring and validating national differences in long-term orientation (pp. 355-370). Hofstede (2001) developed his long-term orientation theory when he reviewed previous studies and found that some cultures emphasized traditions, knowledge from the past and steadfastness more than other cultures. Examples of regions that rate highly in the value of consistence in their traditions and are considered to view things as being of significance over a period of time would be those from the Far East. This theory of Hofstede was supported by the present study as the author found that students from Asia in this study stressed the importance of perseverance in ultimately achieving goals at a level of significance.

Table 1 shows the main concerns of students and the goals and values that they would like to achieve as illus-

trated by their allegories. The process of decision making appeared to be a thorny issue and a challenge to overcome for many of the students from the cultures represented who were concerned with inner harmony. Concerns dealing with sudden death and the consequences of poor decisions were mentioned by all groups. Studies support death anxiety in the American college population, especially for that of undergraduate women (Lester, Templar & Abel-Khalek, 2007; Wen, 2012). Cross-cultural emphasis was placed on concern for security and well-being of the family as a unit with only Europeans not mentioning this factor. The consequences of bad influences were seen as perilous to the family by the Latinx (28.5%) who discussed threats to security from gangs and drugs at a level of significance ( $p = .002$ ). Latinx, North Americans and Europeans, and Asians to a lesser percent, all maintained that it was important to get to know the real character of a person and not be tricked by overt appearances (Table 1).

Achieving true love and loyalty were highly valued by the Latinx group (48.5%;  $p < .001$ ) and the Europeans spoke more often about issues of trust (50%;  $p < .001$ ) as being important. Both of these percentages showed statistically significant differences from the other groups. The Europeans were heavily dominated by students from Eastern Europe who may have been especially concerned over issues of trust. Historically speaking they had been directly involved with the last two world wars (DeRouen & Chowdhury, 2016). They also represent countries which may be in close proximity to each other but have different cultures and governments that are often in transition or conflict with the powers of the neighboring country (Horne, 2014). Researchers Letki (2018) and Horne (2014) agree with one another and maintain the concept of trust as being very fragile in the peoples of newly created democratic regimes.

The percentage of Latinx (48.5%;  $p < .001$ ) who expressed emphasis on the importance of love and loyalty in life far exceeded the other groups. These findings would support the studies of Hofstede (2001) that indicate that conformity and loyalty to the group are valued more highly by this culture than the expression of one's independence. Similarly, strong sentiments of love and loyalty apply also to family (Hofstede, 2001).

Some concerns, such as the desire for revenge and the angst over decision making, were unanticipated by the researcher. Students' descriptions of sudden deaths caused by lack of judgment merit future analysis and may be gender related. Since this is an ongoing study, these issues might be further investigated.

A statistically significant difference in the percentage of the students who wrote about the merits of achieving wisdom was noted with the largest group being Asian (27.5%;  $p < .001$ ). These students were also statistically more likely to express an interest in maintaining the goal of a balanced life which included appreciating the beauty of nature (17.5%;  $p < .001$ ). Eastern culture stresses the importance of sustained observations which lead to growth in wisdom over long periods of development and this factor may be related to the strong respect for elders and appreciation of accomplishments achieved over a period of time (Ng 2007; Ngo,

2008). In this study, the Asian students reflected respect for achievements which occurred over a period of time at a level of significance (42.5%;  $p = 0.005$ ).

Students comments at the end of the semester on the final questionnaire (Appendix C) were generally positive (92%) with the majority (87%) saying they had benefitted from the allegory exercises and learned something about the culture of their classmates (59%) or something further about themselves (28%). This final survey suggested the students gained some insights from sharing their work (83%). Some students commented that they had enhanced their prior knowledge and connected it to fresh knowledge to create new experiences and understanding of other cultures (Appendix C, Student A). The general tone of the comments was positive.

### CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Research question one was: Can the use of short narratives, or allegories, assist students to express their cultural values and to communicate these values to their classmates in a multi-cultural classroom? In this study students readily took the opportunity to use allegory as a constructive way to express their own cultural values to their classmates of diverse backgrounds. Question two: Did students written narratives, or allegories, appear to be influenced by their culture or region of origin? There does appear to be a connection between certain values expressed by students and their cultural heritage or region of origin. Asian students expressed an interest at a level of significance in attaining wisdom and what they viewed as a balanced life over a period of time. Latinx students were significantly more concerned about receiving fair treatment from others and attaining true love or friendship and a sense of self-worth. European students (50%) wrote about the consequences of breaking a trust at a level of significance. Also, at a level of significance, students from several cultures expressed concern about being deceived by appearances. Question three was: Did students indicate they learned something new about their classmates or about themselves after they completed their short narrative or allegory exercises? Nearly 28% of the students responded that they learned something that they had not realized previously about themselves and their own culture while using the allegory exercises. In addition, 70% of the students responding indicated that they learned something new about the culture of their classmates. The final questionnaire addressing these questions indicates students' reactions to short narratives, or allegories, concluding with a value statement were successfully used as an instrument to elicit cross-cultural awareness.

The overall aims and goals of the study were to use the literary form of allegory as a means to achieve self-reflection and self-expression as an instrument to increase understanding between individuals from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. The responses to the surveys and the analysis of the students' allegories showed that students were able to reveal their inner concerns through the use of the allegory genre. Analysis of this final student questionnaire indicated that student allegories, concluding with a value statement were successfully used by students as a vehicle to re-

veal cultural mores to each other and to share them in class discussions. The implications of the findings of this study support the theory that the process of abstraction in allegory may encourage students to express their own concerns and to progress to greater depths of personal expression. Behind the social and literary construct of the basic framework of allegory, students were able to reveal and discuss their personal experiences in the multi-cultural classroom setting. It is recommended by this researcher that allegory be used as a means to achieve greater self-reflection and multi-cultural expression and understanding.

Recommendations for future research would be that it would be desirable to have a greater population of Europeans and Africans from which to draw. It would strengthen any observations to increase the number of participants, and the researcher was unable to draw any conclusions from the limited population from Africa. Ideally the study should be carried out with greater numbers and also provide an opportunity to see if there were any statistical differences due to gender that were not pursued in this study. It is also suggested that instructors spend as much time as possible teaching the techniques of using imagery and figurative language with the students. Although many students had written narratives previously, quite a few of them were not familiar with forming a definite conclusion to a story and did not have prior experience writing an allegory with a value statement or lesson. This allegorical aspect of the narratives, with an abstraction needed to conclude each story with an appropriate generalized value or lesson statement, proved to be challenging for some students. This difficulty indicated to the researcher that more time, several class periods, should be allowed for this introductory part of the lesson.

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**Students' Cultural Heritage and Regions of Origin Survey**

Americans: Students Born in North America (NA): Total 90 (50.3%)

Includes African Americans and students of Mexican background who were born in the USA and identified themselves as Americans

Foreign Born Students: Total 89 (49.7%)

Total Students: (179)

	Students/Totals
Asians (AS): Total 40 (22.3%)	
Bangladesh	4 (10%)
China	31 (77.5%)
India	3 (7.5%)
Pakistan	1 (2.5%)
Vietnam	1 (2.5%)
Latinx (LAT): Total 35 (19.5%)	
North America - Latinx who were born in Mexico	3 (8.6%)
Caribbean	7 (20%)
Dominican Republic	20 (57.1%)
South America	
Columbia	1 (2.8%)
Ecuador	3 (8.6%)
Peru	1 (2.8%)
Europeans & Eastern Europeans combined (EUR): Total 10 (5.6%)	
Albania	2 (20%)
Poland	2 (20%)
Ukraine	1 (10%)
Russia	5 (50%)
Africans (AF): Total 4 (2.23%)	
Ghana	1 (25%)
Egypt	1 (25%)
Burkina Faso	2 (50%)

## APPENDIX B

### Allegory Examples from Students

#### *Latina Student*

I used to live on Staten Island in a neighborhood that appeared to be a perfect place to live without noises and difficult neighbors until an old and annoying man moved next door to my house. The first days were very frustrating to me because he used to have nightmares late at night. He would wake up feverish, and he began to scream every night as this made me lose a lot of sleep. After the four or five days passed, I began to really dislike him. But, something ironic happened one morning. It was what appeared to be a normal day for me that involved getting up by 6 a.m. and going to school. However, when I was about to take the bus, there was a lot of ice on the street because it had just snowed that night. When I was walking toward the bus, I slipped on the ice and broke my right arm. Nobody was around there at that time, but when I tried to stand up I saw a shadow. That shadow was my neighbor. He came out and helped me to stand up and took me to the hospital.

Lesson: Don't let your prejudice get the best of you. Get to know the person before judging them.

#### *Latino student*

Yesterday friends came from Miami. There were five of them who went to the airport together. Three of them were delayed because of problems with their documents. Therefore they couldn't get on the plane. The other two went ahead on the flight. As a result some were missing when those that got on the plane arrived at the other end. The two who were on the flight could not tell the people who were picking them all up where they all were. The ones who had identity problems with their documents might have done better if the other two had stayed with them and tried to help them explain who they were to the authorities. All of the friends would have done better if they had stayed together to help each other out. Friends should stay with each other until the end.

Lesson: When you leave like a group you should come back as a group.

#### *Asian female student*

This is a story about a girl who was named "Strong," she is a Chinese girl. She came to America when she was 17, she was helpless and hopeless. Her family is in China and she was homesick. Strong didn't know anybody when she had just arrived in New York. She cried almost every night because she felt lonely. She can't speak English, everything was new to her. However, she wasn't afraid of all the difficult things that came her way. She told herself that "I will be fine no matter how hard it is." Strong started to go to school and has two part-time jobs at the same time. Life is hard and different for this 17 year old girl without the support of her family. She went to school in the morning, and she had to go to work after school right away. She does this for years. She does well in her school, even though sometimes it is hard to balance school with work. Now, she is a college student at a big famous university and tries to make a better life in America. Years of hard work will make big success.

Lesson: A successful person must be willing to go through many, many years of hardship. Be patient over time success will come.

#### *Eastern European female*

There was a fox that was roaming in the dark forest. Unfortunately, he fell into a well and tried his best to climb out, but he couldn't. The next day, a goat was going down in the same direction and saw him and stopped to ask him, "What are you doing down there?" He answered; "I'm down here drinking from the amazing water. The goat jumped in to try this water, but there was nothing down there. The fox told the goat that they could help one another to get out. The poor goat believed him and did what he asked of him. But when the fox was able to climb out, he just looked at the goat and told him that he was really stupid for believing him.

Lesson: We should not trust anyone without thinking carefully before we make decisions.

## APPENDIX C

### Final Student Questionnaire and Sample Student Responses

The statements and questions below were part of a questionnaire given to students near the end of the semester. The instructions and the questions are provided. The number in parentheses after each question indicates the number of students who responded to that question. In this appendix selected student responses are provided after the questions. The student quotations are verbatim as they wrote them in the questionnaire and include their grammatical errors.

Instructions to students:

This is a questionnaire which asks you about the allegories we studied and wrote. This survey will be anonymous. You do not have to write down your name, class or section.

You may answer by checking off your first choice for statements 1-3 which best shows how you feel. Statement 4 is for those who do not wish to make any comments. In question 5 you can write your own answer.

Please check the line that best shows your feelings about the exercises we did on allegory.

1.  I did not like the allegory exercises. (10)
2.  I did like the allegory exercises. (40)
3.  I liked very much the allegory exercises. (125)
4.  I have no comment. (4)
5. Did you learn something new about your own culture? If so what? (50)

You may write a sentence or two in the space below.

Sample student responses:

Student A: Yes, I remembered the stories I read in the Bible. I had forgotten that I had learned those stories. When I heard them I remembered that I had had them in church before. I didn't like Sunday school when I went but I guess I learned something.

Student B: Yes, other people in the class all talked different which the professor said was a dialect. But it was good because everyone talked so I was not shy. I listened to everyone. They all sounded different but it was OK. I talk in accent from Albania, so no one really understands a lot of what I say. But I think they understand my allegory because I explain it pretty good. It was good to hear that everyone from every place has a dialect when they speak English. I am not the only one with language problem.

6. Did you learn something new about the culture of other people? If so what?

You may write a sentence or two in the space below.

Sample student responses that said they DID learn something new. (105)

Student C: Yes, I learn about other people. Many people speak Spanish in the class. I made some friends that speak Spanish. I am Chinese, and my friends are mostly Chinese. I learn something about Spanish symbols. They know something about Jesus. I am a Taoist, I do not know about Jesus before now.

Student D: Yes, A couple of Black students are nice to me. I did not see Black people before I came here. They call me "brother" which is funny. I don't look like them at all, I am Chinese. The teacher told me that this is a friendly word and it mean unity. I am getting kind of use to the people here. But I was shock when I first come here. But the professor let us all tell our story so we learn something about how we feel.

Student E: We learn something about what other people think when they tell their story from their culture. I am from Puerto Rico. I am surprise that so many students in the class speak Spanish but they are not from Puerto Rico. People come from all over at this college and they tell their stories. I know some of these Spanish stories, but I hear some are different.

Sample student responses that said they did NOT learn anything new. (10)

Student F: I know all of this stuff already. People who can't speak English well slow some of the others down. I should not be with so many freshmen. I should be with juniors and seniors.

Student G: I think we spent too long listening to the stories of other people. They were interesting in some cases and everyone was nice, but I want to work on more advanced composition. Some people in the class tell a story and they don't even know the moral of their own story.

7. How did you feel about working in small groups and sharing your work?

Sample student response that liked group work. (145)

Student H: I really liked working with the people in my group. I got to know them and what they thought.

Sample student response that had mixed feelings about group work. (22)

Student I: I learned something about the other cultures in my class but I think I did a lot of the work in group work because some people don't do what they should.

Sample student response that did not like group work. (12)

Student J: I did not like the group work because I did too much of the work.

8. If you learned something more about any topic or subject you may answer the question briefly in a couple of sentences on the space below and tell what you learned.

(These answers were not mutually exclusive and the researcher and her assistants categorized the responses according to their joint interpretation. There may be overlap in the categorization of these responses.)

Student responses covered the following general topics:

literature (70)

Student K: I learned something about the style of life and literature of students from different places.

Student L: The stories that other people tell from their different countries tells me about their different literature.

writing (85)

Student M: This helped my writing.

Student N: The telling of a story with a conclusion was good for me. I never know how to get to the ending when I write.

main idea (75)

Student O: I learned a lot about how to write a story with a point. Every story should have a main idea.

Student P: This allegory writing exercise helps me figure out what I want to say and say it.

inference (100)

Student Q: I like stories that try to tell us something. Or we have to try to think in my mind what they are saying.

Student R: I like trying to understand different lessons. It is like a puzzle.