



## **We Are Family: The Importance of Community through an Exploration of Johnathon Upper Elementary Schools**

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by Sabrina Evans

### **Introduction:**

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This unit emphasizes the importance of community in the education of African American lives using the novel *Johnathon* by Jo Ann Burroughs. For many students in inner-city/urban environments, there are more obstacles that inhibit the progress and success of a life. Utilizing *Johnathon*, an emancipatory literature selection, the students can establish a keen understanding for the importance of education, community and unity, through utilizing annotations, critical thinking skills and the arts.

During quarantine, zooming with my students, we read *Johnathon*. *Johnathon* is a story of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade overcomer named Johnathon who, despite innumerable obstacles, became a living example of what it means to be refined by what was meant to consume him. Johnathon and his teacher, Mrs. Harris, go on a rollercoaster of emotions and events; from anger, happiness, to tears, worry and victory. Together, alongside of Johnathon's entire community, journey through life to create a better life and legacy for him. With the help of his inner determination and alongside his community, Johnathon comes out as pure gold, as he later becomes a story of tribulation made triumph. I surveyed my students to ask their favorite parts of the story. My students said they loved how Johnathon developed into a doctor, is based on a true story, Miss Harris finally knew that she couldn't follow Johnathon everywhere or protect him physically, and that his childhood was a series of unfortunate events and he became successful. This feedback helped to further the basis of this unit. The core of this unit is to identify dominant narratives and utilize new, race conscious, reading approaches to counter those narratives. Scholar and activist Dr. Felice Blake stated that race conscious reading practices point us toward a reorientation and transformation of the humanities.<sup>1</sup> In this curriculum unit, the students use annotations, inferring, character development, and visual thinking theory to analyze text from a critical, race conscious lens. We incorporate visual thinking questionings to establish critical thinking and thinking aloud, showing connections, opinions and realizations amongst their peers. This unit will take on the approach of Freedom Schools set up in the South during the Black Freedom Movement, as Freedom Schools following the U.S. civil rights tradition of providing a culturally and politically relevant education to disenfranchised youth that is often missing in schools, with the goal of transforming societal injustice."<sup>2</sup>

An old saying says, "It takes a village to raise a child." That saying is a foundational principle for the growth,

development and the promised future of every person, specifically for an African American life. An example of a child who had a village is Johnathon. Johnathon is a young, 2nd grade Black boy with a determination to survive, have joy and succeed at all cost. He is met with some of the most heart wrenching odds, from neglect, death in his family and abuse from his later imprisoned father and desperate mother. Despite his home life, Johnathon shows up physically, mentally, and emotionally every day. The 2nd grade teachers did not want Johnathon in their class, but Mrs. Harris was blessed with Johnathon. She grew from disdain and a stony heart, to a heart of clay, compassion, and love as she started to see him as if he were her own son, capable and worthy of love. She became Johnathon's "success coach."<sup>3</sup> This rollercoaster of events and emotions leads to an everlasting relationship and breaking all odds set against him. After reading this novel, your mind can lead to perpetuation of biases, color blindness, and pity, or it can lead to the theory of an ecological system. Johnathon did not end up as a successful person at the end of the story because he was the exception. Also, Johnathon's teacher was not his savior. These are a part of Johnathon's "ecological system." An ecological system, created by Urie Bronfenbrenner, is a model that offers important assumptions about the ways background and social psychological traits (e.g., self-perspective [microsystem]), family-level deviations (e.g., parent involvement [mesosystem]), and school level influences (e.g., perceptions of teachers [exosystem]) interrelate and impact individual level outcomes such as personal and academic achievement.<sup>4</sup> To formulate this ecological system, we will be discuss Freedom Schools during the Civil Rights era and how they impacted students of all ages.

## Rationale:

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In 2006, my passion for literacy was transformed. *Johnathon* was introduced to me when I was in elementary school by the teacher who ignited my passion for literature and affirmed the truth that I was capable of being an excellent reader. Before this introduction, I had a very narrow and disengaged view of reading. What sparked my interest is that Johnathon's story sounded similar to my father's life story, and many stories I've heard before with the lives of young African Americans and students of color. Johnathon, like many young African Americans and students of color, was insulated and surrounded by an ecological system. In the *Journal of African American Males in Education*, teacher, Lamar Johnson, discusses how together, his parents, church members, family, literature, and teachers all supported and nurtured him, which created an ecosystem of hope.<sup>5</sup> This ecological/ecosystem of hope allowed him to grow into the person he is. He attributed his full success and growth to his ecological system.

Johnathon was much like Lamar Johnson, Johnathon had a father, mother, brother, dog, teacher and teaching, classmates, principal and more who were apart of ecological system. For Johnathon and many others, some of these parts are weak. Johnathon comes to school daily with clothes that are dirty and the same as the day before. His father is an alcoholic, abusive and later becomes imprisoned, his mother is emotionally exhausted and detached, his young brother is his world, and his dog brings him much comfort but eventually passes away. With Johnathon's heart of wonder and Miss Harris discerning his desire to be great, she helps him develop into the man he becomes. With an ecological system, if one part is weak, for whatever reason, other parts can compensate. Each student's ecological system is interdependent, and when an event happens in one layer, the other layers are affected in some way.<sup>6</sup> Like many of our students in urban involvements, they may lack resources, emotional regulation, fear the unknown but what remains consistent is that they have a desire to be loved, seen, heard and successful. Bronfenbrenner's model reminds us of the need to view each

student as existing in a system.<sup>7</sup>

This story of overcoming, victory, community, and faith directly relates to the hearts and demographics of my school and students. Johnathon is an emancipatory literature selection; that is literature that liberates the reader through the characters' experiences, trials and tribulations, and successes.<sup>8</sup>

I teach 5th grade English Language Arts and History at Southampton Elementary School in Richmond Public Schools in Richmond, Virginia. My school is 80% African American, 7.4% Hispanic and 6% White, with 99% free/discounted lunch recipients, and a 20:1 student/teacher ratio.<sup>9</sup> In 2019, we were accredited. With English scores alone, Black and economically disadvantaged students struggled during their state-wide Student of Learning Exam (SOL). With both Math and English, students with disabilities suffered greatly.<sup>10</sup> It would be wrong to assume and create a false narrative that these students have a certain type of trauma, have the same allegory in their individual lives and are unwilling to accomplish their goals. This data is not to perpetuate the dominate narratives, but to exemplify the effects of an underserviced, fragmented and deprived ecological system.

This is why critical pedagogical teaching practices are vital to an ecological system. This is where education is assembled. This counter narrative opposes the dominant society's ideology about the width, depth and height of the intellectual capacity of African Americans.<sup>11</sup> With this information, it further exemplifies the need for critical pedagogy and equitable schools in order to be a safe, stable and whole addition to a child's ecological system.

## Content Objectives:

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"The future of the country will be determined by what happens in the schools."<sup>12</sup> To build a unit that justifies this quote, we have to remember a goal of education. One goal of education is transformation; to help cultivate and develop an environment of challenge, change and hope. We must challenge dominant and neutral narratives by understanding racial recognition vs racial rule.<sup>13</sup> Racial recognition is recognizing race, while neglecting to realize and address racial rule. Racial rule is the power and authority of whiteness and oppression.<sup>14</sup> This is all known as colorblindness. Essentially colorblindness is saying that one doesn't see color and sees everyone as equal. It negates the fact that we are all different and our differences should be noticed, accepted, learned and taught, yet not discriminated against. Colorblindness does not embrace difference, rather it dismisses it. The objective is not to be found in colorblind ideology, or African American exceptionalism, saying that Johnathon is an African American boy who somehow is better than others and is the only person of color to succeed. The goal is to recognize the more dominant narratives and display counter narratives and show the importance of community and unity with each life. Dr. Felice Blake said it well, it isn't enough to include texts by historically aggrieved populations in the curriculum and classroom without producing new approaches to reading."<sup>15</sup>

With the help of Blake and other scholars, we can directly engage race conscious pedagogy to reveal colorblindness and race neutrality, while transforming the false narrative of racial rule within education and curriculum. Another goal is for students to see themselves in Johnathon. A scholar and African American teacher, Lamar Johnson, wrote, "I was not a neglected or unloved child, but there was something that made

me connect with Johnathon.”<sup>16</sup> With the help of incorporating history with ELA, cross disciplinary engagement will allow students to see the direct relationship between both subjects. Students will:

- Identify the dominant narrative and provide the counter narrative
- Draw conclusions and make inferences with support (5.5j)
- Identify cause and effect relationships & Compare/contrast details in literary and informational nonfiction texts (5.5kl)
- Use reading strategies throughout the reading process to monitor comprehension. (5.5m)
- Use context clues to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases
- Identify the author’s use of figurative language (5.4d)
- Describe character development (5.5d)
- g) Write a clear topic sentence focusing on the main idea. and i) Write multi paragraph compositions.
- Organize information to convey a central idea (5.7e)
- Edit for fragments and run-on sentence (5.8j)
- Present higher level of Blooms Taxonomy

## Content:

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“To what degree will schooling serve African Americans if it teaches them to respect and honor the cultures of others and not their own?”<sup>17</sup>

This is a timeless statement, from historian and scholar Carter G. Woodson, that directly says that African Americans learn more about cultures of others than their own and more about the history of others than their own. When they do learn about people who are their same race, they may not be learning the truth of them. These are grave examples of colorblind ideologies and mindless approaches to change. “Colorblindness is the act of pretending that racial recognition rather than racist rule is the problem to be solved.”<sup>18</sup> Colorblind ideologies and pedagogical approaches do not teach the truth about history and it undermines the validity of the experiences of African Americans and people of color. Racism, racial injustice and colorblindness have been a force at the core of the European colonization of America. It has affected every area of influence from religion, family, education, government, media, arts, and business. It has to distorted truth, mutilated minds, annihilated billions of people, and disrupted families. It has also affected every discipline from criminal justice and law, music and arts, to health, math, languages, and English Language Arts. To critically understand racial rule and racial dominance throughout the disciplines one must know history.

### Post-Civil War Era

As stated previously, students in inner-city/urban environments are more susceptible to various obstacles that attempt to inhibit the progress and success of their life. Though the history of African Americans and people of color did not begin with slavery, we can begin in the history of slavery, where innocent lives were forcibly removed from their homeland to work as free/cheap labor on stolen land. Fast forward to the Civil War. In post-Civil War America, African Americans were offered schools before they were offered housing and employment.<sup>19</sup> Why is this important to know? This was another race neutral and colorblind way to maintain control over the minds of newly freed slaves.<sup>20</sup> Instead of having the pure intent of building up the newly freed African Americans, white people saw an opportunity to maintain racial hierarchy covertly. The colorblindness

in this situation is found in the attempt to control freed people by way of education. The mindset of education then was field and factory work.<sup>21</sup> Over time, people realized that this was another method of oppression, by indoctrinating people of color as a means to help maintain white racial power for economic gain. Education wasn't the only way African American's were oppressed.

### **Great Depression, Injustice in Housing and Education**

In the 1930s, after the Great Depression, the housing market was entangled. There were many people who lost their home or were in danger of losing them. In order to prevent many foreclosures and to stimulate home ownership and employment, The Federal House Administration (FHA) of 1934 was formed.<sup>22</sup> The FHA created "residential security maps" for over 240 cities to prevent people of color from purchasing homes.<sup>23</sup> This is the progress of redlining. How does this affect our students in society today? Students have their ecological system. Education, housing, food, family and more are a part of that system. When their system of life has been disrupted by white supremacy and injustice, the whole child is not covered therefore has now roadblocks to overcome. Does this mean that our students won't succeed? By no means will our students fail in life knowing their history, having their internal fortitude and understanding that inspire roadblocks they can overcome. With knowing this history of systemically infiltrating all disciplines and livelihood, many people realized the need for a paradigm shift from rote to creative.<sup>24</sup> A program that could shift the paradigm, highlights the need for students of color to be able to express themselves, learn how to function wholly in the world politically and socially and learn as a unit is called Freedom Schools.

### **Freedom Schools**

Freedom Schools began during the heart of political and vibrant momentous change, The Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement was an organized effort by African Americans to end racial discrimination and gain equal rights under the law.<sup>25</sup> It was an over - a - decade long struggle for justice and equality for African Americans that took place mainly in the 1950s and 1960s. This is not to dismiss the 400 plus years of fighting for injustice. The Civil Rights Movement was led by many prominent leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Malcolm X, and the Little Rock Nine. <sup>26</sup> African Americans, and other people of color experienced much overt racism during this time. The Civil Rights Movement was the momentous fight to end not only overt racism but covert racism that began during the Colonization of America.

Freedom Schools were one of many actions and solutions taken to expose racist, industrial model of education and impose creative, critical thinking education. While using this history in this unit, students will learn the power of community and unity to debunk the savior complex and Black exceptionalism. Freedom Schools were a six-week summer program that was designed to prepare disenfranchised African Americans to become active political actors on their own behalf (as voters, elected officials, organizers, etc.)<sup>27</sup> Freedom Schools, that began in church in Mississippi in 1964, promoted education for transformation and liberation, allowed students to learn about the history of the Civil Rights Movement beyond an individual hero, speech, or march and invited all of us to look critically at the purpose of education today and the possibilities for the future.<sup>28</sup> This style of pedagogy developed a new level of critical thinking for young African American children and even adults. This program empowered young people "to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions" and "to find alternative and ultimately new directions for action."<sup>29</sup> One core element of Freedom Schools is community. Freedom Schools are concerned about the entire child; their ecological system.

For Black Mississippians, the schools were the first time they had been encouraged to think and

act politically, and to explore their creative impulses. Freedom School students read books and poetry by Black authors and listened to stories of Black resistance in past times. At the Holly Springs Freedom School, Pamela Allen taught her students about the Haitian Revolution. “When I told them that Haiti did succeed in keeping out the European powers and was finally recognized as an independent republic, they just looked at me and smiled,” she recalled. “The room stirred with gladness and a pride.”<sup>30</sup>

We discussed briefly how Johnathon is a young boy who despite all odds, succeeds in life due to his internal fortitude and ecological system, or community. During 1964, in a state of much violence, many white Mississippi residents were enraged with growth of African American critical thinkers. The thought of African Americans voting violated the sense of power and authority among white Mississippians. If African Americans voted they would invite the risk of possibly getting hurt or killed because white Americans registered African Americans voting as “messing with white folks business.”<sup>31</sup> Numerous African Americans in Mississippi were murdered trying to vote and transform the political climate. In spite of the violence and radical acts throughout Mississippi during this time, young African American Mississippi leaders attempted for three years to mobilize the Freedom Schools.<sup>32</sup> Because that was unsuccessful alone, they invited over 1,000 African American and white students around the country to come to Mississippi to help build the Freedom Schools. These students came from colleges around America, including Ivy League schools and more.<sup>33</sup> Many of the students from colleges came with the dominant narrative that they were coming to save African American children. They really instantaneously reminded that this was a serious matter. They were to follow directions from African Americans, live with African Americans and they were told that their life would depend on their listening to African Americans.<sup>34</sup> The dominant narrative was quickly countered as African American school leaders and organizers reminded them that we’ve they’ve invested in once caused some people their lives.<sup>35</sup> Through these efforts of honesty, volunteers and organizers were able to engage emotionally in order to unify for one goal and one purpose.<sup>36</sup> The goal of Freedom Schools was to alter forever the state of Mississippi, the stronghold of the Southern way of life.<sup>37</sup> The goal of Freedom Schools was to alter forever the state of Mississippi, the stronghold of the Southern way of life.<sup>38</sup>

### **History’s Connection to Johnathon**

The concept of Freedom Schools directly relates to *Johnathon* because Johnathon has a collective community. He has a mother, father, brother, dog, his classmates, a teacher, a principal, and later in life his professors and his own family. One situation of his community showing was in chapter 1 on pages 7-8. Johnathon describes his mom crying and asking him:

“Do, ya’ know why we’re making ya’ go to school...cause we want to make ya’ somebody important. I don’t want ya’ to be like us, Johnathon I want ya’ to have a good fewchr, where ya’ can have a good job and be happy. Going to school will build ya’ a good fewchr.”<sup>39</sup>

Miss Harris, Johnathon’s teacher, or “techr” as Johnathon says, teared up as Johnathon asked her,

Techr, can ya’ make me somebody important today so’s I can make mommy proud when I go home? Can ya’ make me a ‘specially good fewchr so’s I can have a good job and make my

This is a very great example of Johnathon's ecological system. His mother, who wants the best for her child but struggles to want the best for herself, understands the value of education. Miss Harris, though not wanting Johnathon in her class at first, becomes vulnerable as she hears the passion and desire from his mother to himself. Like Freedom Schools, this communal life of Johnathon shows the connectivity of all things important to Johnathon, including literature and education. Did Miss Harris make him somebody important? She was an influence in his change and contributed so much to his future. But alone, Miss Harris could never do all that Johnathon needed to succeed. He needed the partnership of his willingness and others. Johnathon become a change agent for his future and his legacy as he became a successful doctor. In Freedom Schools, the students become the change agents in the world politically, as Johnathon did become a doctor. Within the unit, we will be creating a Freedom School environment within our individual classrooms that we can transcend throughout our schools and districts with the use of Johnathon. This is to allow students to connect history to present day in order to become knowledgeable of the approaches to liberation during the Civil Rights Movement, how community impacts a life and a movement, and the ability to overcome any and every obstacle that life presents.

## Teaching Strategies:

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This unit is structured as a modern-day Freedom School, or in this case Freedom class. There was a swift exodus from old models of teaching to student-led teaching during Freedom Schools. Within this unit, the primary focus is student-led learning as they grow their critical thinking skills. As the teacher, my primary focus is to question in order to activate critical thinking, teach the fundamentals of annotations and standards, and to guide the engaging activities. With this structure, students will be able to notice the dominant narratives in order to present counter-narratives.

The beginning of class will be history and philosophy of Freedom Schools, artistry, readings and reviews of Johnathon (analysis) where will dissect the text during this time. With the artistry, I want the students to start noticing the common theme, community and unity. The second half of class will be an extracurricular activity (application). This unit is to cultivate critical thinking by ways of questions, reading and writing.

We will utilize Visual Thinking Questions to evoke a critical response and connections.

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What more can you find?<sup>41</sup>
4. What would be a common, dominant narrative? What would be a counter narrative?
5. How do you believe they view/think about themselves?
6. Who's a part of their family?
7. Who else do you believe is a part of their support system?

Strategy 1: Annotations through inference, characterization, context clues and figurative language. The students will use annotations to determine the meaning of the text. The students will identify inferences and

context clues, character traits and development, figurative language and questioning. The standards that support this strategy are:

Vocabulary 5.4 a) Use context to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases, b) Use context and sentence structure to determine meanings and differentiate among multiple meanings of words, and d) Identify an author's use of figurative language.

Comprehension of Literary Fictional Text 5.5 c) Describe character development, j) Draw conclusions and make inferences with support from the text, and m) Use reading strategies throughout the reading process to monitor comprehension.

Strategy 2: Picture views and visual thinking strategies will be used as a primary source and build important background information about ecological environment, colorblindness, and Freedom Schools. Throughout the weeks, the students will be given various pictures, by various artist, and then answer visual thinking questions daily pertaining to the pictures. It is here that students will directly be taught about an Ecological system, colorblindness and Freedom Schools are.

1. Ecological system is a model that shows how self-perception, family and parental involvement, and school and/or environmental influence (teacher, coach, pastor, etc.) a person.
2. Colorblindness saying that one doesn't see color and sees everyone as equal. It negates the fact that we are all different and our differences should be noticed, accepted, learned and taught, yet not discriminated against. Colorblindness does not embrace difference, rather it dismisses it.
3. Freedom Schools of 1964 are schools that push for critical thinking and student led education, highlights the need for students of color to be able to express themselves, learn how to function and learn in the world politically and socially.
4. Dominant narrative is the colorblind outlook of a story. For example, Mrs. Harris is the savior versus a key person who assist Johnathon. Counter-narrative is the equitable and true outlook of a story. That example would be Mrs. Harris assisting Johnathon versus being his savior.

The standards that support this strategy are: Comprehension of Literary Fictional Text 5.5 c) Describe character development, j) Draw conclusions and make inferences with support from the text, and m) Use reading strategies throughout the reading process to monitor comprehension.

Strategy 3: Journaling will daily write in their personal journals/notebooks. This will allow the students to practice their writing skills and gain a joy for writing. Daily, the students will be given an open ended question/prompt to discuss pertaining to *Johnathon* and Freedom Schools. There's no right or wrong, as long as the student is actively making connections to from the novel to Freedom Schools. These journals will be used to help students make personal connections with the text and history, ultimately showing the students how Johnathon is in them all. The standards that support this strategy are:

Narrative Writing 5.7 The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive. d) Introduce and develop a topic, incorporating evidence and supporting details, e) Organize information to convey a central idea, g) Write a clear topic sentence focusing on the main idea. and i) Write multi paragraph compositions.

Editing 5.8 The student will self- and peer-edit writing for capitalization, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraphing, and Standard English. h) Edit for fragments and run-on sentences and j) Use correct spelling of commonly used words.



Strategy 4: Final Project: The 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Quilt will be used to show the importance of community within the class. The students will create their own patch. Each student will have a patch on the quilt (paper – best if laminated, or whatever material you creatively choose.) Each patch will include:

1. their name,
2. their personal ecological system: (explanation of who they are, family tree, and school or environmental influences,
3. how their unique abilities encourages someone else’s difference.

The standards that support this strategy are:

Narrative Writing 5.7 The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive. d)Introduce and develop a topic, incorporating evidence and supporting details, e) Organize information to convey a central idea, g) Write a clear topic sentence focusing on the main idea. and i) Write multi paragraph compositions.

Editing 5.8 The student will self- and peer-edit writing for capitalization, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraphing, and Standard English. h) Edit for fragments and run-on sentences and j) Use correct spelling of commonly used words.

We want to utilize the strategies above to all for all verbs in Bloom’s Taxonomy to be reached. Bloom’s Taxonomy is the classification system used to define and distinguish different levels of human cognition—i.e., thinking, learning, and understanding.<sup>42</sup> We want our students to remember and understand, but we also want them to be challenged to apply, analyze, evaluate and create. These are verbs that I will see throughout the activities; remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create.

Activities (each with 90 minute class period and daily and homework reading pacing depending on your class):

*Week 1:*

Before Reading (20 minutes): Students will be welcomed with a musical selection and daily visuals of a photograph from *Faces of Freedom Summer* by Herbert Randall, which are found on google search or purchasing the book.

The introductory songs will be:

1. To Be Young, Gifted and Black by Nina Simone
2. A Change is Gonna Come by Sam Cooke
3. What’s Going On by Marvin Gaye
4. Say it Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud by James Brown
5. Before I Let Go by Maze Frankie Beverly

Students will be asked the visual thinking questions. Students will be introduced to the author and a historical background of the music and photograph. Directly after the questions, students will watch the documentary on Freedom Schools from pbs.org.<sup>43</sup>

During Reading - Daily In-Class Reading (15 minutes): *Johnathon* by Jo Ann Burroughs Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7, 9

- What is a character trait?

- Think about the main character's traits. Give an example of a situation where these traits would be helpful.
- How did the main character's traits affect the other characters in the story?
- What's the most important character trait that describes the main character?
- What is the worst character trait to have? Why?

After Reading (55 minutes): Extension Activity: After reading, students will be taught about annotations, the importance of annotations and how these annotations will help them. Annotations being a method to understand and make connections to the text. I can explain that they are private investigators of the text. In their interactive notebooks, students will jot down all of the symbols for annotations. After jotting the symbols, we will review the meaning of each. Lastly, students will record the key in their individual books and write their names.

KEY	
Yellow Highlighter	Inference with context clue (Inference = Schema + Background Knowledge) Example: "Mrs. Harris doesn't want Johnathon in her class because she ignores him. I know when you ignore people you don't want to talk to them."
Orange Highlighter	Character Traits - list adjectives and why Example: "Johnathon is ____ because ____"
Blue Highlighter	Figurative Language - metaphor, simile, and hyperbole Metaphor: a comparison of two things using words and phrases: "is a", "was a", "are", "were" Example: My hair was a tree. Simile: a comparison of two things using like or as Example: My afro was so puffy it looked like the top of a beautiful tree. Hyperbole: exaggeration that is not to be taken seriously Example: My hair was as big as a hot air balloon.
Green Highlighter	Questions! (Who, What, When, Where, Why & How?) Students should have <i>at least</i> 3 questions per chapter.

This diagram is the students' key for annotations.

After annotation explanation for the first two days, students will go directly into stations from during reading.

Stations:

Writing Station - Journaling: For a writing workshop, the students will journal daily, creating their personal writing and opinions towards the text and topics. At the end of the unit, it will be graded on completion. This project will be about their personal connection to Johnathon, understanding of community (ecological system), Freedom Schools, colorblindness and their overall experience during this unit. Each day, they will have a topic. Week 1 topics are:

- Who is Johnathon and how is he like me?
- Who is a part of Johnathon's community and how have they impacted his life?
- What is a Freedom School? Do you believe Mrs. Harris believes in Freedom Schools? Why or why not?
- What was an example of colorblindness? How was this colorblindness?

Writing Rubric:

Writing Rubric				
	I need to...	I'm beginning to...	I'm on the way to...	I continuously...
Writing	Stay on topic Use spaces between words Use capital letters Print neatly Spell correctly Use punctuation Add more detail	Stay on topic more Use spaces between words Use a few capital letters Add more detail Spell words correctly Use punctuation	Continuing to stay on topic Use more spaces between words Using more capital letters Adding more detail Spelling more words correctly Using punctuation	Stay on topic Use correct spacing Have neat print Use capital letters A lot of detail Spelled correctly Use punctuation

This is the journal writing rubric that I can test the students on or their peers can.

Individual Reading: Students will be reading their next chapter of *Johnathon* independently and making their annotations.

Teacher Station: At my teacher station, I will be reviewing the journal entries and going through editing strategies.

Daily Homework Reading for Week 1: *Johnathon* by Jo Ann Burroughs Chapter 2, 4, 6, 8, 10

For homework, students will read the chapter assigned for the night and annotate using the key above. To differentiate instruction for students with Individualized Education Plan, they may receive a read aloud at home.

Week 2:

Before Reading (20 minutes): Students will be welcomed with a musical selection and daily visuals of a photograph from Titus Kaphar<sup>44</sup> and connect them to the photos from Freedom Schools. The introductory songs can be the same from week 1 or you can change them as desired. Students will be asked the visual thinking questions (see Teaching Strategies). Students will be introduced to the author and a historical background of the music and photograph.

During Reading - Daily In-Class Reading (15 minutes): *Johnathon* by Jo Ann Burroughs Chapters 11, 13, 15, 17, 19

- Questions:
  - What is a character trait?
  - Think about the main character's traits. Give an example of a situation where these traits would be helpful.
  - How did the main character's traits affect the other characters in the story?
  - What's the most important character trait that describes the main character?
  - What is the worst character trait to have? Why?

**After Reading - Stations (55 minutes):**

Writing Station - Journaling: For a writing workshop, the students will journal daily, creating their personal writing and opinions towards the text and topics. At the end of the unit, it will be graded on completion. This project will be about their personal connection to *Johnathon*, understanding of community (ecological system),

Freedom Schools, colorblindness and their overall experience during this unit. Each day, they will have a topic. Week 2 topics are:

- Write a poem about Johnathon’s experience with Christmas and Mrs. Harris.
- If you were Johnathon’s teacher, what would you have done in this situation and why?
- What part of Johnathon’s community is lacking currently? What part of Johnathon’s community is strengthening?
- What’s an example of dominant narrative in this chapter? Why do you believe so?
- Finish the ending of this story. I would read half of chapter 19, stop before the conclusion is given and ask students to write their own ending.<sup>45</sup>

Writing Rubric:

Writing Rubric				
	I need to...	I’m beginning to...	I’m on the way to...	I continuously...
Writing	Stay on topic Use spaces between words Use capital letters Print neatly Spell correctly Use punctuation Add more detail	Stay on topic more Use spaces between words Use a few capital letters Add more detail Spell words correctly Use punctuation	Continuing to stay on topic Use more spaces between words Using more capital letters Adding more detail Spelling more words correctly Using punctuation	Stay on topic Use correct spacing Have neat print Use capital letters A lot of detail Spelled correctly Use punctuation

This is the journal writing rubric that I can test the students on or their peers can.

Individual Reading: Students will be reading their next chapter of *Johnathon* independently and making their annotations.

Teacher Station: At my teacher station, I will be reviewing the journal entries and going through editing strategies.

Daily Homework Reading for Week 1: *Johnathon* by Jo Ann Burroughs Chapter 12, 14, 16, 18, 20

For homework, students will read the chapter assigned for the night and annotate using the key above. To differentiate instruction for students with Individualized Education Plan, they may receive a read aloud at home.

Week 3:

I might utilize week 3 to extend the lessons and catch up on all work that needs to be complete.

After Reading: Also, this week the students will start and complete their final project: The 5<sup>th</sup> Grade “I’m like Johnathon” Quilt. This quilt will be used to show the students personal connections to Johnathon, importance of community within the class. The students will create their own patch. Each student will have a patch on the quilt (paper – best if laminated, or whatever material you creatively choose.) Each patch will include:

1. Title: I’m like Johnathon because \_\_\_\_.
2. By: their name

3. The students will write at least 4 sentences and no more than 6 sentences about how they are like Johnathon.
4. Their personal ecological system: (explanation of who they are, family tree, and school or environmental influences. They will show this through a tree illustration.
5. How their unique abilities encourages someone else's difference.

## **Appendix on Implementing District Standards:**

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Below are the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) Objectives and Common Core Standards:

English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools - January 2017

Vocabulary 5.4 The student will expand vocabulary when reading.

- a) Use context to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases
- b) Use context and sentence structure to determine meanings and differentiate among multiple meanings of words
- d) Identify an author's use of figurative language.

Comprehension of Literary Fictional Text 5.5 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts, literary nonfiction, and poetry.

- c) Describe character development
- d) Identify theme(s)
- j) Draw conclusions and make inferences with support from the text
- k) Identify cause and effect relationships
- l) Compare/contrast details in literary and informational nonfiction texts
- m) Use reading strategies throughout the reading process to monitor comprehension.

Narrative Writing 5.7 The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive.

- d) Introduce and develop a topic, incorporating evidence and supporting details
- e) Organize information to convey a central idea,

Editing 5.8 The student will self- and peer-edit writing for capitalization, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraphing, and Standard English.

- h) Edit for fragments and run-on sentences

j) Use correct spelling of commonly used words.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Vocabulary, Comprehension and Writing:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

## Resources:

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The article is an autoethnography of an African American male teacher that explains the connection of an ecological system and the story of the life of Johnathon.

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*Johnathon* is an emancipatory novel about a young, African American boy with determination to survive, have joy and succeed at all cost. He is met with some of the most heart wrenching odds, from neglect, death in his family and abuse from his later imprisoned father and desperate mother. Despite his home life, Johnathon shows up physically, mentally, and emotionally every day to Mrs. Harris' 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

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### **Endnotes:**

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This section is about colorblindness and the effect of silence on white supremacy.

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Johnathon's vulnerable encounter with Miss Harris and how he expressed his desire to succeed.

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