

## Revolutions and Resistance:

Creating Space for Adolescent Agency and Advocacy through a Critical Reading of Sonia Manzano's *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*

**A**dolescents growing up in the United States at this critical time are witnessing, and perhaps participating in, protests across the nation. It is only natural then that questions may arise around issues of resistance and advocacy. We call on educators to address these issues in creative and thoughtful ways (Emdin, 2016). One way to help youth process their questions is to join the journey of Evelyn, the protagonist in Sonia Manzano's (2012) *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*, who shares with readers her growing political consciousness around inequities and injustice.

For some, like Evelyn and other characters in the text, political activism is a way to merge an awareness of patterns of oppression with a personal vision of a more just world; young people can see themselves as change agents engaging in a "critical hope" for the humanity of all peoples (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* tells the story of 14-year-old Evelyn growing up in Spanish Harlem in 1969 during the rise of the Young Lords Party, a Puerto Rican activist group that advocated for the independence of Puerto Rico and equitable treatment, resources, and opportunities for the community. Manzano gives us this history through the eyes of Evelyn, who is not only finding her place within her own skin and family—particularly in shaping her relationships with her mother and Abuela—but also finding her place in the world of resistance and revolution.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how teachers can use texts, such as *The Revolution of Ev-*

*elyn Serrano*, to help students develop understandings of oppressive practices within the United States and globally. We focus on the historical legacy of activism, especially the role of youth as change agents in their local communities, national efforts, and global revolutions. We, the authors of this article, have over 30 years of combined experience teaching culturally responsive and transformative fiction and nonfiction at both middle and high school levels. Jody has taught in urban high schools as an English and reading intervention teacher and literacy coach for 18 years, while Carla has taught middle school and served as a K–12 literacy consultant nationally and abroad in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. Carla has used *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* in middle school book clubs and in one high school for a social movements unit. We share here our vision for teaching this novel within our current political climate, using both our expertise in critical pedagogy and our experiences with culturally responsive curriculum.

### Youth Activism and Critical Pedagogy

Youth have been key actors in social movements historically and worldwide, from the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s to more recent waves of advocacy in the realms of feminism, environmentalism, and the rights of LGBTQIA people and immigrants (Costanza-Chock, 2012). For example, youth have been some of our most critical leaders within the Standing Rock Resistance, in which young Native Americans ran 500 miles across the country to

fight against the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Unfortunately, current policies and ideologies both prevent youth from “full democratic participation” and stereotype them in the media as “passive consumers of civic life” (Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005, p. 25). Despite claims that youth are not involved in civic issues, however, voting and engagement in community service have increased in the last decade (Ames, 2013; Putman, 2001; Wolk, 2009). In fact, much of the youth activism that occurs often goes “unacknowledged”; simultaneously, many of our schools are not teaching students “how to exercise agency” (Forest, Kimmel & Garrison, 2013, p. 138).

To address these concerns, we interrogate what activism is within this novel and our communities, while also working to build teacher capacity for the integration of social justice and critical literacy in the classroom. After engaging in their own critical self-reflection on ideologies around justice and systems of oppression, teachers can support students in playing a critical role in social and community problem solving. We define social justice as a pursuit of equal opportunities, resources, and access to human rights and social services that manifest themselves in the everyday lives of diverse populations (Ingram & Walters, 2007). Social justice is about dismantling the hierarchies, calling out the systems that enable inequities, and engaging in critical questioning of issues of power. This can be done by building a shared vision and toolkit for changing “coercive and debilitating public policy” (Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005, p. 25).

Additionally, the suggestions in this article come from a critical pedagogical approach in which students see themselves as change agents and educators create spaces to foster this awareness (Gainer, 2010; Janks, 2014; Morrell, 2002). Critical pedagogy asks youth to explore the relationships between power and domination—to unpack the “socially constructed meaning embedded in texts as well as the political and economic contexts in which texts are embedded” (Morrell, p. 73). This critical work of making meaning begins first with the process of reflection, wherein students are given time and safe spaces to consider their own backgrounds and experiences and how those have impacted their ideologies and sense of agency. We provide suggestions for how to equip students to pose critical questions and be anti-racist, participatory, and experiential, all while maintaining commitments to

academic rigor and cultural and linguistic responsiveness (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007).

Most important, we look at efforts around social justice and critical pedagogy as ways to create *educational sanctuaries*—social spaces where historically marginalized students are provided with instruction and curriculum that integrate their home lives and where students have intellectual and artistic freedom to engage with social equity issues (Espinoza, 2009). The context in which we teach includes students from Spanish Harlem, some of whom have recently arrived from Puerto Rico. We selected this novel because we believed our students could make powerful connections with the characters and their historical experiences. When we expose students to stories that mirror their communities and histories, we are telling them that their stories matter and are a critical part of what is learned (Miller, 2014). In doing so, we are folding into our curriculum their experiences and ideologies, while also asking them to do critical work where they can deconstruct notions of power and learn ways to resist inequity.

Reading texts such as *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* is critical for all students, including white students and those who grow up in different contexts compared to those in this novel, as these narratives open up the Western canon and allow for a plurality of voices and perspectives (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Manzano’s text provides a way to not only help students understand and appreciate the legacy of the Young Lords, but also to understand how power is unequally distributed within our communities. As Ehst and Hermann-Wilmarth (2014) explain, “Teachers can provide students with opportunities to learn multiple stories, to investigate their own histories and cultural assumptions, and to learn how to ask and answer questions that push ideas into action” (p. 30).

## **Beginning with What We Know—and Who We Are**

Before introducing any text, it is critical that we first ask students to reflect on their own experiences and backgrounds, as who we are impacts what we read, how we read, and how we engage with our communities (Miller & Kirkland, 2010). Some of the major themes that arise in *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* center around identity, family, community,

transformation, revolution, advocacy, resistance, and political awareness. We can meet students where they are by asking them what they make of these concepts. Exploration of guiding essential themes and questions (see Fig. 1) allows students to consider critical ideas around social justice and life experi-

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ences prior to reading the novel. These themes and questions should also be revisited, as they are present throughout the text. With our own students, we introduced these ideas initially through individual and collaborative writing and then further discussed them in small- and large-group discussions.

We also recommend beginning this work by participating with students—sharing our own journeys with these topics and co-creating norms for conversations, especially when discussions address the dehumaniza-

tion of certain groups of people. Development of safe spaces is not an easy process, nor one that should be taken lightly. Creating a community that is culturally responsive means building curriculum and instruction around students’ lives and allowing for authentic collaborative conversations (Polleck & Shabdin, 2013).

We can build this kind of culturally responsive space on the first day of the unit (if this work has not already been done previously in class) by having students discuss in small groups their responses to the following questions: *Who am I? How do I identify myself or introduce myself to others? What groups do I belong to?* Next, we can ask students to draw a circle, record their name within it, and sketch lines from the circle outwards, labeling each line with some of the identifying markers they discussed. (See Carla’s example in Appendix A.) We can then ask students to select which three identity markers are most important currently, providing explanations for each. This is a crucial conversation and experience to launch discussions of the novel, as our lives are personally connected to acts of social justice. This is also a place to scaffold students’ future analysis of the main character, Evelyn, tracking how she identifies herself, the groups she belongs to, and the experiences that shape her. These “Circles of Identities” can be revisited throughout the text in transformative moments; students can reexamine scenes, for example, in which Evelyn’s perception of herself shifts as a result of her participation in the activism enacted by the Young Lords.

Next, we can ask: *How do I define my community? What are some issues of access or inequity in my community? What would need to change for my community to be a more just community?* Students can bring photographs from their homes and neighborhoods to share with others or to use as inspiration for writing short imagery narratives or poems. Once this work has been introduced around identity and commu-

Revolution	Advocacy and Resistance	Transformation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is a revolution?</li> <li>2. How do community change agents engage in revolutionary practices?</li> <li>3. Why do revolutions occur, how are they sustained, and what is their impact on communities and individuals?</li> <li>4. What is an internal revolution versus an external revolution?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What would be something that you might change about your community and/or country?</li> <li>2. Why does this matter to you?</li> <li>3. How do you think you could make a change that would make a difference?</li> <li>4. Think about the current political climate. What acts of advocacy and resistance have you seen within just the last year?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is a transformation?</li> <li>2. What does it mean when a person has been transformed?</li> <li>3. Can you remember a time when you felt like you had been transformed or a time when you felt like you “evolved”?</li> <li>4. What contributed to your own transformation?</li> </ol>

Figure 1. Themes and essential questions

nity, we can then discuss notions of “politics.” These politics are not bipartisan, but more broadly encompass students’ ideologies, which are shaped by their positionalities. For example, because many of our students are immigrants or children of immigrants, their political ideologies are shaped by these positionalities. In these kinds of discussions, teachers can ask the following: *How do our identity and community shape our “politics” or our ideologies and belief systems?* We recommend asking students to bring in their community perspectives, as integration of our students’ families and neighborhoods shows them that we not only care about their lives, but that those stories are critical for our own learning, development, and connection. We can either invite community members to visit the classroom to discuss their responses to these questions or have students interview family and other community members to learn ways in which we construct and view our identities and communities and how those perceptions impact how we participate within political systems and civic engagements.

The themes noted in Figure 1 can also be discussed and processed through different kinds of writing and analysis of multigenre or multimodal texts. For example, Carla asks her students to engage in an analysis of Aloe Blacc’s “Wake Me Up” music video ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_o6axAseak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_o6axAseak)) in order to consider questions around the theme of art and resistance: *What is the role that artists play in resistance movements? How have artists (e.g., singers, songwriters, actors, dancers, painters, spoken word artists, poets) engaged in issues of social justice? Should artists participate in social justice movements? How do music, poetry, and other forms of art help us process moments of tension and injustice?* The video shows the journey of a family that is separated, with the mother and child attempting to cross the border to be with the father. Blacc joins the family at the end in a scene where people are protesting. Students can analyze the techniques that Blacc uses to develop the themes of resistance, as well as the ways the video connects to their lived realities and the role that music has in processing these. To continue the critical work of analyzing texts that demonstrate agency and advocacy, students can bring in their own examples of social justice through art.

## Building Background Knowledge through Student Choice

*The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* is set in 1969, and therefore it is crucial to discuss key ideas and historical events that are referenced throughout the novel. Learning stations are a differentiated way to offer students choice based on their interests and can be an impactful method for building students’ background knowledge through multiple modalities (Ocak, 2010). One suggestion is to have students sign up for learning stations before the unit begins in order to provide time for preparation and co-creation. It is also critical that each learning station has clear directions with specific outcomes to allow for engagement, high expectations, support, and accountability. Figure 2 (as well as our recommended readings listed at the end of the article) offers an overview of the different kinds of learning stations that could be used before reading the text. Students can either spend a concentrated amount of time in one station and present their findings to the class, or they can rotate through the stations to get a more robust overview of the time period.

In addition to learning stations, we recommend studying various revolutions, past and present, throughout the reading of the text. Teachers can launch the research with a whole-class topic connected to the text (e.g., Grito de Lares, 1868), and students can then engage in individual or group research on their own, culminating in an inquiry-based research project. For historical options, students could research The Haitian Revolution, the Women’s Rights Movement, the Algerian Revolution, the Black Panther Party, the Civil Rights Movement and March on Wash-

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**Station #1—The Sixties:**

Students read different websites or short excerpts about major people and events from the sixties, which can include but are not limited to: Martin Luther King Jr., the Vietnam War, Woodstock, “hippies,” American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, and Stonewall.

**Station #2—Gallery Walk:**

To tap into students’ artistic and kinesthetic modalities, students go on a gallery walk where they look at photographs from the sixties that are posted on the walls. These can include pictures from various protests to images of Spanish Harlem.

**Station #3—The Young Lords:**

Students read a variety of historical materials on The Young Lords, including the following:

- Timelines available online from the Latino Education Network Service and the National Young Lords websites
- “Young Lords Party 13 Point Program and Platform” (Latino Education Network Service, n.d.)
- Pedro Pietri’s (1973) reading of “Puerto Rican Obituary”
- *The Young Lords: The Reader*, offered for free on the Project Muse website (Enck-Wanzer, Morales, & Oliver-Velez, 2010)
- Manzano’s list of historical articles on the Young Lords from 1969–1970 in the back of her book

**Station #4—Documentaries:**

Film is a powerful way for students to experience the past. Students view The National Young Lords Network documentary and Iris Morales’s film, “Pa’Lante Siempre Pa’lante!”

**Station #5—Puerto Rican History and Culture:**

Students review materials about Puerto Rican history and culture, including those from The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, which offers a wealth of digital information from which students can learn more about Puerto Rican culture and the historical context of the Young Lords uprising. Personal narratives can also serve as a powerful genre to help students relive the historical migration of Puerto Ricans. Juan Flores (2005) has collected many of these stories in his text, *Puerto Rican Arrival in New York: Narratives of the Migration, 1920–1950*.

**Figure 2.** Learning stations: Exploring historical context (References to resources can be found in Recommended Resources at the end of this article.)

ington, and Stonewall. Students could also research more recent resistance movements such as Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, Standing Rock, and the Women’s March on Washington.

Another option is for students to conduct research that has been organized by youth movements or key figures, such as Claudette Colvin, who was 15 years old when she was arrested for not giving her seat up on the bus, nine months before Rosa Parks. Students could also choose to learn more about Diane Nash and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, United We Dream and undocumented youth activists (e.g., Jorge Gutierrez and Nancy Meza), Riot-grrls and feminist zines, Youth Justice Coalition, Fierce LGBTQ, the Global Action Project, and the Free Child Project. (For more possibilities, please see Recommended Resources at the end of this article.) These models provide powerful examples of how youth participate in civic democracy and resistance.

## Delving into the Text with Critical Theories

Manzano offers several entry points for critical literacy and engagement with social justice. Critical literacy is a “pedagogical process of teaching and learning, by which students and teachers interrogate the world, unmask ideological and hegemonic discourses, and frame their actions in the interest of the larger struggle for social justice” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2008, p. 279). Our primary critical lenses for interpreting this text are critical race theories (including critical race feminism and Latinx critical race theory—Lat-Crit) and transformational resistance (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001), which will be explained in the next section. Critical theories ask students to explore oppression through an intersectional lens. For example, LatCrit theory asks readers to extend critical race theory discussions to understand how class, gender, and sexuality intersect with race; it

also includes other factors within Latinx experiences, including language and immigration. This approach asks students to continually challenge dominant ideologies as they manifest themselves within the text and the world; in doing so, LatCrit theorists ask that we constantly keep a mind, eye, and movement toward social justice issues. This means examining both the word and the world—and then making commitments to resisting oppression (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

What does this look like when reading *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* with youth? The work of using critical literacy to explore issues around oppression can begin with those revealed in the first chapter of the text. For instance, teachers can ask the questions: *How do gendered expectations impact the characters? How do these experiences compare to the present day?* As an example, Evelyn's stepfather says to her, "I want you to take out the garbage. If you can't help in the bodega, you can help more in the house! In Puerto Rico, a young girl knows her place. Knows that she should help her mother" (p. 6). Clearly this is a scenario where gender impacts Evelyn's own sense of power. Helping her mother is an expectation that reveals the relegation of women to the home.

Abuela is another powerful character through which to discuss identity politics and issues around the intersectionality of gender with race and class. For example, Abuela is politically active in the Puerto Rican resistance. She fights for equity based on class and race—and supports the Young Lords from the very beginning of their entrance into the novel. She clearly has great pride in being Puerto Rican and has a critical viewpoint of the inequities in power, yet the reader must question her perspective on standards of beauty, as this can be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, Abuela reprimands Mami for putting too much sugar in her oatmeal, which will make her fat. She also dyes her hair bright red and wears excessive make-up, according to Evelyn's perspective. That being said, perspectives of her choices are different according to the viewer. Migdalia, Evelyn's friend, sees Abuela's make-up as a small act of resistance, explaining, "No wonder [Abuela's] brave enough to sweep up garbage—and wear eye shadow the color of the sky" (p. 93). For Migdalia, Abuela's choice in make-up is a political one; she has created her own beauty standards and refuses to adhere to what others are doing.

A critical reading can also be applied to Evelyn's understanding and embracing of her own culture. Teachers can engage students in an inquiry of linguistic and cultural practices connected to identity markers and change, similar to the opening discussion of the "Circles of Identities." Teachers might ask, *How does Evelyn position herself within the Puerto Rican community? How does Evelyn's sense of self change throughout the text?* In the opening chapter, Evelyn denies her culture, cutting her name from Rosa Maria Evelyn del Carmen Serrano to Evelyn, as "it was the least Puerto Rican-sounding name I could have" (p. 8). Perhaps she does this because she wants to be unique and establish her own sense of self or because she has not yet fully integrated her sense of self within Puerto Rican histories and communities.

In addition to the power of naming and its impact on identity, Manzano addresses the historical significance of beauty standards and hair as these connect to issues of identity and culture. In one scene, Dolores, an African American coworker, and Evelyn meet. Evelyn says, "I looked at her lopsided hair, while she stared at my brushed-out bangs. I tried to push my bangs to the side, but they were still frizzy" (p. 20). Evelyn's reference to the "taming" of her hair and her observations of others' hair run throughout the text. The politics of Latinx and African American hair have been discussed for decades and warrant a lengthy conversation with students. To understand the intersection of gender and race, teachers can supplement this conversation with accessible essays, including "Black Hair, Still Tangled in Politics" (Saint Louis, 2009) or "Wearing My Afro Is Always a Political Act" (Brown, 2015). These texts frame the sociocultural conversation in contemporary times and can ground the historical regime of power and what constitutes "beauty."

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Evelyn realizes eventually the importance of wearing her hair naturally. When encountering the female Young Lords later in the novel, she observes, “They acted like they didn’t care how they looked, which only made them look more beautiful. All had natural hair, long or short or wavy or kinky, and I felt stupid with my little roll of bangs. I fussed around

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with them to make them look more natural” (p. 113). While certainly in this situation, she is seeking to fit in with the resistance, later she becomes more critical about why Latina and African American women struggle with these notions of beauty: “Making us hate the way we looked was a trick people in power played on us” (p. 189). This is a tension that is not new to female protagonists of color as

beauty standards connected to a legacy of colonization are revealed, revisited, and questioned.

A critical reading can also be applied to Manzano’s development of how families are impacted by issues of inequity. Teachers can show students how to keep track of key moments, noting the scenes where characters are affected by systems of inequity and how they respond. For example, this kind of inquiry can take on a study of Evelyn’s parents, their work in the bodega, and the Mother’s elusive dream of home ownership. Students can also study Señor Santiago’s character, whose “eyes were as sad as *la esperanza de un pobre*—as sad as the hope of a poor person” (p. 23). Santiago’s character represents the reality of poverty within Evelyn’s community, where he sells *piraguas*, barely making ends meet to support himself and his son, Angel. In one scene, he hits Angel, knocking him to the ground. Evelyn is furious, but Abuela provides her with an alternate perspective, explaining “the problems of *la vida*, the problems of life” (p. 64). She problematizes issues of family relationships and family progress within an inequitable system of economic success.

## Where Do We Stand? Using Resistance Theory to Understand Text and the World

In addition to using critical race and Lat/Crit theories with students, teachers can ask them to consider and interrogate the *concept of resistance*, as “resistance theories demonstrate how individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions” (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 315). When reading *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*, we want students to deconstruct the struggles that Evelyn goes through in understanding and later becoming part of the Young Lords movement. It is neither a linear nor smooth process, and if we want our students to be part of social justice movements, we need to discuss with them the tensions that come with growing political awareness.

Solorzano and Bernal (2001) categorize resistance into four areas: reactionary, self-defeating, conformist, and transformational. These include what Manzano (2012) defines as those small and big acts of resistance—those internal and external revolutions. We can teach students the differences among the four through an analysis of characters’ behaviors and roles within resistance movements. For example, *reactionary resistance* occurs when people may not address or be critical of the reasons for reacting as they do, but instead react without social justice motivation. Evelyn demonstrates this approach early in the novel when she speaks about wearing miniskirts. She explains, “Mami thought I was too young to wear miniskirts, and Pops didn’t think it was right for any girl to wear them. Who cared what they thought?” (p. 9). This small act of resistance, this reactionary resistance, represents the beginning of Evelyn’s roots to activism. However, she does not yet consider the reasons for *why* she is wearing miniskirts and the impact of gender expectations during those times; she only reacts by donning clothes that her parents do not want her to wear.

*Self-defeating resistance* occurs when people may have some critique of the power inequities within their communities and society but do not work to transform themselves or others. This kind of resistance can be found in the Puerto Rican expression that Evelyn often refers to: “*tapar el cielo con la mano*”

(“to cover the sky with their hand”) (p. 4). Throughout the novel, Evelyn views her mother as someone who avoids conflict, someone who is “always covering up what she didn’t want to see” (p. 5). Evelyn compares her to *tapetes*, which are frail and delicate, as her mother is often unable to stand up for herself. Her self-defeating resistance, which could be a function of her own oppression as a woman of color, is to ignore the issues as opposed to facing them head on. In another pivotal scene, Abuela plays a song by *Pajarito y su Conjunto* about a massacre. Mami asks that she turn it off because she does not like to hear the “bad memories” (p. 47). Again, perhaps due to her sense of powerlessness, Mami would rather block out the historical legacy of violence rather than fight back through activism.

*Conformist resistance* occurs when people might be motivated by social justice but do not yet have a deep understanding or critique of systems of oppression (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). This is evident when Evelyn begins to take part in the resistance work with the Young Lords. Evelyn listens to the speeches at the church and begins to change her appearance. She wears her hair more naturally and wears jeans, emulating many of the members of the Young Lords. While she has not yet begun to completely interrogate issues of inequity through an intersectional and historical lens, she is beginning to follow and be intrigued by the Young Lords’ efforts, a powerful step to the more integrated and conscious transformational resistance.

Resistance that is *transformational* occurs when a person is both critically thinking about oppression—where it comes from and how it impacts particular groups—and working toward social justice. These efforts allow for the greatest potential for social change, as we see frequently with the Young Lords. They speak out to the community and hand out flyers about the resistance; they are clear about where power comes from and how it creates inequities within their communities in Spanish Harlem. They use this knowledge for social justice efforts, such as sweeping the streets, setting fires to the garbage to bring attention to the negligence by the city, establishing history classes, and addressing healthcare issues within the community.

Abuela acts as the greatest symbol of transformational resistance in the novel. She is the one who

sees and speaks to inequities through intersectional and decolonizing lenses. Early in the novel, she notes: “They can go to the moon but they cannot clean up *El Barrio*” (p. 52). She is one of the first from the community to join the Young Lords, explaining that she just wants to do “*mi parte*” (p. 75). Her social justice history, however, did not begin until she witnessed oppression and the resistance against those oppressions, being present during a shooting of peaceful Nationalists who were protesting for Puerto Rico’s freedom. This event was pivotal and inspired her to become part of the movement. Abuela’s transformational acts of resistance, however, do not come without conflict and contradiction. Through

Mami’s eyes, Abuela has abandoned her and her family to help the resistance. When she finds Abuela sweeping the streets with the Young Lords, Mami shouts at her, “You always have to help everybody in the world. Why don’t you clean your own house first? Sweep our apartment? Or the *bodega*? No, you want to sweep the streets. But you are not helping anybody” (p. 69). Abuela and Mami’s tension offers a critical talking point for students to discuss the challenges that arise when doing social justice work and how our identities may cause conflict with others and within ourselves.

Evelyn’s entrance into the world of social justice is also filled with conflict and challenges. In fact, when she first sees the Young Lords with their brooms, she feels a strong desire to cry; she runs away from the scene but begins to notice aspects of her neighborhood with a new lens. She smells the frying grease and walks past the rotten food piled on the sidewalk. She notices the children on their fire escapes “dying to be free” (p. 55). Her reaction? A flirtatious remark to the Young Lords: “Hey, you cute hippie guys—you missed a spot. Come sweep over here” (p. 55). It is critical to ask students about this scene, as it is a pivotal moment in her resistance awakening:

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What is so important about this scene? Why is she frustrated? Why does she react the way she does to the Young Lords here?

Like Abuela, Evelyn's rise to resistance comes from being a witness of both inequity and protests. She witnesses the Young Lords, and she listens to stories from her abuela. The combination of both

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perspectives inspires Evelyn to eventually participate in transformational resistance. She begins to critically view her world, the historical precedent of injustice, and the people around her. For example, she criticizes her mother for her apathy and denial of oppression. As Evelyn begins to see the poverty of El Barrio, she mocks her mother's "pathetic attempts to make everything pretty" (p. 100).

She then starts to consider what makes people want to resist, comparing the movement to the beginning of a storm. Evelyn's involvement in that storm begins when the Young Lords use the church as a place for supporting members of the community with various social programs, including free lunches for children, testing for tuberculosis, clothing drives, day care, and educational classes on Puerto Rico. During this time, Evelyn gets involved in the work while also considering multiple perspectives of Abuela, her mother, and the Young Lords. This kind of interrogation is powerful for students in that analyzing the characters—their behaviors and motivations—helps to build their own empathy, which is needed to understand and integrate multiple viewpoints.

Eventually Evelyn joins the Young Lords, demonstrating her transformational resistance. She occupies the church with the group and volunteers her time to help her community. Much of what she learns about resistance is through the actions of the Young Lords and her Abuela's stories, but she also learns through attending a poetry reading by activist Pedro Pietri.

However, despite Evelyn's growth, her entry into the resistance is not without tension:

"The whole Barrio isn't feeling well. Angel isn't feeling well. His father isn't feeling well. I'm not feeling well." But then I had to stop because that wasn't true. I *was* feeling well. Actually, I was feeling good. As a matter of fact, I was feeling great. I hadn't felt this good in a long time . . . I *was feeling so good—but why was I aching too?* (p. 123)

In the center of resistance lies an inherent tension. This tension is present with her mother as well, as Mami harbors feelings of resentment when she concludes that Abuela abandoned her for the fight. While Mami also joins the movement, she does not leave her daughter. For example, when Evelyn is injured during a protest, Abuela stays behind with the protesters, while Mami stays with her daughter, demonstrating that one can be both supportive of family and revolution. It is an important lesson for Evelyn, and she begins to critically reflect on her own past treatment of her mother: "Except for throwing out the garbage, I barely helped Mami around the house. If I didn't want a slave mother, I had to stop treating her like one" (p. 200). Evelyn's transformation has now become seamless, both internal and external. Internally, she recognizes that political acts are personal and can happen within our own homes, and she accepts that they are equally important to the larger revolutions that happen on our streets. Manzano teaches us that both matter.

Figure 3 provides one option for encouraging and documenting students' efforts to think about the different acts of resistance—both small and large—that occur within Evelyn and her community, as well as the author's word choice and character development. Additionally, Appendix A offers a visual for how students can conceptualize Evelyn's tensions and pressures and how she counteracts them with moments of resistance.

### **Academic Writing for Reflection and Social Justice**

The summative writing assessments we have used with our students in the implementation of this unit attempt to reflect the major themes, author's craft, and student choice and voice that we have integrated throughout the novel. Teachers can provide students with several options for written responses that inte-

Chapter Title with Summary	Acts of Resistance (Reactionary, self-defeating, conformist, or transformational)	Literary Techniques and Language	Character Development and Transformation
<i>Chapter 1—My Mother the Slave: We learn about the setting, 1969 in Spanish Harlem, and Evelyn and her family, specifically the tensions.</i>	<i>“That’s why I cut off half my name and chose Evelyn—it was the least Puerto Rican-sounding name I could have” (p. 8). This is reactionary resistance.</i>	<i>“taper el cielo con la mano” (p. 4)—use of a proverb in Spanish to reveal how the mother lives in denial (self-defeating resistance)</i>	<i>Evelyn recognizes and disparages the powerlessness of her mother.</i>

Figure 3. Graphic organizer on acts of resistance

grate their knowledge of the text, their understanding of Manzano’s literary techniques and language, and their stance on social justice. Students can consider the elements of a genre (e.g., the use of dialogue, setting, action, symbolism, foreshadowing in narrative writing) as well as the language. Manzano’s text is an example of translinguaging in literature, or the way bilingual speakers communicate. Rosario (2015) notes that in Latinx literature, “Spanish typically appears in the selected texts as a means of affirming or negotiating cultural identity” (p. ii).

In teaching and analyzing these authorial movements, students can emulate Manzano’s style in their own narratives, considering both genre and language in their writing. One option is for students to create narratives inspired by the text. Students can choose to either engage in writing memoirs (relate a moment or two around the topic of revolution or transformation from their own lives), realistic fiction (create a character who goes through an internal and external revolution), historical fiction (create a character set in a specific time and place who undergoes changes and challenges with injustice), or poetry (write a poem inspired by Pedro Pietri’s “Puerto Rican Obituary”). This writing can be shared with different audiences inside and outside of the school through author talks, readings, poetry slams, and online communities.

Another option is for students to write literary essays in response to *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*. Students can return to the theme of revolution and analyze the efforts of the Young Lords in the novel. *How did the Young Lords sustain their movement and what was their impact on the community?* Students can also consider the theme of transformation and select one character from the text who they thought experienced the most profound transformation, ad-

ressing the question: *Using rich and relevant evidence from the text, which character do you think transformed or evolved most significantly in The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano?*

A third option is for students to collaboratively write argumentative pieces in the form of social justice proposals. Social action projects require students “to take their learning into the community to benefit the greater good through the use of their learned skills”; they also offer students an opportunity to “express their feelings and desire for change to the wider community” (Simmons, 2012, p. 25). Social action projects also enhance literacy as they promote student voice and agency (Darts, 2006; Epstein, 2010; Goss, 2009; Plemmons, 2006). We ask our students to write these proposals collaboratively, as revolutions are done within a collective, and members must negotiate their group’s identity and resistance actions. This kind of work is important for students as they begin to create the necessary engagements for mobilization. We also highly recommend inviting local community activists into the classroom to model these efforts. Figure 4 offers a sample template for social justice proposals that asks students to consider their specific goals, methods, and tools for presentation.

Finally, for students to see themselves as change agents, they must reflect on themselves, their communities, and their own transformations. Therefore, we ask students to question how their sense of community and agency has developed through readings, discussions, and writing. It is through this reflection that

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**Unfortunately, many of us are living in a nation that feels—and is—very divided.**

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#### Social Justice/Resistance Proposal

1. Name your **movement** (e.g., The Young Lords).
2. Create a **slogan** for your issue (e.g., “No More Exploitation of the Poor!” “Puerto Rico is in my heart: Tengo a Puerto Rico en mi corazón.”).
3. Create a **symbol** for your issue (e.g., fist in the air, hands holding, peace sign, school building. See the social protest art in *When We Fight We Win* by Greg Jobin-Leeds.).
4. Create a **10-point platform** (e.g., think Young Lords 13-point platform).
  - Describe specific **action steps** you will take. The Young Lords backed up their statement, “Activity is necessary to get city action to meet community needs” (Manzano, 2012, p. 76), with specific efforts (e.g., sweeping streets, free breakfast for children, medical care, educational classes, day care programs, occupying spaces, clothing drives).
  - Describe how you will use the **media** to get the word out (e.g., flyers, Twitter, Facebook).
  - **Impact statement:** What impact do you hope your revolution/movement will have on the community?
5. Design a **presentation** that shares #1–#4 with the classroom community (e.g., Prezi, Canva, podcast, TedTalk, pamphlet/flyer, Snapchat story, documentary clip).

Figure 4. Social justice/resistance proposal

students can begin to develop more integrated selves as critical readers of the word and the world and how that work can be channeled into advocacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Like others, we urge teachers to focus on social struggles within our curricula to help our students see themselves as change agents, if they have not already (Forest, Kimmel, & Garrison, 2013; Paris, 2012). Unfortunately, many of us are living in a nation that feels—and is—very divided. These critical times call for us to share such narratives as *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* so that we can remember and honor the legacy of resistance and acknowledge our own transformations and the tensions that accompany such political awareness and action. In doing so, we can insert our voices, experiences, and actions in service of a more just and equitable existence for all of our communities.

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## Appendix A: Circle of Identities and Pressures and Resistance

