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Using the Mirror-Window Framework to Teach Children's Literature in Elementary Civics

Donald R. McClure^a and Courtney G. Brunn^a

^a St. John's University

Abstract

This article shares curricular ideas for using the mirror-window framework to teach children's literature in elementary civics. It uses the 2020 Notable Social Studies Trade Book, *Follow Chester! A College Football Team Fights Racism and Makes History* (Respress-Churchwell, 2019), to show that by teaching the story of Chester Pierce, a Black college football player from Harvard in the 1940s, students will increase their knowledge of civic virtues and develop a greater respect for diversity and inclusion. At the end of the article, recommendations for students to take informed action are provided.

Keywords: children's literature; elementary civics; mirror-window framework; racism; sports

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (Sims Bishop, 1990, p. ix)

The mirror-window framework described above can be a useful resource for elementary educators as they teach children's literature in the classroom. The framework helps teachers share new insights and perspectives with students, build children's curiosity, and encourage a love of learning. For elementary social studies education specifically, the mirror-window framework can support civic education and promote social studies learning that is purposeful and powerful (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017).

This article shares curricular ideas for using the mirror-window framework to teach children's literature in elementary social studies. It uses the 2020 Notable Social Studies Trade Book, *Follow Chester! A College Football Team Fights Racism and Makes History* (Respress-Churchwell, 2019), to show that by teaching the story of Chester Pierce, a Black college football player from Harvard in the 1940s, students will increase their knowledge of civic virtues and develop a greater respect for diversity and inclusion. This article's teaching ideas support

second-grade Social Studies Standard 2.C.CV.1 (“Evaluate how civic virtues guide governments, societies and communities”) from the Kentucky Department of Education (2019), as well as Standard D2.Civ.2.K-2 (“Explain how all people, not just official leaders, play important roles in a community”) from the *College, Career & Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The teaching ideas also address second grade English Language Arts Standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.7 (“Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot”) from the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2021). At the end of the article, a completed Inquiry Design Model (IDM) is provided (see Appendix B).

Relevance for Teachers/Practitioners

Using the mirror-window framework to teach *Follow Chester!* has relevance for elementary social studies teachers and practitioners in three ways. First, by using the framework and book together, teachers can help students increase their awareness of democracy and citizenship, engage learners in an exploration of past events, and help students consider how these events relate to their present-day lives. “Young learners do not become responsible, participating citizens automatically. They need to engage in frequent opportunities to make daily decisions about democratic concepts and principles that are respectful of the dignity and rights of individuals and the common good” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017, p. 187). Using the book *Follow Chester!* can be a meaningful way for teachers to guide students through conversations about civic virtues, as well as assist students in developing skills that align with the purpose of elementary social studies education: “to enable students to understand, participate in, and make informed decisions about their world” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017, p. 186)

Second, using the mirror-window framework to teach *Follow Chester!* has relevance for elementary social studies teachers because a main theme of the book-- sports-- is relevant to many students’ own lives. In this way, the book can serve as a “hook” to interest young children as they explore topics related to diversity and civic virtues. As McClure and Robinson (2019) explained, “sports are a popular activity in which many students participate...Teaching with sports...can pique students’ interests and engage young learners in the study of different topics, including many of those found in the social studies” (p. 19). By using sports as a springboard to teach elementary social studies, educators may access children’s funds of knowledge and make history learning more relevant to their lives.

Third, using *Follow Chester!* and the mirror-window framework can help elementary social studies teachers build stronger and more inclusive classroom communities. The framework and book encourage students to examine their existing views in order to gain new insights and perspectives. They also promote social justice concepts, such as those that resonate with the Teaching Tolerance (2016) Social Justice Standards. For example, by using the mirror-window framework, students can explore topics related to the Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action

Anchor Standards and Domains which emphasize learning areas such as developing positive social identities, engaging in respectful interactions, recognizing unfairness and injustice, and expressing empathy. Thus, learning and practicing these important life skills through a reading of *Follow Chester!* can help foster supportive and nurturing classroom and school communities.

Context for Teaching and Learning

Using Children’s Literature in Elementary Social Studies

The use of children’s literature in elementary social studies is not a new teaching method; teachers have drawn on children’s books to teach social studies for some time. Perhaps one of the reasons children’s literature is so widely used in the elementary grades is because of its ability to help young learners consider new points-of-view. As Torres (2019) pointed out, children’s literature can help challenge students’ assumptions and “[disrupt] the idea that there is only one way to see a situation and only one way to approach a particular issue” (p. 164). Brophy, Alleman, and Halvorsen (2018) suggested that using children’s literature in elementary social studies promotes historical thinking skills by helping students understand historical contexts, explore others’ perspectives, and consider different interpretations of history. Each year, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and the Children’s Book Council (CBC) compile a list of recently published children’s books that address a variety of subjects related to social studies education such as biographies, environmentally focused books, folktales, social interactions, world history and culture, and others (see, for example, NCSS & CBC, 2021). These books address NCSS (2010) curricular themes as well.

Although the benefits and methods of using children’s literature to teach elementary students are well known, this article aims to show how drawing on a specific idea to teach children’s literature-- the mirror-window framework-- can help elementary social studies teachers guide students through a meaningful exploration of the past as they learn more about civic virtues, themselves, and the world around them. Using the book *Follow Chester!*, this article offers teaching ideas suitable for a second-grade social studies classroom that support purposeful and powerful social studies teaching and learning (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017). However, the authors contend that this article’s teaching ideas could be modified for social studies classes in other elementary grades as well.

Book Summary of *Follow Chester!*

Follow Chester! A College Football Team Fights Racism and Makes History was recognized as a 2020 Notable Social Studies Trade Book by the NCSS and CBC. Written by Gloria Respress-Churchwell and illustrated by Laura Freeman, it tells the story of a hard-working and determined Chester Pierce during his childhood and early adult years in the 1930s and 1940s. The book focuses on Pierce and his Harvard varsity football teammates’ historic game against the University of Virginia (UVA) in 1947 in which Pierce became the first Black college football athlete to play a game south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Pierce and his teammates

lost the game to UVA, but the Harvard football team’s decision to support Pierce’s participation in the game, and the team’s close camaraderie with Pierce in the face of segregation, crossed racial boundaries. Although the book is based on historical events in the life of Pierce, it also describes a fictional “play” that Pierce’s white teammates created and used on and off the football field. In the play, the athletes shouted, “Follow Chester!” each time they saw Pierce encounter racism. In doing this, the players showed their support for Pierce in the face of the discrimination he experienced.

The end of the book includes three additional sections: “Author’s Note,” “Facts About the Mason-Dixon Line,” and “Facts About Dr. Chester Pierce and the Historic Game at UVA.” These sections provide additional context on events in the book. For example, the section on facts about Dr. Pierce explains that, later in life, Pierce became a renowned psychiatrist and researcher. It also states that Dr. Pierce coined the term “microaggression.” Dr. Pierce passed away in 2016, but his life and legacy continue to leave a lasting impact on society.

Topic Implementation and Impact: Using the Mirror-Window Framework to Teach *Follow Chester!*

Here we provide teaching ideas for using the mirror-window framework to teach *Follow Chester!* to second-grade social studies students. These ideas aim to support children’s civic development, increase students’ self-awareness, and help young learners understand the world around them. This section is divided into four main parts: 1) Lesson Materials; 2) Introductory Lesson Activities; 3) Using *Follow Chester!* as a Mirror; and 4) Using *Follow Chester!* as a Window. Following this discussion, recommendations are provided for students to take informed action. The article closes with a brief conclusion.

Lesson Materials

Below, we provide a list of materials teachers will need to implement the teaching activities described in this article:

- A copy of *Follow Chester!* by Gloria Respress-Churchwell (2019)
- Silver foil cardstock
- Cardboard cut into approximately 4” x 4” squares
- Popsicle sticks
- Hand-held mirrors from home (optional)
- A Mirror-Window Graphic Organizer posted in the classroom (see Appendix A)
- Dry erase markers or regular markers
- A large sheet of construction or easel paper
- Sticky notes

Some of these materials are optional or could be modified to align with a particular classroom’s context.

Introductory Lesson Activities

For second-grade students to use the mirror-window framework with *Follow Chester!*, the teacher will first guide students through three introductory activities to help the young learners understand the framework. Woolfolk (2017) stated that students around 7-11 years of age typically exemplify the “Concrete Operational Stage” of Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development in which they tend to think more logically about hands-on problems rather than abstract ones. Therefore, to begin explaining the mirror-window framework to students, tangible mirrors and windows can be used to help the students grasp the concept.

Step 1: Introducing the Mirror Concept (10-20 minutes)

Before reading the book, the teacher will lead students through a hands-on art activity in which they create personal hand-held mirrors. To do this, the students will cut out a square of silver foil cardstock (a material found at local craft stores), secure the backside of the cardstock to a similarly sized piece of cardboard, and attach the mirror to a popsicle stick. (Alternatively, a teacher may provide students with pre-made, hand-held mirrors, or even invite students to bring in their own hand-held mirrors from home.) After the students create the mirrors, the teacher will explain to the class how to use the mirrors to reflect on the story. Below, a suggested teacher-student dialogue is provided to illustrate one way this explanation could take place.

Teacher: Students, I’d like you to hold up the mirrors you just made and look into them. What do you see?

(The students offer their responses.)

Teacher: I heard some of you mention that you saw yourselves in the mirrors. Today, we’re going to learn how reading a book can be like looking into a mirror. When we read a book, we might see pictures of people who look like us, or we might read about people who remind us of ourselves. But do you know what? Sometimes, books can also help us think about things that real mirrors can’t, like the ideas we have inside our heads. What do you think about that?

(The students offer their responses.)

Teacher: Those are good observations. When we start reading *Follow Chester!* in a few moments, we’ll pause from time to time and look into our mirrors to think about ways the book reminds us of ourselves. We’ll also ask ourselves questions about the main ideas in the story.

After this conversation, the teacher should ask students to share their own comments and questions about the mirror concept. This exchange not only will serve as a formative assessment for the teacher, but also an opportunity for the teacher to address possible misunderstandings or confusion the students might have.

Step 2: Introducing the Window Concept (5 minutes)

After teaching the mirror concept, the teacher will begin to help students understand the window concept. To do this, the teacher and students will gather in front of a physical window and the teacher and students may use the following suggested dialogue.

Teacher: What are some things we see when we look out this window?

(The teacher provides students with a few moments to look out the window and share their observations.)

Teacher: Those are some good observations. When we look out our window, we see the world around us, don't we? We see things we recognize, but we might also see things we *don't* recognize, including people we haven't met, or maybe places or things that are unfamiliar to us. Does anyone know what the word "unfamiliar" means?

(The students offer their responses.)

Teacher: When something is unfamiliar to us, it means that it's new to us. It's something we haven't seen or experienced before. Other people might have seen or experienced it, but we haven't. But guess what? Do you remember when I told you that a book can be like a mirror? A book can *also* be like a window! It can help us learn about the world around us, including those things that are unfamiliar, or new, to us. What do you think about that?

(The students offer their responses.)

Teacher: Now I'd like you to look really closely out our window. In addition to seeing what's outside, can any of you see something else? Can any of you see your own reflection in the glass? Give it a try.

After the students observe their reflections, the teacher will briefly assess the students' understanding in order to gauge their knowledge of the window concept. Similar to step one, this strategy is a formative assessment to identify and address misunderstandings or confusion the students might have. Once the students grasp the window concept, the class will advance to step three.

Step 3: Putting the Mirror and Window Concepts Together (5-10 minutes)

For the final component of the introductory lesson activities, the teacher will first briefly remind students that a book can be both a "mirror" and a "window." To do this, the teacher may offer the following explanation.

Teacher: A book can be like a mirror and a window at the same time because, on the one hand, books can remind us of ourselves. On the other hand, books can teach us about

unfamiliar, or new, things that exist around us. As we read *Follow Chester!*, I want you to think about how the story is both a mirror *and* a window. Just like a *mirror*, what can the book help you to see about yourself? Just like a *window*, what can the book help you to see about others and the world around you?

(At this stage, the teacher will create a simple graphic organizer/t-chart on the board or on chart paper with two columns (see Appendix A). One column will be labeled “Mirror” and the other column will be labeled “Window.” Then, throughout the class read-aloud, the teacher and students will pause from time to time to write notes into the chart and record what they learned.)

After this brief explanation, the teacher will introduce *Follow Chester!* by announcing the book’s title and asking the class to study the illustration on the front cover. At this time, the students will make inferences and predictions about the story before the teacher reads the book. Importantly, the teacher should spend time discussing what the title words “fights racism” and “makes history” mean in order to help put the story in its proper context. (A teacher also might consider having these words placed on a social studies word wall for future reference.) Incorporating these introductory strategies and activities prior to reading *Follow Chester!* will help the elementary teacher provide a meaningful and challenging social studies learning experience for students (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017).

Using *Follow Chester!* as a Mirror (20 minutes)

After completing the introductory activities, the teacher will conduct a class read-aloud of the book. During this time, the teacher and students should pause periodically to reflect on Chester Pierce’s life and ponder questions that will help students examine their own viewpoints and beliefs. The teacher also should help students connect their observations to civic virtues “such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives that citizens should use when they interact with each other on public matters” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p. 33). Below, a suggested teacher-student dialogue is provided that draws on one section of the book *Follow Chester!* as an example of how this conversation may take place.

Teacher: In *Follow Chester!*, the book said the Harvard football team was set to

play a game against the University of Virginia in 1947. Let’s look at a map of the U.S. to find where these two schools are located.

(Together, the teacher and students locate both schools on a U.S. map.)

Teacher: The University of Virginia is a school in the Southern United States. Around

Chester’s time, this school was located south of a boundary called the Mason-Dixon Line that divided the U.S. from the North to the South. The book said that in 1947,

“colleges in the South didn’t allow black students” (p. 6). Do you remember learning about the civic virtue of mutual respect earlier this year?

(The teacher writes the words “mutual respect” on the board or on chart paper for the students to see as the students share their answers.)

Teacher: People who show mutual respect show kindness and care towards

others, no matter who those people are or where those people are from. Students, can any of you think of an example of someone who shows mutual respect?

(The students share their responses.)

Teacher: Did colleges in the South that didn’t allow Black students show mutual respect? Why not?

(The students share their responses.)

Teacher: Students, now I’d like you to look into the mirrors you made. As you look into your mirrors, I want you to think about a question: “How do *I* show mutual respect towards others?” After you’ve had time to think about this question, I’d like to hear your answers.

(The teacher provides students with a few moments to answer the question as they look into their hand-held mirrors. Then the teacher invites the students to share their responses. As the students speak, the teacher writes these responses into the “Mirror” column of the graphic organizer.)

Teacher: Thank you for sharing your ideas about some of the ways you’ve shown the civic virtue of mutual respect in your own life. As we keep reading, let’s find examples of characters who show mutual respect towards each other in the story.

As the read-aloud continues, the teacher and students will occasionally pause to identify instances of mutual respect that appear in the story and write these instances down in the graphic organizer. For example, later in the book, Chester Pierce’s teammates use the play “Follow Chester!” to show care and kindness towards Chester. The teacher and students should discuss this part of the book to understand how and why the play demonstrates the civic virtue of mutual respect. This discussion also may help students think of ways they could use this civic virtue in their daily lives.

Using *Follow Chester!* as a Window (30 minutes)

Throughout the reading, students also will view story events using the window perspective. Here, a teacher will guide students to consider new perspectives and ideas through prompts and intentional questioning which also will provide the teacher with further opportunities to discuss civic virtues with the class.

For example, while reading the front sleeve of the book to the class, the teacher will encourage students to identify unfamiliar words, phrases, and ideas that they hear. The teacher will then write these words on the board or place them on a social studies word wall for the class to refer back to at a later time. Then, using the information provided in the story, as well as additional resources including the author's note or the publisher-provided online materials (see Respress-Churchwell, 2019, pp. 28-30), the class will work together to define the terms. After the meanings of the terms are discussed, the definitions and descriptions should be added to the "Window" column of the graphic organizer. Reading becomes purposeful when students pay close attention to the material. This practice helps students become independent learners as they explore civic virtues and interact with others to "[obtain] factual knowledge" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p. 33).

To incorporate the window perspective to teach *Follow Chester!*, the teacher also will highlight the part of the book that discusses Jackie Robinson. Robinson, the first Black athlete to become a major league baseball player in 1947, might be an unfamiliar historical figure to some second-grade students. Therefore, the teacher should discuss Robinson and his achievements to provide a window into the many struggles Black athletes like Robinson faced during that time. The teacher also should use primary sources, such as photographs, to aid in the discussion. These sources can be accessed through online repositories such as the Library of Congress or the National Archives and can help students understand Robinson's larger impact on sports and society. They also can help young learners put Chester Pierce's achievements into historical context. Below, a suggested classroom dialogue is provided to show one way a teacher might link Pierce's achievements to Robinson's.

Teacher: Today, we've learned important information about Jackie Robinson. In your own words, can anyone describe some of the struggles Jackie Robinson faced?

(The students share their responses.)

Teacher: Good work. We also spoke about the views some Americans held about Jackie Robinson and other Black athletes at the time. I want you to think about our conversations about mutual respect. Do you think people treated Jackie Robinson with mutual respect?

(The students share their responses.)

Teacher: Now I want you to consider this question: How are Jackie Robinson and Chester Pierce alike? After you've thought about your answer, please raise your hand to share it. If you'd like, feel free to look out the window to brainstorm ideas.

(The students share their responses. After each response, the teacher writes the students' answers into the "Window" column of the graphic organizer.)

Teacher: Students, those are some great ideas. While I was listening to your answers, I thought of another question: If Chester Pierce read about Jackie Robinson, do you think he

would feel like he was looking into a mirror or out a window?

(Students share their responses.)

Teacher: I think so, too. While we continue reading, I want you to think about other ways Chester Pierce might remind you of Jackie Robinson.

After reading the book with the class, the teacher will lead a post-reading discussion to ask questions such as:

- Did anything surprise you about the story?
- What did you learn from the book?
- What did you learn from the story about the civic virtue of mutual respect?
- How was the story a mirror for you? What did the story teach you about yourself?
- How was the story a window for you? What did the story teach you about history?

A post-reading discussion promotes the civic virtues of honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives within the classroom community. This discussion also serves as a useful assessment and provides the teacher with an opportunity to address possible misunderstandings the students might have about the material.

After the post-reading discussion, the teacher will invite students to create a physical classroom reading “window.” Using popsicle sticks or a similar craft material, the class will design a piece of art that resembles a window on a large piece of construction paper. Students will then brainstorm one way that *Follow Chester!* introduced them to a new perspective or idea. Using sticky notes, students will write or draw their answers to the question and place the sticky notes on the window once it is finished. After students share what they wrote, the windows could be displayed on a bulletin board or wall in the classroom.

Recommendations: Extension and Taking Informed Action

The *C3 Framework* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013) explained that social studies learning should extend beyond the classroom. In order to fully understand civic virtues such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives, students should “[apply] and [reflect] on them through actual civic engagement--their own and that of other people from the past or present” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p. 33). To do this, students could conduct a biographical research inquiry project in which they would investigate other famous sports figures whose achievements contributed to greater equity in society. After completing the project, the students could present their findings in an essay, report, or multimedia presentation. “Products such as essays, reports, and multimedia presentations offer students opportunities to represent their ideas in a variety of formats and communicate their conclusions to a range of audiences” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, p. 60). These projects also could be shared with the wider school community at a later time.

Another suggested activity for taking informed action could be for students to create a list of classroom commitments that are guided by civic virtues such as mutual respect. The teacher could help students write a list of “I will” statements inspired by *Follow Chester!* (and the use of the mirror-window framework) that could be displayed in the classroom to promote an inclusive classroom community. The *C3 Framework* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013) explained that in order to take informed action, students should “use disciplinary knowledge, skills, and perspectives to inquire about problems involved in public issues; deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues; take constructive, independent, and collaborative action; reflect on their actions; and create and sustain groups” (p. 62). Therefore, by creating, and adhering to, a collaborative list of commitments, students could engage in the process of taking informed action in their own classroom and school.

Conclusion

In the 2016 TEDEd Talk, “The Windows and Mirrors of Your Child’s Bookshelf,” children’s book author and illustrator Grace Lin ended with a powerful quote: “Please look at your child’s bookshelf. Are all the books mirrors? Or are they all windows? Make sure that you have both, because if you do, you’re setting a path for self-worth and empathy.” This article offered teaching ideas for ways that the children’s book *Follow Chester! A College Football Team Fights Racism and Makes History*, written by Gloria Respress-Churchwell and illustrated by Laura Freeman, may be used as both a mirror and a window in elementary social studies education. The book can serve as a valuable resource for young learners to develop greater civic awareness of themselves and the world around them and to increase children’s knowledge of democratic citizenship. In this way, teaching *Follow Chester!* with the mirror-window framework can support powerful and purposeful social studies education (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017), help prepare young students for active citizenship, and guide children in taking informed action and building inclusive communities.

Dr. Donald R. McClure is an Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at St. John’s University. His research explores the intersection of sports and social studies education, the citizenship identities of children from immigrant backgrounds, and teacher education. He can be reached at mclured@stjohns.edu.

Courtney Brunn is a graduate student in the St. John's University School of Education’s Literacy Program. At the time of this article’s writing, she was an undergraduate elementary education major at St. John's University with a concentration in social studies.

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Appendix A

<i>Follow Chester!</i> as Mirror	<i>Follow Chester!</i> as Window

Appendix B

Inquiry Design Model (IDM) Blueprint™		
Compelling Question	What can mirrors and windows teach me about civic virtues by reading the book <i>Follow Chester! A College Football Team Fights Racism and Makes History?</i>	
Standards and Practices	<p>Kentucky Social Studies Standard 2.C.CV.1: Evaluate how civic virtues guide governments, societies, and communities</p> <p>Common Core State Standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot</p> <p>C3 Framework Standard D2.Civ.2.K-2: Explain how all people, not just official leaders, play important roles in a community</p>	
Staging the Question	Students create hand-held mirrors, brainstorm ways that books help readers understand themselves (“mirror”) and the wider world (“window”) and discuss what they know about civic virtues.	
Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
How can <i>Follow Chester!</i> be used as a mirror and a window to learn about the past? (history)	Where was the Mason-Dixon Line and how did it affect Chester’s opportunity to play a football game against the University of Virginia? (geography)	In the book <i>Follow Chester!</i> , what civic virtues did the characters use? (civics)
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Categorize the graphic organizer/t-chart (see Appendix A).	Discuss how the game’s location influenced Chester’s opportunity to compete.	List examples of civic virtues that characters used in the story.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a copy of the book <i>Follow Chester!</i> • primary sources from the Library of Congress or the National Archives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a copy of the book <i>Follow Chester!</i> • a U.S. map 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a copy of the book <i>Follow Chester!</i>
Summative	Argument	Construct an argument that shows what you learned about civic virtues by using the mirror-window framework to read <i>Follow Chester!</i>

Performance Task	Extension	Conduct a biographical research project on other famous sports figures whose achievements led to greater equity in society and reflected civic virtues.
Taking Informed Action		Create a list of classroom commitments that are guided by civic virtues.

Appendix B was adapted from Grant, Lee, and Swan's (2017) "Inquiry Design Model (IDM)—At a Glance."