

Zayne Sibley
American Studies 302/03: Senior Project
Supplement Write-up
April 7th, 2017

Along with my thesis, I have included a children's book I have written about the Pledge of Allegiance as a supplement to my written work. I wrote this book, "A Choice that Matters," for an education class I took last semester (EDUC 350: The Teaching of Reading). We were assigned to write a children's book for any age level, and about any topic. I chose to write about the Pledge as a challenge to myself, to see if I could create a resource that talks about the Pledge to students in a way that aligns with my own critiques and analysis of the ritual and the way it functions in American society. I also chose this topic because of the dearth of children's literature written about the Pledge that is not exclusively meant to instill national pride. Even young children have a variety of experiences with and feelings about America and its government, and books about the Pledge that only venerate the United States are not authentic to this range of experience. I wanted to create a book that validates all students' experiences, and helps them look at the Pledge as a place where they can reflect on their feelings in a way that feels authentic.

My thesis looks critically at the way the Pledge is treated in schools, concluding that it often functions as a site of surveillance and discipline in the classroom. Though this is the reality that I found in many classrooms today, I believe that the Pledge can be utilized productively in classrooms, as a tool to encourage students to reflect on their own beliefs and empower them to take action to promote justice and equality. I wrote this book to provide a model for the way in which I think the Pledge should be treated and framed in American classrooms, as a tool for reflection and personal expression, rather a mandate or a requirement.

This book is meant for students in elementary school, but could be a teaching tool for students of all ages. In order to aid in productive and engaging discussion surrounding the story, I have included discussion questions in the back of the book that will help students engage with the story, connect it to their own experiences, and think through their own opinions on the topic. The book is meant to introduce students to the idea that there are lots of valid ways for people to understand, experience, and react to the Pledge of Allegiance, and that no one's feelings about or response to the Pledge is better or worse than anyone else's. It shows that there are lots of ways of performing (or not performing) the Pledge of Allegiance, and that it is ok for people to perform the ritual differently, however makes them feel good. It encourages students to think critically about their own feelings about the Pledge, and to make their decision about if/how they will perform it based on that reflection. Through this book, I hope to bring to life the central argument of my thesis, that the Pledge of Allegiance can be a tool for critical thinking and reflection, rather than just a site of surveillance and discipline.