CHAPTER 4: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTHOR
RICK NORMAN AND HIS AUDIENCE

With this study, I sought to build upon past research into how an author’s conception of audience affects the writing of a text (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Flower and Hayes, 1981a, 1981b; Kirsch, 1990; Roth, 1987; Rubin, 1998), how the author-audience relationship affects the reading of a text (e.g., Bazerman, 1985; Geisler, 1991; Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Haas, 1994; Wineburg, 1991), and how students respond to authorial intentions (e.g., Miall & Kuiken, 1995; Vipond & Hunt, 1984). I tried to blend these three foci in order to understand more fully the complexity of the author-audience relationship. In this chapter I present the findings of my case study based upon the three questions which I attempted to answer: (1) What was, and is, Rick Norman’s conception of the audience of Fielder’s Choice? (2) How do members of the audience—specifically five high school students—respond to Fielder’s Choice? (3) How do the audience’s responses relate to the author’s intentions?

Rick Norman’s Conception of the Audience of Fielder’s Choice

In general, studies of authors’ conception of audience have shown that a writer may view his or her audience as self (e.g., Roth, 1987; Rubin, 1998), real (concrete or “addressed”) or imagined (“invoked”) (Ede & Lunsford, 1984), single or multiple (e.g., Rubin, 1998), or evolving (Roth, 1987). The amount of time writers spend considering audience varies, but many studies (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1981b; Roth, 1987) show that audience consideration is recursive, occurring throughout the writing processes, so that there is an ongoing awareness of the audience on the part of the author. Studies also seem to show that a writer’s attention to, and perceived relationship with, his or her audience directly affects other aspects of
composing, such as task representation, idea generation, goals, and word choice (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1981a, 1981b; Kirsch, 1990).

What was, and is, Rick Norman’s conception of the audience of Fielder’s Choice? The data used to answer this question were derived from my two interviews with Rick Norman and from his written responses to the students’ journals, as well as from e-mail messages to me and to Ms. Faust, the editor of Fielder’s Choice.

In reply to my asking Mr. Norman about his conception of the audience of Fielder’s Choice during my first interview with him, he prefaced his answer by saying that he really did not know what the audience actually is. However, he replied that his perception was that of an audience that is “mostly male, mostly athletic, mostly fifteen-seventeen years old who have been forced to read a book, and they picked it for some reason” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001). In addition to this defined audience, it seems that he also had a defined audience of adults and of self in mind as well as a general “generic” audience. (See Appendix C for a taxonomic outline.) In this section I describe Mr. Norman’s perception of his audiences—defined and general—and his perception of the students in the study.

**Defined Audience: Young Adults**

Fielder’s Choice began life as audiotaped advice from Rick Norman to his two older children when he thought he might have terminal cancer. Mr. Norman never finished his audiotaped advice to his own children and did not have cancer, but this advice evolved over the course of five years into short stories and finally into Fielder’s Choice, written for other young people as well as his own children. These “others” included friends of his children. After the editing process began, he decided to change the names of some of the characters to reflect their
names. For example, Dampf and McNulty, two minor characters in the book, were named after friends of his children.

Young adults limited in literary experience. Mr. Norman’s stated target audience for *Fielder’s Choice* was “kids who don’t like to read” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001). He himself graduated from high school with less than a 2.0 and “was proud to have graduated without having read a book” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001). However, when he was introduced to the wry, tongue-in-cheek humor of Jean Shepherd, the author of *Wanda Hickey’s Night of Golden Memories, and Other Disasters* (1971) and *The Ferrari in the Bedroom* (1972), at the age of seventeen and spent time reading when sitting in a hospital room with his dying father, Mr. Norman realized that reading could be a source of pleasure. Consequently, he aimed his writing at young people who do not read. His stated intent was that “there would be enough in there that was funny to keep them going until they got wrapped up in the story” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001) and would actually end up finishing the book. Because he perceived that his targeted audience was limited in literary experience, Mr. Norman worried that these young adults would not be able to follow the dialogue and plot twists. He surmised that, instead, they would have to rely upon what literary techniques they may have picked up from “sitcoms and TV shows and movies” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).

Young adults limited in worldly experience and knowledge. In addition to being limited in literary experience, the young adult audience that Mr. Norman imagined were also limited in worldly experience and knowledge, particularly when it came to dealing with personal problems and feelings of isolation. He himself had struggled with problems and feelings of aloneness, but as he grew older he discovered that philosophers “2500 years ago . . . were
His protagonist, Jax, in *Fielder's Choice* is a character who struggles with problems and really does not know what to do. Having had the opportunity to talk to various young adult readers of *Fielder’s Choice* prior to my study, Mr. Norman felt that his audience empathized with Jax, saying in effect, “Yeah, I feel the same way sometimes” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).

Mr. Norman’s perception of his young adult audience’s limited worldly experience and knowledge seems to have prompted his decision early on not to use vulgar or sexually explicit language in *Fielder’s Choice*. During the interactive interview (May 9, 2001) between Mr. Norman and four of the students in the study, Chatrick asked Mr. Norman: “When you were writing this, who were you writing to? I mean, did you make it a point to be clean? Did you make that a point because you thought students would read it?” Mr. Norman responded, “Yeah, I thought that.” He then proceeded to tell the students that he had been a “non-reader” in high school and that he had tried to write a book to capture the attention of “guys that haven’t been interested in reading.” Mr. Norman had explained more fully his decision not to use vulgar or sexually explicit language in *Fielder’s Choice* in an earlier interview I had with him:

> I wanted . . . any kid to be able to pick it up and read it and me not be embarrassed and them not be embarrassed. . . . There are not many books where I think it’s necessary anyway. So I know that was one decision that was made on the basis of audience” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

When the “pristine” speech of the baseball players was questioned by the editor, Mr. Norman explained:

> I didn’t use profanity because I wanted to see if something could be funny without it. Also, I wouldn’t expect an enlisted man in 1946 to use profanity when speaking to an officer in this semi-formal setting, especially given the fact that he is trying to talk his way out of trouble (R. Norman, personal communication to Judith Faust, November 9, 1990).
Mr. Norman’s concept of his young adult audience as being limited in worldly experience and knowledge is reflected in his description of his struggle with the World War Two/baseball backdrop for *Fielder’s Choice*:

One of the things you struggle with especially when you’re writing for young adults is, “What do they know?” I think if you’re writing for adults, you assume that they know as much as you do about history and things. But if you’re writing for kids, you can’t make that same assumption, so to some extent you’re limited in what you can write about and I think [you are] more conscious of maybe having to throw something in to make sure you explain what you’re talking about. . . . In the forties and even in the fifties and sixties, it [baseball] was a big part of everybody’s life. . . . But it’s not a part of kids’ lives anymore. And I was worried that that wasn’t going to translate either because baseball’s a big part of Jax’s life, that’s part of his story, that’s kind of what he’s able to pull himself through with. But I didn’t know whether the kids would be able to follow that because baseball’s not a big deal (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

Nevertheless, Mr. Norman assumed that young people do have a certain amount of knowledge about World War Two and baseball. However, in conversations with young people who have read *Fielder’s Choice*, he has been surprised at some of their questions about the war. “The kids get the wars mixed up. To them there’s not a real distinction between First World War, Second World War, Korea, and Vietnam. . . . Some of the questions they’ll ask me are about Vietnam.” He felt that some of the girls had problems with the baseball jargon but that they simply glossed over the terms they did not understand. “I would think that maybe if you’re not a baseball fan, you don’t pick up on some of the baseball stuff—earned run average and things like that” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).

**Young adults able to distinguish reality from fiction.** When he was writing *Fielder’s Choice*, Mr. Norman also assumed that his young adult audience had the ability to distinguish reality from fiction. However, after talking to students, he perceived that some young readers either actually believed *Fielder’s Choice* to be a true story or simply wanted to believe that there is a guy out there like Jax Fielder. According to Mr. Norman, one young reader told him that his
father knew Jackson Fielder. In reflecting on this blurring between reality and fiction, Mr. Norman commented, “There’s something very real about it. [Students are] a little bit disappointed when I tell them, ‘No, I made it up. It was all in my head.’ I guess I just didn’t think what kids of that age would believe and wouldn’t believe. . . . I think we had perspective. I just kind of assumed they would have that, too” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).

**Defined Audience: Adults**

In addition to his defined audience of children, Mr. Norman also perceived an audience of adults. One audience of adults he perceived was friends and acquaintances. The second adult audience was adults plagued by the memory of their mistakes. Though the audience of adults plagued by the memory of their mistakes is a less sharply defined audience than that of Mr. Norman’s friends and acquaintances, both audiences may be said to represent what Ede and Lunsford (1984) would term a concrete, knowable audience “addressed.” However, as I argue in a later chapter, I do not believe that there is such a thing as a truly “addressed” audience.

**Adult friends and acquaintances.** Just as he changed some characters’ original names to the names of his children’s friends, Mr. Norman also changed the names of other characters to reflect the names of his adult friends and acquaintances. For example, the characters Cole and Musso received names of friends of Mr. Norman. It seems that his intention for doing so was to “guarantee I’ll sell twenty more books” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

**Adults plagued by the memory of their mistakes.** Mr. Norman saw an audience secondary to that of his audience of children. This secondary audience was adults plagued by the memory of their mistakes” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001). In fact, the dedication in *Fielder’s Choice* is to professional athletes who otherwise had good careers but are
remembered for their mistake—their most notable mistake. For example, Bill Buckner, first baseman for Boston, let an easy grounder go through his legs, causing his team to lose the 1986 World Series.

**Defined Audience: Self**

Studies (e.g., Roth, 1987; Rubin, 1998) have shown that writing for self may be closely connected to writing for an “other” audience. It seems that the audience of self which Mr. Norman perceived—the self plagued by the memory of his mistake and the teen self—is closely connected to both his “other” audience of young adults and his “other” audience of adults.

**Self plagued by the memory of his mistake.** Mr. Norman himself is among these adults plagued by the memory of their mistakes, and he sees the writing of *Fielder’s Choice* as a sort of catharsis. In one of my interviews with him, he related the story of the mistake that has plagued him:

> In high school I had lost a big game in 1971 in Monroe. I had gotten called for a penalty in the state semi-final game, and the winning touchdown got called back. And that had always plagued me. I was known for that around town. (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001)

**Teenage self.** In discussing the perspective he kept in mind while reading what he had written in *Fielder’s Choice*, Mr. Norman noted that the reader—the audience—he primarily kept in mind as he read was “myself at seventeen years old in the hospital reading the Jean Shepherd books” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001). His mother, who was divorced from his dad, sent him to sit with his father who was in the hospital with cancer because she did not want his father to be alone. “I would read them and be laughing. I never realized that reading could be enjoyable” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).
General “Generic” Audience

Research has shown that establishing a relationship with a general “generic” audience is often difficult for a writer, particularly for an inexperienced writer. This is why researchers (e.g., Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1981b; Hairston, 1986; Ong, 1975) have written extensively about the general “generic” audience as an imagined or created audience.

In my final interview with him, Mr. Norman noted that in addition to his defined audiences, he also kept in mind a “generic reader” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001). His perceived “generic” reader was a reader who wants things causally connected, wants the author to enable him or her to connect seemingly unconnected concepts and ideas via a new twist, and wants characters who are either extremely interesting or extremely likeable.

Students in the Study

Mr. Norman’s impression of the high school students in the study is reflected in an e-mail he sent after receiving the students’ responses to Fielder’s Choice. In it he wrote,

Keitha—I am reading the kids’ comments and am enjoying myself tremendously. Those kids are smart. . . .To hear their comments as they read is, I would suspect, a pleasure few writers have had. I’m about to bust a gut laughing, especially at the predictions (R. Norman, personal communication, April 17, 2001).

Later in the second interview I had with him, Mr. Norman made some further observations about this particular audience. He noted that they seemed “pretty literate” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001). Reiterating this conception of the audience, he wrote in his responses to the students that they seemed “too literate to be non-readers” (R. Norman, personal communication, May 1, 2001) and complimented them on their perceptive responses.

Though his impression of the students in the study was that they were “pretty literate” and “smart,” Mr. Norman’s written responses to the students’ journal responses seemed to be reflective of a fluid perception of his relationship to this particular five-student audience, and his
perception seemed to shift among four relationships. These perceived relationships, Mr. Norman to student audience, in that order, seemed to be (1) teacher/parent to students/children; (2) mea culpa “apologist” to “offended;” (3) “apprentice” writer to “expert” readers; (4) teacher/defendant to students/“plaintiffs.” It should be pointed out that at the time Mr. Norman wrote his responses to the students, his conception of this audience was based strictly upon their written responses to Fielder’s Choice. Later in this chapter I report his relationship to the students during the interactive face-to-face meeting. The observations in this section, however, are based upon Mr. Norman’s written responses to the students’ journal responses.

**Teacher/parent to students/children.** The primary relationship seems to have been that of teacher/parent to students/children, perhaps because Fielder’s Choice began life as tape-recorded advice to Mr. Norman’s two older children. For example, he “taught” approaches to solving conflicts through practical jokes (“Conflicts can be resolved by three methods: peaceful means, violent means, and practical jokes. I favor the latter.”). He also taught that it is unforgivable to hit a child (“I was glad to read your comment in Chapter 17 that it is ‘unforgivable’ to hit a child. I hope that sentiment stays with you always.”), that a glorified view of war should be questioned (“I was hoping that the reader would also start to question the glorified view of war.”), and that there is not just one way to look at an issue (“Would another way to look at it be that his [Jax’s] indecision, his searching process, resulted in his figuring out a formula with which to live his life?”). At other times, this teacher/parent to student/child relationship was revealed when he complimented the students on “getting” his point (“Apparently I got at least one of my points across.” “You indicated to me that you followed the premise of my novel.”).
Mea culpa “apologist” to “offended.” A second perception which Mr. Norman seemed to have of his relationship to the student audience was that of the mea culpa “apologist” to the “offended.” For example, at times he “apologized” to the students when they were “confused” about or reacted “negatively” to a passage (“Perhaps I didn’t do a good enough job foreshadowing their [Dixie and Jugs’s] marriage.” “I think I may have lost some readers by bringing Jax too far down before I started him on the way back up.” “I was trapped by my own device.”).

“Apprentice” writer to “expert” readers. A third type of relationship between Mr. Norman and the students, resulting from his multiple perceptions of his audience, seemed to be that of apprentice to expert. Several times he seemed to perceive himself as the “apprentice” writer and the students as the “expert” readers. This perception was revealed by his asking the students such questions as: “Do you think the dialect was so strong that it would have caused a reader to give up the book?” “Do you think it [the kitten story] added [to] or detracted [from] the story? Should I have left it out?”

Teacher/defendant to students/“plaintiffs.” Finally, Mr. Norman seemed at times to perceive his relationship to the student audience as teacher/defendant to students/“plaintiffs.” In this particular relationship, he seemed to teach a “lesson” as well as to “defend” what he had written. For example, when Bob wrote that Jax “better show his point fast,” Mr. Norman responded, “I chose to show the point over 200 or so pages so that I would have a novel.” When Loki expressed frustration with the flashbacks, Mr. Norman wrote, “In that the whole story was more or less a flashback, I assume you were talking about parts of the story that were not in chronological order. . . . A writer has to struggle with how much and what he gives the reader at what time so that he does not telegraph his punch.”
Conclusion Regarding Author’s Conception of Audience

Just as Roth’s (1987) successful college students seemed to have multi-dimensioned and variable perceptions of their audience, so too Mr. Norman seemed to have multi-dimensioned and variable perceptions of his audience. Mr. Norman’s perception of his audience was both defined and general. Specifically, he perceived his audience to be young adults, both his own and others. His foremost target audience among young adults was those who do not like to read. Mr. Norman perceived them to be limited in literary and worldly experiences, and thus lacking in knowledge. In order to draw these students into a novel, he believed he had to rely upon humor. Other defined audiences were adults, especially those plagued by the memory of their mistakes, and himself, both the adult self and the teen self. His perception of his general “generic” audience was that this audience would want things causally connected, would want the author to enable him or her to connect seemingly unconnected concepts and ideas via a new twist, and would want characters who are either extremely interesting or extremely likeable.

Mr. Norman considered the students in my case study to be “too literate” and “smart” to be called non-readers. Interestingly, in spite of viewing the students as literate and smart, the predominant perception of his relationship to this particular audience seemed to be that of teacher/parent to students/children. Nevertheless, he did not limit his perception of his relationship to this audience to this one dimension. He also conceived of his relationship to them as mea culpa “apologist” to the “offended,” “apprentice” writer to “expert” readers, and teacher/defendant to students/“plaintiffs.”

Based upon these results, we may answer the question of what was, and is, Rick Norman’s conception of the audience of Fielder’s Choice—both defined and general, self and
other—by saying that it was and is a multifaceted, dynamic conception. It was and is an audience viewed through the window of self.

**Editor’s Conception of the Audience of Fielder’s Choice**

My study also included another person’s—the editor’s—conception of audience to complement that held by Rick Norman. I interviewed Judith Faust, the editor of the book, to see how her conception of audience related to that of the author. The data in this section is based upon an e-mail interview with Judith Faust and e-mail correspondence between her and Mr. Norman.

**Editor’s Description of Audience**

According to the e-mail interview which I conducted with Judith Faust, who had served August House Publishing as editor of *Fielder’s Choice*, she conceived of the audience of *Fielder’s Choice* on several levels but primarily as baseball fans: (1) readers of books about baseball (mostly nonfiction) who might cross over for an obviously connected novel and (2) fiction readers who happened also to be baseball fans. The book was published in the spring of 1991, and the timing was no accident. People buying books as gifts for Father’s Day at the start of the baseball season figured into the marketing strategy. Devotees of Southern fiction and “plain old lovers of good novels” (J. Faust, personal communication, July 27, 2001) were also seen as part of the audience for *Fielder’s Choice*. As editor, Judith Faust was also aware of an audience of young-adult librarians. In reference to the lack of profanity in *Fielder’s Choice*, Ms. Faust noted that “young adult librarians will love it, which can be a very good thing” (J. Faust, personal communication to R. Norman, November 9, 1990).

On a personal level, Judith Faust commented,

> When I think of “audience” for a work of fiction, I think of a sort of generic “reader,” someone who seeks out fiction, loves words and stories, wants to be taken into the world of
the novel or the short story so that she or he can soak it up and see what’s there to feel, react to, empathize with, puzzle over. (J. Faust, personal communication, July 27, 2001)

Comparison and Contrast with Norman’s Conception

When comparing and contrasting Rick Norman’s conception of his audience of *Fielder’s Choice* with the editor’s, I found more differences than similarities. For example, Mr. Norman’s primary target audience was young adults. By contrast, the editor seemed to conceive the audience as an older audience. This is evidenced by her targeting fathers and devotees of Southern fiction. Along these same lines, it is interesting to note that Ms. Faust had pointed out to Mr. Norman that “young adult librarians will love it” [lack of profanity in *Fielder’s Choice*].

Another major difference seems to lie in Mr. Norman’s and Ms. Faust’s conceptions of a general “generic” audience. Mr. Norman saw this audience as those who want things causally connected, want the author to enable him or her to connect seemingly unconnected concepts and ideas via a new twist, and want characters who are either extremely interesting or extremely likeable. This concept of a general “generic” audience that primarily desires logic seems to reflect the logic of classical rhetoric as epitomized by such rhetoricians as Aristotle (1954), Cicero (1970), Quintilian (1910), and Campbell (1776/1963). This emphasis on logic seems fitting for a corporate lawyer whose primary occupation is arguing.

By contrast, Ms. Faust’s personal (as opposed to editorial) conception of a general “generic” audience seems to emphasize the experiential dimension of reading. This can be seen in her use of such phrases as “loves words and stories,” “wants to be taken into the world of the novel or short story,” “soak it up and see what’s there to feel, react to, empathize with, puzzle over.” Her experiential concept of the “generic” reader seems similar to Louise Rosenblatt’s (1978) comment about aesthetic reading, “In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” [italics in
It is not surprising perhaps that Ms. Faust would emphasize that a “generic” audience wants to experience reading since she herself has “an electric fragment of memory of the moment when I connected the letters on the spines of those books with the words on the pages” (J. Faust, personal communication, July 27, 2001).

Conclusion Regarding Editor’s Conception of Audience

Just what does this exploration of Mr. Norman’s and Ms. Faust’s conception of the audience of Fielder’s Choice contribute to our understanding of authors’ and editors’ conceptions of audience? First of all, this case study seems to indicate that at times there may be discrepancies between an author’s conception of audience and an editor’s conception of audience for the same text. In this particular case, these discrepancies seem to stem from the centrality of self in Mr. Norman’s conception of audience. An editor, on the other hand, does not have self bound up in the text. Consequently, we see that Ms. Faust’s concept of audience adds a more “objective” dimension to the audience of Fielder’s Choice; that is, her concept of audience seems to stem from the centrality of marketability or an audience with whom there might be a “best fit.”

The notion of a “best fit” audience was explored by Reither and Vipond (1989) in a case study on the collaborative nature of revision in which they detailed how changes were made in an article that Russell Hunt and Douglas Vipond co-authored. As part of the revision process, trusted colleagues played the role of editors by reading and commenting on successive drafts. Their comments were used to guide changes in the piece. The greatest impact which these colleagues had upon the co-authors was to persuade them “to reconsider the field of knowledge in which their article might fit” (p. 858).
Though Ms. Faust’s editorial concept of the audience of *Fielder’s Choice* centered upon a “best fit” marketing audience, her concept of a “generic” audience seemed to stem from self just as Mr. Norman’s concept of a “generic” audience seemed to stem from self. It is interesting to note that for both Mr. Norman and Ms. Faust their concepts of a “generic” audience seemed to be a “best fit” for themselves. This finding that one’s concept of a “generic” audience may in actuality be a “best fit” with oneself, a defined audience, seems to support a similar finding by Roth (1987). As I mentioned in Chapter Three, he found that college students Laura and Johanna created audiences that were consistent with their own needs—readers who resembled themselves.

These findings lead to three conclusions: (1) an author’s conception of the audience of his or her own text may be derived from self; (2) an editor’s conception of the audience of an author’s text may be derived from a “best fit” marketing audience; (3) both an author’s and an editor’s concepts of a “generic” audience may be a “best fit” with self.

**Audience Responses to *Fielder’s Choice***

Nystrand (1990) noted that “writers and readers each proceed in terms of what they assume about the other” (p. 7). For the reader, this assumption is usually dependent primarily upon the textual features that the author provides. As I noted in Chapter One, some studies have shown that “expert” readers are able to attribute motives to authors as they proceed (Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Haas, 1994; Wineburg, 1991). This “expert” reading sometimes seems to take the form of a “conversation” between the reader and the author. Remarks may be made about the author’s claims (Geisler, 1991), or about the author’s choice of wordings, phrasings, positioning of material, punctuation, or the effect on the intended audience (Wineburg, 1991). It is interesting to note, however, that in Vipond and Hunt’s (1984) study of 150 undergraduates
reading a short story, only five percent of the students imputed motives to the author, a facet of “expert” reading.

How did members of the audience—specifically five high school students—in the words of Judith Faust, “react to, empathize with, puzzle over” Rick Norman and Fielder’s Choice? How did the author respond to the students’ responses? Because the reading and writing processes include social aspects (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981, 1983; Bleich, 1975; Emig, 1971; Flower, 1979; Flower & Hayes, 1981a, 1981b; Perl, 1980; Porter, 1986; Sommers, 1980; Sperling & Woodlief, 1997; Spivey, 1997; Winterowd & Murray, 1985), I have chosen to include in this section the social dynamics among the students and between Mr. Norman and the four students who participated in the interactive interview. This description is based upon the data gathered from my follow-up interviews with the students, in which I asked the students (with the exception of Loki) about their conversations about Fielder’s Choice, and from the interactive interview between Mr. Norman and four of the students.

I have also organized the students’ book notes, journal responses and interview responses according to the four aspects of the rhetorical triangle—topic, author, audience, and text. (See Appendix D.) The topic aspect includes responses to topics in Fielder’s Choice (for example, making choices, war). The author aspect refers to responses to Rick Norman himself as well as to responses to his characters since one way an author of fiction appeals to his or her own credibility—ethos—is through the credibility of the characters he or she creates. Responses to audience include anything that reflects emotion (pathos) since one way an author of fiction appeals to audience is through emotion. For example, responses such as “I do not like,” “sadness,” and “awful” are included in this category. Finally, the aspect of text includes responses to structures such as foreshadowing, dialect, the reality devices, the use of the Major as
a pseudo-audience, the opening and the ending of the novel, and its pace. I have chosen to include Mr. Norman’s written responses to the students’ journals in this particular section rather than in a separate section so that I may more readily show my reader the author’s relationship to this particular audience as illustrated in his responses.

I begin with the social dynamics among the students. Next, I discuss the responses of the students as recorded in their book notes, journals, and follow-up interviews, and the written responses of Mr. Norman. Finally, I conclude with a look at the relationships between author and audience revealed in the interactive interview.

Social Dynamics Among the Students

The five students in the study—Thelma, Chatrick, Bob, Goose, and Loki—comprised a very diverse group of respondents. I have included this section on the social dynamics among these five because, although they responded individually, their responses were, no doubt, influenced by the responses of others. The students did not read Fielder’s Choice in isolation. Rather, the reading of the novel generated social exchanges of ideas among the student participants as well as opportunities for identification—identification of friend with character and identification of self with character. The social exchanges also provided an opportunity for avid reader and “non-reader” to learn from one another. These exchanges of learning included discussions of baseball terms, confusing incidents, their dislike for Jude, what happened to Jax after he left the Major, the happy ending, and the abrupt ending.

Though Loki was the “intellectual” of the group, Thelma, a self-confident and articulate young lady, seemed to function as the hub of the social dynamics among the students. She seemed to serve as a reference resource as well as a participant in general conversations about Fielder’s Choice. The topics in these conversations included explanations of situations and
sports terminology, dislike for Jude, satisfaction with a happy ending but dissatisfaction with the abruptness of the ending.

From Thelma, I learned about interactions she had with Goose and Chatrick. She discussed with Goose, an avid baseball player, the fact that it was “kind of neat” that his nickname correlated with Jax’s nickname of “Gooseball.” This seems to be an illustration of shared identification. Thelma recognized “Gooseball” in one of her friends, and Goose saw something of himself in “Gooseball.” Perhaps it was this shared identity that contributed to Goose, a “non-reader,” reading *Fielder’s Choice*. Thelma also volunteered that Goose phoned her to ask, “What happened in the last two chapters?” Thelma’s discussions with Chatrick, a non-athlete, centered upon some of the sports terms he did not understand and his confusion about what had happened to certain characters. In particular, they discussed Jax’s balk on the mound. Chatrick thought he had fainted. With both Goose and Chatrick we see Thelma functioning as a resource of information. Thelma also indicated that the students had discussed among themselves their dislike for Jude’s character and “how it (*Fielder’s Choice*) ended up good . . . because we all like happy endings.” Here we see Thelma as a participant in the ongoing discussion about *Fielder’s Choice*.

I learned about interactions from Goose when he said that he and Thelma talked about the fact that “she got into it (*Fielder’s Choice*) one day and read it all in one day.” It is interesting that Goose, a “non-reader,” would seem to be impressed by the fact that Thelma read the book “all in one day.” He also noted that they discussed that they liked the book. When I asked if they had discussed details of various incidents, he said they had not. On the surface, this seems to contradict Thelma’s revelation that Goose called to ask her what happened in the last two chapters. Perhaps the discrepancy lies in how Goose would define “details of various incidents.”
Confirmation of discussions with Thelma came from Chatrick, who also indicated that he discussed baseball terms with some of the baseball players at school, including Goose. Like Thelma, Bob said that “everybody . . . liked the book,” but he also indicated that they wanted to know what happened to Jax after he left the Major—about his being blacklisted and his being unable to play baseball anymore.

Because I neglected to ask Loki about any conversations she may have had with other participants, she did not indicate any social interactions. Presumably, however, she was part of the group discussion referred to by Thelma and Bob. In answer to Mr. Norman’s question (“Did they read everybody’s stuff, too?”) during the interactive interview, Thelma indicated that the students passed around his responses to each of them. In particular, Thelma noted that she read all of Mr. Norman’s comments to Bob. Once again, in the sharing of the comments which Mr. Norman wrote to the individual students, we see the social aspect of reading.

The reading of *Fielder’s Choice* provided opportunities for social exchanges of ideas among the student participants as well as opportunities for identifying friend with character and self with character. The social exchanges also provided opportunities for the students to learn from one another.

**Responses: Book Notes, Journals, and Interview**

The students varied in their responses to the topic, author, audience, and text of *Fielder’s Choice*. Some of the students responded to sub-themes (topics) in the novel, but all responded to the primary theme (topic) of making choices. For most of the students, Jax was, in general, a very likeable, credible character. This connection with Jax seemed to create credibility for the author. However, the students did question some aspects of the author’s characterization of Jax. Perhaps because Jax was a likeable, credible character for them, at various points in the novel
most of the students had at least some emotional (audience-related) responses. The strongest and
most universal of these emotions seemed to be sympathy or empathy for Jax and Little Jackson,
and anger towards Jude. Several aspects of the text of *Fielder’s Choice*—dialect, opening
chapter, addresses to the Major, pace of the action, allusions, foreshadowing, flashbacks, word
choice, reality devices—evoked responses from various students. Most of them appreciated the
dialect and the attention-grabbing opening chapter, but some were initially confused by or had
negative responses to various allusions, the flashbacks, and the addresses to the Major. One did
not like the dialect at all.

Mr. Norman responded in writing to the students’ questions, confusions, application of
situations to their personal lives, predictions, emotions, and praises with clarifications;
explanations and defenses of his dilemmas, intentions, and structural devices; suggestions;
questions; and appreciation for their insights. However, the bulk of these responses seemed
directed to Chatrick and Thelma.

**Thelma: “I Couldn’t Put the Book Down”**

Thelma, who seemed to be very self-confident and articulate, earned straight A’s in
senior English and was a member of the Honor Society, loved to read—especially mystery
novels—and write. This love of reading and writing seems reflected in the fact that she could
not stop reading about Jax and could not put down *Fielder’s Choice*. Thelma used her book to
jot down a substantial number of notes. The gist of these notes was often reflected also in her
journal responses. Her journal responses—generally a full page or more—were thoughtful and
rich, and her interview responses provided further insights into both her book notes and her
journal responses.
**Topic.** Much of the plot of *Fielder's Choice* is based on the making of choices, and many of Thelma’s topic responses concerned choice. However, she also picked up on the author’s unique resolution to conflict as illustrated by Jugs playing a prank on Bubba to “put him in his place” instead of fighting him to settle their contention for the catcher’s position on the team. “I like the way the problem with Bubba is resolved. The usual solution is a fight. It is good to see that the author resolves it differently.” When I asked Thelma why she thought the author had presented this solution to the problem, she responded: “Just because it would maybe help with your perspective of guys or something. They don’t always have to fight. Maybe they can just talk about it, and it would work out.” However, she seemed to puzzle over this same “point” to the hunting story in which Jugs and Jax settle their conflict with their father and his buddies by putting chopped poison oak leaves on them. These men had humiliated Jax and Jugs by convincing them that the rabbit the boys had killed probably had Alabama Spotted Blue-Tick Fever, “the blue plague,” and that the only way to know for sure was to examine the rabbit’s liver, which the boys had thrown into the woods. After a miserable, fruitless search, the boys returned to the hunting camp only to find the men howling with laughter. Thelma wrote in her journal: “Why did Jax tell this story? His brother and dad are both gone now. Is he simply reminiscing?” Mr. Norman responded to Thelma’s question about why Jax told the hunting story by telling her that his “theory is that conflicts can be resolved by three methods: peaceful means, violent means, and practical jokes. I favor the latter.” Mr. Norman did not further explain his response, but it seems directly related to his personal anti-war sentiment. He ends the chapter in which the hunting story is told by writing,

It wasn’t too long after they finished mopping up Guadalcanal that they confirmed Jugs had been killed. Somebody in his squadron had seen his plane explode before it hit the water. They told us his last radio transmission was, “Don’t worry about me, fellows, I can walk back from here.”
You know, I ain’t told that bunny story for a while. I used to just hear the jokes in it— theirs on us and ours on them and God’s on all of us (p. 101).

Several times Thelma noted that Jax really could think (in spite of his own insecurities about being able to make choices), and she approved of his basing his choices on love: “I would say he made the right choices. He was honest, loving, and kind. When you have all of this, how could anything go wrong?”

**Author.** In her journal Thelma wrote about Jax, “The author has made a great character. He is a character that we can’t stop reading about. I couldn’t put the book down.” She also noted that she liked the fact that “the author puts everything on a ‘normal’ families level. The dad is aggravated about Jugs going into the Navy, and the mom tells him (Jax) that it is perfect. This seems to be an ordinary family. These boys are so typical.”

An author of fiction creates credibility for himself or herself (*ethos*) by creating credible characters. Thelma seemed to identify strongly with the characters Mr. Norman created, particularly Jax, and she related them to people she knew in her own small Southern town. The emphasis on sports in both *Fielder’s Choice* and Limer seemed to strike a chord with her. At one point in her journal, she made the comment, “I can see many of my friends in these characters.” In my interview with Thelma, she observed, “We have so many athletes.” Referring to the characters, Thelma used terms such as “realistic,” “normal,” “typical,” “ordinary,” and “lifelike.” Specifically, she characterized Jax in her book notes as “likeable,” “a very good guy,” “your typical guy,” and “very real.

However, the web-like relationships of Jugs, Dixie, and Jax seemed to confuse her (“I can’t believe Jugs and Dixie got married. Had they ever seen each other?”), and her only “negative” response to Jax seemed to be in connection to his relationship with Dixie, which she initially found to be “very strange” and confusing. By Chapter Sixteen, though, she wrote that
she hoped “Jax and Dixie somehow end up together.” This complexity of relationships seems reflected in a very interesting comment Thelma made about Jax: “His accent and grammar make him seem very simple. The reader knows he is not.” Here we see what seems to be evidence of “expert” reading.

Rick Norman addressed Thelma’s confusion about the relationships:

You were confused about Dixie. I wanted the reader to be confused so that it would be a surprise when the characters finally worked out their feelings among themselves. Your comments in Chapter Four indicate that you were surprised that Jugs and Dixie got married. I intended that the reader be as shocked as Jax was. I did, however, want the marriage to be causally connected but not predictable. Perhaps I didn’t do a good enough job foreshadowing their marriage.

**Audience.** Thelma’s emotions seemed to be stirred in several ways through her role as audience: sympathy for Jax, the maggot-eaten kitten, Curly, and Little Jackson; anger towards Jude and Maw; sadness at Jugs’s death and Jax’s aloneness immediately after the war ends.

Expressions of sympathy for Jax included the following comments: “I feel sorry for Jax.” “When he gets ready to pitch, my stomach gets in knots.” “When he fell on the ground, my heart sank.” “You can identify with what he is going through if you have ever played sports. Letting everyone down is the worst feeling.” She seemed frustrated that every time Jax had a big opportunity, he failed. In referring to the kitten in the interview, she commented, “It was just terrible.” In response to Yoshi’s revelation to Jax that Curly was an acclaimed comic book artist prior to the war and that his bitterness is a result of his losing his family to Allied bombs, Thelma wrote: “We are now in a way able to sympathize with him [Curly].” Anger towards Jude spilled over several times: “Jude is horrible!” “How pathetic; a ‘man’ against a child.” “I detest Jude.” Thelma also expressed anger toward Maw when she defended Jude’s treatment of Dixie and Little Jackson, “That’s sickening!” A sense of sadness flowed through Thelma’s responses to Jugs’s death and to Jax’s aloneness immediately after the war ends, while he is still at the
Admiral’s. She wrote: “The baby only adds to the sadness of Jugs’s death.” “When Jax is left alone, there is a sense of relief and sadness.” At one point in her journal, Thelma commented about the book as a whole, “This has to be one of the most depressing stories I have ever read.”

Rick Norman responded to Thelma’s concerns:

In Chapter Eight you ask why Jax seemed to fail each time there was a big game. Perhaps the people who struggle are actually the ones who should be revered. They are not on automatic pilot. They are the anti-soldiers who must know “why” before they act. By Chapter Twelve you were of the opinion that Fielder’s Choice had to be “one of the most depressing stories [you had] ever read.” I would be interested to know whether by Chapter Twelve you were so hooked into reading the book that you continued even though it was very depressing, or whether you believe a reader without an assignment may have put the book down at this point in time. I was glad to read your comment in Chapter Seventeen that it is “unforgivable” to hit a child. I hope that sentiment stays with you always.

Text. How did Thelma respond to such textual features as foreshadowing, dialect, the reality devices, the use of the Major as a pseudo-audience, the opening and the ending of the novel, and its pace? Thelma’s responses were varied. The opening lines of Chapter One (“This ain’t about aiding and abetting the enemy, Major. It’s about the 1941 American League pennant.”) confused her. At least twice, her attention was drawn to the Major: “I didn’t even realize he was still talking to the major.” “Why would the major listen to all this?” Even though at one point Thelma commented negatively about the incorrectness of Jax’s grammar, she still seemed to like “the author’s use of accents because it makes the characters more personable.” Noting the pace of the story, Thelma wrote, “The story line moves along well. He seems to move the reader through the story rather quickly.”

Chatrick: “I Finally Understand the Title Now”

A gifted conversationalist, Chatrick was an A-B English student his senior year and was able to write quite competently. Like Thelma, he was also an Honor Society member. However, unlike Thelma, he admitted did not like to read and felt intimidated by long books.
Interestingly, though, he had read at least some of the lengthy Harry Potter books. Chatrick had relatively few notes in his book. Instead, he underlined passages that seemed significant to him. His journal responses, however, ranged from a half page to a page and a half and gave a great deal of insight into what he was thinking. His words, “I finally understand the title now,” quotation seem to capture a significant moment of insight when he, a non-baseball player, had a “revelation” about why Mr. Norman used the baseball term “fielder’s choice” as his title. My interview with Chatrick was very productive, and he seemed very much at ease discussing the novel and his responses.

**Topic.** Chatrick’s topic responses centered on the two main themes of *Fielder’s Choice*: war and choices. He had a very strong anti-war response to the dropping of bombs over Tokyo, and I believe it is worth sharing in its entirety:

Well, I think that with the first bomb I dropped, I would be thinking about all of the “humans” I killed. I don’t think that I could ever go to war and kill people. I know that I couldn’t stand up and shoot the person next to me, so how could the army expect me to rain bombs down on people whom I would never see. I don’t see much difference in the two. If I was to shoot someone in a supermarket, I would be arrested, and in the worst case sentenced to death myself. However, if you are in the army and kill thousands in the name of your country, you are considered “brave” and are congratulated on your actions. I don’t think that I will understand why that happens.

Mr. Norman responded to Chatrick’s very strong statements: “Your comments about Chapters Ten and Eleven indicated perhaps a similar thought process to that of Jax. I was hoping that the reader would also start to question the glorified view of war.”

Though Chatrick was not particularly familiar with baseball terms, he ended his journal responses by saying: “I finally understand the title now. The whole basis of the book, overlooking baseball and the war, are the choices people make. I totally feel that and get it.” Mr. Norman was “very excited” by this comment and wrote that “apparently I got at least one of my points across.” Here we see what seems to be a genuine connection between Chatrick and
Mr. Norman. Chatrick “gets” Mr. Norman’s point, and Mr. Norman is excited by this. Here too is an illustration of the relationship between teacher/parent and student/child. Mr. Norman had a point to make, and Chatrick understood this point.

**Author.** Chatrick initially responded to Mr. Norman in his first journal entry by commenting on Norman’s knowledge of baseball and his ability to write a book and be a lawyer at the same time. (“Shows that he is very dedicated to writing.”) This first journal entry was in response to the information in the back of the book. It is perhaps one indication that Mr. Norman found credibility in Chatrick’s eyes even before beginning to read *Fielder’s Choice*. The fact that Norman could write a book while meeting the demands of a challenging legal career seemed to impress Chatrick.

Just as Chatrick seemed to accept the credibility of Mr. Norman, he also seemed to view Norman’s protagonist, Jax, as a credible character. However, in spite of his generally positive impression of Jax, he did not at all initially go along with Jax’s desire for Dixie, his sister-in-law: “What?!! Get a girlfriend!” (Jax’s encounter with Dixie in the raft) and “What?! He needs to respect his dead brother.” (Jax’s desire to marry Dixie). Later, however, this strong aversion to a relationship between Jax and Dixie changed: “At first I thought that it was bad that Jax was going to marry Dixie, but when he was going to her house, I was really rooting for them to get together.”

Interestingly, though Chatrick seemed to accept the credibility (*ethos*) of Mr. Norman and his character Jax, he seemed to have a strong negative response to Jugs. He was not convinced that Jugs was the lovable jokester Mr. Norman seemed to be portraying. Instead, he found his incessant jokes irritating and, putting himself in Jax’s shoes, often embarrassing. On the other hand, Paw was a very believable character for Chatrick, and the account of his affair with Lilly
was all too real. He noted in his journal: “It sounds almost exactly the same. The way Jax talks about his dad being ‘different’ than he remembered, that is what I remember of my father.” In my interview with him, he commented: “The whole thing about his [Jax’s] father leaving the family and stuff like that, I can identify with that perfectly because that’s exactly how my father acted—to the T. I identified.”

**Audience.** The deepest emotional audience-oriented response from Chatrick came at the revelation of Paw’s affair with Lilly. This struck a deep, personal chord with Chatrick who had himself experienced a similar situation with his own father. In response to the chapter that introduced this scenario, he wrote: “This chapter saddened me. Whenever this situation pops up in a movie, book, or even in real life, I find myself a little upset.” Mr. Norman responded to Chatrick’s very personal comments:

> Your comments to Chapter Three indicated that you had experienced a similar divorce. Of course, I was very sorry to hear that. Do you feel that your own personal experiences affected the way you perceived my novel? An author must direct his story to the collective consciousness of his perceived audience and hope that he does not lose readers because of individual experiences.

In addition to his very personal response to this situation, Chatrick also revealed in various comments a deep sympathy for Jax: “I feel really sorry for Jackson.” “I wish he would catch a break here soon.” “I’m glad that something good has happened to him. After all he has been through, he deserves a little break.” “This final chapter is a very emotional chapter. Jax basically pours his heart out and my heart goes out to him.” Frequently, angry comments were directed at Jude: “I hate Jude!” “Jude is such a snake! He will get his one day. Arrogant S. O. B.” “I just want to say that I hate Jude. He is such a coward.” Chatrick’s angry comments escalated to projecting physical violence upon Jude in response to his treatment of Jax when he returned home from Japan (“That makes me mad. I would have hit him hard!”) and his
hitting Jax with a belt (“I’m surprised he didn’t knock Jude out! I would have. That would really make me furious.”).

Mr. Norman noted Chatrick’s sympathy for Jax and his desire for something good to happen to Jax:

In Chapter Thirteen you are hoping that Jax could catch a break “soon.” It is about this time in the novel that one of your fellow students [Thelma] indicated that “this has to be one of the most depressing stories I have ever read.” Some other people that have read the book have indicated that it was just too depressing. I think I may have lost some readers by bringing Jax too far down before I started him on the way back up.

**Text.** The notes that Chatrick made in his book were primarily questions that he had about the meaning of various terms (e. g., ERA, pert, balk). His journal and interview responses also reflected these questions about terms. For example, Chatrick wrote: “I don’t understand what happened to him on the mound. Did he faint or something? I don’t see how they lost the game. What is “balk”?”

Mr. Norman explained his dilemma of how much background to provide the reader:

Your question in Chapter Eight about a “balk” indicated to me that perhaps I didn’t explain that complicated baseball rule. Again I had to (i) explain the rule, (ii) assume a degree of knowledge or (iii) do both. However, in that Jax was telling the story to other servicemen who would, that day and age, have known what a balk was, I hesitated to get into a lengthy explanation. I was trapped by my own device.

Chatrick’s responses also dealt with other aspects of the text, such as the author’s use of dialect, foreshadowing, the effectiveness of the opening chapter, and the weakness of the final chapter. With reference to the dialect, Chatrick wrote: “I find myself reading a sentence a second and third time because I don’t understand what he is trying to say.” In my interview with Chatrick, we discussed his response to the dialect, and he further revealed his opinion that if he, a Southerner, had difficulty understanding the dialect, then he could not imagine “how people from the North—not knowing how we speak down here—how they could figure it out at all.”
He felt that Northerners might lose interest in the story and that less dialect might have been more effective.

Mr. Norman responded to Chatrick’s concerns about the dialect:

You mention in your comments to Chapter One that you were bothered by the dialect. I think many people were. I was hoping that the dialect would become easier to read once the reader picked up the cadence. Did you find it easier as you went on? Do you think the dialect was so strong that it would have caused a reader to give up on the book?

Chatrick revealed his awareness of Mr. Norman’s foreshadowing that “something bad [was going to happen] to Jugs in the war. I think he will be killed or at least hurt.” Mr. Norman noted this prediction: “I enjoyed your prediction in Chapter Four that Jugs would be killed. Perhaps I was too predictable.” Chatrick also noticed foreshadowing in respect to the way Jax “mentions war, and starts this new baseball thing; I just don’t think it is going to last very long.”

He seemed very impressed with the opening chapter of Fielder’s Choice. By his own admission, if it takes him “till the third chapter” to get into a book, then he does not “tend to make it to that third chapter.” He felt that the opening chapter “did a good job” of drawing him in. However, he was less sure of the effectiveness of the final chapter and made some suggestions for improvement. Chatrick suggested that “it should maybe have gone more into the whole Japanese baseball thing.” He noted that “it could have been tied back into there [the ceremony honoring Jax many years later].” Chatrick also questioned the abrupt ending of the last chapter. (Though Chatrick does directly respond to the author as “he,” I chose to put this quotation in the text section because he seems to be responding primarily to the text created by the author.)

I think he [the author] could have added a few more chapters about him [Jax] having his son and teaching him how to play baseball and leading up to that [the newspaper article]. It just kind of ended in a spot where it was unusual. He [Jax] just left the officer after explaining himself. And that’s where you were left. Then it [the newspaper article] explains kind of what happened in the meantime.
It is interesting to note that as a “non-reader,” Chatrick seemed to have a keen sense of the textual features which Mr. Norman employed, even to the point of offering solutions for areas that he saw as problematic.


Bob, one of the two baseball players in the study, was a quiet fellow whose dry wit popped out at unexpected moments. Although he read rather slowly and labored over his writing, he worked hard in my senior English class and moved from C’s to B’s on his report card. As an avid baseball player, Bob played catcher for many years on school and summer league teams. It was Bob’s strong connection to baseball which led me to include him in the study. I was curious to see how he would respond to a baseball novel, and, as the quotation indicates, he identified with some of the baseball situations in which Jax found himself.

Bob made very few notes in his copy of *Fielder’s Choice*. His journal entries, which skipped over Chapter Ten, averaged a half page and were usually simply a recounting of the story. However, buried within these retellings of the story were nuggets of personal response. My greatest insight into Bob’s responses to *Fielder’s Choice* came from the follow-up interview, and it is at this point that we were both able to use my long-standing friendship with his family to our advantage. Though he was somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of doing an interview in which he was being recorded, the fact that he knew me alleviated some of his discomfort, and I was able to gain some valuable data.

**Topic.** Bob’s topic-related responses dealt almost exclusively with the theme of choice. The one exception was an observation made during the interview that Jax had the ability to look past the fact that Yoshi was Japanese and to see him as simply another baseball player.
When I asked Bob about the main idea of *Fielder’s Choice*, he indicated that he perceived it as confessing to a mistake and trying to make it right. Perhaps in light of this perception, Bob commented in his journal that if Jax “did mess up, it was an accident. He didn’t mean anything by the choices he made. He just wanted to help everybody he could. Gooseball was an honest man.”

**Author.** After reading the brief biography of Mr. Norman at the end of *Fielder’s Choice*, Bob noted in his journal:

> The author Rick Norman seems to be a huge baseball fan. He played college ball somewhere and was known for not being able to hit a curve ball. Although he didn’t make it in the “big leagues,” he leads a very successful life being a lawyer.

Bob’s only notation about Mr. Norman directly seems to indicate his matter-of-fact acceptance of Mr. Norman as a “big league” lawyer “although he didn’t make it in the ‘big leagues’” as a baseball player.

Instead of focusing on Mr. Norman directly, Bob seemed to focus primarily on the characters Mr. Norman had created, particularly Jax, whom he often referred to simply as “the narrator,” and on Jax’s relationship with his older brother Jugs. In fact, though Bob himself has no brothers, it is this friendship between the brothers that he said (in the interview) that he liked best about *Fielder’s Choice*. However, he also noted that “Jugs did all the thinking for him [Jax]. He relied too much on his older brother.” Bob perceived Jugs as being more level-headed than Jax but also as being inappropriately funny in certain situations. He seemed to imply that Jax’s relationship with Jugs did not end with Jugs’s death: “He starts thinking more like his brother.” That is, Jax seemed to gain some of Jugs’s level-headedness after his war ordeal. Still, Bob observed, Jax wanted to do something with his life after returning home from Japan,
“instead of just being a shadow of his older brother.” Bob saw this desire as Jax’s incentive for trying to go back into the majors.

Bob was not at all impressed with Jude. His brief description of him is worth noting:

“There wasn’t much to him. He seemed kind of like a lawyer. You don’t know whether to trust him or not.” This comment is ironic given the fact that the author, Mr. Norman, is a lawyer. Bob seems to be critically examining the credibility of Jude and by implication the credibility (ethos) of the author.

**Audience.** A baseball player himself, Bob seemed to identify with some of the situations in which Jax found himself. For example, he noted in his journal: “I can understand [about the unfair umpiring] because most of the MPSA (Mississippi Private School Association) umpires pull for the teams in Mississippi and give us a little bit of a hard time.” Bob also seemed to identify with those who make mistakes. In my interview with him, he commented, “I could understand some of the [baseball] situations . . . It’s kind of difficult in some situations, and you make a mistake, and you just feel like an idiot.”

As a whole, Bob viewed Jax as “a good old country boy” who “does what he thinks is right.” He seemed particularly impressed with Jax’s ability to survive his ordeal in “The Pipe”: “This is the most courageous thing that I have ever heard of.”

**Text.** From the beginning of his reading, Bob was aware of Mr. Norman’s structural framework of having Jax tell flashback stories instead of giving the Major straightforward answers about his alleged treasonous conduct. In his Chapter One journal response, he noted: “He [Jax] has to convince the government that he didn’t help the enemy, and he is telling stories. He better show his point fast.” Mr. Norman responded to this comment: “I chose to show the point over 200 or so pages so that I would have a novel. I hope you did not find it too frustrating.
waiting for some sort of resolution.” Mr. Norman’s comment is especially interesting given the fact that in the original manuscript, the Army interrogator makes an observation similar to Bob’s: “We have now listened to you for the better part of a day and haven’t, as far as I can tell, touched upon the treason charges against you.” After finishing the novel, Bob noted in the interview that Jax’s motive for telling the stories was “to show that he didn’t mean anything by what he did. He just wanted to show that he made an honest mistake if he did.”

Commenting on Mr. Norman’s use of flashbacks, Bob observed that without them the reader would not have known Jax very well. Perhaps because he and the other students had gotten to know Jax so well through the flashbacks, he noted that they (the five-student audience) wanted a more definitive conclusion to the novel than Mr. Norman had provided.

Bob enjoyed the Southern setting in *Fielder’s Choice* and adapted quickly to Jax’s south Arkansas dialect. Though he felt that if there had not been any Southern dialect in the novel “there wouldn’t have been as much emphasis on the Southern part,” he also felt that the lack of a Southern dialect would not have substantially altered the novel as a whole.

**Goose: “It Was Very Focused”**

Goose, the other baseball player who participated in the study, had in his own words “basically lived, breathed, and worshipped baseball” since he was a child, acquiring the nickname of “Goose” at about age fourteen. In spite of being an Honor Society student—a straight-A student in senior English—Goose hated to read and considered himself to be a non-reader. An intelligent and personable young man, he had figured out ways of succeeding academically with only a minimum of reading. Because he did not like to read, Goose was very appreciative of Mr. Norman’s focused, straightforward style of writing, and this appreciation was highlighted in his responses.
Goose had a fair number of notes in his book, but not as many as Thelma. Like Bob, his journal responses were primarily retellings of the story. However, he too had some golden nuggets of data buried in those responses. The interview with Goose could best be described as frustrating—for both of us. Unfortunately, due to unavoidable scheduling conflicts, I was not able to interview Goose until several weeks after he had handed in his responses. By that time, he had forgotten some of the details of the novel and his responses. Consequently, a fair amount of the interview consisted of my prompting his memory. However, as I combed through the data contained in the interview, I realized that Goose had indeed provided me with more valuable data than I had initially thought possible.

**Topic.** Goose seemed immediately intrigued by the author’s use of the term “fielder’s choice.” He wrote in his journal: “Being familiar with baseball, I know what a fielder’s choice is, but I am interested in seeing how a fielder’s choice comes into play.” In my interview with him, Goose affirmed that as he read *Fielder’s Choice*, he “noticed there were many choices that he [Jax] could have gone either way,” illustrating the dilemma of a fielder’s choice. For example, Goose noticed that Jax stayed with his father in the hospital rather than playing in the championship game: “Maybe this is Fielder’s choice?” Here we see Goose thinking ahead, predicting possible meaning for “Fielder’s choice.” Commenting on the connection between Jax’s struggle to make choices for himself and the story of the Browns’ winning the pennant as a result of heart rather than skill, Goose noted: “He has to go on basic heart instinct—he has to decide for himself instead of listening to peer pressure.” Goose saw this pressure as being “a big point of it [the novel]. His [Jax’s] fielder’s choice came under the pressure.”

Goose had interesting insight into the topic of war. He readily recognized the difference between having an antagonistic relationship with a collective enemy and having a “friendly”
relationship with an individual who may be part of the collective enemy. He analogized Jax and Yoshi’s relationship to that of individuals on an all-star team:

[When] you’re on a team with one of your archrivals, you don’t even think about, ‘Oh, I couldn’t stand him a week ago.’ You play against his team; you don’t play against him. They’re fighting against the Japanese; they’re not fighting against Yoshi.

Author. Most of Goose’s author-related responses seemed to focus on Mr. Norman himself. In fact, he seemed to be the most sophisticated reader with respect to author. For example, in his journal he noted: “After reading about the author’s previous experiences with baseball, I have a feeling he’s going to use his own personal views in the book.” When I asked Goose to clarify what he meant by “personal views,” he responded that since the author had played baseball, he thought perhaps some of the situations in Fielder’s Choice were based on situations “he was in or where he messes up,” just as Jax had messed up in the state championship game. “I was thinking that could have happened to him, caving under pressure.” In fact, some of the situations in Fielder’s Choice were based on situations Mr. Norman was in—situations in which he “messed up.” As noted in a previous chapter, Mr. Norman’s biggest “mess up” under pressure came in a state championship football game in which a penalty call on him cost his team the championship, a situation similar to Jax’s balk costing his team the pennant.

Goose noted that, since “the author is a lawyer now,” there would likely be many twists, “loopholes,” and exaggerated detail in the story. In my follow-up interview with him, he cited Mr. Norman’s description of Neckless becoming ill in Mexico, saying that Norman “really went off into the sickness and everything” (exaggerated detail). When I asked Goose about his connecting Mr. Norman’s being a lawyer and his expectations for Fielder’s Choice, he responded: “Well, most lawyers are like that. It’s a personality thing.”
In terms of the authenticity of Mr. Norman’s characters, Goose seemed to relate most closely with Jax and his relationship with his brother Jugs:

I thought that was just like the typical brother [relationship] because I have an older brother myself, and I’m the middle child just like Jax was, and I used to pitch to my brother, and my brother would pitch to me.

**Audience.** Goose had minimal emotionally evoked responses. His only comments which could be labeled as “emotionally evoked” came during my interview with him, which occurred after a time lapse. One was in response to the maggot-eaten kitten story (“Oh, that was gross!”), and the other was in response to Jude (“I didn’t like him at all.”). The only other “emotional” comment was to the “dropped babies” passage (Passage B) which is noted in the section on the focused passages.

**Text.** As I was rereading my analyses of Goose’s book notes, journal responses, and interview responses, it seemed clear to me that Goose, a self-proclaimed “non-reader,” responded strongly to the textual features of *Fielder’s Choice.* In these responses, he used such literary terms as “style,” “analogy,” “metaphor,” and “narrator.” Goose seemed very appreciative of Rick Norman’s style of writing and expressed this appreciation in my interview with him:

It was very focused. It was written so that the average person, anybody, a kid—a fifteen-year-old kid—can read, and [he] doesn’t have to know these big, complex words [or deal with] sentences that have subject and verb inverted. It’s just so much easier to read than [that of Charles Dickens in *David Copperfield*]. I’m not really English focused. I can’t pick up on those real big words. You get to the point where you just don’t even want to read anymore. You’re just sick of all these big words. So I like the way he writes. I really do.

In his book notes, however, Goose did indicate confusion about some of the allusions Mr. Norman used. For example, he wrote: “Pavlov’s weenie? Who is Pavlov?” He also put question marks at such allusions as “Grant’s Bible” and “donnybrook.” The references to the
Major also seemed to confuse Goose: “Who’s Major?” “Talking to someone named Major?” “I am still wondering—who is Jax talking to???” Mr. Norman addressed Goose’s confusion:

Your comment to Chapter Nine was that you could not determine to whom Jax was talking. That was a difficult part of writing the novel that I struggled with. On the one hand a writer wants to tell the reader what is happening, but at the same time Jax was supposed to be telling the story to someone who had obviously known much of the situation. If you were talking to someone, you would not start out your conversation saying, “I am here talking to you today because you are an army investigator and I have been charged with treason.” That would be presumed. So, as you see, I was trapped by my own literary device.

Towards the end of the novel, Goose figured out the Major’s role, and his confusion gave way to appreciation for the author’s use of the Major as a pseudo-audience, which he expressed in the interview: “He would say ‘Major,’ but in a way I felt that he was talking to me. It was directed at the reader. Even though he was talking to the Major, you could associate with him.”

Though Goose may have been confused about some terms, his baseball knowledge seemed to enable him to grasp immediately the significance of the title, predicting that it “represents a metaphor for a choice that the author had to make.” Another prediction that he made was triggered by what he saw as a possible connection between the misspelling of Jax’s last name in a newspaper article and the title of the novel: “I was just thinking . . . there was going to be a newspaper article or something named ‘Fielder’s Choice’ or ‘Fielder Made His Choice’ or something like that.” Goose also recognized Mr. Norman’s use of an analogy in recounting Neckless’s story of the orangutan wrestling yellow-coated opponents.

In response to the dialect, he noted in his journal: “I find the dialect and the way he [Norman] writes easy to relate to at times, but hard to follow [at] others. I would rather his style than that of Charles Dickens in David Copperfield.” Mr. Norman responded by noting that “an almost universal comment was that the dialect was hard to follow.” He wanted to know if Goose found “that it became easier as the story went on” and if he thought readers “would have quit
reading the book out of frustration.” Later in the interview Goose elaborated on his opinion of Mr. Norman’s use of dialect:

At first it was kind of hard to follow, but once you got used to it, it was so easy to read. After a few chapters of it, you’re just reading it like it’s normal. You don’t even have to delay. At first I was going back and reading, just kind of double-checking, [but] we use some of those slang words down in Louisiana.

**Loki: “He Seems Intelligent”**

Loki was a generally quiet but extremely intelligent student who, like Thelma, Chatrick, and Goose, was also a member of the Honor Society. She had the ability to handle quite easily material which most students find challenging, reading widely and deeply in areas that are generally not within the scope of a high school senior. Loki was able to analyze what she had read and then synthesize it in a coherent format that reflected her thoughtful approach, particularly adept at doing so in writing. Loki’s thoughtful approach is also illustrated in her analysis of Mr. Norman as “intelligent, judging by his writing style and the fact that he has a law degree.” Though Loki was the acknowledged “intellectual” of the senior class, she also participated in track and field—specifically in field events—and was knowledgeable about other sports.

Initially, Loki provided handwritten journal responses and also typed responses. Later, the handwritten journal responses were merely a summary of the chapter and questions she had. The typed responses were her “journal” responses. Occasionally, there seemed to be contradictions between her handwritten responses and her typed responses. For example, she wrote: “The second chapter doesn’t shine much light on the first. I imagine it will not until the end chapters.” But her typed response read: “The second chapter provides more insight into Jax’s life as the story continues forward almost chronologically. The chapter covers a few incidents, but I only find some of them to be of any interest.”
Loki’s copy of *Fielder’s Choice*, by comparison to the books of the other students, was peppered with notes on practically every page. From these notes she drew her journal responses. For example, her note about Jugs, “Gosh, Jugs is never serious. Not at all like an officer,” became in her typed version: “Even after flight school and becoming an officer Jugs still has his sometimes inappropriate sense of humor.”

**Topic.** Most of Loki’s topic-related responses dealt with the main theme of *Fielder’s Choice*, that of making choices. Early in her journal responses, she recognized that “instead of just being a baseball book, the novel becomes something deeper. The novel becomes a book about a choice—a life-altering choice—though what exactly this choice is remains unknown.” In our interview, Loki revealed that she had decided that this life-altering choice occurred when Jax “finally decided that it was *his* life, and *he* was going to control it, not someone else and all the events that came of that.” She seemed to feel that the theme of choice was summed up in the story of the Browns’ winning the pennant not because of the skills of the players but because of their heartfelt dedication:

Such is the simple message of the novel. Choices, good or bad, must be made for the right reasons. The simple message of the chapter, and indeed of the story, is one of hope. Choices are made by everyone every day, but why do we make them? If we are making them for the wrong reasons, then they are wrong regardless of outcome. Only a choice made for the right reasons can truly sit right in the grand scheme of things.

**Author.** Loki’s perceptions of Mr. Norman himself are interesting to note:

It does seem to me that the book, or at least the author, is somewhat humorous. The note about the author contains comments which are quite obviously designed to poke fun at the author, not necessarily to ridicule him but to impart some of his personality through the description rather than having an astringent synopsis of his life. This signals that the tone of the book will probably have comic undertones from time to time.
In my interview with her, Loki commented: “He seems like a very odd man. Oh, you know, he has kind of an off-beat sense of humor. But he seems intelligent, judging by his writing style and the fact that he has a law degree.”

Like the other students, Loki’s responses in this category focused on Jax. However, unlike the comments of the other students, many of her initial comments about Jax were negative and skeptical. She did not seem to accept the author’s portrayal of Jax, questioning the credibility of his protagonist, Jax. In some of her book notes, she used terms such as “paranoid,” “jealous,” “defensive,” “selfish,” “touchy,” and “messed up” to describe him. She also seemed skeptical of certain details about Jax. For example, she made the following notes in her book: “He sleeps on his glove?” When Jax decides that the Japanese are human because they play baseball, Loki commented: “I suppose. Interpreting how his mind works.” By contrast, as she tried to figure out the rationale for Jax’s loathing of Jude, Loki initially seemed to feel that Jude had more credibility than Jax. She noted that Jude was “not disobedient like the other two” though he seemed a little too quick to please. She also seemed irritated with Jax for blaming everything on Jude and for taking out all of his anger on his little brother. At one point Loki wrote in her journal: “I cannot help but wonder why Jax hates Jude so much. There must be more than what is being revealed thus far.”

In spite of her skepticism of Jax, Loki did make some positive notes about him. For example, when Jax determinedly tells the Major that he will not allow himself to be put in prison for treason, she wrote: “Good for you!” Responding to Jax’s struggles after Jugs’s death, she conceded: “I do not blame Jax for his feelings. He has been through a lot thus far. It may also upset Jax to know that Jugs went down as he lived, alleviating others’ feeling of anger with his
amazing sense of humor.” Loki also noted Jax’s feeling of being trapped in the position of “the Alpha male of sorts” when he becomes the “man of the house.”

However, it was not until Loki read Jax’s story of Jude’s “Dud Ranch,” the failed lizard-thawing science project, that she noted: “Oh, maybe Jude has some problems.” But, as she pointed out in the interview, she still did not view Jude as a “bad person.” In fact, at one point, she surmised that “Jax has such a horrible view of Jude, not because Jude is a bad person, but because Jax blames him for the death of their father. It seems that Jude blames himself as well.” Only when Jude marries Dixie and “it was revealed that he was abusive, and he was very vindictive about having married Dixie before Jax got a chance” did she write in her journal: “Jude is a jerk. I cannot believe he got Dixie.”

Loki’s responses to the other characters were minimal. On the positive side, she noted that Jugs seemed to have a good attitude about sports and that Bubba, “one tough guy,” turned out not to be a bad guy after all. Earlier in her notes, Loki had expressed doubt about Jax’s view of Bubba. She did not feel that “a simple grudge [on the part of Bubba] would make someone frame another person for what seems to amount to high treason.” On the negative side, Loki noted that “it seems odd to me that even after undergoing his officer’s training Jugs still has his inappropriate sense of humor.” She also seemed to find Dixie’s reason for marrying Jude incredible: “She married him for a car!”

In spite of what seemed to be a great deal of incredulity, Loki did find credibility in the characters’ pranks and in the simple pastimes of small-town life. When we discussed the pranks in our interview, she commented: “I’ve been raised around guys, and that’s pretty realistic.” In response to the story of Jax and Jugs throwing a baseball through the pipes, she wrote in her
book: “Gosh, I guess all small-town kids are the same.” When I asked Loki to elaborate on this comment, she gave an illustration from her own childhood:

Well, it’s just that they found whatever was there, and they played in an old stack of pipes. My dad’s a mechanic, and when I was little, [he] used to overhaul engines. My brother, little friends from around the neighborhood, and I played with the valves that came out of the engines. We’d make up ridiculous games, but it’s all we had.

**Audience.** For Loki, *Fielder’s Choice* seemed to evoke feelings of aversion, sympathy, sadness, and outrage. Her strongest aversions seemed to be to the kitten story and to Jax’s treatment at the hands of the Japanese. For example, Loki wrote the following notes: “Ugh!” (maggots crawling in the eye sockets of the kitten, conditions in “The Pipe,” and Jax’s eyeball popping out); “I hate that feeling.” (things crawling on Jax); “How terrible!” (Jax battling flies in “The Pipe”); “Ouch!” (Jax being hit by the guard). She noted in her journal that “the haunting image of the cat sticks with me even now.” It is this image that also haunts Jax while he is in “The Pipe.” Mr. Norman responded to Loki’s aversion to the kitten story: “You were disgusted by the cat story. When I speak in schools, that is the most common comment that I get. Do you think it added [to] or detracted [from] the story? Should I have left it out?”

At various times, her sympathy seemed to encompass Bubba, Jax, Jude, Jugs, and Little Jackson. At one point in her journal, Loki indicated strong empathy for Jax’s aversion to funerals:

To tell the truth, I sympathize with Jackson when it comes to funerals. I go out of my way not to get near them. Not that it is a fear of death. I just do not grieve like most people. Jackson seems the same way.

Sadness was evoked by the death of Jugs and by Jax’s mistimed declaration of love for Dixie, but Loki’s outrage was focused upon the “despicable” pranks carried out by the ball players. For example, she responded to the prank on Neckless by writing: “Those rotten cheats!”
Text. An experienced reader, Loki seemed keenly aware of the textual features of *Fielder’s Choice*. Impressed with the opening chapter of the novel, she wrote:

The first chapter of *Fielder’s Choice* is one of the best-written openings in any book I have ever read. It is immediately captivating because it opens directly into action but does not give away the plot or ending to the book. I find this particularly attractive in the novel.

Mr. Norman responded to this praise with appreciation: “Your comment . . . that I did not give away the rest of the plot was very welcome. I tried very hard to give the reader enough information that he could follow the story but not enough that he could predict it.”

In other responses she noticed the author’s use of the following literary techniques: the baseball framework, the purposeful changes of subject (Referring to Jax’s sense of guilt about his father’s death, she wrote: “Accentuated with change of subject.”), the Civil War allusions, the repetition of certain phrases (“That’s psychology.”), the “remember him?” reality device, the building of associations, the chronological organization interrupted by flashbacks (“I’m really getting tired of flashbacks.”), and the connecting of the end of the novel to the sequence in the beginning (Jax being investigated for treason).

In our discussion of the text during the interview, I asked her what she thought of the overall structure and tone of the novel. Here is her response:

Structure—it was interesting, you know, the way he put it together. A little bit of the flashbacks inside of the flashbacks would get annoying and tedious, but overall it was very well assembled. And the tone—it was a very serious story, but it was realistic.

Her criticism of the text seemed to focus on Mr. Norman’s use of flashbacks. Loki observed that using flashbacks to set up the novel was effective, but she became frustrated when “instead of going forward he started going backwards more.” She felt that this lack of forward movement in the action of the story would be distracting for the general reader as well. Mr. Norman responded to Loki’s frustration with the flashbacks:
In your comments to Chapter Four you indicated you were “really getting tired of flashbacks.” In that the whole story was more or less a flashback I assume you were talking about parts of the story that were not in chronological order. I struggled with this a lot during the editing process. Again, a writer has to struggle with how much and what he gives the reader at what time so that he does not telegraph his punch.

In the interview, Loki acknowledged that “once you get toward the end of the book some of those flashbacks that seemed pointless actually tie in very well, so without them it would have had a different effect.”

More than once Loki noticed the Civil War references scattered throughout Fielder’s Choice and noted them in her copy of the book. Commenting on these in the interview, she explained that “being from the South and knowing how everyone here [Limer] takes the Civil War so seriously, I think it [use of Civil War references] just kind of fit in with where he was supposedly from. That’s the kind of thing that guys around here think about.”

A very interesting detail that Loki noticed (which I did not) was the fact that Mr. Norman had Jax use present tense verbs when he tells the Major that he is quite sure that he is not at the prisoner of war camp (in fact, he is at the Admiral’s), although he is recounting a past event. Loki noted this in her journal: “Funny the language used to say that is very present, not at all like he knew what it was until he told that part of the story.” When I asked Loki to expand on that observation in the interview, she explained:

I really didn’t know what to think about that part. It seems like he’s still in shock over everything that’s happened to him, and so he’s just telling this story as it’s coming to him. He doesn’t really realize what’s happened in the grand scheme of things.

Conclusions Regarding Students’ Written and Oral Responses

Topic. Multiple cues such as the title and situations in which Jax had to make a choice were provided about the theme of making choices, and without exception all five of the students responded to this theme. Two of the most interesting responses to the title came from Goose and
from Chatrick. For Goose, an avid baseball player, the title was an immediate cue that the topic of choice would be important in the novel. The inherent logic (logos) of the title seemed apparent to him. For Chatrick also the title was important. However, as one who was unfamiliar with baseball terminology, it was not until the end of the novel that he understood Mr. Norman’s title. As I noted in a previous chapter, Miall and Kuiken’s (1995) study of student readers seemed to indicate that a heightened awareness of author and attention to the author’s purpose may be associated with an extensive reading of literature. What is interesting with Goose and Chatrick is that it is life experiences rather than literary experiences that made the difference in their awareness of the author’s purpose.

Author. Because a major way in which the credibility, or ethos, of an author of fiction is established with readers is through the characters the author creates, I included students’ responses to Mr. Norman’s characters as well as their responses to Mr. Norman directly in the section on author. For all of the students except Goose, their primary form of response to Mr. Norman was through their responses to his characters, especially to Jax. All of them, however, including Loki in the end, viewed Jax positively and identified with some aspect of Jax’s life, thus viewing him as a credible character. These aspects differed across readers. Thelma saw Jax in some of her friends. Chatrick saw himself in Jax’s experience with his parents’ separation. Bob identified with some of Jax’s baseball situations. Goose saw himself in Jax’s relationship with his older brother Jugs. Loki identified with Jax and Jugs’s small-town pastimes.

Though Goose did identify with Jax, most of his author-related responses were directed at Mr. Norman himself. Of all the participants, he seemed to connect Mr. Norman most closely with the text. Goose perceived that it was likely that situations in Fielder’s Choice were reflective of Mr. Norman’s personal experiences, and he connected the plot twists and
exaggerated detail with what he perceived as the typical lawyer personality of the author. It seems that for Goose, Mr. Norman was a rather “visible” author (Crismore, 1990; Nolen, 1995), but his “visibility” did not seem to present any obstacles for Goose.

**Audience.** One avenue for an author to establish a relationship with an audience is through appealing to emotion, or *pathos*. Mr. Norman certainly evoked emotions from the students through Jax’s story. The primary emotion seemed to be sympathy for Jax. Out of this feeling of sympathy for Jax flowed other emotions, particularly sadness and anger. For Thelma and Loki, sadness was evoked by the death of Jugs, Jax’s beloved older brother. Chatrick’s sadness was for himself as well as for Jax when he learned of Paw’s affair. Thelma and Chatrick both expressed strong anger towards Jude. Though the students did not all overtly express the same emotions, they all seemed to be bound by a common sympathy for Jax.

This common bond of sympathy for Jax is no accident. Mr. Norman’s framework for Jax’s story is a legal inquiry into whether or not Jax is guilty of treason, and Mr. Norman, the author/defense lawyer, is presenting Jax to the reader/jury as a character worthy of sympathetic consideration. It is interesting to note that his persuasive appeal to his audience’s emotions (*pathos*) harks back to the use of classical Aristotelian rhetoric in the law courts (forensic).

The students’ responses of sympathy for Jax seem consistent with one of the principles which Norman Holland (1975) derived from his study of five readers, a study which I discussed in Chapter Two. This principle was that defenses must be matched, hypothesizing that a reader finds something in the work that matches what he or she does to cope with needs or dangers. It seems evident from the students’ responses to Jax that they found enough of a match between themselves and Jax to identify with him and sympathize with him.
Text. There seemed to be six features of the text to which the students responded, though not all of the students responded to all six features. These six features of the text were: (1) the opening of the novel, (2) the use of the Major as a pseudo-audience, (3) the dialect, (4) the pace of the story, (5) the flashbacks, and (6) the terms and allusions.

Chatrick and Loki were very impressed by Mr. Norman’s opening chapter. Chatrick felt that it drew him in, and Loki praised it as one of the best openings she had ever read. Thelma, on the other hand, was confused by the opening lines of the novel. The use of the Major as a pseudo-audience confused both Thelma and Goose. However, by the end of the novel, Goose’s initial confusion diminished and was replaced by appreciation. He felt that, though Jax was speaking to the Major, he was also speaking to him. Thelma, Bob, and Goose all adapted easily to the Southern dialect and seemed to appreciate it. On the other hand, Chatrick was bothered by the dialect and would have preferred more conventional spelling and sentence structure. The pace of the novel seemed a bit too slow for Bob and Loki. For Thelma, however, the story seemed to move very quickly. Closely related to the pace of the novel were the flashbacks. Though Bob felt that the pace was too slow because Jax was telling so many stories, he later came to the conclusion that without the flashbacks the reader would not have been able to know Jax as well. Loki was very frustrated by the backward movement of the story because of the flashbacks, but she acknowledged that some of the flashbacks that seemed pointless actually tied in very well in the end. Baseball terms were confusing for Chatrick, who was unfamiliar with the terms of the sport, and Goose was confused by allusions such as “Pavlov’s weenie,” “Grant’s Bible,” and “donnybrook.”

We may conclude that in spite of the diverse responses of the students to the features of the text and the variety of emotions evoked, the students unanimously enjoyed Fielder’s Choice,
sympathized with Jax, and grasped the primary theme of choice. The students identified with Jax and were able to move past what may have seemed problematic. This unity seems to illustrate an aspect of what Burke (1950) termed “consubstantiality,” how through identification, humans are joined yet separate. It seems, then, that creating opportunities for both a defined and a “generic” audience to identify with an author—directly or indirectly—may be an author’s most effective strategy for connecting with his or her audience.

**Direct Responses in Interactive Meeting: Author to Audience and Audience to Author**

Opportunities for exchange, such as the journal responses, seemed to enable Mr. Norman’s audience to connect to him directly as well as through his characters. How did he connect to his audience in a face-to-face situation? And how did the students respond to Mr. Norman? The interactive meeting was an extension of the interaction among the students as they read and responded to *Fielder’s Choice* and Mr. Norman’s written responses to the students. In this section I describe the setting in which the interactive meeting took place, identify the participants, describe typical behaviors of the author and audience, and describe the exchanges between the author and various students and exchanges among the students. (See Appendix F.)

**Setting.** The setting of the interactive meeting between Mr. Norman and four of the student participants was a windowless meeting room on the campus of a university that was centrally located to the participants. A table with chairs around it was arranged in the middle of the room. The seating arrangement was as follows: Mr. Norman was at the end of the table closest to the door; Chatrick was seated to Mr. Norman’s right; Thelma sat next to Chatrick; I was seated next to but a short distance removed from Thelma; Bob sat to Mr. Norman’s left; Loki was seated next to Bob; Bob’s mother, our videotaper, was seated against the wall opposite Mr. Norman.
Participants. The participants in this meeting were Rick Norman, the author and lead conversant in this meeting; high school students Thelma, Chatrick, Bob, and Loki; and myself. Bob’s mother was present as the videotaper, but she did not participate in any form in the conversation. Goose, the fifth high school student who participated in the case study, was unable to be present because he had to work.

It was evident that Mr. Norman wanted to set a relaxed, casual, and open atmosphere for the meeting from the very beginning. In keeping with his belief in the importance of humor, he initiated the first of many rounds of laughter when he told the students that “we need to agree among ourselves that we’ll be straight and not hold anything back. . . . When you get old and bald-headed, it doesn’t matter anymore what people say about you or think about you.” Most of the exchanges involved Mr. Norman, Chatrick, and Thelma, and it was not unusual for Chatrick and Thelma, as well as Mr. Norman, to evoke laughter from the group. Part of this laughter was produced by Mr. Norman’s off and on teasing of Chatrick after he found out that Chatrick did not see anything funny in Fielder’s Choice. It is interesting to note that Bob, a quiet fellow, made a few comments that evoked laughter, some of which was generated by his gentle teasing of Chatrick.

Because most of the conversation revolved around Mr. Norman, Chatrick, and Thelma, Mr. Norman’s eye contact was primarily with the students to his right, Chatrick and Thelma. Chatrick and Thelma primarily had eye contact with Mr. Norman and with each other. Bob had much less frequent eye contact than Chatrick and Thelma since most of Mr. Norman’s exchanges were not with him. Loki’s eye contact was less frequent even than Bob’s. There was often a lack of eye contact from Loki even when she was speaking with Mr. Norman.
It is interesting to note that Chatrick, who seemed very uninhibited and relaxed, nevertheless often sat with his arms folded across his body. Thelma, who seemed a bit less relaxed than Chatrick, also often sat with her arms folded across her body. When she talked, however, she frequently used her hands to punctuate her conversation. Bob often looked down at the table and sometimes seemed disconnected. Frequently toying with her autographed copy of *Fielder’s Choice* or tapping gently on the table, Loki too sometimes appeared disconnected and only occasionally directed her attention toward the author.

**Conversation.** The various exchanges in the conversation were generally ignited by Mr. Norman, who interspersed personal questions and observations (for example, “Well, are y’all all going to college—somewhere?”) with discussion of *Fielder’s Choice* and his writing of the novel. Both Chatrick and Thelma responded readily to Mr. Norman’s questions as well as initiating exchanges. Bob and Loki, on the other hand, seemed to respond to Mr. Norman primarily when spoken to directly. When they did join in the general conversation, their remarks often did not seem directed specifically toward Mr. Norman. Though I had defined my role as that of an observer, I entered into a few of the exchanges, usually pulled in either by Mr. Norman or by various students.

In a preceding section, I discussed what seemed to be Mr. Norman’s perception of the students in the study. These perceptions were based strictly upon what he could assume about the students (cf. Nystrand, 1990) as he proceeded with his written responses. These perceived relationships seemed to be (1) teacher/parent to students/children; (2) *mea culpa* “apologist” to the “offended”; (3) “apprentice” writer to “expert” readers; (4) teacher/defendant to students/“plaintiffs.” The primary relationship in his written responses seemed to be that of teacher/parent to students/children.
However, in the interactive interview, the primary relationship seemed to be that of apprentice writer to “expert” readers. Many of the exchanges revolved around Mr. Norman’s asking the students such questions as “What makes [a book] pleasurable to read?” “When do you put it down? When do you just say, ‘This is stupid! This isn’t going anywhere. This is too boring to read.’” “Should I assume that a reader is at a 5 [on a scale of 1-10 in knowledge of baseball]? Or should I assume the reader’s at an 8?” Though not explicitly stated, Mr. Norman’s intention seemed to be to learn from his audience.

The teacher/parent to students/children relationship seemed less dominant in the interactive meeting than in the written responses, but it still seemed very strong. This may be related to the fact that Mr. Norman has a daughter the same age as the students in the study. This relationship was reflected in “teaching/parenting moments” such as when he instructed the students, “When you start writing for an audience, you have to assume that they know something. And what you try to do is . . . tell them something new.” Another example of this relationship occurred when he exhorted the students, “Although you may not want to do it because it takes time and effort, . . . you can make it [a paper] probably 30% better every time you rewrite it.”

Much less evident but still present were traces of the mea culpa “apologist” to the “offended” and teacher/defendant to students/“plaintiffs” relationships. For example, we see both of these relationships present in Mr. Norman’s response to Chatrick, who said that he did not understand what happened to Jax on the mound in his humiliating loss to the New York Yankees,

Once you start telling a story like he’s [Jax] telling, one guy to another [to the Major], you know, the other guy that he’s telling it to is going to know what a balk is, I would think, back then, you know, and in that context, it’s kind of hard to work in an
explanation (teacher/defendant). I was kind of trapped by what I was doing (mea culpa “apologist”).

**Conclusions regarding interactive exchanges.** As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, this interactive meeting was an extension of the students’ responses to one another and to *Fielder’s Choice* and Mr. Norman’s responses to the students. This continuation is particularly evident in Mr. Norman’s attention to Chatrick and Thelma. Just as the majority of his written comments were directed to these two students when he “knew” them only by a number, his verbal comments and questions were also directed first and foremost to them in the face-to-face encounter. Perhaps this should not be surprising since it was Thelma and Chatrick who provided the most open responses both in their journals and in the meeting. They seemed to connect more personally to Jax and to Mr. Norman than Bob or Loki did. (I omit Goose because he was not present at the interactive meeting).

This continuation is also seen in Mr. Norman’s perception of his multiple relationships with the students. He seemed to see himself and the students in the same roles as he did when he responded to them in writing. However, the focal relationship shifted from parent/teacher to students/children to that of “apprentice” writer to “expert” readers. It is perhaps partly due to this shift in focus that the face-to-face relationship between Mr. Norman and the students was much richer than the “pen and paper” relationship in his written responses.

To conclude, one major observation about the interactive meeting seems pertinent to this study. Though the author’s focal relationship to this audience seemed to shift from his written responses, the nature of the audience’s responses to the author did not seem to shift dramatically from their written responses. Thelma’s and Chatrick’s responses were very open, Loki’s were observant, and Bob’s were spare. However, just as sympathy for and identification with Jax seemed to be the common thread in the students’ written responses, what appeared to be
sympathetic laughter seemed to be the common thread in the students’ “verbal” responses to Mr. Norman and to one another.

**Relationship Between Author’s Intentions and Students’ Responses**

How do the audience’s responses relate to the author’s intentions? Though authorial intentions may be the subject of debate among literary critics, reader response theorists, and poststructural theorists, composition theorists seem to agree that authorial intention is fundamental (e.g., Kinneavy, 1971; Nelson & Calfee, 1998; Vipond & Hunt, 1984; Winterowd & Murray, 1985; Witte, 1987). Research has shown that a writer’s attention to and perceived relationship with his or her audience directly affects goals as well as task representation, idea generation, word choice, and so forth (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1981a, 1981b; Kirsch, 1990). The author-audience relationship also affects readers’ responses to an author’s intentions (Geisler, 1991; Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Haas, 1994; Vipond & Hunt, 1984; Wineburg, 1991).

The question of how the audience’s responses relate to the author’s intentions has already been partly addressed in a preceding section in which I included the author’s written responses to the students’ journal responses. The conclusion there was that the author’s responses to the students’ journals were based upon his perceptions of his multifaceted relationship with the students: (1) teacher/parent to students/children, (2) *mea culpa* “apologist” to the “offended,” (3) “apprentice” writer to “expert” readers, (4) teacher/defendant to students/“plaintiffs.”

In this section I include the author’s stated intentions for the focused passages and the students’ responses to these focused passages. The data for the author’s stated intentions were taken from the interviews which I had with him, and the data for the students’ responses were
taken from their journals and book notes as well as the follow-up interview and the interactive interview. However, Mr. Norman was not given access to the data from the book notes or follow-up interviews, and the interactive interview took place after he had responded in writing to the students’ journals; thus, his written responses were based upon the journals.

I also include in this section a discussion of the students’ responses as they relate to Mr. Norman’s perception of his audience prior to his relationship to the students in the study, whom he had described as young adults limited in literary experience, young adults limited in worldly experience and knowledge, and so forth. Not all of Mr. Norman’s perceptions of his audience, such as those pertaining to adults and the self plagued by the memory of the mistake and in need of catharsis, apply directly to the students’ responses. Therefore, I have limited the scope of this section to the following: young adults limited in literary experience, young adults limited in worldly experience and knowledge, young adults able to distinguish reality from fiction, and the general “generic” reader. (See Appendix E for a taxonomic outline of the interactive interview.) However, I have incorporated into some of these sections (where it seemed particularly obvious) references to Mr. Norman’s own experiences (self) because it is impossible to separate completely Mr. Norman’s intentions for his audience and Mr. Norman himself. In fact, the role of self in writing for others is explored in the next chapter.

Focused Passages

**Passage A: Baseball, an orangutan, and Jax’s revelation.** Mr. Norman’s stated intention for this passage—in which Jax flies over Tokyo, notices the baseball fields, and remembers Neckless’s story of the orangutan—was to convey “in a story form that may be somewhat funny” the point that “there are often things going on behind the scenes, and different
labels may be put on different people, but you just don’t know the whole story” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

None of the students responded to Mr. Norman’s intended humor in this passage. Indeed, Bob focused on a literal response to the analogy by sympathizing with the orangutan. The only emotional audience-related response Bob expressed in written or oral form was to this passage. He wrote, “The section that is chosen is horrible. They pick on a defenseless animal. This man must have some kind of fun when he does this or he is making a lot of money.”

While Bob responded literally, Thelma and Chatrick seemed to question Mr. Norman’s illustration, as well as, in Thelma’s response, to question Jax’s credibility. She seemed very skeptical of Jax’s observation that the Japanese are human because they played baseball. In her journal she questioned: “He realized they were human because they played baseball? Is this the only way he can relate to people? Why did he not think of this before?” She also could not understand his not being more upset with the Japanese. After all, his beloved brother Jugs had been killed in conflict with the Japanese. “Why is Jax not more upset with them? Is he really that forgiving? I find this to be a little strange. Yes, they are people too, but they are also his brother’s killers and the enemy.”

In responding to Thelma’s questions, Mr. Norman wrote:

You found very strange Jax’s ability to forgive the Japanese. Throughout the novel I tried to make Jax a skeptical character searching for answers. More than anything he just wants to get along. If I could rewrite the novel, I would perhaps make this point clearer so that his lack of hate for the Japanese would not seem so out of place.

Chatrick seemed to discredit the analogy that Mr. Norman used to illustrate Jax’s questioning of the “yellow coat” that had been put on the Japanese:

I think that comparing Americans’ dislike of the Japanese and the story of an orangutan being beat by a man in a yellow suit is a horrible metaphor. What he is insinuating is that Americans have somehow “set up” the Japanese. It is saying that the Japanese are
innocent, and Americans don’t realize it. . . . It is a bad comparison. The Japanese knew why they were fighting, and they bombed us first. I do agree that they are human, but part of me thinks that anyone, or any group, that would bomb someone who isn’t even in the war has to be a little “yellow.”

Mr. Norman explained his use of the analogy in this way:

I am sorry that you did not like the story of the orangutan. Through that story I was attempting to show that Jax was searching . . . for some explanation of war and had concluded that there may have been ulterior motives involved in the propaganda.

The only students who seemed to respond directly to Mr. Norman’s point were Goose and Loki. Goose responded to this passage first on a textual level by taking note that Mr. Norman made use of an analogy. He then explained the point of the analogy by writing that “this [story] makes Jax question all the bad things people have said about Japan. Jax wonders if some high official is putting the yellow coat on him [Jax].” Loki noted that “Jax has a revelation about the war and how people construe things.” The revelation that Jax has is that though there is a war on, started by the Japanese, the Japanese are still human and not all are bad. The few bad ones have created a yellow coat, which is placed upon the whole group. From the perspective of the monkey (the United States), all Japanese are wearing the coat of the one who beats him.

It seems evident from the students’ responses that unlike Mr. Norman, they saw nothing humorous in this passage. In fact, they seemed to view this passage quite seriously. The point Mr. Norman was making, that “there are often things going on behind the scenes, and different labels may be put on different people, but you just don’t know the whole story” seemed unclear to most of the students.

**Passage B: Dropped babies.** Concerning Jax’s nightmare about the babies falling from the apple tree, Mr. Norman indicated that the point that he was trying to illustrate was that
“indecision is as big a problem [as]—or maybe a bigger problem than—a wrong decision.” He added:

In making a decision, a lot of times too much angst is spent on whether the decision is right or wrong, where the harm comes in the indecision. And I think he was also bothered . . . by the children. He had his own nephew, he had the children he was bombing, [and] he had the little kid in the street that he sees later on (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

With the exception of Thelma, who viewed this passage as biblical symbolism of the Fall of Man, the students indicated interpretations that were basically the same as Mr. Norman’s intention. Thelma responded to what she saw as biblical symbolism in this passage. She saw it as symbolizing the Fall of Man as recorded in the book of Genesis. “If the babies would not take the apples, they would not fall. They may represent man as a whole. He [Jax] cannot save them because a mere man can’t. Only God can save us from our sins.” Later in the interview when I asked her to expand on this response, she added that she also thought that the baby was “like Little Jackson.” Jax thought of him as his son and was concerned for him. However he was “so far away he couldn’t do anything about it.” In her book Thelma noted that “his ‘dream’ may have been like a message from God keeping him alive.” Though she connected the image of the falling babies with Jax’s nephew, Little Jackson, as did Mr. Norman, she never gave an interpretation of indecisiveness similar to Mr. Norman’s.

The problem of indecisiveness was at the heart of the responses of Goose, Chatrick, Bob, and Loki. Interestingly, however, it was not until I conducted the follow-up interview with Goose that he provided this interpretation of the passage. In his journal he wrote that he did not understand Jax’s dream, but he responded on an emotional level: “This is a very sad part in the book.” It was not until my interview with Goose, after he had reread this passage, that he gave the following explanation of the “dropped babies” passage:
I think what it was mainly showing is that he has to make good choices, but you can’t always make the right decisions. It’s the choices and his ability to pick and choose which choice to make—which baby to catch. He spends his whole time figuring out which one to catch. [If] you spend your whole time trying to figure out what’s your main priority, [you] never get anything done.

Just as Goose did not initially respond to the meaning of the passage in accordance with Mr. Norman’s stated intention, Chatrick also wrote at first that he did not understand the passage even though he read it three times. However, he seemed to write his way to an understanding of the main idea of Jax’s dream, writing a very coherent explanation of it:

Maybe it is supposed to mean that if you try to “save the world” you end up doing nothing, but if you focus on one problem, and when that one is solved, then you move on to the next. If he would have just tried to take one baby at a time, he could have saved some of them. This dream might also be trying to tell him to quit “choking” under the pressure. This dream may help him get over his problem.

Chatrick returned, though, to his doubts about his understanding of the passage: “Maybe all of my interpretations are silly and don’t make any sense, but neither does this dream. All I know is that if I had a dream like this, it would really bother me.”

Mr. Norman responded to Chatrick’s “confusion” over this passage:

In Chapter Twelve you could not make sense of Jax’s recurrent nightmare. In writing the nightmare scene I did not want so much for the reader to figure out the analogy as much as I wanted the reader to be bothered by it and empathize with Jax being bothered by his indecision.

Responding on two levels to the “dropped babies” passage, Bob initially revealed a sensitivity to the pathos of the dream: “This passage is even worse than the one [Passage A] before.” Subsequently, Bob explained the topic of this dream by saying that “this sort of sums up his life. His indecision always ends up hurting him in one way or another.” Mr. Norman suggested another way of looking at Jax’s indecision: “Would another way to look at it be that his indecision, his searching process, resulted in his figuring out a formula with which to live his life?”
Like Goose, Chatrick, and Bob, Loki also interpreted the passage as symbolic of Jax’s struggle with indecisiveness. However, she had an interesting opener to her response: “If I were a Freudian, I would think this passage is about Jax’s latent sexual desires for his fellow POWs. Suffice it to say, I am not a Freudian.” She went on to explain that “the babies represent the flow and ebb of life.” Jax’s life, like the babies, “slips away and he cannot control it beyond his choices. He must stop and decide one course of action.” Mr. Norman responded to Loki’s unique “Freudian observation” and her interpretation of this passage: “I am glad that you are not a Freudian. I hope there are no such things as Freudians. Your interpretation of the recurring nightmare was the same as mine.”

There are three observations that I believe we can make about the students’ interpretations of this passage. First, Thelma’s interpretation seemed to be based primarily upon her familiarity with biblical allusions rather than strictly upon the context of the theme of choice. Secondly, Chatrick seemed to write his way to a coherent interpretation. Thirdly, Goose’s final interpretation was the result of rereading the passage. These observations suggest that familiarity with allusions may bring an added intertextuality to interpretations, and that writing and rereading may clarify interpretations.

Passage C: Love is all. Mr. Norman indicated that the “love is all” passage, in which Jax defends love as the basis for his decisions, was intended to “summarize the whole deal.” He explained his philosophy of love as the basis for making choices by saying that “you’ve just got to love each other and get along. If that’s your bottom line, I don’t think you can go wrong.” He added:

If you have a problem, if you’ll just fill up your heart with love, you’ll look at it the right way. And even if you mess up, and it turns out to be the wrong decision, at least you can say that you made it for the right reason (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).
He confessed that he struggled with whether or not to include this passage because he was worried that he would be “spoon feeding” the moral of the story. In retrospect, he seemed glad he had included it. When I asked Mr. Norman how Jax would define love, there was a long, thoughtful pause. Eventually, he defined it as “ultimate friendship towards everything.” He added, “And I think that’s what he’s figuring out. There is this blissful state that once you reach it, the other problems sort of disappear because the decisions become easy, and it doesn’t really matter if they’re right or wrong” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

All of the students’ responses seemed to imply at least some degree of agreement with Mr. Norman’s philosophy that love should be the basis of decisions. Thelma and Chatrick indicated strong agreement with this concept. Thelma had a very succinct response to this passage: “Love is the reason we act as we do. His decisions have not been bad. They were all for love and therefore can’t be wrong.” Chatrick’s response revealed agreement with Jax that if you make a decision “for love, then that automatically makes it the right one,” and he felt that Jax had made the best decisions possible. He thought that Jax would define love as “caring for somebody” and that as long as someone cared enough to make a decision, that decision was loving. Based on this definition of love, Chatrick agreed with Jax: “I think that’s the right way to make a choice.”

Goose’s and Loki’s responses reflected Mr. Norman’s intention that this passage was meant to “summarize the whole deal.” Goose saw this passage on love as the one that “ties in the whole theme of the book . . . love is all,” as well as tying in all the misfortunes of the novel. He emphasized “that it’s not always the result of the decision that matters, but instead it’s the reason you make these decisions.” In response to my question in the interview, Goose decided that Jax would define love as “a basic relationship of trust and truth between two individuals.”
In a response similar to Goose’s, Loki noted that “this simple statement resolves the conflict in the book and is the response, as it were, to Passage B.” Jax is finally comfortable with his decisions because “they are his decisions and his life; no one can tell him that he made the wrong choice as long as he is right with himself.” Earlier in her journal, Loki had remarked that Jax needed to develop a moral compass to help him make decisions. In the interview, when I asked her if she thought he had developed the compass, she pointed to this passage as evidence that Jax had settled on love as his guide. When I asked her how she thought Jax would define love, she responded that she thought it would be a type of brotherly love in which Jax identified with others on two levels: “This person’s like me; they don’t try to hurt me.”

Taking the point of making choices rather than being indecisive and applying it to himself (included in the “we”) and others, Bob responded:

> The choice we make today will affect our lives tomorrow. It will be wise to make right choices today so it will be easier tomorrow. An honest man can only make an honest mistake. We all make mistakes, but [we should] try to make the right decisions.

However, he seemed unsure of the wisdom of Jax’s choice to base his decisions on love, perhaps because he was unsure of Jax’s definition of love. He noted that there are “two different kinds of love—a family love, and then a married type of love.” Bob seemed to imply that if Jax based his decisions on “a family type of love,” he would not let anything happen to those he loved. He also noted, though, that perhaps Jax needed to base his decisions on more than just love, especially the sexual “married type” love, which could get him into “the wrong spots.”

Mr. Norman initially worried that he was “spoon feeding” the moral of the story in this passage. However, none of the students expressed any sense of being “spoon fed.” Instead, they seemed to respond to the “simplicity” of the “lesson” with a profoundness of their own. In
particular, Bob seemed to take the next step forward from merely responding. Instead, he thought about the application of this “lesson” to his own life.

I believe that two points may be drawn from the students’ response to this passage. First, writing that is clear and “simple” does not always represent “spoon feeding.” Second, students like Bob, who consider themselves non-readers and who sometimes struggle in school, are sometimes capable of responses to literature that are more sophisticated than they or we may realize.

**Passage D: Newspaper epilogue.** Mr. Norman confessed that the newspaper epilogue was “a little bit of a cop-out.” The publisher had told him that he needed at least one more chapter to let the reader know what happened to Jax. Mr. Norman, however, did not feel that he had another chapter in him, and he was (and is) “really bad at writing on command.” Mr. Norman is not sure who came up with the idea of using the newspaper article as a “shortcut,” but Mr. Norman decided to push the article twenty years into Jax’s future because “I think [it] gave me more of a story . . . rather than just tying up loose ends” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

Thelma and Loki both commented on the “great ending,” “wonderful conclusion” of the novel. Thelma’s response to the “wrap-up” of Jax’s life and the conclusion to the novel was very brief: “It seems that Jax’s life turned out great. What a great ending, even if it was with the Yankees.” Loki noted that this newspaper article is a final resolution to the chronology rather than the theme. (She viewed Jax’s “love is all” declaration in Passage C as the resolution to the theme.) Responding to the text and the topic of the newspaper epilogue, she wrote in her journal:

This passage is the final resolution to the book. It is not the resolution of the central theme but of the chronology. He is happy, or so he indicates. Jax makes a joke about the
turn of events, and it shows that he is happy. He and his family are all happy because he made the right choice all those nights ago [the choice to rescue Dixie and Little Jackson from Jude]. I think it is a wonderful conclusion to the book.

In responding to the newspaper article, Chatrick decided that the army’s apology and medal were “too little too late,” but he applauded little Jackson’s playing ball, seeing it as a way for Jax to live through his son. It seems that he too approved of this ending.

In Goose’s opinion, the newspaper article seemed to function as an “afterword” that tells what happened to little Jackson (as well as to Big Jackson), but he also commented on a change he saw in the character of Jax, “Big Jackson gets to throw his gooseball, but he messes up. This doesn’t bother him because baseball is no longer the only love in his life. Dixie and his son Jackson are now the major part in his life.” Bob also seemed to see this article as a summation of Jax’s career and life. However, he took his response one step further just as he had with the “love is all” passage. Bob seemed to make a life application to himself, pondering the question of how others may view what he may consider to be a right decision: “It makes you wonder if you make the right decisions if somebody will question you and then tell you, you are wrong.” Mr. Norman responded to Bob’s comment: “Your final comment was very perceptive. You indicated to me that you followed the premise of my novel.”

As a whole, the students tended to respond to the content of the newspaper article rather than to the format. None of them viewed the article as a reality device designed to convince them of the “truth” of the story. Indeed, Mr. Norman himself did not indicate that this was his intention. Instead, the newspaper article was a “shortcut” designed to fulfill the publisher’s demand that he let readers know what had happened to Jax. The students’ responses to the passage alone suggest that they accepted the article as a conclusion. However, as I discussed in a preceding section, Chatrick questioned the abrupt ending of the last chapter, suggesting that Mr.
Norman should have added a few more chapters leading up to the newspaper article. He was not entirely satisfied with the newspaper article as a conclusion. In his follow-up interview, Bob indicated that as a group they (the five students) wanted a more definitive conclusion. Indeed, in the interactive interview, the students expressed this desire to Mr. Norman. He then explained to them, as he had to me, that the article was a “shortcut” because he did not feel that he had another chapter in him.

Two aspects of the students’ responses are interesting. First, the students’ written responses to this particular focused passage did not reveal the full depth of their response to this passage. Only by looking at Chatrick’s response to the chapter that included the article did I realize that he seemed to see the article for what it was—a “shortcut” that did not satisfy his need to know more about Jax. Likewise, it was only in the follow-up interview with Bob and in the interactive interview between the students and Mr. Norman that I understood that the students wanted more from the conclusion. This suggests to me that the students’ responses did not reveal all that they were actually feeling or thinking—even to the point of creating a seeming discrepancy between their written responses and verbal responses.

Second, I find it interesting that in a very sophisticated way the students seemed cognizant of Mr. Norman’s intent to use the article as a “wrap-up” of Jax’s life, but they were also sophisticated enough as readers to realize that, for them at least, the article did not have enough in it to fulfill its purpose.

**Conclusions regarding responses relative to stated intentions.** This study leads to three conclusions about readers’ responses to passages relative to an author’s stated intentions. First, readers’ understanding of an author’s intended meaning may at times be “impeded” by competing meanings. This seems illustrated in Thelma’s interpretation of Jax’s baby tree dream
as representing the Fall of Man. Thelma evidently was quite familiar with the biblical story in Genesis of the Fall of Man as represented by Adam and Eve eating fruit from the forbidden tree. She applied this familiar representation to Mr. Norman’s description of babies falling from an apple tree in a way that seemed quite different from his stated intention.

Second, readers may respond to what an author may consider to be a “simplistic” intended meaning with profound insights. As I discussed earlier in this section, this seems to have been the case with the students’ responses to the “spoon feeding” of the “love is all” moral.

Third, readers may understand “too well” an author’s hidden intention—an intention that readers were not meant to understand. This seems illustrated by the students’ understanding that the newspaper article was intended to fill in the gaps of the readers’ knowledge of what happened to Jax after he left the interview with the Major. They also indicated that they understood that for them this “shortcut” fell short of its intended purpose.

**Students’ Responses to Author’s Intentions for Audience**

As I indicated earlier in this section on the relationship between the author’s intentions and the students’ responses, I include here a discussion of the students’ responses as they relate to Mr. Norman’s perception of his audience, prior to his relationship to the students in the study. Prior to this relationship, he seemed to perceive his audience as children limited in literary and worldly experience and knowledge but able to distinguish reality from fiction. He also perceived a general “generic” audience as wanting things causally connected, wanting the author to enable them to make previously unknown connections between known facts, and wanting an extremely likeable or interesting character. Since research has shown that a writer’s attention to and perceived relationship with his or her audience directly affects goals as well as task representation, idea generation, word choice, and so forth (e.g., Berkenkotter, 1981; Flower &
Hayes, 1981a, 1981b; Kirsch, 1990), I wanted to see how the students in the study fit into Mr. Norman’s intentions for the audience he imagined.

**Young adults limited in literary experience.** In his general comments to all the students who participated in the study, Mr. Norman shared that his intent or goal in writing *Fielder’s Choice* and *Cross Body Block* was “to somehow entice a non-reader into reading a book.” As soon as Goose read that, he turned to me and said, “That’s me!” In addition to Goose, Chatrick and Bob also considered themselves non-readers. Though these particular non-readers were not reading *Fielder’s Choice* voluntarily, still there were some indications that Mr. Norman had indeed enticed these non-readers. Chatrick was hooked into reading the novel after the first chapter. In the interactive interview with Mr. Norman, he explained that he enjoyed *Fielder’s Choice* and that, after he had finished it, he missed carrying it around. Consequently, he read two more books on his own. Bob indicated in my interview with him that he thought *Fielder’s Choice* was a good book and that he enjoyed the flow of Jax’s stories. When he was previewing the novel, Goose noted in his journal that he thought that the book would appeal to him “since I’ve basically lived, breathed, and worshipped baseball since I was a child.” In the follow-up interview, Goose admitted that he “could reread that book.” In the interactive interview, Thelma expressed amazement that Goose had read *Fielder’s Choice*: “You can’t make him read. You can give him a book, and he won’t read. It’s amazing that he read this.”

Mr. Norman seemed to place a great deal of importance on the presence of humor in his novels as a device for hooking young adults limited in literary experience into reading. Perhaps this is because it was humor that ignited his own reading. In my interviews with him, he stated very clearly that the tone he was trying to create was one of humor: “I hoped there would be enough in there that was funny to keep them going until they got wrapped up in the story.”
fact, he was conscious of having to work very hard to create humor: “You’ve got to make sure that the joke is funny—is timed out right. You’ve got to have an ear—you’ve got to be playing to your audience’s ear; otherwise, it’s not going to work” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001). As a model for his own writing of humor, Mr. Norman apparently used the humor in the Jean Shepherd stories:

> I’ve read the Jean Shepherd stories [to my kids] and know what strikes them as funny, and what I laughed at, where the laugh is. I think you just learn what’s going to be funny, where it’s going to be, and then hope you’re able to do the same thing with your stories. (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001)

Based upon the responses—letters and verbal exchanges with students—which he had prior to my case study, he seemed to believe that it was the humor in *Fielder’s Choice* that struck the chord of response. According to him, teachers have told him that because of the humor in *Fielder’s Choice*, “the kids thought you were going to be a lot funnier [in person] than you were” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).

Though what follows is very closely related to my previous discussion of audience in which I explored students’ emotional responses to *Fielder’s Choice*, I have chosen to include here the students’ responses to Mr. Norman’s intended humor because it is an illustration of readers’ responses to authorial intentions as related to the author’s perception of audience.

Interestingly, my five young adult readers, except perhaps Loki, did not seem to respond on an emotional level in their journals, book notes, and follow-up interviews to any of the intended humor in *Fielder’s Choice*. On the contrary, they saw it as a rather serious and even depressing novel. Thelma commented that the novel had to be “one of the most depressing stories I have ever read.” However, in the interactive interview with Mr. Norman, Thelma indicated that humor did not play a significant role in her enjoyment of a book. In the interactive interview, Chatrick declared, “I didn’t think anything was funny in the book.” He went on to
assure Mr. Norman, though, that what he saw as a lack of humor did not impair his enjoyment of *Fielder’s Choice*. When Chatrick said that he did not find anything funny in the novel, Bob spoke up and indicated that he considered Neckless’s habit of making prank phone calls involving taxis to be humorous. Goose, who was not present at the interactive interview, did not indicate whether or not he thought anything in the novel was particularly funny, but in my interview with him he did give an explanation for Jugs’s jokes on the baseball field: “What I think Jugs was trying to show him [Jax] was that it [baseball] would have to be fun, or it’s no fun playing.” An avid baseball player himself, Goose agreed with Jugs’s philosophy: “I think if it’s not fun, then it’s just pointless to be out there. You can’t really give 110% if you’re not having fun.” Interestingly, Loki did expect “comic undertones from time to time” in *Fielder’s Choice*, and in her book notes, she acknowledged Mr. Norman’s intended humor in what may have been emotional responses. For example, she wrote “laughing notes” (“He He He” or “Ha Ha” or “He He”) in the margins of the descriptions of Neckless’s phone pranks, the team’s joke on the porter, Curly’s attempt at batting, Jude’s inflated view of himself (“God Almighty’s overcoat wouldn’t make him a vest,” p. 166), the grinning frog, and Jax’s story to Jude about killing a tail-gunner who asked too many questions. However, she also made comments such as: “This guy needs a better sense of humor” (response to the anecdote about Paw telling Jax he had a head like a potato). “He [Mr. Norman] has kind of an offbeat sense of humor.” “Jugs—the weird sense of humor.” Though she noted that the pranks “didn’t take away from the dramatic part of the book; [they] just added to it,” she disapproved of some of them. So it is very possible that some of these “laughing notes” may have been expressions of sarcasm.

One particular concern which Mr. Norman expressed to me in our first interview was that students who were limited in literary experience would have difficulty following the dialogue
and plot twists. Because the story is told in the form of a flashback, the dialogue and plot twists are a part of Jax’s defense strategy of telling stories. In the original manuscript, Jax recounted his stories to Davis, the interrogator, and a grand jury. Interestingly, Davis and some of the students (who never saw the original manuscript) had similar responses to Jax’s recounting of what basically was his life story when he is supposed to be defending himself against the charge of treason. Davis commented: “We have now listened to you for the better part of a day and haven’t, as far as I can tell, touched upon the treason charges against you.” Thelma, Bob, and Loki all questioned this strategy just as Davis did. Thelma made a note in her book: “Why would this major listen to all this?” Bob wrote in his journal: “He has to convince the government that he didn’t help the enemy and he is telling stories. He better show his point fast.” Loki had a note in her book: “And I’m sure the Major cares about his little story.”

When I asked Mr. Norman about this tactic, he explained that Jax was operating under the assumption that “if he talked long enough and loud enough, somebody would figure out that he wasn’t a bad guy. Sometimes that’s the best defense.” He noted that in his legal career he has found that it is rather easy to judge someone from the evidence in court. But if a defendant is allowed enough time to go back—“and they always do—you figure out exactly why they’re there. It makes it a lot harder to judge somebody if you’ve walked a mile in his shoes rather than just seen their shoes sitting there” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

Though Bob may have had the most “limited” literary experience of the five participants, it is he who seemed to understand most clearly the author’s motive (intention) for creating Jax’s storytelling defense strategy. In my interview with him, he explained, “I think he [Jax] kind of did it [told the stories] to show that he didn’t mean anything by it—what he did. He just wanted to show that he made an honest mistake if he did.” When I asked Chattrick why the author chose
to have Jax recount his childhood, he responded, “I think it kind of built his personality—you know, what his personality started out as.”

**Young adults limited in worldly experience and knowledge.** During the interactive meeting, Mr. Norman questioned the students about their knowledge of World War Two and baseball. He did so because he had struggled with how much background he should provide his readers, whom he perceived as being limited in worldly knowledge and experience, and he wanted to know if he had given them enough. In my interviews with him, he indicated that he had intended to provide the “right” amount of background knowledge for his young-adult audience. As a group, the students considered themselves slightly more knowledgeable about World War Two than baseball. On a self-rating scale of 1-10 (1=least, 10=most), the students varied from 2-9 (6.75 average) in their knowledge of baseball; on the same scale, their answers ranged from 6-9 ½ (7.125 average) in their knowledge of World War Two. Chatrick commented, “Everybody knows a little something about World War Two. I mean, you learn about it everywhere.”

World War Two was particularly fresh in this audience’s mind since I had taken their class on a field trip to the D-Day Museum in New Orleans. In preparation for the field trip, we had watched actual news footage and had refreshed our memories about key individuals, groups, and terms associated with World War Two. After the trip to the museum, the students had written a fictional first-person narrative of a World War Two experience.

Though World War Two was his specific backdrop for *Fielder’s Choice*, Mr. Norman intended to convey something of his own ideas about war in general:

> I think that war is a terrible thing, the worst thing that we’ve come up with yet. Would you still be for war if you knew that your son was going to get killed? Because somebody’s son is getting killed. I think that’s the question people need to be asking. I think some of that came out [in *Fielder’s Choice*], and I wanted it to come out. I wanted
the people that read it to think about some of these things (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001).

With the exception of Chatrick, the students did not express strong anti-war sentiments in their journals. When I asked them in the follow-up interviews what they thought the author’s attitude toward war was, they did not seem to see Mr. Norman’s strong personal anti-war sentiment reflected in *Fielder’s Choice*. Thelma seemed to see an attitude of “objective” duty in Jax’s willingness to participate in the war without a feeling of personal hatred toward the Japanese. “Our soldiers didn’t really hate the Japanese. That’s what they had to do. They [the Japanese] had never done anything to him [Jax] personally. It was just his duty to go and fight.” Bob suggested that “he [Mr. Norman] probably didn’t like it, but he knew it was going to happen.” Goose and Loki did not seem to see much of the topic of war in *Fielder’s Choice*. Goose explained, “He didn’t really go into great detail about the war. He didn’t really take a side on the war.” Loki “didn’t really see a lot in it about war,” but she suggested that Jax’s sometimes cynical attitude—seeing life as a prank on him by God—may be a reflection of the author’s attitude on war.

One area of worldly experience and knowledge which the students seemed to see in *Fielder’s Choice* and which Mr. Norman did not, was the area of race relations. Mr. Norman did not see anything in *Fielder’s Choice* as necessarily commenting on race relations. “When I think of race relations, it’s black and white” (R. Norman, personal communication, April 24, 2001). The students, however, did not seem to limit their concept of race relations to “black and white.” They all seemed to feel that Jax’s relationship with Yoshi—or in the case of Loki, Jax’s insight that the Japanese were human because they played baseball—spoke to the topic of race relations. Thelma commented on the common bond of baseball “between two very different groups of people.” Chatrick surmised that Jax’s friendship with Yoshi taught him “a little bit more
tolerance and understanding,” and that he should not judge before really knowing someone. Bob seemed to see the relationship between Jax and Yoshi as a commentary on how it is possible to move beyond race. He commented that Jax was able to get past Yoshi “being Japanese” and simply saw him as a baseball player. Like Bob and Thelma, Goose noted the bond of baseball that enabled Jax to see that “it doesn’t matter at all” that they were supposed to be enemies. Loki saw Jax’s “revelation” about the humanity of the Japanese as being “profound in its truth about race relations.” In the interview, she commented that this incident revealed the common tendency to “paint each other a certain way and say, ‘This is what you are, and I don’t care whether or not it’s true.’”

Young adults able to distinguish reality from fiction. When he was writing Fielder’s Choice, Mr. Norman’s perception of his young-adult audience was that they had the ability to distinguish reality from fiction. “I think we had perspective. I just kind of assumed they would have that too” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001). This perception of his audience seemed to be the basis for his intention of making the story as real as possible. He acknowledged in an interview that “all of those [reality devices] were conscious efforts to make it [the story] seem more real” (R. Norman, personal communication, March 29, 2001).

How did my student participants respond to some of the reality devices? One of the reality devices which Mr. Norman employed is Jax addressing the Major directly and asking, “Remember him?” When such a “remember him?” reference is made to Frenchy d’Aquin, Thelma wrote in the margins of her book: “Is this a real player?” Chattrick had no responses to the reality devices in his book notes, journal responses, or follow-up interview. However, in the interactive interview Chattrick questioned Mr. Norman about whether or not any of the stories were from his own childhood. Mr. Norman acknowledged that “probably a good bit of it was
sort of.” He then went on to tell the students that the hunting trip, the kitten story, many of the baseball stories, and the orangutan wrestling challengers at the state fair were all based on real incidents. Neither Bob nor Goose had any responses to the reality devices. Loki noted that the name Mickey Owens (in the dedication) seemed familiar to her and concluded that “he was a baseball player in the thirties.” In responding to the “remember him?” devices, Loki seemed to hold a dialogue with the author as she wrote notes (“Not really.” and “No, I don’t.”) in the margins of her book.

**General “generic” reader.** In discussing with me his perception of his “generic” audience, Mr. Norman described people who wanted to have things causally connected. As a writer, he intended to provide these causal connections, and he spoke of this facet of writing in several of his responses to the students. The responses of the students when the causal connections were not clear seem to support Mr. Norman’s perception of this necessity. For example, Thelma could not believe Jugs and Dixie got married because the events leading up to the marriage did not seem to her to be causally connected (“Had they ever seen each other?”). She also could not figure out why Jax was not particularly upset with the Japanese after Jugs’s death. Loki had difficulty connecting the slingshot incident to Jax’s dislike of Jude: “Jax uses this incident to explain his dislike of his younger brother Jude, but I find this idea quite strange. Jugs is the one who made the slingshot, shot Paw, and laughed after the three were almost off the hook.”

In the interactive interview with Mr. Norman, Bob, Chatrick, and Thelma all expressed confusion about whether or not Jax was actually convicted of the charge of treason. Since Jax simply walked away from the Major, they assumed the charges had been dropped. However, they were confused about whether or not he was actually cleared of the accusation because he
was still blacklisted from baseball. In this interview, Thelma also expressed to Mr. Norman confusion about who had actually brought the charges against Jax. She surmised it was Colonel Cole, but she did not seem to see a strong causal connection: “I didn’t know where he had even seen him again.”

In my first interview with Mr. Norman, the author suggested that in “the process of writing—when you write for yourself and a [“generic”] reader—you make a connection between two things, two dots, that you hadn’t thought were connected” (March 29, 2001). He made virtually the same observation in his general comments to the students: “The writer’s objective in writing is to try to have a reader make previously unknown connections between known facts.” Mr. Norman reiterated the obligation of the writer to “make the connection” in my last interview with him. In the case of Fielder’s Choice, the connection he stated he was trying to make was between World War Two and baseball.

Did my readers “get” this connection? At first, Thelma seemed frustrated by the frequent references to baseball: “This is getting ridiculous.” By the end of the novel, however, she acknowledged that “maybe the game [baseball] really is that important. It saved his life.” Still, as I mentioned in a preceding section, Thelma did not seem to accept the connection between baseball and Jax’s “revelation” that the Japanese were human. Chatrick, who knew very little about baseball, did not seem to think the connection between baseball and war was critical to the primary theme of making choices. In the interactive interview, he indicated that he “didn’t know anything about the military either.” However, after finishing the novel, he wrote in his journal: “The whole basis of the book, overlooking [italics added] baseball and the war, are the choices people make.” In my interview with him, he expressed the opinion that knowledge of baseball would not help or hinder a reader from understanding the point of the book. Bob gave no
indication of accepting or rejecting the connection between baseball and war. Goose, on the other hand, seemed to see a strong connection between baseball and war. As I pointed out previously, he readily recognized the difference between having an antagonistic relationship with a collective enemy and having a “friendly” relationship with an individual who may be part of the collective enemy. In his explanation of this phenomenon, he used an analogy of individuals on an all-star team. Like Thelma, Loki initially was not sure of the connection between baseball and Jax’s “revelation” that the Japanese were human. She noted in her book: “I suppose. Interpreting how his mind works.” However, in her journal response to this passage, she noted that “this idea is profound in its truth about . . . war as a whole.” In a later book note, Loki responded to the following sentence: “Yellow or not, the Admiral knew his baseball.” She wrote: “How ironic! See, they are people too.”

Mr. Norman also commented that he thought the “generic” reader wanted an extremely likeable or interesting character. As a whole, the five students who participated in the case study seemed to find Jax very likeable. This was evidenced both in their comments and, as I have already mentioned, in their desire to know more of what happened to him. Thelma, Bob, and Goose all liked his relationship with his brother Jugs. Additionally, Thelma made comments such as: “[Jax] is so likeable.” “Jugs is an excellent character.” “The author has made a great character [Jax]. He is a character we can’t stop reading about. I couldn’t put the book down.” “He [Jax] was just a very good guy.” Chattrick wanted something good to happen to Jax. Bob saw Jax as “a good old country boy.” Though Loki initially criticized Jax, it seems that ultimately she wanted him to succeed. When Jax is sent to the minors, she noted in her book: “Awe. At least he’s not a total failure.” Commenting on his hot pitching streak when he returns to the majors, she wrote: “Hey, he’s doing all right.”
Conclusions regarding responses relative to author’s perception of audience. Three of the five students who participated in the case study, Goose, Bob, and Chatrick, considered themselves to be non-readers. Responses from these three suggest that they were indeed enticed into reading *Fielder’s Choice*, as Mr. Norman intended, though it was an assigned book. However, there were no strong indications that it was humor that hooked these students into reading the novel. Instead, identification seems to have been a stronger hook.

Mr. Norman feared that young adults limited in literary experience would have difficulty following the dialogue and plot twists. Thelma and Loki, who were not limited in literary experience, as well as Bob, who may be considered to be so, did not necessarily have difficulty following the dialogue and plot twists, but they questioned why the dialogue and plot twists were embedded in the flashbacks. In the follow-up interview, however, Bob gave an explanation that closely paralleled Mr. Norman’s explanation of his intention of showing that Jax “wasn’t a bad guy.”

In addition to perceiving his audience as young adults limited in literary experience, Mr. Norman also perceived them as limited in worldly experience and knowledge, specifically in knowledge of World War Two and baseball. Because of this perception, he intended to provide his audience with the “right” amount of background information. With the exception of Chatrick, whose knowledge of baseball was limited, the students in the study were not limited in these areas, and Chatrick’s limited knowledge of baseball did not hinder him in understanding the theme of *Fielder’s Choice*. However, with the exception of Chatrick, the students did not seem to perceive Mr. Norman’s intention of having his readers question a glorified view of war. Interestingly, though Mr. Norman did not intend for *Fielder’s Choice* to speak specifically to the issue of race relations, all of the students saw some relevance to race relations.
Because Mr. Norman’s perception of his audience was that they were able to distinguish reality from fiction, he intended to make the story as real as possible by using reality devices. Students in the study seemed generally able to distinguish reality from fiction, but at least some were still uncertain about whether some minor characters were real or not. In the interactive interview, Chatrick questioned Mr. Norman about what was real and what was fiction, and Mr. Norman told him that many of the situations were based on real incidents.

Mr. Norman’s perception of his general “generic” audience—readers who want things causally connected, want the author to enable them to connect seemingly unconnected concepts and ideas via a new twist, and want characters who are either extremely interesting or extremely likeable—seemed to have a direct bearing on his stated intentions to connect things causally, to connect seemingly unconnected ideas such as World War Two and baseball, and to create a likeable, interesting character like Jax. Interestingly, it seems that the students in the study exhibited more of the characteristics of this “generic” audience than they did of Mr. Norman’s defined audience. It seems clear by the students’ responses that they did want to have things causally connected, and they seemed to connect with the story and with Mr. Norman primarily through Jax, whom they generally viewed as a very likeable character. It is difficult to say whether or not the students wanted the author to enable them to connect seemingly unconnected concepts and ideas—in this case, baseball and war—via a new twist. Chatrick did not see the necessity of the connection, but Goose made a very definite connection between the two ideas. The others either had no response or had some difficulty, at least initially, in connecting baseball and war as presented through the eyes of Jax.

What conclusions may be drawn about the relation between an author’s perception of audience and his or her intentions and an audience’s responses to these intentions? First, it
seems clear that an author’s perceptions of his or her audience influence intentions. Second, it may be more likely that an audience may respond to an author’s overarching intention(s) (e.g., enticing non-readers to read) rather than to more specific intentions (e.g., creating a hook with humor, creating reality devices) that an author may believe will help him or her accomplish the overarching intention. Third, accomplishing an intention with a defined audience may be more closely related to an author’s perception of a general “generic” audience than we realized.

**Summary of Results**

Three questions guided my research into the author-audience relationship: (1) What was, and is, Rick Norman’s conception of the audience of *Fielder’s Choice*? (2) How do members of the audience—specifically five high school students—respond to *Fielder’s Choice*? (3) How do the audience’s responses relate to the author’s intentions?

Based upon the findings detailed above, we may answer the question of what was, and is, Rick Norman’s conception of the audience of *Fielder’s Choice*—both defined and general, self and other—by saying that it was and is a multifaceted, dynamic conception based upon the view of other people through the window of the self.

How did members of the audience respond to *Fielder’s Choice*? In spite of the diverse responses of the students to the features of the text and the variety of emotions evoked, the students unanimously enjoyed *Fielder’s Choice*, sympathized with Jax, and grasped the primary theme of choice. The students identified with Jax and were able to move past what may have seemed problematic. This unity seems to illustrate an aspect of what Burke (1950) termed “consubstantiality,” how through identification, humans are joined yet separate.

In the interactive interview, the audience’s responses to the author and *Fielder’s Choice* did not seem to shift dramatically from their written responses. Thelma’s and Chattrick’s
responses were very open, Loki’s were observant, and Bob’s were spare. Just as sympathy for
and identification with Jax seemed to be the common thread in the students’ written responses,
what appeared to be sympathetic laughter seemed to be the common thread in the students’
“verbal” responses to Mr. Norman and to one another.

Finally, how did the audience’s responses relate to the author’s intentions? All of the
students responded positively to Mr. Norman’s overarching, global intention of enticing them
into reading. Avid reader and “non-reader” alike enjoyed the novel. However, though Mr.
Norman intended for humor to be the hook, none of the students seemed to see humor as the
hook. Mr. Norman’s intentions for the focused passages met with mixed results. Only
responses to the “love is all” passage seemed to indicate a degree of meshing of intention and
responses. All of the students indicated agreement to some extent with the philosophy
expressed, but only Goose and Loki explicitly responded to his intention that this passage would
be the summary “of the whole deal.” In terms of responding to Mr. Norman’s intentions for his
defined (young adult) and “generic” audiences, the students seemed to respond primarily to his
intentions for a “generic” audience rather than the defined audience.

The focus of this study was on the author-audience relationship because I was interested
in how this relationship might affect the teaching of writing. In the following chapter, I discuss
the implications of these results for deepening our understanding of this relationship.