Literary Learning

The Newsletter for Vermont's English Language Arts Educators and Supporters

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Whose Stories Are Included in Your Classroom Library?

In a previous newsletter, I introduced readers to the #Disrupt Texts movement, which encourages educators to "challenge the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve" (What Is #Disrupt Texts?). One way to do this is to do what is called an "equity audit," which includes looking at the policies, practices, curriculum, and décor of the school and asking the following questions: *Who or what is represented? Who or what is missing? Whose stories are being told? Whose voices are silenced?* (Irizarry, 2020). In a recent article published by ASCD, Nilda Irizarry reminds educators of the power of representation, or lack thereof, in curricular content: "When educators show students what is worthy of learning and remembering, students believe them" (Irizarry, 2020). It is our job as educators to make sure students see their stories included in the collective narrative of their school's culture. For English language arts and literacy teachers, this means taking a closer look at classroom libraries.

This is no easy task, and publishing companies have not made it any easier. As Kara Newhouse points out, "with multicultural books comprising 23% of children's books in 2018 – compared with 50% featuring white protagonists and 27% featuring non-human characters – the children's publishing landscape is still not equal" (Newhouse, 2020). Additionally, "building a classroom library that offers 'windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors' to all children is more than a numbers game. It requires thoughtful curation of who is represented and how" (Newhouse, 2020).

In Diversifying Your Classroom Book Collections? Avoid these 7 Pitfalls, Kara Newhouse warns educators of the "pitfalls" that could make diversifying a classroom library seem like little more than lip service. Among these are choosing books that show only suffering of characters of color (as opposed to "Black characters living joyfully"), ignoring intersectionality or overlapping of diverse identities, and engaging in "sidekick syndrome" by selecting books that feature characters of color as sidekicks or stereotypes. Similarly, educators need to be wary of choosing books that just happen to include a character of color and thinking they are meeting the needs of all of their students. Also, educators must get to know all of their students as individuals and not assume that students of color will want to read a book about a character of color for that reason alone. A good way to ensure authentic diversity and representation is to include #OwnVoices, books *about* people of color written *by* people of color.

Adding diverse and inclusive texts to a classroom library is a great first step, but it is not enough to stop there. Newhouse suggests evaluating the older texts in the classroom and weeding out the ones that are counterproductive to the goal of creating an inclusive classroom library. In addition, educators should make sure the diverse texts are not optional or supplemental to the curriculum but actually part of it. Together, we can ensure that all of our students see themselves in the stories we read and learn more about those who experiences are different from their own.

Text Sets: How and Why to Use Them

A text set is more than just a group of books. In their Text Set Guidance, Achieve the Core defines texts sets as "intentionally grouped sets of texts and media resources focused on a specific topic designed to help all learners build background knowledge and vocabulary through a volume of reading on science, social studies, and other high-interest topics." The use of text sets is research-based and proven to be effective as an instructional strategy to support reading comprehension (Garrison, 2016).

There are different ways to arrange a text set. One way is through a series of a progressively advanced texts and other media organized around the same academic topic. Another way is to group texts around a central or "anchor" text and build knowledge that way. Regardless of how they are organized, reading many texts on the same topic helps students gain a broad perspective, while also diving deeply into the content (Garrison, 2016).

There are many ways to use text sets in the classroom. They can be used to provide students with voice and choice, build knowledge about the topic of an anchor text, support the acquisition of science and social studies content knowledge through reading, and incorporate authentic research and subsequent writing into the ELA curriculum (Text Set Guidance). The use of text sets can help students read on grade level by increasing their vocabulary and background knowledge about a topic, while their structure and volume can improve student fluency (Text Set Project: Building Knowledge and Vocabulary).

Despite the many benefits of teaching with text sets, there is one significant drawback. Building high quality text sets takes time. Luckily, Achieve the Core has gathered and created many resources to help educators incorporate text sets into their curricula. These can be found in the Text Set Project: Building Knowledge and Vocabulary and include a Text Set Panel Interview Video, Literacy expert David Liben's Text Set Introduction presentation, and a professional learning module called Text Set Project: Designing and Integrating Expert Packs. In addition, Achieve the Core's Text Set Guidance includes resources for premade text sets and a process for making your own and their ELA/Literacy Lessons contain searchable text sets.

Text sets can be an effective way to intentionally organize curricular materials around a central text or idea, improving student reading outcomes by building vocabulary

and background knowledge. I would encourage you to try incorporating them into your curriculum.

Resources

Read more about this month's topics here:
Diversifying the Classroom Library
- [4 Actions Leaders Can Take for Racial Equity](#), by Nilda Irizarry, ASCD, 2020.
- [Diversifying Your Classroom Book Collections? Avoid these 7 Pitfalls](#), by Kara Newhouse, KQED, 2020.
- [Reading Diversity](#), by Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance), is a text selection tool that includes a set of editable PDFs that walk educators through a text selection process that incorporates cultural responsiveness and critically literacy along with text complexity.

Text Sets
- Achieve the Core: [Text Set Project: Building Knowledge and Vocabulary](#)
- Achieve the Core: [Text Set Guidance](#)
- [What Are "Text Sets," and Why Use Them in the Classroom?](#), by Shannon Garrison, Fordham Institute, 2016.

Professional Offerings and Activities

Book Study: Designing Authentic Performance Tasks and Projects: Join members of the Agency of Education's Proficiency-Based Learning Team as we engage in a book study of *[Designing Authentic Performance Tasks and Projects](#)*, by McTighe, et. al. The goal of this peer learning community is to develop a shared understanding of the uses and benefits of performance assessment and Project-Based Learning as they relate to equity, student engagement, and authentic assessment as part of a Local Comprehensive Assessment System. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the power of performance assessment and come away with practical tools and strategies for implementing performance assessment and Project-Based Learning in their practice. This professional learning opportunity is free of charge, however, participants will need to [purchase the book](#). Sessions will take place on the following Wednesdays from 3:00-4:30 p.m. and it is strongly recommended that participants attend all four sessions: April 28, May 5, May 19, and May 26, 2021. Register for [Book Study online](#) to attend.

A Hands-on Tour of the Lexile & Quantile Hub, from the Vermont Agency of Education and MetaMetrics: This presentation offers both a quick "tour" and some "hands on time" to explore the new [Lexile & Quantile Hub](#), a "one stop shop" for Lexile and Quantile tools for students, parents, and educators. This session addresses the following topics: accessing the Hub; creating and managing your account; support, Quick Start Guides, and video tutorials; and an overview of the individual Lexile and Quantile tools. [Register](#) to attend this live session on Wednesday, March 31, 2021 from 3-4 p.m.

Emily Leute

English Language Arts
  Content Specialist
Proficiency-Based
  Learning Team

Vermont Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

PHONE:
(802) 828-6598

E-MAIL:
emily.leute@vermont.gov

Making the Shift: Foundations of Project-Based Learning – Cohort B: This is an introductory-level professional learning opportunity to support educators in developing th**e** knowledge, skills, and tools needed to begin shifting their instruction to a Project-Based Learning approach. Participants will take a deep dive into essential elements and phases of Project-Based Learning. Along the way, they will identify components of their current instructional practice that can be integrated into a Project-Based Learning unit. They will also learn new strategies and develop new tools to support authenticity and student-centered learning across contexts. Over a series of five two-hour sessions, participants will collaborate to write a Project-Based Learning plan by adapting a current lesson or unit to align with essential elements and phases of the approach. Participants who attend all sessions and complete a unit plan with accompanying materials will receive an attendance certificate for fifteen hours. There is no cost to participate in the sessions. (Note: This set of sessions is for those who are interested and were not able to register for the morning sessions. Please do not register for these sessions if you have already registered for the morning sessions.) Register online or email Kyle Anderson for more information.

Teen Lit Mob: This spring, Vermont's only teel literary festival will celebrate teen readers, YA lit, and its fandom on Friday, May 7th, from 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. on Zoom. Register to attend by Friday, April 15 with this quick & easy form to reserve your spot! There is no cost to attend thanks to funding from the Vermont Department of Libraries. This year's program includes: Keynote by National Book Award Finalist Ibi Zoboi, author of *American Street*, *Pride*, and *Punching the Air* (with Yusef Salaam); Endnote by Justina Ireland, author of *Dread Nation* and *Deathless Divide*; writing workshops with Ibi, Justina, and Printz Medalist and National Book Award Finalist An Na, author of *A Step From Heaven* and *The Place Between Breaths*, Chris Tebbetts, author of *Me, Myself, and Him*, and *M of F* (with Lisa Papademetriou); and an illustration workshop with comic artist Dan Nott from the Center for Cartoon Studies. The goals of Teen Lit Mob are to:

· Connect teen readers to authors and illustrators.
· Connect teen readers to each other.
· Support teen writers and illustrators.
· Celebrate diverse stories and diverse authors.
· Celebrate and encourage reading for pleasure.
· Promote the Green Mountain Book Award, Vermont's teen-choice book award.
· Cultivate an annual conference that celebrates YA literature in Vermont.

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