Challenging the Canon; Teaching the Literary Canon in the High School Classroom

Abigail Baumgartner

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Challenging the Canon; Teaching the Literary Canon in the High School Classroom

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Submitted to the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College in partial fulfillment of the Upper Division Honors Program.
[November, 2022]
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Acknowledgements:

I have so many people to thank- firstly, my thesis advisor, Dr. Weinstein, for her constant guidance and affirmation. Dr. Weinstein- you’ve supported me through some hard semesters of growth and shaped me as a scholar and educator. Thank you. I also want to thank Drs. Bach and King for serving on my committee, lending their expertise to this project, and pushing me to do my best work. Dr. Bach- you are an example to me, and I value your perspective. Dr. King- thank you for helping me believe in myself as a writer, for always talking with me about the important things, and for cultivating my love of Early Modern drama.

Additionally, I owe a large debt to the English department at University Laboratory High School. I thank the whole “Circle of Wisdom:” first, for helping me fall in love with literature, and then for becoming role models and mentors to an anxious and ambitious pre-service teacher. Special recognition goes to Dr. Candence Robillard, Mrs. Anne McConnell, and Dr. Emily Peters: Dr. Robillard, thank you for answering my never-ending list of questions. Your wisdom is a gift, and I’m grateful that you share it so graciously. Mrs. McConnell, thank you for discussing your practices and letting me into your classroom; I hope to elevate my teaching to half the art form you practice each day. Dr. Peters, thank you for saying yes to that interview and inviting me into your classroom last fall; you have helped me see the teacher I can become, and I will always be grateful for that.

Thanks is also due to my family for their constant love and support, especially my sister who became my guinea pig for lesson ideas on multiple occasions. To my friend Ella, thanks for talking literature with me at all hours and for listening to my ideas.

Above all, thanks is due to God for bringing each of these blessings into my life and for showing me how to teach, and live out, love in the first place.
Abstract:

Literature shows readers what it means to be human by reflecting on the human experience in all its variations and complexities. By actively preserving a handful of literary works through continued publication and education, formal and informal literary canons emphasize those literary works deemed essential for telling a community who they are. Similarly, the community of American secondary education holds to a canon of literary works; texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Macbeth*, and *The Great Gatsby* are taught year after year in schools across the country. This collection of texts, the "High School Literary Canon," has changed very little in the last 30 years. While this thesis does consider the what, where, how, why, and 'so-what' of this particular canon, most of my work focuses on where educators can go from here. There is no escaping our canon, and there is no escaping canonicity. Given those realities, this thesis takes a practical approach to challenging the canon encountered and created in secondary English education. Throughout my study, I read texts, research, and lesson plans; spoke with educators; observed high school classrooms; and drew from my own schooling experiences to unearth new ways to teach texts. The first half of this thesis examines ways to teach current canonical texts in better ways that cultivate empathetic, critically thinking students. I also sought out texts not currently taught in the high school classroom. The texts I examined could, if used in schools, fill in the current canon's gaps in representation, form, or theme.

In this thesis, I'll explore what a canon is and how the current High School Literary Canon developed. Then, I'll grapple with the future of this canon in terms of different reading and reading differently. Throughout, I'll use examples of authors and texts that are both commonplace and obscure. I'll also draw on personal observations and communications with teachers and professors dedicated to the work of high school literary education.
Section I: Presenting the Problem

Chapter 1- Defining Literature

As a high school student, I encountered definitions of literature that centered on literature's purpose rather than its qualities. For example, I was encouraged to define literature as a reflection of life, which shows us how to be human. While definitions like this one might provide some true and helpful insight into literature's purpose, such definitions fail to distinguish literature from any other art form since physical art, music, film, etc., can fit these qualifications.

Tim Gillespie, a high school educator, provides another intriguing definition of literature. Gillespie's definition relies more on form claiming that "literature is most commonly defined as writing that has lasted because it deals with ideas of timeless and universal interest with noteworthy artistry and power, no matter whether the work is a poem, story, novel, play, essay, memoir, or something beyond category" (2010, p.3). While this definition is excellent, I resist the idea that only writing "that lasts" is literature or that the longevity of a work automatically renders it timeless or universal.

Though I've dedicated a significant chunk of my young life to studying Literature, I continually find this construct illusory... and maybe that is part of the point. Perhaps literature is not designed to be defined. Wellek and Warren certainly thought so when they argued in their book, Theory of Literature, that "attempts to find general laws in literature have always failed" and, therefore, "no general law can be assumed to achieve the purpose of literary study" (1949, p. 5). Though not particularly helpful, this approach still highlights an essential piece of literature's nature: at times, it exists beyond what readers, writers, and thinkers can fully grasp using language.

While the decision to define literature by not defining it does have a strong appeal, communication only occurs if both parties agree (on some level) about the relationship between a signifier and the concept it signifies. Though it is far from perfect, the following definition of literature drives this thesis: Illusory in nature, literature is the use of language in the forms of poetry, prose, drama, and beyond to help us understand what it means to be human. Across time and space, all literature seeks the truth about living.
Chapter 2- Defining the Canon

Though defining literature proved an interesting challenge, defining the canon should prove a bit easier because of one key truth: no matter how literature is defined, there is always a hierarchy for determining what uses of language, what aspects of the human experience, or even what aesthetic markers of language deem one work of literature more important than another. That hierarchy is the basis of the canon as a construct.

The word canon derives from the Greek kanon, meaning "any straight rod or bar; rule; standard of excellence" (Canon, n.d.). The Latin word canon referred to a "measuring line" or "rule," especially as related to the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, canon came to mean "decree of the Church," or the term encompassed the texts that were "accepted by the Christian church" as "the Scriptures" (Canon, n.d.). In this way, the term canon systematically categorized texts to convey which texts held authority for spiritual instruction and which ones did not. The canon was a tool for elevating the texts, voices, and narratives deemed to be of God.

As literary studies developed in the Western world, and for our purposes, specifically in the United States, the term canon was applied to the collection and classification of secular literary texts. Like its religious counterpart, the literary canon was a "formally organized" "body of accepted texts" (Bates, 2018, para.10). Canons were composed of the pieces of literature that were the best, most essential texts, and the canon determined the "collective idea of which books you need to know in order to have a high-quality, well-rounded education" (Barron, 2021, para.9).

Whether applied in a religious or secular literary context, the canon gets to a core aspect of the human experience: the desire to achieve understanding through categorization. Humans categorize by color, quantity, shape, etc. And, often, we, as humans, like to categorize ourselves. We break down our intersecting identities into common identifying markers like race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, and nationality. But we also attempt to categorize by quality. We like to cultivate the BEST of any given thing and hold those best things together in one group. This is where canons originate.
Circling back to literary canons, the cultivation of the "best" literature lies at the core of the
disciple, and it has been used to define (and confine) a collective identity of readers and writers. As
Csicsila states in *Canons by Consensus*, early American literary critics "approached the body of American
letters as a portal to the American mind and spirit. According to them, American literature (which in
concept at that time also included political and scientific documents) was the written record of the
American cultural milieu, and, as such, it reflected and preserved the nation's fundamental characteristics
and thought" (2011, p.3). Just as the Church's canon determined what texts qualified as scripture, the
current literary canon for American high schools attempts to form and uphold an American identity by
sharing and instilling the values Americans want their kids to hold. The canon says what ideas, people,
places, and periods are most important for explaining who we are and why; it says that one text defines
us, and another does not. Therefore, if the texts in the canon favor one group or perspective above all
others, that canon draws lines between the favored "us" and all other persons who become "the other."

In the United States, the process of canon formation began with the anthologizing of American
literature in the late 1800s when "university scholars [sought] to formalize the study of their nation's own
literary artists" (Csicsila, 2011, p.1). The term canon was not broadly applied to this practice of
categorization until the 1920s when affluent writers all started writing, publishing, and teaching each
other's works. That approach to canons persisted relatively undisturbed until the 1970s, when critics of
canonicity identified and condemned the canon's impact on "politically disenfranchised cultures or
communities of writers" (Löffler, 2017, p.5). These critics saw "canon formation [as] subject to or a
reflection of the ways in which a particular ideological consensus is transmitted via central cultural
institutions to the reading public" and wanted to alter the politics of canon formation to highlight a
broader range of voices (Löffler, 2017, p.5). Yet the issue persisted. In fact, the first page of Harold
Bloom's influential 1994 book, *The Western Canon*, states that a text is canonical if it is "authoritative in
our culture" (p.1). Bloom then argues that the canon only *truly* includes 26 writers, most of whom are
male and white presenting. In this way, Bloom implies that the white male perspective is the only
perspective with literary merit. All other perspectives lack authority and acceptance.
Though the word was now applied in a secular context, "canon" cannot escape its primary purpose of defining, perpetuating, and categorizing an (American) identity. Any collection of what is "best," be it from a religious or literary standpoint, elevates certain voices, narratives, and experiences above others. There is a bifurcating structure here between the canonized and uncanonized, valued and unvalued, learned and unknown, and good and bad. In some ways, such a hierarchy is inescapable. Opinions will always exist, and categorizing and evaluating provide natural structure and order for our world. But, at the same time, the literary canon and its formation contradict the very nature of literature.

As previously stated, the purpose of literature is to show us what it means to be human, and that makes literature an art form where, theoretically, unity and diversity coexist. Literature aims to take an aspect of a person's lived experience and expose it to the masses. The hope here is not that everyone will relate to every aspect of an experience but that recognizing the intricacies and complexities of a human perspective could lead us all to a better understanding of the human whole. Even as unifying themes to the human experience emerge (such as love, betrayal, fate, a quest for meaning, etc.), the wide range of experiences writers hold changes the lens through which each text views those themes. The vast range of experiences reflected in literature may all hold true for different situations based on race, gender, sexual identity, SES, era, religious background, nationality, or ethnicity; that complexity is something to celebrate and not fear. Literature lets readers engage in the simultaneous realities of varied human experiences while pointing to the truth that we all experience the world in different—but equally valid—ways. I believe there are few better ways to open a young person's eyes to the complexity and commonality of the world than through literature, and yet those individuals committed to teaching literature in the high school classroom see how the canons existing in many classrooms close off those brilliant challenges and truths.
Chapter 3- Canons in the Classroom

Just as the last two chapters begin with quests to identify the definitions and functions of literature and canons, this chapter asks, "What is the purpose of Secondary Education?" Many educational theorists have answered this question differently over the years, and ideas about education's purposes are varied. Horace Mann viewed education as a tool for teaching democratic values to combat the "potential social chaos" constantly looming over society (Reese, 2000, p.17). Similarly, John Dewey claimed educational institutions should "advance[e] the welfare of society" by providing moral training to help students become productive, honorable members of society both politically and personally (Dewey & Hinchey, 2019, p.10). While morally based views of education are "concerned with teaching the young how to live a good life," other theorists see education as a tool for teaching the young "how to make a good living" (Reese, 2000, p.31). In recent years, the view of education as a tool for economic rather than moral training has contributed to the standards movement. In this "new era [of] American education," schooling is first and foremost a step toward "economic predominance" (Rury, 2016, pg. 200-201). Still, educators are pushing against the standards-based view of education as an economic tool. In fact, recent events sponsored by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) encourage an understanding of education as an identity-building, social-justice-oriented practice (NCTE Annual Convention 2021; 2021 AERA distinguished lecture).

In this thesis, I join the ranks of educational theorists looking to define and assign purpose to education. "Challenging the Canon" defines secondary education as "the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction" to adolescents (Oxford Languages, n.d.). While many educational theorists have defined the goal of education differently, this thesis views the purpose of education as a three-fold mission:

1. **Awareness of Individuality**: Students must gain a critical awareness that their experience is not the sum total of the human experience. Students often grow in understanding themselves by reading from multiple perspectives, some of which reflect the student's experience and some of which do not.
(2) **Appreciation of Complexity:** Students appreciate how literature in various forms, across time, and from differing perspectives reveal the complexity of what it means to be human. Their Secondary education hopefully teaches students to be open-minded enough to appreciate rather than fear complexity.

(3) **Desire for Knowledge:** Students understand that there is ALWAYS more to explore. While the student's education and life occur within the confines of one system, there are other ways of being/doing that they have not seen/heard about… yet. Students should learn to seek out that knowledge (if for no other reason than that knowing about others helps us know ourselves better).

Considering how educators view the purpose of education is crucial because it influences the selection of materials and the expectations placed on students. As mentioned previously, the literary canon was not just a means of categorizing but also a tool for instruction and a teacher's choices "value judgements that may alter the interpretation of American cultural history offered to students." (Jay, 1997, p.5). Therefore, secondary education literature instructors must explore the relationships between the goals of teaching literature, the content of the literature they teach, and the canon those texts comprise to serve their students best.

Over the years, educators and researchers have sought to instill these educational values of individuality, complexity, and inquisitiveness in their students. From the New Critics to Louise Rosenblatt and Reader Response Theory to Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's theory of mirrors, windows, and sliding doors, educators continually explore new ways to relate to texts and ask their students to do the same. And now, with the intersectional identities of high school students in the United States becoming increasingly diverse, it is even more important for our curriculum, and the canon it condones, to be inclusive and foster an open-minded approach to living (Nieto & Bode, 2018, pp.16-7). Still, this work is incomplete, and although:

1. There are well-documented studies and experiences which highlight the need for change;
2. Educators can point to where some changes need to occur; and
3. College-level literature courses more frequently feature lesser-known authors and works,
These changes are not sufficiently reflected in the high school curriculum because the canon of the typical high school curriculum has mostly stayed the same.

In fact, the research of Applebee and Stallworth shows that the list of the ten most frequently taught texts for secondary education settings did not change much between 1993 and 2006 (figure 1). Harper Lee is the only female author to appear on either list, all the authors on both lists are white, and the works of William Shakespeare take up 4 and 3 of the top 10 spots on the 1993 and 2006 lists, respectively. A smaller-scale survey sampled from only Southern states in 2012 shows many of the same issues (figure 2). While *The Odyssey* and *Night* make their first appearances on this list, the top texts still lack representation in terms of authorship and story. All three lists elevate majority white-presenting, upper-class male authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Commonly Taught Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applebee (1993)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <em>Hamlet</em> (1603) by William Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1 Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019, p.37*
So why doesn't the canon change? Do we "wish to believe that there really is someone, or something, with taste, with integrity, and with an objective sense of fair play who is making [canonical] decisions rather than to believe that they are sometimes random, always time-sensitive discrete decisions made by overworked individuals" (Randolph, 2000, p.6)? Probably. And perhaps teachers love certain books because of their experiences with those texts. Maybe school systems and administrations mandate which texts will be taught. Likely, teachers need more time and resources to plan instruction around new texts. Or, is it possible that teachers do not get much choice in what texts they use in the classroom? Absolutely. I could devote an entire thesis to exploring the myriad reasons why widespread change is not occurring, but my interests lie elsewhere.

Instead, I want to use my thesis to construct a new canon for the high school classroom. My original vision for this project was to create a perfect set of texts that represented everyone and used all forms of texts. With an eagerness that only a naïve college student can muster, I started making lists of texts and weighing one short story, author, period, literary tradition, or poem against another. After two weeks, I was exhausted. With each attempt, I would think of something else I needed students to see for the canon to be truly, completely inclusive. Suddenly, August to May was not enough time. Even four years was not enough time. I had to admit defeat.

So why did I struggle so much to build a perfectly inclusive canon? Because a perfectly inclusive canon does not exist. In my research, I found that I was not the first person to try to assemble a comprehensive American canon. According to Csicsila, "[b]y the late 1980s anthologies of American literature were explicitly competing with each other in terms of overall comprehensiveness and diversity
in formats," but the reality is that none of them were successful because the canon, by nature, is exclusive (21). By establishing a hierarchy where some texts are of greater literary value than others, some experiences and literary forms are decentralized or even excluded altogether. But, at the same time, canonicity cannot be avoided. Decisions about what gets published, taught, sold, placed in libraries, and discussed are all layers of making one book more widely read and studied (aka "better") than another. Canons *sigh* you can't live with 'em, and you can't teach without 'em.

Before this chapter becomes a full-on lamentation of an educator's love-hate relationship with canons, I want to argue that any classroom curriculum hinges on the exact same paradox. There's limited time, space, and resources for every teacher. Therefore canons and curriculums are in and of themselves paradoxes. Given those realities, the best thing I can do as an educator is consider why I wanted an ideal canon in the first place. What was it I hoped students would gain? After careful consideration, I found my motives boiled down to these four points. I wanted students to:

1. Gain a critical awareness that their experience is not the sum total of the human experience;
2. Appreciate how literature in a variety of forms, over time, and from differing perspectives can show us the complexity of what it means to be human;
3. Understand that there is ALWAYS more to explore- that even though their education and lives take place within the confines of a system, there are other ways of being/doing that they have not heard of yet; and
4. Value opportunities to seek out perspectives and experiences that differ from their own.

That was when I realized that the ideal canon was unnecessary because I could get students to understand these four enduring understandings even while using a broken system. Borrowing the words of Dr. Candence Robillard, a veteran high school educator, "It's not perfect. It's what we've got" (personal communication, September 28, 2022). Truly, there is no perfect canon. There is no perfect high school canon. And there are no perfect answers, but perhaps there are bad, good, and better ones. That's "what
we've got" as educators, and our task is to make it work. The following chapter discusses two ways to move forward- albeit imperfectly- through the practices of reading differently and different reading.
Chapter 4 - Reading Differently, Different Reading; A Framework for the Future

The terms “reading differently” and “different reading” come from a presentation by Ernest Morrell in 2018 via Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides’ Letting Go of Literary Whiteness (2019, p.33). Using these approaches to text selection and instruction as guides, the rest of this thesis will explore practical ways for educators to invite high school students to challenge in the classroom. Section II deals with reading differently, which is the practice of using the texts that are already canonized at the High School level in new ways that challenge preconceived notions about the text and how readers interact with it. In layperson’s terms, different reading takes old, problematic, and tired texts that are part of the high school curriculum and breathes life into them. Reading differently addresses the fact that HOW educators teach a text may matter as much as the text itself. In this thesis, the practice of reading differently will be used to discuss teaching Romeo and Juliet, To Kill a Mockingbird, and a collection of Langston Hughes’ poetry.

Section III focuses on a second text selection “angle” called different reading, which Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides define as the practice of selecting texts that “thin[k] about issues of representation with regard to race across the literature curriculum” (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019, p.33). Without discounting the importance of representation and race in the canon, this study will adopt a broader definition of different reading to refer to the selection of texts outside the traditional high school canon. To qualify for inclusion as a “different reading” text, I required that each work in this section be one for which I could find no online aids for teaching the text at the secondary level. Ultimately, The Duchess of Malfi, Long Division, and a collection of contemporary poetry were selected for analysis. While these texts do not solve all the problems of representation regarding author identity or the subjects explored in a text, I believe these three are a good place to start.
While this is undoubtedly an ambitious project, I want to be clear that the unit outlines presented in this thesis are neither perfect nor complete. Rather, these plans are compilations of ideas, activities, and questions an educator could incorporate into a full unit. The resources I provide here primarily teach students to consider the themes and attitudes surrounding a work of literature rather than focusing on literacy. This choice does not mean I view literacy as unimportant or that literacy and the study of literature are not inherently intertwined, but I recognize that this thesis leans heavily on the literature side of ELA instruction.
Section II: Reading Differently

Rome was not built in a day, and neither were the deep, layered, and compounding relationships between teachers, students, and canonized texts. Just as we faced the hard reality in Section I that there is no way to perfect (or eliminate) the canon, here, we come to another important, sobering truth: Everything about what- and how- teaching happens in the secondary English classroom cannot be overhauled overnight. Be it because of a mandated school curriculum, lack of resources to buy new texts, pushback from community members, or other reasons, teachers do not always get much of a say in what texts they teach. And, except in the case of a full-on revolt, this will not change. Still, this is not to say teachers are without agency in the classroom; teachers hold power over how they teach behind their closed classroom doors. The goal of reading differently, then, is to help teachers identify opportunities for doing important critical work with their students even while teaching the “traditional” texts. Can Romeo and Juliet challenge our ideas of revenge, romance, and tragedy all while demystifying Shakespeare? Might To Kill a Mockingbird become a starting point for students to talk about racism in the United States? Would teaching students to see Langston Hughes’ poetry as a challenge to a white, affluent capitalist society help them think about the ways Black art gets white-washed? In this section, I explore how educators may seek ways to complicate the traditional texts they teach through reading differently.
Chapter 5- To Kill a Mockingbird

Introduction:

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird (TKAM)* was written by Harper Lee in 1960. *TKAM* is set in Macomb County, Alabama. The novel’s 8-year-old narrator, Jean Louise “Scout” Finch, provides readers with an account of the events shaping and shaking Macomb County. The text tells stories of the townspeople, Scout’s family, and her school experiences, and culminates with the events of the summer of 1935 when Scout’s father, Atticus Finch, defends a Black man named Tom Robinson in court after Tom is wrongfully accused of raping a white woman.

*TKAM* ponders what true bravery looks like and how bravery might look different depending on identity and context, but it always involves a commitment to truth and goodness in the face of evil. Most pointedly, the text memorializes Atticus as a good (though imperfect) man because of his brave commitment to stand up for the truth. Still, characters like Ms. DuBose, Boo Radley, and, of course, Tom Robinson also demonstrate bravery throughout the novel.

Often, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is discussed as a novel about racism, and it certainly should be considered in those terms, but *TKAM* intersects that discussion on race with themes of bravery, distinguishing truth from lies, defending truth, and growing up with an understanding of the complexity of one’s community. From a literary perspective, it would be hard to deny *TKAM*’s quality and compelling use of structure, point of view, characterization, and voice. By voicing the novel from a child’s perspective, Lee invites readers to realize how the ugliness of racism destroys innocence.

In short, the text does fine work in calling out flagrantly racist actions and ideas but fails to appropriately condemn prejudices and micro-aggressions throughout the novel. Also, *TKAM*’s approach to “solving” the problem of racism falls short of what (our current model of) antiracism requires. Instead of fighting to change the system itself, Scout decides her role in Macomb will be like Atticus, Maudie, and Alexandria working for gradual change from the inside of a racist system.

Ultimately, *TKAM* is a novel about racism, growing up, and what it means to work for progress/change from inside institutions of racism. The novel superbly evidences how racism complicates culture, the growing up/identity forming process, community, and truth, but *TKAM* only does that work
for white people. The white protagonist and her white family and friends try to keep their white neighbors from killing Tom Robinson, but Tom dies, and all the white people get on with their lives promising to do better next time.

**To Teach, or Not to Teach?**

For a novel written in the American South in the 1960s, *TKAM* was perhaps a step in the right direction, but for the conversations and decisions characterizing racism today, many educators believe *TKAM* should exit the high school canon. In fact, some school districts are removing the novel from their curriculum (Will, 2017). Still, other educators cling to this text. Teachers seeking financial aid to buy class copies of *TKAM* through DonorsChoose claim their students need to read *TKAM* to “connect with previous generations”, understand how the United States has (not) changed, introduce new vocabulary, and/or to inform students of “what it was like to grow up in the South during the 1930s” (Will, 2017).

While those are all fine reasons to teach a text, is *TKAM* truly the best choice for achieving those objectives? *TKAM* uses the N-word approximately fifty times, Black characters are denied a voice in the text, and though the characters fight against racism, they ultimately allow the system to win out. With all the potential harm *TKAM* could do to antiracist efforts in the classroom, students may fare better to connect with other generations and learn vocabulary through any number of other texts. Students could read a coming-of-age story like Thomas’ *The Hate You Give*.

Alternatively, there are teachers who are opposed to teaching *TKAM* and yet they find themselves teaching the novel due to their school’s required curriculum, a lack of resources to buy a class set of another text, or out of fear over the backlash educators may face from community members who love the text. But there is reason to hope! In conversation with two high school teachers, Ms. Anne McConnell and Dr. Candence Robillard, I discussed the current climate surrounding *TKAM*, and the two educators presented a compelling approach to teaching the novel. While *TKAM* is far from perfect, McConnell has found ways to teach the text as a starting point for discussing race with her predominantly white, Southern, affluent students. McConnell claims that *TKAM* works for her because her students relate to the townspeople; they understand the personalities and ways of life the book describes, and they are intrigued...
by how those characters continue denying the truth to maintain the status quo (personal communication, March 9, 2022). As they read, students must ask why the townspeople are denying the truth. McConnell encourages students to consider what would it mean for the town to acquit Tom Robinson, why doing so would disrupt their worldview, and how students themselves may fall into those same traps when they encounter racism in their daily lives. For these students, *TKAM* is a well-known text that their community does not expect to disrupt the status-quo, but the way McConnell approaches the text shows educators can use *TKAM* to challenge racism in ways that reach their students.

**My Perspective:**

In short, the best thing I can say is that *TKAM* is not the book for all students. For many years, this book has been THE book for discussing racism in schools, and that’s wrong. *TKAM* is not scripture for explaining racism in the United States. Like all other books, rather, it is an imperfect text written by an imperfect author at an imperfect time. That does not mean *TKAM* should be taught, but it does not mean it should be excluded, either. Instead of asking “do we teach this book?” educators might want to ask these three questions: Who are the students? What is their (students’) understanding of/history with racism? Where do educators need to start the conversation to move all students forward toward equity and antiracism? The unit I outline in this chapter is best suited for teaching *TKAM* to predominantly white students who do not want to talk about race, but many of the exercises could work in any classroom. The goal of the unit is to use *TKAM* to help students confront racism and their own role in a racist culture.

**Unit Design:**

This unit design suggests some ways teachers can use *To Kill a Mockingbird* to get students to question their own role in racism, the tension between tradition and progress, how change can be made within and outside a cultural system, and what makes a text worth teaching. In this outline, I provide potential essential questions, front-loading activities, text pairings, journal questions, class activities, and book club options to achieve these objectives.

**Essential Questions**
• Is literature an enhancement or detriment to society? What- if anything- makes the literature we study relevant?
• To what extent do you need to be part of a system to change it? To what extent do you need to work outside a system to bring about change?
• What is worth fighting for in life? How should we fight?

**Front-Loading**

Alongside a unit on *TKAM*, it might be useful to educate students on the history of racism and violence against Black people in the United States, specifically as it ties into the time at which *TKAM* was written. Many students have not gotten any instruction about these events. Therefore, providing this information to the class throughout the unit may help students understand the events of the novel, see the text’s events as believable/realistic, and feel more comfortable discussing the issues in class because each student comes to the novel with a shared understanding of a few aspects of racism and racial violence (A. McConnell, personal communication, March 9, 2022). In her classroom, McConnell focuses most of her front-loading efforts on the Scottsboro trial, and as students read *TKAM*, they also follow the story of the Scottsboro Boys. While the Scottsboro trial is an important event to teach, other historical moments are also worth including. The following table lists several important events students should hear about and includes links to resources for teaching those events. For teachers that would prefer to let students explore these topics independently instead of as a class, please see Appendix A for instructions on using the “Rabbit-Hole-Day” approach to internet searches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/scottsboro-boys">https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/scottsboro-boys</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.aclu.org/issues/racial-justice/saga-scottsboro-boys">https://www.aclu.org/issues/racial-justice/saga-scottsboro-boys</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Journal Questions

Journaling allows students to explore the text through writing, synthesize their thoughts and develop new understandings/have revelations about the text. Writing- even about formal qualities of a text- will push students to make learning personal. In this sample TKAM unit, the journal questions are geared toward using the formal qualities of the text to make meaning about and through the text. By looking at the formal qualities of the text, students are also challenged to consider the thematic qualities of the text. Writing in a variety of forms including charts, diagrams, and essays are all used here.

1. Make a map of the town using geographical references in the text. Then consider (1) how are these people divided? (2) who “belongs” where?
2. Consider the structure of the novel. How does Scout’s narration inform the messages of the book?

3. Consider the trial from Tom Robinson’s perspective. Go to the text for evidence of who he is/what he experienced and write an “I AM” poem.

![The I Am Poem](image)

*Figure 3 Shared by Dr. Emily Peters. (personal communication, October 2021)*

4. When talking about Mrs. Dubose, Atticus says “I wanted you to see something in her- I wanted you to see what real courage is… It’s when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do” (Lee, 1960, p.149). Compare this with reactions to Tom’s death.

5. In a conversation with Jem, Scout says, “I think there are just folks.” To what extent is that statement reflected in her community? In what ways does her community divide itself? How does this compare with the social dynamics of the United States in the 1950s-60s? How does it compare to your society today?

6. In what ways is Boo Radley brave? (C. Robillard, personal communication, March 18, 2022)

**Text Pairings**
As the unit progresses, it may be beneficial to pair *TKAM* with songs, short stories, excerpts from other novels, or with films that provide other perspectives on the issues explored in *TKAM*. Some suggestions—along with a summary, justification, and possible time to use each text in the classroom—are provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday</td>
<td>A song about lynching with intense imagery and a somber tone.</td>
<td>Print the song lyrics and have students listen to a recording several times and react. Discuss what they notice in the lyrics and performance. Connect this text back to the frontloading information and to the world of <em>TKAM</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Flowers” by Alice Walker</td>
<td>A short story about a young girl who sees the remains of a man who was lynched. Uses nature and tone to illustrate the child’s loss of innocence.</td>
<td>This would be a good story to read aloud to the class early in the unit to help them think about loss of innocence and then they can draw on this text again as they read <em>TKAM</em>. (A. McConnell, personal communication, March 9, 2022).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” Ursula LeGuin</td>
<td>A (longer) short story about a ‘utopia’ where everyone is happy and shameless without pain, but that joy comes at the cost of a child living in agony.</td>
<td>At the end of the unit, read Ursula Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” with the class. Use the story as a starting point for discussing the power/agency each person has to walk away, fight, or comply when they see injustice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Allowables” (Nikki Giovanni) and “Mercy” (Rudy Francisco)</td>
<td>Two poems that use a spider as a symbol of a white person’s fear of a Black person. The poems grapple with how fear is not an appropriate motive for destroying a life.</td>
<td>Discuss the literary qualities of the poems and compare them (Moore, 2021). Then discuss: How do these two poets use the spider as a symbol? How can readers connect the experiences detailed in these poems to our essential question about resistance to change? In what ways is fear an unhealthy motivator?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Additional Class Activities**

These class activities (outside of those previously mentioned) are meant to engage students in class in ways that lead to discussing the novel’s connection to the unit’s essential questions. Some are group work; some are for the whole class to participate in at once. Some take only a class period while other activities may span the entire unit.

- Provide students with a definition of anti-racism and discuss the word. Then, give students a two-minute free-write on each of the following questions: Is Atticus anti-racist? What about Mr. Dolphus-Raymond? Miss Maudie? Encourage students to go back to the text for evidence and spend the rest of the class (approximately 30 minutes) discussing their positions.
- Over the course of the unit, keep two big sheets of paper (butcher paper reaching from the ceiling to the floor) in the classroom, then label one paper “Scout” and the other “Jem,” and draw a straight, vertical line down the middle of the paper. Next, assign each student to one of the two charts. Use the charts to create a timeline and chronicle the character’s change/growth in understanding their town, environment, and culture. Quotes go on the left, explanation/analysis/justification on the right.

**Book Clubs:**

For some educators, incorporating choice reading into their units prompts students to engage with the content and ideas presented in class through a text they might find more engaging. The following are some good texts to offer as book club options in conjunction with this unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

- *The Hate You Give* (Angie Thomas)
- *All American Boys* (Jason Reynolds & Brendan Kiely)
- *Dear Martin* (Angie Thomas)
- *Black Birds in the Sky* (Brandy Colbert)
Chapter 6- Romeo and Juliet

Introduction:
Premiering in 1597, Romeo and Juliet was one of William Shakespeare’s earlier plays. The play takes place in the town of Verona where a long-lasting feud between two families, the Montagues and Capulets, consumes the entire town in fighting, chaos, and distrust. The title characters Romeo, the son of the Montagues, and Juliet, Lord Capulet’s daughter, fall in love despite the feud. A well-meaning friar allows the two to marry in secret, but fate catches up with the young couple, leading to their separation, deception, miscommunication, and death.

Romeo and Juliet [R&J] is a love story with some beautiful poetry, but the play is so much more than that. For example, the traditional focus of R&J is placed on the romance between the titular characters, but the entire plot hinges on a violent feud between the Montagues and Capulets. In this way, R&J is not so much about love itself as it is about using love as a pathos-inducing plot device for examining the danger of feuding without cause. While questions like “were the teenagers truly in love or was it lust?” or “did they act rashly based on passion or on intuition?” are important to consider, the more pressing comment R&J makes is that, regardless of the (lack of) wisdom in Romeo and Juliet’s actions, they did not deserve to die for their mistakes. Rather, they are casualties of their families’ feud and martyrs for peace. According to Planinc, “the deaths of Romeo and Juliet were [merely] necessary sacrifices for [momentary] peace” (2019).

To Teach, or Not to Teach?:

The most obvious reason to move away from teaching Romeo and Juliet is that Shakespeare has a prominent- and for some problematic- position in our canon. Revisiting the list of top 10 most commonly taught texts in 2002-3 and 2003-4, at least 30% of those texts are plays by William Shakespeare (Stallworth et al., 2006). Such a reliance on Shakespeare’s plays in the classroom stems from the traditionalist belief that Shakespeare’s work wove “the very fabric of Western thought” (Schnierer, 2017, p.106). Harold Bloom, perhaps the most notable (and most curmudgeonly) of the traditionalists, deifies
Shakespeare to the point of centering the Western canon itself on the playwright. Bloom claims that “[n]o other writer has ever had anything like Shakespeare’s resources of languages… that we feel many of the limits of language have been reached, once and for all” with the Bard. Similarly, in regard to character development, Bloom argues that some of Shakespeare’s characters are “so original and so overwhelming that… Shakespeare [has] change[d] the entire meaning of what it is to have created a man made out of words” (1994, p.47).

Such high praise… but is it warranted? Surely Shakespeare’s plays are, in many ways, universal because of their artistry and attention to themes of love, loss, greed, and revenge, but the poor treatment of minorities within Shakespeare’s work (from Aaron in Titus Andronicus to Caliban in The Tempest) raises questions for many readers about the relevance of these plays. Ruben Espinosa argues in Shakespeare on the Shades of Racism that perhaps Shakespearian drama- with its “weight of whiteness and… grotesque nature of white supremacy”- is not the most appropriate text for “uncovering… compassionate and humane treatment of others” in our contemporary moment (2021, p.29). Are there any other texts that would better serve students? Is Othello the best choice when Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman and Mtwa’s Sizwe Bansi is Dead exist? Might the story of love and redemption in Selkam’s The Story of Oxala be a better use of time than Romeo and Juliet? Maybe, but the fact remains that Shakespearian drama has touched every aspect of culture and it is not going anywhere. In his essay “Shakespeare’s Complete Works,” Peter Paul Schnierer provides example after example of Shakespeare’s position as “the most frequently performed playwright world-wide” (2017, p.113). Students will likely encounter Shakespearian drama in its original context, in a contemporary retelling, in parody, or intertextually, so not teaching Shakespeare could leave students with a gap in their understanding of the history and context of the study of literature.

Though Shakespearian drama is a hallmark of western culture, and these plays have been an integral part of the white-centric, masculine canon, the best course of action might be to redefine Shakespearian studies rather than abandon the discipline. Though Shakespeare himself may not have anything to teach the 21st century about the “cruelty” of discrimination, “[w]hat we make of Shakespeare
stands to cast a light on the shades of racism that surround us” (Espinosa, 2021, p.69). In effect, if readers can’t beat Shakespearian drama, they still hold the power to encounter these texts and make their own judgements about the text’s relevance in the world. Perhaps such work could even lead to redirection, reinterpretation, or a reimagining of the Shakespearian canon and its cultural role.

My Perspective:

Romeo and Juliet was, in fact, my first Shakespearian play, and as an 8th grader, I did not care for it. At the time, R&J felt dumb to me because my teacher tried to pass it off as a love story, when R&J is mostly about vengeance, a love for death, and parent-child relationships. Even in middle school, I thought that was bogus. I wanted to blame the friar for everything, complain about Romeo’s stupidity, and stop rereading the balcony scene for the tenth time. The play’s language is beautiful, but as a traditional love story, the play never held a lot of water to me.

With that experience in mind, I revisited Romeo and Juliet as a junior in college preparing for this project and enjoyed it much more. The love story and feuding both capture me differently than they did the first time. I appreciated how Romeo and Juliet holds something for everyone: dancing, fighting, poetry, vulgar jokes, trickery, parents who “won’t understand,” AND romance; unfortunately, our teaching of R&J rarely reflects all of those aspects of the play. As a pre-service teacher, I understand why and how that choice gets made. When the language itself is complex for our students, it seems ambitious to attempt to touch on each of those aspects of the play. Instead, a focus on romance is meant to draw students into the drama. Though an admirable attempt to engage students, our traditional approach to R&J sells our students short by underestimating their intellect and interests. Some educators think students will be more interested in a play with teenage characters and a love story, but that approach loses as many students as it gains. Also, the approach to R&J as a love story is something students expect. They know the basics of the story and have always heard that it’s a love story. How much fun would it be to show them a side of this classic text that they did not expect?
Unit Design:

This unit design suggests some approaches to Romeo and Juliet which challenge a student’s preconceived notions about Shakespearian drama in general and this play in particular. Students should learn to appreciate the Shakespeare genre for what it is—art that can be appreciated, interpreted, questioned, and criticized—and question it. In terms of the text itself, students get a well-rounded picture of R&J as not just a romance, but a tale of revenge and relationship as well. In this outline, I provide potential essential questions, viewing options, front-loading activities, text pairings, journal questions, class activities, and book club options to achieve these objectives. More so than for any other chapter, the unit design for Romeo and Juliet is a compilation of resources, approaches, and ideas that are already being used and published by teachers and Shakespearians.

Essential Questions

Though the inclusion of fate vs freewill as an essential question was tempting, that common focus did not make the cut for this unit design that emphasizes “new” angles for teaching the classic play. The first four questions were inspired by comments to a post by Dana Moore in the Facebook Group “Teaching Shakespeare” (2022).

- Are love, lust, and desire all words for the same thing? To what extent do these emotions coexist?
- Does Romeo and Juliet romanticize death?
- How tightly should someone hold on to revenge? What about tradition?
- What factors complicate parent-child relationships? How important/influential are other adult figures for children?
- Are Shakespeare’s plays still worth studying?

Watching and Reading

While there are countless benefits to reading, annotating, and analyzing the written text of a play, those who study a performance piece without examining it as a performance miss out on a fundamental aspect of the play. Also, for students at the middle and high school level, breaking up a study of a
Shakespearian play by watching a production (that uses the original language) and engaging in close readings of certain scenes leads to greater engagement with and understanding of the play.

Countless filmed versions of *Romeo and Juliet* exist, but for this unit I recommend either Dominic Dromgoole’s 2009 production with Shakespeare’s Globe or the 2014 Broadway production featuring Condola Rashad and Orlando Bloom. Both versions use the original language and are filmed live on a stage, so using these versions ensures the unit is still teaching the play rather than a reinterpretation of the play. Also, these versions feature interracial couples which adds a layer to our interpretation. Using these versions of *R&J*, educators can ask students: Is Shakespeare for everyone? Does this casting choice strike a cultural nerve? Can certain casting or acting choices help us connect with the play in our contemporary moment? Throughout the unit, it might be fun to use scenes from other versions and ask students to compare/contrast interpretations to further these kinds of questions.

**Front Loading**

In all honesty, I usually hate Shakespeare front-loading. As a younger student, it was always my least favorite part because the emphasis on the Globe Theater- its architecture and historical significance- seemed entirely unnecessary, and while I enjoyed the biographical information on William Shakespeare, the lack of connection between the front-loading and the study of the play frustrated me. A more effective approach to front-loading might forgo some of the Globe Theater information and instead ask students to examine several sources about historical attitudes toward gender roles, marriage, and love. Additionally, much of Shakespeare’s biographical information would be of more use in a larger conversation on the literary tradition Shakespeare was a part of, and on his influences for this play. The following list of readings and videos provide some starting points for this frontloading approach.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/English_Renaissance_theatre">https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/English_Renaissance_theatre</a></td>
<td>An article about the history of the English Renaissance Theatre. It discusses the theaters and performances as well as the costumes, the roles of writers and actors, and the genres of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="https://study.com/academy/lesson/english-renaissance-theatre-characteristics-significance.html">https://study.com/academy/lesson/english-renaissance-theatre-characteristics-significance.html</a></td>
<td>This seven minute video explains the characteristics and significance of the English Renaissance theatre. The source emphasizes how English Renaissance theatre introduced theatre to the middle and lower classes and developed permanent theaters. Also, the video introduces viewers to English Renaissance playwrights other than Shakespeare, including Christopher Marlowe and John Fletcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snJpYLY7bYA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snJpYLY7bYA</a></td>
<td>This crash course video from PBS digital studios emphasizes the historical context of English Renaissance drama and how it evolved from history plays and Medieval Mystery plays. The video also discusses notable plays and playwrights other than Shakespeare. Using this video shows students that (1) Shakespeare did not just appear out of thin air, but joined an already developing theatrical tradition (2) Shakespeare had contemporaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS2ndY5WJXA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS2ndY5WJXA</a></td>
<td>This video moves through a quick biography of Shakespeare, the historical context of playwriting in Elizabethan England, and examines Shakespeare’s creation of the history play genre.</td>
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</table>
Paired Texts

As the unit progresses, it may be beneficial to pair *R&J* with short stories and poems that provide other perspectives on the themes explored in the play. Suggestions—along with a summary, justification, and possible time to use each text in the classroom—are provided in table 2.C below. Few units will have time for all of these options but intentionally selecting a few paired texts can add depth to the unit.

Another option is to forgo the book clubs for this unit, and have students read/write about one or two of these texts instead.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Quarantine” by Eavan Boland</td>
<td>A short poem set in during the Irish potato famine in the 1840s and details the sacrificial love between a man and woman. The poem challenges the idea that love is always pretty, neat, and emotional.</td>
<td>In conjunction with a conversation on the essential question about love, lust, and desire. Might introduce the idea that love is more than an emotional connection, and ask students where a love that goes beyond the emotional exists in <em>R&amp;J</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Chaser” by John Collier</td>
<td>In this short story, a young man buys a love potion from an old man. The story highlights how obsessive, impulsive love is not really love at all.</td>
<td>Use this short story along with the “What is Love?” notecard activity detailed in the “Classroom Activities” section below. The key question to ask from this story is: Are obsessive lust and infatuation the same as love?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Partying is Such Sweet Sorrow,” a short story retelling of <em>R&amp;J</em> written by Kiersten White. Part of the short story collection <em>That Way Madness Lies</em> edited by Dahlia Adler.</td>
<td>This short story is a modern retelling of <em>R&amp;J</em> written entirely in text messages.</td>
<td>How can <em>R&amp;J</em> be adapted for our time and context? What are the benefits and limits of altering the story in these ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner.</td>
<td>A classic southern-gothic text written from the perspective of a town telling the life story of “Miss Emily.”</td>
<td>This story works better for older students. The language and stream-of-consciousness storytelling are complex. If you use this text, use it after finishing act 5 to talk about death and love, differences between love and obsession, etc. This is also a good text for considering the ways a</td>
</tr>
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</table>
community can be responsible for tragedy. For example, students could draw comparisons between Ms. Emily’s relationship with her Father and the town and Romeo and Juliet’s relationships with their families and city.

| “Love Song for Lucinda” (by Langston Hughes) | This poem by Langston Hughes is all about love and the danger of being consumed by it. The poem uses fire, light, and nature imagery for that effect. Ultimately, the poem is a message of caution that may connect well with Act 5. | With this poem in mind, you can ask students if Romeo and Juliet encourages a similar kind of caution. Have students annotate and discuss the poem, then do the same for the 5.3.305-310, the prologue, or both passages, and then discuss some possible connections. |
| “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson | This famous short story shows how a blind commitment to tradition can lead society to engage in barbaric acts. | An educator may use “The Lottery” with R&J to discuss the feud between the Montegues and Capulets. Ask students to compare and contrast the town’s attitudes toward the lottery in Jackson’s story with the violent, deadly feud between the two families in R&J. |

**Journal Questions**

While these questions are original, their basic structure comes from Dr. Candence Robillard’s journal questions for Shakespeare’s Othello used in the 2018-2019 school year. For example, there is a question about themes, one about tragic flaws, and a journal prompt that encourages a student to identify key passages and engage in close reading.

1. Though Romeo and Juliet are the main characters of this play, the audience does not meet Romeo until late in Act 1 Scene 1 and Juliet does not appear until act 1 scene 3. How does delaying the audience’s introduction to the title characters establish the mood of the play (Robillard, 2018)?

2. Which character best embodies love, lust, and desire in this text?
3. Some themes in this play are death, love, vengeance, and rhetorical power. Select one of those themes and write about how the theme relates to either Romeo, Juliet, Friar Lawrence, or the Nurse (Robillard, 2018).

4. What are the titular characters’ tragic flaws? Use evidence from the text.

5. Of the different kinds of love you see in the play, which is the most powerful? How does Shakespeare use language to express the experience of love?

6. One way to analyze this play is as a tale of two sets of parents and their deviant children. How are parents portrayed in this text? To what extent do the parents fail their children? To what extent do the children fail their parents (Robillard, 2018)?

7. Is justice served at the end of this play? If so, to whom? Is anyone innocent in the end? Why or why not?

8. What passages might be key passages in understanding each act of the play? Pick two passages that were not reviewed in class, annotate them, and write about how the literary features (imagery, motif, diction such as poetry or prose, elements of irony, etc.) of the passage contribute to the meaning of the play (Robillard, 2018).

Class Activities

These class activities (outside of those previously mentioned) are meant to engage students in class in ways that lead to discussing the novel’s connection to the unit’s essential questions. Compared to other units, drama units usually require students to spend more time going through the text as a group. In this unit, most of the class time will be spent reading/watching the play. For this reason, the additional class activities are kept to a minimum.

- With the balcony scene and death scene, watch more than one version of the play. Consider the way acting, directing, staging, and costume choices alter our emotions and interpretations.

Encourage students to see theatre as a LIVING art.
• Give students a note card at the beginning of the unit during front-loading. Ask them to define love. Post those note cards on a wall in the classroom and use them as a reference as you move through the unit (Peters, 2021).

• Divide students into groups and give them a class period (or two) to research and make a presentation to answer either: “Do we still need to learn about Shakespeare?” or “Is Shakespeare still relevant?” (O’Meara & Folger Education, 2015).

**Book Clubs**

As stated in the *TKAM* chapter, book clubs can help educators encourage choice reading and reinforce the learning and love of reading they hope students gain in the classroom. For my book club options, I moved away from books that are a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*. Each of these books has a different storyline, but all of them examine feuding/conflict, young love, and/or love and death. Most of these options come from Stephan’s NCTE article “Book pairing ideas: Romeo and Juliet” (2019).

- *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez
- *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo
- *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz
- *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell
- *He Said, She Said* by Kwame Alexander
- *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Love, Hate, and Other Filters* by Samira Ahmed
- *The Ferryman* by Claire McFall
- *Naughts & Crosses* by Malorie Blackman
- *Son of the Mob* by Gordon Korman
Chapter 7- The Poetry of Langston Hughes

Introduction

This final chapter in section two focuses on Hughes’ poetry. Though Hughes was not just a poet—he also wrote plays, essays, articles, and an autobiography— he is remembered primarily as a poet and integral writer of the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes’ work has stood the test of time, but perhaps the most compelling aspects of his poetry for high school students are its simplicity of language, complexity of theme, and clarity of technique.

Hughes chose to write for and to working class Black people. For that reason, his poetry has been overlooked due to its deceptive simplicity of language. But thematically, Hughes’ work reveals the human spirit’s strength, physically and spiritually in a way entirely unique (Poetry Foundation, n.d.b). His art accurately reflects “the nuances of black life and its frustrations,” which helped his work endure (Poetry Foundation, n.d.b, para.6). In his own words, Hughes’ poetry is about "workers, roustabouts, and singers, and job hunters on Lenox Avenue in New York, or Seventh Street in Washington or South State in Chicago—people up today and down tomorrow, working this week and fired the next, beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten, buying furniture on the installment plan, filling the house with roomers to help pay the rent, hoping to get a new suit for Easter—and pawning that suit before the Fourth of July" (Poetry Foundation, n.d.b, para.4).

Additionally, Hughes' work is an excellent starting point for students who are just beginning to study the formal qualities of a poem. A collection of Hughes’ poetry spans several styles; some poems are four lines with simple rhyme schemes while other poems continue for several pages and/or do not rhyme. These poems also use a variety of textual features and techniques from parentheses and capitalization for emphasis to repetition and juxtaposition. The wide range of formal qualities and techniques present in Hughes’ work is perfect for helping students learn to identify these techniques and their influence on the text’s message and tone.
To Teach, or Not to Teach?

There are lots of Black writers who deserve a spot in the English Literature curriculum. In terms of poetry, Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni, and/or Amiri Baraka would also be stellar choices. So why teach Langston Hughes? In addition to the three reasons cited in the introduction, Hughes’ work offers a unique opportunity to challenge student expectations by complicating their notions of history and ideology.

In an essay on periodization, Clemens Spahr cites Hughes as an example of periodization diluting the complexity and interconnectedness of literary and political movements. During his career, Langston Hughes worked abroad in several countries including the Soviet Union where he was well compensated and respected as a screenwriter and journalist (Leach, 2004). After experiencing an acceptance in the Soviet Union unlike any reception he received in the United States, Hughes saw communism as a solution to racism and poverty, and his later works condone communism (Leach, 2004, p.83). Eventually, Hughes’ communist ties landed him in a congressional hearing with the House Un-American Activities Committee (Leach, 2004, p.132).

While Langston Hughes’s radical political affiliations with socialist groups and the Communist Party are no secret, they are often swept under the rug as an embarrassment to his true cultural achievement, his folk poetry (Spahr, 2017, p.37). The treatment of Hughes’ work, persona, and ideology receive here is not an isolated incident. In fact, “... the radical dimension of the Harlem Renaissance is often underexplored” out of a fear that recognizing the connections between communism and African American literature “seem to be incompatible with many of the identity-based views contemporary critics hold and therefore need to be explained away” (Spahr, 2017, p.40). By teaching Hughes’ poetry, and giving students the freedom to explore the intersections between African American and communist literature, students will challenge the canon explicitly (by examining the intersections) and implicitly (by grappling with the complexity of periodization).
My Perspective:
Of the three texts used in the “Reading Differently” section, I had the least prior experience with Langston Hughes’ poems. Actually, I had only read “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” plus three or four of his poems. Still, I will never forget my introduction to Hughes through the poem “I, Too, Sing America.” It was the day after the 2016 Virginia race riots, and I sat in my English classroom with my majority white, affluent classmates. That day we read and copied Langston Hughes’ I, Too, Sing America. After our initial discussion of the poem, our teacher asked each student to change the pronouns of the poem. When the first-person pronouns of “I” and “me” were changed to “you” and the third person pronoun, “they” was changed to “I,” my eyes were opened to the power of language to alter my perspective (original copy Appendix B). The discussion my class had about that poem made me uncomfortable in all the right ways. It was the beginning of my journey toward anti-racism. When it came time to begin this thesis, I remembered that experience and wanted to see if I could build a whole unit on Hughes’ poetry that opened the eyes of my students the same way mine were opened.

Unit Design:
The Single-Poet Poetry Unit

There is a benefit to a one-poet poetry unit in the high school classroom. According to Robillard et. al, focusing one unit per year on a single poet helps student “immerse themselves in the craft and rhythms of one artist; to ease past those first tenuous, hesitant readings to allow the words to become familiar; and to acquire the patience and appreciation that comes from a slower, more careful pace of reading” (2015 pg. 84). Hughes’ poetry is perfect for such an approach because the language is clear, the literary devices are present, the context- biographically, historically, and literarily- is rich, and Hughes’ work raises emotion in the reader. For the “[m]any students [who] feel intimidated by the seemingly elusive nature of poetry,” Hughes provides some comfort while challenging those students to grow as readers (Robillard et al., 2015, p.86).

In this chapter, my approach to the one-poet poetry unit relies on two sources. Firstly, Robillard, Bach, and Gunden’s article “Mindful Poetry: Making the Strange Familiar” for its approach to the one-
poet poetry unit. From this source, I embrace color marking as a mindful, critically engaging activity. The second source is Gillespie’s *Doing Literary Criticism: Helping Students Engage with Challenging Texts*; specifically, I use the chapters on biographical and historical criticism. Through historical criticism, readers can discover the ways “writers have taken events from their own lives… and by their creativity, refashioned these experiences into their art” (Gillespie, 2010, p.73). Tangentially, biographical criticism reveals how the “social and cultural context and… tint of political currents, social norms, hopes, fears, customs, attitudes, perceptual breakthroughs, and perceptual limitations of the day” inform the texts we read (Gillespie, 210, p.83). While historical and biographical criticisms are not the only way to view any text, and in some cases can close off rather than enlighten our interpretations, for the purpose of this unit on Langston Hughes, this background information is important for the students’ understanding and connection to a text (Gillespie, 210, p.74).

Simple internet searches reveal that Langston Hughes was a “central figure in the Harlem Renaissance” who focused his work on the experiences of everyday Black people (Poetry Foundation, n.d.b, para.1). While this is not inaccurate, Hughes is a far more complicated figure than this depiction implies. Upon digging a little deeper, one might learn of Hughes’ trips to Spain and the Soviet Union, his socialist sympathies, or even his call to appear before the House Un-American Activities committee for those socialist sympathies (Leach, 2004). The first, incomplete, picture of Hughes as an individual and artist can promote a white-washed, democratized version of his work. The latter attempts to situate Hughes and his poetry in a specific moment in time to help readers better understand the literature and what it has to say about the world. If Hughes’ work is important to study because of its “rich social and political vision through deceptively simple language,” then denying Hughes’ socialist leanings robs readers from seeing the fullness of the poet’s artistic expression (MAPS, n.d., para 1). Readers do not have to agree with Hughes’ beliefs but choosing to ignore the role those beliefs play in the poet’s work is a disservice to reader, author, and text alike.

**Essential Questions**
• What characteristics in a poem, or collection of poetry, build a writer’s voice for the reader?
• How do form and emotion connect within a work of poetry?
• To what extent does context matter when experiencing poetry?

The Poems

One of the hardest parts of planning a poetry unit is determining which poems to include and exclude. Though Hughes’ work covers a wide range of topics and themes, I wanted this unit to expose students to a wide variety of themes Hughes explored in his work including love, death, blues, communism, America, race, dreams, and oppression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Negro Speaks of Rivers</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Question [1]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>Wisdom and War</td>
<td>Night Funeral in Harlem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motto</td>
<td>Juke Box Love Song</td>
<td>Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Exchange</td>
<td>The Trumpet Player</td>
<td>Dinner Guest: Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>Harlem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As I Grew Older</td>
<td>Park Bench</td>
<td>Song for a Dark Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let America be America Again</td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>I, Too, Sing America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Front Loading

To begin this unit, allow students to independently investigate biographical information on Langston Hughes as well as some of his writing through the Rabbit Hole Internet Activity (Appendix A). Provide the following sources to students as launching off points as they begin their search. Provide students with the following sources to get started with their research, but give them freedom to explore Hughes, his writing, and the Harlem Renaissance in accordance with the assignment:

• https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/langston-hughes
• https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art/Poetry
• https://poets.org/text/reading-guide-langston-hughes
At the end of the class period/the next day in class have students share what they discovered. Make sure to highlight the following:

- Hughes is remembered fondly, but he was not loved by everyone. In his own time, many literary critics disliked his work.
- Hughes is a widely read and widely taught poet, but he also wrote stories, essays, plays, and articles.
- Consider the context in which Hughes wrote. What attitudes and struggles may Black artists and writers have faced during the Harlem Renaissance? What else was going on in American history? In world history?
- What life events or historical happenings may have influenced Hughes’ writing? Why?

**Other Texts**

As the poems are read and analyzed in class, other sources should be brought in to inform those readings. The frontloading materials mentioned above are a great place to start, but I also suggest including Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, specifically the first half of chapter 17. Laurie Leach’s *Langston Hughes; A Biography* would also be a helpful resource for students who want to dive into Hughes’ biography as a lens for understanding his poetry. Videos summarizing those historical events and recordings of Hughes lecturing or reading his poetry may also be good to use; these videos are easily accessible on YouTube.

**Journal Questions**
The journals for this unit attempt to balance a celebration of the personal nature of poetry with the expectation that students will engage critically with the form of the poems. Therefore, these journal prompts vary in their approach and complexity to allow students to respond to the poems in a range of ways.

1. For each poem in this unit, do a two-minute free-write. Consider how the poem makes you feel, what the poem makes you think about, how reading it may/may not change you, and any questions you may have about the poem.

2. In class, we’ve discussed love, death, dreams, racism, and oppression as common themes in Langston Hughes’ poetry. Select one of these themes and write your own poem.

3. Think about some of the facts you learned about Langston Hughes through your rabbit hole activity and through class discussions. How does knowing information about the author’s life and historical context alter your reading of their poetry? Select one poem from class and several details you learned about Hughes then write a journal about how those facts inform your reading of the poem. Also answer if you think knowing about the author is a plus or a setback for you as a reader of this poem.

4. Select three poems from class that you have not used in any of the previous journals and color mark them the way we practiced in class. Then pick one of those three poems as the subject of a formal literary analysis.

**Classroom Reading/Marking Process**

Examining the poems as a class and diving into their messages will be a large part of this unit. The following marking process adapted by Dr. Candence Robillard from material created by Jan Adkins, will be used in the classroom to study these poems (Appendix C).

**Additional Class Activities**
• Let students take one of the poems (of their choice) and perform/present it in two ways that give it two different layers of meaning. These layers do not have to be in keeping with “authorial intent,” but they should be clearly identified by the student before they begin the project, and students must annotate their chosen poem for the theme(s) they plan to highlight. This activity could also work as an end-of-unit assessment.

• For some of the poems, break the students into groups and let them have a “silent conversation” which is a way for students to mark the text together (Facing History and Ourselves, 2008).
Section III: Different Reading

While Section II began with the adage that “Rome was not built in a day” to remind us that curriculum change happens slowly, the other side of that reality is that building Rome started with one brick at a time. If we as educators seek a revised high school canon, at some point, something new must be built…Can we find new texts to teach? Can we find ways to make them relevant for our students? Can we make our students feel heard- and challenged- by new-to-them ideas? Will we allow ourselves to read something new and inevitably learn with students as we go? These are the goals of different reading.

There were a lot of ways I could have selected texts for this section, and there’s no way I could fill every gap. Luckily that was not the goal. Instead, I looked for three works (one novel, one play, and one poetry unit) that fit these two requirements:

1. The text cannot be on a list of recommended high school texts. If NCTE recommended it, if I heard of a high school teaching/reading it, or if there are resources online for teaching the text, those were automatic grounds for disqualification.
2. The text must address an issue not resolved in the instances of “reading differently” from section II.

These are all texts I encountered in college either in a course (Long Division and The Duchess of Malfi) or through preparing for this thesis (poems in chapter nine). Just as with the texts of section II, these were not automatic favorites, though I do think I liked all of these more on my first reading than any of the texts in Section II. They’re also all texts I happened to read twice before selecting. Also, these texts were not chosen for shock value. The works presented in this section were chosen for their literary merit, for the ways they (can) fill gaps in our current canon, and for the opportunity they present to reach students. While this section assumes the same outline as Section II with a novel, play, and poetry, these three are not necessarily meant to be alternatives to the three texts discussed in section II, though educators could take that approach.
Chapter 8- Long Division

Introduction

*Long Division*, Kiese Laymon’s debut novel is “a satirical exploration of celebrity, authorship, violence, religion, and coming of age in post-Katrina Mississippi” (Simon & Schuster, n.d., para.2). Though the novel is set in the year 2013, the main character, City, time-travels back to 1985 where another character with the same name is living out the other half of this story. Laymon’s novel is a Bildungsroman for our time, following the parallel lives of two characters named City Coldsten as they time travel and make sense of their world(s) physically, socially, and spiritually.

The novel critiques “parenting in addition to white supremacy and readership” (Charis Circle, 2021, 10:43), using themes of time and layered identity. As a time-travel novel, *Long Division* puts the past, present, and potential future in conversation. Doing so forces readers to consider the layered identities all individuals carry throughout their lives as they grow from childhood into adulthood and parenthood. As *Long Division* explores the identities of its characters, the legacy and impact of racism is also explored. In Laymon’s words, *Long Division* is “an exploration of these young Black kids coming to grips with the reality that there’s a person, a persona, and a super-ego,” and the goal was to write “an adventure with these characters that are heavily steeped in the traditions that made us” (Charis Circle, 2021, 35:29-35:59).

First published in 2013, Laymon bought back the publishing rights for the novel and re-edited the book for the updated edition released in 2021, and the updated novel won an NAACP Image Award that year. While there are no major changes to the story, the 2021 version clarifies the storylines of the two Citys by dividing the novel into “Book 1” and “Book 2.” Through this unconventional re-revision and re-publication, Laymon argues that even the story of the work itself supports “the existence of a number of long divisions” (Charis Circle, 2021, 33:25-27). Laymon is aware of the people who see him as “slow” or “ignorant” because of his choice to republish, but Laymon does not care; the author says he is “highly aware of what [he’s] doing by putting out another long division in the world in a book that’s about two long divisions” (Charis Circle, 2021, 33:37-40).
To Teach, or Not to Teach?

In looking for novels that present something different from what is taught in the current canon, *Long Division* is a compelling choice not just because of the unique situation surrounding the novel’s publication (which raises questions of the author’s role and responsibility after a text reaches its audience) but because of the way the text challenges the Southern Gothic genre.

As previously stated, the current canon includes White authors with far greater frequency than Black authors, and this is especially true when it comes to authors of Southern Gothic literature. The Southern Gothic genre is most often associated with William Faulkner, whose stories center white characters and push Black characters to the fringes of the narrative as sentimental caricatures (Charis Circle, 2021, 17:00-17:30). Laymon and Bradley argue that ignoring the Black perspective when imagining the south gives readers a white-washed, inauthentic picture of Southern life. In short, “if folks are only using southern white literature to talk about southern Black experiences, [they] missed the whole boat (Charis Circle, 2021, 14:20-15:00). By including *Long Division* in the high school curriculum, educators encourage students to get on that boat and celebrate the southern Black experience.

What Makes This Text a Challenge to Teach?

*Long Division* is a deep, challenging text. For younger readers, the novel’s non-linear, self-revising plot will present a challenge, but the rigor of the text should not keep educators from teaching this novel. While teaching *Long Division* may require educators to make extra efforts to help students understand the storylines, their intersections, and permutations, that kind of work is nothing new because some already canonized works (think of William Faulkner again) are celebrated as if those texts’ “unintelligibility was brilliance.” Laymon argues that “[i]f you’re going to tell me that that unintelligibility is brilliance… then you need to explain to me then how when we do something differently often it’s… seen as not brilliant (Charis Circle, 2021, 16:06-16:42).
Unit Design: 
The Text

Students in this unit will read the 2021 version of Long Division. The revision clarifies the two stories and is closer to the version the author envisioned.

Essential Questions

- How does perspective alter our understanding of a situation, the world, or even ourselves?
- In what ways can structure influence the plot and message of a novel?
- What is the nature of the relationship between a reader, writer, and text?
- How are love and time intertwining concepts?

Rules for Reading

Because of the approach to this text where half the class reads Book 1 first and the other half starts with Book 2, the following rules (or something similar to them) might be useful. Leave it up to you to know if these could help your students understand the expectation.

1. You can read ahead but must be ready for what we’re doing that day
2. Don’t spoil it for people who are on pace (spoilers for ppl who are behind are fine)
3. Be ready to talk about the section we’re discussing each day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Book 1</th>
<th>Book 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Pg. 3-37</td>
<td>Pg. 3-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Pg. 38-80</td>
<td>Pg. 36-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Pg. 81-122</td>
<td>Pg. 93-135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Pg. 123-153</td>
<td>Start Book 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Journal Questions**

1. The author, Kiese Laymon, has said this is a book about love. What message about love does this novel convey?

2. As a book about time travel, *Long Division* compels readers to reflect on the choices made by those who came before us. Consider the parent figure relationships in this novel. What do those relationships reveal to us about parenting, the nature of time, reflection, and growing up?

3. Authors carefully select the titles of their works to emphasize an aspect of the text or to highlight the central message. What is the significance of the title *Long Division*?

4. In class, we discussed how Kiese Laymon published *Long Division* in 2013, then republished an edition in 2021 (which is the version we read as a class). How does knowing that change your understanding of the relationship between an author, a text, and the audience? How might those relationships also be in play within the text itself?

5. Consider the Southern Gothic genre and its key features. Does Laymon’s work fall in the Southern Gothic genre? In what ways might *Long Division* deviate from other Southern Gothic texts, specifically in the novel’s treatment of race? Use at least three moments from the text as examples to support your argument.

**Sample Schedule**

Since the texts in Section III are new, I will include a sample schedule to help teachers consider the pace of units on these texts. The following sample is for a four-week unit on *Long Division* complete with journal and discussion prompts to walk students through the unit.

**Week 1:**

For the first week, assign half of the students to read Book One and the other half of the students to read Book Two. The reading should happen outside of class, then in class students should break
into groups with others who had the same reading assignment. In their groups, students add to their two charts (see below).

- Character chart (name, relation to BOTH Citys, characteristics, personality traits, and the year(s) they appear in)
- Chart of events/ this happens then this (once this is done, they can look more closely at one or two scenes)

In addition to the charts, provide each group with the discussion prompt (see below) that corresponds with their most recent reading. Ask students to write a 1-2 paragraph journal for homework to further reflect on that question/information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Book One</strong></th>
<th><strong>Book Two</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 1</strong></td>
<td>Full-class introduction to the novel and how the unit will work. Give students the quiz City takes on pg. 15-16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 2</strong></td>
<td>What happened at the Can You Use That Word in a Sentence contest?</td>
<td>What do you think of Shalya and City’s relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 3</strong></td>
<td>Give them history about 2013, Mississippi, US race relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give them history about 1985, Mississippi, US race relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 4</strong></td>
<td>What do you think of City and LaVender Peeler’s relationship?</td>
<td>What do you think of City and Blaize’s relationship?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Day 5**

| What happened to City during/following his baptism? | What happened to/with City back in 1964? |

**Week 2:**

Week two is all about reading the second half of the novel and bringing the two parts together. Students should finish the novel by the second/third day of the week (make sure to set this expectation early on). Also ask students to continue charting characters and events as they read the rest of the text. Take the first day of this week to catch up on those requirements and for students to ask questions and reflect.

On days two and three, talk as a class about the book and discuss the events of the book (drawing from the character and event charts as needed). Some important questions to consider at this point would be… How much do we understand? How much do we not understand? How much does ‘understanding’ matter? This is also the time to give students the other journal questions so they can start exploring on their own.

On days four and five, talk about how the book came to be. Why/how are there are two versions of *Long Division*? Does it make sense for the author to take back that kind of control of their work? After talking about some of that, do a quick lecture on Roland Barthes and the death of the author. Then ask again, what is the role of the author? Close out the week by watching a Kiese Laymon interview. (I am partial to the Charis Circle discussion between Laymon and Dr. Regina Bradley, but the language used in the video might make it a no-go for many high school settings.)

**Weeks 3&4:**

These weeks are all about taking the time to search for deeper meanings within the text. The last two weeks were intense and moved quickly, so now an educator may give students an opportunity to slow down and reflect on some pieces of the text through close reading, writing, and discussion. Some close
reading options/topics include City’s Baptism, The Sentence Contest, LaVender, Shalya, Blaize, The Shed, and 1964. These close readings can be alternated with open class discussions and time for students to work on their journal questions.

Another way to engage students and assess their understanding of the text in the last two weeks of the unit is through a final project. For this unit, educators may ask students to develop a creative response (poem, short story, personal essay, sculpture, painting, musical performance, etc.) to the text. Ask students to create their own “long division” where they reimagine their lives (or the lives of Laymon’s characters) through a revision and reemphasis of certain aspects of the story. In addition to their creative piece, students must provide a critical commentary for their work where they explain (1) their interpretation of a “long division,” (2) how their creative piece builds on that idea, and (3) ways their interpretation and creative piece may fall short of expressing the fullness of a “long division.”
Introduction:

“John Webster's Tragedy of the Duchess of Malfi [Duchess] shows a (female) ruler who, though nominally sovereign, sees herself under constant (male) attack” (Mahler, 2016, p.358). The play follows the widowed Duchess of Malfi who marries her steward, Antonio, in secret out of fear for her “rancorous brothers” who do not wish her to remarry. The brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, employ a spy, Bosola, who uncovers the Duchess’ secret and the children she bore through that marriage. The brothers “exact a terrible and horrific revenge” which leads to every character’s undoing (Shakespeare’s Globe, 2014).

I first read Duchess during the lockdown of 2020 for a British Literature survey course. Even as a college freshman, I remember enjoying the play. Its treatment of a sovereign queen, the complexity of her character, the ins and outs of the plot, and a moment of dramatic justice as the antagonist goes mad and turns into a werewolf all drew me in as a still relatively young reader and as an emerging scholar. Then, last fall I reread Webster’s play for a Renaissance Drama seminar where the play captured my imagination once again. On this second reading, I fell in love with the play’s quite interesting feminist implications and the way it approached the concept, practice, and existence of sovereignty.

While the central conflict in the play- as demonstrated through the Duchess and her brothers- is a tension over “the Duchess' authority as well as her lawful (or rather moral) right to decide” things for herself (Mahler, 2016, p.358), the question of “Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman/ Reign most in [the Duchess]” dominates this play (Webster, 2015, 1.1.487-8). In one sense, the Duchess is great and sovereign as the public, political, ruler of Malfi, but in private she is a woman and a widow who should submit to her male authority (her brothers). Therefore, the tension in the play comes from the Duchess’ attempts to exercise her sovereignty in her married life when “[m]arriage was the major means of controlling female sexuality and legitimizing the means of inheritance between patriarchal families and governments” (Jankowski, 1990, pp.233-4). By choosing to marry in secret, without her brothers’ consent, and without the church’s blessing, the Duchess acts outside her assigned gender role.
To Teach, or Not to Teach?

One of the major reasons to teach *Duchess* at the high school level has nothing to do with the play itself and everything to do with dismantling a problem caused by the current high school canon. As evidenced in Section I, Shakespeare holds a monopoly on the image of early modern drama in the high school literature classroom. While it is true Shakespeare was one of the most popular dramatists of his time, he had a host of notable contemporaries from Ben Johnson and John Ford to Christopher Marlowe, who likely would have surpassed Shakespeare in popularity if not for his unfortunate death at the age of 29 (Bloom, 1994, p.46). While it may seem nitpicky to complain that only one early modern English dramatist finds inclusion in the high school canon, consider this: In many high schools, teachers devote time to a Shakespeare play each year for four years of high school. By high school graduation, many students have encountered at least three Shakespearian dramas and no other early modern plays. This kind of environment puts Shakespeare on the canonical pedestal. Teaching Shakespearian drama without teaching any other drama from that period gives students the idea that Shakespeare was the only playwright of merit in early modern England.

In chapter six, I referenced Harold Bloom’s obsession with (and literary deification of) Shakespeare and mentioned several problems with that approach to the canon including the white-centric views in Shakespeare’s work. Another major issue with deifying Shakespeare is that doing so may hinder the development of critical readers. When one writer is elevated, canonized, and memorialized so far beyond their contemporaries, students may pick up the implicit message that writing is a “calling” rather than a “discipline” or “skill” (Randolph, 2000, p.7). By viewing the work of a well-canonized author as the byproduct of a “calling,” something close to a divine revelation, students who are still learning “to think critically about the creative process” may not develop those critical thinking skills because they view authors and texts as infallible and impossible to criticize. As the work of Carillo demonstrates, readers who do not learn to question and criticize texts will be unprepared for the fake news, alternative facts, and conspiracy theories that compete for attention in the “posttruth” world (2019, p.155). Of course, Shakespearian studies are not entirely to blame for the passive readership trend, but if educators can
decentralize Shakespeare by teaching other early modern English dramas, perhaps Shakespeare will take a small step down from the pedestal. Maybe students will learn to view each text, regardless of author, as something they can study, accept, reject, question, or critique. And hopefully students will use those critical reading skills to become engaged and thoughtful global citizens.

While there are numerous benefits to teaching non-Shakespearian early modern drama, what makes *Duchess* itself worthy of a spot in the high school canon? First, Webster’s play is, outside of Shakespearean plays, “the most frequently performed play of its period” (Neill, 2015, p.xiii). *Duchess*’ absence from the high school curriculum is not for lack of merit, accessibility, or interest. With werewolves, secret marriage, and the protagonist’s return from the dead as an echo/ghost as plot points, Webster’s riveting play has the capacity to hold the attention of a high school audience. Also, the play’s feminist leanings, layers of deception, understanding of sovereignty, and exploration of public figures leading private lives are all themes worthy of discussion in the high school setting.

**What Makes This Text a Challenge to Teach?**

*Duchess* is a challenging text, and there are few resources designed specifically for teaching this play, but since it falls in the early modern drama category, many of the strategies for teaching Shakespeare can be modified for this unit. The following unit is designed for older high school students, preferably students who have already encountered early modern drama (likely through Shakespeare) as this text and much of the analysis presented here is fairly advanced.

**Unit Design:**

**Essential Questions**

- What role does gender play in the performance of personal and/or political sovereignty?
- Who draws the lines between public and private life?
- Can responsibility and desire both be fulfilled in life?
Frontloading Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reference Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining sovereignty, femininity, and widowhood in the historical context of the play.</td>
<td>If students are using the Norton Critical Edition of <em>Duchess</em>, the introduction (M. Neill) and essays on Sociopolitical Background (M. Curtis) and Feminist Accounts (T. Jankowski) in that volume will work. At the very least, teachers can read those texts and provide students with brief summaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scansion, meter, and footing (to help with close readings)</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vF0HySkrC4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vF0HySkrC4</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crash Course video on the historical context of English Renaissance drama and how it evolved from history plays and Medieval Mystery plays. The video also discusses notable plays and playwrights other than Shakespeare. Using this video shows students that (1) Shakespeare did not just appear out of thin air. He joined an already developing theatrical tradition (2) Shakespeare had contemporaries.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snJpYLV7bYA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snJpYLV7bYA</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Watching and Reading

As explained in chapter six, watching a version of a play as students read/study the text is an appropriate and fruitful way to approach the study of drama-as-literature on the high school level. For *Duchess*, I recommend the 2014 Shakespeare’s Globe production starring Gemma Arterton. A digital version of the play is available from Shakespeare’s Globe. It will take multiple class periods to watch the play. Therefore, it may be wise to either watch for part of the class and then engage students in an activity (like close reading, diagramming, or discussion) or watch for a full class period then do an activity for the duration of the next class. Alternating watching and other activities will help students reflect on the play and engage with the text throughout the unit.
Journals

1. Does the play persuade the audience to view the Duchess as Great? If not, what is her flaw? If so, is her Greatness due to her sovereignty, femininity, individuality, or something else?

2. The opening act of any play sets the tone for the remainder of the drama. In what ways does Act One frame the audience’s understanding of this play? You may want to think about the significance of the French court and/or the Duchess’ lack of speech in the first 290 lines.

3. Consider the three female characters of Julia, Duchess, and Cariola. How do the three contrast each other and to what effect? Organize your thoughts using a chart/graphic of your choosing from the Jim Burke Visual Explanations Handout (Appendix E).

4. While the primary conflict in Duchess is between Duchess and her brothers, it is caused by the conflict between her humanity/desire and her sovereignty/duty. With this in mind, how does Webster reveal this underlying conflict and what comment does the play’s conclusion leave about the relationship between humanity and sovereignty?

5. Throughout the play, the audience gets to know the Duchess’ brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Select one of the brothers and discuss what they contribute to the play. You may want to consider their vengeances, relationships, and fate in act 5.

6. Some interpretations of Duchess argue that Bosola is a protagonist and tragic figure in the play. In what ways does the play endorse this interpretation? Consider how Bosola’s back story, servitude, and actions in the latter half of the play may feed into this reading.

Classroom Activities

1. Along with the frontloading materials defining sovereignty, a teacher could ask students to provide a one-word definition of sovereignty and write that word on an index card. These index cards can be displayed across the classroom for the duration of the unit so students can watch their understanding evolve (Peters, 2021).
2. Discussing the body politic and body natural. Explain the two concepts and then divide students into groups of 2-4. Assign each group an act and have them look for examples of the Duchess’ two bodies in the text. Conclude the activity with each group sharing their findings with the rest of the class and talk about the text’s treatment of public vs private moments.

3. Close Readings: As the class watches the play, pause at certain points: Proposal scene (1.1), Salmon and dogfish speech (3.5), and Duchess vs Cariola’s death speeches (4.2)

4. Discussing Bosola (start with asking what they know then focus back on 2.1.21-71 and 4.2.320-334)

5. Provide students with a blank plot diagram and, as a class, discuss how the plot of Duchess fits on this diagram. Is all of Act 5 a denouement? If so, what changes in act 5?

6. Intertext Presentations: The inspiration for this activity came from an assignment developed by Dr. Candence Robillard entitled the “Intertext Project.” To prepare for these presentations, engage students in a discussion on intertextuality. For the purposes of this activity, define intertextuality as “the ways in which we understand texts in terms of other texts we have read. It also includes the ways in which we use texts in our own writing. Intertextuality “refers to the ways in which we understand texts in terms of other texts we have read;” through intertextuality, readers watch their “understanding of one text becom[e] richer when [considered] in the context of other works” (Robillard, 2021, para.1). Next, ask students to prepare a PowerPoint presentation about their intertextual understanding of Duchess using three modern texts (can be songs, movies, books, etc.) that all deal with a central theme of Duchess. Then, consider how putting these texts in conversation with each other helps you make sense of Duchess.

7. Pick a character and create both a public and private social media page for them. Students could create two Facebook, twitter, or Instagram pages, but each page (public and private) should have at least one post from each act.
Chapter 10- Selected Poetry “What is Conflict?”

Introduction:
From Denise Frohman, a queer Nuyorican spoken word poet, to Ilya Kaminsky, a Soviet-born poet whose family sought asylum in the United States in the 1970s, to Joy Harjo, the Native American (Muscogee) 2019 U. S. Poet Laureate, the poets who are featured in this unit reflect many different backgrounds and identities. The topics explored by the poems in this unit are, likewise, quite different from each other. There are poems about peaches, tense hospital visits, bullying, nature, and war. At first glance, it may seem that these poems have nothing in common with each other, but a closer look reveals that all ten poems can reveal something about conflict, its nature, form, and practice.

To Teach, or Not to Teach?
Some educators don’t believe in the traditional poetry survey because these units can easily lose focus when the only thing the poems have in common is that the teacher likes them. These educators make a fair point. I was in a traditional poetry survey once and it did feel a little pointless because the poems were all so different that I struggled to contextualize my learning. So, with this final experimental unit outline, I want to show that poetry surveys can be done well if teachers carefully select poems that all point back to a central theme. The idea here is that just as assigning students a critical lens through which to read a text contextualizes the students’ learning and promotes engagement, asking students to consider how a group of poems may (or may not) relate to a theme does the same.
### Unit Design:
The Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stomp (Nikki Grimes)</th>
<th>Accents (Denise Frohman)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Thing I Said That During Gym (Shaney Jean Maney)</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings (Joy Harjo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Blossoms (Li-Young Lee)</td>
<td>In the Hospital (Chen Chen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Lived Happily during the War (Ilya Kaminsky)</td>
<td>Poem For Repelling Ghosts (Karen Finneyfrock)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah, Ah (Joy Harjo)</td>
<td>From Deaf Republic: 1 (Ilya Kaminsky)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Poets

Here are the eight poets featured in this unit. Below, I provide some brief notes on each poet’s background and why their work should be included in this unit.

- **Nikki Grimes**: Nikki Grimes is a popular African American poet and middle-grades author from Harlem, New York. Her parents divorced early in Grimes’ life, and she lived in foster homes from the ages of five to 10 (Grimes, n.d.b). Grimes began writing early in life and has earned numerous awards throughout her career from organizations like the American Library Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (Grimes, n.d.a).

- **Shaney Jean Maney**: Maney is a female, white-presenting author, performance poet, and teacher from rural Illinois. She is also the co-founder of The Encyclopedia Show, “a radical literary reading/spectacular which now runs in venues all across the globe” (Amazon, n.d., para.1). While Maney does not have a strong public presence as a poet, she has published one collection of poems, *I Love Science!* (Amazon, n.d.).
• **Karen Finneyfrock:** An American female poet and YA novelist, Finneyfrock was the 2015 recipient of the GAP award, a grant for “BIPOC artists working in all disciplines across Washington State” (Artist Trust, 2021, para.1). Finneyfrock often explores the issues of mental health, childhood sexual abuse, the effects of trauma, and the complexity of growing up in her works, and has published two YA novels and edited the poetry anthology *Courage: Daring Poems for Gutsy Girls* (Artist Trust, 2019).

• **Joy Harjo:** Joy Harjo was named the US Poet Laureate in 2019. She is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and her poetry “draws on First Nation storytelling and histories, as well as feminist and social justice poetic traditions, and frequently incorporates indigenous myths, symbols, and values into her writing” (Poetry Foundation, n.d.a, para.1). Harjo’s work has earned her many accolades. Her work explores issues such as change, tradition, politics, and the challenges indigenous peoples currently face in the US (Poetry Foundation, n.d.a).

• **Chen Chen:** Dr. Chen Chen is an Asian American author, editor, and academic. He is a 2022 United States Artists Fellow and the recipient of two Pushcart Prizes for his work (Chen, n.d.b). He is currently a Poet-in-Residence at Brandeis University (Chen, n.d.a). In his own words, Dr. Chen Chen “is both dramatic and yearning. He is always having A Week. Due to personal reasons and much like the moon, he writes poems and is gay (Chen, n.d.c, para.4).

• **Ilya Kaminsky:** Born in the former Soviet Union in 1977, Ilya Kaminsky came to the United States with his family in 1993 where they were granted asylum. Kaminsky has met with professional success as an author, editor, and translator in addition to working in immigration law (Kaminsky, 2019). Kaminsky’s “contemporary epic,” *Deaf Republic*, won an *LA Times* Book Prize, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in Poetry, National Jewish Book Award in addition to being a National Book Award finalist (Deaf Republic, 2019).

• **Denice Frohman:** Frohman is a former Women of the World Poetry Slam Champion from New York City. As a queer Nuyorican of Puerto Rican and Jewish descent, Frohman’s spoken word poetry
“explores the complexities of language, lineage, queerness, and the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico” and she seeks to promote social change through her work (Frohman, n.d., para.4).

- **Li-Young Lee**: Lee was born in Indonesia to Chinese parents and he is an American poet. His parents came from powerful Chinese families, but they were exiled to Indonesia in 1957 and then fled to the United States in 1964 where Lee’s father became a Presbyterian minister. Lee “considers every poem to be a ‘descendent of God’” and he draws inspiration from classical Chinese poets. Lee’s poems are frequently narrative driven as he uses personal experiences to discuss broader, “universal” themes (Poetry Foundation, n.d.c, para.6).

**Essential Questions**

- To what extent is conflict an essential aspect of life?
- Should conflict always be avoided?
- What are the defining characteristics of poetry? To what extent do a poem’s formal qualities contribute to the reader’s personal and emotional experience of the text?

**A Reading-Writing-Workshop approach to Poetry**

In a reading-writing-workshop poetry unit, the first step is to help students unpack and talk about a poem. This can be done through repetitive readings of the poem which move students through their varied responses to a poem. These guidelines provide a basic outline for the reading, annotating, and writing process in this unit. Obviously, the steps will look a little different depending on the class, poem, and other factors, but this is a framework from which to branch out and explore a poem with students.

1. Provide students with a copy of the poem and then read or play a recording of the poem. Ask students to refrain from writing or analyzing. Let them take in the poem.
2. Now reread/play the reading of the poem again. This time, ask students to circle or otherwise mark the words, phrases that strike them or mark words that are unfamiliar.

3. Finally, read or play the poem again. This time, invite students to take note of the poem’s structure, the poet’s techniques, and literary devices present in the work.

4. Now, as a group, discuss the theme of the poem. How do the emotions, phrases, structure, techniques, and literary devices all communicate a message to the reader?

5. Let students explore and experiment through writing their own poetry. These poems may respond to, use the techniques of, or otherwise build off of the mentor poem.

6. Allow students to read their poems to the class if they wish to share.

**Order of the Poems**

While I do not prescribe a specific order for these poems, there are some that should come closer to the beginning and some that would be best to save for later in the unit. As a suggestion, I would use “We Lived Happily during the War” and “Accents” toward the beginning. Save “From Blossoms” and “Ah! Ah!” until closer to the end because they take the conversation in a very different direction that students may not be ready to see as ‘conflict’ until later in their study.

**Introductory Activities**

- Discuss the workshop approach the class will use throughout the unit (see above). Acknowledge that this is a different way of engaging with literature, but this framework is just as worthwhile as more traditional, formalist methods.
- Let students tell you how they feel about poetry. Do they carry poetry baggage? Is it still exciting for them? Both? Neither?
Class Activities

Outside of the basic reading-writing-workshop approach, here are a few ideas for reading, listening to, and responding to several poems in this unit in more specific ways.

- This is a two (or three) day activity: Break the class into two groups. Give Nikki Grimes’ “Stomp” to one group and Shaney Jean Maney’s “The Thing I Said That During Gym” to the other group. Have each group work through the first three readings of their assigned poem (steps 1-3), and then let the groups switch poems and repeat the process. That night, assign the journal related to these poems. The next class period, lead a class discussion on the two poems. Ask questions like: Is point-of-view important in either of these poems? What about structure or tone? Are these two poems saying similar things or are they in opposition? After this discussion, ask students to develop their own poems which offer a third perspective on the power of language in the lives of adolescents.

- Read through Adrienne Rich’s essay “Someone is Writing a Poem” and ask students to reflect on the nature of poetry. See if they can define poetry and/or identify its elements and purpose.

- Bring a bunch of peaches to school and read “From Blossoms” outside while eating peaches.

- Take students to the school library (or use computers to search digital libraries), and ask them to find another poem about conflict that we did not discuss in class. Ask the students to study this poem on their own for a few days and then spend a few days with the class broken into groups (no more than 3) where each student shares the poem they discovered and teaches it to the other students using the reading-writing-workshop model.
Journal Questions

The journal prompts for this unit are far more relaxed and creative than the prompts for other units in this thesis. The emotional, contemplative, and personal connection built between the reader, writer, and text is something this unit aims to reveal to and in students. To confine a student’s reflections on poetry to literary and critical responses might lead students to neglect the essence of poetry itself. Therefore, journals for this unit are more relaxed and reader-response oriented than other units.

1. Write poems. For every week of the unit, expect students to write 2 poems. These can be completed in or out of class and they do not have to be shared with the entire class though there will be a time/space for sharing later on. So, in my 3-week poetry unit, my students would be expected to write six original poems.

2. Pick a poet from this unit whose work you have enjoyed and find another poem of theirs which was not included in our unit. Read that poem 3 times. On your first reading, just read. On the second, mark the poem and with the third reading, feel free to annotate. Then do some solitary activity for 15 minutes. Take a walk, clean your room, listen to music, etc. while reflecting on the poem. Once those 15 minutes are over, come back to your workspace and creative response to the poem. This could take the form of another poem, a story, a drawing, or a song.

3. Consider “Stomp” and “The Thing I Said That During Gym.” Compare and contrast the way the poets explore conflict in terms of point of view, structure, tone, and other literary devices. How do the two poems approach the power of language?

4. Select a poem you have not written about yet and describe the ways a specific literary device creates a feeling of conflict OR how that literary device aids a poet’s comment on the nature of conflict itself.
Section IV: Concluding Thoughts
Chapter 11- A Vision for the Classroom

To Kill a Mockingbird and Long Division. Romeo and Juliet and The Duchess of Malfi. Poetry by Langston Hughes and poetry by living poets like Chen Chen and Karen Finneyfrock. Though at first glance, these pairs seem to be at odds with each other, this project (hopefully) demonstrated how these disparate texts can find common ground in challenging the high school literary canon.

Because if an educator teaches To Kill a Mockingbird in a way that challenges their students to recognize the roles they play in a racist society and work toward becoming antiracists, that is great. But, if that educator foregoes To Kill a Mockingbird in favor of a text like Long Division to highlight the southern Black experience and encourage students to read complex texts, that is great, too. If an educator finds opportunities to teach Romeo and Juliet or The Duchess of Malfi in a way that defies student expectations of early modern drama and breathes new life onto the page and stage, those are opportunities worth taking. I would love to see students encounter Langston Hughes in all his complexity, but I also hope educators teach a poetry unit on the theme of conflict and ask students to consider the inherent conflict between studying and experiencing poetry.

The texts educators use in the classroom matter. Of course they matter. But at the same time, challenging the canon is not as much about teaching literature as it is about teaching critical thinking through literature. When readers bring their perspectives to a text (even if they study the text in a formalist fashion), those readers can grow from grappling with the text whether they accept or reject the ideas they encounter there. Asking if the canonized texts of the high school classroom are the texts that best serve students is important. But the more central question is “How will educators work with an imperfect text to teach students in meaningful and positive ways?” The good news demonstrated throughout this thesis is that it is possible to work with imperfection. After all, imperfection is “what we’ve got” (C. Robillard, personal communication, September 28, 2022).
Chapter 12- Final Reflections

Now that this project is complete, I find I have so much more to say not just about these texts, but about other texts I did not have time or space to canonize in this thesis. Several notable mentions (texts I am currently questioning) include Zora Neale Hurston’s short stories, Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat*, and several novels by Kazuo Ishiguro. Though I did not explore those texts in this thesis, I know I will explore at least some of those texts someday. I am so excited to enter a career where the possibilities for what and how I do my work are constantly evolving and expanding.

Still, this project also taught me that continuing to develop and evolve as an educator is an immense challenge. Granted, I have virtually no experience in teaching, but developing these ideas took nine months of effort. I can only imagine how hard it would be to adapt a curriculum while teaching full time, and I applaud the educators who make the conscious, continuous effort to keep learning and growing in their profession.

Through this endeavor I learned the importance of developing relationships with other educators who are committed to growing and learning. In this thesis, I cited personal communications with high school teachers six times and referenced materials they developed and shared with me at least four more times. Still, these references are just a handful of instances I spoke with those teachers, and they taught me about more than strategies and resources. They taught me how to think like an educator. The same is true in my relationships with my college professors and fellow pre-service teachers. Like iron sharpening iron, we can discuss, explore, and question together. We choose to make each other better, and that is how our learning finds meaning.
References


Moore, D. In Teaching Shakespeare Facebook Group. (2022, Apr. 13). *What is the BEST essential question you have used for teaching Romeo and Juliet?* [Public Group Post]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/groups/803170750473673/user/1161438657/.


Appendix A. Rabbit Hole Worksheet

Website name and a summary of what you read there:

Questions you have after reading:

What search(es) did you conduct to answer those questions?

Website name and a summary of what you read there:

Questions you have after reading:

What search(es) did you conduct to answer those questions?
Appendix B. Langston Hughes “I, Too” Poem 2016

You
I, too

I, too, sing America.

You
I am the darker brother,
They send me to eat in the kitchen,
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,
Then.

Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am,
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes
Appendix C: Robillard (adapted from Adkins) Color Marking Instructions

Color Marking:
A Way to Annotate Poetry and Prose Passages

Basically, when you are asked to annotate a text, you should look for places in the text where you
- **REACT** to the text.
- **QUESTION** the text.
- Make **CONNECTIONS** between the text and your experience to texts you have already read and
  within the text you are currently studying.
- Locate and define **PATTERNS** of language and ideas within the text.

Those parameters have not changed; instead I want you to think about refining the way you mark a text
for a specific purpose.

Here are some terms I use frequently when I ask you to look for patterns in the text:

**IMAGE**: a word (or more than one word) appealing to at least one of our senses; an image deals, then,
with reader response (your reaction to the text based on language the author has purposefully included).
Of our senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, gustatory), the visual is the strongest. It is also possible
to include organic sensory images (such as excitement, anxiety, nausea, etc.) or kinesthetic images
(motion, aching, etc.).

**IMAGE PATTERN**: the repetition of three (the magic number!) images, not necessarily in uninterrupted
succession

**MOTIF**: a repeated pattern of any type within a work. Note that an IMAGE PATTERN is a motif, but a
motif is NOT always an image pattern. You may see motif defined in other ways in various other sources
for various other purposes. When I use the word, I always refer to a repeated pattern.

Now, on to **COLOR MARKING**!
To complete this kind of annotation successfully, you will need COLORED PENCILS and a CLEAN
COPY of the poem. (I have a decent supply of colored pencils; it’s worth the trouble to acquire your own
set. Also, I usually put copies of the poetry we discuss on Moodle. Some students choose to print two
sets; one to mark independently and one to work on when we discuss in class.)

1. Mark with a different color each type of image/image pattern/motif predominant in the passage.
   Consider the context (what is “going on” in the passage) as you mark. Create a legend on your
   paper to remind you what image/image pattern/motif is marked in which color.
2. Based on your color marking, ask yourself these questions:
   - Is one color predominant? Why?
   - Is there some logical progression of imagery/motifs, from one type to another? Is the
     progression illogical? Why?
   - What is the connection of the content of the passage to the imagery/motifs used to
describe it? (Imagery can reinforce content by giving it EMPHASIS, by making it
   FRESH, and/or by adding IRONY.)
   - Is a specific tone or mood created by the marked material?

Adapted by Candence Robillard from material created by Jan Adkins
3. Based on your marking and your answers to these questions, you will annotate each color you have marked. Describe what you marked and what inferences you draw about the use of that particular image/image pattern/motif.
Appendix D: Robillard Medea Intertext Project

Medea Intertext Project

The term *intertext* or *intertextuality* refers to the ways in which we understand texts in terms of other texts we have read. It also includes the ways in which we use texts in our own writing. Intertext refers to quoting, paraphrasing and allusion, but it also refers to the ways in which our understanding of one text becomes richer when we consider it in the context of other works.

For this project, you will create an intertext study of Medea. How can modern texts help you gain a richer understanding of the themes characters found in the ancient Greek play?

You will create a Google Slides presentation in which you present one theme from Medea. You will illuminate that theme using a minimum of three additional texts. For our purposes, "text" here can be printed, visual, or multimedia (such as a video). If you use a long text, such as a TV show or movie, it will be necessary to provide a sentence or two of summary and context to set up the particular clip you want to show. Clips must be rated PG. Let the audience know the rating of the movie. This summary is to be included in addition to the three bullet points below.

Your presentation should include the following slides:

- **Title slide**
  - Title of your presentation should provide a clue about the theme you address
  - Your name

- **Text 1**
  - The text you have chosen that connects to Medea
  - Three bullet points that provide your insight and interpretation of the text. Each bullet point should be no more than two sentences. Address the thematic questions we used in class. How does the text you chose help to answer those questions? How does the text provide insight and understanding into the themes in Medea? How does Medea provide insight into the new text?

- **Text 2**
  - The text you have chosen that connects to Medea
  - Three bullet points that provide your insight and interpretation of the text. Each bullet point should be no more than two sentences. Address the thematic questions we used in class. How does the text you chose help to answer those questions? How does the text provide insight and understanding into the themes in Medea? How does Medea provide insight into the new text?

- **Text 3**
  - The text you have chosen that connects to Medea
  - Three bullet points that provide your insight and interpretation of the text. Each bullet point should be no more than two sentences. Address the thematic questions we used in class. How does the text you chose help to answer those questions? How does the text provide insight and understanding into the themes in Medea? How does Medea provide insight into the new text?

Your project is worth 45 points. You will be graded on both content and formatting. I am looking for clear connections between the texts and Medea, and I am looking for evidence of your insight. Show that you have made connections beyond a literal or superficial level. Consider how the themes of the play are still relevant to modern audiences. How are contemporary artists still grappling with the same issues and conflicts?
Appendix E: Jim Burke Visual Explanations Handout
(Burke, 2002, p.115).
Appendix F: Relevant Resources

Outside of the material presented in chapters five through nine, the following links, titles, and resources were worth sharing. While these materials did not make the “final cut,” they may be of use to other educators seeking to challenge the canon with their students.

To Kill a Mockingbird


https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/understanding-jim-crow-setting-setting

https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-mockingbird-0

Romeo and Juliet
https://myshakespeare.com/romeo-and-juliet/act-1-prologue
https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-plays/histories-timeline/timeline
https://player.shakespearesglobe.com/productions/romeo-juliet-2009/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24Ery9CmWYk

Langston Hughes
https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art/Poetry
https://poets.org/text/reading-guide-langston-hughes
https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/langston-hughes
https://www.best-poems.net/langston_hughes/index.html
https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/discovering-passion-poetry#ResourceTabs3
https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/poets-voice-langston-hughes-and-you

Long Division
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exPioSNHnFg
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qS170iTUWhM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeQ4b55ZD-k
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Lfo0oNf0E0
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjUSMtvJpq8
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ-HnNE9yRg
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0T8lnLzvcA&t=12s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBEw9YWtELE

The Duchess of Malfi

King, D. R. (Director). (2014). Romeo and Juliet [Film]. BroadwayHD.