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Guided Self-Selection of Texts to Empower Teachers and Students

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Abstract: As censorship legislation limits classroom texts, cultivating a strong reading identity and the ability to self-select diverse, representative, and culturally responsive texts becomes a greater necessity for teachers and students alike. In this article, we examine the process of scaffolding self-selection of texts for graduate education students and secondary students in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Reader identity and metacognition theories as well as Donovan and Weber’s (2021) ‘critic perspective’ informed our work. We present recommended texts from various bands such as “Dis/ability,” “Poetry,” and “Verse Novels.” We also share some of the ways graduate students engaged in text selection within group settings, as well as criteria they found important to their decision making. We then offer practical examples of how to implement guided self-selection at the high school level, focusing on a unit of study using graphic novels. We also include recommendations for teachers to consider as they imagine new possibilities to help students build and practice book self-selection strategies that highlight metacognitive and reflective practices. In conclusion, we consider how intentional self-selection of texts empowers students to disrupt traditional curricula and helps to cultivate lifelong readers in communities.

Keywords: text selection, teacher education, graduate students, secondary students, reader identity, reading communities, culturally responsive YA texts



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Introduction

In the first class of our graduate literature course, we ask English language arts and literacy teacher education students, “*What do you hope to learn by exploring children’s and young adult books in this course?*” In their responses, we find that some are avid readers, as this student illustrates vividly: “I am always stealing time away from some other task I should be doing—laundry, meal prep, grading papers—in order to read for fun.” Many, however, admit that “It has been a few years since I have read books which could be classified as children’s or YA [Young Adult] lit.” They tell us that they desire to “gain insight on different kinds of literature” and that they wish to get to know “more titles and authors.” More importantly, they want to give their students the books that are “rigorous and relevant,” “the stories that have unique twists or writing styles,” and the literature that “broadens [my] students’ scopes.” As one graduate student explains in this example: “[B]ooks by South Asian women [matter], because they are able to capture aspects of our culture in their stories that cannot be achieved by authors who are not South Asian.”

In a sense, our teacher education students are interested in the kinds of texts that are promoted by the #DisruptTexts movement, led by four women educators of color. This movement seeks to “challenge the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve” (Ebarvia et al., 2021, para.# 1). One of the co-founders of #DisruptTexts, Lorena Germán (2021), writes in her book *Textured Teaching: A Framework for Culturally Sustaining Practices* that such “intentionality in text selection builds a rapport with students and opens

the door for relationships” (p. 35). We need these types of texts in order to build student empowerment as well as student-to-student and student-to-teacher connectivity. The ultimate goal is to help students to become self-agentic and “self-sufficient readers” (Gallagher, 2004, p. 24).

Unfortunately, we are currently in a political climate that seeks to take away choices for text selection. Book banning and restrictions on the freedom to read

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have been particularly highlighted in the wake of polarizing censorship legislation and political campaigns targeting everything from school libraries to higher education syllabi (Collins, 2023). The American Library Association (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom “documented 1,269 demands to censor library books and resources in 2022, the highest number of attempted book bans since ALA began compiling data

about censorship in libraries more than 20 years ago” (Banned & Challenged Books, 2023, para. 2).

In *Fahrenheit 451* (1953/2012), Ray Bradbury captured the horrors of a world where books are not only banned but burned. Simultaneously, Bradbury emphasized the necessity of an array of diverse texts when he had his mentoring character Mr. Faber explain to protagonist Guy Montag, “There is nothing magical in [books], at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us” (Bradbury, 2012, p. 79). As educators and teachers, we must “assume a transformative activist stance” (Buehler et al., 2018, para. 3) and engage in acts of resistance against the efforts to silence necessary and important diverse texts and to take away the magical worlds they open to the reader.

Helping teacher education students to grow their agentic voices and reader identities as they embrace diverse texts will allow these prospective and practicing teachers to help their students grow as empowered readers, as well. Keeping this goal in mind, teachers need to read regularly and extensively. One way to support graduate education students in growing their reader identities is through engaging them in guided self-selection of texts and reflection. Strategic self-selection of texts is essential to reading identity development (Scoggin & Schneewind, 2021). With varied choices of genres and authors, readers' motivation to read even more complex texts increases (Allred & Cena, 2020). Such choice allows readers to “have the space to explore, construct, and expand their identities as readers” (Scoggin & Schneewind, 2021, p.3).

Yet, as Donovan and Weber (2021) discovered in a study exploring preservice teachers' practices and processes for choosing YAL with disability representations, too often teachers pick for their students the titles “they liked” within genres without applying “critic perspective” as a selection criterion (p. 218). The critic perspective calls for “research[ing] the author, consider[ing] if the book was identified as #ownvoices, or look[ing] at critical reviews to consider authenticity of representations,” and using “an antibias or critical framework to inform their teacher perspective” (p. 218). The question, then, is where to start or, as one of our graduate students put it, “how to approach book selection when in a teaching setting.”

In this article, we share how graduate education students engage in guided text self-selection that helps them to “branch out” (Gallagher, 2004, p. 31) and diversify the texts that they are reading and, as a result, grow their reading identities. We then consider what this “branching out” might look like in practice within a secondary classroom context.

Who We Are as Readers, Educators, and Scholars

Dr. Ewa McGrail is an English and literacy education professor at an urban research university located in the Southeast of the United States. Lisa York is a doctoral student at this same university and a current English language arts (ELA) secondary teacher in a public high school. As educators, we both believe in selecting diverse and inclusive texts for students, and we also believe in facilitating growth in students as readers and empowering them to select culturally relevant and responsive texts in which they “can see [their] own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (Sims Bishop, 1990, p. ix).

These beliefs are steeped in our distinct cultural backgrounds, family histories, and the particular teaching contexts and communities in which we are situated. Specifically, as a teacher educator of European descent and an immigrant who had to assimilate into a new American culture and gain an affirmation of her identity for herself and with others, McGrail places a special emphasis in her literature courses on honoring the voices from across and within different cultures and fostering dialogue about our unique backgrounds and differing perspectives, and the ways in which we are all more alike than different. The texts written by and for people of color and different cultures, background, and positionalities such as *Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong'o (2019); *Sigh, Gone* by Phuc Tran (2020); *Butterfly Yellow* by Thanh Hà Lai (2020), or *Like a Love Story* by Abdi Nazemian (2020) open the door to these conversations (see Appendix A for more titles).

McGrail saw a need for helping teacher education students unlock such conversations with their own students after seeing too many monoethnic and monocultural literature lessons during her classroom visits with teaching candidates. She made it a point to enable teacher education students to read extensively international and multicultural texts that

celebrate diverse cultures, as well as differing worldviews and personal characteristics of people, collectively and as individuals.

York also appreciates stories that present varied perspectives and particularly values those that are counter to the narratives in power, the stories that help to illustrate a more complete image of humanity. Such narratives include YA texts ranging from Congressman John Lewis' (2013) graphic novel memoir trilogy *March* (created collaboratively with writer Andrew Aydin and artist Nate Powell) to Aiden Thomas's YA magic realism novel *Cemetery Boys* (2020), which tells the story of a 16-year-old gay Latinx trans boy named Yadriel. Other important stories for York include the works of now-established authors such as James Baldwin, Joy Harjo, and Julia Alvarez. Although these were not always the stories she received in adolescence, they are the stories York celebrates in adulthood.

York's positionalities (White, cisgender, middle-class, able-bodied, college-educated, speaker of English as a first language) were largely reflected in her educational experiences, particularly as a K-12 student who encountered a canonical curriculum and a welcoming school environment, which are experiences untrue for many students, if one considers what Bettina Love (2019) references in her book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*: "According to reports, approximately 62 percent of all children come to school every day experiencing some type of trauma" (p. 75).

However, as she graduated and moved beyond this narrowed curriculum scope, York's collegiate

experience exposed her to new voices and counter-stories: she encountered her favorite author Toni Morrison (1977) through *Song of Solomon*; she learned about modern experiences of Indigenous people as she student-taught on the Navajo Nation reservation; she studied current events that called

“Metacognitive thinking will enable readers to examine critically the thinking behind their book self-selection strategies, leading to developing an understanding of themselves as readers and of the world around them.”

into question the delineation of a border between Mexico and the United States. In her preparation to become a high school English language arts teacher, she cultivated an exposure to diverse authors, poets, playwrights, essayists, directors, and activists, all of whom broadened her perspective beyond “a White supremacist master script” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Our reader identities, cultural backgrounds, and pedagogical experiences play important roles

in reader and educator identities that inform the text selection processes we share with our students. In the next section, we describe how we scaffolded text self-selection in the graduate literature course.

Framework for Guided Self-Selection of Texts

What we want to grow in our teacher education students, teachers, teacher candidates, and ultimately their students, is the ability to select fiction and non-fiction texts that not only appeal to their students' interests but are also developmentally appropriate, encourage personal growth in reading skills, and provide opportunities to read extensively in a variety of genres, with characters representing diverse cultures and viewpoints (Kragler, 2000; Weber, 2018). Book selection requires, however, an awareness of one's own thought processes or metacognition (Kaplan et al., 2013). Metacognitive thinking will enable readers to examine critically the thinking behind their book self-selection strategies,

leading to developing an understanding of themselves as readers and of the world around them.

Teachers, like their students, need practice in using metacognitive thinking and reflection (Kaplan et al., 2013) while selecting texts for their students and for curriculum development. Realizing the areas in themselves where they can grow as readers will guide their future text selections and reading identity development. This will in turn allow teacher education students to call on these strategies with their students in the K-12 classroom, and help their students to read for hope, enlightenment, and transformation by embracing humanizing texts that convey myriad voices and experiences (Keels, 2021). Providing guided space for reflective self-selection of texts for their classrooms in a literature course is an ideal context for such conversations in teacher education. We next describe how we created these conversational spaces in a graduate literature course, *Children's and Young Adult Literature*, taught in person and online.

Teaching Pre-Pandemic In-Person

In the pre-pandemic in-person class, teachers and teacher candidates (graduate education students) from elementary through high school contexts had the benefit of extended book self-selection process discussions, which included participation in a whole-class book self-selection activity, before the students moved to select the texts for their literature circle. During the self-selection activity, graduate students inspected the physical copy of a chosen book and reviewed a book card associated with it that contained a pull-out theme, a quotation, or a central question. As such, book cards served both as a teaser and a brief introduction to the book.

After that, graduate education students spent time reading for about fifteen minutes, followed by reflection on their self-selection processes in

response to the general prompt, “*How did you pick this book?*” Individual book selection strategies and thought processes behind them were shared with everyone in class in an open forum and they were recorded on the board for everyone to see. Self-selection processes covered a range of strategies such as looking at the book’s cover art, reading the first pages, physical proximity to the book, word of mouth, connections to previous text series or personal experiences, a book’s genre, blurb, or a book title, personal taste and cultural relevance. The class was then invited to look at their book choices with a critical eye. This resulted in them evaluating their preferences for genre, book author, topic, and reading level. Such evaluations underscored their book selections and caused them to recognize the need to expand beyond these reading habits in their reading instruction in the classroom.

Teaching Online During the Pandemic

During the pandemic, we worked collaboratively to teach the online *Children's and Young Adult Literature* graduate course to teachers and teacher candidates in a different cohort from the in-person course. After reviewing resources such as NCTE’s “Build Your Stack” (National Council of Teachers of English), the ALA’s Michael L Printz Winners, the *ALAN Book Review* and *Horn Book* journal recommendations, as well as the crowdsourced GoodReads Choice Awards, we cultivated a collection of representative, diverse, multi-genre texts for graduate education students’ consideration (see Appendix A). The majority of the books in our collection were published only a few years before when we taught the course, as our goal was to expose graduate education students, and their students, to the most recent high quality literature that included counternarratives (Groenke, et al., 2015) and multiple viewpoints. “An engagement with counternarratives and diverse literary histories helps us [to help teachers] address the pandemics of racial violence,

political insurrection, health disparities, and inequitable education” (Green, 2021, p. 13). Like Green (2021), “we do so to reclaim students’ voices, identities, lifeways, and experiences” (p. 13).

Through previews of the texts and digital gallery walks, graduate education students were introduced to their choices of curated *Children’s and Young Adults’ Books* (See Appendix A). These texts were organized along seven bands: Dis/ability; Gender Inclusive; Multicultural Picture books; Poetry or Verse Novels; Historical or Realistic Fiction; Biography, Autobiography or Memoir; and Fantasy, Science Fiction or Dystopia.

The graduate education students who taught kindergarten through 12th grade needed to consider age and development appropriateness of the texts they selected for their students (e.g., elementary, middle or high school). We organized students into four literature circles of 5-6 students: an elementary group, a middle school group, and two high school groups. To begin their literature circles discussions, we first asked graduate education students to share a little about their experiences with book clubs and literature circles in the past. Some were very familiar with this approach to learning and literacy and had used book clubs in their own classrooms and teaching practice; some had informally participated in book clubs; and others had little to no experience with book clubs, personally or professionally. This self-reflection allowed graduate education students to contemplate their reader identity.

Graduate education students also had to decide as a group what they would read. Each group took a varied approach in this process. Some posted book selections directly to their discussion boards in an online course portal while others decided to collaborate in their own self-selected space, such as through GroupMe, texting, or email. Each group

asked its members to consider titles in each of the genre bands.

All groups had a “group organizer” who initiated these discussions, but in no group did one individual create the group’s selection of texts; instead, it was a democratized process with each member sharing their preferences. For example, one student indicated that the group relied upon voting, rating, and selecting texts through careful consideration of each other’s preferences. Each group member’s votes were color-coded with their initials and this ultimately resulted in a summative tally shared with the entire group. This group even created a Google Document to facilitate the selection process and to document their decisions. Another group had a more direct process of listing their top titles from the list of available texts, then voting from this list. The majority-vote first place title became the selected text in a given genre, centering the genres in the decision-making process. As evident from these descriptions, the selection process involved a collaborative effort and transparency, with all group members being able to see others’ text recommendations, voting tallies, and final selection results.

As course instructors, we did not tell our graduate education students how they had to choose their books except to say that they needed to select a text from each genre of texts (e.g., a text with a character with disability) for their school/grade level. We built in this flexibility because we wanted to give graduate education students agency to select texts of value for their students, their communities, and their teaching contexts. Graduate education students decided on their own selection criteria. We present below a sampling of criteria from those course participants who signed a consent form. The criteria include some of the participants’ own language about their selection process. These quotations are used for illustrative purposes and not for making any generalizations about all course participants.

- **New perspectives:** One student described this as a hope to fill “...a big hole in [her] reading of young adult literature,” showing a desire to fill a knowledge gap. Another said, “I tried to vote more toward books that...I have not seen represented in literature...to get a bit of a varied perspective.” In this sense, the student sought out books that offered fresh ways of viewing topics and experiences.

- **Representation:** Students wanted to read books that allowed them to “...open [their] eyes also to, like, a different culture...” and see representations not often depicted in mainstream, canonized texts. They sought out texts that provided the “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” (Sims Bishop, 1990, p. ix), books that captured experiences they did not always have the opportunity to see presented.

- **Familiarity with authors and genre:** Sometimes this was expressed through a commonality with the author, such as when one student said, “[The author of *Sigh, Gone*] is roughly my age, so, I super identified with the time period that he discussed.” Other students indicated recognition of an author, such as when one said, “Oh, I recognize this [author] from the news...”, and another student “went to school with the author [of *The Gilded Ones*]...I remember she was about 2 or 3 years ahead of me, in undergrad...” Thus, author name recognition served as a notable determining factor.

- **Social and cultural relevance:** Students appreciated texts that provided opportunities for critical conversations around both historical and current sociocultural events. One student appreciated that “[*Sigh, Gone*] raises a lot of questions that we’re dealing with sort of more broadly right now.” Students found that books which helped them to navigate our current political climate

held greater appeal.

- **Personal connections and interests:** Several students appreciated texts that connected with their own experiences and self-perceptions. One student said, “I saw myself in the text. I could relate to the themes of the text, or I can see how I could apply this text to my life.” Another student, referring to *Obsessed: A Memoir of my Life with OCD*, said “One of my group [members] was, actually, had OCD, and they’re similar to the character in the story.” When a book was relatable, it also proved more meaningful.

- **Appeal and appropriateness to student audience:** Students in the course also considered their roles as teachers, thinking about which books would speak most to their students. One said she would select a text because it was “...really important, I think, in terms of emotional learning for students, and that’s been a big push recently with the pandemic trying to give kids ways to talk about their emotions...” Students, then, sought books that might be most appropriate for their classroom contexts.

- **Financial considerations:** Some of the most contemporary titles were not always readily available at the library, so many students knew they needed to purchase their own copy. Thus, they needed to consider the expense of the books. “We would talk, and just kind of make a decision based on either finances, or if someone decides to change their vote.” This quotation suggests that graduate students are also mindful of their students’ financial situations and are trying to reduce book access issues for their students.

- **Accessibility through genre or format:** Several students were excited to encounter genres they had not spent much time with previously, e.g., graphic novels, verse novels, and fantasy novels. One student said, “I

Table 1*Graduate Education Students' Text Self-Selections*

Text Selection	High School	Middle School	Elementary School
Dis/ability	<i>Obsessed: A Memoir of My Life with OCD</i> by Allison Britz; <i>Challenger Deep</i> by Neal Shusterman	<i>The Rest of Us Just Live Here</i> by Patrick Ness	<i>Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille</i> by Jen Bryant
Gender Inclusive	<i>Cemetery Boys</i> by Aiden Thomas	<i>Aristotle and Dante Dive Deep into the Waters of the World</i> by Benjamin Alire Saenz	<i>It's OK to Be Different</i> by Sharon Purtill
Multicultural Picture Books	<i>The Proudest Blue</i> by Ibtihaj Muhammad; <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> by Juana Martinez-Neal	<i>The Day You Begin</i> by Jacqueline Woodson	<i>Dream Street</i> by Tricia Elam Walker and Ekua Holmes
Poetry/Verse Novels	<i>Clap When You Land</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo	<i>The Poet X</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo	<i>Kiyoshi's Walk</i> by Mark Karlins
Historical/Realistic Fiction	<i>The Downstairs Girl</i> by Stacey Lee; <i>Dear Martin</i> by Nic Stone	<i>The Downstairs Girl</i> by Stacey Lee	<i>Your Name is a Song</i> by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow
Biography/Autobiography/Memoir	<i>Sigh, Gone</i> by Phuc Tran; <i>I Was Their American Dream</i> by Malaka Gharib	<i>Sigh, Gone</i> by Phuc Tran	<i>Other Words for Home</i> by Jasmine Warga
Fantasy/Science Fiction/Dystopia.	<i>The Gilded Ones</i> by Namina Forna; <i>We Set the Dark on Fire</i> by Tehlor Kay Mejia	<i>The Gilded Ones</i> by Namina Forna	<i>Pokko & The Drum</i> by Matthew Forsythe

remember growing up and not having any [fantasy] written at an accessible level for young adult readers..." The YA genre has expanded tremendously in the last couple decades, and students appreciated the opportunity to explore this expansion.

Through these text self-selections (see Table 1), the graduate education students showed an interest in growing their reading identities and expanding their

knowledge in different genres. After having read the books, many admitted developing a new appreciation for genres previously dismissed or not considered. We recognized a transformative shift in attitude toward various literature as graduate education students overcame personal biases and assumptions regarding what constitutes "literary merit." The following graduate student's reflection captures an eye-opening reader's experience with reading books in verse and graphic novels. It shows courage and

growth in overcoming one's personal biases towards these genres:

I am like an old school reader. It takes a real shift in mentality for me to read books in verse. I thought I was going to be averse to the book in verse. [But] I enjoyed it..., [And] I still had dismissed, like, graphic novels...[but] I have to say, [verse novels and graphic novels] are two [genres] that I learned so much about in your class, and I would teach a graphic novel in a heartbeat to any grade.

Additionally, this graduate student developed an appreciation of portraying “very serious, like academic themes or historical events” in a graphic novel format, based on her experience of reading *Little Rock Nine* (Poe, 2008), a graphic novel illustrating the integration of public schools in Arkansas during the Civil Rights Movement.

We found that meaningful conversations around text selection and engaging with texts after the impact of COVID and nationwide shutdowns helped to rebuild connections for our graduate education students through their online literature circle communities.

In both in-person or online settings, working with their peers to choose texts for their students and to discuss issues in their selected texts helps to facilitate a community of agentic readers who are learning together and are challenging and enriching one another, important aspects of creating a culturally responsive environment. As Dena Simmons, founder of LiberatED said in a conversation with Learning for Justice, “culturally responsive practices are, at the core, student centered and community centered” (Keels, 2021, p. 33).

Additionally, book selection sharing and reflecting about the thinking behind their thought processes (metacognition) enabled graduate education students to recognize the importance of engaging their students in reflection on book self-selection processes. They also discerned the need to model how to choose books that match not only their interests and promote reading growth but also help to expand their reading habits and open the doors to new genres, authors and characters from different cultures, background, and positionalities.

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In our graduate literature course (in-person and online), graduate students worked with the book lists curated by the instructors. After having been exposed to a guided book selection approach with broad selections in our literature course, we envision graduate students going forward with greater autonomy and selecting their own literature with the Donovan and Weber's (2021) “critic perspective” on their own, without curated book recommendations from us.

What follows is a discussion of how to implement the guided self-selection approach at the high school level.

In the Secondary Setting

Teaching graduate education students how to conduct a scaffolded selection of texts differs from the experience of teaching secondary students how to select texts. In general, graduate education students' reader identities are more fully formed, and they have also simply had more time to cultivate their reading repertoire and develop their reading skills. As a secondary educator and a doctoral student working with graduate students, York has also observed that

high school students are far more impressionable when it comes to the influence of their peers (Ivey, 2014).

While graduate education students may be more interested in gaining new perspectives or developing a better understanding of texts with social and cultural relevance, secondary students seem far more interested in selecting the texts their friends are choosing. A 2020 qualitative study of adolescent readers found that, sometimes, “reading provides a form of social capital, offering opportunities to develop networks/friendships and contribute to discussions” (Wilkinson et al., 2020, p. 160). Although other selection processes are important and useful, we cannot negate the significance of peers’ opinions and the influence of this social capital.

Because we recognized this, we found ways to embed peers into the scaffolded self-selection process. For example, when York’s students in 10th grade World Literature selected Asian graphic novel memoirs from a curated list of texts by eight different authors, she asked them to fill out a Google Form. Recognizing the important role peers play in the selection process, she asked students to include a few names of classmates they hoped to work with in their literature circles (hoping to elevate their buy-in if they had the chance to discuss a text with at least one person in the class with whom they enjoyed working).

However, York also recognized the need to develop students’ criticality in making their selections, helping them to extend beyond simply choosing what their friends chose. To help students develop their “critic perspective” (Donovan & Weber, 2021), York had students conduct a “book tasting,” where students sampled pages from their eight different memoir options, taking note of the style, layout, and content. Importantly, to enable the students to “consider authenticity of representations” (Donovan & Weber, 2021, p. 218), they received a brief overview of each book’s context, setting, and historical

framing, ranging from the story of a Korean “comfort woman” in *Grass* (Gendry-Kim, 2019) to the story of an LGBTQIA+ Chinese immigrant youth in *Messy Roots: A Graphic Memoir of a Wuhanese American* (Gao, 2022). Thus, the Google Form not only asked students with whom they might like to work but also asked students to consider the artistic style that appealed to them (full color, muted color, black and white, etc.), the text length they preferred (shorter, medium, longer) and the cultural contexts and perspectives they were interested in learning about (e.g., Vietnam War refugees, Cambodian genocide survivors, Chinese student protestors, etc.).

Additionally, York hoped to model the importance of centering, not marginalizing, Asian “#ownvoices” (Donovan & Weber, 2021, p. 218) within the World Literature curriculum. The county’s unit plan for Asian literature reduces its suggested writing assignment to examining tensions and divisions between Hindu and Muslim communities. In terms of literature, the most contemporary suggestion for Asian literature mentioned in the county’s unit plan is a book from 2007 entitled *American Shaolin*, written by White American author Matthew Polly, telling the story of his two years living with Buddhist monks at the Shaolin Temple in China (Polly, 2007). Although likely a compelling memoir, the selection and centering of such a text limits space in the curriculum for voices of Asian descent.

This level of criticality is something York applied in selecting her texts for the unit, choosing books entirely written by authors of Asian descent and also choosing contemporary texts, ranging in publication dates from 2010 to 2022. York embraces the idea suggested (and referenced earlier) by Keisha Green (2021): engaging “with counternarratives and diverse literary histories” helps teachers to address social inequities (p. 13). Therefore, York curated text options that afforded such an opportunity and then engaged students in guided selection of the diverse literary histories that appealed most to them and that

also enabled her students to see these histories from the point of view of the representatives from different Asian cultures and experiences.

Extending Book Self-Selection Possibilities

We offer the following recommendations for teachers to consider as they imagine new possibilities for helping students build and practice book self-selection strategies and metacognitive thinking behind these decisions using the “critic perspective” (Donovan & Weber, 2021, p. 218), leading to deeper awareness of themselves as readers and of their reading growth. By regularly incorporating these aspects into the curriculum, students can work toward building lifelong reading skills and practices and growing their reading identities.

1. **Engage in book self-selection:** Here is where robust classroom libraries and an accessible school library proves essential, providing students with myriad choices to peruse, including texts written by authors and with characters from different cultures, ethnic groups and positionalities. This also is an opportunity to involve families and community members by encouraging students to talk to their families and friends about texts they have enjoyed and recommend. These community members might be able to share their own experiences, for example, with the Civil Rights movement or trauma related to gun violence discussed in YA texts they read together such as John Lewis’s (2013) graphic novel memoir trilogy *March* or Angie Thomas’ (2017) *The Hate U Give*, and by doing so to elaborate or provide a new perspective on these topics. The school library’s media specialist and library aide can invite students to develop book pamphlets to promote such texts and conversations with community members. Teachers can display assignments from previous years’ students that showcase the texts former students read, along

with their reflections on how these texts impacted their thinking, and thus, current students can gather a sense of what their peers read, enjoyed, and how these texts transformed them. Administrators and teachers can also post signs outside their door or include email signatures that identify “What I’m currently reading” to demonstrate their literary lives, too, and to make recommendations for impactful books to read.

2. **Discuss the process used, with justification:** Students can complete an initial literary interest survey at the start of the year and then revisit it each time they pick up a new book or different genre. Applying the “critic perspective” (Donovan & Weber, 2021, p. 218), they can journal and reflect about what their selections tell them about their identity as a reader, including personal preferences and biases such as, for example, reading only certain authors, genres, or representations and avoiding other voices, perspectives, topics and genres. Students can create a BookTok or podcast to discuss their thoughts regarding their reader identity and lessons learned through this critical self-reflection.
3. **Analyze for patterns and connections to other criteria:** After reading a text, students can examine what aspects of the format or genre they appreciated by discussing characters or themes that resonated with them, reflecting on why the text felt relevant, and considering how authentic, inclusive and affirming the representation of character (Donovan & Weber, 2021), issues, and events was. A jigsaw approach works well, with students initially analyzing in small groups and then sharing their thinking with a larger group. This is where students will also consider their reading identity and how the texts they have selected benefit them as readers and learners to encourage growth: *Am*

Figure 1

Book Love Graphic Novel Assignment

Book Love Graphic Novel Assignment

For this Book Love Challenge, you will create a graphic novel of the book you have been reading. In case you don't remember what a graphic novel looks like, please refer back to *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. While you are not expected to create the level of art in *Persepolis* and other graphic novels, you **are required** to include the following:

1. **Length** - 4 pages = **These pages should capture at least 4 major events.**
2. **Amount** - **at least 3 panels** per page = **12 total**
3. **Writing** - **a caption OR a dialogue/thought bubble for every panel** explaining what is happening.
4. **Drawing** - each panel should **depict an event** from your book or a scene from an event (an event can happen over more than one panel).
 - a. Stick figures are okay!
 - b. **There should be more than just stick figures.**
5. **Creativity & Neatness** - even if you have stick figures, this should be **neat and understandable**. (no notebook paper, scribbling, etc. TAKE YOUR TIME!!). Using color/shading is a good idea.
6. **Grammar, spelling, and punctuation** COUNT! Make sure you've revised your final draft.

Things to remember:

A panel contains a scene of the action.

A word balloon contains what characters are saying.

A caption describes the scene.

Other ideas:

Balloons! (Speaking, Thinking, Whispering, Yelling)

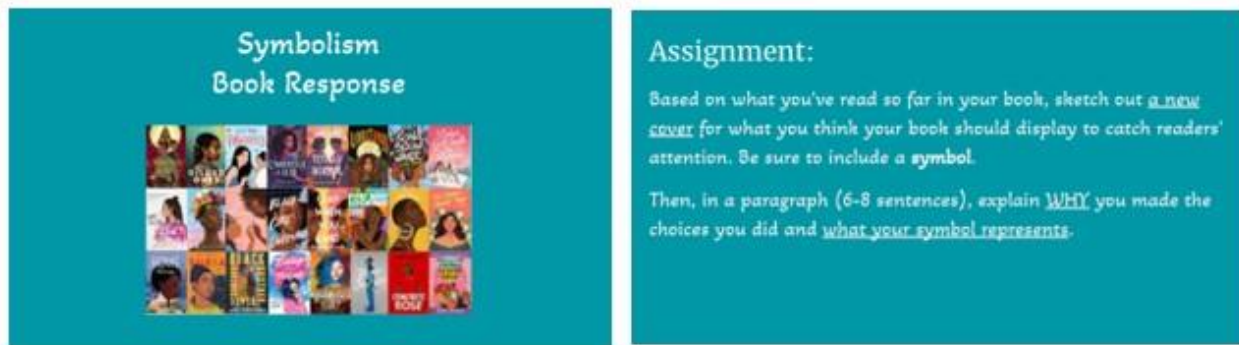
Noises, Non-verbal Cues, Symbolic Balloons

I pushing myself to read new genres? Am I applying “an anti-bias or critical” mindset? (Donovan & Weber, 2021, p. 218); Am I gaining new perspectives into cultures outside my own? They can also consider how they are improving as literary experts and social justice critics, focusing on their ability to recognize literary elements, styles, genres, vocabulary development, as well as injustices, misrepresentations, power issues, and voice silencing, as portrayed within and beyond texts.

4. **Capture responses for everyone to see, reflect upon, and learn from:** It is useful for students to see how their peers are making decisions about their text selections, too. By sharing this information, teachers help to construct a collaborative setting that encourages dialogue about what and how students are reading and if their book choices expand their mind and critical consciousness, as well. We suggest keeping a class Bookstagram, Google Site, Flip, blog, or Padlet where students can post a brief reflection, selection criteria, and reviews

Figure 2

Symbolic Book Cover Assignment



of the books they read that transformed the way they think, solve problems and live. Teachers can also invite students to participate in a rotating Book Talk, where different students share in front of the class (as an opening activity) about their book, how and why they chose it, and what impact it had on their thinking and lives. Finally, students can create products such as graphic novels (see Figure 1) or symbolic book cover designs (see Figure 2) for the impactful texts they are reading to share with their classmates.

5. **Evaluate for fit and growth potential:** Students can reflect on specific goals they had in approaching a text, such as bettering their understanding of an individual with a disability or expanding their vocabulary or knowledge of a less familiar genre. They might also contemplate how they grew in the process of reading that particular book. Finally, they could ponder where they need to go next, deciding whether they need to hear new voices, especially those less often heard, or whether they need to add new genres, formats, reading strategies, and so forth.

Conclusion

Guiding graduate education students (teachers and teacher candidates) through intentional and metacognitive text selection processes not only

empowers them to make meaningful choices for themselves and with their students but also emboldens them to disrupt traditional curricula. In this way, they can incorporate more representative and inclusive texts in different genres and formats “in order to cultivate an inclusive-affirming reading life” for their students (Donovan & Weber, 2021, p. 220), and in doing so, further democratize and diversify future classrooms.

As censorship legislation limits classroom texts, there is a greater necessity for teachers and students alike to cultivate criticality in their self-selection of texts, bracketing their own biases, assumptions, and preferences as they develop stronger reading identities, agencies, and abilities to self-select diverse, representative, and culturally responsive texts. By embracing myriad text choices, educators can expand the scope of the curriculum as they create spaces for critical conversations and authenticity that celebrates multitudinous diverse voices and perspectives.

Critically-cultivated texts and inclusive mindsets assist readers in quilting together knowledge, experiences, and perspectives that act as a necessary garment against the “too-rough fingers of the world” (Hughes, 1994, p. 3), wrapping readers in the warmth that comes from inquiry, empowerment, openness, compassion and human connectivity.

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Appendix A

Children’s and Young Adults’ Books

D I S A B I L I T Y	Elementary					
	<i>Just Ask!: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You</i> by Sonia Sotomayor (2019) Read More	<i>A Friend for Henry</i> by Jenn Bailey (2019) Read More	<i>Scarlet Ibis</i> by Gill Lewis (2019) Read More	<i>Rescue & Jessica</i> by Jessica Kensky & Patrick Downes (2018) Read More	<i>Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille</i> by Jennifer Bryant (2016) Read More	<i>The Princess and the Fog</i> by Lloyd Jones (2015) Read More
	<i>I’ll Walk With You</i> by Carol Lynn Pearson (2020) Read More	<i>Just Under the Clouds</i> by Melissa Sarno (2018) Read More	<i>Show Me a Sign</i> by Ann Clare LeZotte (2021) Read More	<i>Different – A Great Thing to Be!</i> By Heather Avis (2021) Read More	<i>A Kind of Spark</i> by Elle McNicoll (2020) Read More	<i>Hello, Universe</i> by Erin Entrada Kelly (2017) Read More
	Teen (Middle and/or High School)					
	<i>The Truth as Told</i> by Mason Buttle (2020) Read More	<i>Silence Between Us</i> by Alison Gervais (2019) Read More	<i>Song for a Whale</i> by Lynne Kelly (2019) Read More	<i>Cursed</i> by Karol Ruth Silverstein (2019) Read More	<i>A List of Cages</i> by Robin Roe (2017) Read More	<i>Challenger Deep</i> by Neal Shusterman (2015) Read More
	<i>Because You’ll Never Meet Me</i> by Leah Thomas (2015) Read More	<i>Fish in a Tree</i> by Lynda Mullaly Hunt (2017) Read More	<i>Restart</i> by Gordon Korman (2018) Read More	<i>Language Arts</i> by Stephanie Kallos (2016) Read More	<i>The Rest of Us Just Live Here</i> by Patrick Ness (2016) Read More	<i>Obsessed: A Memoir of My Life with OCD</i> by Allison Britz (2018) Read More

G E N D E R I N C U S I V E	Elementary					
	<i>When Aidan Became a Brother</i> by Kyle Lukoff (2019) Read More	<i>It's OK to be Different</i> by Sharon Purtill (2019) Read More	<i>Hurricane Child</i> by Kacen Callender (2019) Read More	<i>Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag</i> by Rob Sanders (2018) Read More	<i>Julián Is a Mermaid</i> by Jessica Love (2018) Read More	<i>And Tango Makes Three</i> by Justin Richardson (2015) Read More
	<i>My Daddies!</i> by Gareth Peter (2020) Read More	<i>It Feels Good to be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity</i> by Theresa Thorn (2019) Read More	<i>Sharice's Big Voice: A Native Kid Becomes a Congress Woman</i> by Sharice Davis & Nancy K. Mays (2021) Read More	<i>The Derby Daredevils: Kenzie Kickstarts a Team</i> by Kit Rosewater Read More	<i>The List of Things That Will Not Change</i> by Rebecca Stead (2020) Read More	<i>Colors of Aloha</i> by Kanoa Kau-Arteaga (2019) Read More
	Teen (Middle and/or High School)					
	<i>King and the Dragonflies</i> by Kacen Callender (2020) Read More	<i>Like a Love Story</i> by Abdi Nazemian (2020) Read More	<i>The Stars and the Blackness Between Them</i> by Junauda Petrus (2020) Read More	<i>Last Night at the Telegraph Club</i> by Malinda Lo (2021) Read More	<i>The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue</i> by Mackenzi Lee (2018) Read More	<i>Little & Lion</i> by Brandy Colbert (2017) Read More
	<i>The Stars Beneath Our Feet</i> by David Barclay Moore (2019) Read More	<i>Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the World</i> by Benjamin Alire Saenz (2021) Read More	<i>The 57 Bus</i> by Dashka Slater (2017) Read More	<i>The Black Flamingo</i> by Dean Atta (2020) Read More	<i>Cemetery Boys</i> by Aiden Thomas (2020) Read More	<i>Redwood and Ponytail</i> by K.A. Holt (2019) Read More

Elementary and Teen (Middle and/or High School)						
M U L T I C U L T U R A L P I C T U R E B O O K S	<i>Windows</i> by Patrick Guest (2021) Read More	<i>Sulwe</i> by Lupita Nyong'o (2019) Read More	<i>Where Are You From?</i> by Yamile Saied Méndez (2019) Read More	<i>Small in the City</i> by Sydney Smith (2019) Read More	<i>The Day You Begin</i> by Jacqueline Woodson (2018) Read More	<i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> by Juana Martinez-Neal (2018) Read More
	<i>Hair Love</i> by Matthew A. Cherry (2019) Read More	<i>Eyes that Kiss in the Corners</i> by Joanna Ho (2021) Read More	<i>We Are the Water Protectors</i> by Carole Lindstrom (2020) Read More	<i>Paper Son: The Inspiring Story of Tyrus Wong, Immigrant and Artist</i> by Julie Leung (2019) Read More	<i>The Cat Man of Aleppo</i> by Karim Shamsi-Basha (2021) Read More	<i>Thank You, Omu!</i> By Oge Mora (2018) Read More
	<i>The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family</i> by Ibtihaj Muhammad & S.K. Ali (2019) Read More	<i>Milo Imagines the World</i> by Matt de la Pena (2021) Read More	<i>Bright Star</i> by Yuyi Morales (2021) Read More	<i>Dream Street</i> by Tricia Elam Walker (2021) Read More	<i>The Welcome Chair</i> by Rosemary Wells (2021) Read More	<i>A Different Pond</i> by Bao Phi (2017) Read More

P O E T R Y O R V E R S E N O V E L	Elementary					
	<i>Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story</i> by Kevin Noble Maillard (2019) Read More	<i>Layla's Happiness</i> by Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie (2019) Read More	<i>The Undefeated</i> by Kwame Alexander (2019) Read More	<i>Imagine</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera (2018) Read More	<i>Out of Wonder: Poems Celebrating Poets</i> by Kwame Alexander (2017) Read More	<i>Tony</i> by Ed Galing (2017) Read More
	<i>All Are Welcome</i> by Alexandra Penfold (2018) Read More	<i>Change Sings: A Children's Anthem</i> by Amanda Gorman (2021) Read More	<i>The Day War Came</i> by Nicola Davies (2018) Read More	<i>Wishes</i> by Muon Thi Van (2021) Read More	<i>When Lola Visits</i> by Michelle Sterling (2021) Read More	<i>Kiyoshi's Walk</i> by Mark Karlins (2021) Read More
	Teen (Middle and/or High School)					
	<i>Clap When You Land</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo (2020) Read More	<i>Every Day We Get More Illegal</i> by Juan Felipe Herrera (2020) Read More	<i>Ordinary Hazards: A Memoir</i> by Nikki Grimes (2019) Read More	<i>The Crossover</i> by Kwame Alexander (2019) Read More	<i>They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems</i> by David Bowles (2018) Read More	<i>The Poet X</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo (2018) Read More
	<i>Call Us What We Carry</i> by Amanda Gorman (2021) Read More	<i>Muted</i> by Tami Charles (2021) Read More	<i>Apple: Skin to the Core</i> by Eric Gansworth (2020) Read More *not a choice if used for autobiography	<i>Every Body Looking</i> by Candice Iloh (2021) Read More	<i>Long Way Down</i> by Jason Reynolds (2019) Read More	<i>Me (Moth)</i> by Amber McBride (2021) Read More

HISTORICAL OR REALISTIC FICTION	Elementary					
	<i>Infinite Hope: A Black Artist's Journey from World War II to Peace</i> by Ashley Bryan (2019) Read More	<i>When Spring Comes to the DMZ</i> by Uk-Bae Lee (2019) Read More	<i>Genesis Begins Again</i> by Alicia D. Williams (2019) Read More	<i>Survivors of the Holocaust: True Stories of Six Extraordinary Children</i> by Kath Shackleton (2019) Read More	<i>The War That Saved My Life</i> by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley (2016) Read More	<i>Stella by Starlight</i> by Sharon M. Draper (2015) Read More
	<i>Your Name is a Song</i> by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow (2020) Read More	<i>For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World</i> by Michael W. Waters (2020) Read More	<i>Evelyn Del Ray is Moving Away</i> by Meg Medina (2020) Read More	<i>Nana Akua Goes to School</i> by Tricia Elam Walker (2020) Read More	<i>New Kid</i> by Jerry Craft (2019) Read More	<i>The Bridge Home</i> by Padma Venkatramen (2019) Read More
	Teen (Middle and/or High School)					
	<i>Butterfly Yellow</i> by Thanhà Lai (2020) Read More	<i>Torpedoed: The True Story of the World War II Sinking of "The Children's Ship"</i> by Deborah Heiligman (2019) Read More	<i>Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home</i> by Nora Krug (2018) Read More	<i>The War I Finally Won</i> by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley (2018) Read More	<i>Dear Martin</i> by Nic Stone (2018) Read More	<i>Salt to the Sea</i> by Ruta Sepetys (2017) Read More
	<i>Angel of Greenwood</i> by Randi Pink (2021) Read More	<i>The Downstairs Girl</i> by Stacy Lee (2021) Read More	<i>We Are Not Free</i> by Traci Chee (2020) Read More	<i>We Are Not From Here</i> by Jenny Torres Sanchez (2021) Read More	<i>Everything Sad is Untrue: (a true story)</i> by Daniel Nayeri (2020) Read More	<i>Patron Saints of Nothing</i> by Randy Ribay (2020) Read More
	<i>Fire Keeper's Daughter</i> by Angeline Boulley (2021) Read More					

B I O G R A P H Y O R A U T O B I O G R A P H Y O R M E M O I R	Elementary					
	<i>Dancing Hands: How Teresa Carreño Played the Piano for President Lincoln</i> by Margarita Engle (2019) Read More	<i>The Important Thing About Margaret Wise Brown</i> by Mac Barnett (2019) Read More	<i>It Began with a Page</i> by Kyo Maclear (2019) Read More	<i>Other Words for Home</i> by Jasmine Warga (2019) Read More	<i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales (2018) Read More	<i>Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah</i> by Laurie Ann Thompson (2015) Read More
	<i>All the Way to the Top: How One Girl's Fight for Americans with Disabilities Changed Everything</i> by Annette Bay Pimentel (2020) Read More	<i>Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks</i> by Suzanne Slade (2020) Read More	<i>Fred's Big Feelings: The Life and Legacy of Mister Rogers</i> by Laura Renaud (2020) Read More	<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i> by Malala Yousafzai (2017) Read More	<i>Before She Was Harriet</i> by Lesa Cline-Ransom (2019) Read More	<i>Watercress</i> by Andrea Wang (2021) Read More
	Teen (Middle and/or High School)					
	<i>Your Story, My Story</i> by Connie Palmen (2021) Read More	<i>Hot Comb</i> by Ebony Flowers (2020) Read More	<i>Sigh, Gone</i> by Phuc Tran (2020) Read More	<i>I Was Their American Dream</i> by Malaka Gharib (2019) Read More	<i>They Called Us Enemy</i> by George Takei (2019) Read More	<i>The Faithful Spy: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Plot to Kill Hitler</i> by John Hendrix (2018) Read More
	<i>When Stars Are Scattered</i> by Victoria Jamieson & Omar Mohamed (2020) Read More	<i>*Apple (Skin to the Core)</i> by Eric Gansworth (2021) Read More *not a choice if used for poetry/verse novel	<i>The Beautiful Struggle (Adapted for Young Readers)</i> by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2021) Read More	<i>Undefeated: Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indian School Football Team</i> by Steve Sheinkin (2019) Read More	<i>All Boys Aren't Blue</i> by George M. Johnson (2020) Read More	<i>Run: Book One</i> by John Lewis & Andrew Aydin (2021) Read More

F A N T A S Y O R S C I E N C E F I C T I O N O R D Y S T O P I A	Elementary					
	<i>The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge</i> by M. T. Anderson (2020) Read More	<i>Pokko and the Drum</i> by Matthew Forsythe (2019) Read More	<i>Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky</i> (Book 1) by Kwame Mbalia (2019) Read More	<i>The Babysitter from Another Planet</i> by Stephen Savage (2019) Read More	<i>The Smoking Mirror</i> (Book 1) by David Bowles (2015) Read More	<i>Sofi and the Magic, Musical Mural</i> by Raquel M. Ortiz (2015) Read More
	<i>The Hatmakers</i> by Tamzin Merchant (2021) Read More	<i>Aru Shan and the End of Time</i> by Roshani Chokshi (2019) Read More	<i>Quintessence</i> by Jess Redman (2020) Read More	<i>Blancaflor, the Hero with Secret Powers: A Folktale from Latin America: A Toon Graphic</i> by Nadja Spiegelman (2021) Read More	<i>The Girl and the Ghost</i> by Hanna Alkaf (2020) Read More	<i>The Barnabus Project</i> by Devin, Eric, & Terry Fan (2020) Read More
	Teen (Middle and/or High School)					
	<i>Pet</i> by Akwaeke Emezi (2021) Read More	<i>Sal and Gabi Break the Universe (Book 1)</i> by Carlos Hernandez (2020) Read More	<i>How We Became Wicked</i> by Alexander Yates (2020) Read More	<i>LaGuardia</i> by Nnedi Okorafor (2019) Read More	<i>Catfishing on CatNet</i> (Book 1) by Naomi Kritzer (2019) Read More	<i>Ghost Boys</i> by Jewell Parker Rhodes (2018) Read More
	<i>Internment</i> by Samira Ahmed (2020) Read More	<i>Damsselfy</i> by Chandra Pasad (2018) Read More	<i>The Gilded Ones</i> by Namina Forna (2021) Read More	<i>Scythe (1)</i> by Neal Shusterman (2017) Read More	<i>We Set the Dark on Fire</i> by Tehlor Kay Mejia (2019) Read More	<i>The Astonishing Color of After</i> by Emily X.R. Pan (2019) Read More
	<i>Parable of the Sower: A Graphic Novel Adaptation</i> by Damian Duffy, Octavia Butler (2021) Read More					