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THE OKLAHOMA CANON: A NEED FOR MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN THE ELA CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This study examines the frequency with which Oklahoma English teachers include multicultural literature into their curriculum. In addition, this study explores teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward multicultural literature, including reasons why teachers may not currently teach texts outside of the traditional canon. This research draws on prior studies that were conducted to determine the frequency with which multicultural texts were included in English classrooms in other areas of the United States. By providing a current list of frequently taught texts in Oklahoma, this study adds to the body of research surrounding the literary canon, multicultural literature, and where the two intersect. 130 teachers completed a survey on the use of multicultural literature in the ELA classroom, by listing the texts they currently teach and answering questions about their attitudes and beliefs about multicultural literature. Ten survey participants who indicated that they were willing to participate in further research took part in a second phase of data collection. Ten teachers participated in one-hour, semi-structured interviews to better understand teachers' rationales for the texts taught in the ELA classrooms, their experiences with teaching multicultural literature, as well as barriers to diversifying the English curriculum. This study yielded a list of the most frequently taught texts in Oklahoma during the 2019-2020 school year. In addition, six key themes emerged from the interviews about teachers' beliefs and attitudes about multicultural literature use.

Keywords: Multicultural Literature, Literary Canon, Young Adult Literature, English Education, Whiteness, Secondary Education

Chapter One: Introduction

My reading habits as a teenager almost exclusively included classic novels. As an eighth-grade student, I remember selecting *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen as my library book because I thought it would make me seem "sophisticated." I made lists of all of the classic texts that I had decided on my own that I needed to read. When I was 16, I enrolled in my first AP English class. My summer reading assignment included *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. I remember disliking it and feeling as though it was highly irrelevant to me, a 16-year old Oklahoma girl in the 21st century. However, I finished it dutifully out of a sense of respect for "great literature." After all, Dickens was one of the best, right? I would go on to read more of the books one is "supposed" to read: more Austen, Shakespeare, Orwell, and Salinger, with the occasional YA novel because, after all, I was still a teenager.

Although I did not realize it then, growing up in a rural Oklahoma school district, I did not experience reading many novels from different perspectives in my high school English classes. In fact, the only title I remember reading by a non-White author was *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which we read in AP language to talk about rhetoric and figurative language, glossing over Douglass's work as an abolitionist. In addition, I can remember reading short stories by Chinua Achebe and Zora Neale Hurston. That was the extent of my multicultural literature experience as a high school student. The novels I was reading, either by choice or by assignment, also did not have main characters who were diverse in religious beliefs, sexual orientation, ability, or social class.

Furthermore, in all of my secondary English classes, I was assigned to read only one book by an author who was not male—Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as part of my AP Literature class my senior year of high school. When my teacher announced that our summer reading project would center around *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I could not have been more excited. Studying this novel felt like a rite of passage. My friends who were a year older than me had raved about it the year before. I would finally get to experience this novel that seemed so beloved by popular culture. To further the claim that the novel would enhance my life, the supplemental material provided for me to read was stamped with the National Endowment for the Arts "The Big Read." I guessed if the novel had earned that title, my life was about to change.

To be honest, I loved the book when I read it. I looked at Atticus Finch as a shining example of kindness. (I had never heard the term "White savior.") I pitied the way that the townspeople of Maycomb ruined Tom Robinson's life based on the color of his skin, but I was glad that I did not live in a time where people experienced the same types of unjust treatment. I also did not like the way that the children in the novel demonized Boo Radley, but now I know there were "Boo Radleys" I had demonized, too.

When I look back on that first reading, I am embarrassed at how naive I was of what was really happening in the book. I wish I would have been challenged to look at it through a more critical lens, to ask the hard questions, and to think about whose stories were never mentioned in the book. When we discussed the novel as an AP English class of four White people, we all agreed that the racism Tom Robinson experienced in the novel was terrible. We probably talked about the Golden Rule, and then applauded Atticus for being the "good guy." After all, he was the guy who chose to "save" this poor man from the racist townspeople out of the goodness of

his heart. I was sad that Tom died, but I do not think I thought long and hard about why he died trying to escape, why that was so worth the risk to him. As a high school student, I had the sense to know that racism was "bad," but I think I would have considered myself one of the people who says they "don't see color." It seemed as though I believed that racism in America ended with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Having grown up with people who, for the most part, looked much like me, I had no idea what the world was really like. I was blind to the injustices that Black, Indigenous, People of Color and other marginalized groups experience daily.

Despite that, I had read *Mockingbird* and was pleased with the strong female character who seemed to defy traditional gender norms. Although I was blind to other social inequities, even at the young age of 17, I *was* aware that women were not treated fairly. I had witnessed that firsthand in my own family, in my church, and even in my school. I already knew that I would not ever completely fit into the mold that many women in my own life had fit into. I saw pieces of my own drive and desire to carve my own path in Scout's headstrong anecdotes. I suppose if the novel had not taught me about the ridiculously unjust South, I had at least learned something about gender norms which would eventually lead to a whole feminist awakening.

The next novel we read was F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby.* This novel was actually known as "the great American novel," so there was no way it would not live up to the hype. I expected nothing less than complete and total enlightenment about the human experience. I was shocked that I hated every character. I could not relate to Tom and Daisy, the "old money" of East Egg. My family had filed for bankruptcy when I was in middle school. I was unsure of how I would pay for college. I also remember being uncomfortable when Tom Buchanan

mentioned that he thought that White people were the “dominant” race, and how it was up to them to keep an eye on the “other races” or they will “take control of things” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p.17). In the margin of the book I wrote, “It doesn’t surprise me that he buys into this. He thinks he’s better than everyone.” The novel was written so long ago, “It was just the times,” I thought to myself. As I continued to read the novel, one day my teacher had the students pick a number of words from the chapters we had read that were new to us. One of the words I picked was, unbeknownst to me, a racial slur for a Jewish person which is used in chapter two by one of the attendees of Tom and Myrtle’s party in their secret apartment. I can remember being embarrassed whenever I looked it up and discovered that it was a slur meant to demean Jewish people. Looking through my annotated copy of the novel from the first read, many of my comments are about how terrible Tom is, but I did not yet have the words “male privilege” and “misogyny to describe that behavior, nor did I understand that I was beginning to look at this text through a feminist lens. Upon finishing the novel, I was convinced it was both the greatest and the worst thing I had ever read. I could not relate to a single character in the novel, I knew they were all morally bankrupt, yet I still believed that I had, indeed, read the “great American novel.”

I do not mention these stories to make excuses for my lack of knowledge growing up and into young adulthood. Although I did not know it then, I was already benefiting from White privilege, the idea that I have never faced discrimination for the color of my skin. I am simply contextualizing my own experience in relation to the canon and how that experience reinforced my identity as a White person because the stories I was reading in school were written for me. I never had the feeling of my cultural identity being either underrepresented or misrepresented altogether. However, these texts also reminded me that I was poor and from an uneducated

family, which according to these texts, was not favorable. I was never going to experience the extravagance of a Gatsby party, and I did not understand the concept of prep and boarding schools that I read about in novels such as *A Separate Peace* or *The Catcher in the Rye*. Instead, my family was closer to the Wilsons who lived in the Valley of Ashes.

I was also reminded that I was a woman. Again, I realized that women were not looked at favorably in these texts. Scout Finch was constantly being told that she was not "feminine" enough by Aunt Henrietta. Even as a teenager, I knew what it was like to constantly feel as though I was never going to be the perfect amount of "pretty" and "tough." When I read Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, I did not like his portrayal of Catherine. Although it bothered me, I did not speak up because I did not want to be seen as a "feminist," especially because my two classmates were male. I thought being a feminist would make me too radical for my tiny little town or even my own conservative household. I settled for the Spice Girls brand of "girl power" instead.

Despite these realizations about my place in society and the role of people like me in literature, I never questioned the curriculum my teachers adhered to. I did not think about the other side of the story, or why certain characters were no more than background noise. On the cusp of graduating high school and broadening my horizons, I was still ignorant to a plethora of injustices occurring outside of my rural bubble, and even ones occurring right in front of my face.

What I Know Now

I attended the same school from the time I was in kindergarten until I graduated high school. I more or less grew up with the same 70 people, most of whom looked, talked, and believed just like me. My hometown is located in southeastern Oklahoma, with a single stoplight on Main Street that did not actually function properly until years after I moved away. There is a church on nearly every corner, and one on either side of my high school. The railroad cuts through the town, going past the Sonic and the WPA-built football stadium. It is the kind of place where people grow up and never leave.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, my town's population is roughly 5,500. Of those 5,500 citizens, 62 percent identified as White. Interestingly, the town also has a large population of Indigenous peoples from a variety of tribal affiliations--Muscogee Creek Nation, the Seminole Nation, and Cherokee Nation--who make up close to 20 percent of the town's population. People who identify as Black or African American make up nearly 13 percent of the overall population of the city, and Hispanic or Latino individuals account for nearly 7 percent. The Asian American population is less than one percent.

As a White student, I did not notice that I was only reading literature from one point of view. I never thought about the voices that were missing from the literature I was reading in school. I now realize my ignorance stemmed from the fact that the literature I was reading tended to reinforce my identity as a White person. I was not challenged to think of the perspectives of individuals with backgrounds and perspectives much different from my own, though several of my peers did not identify as White (or male, heterosexual, Christian, or affluent for that matter.)

When I look back on my high school years, I now realize that many of the students sitting next to me in my classes had an education that was not representative of their cultural identity. I also remember things that teachers said in school or lessons that were steeped in Whiteness. For example, when I was young, one of my good friends was Pakistani. When the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 happened, a teacher explained to us that people "from where [my friend] was from" were the ones who did this. One of my closest friends in high school is a citizen of the Muscogee Creek Nation, and never once did I think twice about how she felt whenever we had all dressed up like Pilgrims as kindergarteners, or when we read stories about colonists, but never talked about how those colonists took land that was not theirs to take.

I now believe that my high school experiences with the literary canon are probably not unique to small-town Oklahoma but are likely representative of the state and perhaps the nation as a whole. My understanding came from a series of events that unfolded as I left my hometown to attend college. When I began attending the University of Oklahoma in 2013, I was surrounded by people who were radically different from myself for the first time. They looked different than me. They believed differently than me. They spent their money differently than me. This "awakening" was furthered in Spring 2015 when a highly publicized racist incident occurred on OU's campus. I knew, then, that racism and White supremacy was, indeed, alive. Admittedly, I felt a bit embarrassed that it had taken me 20 years to notice it.

I later lived abroad for a semester in England, and I returned with greater understanding of my White privilege and the prejudices that I held. As I traveled, I met more and more people who were so unlike me, and I learned their stories. I listened as they would describe to me how they learned English so they could get a better education or how their parents moved to England

so they would have the opportunity to learn in "good" schools. I also got the opportunity to hear about their cultures and traditions. Many people who are from small towns like me do not have many opportunities to meet others from around the world whose lives are so different from their own. It occurred to me that sometimes the only information people know about others from places around the globe is what is reported on TV. Not only do they not know people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, but they also do not seek out their stories in books, films, and art to name a few. Thus, the ignorance continues.

By the time November 2016 approached, I had begun my journey into learning about my own privilege, how Whiteness functions in the United States, and I had begun to seek out stories from people whose voices are often downplayed in the mainstream media and entertainment industries. In the coming years, I would spend more and more time reading and listening to the lived experiences of people who were marginalized because of their race, beliefs, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation. I found it difficult to watch the news as I saw an administration that demonized American citizens for their religious beliefs, for the color of their skin, and for their gender identities. I began to wonder how all of this hatred would affect young people, the ones that I would soon teach? How much of this were they absorbing? I had read reports of children chanting things like "Go back to Mexico" at their classmates. I could not help but think that if these kids could just hear the stories of people unlike them, maybe that would allow them to have some empathy.

In addition, I kept thinking about how so much of what I had learned in school had been "whitewashed." The few people who did not look like me had no cultural representation in our school. They were just expected to accept our whitewashed versions of their stories or to

assimilate to White culture. I knew that my role as an educator was going to be difficult because of what I believed and how the system tends to work. However, that would not stop me from doing my damnedest to do better than the teachers who came before me. If something in the way our education system as a whole was going to change, it needed to start somewhere. I could do my part.

How These Experiences Shaped Me as a Teacher

I entered the classroom as a middle school English teacher in August 2019. I teach in an area of Oklahoma that is predominantly White and middle class, but the number of students who do not identify as White is quickly multiplying. My school receives title-one funding from the federal government, which means that the majority of students at my school qualify for free or reduced lunches because of their parents' income. Additionally, several of my students identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Even as a new teacher, I recognize my role in creating an inclusive classroom and curriculum for my students. I have begun to understand even more the importance of having students read novels that make them feel seen and heard. Because I teach at the middle school level, my students are especially in need of their identity being affirmed at a time when so many of them feel alone and are struggling to figure out who they are.

In the English classroom, specifically, I have the power to choose the pieces of literature that students will read, analyze, and reflect upon. I have the power to use literature to create discussions surrounding larger issues that matter to my students: anti-racism, feminism, LGBTQ+ issues, and class structure, just to name a few. I have the power to make my classroom an inclusive and student-centered space, and the literature I choose should reflect those practices.

However, I do not see the English Language Arts curriculum at my school expanding to create an inclusive learning experience for both students of color and White students. Despite the growing number of students of color in my school district, as well as the growing number of minorities state and nationwide, the curriculum still reflects a mostly White experience.

I admit that despite my own beliefs, it has sometimes been a struggle to make my curriculum as inclusive as I would hope. The resources are sometimes difficult to come by as my school has textbooks that I used when I was in middle school. Additionally, the availability of classroom sets of novels is fairly limited to just three choices, including *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* by Avi, and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis. Most of my team chose to teach *Hatchet* as part of a unit on "survival" stories. However, I chose to forego *Hatchet* in favor of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* for three reasons. The first is that it was the only novel I had access to which has a main character who is not White. The second is that I was also teaching the novel directly after a unit on research, which included identifying and evaluating primary and secondary documents. I used the research unit for my students to research what life in Birmingham was like in 1964, the time and place the novel takes place. They also looked at documents that put the events in the novel in the larger context of the Civil Rights Movement. All of this served as background knowledge for when we actually began reading the novel. Lastly, I thought that the characters, especially Kenny and Byron, were quite relatable for my middle school students. Kenny often gets made fun of because he is different, whereas Byron has a "too cool for school" mentality. The sibling dynamic between the two characters was something that students also seemed to latch onto. They would often tell me stories of how they had done something mean to a younger sibling or how

their older sibling had done something mean to them. Overall, I am happy that I chose this text, though, I think I could have done better.

From my own experience in an Oklahoma school, I received a literature education that reinforced Whiteness. This educational experience was not representative of my school population, nor was it representative of the changing population of this area of the country. The reality is that students sitting in class with me never saw their identities affirmed in the literature they read as part of their education. The short stories appearing in literature textbooks and the novels lining the shelves of the book room both center on mostly White characters. That implied that their culture was not "worthy" of being represented, whether that was the intended message or not. Indeed, this is the message that is often sent to BIPOC, to non-binary individuals, and to other marginalized groups daily by media and entertainment industries. The continued presence of the literary canon in the American public-school system serves as an extension of the Whiteness that pervades everyday life in America.

I have chosen this topic of study because I, myself, want to improve my own practices as an educator. I also want to learn from the successes and mistakes of others who are already engaging in this work. I want to continue to engage in reflecting on how my identity as a White teacher affects my curricular choices. Lastly, I want to take what I have learned and share it with other teachers so they, too, can reflect on the curriculum they teach.

This study seeks to understand the extent to which teachers in Oklahoma secondary schools integrate multicultural literature into the English classroom. In doing so, I also hope to identify reasons that teachers may or may not teach literature from a variety of perspectives.

Lastly, I seek to understand the methods, if any, that Oklahoma teachers are using to integrate multiple perspectives and multicultural literature into their classrooms.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to understand how teachers in Oklahoma secondary schools use multicultural literature in their classrooms, a literature search was conducted to explore the different facets of the research question. First, this literature review will provide context for the study by presenting the context of the state of Oklahoma and its people. Next, a review of the concept of Whiteness is presented in order to better understand how Whiteness functions in the educational system and how it affects the ways in which multicultural literature may be implemented in the secondary English classroom. This discussion is followed by a section highlighting scholarship which outlines methods for implementing multicultural education and multiple perspectives into the classroom curriculum. Then, a summary of research surrounding the implementation of multicultural literature in high school English classrooms is presented as the framework for this study, followed by scholarship examining the relationship between reading literature and empathy. Lastly, some possible criticisms of multicultural literature implementation are offered to provide insight into the opposing viewpoint.

Oklahoma

According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), Oklahoma's racial makeup is largely White (74 percent). Nearly 11 percent of Oklahomans identify as Hispanic or Latino. People who identify as Black or African American make up about eight percent of the population. Native American or Indigenous people account for slightly over nine percent of the populations and, Asian Americans account for about two percent. Less than one percent of Oklahomans identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. An additional six percent identify with two or more races.

In order to better understand the mostly White population of Oklahoma, a literature search was conducted to understand White identity in the context of the South. Shirley (2010) points out that "rural Southern Whites," a term that fits many Oklahomans, experience a sort of "intra-racial" division based upon socioeconomic status. White people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are often stereotyped as "rednecks" or "white trash," terms that *"*assign negative qualities to white identities associated with certain marginalized social characteristics, regarding regional culture and class" (p.38). As a result, these groups often mark non-Whites as "other" and "inferior" to themselves. In doing so, they reinforce not only the hegemonic structure of Whiteness, but also allow themselves to remain powerful over the people they perceive to be "less inferior" than themselves (p.57).

Shirley's findings about White people in the rural South become relevant when examining the results of a (2017) study by Dyke, Gordan, and Job which explores the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election in Oklahoma schools. The article begins with accounts from Oklahoma teachers that illustrate the divisions between students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and White students following the election of Donald Trump as President. While BIPOC students expressed concern about their families' safety, one student told his classmate "My family is all-White, so we'll be okay," (p.85).

In light of the instances such as these, the researchers pose the question, "Is it possible to remain neutral in the classroom?" Furthermore, is it possible for teachers to keep politics out of the classroom when that classroom is in a "red" state like Oklahoma which overwhelmingly voted for Donald Trump? The authors claim that education is, in fact, "always political" (p. 86) and that remaining neutral is not likely. However, engaging in discussions surrounding politics is

a “controversial or risky practice for educators in Oklahoma” (p. 87). As a result, the political environment in Oklahoma is sustained because of “efforts to limit spaces to meaningfully engage and think through the relations and practices that shape our daily lives here” (p.90). Thus, addressing topics such as racism and sexism in the classroom is not likely happening, which further marginalizes “students of color, queer students, and non-Christian students” (p.86).

This article serves as a framework to understand the context of a mostly White, conservative state in the South. Further, it is also important to understand how Whiteness shapes the ways in which literature is taught, and ultimately, how schools function as a whole.

The Overwhelming Presence of Whiteness

In studying multicultural literature, we must first examine the presence of Whiteness in the United States educational system (and indeed, in all institutions in the country). A byproduct of centuries of White colonialism, Whiteness is inherent in the “larger systemic, structural conventions and customs that uphold and sustain oppressive group relations” (Taylor, 2009, p.4). This, of course, includes schools. Taylor points out that although White people are often unaware of how institutions, such as schools, are constructed to serve White people because of their own privilege, “non-Whites have a startlingly clear view of the coercion that White supremacy has constructed” (p.5).

For instance, examine the demographics of teachers in America. According to a 2016 report from the National Center for Education Statistics, White teachers accounted for 80 percent of the teacher workforce in the 2015-2016 school year. Despite the large number of BIPOC in the country, African American teachers made up only seven percent of the teacher workforce,

Hispanic/Latinos account for nine percent, and Asian Americans only two percent. Additionally, less than one percent of teachers identify as Native American or Pacific Islander (NCES, 2016).

With the overwhelming majority of White teachers, it is easy to see how Whiteness pervades school curriculum and culture. Indeed, when one looks at the canon of typical works taught in a high school classroom—from Shakespeare to Steinbeck—the majority of texts that high school students are expected to read are written by White authors. These books are considered to be "great" and integral to a student's education but do not account for the experiences of all students. As the nation's schools continue to perpetuate systemic racism and ideals of Whiteness, how do teachers create a curriculum that not only educates students of all cultural backgrounds on the experiences of people who are unlike them, but also serves as a critical lens into the intrusive force of Whiteness?

Theories in Multicultural Education

In response to the way in which the American education system as a whole perpetuates Whiteness, scholars have proposed multiple ways to integrate diverse viewpoints into the public school curriculum. These pedagogical suggestions are not limited to a single subject area; they span the curriculum from social studies to English. The following is a discussion of three selected theoretical frameworks for creating a more inclusive school curriculum that are important in understanding multicultural education and in the understanding of this study: multicultural citizenship education, culturally relevant (and sustaining) pedagogy, and powerblind sameness/colorblind difference in multicultural education.

Multicultural Citizenship Education

Banks (1991) points out that the inclusion of more diverse perspectives in education, such as ethnic and women's studies, is often deemed a "special interest" rather than subject matter worthy of being taught to all students. Banks defines a special interest as a view that challenges the "power, ideologies, and paradigms" of the dominant culture (p. 137). Thus, centering a minority group in the classroom becomes a "special interest" that not everyone is expected to take an interest in, keeping the minority group's history and stories buried. By continuing to exclude marginalized peoples, those who hold power in the dominant culture deny members of these groups "the legitimacy and validity of full participation in society and its institutions" (Banks, 1991, p. 138).

Banks (1994) developed criteria to classify approaches to multicultural education. He identifies four ways that multicultural subject matter can be integrated into the curriculum (as cited in Dilworth, 2004, p. 158). The first category is contributions, in which isolated facts about the contributions of "heroes" from marginalized groups to society are recognized in curriculum. The second is the additive approach in which multicultural content and diverse perspectives are included in curriculum without the teacher actually making any changes to the curriculum, such as through a unit on the Civil Rights Movement. According to Banks (1994) the first two approaches are not sufficient for true multicultural education (as cited in Dilworth, 2004, p. 158). The third is the transformative approach, in which students are challenged to learn how knowledge is constructed and to critically consider multiple perspectives of cultural groups. In

this approach, students also learn that people construct knowledge based upon their "experiences, values, and perspectives," which allows them to consider how they, themselves, construct knowledge (Banks, 1994, p. 6). The final approach is the social action approach, where students are able to take a stance on social issues and then become involved in solving them. These activities should be "practical, feasible, and attuned to the developmental levels of students" (Banks, 1994, p. 8).

Within these four approaches, Banks also calls for teachers to aid students in reducing any existing prejudices toward different groups of people (Banks, 1994, p. 5). He suggests doing so through the consistent use of positive images of multicultural groups in classroom material. Additionally, educators should adopt an "equitable pedagogy" for teaching students from diverse backgrounds. In practicing equitable pedagogy, teachers modify their instruction "to facilitate academic achievement among students from diverse groups" (Banks, 1994, p. 5).

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies

Ladson-Billings (1992) developed a well-known pedagogy for teaching students from diverse backgrounds known as culturally relevant teaching. The goal of teaching in a culturally relevant way is to "empower students to examine critically the society in which they live and work for social change" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314). Ladson-Billings describes culturally relevant teaching that is designed "not merely to fit the school culture to the students' culture but also to *use* student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314). This

approach to teaching celebrates students' cultural knowledge and experiences, in comparison to "assimilationist" teaching that "encourages students to maintain the status quo" (p. 314).

Ladson-Billings identifies three characteristics of culturally relevant teaching: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 75). Success in the classroom is marked by intellectual growth because of classroom experiences. Teachers demonstrate their cultural competence by "celebrating students' cultures of origin while gaining knowledge and fluency in at least one other culture" (p. 75). Lastly, Ladson-Billings defines sociopolitical consciousness as "the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems" (p. 75). This last characteristic is similar to Banks' social action approach to multicultural education, reiterating the need for learning about other cultures to be put into action both in and out of school.

Ladson-Billings first proposed culturally relevant pedagogy in the early 1990s, and since then, many teachers have adopted it in their own classrooms. Ladson-Billings clarifies that the pedagogy cannot be reduced to "adding some books about people of color" (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 82). Other scholars have revised the theory to account for the changing nature and needs of education. A more recent proposal is Paris's "culturally sustaining pedagogy" (2012), which builds upon Ladson-Billings' work. The culturally sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p.93).

Powerblind Sameness and Colorblind Difference

Castagno (2013) provides a framework for recognizing and categorizing the ways in which multicultural education is often implemented in schools. According to Castagno, multicultural education can be categorized into two categories, "powerblind sameness and colorblind difference," both of which serve to "protect" Whiteness (p.102). "Powerblindness" refers to the "reluctance and avoidance of race, social class, language, gender, sexuality, and other politicized aspects of identity" as these qualities are related to power (p.108). This approach protects Whiteness by overlooking the inequities experienced by marginalized communities in favor of promoting an idea of "sameness." Therefore, Whites do not acknowledge the privilege of power they experience by being White. On the other hand, colorblind difference refers to choosing not to see racial differences, which also reinforces the idea of Whiteness by implying that "race does not matter" (Castagno, 2013, p.118). This is the same sentiment that is echoed in the "all lives matter" response to "Black lives matter." Remaining "blind" to race denies the inequities that exist between White people and BIPOC, but it also denies the traditions, art, language, and other facets of that particular group's culture.

Bringing Multiculturalism to the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom

According to Applebee's book, *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History* (1974), as the study of English as a school subject at both the high school and college levels became a standard part of an American educational experience, the early delegates of what was known as the "Committee of Ten" had to decide which texts would be used for these classes. The committee also has to decide which texts would be taught at the high school level in order to

prepare students for entry tests required by universities. In the years 1886-1900, the ten most frequently taught "classic" texts included four of Shakespeare's plays, as well as texts by Milton and Pope. Similarly, in 1907, a new list of the most frequently taught texts in high school emerged, again with several appearances by the bard himself. Additionally, this list included other "classic" texts such as Eliot's *Silas Marner*, Milton's *Selected Poems*, and Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Applebee, 50).

Thus, developed a literary "canon" of sorts, which reveres certain titles as "worthy" of reading. However, this is problematic, because this list of "greats" is exclusive and, some might argue, outdated. In addition, because these books are written almost solely by White men, they promote only one facet of the human experience. Implicitly, the list promotes the idea that only a White man's ideas and experiences are worthy of being read and regarded as transcendental. Indeed, the literary canon reaffirms the presence of Whiteness in schools.

In 1965, Nancy Larrick found that of 5,000 children's books published between the years of 1960-1962, only one percent of books published focused on a contemporary African American character (as cited in Hughes-Hassell, 2013, p.212). Even though this study is 55 years old, look at a modern school library's bookshelves or a literature textbook, and one would likely find a similar story. This lack of representation in literature keeps school-age children from having a multicultural education. If the majority of literature used in schools is written by White authors, what message does that send non-White students? More importantly, what does that tell White students about their own identity? Larrick remarked that there was "little chance" of children developing cross-cultural empathy when "children are brought up on gentle doses of racism in their books" (as cited in Hughes-Hassell, 2013, p.212).

Other scholars such as Rudine Sims Bishop have also pushed back against the mostly White books taught in schools across the country. Bishop famously referred to books as “mirrors and windows” (Bishop, 1990). According to Bishop, books can be “windows,” which allow the reader to see worlds “real or imagined.” She goes on to say that these “windows” can also become “sliding glass doors” which invite the reader to step into the story. On the other hand, she notes that other books are “mirrors,” and when a reader looks in the mirror, “they can see [their] own lives and experiences as part of the greater human experience” (Bishop, 1990). However, when the reader does not see themselves reflected in a book, “they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part.” Bishop notes that texts with multicultural characters often act as these mirrors for many readers. Although her 1990 study primarily focused on representation in children’s literature, her ideas can be applied to both young adult literature as well as the literary canon. Bishop concludes that when there are plenty of books acting as “mirrors and windows...we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities.”

In a 1991 report for the Center of Learning and Teaching of Literature, a study of the most popular books in the high school English classroom in schools across the United States was published. The report states that “98 percent” of book-length works that were “required reading” for grades 7-12 “were written by white authors” (Applebee & Langer, 1991, p. 9). Additionally, “81 percent” of books were written by men (p. 9). The participants in this study were 488 English department chairs in “public, Catholic, and independent schools” (p.9).

The report also includes another study in which teachers at 650 schools were asked to record the texts that students had been asked to read in class within the previous 5 days. "Across genres,

only 16 percent of works taught were written by women and 7 percent by nonwhite authors" (Applebee & Langer, 1991, p. 10). The authors suggest that because the second survey also included poetry and non-fiction the results were more varied.

The study also examined the contents of popular literary anthologies in use at the time of the report. This analysis showed that some progress had been made in terms of the inclusivity in textbooks. When compared to a study from the 1960s, the report states that the contemporary anthologies were more likely to include works by women and non-White authors. Applebee and Langer concluded that although there is greater representation in English classrooms than in the past, the English curriculum was still "overwhelmingly dominated by white male authors" (1991, p.10). Applebee warns that "as long as these central texts remain unchanged, there will be no 'canonicity' for minority authors or for women" (p. 23). Because of this, female and non-White authors will be "at the margins of the culture that is legitimated by its place in the school" (p.23).

In the 1999, B. Joyce Stallworth surveyed English teachers in Alabama public schools to determine the number of diverse texts that teachers in the state read in their classes. From the survey data, Stallworth compiled a list of the top ten most frequently taught books amongst Alabama secondary English teachers. Canonical texts such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter,* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* were among the titles cited. Furthermore, none of the novels on the list were written by BIPOC and only one--*To Kill a Mockingbird*--was authored by a woman. Stallworth compared her findings to Applebee's 1989 list of the most commonly taught books (which he had compared to an earlier study from the 1960s). The results show that for the greater majority of the 20th century, high school students were reading the same group of novels, although the demographics and cultures

of schools were changing rapidly during that time period. However, Stallworth's results indicated that some teachers were beginning to deviate from the prescribed canon. Three texts by non-White authors, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, were listed fewer than ten times each by the 240 teachers surveyed, but nonetheless, they were listed. Interestingly, these texts are also all by women of color, suggesting that perhaps teachers had begun to stray away from a curriculum of strictly White or male authors (Stallworth, 1999).

In a 2006 follow-up study, Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber again asked teachers in Alabama public secondary schools to share the book-length works they teach in their classrooms. The list of most frequently taught books was, again, dominated by White authors in the 2002-2003 school year. However, the following year, *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Black author Lorraine Hansberry made its way into the top ten most frequently taught texts. The authors mention that other texts such as Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* were nearing the top ten, suggesting that the canon is "evolving" from "a narrow list of classics" to a more contemporary and racially diverse selection (p.484). Another promising finding from this study was that teachers with five years or less of experience were more likely to include multicultural texts. Whether this is because they had also been exposed to more diverse texts in their own high school or college education was not investigated, but perhaps a likely cause.

The follow-up survey also asked respondents to list reasons they did not currently teach multicultural literature. The results indicated three common barriers to including more diverse texts in the classroom: a lack of perceived expertise in multicultural literature, a lack of resources, such as time and money to buy new books, and lastly, fear of censorship (p.484). The

results of the study support the notion that teachers who have the desire to incorporate works not typically included in the canon choose not to do so because "they fear the potential (real or imagined) problems when parents, colleagues, administrators, students, and the community disagree with the content of the literature curriculum" (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, p. 484). Additionally, financial constraints also play a role in the literature a teacher chooses to read in their classroom. One teacher in the study noted that the novels they choose for study are "limited to the class sets in the library" (p. 485). If teachers are able to add new books to the curriculum, this often comes at their own expense. Sometimes, teachers may even ask students to buy their own copies of a book. Lastly, many teachers remarked that they did not know any "non-European" authors, which was their reasoning for upholding the canon. The authors of the study warn that if the authors whose works are read in English classrooms are representative of "only one racial or ethnic group, only one gender, or only one social class" the idea of an inclusive literature curriculum is "superficial" (p. 486).

Other sources also cite censorship as a common reason that teachers may choose to only teach the canon. Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) echo teachers' concerns to "watch what [they] teach" out of fear of the consequences of teaching controversial texts (p.44). However, the authors add that "remaining neutral - or silent - in the face of discrimination always condones the behavior of the oppressor (p. 44). Teachers must decide if their fears of censorship are worth the risk of promoting a hidden curriculum masked in "neutrality."

A more recent study conducted in 2010 by Stotsky provided a national perspective on the book-length works taught most frequently in grades 9-11. Stotsky conducted a survey to understand which texts are commonly taught and analyzed the results to determine the

progression of reading skills employed throughout high school and into college. The survey included over 400 English teachers in the state of Arkansas. The most popular text was Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which appeared 173 times on the list, only once more than Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Stotsky, 2010, p. 60). All of the authors in the top ten were White males, except for Harper Lee, a White woman. The 13th most frequently taught work was *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. The only other text by a non-White author appearing more than 20 times was Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Texts such as Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini appeared further down the list. Additionally, only three texts by female authors appeared more than 20 times: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (Stotsky, 2010, p. 60). Stotsky argues that "little is left of a progressively challenging literature curriculum that is centered on the civic and literary heritage of English-speaking people" because of the increasing prevalence of non-canonical texts (p. 28). In Stotsky's eyes, this is problematic because students do not "develop mature understanding and uses of the English language," and they also do not learn about the "historically significant works and authors" in the English language (p.29). Stotsky attributes these changes in curriculum to the possibility that students and teachers now "exercise their preferences" or teach "culturally relevant" books instead of or in addition to the classics (p. 29). However, Stotsky's focus on teaching books that are historically significant also diminishes the importance of the voices of people whose stories are often left out of history. Stotsky also seems to condemn the use of young adult literature in the classroom because they are "easy to read" (p.9) and "at the middle school level" (p.10).

Conversely, Schieble (2012) points to young adult (YA) literature as a pathway to discussing race critically in the classroom. Schieble argues that "attending more explicitly to whiteness" is "critical" in teaching literature (p. 212). However, she warns that just because a teacher implements more YA texts, which often bring up discussions about topics such as racism, that "does not equal" choosing not to interrogate Whiteness (Schieble, 2012, p. 220). Teachers must create a classroom environment that engages students in "reflective work on their multiple identities" and asks them to look at "privileges and advantages" that are "inherent" in their identities (p.219).

Hughes-Hassell (2013) echoes Schieble's ideas about the power of YA in discussing race in the classroom. The author presents the use of multicultural young adult literature as a "counter-story to the dominant narrative about people of color and indigenous peoples" (p.214). Hughes-Hassell lists four reasons why multicultural YA literature can and should be used as a tool for counter-storytelling. First, multicultural YA gives "voice to teens whose voices have gone unheard" (p.215). Second, multicultural YA disrupts the "single story" narrative for BIPOC students. Third, these books "present the complexity of racial and ethnic identity formation," which is helpful for both BIPOC and White students. Lastly, it is a means for more privileged readers "to consider how the world looks to people who have been traditionally marginalized and oppressed" (Hughes-Hassell, 2013, p. 215). Because the counter-story is "nonconfrontational," multicultural YA can serve as a "vehicle for overcoming the silences and discomfort that prevent open dialogue" (p. 221).

However, it is not enough to simply incorporate multicultural literature or multicultural YA literature into the English classroom. Ketter and Lewis (2001) argue that White teachers

should reflect on how "Whiteness affects their interpretations of multicultural literature and their choices about what literature would be appropriate to teach" (p.175). However, as Boutte (2002) points out, the idea that teachers can "unwittingly contribute to oppression or marginalization of people based on race, class, gender or other differences is not easily digested" (p.150). After all, the teacher's interpretation of the literature (which is based on their own experiences) can affect the way the text is presented in the classroom, and therefore, the way that students may also interpret it.

Literature as a Path to Empathy?

Can reading multicultural literature really teach students to become more empathetic to the lived experiences of others? It seems that many researchers have studied this relationship, but there is a lack of empirical evidence to support it. This section explores research about the idea that reading about another person's experiences and taking on their perspective in that process might make the reader more empathetic, or even sympathetic, toward someone like the character in the real world.

According to Junker and Jacquemin (2017), novels can teach readers how about the experiences of others, including "individuals very different from ourselves" (p. 81). Further, literature has the power to show readers that people who belong to a cultural group to which the reader does not, have "their own desires, identities, and complex life histories" (p. 81). Similarly, Ketter and Buter (2004) found that reading literature "helped students bridge their experiential gaps" with other cultures (p.47). Stallworth argues that the English classroom is a venue for multiculturalism because "reading about experiences from the perspectives of diverse authors

can help all of us better understand the complexities of both differences that can both bind and potentially separate us" (Stallworth, 1999, p.21).

Keen (2006) writes about the idea of narrative empathy in literature. Keen defines "strategic empathy" as a type of empathy in which "authors attempt to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience" (p. 224). She discusses three types of strategic empathy which are particularly relevant to the implementation of multicultural literature. The first is "bounded" strategic empathy which occurs within "in-groups, stemming from experiences of mutuality, and leading to feeling with familiar others" (p. 224). For example, according to this idea, a book written by a White author could inspire greater levels of empathy with a White audience than a book by a non-White author. The second variety of strategic empathy is "ambassadorial…with the aim of cultivating empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end" (p. 224). For example, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* details Douglass's life with the intent of furthering the abolitionist movement. The third type of strategic empathy is "broadcast," which asks every reader "to feel with members of a group by emphasizing our common vulnerabilities and hopes" (p. 224). This form of empathy seeks to create an experience that any reader could relate to despite their cultural backgrounds.

Mar, Oatley, Djikic, and Mullin (2011) present a taxonomy of five emotions of reading fiction, building upon Oatley's original classification of three emotions (p. 822). These five emotions include emotions of sympathy, emotions of empathy, emotions of identification, relived emotions, and remembered emotions. In this taxonomy, sympathy is exhibited when a reader recognizes how a fictional character reacts to events and feels sympathetic for them, an emotion "based on appraisal" (p. 823). Empathy, then, is "having an emotion that is somewhat

like the emotion experienced by the target person (p.824). Readers experience emotions of identification when they imagine themselves in the position of a character (p. 824). Reading can elicit "relived emotions" by causing readers to recall their personal experiences. Scheff (1979) proposed that the emotions one experiences while reading a piece of fiction, which he says are a "reliving of past emotions" allow the readers to "assimilate" or understand, the emotions more fully (as cited in Mar et al., 2011, p. 825). Lastly, remembered emotions are those that may be "derived from evolutionary and cultural kinship with the rest of humanity" (p. 825). The authors propose that readers may experience all of these emotions simultaneously when engaging with a piece of literature.

Some studies do show some change in participants' levels of caring and empathy after reading literature. For example, Adler & Foster (1997) found that in a study of seventh-grade students there was moderate change in levels of caring after reading and discussing. The students read three different books with the theme of the importance of caring for others. The students then responded to essay questions about the books they had read. Students wrote essays before and after completing the reading project and then their responses were compared. The results showed "some change in caring values as a result of reading and discussing selected literature," as students responded with more care to one of the three books (Adler & Foster, 1997). However, the researchers state that despite this, small reading projects could affect readers' if the project is part of "a larger framework" of character education.

Another study's results showed that literature can have transformative effects on individuals' emotions. In the first part of the study by Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman, and Peterson, researchers presented participants with a short story and a control text "lacking the artistic

quality" of literary fiction (as cited in Mar et al., 2011, p.829). Participants who read the short story reported being more "emotionally moved" and showed "significantly greater change in personality than the control group" (p. 829). The participants indicated that the change in personality was "mediated by the emotions evoked by the text" (p. 829).

Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman, and Peterson (2009) hypothesized that participants who were "emotionally avoidant" would show a significant change in emotion after reading literary fiction. Emotionally avoidant individuals were defined as those who "avoid negative emotions because of their sensitivity to emotion content" (Djikic, et al., 2009, p. 15). The researchers had participants read a short story and the control group read a documentary text. As predicted, the emotionally avoidant participants showed a significant self-reported change in emotion after reading literary fiction. However, those who were low avoidant did not show a statistically significant change in emotion after reading the text. Although the results of the study supported the role of literary fiction (in this case, short stories) in having the power to change individuals' emotions, the researchers qualify that it is important to keep in mind that "individuals are more likely to respond to art in idiosyncratic and complex ways" (Djikic, et al., 2009, p. 16).

Furthermore, literature, even literature about characters from diverse backgrounds, may not be enough to cause a measurable change in students' empathy levels. As Ketter and Buter (2004) state that "the idea that racism can be completely eliminated from an experience in class reinforces the idea that exposure to multicultural literature will fix the centuries of systemic racism our nation is built upon" (p.52). Mere exposure to multicultural literature is not enough; students must learn how to critically read all texts and apply that to the ways they "read the world."

Despite the idea that literature can aid readers in becoming more empathetic and caring people in the real world, there does not seem to be a reliable method for measuring this change. Further, many studies have seen no changes at all in readers. Thus, the relationship between reading literature and increased empathy is likely more correlational than causal. Literature does allow the reader to take another's perspective on life, even if just for a few hundred pages. It certainly does not hurt the reader to consider the experiences of a person who may be of a different race, gender identity, religious background, or socioeconomic class than they are.

The Role of the Literature in This Study

Although there is a fair amount of research about the use of multicultural literature in the high school English classroom, none that I was able to find discussed Oklahoma secondary English classrooms. Further, I did not find recent studies of the most frequently read in middle and high schools. Additionally, the topics of multiculturalism and inclusion are timely in light of the current political climate in the country.

The study draws on theoretical frameworks found in the literature in order to shape the methodology. The first is the idea of Whiteness. As discussed in the literature review, the purveyance of Whiteness throughout the American school system promotes a Euro-centric curriculum. This Whiteness exists in many forms, two particular pieces of the puzzle are relevant in this study. The first is, as stated before, the vast majority of teachers in the U.S. are White. Second, in the high school literature classroom, the works of White male authors tend to be more

valued than works by BIPOC. By interrogating the ideas of Whiteness in schools and curriculum, teachers can begin to create a more inclusive classroom.

In addition, the study draws on Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy and Paris's addition of culturally sustaining pedagogy, as well Castagno's ideas of "powerblind sameness and colorblind difference." Ladson-Billings and Paris's ideas are important when considering the student population of a classroom, their cultural experiences, and shaping the curriculum to meet their needs. The "powerblind sameness" that Castagno discusses plays a part when seeking to understand why teachers may choose not to teach multicultural literature. Because White people and therefore White teachers have power in their Whiteness, they might avoid discussing topics such as race, class, and gender.

To create a culturally relevant classroom, teachers must first recognize the presence of Whiteness in their curriculums. From there, they can begin to examine the ways in which the cultures of their students are either affirmed or excluded from that curriculum and how their own cultural identity shapes that. Teachers then have the power to transform the curriculum to better reflect the experiences and interests of the students in the classroom, whose backgrounds all vary. Lastly, teachers must continue to reflect on their practices, as their careers progress. Culture changes with time, and a teacher who does not mold curriculum to meet the needs of a changing student population does not promote a culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand how exposure to multicultural texts varies in Oklahoma secondary schools. Another goal of the study is to understand teachers' attitudes and beliefs about multicultural literature, as well as reasons they might choose not to include multicultural texts in their classrooms. The research question guiding this study is:

To what extent do Oklahoma secondary English teachers include multicultural literature in their curriculum?

This question stems from my own background in Oklahoma public schools, especially in a rural Oklahoma public school. It also comes from my own interests in making the existing literary canon more inclusive and in reading literature that reflects the students in a classroom.

Additionally, two sub-questions guide this study.

1. **For what reasons do teachers choose not to include multicultural literature?**
2. **How do teachers implement these texts in a way that encourages students to think critically about whose story the text is and is not telling?**

The methodology for this study was inspired by Stallworth's studies which took place in Alabama public high schools. After reading her research on Alabama's canon, I became curious about how Oklahoma's might be similar or different. Furthermore, I was curious to see if the book lists that I read about first in Applebee's book and then in Stallworth's research had become more diverse over the past decades.

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach. This approach was chosen because a quantitative approach is required to determine how frequently multicultural texts are taught in Oklahoma schools. However, I wanted to understand the reasons why teachers may or

may not choose to integrate these texts into their curriculum, which calls for a more open-ended, qualitative approach.

First, a mixture of quantitative data and qualitative data was gathered through an online survey. The goals of the survey were to curate a list of the most frequently taught texts in Oklahoma secondary schools, to gauge attitudes toward multicultural literature, and to identify barriers to implementing multicultural texts in the classroom.

There were two groups of participants in this survey. The first group came from a post in the Facebook group entitled "#ELAOK." This group of over 5,000 people functions as a source of community and information for English teachers in Oklahoma. The second group of participants in this survey were selected from a list of teachers employed in Oklahoma public schools during the 2019-2020 school year. This list is public information and can be found on the Oklahoma State Department of Education's website. Within the document, two filters were used to find participants. Participants whose certification was listed as "English Language Arts" were selected. Using this filter produced 768 secondary teacher emails. This number was further filtered after emails bounced back due to broken email addresses, leaving approximately participants. Additionally, two names listed were inaccurately listed as ELA teachers. Participants were contacted using their school emails as listed in this document.

The online survey was created using Qualtrics software and then a link was sent to English teachers via their school email address. The survey included a mixture of nine closed and open-ended questions. The survey also included five demographic questions in order to better understand the participants' teaching experience and backgrounds. The survey asked teachers a series of questions regarding their attitudes and beliefs about multicultural literature. Teachers

also listed the whole-class texts they taught in the 2019-2020 school year. Lastly, teachers identified potential barriers to the use of more multicultural literature in the classroom. (A complete list of survey questions is included in the appendix.)

After survey data was collected, ten participants were selected for the next phase of qualitative research, a semi-structured interview. These participants self-selected by indicating on the survey they would be willing to participate in further research and provided contact information. All participants who said they would be willing to participate in the interview process were contacted, and the ten participants were selected on a first-come, first-served basis. They signed up for a one-hour time slot using an online sign-up sheet. The interviews were conducted via online Zoom meeting because the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated social distancing. The interview was semi-structured. A list of twelve questions was used as the framework for the interviews, but not all questions were used in each interview. (A list of interview questions is included in the appendix.)

Disclaimer/Limitations:

The data collection phase of this study took place during the COVID-19 outbreak, which began in March 2020. Before the public health crisis, an additional element of data was intended to be collected through teacher observations. In these observations, the researcher would have observed the methods that teachers were using to incorporate multicultural texts into their curriculum. However, because of school closures, distance learning, and social distancing policies, these observations were not possible to conduct.

Additionally, the COVID-19 crisis could have also contributed to fewer participants. Data collection occurred after public schools in Oklahoma switched to distance learning. There are many factors that could have kept teachers from participating. For example, some teachers may not have had access to a device or Internet because they were unable to enter their classrooms. Another possible reason that teachers may not have been as responsive is that teachers were overwhelmed with the transition to distance learning. During this time, teachers had to completely transition to teaching online, which involved hours of planning, communicating with colleagues, students, and parents, and potentially learning how to use one or more online learning systems. Lastly, the trauma caused by living through a pandemic could also account for a lack of responses. With many people worried about the health of loved ones who were sick or on the frontlines or those experiencing other hardships resulting from the pandemic, a survey in their inbox may not have been of utmost priority.

Another possible limitation of the study is the labeling system used in the document from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OKSDE). There were two certifications listed in the document, “English Language Arts Elem” and “English Language Arts.” The problem is that some of the “English Language Arts Elem” teachers were likely middle school teachers but might have had an elementary certification. (I noticed this because I was not on the list “English Language Arts,” and I am a middle school teacher.) Interestingly, I also had a few participants email me to state they were not actually an ELA teacher, so there could have been an issue with labeling in the document found on the OKSDE website. Another related issue is that some

English teachers, perhaps those who were emergency or alternatively certified, might not be accurately represented in this list.

In addition, another distinguishing question should have been added to the survey. As I began analyzing data, I realized that unless explicitly stated by the respondent I could not distinguish between AP and non-AP teachers. This became especially important on question 7, which asked teachers to list the whole-class texts taught in the 2019-2020 school year. I found myself wondering if several of my respondents taught AP, which could have impacted the frequency of some responses, since AP teachers work from a list of books that are considered for the AP tests. A few respondents even indicated in their responses that they "have more freedom" because they teach AP English.

Chapter Four: Results

Survey Results

In all, 130 individuals participated in the survey phase of data collection. The survey was sent to a list of 768 teachers in the state of Oklahoma. (Roughly 150 of the emails bounced back as invalid or because of security.) It was also posted in the #ELAOK Facebook group, which has over 5,000 members, which resulted in roughly 20 responses. The majority of responses came from the teachers who received an email. From those who received the survey through an email, the survey had an eighteen percent response rate.

The survey was created using Qualtrics software. The survey contained 15 questions in total. It consisted of five demographic questions, as well as nine content-related questions. These questions were a mixture of open-ended, closed-ended, and Likert-scale questions. After agreeing to participate, teachers were first asked whether their schools required them to adhere to a certain curriculum. Next, they were asked to define multicultural literature. From there, participants shared both the genres of literature taught and the specific whole-class texts that the class read during the 2019-2020 school year. Next, respondents identified perceived barriers to teaching more multicultural texts and reflected on their curriculum and its inclusion or lack of multicultural literature. Teachers were also asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with two statements regarding the literary canon and its purpose. Lastly, participants were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in the next phase of research.

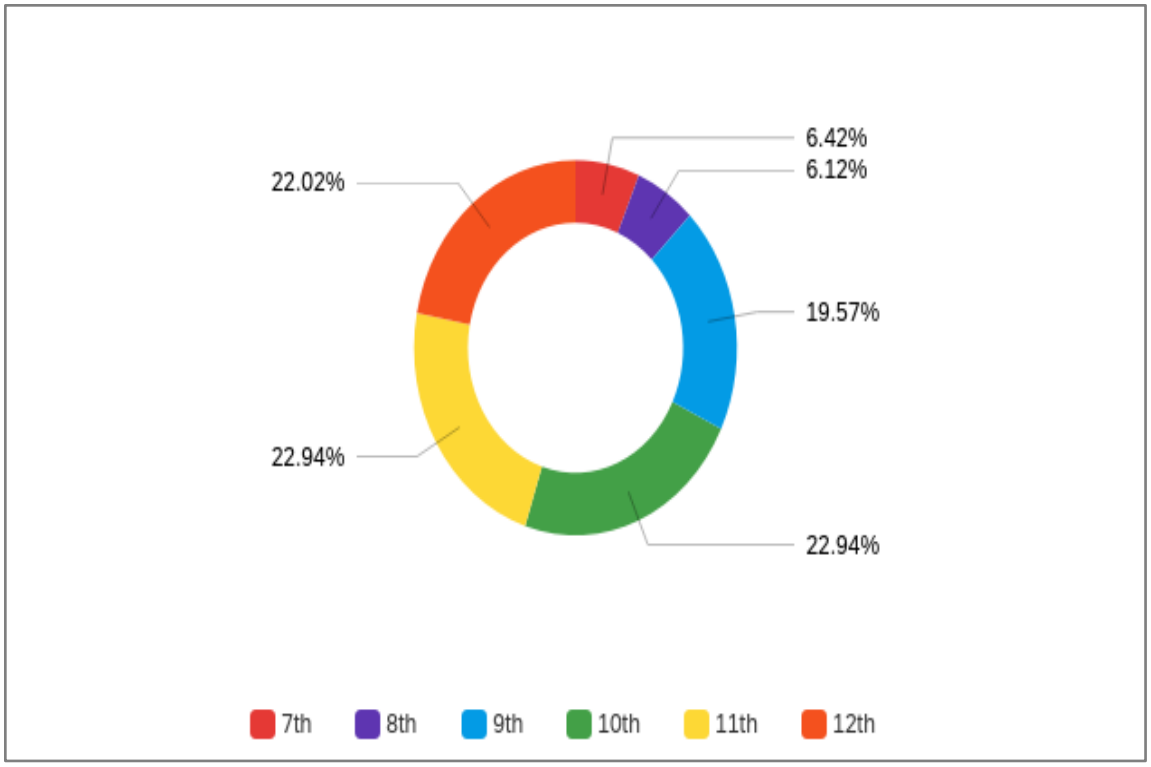
Demographic Questions

Schools:

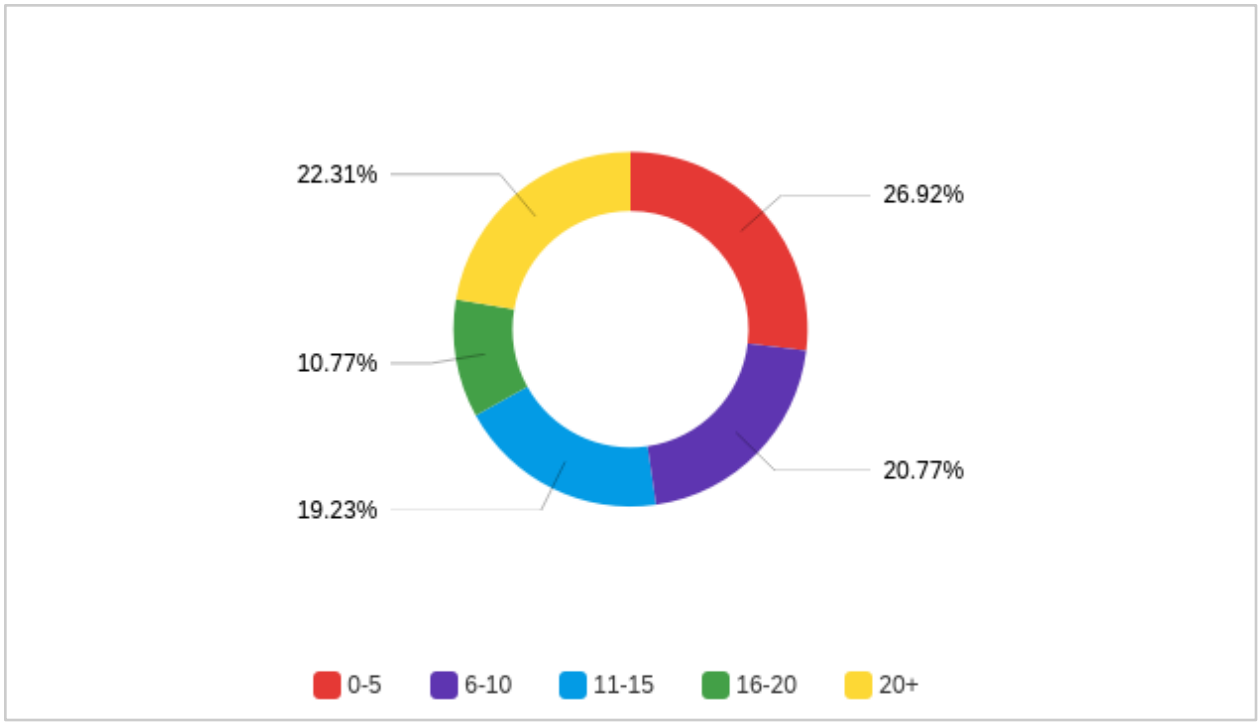
Survey respondents came from 65 school districts across the state of Oklahoma. The majority of those school districts were in a rural setting, but there were also teachers from suburban and metropolitan areas. However, the majority of respondents actually came from suburban schools, since they are larger and often have multiple campuses. About 30 percent of teachers were located in the OKC-metro area. (The list from which I took teachers' emails did not include Oklahoma City Public Schools, Mid-Del Public Schools, or Norman Public Schools.)

Grades taught:

The majority of respondents identified as high school teachers (9-12). In fact, a combined 45.9 percent of respondents taught either tenth or eleventh grades. Another 22 percent of teachers were twelfth-grade teachers, and just under 20 percent of teachers taught ninth grade. (Graph 1) In Oklahoma, the tenth grade ELA curriculum is often a focus on world literature, eleventh grade on American literature, and twelfth grade the focus is on British literature. This is important to consider whenever looking at the number of times certain books appear on the list. In addition, a small portion (approximately 12.5 percent) of the respondents were middle school teachers. Because there is not a prescribed middle school English curriculum, teachers might have more flexibility in the titles that they use in their classrooms. Because of student age, young adult novels might be utilized more at the middle school level as well.



Graph 1: Grade Level Taught by Survey Participants



Graph 2: Teaching Experience (in years) of Survey Participants

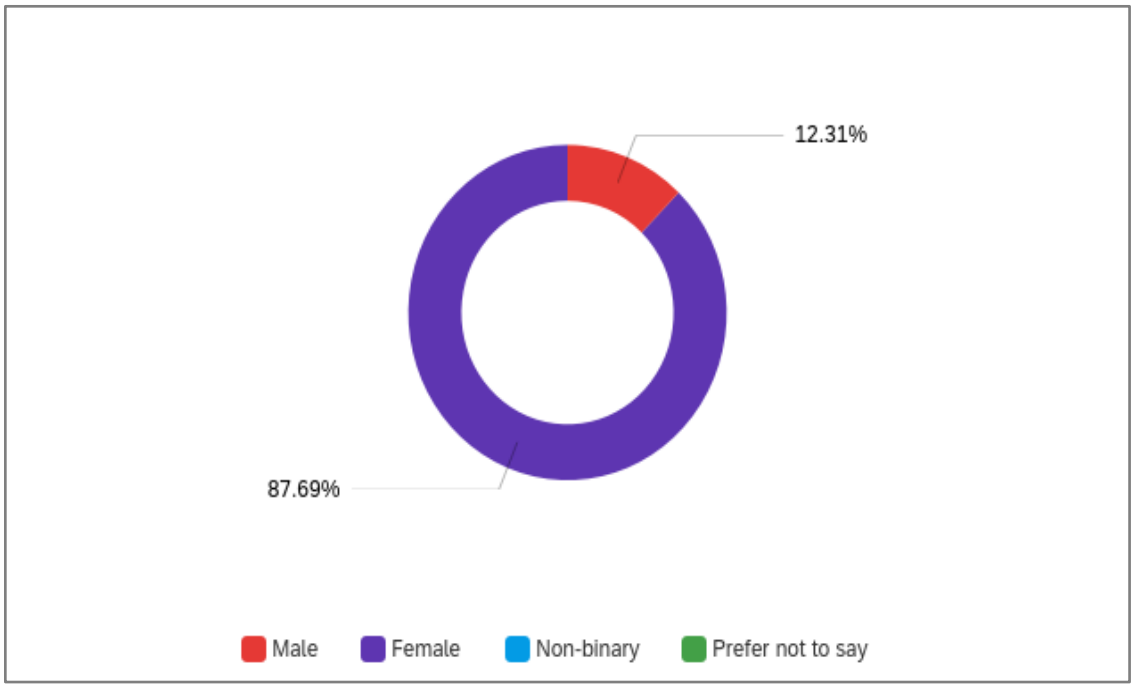
Number of Years Taught

The survey asked respondents to choose how many years they had been teaching in five-year intervals. There were five categories: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 or 20+ years. The amount of experience among respondents was almost evenly divided. (Graph 2)

Early-career teachers with 0-5 years of experience made up nearly 27 percent of respondents. Interestingly, teachers with the most experience--20 or more years--made up over 22 percent of respondents. Similarly, nearly 21 percent of teachers had been teaching for 6-10 years. Teachers with 11-15 years of experience accounted for about 20 percent of respondents' total experience, while teachers with 16-20 years of experience accounted for nearly 11 percent.

Gender:

The majority of respondents were women, which was not a shock, since the majority of teachers in America are women. In this survey, 114 out of 130 respondents identified as female, which is almost 88 percent. Male English teachers made up only 12 percent of respondents. (Graph 3)

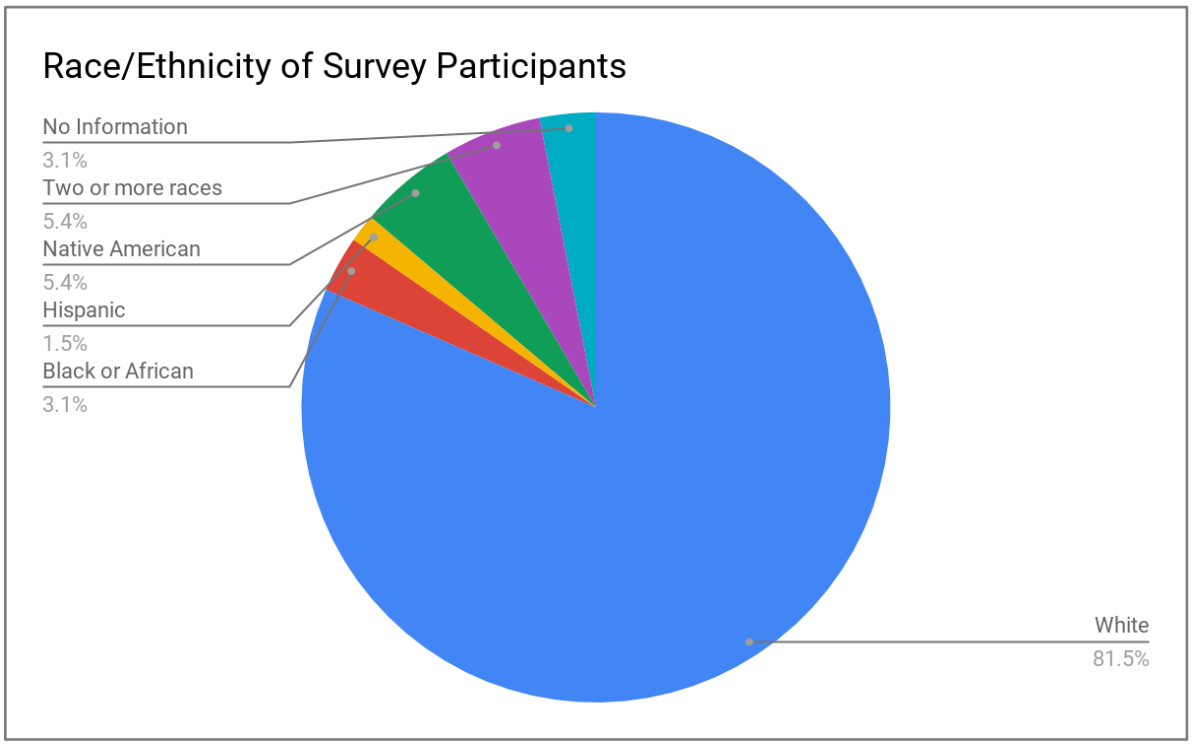


Graph 3: Gender Identification of Survey Participants

Race/Ethnicity:

The majority of respondents, 81.5 percent self-identified as White or Caucasian. (Graph 4) Five percent of participants self-identified as Native American or American Indian. Some of the tribal affiliations mentioned were with the Cherokee Nation and the First Nations. Three percent of respondents identified as Black or African American. Hispanic and Latinx teachers, who also made up just over one percent of survey participants. An additional five percent of

respondents identified with two or more races, and most frequently, this was with an Indigenous tribe. Four respondents did not include any information about their race or ethnicity.



Graph 4: Race/Ethnicity of Survey Participants

Defining Multicultural Literature

Each respondent was asked to define what multicultural literature meant to them. Some teachers kept their definitions simple. For example, one respondent's definition was "literature from multiple cultures." Some definitions were more sophisticated. "Literature that includes perspectives from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, and traditions. It also includes voices of the oppressed - voices that represent women, women of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ individuals," one respondent wrote. Another definition also included "differently-abled" as part of their idea of multiculturalism. Two rather blunt definitions included the sentiment "more than

just old, dead White guys." One respondent added in their definition, "Standard 3 of the OAS specifically tells teachers that this is a priority."

The most common theme throughout the 130 definitions was the word "culture" which was used 101 times. In addition, the words "perspective," "race," "background," were also used in 15-20 percent of definitions.

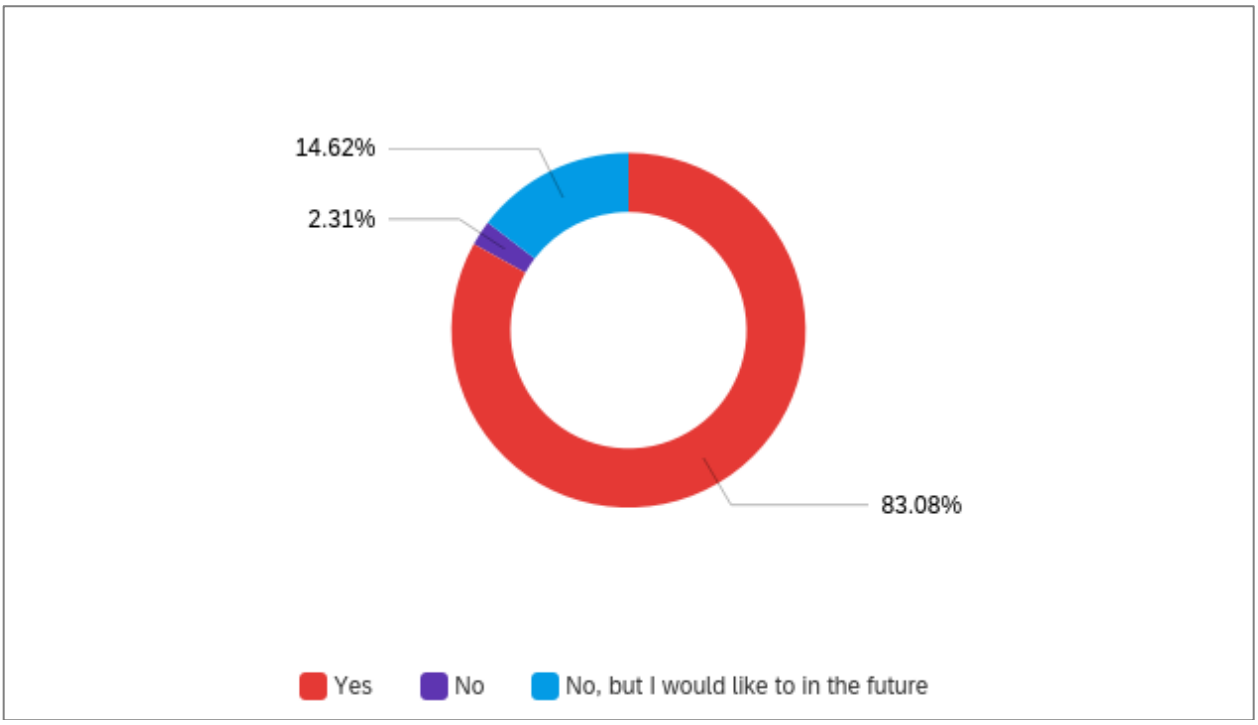
The word "different" was the second most commonly used word. What is implied by these definitions is that "different" means not White, not Christian, not just male. The word "other" was used in 25 percent of definitions. Again, what is implied is that "other" is everything that is not White, Christian, and male. In fact, 18 percent of respondents' definitions included the word "white" usually used in conjunction with the prefix "non." For example, "texts written by non-White authors."

Based on teachers' responses, it seems that most of them would define multicultural literature as "literature from a non-White culture."

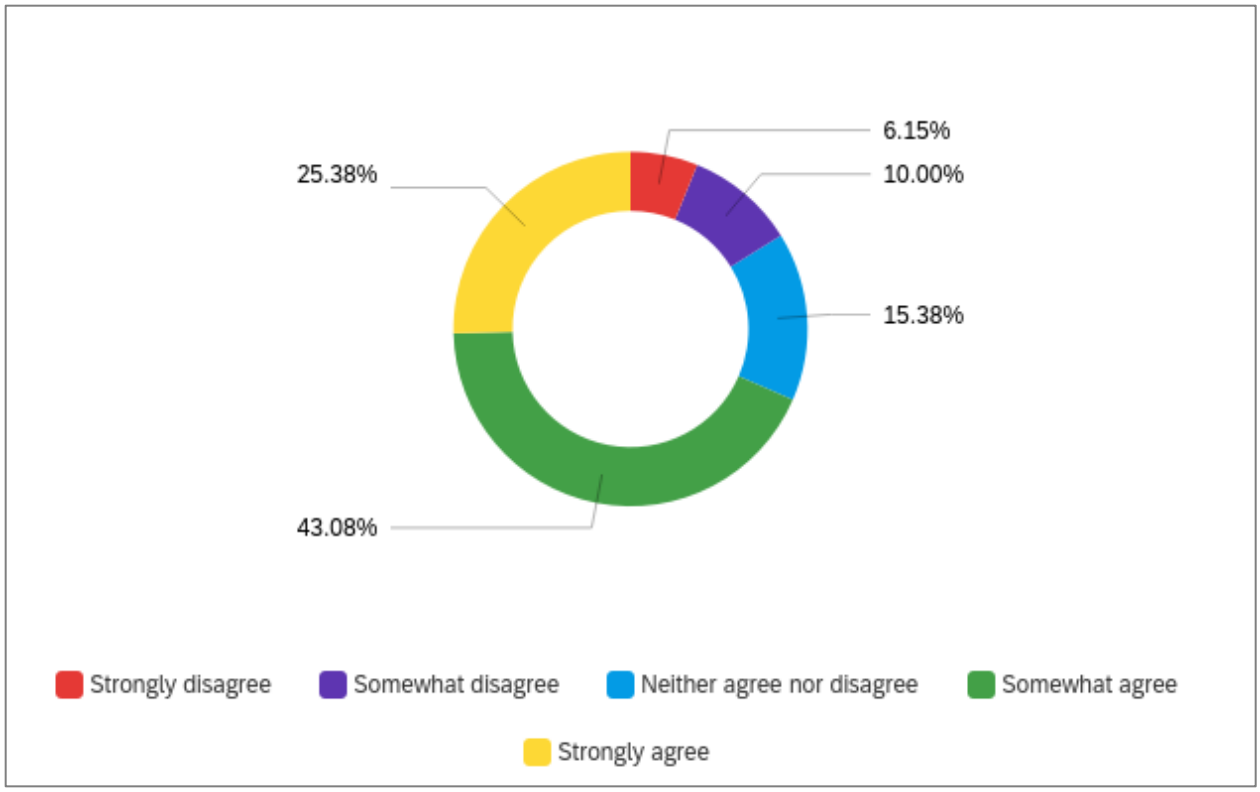
Beliefs About and Attitudes Toward Multicultural Literature

Every survey respondent agreed that it was "important" to include multicultural literature into their English curriculum. Most teachers (83 percent) also self-reported that they include multicultural titles in their classrooms (Graph 5). However, what differed was the level of importance that multicultural literature as well as the literary canon had in each teacher's classroom. Using a Likert scale, participants indicated the degree to which they agreed with the statement "The literary canon is important in preserving our cultural tradition." A large portion, 43 percent, said they "somewhat agree." (This sentiment was echoed in some of the conversations with interview participants as well.) An additional 25 percent indicated that they

"strongly agree" that the canon is important to our cultural condition (Graph 6). In other words, the majority of teachers believe that the literary canon holds at least some importance, especially in a cultural context. On the other hand, 16 percent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Lastly, a portion of teachers (15 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.



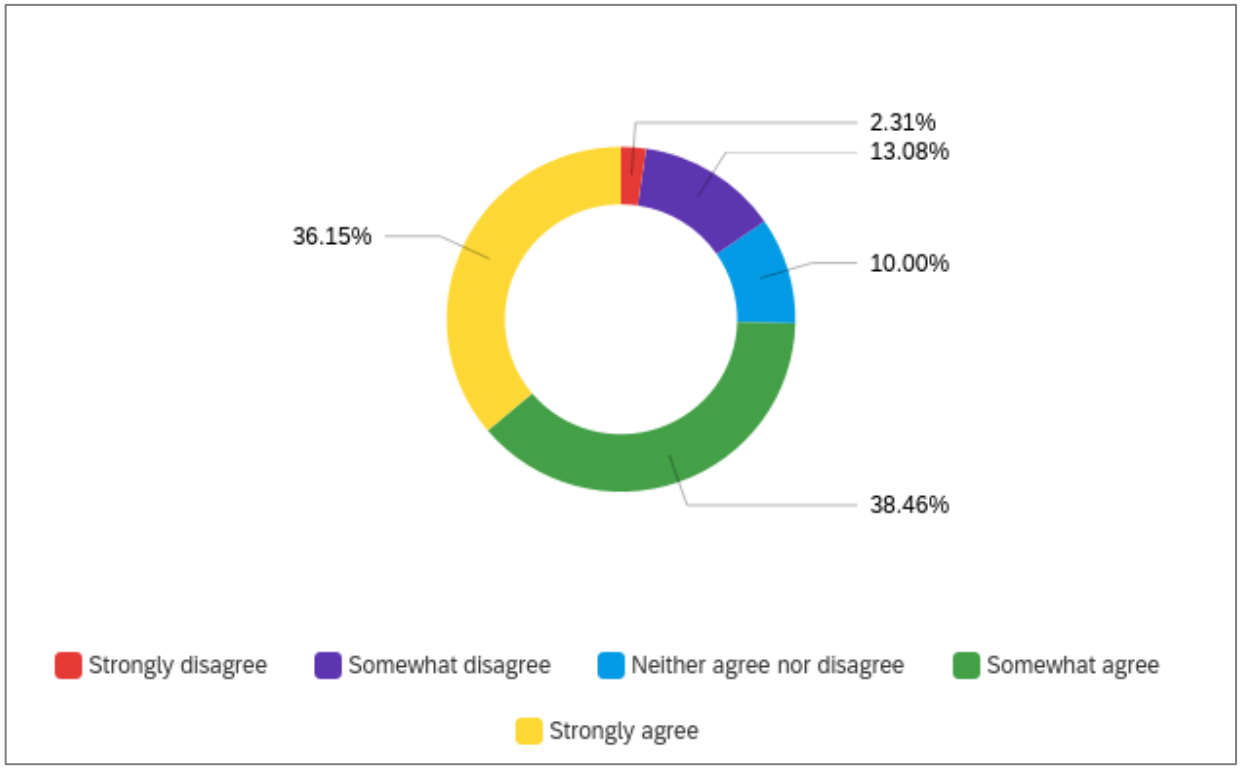
Graph 5: Do you believe that you currently implement multicultural literature in your classroom?



Graph 6: To what degree do you agree with the following statement: "The literary canon is important in preserving our cultural tradition."

Another Likert-scale question asked participants to indicate the degree they agreed with the statement "The works of literature taught in the ELA classroom should reflect the cultures of students." The majority of teachers (nearly 75 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, which is interesting when we consider that many teachers also agreed that it was important to perpetuate the canon in classrooms to preserve "culture." On the other hand, about 15 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. (Graph 7) Again, I find this interesting since every teacher said that they agreed that it was important to teach multicultural literature. Although there are many schools in Oklahoma where the vast majority of students are White, I am not so sure that one would find a school that was wholly White. Therefore, if these teachers

have students who come from different backgrounds, it seems that they would find it important to include literature that reflects their students' identities.



Graph 7: To what degree do you agree with the following statement: "The works of literature taught in the ELA classroom should reflect the cultures of students."

Why Do Teachers Not Teach Multicultural Texts?

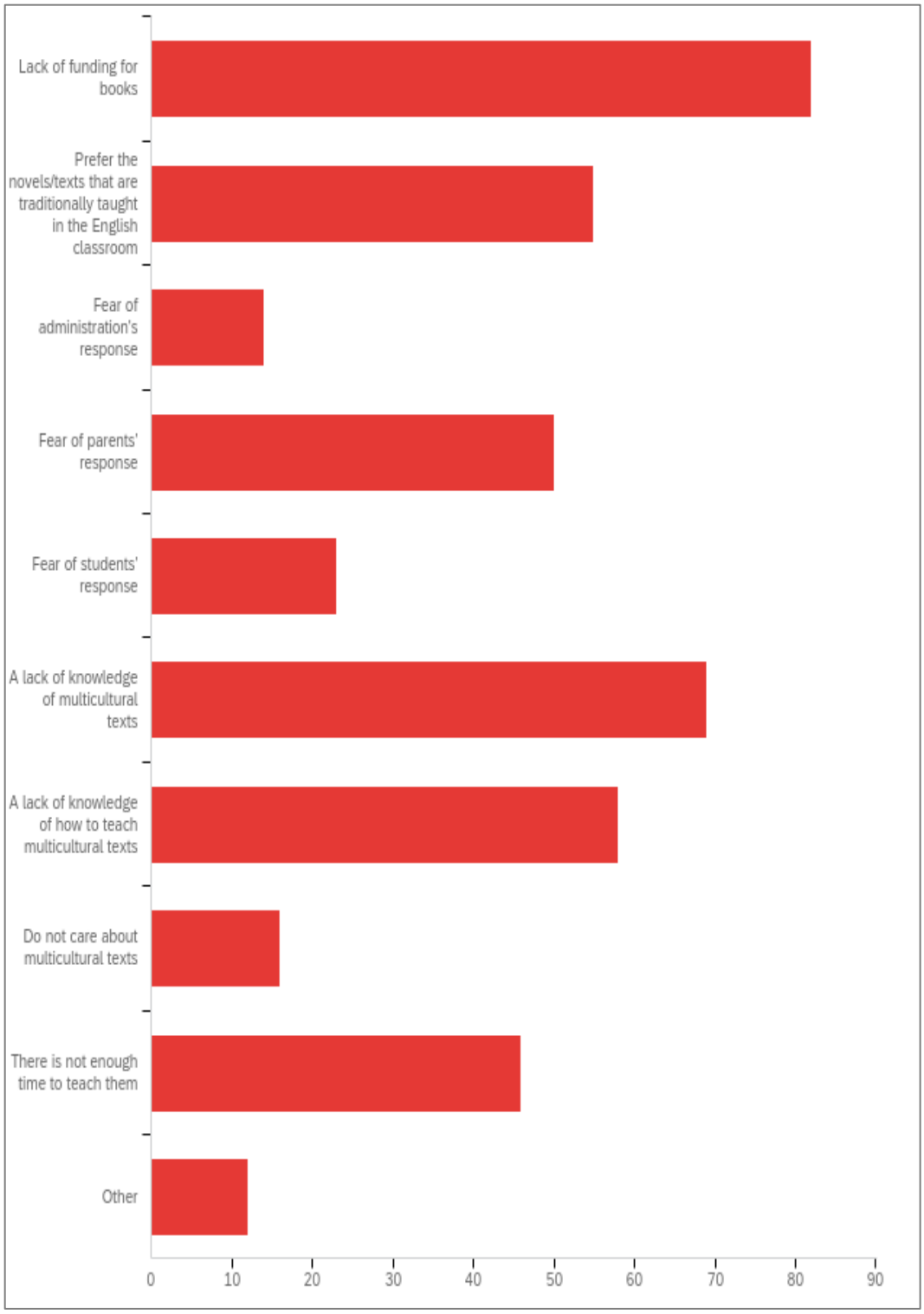
One of the research questions was "What are the reasons teachers may choose to teach or not teach multicultural literature?" In the survey, teachers were asked to choose the reasons why either they or teachers they work with might not teach those texts. They could select as many options as needed, and the answers were not ranked. The choices for this question came from the literature.

As the graph illustrates, 63 percent of respondents thought the most likely reason that teachers do not implement multicultural literature in Oklahoma is that there is a "lack of

funding" for books. Obviously, teachers cannot control the amount of funding their schools receive or what their schools choose to do with the money. Another common barrier, according to 53 percent of respondents, was the idea that there is a lack of knowledge of multicultural texts, as in teachers do not know texts that are by non-White authors. Furthermore, 45 percent agreed that a lack of knowledge about how to teach those texts was also an issue.

Fear of responses from administrators, parents, and students was another idea that was explored. Roughly 38 percent of participants thought a fear of parents could be a barrier to teaching multicultural literature. Nearly 18 percent were afraid of what their students' response might be, while only 10 percent were worried about an administrator's response.

There were two perceived barriers which had interesting results. One that I found interesting were the forty-six people who said there was not enough time to teach multicultural texts. I assumed that these people also had some sort of prescribed curriculum that they must adhere to, which likely did not include multicultural texts. Another idea was that teachers often have to spend a lot of time teaching test prep or reviewing for a test that the time they could use teaching another text was spent otherwise.



Graph 8: Reasons that Teachers May Not Teach Multicultural Texts

The most interesting response was that 42 percent of respondents believed that teachers might not teach multicultural texts because they prefer the novels and texts that are traditionally taught in the English classroom, whereas only 12 percent thought a potential reason was that teachers do not think that multicultural literature is important.

Again, this question asked teachers to select the reasons that either they or teachers they know do not teach multicultural literature. These answers may not necessarily be representative of the respondents, since I asked them to also consider their colleagues' opinions. The opinions of their actual colleagues could have differed.

Curriculum

Respondents were first asked to indicate whether or not their school had a curriculum to which they are expected to adhere. I knew this was important since some teachers might have more autonomy in their classrooms than others and this would likely impact the texts that they teach. Nearly 58 percent of teachers did not have to adhere to a specific way of teaching their classes, while 42 percent had less autonomy.

The next question asked participants to list the whole-class novels that they taught during the 2019-2020 school year. Below is a list of the texts which appeared most frequently on the survey. The list is a mixture of fiction, drama, and poetry.

Most Frequently Taught Texts in Oklahoma Secondary ELA Classrooms (2019-2020)

1. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
2. *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
3. *Night* by Elie Wiesel
4. *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
5. *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
   Lord of the Flies by William Golding
   The Crucible by Arthur Miller
6. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury
   Animal Farm by George Orwell
7. *The Odyssey* by Homer

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* was the most popular book in the state of Oklahoma with over 25 percent of teachers listing it as part of their curriculum this year. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was a close second with 22 percent. It is important to note that these are both written by American authors, and *Gatsby* is considered "the great American novel." Considering that a significant portion of teachers who responded taught eleventh grade where American literature is the focus, this is not very surprising. In addition to these two texts, three others are by American authors: *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. These books were taught by roughly 11.5 to 12 percent of all teachers.

Three texts in the top ten list were written by British authors. Again, consider that 22 percent of teachers teach twelfth grade, where British literature is usually the focus of the curriculum. Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* was taught by 13 percent of participants. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding appeared 16 times on the list (12.3 percent), and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* appeared 15 times on the list (11.5 percent).

One classic text, Homer's *The Odyssey* rounded out the top ten list, being taught in eleven percent of participants' classrooms. Because this text is older, it is part of the public domain and thus, more accessible. Excerpts from it also appear often in literature textbooks.

The outlier here is Elie Wiesel's *Night* which is based on his experience living in the Auschwitz concentration camp. This text appeared 27 times on the list, with nearly 21 percent of teachers currently using this novel in their classrooms. One could argue that this is perhaps the *most* multicultural text on the list as Wiesel is a Jewish man originally from Romania. Many tenth-grade teachers taught this novel as part of the focus on world literature.

Four more texts nearly made the top ten list. George Orwell's dystopian classic *1984* accounted for nine percent of texts listed. Another of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Macbeth*, was taught by 8.4 percent of teachers. Again, these are both British male authors, and *Macbeth* is an especially easy text to find. Something interesting starts to happen once we get a little further down the list. The addition of two texts authored by women, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* is the start of a more diverse list, as many of the texts mentioned after them elevate the voices of many types of people. These two novels were both taught by 7.6 percent of teachers.

Overwhelmingly, the results show that the majority of teachers in Oklahoma are mostly teaching canonical texts. One could argue that there is some diversity in this list since Harper Lee is a woman (albeit a White woman) and Elie Wiesel is Jewish. The argument could also be made that Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* includes a character with a disability, which adds in another identity. However, every other author on the list is a White man.

What follows is a deeper discussion of trends within the texts mentioned. The first trend is the presence of young adult literature. The next trend discussed is the frequency with which female authors appeared on the list. Lastly, the last trend is the presence of BIPOC-authored texts, and how BIPOC-authored texts frequently intersect with other identities.

Presence of Young Adult Literature

Although there were no young adult (YA) fiction books in the top ten list, books from this genre seemed to be gaining popularity in classrooms in Oklahoma. The most popular YA text was *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, a White female Oklahoman. Other popular YA books included Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give,* Jason Reynolds's verse novel, *Long Way Down*, and *Persepolis,* a graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi. What is interesting about the inclusion of these novels in classrooms is that this literature provides readers with intersectionality between multiple identities. For example, *The Outsiders,* although the characters are White, explores what it means to come from a lower socioeconomic status. Both *The Hate U Give* and *Long Way Down* are authored by Black writers, feature Black protagonists, and deal with themes of police brutality in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. *Persepolis* offers a young Iranian woman's perspective on the Islamic Revolution in Iran, using both pictures and text to develop the narrative. These stories are diverse but are united by one common factor, which is that they also focus on these experiences through a teenager's eyes, a perspective that not many "canonical" texts can offer students.

Additionally, more contemporary YA novels were also mentioned multiple times: *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, and *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak to name a few. Again, we see a lot of diversity in this list. While both *The Hunger Games* and *The Giver* focus on primarily White characters, the two dystopian novels are also written by women. *The Book Thief* discusses the Holocaust. *The Poet X* is a verse novel written by an Afro-Dominican woman. Sherman Alexie's novel is one of the few young adult novels that feature an Indigenous perspective.

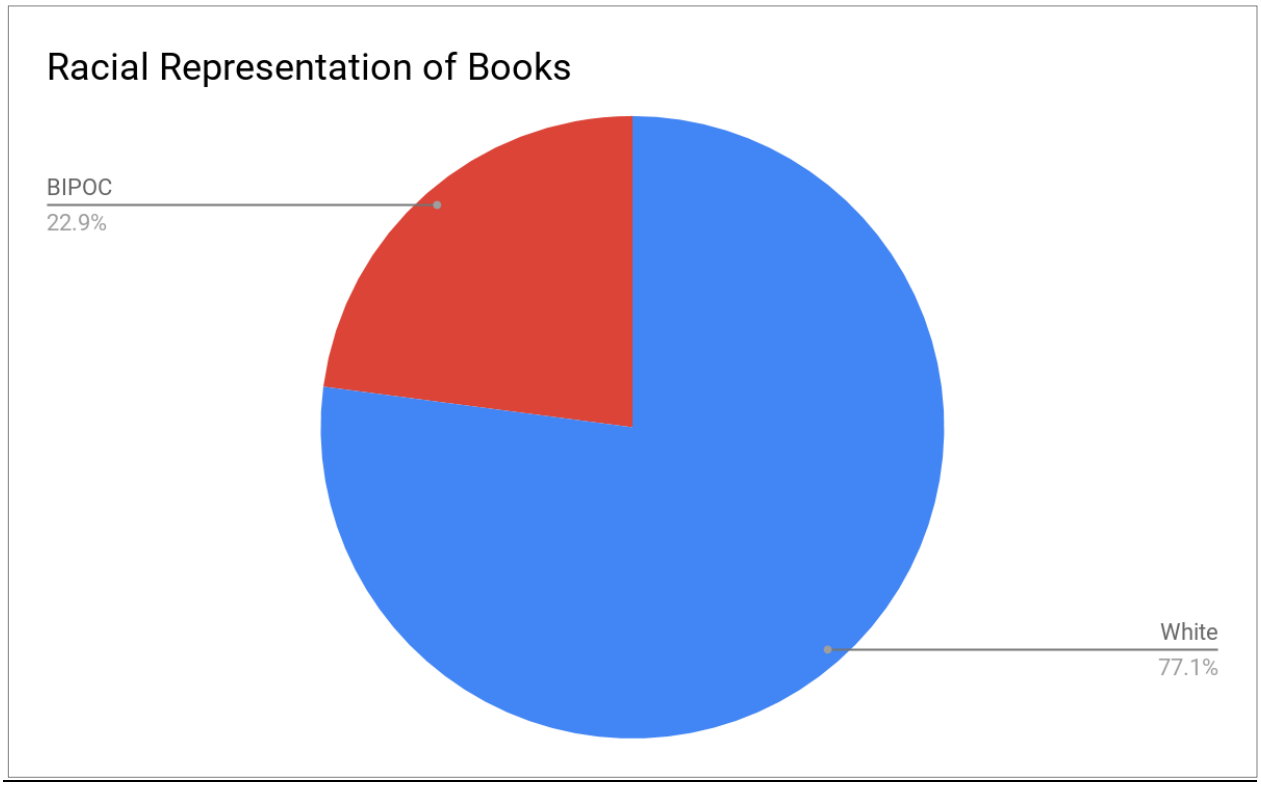
Imagine if the books listed above were the "canon." What if the books we read in English class read books from the perspectives of an Indigenous boy who lives on a reservation in Washington, but also explored what it was like to be a Black teenage girl in the South or a Latinx girl in New York City? What if we read more books with strong female protagonists? What if the books that we read did not just challenge us to think differently about race, class, and gender, but also about poetry? These are all possibilities with the elevation of more YA novel usage in the secondary English classroom.

Books Authored by Women

While the most popular book in the state of Oklahoma, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, was written by a woman, the number of books with a female author mentioned was significantly less than the number of male-authored books. Out of 192 books, only 67 were written by a woman. In other words, only roughly 35 percent of the texts mentioned were from a woman's perspective, and not all of those offer a female protagonist. Another interesting point I found was that only three female authors were mentioned more than once: Toni Morrison, Laurie Halse Anderson, and Amy Tan. Whereas, there were eight male authors who were mentioned more than once. Another significant portion of the books with female authors also were also YA novels (over 42 percent).

As with young adult novels, I noticed that there was more diversity among female authors mentioned than male authors. For example, out of 67 books, 21 were written by women of color. More specifically, there were nine Black female authors, four Latinx female authors, and six Asian female authors. Unfortunately, there were no female Indigenous authors listed.

Books Authored by BIPOC



Graph 9: Racial Representation of Books Reported on Survey

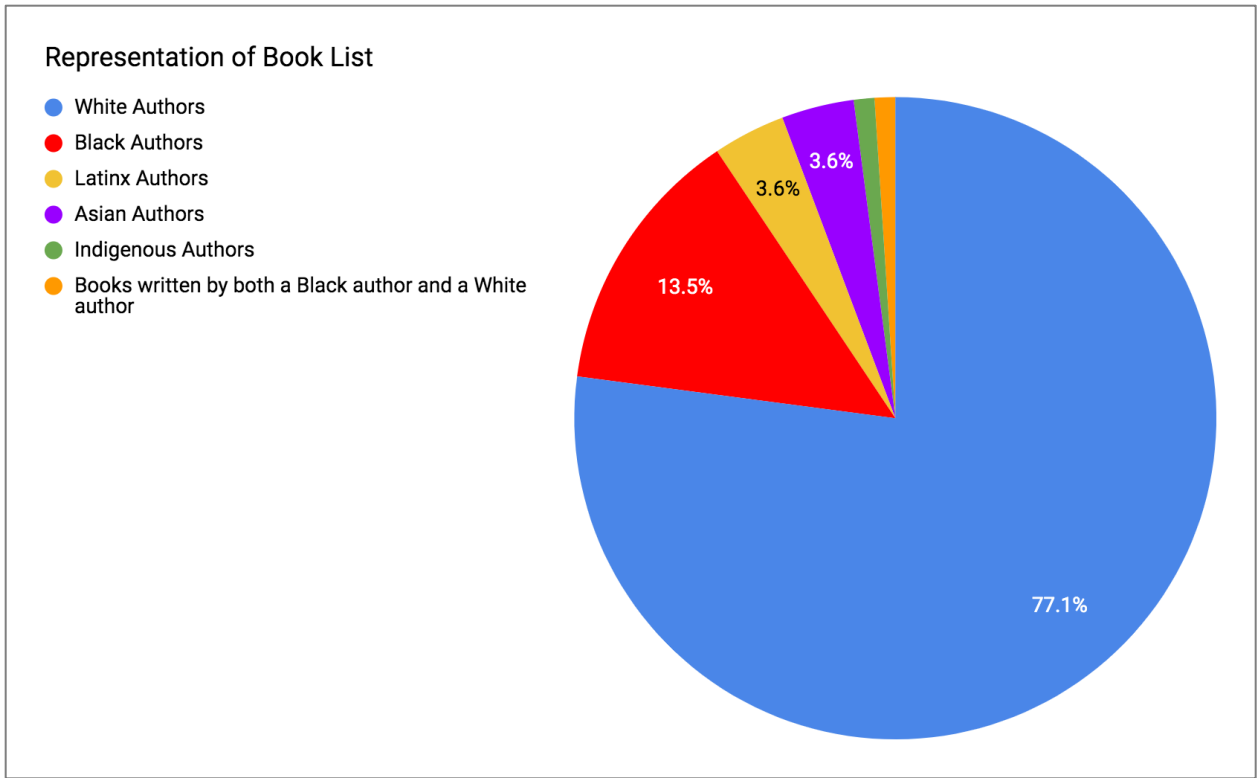
Only 44 books out of 192 books were written by Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) which is approximately 23 percent of all books listed. (Graph 9) An additional five books featured BIPOC protagonists but were written by White authors. (I do not count them in my list of books by BIPOC.) There was a glaring lack of stories from an Indigenous perspective, especially in a state such as Oklahoma with a large Indigenous population. Only two texts featured protagonists who are Indigenous: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie and *Where the Dead Sit Talking* by Brandon Hobson. Again, there were no female Indigenous writers mentioned, which further necessitates the need for more books from Indigenous authors to be included in classrooms. Of the 44 books written by BIPOC, twelve are

young adult novels. Again, YA novels provide a greater rate of intersectionality than many of the canonical texts that line the shelves of our English classrooms.

To further deconstruct the representation of BIPOC in the texts mentioned, I determined the racial identities found in the list. Then, I determined the percentage of authors who belonged to each group represented. (Graph 10). Again, 77 percent of authors who appeared on the list of 192 texts were White. Black authors accounted for 13.5 percent of authors in the text. Nearly 4 percent of books were written by a Latinx author. Books by Asian authors made up roughly 5 percent of the books listed. Texts by Indigenous authors made up about 1.5 percent of all of the authors listed. Lastly, two books co-authored by a Black author and a White author account for an additional 1.5 percent of books that teachers mentioned.

After seeing the visual representation of Oklahoma's English curriculum, the overwhelming presence of Whiteness cannot go unnoticed. Furthermore, the lack of texts by BIPOC is problematic. For example, when looking at Oklahoma's population, one notices that 11 percent of Oklahomans identify as Hispanic or Latino according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Yet, only 7 books mentioned by participants were written by a Latinx author.

In Oklahoma, especially, the lack of texts by Indigenous authors, is an issue that needs to be addressed in schools. Indigenous peoples make up just under ten percent of Oklahoma's population according to U.S. Census Bureau, but their representation in the curriculum is miniscule.



Graph 10: Detailed Racial Representation of Books Reported on Survey

Interview Results

Out of the 130 survey participants, an amazing 63 individuals indicated that they would be willing to participate in follow-up interviews. Unfortunately, due to time constraints it was impossible to interview all 63 teachers (as interesting as I am sure all of their responses would have been.)

As survey participation was dwindling down, I emailed the 63 people offering slots on a sign-up sheet hosted by SignUp Genius. There were 10 slots, as I was expecting 5-6 people to sign up, and I was also trying to provide some flexibility in times and dates. However, all of the slots quickly filled, and I actually had two other participants email me to say that they also wanted to participate. However, one participant later decided not to participate in the interview

process due to scheduling conflicts, and another did not show up to our Zoom meeting and never rescheduled. So, in the end, ten participants were interviewed.

Those ten participants were from a variety of backgrounds. The range of experience in this group was from three years to twenty-three years. All but two teachers taught high school; those two teachers both taught seventh grade. There were participants from western, central, and eastern Oklahoma, including metropolitan, suburban, and rural areas. There were two male participants and eight female participants, which again, is representative of the teaching population as a whole. I was intrigued to discover that many of the participants had backgrounds in other professional fields prior to teaching, such as journalism or serving in the military. Several of them also had experience teaching at the college level prior to their career in secondary education. Another interesting demographic trend that I noticed among participants was that the majority of them also held some form of an advanced degree, whether that was in education or not. In fact, all except two mentioned that they had a master's degree. (This was not a question I asked, it just came up. I cannot say whether the other two did not have advanced degrees, since I did not ask them.) One even had her Ph.D.

I should disclose that I knew three of the ten participants prior to conducting the interviews. One of the participants was a former co-worker at my job as an undergraduate, another was a former classmate, and the last was someone who teaches at the school where I student-taught (but this person was not the teacher I was placed with).

Each interview was semi-structured, but in truth, most were quite conversational. Participants started off telling about themselves, their experience as an educator, where they work, and the grades they teach. Some shared more or less depending on what they felt was necessary to contextualize who they are as a teacher and the communities where they work. In each interview, I asked about their own experiences in a high school English classroom, the novels they currently teach, novels they would like to teach, times when their teaching has received pushback, how their teaching affects their students, and what

Themes

From the ten interviews, six major themes stood out. The first was the role that relationships play in making decisions about what texts are taught and then how conversations around them are structured. Next, "multicultural literature" does not only mean texts written by non-White authors, although that is certainly a large focus amongst teachers. Third, teachers who desire to design their curriculum in a way that amplifies multiple voices should be prepared to spend extra time and money to do so, which is often why so many do not. Next, receiving pushback for teaching "controversial" texts may not be as common as one would presume, although many teachers are scared to take the risk. Then, teachers are afraid to have difficult conversations that multicultural texts often elicit. Lastly, if access to multicultural texts is an issue, teachers can find cost-efficient and creative methods to establish a conversation between the canon and the perspectives of the communities whose voices are not heard in canonical texts.

1. **It is important for teachers to have strong relationships with their students and to "lay the groundwork" with them when incorporating multiple perspectives into the classroom.**

Nearly every teacher interviewed discussed the importance of relationships with students in some form or fashion. For example, one teacher remarked that when teachers "take the time and build those relationships at the beginning" students are more likely to engage "even if it is a little uncomfortable for them, having to talk about race and class." She added that students will not listen to "this type of conversation if they don't feel like their voice is being valued."

Echoing that sentiment, a teacher in a metropolitan-area school recounted a time where she had used an issue-driven commercial in her classroom for rhetorical purposes. The commercial featured the students from Parkland, Florida who are leading a movement for gun reform after a mass shooting at their school occurred in 2018. The teacher said she did this lesson toward the beginning of the year, and she "honestly didn't think any of her students cared about guns." However, one student became upset with the content of the commercial even though the purpose of the lesson was to analyze the rhetoric. The teacher said after they talked about it, they worked it out, and now that they know each other, she sees her mistake. She concluded that she does not shy away from "controversial issues" in her classroom, but she would "stay away from them if I don't know my students very well." She added that after she and her students have formed a relationship and she has "a classroom environment where we know each other and trust each other, [she'll] talk about anything with them."

A teacher in a rural school district stated that whatever he teaches, he makes sure it has "meaning" to his students, something that they can "connect" with. Another teacher shared how she had "normalized" the fact that she and her students have layered identities in her classroom, which she said "helps to make students feel seen and heard and present in the space."

Although the exact words used by each participant varied, all of them discussed knowing who their students are, and using that to make curricular choices. Some of them took that even further, by describing how they take that relationship and use it to challenge their students to think outside of their comfort zones. According to teachers, investing in students seems to be the key to initiating the more difficult conversations that may surround texts where race, gender, or class are central to the storyline.

2. **"Multicultural" does not have to mean "multiracial," though, in many contexts, that *is* what it means.**

For example, one teacher explained that in his class he tries to "stress that multiculturalism can be as much about being exposed to socioeconomic differences and the cultural differences that go along with that as much as it can have to do with race or gender identity." To illustrate his point, he discussed how the students at the school where he now teaches usually do not have the same understanding of the text "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God" as the students he had when he taught in a more rural setting because of those students' religious backgrounds.

Similarly, another teacher stated that "the idea that we cannot be represented by things that do not directly exhibit our experience...is a false representation." A British literature teacher, she discussed how she uses the canonical texts themselves to teach other perspectives. "Even with texts that are fairly cis-heteronormative, super White...there are ways to challenge the status quo and challenge the text as a status quo," she shared. She specifically talked about discussing power dynamics within the texts with her students. While teaching the novel Jane Eyre, "We approached it from the perspective of a group that does not have as much established power within the dominant society," she said. "She [Jane Eyre] was functionally dehumanized in that system, but here she is pushing back," she said. She adds, "I think it has to do with how you approach those narratives and what you choose to center in those stories."

3. **Being a teacher who integrates many perspectives into their curriculum takes a lot of time...and maybe not all teachers are willing to put in the necessary time.**

Fifty-three percent of survey respondents indicated that "a lack of knowledge of multicultural texts" was a barrier for either them or their peers' inclusion of those texts. The majority of interview participants echoed that sentiment in some way.

One teacher agreed with the idea that there is a lack of knowledge among teachers. "If you're not exposed to it, and you've never read it, as a teacher, you have no way of even being able to teach it," she said. She then stated that teachers have to "get creative" with how they add multiple perspectives to their classroom. In her case, she had a fairly canonical curriculum that she had little authority over. So, she chose to add the perspectives of those whose voices were not represented in the text. "I don't think teachers always have the time to think through...and do

the research and plan," she said. "If you don't know about those things or you don't know where to find them, then sometimes you're stuck or sometimes it takes hours. Not all teachers have that time or that willingness or knowledge," she added. Another teacher with 23 years of experience said if she were a new teacher, "it would have been a lot harder for me to go out and find materials on my own."

Other teachers challenged this idea that teachers do not know enough multicultural texts and do not have the time to find them by sharing about their own multicultural reading practices in their personal reading lives. For example, one teacher mentioned a young adult novel that she had recently read which featured an Indigenous protagonist and how she had shared that novel with her students. Another teacher discussed reading books such as *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, *Stamped* by Ibram X. Kendi, and *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo, which informed her understanding of anti-racism. Another teacher mentioned how he spent time finding primary documents such as journal entries to provide perspective on the readings he assigned in class.

These teachers all made the conscious effort to seek that information out on their own. All of this reading, learning, and conducting research was done outside of the classroom. Teachers were not compensated for this work. However, they found it necessary to engage in this work to do their job well and to create the best learning experience possible for their students.

4. **Depending on the location, pushback for teaching multicultural and sometimes "controversial" texts may not be as common as teachers think.**

I was surprised to learn that only five out of the ten people I talked to had experienced any sort of pushback for teaching multicultural texts. For those who had, the pushback came from a mixture of sources, from parents and students to colleagues and administrators. One ninth-grade teacher who described her district as "very suburban" and her curriculum as canonical told a story about wanting to amplify more voices in the curriculum and her colleagues being reluctant to allow change. At her school, the teachers create a pacing guide which outlines the year's curriculum. "The teachers who created that curriculum refused to let me do anything different. They have taught there for 30 some odd years and have refused to change the curriculum for about that long," she stated. She added that any time that she would try to bring up new texts, they would "shut [her] down." This same teacher also added that she was "surprised" that she had not faced pushback from parents or students for her curriculum because of her location. She attributed that to "taking time to...do the groundwork" with her students.

Another teacher from a larger and quite "conservative" school district realized that the only books that are challenged in his district are written by "a person of color or a woman" He mentioned that *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini has been the subject of parents' concerns because of the male rape scene. He followed that comment by pointing out that they "don't ever mention the violence of the scene in the soccer stadium" because they stop reading after the first uncomfortable scene. He also described an incident where a student's mother became upset about how Catholicism was portrayed in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*. He recounted a phone call that he had with the mother where he shared with her that he was also raised in the Catholic Church and understood her concerns but told her "Here is what I'm going to do with the

book." After she listened to his plans for teaching the text, she agreed to let her daughter be part of the discussion, even going so far as to talk to a couple of other students' parents who attended her church and had the same concerns about the book.

One teacher in an OKC-metro school said early in her 23 year career, a student once entered class and said to her, "'My mom wanted me to ask you why we're reading this book about some black guy who didn't really do anything'" in regards to *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass.* She reminded the student of what they had already learned about Douglass, and concluded, "We can't say that Frederick Douglass didn't do anything."

There was only one teacher who said she had received "a lot" of pushback. This teacher taught at a school in southwestern Oklahoma, which also happens to be part of a military community. She first shared that a student's mom had complained to the school counselor about the texts her daughter was reading in her English class. "She told the counselor, 'I don't understand why [she] reads so much Black literature in her classroom. Can't she just read classic American literature?'" The teacher went on to argue that the authors they were reading such as Langston Hughes and Lorraine Hansberry were, in fact, American. She shared another anecdote about a conversation she had with her principal.

> "Our principal said, "Hey, you know I've been hearing your name a lot lately," and I'm thinking, "Oh, it's because I'm graduating with a doctorate or something." He said, "No, you're kind of developing a reputation." I asked, "What do you mean *a reputation*?" He said, "Well, you know, you're kind of coloring outside the lines with what you do and what you say in the classroom. You kind of pick some interesting topics... and not a lot of other teachers will do that." And I said, "Is this because of what we're reading?" And he

> said, “Yeah, a lot of your colleagues are like ‘She’s talking about White privilege in her classroom.’” And I went, “So you’re telling me I’m developing a reputation for being a compassionate and focused and equity driven teacher? I like it!”

However, the same number of teachers reported that they did not really receive pushback from anyone for what they teach. One teacher attributed this to a lack of parental involvement in the school where she teaches. Two teachers in rural schools described having the freedom to teach basically whatever they want. Another teacher in a metropolitan school district described having a lot of freedom in her curricular choices and an administration on her side, which allowed her to teach without a lot of pushback.

One teacher said she was hoping to add a book with an LGBTQ+ character in the future because many of her students identify as LGBTQ+ and she wants them to feel “like they’re represented, too.” However, she already expects pushback on this. She specifically named pushback from her students because of “the attitudes” of some of her past students toward LGBTQ+ students.

5. **Many teachers remain “afraid” to engage in conversations around topics like race, class, and gender.**

Some iteration of this remark was made by nearly every teacher interviewed, and even by some of the teachers about themselves. Many participants seemed to have colleagues who were not as interested in incorporating multicultural texts because they were afraid of the conversations surrounding them, most of the time because they do not “know enough.” For

example, one teacher thought many of her colleagues' mindsets were, "That's not my experience and I don't know a lot about that culture, so what can I bring to the teaching of that book?" Another teacher echoed that thought. "There's a good chunk of teachers that don't feel comfortable with certain conversations in the classroom," she said. "Our poor teachers don't know how to respond, or they feel they're ill-equipped, and they just avoid it. That's an issue."

Another teacher described herself feeling "uncomfortable" at times as a White woman in a class of mostly Black and Hispanic students engaging in conversations surrounding race. I appreciated her honesty, and we engaged in a conversation surrounding those feelings. She shared that sometimes she felt "awkward" teaching students about their culture. On teaching her students about figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Langston Hughes she remarked, "I can tell [them] what I know historically and what I understand as an outsider, but I can't explain what it feels like to be discriminated against in that way."

6. **If a teacher does not have access to multicultural novels or if those novels are not part of the school's curriculum, teachers have some options for integrating multiple perspectives.**

Many teachers mentioned using short stories and poems by BIPOC as a way to amplify voices. These texts can also be used in conjunction with "canonical" texts as a counter-narrative. The British literature teacher said she uses "supplemental texts...from people of color, from people who are not from the States, or not accepted within the United States" to add the perspectives of those whose voices are not being heard in a text. Another teacher mentioned that

for those who find themselves in places where the community is not "particularly tolerant," teachers "have to be clever about using the dead White guy texts as an anchor" for their studies. He then suggested that teachers should "go find all those voices that challenge that view of the world from that time period" in order to have those conversations.

Other educators who participated in the interviews acknowledged their need to integrate more multicultural texts into their classrooms. One educator talked about how she intended to purchase (with her own money) copies of *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan for her ninth-grade class. The same teacher shared that she was able to get several copies of *Killers of the Flower Moon* by David Grann for her class by asking the community for support.

Another teacher mentioned that she was hoping to purchase copies of *Dreamland Burning* by Jennifer Latham, a young adult novel about the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. This teacher lives in the Tulsa-area and knew that students would connect with the book because of their geographic location. She said many students are likely familiar with the areas of Tulsa mentioned in the book. The upcoming school year is also the 100-year anniversary of the event, so she hoped to educate her students about this important and often overlooked event that happened only miles from where they lived. This teacher also realized that she was most likely not going to get the books paid for by her school, so she was planning to apply for grants to get a set for her classroom.

Other Areas of Interest

Most teachers remembered their own high school English reading as "canonical." Some of them mentioned taking multicultural literature classes while they were in college, which inspired them to bring those texts into their classrooms, too. One teacher shared that he came from a small town in Oregon that was almost exclusively White, and he realized that many people may never leave their small towns and "broaden their horizons." Another teacher said she realized the importance of teaching multicultural literature during her first teaching job, when she taught at a school where the majority of students were Black. She said students would ask her questions like, "Why are all of the characters in this book White?" For others, there did not seem to be a clear moment where they realized the importance of integrating multiple perspectives into their curriculum, it was just something that happened. More research should be conducted to determine if exposure to multicultural literature in one's own schooling makes a teacher more likely to implement multicultural literature as part of their own practice.

One teacher in particular talked a lot about using YA books in her curriculum as a means of adding more multicultural texts. "It can get so boring just reading dead White guys all the time," she said. This teacher had also spent over 10 years teaching at international schools in locations such as Lithuania, China, and South Korea. She shared about how she used young adult literature in her classrooms of students from an array of cultural backgrounds. Through that, her students were able to see the representation that YA offers readers. She told a story about her middle school students in South Korea who noticed the "diversity" in LGBTQ-themed books that she kept in her classroom such as "*Love Simon, Leah on the Offbeat, Aristotle and Dante,*

and Will Grayson, Will Grayson." The students remarked that "gay teen lit" as they called it was becoming its own category of writing. The same teacher remembered teaching *Eleanor and Park* by Rainbow Rowell because she had not "read a young adult book that has the experience of an abused teen as a main character, so I thought that was a really unique experience." Her students also enjoyed the book since the character Park is half-Korean. They were able to find similarities and differences between themselves and the character who was growing up in America.

On the contrary, even though one teacher had talked about purchasing *Esperanza Rising,* a young adult novel*,* for the upcoming school year throughout her interview, she said something toward the end of our time together that shocked me. She described a student asking why they did not read books such as *The Hunger Games* series. Her response to the student was, "Honey, a hundred years from now, no one will be talking about that, and they're still going to be talking about *The Scarlet Letter.*" While that may be true, I now wonder if that was the real issue. This teacher had paid for several books out of her pocket, so it is likely that if she wanted to teach a newer book such as *The Hunger Games*, she would be responsible for paying for them. Additionally, some teachers might be reluctant to teach a book that has been made into a movie out of fear that students will not actually read it but will watch the movie instead. Those are both valid reasons. However, she described teaching several books with similar themes, such as *Brave New World, Animal Farm, and Fahrenheit 451*, so it was not that the subject matter was not either appropriate or something that she engaged with. My personal opinion was that she did not think the book was worthy of reading because it was a young adult fiction book. I wish now that I would have asked her to clarify why she thought *The Hunger Games* would not be

considered worth reading in the future, and what makes books like *The Scarlet Letter* or *Animal Farm* worth reading now.

Interview participants also gave advice to new teachers who wanted to incorporate multicultural texts into their classrooms but might not know exactly where to start. new teacher is looking to incorporate more multicultural texts into their curriculum, they should start slow, and have a strategic plan with reasons why the novel in question is the best fit for the identified learning objective. As one teacher pointed out, having a clear plan and communicating it with other teachers that one works with will be more likely to result in greater support at all levels.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

This section contextualizes the importance of this study within current events that are shaping history. I start by discussing the key takeaways from this study. Next, I discuss the steps I am taking in my own teaching practice to implement what I have learned from this research. Then, I discuss future research options and how others may find this work useful. I conclude with a call to action for all Oklahoma teachers to reflect on the literature they are centering in their classrooms.

Key Takeaways

Based on the data I collected, teachers *know* that they should teach multicultural texts. In fact, every single one of them said it was important to include multicultural literature in their curriculum. However, the list of most frequently-taught books showed otherwise. For the most part, teachers are still teaching canonical texts written by White males. Nonetheless, when studying the list of all books mentioned by teachers, some multiculturalism is evident. However, it seems like some teachers do not take action to make their curriculum more inclusive because they do not want to take the time to educate themselves or to look for something new. They may be scared to do so, fearing negative feedback from parents and colleagues. On the other hand, they also may not have the resources to allow them to change their curriculum. According to my participants, being someone who seeks to disrupt the status quo often requires teachers to do their own research, reading, and learning outside of school. In addition, they are also likely to have to purchase their own copies of the texts that their schools do not already own or will not buy, which many teachers (unfortunately and understandably) cannot afford to do.

According to the literature, many teachers who hope to create a curriculum with more multicultural offerings often fear pushback from administrators, colleagues, parents, and even students. From my research, it seems that not as many teachers actually experience that as some might believe. It seemed that teachers who worked in more rural environments were more worried of what their students would think, whereas teachers who worked in more metropolitan areas were more likely to fear parents and administrators. Of course, some teachers did receive that pushback in varying degrees. When this happened, a simple conversation took care of the issue. None of these teachers have ever had their jobs threatened for what they are teaching. It seemed that the worst thing that could happen was that a teacher could develop "a reputation" as one teacher put it.

Another takeaway is the realization that YA novels are some of the most inclusive and multicultural books teachers could offer students. If we are in the business of being culturally responsive in our English classrooms, teaching young adult literature seems like a good way to accomplish that. Most of the YA books on the list were authored by women, and there was also a significant percentage of YA books written by BIPOC. Young adult literature takes being culturally responsive to the next level in that it also appeals to our students on a level that many other canonical texts will not--the protagonists are the same age as them. That means that the characters they are reading about also go to school and do homework, play sports, have their first kiss, get into fights with their parents, and feel like they do not belong. Young adult literature is the intersection of so many cultural identities, it seems that students would be more likely to identify with characters from these texts than ones written hundreds of years ago.

What It Means To Me

As I was finishing the research portion of this study, real-world events reminded me why decentering Whiteness in schools is important. On May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota a Black man named George Floyd was murdered by four Minnesota police officers (Hauser et al., 2020). This came weeks after the deaths of two other Black Americans, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor came to the nation's attention. Taylor was also killed by police officers in her own home (Gross, 2020), while Arbery was gunned down by citizens who suspected him of "suspicious" behavior (Fausset, 2020). In the weeks that followed, over four hundred cities across the United States and around the world erupted in protests, which were ongoing at the time this was written. With the collective outpour of support for the Black Lives Matter movement also came a sort of cultural awakening to the systemic racism that Black Americans in particular face every day in the U.S.

I found myself again reflecting on my own White privilege, my biases, and the degree to which I center Whiteness in my own life. Even more so, I reflected on my practices as a teacher and my curriculum. *Had I made the right choices in my classroom? Though my intentions were good, had I actually done harm? In trying to have a more inclusive classroom, had I unknowingly alienated students in the process? How many times had I upheld the inherent racism in my school system? Did my students feel as though they could call me out?*

In light of the situation and what I have learned throughout my research, I spent a lot of time focused on the texts that I taught during this school year. Below are two graphs that show

the representation found in my school's 7th grade ELA curriculum. When I reflected on the racial representation of the books and short stories we studied in my class, I was suddenly very aware of the voices I had not included, namely those of Asian and Indigenous authors. I was also aware that the one and only text by an Indigenous author, "The Medicine Bag" by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, was only included as a result of our COVID-19 distance learning and did not actually appear on my team's pacing guide for the year. This is troublesome because I live in Oklahoma, a place that is rich in Indigenous history and home to many Indigenous people. I included two short stories by Latinx authors, Sandra Cisneros and Gary Soto. We read a Langston Hughes short story, as well as a couple of his poems. We also read primary documents from the Civil Rights Movement in preparation for our novel study of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham,* which accounted for the larger presence of Black authors. However, the curriculum is still mostly White.

When I looked at the breakdown of male and female authors in the curriculum this year, I was even more shocked. I honestly had not realized that the majority of texts listed on our guide were written by male authors. Furthermore, there are no texts by a Black woman or an Asian woman included on the list, so my team and I have clear paths for improvement.

I believe that it is my responsibility as a teacher to find texts that amplify the voices of people other than White men and women. Even though my team's curriculum does include literature written by BIPOC, I do not believe that it is enough. It is only the beginning. We can certainly find more texts written by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian authors, and it is our duty to do so.

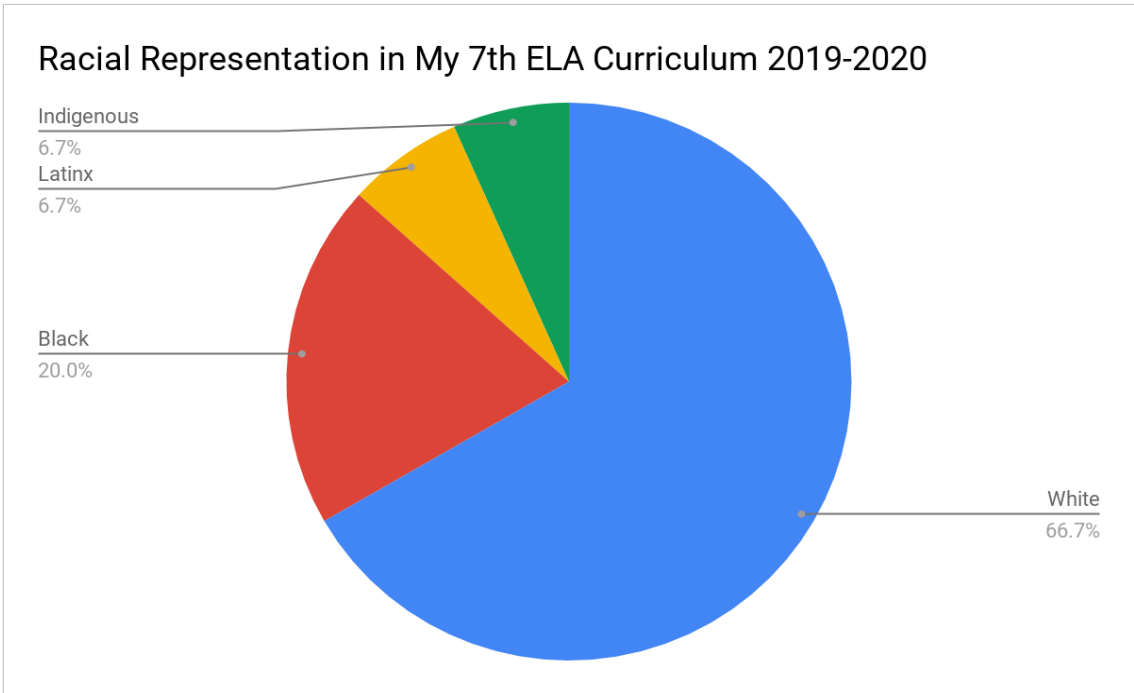


Table 11: Racial Representation in My 7th Grade ELA Curriculum 2019-2020

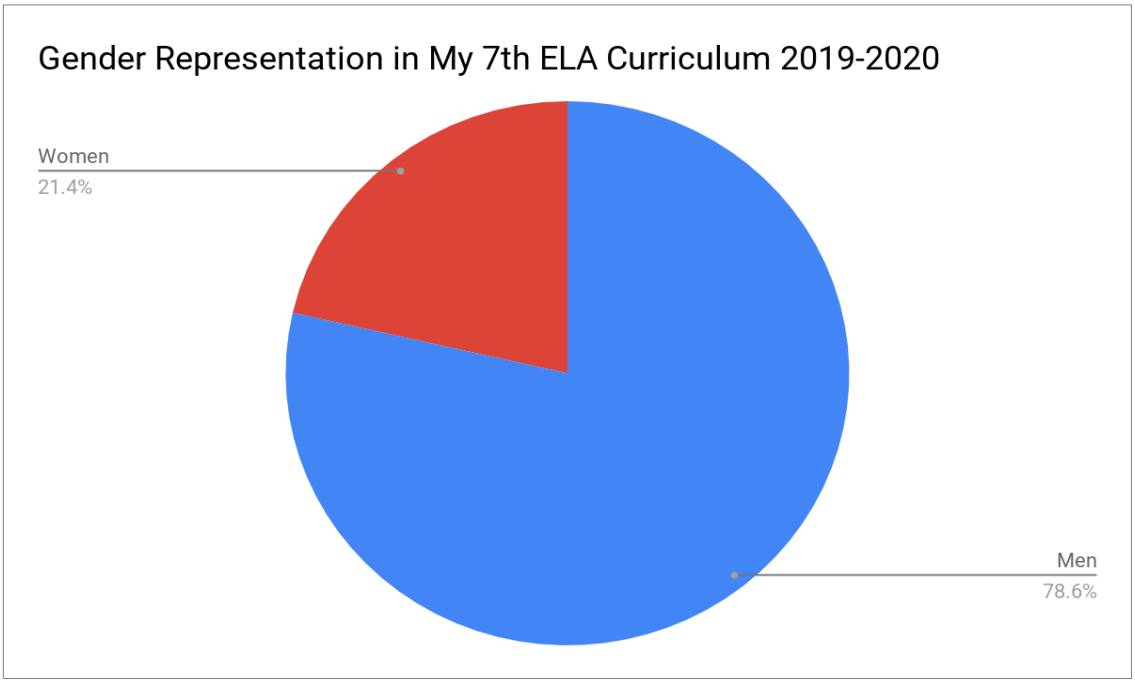


Table 12: Racial Representation in My 7th Grade ELA Curriculum 2019-2020

Admittedly, I know I should have been more intentional about including more voices. I often found myself reading whatever my colleagues who had been teaching for 15-20 years had written on the pacing guide, not suggesting any changes or taking the time to find things I could substitute to teach a particular skill. I take full responsibility for that, and I intend to take these three steps to begin the process of changing this curriculum. The first is that I will share the graphs above with my team and engage in a conversation with them about how we can do better as a team. Second, I will spend time reading and finding some short stories to replace the majority White and male ones that are engaging, grade-appropriate, and can be used to teach and discuss the skills I must teach. Lastly, I will have discussions with administrators and the ELA curriculum coordinator to inquire about how we can get new class sets of books from a BIPOC author. I will heed the advice of my participants and go with a clear plan and my colleagues' support.

Next, I reflected on my personal reading habits, and realized I could seek out more books by Indigenous and Asian authors in particular. I continued to immerse myself in writing by Black authors, both fiction and nonfiction. I read books that helped me become more aware of my own biases and privilege. I also continued to read fiction, especially young adult fiction, by Black authors that I could suggest to my students in the fall.

Lastly, I reflected on the advice that so many of my participants gave in their interviews. Many of them stressed the importance of relationship-building with students, of building trust. I have to know my students. I have to see them. I have to make conscious decisions to adapt and change my curriculum to best meet their needs, not mine. That might mean that I have to work a

little harder and put in extra hours outside of class, but what alternative do I have? Many participants also pointed out that teachers can choose small pieces of literature to make the curriculum more inclusive if buying new novels is not possible. It is understandable that most schools do not have the budgets to buy a class set of 35 of the newest YA novel, especially now as Oklahoma schools are slated to take more budget cuts because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Martinez-Keel, 2020). Adding more poetry, short stories, or nonfiction articles written by non-White authors is a cost-effective and accessible place to start. The journey to a more inclusive curriculum is, in fact, a journey. It is a decision that I have to make every day when I step foot in my classroom. I will do the work. I will engage in the tough conversations. It will not be easy, and I will make mistakes. It will cost me time and potentially even money. But, what will it cost my students if I choose to do nothing?

What Is Next?

This study provides many opportunities for future research. I would personally like to conduct a follow-up study in five to ten years to see what, if anything, has changed in terms of the books taught in Oklahoma classrooms. The survey results showed the emergence of more novels by Black authors, and specifically, Black-authored YA novels. I am curious if this trend will continue in the wake of what the world is experiencing now. It would also be interesting to compare the results found in Oklahoma to other states in this region, or even across the United States.

Another area of research stemming from this study is young adult literature's prevalence or lack thereof in the secondary classroom, especially in high schools. In this research I discovered many intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and ability in young adult novels. As I previously stated, these books have an additional layer of identity for students as they are also written from a teenager's perspective. It seems as though Oklahoma teachers are using this genre more frequently, and I would be interested to investigate its growth.

Additionally, another interesting avenue would be to spend more time in classrooms seeing how the conversations and activities around the novels mentioned in this study play out. Because of the pandemic, I was unable to get that valuable piece of research, which could be useful in determining a framework or procedure for helping White teachers to have these discussions in their classrooms.

A Call to Action

Teachers in Oklahoma say they believe that it is important to include multicultural literature in their classrooms. However, to do that, teachers have to make conscious decisions each and every day. As my research shows, they may have to spend extra time and money to learn about and procure resources for their classrooms. They may have to become more creative in how they teach the canonical texts they already have access to. One thing they will have to do is reflect on the messages that the books in their classroom are sending their students. It will not be easy, and as many teachers shared, it will likely be uncomfortable at times. They might even develop a "reputation." Regardless Oklahoma English teachers have some work to do.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions and Book Lists

Multicultural Literature in Oklahoma Secondary Schools

Start of Block: Survey Description and Consent

You are invited to participate in research about the use of multicultural literature in secondary English classrooms in Oklahoma. If you agree to participate, you will complete this online survey. There are no risks or benefits. There is no compensation for your participation. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be anonymous. After removing all identifiers, we might share your data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you. Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason. Data are collected via an online survey system that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. No assurance can be made as to their use of the data you provide. If you have questions about this research, please contact Catlin Gardner by email at catlin@ou.edu or Crag Hill at crag.a.hill@ou.edu. You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant, or if you don't want to talk to the researcher.
Please print this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

Do you consent to participate in this survey? (By selecting yes, you agree that you are a current English teacher in Oklahoma between the ages of 18 and 70).

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

End of Block: Survey Description and Consent

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 School

_____

Q2 Grades(s) taught (Check all that apply)

- ☐ 7th
- ☐ 8th
- ☐ 9th
- ☐ 10th
- ☐ 11th
- ☐ 12th

Q3 Number of years teaching

- ○ 0-5
- ○ 6-10
- ○ 11-15
- ○ 16-20
- ○ 20+

Q4 Gender

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Prefer not to say

Q5 Race/Ethnicity

_____

Q6 Does your school have a curriculum to which you must adhere? (For example, are there any texts you must teach each year?)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q7 Please list the whole-class novels you have taught or will teach during the 2019-2020 year. (Please specify if these books were used in literature circles rather than whole class instruction.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q8 What other genres of literature do you include in your curriculum? (Poetry, short stories, drama, nonfiction, etc.)

- ☐ Short stories
- ☐ Nonfiction books
- ☐ Poetry
- ☐ Drama
- ☐ Newspaper/magazine articles
- ☐ Graphic Novels
- ☐ Other _____

Q9 Please define “multicultural literature” in your own words.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q16 Do you believe that is important to include multicultural texts in the English curriculum?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q10 Do you believe that you currently implement multicultural literature into your English Language Arts curriculum?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ No, but I would like to in the future

Q12 What are some reasons that you or teachers you know may choose NOT to include multicultural literature in their classrooms? Please choose all that apply.

- ☐ Lack of funding for books
- ☐ Prefer the novels/texts that are traditionally taught in the English classroom

- ☐ Fear of administration's response
- ☐ Fear of parents' response
- ☐ Fear of students' response
- ☐ A lack of knowledge of multicultural texts
- ☐ A lack of knowledge of how to teach multicultural texts
- ☐ Do not care about multicultural texts
- ☐ There is not enough time to teach them
- ☐ Other _____

Q13 To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

"The literary canon is important in preserving our cultural tradition."

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Strongly agree

Q14 To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

"The works of literature taught in the ELA classroom should reflect the cultures of students."

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Strongly agree

Q15 Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview and/or classroom observation to further explore multicultural literature use in the ELA classroom?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q16 If you answered "yes" to the previous question, please include your email address.

Texts Taught in ELA Classrooms in Oklahoma 2019-2020

*Highlighted book titles indicate texts NOT written by a White male author.

33	To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
29	The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
27	Night by Elie Wiesel
17	Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare
16	Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck The Crucible by Arthur Miller Lord of the Flies by William Golding
15	Animal Farm by George Orwell Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
14	The Odyssey by Homer
12	1984 by George Orwell
11	Macbeth by William Shakespeare
10	Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
9	none
8	Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton
7	The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
6	The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte
5	The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas Anthem by Ayn Rand Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood Beowulf Hamlet by William Shakespeare
4	The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennesee Williams

	Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom The Pearl by John Steinbeck The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson
3	Coraline by Neil Gaiman The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo The Giver by Lois Lowry The Awakening by Kate Chopin Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer Othello by William Shakespeare Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie Antigone by Sophocles The Book Thief by Marcus Zusak Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens The Road by Cormac McCarthy In Cold Blood by Truman Capote Bleachers by Jon Grisham
2	A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens Dreamland Burning by Jennifer Latham Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger Killers of the Flower Moon by David Zann Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck Beloved by Toni Morrison Born a Crime by Trevor Noah The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou Hatchet by Gary Paulsen Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut Les Miserables by Victor Hugo Brave New World by Aldous Huxley Oedipus Rex by Sophocles Bless Me Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya All-American Boys by Jason Reynolds and Brandon Kiely The Metamorphosis by Frank Kafka Monster by Walter Dean Myers The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai Grendel by John Gardner A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft by Stephen King Cry, the Beloved Country by Alan Paton

	Educated by Tara Westover The Five People You Meet in Heaven by Mitch Albom
1	The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, The Watsons Go to Birmingham Christopher Paul Curtis A Letter to America by David L. Boren Catch Me if You Can by Frank Abagnale and Stan Redding Catch-22 by Joseph Heller Wonder by RJ Palacio Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway A Separate Peace by John Knowles The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass Camp of the Saints by Jean Raspail The Real Scorpion King by Cameron Banks The Bonesetter's Daughter by Amy Tan Flowers for Algernon by Daniel Keys The 57 Bus by Dashka Slater One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey Daisy Miller by Henry James Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton If Morning Ever Comes by Anne Tyler Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson Making Lemonade by Virginia Euwer Wolff Black Boy by Richard Wright All the Pretty Horses by Cormac McCarthy Al Capone Does My Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko Freak the Mighty by Rodman Phillbrick We the Animals by Justin Torres Where the Dead Sit Talking by Brandon Hobson Looking for Alaska by John Green And Then There Were None by Agatha Christie Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry by Mildred J. Taylor The Shadow Club by Neal Shusterman Life as We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer Nothing But the Truth by Avi The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich My Antonia by Will Cather Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel The Princess Bride by William Goldman Hound of the Baskervilles by Arthur Conan Doyle Walden by Henry David Thoreau The Traveler's Gift by Andy Andrews The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime by Mark Haddon Fat Kid Rules the World by KL Going

	Jurassic Park by Michael Crichton Brandwashed by Martin Lindstrom I Will Always Write Back by Martin Ganda and Caitlin Alifirenka The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien My Survival: A Girl on Schindler's List by Rena Finder, Joshua Greene Walk Two Moons by Sharon Creech Thank You for Arguing by Jay Heinrichs In the Lake of the Woods by Tim O'Brien The Color Purple by Alice Walker Candide by Voltaire The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Malcolm X Everlost by Neal Shusterman Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand I Am the Cheese by Robert Cormier Letter from Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King Jr. Silas Marner by George Eliot No Promises in the Wind by Irene Hunt The Black Pearl by Scott O'Dell The Iliad by Homer The Devil's Arithmetic by Jane Yolen The Yearling by Marjorie Kinnans Rawling Moby Dick by Herman Melville A Night Divided by Jennifer Nielsen The Christmas Jars by Jason F. Wright Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card, Uglies by Scott Westerfeld The Knife of Never Letting Go by Patrick Ness Unwind by Neal Shusterman Breaking Through by Francisco Jiménez Holes by Louis Sachar The Boy Who Carried Bricks by Alton Carter The City of Ember by Jeanne DuPrau Refugee by Alan Gratz A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare Sir Gawain and the Green Knight by Gawain poet Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare Farewell to Manzanar by James D. Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston The Moon is Down by John Steinbeck The Overachievers by Alexandra Robbins The Canterbury Tales by Geoffery Chaucer The Invention of Wings by Sue Monk Kidd The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom The Island of Dr. Moreau by H.G. Wells A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park The Alchemist by Paolo Coehlo Funny in Farsi by Firoozeh Dumas Dear Martin by Nic Stone The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Martin Luther King, Jr. The Juvie Three by Gordan Korman Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story About Brain Science by John Fleishman

	The Pigman by Paul Zindel The Green Mile by Stephen King Reason to Breathe by Rebecca Donovan Black Cotton by Vincent D. Lewis Woods Runner by Gary Paulsen Drums, Girls and Dangerous Pie by Jordan Sonnenblick The Testing by Joelle Charbonneau Divergent by Veronica Roth Wither by Lauren DeStefano Pills and Starships by Lydia Millet Delirium by Lauren Oliver

Books by BIPOC (from most mentioned to least mentioned)

1. Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston
2. The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini
3. A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
4. The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas
5. Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds
6. Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson
7. Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi
8. The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
9. The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo
10. The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie
11. Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe
12. Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
13. Beloved by Toni Morrison
14. Born a Crime by Trevor Noah
15. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
16. Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya
17. All-American Boys by Jason Reynolds and Brandon Kiely*
18. Monster by Walter Dean Myers
19. I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai
20. A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier by Ishmael Beah
21. The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
22. I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez
23. The Watsons Go to Birmingham by Christopher Paul
24. Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison
25. The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass
26. Black Boy by Richard Wright
27. We the Animals by Justin Torres
28. Where the Dead Sit Talking by Brandon Hobson
29. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor
30. Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly
31. Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel
32. I Will Always Write Back by Martin Ganda and Caitlin Alifirenka*
33. The Color Purple by Alice Walker
34. Letter from Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King
35. Breaking Through by Francisco Jiménez
36. The Boy Who Carried Bricks by Alton Carter
37. Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Watsuki Houston
38. Funny in Farsi by Firoozeh Dumas
39. Dear Martin by Nic Stone
40. A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park
41. Black Cotton by Vincent D. Lewis
42. The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Martin Luther King, Jr.
43. The Alchemist by Paolo Coehlo
44. The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Malcolm X

*These books are co-authored by both a Black writer and a White writer

Books by Women (from most mentioned to least mentioned)

1. To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
2. Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston*
3. Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
4. The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton
5. A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry*
6. Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë
7. The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas*
8. Anthem by Ayn Rand
9. Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen
10. The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood
11. The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls
12. Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi*
13. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
14. The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros*
15. The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo*
16. The Giver by Lois Lowry
17. The Awakening by Kate Chopin
18. Dreamland Burning by Jennifer Latham
19. Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte
20. Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson
21. Beloved by Toni Morrison*
22. The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank
23. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou*
24. The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver
25. I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai*
26. Educated by Tara Westover
27. The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan*
28. I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sanchez*
29. Wonder by RJ Palacio*
30. Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison*
31. The Bonesetter's Daughter by Amy Tan*
32. The 57 Bus by Dashka Slater Page
33. If Morning Ever Comes by Anne Tyler
34. Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton
35. Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson
36. Making Lemonade by Virginia Euwer Wolff
37. Al Capone Does My Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko
38. And Then There Were None by Agatha Christie
39. Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry by Mildred J. Taylor*
40. Life as We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer
41. Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly*
42. Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich
43. My Antonia by Willa Cather
44. Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel*
45. My Survival: A Girl on Schindler's List by Rena Finder
46. Walk Two Moons by Sharon Creech
47. The Color Purple by Alice Walker*
48. Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand
49. Silas Marner by George Eliot
50. The Devil's Arithmetic by Jane Yolen
51. The Yearling by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

52. A Night Divided by Jennifer Nielsen
53. Overachievers: The Secret Life of Driven Kids by Alexandra Robbins
54. The Invention of Wings by Sue Monk Kidd
55. The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom
56. A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park*
57. Funny in Farsi by Firoozeh Dumas*
58. Dear Martin by Nic Stone*
59. Reason to Breathe by Rebecca Donovan
60. The Testing by Joelle Charbonneau
61. Divergent by Veronica Roth
62. Wither by Lauren DeStefano
63. Pills and Starships by Lydia Millet
64. Delirium by Lauren Oliver
65. No Promises in the Wind by Irene Hunt
66. City of Ember by Jeanne DuPrau
67. Fat Kid Rules the World by KL Going

*highlighted titles are written by Black, Indigenous, Women of Color

YA Book List
(from most mentioned to least mentioned)

1. The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton
2. The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas*
3. A Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds*
4. Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi*
5. Coraline by Neil Gaiman
6. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
7. The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo*
8. The Giver by Lois Lowry
9. The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie*
10. The Book Thief by Marcus Zusak
11. Dreamland Burning by Jennifer Latham
12. Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson
13. Hatchet by Gary Paul
14. All-American Boys by Jason Reynolds and Brandon Kiely*
15. Monster by Walter Dean Myers*
16. I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sanchez*
17. The Watsons Go to Birmingham by Christopher Paul Curtis*
18. Wonder by RJ Palacio*
19. The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky
20. Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson
21. Making Lemonade by Virginia Euwer Wolff
22. Al Capone Does My Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko
23. Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick
24. We the Animals by Justin Torres*
25. Where the Dead Sit Talking by Brandon Hobson*
26. Looking for Alaska by John Green
27. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred J. Taylor*
28. The Shadow Club by Neal Shusterman
29. Life as We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer
30. Nothing But the Truth by Avi
31. Fat Kid Rules the World by KL Going
32. Walk Two Moons by Sharon Creech
33. I Am the Cheese by Robert Cormier
34. No Promises in the Wind by Irene Hunt
35. The Black Pearl by Scott O'Dell
36. The Devil's Arithmetic by Jane Yolen
37. The Yearling by Marjorie Kinnans Rawling
38. A Night Divided by Jennifer Nielsen
39. Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card
40. Uglies by Scott Westerfeld
41. The Knife of Never Letting Go by Patrick Ness
42. Unwind by Neal Shusterman
43. Breaking Through by Francisco Jiménez
44. Holes by Louis Sachar
45. The Boy Who Carried Bricks by Alton Carter*
46. The City of Ember by Jeanne DuPrau
47. Refugee by Alan Gratz
48. A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park*
49. Funny in Farsi by Faroozeh Dumas*
50. Dear Martin by Nic Stone*

51. The Juvie Three by Gordon Korman
52. Reason to Breathe by Rebecca Donovon
53. Woods Runner by Gary Paul
54. Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie
55. The Testing by Joelle Charbonneau
56. Divergent by Veronica Roth
57. Delirium by Lauren Oliver
58. Wither by Lauren DeStefano
59. Pills and Starships by Lydia Millet
60. Pigman by Paul Zindel
61. Everlost by Neal Shusterman

*Highlighted texts are written by BIPOC

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Transcriptions

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. What, in your opinion, is the point of teaching literature?
2. What types of works do you consider to be part of the canon? How important is the literary canon to you?
3. How do you define "diversity" or "multiculturalism" in literature?
4. What was your secondary English experience like? What types of books did you read? Did this influence your teaching?
5. Did you take any classes on multicultural literature in college? If so, how did that shape your teaching?
6. Tell me about your school and your classroom. What is the school culture like? Demographics?
7. Which whole-class novels do you teach each year? Rationale for each?

    a. Poetry?
    b. Drama?
    c. Short stories?
    d. Graphic Novels?
    e. Nonfiction?

7. Why do you choose/not choose to teach multicultural literature in your classroom? What made you choose these texts for your whole-class instruction?

8. What types of books do you have in your classroom library? How often do you see students reading multicultural literature independently?

9. Have you ever experienced pushback from parents, other teachers, or administration for your choices in your classroom? If so, what was that like? If not, why do you think that is?
How did you respond?

10. Have you ever not taught a book that you wanted to teach? If so, what was it? Why did you make the choice?

11. How do you feel your use/lack of use of multicultural literature affects your students?

12. What advice would you give another teacher who is thinking of implementing more multicultural literature for the first time in their own classroom?

13. What questions do you have for me?

Participant 1

Speaker 1 (00:00):

So I'm at [school name]. I'm one of the weirdest things to walk in that building in a minute. It's a true story. I'm a Latina woman from Trinidad with an East Asian genetic background and I come from an extra national space. And so, you know, it's not necessarily what most of my students have gone through, they don't and we use a lot... Well, okay. So I taught in order, we started with Jane Eyre, then I taught Frankenstein, then we did Gulliver's Travels and I was going to end with Persepolis. I was teaching, I center it around the monolith as a structure. Right. So looking at the hero's journey throughout the year in all of these different texts and the way that I approached it was so with Jane Eyre, a female author during the time when women weren't really accepted as writers. So we did a lot of teaching around primary text, the letters at the time, what people said about women writers, the reviews of the book itself from contemporaneous authors, as well as, critics. And so we looked at what the actual social structure was at the time and the environment in which she was writing. And so we taught Jane Eyre as a feminist hero, right. She was centered her struggles and her concerns, it was her journey. And at the same time, we also talked about class, we talked about certain kinds of empowerment, who could own property, et cetera. We approached it in a way that was... Basically we looked at power and we approached it from the perspective of this is a group that does not have as much established power within the dominant society. This person is doing these things that typically people of her ilk were thought incapable of doing. For some reason, whatever the reasons were, she was functionally dehumanized in that system, but here she is pushing back. Then we went into Jane Eyre and then we actually went into the story, read the book together, et cetera, went through all of that and actually did that work. But for me, what has been really effective is even with texts that are quote, "fairly CIS heteronormative, super white" that sort of stuff...things that are, they're very established, very canonical. There are ways to approach those things either in the texts, looking at power relationships or in approaching them in ways that are inherently. I won't say subversive, but in ways challenge the status quo and the challenge, the text as a status quo.

Speaker 1 (03:03):

Because Gulliver's Travels...so although Jonathan Swift was a white, cis-het man at the time, he was also Irish during a time when there was almost genocidal class violence against the Irish. And so looking at it from that perspective, you can really help folks who experience marginalization and privilege, see how all of those conversations are present in every situation. And it bears examination. So when you look at who is being moved, where when you talk about who has structural power digging into those conversations, makes the texts more interesting because you can pull those experiences from your students in the classroom and you can connect in those texts. And for me, that works really well. And that's how I [in-audible] I mean, I love Jane Eyre and I do love Jonathan Swift. And we did A Modest Proposal in class.

Speaker 1 (03:58):

I also use a lot of supplemental texts that were basically from people of color, from people who are not from the States or not accepted within the United States. We did like a short story, Thursdays or whatnot, where I read a couple of pages of a new book I put on the bookshelf. And one of the things I read them was Rebecca Roanhorse's, new book. And she's Navajo and African-American, she's a current author. She underwent family separation. She was adopted by a black family and then eventually like she can reconnect with her Navajo family. But yeah, she's like a Yale-y Native American rights lawyer who has experienced all of this stuff. She writes for Star Wars. She wrote like one of the new Star Wars novels. And she's a Native American woman. And my students here in Oklahoma, my white male students could not wait to get ahold of her books because we read them in class and we center her narrative as normalized. And I think it has to do with how you center that, how you approach those narratives and what you choose to center in those stories then. I, for me, that worked really well. And, you know, we talked about, we normalized a lot of the plurality in our classrooms, so I speak multiple languages and I spoke to my students in multiple languages in the classroom all the time. It was normal. And I think a lot of that has to do, I think that certainly helps build trust, but it also really helps to make students feel seen and heard and present in the space. It's a space that accepts them for who they are and then so they can bring those plural narratives and those their plural understandings to these texts. And that really helps get cause it's part of what they're expected to dig into.

Speaker 2 (06:03):

Yeah. I like what you said. As the English teacher, you can like those texts, it's the way that you're kind of, I guess, pushing back against them or critiquing them. You can't just say this is the best book of all time and read it exactly as is and be like, wasn't it great because then you'd be ignoring a lot of the,..I think it's what you're saying is like, yeah, you can teach these books, especially in a state like in Oklahoma where you may not have access to, you know, a class set of brand new YA Jason Reynolds books or something. You can still teach them, but you just have to be more creative and more what's the word I'm trying to say?
Speaker 1 (07:30):

You have to kind of interrogate them, to look at the structural pieces. Like for my kiddos...so Mary Shelley, right? So, looking at Frankenstein. On the surface of it, this is a novel about two men and all the women, and the people of color are either silent or nonexistent or for tools. But when you contextualize it, if you give them Mary Shelley's stories first...If you talk what Mary Wollstonecraft and feminism and interrogating female power in an incredibly male world, right. Talking about Shelley, Paula Dory and the Year Without a Summer. Like we, we actually talked about Year without a summer in the context of Frankenstein because that's what happened that year, there's this volcanic explosion. We talked about why geography was so important in the novel. We got the history of Mary Shelley and the weirdness with her sister and all that other stuff. I've got high school seniors. If you can frame something in the space of, As the World Turns, they're going to love the soap opera of it. And Shelley's story connects so deeply with the themes of creation, usurpation, and power, the loss of power, and who gets to have the power of creation. Like why is that even important at that? But those ideas of year without a summer and what it must be like to be, very depressed and in these very dark and troubling times translated directly to pandemic conversation. You know, I'm so grateful we did that because guess what they're experiencing? but once we gave them Mary Shelley, then these themes became not just about what people in this one circumstance experience, but what people in all marginalized spaces can experience.
Speaker 1 (09:26):

And so it's those touchstones, right? And so like the larger experience looks different and having to connect to it is also part of what we do because I tend to use a lot of expressive writing in my assignments, when we're interrogating things like plot and structure and theme. Right. And that really does that's I think where we get to elicit their contribution and their experience and find this universality, I think that's where that gets to be present and celebrating their pluralities that they bring to the classroom, like pulling in your Freire. Like everyone has something...Everyone's got stuff outside that room that they bring in that they're not telling you about. So getting them to think about that and making it a safe place to do that without necessarily being explicit about it, kids are uncomfortable. We still allow them to get those connections and learn those pieces. And like build those understandings of theme, build with the things that we explicitly want from our curriculum while at the same time, making them feel that these texts belong to them because they do. These texts belong to the students. And I think that the idea that we cannot be represented by things that do not directly exhibit our experience or whatever categories of check boxes that we check. I think that that is something that is a false representation. 100% matters. It does, but there are many, many ways to get to representation. And the idea that we're telling these children that, because these people do not look like you, that means that this is not for you. I think that is a falsehood, give them the text. This is how these people have gone through things that you have gone through. This is your experience. This is authentic. This is real. And you get to interrogate this as well. If you think that they're not portraying it in ways that are as universal as we're hoping for, tell me why not. Interrogate that, tell what they could have done better. Tell them how you connect in this way and where you don't connect because all of that matters, and allowing them not, not just allowing them to push back and telling them that their pushback is valid and important. That is, I think it's huge, you know? I mean, they get edited, Steinbeck gets edited...everybody gets edited, true story. They have something real to say about these texts. They can interrogate them, and they can criticize them from the, this is what they're doing well, as well as this [inaudible] But they can interrogate them. I think it's important that they do.
Speaker 2 (12:09):

There is sometimes a notion maybe that, the text that's written by someone from, like you were saying, like from a particular background is meant for a person of that particular background. And while, I mean, that may be true to a degree, like maybe they are trying to help someone who has been through the experiences that they've been through or who looks like them to kind of say like, this is my story and this is how I went through it or something. But I mean, I feel like when I've read stories, you know, especially a lot from like women of color, that's changed the way that I see being a woman and like femininity, and feminism and like the intersectionality of it. And so, I mean, I totally agree with you. It isn't that you're saying like, Oh, you can't read this because you're white or you can't read this because you're black or you are. It's a conversation. And it's meant to kind of help you reflect on who you are and who you, who you are in a greater, world, a system that is kind of existing and how can you learn from it? And

how can you push back? How can you grow, you know, based on what you're learning and how can you make the world a better place? I don't know. That's kind of what I think about when I read things is like, what is this trying to teach me about myself? And like, what is it trying to teach me about the way the world works?
Speaker 1 (13:55):

Yeah. And we've talked about these texts as being the telephone line through time, right? Like it's a conversation that you, as an individual person are having with this author as an individual person. We've done a couple of expressive writing cases where I've had them, you know, pick out themes, pick out situations in the book that they find compelling and then have them rewrite those pieces. Like, how would you do this? What would your characters look like, what would your people be doing here? You know, it can be any character, it can be any setting. I've had some great science fiction versions of... We did Those who Walk away from Omelas
Speaker 2 (14:33):

Oh, I don't know if I've heard, I've read that before.
Speaker 1 (14:35):

It's an Ursula Le Guin short story. It's like four pages really, really good. I's a phenomenal teaching tool. And we did this as a sort of somewhat gentle entry into Jonathan Swift And so we did Omelas, we did A Modest Proposal, and then we jumped into Gulliver, and we talked about all of those pieces, like this is a political situation at the time. This is what this kind of, expressive writing is like it's what figurative writing is like when done at this level. So, you must keep this in mind. These are allegorical stories you're digging into these pieces. And, and if you, if you don't keep your eyes open and really understand what you're reading, you will find yourself agreeing with he's saying until the point where you realize, Oh, wait, where am I? And why am I in this hand basket? Like these are on level kids. They're not, you know, it's not AP or anything like that, but my kids did just fine with these texts. We were having some pretty challenging conversations. We did memes for Jane Eyre. It requires you to understand what's happening in the novel and in the story, right. You have to understand what the central points of contention are and then you have to juxtapose them, right. And create an ironic situation and put that in an image. And that's one thing. So, it's complex. You have to understand a lot about what's happening, but at the same time, it is, it seems fairly straightforward, and it's intellectual work that they're already doing. Right. Because that's how they, this is how they function is, you know, our kids totally function with memes. They did a great job. They did a tremendous job. You know, the meme with Oh gosh...Like one girl is walking this way and there's a couple walking...that one? Literally I had kids do, was it Jane Eyre and.. I'm blanking on his name now. [inaudible] It was perfect. This is a little on the nose, but it's very accurate, you know, and they got it. They absolutely got it. They were there, they captured the exact situation, why Bertha would be upset. We talked about [inaudible]as well, which is Jane Eyre from Bertha's perspective. Even in these stories, there are different perspectives that you can take, and that they're not any less valid than what you're looking at. So that was, that was a lot of fun.
Speaker 2 (18:08):

I guess something that I'm kind of interested in understanding about the people who identify as like these people who are, you know, pushing back or who are making sure that they're centering multicultural texts. I want to understand, like what, what kind of brought you to that point. So, I'm going to ask a couple of questions in that realm. So my first question is what was your own high school experience, like in the classroom, in an English classroom. And did that have any effect on you as an English teacher now?
Speaker 1 (18:44):

Absolutely. So I grew up in the Caribbean, and I was unusual even there. I've been a weirdo my whole life and it was perfectly great. I kind of love it. I've always been a reader and the texts that I got... So, I went to an embassy school where like everybody was from someplace else, explicitly from someplace else and representing them in my home country, who was at my school pretty much. And so I was used to massive amounts of explicit plurality and difference, but that was not necessarily reflected in our library. Our library was British canonical parochial school library, but I grew up with, you know, Tintin comics and Asterix novellas, and Oh gosh like tons of Enid, like tons of Enid Blyton. I got some Stephen King when I was eight years old. I got all sorts of texts, but mostly in the British and American canons. But at the same time, I was existing in a space in Trinidad that was an incredibly plural space. Some of my early reading also included [inaudible] and other people of that nature ER Brathwaite, those kinds of folks. Like I didn't know what a cherry was, I had no idea what that fruit was, never tasted one, never tasted a strawberry until I was 10, 12, something like that, but they're in the book. So all through the books, you know, they're in your primers, they're in stories themselves. They're just like throw away lines that are in there, but it never occurred to me that because I could not resonate with something that in a story that the story did not also belong to me. I was never in a place where that was inherently alienating. And so I was really fortunate there in my early childhood.

Speaker 1 (20:46):

In high school, I got here, and they put me in eighth grade, and so the very next year I went to high school after I got to the states. And I was a little younger than the people in my class. And it was my first school where I didn't get to wear a uniform. You know, I'd worn school uniforms, my whole life. And I did not know how to pick out my own clothes. It was awkward. But in English class...I had received [inaudible] from my mom. She taught in England and she was an economist. She lectured at Oxford and Sorbonne, economics. She was hardcore, spoke eight languages. 100% makes me feel like a slacker. Both my parents were economists, in fact. It was pretty funny. My dad went into oil field stuff, and my mom wanted to academics and that was our dining table. So, it was interesting, I felt different from the things I was consuming and in English, in English class, I always read really, really quickly. And I loved talking about texts. I never felt that I was not permitted to ask questions and interrogate texts I was given. It was just my assumption. Cause that's what I was taught to do throughout my childhood. There were no sacred cows. Everything could be interrogated. Everything was not just open to interpretation, but it was also adaptable. It never occurred to me alienated. And so the idea that sometimes our kids are alienated from these texts because for some reason they don't understand them, they don't know what's happening, they don't know what the human stories are, that's always been a deeply fixable problem. You know, everybody has human relationships. They're messy. And the idea that these, these people are tidy and these are not messy narratives, I think that is a really great point to kind of bite down on, you know, it gives you some real traction because kids understand messy relationships, they understand the imbalance of power, right. They know how to code switch. And you know, there's like the idea of activating prior knowledge, right? Like that's where it all starts. You have to tie into what they know. Once you find something that they know and understand, then they can jump off from there. And at that point, it's just digging into it and talking about it, and, you know, puzzling through the pieces. So, my background has never been one where I was alienated from the texts that did not directly resonate with me. There's not a whole lot of literature out there that goes directly represent me. The closest I get honestly, is VS Naipul, and Naipul is male. He's from Trinidad, he's from where I'm from. He wrote about, he wrote about my babysitter in one of his novels. So yeah, I have that kind of direct representation, but at the same time, that experience does not encapsulate anything of my life except for the setting and some of the characters, but he doesn't write sympathetically about them.

Speaker 1 (24:31):

Yeah, it never occurred to me that disagreeing with something or not seeing direct relationships...was something to other, you know. I'm not sure if it was because I was inherently othered in the space, just because I was such a weirdo or that it just never occurred to me to be othered. But I like to encourage my kids to do that too. You know, like this is, this is absolutely for you. These are for you. Do not let anybody tell you this doesn't belong to you, and This isn't your story. This is your story. Now, if you need to, in your head, these people look different, they sound different. Then, you know, guess what? This has been done throughout history. Romeo and Juliet is West Side Story. We changed the narratives because the stories remain the same because we are human. So, these are all human relationships and experiences. The settings may differ and what people look like may be different than their vernacular may differ, but that doesn't make them any less authentic and effective. It doesn't make the themes any less real, all of that gets to be yours. And so like this idea that I can't give those to my children, children, and then get to interpret them and interrogate them, you know, that never occurred to me.

Speaker 2 (25:58):

I like that you're just like, well, this is how it is and we're just going to peel it apart, and you're teaching them in the, in the process to do the same thing. Like you can do this with anything you ever read or any kind of media you ever consume, you can tear it apart, layer by layer, and you can examine these different structures that we've learned about within them.

Speaker 1 (26:32):

I talk about with my kids, with every text that we do, whether it's a supplemental text, whether it is a larger work an anchor text. Who is talking, what do they look like? What's the background? Who isn't talking, who gets to be a person? who doesn't get to be a person? Who aren't you seeing? Do you see people who have disabilities? Do you have people who are people of color? What roles do the women play? What roles to the children play? Who are these people? Cause you know, these people are all present, right. You know, they're all there because they're always there, but who actually gets to be a person and a character, in the book and who isn't on the page. We talk about that with every single one of the texts. That's one of our orienting things that we do. And it's really interesting because they know. They don't know that they know, but they know. And when they start thinking about it, that really helps them interrogate these things and not just advocate for their own spaces, but also advocate for their colleagues. It brings people together in the room and helps them interrogate these things. Because it's everyone's responsibility to ask those questions, not just if you belong to a particular group, if you don't belong to a particular group. Your job is

to make sure you know who's there and who is not, who was being erased. That's one of the things I really enjoy doing explicitly with them.
Speaker 2 (30:07):

I just think it's really cool that you're giving your students the tools to be able to do that at the time and where they're at. I think that whenever you're in that space, especially when you're like a senior in high school and you're kind of starting to really own who you are as a person, and you're about to break away from your family and you're going to go start your own life, I think those tools are especially important in kind of developing your outlook on the world and who you are as a person.
Speaker 2 (30:56):

So one thing, other things I do is with my students is we talk about cultural texts and we talk about cultural texts in terms of there's the books that you read in class. Right? And so, I ask them: What is a cultural text. If I said this, what would it be? The other thing I like to do is teach them that it's okay to make mistakes in the room. We do a lot of that in fact. We can get authentic answers when I need them, when I ask them to take risks, we know that that's a safe activity to do in this space and it's going to be okay. We talk about cultural texts in terms of, it's not just the actual thing on a page that you're reading right? Reading is wonderful because you get to do, you know, you get to school, all that in your head at your own pace and it's, it's dense and it's rich and it's wonderful. But also, you know, the Marvel movies are cultural texts, right? Halloween, costumes are cultural texts. All of those things. Video games. Oh my God, we had such incredible thematic work with video games where they wanted to dig into theme and dig into the story and digging the character of instruction and setting and all of those pieces. And they wanted to interrogate gaming. And I thought that was incredible opportunity to legitimize what they were doing. They can tell me how all of these things happen and how they understand them. But it also validates their culture, gives them a place in the classroom that is legitimate and makes them feel heard from wherever they are. And gaming is a thing that all of our kids pretty much are doing in some form or other, because they've got, you know, they've got a phone, they're going to play a game. They going to watch YouTube videos. They're going to do whatever it is TikTok. But yeah, this idea that their texts have legitimacy and that you need to hear them in the space, whatever it is that they're into belongs in that classroom because they, they have real estate there, they belong there. What their narratives are is, are legitimate and they have space and they get they're complex. They're not any less worthy of scrutiny than the texts that we're going, that, that we're looking at, you know, but these are, these are learning spaces and I can teach them how to have those conversations with their texts, with these texts. Then we can use those tools once we apply them here and then apply them to other things. It makes them less afraid, that they are not going to be taken seriously or they're not going to be respected. And I think it really does help build trust too, that what they are pursuing intellectually is worthy of scrutiny. I hear their stuff, they're more willing to hear my stuff. It turns out that yeah, reciprocity is real.
Speaker 2 (34:57):

I think I have like maybe two more quick questions and then I'll give a little bit of time at the end. Let's see. So I think the one I'm going to ask next have you ever experienced any kind of like negative pushback from either students or parents, colleagues, administrators for either the way that you're teaching something or a text that you have taught? And if you have, how did you deal with that?
Speaker 1 (35:48):

Yeah. I've been really fortunate. My administrators are fabulous, no worries there. And I went to work at [school] because my supervisor was [name]. And she's just, she's awesome. I love her and I'm there because I trust her. We're all on the same page there. I have gotten pushback from a couple of students when I was not connecting effectively with them in ways that I wasn't speaking their language. And so the way that I dealt with it was I sat my butt down and listened, you know, I'm like, okay, so I'm coming from here. How would you approach this? How, what will you talk about when we talk about something like this? And so if they're talking about cars, if they're talking about, you know, what's happening back in, like one of my kids is has family in Puerto Rico. We were talking about some of the difficulties that his family was going through, and he's like, well, this is how I'd talk about it. I'm like, "Oh, you know what? There's a, there are a couple of kids in our class who have come here from Louisiana because of Katrina." And he was like, really? And I'm like, "yeah, I can't really tell you who it is, but you know, that's the thing And the way that they did this was kind of through that. But listen for it, see if he could figure that out, you know?" Listening to why they felt alienated really, really helped. And I try, I mean, it's my first year of teaching seniors, true story. I'm used to junior high kids. And so, I have to approach it with humility. I have to recognize that these are adults in my classroom. I am in a room with 130 other grownups, you know, they're like little baby grownups, but they have legitimate things to say, and I'm listening to them. Not listening to them would be to abandon one of the most powerful resources I have, because they know each other better than I know them. They know that

environment better than I do. I'm not teaching them anything about the space they live in that they don't already know. What I'm doing is giving them more tools to express that and interrogate it and giving them what they needed to navigate it effectively. Listening to what they have to say because they have what they have to say is important and they will tell you how to teach them. They're not trying to not make connections. They're not trying to stay outside these facts. What I think it's important for us to do is to make it possible for them to connect with whatever text it is. I mean, if, if someone is going to be not, not feel represented by a text, in a room, you know, someone's going to feel that way. So whatever texts you choose. But if you're talking about the universality of human experience, which ultimately is what we are talking about, then you still have to build those bridges.

Speaker 2 (41:39):

Okay. I guess my last big question that I have for you is what advice would you give to someone who is either new to teaching, or maybe they've been a teacher for a long time, but they're rethinking their practices and they want to kind of pivot the way that they're teaching to be more student centered and also more inclusive in their classroom. What kind of advice would you give them?

Speaker 1 (42:31):

What I did with my kids was, again, most of my students were white, middle or lower middle class. Most of my students had jobs. And so, for us, the invisible power disparity was oddly not color, it was class. So, what I did and because I mean I'm Brown like I wear my identity in many ways on the outside of my body, not all of it, but certain components of it. I normalized multiple languages. And when I, when I brought plurality intentionally into the classroom, I did not message it's intentionality. So, we had music by, we did music and, and free writing every day for at least five minutes. Right. I took roll, they had a prompt. You can tie it into activating prior knowledge. You can do whatever you want with it really. You can just send to them the space. Whatever you do when you bring them in, for me, it was putting up a visual of the person who is playing the music or the people who were playing the music. And usually they were people color or mixed ethnicities, different people who looked quote unquote different than your expectation of everybody else walking around the school. And so, we did lots of Yo Yo Ma, Bobby McLaren, that we did. And we talked about the music. We did a lot of miles Davis. And so, I didn't explain, well, you know, this African American man... We didn't talk about the fact this, this is an Asian American man, and this is an African American man with dreadlocks. We talked about, these are people who bring excellence to the table and they are worth studying because of these things that they have said and these things that they do, and you can hear how good it is, and it doesn't matter what ethnicity they are. Even if you cannot bring plurality Into the space in your anchor texts, because we exist in a state where there are lots of conservative places and that's going to be a tough sell for a lot of people. Especially if you're a new teacher in the space or your own locus of identity that you're trying to navigate because we all are. The rules that apply to anchor texts do not apply to supplemental texts. Know your audience and ask them questions. They're all social learners. Everyone we get will benefit from group conversation. But you can ask them the questions you want to dig into. I would suggest doing that. Let them do some of that work because they can. Feel free to be imperfect. Feel free to learn from your students. The number one thing is I cannot do anything with my students if I do not have their trust. If I don't have those relationships in place, if I have not done that groundwork, then it limits my options inherently. Veteran teacher, new teacher, get the trust in place, get the classroom culture down, and get the mutual respect there. Once you have that, you're good. That's got to be there first. Once you have it, the sky's the limit. They'll do anything. They're free to be vulnerable. You're out there in the proximal zone. They feel safe in your space so they take more risks, which is a powerful thing because they learn from each other doing that. There is so much invisible difference we have in our classroom, it's astonishing. They need to feel seen in the space. I tell my kids that their experience is their lens, and their experience is their superpower because they see the world through the lens of their experience. And their collective experience is one that no one else in the world has, which is why their voices are important. Not just important, necessary. Without their voices the people who make decisions are making decisions without their voices, and they can't make the best ones possible if they don't have that information. It's their responsibility to be themselves as hard as they can. It's all grounded in their real-world experience. I try really hard to center that. #00:51:09.33#

Participant 2

Researcher (R): So, I already know where you teach, but what grades do you teach? Because I know you changed…

Participant (P): It did change a little bit. This last year I taught 9th grade Honors, or whatever they call it, pre-AP. And then tenth grade on level and eleventh grade on-level.

R: Okay. So, you have quite a span there. How would you like describe where work in terms of… actually just describe it however you want to describe it.

P: Like the demographics of where I work?

R: Yeah it can be demographics, it could be just like the overall culture, or like the school culture.

P: I would say very much suburban. Very WASP-y. I would say very…I think they want to be open-minded is how I would describe them, but I think they aren't aware of what they aren't aware of, which it can be very frustrating working with that group of students and with the teachers because I feel like they think they know, and they're not willing to want to learn more. That's what I kind of came across working both the students and the teachers. It's like "Ok I already know, and don't try to teach me anything else." And so, when you work the students in that ways it's frustrating because trying to teach anything beyond their worldview and they don't. Then working with teachers like that, it's like they think they already know everything, and how dare you try to teach them anything new. So that was kind of the experience I've had work there. I can say that because I'm leaving now.

R: And how many years did you work at this school?

P: Two.

R: And how long have you been teaching?

P: I finished my twelfth year. And I don't know if it helps you, but I taught in Missouri for 6 years and then Arizona for..that would have been four and then in [school] for two.

R: Nice. Could you remind me the texts that you teach? I know since you teach three grades that's probably a lot of talking and remembering. If you don't get every single one, I can go back to your survey and pull it but just for conversation purposes.

P: In the pre-AP English one class, the freshmen, it's a lot of what I consider the canon. So, if I'm remembering right it's *Fahrenheit 451, Animal Farm, Lord of the Flies, Romeo and Juliet*. We were going to read…I've forgotten the name of it, but Paolo Coehlo…

R: *The Alchemist*?

P: Yes, *The Alchemist*. Then we were going to end the year with *The Odyssey*.

R: So, what about 10th and 11th grade? And you said that is a pre-AP class? Do you think that has anything to do with the types of novels that you're teaching?

P: That and the teachers who created that curriculum refused to let me do anything different and have taught there for 30 some odd years and have refused to change the curriculum for about that long. Anytime I tried to bring up, would shut me down and absolutely…One of them quit this year and is not coming back because I've pushed back on a couple of things and like freaked out and so is leaving the district and going somewhere else because of some PLC things that changed and she just couldn't handle it…Not even having to do with the curriculum, just with working as a team and didn't want to work as a team. So, she's going to a district where she can work by herself.

R: That's frustrating. I guess for her, if that's the kind of teacher that she wants to be, there are places where he can have that.

P: Exactly. Good for her. (Laughs) If this helps, and I don't know if this will be a question that you ask later, one of the boys in my class toward the end… and I'll always remember this because this is like one of the last…it was actually that last day that Thursday before we let out for COVID, he goes "You know what I noticed about this class?" And I said, "What?" He said, "We read a lot of different things." So, I said, "What do you mean?" and he said "Well, we read stuff by Native Americans, we read stuff about India, we read stuff about Africans, we read stuff by Middle Easterns…was that on purpose?" Mmmhmm. He was like, "Nobody else does that!" So, I said "Really?" So, he was like "I noticed you did that, so thank you." But it was a lot of short stuff, so we start out are year with a short story unit and because it is short stuff, I got to pick what I wanted and it was a bunch of different things by different people that other teachers didn't use. Our first big group novel was Of Mice and Men. I'm sorry, I'm trying to go back in my head.

R: That's okay.

P: Our second unit was on the justice system, so we pulled things from podcasts, so it wasn't actually a text. And we were doing lit circles when COVID happened, so we had kids reading a bunch of different things. I think I put that in my survey…But it was The Glass Castle was one of the options, Funny in Farsi was one, Things Fall Apart was one of them…The Book Thief was one. It kind of centered around the idea of people going through adversity. We tried to pull things from lots of different groups and lots of different people and we were going to end the year with Their Eyes Were Watching God. So, the attempt was there to pull in different texts, so it's moving in the right direction, it's just not where I would have wanted it, but it's that getting there.

P: Eleventh grade started with some texts…Native American texts, like shorter pieces. We read A Raisin in the Sun. We read The Great Gatsby. We read some Transcendental things. And then we were getting into dystopian novels. Our last unit was going to be on some sort of and it was called Road Trip Nation and some sort of career thing that the district makes us do, which isn't text based.

R: I asked the question about AP because after…I mean I took AP in high school, so I know that there is kind of like a little AP canon in there. But I realized after…Sorry.

P: I said but it is starting to drift away.

R: Yeah, I and I realized after I did the survey I didn't distinguish…I didn't have a place for teachers to distinguish and so I was wondering. Sometimes there's a bit more freedom with that and even though there is like that canon there's also a bit more freedom to teach things that are "of merit" I suppose you might say that maybe you have a little bit more diversity. Because I mean I don't see a lot of…just from what I've seen…a lot of places are teaching texts like Their eyes Were Watching God or things like that you know. So, I realize now I should've distinguished them, but I just wondered if you had any thoughts on that?

P: I follow a lot of teachers on Instagram and Facebook, and I've noticed a lot of the teachers I follow, at least the ones who are more innovative…they're starting to move away from the traditional canon starting to move more towards letting their AP students have a little bit more choice and actually reading some more of the more current novels. You can still take one of those more current YA novels and dig deeper with them, so they're starting to do that more, which I think is really cool.

R: Yeah, what do you think about YA, and its place in the classroom? Do you think that that has…

P: I think it definitely has merit, and I think there's a lot of merit in independent reading and independent choice. Letting students read what they want but providing them opportunities to practice those skills because once they leave our classrooms, none of us are going to be standing over their shoulders having them analyze that particular passage that we all read together or walking them through that passage. So, they need to start practicing that on their own anyway. And so, if they are faking it, that's okay because maybe they need to learn to fake it til they make it. If that's how they're going to go about it, they need to start learning really quickly how to go about it.

R: I think I'll have I'll copy the question into the chat if you want. Sometimes it helps me to see what I'm hearing. I think kind of along the same line, we were just talking about what types of works do you consider to be part of the canon or not part of the canon and how important is that you?

P: The traditional canon I think can be important because it is so much part of our culture that I don't think we can completely ignore it and I think to do so would do a disservice to our students because they don't get those… I almost want to call them "inside jokes." They don't get those. You don't want our students to be disadvantaged in that they don't get what our society is talking about, or what other people are talking about because a lot of our students can be disadvantaged anyways in those ways and not feeling a part of general culture and not getting what's going on in culture, or what's on news or whatever. So, I don't want them to be even more disadvantaged by not knowing what's going on. But I don't think we make that the "be all end all" and the only thing we teach them because then that does, on the other end, do them a disservice. The problem is getting the time, finding the time to do both. Giving them a nice balance between the literary canon and here's contemporary and here's what good literature looks like across the board. That's always the struggle, and maybe the answer is finding chunks of the literary canon, because I think that's it. It's so often for the kids boring, and long if you give them the synopsis and then look at chunks of that, but then you're reading full novels of the stuff they actually like, maybe that's the answer.

R: This is something I've been wondering about in people who are kind of implementing these things is maybe what their reason why is and kind of wondering what is what was your experience like as a high school student? Did you have someone who did this for you? Was your experience that you didn't see any of this and then you had to realize that was not okay? What was your journey, I guess, to realizing that?

P: I feel like grew up very sheltered, a very wasp-ish experience, I'll be honest. And all the things I read in AP because I was a pre-AP student into AP. I don't think I read anything that was not by a white person. Maybe some Native American things because I was Native American, so sometimes that stuff was pushed on me. But that was it. I moved around a lot too, so like in elementary and junior high I remember reading a lot of Native American stuff here in Oklahoma because that's a thing you do. And when I went to high school…I went to high school in Cincinnati, and so they didn't know anything about Native Americans and they only read books by white people. You know like All Quiet on the Western Front, pretty much all the Shakespeare plays… I'm trying to remember all the things. I remember reading Dracula and Frankenstein my junior or senior year. I think the raciest or most nontraditional stuff we read was maybe stuff by women. WOW. Then going to college probably was when that might have been a little bit more of a push back because I purposely took things that I found interesting which would have been like Native American Lit or African American Lit and that's when I think my eyes were more opened up. Probably even more so in my Masters classes. I did my education kind of backwards. So, I had to do my undergrad and to get my teaching license the way it worked was my undergrad didn't offer a teaching degree, so I had to get my undergrad and my bachelor's in English. Then I had to go back for my Master's and concurrently do my Masters while I was getting my teaching degree. That's the way my undergrad…they knew that most teachers, you know 50 percent of them leave the profession in the first five years, so they didn't offer undergrad in education. They wanted you to get something else, so you have something to fall back on.

R: That's interesting!

P: Yeah, it is I think a good thing in the long run, I just ended up with way more loans than most people. In my master's I ended up taking a lot more classes out of the norm just because I needed them to get my teaching degree and so I ended up with like travel literature and some really cool things that I wouldn't have taken normally that I think opened my experiences to "Wow, there's some literature out there that would have been really cool for me to read in high school. Why wasn't that offered?" And the more I think about it, I don't my teachers were super closed-minded. They were people who would've offered that if they had known about it. I think a lot of a lot of teachers that I worked with, when I'm like "Hey, why don't we read this?" It's not that they aren't open to that and they're super excited when they read it, they just didn't even know that that piece of literature probably even existed. "Oh, I didn't even know there was a short story about that!" They just had no idea and, so I think part of that is just exposure. If you're not exposed to it, and you've never read it, as a teacher, you have no way of even being able to teach it.

R: Yeah, that's it's interesting that you say that because I mean I asked a question similar to that on the survey and the most prevalent answer for reasons why people don't is because they don't know. They don't know any multicultural texts, or they don't know how to teach them is another way. Plus, money was the other one, not enough money to buy different books. But I found it really interesting because I wasn't expecting a lack of knowledge I guess and maybe that comes from a place of like I don't know…maybe I've just always been more interested in this than I thought and maybe I just know these things? I don't know why that is, but I was really shocked at the amount of people who said, "I just don't think people know about these things."

P: There are like the basic stories out there that when you talk to people and you're talking about the curriculum and you're like "This is what I want to teach" or "this is my curriculum that I have to teach." How can I find a story that fits that? It's sometimes hard to find that square to fit that square. It's like "Okay well there's just not something out there that fits that square so this one that I already know about does.

R: Would you say that our school, your school, do you think that they have a prescribed curriculum? Or do you feel like it's pretty open? I was just wondering your thoughts on that

P: I think it's kind of middle. I think they claim to be open, but they're not. Because once the pacing guide is filled out, it's set. And once you come in, that's what you're stuck with and then because of that money situation, whatever they've bought, that's what you're stuck with. It's a Catch 22 I guess. It's kind of open. So if you can find something you know you have the resources already that's great, but you're stuck with what you've got. I don't know. They're kind of middle of the road.

R: So when you're stuck with what you've got, what's the what's the solution? How have you…I mean I you said that you're teaching things like Gatsby, Fahrenheit 451, or Of Mice and Men What are some of the ways maybe you have thought about having conversations with those texts or maybe thinking about who we're not hearing from?

P. You get creative. And that's another thing that I don't think teachers always have the time to think through, and even if you know about some things, then you have to do the research and have the time to plan and think through. "Ok so I have of mice and men. What are some ways I can incorporate some other voices to enrich the experience of mice and men? Because they've already got the idea of poverty, we've already got the idea of possibly some disabilities in that text. We've already got an African-American voice, but that voice isn't very strong, and we've got the voice of a woman. How can I amplify those voices for the kids to understand what those experiences were like in that time period? Because if I don't amplify those voices then those kids don't really understand those experiences and so those experiences that could be very prevalent aren't in the story. Because that could be an excellent story to bring out some things if I wanted to. So then you have to start taking the time to think through that, pull in some other texts, but that takes time and research and thinking through, and maybe knowing some things that you didn't know. And if you don't know about those things or you don't know where to find them then sometimes you're stuck or sometimes it takes hours. Not all teachers have that time or that willingness or knowledge to do so. #00:27:58.67#

R: Especially if you are in the school kind of like where we are, if you come in and you're brand new and you're handed this pacing guide that's basically…you kind of already have everything figured out for you, then you're like…okay! #00:28:09.97#

P: You're going to do this worksheet on this day and then do this quiz on this day. Then you have three weeks to do it, and…Thankfully, at least…I don't know how strict the middle school is, but at least at the high school it was like "Okay, well here are the skills. However you want to teach the skills to get there is fine. But I think sometimes you get bogged down in what that actually looks like or what that means or how to get there. #00:28:43.07#

R: I was just wondering and… you mentioned that you know like being Native American that you experienced like reading some texts that were about being Native American or written by Native Americans. How did that make you feel as someone who belonged to that group of people? Did that make you feel… actually that's a leading question, so just did that make you feel? #00:29:15.39#

R: I'm trying to think back to that class to see if I can remember. I remember at first being in elementary school talking about those things in class made me really uncomfortable in elementary and middle school. I remember not

really wanting the kids in my class to know about it and I'm not sure why. I don't really remember kids making fun of the other kids, but maybe they did and I've just blocked that out. But I remember in college taking that Native American literature class and reading about things that even in elementary school or middle school that we hadn't learned. I felt like Oklahoma did talk about things that I was surprised then going to Cincinnati or going into college like kids would talk about things, and I'm like "Yeah that happened. " And they wouldn't know about the things that happened to schools, the language schools, or the genocide that had taken place. They weren't taught that in school, and they were so naive about some of the things that were going on. And even talking to kids now at the high school, and I'm like "You're in Oklahoma. How do you not know about this?" I wonder how much of our history classes have been changed at the elementary and middle school level now. Because I went to [a neighboring city] growing up and so you can't that much different. But even our kids now, when I would talk to our kids, the juniors about some of this stuff in our first unit, they see some of this stuff, they seem surprised about some of the things that happened. Like "That happened?" Did you not talk about this in elementary school? So their history texts must have changed between the…30 years since I've been in elementary school. But in college, I don't remember being embarrassed about it like I was in elementary school. I think a lot of times reading about it made me severely sad, but reading novels where the person is Native American and that the protagonist is Native American, I'm proud to like share those novels with the students and be like "Here's a look you can read." The Marrow Thieves is a newer one that came out. So I sometimes do (I wasn't super consistent about it) something called First Chapter Fridays where I'll share with them a book that I had bought. I'd read part of the first chapter sometimes not always a full first chapter, but part of the first chapter out loud to them, and then be like "Okay, so this is in my library if you want to check it out. The kids would always fight over who got it first, and The Marrow Thieves was one that the kids were really excited about, and I was excited to share that because having one, a Native American author to share, but two, Native American protagonist to share with them was kind of exciting because it's a little harder to find those texts. #00:32:59.06#

R: Yeah, I've heard of that one! It's on my list, I just haven't read that yet ,but it sounds really interesting! #00:33:06.54#

P: Yeah. Something different. #00:33:14.01#

R: I have got a couple more questions I really want to get to, and then if we get anywhere else that's fine. So I guess the next question is… you kind of talked about this a little bit, but have you experienced any pushback from… it could be other teachers, it could be students, parents, and administrators because of something that you taught in your class and if you have, how do you deal with that or how did you deal with that? What was that like? #00:33:50.77#

P: I'm surprised here I actually haven't. I wasn't sure if I would or not, and I'll say last year in our junior class we did something a little bit different. We had lit circles where we separated the kids, we let the kids choose, but we separated the kids into groups and had them read about different views, different groups who are marginalized in our society, in American society. So, one group looked at people who are marginalized because of their race, one group looked at people who are marginalized because their religion, and one group looked at people who are marginalized because of their sexual orientation… So, we had different groups, and they read a series of texts, both fiction and nonfiction that dealt with that topic. Like I said, the kids chose their groups, and as a PLC we had chosen some texts. I adjusted those texts a little bit because some of the texts they chose I didn't feel were completely appropriate. Other people in my PLC did not preview those texts beforehand and just gave it to the kids. One of those teachers did get in trouble because she did not preview the texts beforehand and gave some things that weren't completely appropriate to the students and did get some pushback from the kids and the parents and had several phone calls and…really bad. I have not. I did not have any issues, but I also feel like I took the time to preview and prepare and did that groundwork ahead of time. And I knew of other texts that I could pull in that I felt were appropriate for their age level and for what they were doing and so I think that makes a difference. If you prepare and you plan and you pull in texts that are appropriate, you're not going to have that push back as much, and if you lay the groundwork with the kids. You have to meet the kids where their prior knowledge is, too. If they're not understanding the text that they're reading or understanding the assignment or kind of the purpose of where they're going when they're reading it is makes sense to them either. It's just another assignment. I haven't had pushback, but I know other teachers in my PLC did last year. We actually completely got rid of that unit and changed it this year because of that, and now we read "A Raisin in the Sun." #00:36:39.15#

R: How do you go how do you feel like incorporating different voices into your curriculum, how has that affected your students? I know you kind of said earlier that one of your students had told you but, do you feel like they appreciate it, I suppose? How do you feel that's affecting them? #00:37:13.55#

P: I think most of probably do appreciate it, or at least I'm projecting that onto them. If they don't appreciate it now, I hope that maybe in the future they do. It's kind of one of those things where maybe not consciously, but it's going to open their worldview and help them realize something beyond their little bubble and that's going to help them regardless of whether they're conscious of it or not. My goal has always been to, you know, help them see beyond their little bubbles in high school, which is kind of hard to do sometimes. They roll their eyes at me sometimes about it, but that's your job as the adult. But some kids did, I know appreciate it, and said things to me about it and others did roll their eyes like "Another text by somebody different?" Because sometimes the texts would have dialects, and like the ways they were written and so they would get frustrated by that. #00:38:48.50#

R: That's interesting. I hadn't thought about that, why students might maybe get frustrated or bored with something like that because of a dialect. Okay, last one unless you have something else we want to talk about that. So what advice would you give for someone who is like a new teacher or someone who's kind of wanting to pivot their curriculum, kind of start over or work more things in? What advice would you give them on how to do that in a way that is also, you know, feasible as a teacher. What advice would you give them? #00:39:35.69#

P: I would say not to be afraid to start. If you are wanting to, but you don't have the resources to start small. A lot of smaller texts can be found online and you can print them off If you need to. Definitely preview the texts beforehand because that way you can know how to approach it with your students. Knowing how to approach it with your students will make it easier for you to know how to teach it to them and know how to help the texts be more accessible to them because it's only going to be affective if it can be accessible to them and you can only make it worth everyone's if it is accessible. Then really make sure you're choosing their text for the right reasons. You don't want to just pull a text that's multicultural because it is. Does it really fit the purpose of what you're doing? Does it really fit a skill that you're wanting to learn?#00:40:49.41#

R: Yeah, not trying to like tokenize it. Here's my multicultural text. I did it. (Laughs) #00:40:55.05#

R: It seems like from what you're telling me, what you're kind of thinking and correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like you're saying "Yes, you can do this, but there needs to be work done on your end as a teacher. For some teachers, that could be the reason why they're not doing this is because they honestly they just either don't have the time or they don't have the knowledge and they might not because of that. #00:41:33.39#

P: Yeah if you don't have a guide or you don't know where to start… It's like anything that you have to just start with like to learn something new. It can be scary and overwhelming, and if you don't have someone who's already doing that or have someone to guide you through that, you may not know how to do it effectively. #00:41:59.91#

R: Exactly. It does take a lot of time and understanding, and.. #00:42:15.28#

P: And you don't want to do it in the wrong way. I could see where people would be like, "I don't know anyone who's like this ,and I don't want to do that group of people or that person a disservice." I can see that completely. #00:42:32.27#

R: Yeah, because it could so easily go south if you don't…#00:42:38.54#

P: It could become a stereotype or… #00:42:43.73#

R: Do you think though, and this is kind of a leading question and it just kind of came to me, but do you think that it's kind of our job to push back and amplify different voices even if it is maybe a little bit more work on our part? Or do you think it's smarter maybe to…#00:43:07.33#

P: That is an excellent question and I… But then my my follow up question is. I don't want it done badly, though. Would you rather them not do it all or would your rather them have caricatures and stereotypes abounding in the classroom? So I guess I don't know what the right answer would be there. I'm reading a book right now where in the

book, the teacher tries to do this and he does it very poorly and upsets the student in the classroom who's Middle Eastern to the point where she runs out of the room crying because he screws it up so badly. And it's all fiction, but it's based on this girl, the girl who wrote it, her life, and so she writes about how the teacher tries to be like this "open-minded guy" and he does this activity like screws it up so badly because he has this incorrect stereotype of her in his mind. She ends up yelling at him later, which you know, is the fairytale fantasy of how you want this girl to, this high school girl, to react later when she goes into his room to tell him why she wants to drop his class. Like "You did this, and this wasn't right, and I'm not your puppet to be, like your stand-in person for you to use me as your example every single time. I'm not here to, for you to try things on me to see how I'll react." It was a very good little chapter where it was like playing out all of the fantasies of kids who feel that way in the classroom. And so, when I was reading that I was like, "I hope I've never done that, and I probably have." So, then that scared the crap out of me! Sorry! But that scared me a lot. I was like "I've probably done that, and kids are too afraid to tell you." #00:45:26.65#

R: That's a fear, too. I think that's a very real fear that you do you think that you're doing the right thing, and someone doesn't tell you. Or, you do you think you're doing the right thing and someone does tell you and then you have to make that choice to say "That was on me and I need to go and you know learn more about this so that I can do better." I think that that probably is a real fear for a lot of teachers too. It's a it's a difficult place to kind of navigate and especially in…in the place where we live, sometimes too, I think it's a difficult thing to navigate. Because you don't want to come off as you know like the social justice warrior teacher who's cramming things down their throats and telling them how they should live their life, but at the same time, your job as an educator, I think, is to broaden horizons and challenge perspectives and said to make them think a little bit. #00:46:51.96#

P: And it is that tough line to walk too, especially in our PC society. And then I think about the news about the recruiter that went to that high school and made the kids line up by their skin color. Obviously, terrible idea, did not think that through. But that's like an extreme example of…you know that person was not doing that activity out of malice, they hadn't thought it through, and like how many times have I tried to do something for the right reasons and done the wrong thing for the right reason? And then just not thought it through, the cultural hurt that I could cause because of my not knowing, because of my ignorance, because of my… #00:47:38.41#

R: I am just thinking, and I'm not saying this to make us feel better about ourselves or something, but I think probably the important thing is that you take what you if you do get into situations like that and you take it and you learn from it and you change because of it instead of just shutting down. #00:48:14.20#

P: And if you've got those relationships with the kids, your hope is that you've built such a good relationship that the kids would tell you. "Hey, that hurt my feelings, that's not cool." #00:48:37.81#

Participant 3

Speaker 1 (Researcher) (00:01):
Okay. So if you want to just start by telling me a little bit about yourself, that would be a good place to start.

Speaker 2 (Participant)
Okay. Just my background or...

Speaker 1 (00:13):
Yeah, you can talk about who you are as a person, but you can also talk about where you work, how long you've been working, what you teach, et cetera.

Speaker 2 (01:02):
So, this is my third year teaching in Oklahoma. I grew up in Oklahoma. I actually lived in Norman as a kid until third grade about. I moved to Colorado in eighth grade, so I went to high school there and college there. And then my mom and my little brother moved back to Oklahoma, I guess, around 2008. And so I wasn't sure if I wanted to move back here, but I wanted to be closer and my mom has a huge family and all of my dad's family lives here. So I went to grad school University of Wyoming for...I should say my undergrad is in history and I have like, I guess I focused on political science and English. You know, I took all of my extra classes in those two areas. I thought about doing museum studies for grad school and I took a graduate level, public history class. I really liked it, but I love English, and really the only reason I wasn't an English major in undergrad is because I wanted to go to law school. Everyone said don't be an English major and go to law school and I wanted to understand history and political science more anyway. So I decided to just try to apply to MFA programs for creative writing. And it was sort of like...I knew they were kind of hard to get into and I was like, if I don't get in, then I'll do museum studies because I liked that too. And I did end up getting into the school I wanted to go to which was Wyoming for creative writing. I started there in 2013, and part of that teacher assistantship was, we had to do a lot of pedagogy because you had to teach comp, it was part of the scholarship. In undergrad I did AmeriCorps and I spent my two years at an afterschool center working with at risk...kids who lived in a lower income neighborhood. I worked there working with like homework and facilitating different kinds of programs that would come in and work with them. It wasn't that I... Being a teacher was something that I have always kind of worked in those, in that realm a little bit and I have enjoyed it. But in museums, I had done some internships there in undergrad, and I knew that a lot of that was education too. And so it wasn't that, Oh, now I'm going to be a teacher, but I think I just didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. And then through my program and learning more about pedagogy, I've done a work with critical theory and critical pedagogy, and that was really interesting to me. Learning more about teaching itself and that, you know, that was just like one part of my graduate program, but lot of it was creative writing. But teaching actually awesome and it encompasses like everything that I want to do, and it has so much room for experimentation. So at Wyoming, I taught comp for the two years during my program. And then I finished in 2015 and I stayed there for two more years, teaching and adjuncting, I taught freshman seminar, which you might be familiar with it. I described it as like an American studies or humanities class, it's very much literature based, but the instructor designed the theme in the curriculum. It was focused on critical reading and writing, and mine was based on the American West and sort of challenging the stereotypes of American West, so we did a lot of different kinds of readings on that. And then I stayed, and I also taught comp and then intro to literature. My son was born in 2016 and my husband was also a teacher. And the thing about adjuncting, it's not very stable and it was a sort of like, I could stay here doing this forever, but what if they get budget cuts or...You just don't know. My husband had been thinking about applying to law school, and we're just those people that gamble at life. We're like, okay, if you get into law school and you get a scholarship modesty, then we'll just do that. If you don't, then we'll just keep doing what we're doing until we figure it out. And so he only applied to TU because my family lives here. He actually just graduated. I got hired to adjunct at Oklahoma State and at TCC. But you know, I had been thinking about, which I love teaching college level kids, but I had been thinking about teaching high school for a long time. I think most teachers that I know, part of why we become teachers is on some level to pay back, the teachers we had or to give to kids the way we were given to. I had so many people that I wanted to..it's the only way to say thank you to those people is to do something similar.

Speaker 2 (08:11):

So, I thought "I could see if I could get hired as a high school teacher." My first interview was with a middle school in Tulsa and never in my life would anybody ever told me that I was going to be a middle school teacher. People who are middle school teachers, I just think they're special people, and I never thought I would be one of them. So, I was hired at Hale that used to be Whitney Middle School. The reason that I took the job is because the principal was very committed to changing the reputation of the school,,. and he said part of that is building school spirit and building a community, and we need good teachers for that. And I thought, you know, eighth grade can't be that much different than high school. It took me about like half a year and they grew on me and I mean, so to sort of figure out what it was going to be like, to get my bearings on what is the middle school world going to be like. I taught eighth grade English my first year, and then he moved me to seventh grade reading my second year Then a bunch of administrative changes happened that year, so there was like a lot of just instability, at the admin level that year. And I was going to come back for a third year because I was very committed to those kids and I had grown to know a lot of them, it's just a 7th and 8th grade school, so it's not very big. But, I was also a little uneasy, and I moved.

Speaker 2 (10:25):

The school that I work at now I had heard about the school since I looked before I lived here because my brother went to school in Tulsa. So when I saw that that they had an opening for a high school English teacher, I almost didn't apply because I felt so guilty leaving, but I thought who knows if I'll get the drop anyway and I'll just shoot my shot and just see what happens. And I did end up getting the job. It was so hard to leave my school. They have that of that, they know that people don't like their schools, you know what I mean? I didn't want to add to that, and I don't want to be another teacher leaving. The eighth graders that I had taught, they were gone, but the seventh graders I taught, I was going to be their teacher again, because they were moving me to eighth grade again. And so that was just hard, and I still keep in touch with a lot of them. But I love my new job, which also makes me feel guilty because at my school they're amazing. They've been around since 2001. They were a high school for a long time, but they've added the eighth grade, seventh grade, and then this year will be their first year having a sixth grade. This was my first year there and I have been teaching 10th grade English and the way that they set it up, they have a tri-system. The way that they have it organized is they have these things they call houses. They ask you to kind of self identify maybe what your passions are or where you think you might go in the future. So, they have a liberal arts, fine arts, STEM, and career. So, they have critical reading and then they have just English literature for 10th graders. And that just depends, like most STEM kids are in critical reading and most humanities and fine arts kids are in English literature. So, you know the emphasis is... I teach a lot of overlap in the classes, but for critical reading, I do try to do more rhetoric and academic writing, and I feel like we do read more nonfiction stuff in critical reading. I've taught mythology and then I'd just started teaching creative writing when we left. I'll be back there next year.

Speaker 1 (15:52):

So, you kind of already started to talk about this a little bit, but how would you describe the school culture of where you work now?

Speaker 2 (16:34):

So, the school culture where I work now is I would say they have had a long time to build on it, but I think that they have been very successful. We don't have a lot of sports, so that was interesting to me. I was interested in what TSAS what is that going to be like with no sports because that's just where pep rallies, all of that. And you know their motto is TSAS is home. I would say that, you know, the, the small actions that they take, like for instance, right before Christmas break all the teachers make like a dozen cookies and for about a month or so before then there's this Excel sheet with every student and each teacher picks a student, and you write a personal message to them. It's something short but personalized to that student, and then it's printed out on a card with their name on it. It's like a surprise, but they all know that it's coming, and then the last hour of the school day, in our yard, all the cookies are out in the gazebo area and then they get their card. and they all have cookies. You know, they do stuff like that. It's a smaller place, and so it's easier to do that. My husband always says the atmosphere is like from a nineties TV show or something, cause we don't have uniforms and they seem happy here. There isn't tight security. It's an old building. mean, the kids especially students who have had other experiences...My sophomore class was the first class who started from seventh grade, and so some of them, they don't know what it's like at other schools. And so maybe somebody gets accused of vaping in the bathroom and then admin wants to look in their bag and they'll say, this is

like a prison here. They don't know, they have no perspective. They don't know what it's like to have their stuff gone through or their lockers gone through. But the students who do know, and the students who just like really thrive there, they love it. And so, they like really respect it in the way that they talk and stuff.
Speaker 2 (21:13):

The school is working really hard to make restorative justice work. I'm like, do you even know what you have here? I think it's probably 60/40. 40% people of color, 60% white appearing students. And then it's about that also split financially, I would say. It's a blind lottery, so it's a public charter. Our community outreach person makes an effort to go to all elementary schools in Tulsa for fifth grade, and he asks people to apply, you know he gives a presentation. The middle school principal has been really dedicated to making sure that TSAS is truly diverse and not just saying that, you know what I mean? I think that the school has changed some because it did start out with mostly white kids from middle upper-class homes in 2001. And I would say probably for the past five, six years, there has been an active campaign and where they're just finally starting to see the efforts of that to make the school more diverse. But that's hard for some people, especially some of the teachers who have been there for 20 years. They're like, you know, they're not used to the different things that come up whenever you have a more diverse population and financially and otherwise. The school that I came from, we only had one teacher over there and I would say our student population was probably 80% of color. And at TSAS, we have lot of mix in our teachers, I mean, it can always be better, but, you know, there were two women of color in the English department and I thought I haven't seen this yet. I think it's, it's a really good place.

Speaker 1 (27:21):

What you're saying about, you know, they're trying to implement restorative justice and that type of thing. It sounds and correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like a pretty progressive school, maybe forward thinking.

Speaker 2 (27:36):

And you know, we have to write all our curriculum. They do ask us to pay attention to the state standards. Middle school has to adhere to certain things, whereas high school isn't held to the same and I'm not sure why I've never looked into that, but maybe because of the middle school testing. My principal always says, she wants us to experiment. She wants us to try new things and that means we're gonna fail. And, but that means that we're trying, It's not perfect, but after working for [old school] for two years, there was a lot of oversight and a lot of management and a lot of like watching you in your classroom and it induces a lot of anxiety when you feel like you're constantly being evaluated.
Speaker 1 (29:09):

Yeah. It seems like they're giving you a lot of, like, they're trusting you a lot as a teacher, which is something that doesn't always happen so much in public schools.
Speaker 2 (29:23):

No. The school was founded by teachers. Our executive director was a teacher, so I think that makes a big difference.
Speaker 1 (29:34):

So, you said you get to write your curriculum. Whenever you sat down to write that, what was your kind of like your rationale behind, texts that you chose or what you chose to have them write about things like that.
Speaker 2 (29:54):

I was like very idealistic. I had just finished a creative writing MFA. I had just done a lot of work with like critical to pedagogy and just like writing pedagogy. Teaching at [old school] was the best thing that ever happened to me as a teacher, because I realized that while all of that is great, these kids are going to be tested their eighth grade tests and who they are as people, they're judged by those test scores. I came into it like test scores don't matter. I knew they were evaluative a of economics and what resources kids have. They don't evaluate intelligence. Like I had studied that. But I didn't know how much that affects them. When they don't get a good score, that experience of like actually seeing it. So, I did change a little bit in that I wanted them to do better on the test for them. Like I wanted them. You get to know these kids and they know the stuff. The frustration of knowing that it was about the language and about like maybe they didn't know what a certain word meant or what the test was asking them to do. To know that that's holding them back from being proud of themselves sometimes... Because [old school] was listed as like one of the worst schools in Oklahoma. They hear that, you know, they think, Oh, we don't get good test scores, all of that. I didn't change what I wanted them to read or how I was approaching it, but I definitely did more vocab and more things like that.

Speaker 2 (32:51):
But so that being said, I learned a lot from that experience so that when I was able to have more control over my curriculum, I think that that helped inform. I know that we have a lot of freedom, but I also know that a lot of these kids are going to want to take the ACT, they want to go to Tulsa Tech, which is really competitive. And so I do try to incorporate a little bit of more of maybe what you would call like traditional things that a traditional teacher would really care about. But my big focus when writing my curriculum is about what exciting possibilities do I have? What can we read? Like what can we discover together? And as a person who pays a lot of attention to my limitations as a white person, teaching students of color, a lot of literature that is held up is good, but a lot of it is in my opinion, not... I realized teaching at [old school] whenever most of my students are of color that a lot of the books that have characters of color are about slavery or about things that are hard to talk about anyway which are important, and as a person who really knows the importance of history, like they're important, but I also wanted books where there are characters of color who are just like living their life, you know? It's hard to find them because they're not purchased by schools usually, not because they're not out there. I did the Outsiders, out of the books that we had because there was no money to buy new books. And they really loved that book. Like all of my students loved that book and I was worried that they wouldn't because all of the characters are white, but they did really identify with the themes. Then we read The Giver. It blew my mind because I had students that were like "Why are there only white people in this book?" And we had to talk about. The things you learn as a white teacher about yourself and about your privilege and about the things you don't notice, and the book is about inclusion and it's about getting rid of...and the dangers of that. We did talk about why did the author decide when they made everyone the same, that they made the white. Just learning through the experience of, a school not having books where there are no problems like that, where they can just read a book and they don't feel like that. And then I went to the Tulsa public library has...it's called the Zarrow...but basically, they have a guest author every year and you gets their book for free, and then they have these like lesson planning type of workshops. And the book that I got was by Rena Garcia, it's called One Crazy Summer. It was just about...The mom had left the family and she was working with the Black Panthers, and the girls go to visit her. The boys didn't like it, like all the characters are girls, I think towards the end, they started to like it more, but they were just like, this is so boring. That experience, I just wanted to make sure to pick books that were inclusive and like pick things about the justice system or about slavery or things that in general only affect people of color when they're talking about the problems, or people who live in poverty when they talk about the problems for that theme, but when we're just reading literature let's let it be about the character's life. The two books that I read for my English lit class was House on Mango Street and We the Animals, which isn't as well known, it's by a writer named Justin Torres, and I knew it because I read it in grad school, and it's written in a very similar style as House on Mango Street, which I thought would be cool to talk about form. It's written in vignette form. The language is very poetic in the way, but the character is he is half Puerto Rican and half white and he has two brothers. And it's, it's also a coming of age story. In English lit 10th grade We are supposed to study the Bildungsroman and the coming of age story. And so, I thought those two books were good together. And he also is dealing with his sexuality. He's gay and he's from this very macho, manly family. It's about the love that brothers have for each other, and the parents are problematic in a lot of ways, but I really liked it because it challenges my students. We read The Great Gatsby and then we also read Slaughterhouse Five. And then in my critical reading class I did something a little bit different because it was a whole new class of kids that I didn't know very well, and it was a lot of boys. But I noticed right away, I was like, Oh, gosh, like I am going to have to reevaluate what I'm doing. And I made it, I made a lot of changes at the last minute and it was interesting. I've never done that. I ended up making that class about the justice system. So, we listened to Serial. We watched some of the HBO series on the [inaudible] case. We watched Bryan Stevenson the one who wrote Just Mercy, we watched his Ted talk and then we watched a documentary on the death penalty, and then we read a lot of articles about the death penalty in Oklahoma.

[00:01:09] And then just I am very serious about...I Learned from a teacher in grad school. I know most of our students in Wyoming were white and male. Laramie was a big city to them. They had never met a person of color in their life. Then the other part of my students, there were athletes of color who are from cities who had never been around that many white people before, and those were my two demographics classroom. One of my professors said, "You have to teach to the most vulnerable person in your classroom, and that is who you need to be talking to and who you need to consider. "I have held that, because I think sometimes I could get afraid that I was going to lose one of the white kids or they were going to say something hateful because a lot of the material we dealt with were current events. Everything is political, it just is. But I feel like students of color, especially in that atmosphere, they were used to being a quiet person and not saying anything because they didn't want to draw attention to themselves.

I am a person who doesn't like conflict. My professor, was like you have to keep the most vulnerable person in the room ,you have to hold them center because you their voice in that classroom. Then, I read this essay, and I think she was from Texas. She was talking about how most of her students were white and from the Bible Belt part of Texas and about how she didn't want to push them away because you're their chance of maybe your might be the only time that they hear something different than they hear in their lives or in their home. For example, she let her students use the Bible in their paper, but they had to state it as "This is what someone of the Christian faith might look to, to understand how to react to whatever." That really changed the way I thought about it, too. What can I bring in that doesn't push them further away, somebody who might already be wary of education, wary of other views other than the ones that they or their families hold that are suspicious of progressive ideas. But then also my students who...I hold them at the center because I want them to see themselves not just roles that are in jail or a slave. I always try to read stuff that's like people of color and their family just going to through everyday life like everybody else, because I just think it's really important.

[00:09:34] Have you ever experienced any, like, pushback or any negative reactions from parents or administrators, colleagues, students for anything that you've taught that you remember? And if you did, how did you react?

[00:10:17] I've never had a parent complain, but that is probably just because of where I've taught. I don't think that my students at [old school] their parents would have... My students wouldn't have complained. That's not something that they're going to be worried about is what their kids are reading in general. It was interesting because we were reading We The Animals, and one of my students of color, it deals with sexuality and... We were doing at the beginning of every class, a little poem for Black History Month, and she said, "My mom wants to know why aren't we reading a book about a person of color for Black History Month? And I was like, well, Justin Torres is Puerto Rican, and did you tell her about the poetry that we're reading? That was the first time I've ever had...I think my student also didn't really like that the character was gay, really…It bothered her a little bit, and I think maybe she had complained to her mom about that. I e-mailed her on that day, and it was the first time I had ever experienced that with her mom. I emailed her and was just like "Hey, I just wanted to let you know this is the book we've been reading. We're also doing this poetry project." But I never heard anything.

[00:12:42] I ask myself whenever I'm choosing books how my cousins would react if their kid was reading this? How would I defend that? What would I say? I try to find things that are multi-faceted Because I think if it was just about one thing, it would be harder to justify it. I have never had pushback from admin about subject material. At my school now, we have a lot of meetings with the English team and it's really cool to hear their ideas and they push me to always try to do my best. And nobody has ever said, "Why are you doing that?" Nobody's ever asked me to justify what I'm doing there. But I definitely have to tell people what I'm doing, and my department head wants to make sure that we are paying attention to things like writing. Students, one of my one of my most memorable students from Wyoming on his evaluation said, "Miss [name] will be a good teacher one day if she stops being liberal." This year, I had a student yell at me at my school right now. We've worked it out since then, and we have a pretty good relationship. We are talking about emotional appeals, and I brought in a lot of different commercials. We were looking at who is their audience? I don't want to bring in anything really controversial, but I was like, these kids don't really care about guns. So, I brought in the commercial that the Parkland kids made to talk about who is their audience? Are they talking to us? Are they talking to lawmakers? Who are they trying to convince? One of my students loves guns, and I didn't know. He argument was about how certain guns aren't really assault weapons. The thing is, is that I'm not taking a stance here. I just want to know who are these kids talking to? He just really wanted me to know and he got really worked up. I was just like "I promise you that I don't have a stake in this." I know a lot of people who have guns, and I'm not against them. But it was just like tunnel-vision,..he couldn't handle it. I think it was like I felt nervous. But that was definitely a learning experience. I will be using the melanoma video next time. Now that I know him and he knows me, I would have no problem bringing that in because I would know that about him. I could say, "Can you tell us about what you know about this?" I don't want to say I would stay away from controversial issues, but definitely I would stay away from them if I don't know which students very well. Once I have that relationship and I have that classroom environment where we know each other and trust each other, I'll talk about anything with them when I know them. It was just too early.

[00:22:44] Ok. So, I have two more questions I'd like to hear. So, I think you kind of already touched on one of them. But how do you think that the way that you've structured your curriculum...How do you think that positively or negatively, how do you feel it that's affecting your students?

[00:23:33] I think it's interesting because the school I work at now, students of color are in the minority, and also the student who are marginalized and other ways. I do think that in that situation where they are in the minority numbers wise, they have been really responsive when I bring in material that affects their lives. Like in that class that I used the podcasts, I think they really appreciate it. I do get a lot of opening when we talk about that in the class where we talked about the justice system. We read a lot about Tulsa LivePD. I had a couple of students who really didn't even think about it, and they were like, "My dad watches that all the time." Then I had a students who have parents in prison that I didn't know about. They said, this is something that I think about a lot. And so, I think that's just one example. But I think when you consider your audience, who are your students? It's a respect. They feel respected when there are things that they can tell that you thought about them, and so then I think they're more willing to meet you as the teacher because they see that. My number one thing, like if I had to tell somebody else what is the most important, relationships, a hundred percent. I think that my students know that I value them, and I value our relationship, and I think that whatever progress I make with them or whatever learning happens because they're willing to, it is because of the work that I do. #01:14:44.97#

My last question was going to be, "What advice would you give someone…a new teacher or a veteran teacher who is want to refocus?" I think you've already started to talk about it with the relationship piece, is there anything else you'd want to add? #01:15:22.53#

One thing I've been thinking a lot about is my limitations as a teacher. I think every teacher should do that. I don't have anyone that I know of in my family who is gay or transgender when I was growing up. When I got older, I have friends. But, I don't know anyone intimately in my family who belongs to those communities. I have transgender students and I have openly gay students, so I feel like it's my responsibility to read writings from people who belong to that community or listen to their speeches or TED talks, walk documentaries…because as a teacher, I feel like it's your responsibility to learn about all the different kinds of kids that you're going to teach. We all have limits. As a white woman I have many limits, I have a lot of privilege. But also I firmly believe in lifting people up, and I think there's a way to acknowledge the struggles that come with belonging to a marginalized group, but I think it's also important for teachers to focus on the successes and triumphs that come out of those groups. I didn't understand that until I worked at [old school]. How important it is for the kids that I worked with to see success stories, and to see themselves represented in texts in a positive way. That would be my advice. One, relationships, which I would say to have a true relationship, you have to know your limitations and you have to learn about the culture of the person you are entering a relationship with. I think you have to know that you're going to mess up sometimes, and you have to be willing to learn from that.

Participant 4

Speaker 1: (Participant) (00:01)
Let's see, this is my second career. I've been teaching 15 years. I retired from the army. So yeah, this is a, different endeavor. In fact, I'm getting close to being a teacher, as long as I was a soldier. So that's interesting. But from that background, I was in the second ranger battalion. I was in the 101st airborne, so I I traveled around the world quite a bit, saw quite a few different things, different cultures firsthand and coming back and after I retired, it was, the realization finishing my degrees, that some people have never left Oklahoma. I grew up in Oregon. And so, it's like, You've never left Oklahoma? You've never left Tulsa? So that's part of it, I think because, I explored a lot. The other part is in high school myself, I did not like English, and that was because looking back, most of it, it lacked context. So a lot of it was out of context. In reflecting, I was reading Isaac Asimov. I was reading Larry Nubin. I can read Edgar Rice Burroughs. I like the science fiction and fantasy world type stuff. I was reading Tolkien before it was popular. But I graduated high school in 1984, so you can guess we read George Orwell, and then all the big build up that the English department did with Animal Farm, and all these before that, it's like, I don't understand this politics stuff. You know, I'm in a small town in the middle of Oregon that most people work in the logging industry. My dad was a truck driver my high school had three people who were not white. And the three kids that were not white were adopted by a white family. So, so that's my school district. So, I go through, I learned stuff in history. I get stuff there in my English class, you know, barely passing. Then I joined the army and I go to Georgia and everything was kind of okay. You know, basic training, I got there in June. So, we have a first pass on July 4th. So, we go into Columbus, Georgia, and that was like eight of us, you know, from our same spot. And we were bar-hopping, going from place to place having a good time, and we walked into one and West was a black guy. And the bartender shouts, as he's about two steps inside the store, get out of this place. I'm like "huh" I was just stunned. According to the history class, 1964 was a civil rights act, there was no more segregation, no discrimination for the last 20 years, what's going on here? So that was my first experience diving into the deep end. And I had been taught that this was done, that it was gone an come to find out, no it wasn't. And you know, over the course of my service... I've been to Israel, I've been to Bosnia, and so I've seen how, again, cultures and races don't resolve issues because of a piece of paper. Some of these issues, you know, as long as you're alive, somebody who was for it is still for it, somebody who was against is still against it. And so, I eventually got my worldview to where the intricacies of our society is built upon all these different multicultural facets. And we do things sometimes unconsciously that are cultural that we don't realize sometimes. It's not just beliefs and values and ethics, but just little bitty things from the type of food you can cook, or your habits and mannerisms and understanding that all of these have roots and who we are that who was with us before. So that's, that's how it's kind of gone from a dark side to a more positive side.

Speaker 2: (Researcher) (08:23)
Yeah. I didn't go to Israel or to Bosnia, but I studied abroad for a semester and I studied abroad in England and of course, England is very diverse. There are immigrants everywhere from all different places, all around the world. And I think that was for me, that was kind of a moment when my eyes were opened to just how, like you were saying, like people don't leave. I felt kind of like, I was different than a lot of people I know from where I live because I'm from a really small town and people don't leave. Like they lived there, they died there. And so for some people, the only time they might interact with or learn about someone who's so different than them, and maybe that's not as true now with, you know, social media and the way that media works, but books can be that, that kind of Avenue for it.

Speaker 2: (09:35)
So, tell me a little bit about your school and the classes that you teach, maybe the texts that you teach and maybe just your overall like school culture. What that's kind of like? It doesn't have to be like, you know, a racial breakdown. It can just be like, what do you think the, the culture of your school is as a whole?

Speaker 1: (09:58)
Okay. So, I'm going to narrow it very closely to the 11th graders on this. I would say we're looking at predominantly white middle class or lower socioeconomic. We have probably a smaller than average group of single-parent homes. Most of my students have at least a stepparent. There's like two black families and couple of Latino families, and we actually have a pretty large contingent of Native Americans that live there. So culturally I would say most identify a little bit more with a rural lifestyle, even though we're literally a hop, skip, and a jump from downtown Tulsa. It's kind of a little bit more of a laid-back feel. You'll find that most of the students have spent probably five or more years together in school. There's very little movement within the district. So, most of them can say five years. Some

of them can say you stole my milk in pre-K, they've known each other that long. In fact, when I had my first interview, the principal was going "Half the district is related and the other half have known each other so long, they act like they're related." I would say most of the parents are, are fairly supportive and probably completed at least high school. We do get quite a bit of support from the parents. In the junior class we do have probably, I would say anywhere from maybe 25 to 30% of the class that actually works themselves. They're working food service and working at quick trip, so they have a lot of encounters with different individuals in these service type positions. So I would say that they're very versed in the world around them and who's there. And then some of them have some very strong experiences and opinions because of good experiences or bad experiences. Oh, and then the other part here is that we have probably about 40 or 50% of our juniors that are concurrently enrolled between TCC and Tulsa Tech. So, so again, we've had a large number of students here that are interacting with different student groups. So in regards to interacting with people within the community I would say most of them are, are pretty exposed at least to the Tulsa area. Although [school] was kind of isolated geographically they are, they're very much in tune with what goes on.

Speaker 2: (14:58)
So, remind me again of the texts that you teach for your class.

Speaker 1: (15:05)
So, I use this [shows textbook] for the 11th grade. II use that as the framework for that, as I answered on my survey. I like incorporating a lot of short stories throughout the year. Because, the book here it starts out, you know, with Native American creation myths. So what I do is I go through and I've got a collection of like six of them that I use with the one that's in the book, and these range from the Shoshone in the Northwest, to the Navajo on the Southwest, all the way up into the Iroquois, Seminoles ,Cherokees, and the Osage here so that you can start to see similarities between a creation myth, but also very distinct cultural differences amongst them. I'm not sometimes looking for one thing that will show an all inclusive multicultural experience, but we're gonna look at Native American culture right now. Let's look other groups and how they looked at creation and how creation was similar. What are some of the things, some of the things like colors, certain regions have similar colors that are valuable to them, while others have certain animals that play the same key roles. You can start to see similar values. It's like, why did this happen? You see the triggering events on that. So I lay those out as a spectrum for them to experience through that particular unit.

Speaker 2: (17:39)
Yeah. So, do you, typically...you say you teach a lot of short stories and it's an American literature course, right? Since that's 11th grade. So, do you just kind of move throughout U S history or do you prioritize different, I guess, like eras over others?

Speaker 1: (18:02)
The textbook is kind of organized chronologically with U S history. I don't go page by page in there, but start looking at...Like after the Native Americans, we start to move into the precolonial period and how Hawthorne looks at Puritanism. We'll even go into the fifties with the Crucible, look at that, and try to get some Hawthorne's short stories in there, because from my experience, trying to read the Scarlet Letter with some of these students, it's just too slow, too much, too soon for them. I can get them across this style, what Hawthorne is talking about, and we can look at different elements of how freedom of religion played out in literature here in this precolonial period. How it's represented and what, what really was each group's goals, looking at Quakers, looking at Puritans and putting that together. Then as we transition, I never completely leave the Native Americans behind because we transition to the colonial period, and now we're looking at the expansion. That's where not only do I have some short stories, but I start to bring in journals. So, I've got a very nice excerpt from one of the diaries from the Donner party, a young family going on the Oregon trail, and some other families moving into the Ohio River Valley and moving up the Mississippi, some excerpts from Lewis and Clark and their diaries. So, we kind of explore this as "Okay we have a new world here." Today we have everything on Google and we say, "Hey, where's this?" and we can pick a satellite image, and everything's known. Here we're looking at a world that these people had no idea what they were doing. I even found a very interesting old book. It was coauthored. I can't remember the English author, but an English-speaking person coauthored a book with Geronimo. Yeah, I think it was archive.org. And he actually talks about his first experience with surveyors in the early 1800s and how these guys were so cool. Like we traded food with them and they were nice, they were polite, they interacted. And then the next chapter, he says about five years later here comes to the U S military. Now the army is here and now I don't trust them. It was kind of an interesting viewpoint

through him, you know, how he didn't have a problem with the Americans at the beginning, he didn't quite trust the way they were acting. But then they ended up killing some people, basically they learned them into a tent and killed them and he goes, that's it. So, I spent a lot of time on like, archive.org and a couple other sites similar to that that goes into these old publications. And you can look at them and I stumbled upon that one day looking for the diaries, that's where I found the Donner diary and these are all out of publication books, but they're all there in PDF. Then we move on and we start to talk about immigration, and this is where the multiculturalism comes in. I have a series of vignette cues there that I use that deal with the roaring twenties and the great depression and immigration. So I pull those in and they set the stage that this is going to be like November to February. So this is where we actually get into some, some novels. We'd start out with The great Gatsby to kind of look at the 1920s. I've got a couple short stories there that I pull in before this, that kind of start to show the change in perceptions, as America emerges from World War, I don't really spend a lot of time in World War I. But post 1918, how are we seeing the world now? And most of these are people returning home, you know, things can be a little different because you've seen different things. Then after I finish Great Gatsby then usually we'll go into Of Mice and Men or Grapes of Wrath, either one, to kind of highlight what's going on during this depression period, The mini-cue lessons that runs through this, they're pretty nice because they deal with using dialect and diction. So, one of them, the unit on immigration has a poem in there "The Dumb [inaudible] Man." His son says he's dumb. It's written in a way that it sounds like he's speaking in Italian, and so you can kind of see the culture clash between the son and the father and how my son says, I'm a dumb old Daigo. And the son says, "no, don't talk, don't talk. I'll talk" because he's going to school, he's learning English, and there are several works like that, that are, that are included with these units too.

Speaker 1: (26:04)
We also have a Harlem Renaissance. So, you see the traditional art branch, the folk-art branch, and how are we going to try and go with the status quo? Are we going to try and show who we really are? And so, January and February is all about exploring just different avenues of individual cultures and what we say probably in New York City. And then we travel out West, and meet George and Lenny, and this is the reality of the American dream. We have some people here, you can see it in this story and this lesson they may be like Jay Gatsby the decade before or the Kennedy's, the families that are quite successful, but then the reality of it is a lot of people have...There's one diary I have that follows an Irish couple that they're leaving Dublin, coming here, get to New York, and it really is the Gangs of New York at that point. They are struggling to leave New York City and almost get killed a couple of times in the process, but they ended up leaving New York and finally settled down... I believe it was Indiana. But it was just, "Hey, we're almost there. We're almost there. Hey, look, there's New York. Oh gosh, we're here. It was so violent and so cold to them and how they left and then how they had to restructure their dream based on the reality once they were there." So, then we are looking at post-war change after World War II. We get into the introduction of technology now more and also there was a greater incidents through the forties and fifties, that's where you start seeing the Western genre of writing pick up. And so you start to see some of these styles that it's like, okay, we're either going to go into the future where everything's great, or we're going to go back into the past and romanticize something with pirates and Cowboys. So, it really became more of an escape and more entertainment and then also how the war influence snuck in. Sixties, two stories I like in there, "The Things They Carried" that one and "A Stranger in a Strange Land." I teach 11th graders so I can get away with that one. I picked both of those because the Vietnam War and the counterculture movement were so much a pivot point in American culture again. Okay, Stranger in a Strange Land is a science fiction book, but this is actually a book that became the mantra of the counterculture. So why did they subscribe to this? What are these things that he's talking about that they really believed. And then we can see "The Things They Carried." So I have a little thing that I have in my room cause I have a storage closet, and I got the idea at the Philbrook museum from the lower garden. What I did is I put hooks over the top of the door, got a pull on a roll of butcher paper that comes down, and so I'll write different key questions from there. And so I was just at school yesterday during my summer sign out, and my last question was, what are you carrying this week? We were just getting into the first part of the things they carried when we shut down. And so, it shows them that there's the physical, but then there's also the emotional memories. So, that's pretty close to my timeline of how I handle the American literature class. I'm not mainstream. Some of the stuff there, you may not see in other classrooms, but others you would. I try to look at it like, what was one of the most important periods out of these times? How can we look at it that way? I try to put it in context for them so that they can, they can look and see and say, okay, I understand now. I may still not like to read fantasy or science fiction. I may still not like to read historical fiction here. I don't like Hawthorne, he puts me to sleep. But they understand. And so, it's like, this is why I like it, or this is why I don't like that stuff.

Speaker 2: (32:21)

I'm curious. Do your students, are they also enrolled in U.S. History as well? Do they take that in 10th grade or do they take it in 11th grade?

Speaker 1: (32:30)
Some of them are enrolled in US history at the time. Others will have already taken it in 10th grade.

Speaker 2: (32:39)
I just, I wondered because I know the school where I did my student teaching, they took American lit at the same time, they did US history and I think it's cool. Like I wish that I could have had that experience because it kind of puts things in greater context. You understand it more and appreciate it a little bit more.

Speaker 1: (33:21)
I'd say probably about half. A lot of it runs into the ones that didn't take it are probably ones that transferred in. Or they may have had a credit recovery class that kept them from doing history in 10th grade. So they're doing it in the 11th now.

Speaker 2: (33:47)
Yeah. That makes sense. You mentioned that some of the texts that you read have a lot of dialect in them. One of the teachers I was talking to, I think yesterday, she was telling me about...I don't remember what she was reading, but it also had a lot of dialects in it. And she said that a lot of students found that frustrating and it kind of turned them off. Do you find the same for your students or?

Speaker 1: (34:19)
I think with the way I introduce it to them, it's a little easier because the one... are you familiar with cues and mini-cues. I forget who the publisher is on them, but if you Google them, you can find them. They do they do a series of lessons in there and the one on immigration and the Harlem Renaissance for that matter. They have shorter poems usually set up within the dialect and they're easy to analyze because you can start looking at the same speech pattern. Now in comparison, when I first took over, the previous teacher gave Life as a Slave over the summer for the pre-AP students, the 10th grade. That was overwhelming to go through this text, not only with the period language the wording and vocabulary from a different time period, but you're also dealing with dialect, very challenging. That's one reason why, I guess I wait until more modern English, to deal with dialect, because if you try to put in dialect into, you know, colonial writing you already have the new vocabulary because you've got the writing of that period. Foundation wise, it comes up with another element that I teach with here. We talk a lot about etymology. We talk about word histories and how they change, how we would say something in a certain way now. But what you're reading at this point that's how it's said. So, they can start to decode and get meaning out of there, whether it's dialect or whether it's period writing sometimes it can be confusing. It's just, we talk to one of them about their experiences on social media and they use all their slang with us and it's like, what? Same thing. But the thing is the author, there is again expressing the cultures in a different way sometimes to use the dialect to show there that this is how people saw them or how he saw them.

Speaker 2: (37:39)
I also wanted to ask, so it seems like from what you're telling me, it seems like you have pretty much, you're able to kind of do whatever you want to do in your curriculum. Like you're not required to adhere to something specific?

Speaker 1: (37:56)
Yeah. I can do pretty much, pretty much what I want as I'm going throughthe year. You know, we basically I have two main goals. I have the ACT in the spring. Well, three...ACT in the spring. I have kids that are now concurrently enrolled, so it's like fall is like a writing bootcamp, so you can actually write a college paper and get an A on it. Then we also look at being able synthesize sources so we're ready for 12th grade. They do more of that. My writing prompts throughout the year are structured just like the ACT writing prompt. I created a template and so every time we go through and we're doing a writing project, you have the three choices or perspectives to look at. And so they get used to looking at a topic, understanding what they have to write about, and choosing which direction to look at. So we do that. But yeah, as long as I meet these goals and hand them off, ready to go then...

Speaker 2: (39:24)

Right. You kind of get that freedom. That's good. So since you have a little bit more freedom to kind of do whatever you want to do you ever find that anyone like it could be an administrator, it could be a parent student, other colleagues. Do they ever push back against you for something that you're teaching or you're not teaching?

Speaker 1: (39:56)
I did have one comment and it was kind of a funny comment in a way. It was anonymous, but the girl in class had said it, so I knew who it was. But she would say, why is everything in American literature so dark? And we were going through the pre-colonial period there, so you have puritanism, which is not very positive. That transitions into American Gothic, you know, over a few weeks, it's like, everything is just so dark. Well, I was talking with the principal, a couple of days later, he goes, you know, I had somebody say that everything's in literature is very dark. And we had just had a department meeting and it's like, okay, I'm doing this with American Gothic. Okay. 10th grade is doing Romeo and Juliet. Okay. And I forget what [teacher] was doing in ninth grade, and [teacher] was doing in 12th, it was Life of PI in 12th. None of these are happy, bubbly stories!

Speaker 2: (41:23)
Yeah.

Speaker 1: (41:26)
They two kill themselves. This kid's hallucinating maybe, but he thinks he's getting eaten. Edgar Allan Poe is talking about going insane. So sorry, but American lit is not necessarily positive. And then it's like, okay, let's look at the other books in my cabinet. I've got The Great Gatsby. Okay. He dies alone. Let's see....Of Mice and Men. George kills Lennie. The grapes of Wrath, Oh, that's a real emotional booster. He started laughing and he said "you make a good point there, don't worry about it." I actually do have The Scarlet Letter in my room and it's like, this is a whole novel about an adulteress. You wonder why people don't like English.

Speaker 2: (42:29)
Yeah. I never actually stopped to reflect on it that way, but I guess it is all kind of dark in a way. And I just, I'd never really thought about it.

Speaker 1: (42:40)
No, we've got a lot of stuff that's definitely not for motivational speakers.

Speaker 2: (43:11)
Okay. I have two more that I'd like to get to really quickly. I want to be respectful of your time, so we'll try to get through them quickly. So how do you feel that the way that you've structured your classroom, how do you feel that you're helping your students in terms? It kind of seems like one of your goals was to kind of maybe open up their worldview a little bit or, to broaden their horizons. How do you feel that the way that your curriculum is structured is doing that?

Speaker 1: (43:42)
I think it's doing a pretty good job. It's showing them different views, different snapshots, and with the use of shorter pieces, I can cover more content more specifically over the course of the year. For example in the fall, if I spent a month or six weeks on The Scarlet Letter in that same four to six weeks, I can cover a lot of stuff from that period, not just Hawthorne, not just puritanism. And so they get all these experiences, these little tastes of different authors, different views. When we finish a particular unit, they'll come out and they'll say "Oh, I don't like Faulkner" or "I do" and they'll know why. My most popular one I think is American Gothic. They really get into those American Gothic writers, and they want to some of the other authors. So, I think it's done a pretty good job. I think it's giving them a broad survey, which in my opinion is a little more important than focusing on specific works. When we get to college, that's when we spend and entire semester on a particular author or a particular period. As an 11th grader in high school, you need to learn a wider range of this so that when you do see that class offered in college, "Hey, I want to take that." I think it's effective. The thing with the shorter stories…it's also helpful for students who have 504s or IEPs. It's easier to structure and modify. It helps everybody out. #00:47:00.26#

Speaker 2: #00:47:02.66#
As far as access goes, you can find a lot of short stories online for free, whereas you can't get a whole novel online for free. I've found that…that's basically the biggest reason why people choose not to teach things that they

considered multicultural according to the survey, it's money. Money and not knowing are the two big reasons. Just interesting to kind of think about…it seems like teachers have to get a lot more creative where we live because there just aren't resources. #00:48:02.27#

Speaker 1:
There are so many things out there you can use. The flip side to that is if I bring in Young Goodman Brown. If you Google that, it's usually a short story, and most of the cheat sites aren't going to waste time doing it. If you put in The Scarlet Letter, you've got multiple sites. So, when you do go to the road less traveled and you pull up some of these short stories, you're giving a more genuine look. I can tell with some of my students when we read Gatsby that they've been to SparkNotes or one of the others. You can kind of see the difference in work. When it's a short story they actually read it. They need to develop their own skills and not be looking for crutches. It gives you a lot more authentic learning, where when you stick with the classics, they've been taught so many times for so many years, the cheat resources the cheat resources run crazy. #00:50:08.91# #00:50:12.17#

Speaker 2: #00:50:12.17#
My last question is what advice would you give to a new teacher or someone who has bene teaching for a while and wants to change their curriculum to make it more multicultural. What advice would you give them to do that successfully? #00:50:25.61#

Speaker 1:#00:50:25.61#
I would say that the first thing with whatever you're teaching, it has to have meaning to the students. There has to be something that they can connect with. We may just get a fingernail connection with some, and others may be all in. There has to be some understanding of why we're learning this. That's me speaking as the "D" English student in high school. If I don't have a reason to do this, I'm just not going to do it. So, the new teacher, there's more stuff out there to teach than you could ever imagine. You're going to have people who say "Do this, do that" but on the other hand, you have to find your style and your audience with your class. My measure when I'm going through my cabinets, and I was trying to get to teach A Stranger in a Strange Land. I have The Scarlet Letter which is a story about adultery, persecution and abuse. I have Life as a Slave, which highlights the abuse and life as a Black slave here in America. I have The Great Gatsby which goes over parties, extramarital affairs, uses this language, and kind of went through every book in the cabinet and had a profile of…this is where this book is, it's trying to create a utopia in the 60s in which we have a lot of new social norms including sexuality. It doesn't get more explicit than The Scarlet Letter. It doesn't get any more obscene or vulgar than killing somebody. Use the texts that you have as a yardstick. Read it, where does it fit into the continuum here? Don't forget to explore that. Keep in mind you can't do everything. I could probably do a graduate class on a particular author. But your love of ELA may not be the person who thinks I'm going to go work in a machine ship in two years. What you're doing is enrichment and broadening, so they may not share the same passion. They didn't teach me in college, but they taught me in drill sergeant school, you have to do things by the books. And you get in front of their platoon, and they look at you like you're speaking another language. Where we get into this language arts and literature, we've done this over and over through high school, college, and grad school...some of them are doing it for the first time. Sometimes we just go in and we've lost them. That flexibility, too.

Participant 5

#00:00:00.00#

R (Researcher): If you just want to go ahead and start by talking about you and your experience as a teacher in your school, I'd love to hear it. #00:00:00.00#

P (Participant): Well I've been teaching for 23 years, and I started fresh out of college when I was 22. And like I said, I have not been at [school name] very long. I had been teaching at international schools overseas for the past eight years, and I just got back to the states in the Fall of 2019. #00:02:00.12#

R: Where did you teach?#00:02:00.12#

P: I taught in Eastern Europe, China and South Korea. So, I taught at [school] here in Oklahoma City for most of my career and I decided to go overseas. I have a master's in gifted education as well. I didn't actually teach middle school until I started teaching internationally. In the States like mostly I've taught 9th grade and I've been a gifted specialist. I taught AP Lang and American Lit for 11 years. Then when I when I overseas, at the first school I was at, I was THE high school English teacher, so I taught 8th-12th grade. In China I taught 8th grade and 9th grade Honors and AP Lange. Then in Korea, I taught 8th, 9th, 11th and 12th. #00:03:18.38#

R: Wow, you have such a wide range of experience. This is going to be really interesting talking to you. No one else that I've talked to has that overseas experience, and I think you're bringing something really interesting to the table. #00:03:30.08#

P: Being overseas… I've always been interested in multicultural lit because I did a directed study of that when I was in college. I did independent study of African-American literature. Yeah and so I always try to bring that into my teaching, because I think those stories are so interesting. But you know like teaching American lit, you know 11th grade, you're kind of restricted to just American lit. So, it was good when I went overseas to be able to expand the offerings a lot more of what they read. Because I really wanted to, while I was there, even though it was like international schools and it was American curriculum, I wanted to be able to teach things that were definitely from their country of origin or from their region but then also at the same time expose them to some classic American texts and things I thought would fit their experience. So, I was in Lithuania in Eastern Europe, northeastern Europe and they were the Soviet Union until 1991. So, we…the eighth graders…read Between the Shades of Gray by Ruta Sepetys, do you know this book? She's a Lithuanian-American, and she also wrote Salt to the Sea. We read that book while we were reading the Diary of Anne Frank because she's a Lithuanian-American authors and that book focused on focused on the experience of the people who lived in the Baltic countries. I didn't know… the kids knew like a little bit more than me…that Stalin imprisoned 3 million Baltic residents in Siberian work camps during and right after World War 2. Also, we got really lucky because Lithuania has like a giant International Book Fair every year and she came, the author came, and so she came to our school and talked to the kids. She did tons of research to write the book. She even went to a like experiential thing in Latvia where she did a prison simulation. I mean, she really got into that yeah and that sounded super scary to me because she said they kept them in a prison camp situation, and it was for like a month. She said she also like found some relatives that she didn't know about who were living in Lithuania. So that was a really cool experience. We read The Joy Luck Club, as far as you know, another international… We read The Giver as our American. Then in 10th grade, and in my 11th and 12th grade, we read Animal Farm and Fahrenheit 451, and I know they're not multicultural, but it really interesting to read…and 1984… each grade had a different one. So it was really easy to read those books with kids who could go home and talk to their parents who had lived during Soviet times and compare what their parents' experience was with what Orwell and Bradbury put in the books. It was a crazy, cool experience to get to talk to them about that because they all went home and talked to their parents about it before I even asked. And then when I was in China, we read…well again, the 9th grade kids read The Good Earth by Pearl Buck, and my honors class, we read…Ballad of a Tiger Mom? Have you read this? Tiger Mom, I think was the name of that, and it's written by a lady who is Chinese, but she moved to America and she went to college and married an American guy, but she wanted to raise her kids like the way the Asian parents raise their kids. She wanted her kids like to have kind of a stricter upbringing and for them to be talented and exposed to all these things and she wrote this memoir about it. It was really interesting because you know the kids are like, "Oh my God, my parents are just like that." You know her experience is a she's trying to do that in America, and her kids are like, "Mom, you're like you're a freak. This is not how we d things." So, it was an interesting comparison for them to read. Then we read The Secret Life of Bees and talked a lot about civil rights.

We were reading To Kill a Mockingbird, so I did that as kind of a companion book and talked about civil rights in the United States and segregation. Because at every school I have a mix of American and international and then students like from the country where the school is, so American students know very little about segregation as it is, but then the kids from other parts of the world know virtually nothing. Then we read, the 8th graders we read The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. We talked a lot about that, and I tried to explain to them that I'm from Oklahoma, but it used to Indian Territory and talk about Native Americans, even though Sherman Alexie is from the Northwest. I wanted to bring in like a high interest multicultural book. #00:10:40.99#

R: Yeah I think that one does a really good job with the pictures and everything and it's funny, too. #00:10:42.55#

P: In Korea, we read To kill a Mockingbird again, because you know, it's like a classic. [pauses] I gave them the choice when we read Anne Frank. Some of them read Between the Shades of Grey and some of them read Animal Farm. So it's just been kind of a mix. Oh, we read A Single Shard by um, Linda Sue Park, she wrote A Long Walk to Water. So A Single Shard, she wrote that before A Long Walk to Water, and A Single Shard is like her adaptation of a traditional Korean folk tale. So we read that and I read that with 8th graders in China and in Korea. It's like a really cute, easy story about this kid who is from this really poor village and he's out one day and he breaks some pottery that the village potter has sitting outside. Then Potter' s like, "Now you have to work for me." So then the guy who's the village potter becomes his mentor, and they have a really great relationship. It's interesting because that talks a lot that mentor relationship that kids need, but it also talks about like the origins pf traditional pottery in Korea. Because the potter of the village gets the chance to make some pottery for the emperor. Then a bunch of my students read My Name is Kaiko in Korea. I like to give my students choice of what they read, and some Korean kids really get into these like darker times in Korean history, like the Japanese occupation. A lot of the girls who read My Name is Kaiko were like, "Oh" because they were doing something about that in history and then heard from their parents or grandparents what occupation was like. So, you know it's just…I try to keep it like…I had independent reading time every day for the 9th graders in Korea. So, I try to keep my classroom library stocked with books from all different cultures and then that way the kids have a lot of things to choose from. They can choose something from their country or their country's history or from America or from whatever. One thing that the kids and I talked about that was really funny is how in YA literature right now there's a lot of like gay teen stories coming out. We talked about how we thought that was its own category of diversity because kids read like, Love Simon and Leah on the Offbeat and Aristotle and Dante or Will Grayson, Will Grayson. So, I have a really good mix of…you know, it was so funny because they were like, "Yeah gay teen YA is its own things now." And I was like, "Yeah, it's cool." Then a bunch of kids read Turtles all the Way Down. So then they were like "Mental illness.." Or like Eleanor and Park, I taught that in China too with my 11th graders because when I read it I was like I don't think I've read young adult book that really has the experience of an abused teen as a main character, so I thought that was a really unique experience. And Eleanor and Park it's funny because the boy is like half-Korean, Korean-American and so the kids really liked that book. The Koreans in my class they were like, "He's Korean and he has blue eyes or green eyes. He doesn't have brown eyes." They were obsessed with that because almost every Asian has brown eyes, and when they meet people, like I have blue eyes, and kids would give me compliments on my eye color and talk about my eyes all the time. So anytime they meet someone who has any color eyes other than brown they're just like, "oh your eyes are so beautiful." Lots of them get contacts to change their eye color. So it's so funny like the little things they become obsessed with. #00:16:17.61#

R: I love just listening to what you're saying. I found it really interesting to think about "Okay, how?… I guess I haven't ever thought, I never thought about how does this translate across like internationally, too. I think that's such an interesting perspective that I hadn't …honestly, I hadn't really thought about it. I wasn't thinking like kids in Korea are reading Eleanor and Park too, you know. That's really cool. #00:16:48.20#

P: Yeah, I thought it was really interesting because you know it's like, I'm teaching an American curriculum and you know like I said, I wanted my ninth graders to read To Kill a Mockingbird. I want my 11th graders to read The Great Gatsby. In 8th grade we read The Pearl. So I wanted them to read specific classics, but to me even The Pearl is you know, it's by an American author, but it's not quite technically an American story. Then for them, learning about things in American history, like learning about segregation is completely outside their realm of experience. It was really interesting just to try to find things that they would enjoy away and you know to see that with young adult lit especially, all kids like the same… you know, they just want a good story. They want a romance or love triangle. In Korea almost every boy in 8th grade read Absolutely True Diary because like once one kid read it as his independent reading book and he told all the other boys how funny it was, and then it was like a little bit scandalous. Then they all read it, and they were like, "Oh my gosh this book, it's like the funniest book I've ever read." So it

was really cool to hear them talk about those books and like trade them around, especially the stuff I love that they read. Then for them to notice things, for us to have a whole conversation about gay teen lit. Then we had another conversation about like cancer stories because they had read The Fault in Our Stars and All the Bright Places and there are a couple others, and they were just like, "What is up with this cancer theme?" #00:19:05.99#

R: So at [current school] you'd just took over, right before this? So, you probably don't have much of a chance to really…#00:19:18.57#

P: No, we read Hatchet, which you know and it's kind of a class. They had read Barrio Boys, or the teacher before had read that with them. I think that was all because they had Bud, Not Buddy in the classroom collection, but the kids didn't really talk about like having read it, so I don't think they'd read that one. #00:19:44.27#

R: So, it's charter school, right? #00:19:50.64#

P: Yeah. #00:19:50.64#

R: Is it fairly new or am I mixing it up with a different charter school? #00:19:56.61#

P: No, apparently, it's like 20 years old. I really didn't know anything about it, either. It was a lady who was a principal of mine at [OKC school] became to the headmaster, and like two days after she started they were like, "Oh by the way, you need to hire an English teacher," and she was like, "Oh, luckily I know someone who subbing right now. I'll give her a call." So I didn't really know anything about it until she told me. It's a technology charter school and it's been around for almost 20 years as well. #00:20:49.77#

R: So, what was the culture at that school kind of like? I know that you have a limited I guess experience there, but what was your impression?#00:20:59.00#

P:.Most of the students are Hispanic, and I know they have to apply to come from their local OKC school. It's only 6-12 grades right now. I thought that was really interesting because the 6th grade English teacher and I talked about it, it's like you have no…from kid to kid you have very little idea what the quality of their Oklahoma City Elementary School was that they came from. I got there and I was like the 7th graders are getting ready to read Hatchet? I mean even in China and Korea, like our 5th graders read that. I was thinking, "Wow, non-native English speakers in other countries are reading that at a lower grade." But you know I had…looking at the students exile scores and stuff, they are a little bit lower of readers in 6th and 7th. The high school teachers talk about they usually catch up by 9th grade, but Middle school can be pretty hard for some of them. Oklahoma City all their elementary schools are neighborhood elementary schools, and so it really depends like where in the city they were living as to the quality of their elementary school. #00:22:44.98#

R: I want to kind of circle back to something you said earlier. You said that when you were in college you took an African-American lit class. So I'm kind of interested in people's experiences with their own high school or middle school through high school English, and then if they don't have kind of experiences with it in college too what that was like? So if you have anything to say about that…#00:23:08.75#

P: Well in high school we pretty much just read the canon. I would say probably like the most multicultural that we read when I was in middle school or high school would have been To Kill a Mockingbird or Of Mice and Men because we definitely weren't reading anything really by women or other minority groups, and obviously those books are white authors talking about minority experience. So when I was in college I fell into a class, like I signed up for the class and it was British short fiction of the contemporary age or whatever, and then the class started and I was like "I have no idea what this class is going to be about, but I'll take it. It sounds interesting." Then I got into the class and the professor who was teaching it, she specialized in Irish fiction, particularly Irish fiction centered around the Irish conflict the Northern Irish conflict. So I read really interesting things in that class, all about Ireland and the troubles and you know all this kind of stuff. And then I decided to take the African-American lit class and that really informed a lot of the things that I chose to do in my own teaching. Here I am teaching at schools in the city with black kids who…they probably haven't read anything by a black author, they probably don't know a lot about their own cultures, history or experience. To me it was like it's sad that they don't have that exposure and so I would bring in The narrative of Frederick Douglass. In my AP class for a few years we read Beloved. And for a few years I taught Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison and I felt like especially teaching Invisible Man was really important because I was like "Ralph Ellison is an Oklahoma author, and almost no one reads him." But then interestingly they

refer to Invisible Man a lot on the AP tests, so I was like "I'm going to do it" and it was a struggle because the kids are like "This book is so complicated." But it was really cool because I could bring in like all this other stuff about African American history at that time. We talked about Booker T. Washington, DuBois, and lynching… anything that I kind of popped up in Invisible Man, I would find articles, some primary sources. We would read about it and talk about it. Then I did The Bluest Eye one year in like 9th grade and I started to branch out into just short stories by other authors like Gary Soto or Amy Tan, things that are really accessible to 9th graders especially. 11th grade we are always did a unit on personal narrative and so I tried to bring in all the personal narratives like from different cultures. So we did like Langston Hughes, Gary Soto, Amy Tan, and Sandra Cisneros and then I found one from Flauvius Stan. He grew up in Estonia and he has this really very moving… it's only a few pages narrative but it's about the fall of the Soviet leader in Estonia that happened around Christmas time one year and he's a kid when that happens. The biggest thing happening in town other than that is that the grocery store has like a bunch of oranges for sale because during Soviet times it was hard to get you know lots of things. So, he goes and stands in line all day to buy oranges for his family for Christmas and so it's like a really cute and pretty moving. Once I kind of got in, then I tried to start branching out and doing more and I mean especially now in the 2000s. Kids need to be reading stuff from everyone as far as I'm concerned. It doesn't matter if they would encounter or not, but like any group of people that are writing their own stories these days, kids should. I have some friends though, I really don't know a lot about African lit, and I have some friends that read African lit all the time. So, there's definitely still gaps I have in my reading that my other friends are reading stuff like that all the time. #00:28:51.20#

P: One thing that I was not so happy with at [school] is I was looking at their 7th grade classroom, and the literature books they have, I mean I knew they were old, but they had like no multicultural stuff in them at all and then I looked and they were from around 1997. I was like "Well that's too old at this point. No wonder it doesn't really have anything multicultural in it." I can think about that evolution of literature books as long as I've been teaching and the things that they put in literature anthologies now are quite different from things they put in when I first started teaching, which would have been around 97. If I were a less experienced teacher I feel like it would have been a lot harder for me to go out and find materials on my own, especially if I were trying to look for materials that kids of a very specific cultural population should be exposed to. So that was a little disappointing for me about that school. #00:30:36.15#

R: So something that I've been…I asked on the survey, but now that it's kind of done and I've gotten quite a few responses on it, I found that the two biggest things that people said why they didn't teach it or why people in general didn't teach multicultural lit was because they don't know multicultural texts or they don't have money to buy them. So, what do you think about that?#00:31:12.98#

P: I would also think that those would be the 2 biggest reasons because I mean I know a lot of teachers I've met a lot of English teachers, and a lot of them don't know. When I was in China we were re-doing our booklist. We were trying to align our novels from 6 to 12. And there's me and a couple other teachers who were really pushing for multicultural selections. The school was good about having…like in 6th grade they read Red Scarf Girl. I can never remember the lady's name, but it's written by a Chinese girl and she was like 12 years old during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. So they read that in 6th grade, and then they read The Good Earth. So they were okay about having books from China in the booklist, but they were really bad about having books about other types of experiences. So a few of us were kind of pushing to widen the perspective a little bit. But there were a couple of teachers and that's what they said. They were like, "well I don't know many of those books and I don't know if I would be comfortable teaching them." There were a couple of teachers who were a little bit older than me and they were like "Well what if I read it and I don't feel comfortable teaching it," kind of like intimating you know. One of the books we were talking about was Speak. And I know Laurie Halse Anderson is white and the characters are white, but you know obviously talks about date rape. That teacher, she said "I would not teach that book. I'm not comfortable talking to ninth graders about that topic." I was like "Oh!" There were various reasons why people…a lot of them said "Oh I've never heard of that book, what if after I read it I wouldn't know how to teach it?" I think that was part of it too. Some people were thinking "Well if that's not my experience and I don't know a lot about that culture, then like what can I bring to the teaching of that book?" Well, if it were me I would you research about the history, about the social issues, you know that kind of thing and try to figure it out. Also, themes are universal and so just hook onto a theme and go with it. I didn't think that people would use like have that as a reason as to why they were reluctant to teach something that was from a. Different culture. #00:34:21.86#

R: I was talking to another teacher and she was kind of talking about what you're saying too. She said "You know, I think for a lot of people, they don't they just don't do research and maybe it's a time thing. You already feel like you're being pulled in so many different directions as a teacher and especially you have your own family at home that you're responsible for when you go home, too. I don't even have children yet and I'm also a newer teacher, so I feel like my time is pretty valuable. But she said you know I really think that people just don't want to take the time because it requires time. It requires your own…finding things and doing that research. She said, "I can understand why people don't. I don't agree with it, but I guess that's probably why." So I thought that was an interesting take on it. #00:35:33.24#

P: I think a lot of it has to do with what your own personal reading. When I'm reading something, like when I was reading Just Mercy for my AP class, I was thinking, this would be a great companion book for To Kill a Mockingbird, bringing this issue into current times. But if those sparks don't happen for you in your personal reading or if you, in your personal reading, don't read a wide variety of books, then yeah I can see where you'd be like "well I just… I don't know about that .I've never heard of it. I don't know anybody who's Hispanic or Chinese or whatever." And it would be harder. #00:36:23.25#

R: So something you kind of mentioned as you were talking a second ago, you mentioned wanting to teach Speak, but you kind of got some pushback from another from a colleague. I was wondering if you've ever experienced, you have experienced that pushback from a colleague, but have you experienced that problem like maybe and administrator or parents or students? Has that ever have and how did you deal with it? #00:36:50.12#

P: Yeah, I mean to me, it sometimes happens with random stuff. I had pushback one year from one mom about To Kill a Mockingbird because she didn't like the fact that the n word was in it. We really didn't have any pushback about Speak because we taught that at [OKC school] too which was interesting. But when I did Absolutely True Diary in China, I got pushback from the kids because Chinese culture is very…their outer appearance, this concept of face and saving face and keeping face is really important. For kids, especially for middle schoolers or high schoolers, part of that is being a perfect student and they don't date until after they graduate. High school is supposed to be the most important thing, and so we were reading it, and every so often kids like "This kid's a pervert!" and I'm like, "Okay, back it up. Now why do you say that? Because he thinks about girls? And he wants to kiss her and he wants to do things?" They're like "Yeah!" and I was like, "We're not going to do that because you are the same age as he is in the book and I know, even if you don't want to admit it that you wonder about those things." It was interesting then because they had a class with a counselor, and so when they got to the dating and relationships unit, then they changed quite a bit. Then they came in and were like, "Remember when we read…." and they just started talking about how hard those decisions were now that they started thinking about them and talking about that class with the counselor. Because I thought, "Well maybe this book is like too mature for them because it's okay for 14 year old American kids, but maybe a little bit too mature for 14 year old kids in Asia." I moved it to be more in correlation with that dating unit that the counselor taught instead of earlier in the year, but I thought that was really interesting pushback that I got from the kids. Early in my teaching when I taught a Narrative of Frederick Douglass, I had this kid come into class one day and he was like, "My mom wanted me to ask you why we're reading this book about some black guy who didn't really do anything?" Okay first of all, we already talked about what Frederick Douglass did, the fact that he was a slave and then goes on to be working for President Lincoln, we can't say that Frederick Douglass didn't do anything. I was like "So, I'm sorry that your mom worded that question in that way, but I'm trying to teach you about how you can come from literally less than nothing and become whatever you want and Frederick Douglass's experience is perfect for that." Plus, it's so short, it is so easy to read, but yeah I was really surprised and it was from…I didn't put two and two together until a few weeks after, that kid's mom was a special ed teacher in my school. #00:41:24.38#

R: Has there ever been a text that you wanted to teach that you just decided, maybe this isn't going to work, or that you brought up and everyone was like "no we're not doing that." #00:41:37.99#

P: There are a couple of times when people have brought things to me for a certain grade level and I was like "No that's too high." Because like I was at a school and somebody said something about teaching Speak in like 7th or 8th grade, I was like, "No, absolutely not." I have had pushback from admin who aren't English teachers and they do research about books and they like the vocabulary and reading level and they think books should be taught at a lot younger age than they are. When were doing that book alignment in China, in 8th grade we taught Of Mice and

Men, and they said “Well we could teach that in like 5th grade,” and I was like, “No you really can't.” The language is very simplistic, but the themes of the book, you have to put those things together to get a grade rating for a book. You can't just go, “Oh the vocabulary is 5th grade.” So that's happened, but the only thing that's come close is I dropped Beloved after a couple of years in my AP class. Partially because like the story is so complicated symbolically, it's very complicated. And two, I just…after a couple years I was like I don't know if I can keep doing this like every year because you know the violence from what happens to —— and her boyfriend that Morrison got from real people…[receives phone call]#00:43:39.05#

R: So I have 2 more questions. How do you feel like…what was the effect on…you already kind of talked about this a little, but what do you think the fact of teaching multicultural literature has been on your students? What has that taught them? How has that changed them or helped them? #00:45:00.45#

P: I think you know it broadens their perspective quite a bit and I usually would I ask kids at the end of the year what they think about all the books that we’ve read and what they felt like they’ve learned. Overseas, especially, the kids do say that they learned so much about America or different countries’ histories or just like what an American teenager’s experience is like. They were all, every student that I had was planning to go to college in the United States. That's part of why…if you’re from the country of origin and you’re in an international school, that's the reason. Then in the States I would have kids from lots of different backgrounds, and they would talk about how it was interesting to read about certain groups that they don't know about or that they had stereotypes about. Especially in my AP class if we were reading Invisible Man or whatever, and the kids would be like “Oh that's so interesting to learn about that culture. It helps us to see the students in our school a little bit differently knowing maybe like how their parents talk to them because of what happened to them or whatever. It’s interesting to have kids in class and hear those conversations too, when they talk to each other and when you have a kid who can go “Oh yeah, my parents… I had a girl who her grandparents fled Vietnam during the Vietnam War and brought her parents with them and she would hear those stories and she told our class about them when we read a Tim O'Brien thing. you know they are. It’s interesting to how kids open up about their personal experiences when we’re reading something from their culture in class. To me, that's why I do it. And it can get so boring just reading, dead white guys all the time, there's so much more stuff out there to read. You know so that's kind of what I hope my kids get out of it. #00:47:54.02#

R: For my last question is What advice would you give to a new teacher or someone who's maybe just wanting to shift their curriculum who's been teaching for a little while, but what advice would you give to them about how to incorporate multicultural texts or how to be successful? What do they need to do? #00:48:15.47#

P: I would say first look at the cultures of the kids in your class and then go and look for maybe some like classic kind of texts. Like if you have a lot of Hispanic kids, you could always start with a Gary Soto or Sandra Cisneros, like established authors from that culture. Same thing if you have a lot of Asian kids in your class, you can always start with Amy Tan. So that's the advice that I would give is just go back to these you know like tried and true texts from authors from that culture as a way to ease into it. Another piece of advice that I would give to people is to widen their personal reading variety. #00:49:15.57#

R: Yeah that's actually interesting that you said that. No one else has really even talked about their own personal reading life so I think actually I think that's a large part of it, too. #00:49:29.68#

P: Well and that’s something I developed from traveling is that you know especially places where I lived, when I get there or before I moved that country, I started looking at things that have been written about the country or look at the big events in their history. I knew I wanted to read about the Chinese Cultural Revolution when I moved to China. Or when I was traveling to Eastern Europe, I wanted to read short stories about the Bosnian War and obviously about World War 2. Because you learn so much that way about… I'm never going to sit down and just read a history book, that’s not my preference. So, it’s easier to read fictional books about different countries’ experiences. #00:50:28.89#

Participant 6

R: So if you just want to go ahead and start telling by me about your experience as a teacher, where you work, what your school is like, etc. #00:00:00.00#

P: Okay, my family is very education-focused. I'm a single kid, I was raised by my mom and she's special education teacher. I spent a lot of time watching her struggle with teaching because it was harder for her to be able to get that connection and find the best route for students to learn. But as a kid I just associated teaching with stress. That's all I thought it was, and I vowed I'd never do that. I'm never going to be a teacher, look what my mom deals with every day. It wasn't until I got my undergraduate degree in journalism and I started heading down that route to go be a journalist, that I had a former professor of mine say "I bet you 1000 dollars that in a decade you're in the classroom." I was like "Nope not happening." She said, "No, I see you when you're on the staff for the college newspaper and the patience that you have to teach people, and you're going to realize journalism is not where your strengths lie." Of course I didn't want to hear that, and so it was about five years in journalism and then I realized "Yeah, I like it when the new people come in and I can train them, and when they get excited about what they've written and it comes out in the paper, that's exciting for me. She was right. Anyway, about 5-6 years after I'd started in journalism, I got the alternative certification. It was the very last year that when you did alternative certification you actually had to have a couple of outside people come and watch your class. So, there was huge, heavy observation when I went in there. One of them was a retired teacher, I had the principals in there three or four times, and each one gave me passing recommendations and everything. Then I went to the state to submit it to get my teacher license and they were like, "Oh yeah, we don't have funding for this anymore, so we're just going to issue you your teaching certificate. Good job! You're ready!" And that was amazing to me, it was such a surreal thing, but they haven't Brought it back. We still have the alternative certification where they have to get a certain numbers of hours and professional development, but I was in a weird gap while they were making that transition. Afterwards I immediately started getting a master's and then my husband said, "Our son's got 6 more years in school before he heads to college. I already know you go to the next thing, so go get the doctorate, and so I did the in 5 years. Then I graduated and then my son's a freshman at Langston right now. It was never a path I thought I was going to be on, one I like actively avoided in most instances, but now I can't imagine any other job, to the point when things open up in our district office or when they ask me when am I going to be a principal that just makes me sick to my stomach. I don't want any of that junk, I need to be in a classroom. I don't want to be an instructional coach, like I want to physically be in the classroom with the students, and I don't really care what grade level it is because I found that secondary…I did middle school at first, I did that for about 4 years, and then I've been up at the high school for about 7. So, I've done middle school, high school, and college students, and there's really not much difference. They all have the same insecurities. They all have the same needs. They all are looking for someone to guide them in a direction, and that was an interesting thing for me as well in teaching to be able to be on all those different levels. I've always been English education, even though I'm certified in speech, drama, debate, and journalism, they keep me with English, which is fine. I'm also the academic team coach at our school something that I highly waited until old dude retired and then I fought hard to get it because there was another male teacher in the building who thought because he was valedictorian and had done it at his previous small school that he should automatically get it, and had to tell him, "I have been here 7 years. I've got seniority. You have to give me this." And they said, "Okay." I'm also the GSA sponsor my school, the gay straight alliance, and we've had that for about 5 years now, and it was students who brought that up, because it couldn't be something of course that we started. I do know the state we live in. So, I've been their sponsor for 5 years now and I love that group. I absolutely adore them. They're the ones that I fear most when we go on breaks like because I know that home isn't always the best place. That's a hard one. But I think it was about 3 or 4 years ago that my focus in my classroom, started to shift, I always had a big focus on multiculturalism and different things like that in the classroom, but it was always kind of like a check on my list of things that I would have for teaching. And it never was really a primary focus which was always interesting to me because I know that I brought it up, I know that I read things that were different viewpoints and different lenses. I'm not quite sure what it was that changed or what it was that fixed my focus to say "No, everything needs to be around concept or equity and privilege and diversity like this needs to be the underlying thing in everything that I teach. But I have gotten a lot of pushback. I'm the only English teacher in my school that teaches this way, not that they're not great teachers. They are, but there's a good chunk of teachers that don't feel comfortable with certain conversations in the classroom. I have, bless her heart, I have a freshman teacher who for the past 3 years has had somebody, some parent be upset that when they read To Kill a Mockingbird and she reads aloud, she says the n word with it. And it's

not like she's going around calling kids this or anything else. Then she asked me…I'm not sure why she thinks…because my husband is Black… I don't know. I don't say the word either, right? But the fact that she said "Well, we front load it. We tell the students this is what is the context of the book. Let's talk about Gloria Maylor's essay on the n word and the use of it and let's have this conversation around you know what this word is and the power of connotation. She has this to frontload it and everything else, but there's always some parent, and the funny thing is it's always a white parent. Their child, usually a girl, feels uncomfortable in the classroom when you say it. I don't know how to begin to help her to get her feel like… she's doing everything that I would you do. Whereas, we read A Raisin in the Sun and the n-word's in there multiple times as are certain tropes of oppression and subtle racism in there. Even the neighbor that's in that one that says "I can't believe you're moving to a white neighborhood there. I guess you're one of those uppity ones." Just the notion that this is a conversation I'm going to have in my classroom and I've never once gotten a phone call. I don't know what the difference is, but I think that every time one of those things happens and our poor teachers don't know how to respond or they feel they're ill-equipped, they just avoid it. That's an issue. Now like I said, I've never really had a parent really upset, although I did have one a couple of years ago, which was interesting because the mom was adamant that the daughter not be made aware that we had this conversation. In fact, she didn't even have the conversation with me, she had it with the counselor. She told the counselor, "I don't understand why Dr. [name] reads so much Black literature in her classroom. Can't you just read classic American literature?" I'm pretty sure that Langston Hughes and Lorraine Hansbury and Frederick Douglass are classic American literature. They just happen to be Black. That was a very interesting thing, especially considering this was another young white lady and she predominantly dated African-American boys, so I don't know if that was the parents pushing back on that, or if they thought she's pushing that on my daughter…I have no clue. But she never brought it up specifically to me and I didn't change a single thing. I'm not . If you ask to not read a book, then I can give an alternate assignment, but I'm not changing anything I do in my class. Around that same year, I was called into the principal's office over something else…I don't remember, but it was not a big deal. I was just in their talking to them, they needed me to do something. Our principal said, "Hey, you know I've been hearing your name a lot lately." And I'm thinking, "Oh, it's because I'm graduating with a doctorate, something." He said, "No, you're kind of developing a reputation." "What do you mean a reputation?" He said, "Well, you know, you're kind of coloring outside the lines with what you do and what you say in the classroom. You kind of pick some interesting topics and focus and everything else and not a lot of other teachers will do that." And I said, "Is this because of what we're reading?" And he said, "Yeah, a lot of your colleagues are like 'She's talking about white privilege in her classroom? Oh my gosh!'" And I went, "So you're telling me I'm developing a reputation for being a compassionate and focused and equity driven teacher? I like it!" It's not the response I think he thought he was going to get, but I was like, "Wow, what an honor!" I know that I'm right in what we're doing. I know that I'm backed by the National Council of Teachers of English. So, I don't think anybody trying to tell me to not do this has a leg to stand on, and I know that I do. #00:13:07.85#

R: Actually, that was one of the questions I was going to ask you was, "Had you experienced that push back?" Surprisingly, a lot of teachers I've talked to said they haven't really I think it depends on where you're teaching, but then it also makes you wonder…So it seems like the culture of your school, [town] is a pretty decent-sized town, right? #00:13:49.21#

P: We are what, fourth largest? Forty percent of our city is soldiers and their families. So, we have a very heavy military concentration, which was the focus of my doctorate, military kids in public schools. And the other deal is [town] is a very Multicultural, urban city. It's kind of strange. We have a few instances where you'll see some things and you're like, "Gosh, you just made us look bad." But for the most part, it's a pretty inclusive community. I haven't gotten too many of those feelings. Now I did when I first graduated with a journalism degree I took a job in Clinton. I remember my like our first…after I got the apartment and it was just me and my son at that time because my husband, was overseas for his 2nd deployment in Iraq. So I took the job for the 9 months while he was gone and then moved back here as soon as he came back from deployment. I took the job up there, got a little apartment for my son and I, he started school, he was in Pre-K…We went out to…I think it was Pizza Hut, and we were eating dinner and the lady who waited on us was a black woman. She took our order and she said, "So you guys are not from around these parts?" And I went "You know small city and everything else…"and she said "No, we don't have a whole lot of that going on up here." She's pointing to my son and me basically implying that we don't have a lot of mixed families here. So I went, "Kids?" I didn't understand what she meant. Are there not children here? Then she just very subtly was like, "No, you see what I'm saying?" without really saying it. Then I thought, "Oh my gosh. [Town] is a weird little bubble because I never would have experienced that here." On my very first day up in Clinton I'm seeing the racial lines in that community. I knew Clinton and Cordell were both sundown towns, and I

did not know about that. I'd heard of it when I was in…I grew up in Arizona. I heard about it in Arizona, the conflict of it, but I never really thought about it here until I started you know asking some people at work about this, and they were like "Oh yea, no literally Clinton is divided. Black people live on one side of the railroad tracks. There's a section where mostly Hispanic people live. They self divide themselves. That was a really eye opening experience as well too, because [town] is way more…progressive. So it was always a little shocking when I would get some pushback, too. I don't subtly do things in class, so I get it. I'm very overt in what I teach, and I let you know exactly where I stand on issues, but always to a point of you see how well I use my voice, now you go use yours. It's a model. I don't expect people to come out of my classroom believing everything that I believe, but having the courage to realize then you don't have to cookie cutter feedback what I'm asking for. Develop your own thoughts. Develop your own opinions. These are the opinions of other people around the world and from different cultures and different ethnicities and different gender identifications and whatever it happens to be, so that way maybe you make a better decision with your voice. That's how I always see it. But, yes it is a little weird because [town] is this weird insular bubble being a military community. #00:18:10.09#

R: Yeah I was thinking about that after you said it, and I wondered if it has something to do with the fact that you know military family there tends to be a lot more diversity within it and they tend to like move a lot they're also kind of exposed to a lot more in terms of like viewpoints and perspectives just because they've lived in different places. So, I wondered if that had something to do with the culture of your school. #00:18:40.05#

P: Yes, and the kids are a little bit more receptive and generally I find more parents are receptive. But those ones that just happen by chance of fate to live in a military community but are not attached to it, are the ones that I get more push back. When I've had those parents that are having issues or even students…every once and a while I'll get some students like What did you learn? "Well, as a white person I'm a bad person." You didn't listen to anything I taught you. That's not what we're saying. You immediately took the defensive posture and your stopped listening. So, I'm sure if I were to go through actually look at the statistics of that, they haven't left southwest Oklahoma, their families are entrenched here, they know nothing else. I don't try to take it personally, but it's a different kind of deal and I don't know. I'm surprised that you said lots of other participants haven't had that same kind of pushback. That's interesting to me.#00:19:51.67#

R: It was interesting to me, too because I kind of expected…I haven't talked… I do have a couple of people I'm talking to who are from smaller schools and I'm interested to see what they say because that's where I'm from. I'm from a really small school in southeastern Oklahoma. Like the thought of it…someone teaching a text by a Black author. I mean I read the Narrative of Frederick Douglass, but I was in AP, so I feel like that's how she got away with it. But we also didn't really like to talk about it in a way that… I don't know we used to talk about figurative language and things like that because we were doing AP Lang. When I read To Kill a Mockingbird in high school that was an AP book that I read over the summer with no real context and we just read it and we came back to school and we talked about it a little bit at the very beginning and I remember being like "I feel like we should be talking about this a little bit more, especially you know like the courthouse scene and Tom Robinson" and I feel like… I don't think my teacher you know maybe did it on purpose, but she was just like "Yeah, that's really sad that that happened." Even in my head, I don't think I had an idea of racism at the time like I talk about that a little bit at the beginning of this. I didn't have an idea. Honestly, I thought racism kind of ended with the civil rights movement because I wasn't really exposed to a lot of people of color or different backgrounds and me in my little town. So when I went to college that's when it kind of like unfolded and I was like "whoa." Even at that point in time I was like, "I think we should talk about this a little bit more, but I didn't really know how to bring that up to my teacher." We all were kind of like "Yeah, that's bad, shouldn't do that and that's kind of what it was left at, you know. So I'm interested to see what people in smaller towns would think about something like this. And not that all small towns are like that, I don't think that every single one is. But a lot of them are. #00:22:24.21#

P: There's a much higher propensity for some of the older way of thinking perspectives in the smaller towns than you will find in bigger towns, and statisticly, that's true. #00:22:36.26#

R: So something I also have kind of been interested in too. I'm wondering, for some people, what was their own high school experience like, as far as what did they read? Did that kind of shape them or did that introduce something to them that made them think "Okay well, I'm interested in learning about different viewpoints or I'm interested in learning about you know these people's stories and they kind of took that and ran with it. So, what was your high school experience like with literature? #00:23:12.32#

P: I grew up in Arizona, pretty much in the middle of the state, near…most people know where Sedona is. So my high school time AP wasn't a thing. So, we went the honors route. So our honors now, they are not allowed to give book reading over the summer. Somehow somewhere someone in the school district said that's not fair to students who don't have that ability to get the books or to read them over summer. So now what they have to do is they can offer those books to the students over summer, give them the ones for the school, and then they have to read over summer if possible, if not then they have 2 weeks to read the book. My high school, you had to read 3 books over summer, and you had to write 3 essays. So it was very extensive. I was challenged a lot on what I read. Freshman was pretty easy, but my sophomore year I ended up having the same teacher my senior year. He was phenomenal. Sophomore year was a focus, and even now, it's a focus on world literature in most districts. But he chose to focus it around religion. We read "My name is….by Jane Potach, which is of course, Jewish. And he also read Siddhartha, which is Buddhist. It's supposed to be modeled after the Buddha finding enlightenment. We read some other one, but I don't remember what it was. I remember that I sensed the theme was religion. On the very first day of class, he walked in and he sat down on one of the desks and he said, "Okay I'm going to make statement and you guys are going to be able to answer it and one you're done with that I don't care what you do." So we were like "Yes! Free day! This is going to be exciting. First day, coolest teacher ever." And so, he said, "I want you to prove to me that God exists." And he said "I'm going to tell you about a philosophy called Cardagan's Leap of Faith, which basically says that you can read every single piece of literature about a certain religion until you get all the way up to the top until you are enlightened and everything, but still once you're at the top of that mountain, you are not going to be able to have proof that God exists. You have to be able to do what's called the leap of faith and leap off the top of that mountain and have faith that God's arms will catch you." It was the coolest lecture ever, and I'm not religious in any iota. I've not been very big into what we would call the formal route of Christian church. Which is strange here in Oklahoma because everyone asks me first thing "what church do you go to?" But it was in that class that we had this amazing discussion, and I realized that year was going to be way different. Even my freshman year was was very outside of the box and you had to do a lot of speeches, which was crazy for you know a 14-15 year old. But you know, we went those different routes. Junior year was… I remember we read Kate Chopin's….The Awakening, where she's married and she's not happy and she meets the boy on the beach. Yeah, so there was that and a couple other ones that were all from different viewpoints, so we started talking about more multiculturalism. Then senior year, I don't remember what we read to be able to get senior year over summer, but that year when we got ready to graduate, it was the same teacher from my sophomore year that was all out the religion stuff, and he grabbed about 4 or 5 of us and he told us "There are certain books that I would have read this year, but I didn't get an opportunity because the district told me we're not allowed to read that novel. We have all these class sets and I keep saying we purchase them, why can't we read them? And he fought for them, but he never got it. So, he said, "I've decided if they're not going to let us read these books, I'm just going to give them away. I'm retiring anyways, I don't care." So he told us, and we were all girls, and he said, "There are two books that we would have read. One is The Handmaid's Tale, so here's a copy of it. I want you to be able to read it so that way you understand as a woman how to be able to spot the signs when your powers start being stripped." The second book he gave us was The Catcher in the Rye. He said, "I want you guys to read this, so you'll understand what it's like to feel like you're alone and realize that if everyone feels like they're alone, then no one is alone." Which at 18, I couldn't care less. oh I got it right. I wasn't quite ready for what message or knowledge he was trying to impart on us. But I said thank you and took the books. I remember reading them about 19-20ish, and it wasn't until I got older, I realized I liked out with the teachers that I had in high school because they were very progressive, forward-thinking, and challenging, not just on a literature level, but a find out who you are level. I read Catcher in the Rye with my students every year and we would have done that when we got back from spring break and we didn't get to do that this year. I tell them "We are going to read the most banned book in all of American literature and it's going to be awesome." They're always so excited for it, and I know it's one of those…there's a lot of problems in that book. There's a lot of misogyny, sex, cursing, but we confront those things head on and go "So what do you think about what he said to the girl?" And they're liked, "Well he's a jerk" That's right, because we don't talk that way to women, now do we? You use it as a learning tool. But the notion that in the ninety's I had teachers who were like, "You need to read these things and I'm going to give you these books." I think probably had more of an impact because when I start to teach these things and teachers give me push or the librarians say I might not want to read that, I always go back to "But this is what I did. This is how I was taught teaching existed in the world. This is what was modeled for me, so I'm going to do it." #00:31:53.91#

R: That's amazing. It sounds, like you said, that you had really phenomenal teachers who really took their job seriously and actually wanted to not just give you content, but …just to really help you understand who you are, like where you fit into the world and to use literature to kind of do that, that's really cool. I'm also kind of interested what your personal reading life is like. So what are the types of books that you choose to read in your free time and how does that kind of impact what you're teaching? #00:32:39.27#

P: I read a lot. There is the challenge on Goodreads each year that comes out and I always set the challenge for 50 books a year. I hit it every year and that's because I listen to a lot of audiobooks. So When I would have to make the drive to OU…I would get up and teach 7 to 3:00, and then as soon as the kids would leave, I'd get in the car and drive almost hour and a half to get to Norman, and I'd be up there til 10:00 at night, and then drive home and turn around and tach the next day. So the way I stayed awake during these was audiobooks, and I had never been an audio person before that, but I realized that was the only way I could consume Literary fiction when I was working on the doctorate because there were so many "Let's read this entire book this weekend." Okay. I guess I'm doing this because that's what the class requires of me, so that didn't leave much time for fun reading. So that was the only way I was able to keep up with it. I realize now I love them. So, I will have probably about at any given time. Right now I am re-reading the Challenger series, but I am also enjoying audio books. I've always read a lot. I read detectives, I read Stephen King…I started reading him at 9 years old#00:37:26.05# I do read a lot of…new fiction. I love going back to classics. There are a lot of classics that I know the premise of, but I've never read. So like a book we wish we would have read in school, I went back and read Les Miserables. I've seen the performance a million times, my husband loves it, so we watch it all the time, but I've never actually read the story, so that was the novel I read this year. Oh my gosh, there are so many different nuances that they don't put in the play performance or the movie. I'll go back and revisit books that I haven't read in a long time too. I do the same thing with TV series. Maybe I'm more nostalgic than I realize. #00:38:51.94#

I talk about books with our librarian at school, and she shows me books that she's purchased that have been on the Sequoyah Reading List, stuff like that. Lots of times she'll say, "I don't have time to go through these new books, here take this one and read it and tell me what you think." Then I'll give it back to her and I'll say it's just like…so if someone likes this, they're going to this one. I do end up reading probably more than I thought I would. That didn't start until I started going back to school. Even thought I read in high school and loved it, and I read as a child…I would get 10 books at a time and I would Rea them all. I read every single Babysitter's Club book known to man. I think that time period from high school, Joining the military, moving to Oklahoma, starting a family, dealing with military deployment, I didn't read a whole lot. It wasn't until I got my journalism degree and I started going back and working in a newsroom that sometimes there's lulls and I would fill it with reading a book. And I realized I missed it, I missed the comfort that getting lost in someone else's world gives you. Now I read all the time. The kids think it's nerdy that I go around and have three books at any given time that I'm reading, but I like it.

R: I'm similar to you. I normally have a fiction book or YA book, and then I have a nonfiction book going and then I have an audio book and at any given point like I'm reading multiple things, too. #00:40:58.66#

R: My reason for asking was on the survey that I sent out, when I asked why either you the person taking it or people that they knew, why they thought that they didn't incorporate more multicultural texts into their classrooms and the number one thing was that they said that either they or the people they know don't know enough multicultural texts. So I wonder, and the reason I ask is because I feel like if you're not actively to read things outside of your class you may not because you're not actively trying to find them and if you only stick to what you know, which is probably you know the canon, then you're not going to. I had a really interesting conversation with another teacher and she was saying you know it takes like it requires of you have to put that time and that effort in and she said I get that it's hard because you know as a teacher you're pulled in several different directions and if you have a family that you're you know tending to as well or you're also in school or you have a 2nd job like that's a lot, but she said but I don't think that that you know changes the fact that that's still your job.You have to keep bettering yourself and so yeah I just was interested to see what you might say about that. #00:43:25.83#

P: So you do have to actively do that. You do have to actively, as a teacher, your learning never ends. The number one thing that I go back to and it was something that Neil Houser had given to us. He told me, "The things that you always talk about in class and how you talk about your classroom, you need to read ___ Palmer's The Courage to Teach." And if you haven't read that. Parker Palmer talks about this notion that teachers are afraid in the classroom.

They're afraid of themselves, they're afraid to go off script, they're afraid to look foolish, and they're afraid to look uneducated on something. Which is why so many teachers want answer keys for everything, which is so silly. Every time I see it, I think if you can't answer this yourself, you probably shouldn't be teaching it. It is about systematically going out and trying to better yourself and not be so afraid. I think the number one strength that I have is who I am in my classroom is who I am with my husband and who I am with my son and who I am with my family is no different than me in the college classroom or high school classroom. Like my personality is my personality. There was a thing that happened this year. One of our sophomore English teachers was teaching something out of either East of Eden or something else and she came across something that she realized a kid had a question about and she didn't know the answer. She'd always kind of curious about it herself, but she'd just hoped that no one would ever ask that question. I go, "Well did you tell them that you didn't really know what it meant either?" "No, I would never do that." "Why not? You're human! If you struggle and you're the teacher, then those kids are going to feel less dumb whenever they struggle with it. Have that courage to do that. " Once I'd read that I was like "Oh yeah you need to have this self-reflective type of personality if you're going to exceed in education. And not just about test scores and things like that. If you're going to really get kids and have them follow where you lead, you've got to be reflective of your teaching and what messages you send. So, there are a lot of books that I read that go in that vein. As a matter of fact, today we just found out today that the DOD has some money for ELA and they asked, "What books do you want?" And our librarian here already said "I already know you're going to ask for Ibram X Kendi's and Jason Reynolds' Stamped." I already have read the original version which definitely was dense. I read that and I read White Fragility and So You Want to Talk About Race? I read a lot of those different texts too, but I do also read them and realize, I think for me it's not as much learning, not that there aren't things in there of course that I learn, but I think I go to those for support that what I am doing is correct. Even though I'm the only one in the building teaching to this level or may push and teach on certain things, I'm right. I can withstand the stares of people that'll go "I can't believe she's doing that" or "I'd never be that brave." But it's right and it's what you should be doing as a teacher. So I already am and I told her yes, order me 50 copies of that, you're going to save me, because if not I definitely was going to pay for it with my own money and not tell my husband. I'm teaching that book next year. It had come out and I wanted to squeeze in an excerpt from it to try and put it in there when we came back from spring break before we got into Catcher in the Rye, but that didn't work out, but I knew I'm reading this next year. Like this is something that needs to be read, and I know our history teachers are not going to read it, so we're going to. It's important for you to continue to be reflective as well too. There are times when…how does my husband phrase this? I'm almost too "woke" for my own good, and I see things they're not necessarily there, and then I want to get all enraged about some sort of oppression that I see, and he says "that's not your battle, that's my battle." I'm happy that you support it, but that's that white savior identity. I realize that even now as a person a person who's very aware of this and cognizant of it, we all have stuff to learn, all of us. I don't go back to them all the time because I enjoy reading things that are more for pleasure. There's a lot of those that I do end up reading that I go "Woah" and then I have to take a step back and go "Am I really doing this?" That came for the very first one that I was given, which was White Fragility, and probably now that I'm talking about it, that was the one where I went "Oh I need to start being more intentional with what I'm doing in my classroom. It can't just be a byproduct. It needs to actually be there. It needs to be always there in my working memory when I'm creating my lesson plans and my units. I'm always on to the next thing. My new one that I got is The Education of Blacks in the South from 1860-1935. I had a former student in the doc program go, "Have you not read this?" "No, I hadn't read that." So that's my new one. I'm writing about this stuff as well too. I've got a couple publications that are One's a chapter that I did with a professor and I've got another one that's out for submission. #00:50:14.55#

R: So how do you how do you feel like the way that you structure your class, how does that help your students? What kind of effect does that have on them? #00:50:14.55#

P: I like to think if I am more open and honest with students from the very beginning, they're more likely to go where I ask them to go. And I ask a lot. There are very few days where we have it really easy and which is surprising because I don't teach AP, I am strictly on level and they give me all the co-taught classes. And that's fine. They ask me every year "Are you going to teach one of the AP classes?" Nope. If you ask me to, I will, but AP kids don't need me. They're very smart, very driven, very successful. Overwhelmingly, they probably have support outside of the school system. Those aren't the kids who need a teacher like me. It's the kids that are like "oh my gosh…you have that one? Ugh. I'll pray for you." They end up being the best kid in the class. I think the notion that you take the time and build those relationships at the beginning makes them more likely to follow wherever you're going. even if it is a little uncomfortable for them, having to talk about race in class. That can put some kids on edge because they feel like that's not something you should be doing in class. They've never done it in class before

sometimes. People, just like I said before, go to that defensive mode. “Well the only thing I learned in your entire unit is white people are bad. It’s not what we were doing at all, but okay I think taking the time in the in the year to build up that trust and then to also be more willing to share your own identity and your own areas in which you fall is different to the way a lot of other teachers will prepare their classrooms. But it's also being reflective as well. One of the multicultural classes… it was another class….cultural pluralism, and we had to write our own cultural identity and I remember looking at that thing going “I’m white. What is there? White’s not even a culture, it’s a made up thing here in the United States.” What am I doing right for this five page paper that I’m going to have to write? I struggled a lot until I realized that there are other areas of identity. I’m a military spouse, I was soldier myself, I'm in interracial marriage, you know all these different things are different levels of identity. If I only structured around one key thing of race then yeah that's the one things. That was when I started to realize there's more levels in layers than just the major tropes that we put people in…race and gender and that's it! That’s when I started seeking out what are some other things that we can read in our classroom? What are some other you know windows and mirrors that you can put up, to quote Ruth? Those are things that we can do in the classroom and so the structure there became that. One of the things that I tell them at the beginning of the year is I can promise them 2 things: that they're going to be better thinkers when they leave my class because that's my only goal you know you have to your goal on the wall. Mine says be better thinkers and it doesn't go away and no one who challenges that. And you're going to read one thing in the class that mirrors you, at least one, in some form or fashion, but because we’re looking at all these windows, you're to have better empathy because they read from all these different perspectives. So they know that from the beginning, this is what we’re going to do and that for some people it might be a little bit different, might feel a little uncomfortable, but this is the world you live in. It’s diverse. So, setting them up at the beginning to get that rapport, and then telling them this is how we’re going to go, that’s had tremendous success. #00:55:20.97#

R: That's interesting that you said… like you're the first person I've talked to also that really mentioned empathy, the concept of how that can create empathy or you hope that it does at least give you know some sort of insight into someone else's story and what they go through or what they have been through. Yeah, I expected, as the researcher, you know you have like your ideas about what people are going to say and then I expected that more and I hadn't heard it yet so. #00:56:04.14#

P: That’s the number one things that I tell them. By looking at all these other points of view, hopefully you develop more empathy. That is like my ultimate goal. If more people have more awareness of other people and took the time to learn about other cultures and other religions and other gender orientations and sexual orientations, we probably wouldn’t be so quick to go “Oh, you’re the other.” It would be, “Oh that’s how you’re different. Cool. I like your difference.” I'm surprised. I'm probably say “empathy” in my class three times a week. #00:56:51.67#

R: I also like what you said about multiculturalism. It is so much more than just race and racial identity. I mean we all are… we wear so many different cultures at any given time you know…even our students, like they have a culture that we don't belong to, we don't belong to youth culture, you know and I mean? So I think whenever you kind of realize that too, that can help so much more. You're going to be able to find something that can relate to everyone like there's something out there. and so yeah… I like that a lot as well. I think you know, traditionally, we do think about like you said race, gender, religion, Class maybe, but there is so much more and we all have so much to learn from each other you know. #00:57:33.76#

P: The unit I teach always always 2nd semester, that’s where we start talking about…I call it the American Voices unit. Junior year it’s all American literature, and American literature, especially the canon is overwhelmingly white and overwhelmingly male. That's it. So I used to go chronologically and I realized when I spend so much to time and diving into that stuff they might turn off of English. Who wants to read more Benjamin Franklin? Even though it's a great lesson and it talks about goal setting these are things juniors should be focusing on since they’re about to get out of high school, it's not proper to start the year with those kinds of things. When we got to the 2nd semester I realized the kids responded more to things that were not traditional literary canon and so I said “I’ve got to change up my focus.” So about 2 years ag, I switched from being chronologically focused to thematically focused. That's where we read about white privilege and male privilege and we had discussions around stereotypes and the difference between racism and prejudice, different things and then we just read American authors from different types of perspective. Which to some extent, pigeonholes a section as well, and I let them know that this is maybe a glimpse into this world that you might not belong to, but this does not speak for the entire World. Our first reading is always “Fish Cheeks” by Amy Tan. Super short and it’s actually a middle school level exile level, and I tell them you’ll go to college and read “Mother Tongue” in your comp classes, but this is from the perspective of someone

who's Chinese American. I don't want you to walk away from this going "Oh I'm so happy we read that, now I know what it's like to be Chinese" because you don't. I don't. Nobody does unless you happen to be Chinese, and even then, not everybody's perspective is the same. But it's better than not reading anything. Every year I challenge myself to add something new to it, and the unit now, what used to be only a couple of weeks now is a month or more. This year I added in the notion of introvert vs extroverts. So, we read something from Susan…#01:00:54.03#

R: The book Quiet? #01:00:54.03#

P: Yes. We read an excerpt from some sort of free textbook I got at NCTE a couple of years ago. They went, "this is an identity?" And I said, "Yeah, you don't think introversion vs. extroversion is an identity?" Then we started talking about an we had them take the test to see which they are. Those are those are always new layers. Because it's easy to say, "Yeah, let's go read African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, and we'll just call it a day and think that somehow covers everything." Because it doesn't. We have immigrant stories when we read an excerpt from Trevor Noah's autobiography. We do feminism literature and we read an excerpt from The Handmaid's Tale. We do all these different types of areas to be able to realize that it's not just the major race, religion, orientation. There are other layers of our identity too. They don't complain as much and when we do that unit, which is nice to your know? #01:02:18.65#

R: My last question and I really have is what advice would you give to someone who is either a new teacher or someone who's just you know wanting to kind of shift their curriculum to include more multiculturalism or just include more perspectives? What would you tell them? How can they do that.? #01:02:44.08#

P: First you have to know the kids in your class and make sure that you build that relationship because they're not going to listen to this type of conversation if they don't feel like their voices is being valued in what they're going to say. And also you have to check yourself as well. You know overwhelmingly teachers look like us, fair skinned, female educators. It's hard to be of one predominant race in the United Staes and to say "Okay we're going to talk about these thing and to not have done your own research too. You also have to kind of take stock of where, I suppose, you live. As much as I want to tell those rural teachers "just do it! It's for the good of the kids." They still have to feed their own family in the end. I don't want someone to get fired either because we live in Oklahoma and it's not always the most accepting or diverse place. So you have got to take stock of how much and how far you're able to push that. I get probably now I get pushback a lot harder than I was before simply because I built up a reputation that school being an honest teacher, Caring, compassionate, empathetic teacher that they trust me and don't ask questions. When they go "what are you reading? You're talking about what?" "Okay, whenever. She's going to make it work and it's all going to be just fine, and it is going to be for the benefit of the students. If I would've tried stuff like this when I was down at the middle school, it would not have worked out well, simply because I just didn't have the name, I didn't have that built-in tenure, and I think I also just was not…I've taken the time to become more self-aware so there are good books out there and you need to read them. If you're going to be an educator and you haven't read something like Stamped, or White Fragility or Let's talk about Race, you probably you're missing out on a connection with your students had you done that. Because you would be more aware of the systemic power that goes along the lines of race and gender in our communities. Develop that rapport. Find out how much you can push it. And educate yourself. You've got to take that time to go out there and do it. #01:05:25.99

Participant 7

Participant: [00:00:01] I substitute taught in three different school districts for probably 10 years. And I substitute taught at the end of getting my bachelor's degree and then I substitute taught while I was getting my masters, and then for a couple of years after when I got out my Masters, I did substitute teaching. But my actual degree was an adult education. I thought I liked it, but there's not a lot of jobs. So I took jobs that were not in education and eventually did stop subbing and jumped out on the limb and I knew Oklahoma needed teachers and decided I just wanted to teach high school, which I loved junior in high school when I was subbing. So I put in to teach high school at this little school. And I live in Arkansas. Have you ever heard of it?

Researcher: [00:01:13] I hadn't until I saw your email and I actually went and looked it up and I was like, wow, that's a tiny little place. And I had never heard of it. And I lived in Oklahoma my entire life.

[00:01:27] But, you know, I came from a small school when I went to school and I walked in there and I just loved everything about it because I felt I was a real good fit. You just know where you fit, and I fit there. And that's where I'm planning on staying until I can't teach anymore or I just really want to retire. I'm sixty-one by the way, you didn't ask, but. So when people say "I'm forty, I'm fifty and I'm just stuck where I am," I say "No, you're not. I became a teacher at 59." Anybody can change. But so, whenever I interviewed for two or three different places and got the job over there and I really, really like the dynamics of our school. We have, I want to say one hundred and fifty maybe students total for 7-12. This upcoming class, we will have 50 seniors. It's a big class. And I have about thirty-five juniors. Thirty-five from on down. Most classes are around thirty-five. Our new senior class is going to be really big and we have two English teachers. There's another teacher and me. And she's been there a long time and she kind of teaches the lower level, and because I have a Masters, I teach upper level. I had been teaching at the university forgot about that. I taught at the University of Arkansas in Fort Smith for twelve years. I taught in the day, and then the last couple of years I've taught a night class. I go from [school] on over to Fort Smith and I teach my class. It keeps my foot in the college world. And so the good thing about when I actually was hired over here, it's hard to keep teachers in a small school, you know? But I think a lot of teachers that are young, they start somewhere and then they want to go someone else. And that wasn't what I wanted to do. I really wanted to find a place that I could just go and teach and fit in. And I love the small size. And I'm very personal person. S,o I'm getting to know everybody. As my superintendent put it, it was kind of neat to have somebody that's not just telling the kids where to go, but that know. So instead of pushing them, I kind of pull them because I'm still there even and wherever they go to college, I try to pull them towards college. We have a lot of kids in our school district that we are Title One school, so all the kids there get free lunches. We have a lot of Native American students. So I really like the one on one. Oh, and we get a lot of kids from other school districts, that transfer in. We're kind of like that big foster family. So it it feels really neat.

[00:05:01] I also went to a pretty small school, so mine was a little bit bigger than that, but not much. Like my graduating class was 68. So it wasn't that much bigger. Would you say that your school culture is kind of like a culture of community? People tend to know each other and everyone knows everyone.

[00:05:28] And where sometimes that can be bad, I think for the most part, it's really good. It's kind of like when I went to small school I felt like we were all brothers and sisters. The kids they help each other out. They really do. So it's like a bunch of cousins getting together. You may not really like them all, but they're your cousin and then you're stuck with them. And here we all are. Yeah, and the whole high school, 9th-12th grade eats lunch at the same time because it's so small.

[00:06:12] So remind me again of the texts that you teach in your classroom and what grade level? You said you teach the upper levels, so is that 11th and 12th?

[00:06:23] I teach nine, ten, eleven, twelve. I'm going to have to try to remember off the top of my head what all... So in ninth grade, we read Of Mice and Men, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Old Man and the Sea. We read some...around Christmas time we read a couple of short stories by...Oh, In Cold Blood...Truman Capote. That's our first introduction to Capote. We read A Separate Peace, I bounce that book around, and it landed on the ninth grade doorstep and been well received. So that's, I think, where it needs to go. We read Fahrenheit 451.This year, we read The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe kind of as filler because the ninth grade, they had to kind of grow up.

They've done real well. I've only been at [school] for two years, and both years, they read everything I've given them to read. Next year I am adding on because I'm buying them. I bought because, you know, I have buy our books a lot of times....Esperanza Rising. I'm going to add that to the ninth-grade class, and I'm doing it for two reasons. One is because I wanted something literary that I felt the kids would like and that they would read and maybe identify with. And my daughter loved Esperanza Rising, and when she was going through a difficult, you know, I would never be 13 again. Would you? I mean, it's awful. Anyway, she told me that she said, I love this book, and she read it at least twice. And there's actually a book way that goes to [school] I don't have him in my own class. At some point I had this book, I was looking at it or something. And he does not like to read. He is in the lower level classes. And he was in the 10th grade, I think, when he told me this and he said "Esperanza Rising, I've read that book. I loved it." He's about as opposite of my daughter as could be. And so, I'm thinking of several good books, and this was one that was in the back of my mind because of that. And then also, of course, because she's a Latin American writer and I like to expose the kids to writers from all over. And they're just not going to be into Pablo Neruda. So, I'm trying to have a good Latin American writer. And so I figured that Pam would be perfect to throw in there. So that's my 9th. It seems like there's something else. If there's anything else a ninth grade class should read, trust me, we read it. I kind of go traditional because to me everything comes off of the traditional. We read this book so if we read something like Of Mice and Men, it's Steinbeck. We're going to spin off a Steinbeck into other American writers and how they're kind of alike or different, and it's also short, easy read and it addresses really major things. Once the kids realize, I mean, they really receive it well. And it helps them to grow up to read this book. And so that kind of connects him to 11th grade American literature. So anything we read like that connects us to the American literature. We read something like Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, Of course, it's more the old English British. So it gets them ready for 11th grade when we more stuff like that. And Fahrenheit 451. They're kind of like, wow, where is this coming from? Because it's more futuristic and stuff. But it wakes them up to see things that they're seeing now. The screens on the wall. The seashells in the ear, and the kids like "woah". That gets them ready for other books that we're going to read, such as Brave New World, things like them. So my ninth grade is a combination of American. I make it a combination of American and World Literature. I want to challenge them, but also want some stuff that's easy.

[00:11:34] In 10th grade, we read Metamorphosis. [inaudible] and when my 11th grade class this year and last year they were in my class, and we read Metamorphosis. Of course, you know, Gregor Samsun and he turns into the roach In August when they started, I said "This is American lit. We're gonna work more on MLA." And I tapped my little MLA poster on the front of the podium and a roach runs out and runs down the podium across the floor. And everybody yells "It's Gregor Samsun!" I felt great because here I had these little ole kids from [small town] who, when they saw a roach, yelled "It's Gregor Samsun!" We read Animal Farm, Brave New World, which we didn't get to read this year because we were in lockdown. I really hated that. We read Night. We read Canterbury Tales. We read a lot of Aesop's Fables. We read Beowulf, not from beginning to end, but we read the part about the...through the whole Grendel section. We read.. I always read an excerpt from Camus's The Stranger. I've done that two years now and both times are like, are we going to read this book? Well, no. But it's twice, two years I've been asked, are we going to read this book? So I might eventually work that in. We read The Picture of Dorian Gray. We read A Christmas Carol a play at Christmas time. But it is world lit, and I try to get people from England, from Ireland, anybody I could find, even if it's just a short story from Africa. It gives them a world view. So we take what we did in the 9th and then we always show connections. I like showing the connections in literature and the world and literature and history, because the kids have actually told me, like we've learned more history in your class than we've learned in history class. Because I feel it's important to know what was going on in the world. Why was this book written? And we relate it to how it's kind of the same story, you know. Was this an archetype of? It's a lot like so-and-so.

[00:17:58] 11th grade, it's American lit. We start out with Scarlet Letter and everything is downhill after that. It's very hard. They struggle with it. They hate it. And let's see, we read The Great Gatsby and they learn more about prohibition and why a bootlegger is a bootlegger and what was going on at the time by than they remember from history class. We read Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. We read up to where they meet the Duke and the Dolphin and I condense it because it's just so thick, and I don't want to spend three months on Huckleberry Finn. We read a book by a more modern author around Christmas time. We read some Willa Cather. We read a lot of excerpts in 11th grade, too, so we get a lot of American authors, but We're not reading the whole book.

[00:20:29] Then the senior class, we read The Road by Cormac McCarthy. I had a whole class on McCarthy, and I think I've learned to really appreciate literature because of the connection, the history, the connection to writing, the connection to the political, to finding correct answers. Well, I've never met McCarthy, but I have stalked him if that

counts. We read Tuesdays with Morrie. That is the last book we read. They all cry. We read Catcher in the Rye. This year, we were going to read Killers of the Flower Moon, but we didn't get to it. We read excerpts from M.Scott Momaday. We read an excerpt from "The things They Carried" Tim O'Brien. We read things like The Falling Girl. It's about this woman who jumps out a window and just falls and falls and sees life and whether or not she makes a noise when she hits the ground. It sounds awful, but the kids just they talk about it, about what it symbolizes and stuff like that. We cover a little bit of poetry, but not a lot. We had some things like Rosetti in the goblin market, great beat, fun stuff. Actually, I got a set of Romeo and Juliet. I'm going to add those, I think, to ninth grade now also. We haven't had a copy of that school, and it's a it's a thinner, bigger print, happy copy. When you force kids to read these little tiny print, they always say "Oh, I can't do it."

[00:23:06] And then I've met quite a few authors, so the kids find that pretty cool, too, working at the university. Like I met Tim O'Brien and I got to have lunch with Amy Tan. And Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel, I've met her. Sandra Cisneros, you know, House on Mango Street. I almost put that book in the rotation just because I've met her. So, it's kind of neat. So, I think that helps the kids. It makes them realize it's real. It's not some stuffy thing that I've never touched that I'm trying to give to them.

[00:24:05] So you mentioned a lot of texts that tend to get pushback if they're taught sometimes like maybe like Catcher in the Rye or Huckleberry Finn. You know, those are typically on like banned book list or whatever. Have you ever had any issues with anybody saying, like, oh, you should be teaching that?

[00:24:36] No, no. I'm really lucky there, too, I guess. I kind of wonder about that. But I'm kind of a free spirit university teacher. But I've got country kids and actually we were reading Catcher in the Rye in the senior class, and I have across my back shelves. I line up all the books we read. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve. They're all just kind of shoved in there. And over on the left side, I have a little easel, just a little hand easel about the size of my hand. And I set the books that we read, senior junior, sophomore freshmen, the four books reading at that time are setting there, and then I write them on the board. I start writing on the board near the end of my first year, because the ninth grader sees "The Road, The Road, The Road" every day and they don't really realize it, but they've heard of it, just never read. So by the time that ninth grader goes to the 12th grade he has seen Catcher in the Rye, you know, who's written it, what year it was written, and it just helps them to learn. So because of that when we had parent teacher conferences, I had a boy in the ninth grade, and his dad came in and he goes, "oh, is that what y'all are reading?" I said, "Yeah." And he goes, "Catcher in the Rye. That's a good book. I'm so glad that They read that book. What grade is that?" "Twelfth." He said, "Well, wait til you get to the 12th grade son." But I haven't had anybody to, you know, to say anything. We do talk about Banned Books Week. I tell him that I'm not going to say they ought to read everything...you pick out what you feel is healthy for you to read. And as a parent, you can definitely tell your child. Sorry, you're not reading that. You know what I said? "They can, they can tell you you're not reading it." When you grow up you can read it anyway if you want to. Or you can say I'm never going to read that book. I haven't any trouble.

[00:28:12] Because I also came from a small school. I know that a lot of times that teachers it seems like at least that teachers at smaller schools kind of have a little bit more freedom because they're not. They're kind of on their own, like I teach at a school that's a little bit bigger, and so I have to stay on pace with what every other teacher is kind of doing, give or take. But we're all teaching, like, kind of the same thing. And so, there isn't as much freedom to kind of say I'm going to do this. And a lot of times I feel like too, In smaller schools, like administration isn't going to come in and be like constantly looking to check up on you. But at a bigger school, that's more prevalent so I think that you get advantages being able to teach in a smaller place. #00:29:59.55#

Participant: Yeah I agree. #00:30:06.78#

Researcher: What was your high school English class like? I've just been curious you know what kind of gets someone to teach you know multicultural literature? Is it something that they were exposed to when they were younger or they were in college, like where does that start?#00:30:33.37#

Participant: That's a good question. Thinking back…of course like a lot of people I loved my English teacher. She was so wonderful. [inaudible because of connection] A Separate Peace and I hated it, and it's funny that teach it now. I remember it forever to read it. I think I don't want to bog the kids down with the reading. Once you start bogging down, you don't like the book. [inaudible] I'm sorry, but I wouldn't teach The Iliad unless someone forced

me too. We read Of Mice and Men, and we did read a wide variety which made me realize that there was a wide variety. I just loved English class. It was where you went to read and to write and somedays she would just put up a picture and she'd say "Write about it." I loved the days we got to do that because I got to use my imagination. I think through college mostly not so much through high school I didn't really learn to appreciate literature from around the world, whether you're a Native American writer or you know 20th century American writer. [inaudible] and so they learn that stories keep coming back around. .You don't have to be an American to write a great story. You don't have to be British to write a good story and the who are flavors you can pick from the more well rounded you are in the end. Probably mostly in college I was subjected to a really big variety, and so I start when they're young. #00:35:01.05#

Researcher: You mentioned that you are going to have to buy some of your books so whenever I sent out the survey, one of the questions was why do you think that either you or people that you know don't teach more multicultural texts? The biggest reason was either they don't know them, or they don't have money for it, they don't have money for books. So, what is that like and how do you… I mean how do you get around ? It sounds like you're going to buy your books, but…#00:35:32.83#

Participant: I am poor, just so you know, I am poor. I don't even have a savings account. You don't want to hear about my personal life right now, but my splurge was to buy some books. When I started, our library is little. You know and I probably have almost as many books on my shelves here. They had some good books. Like, The Scarlet Letter…I'm going to be real honest…it's old and yellowed, The words are little bitty and you're carrying around what looks like a paperback from the 1960s, but that's not a book you want to pick up and sniff or hold close to your heart. And then for some reason they had a brand new set of hard back really nice of A Separate Peace. That was one of the reasons why I was like, " I'm going to teach that. It's a good feeling book." But they didn't have very many. And since I was a new teacher and I think they wanted to please me, they had been through quite a few English teachers. We go to the library every Wednesday, others did not. So I talked to the librarian and I'm like, "can we get a few new books?" And she was like, "What do you want? Tell me the ones in order, what you really want, and then a wish list." So my first year she bought me, I think four sets of books. She said, "I can't do this every year." But this last year she bought me two sets. Like year before, I took my copy of Metamorphosis and I laid it on the photocopier. We do this all time. what'd you do on your planning hour. I ran off half of Metamorphosis. I'll run off the other half tomorrow."

Participant:
And then this year, in the fall of 19, I said, "Okay, can I get Metamorphosis? So she said, yeah, we can get that. So we bought Metamorphosis and we bought The Picture of Dorian gray was the two out last year. And I already know that this year, what I really wanted was probably going to be Esperanza Rising and possibly a copy of Romeo and Juliet, but they've already told us how much the budget is going to be cut [inaudible] When I wanted Killers of the Flower Moon, they said they couldn't get it. I asked my counselor, "Do you know anybody that will buy these books for us because it's a Native American book and you know we have Indian Nation" and she said, "Well, I don't know. Let me see." So, she sent out an email saying, Hey, we need to buy these books for my English teacher. And this guy said, "yeah I will." So we got 13 copies of Killers of the Flower Moon, I got the Indian nation to pay for Killers of the Flower Moon for us. Then I was up at a little book store in Northern Arkansas, and I said, "Do you have any copies of Esperanza Rising?" She's said, we've got a couple here and three or four over there, and they found some in the back. But when she found out what I was doing, that I was a teacher buying them, she let me have for $2 a piece and a 25% discount. So I got those books for a dollar and a half a piece. I only have I think 12, I'm going to have to buy about five more. So I'm going to, as the summer goes on trying to find them. I bought Night last year. I went up there and I bought 20 copies of the book Night by Elie Wiesel. I just look around and find cheap ones, and I just sort of sneak it in, you know, skimp on literally skimp on the grocery budget, 20 bucks. I can buy 20 copies of Romeo and Juliet.

Researcher: Wow. That's very, I mean, it's very admirable, but it's also, I mean, it makes me sad at the same time, but it's like, it's so admirable that you're giving that up for your students so they can have access to things like that.

Participant: I think that they know I would, and they know I do, so even the grumpy ones, they appreciate that.

Researcher: So, what effect do you think that, reading these books, how is that helping your students? How is that changing your students?

Participant:
Well, I'm going to tell you a funny way first and I'll tell a serious way. How many jokes they get. They told me "Oh my gosh I get that joke." I mean, Bugs Bunny makes fun of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. You know, when Tweedy turns into the monster, the kids never understood that. When Bugs Bunny says, "I will hug him and pet him and call him George." And they're like, "Oh my gosh, that's from Of Mice and Men." They realize how many jokes...They'll come in and say they heard something on TV and they're cracking up because they got the joke. So, so that's good. I tell them the whole world's opening up to you. You will get more jokes than you ever got, and you wouldn't believe how many times they have come in and told me exactly that. And they never would have gotten it if it hadn't been for literature. They understand TV shows and more of the cartoons. But they understand more in history, even. Literature totally opens the eyes to history. And what's funny is we were talking about...they didn't realize back in 1918, people went out with masks, and this is before this happened. And I told them, "Well, yeah, like when this book was being written, this was going on." And they're like, wow, we never realized that. And so now it's kind of funny too, because some of my students will understand where a lot of them, their age won't. Well, what was the original question? How does reading literature help out with, what?

Researcher:
How does it help them? How does it change them? How does it prepare them for life?

Participant:
Oh yes. Change them and then prepare them for life. Well, I think they feel proud of themselves that they get these jokes. I think they notice more, they're more politically aware because they've seen, they read Animal Farm, things like that. I tell them that no matter what they do, they're going to have to read and write and they're like, Oh yeah, I guess I do. I know there's a lot of kids there that aren't going to go to college or that aren't going to finish, but we had the best senior class this year ever. It was...one of my students made chancellor's scholar at the University of Arkansas Fort Smith. He has a full ride, tuition, books, a dorm, everything. And then I had two that were merit scholarship winner, and then two more that are going to go that got minor scholarships. And then one of them got a scholarship from the University of Arkansas Tech in Russellville, and she's not going to go, but they offered the scholarship. A lot of our kids have the Oklahoma promise. And so, I pushed them, you know, towards that. [inaudible] is actually the closest campus of the closest university to them. So it's really good, but, and they work well with the kids, but obviously if they had a tuition anywhere in Oklahoma school, I'd definitely push them there. I tell them it prepares them for whatever they're wanting to do, because, like I said, if you can't read and write, you're not going to be able to do things. You can't email your boss. We talk about the difference in writing and whether it's who your audience is and how lax you can be or how proper you need to be. You need to be able to read the instructions. You need to be able to think and you need to be able to connect. You need to know where to go, to figure it out, and it's not just YouTube. And so it, I think that they really see that it's not just in their reading books. They really see how it is connected to things in their future and in their life, even if nothing else. And even like the ninth-grade boy whose dad came in there, I mean, his dad does a labor job. He's not an office guy at all. He comes in, dressed in work clothes. And when this kid heard his dad say it was a good book, and he goes, "you've read that book, dad?" And he says, "Yeah." He gets that connection of Hey, my dad's literary. And even if I work at a factory, I can be literary".

Researcher:
I think that's a really great point to make, because I think, you know, growing up in a school that I did too, I think a lot of my classmates didn't think that they could work on their farm or they could work in the oil field or something, and they could care about the things that were not necessarily related to that.

Participant:
They always do like in 11th grade we did a career profile and then I made them do research. And so there again, this one kid that was originally a real troublemaker. I actually, I stopped fights too. And it became a joke that I was the bouncer. So when they had their research paper, he said "I don't want to do research." I said, "Well what do you want to know more about?" "I don't know." "How about the oilfield?" "Well, yeah, I'd like to know more about that." It shows that you've still got to be able to do research. What if you want this, and you have to bring it to your boss, you got to do the research. So yeah.

Researcher:

Well, my last question is, what advice would you give to a new teacher who is wanting to make their classroom, a multicultural classroom, bringing multicultural literature into their classroom? What would you tell them?

Participant:
Like for my grade, 9-12?

Researcher:
Yeah, just any new teacher.

Participant:
Make the book interesting. I think I would look at that traditional list. And even if you throw some in, like sometimes they say, why aren't we reading Mockingjay and all those. And I say, "Honey, a hundred years from now, no one will be talking about that and they're still going to be talking about The Scarlet letter." So, I would work towards the traditional. If you want to add something more modern in with it, that's fine because you don't want to bog them down. You want to encourage them to read. You want to make it interesting to them. If it's a really long book, don't feel bad about allowing them to skip a section, and if you feel it that would help them along don't feel bad about taking excerpts. They can't Literally read a 300 page book from every country in the world, but kids need that exposure now more than ever. So, I would [inaudible] here and there, help them read and make it come alive to them by telling them not only the history of the book, but what was going on in the world at that time, because that does really help the kids.

Participant 8

R: So, f you just want to go ahead and start by telling me who you are, where you work there, how many years you've been teaching, what your school's like, etc.

Participant:
[00:01:08] I work at [school name] Junior High in [metro area] Public Schools. I have been working there for three years now as of last Friday when the contract ended. I teach a very wide range of students. I'm actually the opposite of what is typical probably in Oklahoma. The majority of my students are not white. They're Hispanic, Asian and African-American. I had maybe five white kids in the class at any given time. Except for maybe my Pre-AP class that's mostly Caucasian and Asian students with a couple of others smattered through. I think it's more of a confidence thing than a capability thing, and parents pushing it more. The school as a whole, we're very…our principal likes to tell us that we go like a rogue school. We kind of do what works for us and our students because we have a very different population from the rest of [city] public schools. I actually attended [city]public schools when I was younger on the other side of the train tracks, and it was majority white students that I went to school with at Highland East and at [city] high school. So, it's a very different section of the district, and so we kind of just do whatever works with our students. Our relationships come first. Our school report card, we very regularly get C'S as a school and online testing and everything, but our principal is really cool about all that. And while we do try to improve and we look at the data and everything, she's more concerned with seeing improvement as human beings with our students because a lot of our students have at any given time, I usually have at least a handful of students that have a parent in jail or aren't around or were in trouble for something or the other. So it's really a school that's more about building relationships and communicating with students. And while curriculum is important. And we are trying to teach them things, we also try to associate everything we do with real-life situations like you're going to need this for A, B, C or D. We try to explain why we're doing things like we're treating things always like it's the road and you want to drive on the right side of the road, or you'll crash into people or get in trouble. Their IDs are like their driver's license and all of that. So, I really like that about my school is that relationships come first.

R: [00:04:33] Yeah, that sounds it sounds like from what you told me and the other people I've talked to you, it seems like you have a really different demographic of students. But it also sounds like your school is pretty…Like well, you're saying, you know, they care a lot about community and relationships, it seems like, you know, they're more…It seems like a very student-centered school versus like, some schools that can maybe be more focused on getting that A on the report card or something like that.

P:[00:05:07] It definitely, definitely is. Like during this whole quarantine thing, we kind of set the district expectations for communication, and our vice principal basically kind of came up with the rubric for what we should expect in the district for curriculum and getting interaction during this whole COVID-19 situation. And we made sure we contacted every student every week. Even if it was just a "Hi" and we're done. If they weren't doing assignments, we contacted them because we had a lot of students where they may not be getting food or anything. And so that was really cool. It was frustrating having to do it sometimes, but I also understood why.

R: [00:05:59] Yeah. So how do you think students feel whenever they're in your school?

P: [00:06:07] Depends on the student. I honestly, I think they all feel safe for the most part, at least with regards to… we're always going to make sure they have food. We're always going to make sure that nothing happens to them. We're going to do our best. And I think they understand that. Some of them really don't want to be there just because they don't like school. We always start off the year with lessons about growth mindset because so many of these students come in with the idea of "I'm not good at school. And so there's no way I can do anything. So why try?" I'm thinking this year of one or two specific gentlemen where I had multiple conversations out in the hallway of "How is not doing anything helping you?" And so having that, that is the struggle with some of them is trying to get them to academically succeed because they go up and down. They can have a, B, and then suddenly they hit a concept that's difficult for them and then shut down. And so they'll have like a series of like five zeros and then their grade tanks. So I think they feel safe. But I also sometimes feel like they are resentful of us trying to get them to do things. But we just try our best to make them feel safe.

R: [00:07:46] Yeah, for sure. Could you remind me of the texts that you said you teach in your class? Really quickly?

P: [00:07:55] Like the full texts or everything. #00:07:58.54#

R: Just like the main texts that you use. It would be hard to probably remember every single thing.

P: [00:08:07] We teach three full books a year and then the rest of the year is through StudySync, which is a bunch of excerpts from a bunch of different things and poems and stuff like that. But there are three novels we start out with. Freak the Mighty, which is a story about two boys, one who is physically capable, but thinks he's stupid and has a really bad family past. And then the other boy is physically disabled but extremely mentally competent. And it's kind of how they work together to overcome their problems and teach each other. The next one is… it's like…I can't remember… the gruesome but true story of Phineas Gage.

R: [00:09:05] Oh, yeah. Yeah. I know what you're talking about.

P: [00:09:08] It's really short, but it's about what happened to Phineas Gage when a tamping iron went through his head and kind of how that helped us develop all this stuff about brain science. And we actually…I'm really sad because we were going to be working with the science department this year and they were gonna teach two chapters of it, and we were going to teach two. We were gonna teach the first half, and they were going to teach the next two because that's the stuff that feels more in-depth with the science, and then we were going to close it out. And our last book, which I am most sad about not getting to teach, because every year everybody loves it. Like, I can't remember one kid who did not enjoy this book in class. It's called The Juvie Three. And it's three boys who are being given a second chance after having been incarcerated for various things. One of them was a joyrider and one of them was part of a gang, and then the other one was accused of murder, and he's actually innocent. It's this whole thing about how they get a second chance. They live at a halfway home, but something happens to the person who runs it. And so they have to make it work. They don't wanna go back to prison or juvie, so they work together to try to make it look like everything's normal while they're waiting for this guy to recover and come back and kind of how that changes them That has…it doesn't say what two of the boys' races are, but it's kind of implied. And then one is African-American, one is definitely white, and I think based off of names, one is Hispanic, but I might just be… It never says on the other two.

R: [00:11:19] It seems like from the texts that you've chosen, it's kind of has a lot of themes that maybe, you know, like overcoming and even though we have things that either society says should hold us back or we think personally might hold us back, like we can still move forward and be successful because of it or we can have still have a good life because of it. Did that have anything to do with maybe like, you kind of talked about some of your students have rough lives? Did that play into like did that have an effect on,,, the decision to choose these texts or were they already there when you got there? #00:12:00.45#

P: They were already there. But when I got there and they were discussing why they chose to read these, yes, that was part of the conversation, and I definitely see why. And that's why we still teach them even thought the people who make the decision to read them are no longer at our school. Like with Free for Mighty, it deals with that fixed mindset of "I'm learning late" because he's…One of the main characters, the book is written from his perspective, Max, he referred to himself as an LD or learning disabled, and he's always been in the lab classes and everyone thinks he's stupid or the only reason that he doesn't get made fun of us for being stupid is because he's so big. He's like massively tall, and so he'd pummel anybody who made fun of him. But he goes through this whole thing…the first line of the book is something along the lines of "Before Freak came along, I never had a brain." And it goes to the full story, then it turns out at the end this whole story was. Max writing, and it's as a result of his relationship with Freak. He always said that he couldn't write, and he couldn't read, and he wrote a whole book. I like that at the beginning of the year. It's the first thing we read because so many of the students I have, especially in reading and English, just think that they suck and there's nothing they can do to...I can't even count how many times I've heard "I can't do this." And they hate me for it, but I don't allow that in my room. I make them say "I don't get this yet" or I make them ask a question. They'll be like, "can you help me with this?" "Yes, but you've got to ask the question, come up with a way to ask me." Or they might say, "I don't get this." The first thing that I tried to teach them was you have to ask the question because if you don't ask the question I don't know. I just taught the whole thing, tell me a specific things little thing, or if it's all of it, start somewhere at the beginning. The first few months, they hate me for it. They get so frustrated. Even though I tell them it's going to happen. The first day I was like, you have to ask me a question and it can't be "Can you help me?" My answer will be yes, and I'll stand there. They don't seem to

believe me until about two months in when I refuse to do anything until they ask me. There's actually, depending on how much they struggle, there's a bookmark I got from my principal where it goes through like how to ask a question. Sometimes if they're really struggling with it, I make copies of those and hand them out. It's like "What, where?"…it lists different question words and like the types of questions you should ask if you want this, this, this or this. And so, we start off with that book. At least that's how I've always viewed starting with that is it shows them that you can improve as long as you have the willingness to work and you're willing to work with somebody else who's willing to also work with you. He doesn't do it on his own. But he definitely… he goes from being an all lab classes to all advanced classes because Freak's mom, which is the …t's not his actual name, his name's Kenneth. They're called Freak the Mighty together. And so he calls him freak and this whole thing. Freak's mom wants them to be together because he's starting a new school, he just moved back there. And so, they're in all the classes together and he ends up passing and getting in these advanced classes which he never thought of. I love that book. And then Phineas Gage is just kind of cool. And I like teaching it because I can associate it with my husband's brain injury that he had a in high school. And so I kind of can explain some of those things a little bit better. The Juvie Three I like because a lot of our students relate to some of these kids' backgrounds. Some of them, whether they say or not, expect to end up in jail or in a gang or whatever it is, where they are discriminated against or they… The African-American boy, all he wants to do is play guitar. He is super peaceful, and he does not want to be violent at all. But some people are pushing towards that, and just because he's big and African-American, they think he's aggressive and so they're aggressive with him. And then there's Terrance who, at the beginning, he is a total brat. He was in a gang in Chicago, and all he wants when he first gets back out of juvie is to join another gang because he just wants to belong somewhere because his dad beat him and his mom's not around. And then Gecko, that's his nickname. His mom is a single mom and his older brother is a delinquent who pulled him into this stuff. He's got a talent for driving, so like when his brother saw him behind the wheel of a go cart, he started training him to be his getaway driver. And his mom is always so busy working and then focused on his brother Rueben, because he's always in trouble, that he always feels left out., and he just doesn't think and just does whatever he's told to do by his brother because he doesn't know what else to do. And so it's kind of…there's something for a lot of my kids to, like, identify with, with at least one of the boys, if not all of them.

R: [00:19:15] Yeah. I mean, that seems like a lot of stuff that so many of our students do go through that maybe we don't always know about that like it's going on in the background. Let's see. Have you ever experience any kind of actually. I want to go back for a second. I was going to ask about Study Sync think what is that exactly?

P: [00:19:45] It is a basically like a textbook, but it is a combination of like workbooks, like online stuff. You can either do it through the workbook or you can do it online. And they've got lots of videos and short stories and excerpts from novels and stuff. And it's just it's the textbook that our school adopted. Actually, we adopted it right as I was becoming a teacher, so it's all I've ever known. My first year teaching was the first year that we were teaching StudySync. And there's lots of different things in it…there's poetry, there's short stories, there's novel excerpts. We do an excerpt from Nelson Mandela's autobiography, A Long Walk to Freedom. We do poetry. I'm going blank. The Langston Hughes poem… "I Too, Sing America." And we actually have a really cool thing that we read that. We read it, we analyze it, and then they write their own "I, Too" poems about their own problems and how they overcome them, or how they're going to overcome them. We always warn the counselors with that one, because they get a little dark sometimes. One this year where one, it wasn't dark, but it was just like overcoming prejudice against the LGBTQ Community and like accepting herself. She came bouncing into my room one day and was like, "I'm so excited [teacher's name]." So I'm like, "what happened?" And she's like, "I asked this girl to the dance, and she said, yes, and we're going on a date." And it made my heart so happy that she felt comfortable telling me, that I made her feel welcome enough that she is comfortable. There's so many who… I remember when I was student teaching me and my mentor teacher walking down the hallway toward the girl in our class, and she was holding hands with another girl and let go of the girl's hand as she saw we were coming and hid it behind her back. That broke my heart a little bit. We ended up having a conversation, going, "Hey, you don't have to hide who are from us. We don't care." I have actually seen her around periodically. So she wrote about that, and other students write about depression or their dad like there was one whose dad was in jail. We always warn the counselors the week ahead of time when we're writing these kinds of things because they have something called Gaggle in the district, and if they type things that are worrisome through the school, like Google Docs and stuff, it sends them. Like if somebody is talking about shooting or like suicide or whatever, like buzz words that might send an alert to the principal. So we kind of go, hey, we're doing this week. So, yeah, most likely if it goes off, it's fine. We're expressing emotions in the way that teenagers do.#00:23:12.73#

P: [00:24:14] That's always one of my favorites. And then there's a short story called “Thank You, Ma'am, and we read that. I always find it hilarious when she smacks him with her purse. “Knock, knock,” that's not in the study, but we usually pair it with “I Too Sing America.” It's like a slam poetry performance piece kind of thing. We put that with I, too, sing America. We also do like a dystopian unit in December leading up to the end, and they have create their own just like Utopia. So we read an excerpt from Hunger Games, an excerpt from Feed, and an excerpt from The Giver. We don't read the whole thing in the full text because all those texts are eighth-grade texts, but we can read excerpts of them. We read, a lot of different things in a lot of different categories of stuff in StudySync because they have all sorts of things everywhere.

R: Have you ever experience any kind of pushback from …it could be and from what another colleague, parents, students, anything like that for what you're teaching or you're not teaching? #00:31:48.90#

P: Not really. Most of what we teach is really… I mean honestly, about 60 percent of our parents didn't really care, which is where some kids get their attitude about school from. My principals…as long as we warn them if something, but we haven't really had to do that so far, to give them a warning if we feel like someone is going to give us a problem. They’re very supportive. Our principals…as long as they go and warn them “You may be getting a phone call.” They’ll back you up. I’ve rarely been intimidated by a parent because I have the principal that I do, and she's very open to discussing things. I don’t have any issues with administration. I don’t remember at this point of having any parent pushback on what I’m teaching, curriculum-wise. Usually, they only complain about grades or that I won’t let their kid go to the bathroom for the millionth time. Their only pushback I get sometimes is students who don’t want to read it or they don’t get it because they can’t connect with it. #00:36:24.32#

P: It sometimes amazes me what they don’t know. We were talking about Martin Luther King Jr versus Langston Hughes…it’s two different time periods. And we read a Harriet Tubman thing. It’s three different time periods, but they all associate all 3 of them with slavery. They were like “Martin Luther King was fighting against slavery.” And I said, “No, slavery was over, even during Langston Hughes’s time. It was more about oppression, being discriminated against, and not having the same opportunities and being shot or lynched for no reason.” One year I had to explain what “lynching” means, which was super uncomfortable. I just kind of assumed. This is the stuff that I grew up just knowing. #00:37:41.04#

R: I had a similar thing happen to me. I had a couple of students who did not know who Martin Luther King Jr was, and I was shocked. #00:37:55.46#

P: They all knew who he was, I will give them that, but they have no concept of the difference between discrimination and slavery. Having to explain that, I’m always shocked. I don't know why I'm shocked every year when they have trouble. Especially because a lot of them are African-American students, who have that kind of confusion. So that's another thing… maybe it’s a little…I don’t know if I’d call it a prejudice…maybe a misconception… I don't know, but I just kind of assumed as a white female growing up I knew all about it, so why wouldn’t an African-American student know. I feel like I know more about it than some of them. I feel awkward and stupid trying to explain stuff about their heritage and culture and their political leaders. I feel kind of… I think fraud is too strong a word, but I can’t think of another one. As this white female teaching about slavery and about the Civil Rights Movement, it's obviously necessary, but I also feel like it shouldn’t be me that’s teaching it. And then that reminds me of l when I was long-term subbing at the school where I teach now in 8th grade. They have a whole Holocaust unit. I was really passionate about it, and I love Anne Frank, the diary and stuff, it was so moving for me when I was their age. So we’re doing a virtual tour of the Holocaust Museum in Krakow, and I’m talking about all this stuff, and I had several students raise their like, “Are you Jewish?” I said, “No, why would you think I’m Jewish.” “You just seem to really care about this stuff and know a lot about it.” I was like, “Well millions of people were slaughtered just for existing, so yeah, I care about it.” The fact that they don't know anything about it, and some of them don’t care, and it doesn’t affect them looking at the pile of shoes or whatever it was like that they have on the virtual tour. I’ve actually been there, and you walk through the hallway and on either side there’s these glass walls and they're partitioned and in each one there’s a mounds of shoes or clothes. One I think was hair from when they were shaved. That’s how many people at a time were stripped from their dignity and thrown into a gas chamber. I remember being really affected by that. It was shocking that they didn’t know about this even though it was only 2 generations ago, it’s already being forgotten by the youngest of us. #00:42:49.11#

R: Yeah, it is really interesting. I always try to think about it from my own perspective. Was I just like an overzealous child who wanted to know about everything and that's how I knew about it when I was their age or like and then I think about it and I feel like my parents talked to me about stuff like that. I don't know if that has something to do with it. #00:43:08.78#

P: My parents and my grandparents talked to me about it. My grandfather was in WWII. I don't know, maybe it's because we were in the generation where we had people to talk to about it but a lot of World War 2 veterans are dead now. They don't have grandparents that experienced it. And then my dad was alive during the later end of the Civil Rights Movement. So I really don't know what that is or like they're just not at the age where they can understand the difference in the time. #00:44:32.76#

R: Maybe that's just not solidified in their heads yet, they haven't had enough history classes to really understand that yet, I'm not sure. #00:44:45.17#

P: You have to do so much more background than you think you will. #00:44:53.67#

R: I appreciate your honesty though like when you're talking about you know you kind of feel like "Ok, why am I the one who's doing this? I kind of felt similar this year. I taught The Watsons Go to Birmingham and so you have to kind of give context because it takes place in 1964 and they go to the South and there's the 16th street church bombing. For them to understand that, they have to understand why that would happen. So then we have to talk about the civil rights movement, we have to talk about what life was like in the south, and honestly, some of them don't have a clue. It's scary, but you're right when you said like somebody has to tell them about it and as a teacher when you're teaching that text I have to tell them about it for them to understand the book. #00:45:51.73#

P: And why we're even reading it in the first place.

R: It can feel…as someone who is white, I think there's like a fear that you're either going to say something wrong or what you're going to say is going to be misconstrued or…#00:46:19.06#

P: You're missing a larger picture. I can tell you what I know historically and what I understand as an outsider, but I can't explain what it feels like to be…discriminated against in that way. I understand as a woman, to a certain extent, but it's a completely different thing. As a woman, it's more a fear of walking in the dark, a fear of walking by yourself, a fear of not being important enough, not being enough. Because it's been pounded into you by society all your life that isn't what you're supposed to be doing. Even though that's changed, there's still "When are you going to have kids?" That's a form of oppression, but it's not the same as a total systemic hatred toward your race. #00:47:29.45#

R: I think also depending on the population that you're teaching to. I teach to mostly white community for me and where I teach, there was the fear for me in the back of my head, "Am I going to be seen as pushing an agenda because this is what we're teaching or this is what I'm explaining?" Then as someone who's newer in their career, it's a worry, even if you know what you're doing is right, you're like well I still need to eat and I still need to have a job. I appreciated your honesty in and I feel like I could relate to it. #00:57:14.35#

R: This is probably my last question. What would you tell a new teacher or someone who has been teaching for a while if they kind of want to change their curriculum? How would you tell them that they can do that successful way if they're wanting to incorporate more multicultural literature or even just be more responsive to their culture of their students? #00:57:36.18#

P: As a 1st year teacher I would definitely say take it one step at a time. Especially because as a first year teacher, everything is overwhelming anyway. First year do what's put in front of you, but start making ideas and writing down what you want to add in, and year by year, pick one thing that you feel really passionate about the next year. Then, really pitch it, get it approved if it's not already, look at the approved district list of books and try to see what's already there because you'll already have a leg to stand on. Have an explanation for why you think it's important. If you have a very diverse population like I do, but all you read are the classics, there's the argument that our students need to see that people like them can do things like this. But do it a little bit at a time. If you try to come at people who are been doing it longer than you with a whole new curriculum at once, you're going to get a lot more

pushback than if…and also think of something that not everybody loves in the fist place that you can replace it with, because if you come up with the idea but have nowhere you can place it, that also makes the the idea better if you say, “This is what I want to teach and this is why.” If I say “I know we’ve been looking for something to teach theme better and I think this would fit in nicely” plus you have the added benefit” Just find a way slowly, but do have the arguments ready. I also have a very different experience with admin than a lot of people I think have, but go into it with a plan and the explanation for why. Think of the arguments that could be set against it and have some response ready. But I don't see as long as you're not trying to tell experienced teachers that they know better than they do. If you come at it from that angle or in a way that can be perceived that way, there's no way you're going to get what you want. One thing at a time. Patience. Have an argument. Come at it with humility. Because if you come in saying you're better than everybody else or in a way that can be perceived that way you're not going to get people who are doing it for 20-30 years, and you really do kind of need their support when you're going to admin because they’re the people that admin know will still be around. Just keep at it because it may not work the first time and you may have to go off on your own a little bit, but be careful about doing that because the more teachers you have with it, the more you are covered if somebody said something to you about it. I hate that we have to operate that way but it's the world we live in. #01:01:23.38# Communication, if I had to choose one word. Plan and communicate. #01:08:41.52#

Don't be afraid to try new things, but also don't feel the need especially if you're a teacher that you have to try new things right away. Because I remember my first year I felt so bad that I wasn't being as creative as the rest of my team and I was just doing whatever was put front of me but sometimes that’s enough, especially if you’re somebody who wants to eventually do more multicultural things and be more diverse in your classroom. Take the time to know what is already there and be patient with yourself because you're not perfect. None of us are. There's no one way to teach multiculturalism because every classroom different. It's not just about teaching to those you have, it’s also about exposing them to things that are different than what they are as well. Something I want to add into my classroom eventually is LGBTQ stuff…That’s one that I do think I will have pushback on just because of certain students that I’ve had in the past with their attitudes. Eventually I want to find a text that we could do that in a way that I'm not alienating anybody but I’m also helping to inform them on stuff. Some of my favorites students sometimes are my LGBTQ students because they're so themselves and they’re unapologetic about it. I want them to feel like they’re represented, too. I think we do a very good job of representing the disabled and different races cultures, but I don't think we have done as a good of a job as we could with gender and religion and things like that. Both of those I think need to be incorporated in the future. I think everybody needs to reflect on that at some point because no matter how good you're doing, If you stop reflecting and stop learning and looking at how you can do better is when you should stop teaching.

Participant 9

R: All right, if you wouldn't mind to start out by just telling me a little bit about you as a teacher, where you work, what you teach…#00:00:14.60#

P: Okay, so right now I teach at E****d Memorial High School, mostly AP English language and AP seminar. In my history of teaching I've taught everything but freshmen at the high school level, and a mix of on-level humanities, Shakespeare… I've had remedial test prep classes where all curricular restrictions were removed so that I could teach whatever I wanted to in an attempt to hit the skills the students would say on exams, you know. So it's been sort of a pretty broad palette of different content, different options. My first teaching job was in G*****e Oklahoma from 1997 to 2004. And then I moved to E****d in the fall of 2004 and I've been there since in very similar descriptions. So I taught..in G*****e I taught on level juniors and AP to juniors, AP Lang to juniors. Then more of the Course diversity has come since I've moved to E*****d. And that's actually where probably my personal affinity for trying to deal with multicultural literature came into place. When I got to G*****e, we were starting our AP Lang program. In the late 1990s through the early 2000s, the AP language exam actually had quite a few Chicano authors as well as…it's always had a strong sampling of African-American authors. But my mostly White, more rural than suburban students had no context for those Latinx, Chicano authors. So, we really made it a point in building the curriculum for that class because we got a grant from the state department where we could pick anything that we wanted to teach a hyphenated Americans class. I mean it was the contemporary lit class because students were needing it on the AP Lang exam at that time. My teaching context in E****d is probably much more predictable with sort of the "literary canon." So our sophomore curriculum has better fiction diversity built in than our junior curriculum does. We're still dead white guys or one living white guy in the junior curriculum. So we really try hard to pull diversity in through a lot of the nonfiction passages that we read. And then a third hat that I wear, just so that you know, is that I'm actually the high school co-chair of the AP English Language and Composition Development Committee.#00:03:24.60#

R: Oh, wow. #00:03:24.60#

P: We actually have very specific diversity requirements that we have to meet when we are suggesting passages for the exam because that exam is very conscious of the student population, the diversity of the population served. So we have…well it's becoming more fluid in terms of gender definition, but we do have gender and minority expectations that we have to meet when we're submitting passages to ensure that it is not an "Old, dead, White guy assessment." So..I'll kind of stop there and let you filter that through questions that you've got and what more do. #00:04:11.35#

R: So, when you're saying that you're that board, is that a nationwide board or is it just in the state of Oklahoma? #00:04:20.54#

P" It's four high school teachers and four college teachers who are actually basically the scary committee for the A.P. English Language and Composition course and the assessment itself. I'm getting ready to start my fifth year on that next year and that will be my last year as well. #00:04:35.56#

R: Wow that's really cool. How long?…I'm thinking back to when I took AP Lit and AP Lang…is that newer? How long have they been making that conscious effort.?#00:04:49.74#

P: Well, I can say easily since the late ninety's just because we saw that push with…You know, I think Ralph Ellison has always been one of the heavily referenced authors. Toni Morrison has always been a heavily referenced author… I'm very disenchanted with the idea of the literary canon in and of itself, but nonetheless the big hitters you would expect to see on an assessment like that. But then what really pushed me to make sure that I was including more diversity in my classroom was when the AP Lang exam went through a state of Sandra Cisneros and Richard Rodriguez and Gary Soto, and a lot of voices this population that I was teaching wouldn't know. A little more about just my personal educational background. I actually grew up in inner city San Antonio. #00:05:49.86#

R: So, that's really different than here.#00:05:49.86#

P: Yeah, and so I came to Oklahoma State for college, and so, you know, I went from understanding racism, but not..not having that as contextualized with the Latino community as it was for the African-American community. Then I got to OSU and was just running into kind of rampant racism and stereotypical terms to people that were my friends growing up, with my girlfriends, and those sorts of things. I mean the joke was that I was one of 8 white kids in the school, right? I think that for me that was also a little bit of a labor of love because not only did the students need this for this international assessment that they might get college credit for, but I just saw it as a huge gap in their own personal experiences and they didn't travel, you know? I mean I had students in G*****e who had never been to Dallas So a conversation about a skyscraper was lost o them because the Devon Tower didn't exist at that age and they'd never been on a plane before. To expect them to read a passage from Richard Rodriguez when he talks about sort of his midlife crisis and who he is and how he's been raised, they didn't stand a chance because they had no context for what he was talking about culturally, much less from the standpoint of 16 year olds talking about a middle aged man in a midlife crisis, you know? So that's been sort of the mix for me is trying to make sure that they have literature that is more engaging for students combined with..I'm hesitant to use the social justice phrase in terms of curriculum because I think sometimes it's got its own negative connotation that goes with it, but these students want to be competitive in a job market, they have to treat people. #00:07:53.86#

P: It's interesting that you brought kind of the idea of not traveling and not having any experience with other cultural groups because hat's actually a big motivator for me. I grew up in a really small town in Oklahoma and most people that I knew were born there, they lived there, and they died there. For me… I didn't have that kind of experience, I didn't have that frame of reference, either when I would read books. But I feel like I still liked the books that I read…maybe because I was always kind of nerdy. But I could see why a lot of my friends, who that wasn't ever going to make any sense to them that didn't care. "Who cares? That person is some rich person and New York? Oh, that's cool. I'm going to go work on my family's farm after I get out of school." I get that, and that's kind of the motivator for me too, and part of my story. #00:09:06.05#

P: You know that's totally fair, and I think it's something that's often overlooked in the conversation about incorporating multiculturalism is that…Well for example, the flip side… It's part of the required curriculum doing something like "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" which I always teach my E****d students that they never get the reference to… on the threshing grain floor. They don't…if they haven't explicitly covered that little passage in Sunday School they never get that reference and my G*****e kids always got that reference. I'm going frame to the idea of multiculturalism, you know, again especially teaching where I teach that's relatively conservative, that too often gets sort of a leftist label put on it. And so I really try to stress that multiculturalism can be as much about being exposed to socioeconomic differences and the cultural differences that go along with that as much as they can have to do with race or gender identity or those kinds of issues. Which is why I said I'm a little bit hesitant with the social justice label because I do think that that carries a lot of connotation. Whereas when you start spinning multiculturalism as we need to talk about the poor white farming community as much as when you talk about the inner city person of color experience, then at least my experience so far is that intent of balance and acknowledging that that community has something to add to the conversation. I think it increases sensitivity overall. #00:10:55.64#

R: Yeah I think so many times it is kind of perceived as "Oh, multiculturalism just means race." For a lot of people that is the first thing that comes to mind, but it can be just as much about you know socioeconomic status. It could be about youth culture. I mean, we all belong to so many cultural groups and our identities are so layered. Our students have just as much to kind of bring to the table from their own experiences as a teenager or as a football player or as you know someone who works at Sonic after school. So I think that's something that I've heard come up a lot in the interviews. I mean, I think for myself I think the fist thing that comes to my mind are a lot of times, it is race, but just being reminded over and over again that that doesn't have to be how it is. We can take those texts that are you know stereotypical or the canon and we can ask these questions to kind of interrogate it and think about the other side of things. So that's something that's come up a lot in my interviews so far that's been really interesting to talk about so. Let's see…so how many so how many years have you been teaching? #00:12:15.77#

P: I just finished my 23rd year #00:12:17.44#

R: Oh wow, congratulations.#00:12:20.37#

P: Thanks. #00:12:20.37#

R: And could you remind me… you teach 11th grade right now, so what are the texts that you typically teach. #00:12:38.93#

P: [School] has sort of a list of common texts that we all expect students to experience at different grade levels. So the major texts we all teach would be The Crucible, The Great Gatsby. We'd still been holding on to the Scarlet Letter , but we finally pushed that one off to the seniors. We just felt like it was better-serviced there. We could teach it rhetorically, but really the reason why we did that is we wanted to open up room. So this year we did a choice novel unit. Well we used Ralph Ellison's The Invisible Man as the mentor text, and so all students would read excerpts from Invisible Man as a point of common conversation. Then if students wanted to pick that novel to read they could because we've got a school board policy that says we have to be able to provide copies of the text and cannot require them to go buy a copy of the text. But we worked with the Media Center and they created a list of other texts that had similar themes to Ellison's Invisible Man so that students could work to pick some subject matter that they were interested in investigating if they wanted to. And we were actually..that was in the process of being assigned when we broke for spring break. I had a couple of conversations with students about that experience once we started teaching again, but so many of them just dropped that assignment in general that those are kind of more small-scale book club meetings. But it was yielding what we would hope, which was a lot of diversity and a whole lot of different voices coming through. And then the other thing we would do is Tim O'Brien's The Things They Carried. Which, I mean again that's sort of the smirking definition of multiculturalism, you know? You've got a successful white guy who's writing that, but he's exploring a whole lot of things including the culture of people who've been to war and come back and what that transition or lack thereof is like. So those are the… The Things They Carried and Invisible Man are more those AP oriented texts. And then we still have one teacher who's holding onto Their Eyes Were Watching God, which I taught for a really long time and so that one's an interesting option as well. Then we keep moving To Kill a Mockingbird around in the curriculum. So like right now, it's technically with the freshman teachers except for that they don't teach the full thing. They teach the debate scene out of it and use that as a launching point to teach the kids how…or the courtroom scene out of it…as a logical point to do some mock debate in class. We still have a junior teacher work ing through the majority of the text with her students. So at the junior level, that's sort of the range of primary texts or anchor texts that we work with for our units. Then from there it's a whole lot of mix match from the textbook that we have as well is just different ancillary texts that teachers bring in. We keep trying to talk about choice in text. So like we'll do two short stories in class, and we really urge the students to go find a short story that they're interested in, and then have an academic conversation about it. So the good news there is that's starting to cut back on some of those required explicit texts to create some room for students. Of course, the challenge there is we have to take that deep breath about quality and whether or not they're actually really doing the assignment with it. #00:17:01.45#

R: It seems like your school has some ideas about what you should teach, but that there is still autonomy within that. Is that..would you describe it like that? #00:17:14.87#

P: I would and then I think probably how well that is adhered to is going to vary from building principal to building principal. If you have an English teacher who's doing evaluations, then they can dig in on fidelity to the broader district principles I suppose etc. And if you have a batch of administrators and none of them are an English teacher, then the unfortunate reality is they just don't know the content of the curricula and so as long as the students seem to be learning and progressing there's a shake and ta nod of the head. I know we've got a couple of buildings that, well one in particular, that still does a whole lot of the same old same old because they just weren't following the broader curriculum choices that the district had made and they weren't getting called out on it, so they weren't getting any pressure to start working on that more inclusive voice. #00:17:14.87#

R: Would you say that the reason…well, what I've kind of found through the surveys so far is that most people have said that they think that the reason that people don't teach texts that are multicultural… the most common thing is that people don't know them, they don't have a reference for what that might be, and then the second biggest thing is money. We don't have money for books in Oklahoma. So what do you think about those two? Which one do you think is more true for you or can you speak for either of those? #00:17:14.87#

P: Yeah. I feel like we get money in fits and spurts,you know. We had a textbook adoption year, so we could have lots of conversations because there was money for the English Language Arts that year. Then other years there's not any money, so "go find what's on the shelf and don't hurt yourself." So I think there is some truth to that and I also know that because of how we use bond money, [town name] is in a little different situation there as far as maybe

being able to revolve texts. So I do think part of it is just lack of knowledge of texts. You know a whole lot of people just teach what they know, which of course just kind of perpetuates the same old canon. And so I think that that's part of it. I think the 3rd thing that I would throw in there, though, is it's going to be based highly on the community. So I think I made this comment on the survey in the narrative section, we're teaching…all of the major texts that we teach at the junior year are based in sexual infidelity. The crucible, The Great Gatsby, The Scarlet letter, all of these touchstone texts are all based in adultery of one shape or another and nobody bats an eye at that because they're all dead white guys. Because those parents believe they know those texts because they were supposed to sit through them in high school. When we get a text challenged, it is either because the author is a person of color or not dead yet. And so I think that's one of those things that folks are really…and that might vary from place to place, right? Like in [old school] I didn't have nearly the parental involvement that I have in [new school], so I could pretty much do whatever I wanted. Because as long as the kids weren't complaining about the class, the parents weren't asking about the class, that was a just a different community demographic right? Conversely, I have a friend who's just retired in Vermont and they got tired of teaching Lolita and so were retiring it from their canon and the community got in a snit because they were going to quit teaching this classic work of literature to their students and they forced Lolita back into the classroom. Just the point being that I think that sometimes when we talk about curriculum we don't always talk enough about the local community and what they will and won't tolerate you know. And so that is the biggest problem we face in [current school] is whether or not we think the community will support it. It's not it's not broad based community support. We're just concerned about the vocal minority on social media. That gets complicated and this next batch is highly editorial about my interpretation of [school] and our relationship with the community. The community really really supports the schools. We've passed 60 some odd consecutive bond issues, but we have rotated as much of our funding as we legally can into those bond issues that if a bond issue doesn't pass, we're screwed. We will really be in a difficult financial situation because we're doing lots of stuff. We've opened up more general fund money because we have the luxury of moving all of our technology purchases are through our bond issues. And so other school districts can't afford to buy technology because they're having to choose between technology and teachers. We're buying technology through bond issues but that means that we can't afford for a bond issue to not pass. The worst thing that could happen is you end up with one of the mega churches angry at you and they all decide to vote against you on bond issues because so few people vote on bond issues and because you have to have that super majority for a bond issue to pass. Then you can't afford to have an 1800 to 3000 person church angry at you. Anyway, I think that that's the other challenge then is you know is when you want to be multicultural or when you want to try to bring in multiple perspectives that relationship with the community then becomes a much bigger touchstone for certain districts than it might be for others. And that's actually something just with the books that are and aren't challenged in [school] whether it's a the middle school level or the high school level, we can see it coming from a mile away if it's an author that's a person of color or if the author is not dead yet. #00:24:31.06#

R: So interesting. That's actually one of the questions I want to ask you is have you ever had a book that you were teaching that has been challenged by an administrator or another colleague or a student or a student's parents and if you have been through that, what was that like?#00:24:57.80#

P: Well I was on a review committee for one, which was a parent that challenge Fahrenheit 451 and whether it was at the appropriate grade level or not. They thought that it was at too young of a grade level , and so that was sort of the a different kind of challenge there. But, the other one that we've really…we've kept in the curriculum, but we've struggled since we added to the curriculum was Kite Runner. And you know just a lot of people going to different websites that have agendas that are sort of set on making certain books look badly you know. And it's not surprising that when you go to those websites, it's amazing how the vast majority of texts they have a problem with are written by women or people of color, and there are just enough white guys who've written classics on there that they can say "no no, look we have problems with all kinds of books, not just these people." So the way [school] actually finally decided to deal with that was we at the Pre-AP sophomore year or so, we actually have an alternative text section of pre-AP sophomore English. We don't announce that up front you know kids are randomized into that section of pre-AP English, but then when the book list gets published, the two that typically trigger parents are either The Glass Castle or Kite Runner, and if they have a problem with it, then the students are moved to that alternate section. So instead of reading The Kite Runner they read Things Fall Apart, which the last time I taught sophomores, I was teaching that alternate section and I just kind of laughed at everybody and said, "Wow you've done me such a favor because I'm not teaching Kite Runner, instead I'm teaching the book that completely calls into question white colonialism. But again like for me this goes back to what I see as sort of the flaw in a lot of the complaints that we get about these texts is there's not the highly stylized non-literal male rape scene that you get in

The Kite Runner. Most parents don't even get to the violence in the soccer stadium in the end because there are so traumatized by the notion of this male rape scene that they have never looked at on the page. But you know, Chinua Achebe is an old book., and so they're they're okay with their kids reading this book that's got polygamy and it has its own fair share of violence. But yeah we never get questioned on it. That's why I say there's just a really weird relationship with the community about what's Okay and what's not okay. #00:28:38.09#

R: You're the 1st person I've talked to actually that has really had a lot of pushback from anything that they've taught And I think that's really interesting and l. And it's not…It's not like your a geographic location I don't think, because I've talked to people who do teach more metropolitan areas like that, and I've talked to a couple of people who teach in smaller areas where that might be more common. So that interests me that you're the first person I've talked to that's had that experience. #00:29:11.31#

P: And I could teach all those same books in [old town] and the kids went home saying nice things about the class and the parents weren't going to pick up a book and read it so it didn't matter. I#00:29:23.67#

R: That was my experience growing up too. My parents just kind of trusted teachers to do what they're going to do and that was it.#00:29:30.40#

P: Well so a good example was when I was in [old school] I taught the Aniya's Bless Me, Ultima to juniors. When I got there that was a sophomore level text and I started off teaching sophomores for one year. They didn't have an AP Lang program, so I was starting it before I was teaching AP Lang. I taught that book for 6 years and never once had a parent question it, but the first time I started teaching it in [new school] I ended up with parents' questions because I was teaching witchcraft. And so one mom. who was rather excellent, you know, her daughter took the book to her and had some questions about it. So the mom sat down over the weekend and read it and then called me, and said "I just had some real problems of how this portrays Catholicism." So I told her I was raised Catholic so I certainly understand what you're saying, but here is what I'm going to do with the book. We had probably about an hour an hour and a half long conversation about the difference between reading the book versus using it as a teaching tool. And she finished the conversation by saying "you know, the reality is I just don't have a degree in English and so I don't know where you guys are headed with this stuff. Now that I see what you're going to do with this, it makes total sense. Then the other two parents who had a problem she went to church with. So she said "I'm going to contact these parents. I'm going to talk to them. This isn't going to be a problem." By the time it was said and done, I taught I think between those 3 families like a total of 7 kids, sometimes in multiple grade levels depending on how my schedule shook out. The relationship was there and it ended up being perfectly fine. But if I had not had a conscientious parent who wanted to sit down and read the book and then call and have a conversation about it, that would have been a trainwreck, my first year of teaching here. Truly like one of the best things that happened in that, Aniya makes mistakes about Catholicism on purpose, there are common misunderstandings about Catholicism. The mom said, "Well, no one who's a Catholic would make that mistake," and I chuckled and said "Ok so my dad was a lifelong Catholic just got scolded from my mom when we were home at Christmas because he made a reference about what the immaculate conception was and it was wrong." And she was like, "oh." But again it goes back to…fortunately a relationship was fostered there because had it been a different parent and then an angry phone call to the school board and I would been digging myself out of a hole instead of having a parent advocate. I keep circling back to that idea in curriculum development and that multiculturalism, and using multiculturalism in the classroom, can be particularly challenging In certain communities. I don't always know what the trigger's going to be. In some communities, it's going to be texts that question religion, some communities texts that deal with sexuality you know. When we having The Kite Runner challenged as a district, I actually ended up in a conversation with the district superintendent and one of the school board members at that point. The school board member said, "Well we just don't understand why you guys have to suggest books that have that content." And I said to her "What do you mean by t*hat* content? Do you mean cussing, because I can find a book without cussing. Do you mean sex? I can find a book without sex. Do you mean race? I mean, I can find books that don't have racial tension, but we're teaching Western lit. There will be conflict in the text, and I can't always guess what's going to trigger each parent." If you want a book without cussing and without sex in it, then I'll teach Huck Finn. That'll be fine." #00:34:56.35##00:35:02.51#

[participant is having conversation with his daughter]

R: We're getting close to being finished too. So my next question kind of goes along with what you've already been talking about. Is there a book that you haven't taught that you've wanted to?#00:35:37.24#

P: Oh, interesting. I think…at this point I've kind of picked up enough political collateral that I kind of get to do what I want to. So like one book that fascinates me that actually is a really good read for students is something like Neal Schusterman's Unwind. That asks a lot of really really really difficult questions about power structures, why people make decisions, how the decision process gets made, and I don't think that I would get permission to teach that as a required class for all juniors. Because that whole book revolves around abortion. It obviously takes a different spin on that issue, but nonetheless, that's still at heart what it's discussing. But that I mentioned that test prep class. The goal is to get those kids to read anything; the district just didn't care. It was largely an EL class, so we weren't really worried about parent complaints or parent intervention. So they absolutely bought me a classroom set and let me teach that. And it did exactly what I thought it would do. Have you read it before? #00:37:02.70#

R: Yeah I have. Actually we used that in our lit circles when I did my student teaching, so kids get really into it. Even my mentor teacher she was like when we were sorting people she was like "yeah you're going to want to put that kid in this group, he was a kid who was kind of reluctant reader and she was like yeah put him in that group." And you know, he loved it. #00:37:19.81#

P: So well and then you get to a point where you find out about a modest proposal. And in that teachers way I kind of chuckled and was like "wow this is based off of an actual thing that happened." So all of a sudden, I've got these EL students wanting to read Swift so that we can read A Modest Proposal. "What's this whole baby thing you're talking about?" I know how powerful that can be, but I also know that in my community I can't ask that in a broader context. And really right now I'm absolutely a button pusher ,so if there is a text that I wanted to teach right now that I don't feel like I could, it would actually be like White Fragility, which is a nonfiction. But her argument about somewhere along the way Americans confused racism with an act instead of a mind set and why that is so crippling to any sort of meaningful conversation about the relationship between white America and people of color is perfect for a class based in argumentation, but just the title itself. Like my administration would pass out, which means I'll probably ask just because I'll be entertained by doing that too. But I know that I'm not… I won't get permission on that one. They're not going to be able to see their way through the headache. So that's one that I have to mention in class and then if students want to go and read it they can. I can probably do excerpts from that or I can go pull an article from that author that touches on some similar themes, and because you don't have the provocative title of White Fragility I can get away with teaching the author and teaching the concepts. That's what's funny because the author of that one is a white female, and that's why she's actually gotten so much credibility with so many people who read it is because she's coming at this from the perspective of a white voice. So, for a white audience that's "safer" than reading a person of color talking about exact same issue. Even then from a narrative standpoint that's something I'd want to teach, I'd love to teach that, but you know…I think that's where when it comes to multicultural literature, especially if you're in a difficult teaching context or community that's not particularly tolerant, then you just have to be clever about using the dead white guy texts as an anchor and how do you go find all those voices that challenge that that view of the world from that time period so that multiculturalism still gets expressed. I find that challenging, though, with my students of color. I'm learning that I have to be really… I want to be clever about it to not trigger the angry parents, but my students that I'm actually trying to do a "tip of the hat" to aren't always mature enough or sophisticated enough to realize that's what I'm doing, and so they're still frustrated that all the novels are dead white guys. We have a pretty large population or at least comparatively large population of students who are out of the closet, and one of the challenges…and I have one and I love her and I have a great relationship with her family so I think that's why she feels safe saying it. We were talking about Walt Whitman one day, and we're talking about his biography and how fascinating it was that a country embraced him as old and gray haired and allowed him to be the voice of America while pretty much just choosing to ignore that he lived with the same man for 40 years, and like kind of the blinders on. I had a great conversation with [student] one day, because I followed that up by pairing …a Ginsburg text "Supermarket in California" where homosexuality at least the reference there is much more overt, and we talked about part of analyzing that text is we need to realize that part of what Ginsberg is saying to Walt Whitman was "I'm a gay man, I'm a 1950s American, I don't have this optimism. How did you have that optimism as a gay man in the 1870s?" But I was just…I was kind of coy with that because I was trying to not be quite in the face of some students who, they and their families would have a real problem with that, but I want them thinking about those ideas. [Student] kind of called me out on it. She was like, "Yeah, but if we're going to get people to change, then we have to be more explicit with those things or else they can continue to choose to ignore those realities and pretend like they don't exist." And so I do think that's a real challenge for

teachers right now is trying to figure out how to prepare our students for the diversity that they're going to see in the world when they leave particularly more homogenous Oklahoma communities. While at the same time, recognizing that 16 year olds at least in my context, they're just not there from a maturity standpoint you know? Like getting in their face with something does smack them with an agenda even if you know that that's something that will be essential to their success later on. #00:43:21.91#

R: Yeah that's really true, I think. I feel like as a teacher when everybody already is kind of I… for a lot of people I think they feel like nobody's really on their side anyway you know what I mean? If you try to push back a little bit, then who knows what's going to happen to you? #00:43:42.48#

P: Yeah, I think that's fair because right now, and again, this will change from area to area you know… I've got friends in California where the teacher appreciation gift they get are bottles of wine. That would never happen in Oklahoma. And for my friend in Vermont in that really weird situation where the community was bound and determined that we're all going to have Lolita in an academic context. But I think you're right, at least in Oklahoma and Texas, that narrative about whether or not schools are being successful is impacting these curricular choices and there is not explicit trust that the teacher must know what they're doing. But that's because for over a decade the public has been told, most often indirectly and not explicitly, look our schools are failing, so therefore our teachers must not know what they're doing, and that does impact curricular choice. We could talk in vacuums with a whole bunch of teachers and talk about how it shouldn't impact us, but we can also all start putting our resumes out there for other jobs you know. #00:44:59.76#

R: What is the effect on your students buy incorporating these multicultural texts? What is your hope for them, and how do you see it actually helping them. You know in their in their learning and to grow?#00:45:11.93#

P: A phrase that I've actually stolen from a Stephen King novel is needing the ability to "think around corners." And so because I've always taught AP language, it's an argument-based class, because the way the Oklahoma state standards have been rewritten so argumentation is the major mode of writing that we're doing in high school… Ninth grade year is kind of weird because it's informative, but it's supposed to be informative research based so it's a stepping stone to argument. I always get to talk about perspectives in my class and how you have to be able to think around corners and just take someone else's perspective if you're going to write good arguments. And, in some cases that comes from…and this is where something like Unwind is so powerful because our 3 main characters there are all dealing with the very same issue, but they have 3 very different perspectives on it because of why they've been sentenced to unwinding. The tangible part of that is that I can see students starting to think about things from class delineations and why would people in different classes approach things a different way and I can see them thinking in cultural perspectives when they're writing an argument trying to anticipate you know "Okay, I want to argue for something really tangible like should we have a light rail system between downtown Oklahoma City and Edmond? And how you're trying to persuade the wealthier side of Edmond that that's a good thing versus how you try to persuade the growing diversity on the south side of Edmond, that's a good thing, it would be two very different arguments. So because the class is grounded in the need for multiple perspectives, then I get away with a ton because I can always say that it's in service of teaching them to think around corners, but that has to do with a multicultural respected, or even just contrary political perspectives. I think that's where as a teacher you can get away with introducing multicultural stuff is to make sure that you do include that dominant voice and that you don't go out and out discredit it, and that you point out that there is some logic to their line of reasoning, but that doesn't mean that everybody views the world that way. And so my students do well on their ACT timed writings and they do well on their AP exams and so I feel like I can get that more tangible, skill-based outcome through those two assessments just because I've seen them demonstrate that ability to think in those terms, especially when they come across an author who is not from a dominant culture on one of those assessments, probably more so the AP Lang exam because of how it's structured. But still I'm really pleased when I read…when we do ACT timed writing practice in class I see them answering those questions like…there is an ACT practice prompt that has to do with the mechanization of the workforce, and I see students writing about how that's going to sound great to the business owners, but here's why it's going to be a problem for the workers. "Okay, there's that tangible ability to think around the corner regardless of which side of that your family is probably on that's the skill that we want them demonstrating.#00:49:03.33#

R: My last question for you is what advice would you give to someone who is maybe new to teaching or maybe they have been a teacher for a while and they kind of feel like they want to change their curriculum or they want to bring in more voices? What advice would you get to them for how to do that successfully?#00:49:20.25#

P: So I think two steps. One is almost always to start the process not with major texts. You know I think whether you're bringing in short stories that provide that different perspective or whether you're bringing in nonfiction that provide a different perspective, those kinds of things oddly fly under the radar, particularly if there is a community that's prone to pushing back or students who are really uncomfortable with having their base worldview questioned or challenged. Those smaller texts…you can get through them in class, completely under your supervision so you can help them not make some of those mistakes in reading those kinds of texts. [call ends due to connection]

Participant 10

Speaker 1-Researcher (00:01):

So, if you just want to go ahead and start by telling me about yourself, how long you've been teaching, where you work at, and your experience with, multicultural literature.

Speaker 2- Participant (01:01):

So, this will be my 15th year to teach. I have taught in maybe seven different counties in Oklahoma, and I spent two years in the Virgin Islands. This'll be my second year at [Tulsa-area school]. I spent four years at Tulsa Public Schools. Probably there is where I really started, you know, seeking out books that represented multiple perspectives of our country, of our society.

Speaker 2 (01:49):

I was part of the Johns Hopkins talent development program. This school where I taught, Webster High School had received a grant from Johns Hopkins, talent development. And some of the books, like one of the books we talked from was Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. And I know there's some controversy surrounding Sherman Alexie now. I'm a member of different groups that promote... I don't want to say diversity because that takes... Diversity assumes that there's something that's not diverse or not othered, you know what I'm saying? But anyway, the school where I'm teaching now, doesn't necessarily have that same emphasis on diversity if you want to use that term. But, I'm hoping to, to introduce some books that will present that. So, I don't know if that helps or not.

Speaker 1 (02:59):

It does! So, could you tell me just maybe a little bit more about, [school] in general? Like, is what's the size of the population? How, how big is your school? How do you think, you know, kids feel whenever they are in your school?

Speaker 2 (03:00):

We have about 700 kids at our high school. Um, mostly white kids. We do have a significant Native American population. But as far as other diversity, there's not a whole lot. We do have some African American kids, Hispanic kids, but it's, you know, a suburban school.

Speaker 1 (03:56):

What is the culture like in your school as far as...Like, what is the tone set by teachers and administration for students? How do you think that they feel whenever they walk in the door each day? Is it, you know, like very community driven or, what do students feel like whenever they walk in, do you think?

Speaker 2 (04:23):

I think they feel welcome you know, I don't know what they would say.

Speaker 1 (04:31):

Right.

Speaker 2 (04:34):

Um, I think they feel welcomed. The administration sets a positive tone. I don't know.

Speaker 1 (04:48):

No, you're fine. I mean, I think sometimes it's maybe hard to like 100% know. How involved in... Does your district have some kind of list of texts that you have to teach or, do you have freedom in what you're teaching?

Speaker 2 (05:15):

Well, before I came to the school, they kind of adopted a list of not anchor texts. That's what Tulsa public school uses. I don't know if you've talked to anybody from Tulsa Public Schools.

Speaker 1 (05:28): No, I haven't actually.

Speaker 2 (05:30):
Okay. Well, years ago, Tulsa public schools adopted a series of anchor text or texts per year, per you know, ninth, 10th, 11th, 12th. So [school] had kind of done that too. For example, with seniors, it was Beowulf and then, Canterbury Tales, Macbeth,1984 and then senior project. And I kind of wanted to get away from that this last year a little bit. And, I wasn't able to, so yeah.

Speaker 1 (06:12): So why, why do you think you aren't able to? Is it because maybe you're still feeling like you're new at this school?

Speaker 2 (06:20):

No, that's the thing. You know, I asked the principal and they wanted... I was told, just kind of stick with the curriculum, stick with what had been planned out. And then for sophomores it's of course Romeo..., I mean, not Romeo and Juliet. That's not right. For sophomores, we taught Night and then we were going to teach Flowers for Algernon, but this next year, I, really want to teach Dreamland Burning.

Speaker 1 (06:57):

Oh yeah. That's a really good book. And it'd be really meaningful to your students too, since you know, you're right there in Tulsa, they probably are familiar with all of the places mentioned and

Speaker 2 (07:09):

Yeah, exactly. Well, and I would like to teach it to 10th graders, this spring, because we will be right at the 100th anniversary of the massacre when, right after school lets out next year. It'll be May 31st to June 1st. We'll be right at that. And then there are all kinds of field trips we could do. So I would love to teach that and I'm going to promote it.
Speaker 1 (07:35):

Yeah. I think that's a great idea. Have you, have you talked about it with other people at your school?

Speaker 2 (07:43):

Not yet.

Speaker 1 (07:44):

What do you think, how do you think they'll react?

Speaker 2 (07:48):

Uh, I don't know. Um, it seems like the teacher that teaches most of the other sophomores, she's pretty flexible. Each of us doing our own thing. With the senior teacher, the other senior teacher, um, she actually wants for us to teach the same thing, like exactly the same thing every day. And I'm going to have to deal with it. I'm going to have to, Because for example, she's not a big poetry person and I am, so, so I'm going to have to have a sit down with her and just tell her I don't... I feel confined by saying that we both have to teach the same thing every day.

Speaker 1 (08:36):

Yeah. I could see where that'd be really frustrating. My district is kind of like that. Like we have common goals and we pretty much stay fairly close to each other. There is room for flexibility, but I can understand what you're saying. Sometimes you might not identify with it or feel as passionate about it...

Speaker 2 (08:55):

Or, you see some, a need for change in the midst of the stream. And I want to be able to do that. If we needed a break and do something different to address needs, then you know, I want to be able to do that. And right now I'm going through...well, do you know who [professor at OSU] Well, I participated in her...it was a month long poetry, write.

Speaker 1 (09:37):

Yeah. I've seen those that she does.

Speaker 2 (09:40):

I just gained so much from that, that I want to take back to the classroom. Maybe that first month of school that's what we would do is mainly poetry, read poetry and write poetry.

Speaker 1 (09:54):

That's really cool.

Speaker 1 (10:37):

So, that's something I notice a lot too, is that, a lot of schools don't teach poetry, but it shows up on tests. And, also it's fun. Like I think it's fun too. And that's something that I've started to think about too, is how am I going to include that more next year? Because I didn't do a good job of it this year. So that's really cool that you're having your students do that.

Speaker 2 (11:27):

I think it would be a good launching pad because, you know, in poetry you don't have to, I mean, some rules, you abide by. Like poets don't generally invent spellings. I mean, some, I guess they do sometimes, but for the most part spelling and standard. Capitalization is kind of optional. Punctuation is kind of optional, but I think you can get a sense of the kids' ability with capitalization and punctuation, just by looking at how they handle poetry and to deal with it kind of in a nonthreatening way and then go from there.

Speaker 1 (12:04):

And it's a good way to kind of start to get to know your students too, because I feel like poetry is a really personal form of writing. So what was your, I've been kind of asking everyone this question, just out of curiosity, what was your high school English class like? What kind of texts were you reading when you were in high school, and is it similar or different from what is most often being taught now?

Speaker 2 (12:34):

Well I was in the...I went to Tulsa central high school and so I was in the only honors class English class all through like 10th, 11th, 12th. There wasn't, I don't know if there even was AP, I don't know. But anyway, I mean there wasn't AP at my school at that time. So we read like _____ and I remember reading War and Peace. You know, I know we did Macbeth and Hamlet. I didn't remember much from that. So the truth, um, just very classic literary texts is what we read.

Speaker 1 (13:15):

So did you, did you find more exposure to diverse texts or multicultural texts in college or...

Speaker 2 (13:32):

Somewhat I guess. It's been so long to tell you the truth.

Speaker 1 (13:38):

What is your own personal reading life like? Do you find that you're looking for more texts that maybe would speak to different identities in your own personal reading?

Speaker 2 (13:55):

I think so....trying to think. Yeah. I mean, I read just about anything when I see a good book. I've subscribed to so many different reading lists and, when I see a good book, I put it on my list and, you know, try to read it. So [OSU professor], she's also doing a LGBTQ+ reading group, so I'm part of that. And then I'm in the... There's local, well, it's probably not local, I suppose anybody can join it, but it's on teaching about the race massacre. I'm part of that this year, and I'm part of another reading group. And I'm part of a book group with Penny Kittle. The Book Love, you know?

Speaker 1 (15:25):

Uh huh. Yeah, that's really cool.

Speaker 2 (15:30):

So I've got my plate pretty full because, I mean, we've worked around the house a whole lot and the yard, so the stuff that I would spend my summer doing, I've gotten ahead on. And so I have little time.

Speaker 1 (15:50):

Um, so you, you mentioned, um, Dreamland Burning and the race massacre, do you find that your students know much about it or even know that it happened? I'm just curious.

Speaker 2 (16:05):

I know they know it happened, how much they know. I don't know. I did ask because, you know, I've got this going around in my brain about teaching it if anybody teaches it and nobody does. And I think it would be perfect to teach with ninth grade when they have Oklahoma history. I'm not the ninth grade teacher, but I think that that would be perfect. But anyway, but I can certainly teach it in 10th grade.

Speaker 1 (16:34):

Okay. Well, you kind of already touched on this a little bit, but have you experienced any pushback for something that you either have taught or you want to teach? And what was that like? And it could be from, you know, administrators, which I know you kind of already talked about. It could be from another teacher, parents, anything...

Speaker 2 (17:05):

I have not, no. In fact, you know, I expected, when I was in Tulsa public schools, I expected to get push back because we taught Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time, and I never got a single phone call. I've never had a parent complain or anything. So, you know,

Speaker 1 (17:38):

As far as other teachers..., Cause you talked about your principal saying like that wasn't going to work...
Speaker 2 (17:45):

That's the only thing...What happened was, before spring break, after I read, I had never read Flowers for Algernon. So, after I read it, I thought, maybe it would be a good book to teach. And since I was going to teach it to my sophomores, my seniors had never read it that I would teach it instead of 1984. And that's when they told me no, let's stick to the plan that we have and teach 1984. Well, then it turned out to be a non- issue because you know, it didn't have school. And so, for those last few weeks, during the time of distance learning I had a reading assignment per week, a writing assignment, which was poetry. I really did a lot of poetry because I figured, well, the first time I did it, I got such a good response that I kept it up, then I did a vocabulary type thing once a week and I didn't even try to teach a novel. I knew, I knew I saw the handwriting on the wall.

Speaker 1 (18:52):

How do you feel like your students respond to, the literature that you currently teach?

Speaker 2 (19:15):

Okay. Well, I'll just take it put book by book. I feel like they, they did really well. I felt like the 10th graders were better at...I mean, they were more receptive. They like Night, for example, they like Lord of the flies, which I taught. I don't know what they would've done with flowers for Algernon. I'm just not sure about that. We did a little unit on short stories. I felt like the 10th graders just really pretty well responded. We read, for example, that Jack London story about, Oh, to build a fire is the name of it. And we read Harrison Bergeron. The 12th graders, they were checked out when they came in the door. I got some really good response on Beowulf, you know, which I was proud of because that's one of those things that, you know, especially gamers kids, who've been into gaming, you know, they're into that heroic battle thing. And so that kind of taps into that. What's interesting...we, we read a Journal of a Plague with no idea what would happen. The seniors did enjoy A Modest Proposal, although it went like this over some kids' heads, they thought what, you know? Do I didn't feel as successful with the seniors because like I say, they're already big kids. I had kids had already signed up with military. I mean they, so...

Speaker 1 (21:27):

So when I've been talking with some of the other people I've been interviewing, they've been saying... And I, and I asked this on the survey too...The number one reasons why people don't teach multicultural literature. And the answer I got that was the most prevalent answer was because of, obviously we live in Oklahoma and there's no money. Do you have any experience with that? Asking for a book and being told, no, there's no money for this.

Speaker 2 (22:09):

Not, not really. For example, if I teach Dreamland Burning, I'm gonna, I will have to come up with a way to get it, so I'll need to apply for some kind of grant. So that's the thing. I think you have to be proactive. You have to be your own advocate. We had the whole discussion this last year, but about new books to purchase, you know, I haven't heard anything. I haven't heard where we've gotten on that, but, but that was before the Dreamland Burning idea came along. So for me, I'll have to get a grant.

Speaker 1 (22:47):

So the next biggest thing that people said, they said either they don't have the money or they said they or the people they know, don't know multicultural texts. So do you feel like, you or the people that you work with, would you say that that's true of them? Do you think that they take the time to know those things? Because, something that I really thought about was, you know, it takes time to be able and you have to put effort in outside of the classroom to be reading these things and finding these things. And obviously teachers, you know, have tons of things going on. They don't have tons of time to do that and it costs money to find books sometimes. So do you think that time and effort is kind of like a barrier for them not knowing them? Or is it just like they, they don't want to know.

Speaker 2 (24:04):

I think it's a little of both. I feel like we're open, but not as much as we should be. You know, some teachers are more open than others to it, changing it up. I would say that a couple of the teachers, I know they're really bound by AP and what AP is doing. And it will be interesting to see how that goes after this. You know, I don't know if you, you've probably heard that California. I mean, the University of California dropped their requirements for ACT/SAT. So I expect that AP will be next. I'm wondering. I've always felt like an AP was privileged. I don't know if I've answered the question, but I felt like some teachers are more open than others, but you know, like I'm thinking of one particular teacher, she really lighted up when I mentioned certain books, like the curious incident of the dog in the nighttime. And not that that's the best example, but she's like, Oh yeah. So some are more than others. I can think of one teacher, she's got her hands full and with her own life, I don't know how much time she actually has to devote to reading. You know, she's got a couple of little kids and so, you know.

Speaker 1 (25:53):

Yeah, no, I mean, you can definitely think about, there's so many reasons why. We are already, in this overworked and underpaid thing and you know, working extra hard on that outside of, your job, that's hard. But at the same time, wouldn't you want to keep moving forward and trying to make things better for your students. I think there's...there's a fine line there, and a lot of people have kind of brought that up and I don't know. When you, when you said that you thought AP was privileged, what do you mean by that? Exactly. Do you mean in like an economic sense or,

Speaker 2: (27:02):

I don't have any proof of it, but I wonder how many kids who are on IEPs are in AP. When I taught at Webster, I taught pre-AP and I had a couple of kids who liked me from ninth grade and wanted to take my English the next year. Two of them were on IEPs and we, we did it. I just wonder how often that's the case.

Speaker 1 (27:39):

Yeah. I think you bring up a good point there. And I think it's a conversation that a lot of people are starting to have, you know, are we just perpetuating this hierarchy of students or are we actually helping them? I don't know.

Speaker 2 (27:56):

Well, and I don't know, I haven't been where I am long enough to, you know, see. Because you know how it is that first year, you're just kind of getting to know the teachers, the students, the school, the rules. And so I don't know enough to say anything yet.

Speaker 1 (28:16):

Yeah, I definitely can relate to that. Cause you know, I was at my first year at the school I teach in. And it's sometimes hard to feel like you can speak up cause you don't want everyone to...first of all, you want to have a job next year and you don't want everyone to completely dislike you because you have to work with them all the time. So it's, I think it's a hard balance. So, what advice would you give to someone who is starting out teaching or someone who is hoping to make their curriculum more inclusive? What advice, what practical steps would you give them?

Speaker 2 (29:22):

Okay, well, I don't know, but I just thought this book, The Penny Kittle/ Kelly Gallagher book, and I'm going to work through it this summer. They also had penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher had a quarantine series they did, that I'm still trying to catch up on and they bring in a variety of people, wide variety of people. I shared that link with my co-teachers, you know, and one of them was like, "Oh yeah, I love them!" That's all. I just hear from one. But anyway, I would tell them to check out 180 days.

Speaker 1 (30:17):

It seems like you have a pretty...you've already started to think about how you're going to potentially get that text. I guess I'm not like trying to put words in your mouth, but, I'm assuming that you probably have come up with some kind of plan of action to take to your colleagues or your administrator and say, "Hey, this is why I want to teach this, and this is how we're going to do it."

Speaker 2 (30:44):

Right. Part of the problem is since we've been doing everything virtual, it's just, you know, that's been a big stumbling block. I can't just go up and have a conversation with somebody about it, but yeah, I think it would be perfect for after spring break next year.

Speaker 1 (31:08):

I will be really interested to see how it works out for you.

Speaker 2 (31:11):

Yeah. And then if it does work, then, you know, if a ninth-grade teacher would like to take it and run with it, she could, or we could just teach 10th grade every year if they don't get.

Speaker 1 (31:26):

I think your students would like it too! Like I said, they know those places, so it brings some excitement into reading about it.

Speaker 1 (31:42):

So, if you're, if you're giving, advice, you're saying to find some kind of professional development and kind of work through that, and that'll kind of like give you practical steps just to start that journey.

Speaker 2 (31:59):

Yeah, I think so.

Speaker 1 (32:06):

It also seems like you've found a lot of community too, because you said, you're in a book club with LGBT books and you have participated in these other reading groups and stuff. So, it seems like you are also, you know, putting in that time to be in community with other people and, and to have that, that conversation.

Speaker 2 (32:30):

Right.

Speaker 1 (32:40): I think that that's really important and other people have brought that up too. You know, you really have to be communicating and collaborating with other people. Because if you don't have other people, you know, to kind of help you through that and to be on your side, then that can be scary.

Speaker 2 (32:58): Right. Yeah. And you know, I mean, every summer I look for something. I did the OSU writing workshop, the writers Institute at OSU. I did that in 2017 and in 2018, I went with Northeastern state to the Oregon Shakespeare festival. I just, I try to fill my summers up with all kinds of opportunities anyway, this year it just happens to be virtual, which is okay with me.

Speaker 1 (33:34): Yeah. Well, is there anything else that you want to add that I didn't ask you about or any questions that you have for me?

Speaker 2 (33:46):No, not really. You know, I'm just, I feel like I'm just still learning, you know, I'm a work in progress, so I'm not sure ...I'm definitely not an expert yet.

Speaker 1 (33:57): Well, I don't think anyone is. So, I mean, I think that, to me, I think the more important thing, and I mean, I think a lot of people would share this opinion, but I think the most important thing is that you're willing to learn and willing to change because I feel like, you know, sometimes people hit that wall and they don't want to learn and change anymore. And so I think that's what matters most. Well, it was really good talking to you.

Speaker 2 (34:30): Yeah, you too.

Speaker 1 (35:26): And I really wish you luck with, you know, getting this book into your classroom and I really hope that that works out for you and I'd love to hear how it goes. Cause I think it's really important.

Speaker 2 (35:39): Yeah. Thank you.