

# Reading the World in an American Literature Class: Postcolonial YA Novels and Cosmopolitan Youth

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Research question: *How do students **perceive** their experience of using Social Identity Development Theory as a lens to analyze postcolonial Young Adult novels written by American writers?*

The novels students chose from for this unit:

- The Hate You Give -- Angie Thomas
- The Sun is Also a Star -- Nicola Yoon
- Everything, Everything -- Nicola Yoon
- Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass -- Meg Medina
- Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets to the Universe -- Benjamin Alire Saenz
- All-American Boys--Jason Reynolds & Brendan Kiely
- American Born Chinese -- Gene Luen Yang
- Flight -- Sherman Alexie
- Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian -- Alexie
- Shadowshaper -- Daniel Jose Older
- Bless Me, Ultima -- Rudolfo Anaya

**Unit Activities:** (approximately 8 weeks)

Pre-reading Activities:

- Watch “The Danger of a Single Story” TED Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- Read “Indian Education” short story by Sherman Alexie
- Introduce Social Identity Development Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
- Choose books from list

Reading Activities:

- Read, read, read; allow as much time in class as possible
- Reading Check-in activities; journaling; small group discussions
- Research book reviews on Amazon & Goodreads
- Introduce Postcolonial terms

Post-reading Activities:

- Analysis essay (or other summative assessment)
- Informal book talks to small group (optional presentation to the class)
- Reflections in journals & Google forms

Social Identity Development Theory: (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

- Apply to protagonists to understand the character’s reaction to social injustice or oppression
- Analyze ways character changes and/or adapts to the conflict or situation.
- Applying theory to novel analysis at the high school level meets the CCSS reading and writing standards in a unique way while also increasing students’ social and emotional abilities.

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## Postcolonial terms:

- Postcolonialism
- Decolonization
- Race & Ethnicity
- Diaspora
- Native

## Results:

- Most applied the theory successfully
- Choose books that depicted characters and cultures that differed from their own
- Develops social and emotional skills.
- Many made personal connections to the experiences of the main characters

## Suggestions:

- Adapt for various secondary ELA grade and ability levels
- Focus on a particular genre (contemporary YA, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Historical, Nonfiction)
- Assigned more than once in a school year

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