

(Re)Shaping the High School Curriculum:  
Using Young Adult Literature to Teach  
Social Issues and Communication

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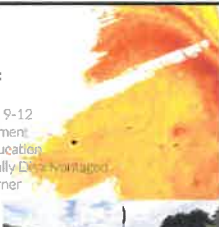


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## Background

<p><b>Village of Oakfield:</b> Population 1,075 9 miles from Fond du Lac 70 miles north of Milwaukee Most notable historical event was the F5 tornado that demolished much of the village in 1996 - many homes, two churches, the middle school, and the canning factory were destroyed</p>	<p><b>School District of Oakfield:</b> 544 students K-12 150 students in grades 9-12 19% Open Enrollment 11.3% Special Education 23.9% Economically Disadvantaged 0.7% English Learner 90.8% White Rural, farming area</p>
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## Goals for this session:

- Share titles to get your own groups started
- Provide discussion questions and write more to share
- Share formative assessment ideas
- Discuss summative assessment "final project"

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How this unit came to be:

- Changes in course structure
- Desire to find relevant reading options for seniors
- Attempt to combine novels with research and communication skills

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Students were split into groups of 3 or 4 based on each social issue topic.

Students chose books from the list I provided but were encouraged to find and suggest others.

The biggest key to “buy-in” for my students:

**CHOICE!**

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## Book Options - Mental Illness

- Wintersgirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher
- Will Grayson, Will Grayson* by John Green
- Turtles All the Way Down* by John Green
- Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman
- Cut* by Patricia McCormick
- Burn Journals* by Brent Runyon
- Parks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- Lisa, Bright and Dark* by John Neufeld
- One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey
- Starved* by Michael Somers
- It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini
- I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sanchez



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## Book Options - Modern Slavery

**Sold** by Patricia McCormick  
**Diamond Boy** by Michael Williams  
**Stolen** by Katarina Rosenblatt  
**Bitter Side of Sweet** by Tara Sullivan




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## Book Options - Crime/Justice/Punishment

**The Hate U Give** by Angie Thomas  
**Dear Martin** by Nic Stone  
**Snitch** by Allison Van Diepen  
**When I was the Greatest** by Jason Reynolds  
**Always Running** by Luis Rodriguez  
**All American Boys** by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely  
**Monster** by Walter Dean Myers  
**Scorpions** by Walter Dean Myers  
**The Juvie Three** by Gordon Korman  
**Lockdown** by Walter Dean Myers




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## Book Options - Drug Use/Addiction

**Dope Sick** by Walter Dean Myers  
**A Piece of Cake: A Memoir** by Cupcake Brown  
**Far From You** by Tess Sharpe  
**Lifeline** by Abbey Lee Nash  
**Crank** by Ellen Hopkins  
**Go Ask Alice** by Beatrice Sparks  
**Smack** by Melvin Burgess  
**Tweak: Growing Up on Methamphetamines** by Nic Sheff  
**Beneath a Meth Moon** by Jacqueline Woodson




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## Discussion Questions

How do the characters in your novel treat the topic (mental health, modern slavery, or crime)?

Is there a stigma in our society in regards to the topic of your novel? What is that stigma?

What would you do if you were in the character's situation - the same thing or something different?

How does the character's background or environment affect the way that they treat the conflict in the novel?

Why do you think the author chose to present the topic in this fashion?

Discuss your novel in comparison to the other novels being read in your group. How are the answers to these questions the same or different in each novel?

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Based on the novels from the list that you have read or your background knowledge of these topics, what are other discussion questions that would lead to strong conversations in your classroom?

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## Formative Assessments

**"Journal Entries"** - Students take part in a quick write, journal style entry about what they have read since their last writing session and/or posted discussion question (post on board, online/Canvas, etc)

**News Articles** - Provide groups with news articles about their topics. Have students search for a recent and relevant article about the topic. Students can write about the connections between the article and their novel or annotate the article with connections.

**Exit Slips** - Students can quickly jot down information on their way out of the room: summarize what they read, offer a solution to the issue, make a connection, share their emotional response based on their reading.

**Small Group Discussions** - Students discuss their novels and the issues in their own established groups. Students can also rearrange and discuss their novel and topic with students from other groups.

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## Final Project - Culminating Activities

### [Project Assignment Sheet](#)

1. **Research a specific social justice issue to understand the history, progress, and future of the issue**
  - a. Students completed their own research about the social issue
  - b. Students make connections between their novel and the information they read (considering aspects like time period, changes in society over time, etc.)
2. **Write a properly cited research outline**
  - a. This replaced a full research paper due to time constraints; could easily be adapted into a research paper
  - b. Still included research skills and use of MLA format
3. **Give a presentation to inform and inspire others to take action**
  - a. Uses public speaking skills
  - b. Future goal: turn this into more of an academic service learning opportunity where students could volunteer, host a fundraiser, find local groups that focus on their issues, team up with groups in the area etc.

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### Standards Met In Final Project:

#### Reading Literature

RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

#### Speaking and Listening

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

SL.11-12.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

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"I think reading young adult literature instead of classics was extremely beneficial to us students. The novels we read contained ideas and conflicts that are present in today's society. Classics have conflicts and issues that are not always relevant anymore and that is why reading novels on social issues was better for educating students."  
- Michael

"All of the books I read and topics discussed in class I genuinely enjoyed. Overall everything went well and I enjoyed this year!" - Jonathan

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## How can you make this work?

Books are expensive! I use local resources to help me get copies of books for my students (especially since there are rarely more than 1-2 reading the same novel at the same time):

- Area public libraries
- Interlibrary loan systems
- School library
- Overdrive/library ebooks
- My personal collection
- Colleagues with large classroom libraries

### My other advice for getting started:

- Use novels from other classes
- Take it slowly and introduce a new topic each year rather than all at once
- Don't offer a ton of options at first and build your personal library as you read the choices
- Ask for help and suggestions!
- Twitter has become my favorite PD!

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### Discuss with your neighbor or group:

- **What pieces of this unit would fit well into your curriculum?**
- **What other ideas do you have for formative assessments with this unit?**
- **What obstacles stand in the way of implementing all or some of these YA options in your classroom?**
- **How could you take what is created here and expand it to better meet the needs in your own classroom and curriculum?**

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Thanks! Any questions?

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**Global/Social Issues Project (Semester 1 Final Exam Project)**

**Objective:** To analyze a global issue by describing the details, comparing perspectives, determining realistic solutions, and supporting your thoughts about the issue.

1. Research a specific social justice issue to understand the history, progress, and future of the issue
2. Write a properly cited research outline
3. Give a presentation to inform and inspire others to take action

**Background:** You have already begun your research on a social issue by reading novels based on that topic or theme. You will continue to do more research on the larger issue, beyond your specific book, and also the specific details surrounding the topic of your novel.

**Part 1 - Written Research Outline:**

As you complete your research, you are to create a detailed outline of the information that you find that is relevant to your topic. Consider this the first step to a longer research paper, but we will not take the next step of writing the actual paper. Much, if not all, of the information included in this outline will become part of your presentation.

**Part 2 - Presentation:**

Groups have some choice as to how the information will be presented. The presentation will be based on the contents of the written outline. The presentations will take place during the final exam block and must be at least 7 minutes long.

Ideas on how to present material:

1. Slide show/digital presentation (Slides, Prezi, etc)
2. Write a play script/present it
3. Give an oral presentation with handouts or posters
4. Make a video on the issue
5. Conduct/record an interview with someone that works/ is affected by the issue (this option would be along with a shorter version of one of the other options depending on the situation)

**Topics to be Addressed:**

Numerous topics should be addressed in researching and presenting on your topic:

1. **An overview of the problem/issue -**
  - a. What is the problem? Where does it exist? When did it begin? What people or groups are directly involved? Specific names, dates, and locations are expected.
  - b. Why does (or should) this matter to us?
2. **Different perspectives (views) about the problem -**
  - a. What are the causes of the problem? Does everyone see it as a problem? Historical sources may be used to determine facts and opinions about the problem.
  - b. What seems to be society's perception or attitude toward the subject? How is the attitude similar or different in the US compared to other countries? Different groups of people (politically, socioeconomically, culturally, for example)?
3. **Connection with readings**
  - a. How was the subject treated in the novels you read or by different authors? What seems to be the author's attitude toward the subject? How integrated was the topic into the novel (main focus? Side story? Background?)
  - b. Are there other articles or news stories written about the topic? Read some as a group and discuss. This could connect to the perspectives mentioned above.

#### 4. Possible existing solutions -

- a. What has been tried so far in an effort to resolve the issue?
- b. How have experts/others associated with the issue suggested fixing the problem? What makes the suggestions different? Based on the background of this issue, what do you predict will happen in the future?

#### 5. Barriers to existing solutions -

- a. What human, environmental, and/or geographical barriers stand in the way of fixing the problem?
- b. What can be done to address these barriers in order to move along on solving the problem?
- c. Given what you have learned, what do you think would be the best solution to the problem?

#### Documentation of Sources:

All sources must be documented using MLA Format. In your outline, include 'in-text' citations along with the information or quotes **and** a Works Cited page at the end of the outline. Every source that you use must have its own citation. [www.easvhib.com](http://www.easvhib.com) or [www.citationmachine.com](http://www.citationmachine.com) are fantastic and easy tools that assist in creating citations for the sources you use while writing your outline and presentation.

*Plagiarism: Not citing the sources you used or directly copying and pasting information will result in completion of an additional alternative assignment and a disciplinary report to the office. It is a serious offense to pretend others' ideas are your own.*

#### Scoring:

Research outline will be scored on:

- **Inclusion of information** - enough information, variety of information, validity of information
- **Organization of information**
- **Use of paraphrased and quoted information**
- **Sources** - use of multiple sources to support information, correct citations (in-text)
- **Works Cited** - correctly cited sources, *at least 5 sources (not including novels)*

Presentation will be scored on:

- **Voice** - volume and projection; pronunciation and enunciation; intonation and emotion; speed, pacing, and pauses
- **Body language** - Facing audience, posture, eye contact, gestures, placement of notes (use of notecards)
- **Introduction** - provides clear, strong beginning to presentation; grabs attention, previews main points
- **Organization** - main points are organized, clear, and supported; includes all required information
- **Clarity** - clearly shares information with class, explains necessary information
- **Conclusion** - clear, strong closure; reviews main points, offers solution or call to action, has clear ending
- **Audience considerations** - utilizes words, images, audio, video, and interactive elements to engage audience interest and deepen understanding; addresses what the audience should think, feel, see, and do during and after; prepare for questions and answers
- **Professionalism** - prepared, practiced, professional, and polished

Division of work within groups: I will discuss with each group their plan for "dividing and conquering" this project. That being said, I expect all students to put forth equal effort and pull their weight within the group. I reserve the right to score students differently based on their involvement and the work each individual completes. Ultimately, though, this is a **group** assignment and I expect that you work well as a team.