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TEACHING MULTICULTURAL TEXTS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As a teacher I have found it difficult to identify a single comprehensive resource that provides free access to the necessary components to create a multicultural English unit from the ground up. Thus, for this project I built a website for teachers that answers the following research question: *What are the best practices for selecting and teaching multicultural literature in secondary schools in order to represent and build empathy for students from traditionally marginalized populations?*

The project was created for use by all secondary English teachers throughout the United States who are interested in adding or refining a multicultural literature unit. Administrators, department chairs, literacy coordinators, etc. might also find the project to be a helpful resource that they can share if they are pushing for their English departments to adopt more multicultural literature.

A website was chosen to present this material because the platform is dynamic. A dynamic website was important because new books are constantly being published -- a static resource would quickly grow outdated. Likewise, it will be easier to incorporate new research that supports the inclusion of multicultural literature, or add additional best practice for teaching multicultural texts as they become realized. Additionally, the organization of the website, with various tabs across the top, allows for educators to directly access the specific content they are most interested in. For those just beginning the process of building a multicultural literature unit, the sequence of the various tabs walks teachers in order through the process of developing a multicultural literature unit.

The project is located at the following web address: www.teachingmulticulturaltexts.com

The first section of the website features the **Justification** for teaching multicultural literature. While teachers have the autonomy to make many decisions within their classroom, choosing and purchasing class and unit texts is a process that requires approval from multiple parties within a school and district. Thus, this section provides teachers with research-backed talking points to use for informing department chairs, school administrators, parents/guardians, and district decision makers alike of the importance of including multicultural literature into the curriculum. The page is broken down into three areas: Representation Matters, Building Empathy, and Versatility. Representation Matters opens by addressing how changing demographics with the United States, coupled with the lack of curricular changes, impact students. Building Empathy addresses how multicultural literature can be used to build empathy in students, as well as the effect of such increased skills. Lastly, Versatility explains how teaching multicultural literature can come in many forms to fit the needs of various classrooms.

The second section of the website, **Selecting Texts**, is broken down into four areas to aid educators in deciding on multicultural titles for their curriculum. It begins with Considerations that should be kept in mind throughout the selection process, such as a text's Lexile score, the effectiveness of first person narration, etc. Secondly, a list of Criteria is provided for teachers to use when evaluating books to ensure they are authentic and appropriate. Next is a Preliminary Book List comprised of 100 titles that exclusively feature protagonists from marginalized communities (race, gender, sexual

orientation, socio-economic status, etc.). Lastly, External Book Lists shares a series of links to other multicultural book resources such as the Coretta Scott King Book Awards. These links allow users of the site to search for new literature outside of the Preliminary Book List.

The third section provides teachers with **Best Practices** for teaching multicultural literature. This section shares eight different tips for teachers to incorporate into their instruction of multicultural texts. The practices range from unit-wide reminders such as not tokenizing a student from a marginalized identity to serve as a spokesperson on behalf of the entire group, to specific ideas for an assignment such as creatively writing as a character from the text. Each of the practices not only includes an explanation and rationale, but also an example for educators to follow.

The final **Resource** section of the website provides teachers with a sample unit, justification for the decisions made throughout the sample unit, and links to multicultural book grants. The sample unit provides guiding/essential questions, front loading/pre-reading resources, guided reading/journal questions, as well as larger weekly assignments to accompany the text, *How It Went Down* (Magoon, 2014). Next, the sample unit is broken down to explain the decisions made in conjunction with the supporting research and best practices. Lastly, the section includes links to a series of grants for multicultural literature that teachers could apply for when looking to purchase multicultural texts for their classrooms should their school/district be unable to provide the necessary financial resources.

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