

Using Text Sets to Support Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

A research-based¹ way to use connected texts and resources to support multiple perspectives, connect with students, build critical consciousness, and humanize literacy instruction.

Text sets offer an opportunity to engage with conceptually related resources that provide new context, fill in a gap in the material presented, or center perspectives missing from the anchor text. Intentional text set curation can give educators tools to address complex topics, perspectives, or events in nuanced ways, all while supporting students' reading, discussion, and analysis skills.

What is a text set?

Text sets are intentionally grouped sets of texts and media resources focused on a specific topic. This is a way to quickly build knowledge and vocabulary through a volume of reading, and can be used at any grade level. For more guidance, see [here](#).

There are many ways that text sets may be used for these goals. For example:

Use Text Sets to Center:



Counternarratives: Consider one-sided stories. What alternative messages or aims would help deconstruct the traditional narrative that students are currently learning (or already learned) about? Whose voice is not heard? What texts can be used to elevate, amplify, and give agency to those who are marginalized by the dominant narrative?²



Current Events: Consider the world around us. How can texts support students in understanding relevant real-world issues that are taking place today? What implications do time, place, and cultural/social/political factors have on this real-world issue?



Identity: Consider students' many identities. How might including additional resources provide opportunities for students to see one or more of their identities, life experiences, or interests reflected?³



Language: Consider students' linguistic identities. How can texts written in students' home languages and/or varieties of "non-standard" language be used to leverage students' full linguistic repertoires? How can resources and instructional practices support translanguaging and language/vocabulary development (including across languages)?



Perspectives: Consider representation and authorship. How might including varied perspectives or new authors give new depth, context, or information to help students better understand the topic under study?



Social Justice: Consider action and agency. Who is presented as having agency? How can additional content and context help students identify meaningful ways to take action or address social inequity?

¹ [Growing Knowledge Matters. A Lot](#), excerpted from [Reading As Liberation: An Examination of the Research Base](#), Student Achievement Partners

² "A dominant narrative is an explanation or story that is told in service of the dominant social group's interests and ideologies. It usually achieves dominance through repetition, the apparent authority of the speaker (often accorded to speakers who represent the dominant social groups), and the silencing of alternative accounts. Because dominant narratives are so normalized through their repetition and authority, they have the illusion of being objective and apolitical, when in fact they are neither." University of Michigan, Inclusive Teaching

³ Note that shared identities may not correlate with shared experiences. Create space for varied experiences for those who may share identity markers.

Text Sets in Action

When?

- Paired with an anchor text (before, during, or after reading)
- Project-based learning
- Independent reading
- Small-group work
- Homework
- At small increments throughout the day/instructional block (e.g., Morning Meeting, Do Now, transition)

How?

- Independent, partner, small-group or whole-class reading
- Student choice or assigned

What?

Text sets can include a **wide range of resources** and should not be limited to traditional “texts.” Consider any of the following when building your text set:

Text Excerpts/[Juicy Sentences](#) Infographics Images Art Multimedia Videos Poems
Interviews Class/Teacher-Authored Texts Photos Primary Sources Maps Songs/Lyrics

Note: All students need regular access to grade-level anchor texts and volume of reading texts at a variety of complexity levels. Text sets support volume of reading goals and can include texts that are below, at, or above grade level. Implementing text sets could require a range of student-specific supports, depending on the instructional purpose and resources used.

Who?

In building your text set, stop to think about **representation in authorship and content**. Ask yourself:

- Who is the **author/creator** of this text or resource? How might that have impacted their choices in the text? Are their identity/identities, languages, and/or lived experiences reflected in its content? If not, can I find another resource to add or use instead?
- Across this unit and/or text set, what **range of identities/perspectives are represented**? What voices are needed to expand upon the narratives/information included, provide additional non-dominant perspectives, and/or connect with students' identities or experiences?

Example text set use cases with a focus on culturally relevant pedagogy:

Context	Example Text Set	Connected Purposes
Grade 1 science unit on habitats includes information about scientists who are all U.S.-based and white.	Pair with a text set that includes a range of habitat scientists representing a diversity of racial, gender, language, and geographic identities (e.g., including videos in home languages). Ask students to pick several scientists to learn more about as part of their culminating task.	Identity Perspectives Language
Grade 4 social studies unit on Montgomery Bus Boycott/Civil Rights movement focuses on the male figures of the movement.	Pair with a text set that highlights the contributions and leadership of women such as Claudette Colvin and Jo Ann Robinson.	Counternarratives Social Justice
Grade 8 ELA/literacy unit with <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> centers dominant narratives.	Pair with a text set that includes informational texts and multimedia resources about wrongful convictions, mass incarceration, and racial inequity.	Counternarratives Social Justice Perspectives

Create Your Own Text Set to Support Culturally Relevant Pedagogy



Interrogate



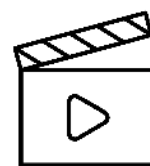
Identify



Build



Plan



Use



Reflect



Interrogate Existing Resources and Your Own Perspective

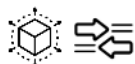
INTERROGATE YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE, POTENTIAL BIAS, AND KNOWLEDGE:

- What do I already **know or believe** about this text, topic, and/or author's perspective?
- What do I need to **know more about** related to my culturally relevant goals? *For example, you may need to learn more about a historical event, a cultural practice that is unfamiliar to you, or students' identities related to this topic.*

INTERROGATE EXISTING UNIT, ANCHOR TEXT(S), AND/OR TOPIC:



Identity, Language & Current Events: Is this anchor text, topic, or unit **relevant** to students' lives, communities, identities, cultures, languages, and interests? How do you know (or how could you find out)? Why does this content **matter to students**?



Perspectives & Counternarratives: Whose **perspective** is featured in this anchor text, topic, or unit? Whose perspective is missing? Does this text/topic **perpetuate** a dominant narrative?



Social Justice: What **messages** are being sent through this anchor text, topic, or unit about empowerment, power, and oppression? Are there generalizations (or deficit language/ideas) that need to be countered?

To more fully analyze your anchor text, see the [Text Analysis Toolkit](#).



Identify Topic(s), Perspective, and Goals for this Text Set

SET YOUR INTENTIONS: Based on your interrogation, identify the topic(s) and goals for the text set that you hope to design.

Consider:

- Which **purpose(s)** your text set will focus on: counternarratives, current events, identity, language, perspectives, and/or social justice?
- How can you prioritize the resources that you want to look for and/or **narrow the focus** of your text set based on your instructional goals?
- How can you **connect to** other content areas and genres, where applicable, and/or other topics that are addressed throughout the year?
- Consider asking your **students for their input** around what they'd like to better understand or explore (e.g., a Know-Want to Know-Learned chart, polling students, engaging in Morning Meeting discussion, etc.).






Build Your Text Set!

IDENTIFY RESOURCES: Select the texts and resources for your text set. Many text sets have between 4 and 8 resources.

A few helpful tips:

- Mix it up! Text sets can include a variety of genres, formats (print, non-print, multimedia), and levels of complexity.
- Keep it concise! These are resources meant to support knowledge and ideas. Look for shorter works (e.g., poems, articles, excerpts) rather than full-length/lengthy anchor texts.
- Consider whether a resource includes up-to-date and/or relevant information to build context around the topic or event.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trouble finding a resource? Try looking for multimedia resources instead, pulling a sentence or paragraph out of a longer or more complex resource, or making your own resource (or authoring one with students based on research). <p>SEQUENCE RESOURCES TO HELP SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING: Ask yourself how one resource could help students better understand the next one, as well as how selected resources connect to the overall unit, topic, or anchor text.</p>
 <p>Make a Plan</p>	<p>DETERMINE PLAN FOR USE: When and how will students engage with these resources? Identify time for student discussion and writing about new ideas, which language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) students will use, and the level of scaffolding or support needed.</p> <p>DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE LEARNING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how students will have opportunities to show their learning and thinking about this text set. Consider using an easy-to-implement structure like a Rolling Knowledge/Rolling Vocabulary Journal and a culminating task or experience. • Identify inspirations. How does this learning influence new ideas, curiosities, or wonderings? <p>INCORPORATE CHOICE INTO YOUR PLANNING: Consider where students will have choice in engaging with the resources, connecting to their own funds of knowledge, exploring content further, or completing a culminating task/experience.</p>
 <p>Use the Text Set</p>	<p>STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH TEXT SET! Use your text set resources, adjusting plan as needed.</p> <p>ASSESS LEARNING: Engage in opportunities for students to share, collaborate, and showcase their learning and thinking throughout. Also consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will assessments measure and for what purpose? What assessment format(s) will give students equitable opportunities to demonstrate growth, understanding, and abilities/assets? • What formative assessments practices will reveal student assets? How will they be used to adjust instruction? • How can assessments serve as a learning tool for students? <p>SOLICIT FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS: Provide an opportunity for students to give feedback on their text set and/or unit experience through an exit ticket, survey, focus group, 1:1 conversation, or class discussion. You might ask students to reflect on: their personal connection with the content/resources, learning about new perspectives, what this text set inspired them to do or learn more about, whether they felt their ideas mattered during instruction, and opportunities to collaborate with other students. See sample text set student feedback resources here.</p>
 <p>Reflect on Process and Execution</p>	<p>ASK YOURSELF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you learn about yourself, your biases, your teaching, and the students you serve through this process? • In what ways did you meet your intentions for this text set design? What might you do differently next time to better connect to student identities, languages, varied perspectives, counternarratives, social justice, and/or current events? • How did the text set create opportunities to affirm students' nuanced and multifaceted identities and cultures (including racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities)? How does this text set engage students in building their capacity to “read, write, think, and speak in ways that understand power and equity in order to understand and promote anti-oppression”⁴

⁴ Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, [Author Interview With Dr. Gholdy Muhammad: 'Cultivating Genius'](#), EdWeek