


**TEXT SET TOPIC: Environmental Racism and Civic Engagement**  
*Suggested for use with Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler*

**Grade Level Recommendation:** Grades 11-12

**Key Focus Areas for Design:**

Counternarratives **Current Events** **Identity** Language Perspectives **Social Justice**

**Topic:** This text set is about encouraging students to be change agents in addressing structural racism and the environmental injustice it fuels.

**Curriculum Connection:**  This text set can be done as is but is suggested as a companion resource for Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

**Context/Rationale/Reflections:** This text set focuses on awareness and civic engagement and aims to empower students to consider what a better future looks like and in what ways individuals can be agents of change in their own communities and society-at-large. Resources are selected to pair with *Parable of the Sower's* content and to enhance students' understandings of the author's perspective, the sociopolitical climate when the text was written, and connections to today.

**! Important teacher notes for this text set !**

- For many students, the topic of climate change can feel overwhelming and futile at times. Keep in mind how to center joy and activism in the novel, consider the main character's orientation towards action, and help students think critically about community development.
- The background knowledge and meaning of *Parable of the Sower* are high complexity. The additional readings and activities in this text set aim to support students' background knowledge and critical thinking so students are better able to comprehend the context behind events in the novel.
- *Parable of the Sower* contains numerous potential content/trigger warnings around drug use, sexual and physical violence, etc.



**Resources to build teacher background knowledge:**

- [Octavia Butler: Writing Herself Into The Story : Code Switch : NPR](#): for more information on Octavia Butler's life and path to writing
- [Afrofuturism: How Octavia Butler is moving us forward | Princeton University Library](#): for more information on Afrofuturism as a genre
- [Effects of Climate Change on Marginalized Communities](#): for more information on the impact of global warming on climate and resources for human life, particularly marginalized communities
- [Housing Segregation and Redlining in America: A Short History | Code Switch | NPR](#): for more information on the history of redlining in America
- [How human trafficking and bonded labor make capitalism possible | David Bishop | TEDxHKU](#): for more information to contextualize several characters' experiences in *Parable of the Sower*



**A note for multilingual students:**



Text Sets are meant to support knowledge building! Support opportunities for student [translanguaging](#) while using this text set by encouraging students to write, discuss, and present in their home language(s), English, or a combination while they are learning.

Text/ Resource	Author/ Creator	Brief Description/Notes	Why use this resource?	Considerations for using this resource
<a href="#">The Arsenal of Exclusion &amp; Inclusion: All the Things We Leave Out   Architect Magazine</a>  <b>ARTICLE</b>	Aaron Betsky	This article summarizes the concept and examples of exclusionary architecture. It is an overview of a larger book called <i>The Arsenal of Exclusion &amp; Inclusion</i> .	It helps students understand the economic, political, and social implications of specific architectural decisions and designs.	<p>Consider how Lauren’s community (in <i>Parable of the Sower</i>) and others like it use exclusionary architecture, and what that means for those inside and outside of that space. Who is benefited? Who is harmed?</p> <p>Use the internet to look up photographic examples of exclusionary architecture and/or have students find examples in their own communities. Brainstorm solutions for more inclusion.</p>
<a href="#">Sci-Fi Writer Octavia Butler Offered Warnings And Hope In Her Work : NPR</a>  <b>ARTICLE/ PODCAST</b>	NPR, Laine Kaplan-Levenson	Using sound bites of archived recordings with Octavia Butler, the podcast discusses how Octavia Butler used what she saw during her lifetime to create stories of the future.	It provides students with the necessary historical context that inspired <i>Parable of the Sower</i> , and it positions students to reflect on Octavia Butler’s world versus our world today.	Discuss how the politics that Butler experienced in the 1980s have led her to write a cautionary tale including peddling scarce resources like clean drinking water due to inefficient government and global warming. What did Butler believe was the financial priority of her administration? What anxieties did Butler have in regard to these priorities? How are they reflected in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> ? Brainstorm what essential functions of government are needed for a society to be successful.
<a href="#">Pandemics and the poor</a>  <b>ARTICLE</b>	Ben Oppenheim & Gavin Yamey	This article discusses how poor populations are more vulnerable to epidemics and pandemics. To protect the poor, the article suggests a four-point plan.	It provides students with the opportunity to reflect on how epidemics and pandemics affect poorer people and to reflect on what suggestions the author offers to “protect the poor.”	Make an infographic to analyze and communicate findings from the article. Brainstorm additional suggestions on how our communities can ensure equitable access and break down discriminatory barriers.

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<a href="#">There Is No Hierarchy of Oppressions</a>  <b>ESSAY</b>	Audre Lorde	Audre Lorde uses the intersection of her own racial and sexual identities to demonstrate their inherent inseparability. <i>“There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions”</i> was published by the Council on Interracial Books for Children in 1983.	This essay offers students the opportunity to reflect on their own identities and understand the importance of intersectionality and the dangers to a “hierarchy” of oppression	Students map their own intersectionality and what that means in context to their experiences and how they navigate society. Consider how our intersecting identities shape our perspectives and the way we experience the world. How do differences in power and privilege influence the relationships we have with each other? How do these differences affect our sense of community and its development?
<a href="#">“Home”</a>  <b>POEM</b>	Warsan Shire	Warsan Shire is a British writer and poet who was born to Somali parents in Kenya. She uses her position as an immigrant herself to convey the lives of immigrants.	Continuing the theme of intersectionality, this poem offers students the ability to reflect on the lived experiences of refugees and immigrants and to make the connection to characters in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> who are leaving the place they once called home due to tumultuous circumstances.	<p>In <i>Parable of the Sower</i>, Lauren decides to make a survival pack in case the walls surrounding her community ever fall. Reflect on what items you would include in your survival pack if you were in Lauren’s position. Consider what items would be absolutely necessary for your survival and what items could potentially have multiple uses. Students can present their survival packs to the class and explain how they made their particular decisions.</p> <p><i>Note: Consider how a discussion on displacement and/or immigration might be triggering based on your knowledge of your students. Be sure no students feel pressured to speak on this topic.</i></p>
<a href="#">Wade in the Water: Hurricane Katrina, A Poem by Walidah Imarisha</a>  <b>POEM</b>	Walidah Imarisha	“Wade in the Water” is a spoken word piece about Hurricane Katrina written by Walidah Imarisha. It is part of her book of poetry, <i>Scars/Stars</i> . Students may need brief context about the <a href="#">events and effects of Hurricane Katrina in 2005</a> .	In looking at the events and response efforts of Hurricane Katrina, students can connect this to the events in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> .	<p>If needed, the written version of this poem can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>After listening to the spoken word poem and reading more information, write an argumentative response on how to have a fair allocation of resources. How should it be decided whose lives to “prioritize” saving in moments of crisis? Can this be decided? By whom?</p>

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<a href="#">Water mafia: Why Delhi is buying water on the black market - BBC News</a>  <b>ARTICLE</b>	BBC News, Sanjoy Majumder	This article discusses the privatization of water in Delhi.	In <i>Parable of the Sower</i> , water is a commodity, and drought is common. Understanding access to and privatization of water locally and globally allows students to make connections to events in the novel.	<p>What ways could climate change cause the problem of privatization and lack of access to water to increase? How does that connect to the events in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> so far?</p> <p>Students can engage in more research on the “water gap” in the United States at <a href="#">Closing the Water Access Gap in the United States</a>.</p>
<a href="#">We don't farm because it's trendy; we farm as resistance, for healing and sovereignty</a>  <b>ARTICLE</b>	Environmental Health News, Ashley Gripper	This article discusses farming as a method of resistance and justice.	This article allows students to reflect more on the environment and justice and how both intersect. Students are able to make connections to the work that Lauren is doing in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> and brainstorm solutions for change in the face of crisis.	Consider how farming can connect someone to ancestors of the past and generations of the future? How do concepts of environment and justice intersect in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> ? Draw connections between the work Lauren is doing to be a change agent in her community in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> and the work the people featured in the article are doing in their community.
<a href="#">37 Causes, Effects &amp; Solutions For Resource Depletion - E&amp;C</a>  <b>ARTICLE</b>	Environmental Conscience	This article looks at the causes, effects, and solutions of resource depletion. Students may need additional information about <a href="#">Natural Resources Depletion: Consumption in a World of 32:1</a> .	Students will be able to explain the effects that resource depletion and climate change have had on the characters in <i>Parable of the Sower</i> and explain how Lauren has acted as a change agent.	Students imagine themselves as agents of change in building a better future in their neighborhoods, school communities, and society at large. Think critically about community development and the overall values and social structures needed to build a better future for themselves, their communities, and society at large.

**Options for culminating experiences:**

- **Alternate Character Narrative** → Students will imagine they are an original member of Lauren's group at Acorn and that they decided to move on and begin a similar community. They will consider the following questions in designing their narrative: What do you call your new community? What aspects of Acorn do you keep the same, and what do you change? Where do you set up this community? How do you find new members?

- **Solutionary Narrative** → Students will choose an event or issue reflective of a current anxiety or value impacting our society to develop a narrative. The narrative piece must demonstrate a mixture of elements and key concepts representative of the unit's goals. The narrative's conclusion must explicitly exhibit solutionary thinking representative of the key concepts needed to to design a better future.